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JOHN THELWALL: ROMANTICK AND REVOLUTIONIST.

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, PH.D., 1977

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JOHN THELWALL: 
ROMANTICK AND REVOLUTIONIST 

by 

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B.A., Saint Vincent College, 1970 
M.A., Northeastern University, 1972 

A THESIS 

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire 
In Partial Fulfillment of 
The Requirements for the Degree of 

Doctor of Philosophy 
Graduate School 
Department of English 
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ABSTRACT

JOHN THELWALL: ROMANTICK AND REVOLUTIONIST

by

VERNON OWEN GRUMBLING

John Thelwall: Romantick and Revolutionist deals with the political activity and the major writings of the English democrat, John Thelwall (1764-1834), during the 1790's. Thelwall was politician, social critic, novelist, and poet; and he became a friend of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Chapter i presents the story of Thelwall's political activity. When the movement for a democratic reform of Parliament revived in the early nineties, Thelwall gradually became involved. He linked the "genteel" reformers of the early eighties with the working people who increasingly filled the ranks of the reform movement in the nineties. In 1794 he was arrested and tried for high treason, but was acquitted. Throughout his political career Thelwall advocated parliamentary representation based on what would now be called the principle of "one man, one vote."

The radical criticism of English society that Thelwall presented in his London lectures is the topic of chapter ii. Because Thelwall had been a Tory prior to 1790, he emphasized respect for certain traditional styles of life, especially rural life, and he emphasized the need for stable, benevolent social relations. Because
he assumed that property is the result of labor, he viewed economic society with a radical democratic bias.

Thelwall presented much of his social program in a novel called *The Peripatetic, or Sketches of the Heart, of Nature and Society* (1793), the topic of chapter iii. *The Peripatetic* is both sentimental and didactic. The hero is a "man of feeling" whose walking tours in the company of "philosophizing" friends give the novel its structure, and explain its title, an allusion to Aristotle's Peripatetic School. The hero believes that intimacy with the natural world leads to social benevolence and democratic mutual respect. Thus Thelwall combines the novel of sensibility with the "revolutionary novel" of the 1790's.

Chapter iv presents an analysis of the poetry Thelwall wrote from 1787 to 1801. His earlier work is extremely convention. In 1794 Thelwall employed the sonnet and the ode forcefully in order to make public the emotions he felt as he awaited trial. After he left politics, Thelwall wrote verses to celebrate the joys of family and nature.

Thelwall's friendship with Wordsworth and Coleridge is the topic of the final chapter. Thelwall became acquainted with Coleridge in the spring of 1796 when both still lectured in support of parliamentary reform. They carried on a voluminous correspondence for over a year, discussing literature, politics, and religion. Coleridge revealed himself unreservedly to Thelwall, and accepted his criticism. In 1797 Thelwall visited Coleridge and Wordsworth at Alfoxden in Somerset. His visit drew government spies and eventually cost Wordsworth his lease to Alfoxden Mansion. Nevertheless, Thelwall's views of nature and politics had a limited influence on Wordsworth, for passages in *The Peripatetic* show parallels with passages in *The Excursion.*
Throughout his career Thelwall absorbed the intellectual values of late-eighteenth-century England and carried them to extremes. He was unique not because he carried his advocacy of democracy to heroic extremes, but because in his writings he also asserted the need for organic relationships in society, relationships grounded upon the assumption of general intimacy with the beauty of the natural world.
This thesis has been examined and approved.

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FOR MY LOVELY WIFE

AUDREY BRIDEY
INTRODUCTION

ROMANTICK AND REVOLUTIONIST

Experience of something approaching democracy makes us realize that most of our history is written about, and from the point of view of, a tiny fragment of the population, and makes us want to extend in depth as well as in breadth.

--Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down, 1971

Driven from pillar to post; tried for high treason; permanently deprived of his manuscripts and books; beaten and assaulted by hired thugs; he /John Thelwall/ yet persisted undaunted on his chosen path. . . . He was without fear.

--Walter Phelps Hall, British Radicalism 1791-97, 1912

On October 26, 1795 a crowd gathered at Copenhagen Fields, a cattle market on the northern outskirts of London. It was Monday, a work day, but the crowd was filled with the working-class faces of shopkeepers and artisans, Wapping watermen and silk weavers. Grim-faced they marched to a political rally of a type formerly unknown in England, for they were and always had been unenfranchised in the politics of their country: they possessed no vote for representatives in Parliament. A recent investigation of Parliament had shown that a majority of the House of Commons was returned by 162 influential men, out of a population of ten million.¹ The crowd rallied on a workday


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because for many Londoners there was no work. England had been warring with Republican France for two and one-half years, building a vast new debt, payable to war contractors, upon the old debts she had acquired fighting her own American colonies twenty-five years before. Government pension lists were swollen; the price of wheat, stable throughout most of the century, had nearly doubled in the last ten years; while wages, for those fortunate enough to find work, had remained constant. In response to these conditions masses of people agitated for the right to vote, joining a movement begun during the American Revolution by that portion of the gentry who were also unenfranchised.

The government of George III treated this reform movement as if it were a disease. A year before the government had made an unsuccessful attempt to destroy its purveyors in a series of trials for High Treason. As a consequence of this mass meeting at Copenhagen Fields, William Pitt's ministry would propose the Two Acts (38 Geo. Ill, cap. 7, 8) to eliminate the vehicle by which reform agitation spread: the free exchange of ideas. The first law would make it possible to speak and write high treason, a crime traditionally defined in terms of overt act; the second would forbid political meetings of more than fifty persons.

The crowd gathered at Copenhagen Fields would have violated the latter law, for it was immense by contemporary standards. Before the day ended one hundred thousand people, nearly a tenth of the total

---

population of London, had assembled to support the demand for universal manhood suffrage. A young Irish Nationalist named John Binns chaired the meeting, but by general reputation its most effective speaker was a short, dark-haired man of thirty-two, a self-educated poet and novelist named John Thelwall.

The political lectures he held twice weekly in a London hall were the real object of the ministry's new law against political meetings. At Copenhagen Fields the message he shouted out largely repeated that of his lectures. He encouraged his audience to respect themselves as rational judges of social questions and as "the productive members of society." He condemned Prime Minister William Pitt's attempt to repress what he called the traditional rights of Englishmen. He argued that violence on the part of the reformers would only crush their movement and he cautioned his audience that violence would be suggested by government spies placed among them. But first and last, Thelwall celebrated their right to vote as the legal, peaceful, and just solution to the social and economic injustices they suffered. "We must have redress from our own laws," he said, "and not from the laws of our plunderers and oppressors." The crowd was so large that Thelwall and the other speakers were forced to repeat their speeches at two other platforms. By all accounts the people remained attentive, sober, and quiet. Before sunset they returned to their homes, bearing pamphlets on

political history and considering exhortations that they remain resolute in the face of oppression. They presented to eighteenth-century England a glimpse of a modern democratic movement, and their most articulate and celebrated spokesman was Citizen John Thelwall.

Three days later, when George III travelled to open a session of Parliament, an angry crowd stormed his coach, and an unidentified assailant shattered one of its glass windows with a pebble. Pitt's ministry connected this violence with the mass reform meetings, and soon proposed the Two Acts. By the end of the year they were signed into law, and the movement for Parliamentary reform subsided beneath the threat of massive indictments for High Treason. But Thelwall, who had already been tried and acquitted for High Treason, circumvented the law prohibiting political discussion of "the affairs of this realm" by lecturing on classical politics. He intended to

Shew the Public that if we have discrimination and courage at once to obey the law and persevere in every unprohibited duty, it is impossible for ministers to frame restrictions that can effectively impede the progress of truth and consequent reform.

For a year and a half he continued his lectures, but as the war with France grew more popular throughout England, Thelwall's politics became more odious. His battle with magistrates, mobs, and police spies became an uneven one, and he finally retreated before an overwhelming flood of nationalism to the mountains of Wales, where he leased a small farm and tried to live in harmony with nature.


5 Prospectus of a Course of Lectures to be Delivered Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the ensuing Lent, in strict conformity with the restrictions of Mr. Pitt's Convention Act (London: Symond's, 1796), p. 15.
Thelwall's political achievements owed much to the way he personified and transmitted the opinions and aspirations of his age. He was a literary man, an enthusiastic poet and novelist, like many others at the end of the eighteenth-century. He frequented the popular debating clubs, where he discovered and articulated popular concerns. He opposed slavery and warfare, while he championed the common man and common sense, especially as arguments in favor of open political discussion. Like many Englishmen he was pleased at the news of the Fall of the Bastille. The pleasure he took in scientific study led him to deliver prize papers at the medical society of Guy's Hospital in London. He was a free-thinker who scorned institutional Christianity because he thought it a purveyor of social inequality and superstition.

Both his enthusiasms and scepticisms corresponded to the drift of late-eighteenth-century opinion, in some ways an end-point of the Enlightenment tradition. John Locke's political philosophy of rights and contracts permeated the thought of interested men, and many men were interested in politics. In the seventies the American colonies had fought successfully to establish commercial and legislative autonomy, and they ratified a republican constitution in 1789, the year the Bastille fell. In England interest in Parliamentary reform spread from a narrow base in the eighties to a mass movement in the mid-nineties. Intellectual activity was stimulated by potentially revolutionary developments. Religion was losing its power to fix obedience upon its

social dictates, and philosophy was focusing more and more upon material science. The literature of Sterne, Bage, and the Swiss-born Rousseau prepared the cult of individual sensibility while Burns and Cowper cultivated a sense of respect for the common man. By the end of the 1780's the Industrial Revolution had demonstrably begun, and by 1798 Thomas Malthus declared the "iron law of wages." Of course, such activity took place against a backdrop of Augustan decorum, because many people of all classes were touched only indirectly by it. But for the visionary intellectuals, for Blake and Coleridge and Wordsworth, the end of the eighteenth century was at least briefly a time when hearts leapt up toward the goal of equality, a time when human passions and the natural world offered unceasing fountains of delight. In his life and work John Thelwall carried the aspirations of his age to radical extremes. He employed his sensibility and his intellect in a career sufficiently adventurous and variegated as to resemble romance. In his first forty years, to which this study is limited, he was politician, social philosopher, novelist, poet, and a decided influence upon the great poetic geniuses of his generation: William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These accomplishments provide useful divisions for our study. The first and second chapters deal with Thelwall's political career and his social criticism, respectively. The third and fourth chapters present his novel, The Peripatetic, and his poetry, while the fifth chapter analyzes his relation to the Lake Poets.

Thelwall's political power stemmed also from two personal sources: his oratorical prowess and his near-suicidal persistence.

7The dramatic extension of the reading public during the last half of the eighteenth century is described in Richard Altick, The English Common Reader (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).
Both flowed into the deep channel of his belief in democracy. He gained
a reputation as a great democratic orator, not only because he could
speak intelligibly and rousing ly to working people, but also because his
talk could charm such disparate intellectuals as William Hazlitt and
Robert Southey. He even convinced Crabb Robinson that he would never
hang if he could but address the crowd around the scaffold. Along with
the shoemaker Thomas Hardy and the linguist Horne Tooke, Thelwall did
narrowly escape being hanged--hanged, drawn, and quartered--in the
famous High Treason trials of 1794. When the ministry first ordered the
group arrested it also suspended Habeas Corpus, so Thelwall and the
others lay isolated in the Tower for more than nine months. During the
final six weeks before the trial Thelwall was confined to a Newgate dun­
geon he called "the charnal-house" because carcasses of dead felons were
stored there until burial was arranged.

Undaunted, Thelwall spent his days writing poems about nature
and patriotism. He also composed a radical trial defense which his
attorney, the eloquent Thomas Erskine, vetoed. "If you read it, you'll
be hanged," warned Erskine as the trial began. "Then I'll be hanged if
I do," answered Thelwall, whose wit was not easily intimidated, even on
the day when his life was to be decided. And he was not hanged, because


Thelwall's account is quoted in Mrs. C. B. Thelwall, Life of Thelwall (London, 1837), p. 224-27. The anecdote concerning hanging that follows is mentioned on p. 252n.
the London jury refused to equate mass advocacy of universal suffrage with the crime of High Treason, and thus acquitted the prisoners. After his acquittal Thelwall continued to lecture on democracy and education. His political goal then was extreme. Today it would be called the principle of "one man, one vote," and in this Thelwall both continued and broadened the old reform movement of the eighties, carrying it to the new wave of workingmen who made up the mass movement of the nineties. Despite the new potential for violent activity, and despite harassment by government spies and provocateurs, Thelwall maintained his conviction that the nation's happiness depended upon a reasonable, educated citizenry rather than a bloodthirsty mob.

He was more than a political agitator. In his lectures and writings Thelwall delineated a systematic and modern social critique. He grounded his concepts of political and social ameliorization upon a radical interpretation of traditional British thought, as well as upon the new idea of "natural rights" generated by the events in France. From the perspective of his own working-class background he argued that because the "laborious classes" created all wealth, they deserved not only political equality but also basic economic rights. As the Industrial Revolution was beginning, Thelwall lectured that those citizens left without employment because of its vagaries deserved not "charity" but a just return for their prior labor. Furthermore, he argued, the working classes deserved free education, decent working conditions, stable wages, and sufficient leisure time to enrich their lives. As early as the 1790's Thelwall criticized factory conditions and pointed out the human costs of industrialization.

Despite these activities, Thelwall considered himself a man of
letters. After discarding several other livelihoods, in 1787 he published his largely juvenile Poems (London: John Denis, 1787) in two volumes, and two years later he became editor and chief contributor to The Biographical and Imperial Magazine. In 1793 came a unique novel, The Peripatetic, or Sketches of the Heart, of Nature and Society (London), probably his greatest literary achievement for its own sake, as well as its influence upon William Wordsworth. The political poetry he penned while in prison the following year he published as Poems Written in Close Confinement, in the Tower and Newgate, Under a Charge of High Treason (London: James Ridgway, 1795). After he left politics he published Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement (Hereford: W. H. Parker, 1801) and The Daughter of Adoption (Hereford: W. H. Parker, 1801), the latter a Gothic novel he was obliged to send out under the pseudonym of John Beaufort. After this he began a long career as elocution teacher and speech therapist, but he interrupted it to publish two lengthy occasional poems, an "epic effusion" on the death of Nelson called The Trident of Albion (Liverpool: G. F. Harris, 1805), and A Monody, Occasioned by the Death of the Right Honorable Charles James Fox (London: H. K. Causton, 1806). In 1818 Thelwall bought The Champion, a periodical in which he wrote politics and criticism. Because this study focuses upon Thelwall's early career, a chapter will be devoted to The Peripatetic and another to his first three books of poetry.

The Peripatetic is unique in form and revolutionary in theme. Reflecting the tradition of formal experimentation exhibited in the novels of Sterne, Mackenzie, and Day, The Peripatetic combines familiar essay, adventure tale, and topographical tour in a combination of prose and verse. With these techniques Thelwall furthers a comic plot about
a pair of childhood sweethearts grown to lovers named Belmour and Sophia, who are separated by Belmour's father in order to further a more lucrative match. The lovers sink into suicidal melancholy until cheered and then united by Belmour's old friend Sylvanus Theophrastus, the narrator of the novel.

In the novel Thelwall presents a sample of the wide-ranging criticism of life typical of the literature of the 1790's. As the title and the narrator's name indicate, Thelwall writes in the scientific spirit of Aristotle and Theophrastus. Sylvanus and his friends, "walking philosophers," question marital customs, political institutions, and the nature of the physical world. Opposition to parental tyranny is one of the novel's several revolutionary themes, for Sylvanus is both a "man of feeling" and an intellectual. As he and his friends walk the countryside surrounding London, they attack what they consider abominations generated by the commercial system: vast inequality of wealth, degenerate luxury, the slave trade, and the enclosure of common lands into private domains. Investigations of the material world, which modern critics might consider scientific rather than literary, are vital concerns to Sylvanus and his philosophic band. Poems and conversations about geology and physiology, for example, contribute to the narrative, as does an autobiographical study of how natural objects help develop a "visionary power" in the human mind.

Thelwall's three collections of poems provide a fourth topic. The poetry he wrote from 1787-1801 develops from extremely conventional and sometimes flawed tales and lyrics in the Poems (1787) to more imaginative and observant studies of nature and personal emotion in the Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement (1801). The prison poems of 1795,
though often very personal, are really rhetorical declamation and thus employ the fancy rather than the imagination. Generally, his poetry rode upon the returning lyric wave that characterized much late-eighteenth-century verse. Like many contemporaries he wrote about orphans and debtors, traditional freedoms and enlightened hopes, natural scenes and personal sentiments. But through the influence of Thompson and Akenside his poems often capture that quality of close observation which distinguishes Wordsworth's early work. For these reasons his canon serves as a useful background for the study of Wordsworth, more so because in Thelwall's best poems we can glimpse in embryo the kinds of insights which reach maturity in the great statements of Wordsworth and Coleridge. The democratic agitator could learn from the Woodbine "that blissful thoughts are bliss."

Finally, John Thelwall made a direct and lasting impression upon William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an impression which influenced their intellectual and artistic development. As a famous political hero, and later as the democrat who wrote "the only good reply to Burke," Thelwall attracted the friendship of Coleridge, who began to correspond with him in 1796. Because both had lectured against the war policies of William Pitt, and because both had been silenced by the Two Acts, their correspondence was friendly and unreserved. In their discussions of religion, politics, and literature Coleridge articulated many of his developing opinions, and accepted Thelwall's emendations to his favorite poems. Thelwall finally met Coleridge and Wordsworth at Alfoxden in the summer of 1797, and very nearly settled in the Quantocks with them. But by that time Thelwall had become a dangerous friend, for his very name scandalized the inhabitants of Somerset. The dinner party

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with which Wordsworth hosted Thelwall was spied upon. Although Thelwall left the area to make life easier for the poets, his single visit cost Wordsworth the lease to Alfoxden Mansion, where the Lyrical Ballads were planned and largely executed. But the influence of Thelwall remained with Wordsworth, whose "Tintern Abbey," The Prelude, and The Excursion show marked parallels with Thelwall's Peripatetic.10

Through all his careers Thelwall demonstrated an enormous passion for the arts, and an abiding respect for the common man. Both of these predilections were formed during his youth, which will be outlined in the remainder of this introduction.

John Thelwall was born in Covent Garden in 1764--seven years after Blake, six before Wordsworth. He was the third child and younger son of a silk mercer, who made plans for John to study historical painting.11 When he was nine years old, however, his father died, expressing a final wish that the business be sold and the proceeds placed in securities to insure the family's income and to educate the children. But he left no will, and his widow chose to continue the business, which slowly sank, exhausting the family's fortune. Young John was from birth


11 This and the following autobiographical information is drawn from Thelwall's own "Prefatory Memoir" to his Poems Written Chiefly in Retirement (Hereford: W. H. Parker, 1801), p. v-xlviii. The memoir is written in the third person because it quoted in part from the third volume of Phillip's Public Characters, a contemporary biographical journal I have been unable to locate. Subsequent references to the "Prefatory Memoir" will be noted directly in the text.
a small boy with weak lungs. By the time his father died John had attended two grammar schools taught by heavy handed tutors, from whom "almost all that he learnt was to glory in returning from the severest castigations without a tear" (p. v). After the death of his father he went away to a boarding school at Highgate. The progress he attained there he attributed to "his having been left alone, with little restraint, and no terror upon his mind, to follow the bend and bias of his own imagination" (p. v). He found a positive influence in the tutorship of a young clergyman named Harvey. Harvey inspired his students to love literature by permitting them to form classes based upon their own choice of books. He coached Thelwall in the use of his voice and lungs, which remained unusually weak. When the idol left Highgate, Thelwall's scholarship momentarily evaporated, repeating a pattern that occurred when his father died. He recovered, and began to pursue his own course of reading.

But before his fourteenth birthday the waning family finances brought him home and placed him behind the shop counter. Because his father and his tutor had taught him to love the arts he found this occupation distasteful. For two years he worked unwillingly in the shop and tried to see beyond its walls by devouring books from a nearby lending library. Although he felt contempt for novels, the usual staple of such collections, he valued Fielding and Sterne. Drama, poetry, and history he relished. Unable to read sufficiently in the shop, he began to carry books with him on errands. No doubt he presented a strange picture, walking about the streets of Covent Garden clutching a parcel of silk under one hand, and with the other, holding an open book before his face. When he became politically famous, he was forced to abjure the habit
because friends considered it an affectation. While working at the family shop he also rewrote and performed plays with a small group of friends, sometimes constructing stages and scenery.

But his life at home became increasingly discordant. His older brother chastised him brutally and his mother could not understand his love of books. He applied to a painter for lessons, but Mrs. Thelwall felt the fee was unmanageable; he wrote to a dramatic producer, but the appeal met only with a flat remonstrance. Stung by desperation he agreed to be apprenticed to a master tailor. He later evaluated this plan in a passage styled by Augustan measure, informed by common sense, and yet concerned with the demands of the heart:

This was one of those projects of narrow and miscalculating policy by which the dictates of Nature are so frequently violated, and the prospects and happiness of youth are so inhumanly blighted; the specious prospects of pecuniary advantage being substituted in place of those more enlarged and generous views that result from a due consideration of the biases of taste and character; and, by which, eventually, even those interested views would often be less effectually thwarted. It ended as such projects usually do. (p. ix)

At first the new apprentice felt thrust beneath himself and his talents, but he soon came to examine and enjoy his participation in the working class. He mingled occasionally in his friends' amusements and made a discovery that remained of paramount importance to him throughout his life. Later he wrote that "Though much more gross in their exterior, and less polished in their language and manners," the working men were "much better informed" than the middle-class shopkeepers he had left. Workers in a large town, he observed, shared "a common hive, to which each brings his stock, however small, of intellectual attainment, where it grows by co-partnership, and is enjoyed in common" (p. x). On the other hand, he learned about their intellectual frustrations. Those
who attained some education spoke as vulgarly as those who had none, and they were more likely to dissipate themselves in alehouses with comrades who desired their wit. It was the insulation of knowledge, he concluded, that corrupted, and he decided that knowledge would not corrupt if it were general among the class.

This study of humanity Thelwall complemented with a still more fervent devotion to books, especially Shakespeare, Milton, and Thompson. But his work grew wearisome as his lungs grew weaker, and one day he astounded his master by suddenly begging to be freed from his apprenticeship. The tailor agreed, and the youth ran to the house of a friend where he remained while he parlayed with his family.

Again he attempted to study under an historical painter, but his older brother's extravagance and his mother's incompetence had finally exhausted the family funds. By then Thelwall was eighteen years old. Because he had no other prospects he reluctantly consented to his brother-in-law's suggestion that he be articled to an attorney, John Impey of the Inner Temple. He remained a law clerk for three and one-half years, "studying the Poets and Philosophers more than cases and reports, and writing elegies and legendary tales more than Declarations of Case" (p. xvi). He must have possessed as unlikely a temperament for the law as one could possibly conceive. Later he recalled his character at the time:

Prone and habituated, upon every subject, to give unreserved utterance to the existing sentiments of his heart, he looked forward with indignation to the prospect of letting out his hand, or his voice, to venal pleading: of making the Fee and the Brief the major and minor of moral proposition; and enquiring, upon every occasion, not, what was true; but, how the Cause of his client might be best supported. (p. xvii)

Although he hated the law, he found he liked many lawyers. Consequently,
he decided that "Ignorant Prejudice perceives only gross effects in their last stage of operation, and condemns individuals, while institutions are alone to blame." A second bias that he formed at this time he later recorded in his novel The Peripatetic. He felt a hearty disgust for the prudent children of domestic uniformity, who are solicitous that the important functions of their existence, as eating, drinking, and winding up their watches, and the like, should proceed in orderly succession at exact and stated periods. (I, 66)

Soon Thelwall acted upon the latter principle, if indeed he had not already embodied it. After his third year as a clerk a new partner entered the firm and began to abuse him. An indignant Thelwall exposed some dishonest dealings in which the new partner engaged. The subsequent investigation was ended prematurely by the partner himself, who committed suicide with a razor. Within a few months Thelwall's disgust overcame his prudence and he left the apprenticeship, just before it would have been completed.

Thus did Thelwall set out upon a career in literature in the year 1786: twenty-two years old, prepared by no regular education, supporting an elderly mother and an indolent brother. Within a year he published Poems upon Various Subjects which received good notice in the Critical Review (October, 1787). From 1789 to 1792 Thelwall served as editor of the Biographical and Imperial Magazine. During these years he earned about £50 per annum, a small sum but sufficient to support his family, and, in 1791, his bride. Two years after his marriage he published The Peripatetic, in which he attacked the slave trade and monopolistic farm enclosures, and celebrated science, romantic scenery, and the fall of the Bastille.

He had encountered these political issues as a law student when
he had participated in the traditional public debates at Coachmaker's Hall. Initially he was a follower of Pitt, but the anti-slavery agitation and the July 14, 1789, attack on the Bastille fired his sympathies and reordered his practical politics. During a 1790 debate he passionately denounced both the Whigs and the Tories for agreeing not to contest but to divide the two Westminster Parliamentary seats. Soon afterwards, he was appointed poll clerk to that election, but, typically, discarded the lucrative post in order to campaign for an announced independent, John Horne Tooke.

That incident carries us to the beginning of Thelwall's political history, the topic of the ensuing chapter. But it symbolizes the paradox central to Thelwall's career. Because he carried the dominant ideas of his age to extreme conclusions, he achieved popularity so immense as to be matched only by the infamy that replaced it. Infamy and obscurity, of course, are the lot of the democratic leader who finds his pursuit of social justice blocked by nationalism; his only reward is knowledge of the whitecap leading the tide of history, though he may not see it break upon the nether shore. Thelwall was fortunate to witness the passage of the first Reform Bill in 1832, even if it was a limited and conservative measure compared to the legal revolution his own plan would have wrought forty years before.

Thelwall has suffered obscurity as well as infamy. Today his works remain ignored, although he addressed such important future considerations as the utility of general education, the moral problems of colonialism, the injustice of economic monopoly, and even the pollution of the environment. Yet not the least reason why Thelwall's canon
should be reinstated is that it aids our understanding of the 1790's, an age that vibrated between mechanism and imagination, between measured decorum and revolutionary ecstasy. Concerning the great romantic poets who grew up in this period A. E. Hancock writes:

In proportion as the moods and ideas and dreams that the poet wrought into his verse are vital and significant, they came from the restlessly striving common heart and mind of his age--from the depths of national consciousness, in the midst of which, whether or no, he lived and moved and had his being.12

Thelwall deeply impressed "the common heart and mind of his age." He influenced both illiterate workingmen and the poet William Wordsworth, because his imagination scorned the boundary dividing the realm of utility from the realm of delight.

CHAPTER I

POLITICAL HISTORY:

"TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE"

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven.

--William Wordsworth, The Prelude, 1805

In 1790 John Thelwall vented his outrage against the established political parties by supporting an independent candidate, John Horne Tooke, for Parliament in the borough of Westminster. By that time the system of parliamentary representation had been under attack for more than fifteen years by a coalition of middle-class reformers. During the mid-eighties the movement had temporarily subsided and its energy had been re-directed toward such humanitarian causes as abolition of the slave trade. During the period 1788-92 the parliamentary reform movement revived under the stimuli of the Regency Crisis, the Fall of the Bastille, and the writings of Tom Paine. After 1790 Thelwall was gradually drawn into the movement until October, 1793, when he approached what was then its center, the London Corresponding Society. Within a month after Thelwall joined the working-class organization he became its chief fund-raising lecturer.

It was a dangerous time for reform activity. The English government had declared war against republican France in January, 1793, nine months after Paine had fled to France, accused of a seditious libel. Paine would never return to England, and in his absence Thelwall became the reform movement's most important voice. Paine advocated republicanism,
but Thelwall sought a radical version of the movement's old goal, extension of the franchise. From his close friendship with Tooke Thelwall linked the London Corresponding Society to the older reformers. In these ways he grounded the more widespread movement of the 1790's in a native political tradition.

In 1794 Thelwall was tried and triumphantly acquitted of High Treason, and thus became a heroic figure to younger men such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He organized immense, peaceful rallies, and later he defied gagging laws aimed directly at his lectures. But ultimately he failed. When he retired in 1797 parliamentary reform had become an unpopular issue and Thelwall himself had become an object of fear and scorn. The failure of his cause, however, is less significant than the fact that such an attempt was made in the 1790's. For if the reformers had succeeded, England would have acquired the modern democratic constitution which it achieved only in the twentieth century.

The central reform issue in the 1790's was parliamentary representation. The reformers considered Parliament to be more a club than a representative body, and their judgment was supported by strong evidence. Members of the House of Lords, of course, sat by virtue of hereditary title, but this was not the central issue. The House of Commons was elected by a system which excluded most of the population from voting and which encouraged domination of the Commons by ministerial and aristocratic influence. Property qualifications for voting generally discriminated against those who owned no real property, such as London artisans and farm workers. But the property qualification varied from borough to
borough. Although in a few "pot-walloping" boroughs suffrage was extended to all heads of households, in most boroughs it was limited to those whose property or rank fitted selective requirements. Some constituencies were so limited that a single individual could control them. These were called "rotten boroughs," a long-standing grievance of reformers. In the borough of Old Sarum, for example, a leasehold was transferred from its owner to a pair of voters on election day. After they elected two Members of Parliament they promptly returned the leasehold to its owner. Generally, representation in Parliament did not correlate with the distribution of population. Tiny villages were represented while new industrial cities like Manchester were not.¹

Naturally this pattern encouraged heavy concentrations of power. In all of the eighteenth century the greatest number of seats contested in a parliamentary election was seventy-one, out of five hundred and eighty-eight elected. An investigation undertaken in 1793 demonstrated that fifteen hundred electors technically controlled a majority of the Commons, in the midst of a nationwide population totalling more than nine million. Actually, a majority was returned by "162 powerful individuals" who controlled rotten boroughs and government patronage.² A Lord who held a hereditary seat in the upper house might also choose a group of borough members in the Commons. Thelwall often entertained his lecture audiences by quoting newspaper advertisements that recruited prospective legislators.

At a time when a skilled carpenter might earn £30 per year, an income of £300 was required to sit in Parliament. For the wealthy or well-connected, however, a seat in Parliament provided lucrative opportunities. The empire's swelling patronage was dispensed by ministers in the form of jobs and "places," that is, legal jobs that required no duties. Members were often pensioned by the Crown, and others found the inside track leading to valuable government contracts.

In the 1790's large numbers of working people entered the movement for parliamentary reform, joining groups already predisposed toward it. These were the unenfranchised gentry, dissenters (who were barred from holding office by the Test Act), merchants, intellectuals, Cambridge undergraduates, franchised voters in the "liberal" constituencies such as Westminster, and much of the Whig opposition in and out of Parliament. A Tory, William Pitt, was Prime Minister. Because he had actively supported reform in the eighties and opposed it in the nineties, the Whigs tried to make reform a party issue. Traditionally, the Whigs were champions of the aristocracy and constitutional rights against the royal prerogative. The Whig leaders Charles James Fox, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and Francis Grey supported moderate extensions of the franchise. But as the opposition party, denied Crown patronage, the Whigs were an ineffectual force for reform within Parliament. Their reform society was named The Friends of the People, a name which aptly reflected the arrogant way in which the aristocrats dealt with their middle- and working-class allies. The largest and broadest-based reform group by far was the working-class London Corresponding Society. It was organized in January, 1792, and by autumn of the same year it listed three thousand active members. A third major group, the Society for Constitutional In-
formation, was composed of wealthy, middle-class reformers. The Society had been organized in 1780, and it represented moderate as well as radical ideas concerning the reform of Parliament.

The roots of the reform movement which Thelwall joined in the early nineties may be traced to the war England fought against her American colonies. The heavy taxes required to prosecute the war spurred three interrelated reform movements. The first sought "economic" reform, that is, smaller annual budgets and tighter parliamentary control over government contracts. Its main support came from enfranchised voters of modest means in the counties. The second movement sought a Parliament more independent of the Crown. Proponents of independence often also favored economic reform because many M. P.'s lived on the Civil List. A third movement emanated from the boroughs of London and Westminster and the county of Yorkshire. Because the franchise there was widely extended individual voters possessed less real power than those of more restricted constituencies. Yorkshire's twenty thousand voters, for example, elected two representatives, the same number appointed by the proprietor of Old Sarum. So this movement sought to increase constituencies uniformly throughout the nation. Although all groups opposed rotten boroughs and aristocratic influence, they disagreed about the nature of Parliament and the parliamentary franchise. City radicals expected that a wider franchise would mean better representation of constituencies, while county backbenchers favored a propertied, deliberative Parliament. The latter view was supported in the eighties by Edmund Burke, who had forcefully opposed the American war. The former position was supported by Charles James Fox and a group of radical
During the winter and spring of 1779-80 military expenditures in America mounted and reform agitation in England crested. Petitions and programs were circulated throughout the nation by the various reform groups. Some of the issues would return in the nineties, as well as some of the personalities. In December, 1779, Burke proposed in the Commons a bill for economic reform. By February the bill died and the liberal Duke of Richmond doubted if anything other than "an irresistible cry from out of doors" could effect any reform legislation. In December, 1795 Richmond addressed a huge open-air meeting of the London Corresponding Society at the invitation of John Thelwall, who spent the following year writing heated rebuttals to subsequent works of Burke. But within a month of the defeat of Burke's reform bill, in March, 1780, the Westminster Committee of Electors, chaired by their Whig M. P. Fox, met to write a reform platform. Their final program called for universal manhood suffrage, annual Parliaments, equal districts, secret ballots, and abolition of the property requirement for members. It was composed largely by William Cartwright, a military man, farmer, and industrialist. In his person were fused both the rationality and the sentiment of the late eighteenth century. In 1776 he had outlined what became the Westminster program in a pamphlet called Take Your Choice. He claimed that his argument in this book "... becomes an axiom and leaves little or no room for judgment of opinion." Although his proofs were almost geometrical in tone of presentation, they did

not conceal Cartwright's assumption that all men possess "... the same senses, feelings and affections to inform and to influence, the same passions to actuate, the same reason to guide." When the Westminster Electors endorsed "manhood suffrage," many probably understood the term to mean "poor-rate-payer." But Cartwright felt such distinctions of property ownership were irrelevant to the right of representation. Although Thelwall later would ground his arguments for manhood suffrage on British legal precedent, it is clear that he shared Cartwright's a priori, humanistic vision of the Englishman's political rights.

In April, 1780, Cartwright helped found the Society for Constitutional Information. In the nineties Thelwall became ambassador to this group from the Corresponding Society. The Constitutional Society, as it was called, was founded as and remained a gentleman's club; dues were a guinea per year. The late-eighteenth-century link between liberal politics and the arts and sciences is demonstrated in its original membership, which included Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the playwright; Sir William Jones, first president of the Asia Society; John Horne Tooke, clergyman and linguist; Johnson's physician Brocklesby; and the popular novelist Thomas Day. The society underwrote the expense of publishing the classic "liberal" British political writers such as Milton, Locke, and, by 1780, Cartwright. The society saw its role as that of educator, and within ten years its publications came into the hands of the shoemaker Thomas Hardy, who founded the London Corresponding Society.

Discussion of one other figure will complete the background

necessary to understand Thelwall's activities in the nineties. After the Gordon Riots of August, 1780, reform activity waned until May 18, 1783. On that date the twenty-four-year-old William Pitt, son of the Great Commoner, introduced to the House of Commons a resolution calling for an inquiry into the state of its representation. Because of Pitt's lineage, perhaps, his resolution was only narrowly defeated. Later that night he met with supporters of the motion at the Thatched Roof Tavern. There all agreed to a resolution asserting that "Without a parliamentary reformation neither the liberty of the nation can be preserved, nor the permanence of a wise and virtuous administration can be secured." Ten years later Pitt would fail to recall the meeting when called to testify by Horne Tooke, co-defendant in Thelwall's treason trial which was instigated by Pitt himself.5

Later in 1783 Pitt was appointed Prime Minister by the King, unseating the Whig Fox whose plan for the India Company had precipitated a crisis, and, incidentally, made a Tory out of twenty-year-old John Thelwall. A year later Pitt was overwhelmingly elected Prime Minister. He was considered to be a reformer and as such won the support of London radicals. While in office he attempted two conservative reform measures. In 1784 he proposed to add one hundred new seats and to disenfranchise certain rotten boroughs; at the same time he attacked the concept of manhood suffrage. His bill was defeated, and a year later he proposed that the nation buy off the proprietors of rotten boroughs, which was also defeated. Clearly, Pitt's programs corresponded to the ideology of the economic reformers but offered

5For resolutions see F. D. Cartwright, p. 149.
little satisfaction to his radical allies in London and Westminster.

In the next few years there followed a general hiatus in political activity, while its energy was temporarily focused upon philanthropic causes. Toward the end of the eighties opponents of the slave trade mustered serious attempts to abolish it. The Society for the Relief of Small Debts was founded to aid those trapped in debtor's prisons. On both of these issues Thelwall wrote poems and spoke in the amateur debating societies such as the one that met at Coachmaker's Hall. Pitt's negotiation of a new commercial treaty with France in 1787 promised an unprecedented prosperity and brought about a general feeling of well-being. Britain celebrated the centenary of her Glorious Revolution pleased with social progress and economic stability. On the anniversary itself, November 4, 1788, London's Revolution Society held a banquet, and across the nation men met to celebrate the principles of liberty that they felt the revolution had guaranteed.

That same month, however, events began to shake British complacency and to reorder British politics. Late in November George III apparently became insane. Because of his simple manners he had been a popular king. Consequently, his illness saddened the British people. But it also revealed flaws in the nation's Constitution. The immediate problem was whether or not the Prince of Wales should succeed directly to the throne. He was a close friend of the Whig Fox, while the Tory Prime Minister Pitt had won the trust of the disabled King. As a consequence both parties deserted their traditional characters. Pitt argued for a temporary, Parliamentary-controlled regency, while the Whigs, who in 1688 had in Parliament altered the line of succession, now denied Parliament the right to regulate the succession and argued
that the Prince of Wales should permanently take the throne. The dispute grew more and more heated in Parliament until February, when the King recovered competency.

During the Regency Crisis Thelwall attained his first formative insight into the political structures of his age. He was twenty-four years-old, the same age at which Pitt made his initial reform resolution. Thelwall also was a debator, not in Parliament, but in Coachmaker's Hall, where amateurs argued public issues, often as informal preparation for the practice of law. Thelwall's favorite issue was abolition of the slave trade. He found inspiration in Pitt's eloquent speeches delivered in the House of Commons. For this reason Thelwall supported Pitt on the Regency question. He was impressed by Pitt's reputation as a reformer, and he was disturbed by the Prince of Wales' scandalous and costly style of life. But there was also a more complex reason. Like the Tory Vicar of Wakefield Thelwall felt loyalty to the King as immediate protector of the people against oligarchic forces. He thought that if the Prince should succeed because of the Whigs' obstruction, he would become the tool of an influential and self-interested party. On the other hand, Thelwall trusted Pitt as loyal to George III, and, therefore, as the man best qualified to guide a controlled regency until George III re-

6Mrs. C. B. Thelwall, Life of Thelwall (London, 1837), pp. 48-49. This is a polemical biography written by Thelwall's second wife soon after his death. It is a valuable source for anecdotes and for certain public papers written by Thelwall. For a better organized account of Thelwall's political career, see Charles Cestre, John Thelwall: A Pioneer of Democracy and Social Reform in England During the French Revolution (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), chapter ii, "Patriot". As his title implies Cestre argues that Thelwall's political activity was determined largely by the French Revolution, a thesis contrary to that presented in the present study.
covered. But Thelwall was forced to review his stand on the issue because of an incident that occurred when he was debating it. One evening at Coachmaker's Hall he was speaking on behalf of Pitt's position when a group of magistrates entered. Because Thelwall supported the "right" side of the question, the magistrates permitted him to finish his speech before they closed down the meeting.7

Some five months after George III regained competency, the Bastille fell. It is important to note that the news was generally welcomed in England. The siege of the Bastille was not viewed as the initial act of a coming revolution; rather, it was seen as the people's reaction to aristocratic interference with the work already begun by the National Assembly. The National Assembly had been formed by representatives of the Third Estate and had been assuming parliamentary power. So in England the Fall of the Bastille seemed to support a continuing, and long overdue, struggle toward the form of government long cherished by Englishmen. The Morning Post, for example, commented: "An Englishman not filled with esteem and admiration at the sublime manner in which one of the most important Revolutions the world has ever seen is now effecting, must be dead to every sense of virtue and freedom."8 Conservatives such as Hannah More and Horace Walpole agreed. By August, 1789, the French National Assembly promulgated the Declaration of the Rights of Man based on the assumption that "Men are born free and equal


and shall remain so under the law." The document is less democratic than anti-hierarchical, as Professor Hobsbawn has shown, but it served as Pre­amble to a new French Constitution, which abolished feudal privilege and ended absolute monarchy.

The latter change especially interested patriotic Englishmen. The Glorious Revolution had demonstrated Parliament's right not only to alter the line of succession, but also to define the monarch's religion, to control taxation, and to provide for its own continuity. On November 4, 1789, these rights were commemorated by the Revolution Society. This year the members also celebrated the French Revolution. At the Old Jewry Meeting House Richard Price, an aging reformer, preached a sermon titled "On Love of Country," which indirectly stimulated the most serious political activity in England since the seventeenth century. Price summarized the principles of the Glorious Revolution as he saw them:

First; Liberty of conscience in religious matters. Secondly; the right to resist power when abused. and Thirdly; the right to choose our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for ourselves.

But the revolution's work, he added, remained incomplete because the nation was not properly represented in Parliament. When the representation, he said, "... is not only extremely partial but corruptly chosen and under corrupt influence after being chosen, it becomes a nuisance, and produces the worst of all forms of government."9

His speech directly challenged the complacent attitude with which Englishmen viewed the events in France, but its significance lies in the fact that it elicited an impassioned, conservative response from Edmund Burke. Burke published Reflections on the Revolution in France and the

Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event in October, 1790. Since Price had delivered his sermon the French Assembly had confiscated the property of the Catholic Church and had established A Civil Constitution of the Clergy to insure its loyalty. Burke was attached to the Catholic religion of his native Ireland. More importantly, he deeply venerated the value of tradition in political society. Yet in 1790 Burke was still thought of as an English reformer because he had opposed the war with America and he had staunchly supported economic reform during the eighties.

For these reasons and because Burke wrote in a masterful fashion, his pamphlet became a best-seller. The nation was agitated by the violence with which Burke condemned the French Revolution and the activities of English reformers like Price. He criticized the French National Assembly's preoccupation with theoretical rights. He deplored its treatment of the church and the aristocracy, institutions he defended as bulwarks of civilization. He charged that land was inadequately represented in the Assembly, and he defended great accumulations of personal property as the means by which culture was transmitted. He also argued forcefully against those Englishmen who supported France. In answer to Price Burke described the Glorious Revolution as essentially conservative, because it altered the succession in only a minor way. In no way did the revolution serve as argument for future change in parliamentary representation. Burke expressed doubt in the concept of general self-government by distinguishing between two orders of men: those who understand order and those who depend upon authority for it. Manual laborers, he generalized, fell under the second class: he
considered them "not honorable."

Thelwall formed an immediate dislike of Burke's point of view. He now felt disenchanted with both parliamentary parties in England. Earlier in 1790 the Whigs and Tories had agreed to split the two Westminster seats in order to avoid election expenses. Thelwall had responded by leading the campaign of an independent candidate, John Horne Tooke. During the Regency Crisis of 1788-89 Thelwall had become disillusioned with the Tory Pitt, and now Burke seemed to show that the Whigs were even less considerate of the political rights of the majority. In his Reflections Burke had called the French common people "a swinish multitude." The phrase deeply disturbed reformers, who were quick to reply to the pamphlet. Initial responses came from the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and the radical Whig James MacIntosh. But the answer which spoke for and to the "swinish multitude" came from the pen of a former exciseman and staymaker, Tom Paine, an Englishman by birth, an American by choice, and in international revolutionary by nature. A friend of President Washington, Paine was a republican, as vehement in opposition to monarchy, aristocracy, and tradition as Burke was in defense of these institutions. In 1790 Paine visited England to promote sale of an iron bridge he had designed. In February, 1791, he anonymously published the first part of The Rights of Man, in which he responded to Burke's criticism of the French Revolution. The revolution had not been directed against King Louis XVI or any other individual, Paine insisted. Rather, the revolution supported principles of representative government, and the King himself had stood in need of representative

institutions to correct long-standing abuses. Whatever violence the revolution had occasioned, he argued, was the consequence of originally "raising some men high, which means making others low." Like Burke, Paine also discussed the British government. Britain possessed no real Constitution, he charged, for a Constitution should precede formation of a government. Paine challenged Burke to carry his fondness for tradition to the source of the present British monarchy: the violence of the Norman Conquest. If one logically pursued the idea of tradition one would eventually arrive at the situation of the earliest men, who Paine asserted had stood equal before God. Just as Burke had distinguished between two orders of men, Paine distinguished between two kinds of government. One proceeded from superstition and brute force, while the other proceeded from enlightened self-interest.¹¹

The Rights of Man electrified English readers. Within a year it sold more than forty thousand copies; actual circulation of these is in-calculeable. The shopkeepers and workingmen who had seldom bothered with political pamphlets bought this one, read it, memorized passages, and passed it on to their friends at the tavern and workshop. It was written in their idiom: plain, reasonable, and acutely sarcastic. Burke's concern for the French Queen Marie Antoinette Paine mocked by accusing Burke of "pitying the plumage, to forget the dying bird." To Burke's defense of hereditary rights Paine answered that "as government is for the living and not for the dead, it is the living only that has any right in it."¹² For the ruling classes, including many liberals, Paine's


popularity was frightening. Not only had he denounced the pillars of the Constitution, he had doubted the very existence of a constitution.

The work of Paine and Burke precipitated a flood of new reform societies, which issued another flood of publications. Soon after Reflections was published middle-class reformers formed a Constitutional Society in unrepresented Manchester. And soon after The Rights of Man was published, the original Constitutional Society, long inactive, re-grouped. On May 28 the society issued an address to the nation charging that "Mr. Edmund Burke has, with deplorable inconsistency to his former professions, censured the illustrious patriots of a neighboring kingdom, for delivering more than twenty-five millions of their Fellow Creatures from a state of abject oppression and civil bondage."13

On July 14, 1791, the anniversary of Bastille Day, reformers' numbers were increased by violence directed against them in Birmingham, where reform was popular among dissenters. Infuriated by a dinner of the local "Friends of Freedom" a mob gathered and began to pull down homes and meeting places of dissenters. Two days went by before the local magistracy proclaimed it unlawful to destroy property. By the time troops arrived from London the rioting had ended and the crowd had caused £100,000 in damages. The rioters had been carefully organized and the magistracy remained inactive. Even the King sympathized with

the rioters. Among the houses burned was the laboratory of Joseph Priestley, the co-discoverer of oxygen, who left his native land for America. Reform was intimidated in Birmingham, but the masters and journeyman cutlers in Sheffield soon formed a club. By December they addressed the nation on reform and subsidized a cheap edition of The Rights of Man.

A month later a much more significant working-class group was established. On January 25, 1792, the London Corresponding Society was founded by a shoemaker, Thomas Hardy, and eight friends, after dining together one night at the Bell Tavern in the Strand. For years Hardy had read political tracts, including those published by the Society for Constitutional Information. Initially the group was unassuming: for the first five evenings they debated the question "Whether we, who are Tradesmen and Shopkeepers and Mechanicks, have any right to obtain Parliamentary reform?" Democracy served as the Society's means as well as its end. Dues were set at a penny per week; only workingmen, or men without wealth, could hold office; discussion proceeded according to rule, and every member had a right to speak; most important, there was no property requirement. Each Sunday evening they met in the social room of the Crown and Anchor. Their euphorians were strong argument, and, after the meeting, good English ale rather than Madeira wine. They studied Cartwright, Wilkes, Locke, and Milton, and they debated their own political claims. When the original group reached sixty men, they resolved to throw off thirty into a new division, which would continue the same mitosis. By July, 1792, twelve divisions were formed, and by

14 George III felt "pleased that Priestley is the sufferer for the doctrines he and his party have instilled." See Brown, p. 81.
The total membership amounted to three thousand. Throughout the provinces the dozens of political societies modelled themselves upon and corresponded with the London group. The organizing issue was parliamentary reform, by which these men hoped to become enfranchised, reputable, and useful to the common weal.  

But during 1792 the issues took on a more serious tone. In February Tom Paine published a second part of The Rights of Man, and this became even more widely circulated than the first. Paine now directly attacked the wastefulness of monarchical and aristocratic institutions in England. In France both institutions were being rendered ineffectual. By September the King was suspended and aristocratic conspirators were executed. In The Rights of Man, Part II Paine turned from apologies for France to government in general. His thesis was the wastefulness of aristocratic and monarchical institutions. His brash rhetoric surprises even today; but in 1792 it seem ominous. "Monarchy and aristocracy," he declared, "will not continue seven years in Europe." He distinguished between society, which fulfills most collective human needs, and government, which need pursue only narrow objects, and hence should remain small and inexpensive. Wars were wasteful, he argued, the consequence of monarchy, which "loses the name of robber in that of monarch" (p. 361). He saw England's Glorious Revolution from a radical perspective. It was not really the work of the people, but "a bargain between parts of the government," and he pointed out that the Settlement Parliament of '88 had acquired authority only from itself (pp. 382-84).

15Brown, pp. 55-59; Cone, pp. 119-23; Hall, pp. 159-77.
16Complete Writings of Thomas Paine, p. 352.
Representative government, he wrote, "is the only government worthy of the title." The achievement of this goal in England called for a specific means: "A convention of the nation is necessary to take the whole state of its government into consideration" (p. 390).

In his final chapter Paine proposed an extensive social welfare program which included publicly subsidized schools, dowries, and work programs. These would be financed by abolishing the House of Lords and the Crown. The latter, he wrote, "signifies a nominal office of one million sterling a year, the business of which consists of receiving the money" (p. 414).

The Rights of Man, Part 2 caused discussion about reform to harden along three lines. Conservatives became convinced that any change could mean danger. The middle- and working-classes began to view representation as a present right rather than a possible future gift. And upper-class sympathizers now split. In general, those repulsed by Paine focused upon his republicanism, the course which France was following by the autumn of 1792. Those friendly to Paine were stimulated by his brash confidence in representative government. The Constitutional Society voted Paine an honorary member, even though it showed no support whatsoever for republicanism. Its members were not even united on a specific reform of parliamentary representation. Horne Tooke, for example, who often chaired the Society's meetings, never committed himself to universal manhood suffrage. The London Corresponding Society voted in April, 1792, to accept Paine's latest work for discussion. Immediately, Whig reformers in Parliament, led by the aristocrat Francis Grey, organized The Friends of the People to effect a moderate reform and to discountenance Paine's influence. Twenty-four
of its members were M. P.'s; some others had left the Constitutional Society when Paine was voted in. On April 27 the latter challenged The Friends of the People in an open letter: "You may boast of names, of wealth, of talents, and even principles: but without the fellowship of the People . . . your association will crumble in the dust."17

Throughout the nation the unenfranchised "people" continued to organize in 1792. In Norwich a federation was formed to co-ordinate seven reform clubs. In the borough of Southwark a more radical Friends of the People was founded on the principle that "Equal active citizenship is the inalienable right of all men." The group expressed dissatisfaction with the aristocratic parliamentary parties: "We are wearied with the unmeaning names of WHIG and TORY." At the second meeting Thelwall joined. Soon he was named delegate to a standing committee representing several patriotic clubs, including the Constitutional Society, in which his old friend Tooke was then very active. The Southwark Society was the first reform group that the former Tory Thelwall joined. He seems to have been spurred to the act because earlier in the month his debating club, the Society for Free Debate, had been barred from Coachmaker's Hall for refusing to exclude political topics.18

Thelwall's experience foreshadowed the first wave of government anti-reform activity. On May 21, 1792, George III issued a Royal Proclamation against seditious writings and called on magistrates to in-

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17Quoted in Cone, p. 127.

18John Thelwall, On the Moral Tendency of a System of Spies and Informers and the Conduct to be Observed by the Friends of Liberty During the Continuance of such a System, 3rd ed. (London: Daniel Isaac Eaton, 1794), p. 111.
vestigate seditious printers. The main object of the proclamation was Paine, whom the Attorney General charged with a seditious libel upon the Crown. Paine himself was a proud man and obviously an effective politician. He may well have considered his solution simple and workable. But his republican program was not echoed officially by any significant reformers. For example, the Corresponding Society voted its first address to the nation on April 2, 1792, full in the wake of The Rights of Man, Part 2. But the address did not mention republican or even anti-aristocratic opinion. Rather, it denounced corruption, affirmed the right of all citizens to share control of the government, labelled the current Parliament "unconstitutional," and advised ". . . the only remedy . . . a fair, equal, and impartial representation of the people in Parliament."19 The King's proclamation, however, turned the issue into one of free speech in general. Responding to what they considered unconstitutional repression, reformers increased their activities. The Constitutional Society published a denunciation of the proclamation and distributed six thousand copies. When the House of Commons voted its gratitude to the King, Francis Grey asserted his Whig principles in the minority opinion, asserting "There ought to be perfect freedom for circulation of all opinions about public affairs."20 In June, 1792, Paine admitted authorship of The Rights of Man in an insolent open letter to the Attorney-General.

19See Howell, State Trials, XXIV, 277-78.

20Quoted in Cone, p. 131. The narrative of government actions and reformers' responses during 1792 is described in Brown, 80-91; and Cone, pp. 122-40. The parliamentary scene during the same period is analyzed in Laprade, pp. 53-74.
During the summer Thelwall was resting at the seashore, but he took time to organize a debate in Canterbury on the question "Whether in France a Republican government ought to be preferred to a limited monarchy?" The audience affirmed the proposition by a margin of four to one, outraging the local magistracy. Six months later Thelwall wrote about the incident in tones as brash as those of Paine: "I am told . . . that dreadful denunciations were thundered against me by the assembled corporation as soon as I was known to be out of their power."

When he returned to London in August French events again filled the news. The German Duke of Brunswick was marching against Paris, proclaiming restoration of the ancien régime. On August 10, 1792, the Paris Commune overawed the Legislative Assembly and proposed a National Convention based on universal suffrage to decide how to depose King Louis XVI. In September fear of invasion prompted the execution of about a thousand royalists and criminals, and the Assembly began stronger economic controls. On September 22 the newly elected Convention met and declared France a republic.

English response was quick. All the major popular societies sent addresses of support, and the Constitutional Society sent 1000 pairs of shoes. The English ministry was quietly preparing further actions. It first moved to arrest Paine, whose trial had earlier been postponed. But he had already left for France to sit as an elected delegate to the Convention. In October the Corresponding Society elected its first spy, a David Lynam, as a division leader. Thelwall's

21 Thelwall, Moral Tendency, p. iv-v.

22 Howell, State Trials, XIV, 805-07.
Society of Free Debate had been meeting at the King's Arms in Cornhill throughout the autumn, but in November the Lord Mayor Sir James Saunderson either bribed or threatened its manager in order to stop the debates. His action seemed despicable to Thelwall, because Saunderson, like Pitt, had built a reputation in the previous decade as a reformer. "Imagine my surprise," Thelwall wrote the Lord Mayor, "when I found the doors closed . . . by a mob of constables armed with the staff of that very man's authority who, a few years ago, as chairman of the Quintuple Alliance, signed many of the boldest resolutions that association published." To oppose the Lord Mayor, Thelwall advertised throughout London for a hall in which he could continue the debates. Although he offered twenty guineas and accepted full legal responsibility in the event of prosecution, he received no offers and his postbills were torn down. The Corresponding Society simultaneously began to find itself locked out of meeting rooms.23

On the last day of November still another political group formed, though this one possessed a mysterious pedigree. The Society for the Preservation of Liberty and Property Against the Attacks of Republicans and Levellers was founded, according to its papers, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern by a magistrate named John Reeves. Its stated purpose was to suppress seditious publications and principles. Several historians doubt whether any actual founding meeting took place. Reeves served not only as chairman but also, under an assumed name, as secretary. The ministry seems to have instigated the society; at the same

23Moral Tendency, p. v-viii. The Quintuple Alliance was a loose confederation of committees from boroughs which supported parliamentary reform. It was an active force from 1781 to 1783.
time Grenville, the war minister, encouraged his brother to sponsor a similar group. As the French moved to execute the King, the Reeves Association gained overwhelming success. It stimulated floods of resolutions and other conservative groups formed in imitation.24

The government made use of the new wave of disgust with France. On December 1, 1792, Pitt wrote a second Royal Proclamation against sedition and called out the militia, in order to reconvene Parliament. On December 5 fifteen hundred of London's wealthiest merchants met to sign a declaration of allegiance to the Constitution. The Corresponding Society, which had never favored an English Republic, now was forced to disclaim it. On December 18 Paine was tried and convicted in absentia of a seditious libel. Thelwall, however, refused to be cowed by the event. Later that month he delivered to his debating club an extempore allegory about Chanticleer, a barnyard cock "too puffed up with ermine" to see the sickle descend upon his neck.

Paine's trial marked the beginning of nearly two years of continuous prosecutions. In January 1793, the French beheaded Louis XVI, despite Paine's protests, and in February declared war upon England and Holland, allies in the coalition against her. These events drove away many Englishmen from the ranks of the reformers, and for several months the government successfully prosecuted reform leaders. In May the dissenter William Frend was tried in a Cambridge University court for approving the principles of the French Revolution in a pamphlet. In June the barrister William Frost, who belonged to both the Constitutional

24 The Reeves Association papers are reprinted in Laprade, pp. 75-79. For accounts of the prosecutions in England and Scotland during 1793 see Brown, pp. 83-99; Cone, pp. 141-64.
and the Corresponding Societies and who had worked with Pitt in the reform movement of the eighties, was sentenced to six months imprisonment for a remark he made when a government spy accosted him at dinner. In July the dissenting minister William Winterbotham received four years for preaching a reform sermon, despite contradictory testimony on the part of prosecution witnesses. And in November the printer Daniel Holt was sentenced to four years imprisonment for reprinting *The Rights of Man* and a ten-year-old address of Cartwright's.

In Scotland more serious trials were taking place. In August a young Scotch advocate and reformer named John Muir was tried and convicted of sedition and sentenced to Botany Bay for fourteen years. Muir had attended a small convention of Edinburgh reform societies the previous October, and had unsuccessfully moved an address from an Irish reform group. Muir was an internationally renowned figure: he had returned from France to stand trial. The presiding judge at his trial, Lord Braxfield, was unimpressed. He was heard to whisper to a prospective juror: "Come awa', Maaster Horner, come awa' and help us hang ane o thae damned scoundrels." Because Muir was a gentleman, his transportation to a penal colony changed the stakes of the government's anti-reform program.

Despite the serious trials of 1795 the popular societies struggled to face intimidation. In March the Norwich Federation asked the Corresponding Society about the possibility of an English Convention, and the following month the Edinburgh groups held a second convention though Muir was already under indictment. Through the spring new societies sprang up in Coventry and Tewksbury, and petitions were organized. From across the nation petitions arrived at Parliament, including that of the Corres-

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ponding Society, which bore 3,000 names. In the Commons Sheridan moved to disregard them in favor of that delivered by Francis Grey for the Friends of the People. It contained obvious statistics about the parliamentary representation, and concluded that "162 powerful men" could effect a majority in the Commons. The Whigs' tactic of disregarding popular opinion and relying upon the Commons' sense of fairness failed miserably: the Commons knew the facts of representation well, and voted down Grey's motion of inquiry by 282 to 41, the widest margin to date against reform.25

It became clear to the reformers that they must find more effective means to convince Parliament. Through the summer and autumn of 1793 the Corresponding Society again absorbed large numbers of new members. In October Thelwall joined, and was immediately elected to the Central Committee. On October 24 the Society called an open air meeting in Hackney, a dissenting stronghold, and 4,000 people attended. The meeting elected Joseph Gerrald and Maurice Margarot to represent the Society at a second convention to be held in Scotland. On November 19 the English delegates, including two men from the Constitutional Society, reached Edinburgh, and the assembly there reconvened as the British Convention of the Delegates of the Friends of the People Associated to Obtain Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments. Though its name was well-defined, the Convention's operations were careless. The members employed French salutations and dated their minutes "Year I of the British Convention." Probably they also approved a motion to reconvene automatically if the government "illegally" passed any measure forbidding free association; on December 4 they approved a motion to reconvene if

25 For interpretations of this report see Brown, pp. 101-03; Cone, pp. 161-63; Hall, pp. 174-75.
dispersed. Within two days they were dispersed by force (the Convention's leaders insisted upon being physically removed from the hall) and the English delegates were arrested. Despite its careless rhetoric the Convention had made no attempt to displace the government. Although it had debated its own rules at great length, it had not made plans to organize the nation on the issue of reform. 26

Nonetheless trials began the same month, and before they concluded William Skirving, secretary of the Edinburgh group, and the Englishmen Margarot and Gerrald were convicted of sedition and sentenced to 14 years transportation. In Gerrald's trial the prosecutor announced that he was to be tried not upon "the statutes alone, but upon the laws of God and the laws of this and every well-governed realm." His vagueness made sense, because there were excellent grounds for throwing out the case, or at least mitigating the sentence: the Act of Union had rendered Scotland's sedition laws inoperable. But law and evidence were superfluous to the trial. When it began Gerrald tried to exhibit testimony that Judge Braxfield had already stated in public that all members of the British Convention deserved whipping. But the judges responded that Gerrald seemed to be incriminating himself. In his final charge to the jury Braxfield called Gerrald "a most dangerous member of society." 27

These trials outraged English reformers. In November Thelwall had volunteered a twice-weekly lecture series to help defray the expenses of the Corresponding Society's delegates; by the end of the year he com-

26 The Scotch Convention and subsequent trials are related in Brown, pp. 103-07; Cone, pp. 180-86.

mitted himself to pay for bail bonds and court fees. His lecture fee was low (six pence) because his object was to draw new members as much as collect funds. Hard times caused by the war and fear caused by the Scotch persecutions were sapping the strength of the popular societies. Unofficial prosecutions also took place. In January, 1794, Thelwall was planning to deliver a regularly scheduled lecture when he heard that a group of John Reeve's deputies were hiding in a room adjoining the assembly hall. When they had gathered sufficient evidence they were to emerge and arrest Thelwall, "springing," as he said, "like so many cats upon the helpless mouse of a lecturer." Apparently Thelwall enjoyed playing cat and mouse, for instead of cancelling his lecture, he spoke extemporaneously on "The Moral Tendencies of a System of Spies and Informers, and the Conduct to be Observed by the Friends of Liberty during the Continuance of such a System." He attacked war in general, which he called "the European slave trade." He charged that ministerial newspapers supported the war against France by means of racial propaganda.

He advised reformers to use "the most guarded caution" which should neither "degenerate into tameness and inactivity . . . nor be frustrated by the nets and snares of wicked and designing men" (p. 8). Most daringly, he directly challenged the listening Reeves Associators: "Come then, from your lurking corners, ye tools of perjured treachery--come forth, I say, if in your dark retreats the voice of manly indignation can reach your ears--ye shall not daunt the soul that virtue fortifies" (p. 91). The nation's need, he argued, was for inquiry and education, by which men might understand "the capacities of man." The lecture

28 Moral Tendency, p. ix.
was an effective strategy: he received a standing ovation, while the magistracy was, for once, intimidated.

The following Monday the police struck back. Thelwall had scheduled a debate at the Park Tavern in Southwark on the question "Which is to be considered as more destructive in its principles and conduct, the present, or the American war?" His topic tied together the American, French and English causes, just as Thelwall himself was connecting the older anti-war activists, such as Tooke and Cartwright, with those of the Corresponding Society. The debate was disrupted, he wrote, by "twenty profligate and disordered wretches (officers of the police)" who shouted "God save King George" whenever anyone attempted to speak. Thelwall held the chair, however, until ten o'clock, when the police overturned his desk and put out the lights, still making no claim to authority. Thelwall then informed the magistrate waiting downstairs that "his constables were the only rioters at the meeting." When the magistrate refused to disperse his agents, the debaters blocked the stairway until their speakers could return to their homes.  

Thelwall's defiance was matched by the remainder of the Corresponding Society. On January 20 the Central Committee called a General Meeting at the Globe Tavern in the Strand and approved an address to the nation which Thelwall composed. In it he quoted the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights to lay a constitutional basis for denouncing the seditious trials in Scotland. He defended "the wisdom and good conduct of the BRITISH CONVENTION" and pleaded for solidarity with Scotch and Irish reformers. The crisis, he argued, was at hand: "We must now chuse at

29 Moral Tendency, pp.ix-xii.
once either liberty or slavery for ourselves and our posterity. Will you wait til BARRACKS are erected in every village, and til subsidized Hessians and Hanoverians are upon us?" The demand remained the same: "a full, fair and free representation of the people." But Thelwall sharpened its bite in a passage reminiscent of seventeenth-century rhetoric:

Our common Master, whom we serve (whose law is a law of liberty, and whose service is perfect freedom) has taught us not to expect to gather grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles. We must have redress from our own laws, and not the laws of our plunderers, enemies, and oppressors.30

The address concluded with a resolution to call a "General Convention of the People" in the event that foreign troops were landed or habeas corpus was suspended. On February 14 the Constitutional Society published 40,000 copies of its own resolutions condemning the trials and the ministry, and asserting that the Corresponding Society "deserves well of its country."

From this time on there seems to have been little serious planning of a convention. On April 14 the Corresponding Society held an outdoor meeting at Chalk Farm near Primrose Hill. A letter to the Friends of the People was read, which had asked them their thought on a convention; their negative reply was also read. The meeting approved Thelwall's resolutions attacking, again, the Scotch courts and the English ministry. His last resolution, apparently a compromise of some sort, was grave but precise: "Any attempt to violate those remaining laws" which preserved

30 The Address Published by the London Corresponding Society at the General Meeting, Held at the Globe Tavern, On Monday the 20th Day of January, Citizen John Martin in the Chair, to the People of Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1794), p. 6.
Englishmen from arbitrary judgments such as those passed in Scotland "ought to be considered as dissolving entirely the social compact between the English Nation and their Governors; and driving them to an immediate appeal to that incontrovertible maxim of eternal justice, that the safety of the people is the supreme, and, in cases of necessity, the only Law." The proposition was clearly hypothetical; as evidence would later show, neither Thelwall nor other leaders made any preparations for a coup. The reformers did feel that in the trials in Scotland they had given too much ground, and they wished to assert their confidence in English laws. During the Chalk Farm meeting Thelwall pointed out a group of government spies in the audience and challenged them. When the crowd began to turn on the informers, Thelwall prevented violence by affirming that the meeting was both legal and peacable, and that it "would make the spies' employer quake with terror." At dinner that night enthusiasm remained high. Thelwall, who could seldom resist both a jest and an audience, blew the head from his flagon of ale and declared: "Thus should all tyrants be served."

In a strange sort of lull before the coming storm, reform activities took on a comic touch during the next few weeks. Thelwall's lecture at the Beaufort Buildings attracted a group of coal porters whom an elderly lady had hired to sing "God Save the King"; after hearing Thelwall they left the meeting sympathetic to the reform movement. On May 2 the Society for Constitutional Information held what would be their final meeting, a high-spirited banquet to celebrate their fourteenth Anniversary. Horne Tooke prefaced his speech by declaring himself not intoxi-

31 State Trials, XIV, 735-41. See also Brown, pp. 111-17; Cone, pp. 191-201.
icated, and the party toasted "the swine of England, the rabble of Scotland, and the wretches of Ireland." 32

Ten days later, on May 12, 1794, Hardy was arrested for high treason. The government waited a day, hoping perhaps for flight, before arresting Tooke and Thelwall; in a few more days the arrests totalled twenty-six. At the same time Pitt and Dundas presented the case to Parliament, which chose by ballot secret committees to investigate the evidence. The Commons' Committee included Pitt, Dundas, the Scotch Lord Advocate, the Solicitor General, the "co-founder" of the Reeves Association, and Edmund Burke among its twenty-one members. In two weeks the committees reported evidence of treason: the reform societies were planning a convention to assume governmental authority in order to effect "a total subversion of the Constitution." Within a week, on May 12, Pitt succeeded in suspending habeas corpus. Thelwall and the other prisoners would be held without bail. 33

Before his arrest Thelwall lived in Southwark at the Beaufort Buildings, where he lectured and where the Corresponding Society engaged rooms. Although he was taken on May 13, a Monday, he had known of the charges against him the Friday before. He was advised to destroy his papers and leave the country, but, relying upon his legal training, and confident that he had committed no treason, he decided not to alter his routine in any way. On Saturday he called a Committee meeting for the following night, then went out to the theatre, his favorite non-political pastime. At the meeting he lectured from Blackstone on the treason law, counseled resolve, and offered resolutions supporting Hardy, who had been

32 Brown, p. 116

33 The arrests and trials are analyzed in Brown, pp. 118-29; Cone, pp. 202-09.
arrested that day. The following morning he was seized when he returned from communicating with the Society's divisions. He was pointed out by a spy named Walsh who later investigated Wordsworth and Coleridge. Despite Thelwall's plea he was taken away before the Bow Street Runners confiscated his papers. They took everything, Thelwall said, "Poems, Novels, Dramas, Literary and Philosophical Dissertations, all the unpublished labors of ten years application." They also took his library, and a hundred copies of his published texts: "At a time when my family could receive no support whatever from my exertions, they were deprived of the only resource that could in any way supply the deficiency--the sale of my former labors."35

The day after his arrest Thelwall was interrogated by the Privy Council, including Pitt, Dundas, and Lord Chancellor Loughborough. He acted with typical assurance, and later recorded the incident as a melodrama. Thelwall entered the room and "beheld the whole Dramatis Personae entrenched chin deep in Lectures and Manuscripts; some mine, and some not; all scattered about in the utmost confusion." The interview began when Thelwall was asked his name. He answered and added, "You need not give yourself any trouble. I do not mean to answer any questions." Pitt, Thelwall recalled, became very upset and repeatedly ordered him to consider, while the Attorney General spoke calmly. Thelwall's theatrical re-creation of the dialogue follows:

Pitt. (After a pause, with a mixture of petulance and embarrassment.) "He don't know what's against him. Better let him see what's against him. Here (reaching across the table) here let him see this paper. Now, Mr. Thelwall, do you know you are apprehended

34The Tribune, I, 8.

35Mrs. C. B. Thelwall, Life of Thelwall, p. 158.
for treasonable practices, and that this paper was found upon you?"
I made no answer. It was a paper rejected by myself and all the
committee to whom it was referred; but I did not chuse to fix it upon
the person it originated with.
Att. Gen. "Do you know any thing of that paper, Mr. Thelwall?"
I made no answer.
Pitt. (Very petulantly.) "Read it to him. Let it be read."
It was read accordingly; Pitt keeping his eye upon me, with great
fierceness of deportment. "Now, Mr. Thelwall, it behoves you to
account how that paper came to be in your possession."
I was not of the same opinion, and, therefore, made no answer.
Att. Gen. "Mr. Thelwall, can you tell how you came by that paper?"
Thelwall. "I am bold in the consciousness of innocence; but I
shall answer no questions."
Pitt. "What's that? What's that?" to the Chancellor.
Chancellor. half whispering in Pitt's ear. "He says he is bold
in consciousness of innocence; but he will answer no questions."
Pitt. (fidgeting about upon his feet; his lip quivering, and
his whole countenance convulsed with rage.) "A strange reason, that,
for answering no questions, Mr. Thelwall.--A strange reason being
bold in conscious innocence.--a strange reason for not answering."
Thelwall. "If I answer this, you will expect me to answer other
questions: and it is no part of the law or constitution of this
country to answer interrogatories to a Privy Council."
Lord Chancellor. (very gravely.) "You do not come here to answer
to the laws and constitution of your country, Mr. Thelwall."36

At this point, Thelwall recalled, he could have pled guilty to the treason
of imagining and compassing the act of pulling a Privy Councilor by the
nose. His interrogation was quickly ended when Pitt decided they were
"only putting him on his guard."

Thelwall's memory may have added some dramatic touches, but the
following day a sixteen-year-old youth named Harry Eaton exhibited even
more firmness. Eaton was a son of the publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton, who
had been prosecuted and acquitted for publishing Thelwalls's Chanticleer
squib. He had been living with Thelwall's family while his father
awaited other trials. When examined by the Privy Council he accused
Pitt to his face of "having taxed the people to an enormous extent"

36The Tribune, I, 92-94.
and "having brought odium upon his majesty the King."³⁷

Thelwall was imprisoned in the Tower, along with Hardy and Tooke, from May to November, when the trials began. They occupied small cells near each other, but for more than three months they were not allowed to talk together. For two weeks they were forbidden books and paper, and when Thelwall finally was allowed to order books, Shakespeare’s plays and the State Trials, he found a lump of opium packed among them. For a time two armed guards occupied his cell; when they were recalled, a squad of soldiers periodically entered and searched his quarters. They sat alongside whenever he spoke to his wife and mother. In a few months time, however, Thelwall’s talk made friends, if not converts, of the soldiers, who had been told that the reformers planned to raid London barracks and murder soldiers in their sleep.³⁸

The charge against the prisoners, high treason, was the most serious possible. The government had rejected the lesser charge of sedition because in England, unlike Scotland, it was not only difficult to prove but also carried a relatively weak penalty. The mandatory sentence upon conviction of high treason possessed color:

To be hanged by the neck; but not until you are dead; you shall be taken down alive; your privy members shall be cut off, and your bowels shall be taken out and burned before your face; your head shall be severed from your body, and your body shall then be divided into four quarters, which are to be at the King’s disposal; and God have mercy on your soul.³⁹

Faced with this prospect, the prisoners rallied one another’s hopes.

³⁷The Tribune, I, 118-20.
³⁸Mrs. C. B. Thelwall, pp. 175-99.
³⁹State Trials, XIV, 232.
Thelwall indulged his exuberant romantic taste by writing *Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower*. He captured the dedication felt by the prisoners in his record of an incident that took place with Horne Tooke, soon after the prisoners could communicate:

Our chambers, though not in the same house, were near to each other; and our windows were so situated as to afford us the satisfaction of a mutual view. From the bars and grates of these windows, at the still hour of midnight, the moon scattering her feeble light over the still surface of the river, and among the intersecting masts of the vessels, and affording us a feeble light, suited to the solemnity of the scene, we had been mutually attracted to enjoy the contemplation of that small portion of nature which it was still permitted us to behold. Finding ourselves in this situation, we began to unbosom ourselves with the freedom of men who, having nothing to conceal, had nothing to fear from what might be overheard. We saw indeed that the blood-hounds of power thirsted for our blood, and it was impossible to know what arts they were practising to secure the banquet: but exulting in the sacrifice we were probably to make, we rejoiced in the conduct we had already pursued, we compared our sentiments on that which was probably to come; paid the discriminating tribute of approbation to the memory of those murdered patriots who had been the pre-occupants of our dungeons, and comparing the fate of Sydney and of Essex (not that we gave credit to the reputed manner of his death) rejected with reciprocal indignation, the cowardly subterfuge of suicide; the venerable patriot closing the conversation with these emphatic words -- I will either live to be useful, or die usefully.40

Thomas Hardy's resolution was as firm. As he left to stand trial he said, "Well, Citizen, if they do hang me, all I can say upon the subject is that I hope it will do a monstrous deal of good to the cause for which I suffer"(III, 212).

Outside the Tower of London the reform movement lay crippled: its leaders apprehended; hundreds of minor figures held on suspicion throughout the kingdom; spies everywhere. The government waged an expensive campaign among the lower classes, complete with ballads and free

40The Tribune, III, 211. Thelwall's *Poems Written in Close Confinement* are examined below, chapter iv.
engravings of Marie Antoinette. The young democrat Coleridge had given up on corrupt England and was planning a "Pantisocratic" commune on the banks of the Susquehanna in America. Hardy himself suffered a terrible personal loss. Following Howe's naval victory on June 1, a mob ransacked Hardy's house in Piccadilly, forcing his wife to escape by a window to the roof. In August she died, after delivering their child still-born. She left her husband a letter in which she hoped "the spirit of God is with you and me." It broke off in mid-sentence.41

Thelwall worried about his wife's frail health. He also had to endure the indignity of a brother-in-law who offered "to do what I can to get you out of this hobble" and who hoped "you take care not to get into another one." The brother-in-law's smugness belied his helplessness in the face of disaster. In October Thelwall was transported to Newgate Prison where he was confined in what he described as "the common receptacle for the putrid carcasses of felons who die of diseases in the jail." He remained in the dungeon for four weeks before he was returned to the Tower, but the stench of the place he remembered all his life.42

Meanwhile, another trial had begun in Scotland. This time a special commission replaced Judge Braxfield, and heard a strange case. A certain Robert Watt was charged with having plotted a conspiracy to seize Edinburgh Castle and raise the city's industrial workers in a provisional government. Allegedly, he had secured pikes and battleaxes for the survivors of the Scotch convention trials held the previous winter. But when Watt's trial opened in September, it was revealed that

41 Brown, p. 123.
42 Mrs. C. B. Thelwall, p. 217.
he had been the government's primary informer on the Scotch reformers. In that capacity he had reported to Henry Dundas and the Scotch Lord Advocate for over a year. The government charged him now not with sedition, but with high treason. Watt claimed that he was only manufacturing more evidence. Whether this was true and the government was employing (or betraying) him, or whether Watt was satisfying his own sense of guilt in a real conspiracy, no one in the radical camp could decide. But his trial was anxiously followed by the prisoners in the Tower.

The evidence against them had already been released in the Report of the Secret Committees. It was thought that they intended to form a provisional government by means of their convention, and that Hardy was stockpiling weapons. On October 6 Chief Justice Eyre read their indictment and charged the Grand Jury. Treason was defined solely by the Statute of 25th Edward III: "When a man doth compass or imagine the death of our Lord the King ... or if a man do levy war against our Lord the King in his realm, or be adherent to our Lord the King's enemies in this realm, giving them aid or comfort in the realm or elsewhere." Eyre's charge initially seemed judicious. He advised the jury that, despite the treason charge, "The Royal Authority, in this, as in all other Functions, is exerted, and operates ultimately, for the Benefit of His People." But then the judge elaborated upon the treason charge. First, he averred that "not only immediate and direct attempts" but also remote steps to bring about the King's death constituted treason. Then he asserted that to imprison the King was the same as to cause his death. Further, "to subvert from its foundations the British Monarch, that glorious Fabrick" was also compassing the King's death, and hence treason, although "no lawgiver had ever ventured to contemplate it in its whole extent." He
then proceeded to describe how a reform association "could work itself up to High Treason by means of impetuous and bad men," and how a convention "which perhaps, in better times, would hardly have been thought worthy of great consideration" would be treasonous if it sought to overawe Parliament into action.43

The inclusiveness of the charge alarmed the defense. Ten days later, on October 16, the Grand Jury returned a True Bill against all but one defendant. On the same day in Scotland Robert Watt was hanged and beheaded; by the mercy of the court he was not dismembered. Two days later an attack on Eyre's charge appeared in the liberal Morning Chronicle. Cursory Strictures on the Charge Delivered by Judge Eyre proved to be the work of William Godwin, author of Political Justice. By means of rigorous legal argument Godwin ridiculed the judge's interpretation of the treason statute and established that the law confined treason to "levying war against the King, and compassing or imagining the King's death." Godwin noted that the very same statute provided that any other treason must be defined "by a direct proceeding of Parliament." Eyre, Godwin wrote, seemed to understand this, for he advised the jury "that they are to make no new law, and force no new interpretations; that they are to consult only the laws of the realm." According to those laws, Godwin asserted, subverting the monarchy was no treason. It mattered not how one conceived of society, he argued, in a trial the issue must be the law:

Let it be granted that the crime, in the eye of reason and discretion, is the most enormous, that it can enter into the heart of man to con-

43State Trials, XIV-XV, passim. Hardy's trial is followed by that of Horne Tooke. Thelwall's trial is inexplicably absent.
ceive, still I have a right to ask, is it a crime against law? . . . are we to deduce that, under Chief Justice Eyre, and the other judges of the Special Commission, reasonings are to be adduced from the axioms and deductions of moralists and metaphysicians, and that men are to be convicted, sentenced, and executed, upon these? (p. 7)  

Godwin's argument was sound. He pointed out that sedition laws were available to punish less serious offenses, and that the crime had been made to fit the charge, rather than the opposite. In the remainder of his pamphlet he demonstrated how Eyre had prejudged the defendants while speculating on potential treasons. He quoted Blackstone, and Hume's record of Lord Stafford's treason trial, in order to attack what the Tory Stafford had called "constructive treason."  

Cursory Strictures was first published by a Mr. Kearnsley who "on receiving a menace from the Treasury, discontinued its sale." Then Daniel Isaac Eaton sold the remainder of the edition, and published a second at half the original price. The book's only crime, Eaton printed on the title page, "is the containing more law than the charge against which it animadverts."

Godwin's defense seems somewhat ironic, even though he was a friend of Thelwall and of Thomas Holcroft, who, though safe underground, had dramatically surrendered when the indictment was returned against him. In Political Justice Godwin had not only discounted the utility of reform movements, but had also deprecated the law as a means of obtaining justice. And his strictures against gratitude had already prevented him from visiting Thelwall in prison; he thought it wasteful to risk the


45 Godwin, pp. 9-12. Edward, 3rd Duke of Stafford, was convicted of high treason. He was beheaded on May 17, 1521, and attainted in 1523.
life of a great philosopher simply to console a friend. Fortunately for Thelwall, the reticent thinker laid aside his prejudices and his fear, and *Cursory Strictures* swept the nation and focused attention on the trials.

When Thomas Hardy was brought to the bar on October 28, Chief Justice Eyre cautioned the jury against the influence of recent pamphlets. John Scott (later Lord Eldon) opened the prosecution with a speech of nine hours, even though this was a felony trial, which traditionally should conclude in a day. His case was based upon the same evidence released in the Parliamentary Report: the defendants had planned a national convention to usurp the government; by "a fair, full, and free representation" the reformers had meant a commonwealth; and they had prepared violent means to overthrow the King. The trial lasted nine days; for Hardy it was a trial of endurance during which his resolve never faltered. Throughout the nation rumors circulated that three hundred new warrants would be signed upon Hardy's conviction. Even Francis Grey, an aristocrat, felt threatened. In the provinces reformers and their families anxiously awaited the news from Old Bailey. If the government had pointed to the example of the French Convention, reformers now perceived a mounting wave of terror worthy of the name of Robespierre.

The eloquent Thomas Erskine, who had attempted to defend Paine *in absentia*, cross-examined prosecution witnesses brutally, attacking the motives of spies. He based his summation, as Godwin had based his pamphlet, upon the statute law of treason, constantly referring evidence

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back to it. His performance was masterful: at one point his voice failed, so that an aide had to repeat his whispered words to the jury.

Still, few felt confident of the outcome. The popular societies had published caustic resolutions, such as the one Thelwall wrote for the Globe Tavern meeting. They had discussed potentially illegal acts, such as assembling in convention if the safeguard of free speech were abolished; Hardy had passed on the name of an ironmonger to a second party interested in purchasing pikes, though there was evidence that Hardy himself showed no interest in the matter.

On the ninth day the jury retired for three hours and returned a verdict of not guilty. They refused to accept that treason included attempts to change Parliament, or even a national attempt toward that end. They refused to condemn actions which might cause unintended actions. That night Hardy was drawn in a coach by the crowd through the streets of London. As the news went out to the provinces, spontaneous celebrations erupted. In Colchester, nineteen-year-old Crabb Robinson dashed from door to door, waking his neighbors and shouting out the good news.47

The pressure on the remaining defendants eased a bit. Hardy had been the founder and long-time secretary of the Corresponding Society. Home Tooke's trial came next, and it converted relief to hilarity. Earlier in his life he had been refused admittance to the bar, and he delighted in any opportunity to perform in court. This time he held all the useful facts, for in his recent activities he had behaved carefully. He had left the chair of the Constitutional Society, for example, when


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potentially dangerous resolutions were moved. Tooke called Pitt himself as a defense witness, and asked the Prime Minister about resolutions they had signed together at the Thatched Roof Tavern in 1783. Spectators laughed when Pitt shuffled and finally answered that he could not recall. After six days of Tooke's wit the jury acquitted him on their first vote.

Next came Thelwall's trial. Despite the previous acquittals, his case remained uncertain. Tooke had managed himself in a way that set him apart from the rest of the defendants, especially those who were workingmen, or their leaders. In addition, Pitt had been badly embarrassed. At least one conviction was necessary to justify the continued suspension of habeas corpus. Thelwall had lectured, often extemporaneously, for over three months in the Corresponding Society assembly rooms. His motto "moderation in means, but not in principle" had, no doubt, informed many lectures. Furthermore, the day before his trial began the Privy Council actually interrogated a young law apprentice who was assisting the defense. Thelwall had been long planning to speak on his own behalf, but Erskine would not honor his request.

Thelwall did actually prepare a brief of his defense, in the form of a summation, which he later published. It demonstrates some expertise. First he established his personal integrity. At his trial he examined his character witnesses, surgeons under whom he studied physiology. Next he compared the prosecution's charges, point by point, with the treason statute, quoting Blackstone and Locke throughout. He showed that the convention the reformers had discussed admitted the King as sovereign. They intended only to sway public opinion, and thus indirectly influence Parliament. He distinguished the case of Britain from that of France and insisted: "I have always insisted that many
actions have been perpetrated in France that no good man can contemplate without horror."\(^{48}\) Though his sarcasm grew dangerously sharp at times, he attempted to make it serve his case: the reform societies he described as "a few powerless societies of tradesmen and mechanicks, associated with 2 or 3 gentlemen of private fortune, whose whole estates would scarcely furnish the luxuries of a Prime Minister's table"(p. 16). Whether Thelwall's plaintive appeal to ancient jury privileges and his apology for universal suffrage would have impressed the jury or pushed them too far, one cannot say. But his skill in declamation may well have offset his radical claims. Certainly he stood on firm ground when he attacked Judge Eyre's pronouncement that a man may be incriminated by acts committed in prosecution of a conspiracy before he became a party in such conspiracy. This, Thelwall warned, was constructive conspiracy(p. 71). Finally, his story of how a government spy called at his home to take him to a meeting and vote for certain resolutions would surely have touched a jury(p.76).

The actual trial was initially somewhat anticlimactic. The prosecution repeated arguments used against Hardy and Tooke. The reform societies intended "to overawe the legislature, and boldly to assume the reins of government." Their avowed goal of reforming the House of Commons was "a colourable object of pretences, which might lead others, less wicked than themselves, to co-operate . . . in pursuance of their secret objects"(p. 313). The prosecution attempted to connect these "secret objects" with overt acts. The societies corresponded with the French Convention, even after the execution of Louis XVI. In their publications


For the trial itself, see. The Trial of John Thelwall on a Charge of High Treason (London: Allen and West, 1794).
the reformers sought "representative government," which the prosecution asserted should be read as a term used by the American Joel Barlowe, an outright republican who was also an honorary member of the Constitutional Society (p. 321).

The prosecution then attempted to portray Thelwall as the most desperate and violent reform leader. Primary evidence was the testimony of two spies and a letter taken from Thelwall's library. The letter proved to be the most serious evidence against the defendant. It was addressed, though not mailed, to a friend in America. Apparently Thelwall was indulging his sense of righteousness, for he claimed that "no man had gone bolder lengths, or had encountered greater danger in the cause of liberty than himself." He described himself as a "Republican and a true sanscullotte" in regard to French affairs, but the prosecution implied that he was an international revolutionary. No doubt Thelwall regretted suggesting in this letter that America had "too much veneration for property, too much religion, and too much law" (pp. 326-28).

Thelwall's counsel, Thomas Erskine, defended the letter as a private, speculative, and unconsummated conversation. The prosecution startled Erskine by unexpectedly resting its case after only one and one-half days. Erskine was not prepared to begin his case, but his spontaneous wit sufficed. He covered his own embarrassment by asserting he was indeed embarrassed "that Sergeant Adair (the chief prosecutor) spoke four and one-half hours without introducing a single piece of evidence that was new" (p. 347). Erskine systematically criticized the vagueness of the "constructive treason" indictment, explaining how it would have incriminated the respected Duke of Richmond for reform activities during the eighties. Erskine insisted that to establish treason the prosecution
must prove conspiracy to wage war against the King: "If they failed, it mattered not whether his client was a prudent man or a rash one" (p. 347).

He proceeded to show Thelwall rash in his acceptance of government spies, and he demolished the credibility of the spies' testimony against Thelwall. The principal witness, Erskine showed, had been convicted of bigamy and was consequently a convicted perjurer. And he showed that the second important prosecution witness, another spy, offered misleading testimony: the spy asserted that Thelwall had attended a meeting of reform delegates which had considered publishing the names of police infiltrators; the spy neglected to mention that Thelwall had led opposition to the proposition, which was defeated. When asked why he did not mention Thelwall's actual role, the witness answered that he did not think it material. Thelwall himself cross-examined his accusers and showed that they could not swear he had made any proposals for violence or for republicanism. He forced at least one spy to admit that he had offered unusually moderate, peaceful advice (pp. 350-70).

On the fourth day Erskine's assistant, John Gibbs, summarized for the defense. He depicted Thelwall as a rash-spoken "underling" in the reform movement, an underling prosecuted even after his leaders had been acquitted (p. 361). Despite an unfriendly final charge from Justice Eyre, the jury acquitted Thelwall after one hour and ten minutes; despite warnings from the bench, the verdict was received "with clapping, shouts, and huzzahs" (pp. 370-75).

As always, Thelwall was prepared to make an address:

My Lords and Gentlemen of the Jury, I protest, in the sight of my country, and call upon that posterity whose applause I hope to obtain, and whose happiness I have anxiously laboured to procure, to bear witness for me . . . that no part of my political conduct has ever

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had any actuating motive but a desire to promote the welfare and happiness of my fellow creatures, by peaceable means -- by reason alone . . . . Not only have I forborne all personal concern with violence, or plans of violence, myself, but a great part of my activity has been exerted in preventing the Society with which I have been connected from being led by spies and informers (by the Taylors and lynams who had insinuated themselves into it, for purposes of the blackest treachery), into schemes of rashness and violence -- in preventing them from being seduced by such beings into the ridiculous project of procuring arms, and exchanging the artillery of the pen, which is the only artillery the Corresponding Society should ever use. (Mrs. Thelwall, p. 259)

Of his imprisonment Thelwall said that "nothing was so offensive to our persecutors and their agents as our cheerfulness and gaity; it was a contempt of their power and authority so marked and so impressive, that "it was impossible for them patiently to bear it" (Mrs. Thelwall, p. 227). Thelwall's acquittal signalled general victory, for all the other prisoners were released, and the rumors of new arrests disappeared. Amid the rejoicing, Thelwall was pulled in a coach throughout London, and, before his day was done, achieved the satisfaction of addressing a crowd of Londoners from the porch of his brother-in-law's house.

Nonetheless, the reform movement was slow to revitalize. Hardy was saddened and Tooke petulant; both retired. Under new leadership since the trials began, the Corresponding Society had lost impetus. Thelwall, however, held no reservations: he would push on for parliamentary reform. When asked by a friend to consider his own interest he responded:

Look to the widows and orphans in every manufacturing town throughout the nation; the men, it is true, have met a milder fate. They have escaped the last extremities of domestic misfortune by laying down their intolerable load of existence among the marshes of Flanders and the dykes of Holland. (Mrs. Thelwall, p. 291)
Thelwall's rhetoric seems overblown, but it corresponded with social reality. In *The Ruined Cottage* Wordsworth was dramatizing the same plight of the lower classes. The national war with France continued 11 years, and worked fierce hardships on the lower classes.

Soon after his acquittal Thelwall took action. On February 25, 1795, he resumed lecturing at the Beaufort Buildings. It was the day appointed by the King for a solemn fast in support of the war effort. Thelwall, however, decided to discuss "the distresses of the industrious poor." He criticized the press gangs which enslaved "England's bold peasantry"; he attacked taxes, which he claimed came "in the first instance from the labors of the poor"; he denounced "trading magistrates" who invested huge sums in war contracts; and he denigrated churchmen who prayed "to enable soldiers to cut throats." War with France, he repeated, was a calamity for the nation; the nation should demand its end.  

From this time Thelwall lectured every Wednesday and Saturday, drawing crowds of 500 or more (I, pref.). As a guard against future prosecution, he employed a shorthand writer, and twice weekly he published his lectures in a journal called *The Tribune*. His goal was to educate citizens to "the extreme difference between the interests of the ministers and the interest of the people "(I,67).

At the same time he resumed his lectures, Thelwall resigned from the Corresponding Society. He foresaw that the government might attempt to tie his public words to its activity in order to formulate another "constructive treason." From some members he received criticism, but he remained resolute. Probably Thelwall feared that new converts to  

49 *The Tribune*, I, 3-8. Subsequent references will be noted in the text.
the reform movement might indeed be led to imprudent violence. The economic situation in England had been growing continually grimmer since the autumn of 1793. Two bad harvests had occurred, and speculators held grain outside of London. Impressment increased at a pace with unemployment. East side day laborers and Irish dockworkers, formerly apolitical, were converting their genuine hunger into hatred for the government. But raw hatred, Thelwall decided, was unproductive. He truly abhorred bloodshed, and, as a near victim of what he called the English terror, he wanted no system of conspiracy and recrimination to taint the move toward democracy. So he lectured on the peoples' grievances and reiterated the need for peaceful acquisition of representative government.

He spoke directly to the working-class, and, increasingly, to the "respectable" middle class, endeavoring to bring them information upon which he was convinced they could reason. He attacked, for example, Pitt's optimistic commerce message of 1795, pointing out that Pitt had included subsidies paid to foreign armies in the sum of exports (I, 31). He cited economists who calculated that £70 million had already been spent upon the war, and explained that the government's total annual income amounted only to £17 million. He documented anecdotes of the crimping, and read the list of subsidies paid to French émigrés: "Dreaming monks and swindling aristocrats" (I, 43). But such facts, he would conclude, "are wrapped in the veil of political mystery. They are not meant for the eye of the swinish multitude" (I, 31).

The solution Thelwall advocated was simple: universal suffrage. With the whole people represented in Parliament the corrupt ministry would be expelled and "the war of the monied alarmists" would be con-
cluded. The first step, he told his audiences, should consist of "manly and spirited remonstrances to the government." By "manly," he explained, "I mean benevolent and peaceful" (I, 19). To those who felt anarchy would result from "attending to those who oppose war and statecraft," he commented upon an old man's story of crimping: "A happy family are thrown into confusion. The elder son sells his brother to a pressgang, and the daughter becomes a camp prostitute. . . . is not this anarchy? or something worse?" (45)

The reason Thelwall could recommend peaceful remonstrances was that he firmly believed that English citizens possessed rights. He viewed the British constitution as a monarchy long guided by democratic institutions, especially the ancient Saxon Witan, which many reformers mistakenly thought an efficient democratic assembly. But his analysis of the current government was acute. It was "neither monarchy nor democracy," he charged, "but an usurped oligarchy, constituted by a set of borough-mongers, who have stolen at once the liberties of the people, and abused the prerogatives of the crown" (II, 218).

Thelwall also questioned the standing army, a new institution, because it was quartered in isolated barracks. "When men are the soldiers of the people, they will defend the people; when they are soldiers of the court, the court will persuade them they have an interest separate from the people" (II, 93). And solidarity among the people, he warned, was mandatory: "Do not suppose, because you are a few steps higher on the ladder of society, that the lower steps cannot be broken away without serving your destruction" (II, 232). Current inflation should not be blamed on shopkeepers, for it was the result of war expenditures and government corruption. He cited historical documents.
to show a rise in the cost of food relative to wages from the early Elizabethan period to the end of the eighteenth century (I,6-30).

Meanwhile, the Corresponding Society was regaining strength under the general chairmanship of Francis Place, who later became a Chartist leader. During the summer of 1795 Thelwall's health again turned bad, and drove him to the sea air of the Isle of Wight. On October 7 he returned to London and resumed his lecture series. By then the Corresponding Society had grown to over seventy divisions, and its leadership was planning a massive open-air demonstration against the war for October 26 in Copenhagen Fields, a large pasture north of London. At their invitation, Thelwall attended to help keep order, although he was no longer an official member. When he arrived the crowd had grown to an estimated 100,000 to 150,000, so he was forced to shout out his speech from two different platforms; yet most spectators could not hear him directly. He spoke against violence, and defined the means proper for serious reformers:

It is not by tumult. It is not by violence. It is by reason; by turning our serious attention to facts and principles; by bold and determinate investigation, not to be checked by idle threats, nor turned aside by actual danger.

He warned that violence would be fomented by spies: "There are wretches who hope from our meetings and assemblies to pick out pretences for establishing that system of military despotism which they wish to establish over us" (p. 3).

50Cone, p. 217.

51Peaceful Discussion, and not Tumultuary Violence the Means of Redressing National Grievance, 2nd ed. (London, 1795), p. 9. Subsequent references are noted in the text.
He considered factions to be as dangerous as spies to the cause of reform:

Fix your attentions on principles, not on men. Remember that no man ought to be of so much consequence as to draw your attention from the general object: and remember also, that you fall into this error as completely when you precipitately denounce, as when you implicitly confide.(p. 17)

As an example of the fruits of faction, Thelwall pointed to the French, who had recently affirmed a new Constitution that discriminated between "active" and "passive" citizenship. Thelwall reaffirmed his veneration for the original principles of the French Revolution, but bitterly attacked the new constitution, by which, he charged, the rich "having the power of aristocracy in their hands, though without calling themselves aristocrats, have imbibed the selfish desire of preserving to themselves the advantages of that power"(p. 14).

Because present grievances were caused by a long-term decline in real wages, he cautioned against redressing the grievance by attacking isolated profiteers: "If you destroy one set of villains, another set will arise in their place . . . and therefore, it is the system you must reform, not wreak your vengeance on individuals." The system to be reformed was, as always, the corrupt Parliament, and the crowd's own restraint and concern would gain their end:

I have told you that this is one of the most glorious days that England ever beheld, and I will tell you why: it demonstrates to the confusion of calumniators, that so many people of all ages, classes, and orders of society, can meet together, without tumult or disorder, with but one voice, one heart, one sentiment: that every pulse can beat, at once, for the liberty, the peace, and the happiness of the human race; for the abolition of corruption, violence, and persecution; for the triumph of equal laws, equal rights, and consequently of virtue and happiness, exalted by reason, and united by peace.(p. 22)
The crowd listened to the speeches as best they could. There is no record of violence. At 5 o'clock the meeting ended and the people returned to their homes.

Three days later, on October 29, a crowd gathered by the route of the King's carriage as he travelled to Parliament to open the new session. People chanted "no bread, no King" and someone threw a rock through the window of the coach. The King was unhurt, but the consequence of the act was as Thelwall had predicted: government activity. On November 6, 1795, Lord Grenville introduced a Seditious Practices Bill to the Lords; four days later Pitt proposed a similar bill in the Commons. Together the proposals spelt an end to political discussion among the English people. The former widened the treason law to include spoken and written words as well as overt acts, and specified intimidation of Parliament as a treason. The latter was aimed directly at Thelwall: meetings of more than fifty persons would be illegal unless specifically sanctioned by two magistrates. A second offense would mean seven years transportation, and if twelve men remained after a meeting was dispersed, they were subject to the death penalty.52

Proponents of the bills argued that any more political agitation would bring anarchy, and pointed to the attack upon the King. In his next lecture Thelwall took pains to refute them. "Political lectures are not the cause of these disturbances," he said. "This is the true cause, a ha'penny loaf, purchased on the second of September, 1795, which weighs two ounces" (Mrs. Thelwall, p. 384). A wide spectrum of liberal opinion organized against the Two Acts, including the wholehearted support of

52Cone, pp. 218-19; Watson, pp. 585-88.
the Whigs and of those upper-class liberals who had begun the reform movement in the 80's. Christopher Wyville organized meetings once again in Yorkshire; Henry Erskine, brother of Thomas, organized a large meeting in Edinburgh, from which 20,000 Scotsmen petitioned the King.

From this time on Thelwall devised the Corresponding Society's strategy and wrote its addresses. A Royal Proclamation had already forbidden political meetings; Thelwall called another for November 12 at Copenhagen Fields. His Advertisement was carefully phrased:

> The meeting is strictly legal, under the authority of the Bill of Rights; a Proclamation is not law . . . . attempts may be made to seize some of the persons assembled; do not resist: ministers desire nothing more earnestly than tumult.

He then approached the Whig Friends of the People and persuaded them to attend the meeting. The structure of the meeting proved to be an interesting democratic experiment. Speakers addressed the crowd from five platforms, explaining the several petitions that would be offered. After each petition was read, the question was put by means of a semaphore system: when the speaker raised his handkerchief, supporters would raise hands; when he elevated his hat, dissenters raised their hands. A massive crowd, again estimated at over 100,000, thus endorsed a resolution abhorring the violence done to the King, and endorsed petitions to King, Lords, and Commons pleading against the Two Acts. Then they went quietly to their homes.53

On November 23, 1795 the Corresponding Society published 100,000 copies of a "Declaration of Principles," which Thelwall wrote and financed largely by his lecture proceeds. On December 6 another mass

53 For details on the series of meetings, see Mrs. Thelwall, pp. 400-04; Brown, p. 152; Cone, pp. 220-22.
meeting was held. Again an immense crowd turned out and the liberal
Dukes of Norfolk and Bedford addressed the people as "fellow-citizens."
Though very sick Thelwall took the speaker's platform to denounce the
Two Acts as unconstitutional. While he was speaking, someone began the
cry "soldiers, soldiers" which immediately panicked the crowd, for the
ministry had called out horse soldiers against a crowd of Middlesex free-
holders only a few days before. Thelwall saw the potential destruction
the people might bring upon themselves, surrounding property, and the
movement, and he cried out:

Why fear the soldiers, my countrymen? Ministers know too well,
that men, on changing a brown or black coat for a red one, cannot
throw off all the ties of kindred, the love of that liberty
which they heard and lisped in their infancy, the dear and bland
affections for their native country. Would that all the British
soldiers in the country -- would all, all were here and we, confi-
dently, unarmed as we are, with our bosoms open, our wives and
children in our hands, would meet them firm and undaunted. (Mrs.
Thelwall, p. 412)

The crowd was calmed, and the meeting went on without violence. Mean-
while, Petitions were flooding Parliament: a total of 130,000 signers
opposed the Two Acts, while only 29,000 registered their approval. But
all was to no avail. Time ran out on the reformers, and the unreformed
Parliament passed both bills. The King signed them into law on Decem-
ber 12, 1795. After that date Thelwall saw no alternative but to dis-
continue his lectures. He filled The Tribune with old material, then
discontinued it at a loss. The Corresponding Society gradually curtailed
activity. In the spring Gale Jones and John Binns were sent to provin-
cial societies to explain the new laws. They were arrested in Birming-
ham and tied up in expensive trials. Jones was convicted of "using
violent language."^54

By February, 1796, however, Thelwall had employed his legal expertise to plot a border-line course of action. He carefully examined the text of the Two Acts and discovered a loophole: lectures were forbidden only when they treated the politics "of this realm." Quickly he designed a course of lectures on classical politics, which he advertised in a Prospectus on February 2, 1796. "I will not violate the law," he said, "but I will continue to obey the dictates of my own conscience, and promote the important cause of popular discussion, in such ways as the law has not forbidden. Locke, Sydney, and Harrington are put to silence; but Socrates and Plato, Tully and Demosthenes, may be eloquent in the same cause."^55 He completed 20 lectures in London, ending on March 25, 1796, and then took his series to the provinces, in order to keep alive the movement there.

^54Brown, 152; Cone, p. 220-22.

^55Prospectus of a Course of Lectures to be Delivered Every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday during the Ensuing Lent, in Strict Conformity with the Restrictions of Mr. Pitt's Convention Act (London: Symond's, February 2, 1796), p. 15. Thelwall's classical scholarship was actually somewhat superficial. An analysis of his allusions to the literature and history of classical antiquity reveals that he refers often to Livy, Plutarch, Sallust, and Herodotus, all of whom were readily available in translation. His lectures on classical politics have not survived, but the Prospectus indicates the topics on which he dwelled in the lectures, generally the same topics he mentioned in his other political writings: Brutus and the expulsion of the Tarquin Kings, the reforms of Scrvius Tullius, and the aristocratic arrogance of Appius Claudius Pulcher (which he garnered from Livy, especially Book 1); the reforms of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, and the story of Brutus and Caesar (from Plutarch, Lives); and the theory of the decline of Rome (from Sallust and Livy). Another frequent topic is Socrates, whose Apology Thelwall probably read (in translation) in a contemporary biography (Mendelsohn, The Life of Socrates) that I have been unable to locate. Thelwall makes an extremely interesting allusion when he describes the Greeks Harmodius and Aristogiton as tyrannicides because they killed Hipparchus, brother of the tyrant Hippias, in 514 B.C. The common sources for the story, Herodotus 5.58 and Thucidides 6.54-59, point out that the attack was motivated by personal rather than political reasons. The only classical source in
In Norwich, a liberal stronghold, he delivered 22 lectures without incident and proceeded to Yarmouth, carefully meeting organizers in groups of 50 or less. On August 19 he lectured in an empty warehouse to a crowd of middle-class men, women, and children. A press gang broke into the meeting and attacked the audience with bludgeons, splitting open the head of a 15-year-old. Then they extinguished the lights and grabbed Thelwall. "In the mean time," according to newspaper report, "some of the people collecting, and recognizing him, exclaimed 'It is Thelwall; let us rescue him'" and rushed the press gang. At the same time a 16-year-old radical advanced, "clapping a pistol to the head of the most resolute among the press gang, exclaimed 'Offer the least resistance and you're a dead man.'" So Thelwall escaped, to send off outraged, but useless letters to the Mayor of the town. Thelwall proceeded to Wisbeach and Lynn, where his lectures were again disrupted; he wrote more open letters, and published an account of his harassment.56

But the harassment continued, and he was forced to return to London. There he wrote two pamphlets in answer to Edmund Burke, whose Reflections he had never rebutted. In The Rights of Nature Against the Usurpations of Establishments Thelwall attacked Burke's Letters on a


which the killing is praised as an act of public heroism is Diodorus Siculus Antiquities 10.17.1. This work was extremely obscure in the 1790's in England. Because Thelwall confuses the story (he says that the victim was Pisastratus, father of the slain Hipparchus), it seems likely that he gained his information second-hand. His tutor and coach was probably his friend George Dyer, an accomplished classical scholar who declined his degree at Cambridge because he refused to affirm the Thirty-Nine Articles.
Regicide Peace, in which the conservative had argued that throughout England, the "responsible Public" totalled some 400,000 inhabitants. Thelwall retorted: "Of our whole population, not a tenth part have either the leisure nor the means for any degree of information. And this is your boasted society of civilization and refinement . . . . is this good order?" It was this pamphlet that led Coleridge to praise his friend for writing "the only good reply to Burke."57

In the second pamphlet Thelwall was at his best. It was an ironic reply to Burke's Letter to a Noble Lord. Earlier in the year Burke had received a pension which the Duke of Bedford had questioned in the House of Lords. In his Letter Burke replied with a brilliant repartee. Thelwall was interested in widening any breach in conservative ranks, and he was outraged at what he saw as the inconsistencies of Burke's thought. Burke had written that the Duke of Bedford had been "swaddled and dandled into a legislator," an apparent insult to the aristocracy, and had cast aspersions on the Duke's fortune which had been acquired under Henry VIII. In answer, Thelwall compared the income tax proposal of outlawed "revolutionary" Tom Paine to the attempted reforms of a conservative Roman King, Servius Tullius. Thelwall then suggested that Burke's comments on hereditary property qualified him as "the first complete leveller I have ever met." He asked "Is no property to be sacred, but the property of seats and votes in Commons?" He thought that Burke had been a supporter of aristocrats since the Earl of Rockingham's patronage had saved the Irishman from "the neces-

sity of being a public lecturer in a provincial school."58

In his climactic stroke Thelwall quoted Burke's attack on "overgrown Dukes, who oppress the industry of humble men, who hold large portions of wealth without any apparent merit of their own, and by their vast landed pensions--enormous as to not only outrage economy but even to stagger credulity--trample on the mediocrity of laborious individuals" (p. 30). Thelwall had spent seven years defending the rights of "laborious individuals" whom Burke had previously categorized as "not honorable." Thelwall had received not a pension but a treason trial, an attempted kidnapping, and, finally, personal infamy. At the beginning of 1797 rumors of a French invasion drained support from the reform movement. The London Corresponding Society would disband in another year; already some of its members were conspiring to support a violent rebellion in Ireland.

Sometime in the spring of 1797 Thelwall simply retired. He began to search for a farm where he might quietly raise his family. Although sporadic and increasingly violent reform activity continued, the movement Thelwall had championed--a rational, voluntary extension of the right to choose representatives--was exhausted. Ahead lay a long war with France, an incomplete reform in 1832, and the violent frustration of Chartism in the forties. The democratic polity Thelwall advocated would not be realized in England until the twentieth century. His own strenuous efforts ended in ignominious defeat. To discover what victory might have meant, we must examine the systematic social criticism Thelwall constructed upon the basis of political equality.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL CRITICISM:
"NOTHING MORE THAN JUSTICE"

... England is ... a fen
Of stagnant waters.

--William Wordsworth, "England, 1802"

Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence, and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality, and fraternity of the ancient gentes.

--Lewis H. Morgan, The Ancient Society, 1877; quoted by Friedrich Engels, On the Origin of the State

At the turn of the nineteenth century England lay poised before a great impending transition. Democracy, industrialism, and capitalism were presenting dim visages which contemporary observers variously found bleak and threatening, fertile and promising. To the conservative social innovations presaged Armageddon; to the liberal old abuses seemed to be draining the nation's vitality. As a social theorist John Thelwall drew upon both traditional and new concepts in order to criticize the nation as it was and as it ought to be. He brought to the task his personal experience of conditions in different classes of society. His social goals mandated the equal worth of all citizens and emphasized the importance of all who worked. The objectives he sought anticipated those of mature Victorian social thought, for Thelwall refused to identify individual political freedom with economic individualism, an assumption
generally accepted by nineteenth-century Radicals. Thus Thelwall's thought formed a bridge from the benevolence of the eighteenth century to the organicism of the later nineteenth century represented by the thought of John Ruskin, William Morris, and the mature John Stuart Mill.

In his lectures Thelwall examined individual rights and responsibilities and the proper sphere of governmental activity. He investigated the labor force and the poor--what came to be known as the "proletariat." He analyzed the effects of agrarian enclosure, industrialism, and the new problems of life attending all these issues. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he spoke in practical as well as theoretical terms, researching statistics on wages and living costs as far back as the reign of Elizabeth, and proposing concrete programs for regulation of agrarian reform. His analysis throughout was based on a consciousness of the character and problems of the "laboring classes."

Despite chaos abroad in revolutionary France and repression in England, Thelwall wished only to submit his propositions to the judgment of democratic opinion; he abhorred political violence in all but the most desperate situation. An analysis of the tactics he systematically espoused and of the sources of his thought will provide an appropriate introduction to his social criticism. Although early in his career Thelwall used sanguinary rhetoric, taunting the beheaded king-cock Chaunticleer, after his trial he guarded increasingly against violent speech, even in jest. Peacefulness was for him more than a matter of tactics; it was a basic assumption about the nature of man, a popular assumption in eighteenth-century England. The peace so celebrated by Thomson and Pope became a tradition for reformers at the end of the century. William Frend, who
was expelled from Cambridge, and Joseph Gerrald, who was sentenced to transportation, had each written consistently and vehemently against bloodshed, in the very books upon which their prosecutions were based. Predictably, Thelwall condemned violence in the French war, but he also denounced potential violence against the English government. The perpetrator of an aggressive war he called "... a political murderer who proceeds by system. He slaughters by wholesale; and exults over the catalogue of his atrocities." He also castigated the creator of revolutionary "tumult": "I do not persuade men to commit rebellion... a crime of monstrous magnitude; because it involves the peace and tranquility of society, and gives us a few upstart leaders, whose minds are inflated with a desire for power." 1

If Thelwall had not learned from his own treason trial the stifling effect of political violence, he could not help learning it from the increasingly chaotic activity across the channel. Although still a professed friend of the Revolution in 1795, he nonetheless declared: "The example of France will convince all mankind that once you begin to shed blood for differences of political opinion or prejudice, there is no telling to what excess it will lead" (III, 229).

In retrospect, this regard for human life may appear somewhat naive, but Thelwall viewed it as good policy as well. As early as 1794

1The Tribune, I, 287. The Tribune was a journal written and published by Thelwall twice-weekly from February to December, 1795. In it he reproduced his lectures (he employed a short-hand writer to transcribe them) and included an occasional brief contribution from friends such as George Dyer. Thirty issues made up a volume, which was subsequently published in a bound edition. Three such volumes appeared, the last dated March, 1796. Unless otherwise indicated, all page references noted in the text pertain to The Tribune.
Thelwall was convinced that the movement was faltering not for lack of violence, but because it had failed to repudiate unruliness. Furthermore, the movement had failed to seize upon government violence in the war as an issue for mobilizing public support. The government's Proclamation of 1792, which had vacuously alleged "treasonable violence," had cowed the reformers, Thelwall acknowledged, and had permitted the ministry to wage an aggressive war against the new French Republic. The consequent Terror in France and war mobilization in England actually provided the conclusive arguments against reform in England. He believed that France could have become a showplace of reform: "If you had given a few years of peace and quietness to the new government and principles of France, the eyes of mankind would have been impartially directed towards them."

Had public opinion been mobilized early against violence, it might have helped bring about parliamentary reform as a means to control a wasteful war-mongering ministry, and to establish productive relations between the two most economically and democratically advanced states in the world. It is perhaps idle to speculate on so complex a problem, but it might be pointed out that a decade before, when English opinion had mobilized against the American war, the pressure not only forced a peace treaty and brought down a ministry, but also paved the way for political reform attempts throughout the 1780's.

Thelwall's steadfast opposition to domestic "tumult" was based upon his conviction that sovereignty lay in the majority of the nation. For the majority to function, Thelwall assumed the absolute necessity of free expression. In his lectures he repeatedly warned against the intolerance of both party faction and government repression. For example,
although he was sympathetic to the goals of Jean Paul Marat in France, Thelwall pointed out that Marat's fame had "lasted only a day, because built upon faction, violence and injustice" (II, 181). Toleration of opinion was of paramount importance: "Let us then fairly and impartially admit that men may differ from each other in opinion, without having corrupt and rotten hearts" (II, 177). He recklessly attacked by name the government spies who had infiltrated reform societies:

Ye must scatter the poisonous seeds of suspicion in every breast and sow division between patriot and patriot; and if any little personal difference happens to arise between them, or any misapprehension or suspicion, you must inflame it into the rancor of party hatred.

(II, 174)

France had descended into chaos, Thelwall thought, largely because that nation possessed no tradition of free political debate: "Had they experienced the advantage of a regular and gradual introduction to the principles of truth," he said, bloodshed could have been avoided.

His implication was that England enjoyed a more liberal tradition, and this history confirms. Basil Willey points out the vast gap between the political development of the nations. France's revolution was complicated by aristocratic pressure for decentralization and by sansculottic pressure for immediate economic equality. In England the bourgeoisie had achieved limited power bloodlessly a hundred years before when the Glorious Revolution had ended absolutism and had established the "balanced power" of the British Constitution. By the late eighteenth century feudal obligations had largely disappeared, and the middle class, blending into the aristocracy, grew in numbers and in

political influence. Official ideology came from Locke. Although Locke did not endorse manhood suffrage, he vested sovereignty in the people, the assumption which for Thelwall ruled out revolutionary violence.

Although universal suffrage would have wrought radical change in England, its proponents did not consider themselves "revolutionaries" in the sense of those who would overthrow the Constitution. History has fastened upon them the name Jacobins, which their enemies employed; actually, since the eighties the reform party had called themselves "patriots." Among them there was essential agreement on the need for extending the franchise. What Parliament might then legislate was a subject less discussed in the London Corresponding Society. Institutions like the tithe, the Test Act, and impressment were obvious targets. At the extreme, some reformers hoped for a republic.

Tom Paine did urge a republic in The Rights of Man, Part II. He convinced many by demonstrating the "wastefulness" of monarchy and aristocracy. But his economic program was tentative and self-contradictory, for at bottom Paine believed that government itself was an evil to be reduced. He was a capitalist who associated with the Constitutional Society rather than the working-class Corresponding Society. Despite the immense influence of The Rights of Man, after 1792 Paine wrote little addressed to the immediate social needs of England; by that time he had left the country and would never return.

But Thelwall lectured on economic and social proposals in London from early 1793 to early 1797. He was the most comprehensive social theorist among the reformers; more than any other he addressed himself
to the issues of the coming democratic and industrial state. His thought flowed in both traditional and innovative channels, which allowed him a flexibility uncommon among his contemporaries. In contrast to Paine, he did not think a republic necessary to solve English problems, despite his personal dislike of George III and kings in general, as the decade advanced.

As a young man, Thelwall had been a Tory: he admired the Earl of Chatham, read Hume and Smollett, and respected the Crown as protector of the nation against concentrations of power in the hands of aristocrats and monopolists, much like the good parson of Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. These interests fostered in Thelwall a concern for economic and human ties as well as simply political ones. Furthermore, Thelwall's own abhorred legal studies presented him with traditional arguments for political liberalism, and he shared his contemporaries' belief in the myth that democratic institutions had predominated during the Anglo-Saxon period. As Christopher Hill points out, similar misreadings of history influenced the Republicans during the Civil War. The eighteenth-century preoccupation with the ancient continued to build upon this tradition, so that in 1776 Major Cartwright based arguments for suffrage upon

3There are striking parallels in this respect between Thelwall and the Tory Samuel Johnson. Bertrand Harris Bronson suggests that the basis of Johnson's Tory humanism "rests clearly upon the radically democratic assumption, uncongenial to the prepossessions of our time, that we are all moral beings with a common stake in the working out on earth of our personal salvation." See his discussion in *Facets of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 234-40.

Anglo-Saxon political equality. Also, in the eighteenth century there developed a sense of "democracy of intellect," to use Basil Willey's term. His example is Johnson's criterion of taste. The idea that an intelligent man could speak to any crucial issue, respond to any grave question, deeply influenced Thelwall, who, before his political career began, read prize papers to the physical society at Guy's Hospital.

In his lectures Thelwall represented the Glorious Revolution as establishing ultimate sovereignty in the people, and quoted Coke's description of England as a Commonwealth with a King as chief magistrate. He read Blackstone's comment that "Every British freeman should be governed by laws of his own making." To prove electoral reform respectable, he quoted the Earl of Chatham, "The Great Commoner"; to prove it legally acceptable he quoted Blackstone's assertion that "any alteration of the Constitution should be toward a more complete representation" (II, 363-63). In the crucial manifestos he wrote for the Corresponding Society, he drew from traditional constitutional law. The Globe Tavern Address of 1793 quoted sections of the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights.

He turned charges of "innovation" against the opponents of reform. When Lord Justice Clerk convicted reformers of the basis of his "conscience's dictates," Thelwall called the decision unconstitutional and illegal. "Loyal societies" which used extra-legal means to curtail free speech Thelwall called a dangerous innovation. He argued that, although there was little threat of revolution in England, a counter-revolution was being completed by Pitt, one that was eroding the principles

of 1688. When the Two Acts were debated in 1796, Thelwall argued that they would return the nation's polity to absolutism. To support universal suffrage he mustered the popular myths that Anglo-Saxons had achieved universal suffrage in the Witangemot; that their juries were independent and fair; that King Alfred had withstood foreign domination and had ignored class distinctions in his government. For Thelwall and his associates these were not fuzzy propagandistic legends but living ideals that fostered a democratic national pride. This helps us understand his steadfast adherence to peaceful behavior. He sincerely believed that British law and British tradition would protect the people when they sought redress of grievances.

His sense of history served to ballast the revolutionary thinker, for Thelwall was a creature of his times, sharing the all-embracing excitement generated by the conviction that intelligence and benevolence can indeed recreate man. In England his friends were Holcroft, Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecroft. With them he perceived in the world of men the freshness of a new dawn, bringing daylight bright with laughter and trust. But his understanding of history was sufficient to advise him that the same sun shines upon the earth, whether in the summer age of satisfaction or in the spring of re-creation.

B. Sprague Allen has represented Thelwall as a consistent disciple of William Godwin, the author of Political Justice. This idea is an exaggeration. In the first place, Thelwall had actively debated issues such as the slave trade and the debtor laws in 1788, long before he had ever heard of Godwin. Secondly, in 1793, before Political Justice was

published, Thelwall had published his own revolutionary novel, The Peripatetic, in which he outlined much of his political and social program. Finally, if Thelwall's thought had been dominated by Political Justice, he would not have continued agitating for immediate political reform, which Godwin had criticized as self-defeating because premature. Thelwall was in no way an anarchist. He envisioned a socially active government and assumed that members of society, far from acting only as individuals, should act in concert by means of representation and public debate. The idea of Godwin that Thelwall did firmly fasten upon, Allen's chief example, was the notion that individuals should not be blamed for the corruption which proceeds from bad systems.

In John Thelwall: A Pioneer of Democracy and Social Reform in England at the Time of the French Revolution Charles Cestre argues that Thelwall was overwhelmingly influenced by the French Revolution. There is some usefulness in the thesis, of course, for the Revolution fired Thelwall's imagination just as it coincided with the re-awakening of English interest in parliamentary reform. In addition, Thelwall seems to have learned about Roman history through Livy, especially Book 1, a popular document in revolutionary France. But Thelwall had participated in reform movements before the fall of the Bastille, and throughout his career he drew heavily upon constitutional law and British tradition to support parliamentary reform. But his thought, like that of many Englishmen, was probably influenced by philosophers who also laid the intellectual basis for the French Revolution.

Like Hume and Helvetius, Thelwall was sceptical about supernatural explanations, especially when they masked economic motives.
Like Holbach, Thelwall held a materialistic view of the universe and the consequent conviction that man should concern himself with social obligations. Like all those influenced by Rousseau, Thelwall learned an appreciation of the "natural" life, and a sense of the social injustice which civilization had perpetrated, as well as the concept of the contrat social.

From all of these thinkers and from the general influence of his contemporaries, including Godwin, Thelwall gained a fervent admiration for the faculty of critical reason. He was ready to consider new ideas without prejudice and most ready to tear down both matter and sham when they denied man his human need for brotherhood: "An idea of 6000 years and of 6 minutes must be considered according to the same reason" (I, 149). By this he did not mean that the two ideas were equally valid. Rather, he meant that men must employ their intellects to judge any idea, new or old. An extant institution possessed for him no mysterious or extrarational argument for its continued existence. In this he shared the "utilitarian" outlook of his contemporary, Jeremy Bentham. From his observations of the general condition of England he became a reformer, one who saw more value for his age in change rather than in stability. Paradoxically, the change he recommended frequently involved a "return" to older institutions. Thelwall saw the two-party system of his own age act as a simple instrument for dividing patronage between the "ins" and the "outs." It concentrated power in the hands of the aristocracy and the wealthy, a violation of the principle of self-interest.

From this relatively commonplace critique of extant politics Thelwall developed an extensive analysis of the relationship of government to society in terms of international responsibilities, colonialism,
racial oppression, property, individual rights and responsibilities, the rights of labor and the poor, education, enclosure, industrialism, and the quality of life itself.

The war which Britain waged against republican France Thelwall condemned as a wasteful and savage anachronism in an enlightened age. But much of his rhetoric went beyond defending the French government and deploiring military violence. He saw with anguish and documented with outrage the war's effect upon the English working classes: "War is always a losing trade, for the most important members of the community must be lopped off." Especially the current war, he charged, was fought by the poor and the productive, while the powerful remained untouched:

Why should the wealthy merchant, the ermined peer, the overpampered parasite of ministerial corruption, remain in indolent security at home, while the peasant quits his plough, or the artificer his loom, to shed blood in defence of those who disdain to share the common danger? (II, 277)

He argued that the poor suffered the greatest from consequent inflation. In many lectures he carefully traced increases in the cost of provisions both before and during the war, and demonstrated the effect of increased freightage costs, unreasonable demands on production, and the diversion of foodstuffs to foreign allies. Increases in the cost of living he contrasted with unchanging wages and rising unemployment in industries stifled by curtailed trade. Although others could shift the burden to some degree, he pointed out, the workers could sell only their labor. Consequently, they were "unable to supply a necessary quantity of wholesome food for themselves and their children" (I, 3-6; III, 28, 280).

He attributed the high cost of the war to corrupt contractors.
In October, 1795, he singled out the list of subscribers to a fund supplied to the government for prosecuting the West Indian conflict: "Scarcely a man will you find among them who is not a dealer in government loans--a government contractor--a government agent--or a West Indies monopolist" (III, 51). The latter first raised a subscription to popularize the war, and then loaned the government money to continue it. To the man with ready money the war provided a quick return, for interest on many short-term loans began as much as three months before payment. Thelwall warned against the ultimate cost of the war: "War is pillage for a few; the destruction of fertility" (III, 50). Its cost should alarm even the man of property: "I wish I could convince them of the danger of stretching the cord till it breaks. . . . Bank notes and Exchequer bills may supply the place of currency while the people are able and willing to pay. But the bubble must burst" (I, 40). Historians have almost unanimously recognized the error of Pitt's debt funding, which Thelwall was attacking, and the bubble did nearly burst in the economic dislocation of 1819, when Lord Byron, among others, advised his friends to sell their government bonds.

A primary rationale of the war was the "natural enmity" between the English and the French. Thelwall tried to controvert this idea with assumptions of the Enlightenment: "Britons are but men, and the inhabitants of other countries are but men also, partaking of the same common nature, feelings, capacities, affections and powers of mind and body" (II, 85). Race or nationality could never give men real superiority over other men. The French soldier fought ferociously because he fought for a nation in which he held a stake. Thelwall repeatedly narrated cases
in which British soldiers "sent to destroy democracy abroad, have
brought home a heavy cargo of it" (II, 253). In one story a Scotch
soldier was court-martialed and jailed for refusing to drink a toast
to the proposition "Down with the Friends of the People."

Thelwall asserted that exploitation of one race or nation was
the accomplishment of devious and self-serving rulers. He delighted to
quote Alderman Newnham, who affirmed in Parliament that "the condition
of negroes in the West Indies is happier than the poor among ourselves!"
(II, 161) He carried his analysis a step beyond at least one of his
famous "humanitarian" contemporaries. To William Wilberforce, a politi-
cal conservative, but also a long-time religious champion of the move-
ment against the slave-trade, Thelwall addressed the following apostrophe:

O Wilberforce, if thou art indeed that man of humanity which thy
zeal in the cause of the wretched Africans would lead us to believe,
seek not so wide for objects of thy benevolence; nor expect that
redress can begin in the western hemisphere. The seed, the root
of the oppression is here; and here the cure must begin. If we would
emancipate our fellow beings, in whatever part of the world, it is
not by becoming slaves of a Minister that so noble an effect can
be produced; if we would dispense justice to distant colonies, we
must begin by rooting out from the center the corruption and
oppression by which that cruelty and injustice is countenanced and
defended. (II, 167)

The "corruption at the center," of course, was the denial of political
power to the productive classes at home.

In a series of lectures Thelwall questioned "The Humanity and
Benevolence of the Eighteenth Century." He insisted on comparing
social ethics with real social conditions. If in the case of Wilberforce
benevolence might mask a blindness to problems near-at-hand, in the case
of the colonialists benevolence masked outright exploitation. Thelwall
directly attacked the British presence in India: "In 6 short years we
destroyed or expelled no less than 6 millions of industrious and harmless people." His favorite instance was a quotation from Daw's *History of Indus tan*: "Men found themselves wading through blood and ruin, when their only object was spoil" (I, 73-74).

But Thelwall also sounded a distinctly new critical note. He argued that the spoil was not worth the blood and ruin, not to the nation at large. He presented statistics to prove to his audiences that in the long run Canada and India cost the nation more in administration and warfare than the colonies returned. He explained a hidden cost: "Colonies promote patronage and strengthen the minister and his governors" (I, 76). The popular notion that each country had a right to choose its own government Thelwall accepted, but he realized that it was an easily dismissed, a priori argument. He added a practical reason:

... it would be a happy thing for the universe in general, and for Britain in particular, if there were no such thing as a colony or dependency in the political system of the universe. I am convinced the people would be more happy; that a more fair and equal population would be spread over the world. ... (III, 48)

But the consequent lowered prices would not be favored by "commercial monopolists" who influenced public prosecution of a war intended to secure their private colonial empires. At the same time the conservative Burke was prosecuting Warren Hastings for corrupting the colonial system, Thelwall was indicting the colonial system itself.

Thelwall predicted that the desire of a few for grand spoil would become England's greatest problem. Although he carefully avoided suggesting any program for confiscating private property, the "levelling principle" which was making Godwin's name anathema, Thelwall repeatedly
attacked the power of property. To the incipient capitalist society of the late eighteenth century, which possessed both upward mobility and heightened divisions of wealth, Thelwall lectured that "Veneration for property is a vice destructive to the Morals and Intellects of Society. It is the source of all the oppressive rapacity and unfeeling avarice which produces so many vices in one description of men and so much misery in another" (Natural and Constitutional Rights of Britons, p. 43). If free commerce replaced the colonial system it would counteract the force of aristocratic titles and spread goods throughout the world at a lower price. But commerce guided by "oppressive rapacity" had nurtured the slave trade and had corrupted taste by bringing "the luxuries of the world to the rich man's table" (Natural . . . Rights, p. 83).

This opposition between property and life informed Thelwall's concept of political rights. The economically conservative Major Cartwright had argued that man rather than property was the object of representation as early as 1776; by the nineties the idea had become a reformist axiom, opposed by Burke's assertion that land, wealth, and tradition (the church) also held legitimate claims. But to this Thelwall added a more radical proof: "Let us not deceive ourselves; property is nothing more than human labor." So the enormous taxes necessary to maintain patronage and prosecute wars originated among those whom the government affected to despise: "Every shilling must come, in the first instance, from the labors of the poor--for all production originates with them" (1,2).

For Thelwall, universal suffrage was not confuted by the rights or security of property; on the contrary, it was mandated by the nature
of property. Property originated in the very hands excluded from po-
litical participation; the production of material wealth fused the
members of society into an indivisible organism. He drew upon a taste
for material simplicity and a sense of the common weal, both of which he
derived from his understanding of Roman society. His radical analysis
of the source of wealth came from his own working-class experience and
from his secular conviction in the efficacy of the Golden Rule. He
thus avoided not only the conservative veneration of traditional property,
but also the doctrine of individualism, by which all possessed the free-
dom to amass wealth and none possessed real responsibilities to the so-
ciety from which the wealth came.

Responsibility was paramount in Thelwall's conception of social
relations. He thought that government had an active responsibility to
secure the common prosperity. The first task of a reformed Parliament
should be to "restore to us the opportunity of earning a comfortable
subsistence by moderate labor" (I, 159). The role of government was
"not only to cure disasters which result from the political wickedness
or absurdity of the rulers, but to provide also for those which result
from accidental circumstances, from physical causes, from derangements
of the elements, and unforeseen disasters" (I, 6).

It was the responsibility of government to focus its activity
not upon one class but upon all those with a right to participation:
"Government cannot be continued but by consulting the happiness and
welfare of the people, and realizing the prosperity of even the lowest

7For an analysis of Thelwall's classical reading, see p.74.
orders of society." The present ministry, he charged, protected owners at the expense of workers: "Factors, merchants, wholesalers and opulent manufacturers can enter into combinations with impunity" (Natural . . . Rights, p. 42). Laboring men, however, were discriminated against by law: "... our unrepresented laborers and mechanics are punished like felons for associating to increase wages" (II, 60).

As Charles Cestre points out, Thelwall anticipated the trade union movement of the nineteenth century (Cestre, pp. 186-88). Thelwall asserted that "Every large workshop and manufactury is a sort of political society which no act of Parliament can silence and no magistrate disperse." In this context Thelwall defined the laborer's just recompense; "The laborer has a right to a share of the produce, not merely equal to his support, but proportionate to the profits of his employer." Thelwall's insistence that "all property is nothing but human labor" (Natural . . . Rights, p. 43), suggests that the employer who does not himself labor might share a very small proportion of the product.

The Corn Laws presented another example of how the government protected an advantaged economic class. Thelwall accurately predicted in 1795 that the price of corn would rise steadily because the aristocrats in Parliament could regulate their own prices, and he also correctly predicted that only a reformed Parliament would resolve the question in the interest of the whole nation (II, 60-65).

8 The Rights of Nature Vindicated Against the Usurpations of Establishments: A Series of Letters to the Right Honorable Edmund Burke (Glasgow, 1796), I, 19-20. In John Thelwall Cestre treats Thelwall's views on industrialization, education, drawing conclusions sometimes similar to my own. Generally, though, he depicts Thelwall's interest in nature as historically retrogressive, and he stresses, as a Liberal, Thelwall's relations with eighteenth-century Whigs.
In his concept of legislation Thelwall fused two eighteenth-century contradictory principles, benevolence and self-interest: "Laws to be binding on all should consult the benefit of all" (III, 250). To assure that the men best suited to make such consultation would receive power Thelwall affirmed the necessity of popular election: "However imperfect this criterion, there is no other to which we can appeal" (III, 254). Because of his understanding of property Thelwall conceived of government-activity in organic terms, unlike many of his radical associates. The people held obligations as well as rights on the basis of their membership in society. For example, the war with France involved each and every British citizen; if it were an unjust war, each must share in the collective guilt to which all contributed by the mere fact of working. From this Thelwall developed a notion that appears similar to the modern idea of civil disobedience: "I think it is fair and honest in every man, by every means that has no connection with violence, to throw any impediment he can in the way of the prosecution of the war" (I, 81). Government touched upon aspects of individual lives in many ways: "Even our amusements are intimately connected with the political system" (III, 280). He explained to his audiences how theatres were licensed and documented cases in which the government repressed anti-war sentiments spoken on the stage.

Because the poor possessed the right to active participation in society by virtue of their labor, their maintenance should not depend upon the "charity" of individuals or parishes, but upon simple justice. Observing that sumptuous luxury existed alongside starvation, he exhorted his audience, "Thus let us administer to the relief of those who, having
the same power of enjoyment with ourselves, have a right to, at least, an equal participation of all the necessaries of life, which are the produce of their labor" (I, 13). The system of parish "poor-rates" Thelwall accurately criticized: "... this charity, as it is called, breaks the spirits of those who ought to derive support from their generous efforts to render fertile that earth which, without their aid, would be waste and sterile. ..." Thelwall saw that because of low wages, especially in the country, the poor had been placed in opposition to the middle-class of landowners and leaseholders who took on "an unjust and unnecessary load in supplying by charity what in justice ought to be dispersed as the merited return for labor" (II, 342).

The objection that the poor were too lazy and too unruly to have a responsible interest in politics Thelwall met directly: if they could not be trusted to look after their own political interests, whom could they trust to do it for them? (I, 61) The fact of widespread poverty and misery argued against those who had been caring for their interest. The objection that the poor were captives to vice Thelwall considered in a series of lectures. The depravity occasioned by sex and drink was shared by all classes of society; the only real distinction was that the rich revelled with wine, while the poor drank gin, to the detriment of their health. Misconceptions of the poor endured because to a considerable degree the wealthy isolated themselves. All classes might throng together on city streets, but even in London the wealthy lived in separate enclaves, riding in coaches while the poor walked. It might be observed that the fashionable West End of London was beginning to be developed at this time. The idea of boorish violence among
the poor persisted because history had been written by the wealthy. This may have been the simple observation of an obvious fact, but fifty years later the same fact would strike the young Karl Marx with sufficient force to change the course of history. In 1795 Thelwall was asserting, in a packed lecture hall in London, that "the poverty of the people would have no charms, in the eyes of certain individuals, if they did not believe that the consequence of poverty would be ignorance" (I, 38).

Thelwall did not think the ignorance of the poor unchangeable. He expected that the first lasting reform of an universally elected Parliament would be a national education program, which would presume that the working-classes had as much right to daily leisure time as any citizens: "Let then all be granted . . . some leisure for such discussions, and some means for such information, as may lead to an understanding of their rights, without which they can never understand their duties" (Rights of Nature, I, 16). A major goal of education for Thelwall was preparation for accepting a citizen's duties, that is, gaining the ability to think independently and to communicate with others. He wholeheartedly believed in public disquisitions on questions of public policy as a means of exchanging information and ideas to further the common good. But he also warned against possible abuses. He constantly cautioned his own audiences against blindly accepting his opinions: "Scrutinize everything you hear from everyone; and most of all, everything that you hear from me" (I, 62). He offered a practical ideal: "Nothing deserves the name of opinion, but what results from a determination to be in possession of all the facts you can accumulate, and to examine with equal candour, the arguments against you and those in your support" (III, 18).
Thelwall hoped that by means of unrestricted communication he could help solve the problems of concentrated wealth and wide-spread ignorance. He saw that many aristocrats were drawn to his lectures; on the other hand, he knew that bands of miserable peasants destroyed mills while at the same time denouncing Jacobins. In the society Thelwall envisioned all who shared production would share the fruits of labor, and each individual would partake of equal rights and equal obligations. His was the gradualist approach to a society in which all worked and shared, eventually, one might surmise, a classless society. He realized that such a change necessitated a radical shift in the way individuals viewed their relations to one another, and in response to this need he praised a kind of socialist metaphysic:

If we consider that man lives not for himself alone, but that every existing being, each individual that participates in the feelings and sensations of which he himself is conscious--all that have the same common faculties with himself, are entitled to the same enjoyments and the same rights; that year after year, generation after generation, ages after ages, and myriads after myriads may pass away, and still society exists to reap the benefits of our exertions; then our energy becomes as it were immortal, and the desire, the hope, the anxiety to labor for human happiness, can only terminate with existence. (I, 225)

The revolutionary attitude should have practical effects: "Nor can we suppose that anything now produced by the efforts of the nation, bears the smallest proportion to what might be produced by a just and liberal government that regarded the real welfare of every order of society. . . ." (I, 36).

Because of his own experience in childhood Thelwall retained an acute interest in work and in the natural world. His conception of society was one in which members produced and shared the comforts and
and necessities of life. Consequently, he paid careful attention to two changing institutions of production: enclosure and the factory system. When he travelled through the countryside on walking tours, Thelwall was impressed with the great number of cottagers, that is, small farmers, who had left their homes. But the vast acreage of uncultivated land also stirred him, for the nineties were a decade of famine so severe that the custom of powdering hair and wigs was discarded. Thelwall saw the need for greater cultivation, so that England might balance her commercial power with a stable and independent food supply. When he lectured on the topic he supported his own ideas with evidence from the Reports of the Board of Agriculture. Thelwall considered enclosure as a possible means for vastly increasing production, and recognized that, if enclosure "were based upon a fair and honest principle," it should be welcomed. For him that principle required two objectives: "... to produce the largest quantity of the necessaries of life that the country can produce, and to promote the most equal distribution of those articles of comfort which can peacably and justly be effected" (II, 44-46).

But the actual effects of enclosure were increased corruption and less stable production, for it was the rich and powerful man who could force the necessary act of Parliament, and it was the wealthy farmer thus created who could store grain for future speculation. Thelwall thought that such monopoly might be avoided if enclosed farms were limited to less than two hundred acres. The system of vast individual holdings had been changing the farmer himself: 'The fact is, that the very character of the farmer is almost annihilated. In many parts of
the country you can see no such thing as an individual who attends to his own farm." Farmers were becoming "men of respectability" for which Thelwall read "those who have the power and inclination to starve their fellow beings by wholesale." He asked, "Where will you go for those little farms which supported in comfort, and supplied all the simple necessities and decencies of life, a family healthy from its industry, virtuous from surrounding necessities?" (II, 64-65) These values held a secure place in eighteenth-century sentimental thought. A few years before Robert Burns had depicted them in "The Cotter's Saturday Night"; a few years hence Wordsworth would base upon them a new theory of literature. In the statesmen of Wordsworth's Westmoreland the old values remained vital through the beginning of the nineteenth century, as Kenneth MacLean shows. But Thelwall was not confined to a region nor to the idyllic view of country life. On his walking tours, which included many a hedgerow interview and many an ale house debate, he witnessed the misery depressing both the "peasantry--leaseholders of small plots--and the dispossessed farm laborers. He attacked "the drudgery of the spinning wheel" when the cottager could not gain a subsistence by it. Despite his own attachment to sentimental traditions he realized that rural workers were actually sinking on the social scale because institutions such as enclosure, parish charity, and the Corn Laws were enhancing the domination of the large landowner.

The first corrective measure was to defend the economic and human value of the rural worker against attacks by the aristocrats, like Justice Clerk of Scotland, who once suggested from the bench, "If they be not contented with our good laws and wise government, they may e'en take their alls upon their backs and pack off with themselves." To this Thelwall retorted, "What would Lord Justice Clerk's landed estate be worth after they were gone? What would it produce? Let them sow the musty records of the courts of law" (II, 63). Thelwall presented the Speenhamland System, which Wordsworth and Dickens attacked with ferocity, as the parody of a just institution. He related that a large-scale landowner gave the poor of his parish a mountain of sheep-turnips, cattle fodder which he could neither use nor store: "While the poor grind their teeth upon turnips, the landed gentleman has saved himself not only the obligation to pay a fair wage, but also the poor rates that were supposed to supplement his own low wages."

Thelwall's practical proposal was for the government to divert economic resources from warfare to agriculture and help homesteaders cultivate the nearly twenty-five million acres which the Board of Agriculture thought fit for production. Such a program would provide independent livelihoods for fifty thousand families (II, 64-68). This was one of his most significant ideas, for it would have changed the face of modern England. Such a program could have provided labor for those already dispossessed and alienated, slowed the rate of emigration, maintained the yeoman tradition, insured a just distribution of small estates,

10 The Peripatetic (London, 1793), I, 144-45.
provided against future famines, and made the government work actively
to benefit the nation as a whole. It would have changed the force and
direction of the industrial revolution in England so that, perhaps, the
tasks which Ruskin and Morris attempted a hundred years later would not
have proved so onerous.

It was not only agricultural institutions to which Thelwall at­
tended, but also the technological force which was changing the face of
the countryside. We have seen that Thelwall championed the working-classes,
his obvious audience and constituency, by asserting that workers should
possess the right to organize for better wages. By working men he meant
in this context apprentices, journoymen, and small masters in a variety
of trades: those who constituted the greater portion of the London
Corresponding Society. He also criticized the incipient factory system,
especially in its effects upon the worker. In 1797, after he was forced
to discontinue his London lectures, Thelwall took a walking tour of the
west of England. He toured factories, both old and new, and recorded
in his journal data such as hours, wages, the state of workers' health
and morale, and environmental change. In John Thelwall Cestre offers
excerpts from the journal, now apparently lost. Cestre correctly points
out that for Thelwall to examine factories with any scientific objectivity
in the year 1797 marks him as a man of vision and a precursor of the
modern economist. Some samples of his observations follow:

At Froome a cloth mill. Women waiting for spare wool to be spun by
hand 2½ d. per lb.; great work spin 2 lb. a day. Children in the
factory 1s 6d to 2s 6d per week. Day, fourteen hours. Pallid and
miserable.

At Nailsworth, woolen manufacturies. Dyers, their pallid and un-
wholesome looks. Hired by the week, 9s per week, constant employ.
Weavers often standing still waiting for work. . . . Spinning mills: sixteen men, women and children working in a small room so blocked up by machinery as to prevent circulation of air. Most of the persons in the room pallid, with sickly sweat. The children emaciated. . . . Machinery that brings a multitude to labor in one spot bad. Regulations possible.  

Thelwall's tours and observations foreshadow the Rural Rides (1820-30) of William Cobbett. Both writers had been converted from Toryism to radicalism; both celebrated traditional rural values; and both criticized the incipient factory system.

Thelwall also noticed pleasant conditions in the factories at Malmesbury spinning factory: "Healthy, florid, decent and comfortable appearance of children. Much of the business furnishes good exercise. . . . not so many in an apartment. Lively and intelligent countenances of shearers, jocularity." And he noted that in certain factories wages compared very favorably with those paid to farm workers, and sometimes even caused farm wages to rise.

At another woolen mill, in Wooten-under-Edge, Thelwall noted: "Filth and rags, but tolerably healthy," which Cestre interprets as an unwillingness to "unduly indulge in laments about the looks of factory workers" as compared to farmers. Although the manuscript is unavailable for inspection, it seems unlikely that Thelwall meant to accept "filth and rags" in a factory any more than he would accept them on the back of a poor cottager. Likewise, Cestre quotes Thelwall's note that factory workers demonstrated "a vanity to make it appear that they earned more than they did" as praise for the workers' pride in their factory. But it is unlikely that Thelwall felt joy over anyone's "vanity to make it appear that they earned more than they did," because this contradicts his basic belief in simplicity, evidenced by his attacks on the ostentation and luxury of his age, a corrup-

Quoted in John Thelwall, pp. 164-66.
tion which spread from those who did no work at all.

Thelwall's preoccupation with the classical virtue of simpli­city in this context suggests the modern idea that industrialism and indus­trial wealth can reach a point of diminishing return. When he visited a huge tunnel in Sussex built to facilitate industrial traffic he was struck not by the size and strength of the structure (one thinks of Tom Paine's real interest, selling iron bridges), but by the information that two peasants had died in its construction and that its long, dark avenue had led to many crimes of violence and licentiousness.

He repeatedly denounced the institution of service, which was then expanding in proportion to England's commercial and industrial productivity. He asserted that servants were not necessary for a decent life, and that they fostered the misconception that a man's material wealth should bring him greater social consideration than that due a person with minimal personal wealth. The hint Thelwall offers that factories ought to be regulated demonstrates his conviction that the individual's production of material wealth is not the sole, nor even the paramount, principle of economic society. This places him in opposition to the "radicals" of the following century who added to political equality the concept of individual economic freedom as the twin guiding principles of society. Without advocating abolition of private property, as did Godwin and Holcroft, Thelwall maintained that a good life was the right not merely of the landed rich nor the monied rich nor the capitalist rich, but was the right of all members of society. A good life meant a generous subsistence of "the necessaries and comforts of life":

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I indeed affirm that every man, woman or child ought to obtain something more in the general distribution of the fruits of labor than food and rags, and a wretched hammock with a poor rug to cover it; and that, without working twelve and fourteen hours a day, six days out of seven, from six to sixty. They have a claim, a sacred, inviolable claim, growing out of the fundamental maxim upon which alone all property can be supported, to some comfort and enjoyment, in addition to the necessaries of life. (Rights of Nature, I, 16)

Beyond that, material wealth might hinder rather than promote happiness. Grander carriages, more servants, vaster political power all would be forthcoming, creating new barriers between each human being and his fellows. In his novel The Peripatetic Thelwall argues in a disturbingly modern, yet obviously ancient tone, that the stylish, fast modern coach not only truncates one's humanity but also destroys one's true comfort:

These trees, these shrubs, this smiling turf, enamelled with these simple blossoms, all invite to intellectual exercise, and render even the idle walk not vain. . . . As roving, excursively, from these to a variety of other reflections, I pursued my tranquil and cheerful way along the fields, and smiled to behold, at irregular distances to the right and to the left, the clouds of dust that marked the winding courses of the roads, and in which the more favored Sons of Fortune were suffocating themselves for the benefit of the air, I felt a glow of health and vivacity, which the bustle and loaded atmosphere of the metropolis never yet afforded. (I, 12-14)

For this social critic, then, the good life included neither a superabundance of material possessions nor an increased velocity of activity, but the realization of humanity in oneself and in one's neighbor. Thelwall believed that the poor ought to have a comfortable subsistence, but more than that, he insisted that they should have the leisure to improve themselves and to govern the affairs of society. No doubt recalling the poetry he devoured while apprenticed to a linen tradesman, he realized that all men need more than food, more than work: they
need to be considered as ends in themselves. This insight governed his career as social critic.

Thelwall had originally considered the role of social theorist subordinate to that of artist: in his novel *The Peripatetic*, published in 1793, he created a character who was both social critic and, like Thelwall himself, a lover of the liberal arts.
CHAPTER III

THE REVOLUTIONARY AS NOVELIST:

THE PERIPATETIC

But Revolutionism was more than an academic philosophy. It was a social religion, in the sense that it was to many men their "serious reaction" to life as a whole.


Whatever valuable impressions are made upon the mind by fictitious adventures, the same, in vividness, though perhaps generally, not equal in degree, are made by real adventures; and facts with whatever view and in whatever manner, treasured up in the mind, are ready to be applied to any farther and higher uses that they are capable of, whenever the person who is possessed of them is disposed to view them in any other light.

--Dr. Joseph Priestley, Lectures On History, 1791

One is ashamed to be pleased with the works of one knows not whom.

--Henry MacKenzie, The Man of Feeling, 1771

I

Early in 1793, more than a year before imprisonment in the Tower of London would focus national attention upon his political activity, John Thelwall sought to enhance his literary fame by publishing a novel. Having achieved some success as poet and journalist, Thelwall had gained sufficient practical knowledge to base his novel upon two popular traditions: the long-established novel of sensibility and the newly fashionable novel of revolution. Moreover, Thelwall gained from his

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literary experience the confidence necessary to mold these traditions into a unique form.

The Peripatetic; or, Sketches of the Heart, of Nature, and Society is a novel of sensibility, and as such its ultimate roots may be found in two eighteenth-century classics: Richardson's Clarissa and Rousseau's La Nouvelle Heloise. It derived more directly, however, from Sterne's A Sentimental Journey and MacKenzie's Man of Feeling. These works focused less upon romantic love than on an emotional personality who demonstrated what Henri Roddier calls "sentimental deism," an emotional, benevolent interchange with natural and social stimuli.¹ Sterne's hero Yorick puts it this way:

Dear sensibility! source inexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows! thou chainest thy martyr down upon his bed of straw--and tis thou who lifts him up to heaven. . . . I feel some generous joys and cares beyond myself--all comes from thee, great, great SENSORIUM of the world!²

From Sterne and MacKenzie Thelwall learned to temper sensibility with satire. But the object of his satire was not the ironic plight of a hapless individual, but the coarseness and corruption of the age. At the same time Thelwall utilized the sentimental tradition he parodied it in order to redefine its function. He felt it could be social and instructive, rather than self-centered and desperate. The Peripatetic, therefore, exhibits a social ideal: democracy motivated by social affection. Thelwall's "Man of Feeling" does shed many tears, but his tears suggest social reformation rather than simply gratuitous emotion.


During the last decade of the century a new branch of the sentimental tradition had begun to incorporate the desire for social reform, yielding the "revolutionary novel." In 1792 Thelwall's friend and future co-defendant Thomas Holcroft published Anna St. Ives, considered to be the decade's first revolutionary novel. The story bitterly criticizes the effects of aristocratic institutions and presents a well-educated, rational, and socially-conscious heroine. After Anna St. Ives came a barrage of novels which preached "revolution" not by narrating French triumphs or fabling English insurrection, but by presenting the personal visions of fictional characters, revitalized by "new" ideas: advocacy of rationalism, materialism, anarchy, and feminism, for example, and denunciation of aristocracy, parental tyranny, professionalism, and militarism. Many of these themes had been touched upon during the previous quarter century by novelists such as Thomas Day (Sandford and Merton, 1783), Henry Brooke (The Fool of Quality, 1765-70), and Robert Bage (Mount Henneth, 1781). During the 1790's the themes were given a more radical bent and a sense of urgency by William Godwin, Charlotte Smith, and Elizabeth Inchbald, among others, who were spurred by the success--and failure--of the revolution in France to redefine social relations for England and the world.

That The Peripatetic was revolutionary seems evident immediately from its preface, in which Thelwall charged that publication had been delayed for months and the manuscript withheld illegally from the author because he "would not oblige the publisher ... either by omitting the

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political reflections, or by turning them to the other side of the question. One might consider this to be sensational advertising if one did not know Thelwall's subsequent history. The actual revolutionary theme which dominates *The Peripatetic* is democracy. The author attempted to dramatize the intrinsic value of even the poorest, most obscure individual by exploring the common bond that he felt joined human hearts and minds, and by explaining how the true links of society are forged not by power and wealth but by human benevolence and by the "visionary power" (his phrase, in 1793, not Wordsworth's) proffered to all men by the natural world (III, 13).

There remains a third eighteenth-century literary tradition in which *The Peripatetic* participates, one which, indeed, comprehends both the sentimental novel and the revolutionary novel. It is didacticism. In a broad sense, literature supplied information: political, moral, historical, scientific. An extreme example is Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* in which scientific lore is presented in verse form. Modern critics consider such works subliterary, but eighteenth-century readers were slower to draw distinctions. They thirsted for general knowledge and they respected the classical didactic poetry of Hesiod, Lucretius, Ovid, and Vergil. A grand example of wide ranging study was the career of Joseph Priestley, who was scientist, historian, economist, moralist, and divine. Thelwall was an ardent amateur, and *The Peripatetic* bears the fruits of his avocations: information and opinion on anatomy, medicine, poetry, painting, psychology, and especially history.

All teaching in the eighteenth century, however, tended toward

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4 *The Peripatetic*, I, 9. Subsequent references will be noted in the text.
the goal so well expressed by Pope, and the study of man led ultimately to a desire to refine man's conduct. As J. M. S. Tompkins writes:

Conduct, the definition and application of the general moral laws that should govern the behavior of men in society, was the prevailing intellectual interest of the age, and naturally enough this interest was reflected in the novel.5

In The Peripatetic Thelwall elevates questions such as how to treat beggars and how to maintain mental equanimity to the level of thematic concerns. As a revolutionary writer, his suggestions regarding "the behavior of men in society" broke sharply with the moral laws and conventions of the Augustan age.

Deployment of all these varied topics in The Peripatetic required a unique and interesting structure, one emphasizing the personal voice. The 1790's were a decade of literary experiment, ranging from the vastly popular "rhymeless" sonnets of Charlotte Smith—which even Coleridge admired—to the vastly more significant new theory of poetry proposed by William Wordsworth at the end of the decade. After examining the novel's narrative form we will consider how The Peripatetic develops its thematic potential as a sentimental and revolutionary novel.

II

When Yorick in A Sentimental Journey finally sets down his preface, a quarter of the way into the book, he begins by comparing his own experience to that of "many a Peripatetic philosopher."6 Twenty


6 Sterne, p. 33.
years later Thelwall plucked out the concept and developed from it his own type of sentimental hero. Thelwall's Peripatetic, however, is pedestrian as well, for he travels on foot, like a democrat, rather than in the carriage of the wealthy aristocrat or merchant. The vulgar connotation of "pedestrian" Thelwall no doubt welcomed, for it enforced his attack upon the luxurious vulgarity of the rich. Just as the sentiment and wit of Sterne's hero are jarred continually by Remise and Desobligeant upon the Grand Tour of France and Spain, those of Thelwall's hero are stimulated by footpath and "verdant marge" upon a common man's tour of the towns and countryside along the southern rim of the Thames estuary.

As he sets out at the beginning of the novel Thelwall's Peripatetic hero affirms the educational method of Aristotle's Peripatetic School, whose members philosophized while strolling amidst the natural stimuli of the Lyceum:

Through this vale
(Ye hallow'd manes of the boasts of Greece!)
Thro' this low vale will I suppose ye walk'd
Pouring divine instruction, or, reclin'd
Upon these verdant hillocks, musing deep,
The silent energy of the soul collected. (I, 10)

In The Peripatetic Thelwall incorporates many elements of classical literature, a tradition dear to eighteenth-century England. The novel's hero bears a classical name: "Sylvanus Theophrastus." The former means "woods-lover," and the latter refers to the Athenian naturalist and philosopher who carried on the work of Aristotle, that is, the Peripatetic School. Theophrastus' Characters, sketches of personality types, influenced both eighteenth-century English literature and Thelwall's characterizations. Other characters bear appropriate Latin names. Arisor ("laughter"), for example, is a cynic, and Ambulator ("walker") is an enthusiastic traveller. The characters discuss issues
in a way that remotely resembles the Platonic dialogue. Topics such as stoicism and Platonic love recur throughout the narrative. Epigraphs quoted from Vergil's Aeneid and Georgics and from Horace's Odes open volumes and chapters. On the title page Thelwall presents a renowned quotation from the Georgics. The words seem appropriate to a hero named Sylvanus Theophrastus, as well as to the author's own life:

Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musae
Quarum Sacra fero ingenti amore,
Accipiant.7

Sylvanus is a teacher, a sage. He speaks directly and intimately to the reader, narrating the novel's action as he encounters it. He offers his own opinions on society and literature, and he provides useful information: he recounts the history of towns and houses, he describes battles that influenced the British Constitution, and he even discloses Dryden's plans for an epic poem. His reflections are dictated by association. Like Yorick, Sylvanus is spurred to loquacity by real scenes and real people; unlike Yorick, he is an intellectual.

Yet Sylvanus can lay claim to sentiment as eccentric as that of Yorick or Harley. He confesses that when he was a young man he worked for an attorney and in that capacity was once sent to dun a man for debts. When he arrived at the proper house, he found the debtor absent, but the debtor's family, ignorant of his mission, offered their food and

7Vergil Georgics 2. 475-77. "Ye Muses, who are sweet before all else, whose mysteries I unfold with great tenderness, accept me." The "mysteries" Vergil unfolds in the Georgics, of course, are the natural processes of regeneration, a major topic in The Peripatetic. Thelwall's love for the Muses during his youth is recounted above in Chapter i. Characteristic of the classical quotations Thelwall chose for epigraphs, this passage was commonplace to eighteenth-century readers.
wine so hospitably that he soon came to detest his task:

... my heart smote me at the bare idea! the whole system of intellectual nature seemed to revolt within me: and though half the attractions of the little blooming maiden, who with all the unsuspicious innocence of youth, placed me in a chair, would have been sufficient, on any other occasion to rivet me to the spot, I made an awkward apology, told them I would call again, and retreated with an air of confusion, which nothing less than the consciousness of perpetrated guilt could possibly increase. (I, 115)

As he hoped, his visible chagrin sufficiently alerted the family so that the following day, he again fails to locate his prey. The debtor is able to settle his affairs outside of the law-court, which would have surely imprisoned him; as for Sylvanus, he soon quits the law to become a writer.

It is the natural world which dominates Sylvanus' sensibility and fosters his social affections. When he first travelled to the debtor's home he walked across "delightful tufted vales and forest mantled hills" instead of riding in a faster chaise. Rural scenes dominate his reflections throughout the novel and, from its very first page, supply the principal force by which the novel proceeds.

The first scene effectively demonstrates Sylvanus' spontaneous sensibility as well as Theiwall's comic tone. Under the heading "Appropriation of Time," Sylvanus delivers a nearly pompous lecture which might have been offered years before by Mr. Spectator:

Perhaps nothing is more common than to bewail the shortness of life, unless it be to misspend the little time we are permitted to enjoy. We complain that the evening is closing on our unfinished labours, without remembering how much of the day has been wasted in idleness; and peevishly lament the insufficiency of our strength, without reflecting upon the fatigues produced by dissipation and folly. (I, 1-2)

Not only dissipation, but a lack of decorum contributes to the problem, namely
The injudicious manner in which seasons and avocations are suited to each other: an improvidence so great that whosoever should correct himself in this particular, would find room enough in the little circle of human life, for a much longer proportion of wisdom and of pleasure, of business and of relaxation. (I, 2-3)

This thought leads Sylvanus to consider the utility of working through the early morning hours, rather than sleeping until the afternoon, a habit detrimental to health. After paying tribute to Hygeia for his own good health, he notices the spring landscape outside his study window, which reminds him of his reflections on the decorous use of time:

I was led, in a great measure, perhaps, by the fineness of the weather, to extend them still further, and not only to consider that the night is but too frequently devoted to those duties which belong to the day, but that, by not properly attending to the invitations of nature, days and seasons, also, are frequently misapplied. . . . How inconsistent would it be, neglectful of all the allurements of the season, to consume the day in the confines of the study, and refer to some other season, too dull, perhaps, for enjoyment, too comfortless for exercise, the hours of vacation which Nature occasionally will crave; and in which, despite the perseverance of studious application, sooner or later, she will peremptorily be indulged. (I, 7-8)

Having travelled a considerable distance from his solemn opening, Sylvanus reaches a happy conclusion:

These reflections had no sooner occurred, than my resolution was taken; and, quitting my study, I sallied forth on a pedestrian expedition, in quest of health and recreation. (I, 8)

The Peripatetic, unlike other men of feeling, tends to balance his impulsive sensitivity. His attitude partakes of the peculiar intellectual confluence of the 1790's, at once looking back to Augustan rationality and forward to Romantic exuberance.

When Sylvanus forsakes his study in the Borough of Southwark for the open fields and hedgerows he begins the first of three journeys which provide the structure of The Peripatetic. The initial walk he makes alone, wandering to Greenwich; the second is an excursion to
Rochester in company of two friends; the third is a longer vacation tour to St. Albans, planned months ahead and completed during the following autumn. In addition, when properly stimulated, Sylvanus remembers other journeys which he recounts to his companions and to the reader. A full moon reminds him of a youthful day-hike; a spring shower evokes a year-old walking tour interrupted by thunderstorms, which introduces two new characters: the cynical Arisor and the sentimental Wentworth. Sylvanus narrates his recollections as they occur, switching abruptly from the track of his present journey to the former one. He digresses far from the original stimulus, but each digression leads back to a common theme.

Having left Southwark Sylvanus makes his way to the Thames where he stops to admire and criticize the commercial empire which has made possible the "forest of masts and sails" before him. After an unexpectedly civil exchange with a militaristic Scotch sailor, he turns toward Greenwich. While admiring the old soldiers' hospital there he notices a strangely familiar face, whom he quickly recognizes as a childhood friend named Belmour. But before Sylvanus can greet him Belmour turns away with eyes averted. Perceiving "the inward canker of the mind" upon his friend's countenance Sylvanus pursues him and discovers that Belmour has lied about travelling to America in order to hide from his friends. As Sylvanus' concern rises Belmour asks him to wait outside a building for a moment, and slips away through the rear exit.

Belmour has committed no dark Byronic crime, the chagrined Peripatetic soon informs us; rather, he is the victim of arrogant
parental authority. He had intended, from his youngest days, to marry a childhood sweetheart. But when he reached his majority his father first commanded him to marry a wealthy stranger and then sent him on a voyage to look after business interests. Belmour sailed, but returned prematurely and quarrelled with his father, who then disinherited him for defiance. When Belmour next fled to his Sophia, he discovered that she had disappeared leaving no signs but a buried father and a bankrupt family business. Thus bereft of both family and lover Belmour has become a melancholy recluse. Sylvanus, who knows only the outline of the story at this time, suggests that Belmour has simply lost his sanity.

The character of Belmour serves as a pessimistic foil to the exuberant sentimentality of Sylvanus. Belmour emerges as a second hero in the novel. His story is a comedy: in the closing chapters of the novel Belmour meets and regains his childhood love. His "insanity" is treated both comically and seriously by Thelwall, who demonstrates in it the potentially decadent, destructive aspect of the sentimental tradition.

Immediately after Belmour runs off, Sylvanus' closest comrade appears in Greenwich. He is the generous and egalitarian Ambulator, whose "eye is ever on the watch for opportunities to indulge his benevolence" and whose "attentions are always proportioned in a directly-converse ratio from the generality of mankind: he would brush by a titled friend to take unconnected merit by the hand" (II, 88; I, 87). He and Sylvanus decide to make a walking excursion to Rochester and the following morning they set out at a leisurely pace, examining picturesque valleys and antique houses, speculating about beggars and the distrib-
bution of wealth. When they dine at an alehouse that evening, a comi-
cally loquacious landlady discovers to them that they have stumbled upon
the refuge of their melancholic friend, and together they search out
Belmour and persuade him to accompany them.

Thus at the beginning of the second volume two plots become
intertwined. The main plot, revolving about Sylvanus, is relatively
amorphous. As he and his friends progress on their travels they react
to problems concerning affection and justice, problems embodied in the
characters they meet. The solutions arrived at by the main characters
develop into a pattern: simple natural affections lead to social benev-
olence and personal fulfillment.

The second plot turns about one troubled character, the foolish
lover, Belmour, and the two plots are connected. Ambulator and Sylvanus
meet and decide to visit Rochester only after they relinquish hope of
finding Belmour, whom they soon uncover and join. Early in the second
volume the three travellers encounter a dead thrush, apparently tortured
by mischievous children. The pathetic sight renews the theme of man's
relations to less intelligent creatures, a theme initially presented
when Sylvanus attempted to thwart the devices of a gang of birdcatchers.
The dead thrush increases Belmour's melancholy, although it distracts
him from his own problems. Soon after, the travellers meet a poor or-
phaned girl on whom Ambulator bestows a generous gift. As they lament
the "temptations" which will assail her, and their own impotence to re-
strain these temptations, Belmour suddenly realizes that other human
beings may possess greater cause for grief, and greater resolution
against it, than he possesses, and his dejection deepens.
Sylvanus attempts to raise Belmour's resolution by declaiming militantly on behalf of the poor, who are oppressed by taxes that inflate the luxury of an unfeeling court. The dual actions turn a cog in tandem as Belmour partakes of his friends' enthusiasm and escapes his own sorrow. Belmour has stepped toward health with the aid of his friends; and Sylvanus has illustrated the relations by which man's natural affections lead toward social interdependence.

A little later Sylvanus is spurred by the sight of a drunken gypsy beggar to recollect a previous excursion to a country churchyard, where the most Christian-sounding epitaph lay over a gypsy king. Sylvanus explains that he caught sight of a local legend, a young woman who cries upon a certain tombstone on summer nights, and who disappears instantly when she is addressed. The combined empathy evoked by her story and by that of the gypsy's epitaph—which proclaims that he precedes his loved ones to a better land—stirs Belmour to articulate, for the first time, his whole sorrowful history. Sylvanus interprets this act as an important step toward social affection and mental rehabilitation. Because Belmour's affections are quickened by the gypsy's epitaph, the group alters its judgment on the moral worth of gypsies, one of the "moral questions" the group is considering. And as for the beautiful young mourner, she proves to be no ghost, as the superstitious villagers suppose, but a thoroughly live, though melancholic, "Wanderer" mourning her dead mother. In the novel's closing pages, she is revealed as none other than Belmour's beloved Sophia, and her story has already helped him regain health.

By the end of the second volume, both plots reach climaxes. The travellers reach Rochester, complete their touring, and turn back toward...
London, but not before Sylvanus and Ambulator have so cured Belmour that he agrees to walk with each, on alternated weeks, during the oncoming summer season. Flushed with success, Sylvanus closes the volume by reciting a poem he has written to celebrate the goal of his Perpatetic philosophy:

Let me, whom each pleasure eccentric can move
Who would travel to know and would know to improve
... man in his varied condition compare
And learn the hard lot which so many must bear;
Til embracing Mankind in one girdle of Love
In Nature's kind lesson I daily improve,
And (no haughty distinctions to fetter my soul)
As the brother of all, learn to feel for the whole. (I, 227-8)

As the last volume opens, however, Belmour's action becomes anti-climactic, for despite his promise, he fails to join the party setting out on an excursion to St. Albans. As the journey begins, Sylvanus blesses their lost friend: "Poor Belmour! wherever thou wanderest may guardian spirits hover still around thee, and snatch thee from thy fate and dread" (III, 11). The party has been joined by the philosopher Julio, whose judgments lend authority to topics previously discussed. They examine wealthy characters who exhibit the distinction between benevolence and dissipation; and they balance Belmour's brand of overromanticized love by criticizing the current vogue of "platonic" friendships.

When the group eventually arrives at St. Albans, they bear the novel to its denouement and conclusion. After touring some Gothic ruins, the party dines with a half-dozen high-spirited young gentlemen who confess, somewhat shamefacedly, that during the previous evening they had teased a melancholy fellow until he fled into the night. As the travellers grow worried, Ambulator notices a white-haired old man weeping
bitterly while reading an old edition of Tom Jones. When Ambulator asks his problem, the old man replies that because he has been reading about how young Tom saves Sophie's songbird, he is reminded of his lost niece and the brave little neighbor boy who loved her.

The "brave boy" is Belmour, of course, for the old man is uncle to Sophia, who within minutes is carried unconscious into the very same inn. When revived she reports that she fainted when she saw a young man throw himself into a mill-pond. A rescue party sets out, and returns with the cold, dead body of Belmour. But medicine, one of Thelwall's safer avocations, saves all: despite having lain dead for an hour Belmour is resuscitated. As soon as he revives, a villainous Scotch coroner named Pomposo MacCapias appears and tries to arrest Sophia for "causing a dead body to be removed before officially examined by the coroner" (III, 193), Thelwall's parting shot at the legal profession.

After some confusion Belmour and Sophia find one another. Sophia recounts the melancholy she felt after her parents died and explains her subsequent career as Gothic grave haunter. The lovers are united, and the novel concludes.

The farcical element presides over the resolution of Belmour's story because Thelwall employed that story as a convention, one by which he could parody and redirect aspects of the sentimental and Gothic traditions. Sophia and her uncle are more devices than characters. He is

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8 One might question whether the parody is truly intentional. In defense of my interpretation I offer the farce itself: when an author revives a dead lover, he obviously exaggerates the conventional comic conclusion. The "moral essay" on use of time with which the novel opens is concluded in a way that treats both theme (propriety) and form (the personal essay) ironically. Propriety is redefined, and the essay culminates in an action, that is, metamorphoses into a novel. Belmour's story is introduced in order to dramatize Sylvanus' sentiments. Thus it is a tool to be manipulated. Finally, a contemporary reader of the novel stressed that "Mr. Thelwall possesses a happy vein of satire" (Analytical Review) [May 15, 1795], quoted in The Tribune, I, 327.
the convenient senex, rich and benevolent, she the guardian spirit whom Sylvanus unknowingly evoked at the beginning of the final volume. They resemble the characters of romance, characters who appear magically. Arisor and Ambulator, though better developed, depend ultimately upon the Peripatetic for depth because they are alternate aspects of Thelwall's personality. The hero Belmour, it is true, develops in some respects. When he appears and disappears, alternately wide-eyed with emotion and then calm with desperation, speaking longingly of relief from sorrow, he presents a complex creation.

But the author stops short of producing a psychological novel; he does not allow Belmour to grow moderate and wise through the help of his friends; he does not describe Belmour's summertime therapeutic rambles. They prove inadequate, because Belmour returns to suicidal habits until rescued by his lover in the conventional comic resolution. The plot itself is determined by obviously unnatural coincidence and heightened by artificial suspense. Belmour refuses to relate his sad experience for some twenty miles of footpath and nearly a volume and a half of novel, until stirred to it by the story of a strange wanderer who happens to be his lover.

But such devices are not finally unpleasant, despite the thinness of illusion, partly because of their playfulness, and partly because in The Peripatetic the illusion of plot is transcended by a different illusion, that of constant and immediate intercourse with the experience of the sentimental narrator. The novel's action is less important in itself than in the scenes it presents to the sensibility of narrator and reader. The centrality of Sylvanus' responses invites an examination of
the journal-like structure of the novel.

Although The Peripatetic in many ways corresponds to the generic requirements of the novel, its own subtitle suggests it is written "In a Series of Politico-Sentimental Journals, in Verse and Prose, of the Eccentric Excursions of Sylvanus Theophrastus, Supposed to be Written by Himself." Although many tight realistic narratives have been cast at least partly into journal form, Thelwall thought his particular technique an experiment, as he confides in the preface:

Nor is he [the author] conscious that it has the refuge of a single precedent, behind which its irregularities may be sheltered. To the charge of singularity, however, he will not be very reluctant to submit, especially if he should be considered as having, in any measure, effected his design of uniting the different advantages of the novel, the sentimental journal, and the miscellaneous collection of essays and poetical effusions. (I, vi)

The Peripatetic does combine these forms, often within a single "chapter" heading, each of which signifies either a topic ("Appropriation of Time") or the stimulus for a topic ("The Lark"). These divisions, "natural divisions" Thelwall calls them, he admittedly borrowed from Sterne, along with the sentimental association of ideas. The way in which verse is fitted to the reflections and the quantity of verse thus fitted better carries Thelwall's claim to singularity. The passage begun under "The Lark" illustrates the technique by which he combines the forms. Sylvanus' stream of thought is interrupted by a chorus of birds to which he gives close attention:

Among the rest, I was particularly charmed with the notes of a sky-lark, who, rising just before me, began to pour forth a strain of so much rapture that I could not but feel my heart uplifted to join with him in that devotion which I fancied him to be warbling to the Restorer of the year. (I, 15)
Sylvanus immediately breaks into his own spontaneous song:

Sweet attic warbler! poet of the skies!
To thee not vainly comes the genial Spring
To give a sordid joy. Thy little breast,
Fond as it flutters with returning glow,
Quivers the strain of rapture, which imparts,
Congenial transport to attentive man
And pays the bounteous season, with its song,
For the kind boon her cheering smile bestows.

Wake, sons of the earth! who boast superior souls,
And hail the healthful gales with equal gratitude,
And give to other hearts the bliss ye feel. (I, 16)

And his song leads to prose-journal reflection on how the natural world offers lessons not only in devotion, but also in the far more important "practical religion":

"The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields may furnish a lively picture of the external ornaments of religion, and the full chorus of spring may assist devotion to soar on the grateful pinions of rapture, to the throne of Him from whom all blessings flow; but the awful study of natural history is replete with purer lessons; and from the stork, that bears its aged parent on its back, and the pelican, whose maternal care has produced the fable of her fostering the infant progeny from her own bleeding bosom, we learn the practical religion of the heart! the glorious maxims of relative and social duty. (I, 17)

He returns to song to conclude the thought:

Vain alike, the hymn, the pray'r
Pride's full-oft, or Sloth's pretence:
Would you Heaven's best favour share,
Be your suit--benevolence. (I, 18)

This sentiment is calculated to lead into the following section, titled "The Beggar."

Thelwall combined reflections with narration of his journeys and of Belmour's story. In fact, Thelwall freely admitted in his preface
that the plots were introduced only after much of the sentimental jour­
nal had been composed. Although Thelwall probably felt some pride in the
originality of his addition and no doubt had an eye out for the popular
reception offered to a strong, happy ending, the author's modus operandi
really conformed to a contemporary pattern. J. M. S. Tompkins writes in
The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800,

A novel could be easily made by adjusting some half-dozen
tales and an essay or two in a slight narrative framework,
and after this fashion many were constructed.9

Nor were novels necessarily pulp. Thelwall's narrative framework rather
intricately wove together the themes of his "essays." Another novel
similarly constructed was The Man of Feeling (1771), according to its
author, Henry MacKenzie:

I have seldom been in use to write any prose except what
consisted of observations (such as I could make) on men
and matters. The way of introducing these by narrative
I had fallen into in some detached essays, from the notion
of its interesting both the memory and the affections
deeper than mere argument or moral reasoning. In this
way I was somehow led to think of introducing a man of
sensibility into different scenes where his feelings might
be seen in their effects, and his sentiments occasionally
delivered without the stiffness of regular deduction.10

The Man of Feeling was not the work of a literary hack; MacKenzie was a
successful attorney whose "detached essays" delivered by the "man of
sensibility" recapitulated a pattern of thought typical of the late

9 J. M. S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England (Lincoln: Uni­
iversity of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 70-71.

eighteenth century, as demonstrated not only by his own popularity but also by that of his precursors, such as Henry Brook.

The eighteenth century was the Age of Sensibility, suggests Northrup Frye, and as such it implicitly accepted the Longinian view of literature. Frye explains the assumptions with which we normally approach an author like Sterne:

Here we are not being led into story, but into the process of writing a story: we wonder, not what is coming next, but what the author will think of next. 11

And Thelwall writes as if fully cognizant of his role. For example, after a long digressive account of Sylvanus' experience riding on a fox hunt, the hero makes the following apology:

But to return to my companions, to whom I must be admitted not to have behaved with the most ceremonious politeness; and who will perhaps be expected (while I have been rambling, on my winged course, over hill, dale and woodland--fields of history and bowers of fancy, cliffs of Kent and rocky mountains of Parnassus) to have marched forward with some degree of anger and resentment, and by this time very comfortably put on their nightcaps at the inn in Rochester--But not so fast, censorious Reader! for to the great disparagement of thy sagacity, and much to my satisfaction, I am going to rejoin them and renew our conversation, just at the very place, and precisely in the same friendly humour, that I left them. (II, 74)

Contemporaries considered The Man of Feeling a classic of the same order as Tom Jones, and, since there is little danger that The Perpatetic will also become one, it should be afforded at least the courtesy of a reading congenial to its own line of descent.

Its own peculiar line parallels other literary genres. First, The Peripatetic bears resemblances to the picaresque tradition: a hero makes a journey through a realistic setting so that the author may comment upon society. But relatively little action occurs, and Sylvanus is not a naive character, but rather a highly sensitive one who narrates his own story. Second, The Peripatetic shares with Menippean satire the use of verse, the symposium-like structure, and the tendency toward highly stylized characters who mouth attitudes. But Thelwall approaches the role of novelist in that he "sees evil and folly as social diseases" rather than as "diseases of the intellect," to use Northrup Frye's formulation. Finally, The Peripatetic closely resembles the confession, or, more precisely, the fictional autobiography. Sylvanus is a thin disguise for Thelwall's own sensibility; author and character share the same eccentricities, the same legal background, the same infatuation with the moon. Thelwall may have been influenced by the English publication of Rousseau's Confessions, or he may as easily have employed the form most congenial to an egotistic aspiring political lecturer. Perhaps Thelwall learned the technique of sandwiching prose reflections, narrative, and poetry from the eighteenth-century Tory writer Richard Graves, author of The Spiritual Quixote and The Reveries of Solitude. The travel aspect of The Peripatetic suggests the influence of the contemporary prose tour, such as William Gilpin's Observations on the River Wye . . . Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty (1782), especially in the care with which Thelwall points views and

monuments. Perhaps he hoped that tourists would purchase The Peripatetic to carry with them. But the locale he describes, suburban London, was an unexotic one compared to the subjects of the prose tours, like the Lake District.

Also, topographical poetry generally described more colorful regions, and the topographical portions of The Peripatetic are written not in verse but in prose. Yet Thelwall's novel at times shares many of the functions of the topographical poem, which, Robert Arnold Aubin informs us, may commemorate historical scenes, convey economic information, recreate the picturesque, celebrate a town, describe a local region, or follow a river. The poetry in The Peripatetic is generally not concerned with topography. An exception, "Shooters Hill," and its accompanying prose story demonstrate the general use to which Thelwall puts topographical description. The view from Shooter's Hill is essentially a view of Eltham Castle, the legendary home of King John, which Thelwall treats after the manner of Volney's Reflections on the Ruins of Empire:

Eltham whose towers, in age's stern decay
And smiling woods, in vernal foliage gay,
Late (fond of scenes renown'd in times of yore)
My feet eccentric wand'r'd to explore...

Ye fallen turrets, now in fragments spread,
Or doomed to patch the rustic's humble shed.

In prose he relates the history of the castle's royal owners, down to the present, when,

... converted to a farmer's barn, it affords an occasional banquet to rats and owls, and is the storehouse of the best wealth of the nation. ... by which the humblest peasant, as well as the haughtiest tyrant may be benefited and sustained! (I, 182-83)

III

The didactic tone and substance of *The Peripatetic* corresponded closely to the literary predilections of the age. For years after Rousseau's great sentimental novel *Julie* had been translated into English, British journals contrived to publish excerpts from it, not the romantic scenes, but passages offering instruction on the evils of duelling, on domestic economy, on education.\(^\text{14}\) The late-eighteenth-century reader sought, above all, improvement, and his interests were broad. In *The Peripatetic* Thelwall not only offered correct examples of sentimental and benevolent conduct, but also dispensed a wide variety of topical information about science, history, and literature, in keeping with Sylvanus' role as a philosopher and sage. Thelwall firmly believed that the more any man learned of history, art, psychology and natural science, the more thoroughly he would understand his own nature and the more enthusiastically he would wish justice and harmony upon the society in which he participated. In a sense, then, Thelwall did deserve the title "untenured professor of liberal arts."

It may be argued that scientific curiosity dominated the English Romantics as forcefully as did antiquarianism. Since the early eighteenth-century the work of Newton had influenced the curriculum at Cambridge, and the chemical experiments of Sir Humphry Davy, especially

those employing nitrous oxide, fascinated Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge. The latter asserted in "Religious Musings" (1794) that "Freedom" must "spring from heavenly science," and praised "the Patriot Sage, Dr. Franklin" who "Called the red lightnings from the o'er-rushing cloud."

Wordsworth soon lost his taste for any pursuit smacking of materialism, but a generation later Shelley, the practitioner of alchemical transformations, exhibited a curiosity toward the physical world akin to that of Thelwall. Early in 1793 Thelwall gained acclaim as an amateur, albeit accomplished, anatomist when he presented to the "Physical Society" of Guy's Hospital a paper entitled An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality. The society of surgeons discussed his work for six successive evenings and then voted their gratitude for his theory.

Anatomy finds its way into The Peripatetic after Sylvanus explains the liberal rewards of scientific study:

The more complicated the object of our examination may appear, the more forcibly it proclaims the wisdom of its Author; and the more irresistibly are we compelled to admire the simplicity of operation, on which all true sublimity depends; and which, in the midst of variety and apparent complication, never fails to present itself to the scientific eye. (I, 161)

Sylvanus argues further that "the elegant votary of the polite arts" should find pleasure not only in the exterior lines of the human form but also in "the laws of human economy," the most amazing of which is the action of the heart:

See where the heart, life's awful reservoir
That pours to every part the vital store--
Great seat of Passion, at whose proud control
Or slow, or wild the purple torrents roll! (I, 163)

Sylvanus continues at some length, incorporating a surprising amount of
technical information into similar figurative language, including his suspicion that the lungs extract "the pure electric fire" from air.

Like many a democrat after him Thelwall believed that useful knowledge should become the common property of society, available, ultimately, to all social classes; as a youth he had witnessed at first hand the not infrequent devotion of working men to their books, despite very difficult circumstances; as an unenfranchised adult he was obsessed by the thought of how radically an educated populace might alter society. Many of the topographical passages in *The Peripatetic*, consequently, contain historical lessons applicable to current politics. When Sylvanus passes through the village of Dartford, for example, he concentrates his description upon two historical features of the town: it was the site of England's first paper mill, and it was also the spot at which Wat Tyler's rebellion was crushed by King Richard II in 1381. As for the former, Sylvanus notes reverently that the mill was built by Sir Henry Spelman during the reign of Charles I. As for the latter, Sylvanus sympathetically describes the rebel's demands, which focused upon the replacement of feudal dues by fixed rents on land. He then indignantly relates how the fifteen-year-old king played treacherously and fatally upon the honesty and goodwill of an illiterate. From the story of Wat Tyler Sylvanus poses a general question which his readers were to apply to recent events in France:

I appeal to the common knowledge and common sense of mankind, whether the uniform conduct of all tyrants has not conspired to teach the world this lesson—-that once you have got them in your power, you must either lop them off, or they will lop you off? (II,27-80)

15 See above, "Introduction."
At Crayford Sylvanus recalls the battle in which Saxon tribes under Heingest routed the Britons whose leader Vortigern had been misled by "the folly and weakness of alliances" (II, 6-7). In 1793 the English ministry was constructing German alliances in order to oppose the new French Republic. Sylvanus warns not only against alliances, but also against the introduction of foreign mercenaries into England by recounting the royalist coup d'etat attempted by Swiss guards in Paris. In all these instances Thelwall's intention was not to write temporary polemics but to ascertain historical principles of which the English nation should be informed and upon which it should govern its political life.

Besides science and history, Sylvanus presented literary instruction. In Volume III he and his friends wish that Dryden, whose warmth they favor over Pope's correctness, had completed a "martial epic." They criticize his indecisive choice of theme, and Sylvanus suggests that Alfred would have figured better in a national epic than either Arthur or the Black Prince. The discussion tempts Sylvanus to recite the invocation to his own epic, a satire upon contemporary verse, which he characterizes as unnatural, filled with exalted diction and artificial sentiment, the product of luxurious taste (III, 51-78).

Thelwall's satirical mode suggests an important aspect of late-eighteenth-century literature, one often overlooked in favor of less significant factors. Although Churchill and Crabbe were practically the only successful verse satirists of the period, the age in some ways extended the vigorous critical temper of the Augustan period to a more wide-ranging criticism of life. The novelists Bage, Brook, and Day attained enormous popularity precisely because they criticized old pat-
terns of conduct, such as duelling and social snobbery, based on aristocratic ideals. At the same time they criticized aspects of bourgeois conduct, especially the "luxury" of the nouveau riche. The eighteenth-century's quest for improvement became an energized search for new norms of conduct during the 1790's when the desire for social change was vitalized by the French Revolution. Many "radical" intellectuals of the decade demonstrate this critical temper throughout their works. Although often depicted as shrill dogmatists, they responded to a relatively widespread dissatisfaction with daily existence by seeking desperately for the reality that lay beneath political and religious jargon and conventions, for the reality that truly determined the structure and quality of social life. Although their answers were often short-sighted and absurd, their questions were frequently profound. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, composed a rather disorganized retort to Burke's Reflections but managed to lay open a flaw in his philosophy which even his most dedicated defenders must acknowledge to a degree: she charged that for him human dignity was dependent upon property.

Thelwall, too, yearned for new solutions that would build upon close critical observation of real problems. The skeptic David Hume had made a great impression upon him, and one of his favorite poets, Mark Akenside, had stated a half century earlier what might have served as Thelwall's literary ideal:

   ... so, haply, where the powers
   Of fancy neither lessen nor enlarge
   The images of things, but paint in all
   Their genuine hues, the features which they wore
   In Nature; there, opinion will be true,
   And action right.16

16The Pleasures of the Imagination I.75-81.
This attitude represented one pole of Augustan thought. But Thelwall also felt himself the votary of its opposite pole: sensibility. In The Peripatetic Sylvanus urges a synthesis of reason and sensibility, of fact and emotion, in order to understand and utilize life's possibilities: "Philosophy and Sensibility are by no means so inconsistent as the ignorant and unfeeling world would persuade us" (II, 13-14). In part, Thelwall is carrying on the tradition of sentimental deism that gained widespread popularity from the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury, who saw sensibility, reason and natural affection as leading directly to tasteful, satisfying social intercourse.

Thelwall insisted that such civilization was possible for all classes, a thought foreign to Shaftesbury, for whom "To philosophize is but to carry Good Breeding a step further." For Thelwall, however, "Good Breeding" meant education, and he saw a great deal of bad breeding and faulty education in the vogue of sentiment, which by the 1790's had reached the decadence incumbent upon age. In The Peripatetic Sylvanus criticizes the tradition from the perspective of a "man of feeling." He confesses that from his youth he has constantly been attracted to lonely, melancholy scenes:

. . . oft unperceived I left the cheerful throng
And stole, in lonely meditation wrapt,
Slow by the woodland side, in the still hour
Of pensive Evening. (III, 13)

He defends sensibility, but only when based squarely upon the influence

17 Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times I.i.3.
of natural sensations, which leads to benevolent emotion:

I cannot see why the finest susceptibilities of nature should not be considered as unworthy of those who boast the highest order of natural intellect--or why Reason, which is only the aggregate of Sensation, collected and exhibited in lucid focus, should think she shows her own strength and dignity, without which she never could have existed. . . . (II, 178)

From his own personal experience he draws a "critique of pure reason":

For my own part, I have always held a very opposite set of maxims--the tear ever prompt, in my infancy, to start at every tale of real, or fictitious woe, is not yet dried up; nor can I recollect that the feelings I have thus fondly cherished, have ever betrayed me into half as many actions or situations unworthy of the manly pride of reason as the maxims of cold-blooded apathy would evidently lead to. (II, 179)

The comical reasoning with which Sylvanus began his impromptu spring vacation takes on a serious aspect. It is the consequence of sensitive reason applied to a vital problem of conduct. Throughout the novel Sylvanus continues to establish his own "susceptibility" to the natural world. In "A Childish Retrospect" he recollects how he once wandered off from less sensitive relatives during a walk to Margate:

... as the party was principally composed of those sagacious sober-sided mortals, whose animadversions were generally confined to a few hums and has (sic) about the decay of trade and the balance of power . . . I could neither partake nor enjoy, and wandering from place to place, in quest of such objects as might amuse my fancy or gratify my curiosity, I came, unexpectedly upon the pier. . . . the prospect faded before my curiosity was gratified; and when scarce an object remained to engage the visual sense, the murmuring of the ebbing tide still rivetted my enchanted ear, and the veil of darkness was almost closed over the face of heaven when (after a long and anxious search) I was discovered in this situation, hanging in sweet enthusiasm, over the artificial precipice, and listening to the dashing surge. (I, 79-80)

His thirst for nature, though eccentric, yields practical satisfaction,
an infatuation with ordinary life:

Idle eccentricity:--this vagrant frenzy!--moody melancholy! --half sense, half madness! . . . the will with which the Muse, or the Moon, inspires me: which from the most frivolous adventures, and the most ordinary objects has so often extracted the sweets of amusing meditation! (II, 71-72)

Nature, Sylvanus asserts, effects a near magical power over human beings, a power evident even in its effects upon infants:

O wondrous Nature! O Mysterious law
And winning charm of rapturous melancholy!
That, causeless, thus can o'er the infant eye
Spread the dim soothing veil of semblant woe
From sombrous glooms, and sounds of sullen awe,
Can call extatic Rapture, and in tears,
Bathe sweeter joys than Laughter ever knew! (III, 15)

Thelwall's insistent grounding of sensibility upon nature anticipates a criticism of the whole sentimental tradition presented by its historian, Professor Tompkins: "The votary of sensibility valued emotion for itself, without stopping to consider whether it sprang from an adequate cause."

In the character of Sylvanus Thelwall presented an example of a properly formed sensibility; emotional, but reasonable; compassionate but "manly"; benevolent but unpatronizing. In The Peripatetic Sylvanus offers the positive, and Belmour the negative criticism of the sentimental tradition. Sylvanus especially relishes nature in wild settings, and he enjoys the atmosphere of old ruins, such Eltham Castle. These predilections correspond to Northrup Frye's theory that the literature of sensibility is set "at one of the two poles of process, creation and decay."

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18 Tompkins, p. 100.

of the natural world gives him an aura of "toughness", which corrects what Professor Tompkins sees as a distracting problem in the typical sentimental hero:

But the flaw that so often vitiates the sensibility of the eighteenth century is egoism; it is difficult to find a passage that is quite free from this taint. Tears are too facile, too enjoyable. . . . one longs for a little toughness. . . .20

Bad weather, for example, does not in the least daunt Sylvanus. When he and his friends encounter a shower while walking to Rochester, he quickly finds shelter beneath some trees. After raising his fellows' spirits by showing what a fine view of the Thames they have stumbled upon, Sylvanus philosophizes about the need to adapt to such difficulties:

"Trifles like these must not disturb the serenity of the PERIPATETIC. For my part, nothing puts me out of the way; or disturbs the tranquil independence with which I constantly pursue the beautiful phenomena of Nature: a pursuit which no accidental change in the weather can disappoint: for which of these changes cannot produce some additional food for science or imagination?" (II, 105)

Furthermore, Sylvanus actually seeks out the most dangerous, adventure-some experiences he can find in nature. For example, he climbs the cliffs of Sandgate,

Where as I stride, perchance the smallest slip
Or giddy wandering of the timid brain
Might headlong plunge me many a fathom down.21


21The Peripatetic, II, 193. Cf. King LearIV.vi.22-24: "I'll look no more/Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight/Topple down headlong."
Experiencing danger in the natural world, Sylvanus argues, tightens one's grip on life, and when the experience is preserved by the memory, it remains to sweeten times of comfort and security. The memory itself is to Sylvanus not a mere mechanical matching of fixed semblances, as Locke would have it, but an organic integration of the whole individual by a real, even material process:

"... memory and reflection are something more than impassive vacancy--or immaterial suggestion. ... they dwell in the vital essences of the blood, and are modifications of that susceptible organization, without which the breath that gives us life were nothing. (II, 178)"

Though Sylvanus fears neither inconvenience nor danger, his sensibility demands he abjure the hardness of spirit which leads to cruelty, and forces him to a realization of his kinship to "every living thing."

In one of the novel's first scenes he sees a group of bird-catchers trap a skylark, and pours out a sad lament:

I saw the little warbler, whose song had so delighted me, and whose rapture had awakened so many pleasing reflections--so many charming sensations in my bosom, struggling beneath a treacherous net. ... consigned, among a throng of little warblers, like himself, to all the woes of cruel slavery; to taste the joys of liberty no more; to mourn, perhaps, his little widowed mate; to mourn, perhaps, his callow chirping young, who, robbed of the support derived from his provident assistance, may probably expire with lingering famine in the deserted nest. (I, 34)

Prose as purple as this jars the ear of modern readers, but the passage demonstrates two essential themes of the Age of Sensibility named by Northrup Frye: "an imaginative animism, or treating everything in nature as if it had human feelings ... and the curiously intense awareness of the animal world."
The passage also demonstrates Frye's third essential theme, "the sense of sympathy with man himself, the sense that no one can be indifferent to the fate of anyone else," because the lark could be an impressed soldier, though Sylvanus does not explicitly complete the metaphor. Sylvanus considers how the callousness of the action is caused by the luxury it serves:

Daughters of Albion's gay enlighten'd hour!
Here the sweet strains your captive warblers pour . . . .
Nor ever think—that for a sordid joy,
Their hopes, their rights, affections ye destroy. (I, 35)

As the poem continues, Sylvanus explicitly renders the lark an emblem of the human oppression bred by commercial imperialism. The Daughters of Albion indirectly cause suffering in the tea plantations of India and the cane fields of Jamaica:

Heedless of groans, of anguish and of chains,  
Of stripes inflated, and tormenting pains,  
At morn, at eve, your sweeten'd beverage sup,  
Nor see the blood of thousands in the cup . . . .  
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Each sweeten'd drop yon porcelain contains  
Was drawn, O horror! from some brother's veins. (I, 35)

Professor Tompkin's third strong charge against the sentimental novel was that it lacked a sense of humor:

Humor in the English novel at the end of the eighteenth century is, with a few marked exceptions, scanty and crude. Didacticism and sensibility was the more deadly. . . .

23 Tompkins, p. 112.
But Thelwall's criticism of sensibility permits Sylvanus to laugh at himself. In the second volume Sylvanus narrates his past adventures on a hunt to criticize not only the cruelty, but also the selfishness of that activity. Yet he condemns softly, more poking fun at himself than castigating his sportsman friends. From the outset, he confides, his desire was aesthetic rather than bloodthirsty:

Though I am by no means a friend to those amusements that arise from the worrying and tormenting of unoffending animals, yet, as I considered that my presence could make no difference in the sufferings of the unhappy victims, I had consented to indulge my curiosity by becoming a party—or, rather a spectator of the chase; more with a view that I might here after better enjoy the glowing descriptions of Somerville's didactic muse, than that I might boast my initiation into the cruel mysteries of Diana.

He does not scruple to depict his own ludicrousness:

Behold, then—if I may be permitted an Iricism—behold the Peripatetic on horseback! the philosophical, poetical, sentimental Sylvanus Theophrastus surrounded by dogs, and horns, and huntsmen, mounting with jocund shout, the impatient neighing steed, and preparing for the noisy tumults of the field. Smollet's Trunyon (sic), however, was scarcely further out of his element: for though emulation—or, to give credit where credit is due—the emulation of my horse would not permit me to lag during the pursuit, and though I was by no means insensible to the full chorus of the deep-mouthed pack; yet I must confess myself so wretched a sportsman that the cry of the poor animal at its death . . . had less charms for me than the fine variety of scenery which the eye encounters in every direction on this romantic [Kentish] coast.

And Sylvanus describes his solitary ride along the beach with a fine sensitivity for the picturesque:

Now sweeping along the beach, almost upon the very margin of the ocean, with the waves roaring to the right, and the lofty mountains, or rather perpendicular rocks frowning a browner
verdure upon our left, we beheld the town of Hythe swelling before us on a charming woody eminence, whose variegated foliage intersperses, and partially embowers it; now toiling up the steep, we were saluted by the ivied fragments of ancient castles--scenes of rude splendor, once, and Gothic pride.

Then compassion for the starving poor arises in Sylvanus' thoughts out of his contemplation of the hunted prey:

Tis true, what thus our hooves destroy
Might some poor famished wretch supply,
Might give a meal to those who tilled
But seldom taste the plenteous field. (II, 50-53)

The entire passage repeats the novel's recurring theme, that sentiments grounded upon nature and tempered by reason lead to benevolent social relations--the belief that "every living thing shares the same feelings with ourselves" (II, 14).

Despite Sylvanus' depth of feeling, he lies in no danger of dying for love, as did MacKenzie's Harley. So Thelwall invented the weak-willed Belmour who lies constantly in danger of dying for love. When he and Sylvanus encounter the dead thrush their responses contrast sharply. Belmour sees in the thrush only a pathetic reflection of his own sorrows, and thus presents a comic figure:

"Ah bird!" sighed he, and after a considerable pause, "Poor bird!" shaking his head and regarding it with a look of that melting sympathy, for which he was once so eminent. "Yet why pity thee? Thy griefs are ended. . . . yet this little breast has fluttered for its lost Sophia, and sighed, and sobbed, and panted til it ached." (II, 19)

Sylvanus' reflection is at first maudlin enough:

Poor little captive! he had not lived, indeed to draw out a lingering existence, and flutter his little hopeless
wings against the bars of an inexorable cage. The prospect of endless slavery had broken its little heart. (II, 13)

But he realizes that the thrush is but one of many "humbler tenants of the earth" who feel the weight of oppression. Recognizing that the thrush had been caged by boys, Sylvanus immediately turns his thought toward correcting their lack of compassion: "Were we taught from our infancy that every living thing has the same feelings with ourselves," Sylvanus argues, universal benevolence could become a reality. To illustrate he tells how he corrected a little girl's thoughtlessness by means of a timely fable (II, 18-19).

When the travellers approach the mammoth chalk pits at Stone, Sylvanus quickly vaults the safety rail in order to feel "the full enjoyment of its sublimity." His active pleasure is halted by a glimpse of Belmour, whose predictable melancholy possesses a humorous touch:

But the wild looks of our bewildered companion presently reminded us of our indiscretion; and I thought I saw him absolutely preparing to execute upon the spot the resolution we so much dreaded. (II, 96)

Later, when Belmour hears that an old farmhouse was once a monastery, he praises the institution as a refuge for desperate lovers. Sylvanus, of course, tries to correct that "irrational idea" by suggesting a new institution that would house the victims of political oppression.

Finally, the same group of young gentlemen at St. Albans whose teasing drives Belmour to suicide also rally Sylvanus quite heartily when they see him emerge, bespattered and foolish, from a dirty old monk's hole into which his Gothic sensibility had led him. Sylvanus welcomes their raillery, in an aside to the reader, as a good antidote for solipsism (III, 145).
Considered seriously, Belmour's insanity epitomizes an excessive sensibility. Rather than argue from this fact toward more rigid conformity, Sylvanus suggests that insanity, when not caused by organic defect, would be better treated "if we were to reason from the analogies within our reach (to compare the insane with the eccentric, and the eccentric with the orderly mass) (II, 182). And the Peripatetic himself had as a young man experienced the insanity born of despair. While returning from a late-night party the moon drew him upon a further ramble during which:

The laws of Providence (as my early tutors had explained them) pressed an unavoidable concatenation upon my thoughts. . . . My mind was bewildered in horror. To doubt the system I had been taught seemed blasphemy beyond hope of pardon, yet grant it true, and my soul was ship wrecked indeed. . . . The mind that was never tormented by such a doubt, can form no idea of its horror. I looked upon myself as abandoned to reprobation for harbouring the dreadful thought. I recollected, however, that it was involuntary: and involuntary criminality baffled every conception of reason. (I, 74-75)

Sylvanus met the danger squarely and banished it with the aid of nature, reason, and benevolence:

Darkness and unoccupied solitariness might have led to madness. I resolved to avoid the danger; and in the contemplation of those natural phaenomena, for which I had always so enthusiastic an admiration, to banish these distracting doubts till I could examine the system from which they resulted. . . . I have examined it; and found it built on sand. The bigot phantoms of hereditary prejudice have vanished before the searching rays of investigation, and left in their place the pure and simple form of a milder persuasion, whose universal benevolence smiles endearment to the heart of sensibility, whose cheerful precepts are founded on the conviction of reason; and which promises the perfection of Justice without the immolation of Mercy. (I, 76-77)

The social affection with which Sylvanus balances his own mind is itself subject to the scrutiny of the skeptical eye. In one of the
novel's most humorous scenes Sylvanus enters a country church with the cynical Arisor and the sentimental Wentworth. The last offers a long Wordsworthian paean to village life:

"Within these walls, perhaps, the bonds of fraternal affection, which unite the little society in virtuous harmony have been more closely knit. Here Charity has learned to bestow her frugal mite to best advantage; simple Nature has indulged her grateful feelings for the humble blessings that are scattered around, and artless Purity has poured forth her sainted prayer. Here, too, virgin Innocence has blushed at the unpolluted altar that yielded her to the honest lover of her unbiased choice. . . ."

The loud laugh of Arisor interrupted this rhapsody. "Tut!" said he, "we are not now in Arcadia. The simplicity of Thurlby's clowns would give you, I fear, but an indifferent image of Saturnian days. I would not lay a bottle of home-brewed ale against all the maidenheads in the village!" (II, 111-12)

Arisor goes on to explain that he spends summers in the village and has witnessed over many years the introduction of luxurious vices from the university and the town.

Spurned by this sense of realism Thelwall refuses to countenance legends of the supernatural. In this he does not meet one important criterion of sensibility, "an imaginative sympathy with the kind of folklore that peoples the countryside with elemental spirits." Thelwall was attacking the Gothic supernaturalism which pervaded the late-eighteenth-century novel. He felt that superstition locked the lower classes into ignorance. Thus Sophia's "haunting" of her mother's grave proves to be no mystery. It is only a natural melancholic reaction to the isolation she experienced after the disruption of her family life. That local villagers confuse her nightly visits with a two-century-old legend

shows only ignorance, as Arisor points out, since the gravestone upon which she mourns is not five-years-old.

When Belmour relates his own history it deflates Gothic invention even more dramatically. After suffering his father's curse, Belmour says, he became withdrawn and decided to quit England for America. While travelling along the docks to his ship, however, he is enticed by the gloomy scene of "the mournful lustre of the moon trembling on the boundless waves and silvering over the heavy surge that frothed against the sand." Just as he is about to step into a watery doom he is halted by the hand of an old man with a long beard, dressed in a flowing robe. Belmour's grief changes quickly to fear, for the man's appearance was "not of an inhabitant of this world, but of one of those benevolent agents from a better sphere, whom poets and visionaries have so often depicted" (II, 163). Speaking only in gestures, the old man guides Belmour along the beach and through a large old mansion into a kitchen where he presents food and wine. Meanwhile, Belmour's awe has increased:

"Everything I beheld bore as little resemblance to the things of this world and century as though the power of magic had restored the honoured dead and boasted sages of the most remote antiquity." (II, 164)

Finally the stranger speaks, commanding Belmour to reveal the source of his sorrow. After listening to the story the old man pronounces his judgment:

"You seem to have carried your parental reverence too far, and not duly to have considered, that when those whom nature, or the institutions of society, have placed above us, presume to push their authority beyond the boundaries which the dictates of nature have prescribed, it may even be criminal to obey." (II, 171-72)
The stranger then absolves Belmour of the parental curse and sends him off to search for Sophia with the injunction that "gratitude and affection are the sole duties of a child." The old man's advice is realistic rather than enigmatic precisely because he is a real living person—like the Marquis de B[iron] in A Sentimental Journey. Sylvanus immediately recognizes him as an old friend, "Mr. R____, resident of Kent... whose singularities and benevolence alike have conspired to make him the wonder of the surrounding county," and who, despite his eighty years "often goes and toils in the fields to understand his laborer's wants" (II, 174).

One of Thelwall's major themes is the deflation of fantasy by reality. In this light, the final comic resolution of Belmour's action appears more significant than a mere stock device. Belmour should marry the woman of his choice, regardless of her wealth or rank, regardless of parental prejudice. It is the common-sense cure for what ails him, as well as the romantic solution. "Young lovers have a real need," says Sylvanus, "to cultivate the pleasures and dispositions most agreeable to each other" (III, 7).

IV

This attitude represents the first of several "revolutionary" themes in The Peripatetic, for it radically violated the conventions of eighteenth-century literature. Eighteenth-century society itself witnessed and blessed the marriage of commercial fortune to aristocratic

Sterne, p. 134.
title according to the considerations of family. "The eighteenth-century loved a fine gesture," writes Tompkins, and the finest gesture it knew was "generous submission to parental authority," which in fact provided a stock scene for the sentimental novel. The conclusion of Clarissa, for example, makes it clear that she realizes her fate would have remained secure had she only obeyed her father, however thick-headed he may have been.

During the 1790's the revolutionary novelists hammered away at this theme, and reaped abuse from contemporary morals watchers. In Anna St. Ives (1792) Thomas Holcroft joins the daughter of a baronet to the son of his overseer. Holcroft expounds an attitude toward marriage similar to that of Thelwall: "Surely if marriage be not friendship according to the best and highest sense in which that word is used, marriage cannot but be something faulty and vicious." Eventually his lovers unite, despite the prejudices of their parents. But their desire is unselfish, for Holcroft esteems social responsibility. The lovers refuse to sport with their parents' feelings. For a while they even attempt to "convert" a selfish young aristocrat into a humane husband for Anna so that she can better use her station to aid the poor.

In most of these novels what convinces is the sense of new beginnings, the sense of possibility for reformation of society even on the lowly level of individual action. In The Peripatetic Thelwall especially emphasized this optimism. The conclusion which Sylvanus draws from the dead thrush overpowers Belmour's short-sighted despair with a

26Tompkins, p. 86.

stalwart optimism: "I am not so thoroughly persuaded of the influences of original sin as to believe that human nature would grow up in such cruel depravity, as that which we too frequently behold" (II, 14). We have seen how Sylvanus believed that even cruelty to animals could be prevented, if a society properly educated its children. Sensibility was not only to be evoked, but to be corrected as well.

In The Peripatetic Thelwall dramatized modifications in daily life which would promote more "natural" and hence more generous feelings. In the same way that he criticized the sentimental ethos, Thelwall relied upon a balance of reason and sensibility to renew common manners. Sylvanus prefers walking to riding, for example, not only because he is a democrat but also because he wishes a more immediate experience of the natural world, and, curiously, because he wants to avoid pollution:

As . . . I pursued my tranquil and cheerful way along the fields, and smiled to behold, at irregular distances, to the right, and to the left, the clouds of dust that marked the winding courses of the roads, and in which the more favored sons of Fortune, were suffocating themselves for the benefit of the air, I felt a glow of health and vivacity, which the bustle and loaded atmosphere of the metropolis never yet afforded. (I, 13-14)

That the novel continues as a guided tour argues that Thelwall intended more than simple adulation of artistic eccentricity. Sylvanus refuses to vacation with his wealthy friend Ambulator unless they walk cross-country. As they travel, the Peripatetic criticizes the overcrowding of houses in a formerly simple village, and later he points out some country children as an example of the environmental influence on human development. They are, he says,
playful infants, sporting and squabbling at large in the full enjoyment of health, vivacity and liberty, free from all the dangers which, in towns and cities, render the unhappy being a slave and a prisoner from his infancy, and a premature victim to cares and sorrows. (II, 225)

The changes which Goldsmith recorded in *The Deserted Village*, depopulation and decline, continued at an even faster rate during the 1790's. On the outskirts of Bermondsey the travellers visit a rustic neighborhood of little cottages and fields that "Improvement has neglected." Sylvanus rejoices that there remains an area so near the city "where decent Poverty may find so many comfortable retreats, be hid from gazing scorn, and enjoy a purer gale than the choaked city can afford." But he also knows that cottages are unfashionable, especially when they stop the view from the estates of "gentlemen":

And not among the least cruel of the practices by which the higher orders of society among us wantonly, and with impunity, oppress the poor, is the modern tyranny of exterminating, from the vicinity of each proud mansion, the inhabitants of these humble sheds. (I, 135)

The cause Sylvanus assigns not only to false pride, but to false sensibility:

The imperious lord is not content with his own superiority: he envies the poor peasant (by the sweat of whose brow he eats) even the wretched offal of his own industry. Air and the cheerful verdure of the field are luxuries too great for Poverty: or, perhaps, his tender feelings cannot endure the sight of such wretchedness; and he finds extermination less expensive than relief. (I, 134-5)

He then offers two objections, one moral and the other aesthetic. In the first place, the wealthy have destroyed the retreat of "decent Poverty and honest industry": secondly, the wealthy have selfishly
thrust a human family from a healthy, naturally educative enviroment into a crowded, degrading one:

The poor inhabitant is driven from his cottage, from his little garden, and his bubbling spring, to seek, perhaps, a miserable habitation within the smoky confines of some increasing town; where, among narrow lanes, house crowding upon house, and every floor, every room containing its own separate family, he is doomed to see the once cleanly partner of his joys and cares, who had used by her industry to assist his own, compelled to dedicate her whole incessant labour to fruitless efforts for the preservation of a sufficient degree of cleanliness in her family to prevent the contagious approaches of disease. (I, 135)

That cottagers are likely to prove thieves Sylvanus sarcastically counters by suggesting that there are big thieves as well as little ones:

"While Placemen and the tools of Placemen plunder the realm by wholesale, and with the profits of their rapine, purchase of pretended representatives the permission to plunder us still more: and enslave us—rob us of the liberty of reasoning into the bargain—shame on these low-born, half-starved cottage wretches!" (I, 141)

In its revolutionary doctrine The Peripatetic is more directly political than the works of Godwin and Holcroft, who tend to see social change as dependent upon a slow and gradual change in human nature. Thelwall the political lecturer introduces two distinctly political solutions. One is Ambulator's defense of smallness, actually an attack on the effects of agricultural monopoly and the enclosure system:

"While lands were rented out in small proportions, indeed, the master and the labourer were near enough to a level to sympathize in each other's misfortunes; and the reciprocity of kindness might be rationally expected; but now that one opulent individual (a farmer, perhaps, in nothing but the employment of his capital) grasps whole districts in one concern, policy may sometimes dictate relief, but humanity, my friend, is reserved for his family and co-equals." (I, 145)
Like Godwin and Holcroft Thelwall indicts individual villains less severely than the system which produces them:

"The system, my friend, the system is alone to blame, which throws every advantage into the hands of the wealthy few at the expense of the entire depression of the many. . . . And yet had every man . . . the weight proportioned to his real importance in the state—were freemen freely represented—had every one who has an interest, a voice also in the representation, would the most important part of the community be thus neglected and despised?" (I, 146)

Thelwall considered the laboring poor to be the most important segment of society because he felt they produced its real wealth. This conviction determines his attitude toward a typically sentimental attitude, and an object of much contemporary discussion, benevolence toward beggars. Sylvanus despises professional begging because he judges that "Seldom is real misery importunate." After refusing the petition of a soft-spoken older man carrying a hay-rake, however, he becomes conscience-stricken, and follows the man in order to help him. Sylvanus discovers that the suppliant is a farm laborer who has travelled from distant sterile lands, searching for work. Because the laborer never considered enforcing his petition with a blow from the hay-rake, Sylvanus gives liberally ("or not at all") after presenting to the reader a portrait nearly Wordsworthian in its simplicity and detail:

. . . he turned round again toward me, and displayed as meek, as honest, and as supplicating a countenance as was ever shaded by a few grey hairs. . . . His garb was decent; and his coarse shirt, buttoned about his neck, without any handkerchief, though

28 For a detailed discussion of Thelwall's political ideas, see chapter ii.
was evidently clean; and though the marks of want were conspicuous in his features, his whole appearance had nothing of that emaciation which characterizes habitual wretchedness. (I, 27)

Sylvanus gives liberally simply because the laborer deserves to live as well as anyone else; as a producer he should share in the nation's wealth. Work and integrity are important, Sylvanus advises, when Ambulator automatically offers money to a drunken gypsy:

"Look at those limbs, and that healthful countenance: and then tell me whether you consider it to be the part of a professor of real benevolence, to encourage vagrant indolence? . . . it can never be the part of a good member of society to contribute to the useless and the idle: unless, indeed, where it is commanded by the coercive laws of his country, and sanctioned by hereditary institutions." (II, 45)

It is to Thelwall's credit that he shared with his fellow revolutionary novelists a genuine curiosity about their opponents' feelings and motives. Thelwall had little use for the aristocracy, who he felt possessed an enormous economic interest that only a few truly great men could transcend. But he did seek to understand the enthusiasm for war that had been sweeping the English people early in 1793. Near the beginning of The Peripatetic Sylvanus examines at length a militaristic old Scotch sailor whom he meets at the docks. Open admiration is what Sylvanus feels for the man's solid education, his frugal meal of bread and porridge and "the quiet valor with which he spoke of battles, cannon balls and wounds." But most of all Sylvanus is charmed by "the evident benevolence of his mind, and the simple piety and morality that gave a serious tint to the whole of his conversation" (I, 49-50). So the Peripatetic is shocked to hear his friend complain about peace as an affliction.
Initially Sylvanus' good humor triumphs, for he quickly decides "We are all Quixotes in one point of view or another; and however rational we may be upon the whole, there is sure to be some subject with respect to which we are insane." But as he investigates further, he finds that the sailor had spent his entire life, from fourteen to seventy years, "between the dockyard and the man o war," a forceful material influence, Sylvanus realizes, the fruit of the system of warfare itself. But as he leaves the sailor Sylvanus quietly records his tolerant respect for a political opponent: "Adieu, good, honest, though mistaken tar! harsh indeed were the censor that should condemn thy unlettered prejudices" (I, 51-52).

As a work of art The Peripatetic possesses faults that the modern reader cannot overlook. Digressions on the circulation of the blood cannot fail to bore; a plot in which the principal character neglects to partake in a considerable action invites tedium; the details of its topographical tour are now intelligible only to the antiquarian. The themes advanced in the novel are often preached, and preached wordily; the conflict between the thematic importance of real fact and the artistic need for imagination is never resolved.

Yet the flaws of The Peripatetic are the flaws of its age. The novel itself was then an object of experimentation. New devices and new functions were introduced and no one knew which would gain ascendancy and which would be cast aside. In response to the problems of a rapidly changing society, sensitive men and women responded as they always must, by teaching old values and new solutions, in novels and poems as well as in pamphlets and sermons.
The criticisms and solutions offered in *The Peripatetic* Thelwall presented with drama and compassion. He succeeded in weaving his themes into an innovative and intricate form by which he at once criticized and defended the traditions informing "the Age of Sensibility." The renewed sentiment he dramatized was based on the belief that immediate experience of the natural world led inexorably to a richer individual life and to a democratic awareness of social obligations. That theme must hold permanent value whether or not novel and author recline quietly in the shades of obscurity.
CHAPTER IV

POETRY:

"THE SOURCE OF JOYS"

... the Poems in these volumes will be distinguished by at least one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy purpose.

--William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1800

The first passion of the soul of that pretended free agent ... was poetry. For its calm and retired delights, in his early days, he sacrificed profession, prospects, friendships, ease and health; and lo, all his succeeding and maturer years have been tormented by the bustle and vexation of political and professional discord.

--John Thelwall, Poetical Recreations of the Champion and His Literary Correspondents, 1818

The same year in which John Thelwall began to call upon himself "the vexation of political discord" by joining the London Corresponding Society was the year his Peripatetic won him the esteem of Thomas Holcroft, who advised Thelwall to write for the theater. Thelwall must have imagined that his dream of literary success, which had sustained him through several unhappy apprentices, would soon be realized. Six years earlier, in 1787, he had published his first poetry, two volumes of tales and elegies called Poems On Various Subjects (London: John Denis, 1787). Although these Gothic love adventures and effusions of sentiment suited the taste of the age, they were marred by amateurism and conventionality. After

1A useful guide to the taste of the age, and thus a gauge for evaluating Thelwall's poetry, is found in Robert Mayo, 'The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXIX (1954), 486-522.
their publication Thelwall began to correct what he considered his greatest defect, a lack of learning, by studying politics, history, and ancient literature. He revised and edited his poetry, and, in 1789, he began to write and edit The Biographical and Imperial Magazine.²

But during the same period he was drawn by what must be judged a far greater aptitude for oratory to public debates and patriotic societies. His arrest in May, 1794, deflected his literary development in two ways. His manuscripts were confiscated by the government, and the new poetry he wrote while spending the remainder of the year in prison was entirely political. Probably imprisonment helped the poet in Thelwall by improving his concentration and by securing him time for revision, because Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate Under a Charge of High Treason (London: J. Ridgeway, 1795) demonstrate some competence in the more sophisticated forms of sonnet and ode.

In 1797, when Thelwall's politics were arousing only violent animosity, he retreated to the Wye valley where he farmed and composed more poetry, hoping to recoup the losses he suffered when the Tribune was suppressed. The disastrous harvests of 1798 and 1799 dried his agricultural aspirations, but the literature he produced during this period was rendered more valuable by the influence of two new friends, poets who had also retreated from the center of political struggle to the countryside: William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Thelwall first met them in July, 1797, while he was still searching for a place to settle. Four years

²I have been unable to locate any issues of this rare journal. It was published from 1789 to 1792, and its name seems especially inappropriate to Thelwall's political beliefs.
later, the poetry he carried to the printer in hopes of repaying his farming debts showed the influence of the great romantic poets in its preoccupation with natural description and personal sentiment. In this Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement (Hereford: W. H. Parker, 1801) represents a return to Thelwall's former themes. But the new methods by which he associates the processes of emotion with exterior natural symbols indicate a "romantic" development in his poetry that is borrowed. In this volume Thelwall also attempted to derive heroic themes from those traditions which the Augustans had variously considered grippingly exotic or barbarously Gothic: Celtic legend and Saxon history.

To examine the development of Thelwall's art through the three works is to view a pattern which recurs among his contemporaries and which in some ways typifies the development of what had been late-Augustan into what would be Romantic: Infatuation with the rural is mixed with and briefly displaced by political affirmation, which itself drew upon the age's continuing susceptibility to emotion and its preoccupation with "classical" ideals of simplicity, freedom, and citizenship. When appreciation of nature themes again dominates, it is intensified by the urgent need for personal stability.

The distinctive theme that abides throughout Thelwall's entire canon is the idea of moral purpose. His was an extreme development of the eighteenth-century's serious impulse to teach, and it looked back to the work of Johnson and Steele, as well as forward to the Victorian requisite of "high seriousness." Occasionally the moral taught in Thelwall's poetry deserves the epithet "Victorian" in its pejorative sense, that is, "narrow-minded." But sometimes he will sketch a natural emblem
in a way that recalls the exquisite and sophisticated "purpose" of a "Lyrical Ballad."

Despite the technical advances Thelwall achieves in his development, the strengths and weaknesses of his poetry remain mixed. Wordiness, utterly conventional diction, heavy Latinate structure, and occasional banality blemish ingenious natural imagery, genuine passion, and hearty affection. Still, Thelwall's canon offers forceful, imaginative, and distinctive verse.

I

Poems On Various Subjects (1787) may properly be characterized as enthusiastic, sentimental, and conventional. It was the first published work of an imperfectly educated young man whose own Apology admitted his poems were "mostly written at such short intervals as could be snatched from the avocations of a profession /The law/, perhaps the most unfriendly to the study of liberal arts" (p. ii). Despite the lack of a critical audience during his poetic apprenticeship, Thelwall sought to enter the late-Augustan literary world by meeting its "romantic" fashions: heavy emotion, remote setting, Gothic adventure, rural simplicity, and enlightened benevolence.

He was inspired to these goals by the works of those poets which he had devoured as a schoolboy and apprentice: Mark Akenside's Pleasures of the Imagination, which summarized principles of aesthetic associationism; Akenside's patriotic songs and odes; William Shenstone's simple elegies of personal emotion; David Beattie's The Minstrel, which inflated the role of Poet; the ballads composed during the twenties by Tickell and
Mallet; and Pope's Homer. With the exception of Pope, these artists have been considered of remote importance to eighteenth-century literary history. Yet they supply a stream of influence to the English Romantics who extended their traditions.

Through their influence Thelwall molded his first poems into conventional forms: romantic tales, pastorals, rural elegies, and sentimental effusions glorifying melancholy, young love, poetic sensibility, and right conduct. Thelwall is undisturbed by the possibility that such themes might clash. The half-dozen "tales" that comprise the first of two volumes derive from two sources. Plots seem to be borrowed from the ballads of the twenties, and the settings and names seem inspired by the Reliques of Ancient English Poetry which Thomas Percy and William Shenstone edited in 1765. For the first, Thelwall alludes to Mallet in a note, and employs the same non-repeating ballad quatrain. His titles "Edmund and Rosalinda," "Allen and Matilda" signify the structural similarity.

Thelwall's narratives, however, reduce structure to formula. The forsaken daughter, the stubborn father, the mistaken heir, and the discovered parent wander facelessly through the stories as almost interchangeable parts, and the leading figures die from melancholy or discover incredible redeeming coincidences. In "Edmund and Rosalinda" the hero has been banished for marrying beneath his rank. He and Rosalinda have travelled from "over the sea" to an English forest. Racked by hunger and beset by robbers, they come upon the cottage of a hospitable matron who feeds them and then narrates her own story of parental cruelty. She had eloped against the wishes of her father, Alcuin, king of Mercia, and hid from him long enough to bear a daughter. When Alcuin finally arrived with
a massive army, her husband, Roldan, fled with the baby. At the same time Rosalinda hears Roldan's name spoken she catches sight of a familiar portrait on the mantle and promptly swoons, for in Roldan she recognizes her father, who had charged her from his deathbed to find and comfort her mother (I, 1-18).

Of such plots a little might spread a long way, but in subsequent tales the plots do not vary appreciably. No doubt the stories exploit the age's bourgeois preoccupation with "true love" battling against rank. In "Allen and Matilda" the obstacle is money. Soon after Matilda assures the handsome peasant Allen that his poverty need not bar his suit, Matilda's ferocious father returns from a faraway prison. Sir Thudor naturally thinks little of Matilda's lover, but he reconsiders when Allen compulsively offers himself as a sacrifice to love. Sir Thudor is not moved by Allen's self-sacrifice, but by his sword, which the father recognizes as one he had given a courageous brother knight--Allen's father. Such incredible coincidence, however, is somewhat offset by the brisk dialogue that advances the action:

Then drew young Allen from his side
   A sword both sharp and keen;
And then with bended knee, he cried
   To Thudor of the green:

Here, Thudor, take my keen-edg'd sword
   And plunge it in my heart
But do not with a keener sword
   Me from Matilda part.

The moral lessons offered in these tales are uncomplicated. Neither disparate fortune nor prejudiced parents should obstruct love. The Saxon settings symbolize the value of rural simplicity, an idea prized
less by the Saxons, no doubt, than by the Augustans, who imputed to their own forebears the qualities they valued in Vergil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. The "fraternity of the ancient gentes" was a myth Thelwall employed in his poetry years before he had occasion to use it in his political speeches. Rosalinda's mother, for example, offers her guests "a wholesome draught" of cow's milk "such as our forefathers quaft" while she praises still older times when "all luxury unknown/Then charity unmix'd with pride/And simple virtue shone" (I, 4). She preaches fraternal benevolence both by example and by argument:

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For what can greater joy impart  
To minds with feeling blest  
Than to revive the drooping heart  
Or succour the distressed. (I, 5)
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Ignoring the problem of redundancy, the value of the tales still remains mixed. The dialogue and love motifs are comparable to, say, Keats' early tales, but Thelwall's work lacks imaginative symbolic action. An interesting symbolic action, however, dominates one tragic pastoral called "The Redbreast" (I, 184-89). After a country boy's sweetheart is "seduced to the town" he begins to care for a friendly robin. Soon the bird visits him daily to obtain food, and from these visits the boy obtains solace and companionship. But one day he impulsively sets off to search for his lover in the city. He returns empty handed, of course, and finds his robin frozen in the snow outside his cottage door. Then he realizes that he has "broken faith" with a trust, as his own lover did. But Thelwall does not summarize the insight in artful terms, as Wordsworth would; rather, he permits the boy to verbalize his melancholy for another dozen stanzas.
Melancholy is a dominant theme in these volumes, as it was in much late-Augustan poetry. The measured melancholy of William Shenstone was an enormous influence upon the young Thelwall. Their respective treatments of the emotion share the neo-classical characteristics posited by E. T. Sickels in *The Gloomy Egoist*: it is classically derived, hence imitative, and it is didactic, general, and formal rather than personal and "spontaneous." In "Despondency" Thelwall supplies his jilted rural swain with typical eighteenth-century ennui:

Why sit I thus, to listless Grief a prey  
Nor lop my orchard boughs, nor prune my vine?  
While chok'd with weeds, my promis'd crops decay  
And with'ring flow'rs, through lack of tending, pine.

No more my kids I gather from the rocks  
Or teach my lambs in verdant meads to roam;  
But quite neglectful of my pining flocks  
Within my dreary cottage sigh at home. (II, 95)

This obviously continues the eighteenth-century tradition of imitating Vergil's *Eclogues*. Thelwall learned the tradition from William Shenstone, who used the same rhythm and rhyme scheme in his *Elegies*, and who used similar diction and theme in his *Songs*. Shenstone's "Song 1" begins,

On every tree, in every plain  
I trace the jovial spring in vain;  
A sickly langour veils mine eyes  
And fast my waning vigour flies.\(^3\)


Thelwall's melancholy, like Shenstone's, fits Sickels' description of "tamed and superficial emotion." Yet judged according to Neo-classical standards, the telling is competent. In the first stanza the images are vivid and economically stated. By placing two images in each middle line the poet not only breaks the metrical flow but also imparts the effect of accumulating labors. The final line is slowed by a double caesura which gives extra emphasis to the final accent on "pine." By contrast, the uninterrupted lines in the subsequent stanzas speed the action more and more until the final line, which is spoken like a sigh in order to capture the speaker's sense of monotony:

Within my dreary cottage sign at home.

A second theme of melancholy common to the late-eighteenth-century tradition was the complaint of the poet himself. It was made fashionable by the work of Beattie, especially by his "Triumph of Melancholy." In "The Execration" Thelwall delivers a conventional diatribe against the Muse:

Curs'd be the Muse! and curs'd the fatal hour
When first I listen'd to her syren tongue
Resign'd my bosom to her pleasing power
And by her tuneful influence was undone. (II, 104)

In another complaint, "New Year's Night, 1787," Thelwall presents more personal emotion. Unlike Beattie's "Triumph of Melancholy" the poem is occasional. The poet sits alone in his room during the holiday, contemplating the particulars of his bad fortunes. Like Wordsworth remembering Chatterton, Thelwall realizes the bleak prospects of his poverty:
The hopeless sons of penury and woe
   Alone, neglected and deserted pine;
No hours convivial they in revels share
   Where wit, where beauty, and where affluence shine. (II, 116)

Yet he finds compensation in his poetic impulse, much like the exuberance
Keats felt for his art:

   Bless'd is the youth who boasts a Poet's name!
   He, independent, Fortune may despise;
   Others their bliss from outward objects claim
   He, in his bosom bears the source of joys. (II, 117)

Beattie had tried to evoke Memory, which proved inadequate, precisely
because it depended upon outward things. Although Thelwall says only
the crude statement that the poet "in his bosom bears the source of joy"
in so doing he presented in embryo that romantic concept by which the
poet is perceived as the source of energy.5 The lines also present
superficially what Coleridge dramatizes intricately in his "Dejection;
An Ode."

The most precise and the most pleasing poetry in the volume is
that which describes natural objects. Thelwall's "Rural Elegies," really
more like epigrams, on flowers and trees contain much lucid imagery and
engaging sentiment. The most interesting is "The Woodbines":

   Conscious that we need supporting
   Round the hazle's stem we twine; (sic)
   And, the sun's warm influence courting,
   O'er their waving tops decline.

Thus our blossoms far displaying
O'er the babbling streams are arch'd
Where the fish, beneath us straying,
    By our shades are kept unparch'd.

Different powers, when thus uniting,
    Tend to benefit mankind;
Which in solitude delighting
    Neither use nor pleasure find. (II, 160)

Thelwall's observation can be scientific as well as emblematic.

In "Extempore. Upon Seeing a Bird Perched on the Summit of a Poplar"
the intensity of the poet's watching creates a closer relation with the
wild creature:

See, on yon poplar's topmost spray
    The little warbler stands;
And, fearless, while he pours his lay,
    The distant view commands.

The spray that shakes with every breeze
    That fans the vernal air,
Shakes not this bosom's tranquil ease,
    Nor gives one trembling care.

No weight of guilt to press him down,
    No stores his heart to thrall;
Should he from yonder spray be thrown,
    He fears no dang'rous fall.

If shaken from the feeble spray,
    He'll claim his native skies,
And sweetly pour his sprightly lay,
    As thro' the air he flies.

So 'tis with him whose tranquil soul
    With pious ardour glows;
No cares his steady joys controul,
    He fears no threat'ning woes.

Secure on Danger's brink he stands
    And laughs at Fortune's spite;
Prepar'd, when Fate a change commands
    To seek the Realms of Light. (II, 167-68)

From the abstract, stock diction of the final stanza the poet rises to a
powerful image, derived from Milton and suggesting Shelley.

The beauties offered in *Poems On Various Subjects* are frequently marred by forced rhymes and unnatural inversions, some of which are evident in the lines quoted above. A fault more unsettling, perhaps, to the modern reader is the degree to which the poet preaches. There is little use presenting Thelwall's epical narrative poem on "A Seduction," or the "Essay Prefatory," in which he castigates not only the seducer, but also the forsaking parents. Nor is there great literary value in the play Thelwall bases on a case history of the Humane Society. These attempts exaggerate his youthful ardor less than they exaggerate the characteristics of his age, characteristics without which the work of the great Romantic poets would be incomplete. Although Thelwall bludgeons his audience with polemics against seduction, he also enchants with his story of a tiny creature that flings itself into "the Realms of Light."

II

If the youthful author of *Poems On Various Subjects* resorted to the "gross stimulant" of a Humane Society report, he required no such artifice in *Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate Under a Charge of High Treason* (1795). He had himself become a visible symbol to his contemporaries. The solemnity he obviously felt in prison lent humility and simplicity to the poems he wrote there; the sense of occasion he must have felt afterwards inspired him to edit a spare and handsome quarto edition composed of only sixteen poems: twelve sonnets, a ballad, a song, and two formal odes.
Use of the sonnet form represented an important step in Thelwall's poetic development. In his first work he had published only one uninspiring sonnet. Probably Thelwall intended to record his political arguments in the same form that Milton had used. Thelwall infused his political sonnets with personal, almost private emotion, an innovation made popular by Charlotte Smith in her *Elegiac Stanzas* (1789). He rejected her use of blank verse in favor of a rhyme scheme that varied from sonnet to sonnet. But true to the Age of Revolution he introduced a radical departure of his own. He added to the volume's first sonnet a pendant line, 'Ere leave a trampled Realm in Chains to mourn (p. 1)

which serves as an emblem for what follows. The line itself is necessary neither to the syntax nor the rhyme of the sonnet. It signifies that the volume as a whole is cast in a sophisticated, integral form. The first sonnet argues the importance of posterity in images of parental love. Succeeding sonnets analyze the causes of England's problems and praise those martyrs who have given their lives in order to solve similar problems in the past. In the final sonnet of the series the poet vows to welcome his own doom with a proper demeanor. The importance of his cause is dramatized in a ballad about the war with France, and the ballad is followed by the prisoner's own lighthearted song in which he defies the danger threatening him. Eventually the volume concludes with the same theme of parental responsibility with which it began: the final ode treats the problem of educating the young to love civil liberty.

*Poems Written in Close Confinement*, then, is an intricately patterned series of moral appeals. In the first sonnet, "The Feelings of a
Parent," the poet phrases his appeal to include his audience:

Ah! who yet conscious of the social glow
Of Nature—or whose generous breast can feel
An offspring's future woe or future weal
The cause of sacred Freedom would forego
For aught luxurious Grandeur can bestow
Or tyranny inflict? Who that can view
In meditation's glass the scenes of woe
The darling issue of his loins must know
Beneath the despot's rod, but would pursue
(To Nature, and to Patriot virtue true)
The glorious chase of Liberty, and scorn
Each fierce opposing danger—the fell steel
Of ruthless Janissaries—the stern Bastille
Its bars, its iron doors, and caves forlorn,
'Ere leave a trampled Realm in chains to mourn. (p. 1)

The sonnet shows the advantages to which Thelwall puts the closed rhyme and rigid rhythm of the sonnet form. His irregular rhymes reflect oratorical emphases, and his modifications of rhythm work toward an almost breathless climax. The caesuras in lines 2 and 6 build tension by dividing the parallel conditions; the parenthetical qualification of line 10 momentarily subdues the rush toward resolution, which rises in each line only to ebb again at the three succeeding caesuras, and then gather strength in the final lines from the rhyme "steel/Bastille" and recede again at the words "caves forlorn." Here the rhyme points back to the idea of "scorn" for danger, and the final quatrain is complete.

But a line remains. To read it one needs draw another breath, perhaps appropriately, for it is a condition that links the significance of posterity to the explanation and drama and song that follow. To write a pendant line to a sonnet may seem useless tinkering. Coleridge teased Thelwall for doing so. But both wrote during an age of tinkering, by

6Their mutual criticisms are examined below, chapter v.
which English literature would undergo many alterations.

The titles of the following sonnets suggest the sources of England's political problems: "To Tyranny," "To Luxury," "The Source of Slavery." The last offers an attractive image:

...alas! we fly
The homely altars--slight the once-lov'd name
Of rustic Liberty, and deify
Luxurious Pride. (p. 5)

The final sonnet is dated November 26, 1794, just a week before Thelwall's trial. His promise to remain dignified draws force from an allusion to revered Commonwealthmen:

...mark: if now base fear
Palsy the boasted virtue--or if now
(Forgetful of the truths so oft upheld)
Abject beneath the imperious foot I bow;
To terror--vested Power--suppliant! depress'd!
Or one emotion feel, but what the breast
Of Hampden or of Sidney might have swelled. (p. 12)

From this heroic resolution the poet turns to an example of what inspires him: a young family separated by imperial war. He treats the topic in a ballad titled "Nellie's Complaint." Its subtitle, "On the march of a detachment of guards from the Tower to join the army at Flanders," suggests that Thelwall was writing about one of his new-found jailor friends. But because the poem fails to utilize the devices proper to the ballad, it seems to lack genuineness.
The traditional ballad stanza is discarded for one employing four-foot lines throughout, and repetition is not utilized. "Nellie's Complaint" opens like many a "simple eighteenth-century song:

When Willy first, by war's alarums,
Was summon'd to the hostile shores
Keen sorrow dimm'd young Nellie's charms,
And thus the nymph her fate deplores:

The heroine's first lines, however, sound a bit archaic:

Ah, soul befal the wicked wights
Who plunge the world in endless strife
Which Love's delightful harvest blights
And blasts each tender joy of life.

But soon her complaint begins to sound like rhetorical appeal:

Must Willy, from his country torn
A stranger's doubtful cause sustain
And leave his faithful maid to mourn,
O'er vows of love returned in vain?

The action of the poem is inadequate to the ballad form. At the conclusion Willy sails off to the continent, unmarred by violence and thus provoking no pathos. If Thelwall was calling for future action to save Willy, his rhetorical strategy dampens the potential appeal of the ballad.

In the very next poem, "Stanzas On Hearing For Certain That We were To Be Tried For High Treason," Thelwall turns from sympathy for Willy's plight to celebration of his own. The mood is carpe diem, like that of Lovelace's prison poetry, but unlike Lovelace Thelwall celE-
brates the joy of duty discharged. The moral lesson of a happy martyrdom might seem hollow or foolish but for a capable extended metaphor based upon sailing:

Short is perhaps our date of life,
But let us while we live be gay.
To those be thought and anxious care
Who build upon the distant day.

Tho' in our cup tyrannic pow'r
Would dash the bitter dregs of fear,
We'll gaily quaff the matling draught,
While patriot toasts the fancy cheer.

Sings not the seaman, tempest-tost,
When surges wash the riven shroud--
Scorning the threat'ning voice of Fate,
That pipes in rocking winds aloud?

Yes;--he can take his cheerful glass,
And toast his mistress, in the storm,
While duty and remember'd joys
By turns his honest bosom warm.

And shall not we, in storms of state
At base Oppressions's fury laugh
And while the vital spirits flow,
To freedom fill, and fearless, quaff?

Short is perhaps our date of life,
But let us while we live be gay--
To those be thought and anxious care
Who build upon the distant day. (pp. 25-26).

The poem with which the volume concludes addresses the sober question of educating children so that they may themselves protect their future liberties. In form the ode depends upon the eighteenth-century "Pindaric" ode, by Mark Akenside. Each of three stanzas consists of strophe, antistrophe, and epode.

From Akenside Thelwall also borrows a near-idolatrous reverence for the Greek and Roman states. Civic duty, as taught by the example of Greek and Roman heroes, makes up the argument of the ode. Stanza I, 1
begins on a note of doubt occasioned by modern times:

Why toils my friend to train the docile mind
of yon gay stripling to the arduous chace
Of virtue... the fierce story
Of Greece triumphant o'er the threat'ning hordes
Of Persia's despot, when the Spartan spear
And Attica's firm phalanx mock'd the swords
Innumerable of marshalled slaves.

In the antistrophe of the same stanza Thelwall considers Roman models:

... when the patriot soul severe
Of Brutus from the cloud of torpor broke;
And, brandishing the reeking steel, that shed
Chaste purple drops, fresh from the bleeding heart
Of wrong'd Lucretia, on the Tyrant's head
He pour'd avenging wrath. (p. 17)

In the epode he reverts to the present danger:

Ah! heedless parent! ere too late forego
The dangerous lesson, nor with fatal zeal
Wake the keen ardor for the public weal
Which might, in happier times, renown bestow. (p. 18)

The argument is resolved in the final stanza where the poet extends the concept of paternal love to social responsibility. Thelwall offers the extreme example of Brutus, who was brave enough not only to educate his son, but to sentence him to death for impugning the liberties of the state. There is an organic connection, Thelwall asserts, between familial and social love. In this assertion he both completes and vastly enlarges upon the theme with which the volume opens.
III

The interval between Thelwall's publication of Poems Written in Close Confinement and his next literary venture lasted six years, during which his fame became ignominy and his optimism became resignation. Thelwall exchanged activism in the metropolis for retirement in the countryside, and the change deeply affected his Poems Written Chiefly in Retirement (1801). For its dominant themes he reverts to his first published poems and expands upon his original interests: intense personal affection for friends and family, intimacy with natural objects, and fascination for history and legend. The energy he projects into these themes is liberated by his near total exclusion of political themes.

The theme of retirement meant, first of all, a preoccupation with affection. Its object was "the few whom kindred ties endear," rather than "the kindred whole." In the volume's first section, titled "Effusions of Social and Relative Affection," Thelwall placed compositions about his wife and his daughter. He included previously published poems about old friends and he added some interesting epistles addressed to a new friend, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Probably the most political poem in the volume is an epistle to his wife, "To Stella in the Country." It is dated December, 1796, about the time he was deciding to leave politics. Its form signifies a conflict. The first sixty lines, which recall memories of their courtship and wish her joy during their separation, are written in long, irregularly rhymed, ode-like stanzas, while the final twenty-eight lines, which plead his hope for political vindication, are cast in quatrains. The poem ends on a note of resignation:
Imperious Duty! rigid Spartan guide!
Strew, strew, at times a rose among thy thorns
Or steel each votive breast with stoic pride
'Til from the gloom resurgent Virtue dawns. (p. 123)

The private emotion of the opening lines, however, better indicates the theme of the entire volume:

Joy of my soul! who now in Catmose' vale,
Cradlest our drooping Infant on thy breast,
And shield'st from Wintry blasts, that would assail
His fading Cheek, ah! may no gale unblest
Shake thy own tender frame, nor anxious care
For him thou leav'st, reluctant, mar thy rest.

Midst the long sever'd Kindred may'st thou share
The season's pastimes and its joys encrease
With fond remember'd tales of Infancy. (pp. 120-21)

Thelwall included in this volume a few previously published poems about old friends, perhaps to convince himself of the continuity of his own life. The "Epistle to Mercutio" originally appeared in The Peripatetic. Written just before his marriage to Stella, it links "social" with "relative" affection. It also shows the warmth and ease of which Thelwall was capable when he abandoned stock diction and spoke directly:

While you, my friend, in London's giddy town,
With jest and song each grave reflection drown
Flirt with gay belles, besiege fantastic wenches,
Who fire love's glances from their bandbox trenches
Whence, while their banners wave, they dauntless wield
The various arms of Love's triumphant field--
The high-plum'd helm that each fierce bosom awes,
And all the sacred panoply of gauze:
While cares like these your youthful heart disdain
Far from the peaceful shade and rustic plain;
Me here, remov'd from scenes of bustling noise,
The town's lewd follies, and its sickly joys,
The Muse perchance, perchance some stronger power
Attracts to loiter in the rural bower. (pp. 110-11)
In mock-heroic tones the poet describes the journey to his fiance's home. He had traveled on foot until caught in a thunderstorm when he hailed a passing coach:

And lo! a coach, with steeds of fiery breed
Thro' Stamford, bound towards the banks of Tweed.
No room within, I cheerly mount the roof,
Against the rain by love, no clothing, proof:

For like a modern friend, so Fate decreed!
My good surtout lurk'd in the hour of need
Secure at home, together folded warm,
And left me fenceless to the pelting storm. (p. 113)

In verses reprinted from *Poems On Various Subjects* Thelwall celebrates nostalgic memories of Christmas spent beneath his father's roof:

Around the social hearth, at night, we throng'd
Where humour much, but more good nature shin'd
While joke and song the cheerful feast prolonged
Beyond the usual hour for rest assigned.

Oft would our Sire the youthful train provoke
Full oft incite to pastimes gay and bland;
Full oft himself revive the flagging joke
And, in the comrade, lose the sire's command.

Good, gentle soul! who every soul could cheer!
Of morals blameless, as of manners gay!
He scorned the stoick frown and tone severe,
And rather chose by love than fear to sway. (p. 97)

However, with the following line, "But he is gone; and gone the joys of life;" the poem begins a stock lamentation typical of the early poems.

Since the time of the early poems Thelwall had experienced more immediate sorrows that might stimulate more realistic melancholy. During the harsh winter of 1799 his favorite child Maria died. He recorded his anguish in a series of "Effusions" which present vivid psychological
descriptions. At the head of the series he placed the fragment "Maria," begun before his daughter's death, at the time he was settling in the countryside. Its theme is the love he felt for his family during his imprisonment:

... how oft
Yearn'd my fond heart for the social bliss
Permitted at short intervals and rare. (p. 143)

He recalls that strength had come from patriots and martyrs,

... that bad me think
T'was for Mankind I suffered--for the cause
For which a Hampden fought, a Sidney bled,
For which the Gracchi perished.

But these visions never effaced the "wish'd for hour" when he would see his wife and daughter:

... then
When thro' my grated dungeon I have gaz'd
With straining eye unmov'd, upon the gate
Thro' which the partner of my soul should pass--
And this, my only babe. (p. 144).

The "personal sentiment" of Thelwall's published prison verse, much as it dealt with paternal feeling, contained nothing so personal, nothing that might have been interpreted as unwillingness to meet the appointed doom.

The strength which Thelwall derived from his daughter during his imprisonment he lost upon her death. In the poems about her he frankly records his anguish. Thus he uses conventional modes less than he details the psychological processes of his grief. In "Effusion 1" he

7 Wordsworth was impressed with the merits of these "effusions of anguish." See below, chapter v.
describes them as physical reactions:

    Each nerve and fibre feels the untuning touch
    Of most assured decay. Dim swarms the sight;
    The vital spirits languish; and the blood,
    No more obedient to the order'd course
    Of self-preserving Nature, refluent oft
    Turns on her o'ercharg'd fountain; or, impelled
    By wildering Anguish, rushes to the brain,
    And whelms the sense in apoplectic whirl,
    That Nature's chain seems bursting. (p. 146)

Pleasant sensual stimulation only emphasizes his sorrow,

    . . . while thought on thought
    Flows on in sad monotony--and all
    That in the frame of Nature wont to joy
    Sight, or the touch, or hearing, seems to blend
    In funeral lamentation, and recall,
    With dirgeful record, the afflictive hour. . . . (p. 147).

The poet contrasts his state of mind with an arctic spring, transforming
the imagery inspired by Thomson into vivid personal metaphor:

    . . . oh! most like
    That boreal dawn that oft, in arctic climes
    With gay illusive splendour, gilds the gloom
    Of the long winter; and false hope awakes
    Of genial suns, and op'ning flow'rs, and sweets
    Of vernal joyance from the genial south
    Approaching. Yet to them, the Day shall come--
    Though distant. O'er their hills of melting snows
    And sudden-blooming plains, the north'ring tribes
    Shall see their Summer God in gorgeous pomp. (p. 147)

    In "Effusion III, On the Banks of the Wye, May 15, 1800,"
Thelwall clearly borrows from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." But his
conclusion seems rather to anticipate Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode."

    Along thy varying banks, sequester'd Wye,
    At eve, I wander mournfully--full oft
    Thredding the tangled maze, or under shade
    Of hoary oaks, that overhang thy stream.
    . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
... no more mine eyes
Dim with their griefs, from tint or varied line
Receive accustom'd joyance. Rocks and falls
And deep worn pools reflective, and ye woods
Wash'd by the eddying stream, and you, ye hills
Of fearful height, in wild perspective heap'd
Closing the sinuous valley, what to me
Are all your varied forms? . . .

... other forms
Possess my weeping Fancy: other thoughts
Rending the grief-swoln bosom, vail the eye
In dim abstraction, and my troubled soul,
The while I rove, is absent; nor remains
Ought but the wand'ring shade of him who erst
Trac'd your wild haunts delighted. (pp. 148-49)

In the last poem of the series, called "Cerrig-Enion," the poet articulates his sense of alienation from nature. In the telling he achieves a partial resolution of his sadness. Cerrig-Enion is the tomb of Enion, a Cambrian (Celtic) hero. The poet mourns the depopulation that has changed the face of the Welsh countryside, but his attention is distracted by personal sorrow, which he finally realizes is also social:

. . . pangs of home-felt sufferance--woes that bend
Our hearts, united in one common grief,
Down to the earth they sprung from!--woes that blot
The half of Nature's glories (thro' the vail
Of sadness dimly seen) and dull the edge
Of curious observation. . . . (p. 150).

The poet realizes that he will mourn his daughter each time he sees the rural scenes with which he associates her, but he also realizes the "vitality" of these objects. From these insights the poet derives a final affirmation: that each natural object will mourn the memory of Maria. Though he has not lost the burden of his sorrow, he has lightened it. His concluding descriptions convey at least the promise of sorrow mixed with beauty:
Thee, budding flower!
Cropp'd in thy sweetest promise--Thee, the fields
The groves, the woodland wild, or dreary heath,
The peaky Mountain, and the shelter'd vale,
Alike shall mourn!--alike the village spire,
The feen-thatched cottage, and the crumbling heap
That stories ancient prowess, shall renew
The sad remembrance, echoing to our souls,
The mournful music of Maria's name. (p. 163)

So the first and second objects of Thelwall's retirement, family and nature, become sorrowfully entangled in his poetry. He had recorded far happier prospects in "Lines Written at Bridgewater, in Somersetshire," in July, 1796, while he was still looking for a peaceful retreat from "a world most scorpion like/That stings what warms it." Then he anticipated a cheering prophecy of kindlier times
Of hours of sweet retirement, tranquil joys
Of friendship, and of love--of studious ease,
Of philosophic thought, poetic dreams
In dell romantic, or by babbling brook,
High wood or rocky shore. (p. 127)

If this picture sounds familiar it is because Thelwall had been visiting Coleridge at Nether Stowey and had sat as guest of honor among a large dinner party presided over by William Wordsworth at Alfoxden Hall. His visit was so successful that Thelwall hoped to settle in Somersetshire with his new friends in what today might be called a "rural commune."8 He foresaw not only the simple pleasures of gardening but also the free friendship and honest intellectual curiosity he could no longer find in London life. If one can ignore the bad fortune that clung to both Thelwall and Coleridge, one can sense the idyllic satisfaction that infuses Thelwall's dream:

8Thelwell's relations with Coleridge and Wordsworth are examined in the following chapter.
Ah! 'twould be sweet, beneath the neighboring thatch,
In philosophic amity to dwell
Inditing moral verse, or tale, or theme,
Gay or instructive; and it would be sweet
With kindly interchange of mutual aid,
To delve our little garden plots, the while
Sweet converse flow'd, suspending oft the arm
And half-drawn spade, while eager, one propounds,
And listens one, weighing each pregnant word,
And pondering fit reply, that may untwist
The knotty point--perchance, of import high--
Of Moral Truth, of Causes Infinite,
Creating Power! or Uncreated Worlds
Eternal and uncaus'd! or whatever
Of Metaphysic, or of Ethic lore,
The mind, with curious subtilty, pursues--
Agreeing, or dissenting--sweet alike,
When wisdom, and not victory, the end. (pp. 129-30).

But politics intervened: Thelwall's "infamy" proved as strong
in the village of Nether Stowey as it was in the coastal towns where he
had been attacked. He left Somersetshire and soon leased a farm in Wales,
near the village of Llys-Wyn on the Wye, and there reaped only disappoint-
ments. The greatest, of course, was the death of his daughter; that and
the "rustic" landlord who jested about it soured his taste for country
life, but not before he had written a few thoughtful nature poems that
show his debt to Wordsworth. The most striking of these is "The Wood-
bine," which develops an imaginative interplay between thinker and nat-
ural object. As one of Thelwall's competent "Romantic" poems, it ought
to be reproduced in full:

The Woodbine. Dovedale, Oct. 1797

Sweet flower! that loiterest on the autumnal branch
Beyond thy wonted season, pleas'd to view,
In Dove's pure mirror, thy reflected charms,
And cheer her with thy fragrance, be thou blest!
For thou hast sooth'd my heart; and thy soft scent
(Mild as the balmy breath of early love!)
Hath warm'd my kindling fancy with the thoughts
Of joys long past--of vernal days, how sweet!

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Past with my gentle Stella, far away--
Even in the vale of Catmose. Or my heart,
Turning from retrospects to dreams of hope--
Paternal hope! can dwell on thee, sweet flower!
(Emblem of artless softness) till I see
In Fancy's glass, the offspring of my love
Seeking the fragrant bower, to breathe, or hear
(In Youth's due season) the delightful tale
The thought, perchance, is wild--the hope is vain--
(For, ah! what blighting mildews wait the hours
Of life's frail spring tide!) yet 'tis cheering sweet
And my heart hails it, gentle flower!--well pleas'd
If o'er the sterrile scene of real life
Imagination sometimes shed around
Her transient blooms: for blissful thoughts are bliss. (pp. 139-40)

This theme falls far short of the powerful vision of reality
which Wordsworth was intuiting as he "gazed and gazed" at the natural
world surrounding him. But Thelwall does master a level of metaphor
different from that which characterized his eighteenth-century pas-
torals in which the rural swain lacks strength to summon his lambs from
the hillside. In "The Woodbine" he crosses the narrow bridge leading
to a new age of sensibility, not only in the thought "that blissful
thoughts are bliss," but also in the structure of the natural imagery.
The woodbine cheers the water with her fragrance and also soothes the
poet's heart by recalling "the thoughts of joys long past," namely, his
memories of the hours he had spent with his wife among other woodbines.
Likewise, just as the woodbine is "pleas'd to view" her "reflected
charms" in the water of the lake, the poet's heart "can dwell on thee,
sweet flower," so that he can see his absent children, and foresee
("in Fancy's glass") their natural growth toward "soul awakening passion."

Though marred by hackneyed diction ("blighting mildews") the
nature metaphor remains vital to the final line. The "transient blooms"
which imagination sheds may also be the woodbine loitering into autumn,
and may be the vagrant poet loitering in a county distant from his loved
ones. Because the flower blesses his thoughts, he in his thoughts blesses the flower, and thus captures a unique point of union between observer and nature, one revealed by the imagination rather than the fancy, and one conducive to joy for both the poet and reader.

Although "The Woodbine" is a relatively successful poem, and, considering its date, a significant one, Thelwall was not a great poet of nature. Perhaps he was simply not born with the gift. Or perhaps his greatest gift, for oratory, dampened his poetic talents. The diction and rhetoric which aroused a London meeting probably militated against the clarity that Wordsworth gained from isolation and the color that Coleridge gained from books.

The third and last poetic fruit of Thelwall's retirement was his renewed interest in ancient heroic legend. No doubt it answered a personal need to transform his own political failure. Perhaps it also served as a means of masking political sentiments he could not help repeating. In Poems Written Chiefly in Retirement historical themes appear in a "dramatic romance" called "the Fairy of the Lake" and in specimens of an epic called "The Hope of Albion." Both are set, significantly, in pre-Norman England.

"The Fairy of the Lake" is really a musical fantasy, filled with sorceresses and elves, and designed for the popular stage. The hero is Arthur, whose standard here, as in Tennyson's story, is his purity: not only must he defeat the Saxon allies of the spineless Vortigern, but he must also outwit Vortigern's adulterous wife Rowenna, a powerful witch. In 1801 the play's moral would have been only thinly veiled: end foreign alliances, fortify the island with its own brave yeomen, and return to
simple, pure conduct. The lessons are similar to those Wordsworth was composing at about the same time.

Instruction, however, dominates the play less than comic romance. Steadfast Arthur wins Guinevere, while his squire Tristram, drunk on Welsh ale, trades insults with a sarcastic, frozen incubus. The play is filled with songs, some romantic, and some macabre, like this one sung by "an invisible spirit":

There, beneath the blasted yew
Where reptiles lap the poisonous dew,
While the bird who shuns the day
Hooted loud, and tore his prey
Its die it drank from infant gore
And tears of mothers blotch it o'er;
Groans from its rustling folds resound,
And hissing serpents fringe it round. (p. 7)

In contrast, "The Hope of Albion" is a serious epic, based upon the reign of Edwin, King of Northumbria in the age of the Saxon Heptarchy. Its theme is sounded in the opening lines of Book I:

Northumbria freed, and Edwin's patriot worth
My verse records; his wanderings, and his woes,
His martial ardour, and his faithful loves:
How these, by powerful destiny, combin'd
To form the Hero; who by virtue rose
Superior to the fratricidal rage
That sought his life, insatiate, and his youth
Doom'd to disastrous exile; till arous'd
To final effort, he their traitorous wiles
Turn'd on the traitors' heads; and, from the strife
Of feuds and deadly factions, haply wrought
A nation's bliss: whence union, wisdom, power,
Spread thro' the Seven-fold Isle; and cheering lights
Of Holy Truth— and Liberty, and Laws. (p. 179)

One can immediately understand Thelwall's interest in the story of a virtuous man who withstands popular infamy to become a patriot king. Thelwall yearned above all that his political judgments would prove him
a true patriot. The fruit of Edwin's rule was a government of equal laws, a tradition which the ex-tory, radical lecturer had always endorsed.

This volume contains part of the first and the entire second book of The Hope of Albion. Like Thelwall's personal vindication, the epic was never completed. After the publication of Poems Written Chiefly in Retirement Thelwall returned to London and began teaching what he had always done best: speaking. Some thirty years later he would bitterly recall his discarded national epic.

For the great epic poem of the nineteenth-century would not deal with political heroes but with the mind of the poet himself. Thelwall possessed neither the eye nor the diction nor the depth of imagination necessary to make that work. He should be remembered, though, not only for the simple, inspiring poems he wrote about his superbly romantic political career, but also for his imaginative celebrations of family, friendship, and the world of nature.
CHAPTER V

"THY STERN SIMPLICITY AND VIGOROUS SONG":

THELWALL'S RELATIONS WITH WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

Your . . . criticism has convinced me that your nerves are exquisite electrometers of taste.

--S. T. Coleridge to Thelwall, February 6, 1797

Wordsworth borrows without acknowledgement from Thelwall himself.

--Henry Crabb Robinson, Diary, February 12, 1815

Although himself forgotten as a poet, Thelwall's literary and personal relations with William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge have enriched the history of English Romantic literature. He won the admiring friendship of Coleridge, who celebrated his "stern simplicity and vigorous song" in a sonnet. For over a year the two debated religious, literary, and political questions in a lengthy correspondence. Their correspondence had its beginnings in their respective careers as anti-ministerial lecturers during 1795, before both were silenced by passage of the Two Acts. Though they frequently disagreed in their letters, each remained genuinely interested in the other's point of view and each conceived a high admiration of the other's genius. They took turns trying to encourage each other with praise and with practical schemes for success. The letters Coleridge wrote to Thelwall are most revealing, because during the year 1796 Coleridge was redefining his own identity. He was losing interest in liberal politics and at the same time re-establishing
his religious beliefs. Because Coleridge had lost his intimacy with
Robert Southey, and because he had not yet gained the close friendship
of Wordsworth, he communicated his emotions and ideas especially openly
to his new friend. Their correspondence of 1796-97, then, supplies the
first episode in the story of Thelwall's relations with the Lake Poets.

Thelwall's visit with Coleridge and Wordsworth in July, 1797, makes
up the second segment of the story. By that time his politics had become
unpopular with many of the people as well as hateful to the government.
Thelwall finally decided he had experienced his fill of harassment. Part­
ly at Coleridge's advice he began to look for a quiet home in the country,
and toward this end he accepted his friend's long-standing invitation to
visit Nether Stowey. He arrived there on the very day Wordsworth was mov­
ing into Alfoxden House, where the Lyrical Ballads would be planned and
largely executed. Though Thelwall remained only ten days, his visit sig­
nificantly affected the lives of his hosts. Like the more active polit­
tician, they also still opposed their country's government, and they also
abominated the war with France. In their country retreat their own loy­
alty was questioned. While they entertained Thelwall they were spied upon
and information was forwarded to the Secretary of State. Even after he
left, their hospitality toward them caused problems. Their landlord became
so enraged by the visit that she terminated Wordsworth's lease to Alfoxden,
thus depriving him and Coleridge of a setting in which they wrote much
successful poetry.

But Thelwall's acquaintance was a source of lasting literary sti­
mulation for Wordsworth. Selected passages of "Tintern Abbey," The
Prelude, and The Excursion show certain parallels to passages in The
Peripatetic.

To complete the examination of the relations among the three men requires a return to chronological narrative, one set nearly twenty years after the original events. By that time the friendship between Thelwall and Coleridge had long since ceased to make malleable their differences over religion and politics. The renewed radical agitation during the years 1816-19 forced the former allies into different camps. They recalled their old friendship in public and private writings which shed further light upon the intellectual development of each. On the other hand, Wordsworth's admiration of Thelwall's person and poetry remained strong throughout his life.

I

Thelwall's relations with Coleridge actually antedate their first correspondence. Certain evidence suggests that they followed each other's political arguments during 1795. Coleridge planned a lecture topic after hearing about a talk presented by Thelwall on a similar topic. On June 3, 1795, Thelwall delivered a lecture "On the Unfortunate Restoration of the House of Stuart with Strictures on the Differences between the English Revolution in 1649, and that of France, in 1792 . . . including a delineation of the Character of Cromwell."¹ His advertisement may have reached Bristol, where Coleridge was beginning to make plans for a series of lectures on the same topic. His series was to begin on June 23. Only Cottle's

¹The Tribune, III, 183-200.
printed Prospectus remains: "S. T. Coleridge Proposes to Give in Six Lectures a Comparative View of the English Rebellion under Charles the First, and the French Revolution." The outline included plans to compare the characters of Robespierre and Cromwell, as Thelwall had done. Although Cottle asserts that the lectures were delivered, no evidence corroborates his story.

Coleridge also used a particular image which Thelwall had employed in a published lecture. On October 30, 1795, Thelwall defended the reform societies from the accusation that they had plotted or inspired the recent attack on the coach of George III. He tried to show that the unorganized, illiterate poor were more apt to take such self-defeating mob action than than organized reformers. To dramatize his point he presented a striking description:

For when they feel the gnawing tooth of hunger at their vitals, when they see a family which ought to be a blessing become a curse, and dare not enter into virtuous union with the fair partners of of their hearts, will they not thirst for vengeance? When he ... recoils from the picture of a beggared, ragged partner, and a starving brood of children, what are the emotions he is likely to feel? Will he not be indignant? Will not those tender passions yield to gloomy and ferocious resentment? (Tribune, III, 138)

Thelwall argued that parliamentary reform would eliminate financial corruption and thus raise living standards.


It is difficult to determine precisely when this lecture was issued as Number XL of The Tribune. Because of its relevance to the urgent problem of the attack on the King, it must have appeared within a few weeks.

Meanwhile, in Bristol, Coleridge was revising his Moral and Political Lectures for re-publication on December 3 as the Introductory Address to Conciones Ad Populum (C. W., I, 5-19; 22). As published it contains a concluding passage missing from the earlier version. The conclusion begins with the assertion that "patriots should plead for the oppressed, not to them." Coleridge's solution, like Thelwall's, is predictable: "Religion appears to offer the only means universally efficient" (C. W., I, 45). Coleridge applied his alternative solution to an example remarkably similar to that depicted by Thelwall:

**Domestic affections depend upon association. We love an object if, as often as we see or recollect it, an agreeable sensation arises in our minds. But alas! how should he glow with the charities of Father and Husband, who gaining scarcely more than his own necessities demand, must have been accustomed to regard his wife and children, not as the Soothers of finished labour, but as Rivals for the insufficient meal! In a man so circumstanced the Tyranny of the Present can be overpowered only by the tenfold mightiness of the Future.** (C. W., I, 45)

The contrasting deductions drawn by Coleridge and Thelwall reveal the lines of argument in their subsequent correspondence.

Evidence of Thelwall's interest in Coleridge's writings establishes a new date for Coleridge's The Plot Discovered and shows it to be timely and controversial propaganda. In a lecture titled "A Civic Oration on the Anniversary of the Acquittal of the Lecturer, delivered on December 9, 1795, Thelwall referred directly to The Plot Discovered by the title
printed on its cover, *A Protest Against Certain Bills*:

Suppose I should write a speculative treatise (and why should general speculations be restrained) after this bill of Lord Grenville's is passed, it would not want a speech of nine hours to show that such a book is high treason. Hume might have been hanged for his "Idea of a Free Commonwealth," as Godwin has shown in his "Considerations"--the future vendors of that work may be hanged, drawn and quartered, as Coleridge has shown in his "Protest"! (Tribune, III, 259)

This evidence further discounts the speculation of Lucyle Werkmeister that Coleridge did not publish the pamphlet until after the Two Acts became law on December 10, 1795. The publication date printed on the cover (November 28), she argues, represents Coleridge's attempt to remain within the law by predating the work. She also suggests that the only reason he published was to protect himself by putting in print a toned down version of his lecture.4 The most recent editor of *The Plot Discovered*, Lewis Patton, also discounts the printed publication date, on the grounds that it would not have allowed sufficient time to revise the lecture (November 26). But he opposes Werkmeister's thesis with his discovery of a presentation copy in Coleridge's hand, dated December 10, 1795 (C. W., I, 278).

But the fact that Thelwall quoted Coleridge on the ninth in the same breath that he quoted Godwin indicates that *The Plot Discovered* was not only in print by December 8 (allowing one day for a copy to travel from Bristol to London) but was current among the center of the London opposition by December 9. The latter fact suggests a much earlier date of publication. Until December 10 the bills were still under debate in

both houses, so Coleridge was clearly publishing a timely and useful stroke of propaganda rather than a self-exculpation.

In The Plot Discovered Coleridge mentions Thelwall by name. He asserts that Pitt's Convention Bill had two purposes: "First that the people of England should possess no unrestricted right of consulting in common on common grievances: and secondly, that Mr. Thelwall should no longer give political lectures" (C.W., I, 296). His additional comments on Thelwall in this passage are sufficiently ambiguous that the hot-headed lecturer misread them and took offense. The complaint that Thelwall mailed to Coleridge opened their mutual correspondence. Lucyle Werkmeister also misread it as evidence that "Coleridge takes particular pains to censure . . . even Thelwall himself, who is described as a malcontent" (Werkmeister, p. 261). The entire passage follows:

In proportion as he /Thelwall/ feels himself of little consequence he will perceive the situation of the ministry is desperate. Nothing could make him of importance but that he speaks the feelings of multitudes. The feelings of men are always founded in truth.

The modes of expressing them may be blended in error, and the feelings themselves may lead to the most abhorred excesses. Yet still they are originally right: they teach man that something is wanting, something which he ought to have. Now if the premier, with the influence of the wealthy and the prejudices of the ignorant on his side, were evidently struggling to supply these perceived desiderata, could an unsupported malcontent oppose him? Alas! it is the vice of this nation, that if a minister merely promise to increase the comforts or enlarge the liberties of the people, he instantly conjures up such a wild and overwhelming popularity, as enables him to execute with impunity the most ruinous schemes against both, But William Pitt knows, that Thelwall is the voice of tens of thousands, and he levels his parliamentary thunder-bolts against him with the same emotion with which Caligula wished to see the whole Roman state brought together in one neck, that he might have the luxury of beheading it at one moment. . . . (C. W., I, 297)

The thesis of this passage is that masses of Englishmen have come to
realize their just grievances. Consequently, when Thelwall voices their complaints he becomes precisely the opposite of "an unsupported malcontent." This reading is confirmed by Coleridge's response to Thelwall's complaint:

I have heard that you were offended by the manner in which I mentioned your name in the Protest against the Bills--I have looked over the passage again, and cannot discover the objectionable sentence. The words 'unsupported Malcontent' are caught up from the well-known contemptuous pages of Aristocratic Writers & turned upon them: they evidently could not be spoken in my own person, when 5 or 6 lines below, I affirm that you are the 'Voice of Tens of Thousands'--certainly therefore not 'an unsupported Malcontent.' --I meant the passage--(not as complimentary: for I detest the vile traffic of literary adulation) but as a Tribute of deserved praise.--When I recited the Protest, the passage was 'unsupported Malcontents' meaning myself & you--but I afterwards was seized with a fit of modesty & omitted myself--.

In the same letter (undated, but probably written late in April, 1796) Coleridge sent Thelwall a copy of his Poems (1796). He admitted that it contained "much effeminacy of sentiment, much faulty glitter of expression" and he noted that "I build all my poetic pretensions on the Religious Musings." These are, of course, important statements for the student of his poetical development. Coleridge concluded his letter with the cheerful invitation of one impoverished radical to another: "If you ever visit Bristol have a bed at your service" (C. L., I, 205).

The offer is significant because both Coleridge and Thelwall suffered financially for their political activities. Thelwall's London backers abruptly withdrew much-needed support for the rental of his lecture-room in the Beaufort Buildings early in April, the same time

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5Coleridge, Collected Letters, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), I, 204-05. All further references to this text will appear in the text.
that the government suppressed publication of The Tribune. Thelwall
found he owed substantial amounts for both operations, although pre-
viously they had been his sole sources of income. His public support,
likewise, was vanishing. The Whig opposition, which Thelwall had drawn
into alliance with the Corresponding Society to oppose the Two Acts, had
begun the new year by organizing for their repeal, but then had quietly
resigned the effort. And when Coleridge answered Thelwall's complaint
late in April he had already decided to put an end to his own political
paper The Watchman. Its "chief objects" had been "to co-operate (1) with
the Whig Club in procuring a repeal of Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's
Bills, now passed into law, and (2) with the Patriotic Societies, for
obtaining a Right of Suffrage general and frequent" (C. W., II, 4-6).
A fortnight after he first wrote to Thelwall Coleridge exclaimed to
Poole: "O Watchman, thou hast watched in vain," and calculated that his
labor had yielded a net loss (C. L., I, 208-09).

But their mutual impoverishment discouraged neither man from
praising the other's talent, for they shared a valuable resource that
money could not buy: a righteous, hopeless cause. Coleridge had sent
Thelwall a poem dedicated to him in the manner of the Sonnets On Eminent
Persons published in the Morning Chronicle:

TO JOHN THELWALL

Some, Thelwall, to the Patriot's meed aspire,
Who, in safe rage, without or rent or scar,
Round pictur'd strongholds sketching mimic war
Closet their valour--Thou mid thickest fire

6John Thelwall, "Prefatory Memoir," Poems Chiefly Written in
Retirement (Hereford: W. H. Parker, 1801), pp. xxix-xxxii.
Leapst on the wall: therefore shall Freedom choose
And weave for thy young locks a Mural wreath;
Nor there my song of grateful praise refuse.
My ill-adventur'd youth by Cam's slow stream
Pin'd for a woman's love in slothful ease:
First by thy fair example taught to glow
With Patriot zeal; from Passion's feverish dream
Starting I tore disdainful from my brow
A Myrtle Crown inwove with Cyprian bough--
Blest if to me in manhood's years belong
Thy stern simplicity and vigorous Song.  

When Thelwall responded on May 10, 1795, he acknowledged the tribute
and returned praise for Coleridge's genius: "You have far too much genius
& too intractable a spirit to make a good schoolmaster." He suggested
more appropriate alternatives by which his friend might earn a livelihood:
"Come to London," he advised, "your proper sphere." Coleridge should
live near the booksellers where he could turn a good profit by translating
Cicero. Ironically, Thelwall advised Coleridge not to leave England.
German studies would ruin Coleridge's poetic talent. In criticizing
Coleridge's own alternative plans Thelwall made at this early date what
have turned out to be shrewd analyses. He thought Coleridge's plan to
become a Unitarian minister was "a miserable speculation, even if your
opinions were settled, which, in spite of your enthusiasm, nay by your
enthusiasm I am sure they are not." Coleridge would spend a lifetime, of
course, refining his religious beliefs; Unitarianism he would discard at
Malta. The final advice that Thelwall offered was acute: "Let your in-
dustry keep tolerable pace with your talents and your learning and I have
no doubt but you may earn a decent comfortable livelihood and establish

a reputation." At the same time, Thelwall presented severe criticism. He attacked the strictures Coleridge had published against Godwin's theory of marriage in The Watchman. They exhibited the "furious prejudices of the conventicle." He also criticized in great detail the poetry and religious sentiment of "Religious Musings." 

Coleridge responded on May 13, just three days after Thelwall dated his letter. He warmly welcomed his friend's advice: 'My dear Thelwall! you have given me 'the affection of a brother': and I repay you in kind. Your letters demand my friendship and deserve my esteem: the Zeal, with which you have attacked my supposed Delusions, proves that you are deeply interested for me, and interested even to agitation for what you believe to be the truth' (C. L., I, 212). He was stung by Thelwall's charge of religious superstition for his condemnation of adultery, and he defended himself handily:

'These be hard words, Citizen & I will be bold to say, they are not to be justified' ... 'My dear Thelwall how are these opinions connected with the Conventicle more than with the Stoa, Lyceum, or the grove of Academus? I do not perceive that to attack adultery is more characteristic of Christian Prejudices than of the prejudices of Aristotle, Zeno, or Socrates.' In truth, the offensive sentence 'your principles are villainous ones' -- was suggested by the Peripatetic Sage. (I, 212-13)

This was a palpable hit upon Thelwall's relative ignorance of the classics; it suggests that Coleridge knew of Thelwall's novel. He had no doubt felt patronized by Thelwall's words: "When I was yet a Christian & a very zealous one, i.e. when I was about your age . . ." (Gibbs, p.87).

Coleridge then turned his attention from adultery to property:

"The real source of inconstancy, depravity, & prostitution, is Property, which mixes with and poisons every thing good--& is beyond doubt the Origin of all Evil." The "sensualist," Coleridge argued, "is not likely to be a Patriot," and he criticized a list of supposed sensualist/patriots: he charged Gerald with hypocrisy (for offering prayers at the Scottish Convention), drunkenous, and whoremongering; and he charged Godwin with arrogance and cruelty, especially in "his base, & anonymous attack on you." Coleridge's point was that these materialists were not bound by absolute principles, and hence could with "an exertion of ingenuity . . . deduce their criminality even from Godwin's System of Morals" (I, 214-15).

Coleridge answered Thelwall's objections to the introduction of religion and metaphysics into poetry: "Why pass an Act of Uniformity against Poets? . . . some for each--is my motto--that Poetry pleases which interests . . ." (I, 215). This criticism was destined to enhance Coleridge's work. He did not dwell on Thelwall's criticism of particular passages in "Religious Musings". He simply wrote, "Your remarks on my Poems are, I think, just in general--there is a rage, & affectation of double Epithets" (I, 215). Thelwall had suggested that "the whole poem /Religious Musings/ also is infected with inflation and turgidity" (Gibbs, p. 88). A collation of Poems (1796) with Poems (1797) and Thelwall's letter indicates that Coleridge changed or removed five out of six passages criticized by his correspondent:

1. Uncharm'd the Spirit spell-bound with earthly lusts (1796)  
   And first by fear uncharm'd the drowsed Soul (1797 l. 34)

2. Yea, and there,  
   Unshudder'd and unaghasted, he shall view  
   E'en the Seven Spirits (1796)
Yea, unmoved
Views e'en the immittigable Ministers (1797 ll. 78-79)

3. Your pitiless rites have floated with Man's blood
The skull pil'd Temple (1796)

The erring Priest hath stained with brother's blood
Your grisly idols (1797 ll. 136-37)

4. The odorous groves of Earth reparadis'd
Unbosom their glad echoes (1796)

The high groves of the renovated Earth
Unbosom their glad echoes (1797 ll. 365-66)

5. Ye petrify th' embrothell'd Atheist's heart (1796)

is omitted in the later version. Thelwall had objected to these lines as "one of those illiberal and unfounded calumnies with which Christian Meekness never yet disdained to supply for want of an argument" (Gibbs, p. 87). Perhaps Coleridge changed the line out of remorse, because in Thelwall's next letter the atheist severely criticized him for telling stories about Gerald and Godwin.

Their respective philosophical positions present no small amount of humorous irony. Thelwall reprimands Coleridge for cruelty and calumny, while the theoretical adulterer Thelwall seems unaware of his own domestic conventionality, as evidenced by the telling compliment with which Coleridge ends this letter: "Write me when you think you can come to Bristol—perhaps I may be able to fit up two Bed-rooms in my house. . . . Give my kind Love to Mrs Thelwall & kiss the dear Babies for me" (I, 216).

Although Thelwall's next letter has been lost, Coleridge defended himself against the accusation of calumny in a letter to Thelwall dated

9Coleridge, Poetical Works, pp. 110; 112; 114; 122 and respective textual notes.
June 22, 1796. He claimed that he had "never given a moment's belief to the stories unless they had been delivered by "professed Democrats." Furthermore, he claimed that he had erred on the opposite side by overly praising both Gerald and Godwin in public. He admitted that he, like Thelwall, could "fill a book with slanderous stories of professed Christians" but argued that these men would admit that they acted contrary to Christian principles (I, 221). This point may have fallen only lightly on Thelwall, who for several years had been persecuted publicly and privately by powerful men who professed that they were defending the Christian religion.

In this letter Coleridge criticized The Peripatetic and a polemic titled The Rights of Nature Against the Usurpations of Establishments, both of which Thelwall had mailed to him. Coleridge wrote that The Peripatetic "pleased me more because it let me into your heart--the poetry is frequently sweet & possesses the fire of feeling, but not enough (I think) of the light of Fancy" (I, 221). He also praised the polemic: "your answer to Burke is, I will not say, the best--for that would be no praise--it is certainly the only good one; & it is a very good one" (I, 221). His compliment signified more than idle flattery. Thelwall's thesis was that the poorer classes possessed unalterable rights not only to comfortable subsistence, but also to leisure and education, because they produced the nation's wealth. This idea helped fill the philosophical gap which separated the two thinkers. For Thelwall it gave a "social" justification to his struggle for political and economic rights under equal laws. For Coleridge, it not only placed absolute limitations upon the political power wielded by property, but also included both rich and poor in an
organic structure similar to what he called in "Religious Musings" "the vast Family of Man" (1. 341). Coleridge's praise actually renewed Thelwall's political efforts, for Thelwall had great respect for the younger man's opinion. Seven months later Thelwall wrote a political ally that his hopes for the pamphlet's effect were heightened by the praise of "a brilliant young man named Coleridge." Thus the great conservative theorist of the nineteenth century passed intellectual support to one of the century's seminal radicals.

The next letter from Coleridge is dated November 13, 1796. At that time he reiterated his support for The Rights of Nature, which Thelwall was extending: "The Sketch of your Plan I like well. The origins of Property & the mode of removing its evils--form the last chapter of my Answer to Godwin, which will appear now in a few weeks--we run on the same ground, but we drive different Horses. I am daily more and more of a religionist--you, of course, more & more otherwise" (1, 253).

During 1796 Coleridge's exposure to death and suffering strengthened his religious convictions. In May, when he was heatedly defending Christianity to Thelwall, his brother-in-law James Lovell, an original Pantisocrat, died "of a putrid fever" leaving a widow and infant; in September Charles Lamb's life was stricken when his sister Mary stabbed their mother during an insane fit. Coleridge offered Lamb profuse Christian consolation by letter. But he himself was suffering. A few days before he wrote to Thelwall he had undergone a serious attack of neuritis which he treated with "between sixty and seventy drops of

10 Manuscript letter in the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
laudanum," an enormous dose. The epileptic fits and generally delicate constitution of his young boarder, Charles Lloyd, was placing a strain on a marriage already shaken by insufficient income.  

Coleridge had responded to the pressure with indecision. During the preceding four months he had accepted and then rejected generous offers to join the Unitarian ministry in Nottingham, to open a school in Derby, and to take the assistant editorship of the Morning Chronicle. Aside from outright gifts given by Poole, he had only two sources of income: review writing and an annuity of £35 begun by Poole and friends in March. The first year's installment, needless to say, had been spent, along with many advances from Cottle, his publisher. In November, 1796, his son Hartley was about three months old. Throughout the month of November Coleridge's letters reveal one obsession: to settle in Nether Stowey near his respectable friend Poole and to raise a garden there. By November 15 his anxiety reached a climax evidenced by his complaint to Poole: "I want consolation, my friend! my brother! Write & console me!" (I, 257).

Yet on November 13 Coleridge made no complaint to Thelwall. Perhaps he wished to appear strong to his resilient friend, because he showed a touching regard for Thelwall's welfare:

Have you, my dear Thelwall!--no plan for your future Life? What is the state of your body? Are you sickly, or strong? Is your body so weakened by exertion & anxiety, as to make stimulants (such as wine &

constant animal food) necessary to your health? How many dear little ones have you?--I should like to know all things about you--for you, I am confident, I know already.--My plan is formed--but of myself hereafter.--You mentioned to me that you are not a man of Greek & Roman Literature--have you read variously in your own language? I mean, have you been in the university phrase a Fag? Or rather have you read little, but reflected much?--I ask these perhaps impertinent questions because I wish to see you engaged in some great works--& for these various & profound study is assuredly a thing needful. (I, 254)

Lawrence Hanson considers this comic. He writes: "Coleridge's fatherly concern for his friend's welfare would not have been without irony at any time; at such a moment, it enters the realm of the fantastic."12 His comment misrepresents their relationship and exaggerates Coleridge's helplessness. In the same letter Coleridge offered to help sell copies of Thelwall's pamphlet, and the advice he offered to Thelwall as an artist was precisely correct.

In a postscript to this letter (November 13, 1796) Coleridge revealed an interesting literary aspect of their religious debate: "I was glad to hear from Colson that you abhor the morality of my Sonnet to Mercy--it is indeed detestable & the poetry is not above mediocrity" (I, 254). The subject of this sonnet was William Pitt. Coleridge had titled it "To William Pitt" when he had first published it in the Morning Post on December 23, 1794, soon after Thelwall's acquittal. In the sonnet Coleridge prayed that Mercy would punish the Prime Minister if Justice should sleep. Thelwall, the direct victim of Pitt's policies, thus chastized Coleridge for an unseemly thirsting after vengeance. Coleridge, of course, showed his Christian ethos by admitting his fault.

12 Hanson, p. 133.
Six days later (November 19, 1796) Coleridge again wrote Thelwall to lament their mutual insolvency. Thelwall was experiencing difficulty selling his pamphlet. "Ah me!" Coleridge consoled him, "literary Adventure is but bread and cheese by chance! I keenly sympathize with you."

He proposed a plan for selling it by subscription. He also noted, for the first time, that "you and I, my dear Thelwall! hold different creeds in poetry as well as religion." He had felt otherwise, he wrote, when he had first read Thelwall's Poems Written In Close Confinement (I, 258).

It is perhaps a sign of Coleridge's pre-Wordsworthian taste that he was attracted to poems that must be described as at least frequently "turgid and inflated."

This letter is justly famous because in it Coleridge presented to Thelwall a startlingly vivid and honest self-portrait:

Your portrait of yourself interested me--My face, unless when animated by immediate eloquence, expresses great Sloth, great, indeed almost idiotic, good nature. 'Tis a mere carcase of a face: fat, flabby, expressive chiefly of inexpression.--Yet I am told, that my eyes, eyebrows, forehead are physiognomically good--; but of this the Deponeth knoweth not. As to my shape, 'tis a good shape enough, if measured--but my gait is awkward, the walk, the Whole man indicates indolence capable of energies.--I am, ever have been, a library coriorant--I am deep in all out of the way books, whether of the monkish times, or of the puritanical area--I have read all digested most of the Historical Writers--; but I do not like History. Metaphysics, Poetry, 'Facts of mind'--(i.e. Accounts of all the strange phantasms that ever possessed your philosophy-dreamers from Thoth, the Egyptian to Taylor, the English Pagan) are my darling Studies.--In short, I seldom read except to amuse myself--& I am almost always reading.--Of useful knowledge I am a so-so chemist, & I love chemistry--all else is blank,--but I will be (please God) an Horticulturist & a Farmer. I compose very little--& I absolutely hate composition. Such is my dislike, that even a sense of Duty is sometimes too weak to overpower it.

I cannot breathe thro' my nose--so my mouth, with sensual thick lips, is almost always open. In conversation I am impassioned, and oppose what I deem error with an eagerness, which is often mistaken for personal asperity--but I am ever so swallowed up in the thing, that I perfectly forget my opponent. Such am I. (I, 259-60)
By December 17, 1795, the date of his next letter, Coleridge had finally moved to a cottage near Pocle's house in Nether Stowey. Poole yielded only after Coleridge's letters began to border on the hysterical: "O my God! my God! when am I to find rest! Disappointment follows Disappointment; and Hope seems given to me merely to prevent my becoming callous to Mercy! Now I know not where to turn myself!" (I, 271-72)

His anxiety about his future home and finances had further debilitated his health. To Thelwall he admitted for the first time that his health was bad, so bad that it "made the frequent use of laudanum absolutely necessary" (I, 276). Despite his use of laudanum, or because of it, Coleridge discussed in this letter nearly every topic of their correspondence, beginning with a confident variation of their long-running financial consultation. His initial emphasis should be noted:

My farm will be a garden of one acre & an half; in which I mean to raise vegetables & corn enough for myself & wife, and feed a couple of snouted & grunting Cousins from the refuse. My evenings I shall devote to Literature; and by Reviews, the Magazine, and other shilling-scavenger Employments shall probably gain £40 a year--which Economy & Self-Denial, Goldbeaters, shall hammer till it cover my annual Expenses. Now in favor of this scheme I shall say nothing: for the more vehement my ratiocinations were previous to the experiment, the more ridiculous my failure would appear; and if the Scheme deserve the said ratiocination, I shall live down all your objections. I doubt not, that the time will come when all our Utilities will be projected in one simple path. (I, 277)

With his new plans he acknowledged a kind of failure: "I am not fit for public Life; yet the Light shall stream to a far distance from my cottage window. Meantime, do you uplift the torch dreadlessly, and shew to mankind the face of that Idol, which they have worshipped in Darkness" (I, 227).

In his previous letter Coleridge had asked Thelwall to criticize...
alternative drafts of his "Sonnet, Composed On a Journey Homeward; the Author having received Intelligence of the Birth of a Son, Sept. 20, 1796."

As a materialist, Thelwall had apparently dismissed the idea of *deja-vu* as "mysticism." Coleridge first stoutly defended the poem, then abruptly admitted, "I do not like the Sonnet much myself" (I, 278). Thelwall had objected to the phrase "dreamy semblance," which Coleridge changed to "a mere semblance" when he published the sonnet in *Poems* (1797). On the subject of criticism, he quoted Thelwall's assertion, "Poetry to have its highest relish must be impassioned," and further refined it into appropriate advice for Thelwall: "... but first, Poetry ought not always to have its highest relish, & secondly, judging of the cause from the effects, Poetry, though treating on lofty & abstract truths, ought to be deemed *impassioned* by him who reads it with impassioned feelings" (I, 278-79).

Here Coleridge verbalizes, for the first time, I think, the germs of two important critical ideas: the active imagination he later described in the *Biographia Literaria*; and the great author's ability to tap the source of his readers' passions. Coleridge disapproved of Thelwall's tendency to label a poet "Della Cruscan" because of an error in meter, and repeated his earlier injunction: "Do not let us introduce an Act of Uniformity against Poets." His own style, he admitted, often combined "philosophical opinions" with "feelings" (I, 279).

Their third regular topic, religion, drew Coleridge's most voluminous argument. He accused Thelwall of speaking about Christianity with contempt: "Contempt must always be an evil--& a good man ought to speak

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contemptuously of nothing." This advice touched the weakest aspect of Thelwall's personality. "I am sure a wise man," Coleridge continued, "will not speak contemptuously of opinions which have been held by men, in other respects, at least, confessedly of more powerful Intellect than than himself. 'Tis an assumption of infallibility. . . ." (I, 280)

In Thelwall's profession, egotism was both his strength and weakness, just as was Coleridge's tendency to blend philosophy and feeling.

Coleridge then defended Christian myth:

You say the Christian is a mean Religion: now the Religion, which Christ taught, is simply that there is an Omnipresent Father of infinite power, wisdom, & Goodness, in whom we all of us move & have our being & 2. That when we appear to men to die, we do not utterly perish; but after this Life shall continue to enjoy or suffer the consequences & natural effects of the Habits, we have formed here, whether good or evil.--This is the Christian Religion & all of the Christian Religion. That there is no fancy in it, I readily grant; but that it is mean, & deficient in mind, and energy, it were impossible for me to admit, unless I admitted that there could be no dignity, intellect, or force in any thing but atheism.--But tho' it appeal not, itself, to the fancy, the truths which it teaches, admit the highest exercise of it. Are the innumerable multitude of angels & archangels less splendid beings than the countless Gods & Goddesses of Rome & Greece? . . . You may prefer to all this the Quarrels of Jupiter & Juno, the whimpering of wounded Venus--be it so (The difference in our tastes it would not be difficult to account for from the different feelings which we have associated with these ideas)--I shall continue with Milton to say, that

Sion Hill
Delights me more, and Siloa's Brook that flow'd
Fast by the oracle of God. (I, 280-81)

His reference to classical poetry, I think, was meant to chastize Thelwall in a subtle way for the intellectual arrogance of speaking without knowledge. Christian morality was the subject of his next apology: "To preach morals to the virtuous is not quite so requisite, as to preach them to the vicious. . . . Christianity regards morality as a process--it
finds a man vicious and unsusceptible of noble motives; & gradually leads
him, at least, desires to lead him, to the height of disinterested Virtue" (I, 283). Thelwall certainly preferred to "teach morals to the virtuous," as John Colmer points out.14

Despite the warmth of his argument, Coleridge expressed his regard for Thelwall's friendship by joking about their religious disagreements:

You possess fortitude, and purity, & a large portion of brotherly kindness and universal Love--drink with unquenchable thirst of the two latter virtues, and acquire patience; and then, Thelwall, should your system be true, all that can be said, is that (if both our Systems should be found to increase our own & our fellow-creatures' happiness)--Here lie or did lie the all of John Thelwall & S. T. Coleridge--they were both humane, & happy, but the former was the more knowing: & if my System should prove true, we, I doubt not, shall both meet in the kingdom of Heaven, & I with transport in my eye shall say--'I told you so, my dear fellow.' (I, 285)

When Thelwall replied he must have continued the religious debate with great force. Coleridge began his next letter (dated two weeks after the last, December 31, 1795) by declining the subject: "Enough, my dear Thelwall, of Theology. In my book on Godwin I compare the two Systems--his and Jesus's--& that book I am sure you will read with attention" (I, 293). Unfortunately, Coleridge never did complete this oft-projected work. If such a book had been strengthened by Thelwall's objections--and his affirmations on the question of property--Coleridge might have united Christian conviction with proto-socialist ideology. Coleridge's book might have diverted attention from Godwin's Political Justice, then reaching a peak of influence upon young intellectuals.

Thelwall had criticized Southey's Joan of Arc as competent in

sentiment but deficient in imagination. Although Coleridge had previously accorded Southey unqualified praise as "the Patriot's Poet," he now agreed with Thelwall. He added an insightful comparison of himself and Southey. From its introduction, it sounds as if it might have been stimulated by laudanum:

"Dismissing mock humility, & hanging your mind as a looking-glass over my Idea-pot, so as to image on the said mind all the bubbles that boil in the said Idea-pot, (there's a damn'd long-winded Metaphor for you) I think, that an admirable Poet might be made by amalgamating him & me. I think too much for a Poet; & he too little for a great Poet. (I, 294)"

In the same tone Coleridge responded to Thelwall's story of his mother's death with a jumbled summary of opinions on the definition of life. He managed to discuss Beddoes, Darwin, Monro, Hunter, Plato, and Ferrier, all in a brief paragraph, by way of asking to see Thelwall's Essay On Animal Vitality (I, 294-95)

Once again he invited Thelwall to criticize an important poem, "Ode to the Departing Year," and once again he wished to see his friend in Stowey: "I would to God we could sit by a fireside & joke viva voce, face to face--Stella & Sara, Jack Thelwall, & I!" (I, 295)

Five weeks later, at the end of January, Coleridge had not yet seen his friend, and Thelwall was in financial trouble once more. As before, Coleridge offered sympathy and advice. He encouraged Thelwall in his plan to open a school, though he cautioned against expecting much support from liberals: "Most of our Patriots are tavern & parlour Patriots, that will not avow their principles by any decisive action; & of the few, who would wish to do so, the larger part are unable from their children's expectancies on rich Relatives &c &c." Secondly, he cautioned against
depending upon free-lance writing: "Do anything honest, rather than lean with the whole weight of your necessities on the Press. Get bread, & cheese, cloathing & housing independently of it; & you may then safely trust to it for beef and strong beer" (I, 305). Thirdly, infatuated by the idea of agricultural self-sufficiency, the germ of his interest in pantisocracy, Coleridge had already helped convince Thelwall to live in the country. The politician no doubt also saw personal advantages: clean air for his bad lungs and a home for his family free of political strife. But he needed a source of income, and Coleridge once again offered the precise plan:

You will find a country Life a happy one; and you might live comfortably with an hundred a year. Fifty £ you might, I doubt not, gain by reviewing; & furnishing miscellanies for the different magazines; you might safely speculate on twenty pound a year more from your compositions published separately--50+20=70L--& by severe economy, a little garden labor, & a pig stie, this would do. . . . (I, 305)

Five weeks later Coleridge still had not laid eyes upon Thelwall, but he had received a new copy of his friend's Poems Written in Close Confinement. His brief criticism follows: "Of the poems the two Odes are the best--Of the two Odes the last, I think--it is in the best style of Akenside's best Odes.--Several of the sonnets are pleasing--& whenever I was pleased, I paused, & imaged you in my mind in your captivity." He offered very practical criticism of the second part of The Rights of Nature: "Your pamphlet is well written; & the doctrines in it are sound, altho' sometimes, I think, deduced falsely." He agreed with Thelwall's assertion that natural children should be legal heirs. But Thelwall should use the idea as an argument "in favor of marriage" because marriage was
"permanent co-habitation useful to Society as the best conceivable means 
(in the present state of Soc. at least) of ensuring nurture and systema-
tic education to infants and children." If Thelwall took this position, 
it would prevent accusations of licentiousness from "Mr. Burke7 and the 
Priests" (I, 306). Coleridge also cautioned Thelwall against writing 
mere assertions rather than arguments; generally, though, his praise was 
high:

... the pamphlet is the best, I have read, since the commencement 
of the war; warm, not fiery; well-reasoned without being dry; the 
periods harmonious yet avoiding metrical harmony; and the ornaments 
so disposed as to set off the features of truth without turning the 
attention on themselves. (I, 307)

Although Thelwall's criticism of "Ode to the Departing Year" is 
not extant, Coleridge reacts to it in this letter:

My Ode by this time you are conscious that you have praised too high-
ly--you wrote to me in the warmth of a first impression. With the 
exception of 'I unpartaking of the evil thing' which line I do not 
think injudiciously weak, I accede to all your remarks, & shall alte/r/
accordingly--Your remark that the line on the Empress had more of 
Juvenal than Pindar flashed itself on my mind--I had admired the line 
before; but I became immediately of your opinion--& that criticism 
has convinced me that your nerves are exquisite electrometers of 
Taste. (I, 307)

The only other time Coleridge used the latter epithet was to describe 
Dorothy Wordsworth after he first met her (I, 330).

This February letter is the last remaining communication between 
the two friends until Thelwall arrived at Stowey in mid-July, 1797. Per-
haps Thelwall decided to pick that village as his family's rural retreat 
after reading Coleridge's idyllic description:
I never go to Bristol--from seven to half past eight I work in my garden; from breakfast till 12 I read & compose; then work again--feed the pigs, poultry &c, till two o'clock--after dinner work again till Tea--from Tea till supper review. So jogs the day; & I am happy. I have society--my friend, T. Poole and as many acquaintances as I can dispense with--there are a number of very pretty young women in Stowey, all musical--& I am an immense favorite: for I pun, conundrumize, listen, & dance. The last is a recent acquirement--. We are very happy--& my little David Hartley grows a sweet boy--& has high health--he laughs at us till he makes us weep for very fondness.--You would smile to see my eye rolling up to the ceiling in a Lyric fury, and on my knee a Diaper pinned, to warm.--I send & receive to & from Bristol every week... I raise potatoes & all manner of vegetables; have an Orchard; & shall raise Corn with the spade enough for my family.--We have two pigs, & Ducks & Geese. A Cow would not answer the keep: for we have whatever milk we want from T. Poole.(I, 308)

II

For English Romantic literature the summer of 1797 was in the Quantocks the seed-time for bright and sustaining fruit. The Wordsworths, Coleridge, and their friends experienced one another and absorbed the texture and energy of natural scenes with such clarity and excitement that a new kind of poetry came to be written and explained. Those who fed the new discoveries about "man, nature and society" with their conversation and affections themselves must have fed "on honey daw... and drunk the milk of Paradise."

On July 7, 1797, Coleridge's old friend Charles Lamb arrived at Stowey to spend his week's vacation from the India House. He met William and Dorothy Wordsworth, who had come for a visit from Racedown a few weeks before and had stayed, fascinated by the company of Coleridge. Their hillside rambles--without Coleridge, whose burned foot prevented walking--inspired the latter to compose "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,"
his greatest poem up to that date. But an important guest had not arrived by the time Lamb returned to the city. Immediately upon arriving there he wrote Coleridge: "Is the Patriot come yet? I was looking out for John Thelwall all the way from Bridgewater, and had I met him, I think it would have moved me almost to tears."15

On the 17th, three days later, Coleridge and Sara moved Dorothy and William into Alfoxden. The house delighted them all, as it today delights those who read Dorothy's description:

The house is a large mansion, with furniture enough for a dozen families like ours. There is a very excellent garden, well stocked with vegetables and fruit. The garden is at the end of the house, and our favorite parlour, as at Racedown, looks that way. In front is a little court, with grass plot, gravel walk, and shrubs; the moss roses were in full beauty a month ago. The front of the house is to the south, but it is screened from the sun by a high hill which rises immediately from it. This hill is beautiful, scattered irregularly with trees, and topped with fern, which spreads a considerable way down it. The deer dwell here and sheep, so that we have a living prospect. From the end of the house we have a view of the sea, over a woody meadow-country; and exactly opposite the window where I now sit is an immense wood, whose round top from this point has exactly the appearance of a mighty dome. In some parts of this wood there is an under grove of hollies which are now very beautiful. In a glen at the bottom of the wood is the waterfall of which I spoke, a quarter of a mile from the house. We are three miles from Stowey, and not two miles from the sea. Wherever we turn we have woods, smooth downs, and valleys with small brooks running down them through green meadows, hardly ever intersected with hedgerows, but scattered over with trees . . . Walks extend for miles over the hill-tops; they are perfectly smooth, without rocks.16

Alfoxden offered the society of Coleridge, the "principal inducement" to their move; they would share a countryside rich in various natural


beauties; and they would reside like the favored children of some
dream-tale in an elegant country estate they could not afford, for the
rental fee was tiny. War with France and political repression in
England became distant and forgettable sources of alienation so they
were free to discuss new means of altering "what man hathmade of man."
As they rambled about the Quantock hills Dorothy, William, and Samuel
would construct an island in time and space, and use its freedom to
draw from one another new conceptions and brilliant executions of an
artistic vision grounded upon common natural processes and simple
human affections.

But their bubble would eventually burst and the rarified air
they breathed would blow away. They would be forced to leave those
green hills, and would themselves decide to leave their native island.
The very day they unpacked at Alfoxden John Thelwall concluded his
long walk from London to Nether Stowey, searching for a refuge, travel­
ing part of the way incognito for fear of attack. He remained for ten
days of long walks and excited political discussions. What he gave to
Wordsworth's poetry will be discussed below; what he cost the Words­
worths was their lease to Alfoxden.

It is difficult to understand what a giant stature Thelwall pre­
sented to Wordsworth and Coleridge that summer. As one of the "ac­
quitted felons" he had actually undergone trial for his life before a
"dread tribunal" like that which had haunted Wordsworth's dreams. For
several years he had been a watched man, but by the summer of 1797,
events had rendered him infamous. His defiance of the Two Acts, as
E. P. Thompson points out, was nationally significant. In April

17 E.P. Thompson, "Disenchantment Or Default: A Lay Sermon," 
Power & Consciousness, eds. O'Brien and Vanech (New York University, 1969),
p. 158. From this source I have learned of the activity of the Somerset
militia.
there had been a naval mutiny at Spithead. It marked a major division between opposition ranks. In his "Spital Sermon" the liberal Samuel Parr, known as the "Whig Johnson," viciously attacked the well-respected radical hero Godwin for weakening the filial affections by which society cohered. In July a second mutiny broke out at the Nore. In Somerset the reserves were drilling vigorously in fear of French invasion. There would be no room there for Thelwall or those who befriended him. Yet at Alfoxden Wordsworth and Coleridge welcomed Thelwall enthusiastically. He had been a distant hero to them both during his trial three years before and his current infamy no doubt seemed a testimony to his unswerving principles. In fact they too still opposed the war abroad and the suppression of free speech in England. That Thelwall was then being physically forced to abandon the cause may have soothed their own senses of duty, for Wordsworth had failed to publish his revolutionary Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff . . . by a Republican and had discarded plans for The Philanthropist, a radical journal. Coleridge had lectured and published, of course, but only in Bristol, while Thelwall's lectures on the Strand had been silenced by an Act of Parliament.

One longs for details of the nation's most famous and outspoken radical visiting its most creative poets. But only a sketch of events remains. Ironically, these have been preserved largely in Thelwall's almost ecstatic letter to his wife, and in the reports of government spies. Thelwall remained in Stowey with Sara the evening of Monday, July 7. The following morning they walked the three miles to Alfoxden where they joined Wordsworth, Dorothy, and Coleridge on a ramble to the Alfoxden waterfall, discussing politics and literature. That night Thelwall recounted the day's events in a letter to his wife:
Profit & everything else but my Stella & my Babes are now banished from my mind by the enchanting retreat (the Academus of Stowey) from which I write this, & by the delightful society of Coleridge & Wordsworth--the present occupier of All Fox Den. We have been having a delightful ramble to day among the plantations along a wild mountain dell in these grounds thro which a foaming, murmuring, rushing torrent winds its long artless course--There have we sometime sitting on a tree--sometime wading boottop deep thro the stream & again stretched on a mossy stone or root of a decayed tree, a literary & political triumvirate passed sentence on the productions and characters of the age--burst forth in poetical flights of enthusiasm & philosophised our minds into a state of tranquillity which the leaders of nations might envy and the residents of cities can never know.18

At Alfoxden he found an old radical's dream: "Faith we are a most philosophical party. A large house with grounds & plantations about it which Wordsworth has hired I understand for a trifle merely that he might enjoy the society of Coleridge contains the enthusiastic group consisting of C and his Sara--W & his Sister--& myself--without any servant male or female." The phrase "State of tranquillity" recalls the Preface to Lyrical Ballads in which emotions are said to be "recollected in tranquillity." In this letter the word is connected with two other ideas central to the Preface: that men are more tranquil if they live independent of worldly power and in close intimacy with natural objects. One may speculate that Wordsworth had already verbalized this portion of his psychology of poetry. Yet at that time Thelwall had a far more pressing interest in tranquillity.

Coleridge and Wordsworth both recalled the day by means of an anecdote that stressed tranquillity. The party was relaxing in Alfoxden's "romantic dell." Coleridge, no doubt proud of his friend's dangerous reputation said "Citizen John, this is a fine place to talk

18Thelwall to Mrs. Thelwall, July 14, 1797, ms. letter in the Pierpont Morgan Library.
"Nay, Citizen Samuel, it is rather a place to make a man forget that there is any necessity of treason." This was Coleridge's recollection; that Wordsworth recalled it somewhat differently seems significant: "Coleridge said it was a place where a man could learn to reconcile himself to the journeys and conflicts of the world, and Thelwall replied rather that it would make on forget them altogether." To have heard the active radical utter such a sentiment about the importance of natural scenes might well have reaffirmed Wordsworth's returning faith in nature at a crucial time. One could speculate that this might have been one of the major causes of the development by which "half the human race was averted from his ken." Three days after this incident all walked back to Stowey. Thelwall recorded that they spoke of "the moral character of Democrats, of aristocrats" and "the pursuits proper to literary men--unfit for the management of pecuniary affairs." Seldom were any literary men less fit for such management. The following Sunday when Wordsworth held a large dinner party Coleridge wrote to Tom Poole and asked him to bring the meat--a leg of lamb. On Sunday, July 23, the party began with Wordsworth reading The Borderers beneath the larch trees on the lawn. Guests included Thelwall, Poole and his apprentice, Thomas Ward, and perhaps the Cruickshanks and a Mr. Wilmott of Nether Stowey. An account of the dinner was passed from


20Poetical Works, V, 511.

Thomas Jones, gardener at Alfoxden, to a government spy, who wrote "... there were 14 persons at Dinner Poole and Coldridge (sic) were there, And there was a little Stout Man with dark cropt Hair and wore a White Hat and Glasses (Thelwall) who after Dinner got up and talked so loud and was in such a passion that Jones was frightened and did not like to go near them since." How much Thelwall frightened the other guests is not recorded. Clearly, his talk was not the common chatter of Nether Stowey.

Unfortunately, there is no more to report about the visit but its after effects. Thelwall's story occurred first. His reaction to the hospitality he experienced was almost childishly enthusiastic. It assumes pathos from the spying and repression that would follow. Upon leaving the poets on July 27 he immediately decided that he had found a home. Since the day was the anniversary of his birth and marriage, he wrote a poem: "Lines, written at Bridgewater, in Somersetshire, on the 27th of July, 1797; during a long excursion, in quest of a peaceful retreat." In it he hoped the day would offer prophecy of kindlier times, and in his wish he gives us a most idyllic dream of the society of Wordsworth and Coleridge:

... of hours of sweet retirement, tranquil joys
Of friendship, and of love--of studious ease,
Of philosophic thought--poetic dreams
In dell romantic, or by bubbling brook
High wood, or rocky shore; where Fancy's train
Solemn or gay, shall in the sunbeam sport,
Or murmur in the gloom, peopling earth, air,
Ocean and woodland haunt,--mountain, and cave,
With wildest phantazies. ...
Ah let me then, far from the strifeful scenes
Of public life (where Reason's warning voice
Is heard no longer, and the trump of Truth
Who blows but wakes the Ruffian Crew of Power
To deeds of maddest anarchy and blood)
Ah let me, far in some sequester'd dell,
Build my low cot; most happy might it prove,
My Samuel near to thine, that I might oft
Share thy sweet converse, best-belov'd of friends—
Long-lov'd ere known: for kindred sympathies
Link'd, tho' far distant, our congenial souls.

Ah 'twould be sweet, beneath the neighb'ring thatch
In philosophic amity to dwell,
Inditing moral verse, or tale, or theme,
Gay or instructive; and it would be sweet,
With kindly interchange of mutual aid,
To delve our little garden plots, the while
Sweet converse flow'd, suspending oft the arm
And half-driven spade, while, eager, one propounds,
And listens one, weighing each pregnant word,
And pondering fit reply, that may untwist
The knotty point -- perchance, of import high—
Of Moral Truth, of Causes Infinite,
Creating Power or Uncreated Worlds
Eternal and uncaus'd or whatsoe'er,
Of Metaphysic, or of Ethic lore,
The mind, with curious subtily, pursues—
Agreeing, or dissenting -- sweet alike,
When wisdom, and not victory, the end.
And 'twould be sweet, my Samuel, ah most sweet
To see our little infants stretch their limbs
In gambols unrestrain'd, and early learn
Practical love, and, Wisdom's noblest lore,
Fraternal kindliness; while rosiest health,
Bloom'd on their sun-burnt cheeks. And 'twould be sweet,
When what to toil was due, to study what,
And literary effort, had been paid,
Alternate, in each other's bow'er to sit,
In summer's genial season; or, when, bleak,
The wintry blast had stripp'd the leafy shade,
Around the blazing hearth, social and gay,
To share our frugal viands, and the bowl
Sparkling with home-brew'd beverage: -- by our sides
Thy Sara, and my Susan, and, perchance,
Allfoxden's musing tenant, and ti.. maid
Of ardent eye, who, with fraternal love,
Sweetens his solitude. With these should join
Arcadian Pool, swain of a happier age,
When Wisdom and Refinement lov'd to dwell
With Rustic Plainness, and the pastoral vale
Was vocal to the melodies of verse--
Echoing sweet minstrelsey. With such, my friend--
With such how pleasant to unbend awhile,

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Winging the idle hour with song, or tale,
Pun, or quaint joke, or converse, such as fits
Minds gay, but innocent: and we would laugh--
(Unless, perchance, pity's more kindly tear
Check the obstreperous mirth) at such who waste
Life's precious hours in the delusive chace
Of wealth and worldly gewgaws, and contend
For honours emptier than the hollow voice
That rings in Echoe's cave; and which, like that,
Exists but in the babbling of a world
Creating its own wonder. Wiselier we,
To intellectual joys will thus devote
Our fleeting years; mingling Arcadian sports
With healthful industry. O, it would be
A Golden Age reviv'd.23

But he would enjoy no Golden Age in Somerset. Wordsworth's gardener had gossipped to the servants of Dr. Lyons of Bath, who wrote the Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland, on August 8.24 It is ironic that Thelwall, who had noticed no servants, had warned about such betrayals even before he had been jailed for treason. A spy named Walsh was detailed to examine the inhabitants of Alfoxden. Scholars have treated the incident in various ways. Mrs. Moorman calls it "an amusing and absurd episode" (pp. 329-30). More recently, E. P. Thompson dramatizes the courage that the poets showed in befriending Thelwall at this time (pp. 156-62).

The question of who actually drew the spy to Alfoxden presents somewhat of a crux. The early biographers of the Lake Poets assumed that Thelwall's visit was the cause, but in 1934 A. J. Eagleston, after searching through Home Office papers, concluded that the spy was sent because lower-class natives became suspicious of the general behavior at Alfoxden. His case is well-presented, but may not be conclusive. In the first place, Dr. Lysons' initial letter is missing from the

24Eagleston, pp. 81ff.
record: whether or not it contained reference to Thelwall is unknown.

On his approach to Stowey, Thelwall had remained with friends in Bath, where he had "met with some enthusiasm." Dr. Lysons might have heard of Thelwall's actions at that time. In the second place, according to E. P. Thompson, the Home Secretary knew that Thelwall had stopped in Bristol (before he visited Stowey) because the mayor there had written him on August 7, one day before Dr. Lysons' first letter was dated (p. 161).

Finally, the spy assigned to Alfoxden was the same man, "an itinerant spy, Walsh," who had led police to Thelwall on the day of his arrest back in 1794. It seems more than coincidental that he would investigate Alfoxden only two weeks after his most famous catch, Thelwall, had been there.

Dr. Lysons' letter of August 11 follows:

My Lord Duke--On the 8th instant I took the liberty to acquaint your Grace with a very suspicious business concerning an emigrant family, who have contrived to get possession of a Mansion House at Alfoxton, late belonging to the Revd. Mr. St. Albans, under Quantock Hills. I am since informed, that the Master of the house has no wife with him, but only a woman who passes for his Sister. The man has Camp Stools, which he and his visitor take with them when they go about their nocturnal or diurnal excursions, and have also a Portfolio in which they enter their observations, which they have been heard to say were almost finished. They have been heard to say they should be rewarded for them, and were very attentive to the River near them--probably the River coming within a mile or two of Alfoxton from Bridgewater. These people may possibly be under Agents to some principal at Bristol.

Having got these additional anecdotes which were dropt by the person mentioned in my last I think it necessary to acquaint your Grace with them, and have the honor to be &c.

D. Lysons
(Eagleston, p. 80)

25Thelwall to Mrs. Thelwall. See n 18.

26The Tribune (1796), I, 87.
Note that the "nocturnal excursions," which Eagleston assigns as the main reason for the investigation, are called "additional anecdotes" by Lysons.

On the same day (August 11) Walsh was already on the job at Hungerford. He addressed a letter to the Under-Secretary of the Home Office, and received instructions the following day (August 12):

You will immediately proceed to Alfoxton (sic), or its neighborhood yourself, taking care on your arrival so to conduct yourself as to give no cause of suspicion to the Inhabitants of the Mansion there. You will narrowly watch their proceedings. . . . You will give me a precise account of all the circumstances you observe, with your sentiments thereon; you will of course ascertain if you can the names of the persons, and will add their descriptions and above all you will be careful not to give them any cause of alarm, that if necessary they may be found on the spot. (pp. 80-81)

On August 15, Walsh wrote from the Globe Inn at Stowey where he heard a certain Mr. Woodhouse ask the landlord if Thelwall was yet gone from Alfoxden. "I then asked if they meant the famous Thelwall. They said Yes. That he had been down sometime, and that there was a Nest of them at Alfoxten House who were protected by a Mr. Poole a Tanner of this Town, and that he supposed Thelwall was there (Alfoxten House) at this time" (p. 82). Walsh's reaction to mention of Thelwali's name might be evidence of his surprise to hear of the radical in Stowey, or it might simply have been his means of entering into conversation with the strangers at the inn. He did gain there the information that the inhabitants of Alfoxden were "disaffected Englishmen" rather than French, and he did learn the identity of Alfoxden's lessee: "His name is Wordsworth, a name I think not unknown to Mr. Ford the Under-Secretary." Why the Under-Secretary would know of Wordsworth at this time presents a crux for which I can offer no clue.
On the next day (August 16) Walsh reported on Coleridge, Poole, and Thelwall:

... Mr Poole is a Tanner and a Man of some property. He is a most Violent Member of the Corresponding Society and a strenuous supporter of Its Friends. He has with him at this time a Mr Coldridge /sic/ and his wife both of whom he has supported since Christmas last. This Coldridge came last from Bristol and is reckoned a Man of superior Ability /sic/ He is frequently publishing, and I am told is soon to produce a new work. He has a press in the House and I am informed He prints as well as publishes his own productions.

Mr Poole with his disposition, is the more dangerous from his having established in this Town, what He stiles The Poor Man's Club, and placing himself at the head of It, By the Title of the Poor Man's Friend. I am told that there are 150 poor Men belonging to this Club, and that Mr Poole has the intire command of every one of them. When Mr Thelwall was here, he was continually with Mr Poole.

By the direction on a letter that was going to the post Yesterday, It appears that Thelwall is now at Bristol. ...

It is reported here that Thelwall is to return soon to this place and that he is to occupy a part of Alfoxton House. (pp. 82-85)

Eagleston argues that Lysons' letter (August 11) contains no news of Thelwall, yet drew Walsh from London; therefore, the government agent came because Wordsworth was thought to be a French spy. It is as likely that Lysons' first letter (August 8) mentioned Thelwall's visit to the area. Walsh's report from the Globe Inn shows that the visit was the topic of common tavern talk. Furthermore, the Home Secretary knew of Thelwall's presence in Bristol from the Mayor's letter of the previous day (August 7). I would argue that Walsh had been following Thelwall as best he could, and thus came into the Bristol area, where he might have suspected Thelwall of treating with French spies to help plan an invasion.

But two important facts are clear. First, Coleridge's humorous story about a clownish spy mistaking Spinoza for "Spy Nozy" misrepresents
the seriousness of the affair. Probably Coleridge encountered one of the native informants, as Eagleston suggests. Walsh was a clever operative of sufficient ability to work at the center of the most important investigation of the decade: the State Trials of 1794. Second, Walsh's investigation did place Wordsworth and Coleridge in real danger. Coleridge had been a journalist bitterly hostile to Pitt and the war, and he had long corresponded with Thelwall. At least one letter to him from Thelwall went undelivered. Wordsworth had twice visited revolutionary France; his manuscript "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" was by 1797 clearly treasonable. The poet's scrutiny of the sea was not laughable to the government, for the Bristol channel harbored Britain's second largest trading fleet. If a roundup of suspicious persons had been ordered as in 1794, Wordsworth and Coleridge would have been likely candidates. In the absence of habeas corpus they might have been held for months, perhaps even until hostilities with France ceased. Early in 1796, before any mutinies had taken place and before French invasion threatened, the aristocrat Francis Grey (later prime minister) had considered himself to be in danger. Consequently, Under-Secretary King's injunction to Walsh was ominous: "... above all you will be careful not to give them any cause of alarm that if necessary they may be found on the spot."

When Thelwall proposed to live at Nether-Stowey, Coleridge and Poole realized the potential danger. That Thelwall still enjoyed their esteem is shown by Coleridge's letter of introduction to Josiah Wade in

the town of Bristol:

John Thelwall is a very warm hearted honest man--and disagreeing, as we do, on almost every point of religion, of morals, of politics, and of philosophy; we like each other uncommonly well--He is a great favorite with Sara. Energetic Activity, of mind and of heart, is his Master-feature. He is prompt to conceive, and still prompter to execute--. But I think, that he is deficient in that patience of mind, which can look intensely and frequently at the same subject. He believes and disbelieves with impassioned confidence--I wish to see him doubting and doubting and doubting. However, he is the man for action--he is intrepid, eloquent, and--honest.--Perhaps the only acting Democrat, that is honest. (C. L., I, 339)

After he met Thelwall, Wade responded to Coleridge:

Thank you for the character of Thelwall. So far as I was able to judge it is very just. He dined with me on his return--we went down to Pill by water & walk'd back. Some People would accuse him of too much levity; but you know my opinion is that there is, "a time for all things"--we went out to be merry & laugh. (C. L., 339 n)

On August 19 Coleridge informed Thelwall of the problem: "I am sad at heart about you on many accounts; but chiefly anxious for this present business.--The Aristocrats seem determined to persecute, even Wordsworth. --But we will at least not yield without a struggle--and if I cannot get you near me, it will not be for want of a tryal on my part" (I, 341). True to his word, the following day he asked John Chubb, former Mayor of Bridgewater, for assistance. The rhetoric he employs is interesting:

I write to you on the subject of Thelwall. He had found by experience that neither his own health nor that of his Wife & children can be preserved in London; and were it otherwise, yet his income is inadequate to maintain him there. He is therefore under the necessity of fixing his residence in the Country. But by his particular exertions in the propagation of those principles, which we hold sacred & of the the highest importance, he has become, as you well know, particularly unpopular, thro' every part of the kingdom--in every part of the kingdom, therefore, some odium, & inconvenience must be incurred by those, who should be instrumental in procuring him a cottage there--but are Truth & Liberty of so little importance

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that we owe no sacrifices to them? And because with talents very
great, & disinteredness undoubted, he has evinced himself, in acti-
vity & courage, superior to any other to him?--There are many rea-
sons for his preferring this to any other part of the kingdom / he
will here find the society of men equal to himself in talents, &
probably superior in acquired knowledge--of men, who differ from
each other very widely in many very important opinions, yet unite in
in the one great duty of unbounded tolerance.--If the day of dark-
ness & tempest should come, it is most probable, that the influence
T. would be very great on the lower classes--it may therefore prove
of no mean utility to the cause of Truth & Humanity, that he had
spent some years in a society, where his natural impetuosity had
been disciplined into patience, and salutary scepticism, and the
slow energies of a calculating spirit. (I, 341-42)

But Chubb left the decision to Poole, and Coleridge realized
that he could not ask his old friend to harbor any more suspicious char-
acters. His letter to Thelwall records the alienation experienced by
the little group at Stowey:

... the hope, which I had entertained, that you could have settled
here without any, the remotest interference of Poole, has vanished.
To such interference on his part there are insuperable difficulties--
the whole Malignity of the Aristocrats will converge to him, as to
the one point--his tranquillity will be perpetually interrupted--
his business, & his credit, hampered & distressed by vexatious ca-
lumnies--the ties of relationship weakened--perhaps broken--& lastly,
his poor Mother made miserable--the pain of the Stone aggravated by
domestic calamity & quarrels betwixt her son & love for these fifty
years.--Very great odium T. Poole incurred by bringing me here--my
peacable manners & known attachment to Christianity had almost worn
it away--when Wordsworth came & he likewise by T. Poole's agency
settled here--/ You cannot conceive the tumult, calumnies, & ap-
paratus of threatened persecutions which this event has occasioned
round about us. If you too should come, I am afraid, that even riots
and dangerous riots might be the consequence/ either of us separately
would perhaps be tolerated--but all three together--what can it be
less than plot & damned conspiracy--a school for the propagation of
demagogy & atheism? (I, 343-44)

Not only was Thelwall prevented from settling but Wordsworth was
literally forced out of Alfoxden by the trustee of the estate, Mrs.
Albys. On September Tom Poole wrote her a long letter defending
Wordsworth's character and directly addressing the sore point:

But I have been informed you have heard that Mr. Wordsworth does keep company, and on this head I fear the most infamous falsehoods have reached your ears. Mr. Wordsworth is a man fond of retirement--fond of reading and writing--and has never had above two gentlemen with him at a time. By accident Mr. Thelwall, as he was travelling through the neighborhood, called at Stowey. The person he called on at Stowey took him to Alfoxen. No person at Stowey nor Mr. Wordsworth knew of his coming. Mr. Wordsworth had never spoken to him before, nor, indeed, had any one of Stowey. Surely the common duties of hospitality were not to be refused to any man; and who would not be interested in seeing such a man as Thelwall, however they may disapprove of his sentiments or conduct?28

Poole argued glibly but unsuccessfully. On Midsummer's Day, 1798, Wordsworth vacated Alfoxden. Perhaps because there was no nearby available house to rent, perhaps because he felt disgust for this expensive persecution, he and Coleridge decided the time was right to complete their long-standing plans for a visit to Germany.

The effect of Thelwall's visit, then, was extensive, though perhaps it is exaggerated by H. M. Margoliouth in Wordsworth and Coleridge:

Thelwall . . . did something towards deflecting the course of English poetry. . . . If there had been a second year at Alfoxden, we cannot say what would have followed--perhaps a permanent settlement in Somerset. Wordsworth was not so wedded to his native north; he had spent comparatively little time there since leaving school. There might have been no Lake School, but a Quantock School, of poetry. If Coleridge had never been lured to Keswick, he might never have become an opium addict and his might have survived. . . . I think we should have had Tintern Abbey, for it was due. We might perhaps, have lost the Lucy poems, born of bitter nostalgia in Germany.29


Margoliouth passes over the possibility that Thelwall might have joined the "Quantock School." In poetic ability the lecturer fell far beneath his friends. But they recognized his talent as a critic. Coleridge accepted this emendations to "Religious Musings," and Wordsworth noted many years later that both he and Coleridge respected Thelwall's ear and his blank verse. Furthermore, Thelwall could have contributed his first-hand information of how industrial workers suffered in the Midlands and how rural areas continued to be depopulated by enclosure and the factory system. Because Wordsworth continued to reside in the relatively undeveloped Lake District throughout his life, he was later somewhat protected from the full impact of these problems.

But the poets' friendship with Thelwall continued. Had it not there might indeed have been no "Tintern Abbey." Early in the spring of 1798 Thelwall finally leased a farm near Liswen in the Wye Valley. In a recent study Geoffrey Little argues that Wordsworth either made an unrecorded visit to Liswen or received a long description of the farm from Thelwall. He notes similarities between Thelwall's published description of it in 1801 with the initial landscape sketched in "Tintern Abbey." The description follows:

Thelwall was principally influenced by the wild and picturesque scenery of the neighborhood. For the village (embowered with orchards, and overshadowed by grotesque mountains) is sweetly situated

---


upon the banks of the Wye, at one of the most beautiful, tho least visited parts of that unrivalled river; and the cottage itself, thro' the branches of the surrounding fruit trees, catches a glimpse--while its alcove (elevated on the remains of an old sepulchral tumulus) commands the full view, of one of the characteristic and more than crescent curves of that ever-varying stream; with its glassy pool sleeping beneath the reflected bank, its rapids above, and roaring cataracts below, bordered with plantations and pendant woods, and diversified with rocks and pastures.\textsuperscript{32}

The setting of "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth noted, is a few miles above the Abbey, where the river is not tidal.

Little produces striking evidence for this speculation that Wordsworth visited Thelwall in May, 1798, and that this visit sharpened the recollections he would make in July when the poem was written.

Wordsworth composed "Anecdote for Fathers" before May 16. In the Fenwick note to that poem he speaks of having recently visited Liswyn Farm, which is mentioned in the poem as well.\textsuperscript{33} The period from May 10 to May 15 is blank in Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal.\textsuperscript{34} If Wordsworth was thinking of Liswen Farm and Thelwall when he wrote "Tintern Abbey," the fact may shed some new light on one of the poem's loveliest passages:

\begin{quote}
For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity. (11. 88-91)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32}Thelwall, Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement, pp. xxv-xxvi. The passage is written in the third person because Thelwall is quoting a biography that appeared in a magazine.


III

In the years 1797 and 1798 Wordsworth wrote poems that show the vital influence of John Thelwall. Certain passages demonstrate close parallels to work previously published by Thelwall.35 The parallels reveal a kinship between two minds infatuated with the experience of nature and fascinated by the formation of personality, common enough interests in the 1790's, but interests treated in a similar fashion by these two poets.36 In addition, The Excursion shows remarkable parallels to The Peripatetic in structure and theme.

Thelwall's influence may be outlined as follows: his musings on the processes by which natural scenery influences intellectual growth; his championship of traditional rural labor and his criticism of the factory system; his novel's structural similarity to The Excursion; and his mandates that poets should observe nature with fresh eyes. Lines on these topics correspond to passages in "Tintern Abbey," "To My Sister," and "The Thorn," written in 1798, as well as in The Excursion The Prelude, "Michael," and the Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

The relationship between Thelwall and Wordsworth during 1797-98 has already been noted. As early as September, 1797, Wordsworth knew that because of Thelwall's visit he might lose the lease to Alfoxden. It is likely that he felt some affinity for Thelwall as he planned for

the future throughout the winter and spring. What communication they
might have had is uncertain; no letters survive but Wordsworth might
have used them discreetly. He and his sister Dorothy visited London in
December to offer *The Borderers* at Drury Lane. Little's speculation
that they made an unrecorded visit to Liswen is probable. On any of
these occasions Wordsworth might have conversed with Thelwall. It is
certain that Coleridge possessed *The Peripatetic* from June 22, 1796.
He could have shared it with Wordsworth any time before or after Thel-
wall's visit in July, 1797.

Although "Tintern Abbey" is the awesome original creation of
Wordsworth's mind, it contains passages remarkably similar to lines in
*The Peripatetic*. There Thelwall asserts his conviction "... that me-
mony and reflection are something more than impassive vacancy, or imma-
terial suggestion: that they dwell in the vital essence of the blood,
and are modifications of that susceptible organization without which
the breath that gives us life were nothing."\(^{37}\) He also notes that
memory performs a specific service for one who enjoys natural scenes:
He hopes "that future feelings may atone/For scenes I can no more recall.
(I, 102). These feelings were "sympathy" and "benevolence": who, he
asked, cannot

> . . . feel the generous thought prevail
> From Nature's hand on all around
> Meads graz'd by flocks, and choral shades
> Since love's benignant stamp is found
> And sympathy thro all pervades? (I, 102)

\(^{37}\) *The Peripatetic, or Sketches of the Heart, of Nature and
Society* (London, 1793), II, 133. Subsequent references will appear in
the text.
Taken together, the preceding sentiments strikingly resemble the initial observation Wordsworth makes upon the opening scene of "Tintern Abbey," a scene he might have viewed at Thelwall's farm:

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. 38

The phrases "felt along the blood" and "feelings, too, of unremembered pleasure" are conspicuous.

Moreover, Thelwall explains how his mind interacted with the external scenes of nature. He admits that early in his life he harbored a cruel tendency:

... nor was it till frequent opportunities of contemplating, with enamored eye, the varied beauties of creation, in my eccentric ram­bles, and indulging the poetical studies to which they conducted, had soothed and meliorated my heart, that the blossoms of sensibility began to unfold themselves, and I wakened to a sympathetic feeling for every sentient tennant of this m--peopled sphere. (I,101)

"Meditation," and "The Muse, Wild Fancy's Child" transformed his experience of "the varied beauty of creation." Thelwall stresses the importance of contemplation to his mature personality in lines quite similar

to those of Wordsworth:

Nor yet external scenes alone
The moralizing theme impart--
Your searching glances, inward thrown,
Correct the feelings of the heart, (I, 102)

In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth confesses not youthful cruelty
but "the coarser pleasures of my boyish days." That pleasure was

An appetite: a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. (II, 261)

He has learned to look on nature "hearing oftentimes/The still, sad music
of humanity," much as Thelwall preaches:

Ah! sure where'er a nerve is found
To feel delight, or suffer woe,
There man, by every tie is bound
Or this to ward or that bestow. (I, 102)

Thelwall's abstract statement, "Love's benignant stamp is found/And
Sympathy thro all pervades," may have stimulated Wordsworth to conjure
the elaborate imagery of the lines beginning, "And I have felt/A presence
that disturbs me. . . ."

Thelwall defends the sentiments he has learned from nature:
"I cannot see why the finest susceptibilities of nature should not be
considered as worthy of those who boast the highest order of natural
intellect or why reason, which is only the aggregate of sensation, col-
lected and exhibited in lucid focus, should think she shows her own
strength and dignity . . . by stifling them. . . . Nor can I recollect
that the feelings I have thus fondly cherished have ever betrayed
This passage recalls two from "Tintern Abbey": the poet is "well pleased to recognize/In Nature and the language of the sense/The anchor of my purest thoughts"; and, therefore, "this prayer I make/Knowing that Nature never did betray/The heart that loved her" (II, 261-62).

The process by which natural scenes stimulate and purify the imagination through the agency of fear is one of the major themes of The Prelude. The fear Wordsworth associates with certain natural objects is very similar to the effect of "sublimity" in Burke's Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, as J. B. Owen points out in "The Sublime and Beautiful in The Prelude."

In Book I, "Childhood and School-Time," Wordsworth narrates examples such as the "Stolen Boat" episode. He talks of deliberately placing himself in danger when gathering birds' eggs from mountain crags. Burke, of course, does not discuss the effect of sublime sights upon the maturing child. But in The Peripatetic Thelwall recalls his childhood love of wild, dangerous places on account of their effects upon his imagination:

And I who frequent, from my infant years,  
Led on by curious Fancy's daring hand,  
With "hairbreadth scapes" and dangers imminent,  
Have toy'd familiar--Who, in pensive mood--  
Oft by the rushing torrents crumbling foam  
High tottering, or deep eddie overhung  
By writhing oak, or willow's weeping spray,  
Fit couch, fit canopy for brooding thought  
At Evening's solemn hour . . . or sublime,  
On the cloud-propping cliff's tremendous brow,  
Have woo'd the awful dread that thrills the soul,  
And wakes Imagination's wildest dreams  
Till the dazed sight turns fearful. (II, 192)

In a crucial passage of *The Prelude*, composed between March 19 and June 25, 1798, Wordsworth describes how he often listened to the sounds of the woods in order to gain "the visionary power":

> I would walk alone,  
> In storm and tempest, or in star-light nights  
> Beneath the quiet Heavens; and, at that time,  
> Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound  
> To breathe an elevated mood, by form  
> Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,  
> Beneath wome rock, listening to sounds that are  
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,  
> Or make their dim abode in distant winds.  
> Thence did I drink the visionary power.40

Several briefer poems that Wordsworth composed in 1798 show analogues to *The Peripatetic*. The theme of "To My Sister" is remarkably similar to that of the humorous opening scene of the novel. The narrator, Sylvanus, had risen early to work in his study, only to be distracted by the scene outside his window: "Now that heaven sheds abroad the cheerful, genial radiance of the spring, and vegetation, almost visibly shooting forth to meet the joyful ardor, offers the most invigorating pleasures to the corporeal and intellectual eye;--How inconsistent would it be, neglectful of all the allurements of the season, to consume the day in the confines of the study" (I, 7). Wordsworth may have read this passage and transformed it from a lecture to a brief conversational lyric:

> My sister ('tis a wish of mine)  
> Now that our morning meal is done,  
> Make haste, your morning task resign;  
> Come forth and feel the sun.

40 *The Prelude* (1805), Book II.11.321-30. For the sake of more precise notations, I will refer to *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* by book and line.
Edward will come with you, and pray,
Put on with speed your woodland dress,
And bring no book: for this one day
We'll give to idleness.

No joyless form shall regulate
Our living calendar:
We from to-day, my Friend, will date
The opening of the year. (IV, 59)

When Wordsworth composed "The Thorn" in April, 1798, he had first seen the tree in the light of a storm, and then sought for "some invention . . . to make this thorn permanently an impressive object as the storm has made it to my eyes at this moment" (II, 511). He might have found the requisite invention in that scene of The Peripatetic in which Sylvanus, Ambulator, and Arisor catch a glimpse of a mysterious woman kneeling by a gravestone. Sylvanus explains that "she is frequently seen plucking nuts, and berries, and wild fruits, upon which she is supposed to exist" (II, 138). "So extraordinary an appearance," he continues, "could not fail of filling the ignorant with superstition, and the credulous rustics tell many improbable stories about her." He relates one story of murdered lovers, but Arisor debunks it as a legend far older than the tombstone in question. Wordsworth, on the other hand, had a sharp interest in "the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind" (II, 511). Consequently, he made the superstitious story-teller the object of his poem.

In The Excursion Wordsworth borrowed similar topics in order to transform them. Also, The Excursion clearly depends upon The Peripatetic to a significant degree. In 1814 Wordsworth's friend and early interpreter, Henry Crabb Robinson, noted in his diary that "Wordsworth borrows without acknowledgement from Thelwall himself." He had just
returned from Thelwall's home, where the two had discussed The Excursion. Thelwall had accorded it high praise, although he apparently did not suggest his own influence.  

On March 11, 1798, Wordsworth wrote James Losh that he was working on a poem to be entitled "The Recluse; or Views of Nature, Man and Society." The Recluse, of course, eventually materialized as The Excursion and The Prelude. Thelwall's complete title is The Peripatetic, or Sketches of the Heart, of Nature and Society; In a Series of Poli­co-Sentimental Journals, in Verse and Prose, of the Eccentric Excursions of Sylvanus Theophrastus. The parallels of character and plot have been capably outlined by Judson Stanley Lyon:  

In The Peripatetic one of the characters is alluded to as "The Wanderer," which may have suggested that name to Wordsworth. Theophrastus in The Peripatetic represents Thelwall himself and corresponds to the Poet of The Excursion. Thelwall's Ambulator resembles Wordsworth's Wanderer, for he is a wise antiquarian with a great love for humble life. Arisor in The Peripatetic corresponds to the misanthropic Solitary. Both works present philosophical and social views through dialogue; both show great interest in local topography. . . . The Peripatetic has a passage on the observation of regular living habits as a key to health, much as The Excursion does. There is a long passage on the advantages and disadvantages of commerce in The Peripatetic, just as in The Excursion. There is also a strikingly similar graveyard scene in The Peripatetic, in which the characters moralize over selected graves somewhat as they do in The Excursion, Books VI and VII. Thelwall's acute social consciousness colors much of The Peripatetic, and in several other points, such as the occasional touches of


humor, the urban setting, and the extensive use of prose, this work differs vastly from The Excursion.43

Although this is generally correct, some qualifications should be noted. First, Thelwall's passage praising "regular living habits" is countered by many passages celebrating the eccentricities of the narrator, who on occasion walks all night in pursuit of a love affair with the moon. Second, Lyon does not consider a major difference, namely that Wordsworth fills The Excursion with a host of stories about absent characters, some living, some dead, in the manner of Crabbe's Parish Register. Thelwall, on the other hand, tells few stories that do not directly concern the central cast of characters. In this respect The Peripatetic is a novel. Third, its setting is less "urban" than suburban: the most important scenes take place in a rural setting.

Lyon fails to specify the common theme informing both works: optimism. In a paper recently read to the Wordsworth Society entitled "Why Read The Excursion?," Russell Noyes abstracts the poem's argument: "the vindication of man's right to hope by the overcoming of despondency through the re-establishment of general knowledge."44 Neither the Wanderer nor the Peripatetic doubt that their despondent friends will ultimately return to joy. In his solution Wordsworth combines a somewhat unorthodox version of Christian hope with mystical pantheism.45 Thelwall

45 Lyon offers an extended examination of this problematic theme in The Excursion: A Study, pp. 90-119.
offers a scheme by which sensitivity to nature leads one to social benevolence, but he also insists upon the destruction of outworn social conventions, most notably, the arranged marriage.

The "strikingly similar" graveyard scene shows how Wordsworth transmuted a common theme. Thelwall's scene begins with a speech one would expect to find in Wordsworth's poem. The antiquarian Wentworth praises the little church at the cemetery:

"Within these walls, perhaps, the bonds of fraternal affection, which unite the little society in virtuous harmony, have been most kindly knit. Here Charity has learned to bestow her frugal mite to best advantage; simple Nature has indulged her grateful feelings for the humble blessings that are scattered around, and artless Purity has poured forth her sainted prayer. Here, too, virgin Innocence has blushed at the unpolluted altar, that yielded her to the honest lover of her unbiased choice; and the venerable Pastor, whose unsullied life accorded with his lesson, had enforced perhaps, the duties of morality and religion by the example he was first to set."

But Thelwall's sense of realism intrudes:

The loud laugh of Arisor interrupted this rhapsody. "Tut," he said, "We are not now in Arcadia. The simplicity of Thurlby's clowns would give you, I fear, but an indifferent image of Saturnian days. I would not lay a bottle of home-brewed ale against all the maidenheads in the village." (II, 111-13)

Although at first glance Thelwall's satire seems diametrically opposed to Wordsworth's sentiment, the two are not so far apart. Thelwall's satire is local and temporal: the village of Thurlby has absorbed vices from the town and university, Arisor soon explains. The rural ideals are not disputed; rather, their actuality is doubted. Many passages in The Peripatetic celebrate the simple, rural life (i.e. I, 130-42). In The Excursion Wordsworth may not accept the viability of the village
ethos, but he nevertheless dwells on it. He offers two complete books (VI and VII) of exempla generated by the churchyard, while in The Peri­patetic Thelwall turns to a satire on the church pastor. For Thelwall the dead are not always to be trusted. The party exclaims over an es­pecially moralistic epitaph until Arisor notices that it marks the grave of a gipsy.

Despite his scepticism Thelwall does celebrate the simple joys of those live in humble cottages. In a poem he wrote at Gloucestershire in August, 1797, he contrasts the then disappearing cottage weavers with factory workers:

Here holier industry,
Even from the dawning to the wester ray,
And oft by midnight taper, patient, plies
Her task assiduous; and the day with songs,
The night with many an earth star, far descried
By the lone traveller, cheers amidst her toil.
Nor cheerless she; nor to her numerous race--
If semblance may be trusted--(as too oft)
Like a penurious step-dame, scantily
The appointed task rewarding. By her side
Sits lowly Comfort, in her decent stole
(If homely, yet commonious) dealing round
The well-earn'd bread of sustenance; while shout
The circling infants; their sleek ruddy cheeks,
Like the sunn'd side of brown Pomona's fruit,
Gladden the kindred eye. Ah! 'tis a scene
That wakes to social rapture. (Poems . . . Retirement, p. 137)

The picture of the weavers, incidentally, parallels that of the family cottage in Wordsworth's "Michael":

Down from the ceiling by the chimney's edge,
Which in our ancient uncouth country style
Did with a huge projection overbrow
Large space beneath, as duly as the light
Of day grew dim, the House-wife hung a lamp:
An aged utensil, which had perform'd
Service beyond all others of its kind.
Early at evening did it burn and late,
Surviving Comrade of uncounted Hours
Which going by from year to year had found
And left the Couple neither gay perhaps
Nor cheerful, yet with objects and with hopes
Living a life of eager industry. (II, 83-84)

In the second half of his contrast Thelwall attacks the factory system for destroying "relative endearment":

Nor, as yet,
Towers from each peaceful dell the unwieldy pride
Of factory overgrown; where Opulence,
Dispeopling the neat cottage, crowds his walls
(made pestilent by congregated lungs,
And lewd association) with a race
Of infant slaves, brok'n timely to the yoke
Of unremitting Drudgery--no more
By relative endearment, or the voice
Of matronly instruction, interspers'd--
Cheering, or sage; nor by the sports relax'd
(To such how needful) of their unknit prime
Once deem'd the lawful charter. Little here
Intrude such pompous mansions--better miss'd. (pp. 137-38)

This contrast closely parallels two related passages from Book VIII of The Excursion in which first the Wanderer, and then the Solitary, criticize factories:

"Domestic bliss
(Or call it comfort, by a humbler name,)
How art thou blighted for the poor Man's heart!
Lo! in such neighborhood, from morn to eve,
The habitations empty! or perchance
The Mother left alone, --no helping hand
To rock the cradle of her peevish babe;
No daughters round her, busy at the wheel,
Or in dispatch of each day's little growth
Of household occupation; no nice arts
Of needle-work; no bustle at the fire,
Where once the dinner was prepared with pride;
Nothing to speed the day, or cheer the mind;
Nothing to praise, to teach, or to command!"
"The Father, if perchance he still retain
His old employments, goes to field or wood,
No longer led or followed by the Sons;
Idlers perchance they were,—but in his sight;
Breathing fresh air, and treading the green earth;
Till their short holiday of childhood ceased,
Ne'er to return! That birthright now is lost." (VIII.262-82)

These structures rose, commingling old and young,
And unripen sex with sex, for mutual taint." (VIII.339-40)

Their social criticism continues into the final Book of The Excursion where the Wanderer warns against what he considers the dynamic of the new industrial system:

"Our life is turned
Out of her course, wherever man is made
An offering, or a sacrifice, a tool
Or implement, a passive thing employed
As a brute mean, without acknowledgment
Of common right or interest in the end;
Used or abused, as selfishness may prompt." (IX.113-19)

In Thelwall's final political publication The Rights of Nature, which Coleridge sold for him in 1797, the same warning occurs:

But foul befal the man, and foul befal the government, that considers the great mass of the people as mere brute machines; insensate instruments of physical force, deprived of all power, and destitute of reason, or information. . . .46

Criticism of contemporary society reaches a climax in The Excursion in the Wanderer's famous speech on the need for educating the masses:

He paused, as if revolving in his soul
Some weighty matter; then, with fervent voice
And an impassioned majesty, exclaimed—

"O for the coming of that glorious time
When, prizing knowledge as her noblest wealth
And best protection, this imperial Realm,

While she exacts allegiance, shall admit
An obligation, on her part, to teach
Them who are born to serve her and obey;
Binding herself by statute to secure
For all the children whom her soil maintains
The rudiments of letters, and inform
The mind with moral and religious truth. . . ." (IX.290-302)

In The Peripatetic Thelwall calls upon Parliament to fund and regulate free schools for all British children (III, 39-41).

A final possible influence of Thelwall is more difficult to pinpoint. In The Peripatetic several passages suggest distinctly Wordsworthian sentiments. Whether they are sources is uncertain; perhaps they only show a further kinship of mind between the two men. Throughout The Peripatetic Thelwall stresses the importance of close observation of nature. He praises "the will with which the Muse, or the Moon inspires me, which from the most frivolous adventures, and the most ordinary objects has so often extracted the sweets of amusing meditation" (II, 72). We have a habit, he writes, "of thinking nothing wonderful which we have frequent opportunities of observing" (I, 93). One is fit for neither poetry nor life if one cannot "give to every object something more of beauty or excellence than it intrinsically possesses in the eye of critical enquiry" (I, 131).

Ideas like these dominated the minds of Wordsworth and Coleridge when they planned and composed their Lyrical Ballads. Years later Coleridge recalled Wordsworth's "original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle, and the
As years passed the friendship among the three men diminished. If Thelwall's love of natural scenes withstood the terrible harvest and winter of 1799-1800 in Wales, his finances did not. The death of his daughter, Maria, supplied the final stimulus to return to London where he found he could earn money by teaching the art of persuasive speaking, set up a school of elocution and eventually became renowned for curing stammerers. His methods delighted Crabb Robinson, who recorded astonishment at seeing a group of stutterers recite Milton's *Comus* with perfect enunciation. Thelwall placed intellectual as well as physical distance between himself and the Lake Poets by holding to his democratic convictions and by continuing his friendship with veteran radicals. In 1815, Robinson reports, Thelwall was one of three men he knew who regretted the outcome of Waterloo. "It proceeds," he writes tolerantly, "from an inveterate hatred of old names." By that time the names of Wordsworth and Coleridge had become old, if not hateful, to Thelwall.

The dissolution of his friendship with Coleridge may be traced through their correspondence. In January, 1798, Coleridge apologized to Thelwall for a misunderstanding about his offer to sell the latter's political pamphlet (*Letters, I, 382*). In March Coleridge wrote his brother George that "The opposition and the Democrats are not only

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47 *Biographia*, I, 127.

48 Robinson, I, 326; 315-16.
vicious—they wear the filthy garments of vice. . . . I have snapped my squeaking baby-trumpet of Sedition & the fragments lie scattered in the lumber-room of Penitence (I, 396-7). A year and a half later, in December, 1800, he sent Thelwall £10 which he said was sent by "a young man . . . whose principles are not over democratic, but who honours your talents and purity of intention. . . ." Perhaps by this story Coleridge covered his own generosity toward his afflicted friend. He concluded by asking "Have you any religious faith?" (I, 655-6)

The bad harvest and the death of his daughter had apparently strengthened Thelwall's disbelief and thus sharpened the tone of his response, for a month later Coleridge concluded the long-standing debate on religion:

You entirely misunderstood me as to religious matters.--You love your wife, children, & friends, you worship Nature, and you dare hope, nay, have faith in, the future improvement of the human race.--this is true Religion. Your notions about the historical credibility or non-credibility of a sacred Book, your assent to or dissent from the existence of a supramundane Deity, or personal God, are absolutely indifferent to me, mere figures of a magic Lantern. I hold my faith--you keep yours. (II, 667)

And in April, when Thelwall asked for criticism of his Poems Written Chiefly in Retirement, Coleridge was abrupt:

. . . we are so utterly unlike each other in our habits of thinking, and we have adopted such irreconcilably different opinions in Politics, Religion & Metaphysics (& probably in Taste, too) that, I fear,--I fear--I do not know how to express myself--but such, I fear is the chasm between us, that so far from being able to shake hands across it, we cannot even make our words intelligible to each other.--Moral Esteem, frequent & kind wishes, & a lively Interest in your welfare as a good Man & man of Talents make up in my mind for the too great want of similitude in our intellectual Habits and modes of Faith; (and, I presume, the same holds good in your feelings towards me.) (II, 723)

He also asked Thelwall not to mention his name in the memoirs appended to the volume.
For the next two years, there is no record of any communication between them. Then in the autumn of 1803, Thelwall was planning to visit Coleridge at Keswick, and Coleridge asked him to run an errand on the way: "If this Letter reach you in time, you will oblige me by going to the best Druggist in Kendal for me, & purchasing an ounce of crude opium, & 9 ounces of Laudanum, the Latter put in a stout bottle & so packed up as that it may travel a few hundred miles with safety." He also asked Thelwall to bring an edition of Duns Scotus' *Super Tertio Sententiarum*, about which he joked: "You will laugh heartily at travelling in a Gig with old Duns Scotus as a companion" (II, 1019-20).

Probably Thelwall laughed over neither the opium nor the scholastic philosophy. This is their last recorded correspondence.

By 1816 Coleridge's bondage to opium had become so secure that he was planning to place himself under the care of Dr. Gillman of Highgate. Having been attacked bitterly for more than two years by William Hazlitt for political apostasy, Coleridge was becoming an adamant Tory. When writing to the Anglican theologian Hugh J. Rose he presented a revisionist portrait of his old political ally:

In the year 1797, my humble cottage at Stowey was honored by a visit which I had made some ineffectual efforts to prevent, and owed to an utter misconception of my opinions, literary, religious, moral & political--a visit from the then notorious, and now somewhat more innocuously *sic* celebrated, Citizen John Thelwall. (Poor fellow! he had, I am persuaded, as honest a heart as was compatible with his exceedingly profound ignorance of his ignorance, and the restless Babble and Squeak of his Vanity and Discontent.) On the evening of his arrival Citizen John received the first of many shocks from Hartley Coleridge's being made to kneel at mine and his mother's feet and with his little hands folded, helped out with a part of the Lord's prayer. He took occasion to dilate on his own determination to preserve the minds of his own children from any bias in favor of notions which they could not appreciate or even understand; the injustice and monstrous tyranny and usurpation of which had (he asserted) been so irrefragably proved
by the eloquent philosopher in Geneva (Rousseau)! I entreated him to have compassion on the weak in philosophic faith, or rather to regard what he had witnessed as a proof of what I had before told him, and which I was so unwilling to believe--viz. that alike on the grounds of Taste, Morals, Politics, and Religion, he and I had no one point of coincidence. On the next morning as we stepped out into my Garden, he exclaimed with much vivacity--"Hey day! what do you call this? 'My Botanic Garden!' 'Botanic Garden! why it is a wilderness of weeds!' 'Truly, the plants are mostly indigenous!' 'Poh! but it is such a nice little spot--it has so many capabilities, that it is quite a shame!' 'Nay! BUT HEAR ME BEFORE YOU CONDEMN. I intended to educate it strictly on the Rousseau Plan, and to have preserved it from all artificial Semination--but I don't know how--the beasts from Hell, or the winds of chance have filled it chockful with Nettles, Hensbane, Nightshade, Devil's-bit, Fool's-Parsley, and (taking up the Plant (Rhinanthus Cristi-Galli) as I looked steadfastly at him) COXCOMBS, Citizen John!' (IV, 879-80)

Two years later Thelwall offered a more public and somewhat kinder picture of Coleridge. He wrote in The Champion, a periodical which he had purchased to work with the new generation of radicals. Commenting on a new lecture series Coleridge was just beginning in London, he defines his old friend's talent in a way that modern readers should appreciate:

The name of Coleridge has a great charm in it, which we should be sorry to see dissolved. His great learning--the known extent of his out-of-the-way reading, the torrent of fine, and of extraordinary ideas, which he can occasionally pour forth,--his original, though unorganized genius,--nay, his very eccentricities, cast a sort of mysterious spell about him, that transports us out of the ordinary present, and makes him live out our imaginings as a sort of being of another generation, or another sphere: and, perhaps, it is well that he should be so considered. For our own part, at least, we are ready to confess, that we should otherwise have for him some of those feelings which we should be sorry to cherish for so extraordinary a man.

The reason for these feelings was the "violent change" in Coleridge's political professions. But Thelwall goes on to make an insightful, if irreverent analysis of Coleridge's greater intellect:

Alas! poor Coleridge! a seraph! and a worm! At least, a seraph he would have been, had there but been so much of the nerve of any one concentrating principle whatever in his composition, as might
have given consistency to the splendid but disjointed materials of his mind. This, only this, was wanting to his fame!—and it is in vain that the visions of mysticism, and the unintelligibilities of metaphysics & Psychology are applied to, to supply its place. Every production of his genius, every effort of his mind, whether oral or written, bears some stamp and evidence,—some obscuring blot from this primitive deficiency. Let us not be mistaken, however, as though we wished to depreciate these lectures; the very atoms and fragments of such a mind, have a value beyond the perfect coinages of the ordinary class of lecturers. That affluence of fine ideas—that power of expressive language in which he frequently abounds—that store of miscellaneous knowledge, he has so laboriously attained, and which, occasionally, he so happily imparts, entitles him to more than all the patronage that can crown his efforts.49

That Thelwall tendered such profuse praise in spite of the deep political differences between them at that excited time, was a sign of his continued affection for his old friend. Just as in the old days, he thought to help Coleridge improve his financial condition, when the chance arose.

As for Wordsworth, the epilogue is briefer. There is little extant correspondence between the two men. Late in 1803, however, Thelwall ventured into Edinburgh to lecture on the art and science of elocution. There he suffered a merciless ridicule from a group of wits led, he thought, by Francis Jeffrey, editor of the Edinburgh Review. Apparently he was writing to Wordsworth before the lecture, for in January, 1804, just after the lecture, Wordsworth wrote to him: "You may perhaps remember that I told you, there were enemies in wait for you in Edinburgh." In response to the ridicule Thelwall had, as always, written a pamphlet, which Wordsworth here praised and encouraged: "Follow up the attack you have made upon the moral sentiments of the Review, and you may overwhelm them entirely." Wordsworth closed the

49The Champion (December 20, 1818), pp. 808-9, as quoted in Richard W. Armour and Raymond F. Howes, Coleridge the Talker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1940), pp. 399-400.
letter with the hope that they would meet in the summer and discuss "poetic meter."50

The last may have been significant, for Wordsworth was then hard at work on The Prelude, which he mentions in the letter. The compliment was not idle flattery, however, for Wordsworth later wrote to Benjamin Haydon about the verse Thelwall had written on the death of his daughter:

Thelwall's were the anguishes of the unbeliever, and he expressed them vigorously in several copies of blank verse, a metre which he wrote well for he has a good ear. Those effusions of anguish were published but though they have great merit, one cannot read them but with much more pain than pleasure.51

Unlike Coleridge, Wordsworth remained respectful of Thelwall. In the note he dictated to Miss Fenwick in 1842, eight years after Thelwall's death, Wordsworth offered a final recollection of his old friend:

Thelwall really was a man of extraordinary talent, an affectionate husband and a good father. Though brought up in the city, on a tailor's board, he was truly sensible of the beauty of natural objects.52

It is clear that Thelwall won the esteem and love of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge at the time they were incubating their greatest productions. Coleridge strengthened his own religious convictions in a vain attempt to convert Thelwall; perhaps this inter-

52 Poetical Works, I, 241.
change also helped Coleridge establish a stronger sense of his own identity. Certainly, he valued Thelwall's literary criticism. According to Thelwall's advice he altered his then most favored poem, "Religious Musings." To Coleridge Thelwall was in many ways a foil. In terms of Coleridge's own metaphor, Thelwall's mind supplied "a mirror above my boiling pot of ideas," by means of which Coleridge was enabled to skim away and discard his own less useful speculations.

Wordsworth, on the other hand, Thelwall affected differently. His poetic talent rested upon no monument of learning such as Coleridge possessed. His simple boyhood in the Lake District raised in him a love of natural scenes similar, in some ways, to that which grew in Thelwall at the edge of the great metropolis. Also, the stout yeoman cottagers of the North inclined Wordsworth toward practical democracy of mutual sympathy and respect. Thelwall's ideas about the moral effects gained by contemplating nature, and his ideas about the need in England for a democracy based not upon money but upon the mutual sympathy won from nature fell upon fertile ground when shared with Wordsworth, who was arriving at similar conclusions. Thelwall influenced "Tintern Abbey," one of Wordsworth's greatest poems, and he influenced the crucial books of The Excursion, which Wordsworth considered "the crowning expression of his genius."53 Because of Thelwall's friendship the lives of both poets were changed, and the beauty to which they gave birth was altered as well.

53Noyes, p. 139.
CONCLUSION

One summarizes the career of John Thelwall best by naming the paradoxes which seem to have informed it. As a young man Thelwall strove desperately to enter the social class that was marked by education. He educated himself, after a fashion, and set out on a career as a writer with a modicum of talent and a vast exuberance. The literary and intellectual values he met in late-eighteenth-century England raised in him a conviction of the inevitable connection between sensibility, that is, proper education, and social equality. He seized upon his age's dream of brotherhood so firmly that it may be said he himself was seized. In his political actions he became the dream of his age: he rode the crest of his contemporaries' sense of social justice as assuredly as he rode upon their backs through the streets of London after his trial in 1794.

His flaw was his single-mindedness: what Coleridge called simplicity. He was unable to see, or would not see, that intellectual currents are ultimately determined by events. His lack of education no doubt increased his naive sense of its possibilities. When the revolution in France turned violent, then militaristic, in England intellectual assent was withdrawn from democracy and invested in nationalism. Thelwall saw the principles he had learned swept away by a new tide.

It is tempting, but useless, to speculate on the chance of his political success. Perhaps he was close to victory on the issue of the Two Acts, and perhaps Englishmen did nearly refuse that infringement upon their history that Thelwall denounced. But Thelwall's true achievement
must lie in what he left behind, in his works. The heroism--or idiocy--
of his political career is now less important than the thoughts which
motivated him. In his poems, lectures, and his Peripatetic he constructed
a stable base for the democratic sentiment that was cried out in his
time. He wrote that labor is the source of wealth, and saw in this idea
the inevitability of regarding all members of society as a single
organism. Despite his obvious inferiority in learning to the great
thinker Coleridge, Thelwall employed his "sensibility" to discern that
wealth by itself is not the final measure of society nor of the individual.
In his Peripatetic he argued that intimacy with the natural world was
an important complement to, in fact even the cause of, a true under­
standing of social relations and the use of wealth.

How deeply Thelwall impressed this idea upon William Wordsworth
is a question that future studies may continue to investigate. If
Thelwall impressed Wordsworth in the least, he has enriched our liter­
ature. Because he presented his understanding of "the visionary power
of nature" in his own works, he attempted awkwardly but exuberantly to
preserve the sensitivity of his age, an age when it was indeed "bliss
to be alive." For this reason his work deserves continued attention.
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