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Idealism in nineteenth-century British and American literature

RICHARD ELDRIDGE

The topic of the presence of German Idealism in nineteenth-century British and American literature, or its influence on it, is both impossibly large and not readily tractable. One could begin to trace philologically either all or the most important direct engagements of major English-language literary writers with German texts. For example, Coleridge read Kant, Fichte and Schelling, notoriously including in *Biographia Literaria* without attribution several pages translated directly from Schelling's *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre*. George Eliot read and translated Feuerbach and David Strauss; Thomas Carlyle read and was substantially influenced by Fichte in developing his doctrine of the Everlasting Yea, but also by Goethe and especially by Hoffmann, Tieck and Jean Paul in developing the literary form of *Sartor Resartus*, with its peculiar quasi-existentialist resistance to systematicity. Given the mass of material and the variety of engagements, it would, however, be unprofitable, and quite likely impossible, to comb the archives for evidence of every direct textual engagement of a major English-language literary writer with a German Idealist source, at least as long as we lacked a general account of why these engagements took place and a way of arranging them into categories having to do with general themes and ideas that were taken up.

Hence, it will help at the beginning of what will nonetheless be a breathless survey of many cases to distinguish two different kinds of influence of German Idealism on English-language writers: immediate engagement by way of direct reading, including traceable borrowings of images, phrases, themes and so on; and indirect engagement, as English-language writers take up, develop, revise and criticise some of the thinking about human life that is both evident within some major German Idealist texts, but also more broadly circulating within the culture. Figuring out this latter, indirect

mode of engagement amounts to thinking of German Idealist philosophers as engaged with certain problems that are also widely felt throughout modern European culture – problems such as increasing secularisation, increasing commercialisation and increasing urbanisation, all with a consequent pluralisation of modes of life and a consequent sense of difficulty, but also of new possibility, in finding persistently satisfying orientation within actual or available modes of life activity. Like many philosophers, including the German Idealists in various ways, many literary writers respond to such problems, both taking up themes and motifs that are present in Idealist writing – sometimes in direct awareness of this fact, but sometimes not – and also developing distinctive stances of their own in relation to such problems, stances that are typically expressed less in systematic theories than in narratives of engagement with these problems. These narratives then typically do not record simple arrivals at solutions to these problems; instead, they describe partial solutions and partial failures, persisting uncertainties and the unavoidable presence of contingencies, even when a problem of life has been somehow addressed.

In a useful survey essay entitled ‘The Present Situation in Philosophy’, given as his inaugural lecture upon assuming the Professorship of Logic and Metaphysics at Edinburgh in 1919 and published in 1920, Norman Kemp Smith describes the broad stances of Idealism, naturalism and scepticism, and he undertakes to evaluate their respective virtues and vices. All three stances or styles stand, according to Kemp Smith, ‘in a constant relation of interaction and mutual aid’;¹ the virtues of scepticism, he argues, are its openness to diversity and its sense of human vulnerability. ‘It is the enemy of fanaticism and of false sentiment in every form.’² But while ‘valuable as a regulating balance-wheel, [scepticism] can supply no engine power’.³ It is parasitic, destructive and spectatorial. The sceptic is ‘a specialist in the subject of error, and when the community’s stock of error gives out, he is faced by the spectre of unemployment, condemned to idleness until a new crop has been grown’.⁴ Scepticism cannot answer to a genuine need for construction, that is, for the articulation of values – cognitive, epistemic, moral, social, political, cultural, artistic, religious and so on as may be – a grasp of which might enable orientation, guide us in practice and sustain us in a sense of the worth of what we do.

In contrast, naturalism is constructive, but in a spirit that is ‘relative and empiricist’.⁵ It endorses the great modern achievements of science and medicine, and it defends the existence of genuine scientific knowledge, without worrying much about either sense-data or the older epistemological

standpoint that seemed to lead to Humean scepticism. Yet naturalism is unable to characterise and defend the success of science in anything other than pragmatic and circular terms. We see that it works because we see that it works. It tends to enforce a strong fact/value distinction,⁶ hence, undermining any effort to explain why any activity or set of commitments is really valuable in favour of noting that it is just a matter of fact that under certain conditions certain people do certain things. As Kemp Smith puts it, only parts and episodes are of interest to naturalism,⁷ not achievements in the articulation and embodiment of values.

And so Kemp Smith himself argues for Idealism. Only it can even begin to show how 'the objective claims of aesthetics and morals . . . possess some kind of absoluteness'.⁸ 'Progress in human thought'⁹ does take place, both in representing and explaining how material phenomena are and in articulating and embodying values. Even if the project of developing a complete theory of human culture and of commitments to and in practices cannot be completed, it is reasonable to suppose that the histories of art, religion, morality and politics, along with the history, too, of scientific inquiry, show human beings becoming clearer in various ways about what it is worthwhile for them to do. Constructively, we should follow Idealist philosophers and reflect on these various histories, in the hope of articulating yet more clearly and fruitfully what is going on in the courses of achievement of value that they display.

This is an attractive suggestion, and it helps to explain why even with the rise of naturalism, Idealist thinking retains some attractions for many. (One might think of a great deal of post-Hegelian European philosophy as devoted to the investigation of human reality and to the articulation of values the effective pursuit of which is latent within it, yet dropping any claims about the closure or completability of this project, hence leaving room for continuing criticism, improvisation, risk and just plain luck.) Yet we live within a more pragmatic, naturalist and even sceptical climate than was the case in 1919, where in fact positivism was already being developed. It is harder for us than it was for Kemp Smith – and harder for the good reason that we are aware of so many more contingencies, pluralised modes of life and so forth – to accept that there is inchoate but genuine progress in the histories of art, religion, morality and politics that is there to be deciphered and articulated, as opposed to large masses of somehow social-material happenstances.

But then what? My main argumentative suggestion is that some of the most important, major literary writing in English in the nineteenth century, and in fact well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, takes up the problem of how in the Idealist spirit to discern and articulate

values that are inchoately present in human reality, but that literary writing's engagement with these problems is also infused with a sceptical–empiricist–anti-systematic spirit. Naturalism is not a view that is by itself suitable for understanding human life, at least not for generating interesting narratives about what happens or might happen. Casting human actions and engagements in practice as simple reactions to neurons or stimuli, or unalterably given desires, fails to see the complexities of the inheritance, identification, contestation, reflection, criticism and revision of both desires and values that are present within human cultural life. The tendencies towards expressivism and emotivism that naturalism supports provide just too implausible and ultimately useless a story about valuing activity for literary writers to take much interest in it. Nor will scepticism quite do by itself, for just the reasons that Kemp Smith gives. Standing aside and gazing spectatorially on diversity will not help us to articulate what might be of value to us or even what might be persistently tragic in human life, as opposed to merely unfortunate or pathetic.

But if human actions and the attempts to instantiate values that they express are neither to be reduced to immediate reactions to material givens nor gazed on spectatorially from outside, then how are they to be looked upon? A first step will be giving up the representationalist conceit that much seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy inherited from Cartesianism. It is simply not possible to abstract from actual uses of representations within concrete worldly activity, in order instead to consider these representations as somehow present purely in mind, so as then to determine which of them are absolutely reliable and which are not. Instead, we are always already bound up in public claim-making activity, including the activity of making claims about what it is valuable or worthwhile to do (both in an immediate present and in longer courses of joint social life). Whatever reliability claims about values may have, it must show itself within concrete practice. It cannot be established solely internally. A representation existing solely in the medium of the mind, without concrete applications in already existing practice, is as good as a nothing. Hegel famously develops a trenchant criticism of this representationalist conceit in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*. 'A ruse is just what cognition [of whether any particular internal representation is in itself absolutely reliable] would be in such a case, since it would, with its manifold exertions, be giving itself the air of doing something quite different from creating a merely immediate and therefore effortless relationship^{a, 10} to representations in actual use within practices. Any reliable sense of what it

a. 'Denn eine List wäre in diesem Falle das Erkennen, da es durch sein vielfaches Bemühen ganz etwas anderes zu treiben sich die Miene gibt, als nur die unmittelbare und somit mühelose

is genuinely worthwhile to do ‘would surely laugh our little ruse to scorn’,^{b,11} commitments must show themselves to be valuable within concrete, worldly practice, or not at all. This rejection of the representationalist conceit, powerfully present in Hegel, is also figured, somewhat more indirectly, in both Kant and Fichte. Kant rejects, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy usefully put it, any *mathesis* or self-presentation of the subject,¹² and living up to the demands of the Categorical Imperative is cast not as something that we know in detail concretely how to do – although certain obvious wrongs are clear and must be avoided – but rather as an infinite project of the articulation and development of a culture of reciprocal respect, that is, of a kingdom of ends. Fichte argues somewhat similarly that any finite human subject with discursive consciousness must either have an intellectual intuition of freedom as a power to be exercised or a more inchoate sense of self-immiseration and of a lack of courage in failing to exercise it.¹³ We are, for Fichte as for Kant and Hegel, more than simply reactive natural mechanisms. But deriving a detailed and specific doctrine of duties from this intuition or sense is an ongoing task, and Fichte – despite his efforts at systematic derivation – mostly ends up narrating his own repeated swerves into and falls back out of efforts at systematic theory, as he continually tries to develop a new system, coupled with a compelling introduction into how it makes its claims on us.¹⁴ As a result, in Fichte too, however inadvertently, the travails of a worldly subject – Fichte himself – begin to be foregrounded over the development of any complete and systematic theory.

However it may be with Hegel, Kant and Fichte, the rejection of the representationalist conceit is a commonplace within major English-language literary writing of the nineteenth century. Early on in the *Prelude*, Wordsworth announces a mandatory turn away from representationalism and towards a sense of the always already existing embeddedness of the human subject and human thinking in open processes of the development of nature and culture.

Hard task to analyse a soul in which,
Not only general habits and desires,
But each most obvious and particular thought –
Not in a mystical or idle sense,
But in the words of Reason deeply weighed –
Has no beginning.¹⁵

Beziehung hervor zu bringen’, G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft in Verbindung mit der Rheinisch-westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, *Gesammelte Werke*, 31 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1980) (hereafter PhG), ix, 53–4.

b. ‘So würde es wohl . . . dieser List spotten’, *Ibid.*, 53.

Yet the rejection of the representationalist conceit does not imply any Humean or sceptical graceful submission to the follies and sways of either nature or material culture regarded as self-developing independent agencies. Wordsworth will continue to court what he calls in the title of his great poem, written in 1802 and published in 1807, 'Resolution and Independence'. The poem recounts the 'apt admonishment . . . to give me human strength'¹⁶ that the poet finds in the words, or at least the bearing, of an itinerant leech-gatherer. Even a human being so immiserated and reduced in circumstances displays onwardness, persistence and agency, and so should we. That human beings possess powers of articulating and pursuing values and so of constructing a life is not a fact to be denied or scanted. As William Blake in his great epic *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804–20) has Los put it, 'I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans | I will not Reason and Compare: my business is to Create.'¹⁷

In order to get on with the work of creating a system that will at least tentatively sketch the terms of the fruitful exercise of human agency, but without adopting the representationalist conceit, the literary writer typically takes up what M. H. Abrams usefully calls 'the vatic stance'.¹⁸ Adopting the vatic stance is a matter of looking not within at self-enclosed representations, but a matter rather of attempting to discern what is going on over time, both in one's own life and in the development of a larger culture. The poet, as Wordsworth puts it in his 1800 Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, quoting Shakespeare's Hamlet, 'looks before and after'.¹⁹ Avoiding all 'false refinement or arbitrary innovation',²⁰ the poet attempts by 'look[ing] steadily at [his] subject'²¹ to get clear both about what is immanently going on and about how to feel about it, in the hope of overcoming melancholy and alienation, and of achieving increased felt confidence in one's involvements in courses of life. In relation to an initiating scene, incident, person, social phenomenon and so forth that is at first troubling, obscure or perplexing, Wordsworth undertakes to narrate 'What passed within me',²² as he moves – partly in the course of immediate response, but equally powerfully via retrospection and linguistic formulation of his experience – out of perplexity and into clarity and confidence in the having of feelings and evaluational stances, in a way that is exemplary for humanity as such.²³ As Abrams puts it, Wordsworth undertakes rehearsal of the circumstances of his life 'in order that the design inherent in that life, which has become apparent only to his mature awareness, may stand revealed as a principle which was invisibly operative from the beginning'²⁴ in such a way that 'a culmination which is comprehended within life itself is both achieved and narrated'.²⁵ The purpose of this rehearsal is 'to justify the experience of loss and suffering in

terms of a purpose that is immanent in the mind's growth into maturity'.²⁶ John Keats similarly, but more darkly, sketches growth within human life in his Letter of February, March, April, May, 1819 in describing the world as a 'The vale of Soul-making',²⁷ and in his Letter of 3 May 1818 in describing how we may move in life as if in 'a large Mansion of Many Apartments' from 'the infant or thoughtless Chamber', to 'the Chamber of Maiden-Thought', to the conviction that 'the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak', where we feel 'the burden of the Mystery'²⁸ that can be addressed, if at all, only in and through writing.

Crucially, felt orientation and meaning in life are to be found, if they are to be found at all, 'in life's every-day appearances',²⁹ as Wordsworth puts it, no matter how initially unpropitious they may appear. We are

called upon to exercise [our] skill,
Not in Utopia – subterraneous fields,
Or some secreted Island, Heaven knows where! –
But in this very world which is the world
Of all of us, the very place in which, in the end,
We find our happiness or not at all.³⁰

Here Wordsworth's thought and procedure are extraordinarily close to the almost exactly contemporary remarks in Hegel's *Phenomenology* that the dawning of a 'new existence, a new world and a new shape of Spirit'^{c,31} might be both glimpsed and furthered by recollecting the process of alienation and its overcoming. 'The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world'^{d,32} of accomplished meaningfulness that is arising out of the ashes of the past, and out of the human energies and interests that have been immanent within it. If it is the case that the development of truth as both the achievement and the reflection of grasp of fulfilled living is immanent within and open to completion within the historical process, then we can and 'must hold fast to the conviction that it is the nature of truth to prevail when its time has come, and that it appears only when this time has come, and therefore never appears prematurely, nor finds a public not ripe

c. 'Das neue Daseyn, eine neue Welt und Geistesgestalt', Hegel, PhG, 433.

d. 'Der Leichtsinne wie die Langeweile, die im Bestehenden einreißen, die unbestimmte Ahnung eines Unbekannten sind Vorboten, daß etwas Anderes im Anzuge ist. Diß allmähliche Zerbröckeln, das die Physiognomie des Ganzen nicht veränderte, wird durch den Ausgang unterbrochen, der ein Blitz in einemmale das Gebilde der neuen Welt hinstellt.' Hegel, PhG, 15.

to receive it'.^{e,33} What remains to be done is to describe and make explicit what we are already bound up with, within the frame of ordinary life, as it is moving into the condition of affording us standing conditions of fulfilment and of meaningful, endorsable life.

Yet there is also a textually slight but momentous point of divergence between Hegel and Wordsworth. Recall that Wordsworth's lines about finding fulfilment within this very world end with the thought that there we find our happiness 'or not at all'. This last, concessive, self-doubting 'or not at all' makes all the difference. Hegel displays apparent confidence that he can fully and adequately describe the emergence in and through us of a fully satisfying new world, a fully satisfying shape of spirit. (Or can one hear an undercurrent of anxiety about his own ability to do this in Hegel's phrases 'we must hold fast to the conviction' ['Wir müssen überzeugt seyn'] and 'never appears prematurely, nor finds a public not ripe to receive it' ['nie zu früh erscheint, noch ein unreifes Publikum findet']? The modal verb and the double negative construction are at the very least curious, and in the *Aesthetics* Hegel is yet more ready to acknowledge continuing failures of felt meaningfulness in life, failures not remedied by institutional arrangements, and failures spoken to, but not resolved, by works of modern art.) In the case of Wordsworth, in contrast, moments of apparent supreme confidence in his own exemplary accomplishment of meaningful life are immediately succeeded and qualified by hesitations, doubts and uncertainties that motivate relapses into renewed rehearsals of not yet fully clear courses of development. In 'Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth's metaphysical paean to 'nature and the language of the sense' as 'The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, | The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul | Of all my moral being',³⁴ is immediately followed by the thought, beginning within the very same line 'Nor perchance, | If I were not thus taught . . .',³⁵ as if to say there is more than insignificant room for doubt about this.³⁶ In the *Prelude*, Wordsworth offers his readers the apparently concluding thought that minds who have followed his own rehearsals of progress and taken them to model their own 'are truly from the Deity, | For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss | That can be known is theirs – the consciousness | Of whom they are, habitually infused | Through every image and through every thought, | And all impressions.'³⁷ Yet despite this apparent conclusion, Wordsworth immediately reverts to the thoughts that there may be no one, not even he, who 'hath his whole life long | Preserved,

e. 'Wir müssen überzeugt seyn, daß das Wahre die Natur hat, durchzudringen, wenn seine Zeit gekommen, und daß es nur erscheint, wenn diese gekommen, und deßwegen nie zu früh erscheint noch unreifes Publicum findet', Hegel, PhG, 49.

enlarged, this freedom in himself' and that he finds himself still 'to roam, | A meditative, oft a suffering man'.³⁸ For Wordsworth, and for other major literary writers, there is, it seems, no truth in the emergence within ordinary human life of standing conditions of fulfilment and meaningfulness, at any rate, no truth that can simply be made explicit or announced without strong qualification and exposure to continuing doubts.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge shares Wordsworth's rejection of the representationalist conceit, worrying, like Wordsworth, that adoption of that conceit enforces alienation and the sort of vulgar, grasping, self-undoing economic competitiveness that he sees as exemplified in modern urban life. In a passage that parallels Hegel's discussion, in § 185 of *The Philosophy of Right*, of Civil Society as a sphere of 'contingent arbitrariness and subjective caprice [that] destroys [particularity in itself] and its substantial concept in the act of enjoyment',^{f,39} Coleridge writes that when we are in the grip of the representationalist conceit and suffer its social effects, we become

An Anarchy of Spirits! Toy-bewitched,
 Made blind by lusts, disinherited of soul,
 No common centre Man, no common sire
 Knoweth! A sordid solitary thing
 Mid-countless brethren with a lonely heart
 Through courts and cities the smooth savage roams
 Feeling himself, his own low self the whole.⁴⁰

In Book VII of the *Prelude*, Wordsworth similarly describes London as a scene of 'thickening hubbub',⁴¹ and he exclaims about the St Bartholomew Fair in particular, 'What a hell | For eyes and ears! What anarchy and din | Barbarian and infernal – 'tis a dream, Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound!' that 'lays . . . | The whole creative powers of man asleep!'⁴² For Coleridge, the cure for this condition of alienation and anarchy, if there is a cure, arises when one comes 'by sacred sympathy [to] make | The whole one Self! Self, that no alien knows! Self, far diffused as Fancy's wing can travel! Self, spreading still! Oblivious of its own, | Yet of all possessing'.⁴³ Or as Coleridge puts in a later theoretical tract, 'the groundwork, therefore, of all true philosophy is . . . that intuition of things which arises when we possess

f. 'Die Besonderheit für sich . . . als . . . Befriedigung . . . zufälliger Willkühr und subjectiven Beliebens . . . zerstört in ihren Genüssen sich selbst und ihren substantiellen Begriff', Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts*, eds. Laus Grotzsch and Elisabeth Weisser-Lohmann, GW, XIV, 1 (2010), § 185, 161.

ourselves, as one with the whole'.⁴⁴ But how is such an intuition to be arrived at, when one rejects the representationalist conceit and acknowledges being always already caught up within chaotic life on the ground? Somewhat like Fichte, Coleridge spent much of the rest of his career, to the detriment of his poetry, attempting repeatedly and fruitlessly to theorise about the human subject in nature, in order to explain systematically the availability of such an intuition of self as one with the whole. Where Blake prophetically declaims allegorical systems, Wordsworth rehearses his own progress in the hope of confirming it and establishing its exemplarity, while yet remaining haunted by doubt, and Coleridge theorises, Shelley apotheosises love and embraces an abstract Platonism of emanations,⁴⁵ Keats distracts himself with aestheticism, and Byron wavers between Prometheanism and irony. In each case, the effort is to sketch some overcoming of alienation and social anarchy in favour of felt confidence in courses of life and the achievement of orientation in activity, but in a somewhat indirect, not immediately political-theoretical way.

Jane Austen finds a way out of the impasses of both uncertain theorising and the all too tentative rehearsal of individual progress by developing the marriage plot, hence abandoning the individual as the sole focus of narrative rehearsal. In her most accomplished novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Austen sets the mutually mercenary marriage of Charlotte Lucas and Mr Collins and the sexually impulsive, but then subsequently foundering marriages of Mr and Mrs Bennett and of Lydia and Wickham in counterpoint with the courtship and impending marriage of Darcy and Elizabeth, who achieve, in contrast, a just and reasonable attachment, where erotic attraction, humour and conversational intimacy are all intermixed. (On the topic of erotic attraction, it is worth noting how often Darcy stammers and Elizabeth blushes when they are in one another's company.) There is no metaphysical rhapsodising about the joys of isolate individual experience, either of one's own creativity or of nature's beauties. There is no political theory of the contours of a good enough political order here and no account of its conditions of achievement. Happiness is achieved pairwise or not at all, and it is, moreover, shadowed by the problems of maintaining it within future wedded life and of the intrusions into that life of not only difficult relatives, but also the inevitable effects of broader socioeconomic and political inequalities and miseries in the surrounding culture. Towards the end of the novel, Austen cuts away from dialogue and describes in the third person, using her own cool voice, Elizabeth's acceptance of Darcy's proposal:

Elizabeth feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of his situation, now forced herself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently, gave him to understand, that her sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period [of her former rejection of him] to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure, his present assurances. The happiness which this reply produced, was such as he had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do.⁴⁶

One can hear a certain irony in this passage – Darcy had ‘probably’ never felt such happiness before, and his sensible and warm expression of his violent love is presented as somewhat scripted, even clichéd. (How sensibly and warmly *is* a man violently in love supposed to express himself?) The novel ends with a brief review of the characters other than Elizabeth and Darcy, as Austen takes pains to remind us that Mrs Bennett is still silly, that Mary still moralises unattractively, and that Lydia and Wickham have an insufficient income, remain ‘extravagant in their wants and heedless of the future’, and retain ‘all the claims to reputation which [their] marriage had given [them]’⁴⁷ – that is to say, none. There is no fantasising about either perfect individual bliss or the achievement of a social utopia; the achievement of happiness on the part of Elizabeth and Darcy is carefully qualified. But it is nonetheless a genuine happiness, and Austen’s narration of it represents a supreme literary address to the problems of alienation and social chaos that shape the development of German Idealism.⁴⁸

George Eliot takes up the Austenian marriage plot in *Middlemarch* (1871/2), similarly setting in counterpoint the impulsive and less happy marriages of Lydgate and Rosamond, and of Dorothea and Casaubon, with the mixed cases of Fred Vincy and Mary Garth and Mr and Mrs Bulstrode, and with the happier final marriage of Dorothea and Will Ladislaw. Her ability to present the movements of village sympathies and aversions, set against the background of developments in larger forms of practice (the passing of the 1832 Reform Act; the development of English Methodism; issues about professionalism in the prescribing and sale of medicines, and so on) is arguably peerless. She displays an all-sided human sympathy for her characters, a sympathy that is encouraged, perhaps, by her reading and translation of Feuerbach, with his attention to contemporary anthropological facts of feeling. As Philip M. Weinstein puts it, she displays ‘unstinted sympathy and unbiased judgment, [with] life grasped momentarily and in the larger view, inwardly and outwardly’.⁴⁹ Yet she has difficulties in her major novels in

presenting a compelling picture of the achievement of adult happiness, stable orientation, and felt confidence in relationships and activities. Officially *Middlemarch* ends with Dorothea and Will Ladislaw now happily married, with Will having been elected to Parliament. Yet Dorothea is confined to the domestic sphere, and some readers have found in the description of the sunny, blond-curled Will Ladislaw and of Dorothea's somewhat maternal relation to him reason to regret that Dorothea did not end up both making a public life of her own and matched with the darker, more intense Lydgate. *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) ends with Maggie and Tom being swept away in a flood and so out of historical time, unable to manage the investment of their sympathies and intensities in village life as it had surrounded them. When Eliot produces a more clearly happy ending, as in *Silas Marner* (1861), the effect can seem melodramatic and sentimental, as Silas is converted away from miserliness and a sterile form of Calvinism and into sympathy for humanity by the love of a golden-haired child. Eliot's own complex sympathies and insight often seem strongest when directed at a wide range of minor characters, who reach more qualified and often mutually contradictory ends without any clear overarching story of triumph.

In a similar way, Charles Dickens offers plots that trace the achievement of stable identity and felt meaning in social life, paradigmatically in the figures of marriage, inheritance and adult work, but that also covertly express deeper tensions that remain unresolved. With, as Weinstein puts it, an imagination that 'is simultaneously Christian and Freudian', Dickens frequently produces 'a palimpsest that expresses both a mid-Victorian ideal and the gathering forces that ideal was meant to keep at bay'.⁵⁰ Officially, the values of selfless altruism, maturity and a disciplined heart win out over fitful passion and errancy. But, as in Eliot, a happy resolution is often imposed, while forces capable of undoing it are simultaneously registered and repressed. In *David Copperfield* (1850), for example, 'recalcitrant reality . . . is evaded, first by the fantasy of a child-wife [Dora] perfected in death and, second, by the culturally shared platitude of an all-reconciling housekeeper[-wife], Agnes'.⁵¹ When David insistently presses his own feelings on Agnes, he concludes by saying, in words that his fervour belies, 'There is no alloy of self in what I feel for you.'⁵² Or a desire that, in 1850, dare not speak its name and that binds together David and James Steerforth is simultaneously registered and suppressed. "'You belong to my bedroom, I find",' the 'very good-looking' Steerforth tells David, leading David to wonder 'if that were all right which I had a secret misgiving was nearly all wrong' (95, 96).⁵³ A nocturnal world of passion, imagination and sensuous responsiveness is supposed to be integrated into

a daylight world of marriage, family, civil society and the state, and yet this integration is never quite wholly achieved in a believable way.

Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1836) – the biography of the German philosopher-pilgrim Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, compiled by an anonymous editor and incorporating Teufelsdröckh's own autobiography and philosophy of clothes – moves explicitly in the orbit of German thought, with extensive references to and borrowings from Goethe, Schiller, Tieck, Jean Paul, Kant and Fichte. Teufelsdröckh's own ontology is markedly Idealist.

Of Man's Activity and Attainment the chief results are aeriform, mystic, and preserved in Tradition only; such are his Forms of Government, with the Authority they rest on; his Customs, or Fashions both of Cloth-Habits and of Soul-Habits; much more his collective stock of Handicrafts, the whole Faculty he has acquired of manipulating Nature: all these things, as indispensable and priceless as they are, cannot in any way be fixed under lock and key, but must flit, spirit-like, on impalpable vehicles from Father to Son; if you demand sight of them, they are nowhere to be met with . . . So spiritual (*geistig*) is our whole daily Life: all that we do springs out of Mystery, Spirit, invisible Force; only like a little Cloud-image, or Armida's Palace, air-built, does the Actual body itself forth from the great mystic Deep.⁵⁴

As is typical in the literary turn, however, Teufelsdröckh's itinerary towards the acceptance of this ontology and his attempts to live according to it are of more interest than its straightforward assertion. Having initially committed himself to 'the spirit of Inquiry', he then finds around him, as the editor puts it, 'all a grim Desert, this once-fair world of his; wherein is heard only the howling of wild-beasts, or the shrieks of despairing, hate-filled men; and no Pillar of Cloud by day and no Pillar of Fire by night, any longer guides the Pilgrim'.⁵⁵ Or in Teufelsdröckh's own words, "'To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference to grind me limb from limb".⁵⁶ Teufelsdröckh moves out of immersion in this condition of "'The Everlasting No (*das ewige Nein*)'" initially through an act of 'Baphometric Baptism', wherein 'the fire-baptised soul . . . feels its own Freedom'⁵⁷ in an act of defiance that is, surely, inspired by Novalis on *Selbstgefühl* and Fichte on intellectual intuition. But this initial move leads only to life in the "'CENTRE OF INDIFFERENCE'",⁵⁸ as it remains unclear how

this defiant assertion of freedom and a power of meaning-making is to be concretely lived. At this point, “the first preliminary moral Act, Annihilation of Self (*Selbst-tödtung*)”⁵⁹ takes place, opening the way to “Fore-shadows, call them rather fore-splendours, of that Truth, and Beginning of Truths [that] fell mysteriously over my soul . . . like the mother’s voice to her little child that strays bewildered, weeping, in unknown tumults; like soft streamings of celestial music to my too-exasperated heart”.⁶⁰ The truth that is here revealed is that of “Renunciation (*Entsagen*)”.⁶¹ One must give up one’s demands or lower one’s expectations. When they are sufficiently reduced, then the tiniest fraction or moment of happiness will yield an infinite value. “*The Fraction of Life can be increased in value not so much by increasing your Numerator as by lessening your Denominator*. Nay, unless my Algebra deceive me, *Unity* itself divided by *Zero* will give *Infinity*”.⁶² Within this frame of mind, one may come to ‘love God’ and to live within “the EVERLASTING YEÄ, wherein all contradiction is solved: wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him”.⁶³ This “Conversion” accomplished, Teufelsdröckh finds that

I too could now say to myself: Be no longer a Chaos, but a World, or even Worldkin. Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it, in God’s name! ’Tis the utmost thou hast in thee: out with it then. Up, up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called Today; for the Night cometh, wherein no man can work.⁶⁴

How compelling are this conversion and the mode of life that is urged as a result of it? The anonymous editor and biographer is haunted by a ‘painful suspicion . . . grounded perhaps on trifles, yet confirmed almost into certainty by the more and more discernible humoristico-satirical tendency of Teufelsdröckh . . . [that] these Autobiographical Documents are partly a mystification! What if many a so-called fact were little better than a Fiction; if here we had no direct Camera-obscura Picture of the Professor’s History; but only some more or less fantastic Adumbration.’⁶⁵ After all, the editor complains, Teufelsdröckh has not ‘told [his] singular story in plain words’, but rather in ‘Nothing but innuendoes, figurative crotchets: a typical Shadow, fitfully wavering, prophetic-satiric, no clear logical Picture’.⁶⁶ Both in Teufelsdröckh’s putative autobiography and in *Sartor Resartus* as a whole, wit, fantastic associative leaps, and flights of exuberant diction in the styles of Sterne and Jean Paul overwhelm any plausible psychological or

social theory. A will to life in accordance with meaningful ideals persists, but it remains caught within the framework of the comic.

Ralph Waldo Emerson visited Carlyle at his Scottish farm in Craigenputtock in 1833, during the period of the completion of *Sartor Resartus*, and he arranged for that book's first single-volume publication in 1836 by a Boston publisher. His work displays much of the same desperate hunger for ideals and for renovated life according to them that marks Carlyle's, but with more American optimism, yet fitfully shadowed by despair, rather than released in manic wit. Emerson's writing overall inherits and continues the rhetorical tradition that Sacvan Bercovich has usefully identified as the American Jeremiad, which joins 'an unswerving faith in the [Protestant] errand' into the new world and 'an unshakeable optimism' with 'the castigation of [present] iniquities'.⁶⁷ Already in 1630, John Winthrop took as his text for his lay sermon on the ship *Arabella* crossing the Atlantic *Deuteronomy* 30:5: 'And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.'⁶⁸ Like the writings of his Puritan forebears, the Emersonian essay is designed as 'a political sermon' or 'a state of the covenant address', intended 'to revitalize the errand'⁶⁹ by joining together present criticism with a call to return to the path. American exceptionalism is the thought that the realisation of God's purposes and the fulfilment of the covenant are to take place in a new world, free of the corruptions of Europe. This exceptionalist stance, running up against the developing industrial and commercial modes of life that surround it, lends to American writing in general, and to Emerson's in particular, its characteristic mood of hope haunted by despair. Emerson continually calls for the true American Scholar who does not yet exist, 'Man Thinking' who is characterised by 'self-trust', while he sees in fact around him only 'the bookworm' or, in a Schillerian figure, 'man metamorphosed into a thing, into many things', man 'subdivided and peddled out . . . spilled into drops' through the social division of labour.⁷⁰ 'I dedicate my book to the Spirit of America', Emerson wrote in his journal in 1822; 'I dedicate it to that living soul, which doth exist somewhere beyond the Fancy, to whom the Divinity hath assigned the care of this bright corner of the Universe',⁷¹ and he professes that he is 'ready to die out of nature and be born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the West'.⁷² Despite his readiness to be reborn and the thought that free and meaningful life according to divine ordination is no thing of fancy, however, Emerson characteristically swerves into doubt and despair within a few lines or paragraphs of his heights of optimism. In 'Experience', in the next sentence after announcing

the existence of ‘the Power which abides in no man and in no woman, but for a moment speaks from this one, and for another moment from that one’, Emerson goes on to ask, ‘But what help from these fineries or pedantries? What help from thought? Life is not dialectics . . . Culture with us . . . ends in headache.’⁷³ The essay opens with a question and answer that announce the difficulty rather than the availability of fruitful thought. ‘Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none.’⁷⁴ Emerson’s swerves into doubts and uncertainties are a strength of his writing more than a weakness, as they help to maintain the onwardness of his thought – his commitment to ‘the unattained but attainable self’⁷⁵ – and to save him from succumbing to the worst blindnesses and excesses of American exceptionalism in its imperialist operations. But these swerves also effectively foreground Emerson’s intellectual itinerancy and inability to develop concretely actualisable political ideals and programmes, perhaps even an inability quite wholly to believe in the course of his own life.

Henry David Thoreau takes up the Jeremiad rhetorical stance from Emerson and the broader New England context, but he modulates into a more bodily register of labour and agricultural life in nature. His criticism of the present is directed at thoughtlessness, aimless expenditures of energy, especially in commerce, and distracted fearfulness. ‘The mass of men,’ he writes in *Walden* (1854), ‘lead lives of quiet desperation’;⁷⁶ ‘men labor under a mistake . . . as serfs of the soul; . . . by a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures which moths and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal. It is a fool’s life.’⁷⁷ Against the grain of this modern life of empty business, Thoreau takes to thought in order to discover for himself livable ideals and virtues. ‘To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust’;⁷⁸ ‘I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.’⁷⁹ Yet in the end, as in Emerson, and despite his political hopes, Thoreau’s writerliness in the text of *Walden* and the doubts that linger within in are foregrounded over his conclusions and achieved way of life. In a justly famous section on ‘The Bean-Field’, he comments elegiacally on his own writing, giving voice to a sense of time and work still unredeemed. (Thoreau lived at Walden Pond from 4 July 1845 until 6 September 1847; his essay ‘Civil Disobedience’ was published in 1849 and his *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* in 1849,

so that in this passage in *Walden*, published in 1854, he is reflecting on both those earlier works and on his way of life and writing at Walden.)

but now another summer is gone, and another, and another, and I am obliged to say to you Reader, that the seeds which I planted, if indeed they *were* the seeds of those virtues [viz. ‘sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like’] were wormeaten or had lost their vitality, and so did not come up.⁸⁰

Freighted with political hope and political criticism, but remaining predominantly metaphorical, Thoreau’s images of planting, labouring, reaping, and spending according to thought remain more critical and invitational than directly effective in entering into modern practice.

As if directly to correct and to overcome the writerliness and philosophical intellectualism of Emerson and Thoreau, and informed by his own experience as office boy, printer’s apprentice, typesetter, nurse, newspaper publisher and clerk in the Bureau of Interior, among other occupations, Walt Whitman writes in *Leaves of Grass* (1855, 1881, 1889, 1891/2) with an unmatched antinomian exuberance and erotic energy in seeking to sketch in free verse the incarnation of ideals in worldly practice. Immediate energy of assertion trumps detached theorising. ‘I too am not a bit tamed . . . I too am untranslatable, | I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world’.⁸¹ Whitman characterises himself, sounder of this yawp, as ‘Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos | Disorderly fleshy and sensual . . . eating drinking and | breeding, | No sentimentalist . . . no stander above men or women or | apart from them . . . no more modest than immodest’.⁸² His proclamations of joy in activity that flows from energies alike of body and mind is founded more in intuition, feeling, attitude and the moment of writing than it is in theory and argument. ‘Wisdom is not finally tested in the *schools*, | Wisdom cannot be pass’d from one having it to one not having it . . . | Wisdom is of the soul, is not *susceptible* of proof, is its own proof, | Applies to all stages and objects and qualities and is content’.⁸³ The wisdom that Whitman offers – his version of ideals actualised in life – is a more or less pantheistic celebration of life in self and other. ‘I CELEBRATE myself, | And what I assume you shall assume, | For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you’;⁸⁴ ‘In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own | face in the glass’.⁸⁵

Herman Melville is the darkest and most tortured of the major American writers of the achievement of the ideal within the actual. He takes up the

Jeremiad trope of America as the new Israel, arguing in his own authorial voice in *White-Jacket* (1850) that

we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world . . . God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls . . . Long enough have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in *us*, if we would but give utterance to his promptings.⁸⁶

Perhaps, however, because of the very explicitness of this statement, and perhaps, too, as a result of his own experiences as a seaman of the difficulty of sustaining even a tiny shipboard community, metaphorically proleptic of ideal community as such, of some thirty men, Melville is also aware of the dark side of this self-conception. The very effort to give utterance to these promptings – to speak *how* an ideal community may be achieved through the expunging of evil – may itself also be an index of vain, mad, narcissist power-seeking that is all too likely to result in imperial misadventures or other disasters. Ahab (*Moby Dick*, 1851) would rid the world of the incarnate maliciousness, as he sees it, of Moby Dick, yet Steerforth reminds him that the war between them is his doing, not the whale's – 'See! Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him'⁸⁷ – and argues that it would be better to abandon this madness of pursuit and to return home with a decent cargo of whale oil already acquired. Melville is explicit that the quest for the whale is a 'great allegory',⁸⁸ presumably of the simultaneous necessity and mad violence of idealisation in relation to community. Ahab regards the whale as:

That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue devil; – Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race

from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it.⁸⁹

If the violent death of all but Ishmael, left to tell the tale, is what the bursting of that hot heart's shell on evil comes to, then how, if at all, can evil be confronted and community reformed? What, if anything, can writing do? It is perhaps no surprise, then, that in *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1853), written immediately in the wake of *Moby Dick*'s too slight reception, Bartleby, a copy-clerk – that is, a kind of writer – should take as his repeated slogan and policy 'I would prefer not to'.⁹⁰

It is something of a commonplace that twentieth-century British and American literature abandoned the efforts at social realism and at the tracking of possibilities of the achievement of ideals within social space that were characteristic of much nineteenth-century literature. Compare the styles and subject matters of Eliot, Dickens, Trollope and Galsworthy with those of Joyce, Woolf and Conrad. As Virginia Woolf famously remarked in her 1924 essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown': 'On or about December 1910, human character changed.'⁹¹ As a result of yet further increasing urbanisation, industrialisation, awareness of social diversity and also of mutual social opacity, the thought that one might as a literary writer attempt to tell the story, or at least a story that is *exemplary for the possibilities of humanity as such within social life*, of the overcoming of alienation and anxiety, and of the achievement of stable orientation and felt confidence in relationships and activities founders. The modernist literature that expresses this foundering displays a pronounced turn inward, towards plights of unsettled consciousness and away from social plotting.

Woolf's own *To the Lighthouse* (1927) is a central text of this modernist turn. A key contrast in the novel is between the characters of Mr and Mrs Ramsay, both as those characters are described and presented directly in actions and as they are recalled and assessed by the young painter, Lily Briscoe. Mr Ramsay is a recognisably Idealist philosopher, modelled on Woolf's own father Leslie Stephen, author of *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876) and *The Science of Ethics* (1882), as well as other works that defended utilitarianism and developed a doctrine of social vitality, in an effort to blend a Hegelian sense of progress with a more fully secular metaphysics. In the novel, Mr Ramsay is determined to grasp and articulate the plot that lies behind the development of everything, including the progressive development of human social life. If we could only articulate this plot – that is, only become clearer and more complete in characterising

what values really invite and sustain our allegiances in such a way as to promote freedom and social harmony, just as Kemp Smith argued is the standing project of Idealist philosophers – then we *could* achieve stable orientation and felt confidence in relationships and activities. Mr Ramsay, in attempting to grasp ‘Subject and object and the nature of reality’ so as to set out this plot, has ‘a splendid mind’, and he has got quite far, but then also not quite far enough:

For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q. . . . But after Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in the distance. Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still, if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q. Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. If Q then is Q–R–. Here he knocked his pipe out, with two or three resonant taps on the handle of the urn, and proceeded. ‘Then R . . .’ He braced himself. He clenched himself . . . Qualities that would have saved a ship’s company exposed on a broiling sea with six biscuits and a flask of water – endurance and justice, foresight, devotion, skill, came to his help. R is then – what is R? . . . He had not genius; he laid no claim to that: but he had, or might have had, the power to repeat every letter of the alphabet from A to Z accurately in order. Meanwhile, he stuck at Q. On, then, on to R . . . Feelings that would not have disgraced a leader who, now that the snow has begun to fall and the mountain top is covered in mist, knows that he must lay himself down and die before morning comes, stole upon him, paling the colour of his eyes, giving him, even in the two minutes of his turn on the terrace, the bleached look of withered old age. Yet he would not die lying down; he would find some crag of rock, and there, his eyes fixed on the storm, trying to the end to pierce the darkness, he would die standing. He would never reach R.⁹²

This heroic, vain, self-centred, masculinist, doomed effort to tell the story of everything, so as to achieve and sustain stable orientation and felt confidence in relationships and activities, is contrasted to the patient, other-oriented, feminist attentions of Mrs Ramsay to those around her. Mrs Ramsay is able to set a table and manage the conversation at a dinner

party. Her attentions turn from her children to her various guests and to her husband, putting everyone at ease, or at least responding to every particular case – including the management of her husband – with sympathetic understanding. Her sympathetic attentiveness to particulars is, it seems, a feature of her character, without either any need for, or possibility of, support from a grander story about the development of everything. She acts as a decent, sympathetic human being ought to act. Lily Briscoe in the end inherits something of this stance, thus forming a genuine quasi-filial chain of sympathy that is contrasted to Mr Ramsay's more combative and less fruitful relations with his own philosophy students.

Here in one clear sense Virginia Woolf is putting paid to Idealism. The time for its grand projects of social decipherment and the articulation of commanding values is past. No theory can save us; the very effort at grand theory is a symptom of markedly masculinist egoism and a failure of humanity. In Kemp Smith's terms, perhaps we are left with only naturalism and scepticism as live possibilities.

And yet what of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* itself? It has a large narrative arc. It describes the virtues and vices of various characters, and it tracks these characters to their various fates. In its implied assessments of the characters of Mr and Mrs Ramsay, figured in the understanding of Lily Briscoe, it offers us a story about values that might command our allegiance and support a decently stable orientation and sense of felt confidence in relationships and activities. And so in this way, the activity and stance of Woolf herself, despite its different tonalities, turn out to be not quite altogether different from that of Mr Ramsay, in that she, too, has a large story to tell about values and social orientation. As this complex situation illustrates, it seems plausible to conclude that if Idealism is not quite with us in its classic form as a live option for systematic metaphysical and institutional theorising, neither modernist writers nor we their audiences are quite beyond it either.

Notes

1. Norman Kemp Smith, 'The present situation in philosophy', *Philosophical Review* 29 (1920), 5.
2. *Ibid.*, 6.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 12.
6. *Ibid.*, 18.
7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 23.
9. *Ibid.*, 4.
10. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1979) (hereafter PS), § 73, 47.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Leser (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), 31.
13. See J. G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 36, 16; J. G. Fichte, *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's sämtliche Werke*, ed. I. H. Fichte, 8 vols. (Berlin: Veit, 1845/6), reprinted as vols. I–VII, *Fichtes Werke*, 11 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), I, 461, I, 434.
14. See Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 68–70, for an analysis of the foregrounding of the authorial personae in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* in a movement of procession and epistrophe.
15. William Wordsworth, *Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 1805: ii, ll. 232–7; 86.
16. William Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), I, 112, 169.
17. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman, rev. edn (New York: Random House, 1988), ch. 1, ll. 20–1, 153.
18. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: tradition and revolution in romantic literature* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1971), 13.
19. Wordsworth, 'Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*', in Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, 456.
20. *Ibid.*, 447.
21. *Ibid.*, 450.
22. Wordsworth, *Prelude* (1805), III, I, 174, 112.
23. See Richard Eldridge, *Literature, Life, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 69–100, for a full analysis of the argument of Wordsworth's 'Preface'.
24. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 76.
25. *Ibid.*, 123.
26. *Ibid.*, 124.
27. John Keats, 'To George and Georgiana Keats', *The Major Works: including Endymion, the Odes and Selected Letters*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 473.
28. Keats, 'To J. H. Reynolds', in *Ibid.*, 397.
29. Wordsworth, *Prelude* (1805), XII, I, 369, 508.
30. *Ibid.* (1805), X, ll. 723–8, 442.
31. Hegel, PS, § 808, 492.
32. *Ibid.*, § 11, 7.
33. *Ibid.*, § 71, 44.
34. Wordsworth, 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey', in *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, ll. 108–11, 109.
35. *Ibid.*, ll. 111–12, 109.

36. See Eldridge, *Literature, Life, and Modernity*, 69–100 for an analysis of the structure of doubt and self-criticism in ‘Tintern Abbey’.
37. Wordsworth, *Prelude* (1805), XIII, ll. 106–11, 516.
38. *Ibid.* (1805), XIII, ll. 120–1, 126, 516. See Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 102–23 for an analysis of the conclusion of the *Prelude*.
39. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 2001), § 185, 222.
40. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Religious Musings’, [1794] in Coleridge, *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), ll. 143–52, 110–11.
41. Wordsworth, *Prelude* (1805), VII, l. 227, 262.
42. *Ibid.* (1805), VII, ll. 658–61, 652, 654, 288.
43. Coleridge, ‘Religious Musings’, in *The Complete Poems*, ll. 154–7, 111.
44. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Essay XI, On Method’, in *The Friend* [1809] (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2010), 344.
45. See Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty’ and ‘Mont Blanc’, in Shelley, *The Major Works*, eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill (Oxford University Press, 2009), 114–19, 120–7.
46. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Fiona Stafford (Oxford University Press, 1980), 280.
47. *Ibid.*, 296.
48. See Richard Eldridge, *On Moral Personhood: philosophy, literature, criticism, and self-understanding* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 141–80 for an analysis of Jane Austen’s treatment of marriage in relation to Hegel’s account of the reconciling Yea at the end of ch. 6 of the *Phenomenology*.
49. Philip M. Weinstein, *The Semantics of Desire: changing models of identity from Dickens to Joyce* (Princeton University Press, 1984), 75.
50. *Ibid.*, 46, 44.
51. *Ibid.*, 37.
52. Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 737.
53. *Ibid.*, 95, 96.
54. Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. Archibald MacMechan (Boston, MA: Ginn, 1897), 155–6.
55. *Ibid.*, 148.
56. *Ibid.*, 151.
57. *Ibid.*, 154.
58. *Ibid.*, 169.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*, 171.
61. *Ibid.*, 173–4.
62. *Ibid.*, 173.
63. *Ibid.*, 175.
64. *Ibid.*, 179.
65. *Ibid.*, 183.
66. *Ibid.*, 168.
67. Sacvan Bercovich, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 6, 7.

68. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, eds. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford University Press, 2008), 256.
69. Bercovich, *The American Jeremiad*, 5, 4, XIV.
70. Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The American scholar', in Stephen E. Whicher (ed.), *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 73, 65, 64.
71. Ralph Waldo Emerson, 11 July 1822, in *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson: with annotations*, vol. 1, 1820-4, eds. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2006), 160.
72. Emerson, 'Experience', in *Selections*, 267.
73. *Ibid.*, 261.
74. *Ibid.*, 254.
75. Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'History', in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: The Library of America, 1981), 239.
76. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 8.
77. *Ibid.*, 5.
78. *Ibid.*, 14.
79. *Ibid.*, 86.
80. *Ibid.*, 154-5.
81. Walt Whitman, 'Leaves of Grass', in *Poetry and Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1996), 87.
82. *Ibid.*, 50.
83. *Ibid.*, 300.
84. *Ibid.*, 87.
85. *Ibid.*, 85.
86. Herman Melville, *Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby Dick*, ed. George Thomas Tanselle (New York: Library of America, 1983), 50.
87. Melville, *Moby Dick*, in *Ibid.*, 1402.
88. Herman Melville, 'Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, November 17, 1851', in *Correspondence*, ed. Lynn Horth (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 212.
89. Melville, *Moby Dick*, in *Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby Dick*, 989.
90. Herman Melville, 'Bartleby the Scrivener', in *Moby Dick and Other Writings*, ed. G. Thomas Tanselle (New York: Library of America, 2000), 649 and *passim*.
91. Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford University Press, 2008), 32.
92. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, new edn, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford University Press, 2006), 30-1.