CHAPTER 3
MODERNISM, ROMANTICISM, AND THE ENGLISH ACCOMMODATION

Trilling, Leavis and Modernism

Lionel Trilling, commenting magisterially on the 'Leavis-Snow Controversy' described Leavis's 'tone' as 'a bad tone, an impermissible tone'; a criticism which, with its connotations of good taste and good form, Leavis quite predictably and savagely repudiated. This and other disagreements about Leavis's exchange with C.P. Snow are not the results of temperamental difference alone. The two critics' positions, taken together, point to an important paradox inherent in English studies: its critique of scientific rationality, discussed in the previous chapter, is undermined by its modernist allegiances. The argument I shall be making is that modernism is distinguished by a movement away from empiricism and towards idealism and subjectivism; and that this movement diminishes its critical force in important ways. Georg Lukacs, of course, made this argument with unparalleled force; but as I hope to show, Trilling shared much of Lukacs's distrust of modernism.

C.P. Snow's 1959 Rede Lecture "The Two Cultures" identified as distinct and hostile cultures that of the literary intellectuals and that of the natural scientists. Snow, transparently on the side of the scientists despite awkward attempts to sound neutral, intended to provoke, and succeeded. As Stefan Collini puts it, "[o]ne can only feel that a malevolent deity setting out to design a single figure in whom the largest number of Leavis's deepest antipathies would find themselves
embodied could not have done better than to create Charles Percy Snow" (Collini xxxii). Snow repeatedly implied that literary intellectuals were Luddites, ignorant of the fundamental precepts of science, arrogant, of dubious political persuasion, elitist, and so on. When Leavis counter-attacked, as he did in "Two Cultures? The Significance of Lord Snow," he did so with a ferocity extreme even by his own standards. Snow lacked a mind to engage with, his novels could not be considered novels, his 'blankness in the face of literature' and his 'intellectual nullity' ruled out the possibility of intelligent debate, he was not a human being so much as a horrible portent of the times, and so on. The story of the encounter has been told many times; here I will only point out that Leavis's response was very much a part of his overall response to industrial civilization. Snow's Philistine aggressiveness was all that was needed to bring out Leavis's most venomous rhetoric.

Trilling says two things about Leavis's argument in the Leavis-Snow debate that are related to the central concerns of this thesis. He talks of Leavis's refusal to "give anything like an adequate recognition to those aspects of art which are gratuitous, which arise from high spirits and the impulse to play," ("Leavis-Snow Controversy" 151) a criticism the significance of which will become apparent in the last chapter, which discusses Schiller's idea of the play-drive. Trilling also says:

If ever a man was qualified to state the case for
literature, and far more persuasively than I have done, it is Dr. Leavis. His career as a critic and a teacher has been devoted exactly to the exposition of the idea that literature presents to us "the possibilities of life," the qualities of energy and fineness that life might have. And it is, of course, the intention of the Richmond Lecture to say just this in answer to Sir Charles's indictment. Yet something checks Dr. Leavis. ("Leavis-Snow Controversy 169")

The peculiar interest of this particular passage lies in the fact that it marks the most substantial conflict of interests between two very influential critics. In the terms of the argument being made in this thesis, if Leavis's work is to be valued for the centrality to it of the resistance to instrumental rationality and the materialism of modern society, Trilling's is to be valued for the centrality to it of the resistance to modernism. Briefly, if Leavis's contribution was invaluable in that he clearly and forcefully articulated the central humanities position, and moreover linked it with creative art and tradition, nevertheless the strength of his position was vitiated by the fact that he articulated it from within literary modernism. Whatever doubts he may have had about modernism (and some of those are very interestingly laid out, especially in his later remarks on Eliot and Joyce), for much of his academic career he endorsed modernist writing, modernist values.¹ Even the critical enterprise was in important ways modernist.' Trilling, it seems
to me, is unique among the important critics of the period from the 1920s to the 1950s in the complexity of his opposition to literary modernism.  

It is perhaps inevitable that the two critics developed strengths that were, in a sense, mutually exclusive. Taken together, their positions may offer us something considerably more useful than either one in isolation.

"Something checks him," Trilling writes. What Trilling has in mind (as deterring Leavis from responding forcefully to Snow) is the peculiar nature of 'modern literature,' a peculiarity Trilling most famously explored in "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," but the sense of which persists as a sort of ground bass in all Trilling's writings. In The Liberal Imagination he attacks on two fronts: he faults the New Critics, and by extension the modernists they admired, for their lack of historical sensitivity, for forgetting "that the literary work is ineluctably an historical fact, and... that its historicity is a fact in our aesthetic experience" (The Liberal Imagination 175); and he reproaches T.S. Eliot, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (among others) for their programmatic anti-intellectualism, their "horror at the prospect of life being intellectualized" (268). In Beyond Culture he criticizes (subtly, of course, being Trilling) 'our contemporary aesthetic culture' which "does not set great store by the principle of pleasure in its simple and primitive meaning and... may even be said to maintain an antagonism to the principle of pleasure" (72). That this is a criticism is
demonstrated by his approval of Wordsworth's and Keats's "conscious commitments to the principle of pleasure" (64). In the same book, in "The Two Environments," is Trilling's endorsement of Saul Bellow's claim that "literature['s] romantic separation or estrangement from the common world.... has by now enfeebled literature" (230). Beyond Culture has the famous "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," in which Trilling set out most clearly his sense of modern literature as being somehow dangerous, as "concerned with salvation," as an invasion of one's privacy (8-9). More disconcerting even than the literature, to Trilling, is the response of his students, their "readiness...to engage in the process that we might call the socialization of the anti-social... or the legitimation of the subversive" (26). This is a theme Trilling returns to later: the legitimation of the subversive energies of modernism points to the worrying fact that modernism has been too successful in urging its claims against bourgeois happiness, against classical tranquillity. In The Opposing Self the criticism is indirect, but telling. Trilling praises Keats's 'attachment to the principle of reality,' his earthiness, his sensuousness, his happy tolerance of rowdiness; all of which is tacitly opposed to the sickly posture of alienation and despair that Trilling perceived as characteristic of modernist writing. In an extraordinary essay, "William Dean Howells," Trilling risks setting up the quotidian, 'commonplace' Howells against writers who are committed to "the idea of unconditioned spirit" (90).
Given Trilling's understanding of modernist literature, his analysis of Leavis's performance in the Leavis/Snow controversy could only mean: Leavis is unable to respond effectively to Snow because Snow has a point and Leavis knows it; Snow is primarily attacking modernist literature, and this literature is vulnerable in ways in which the earlier literature was not.

The urbanity and subtlety of Trilling's style has perhaps obscured the intensity of his hostility to the chief assumptions of modernist writing. The range of perspectives from which Trilling chose to criticise modernist writing is perhaps an indication of his ambivalence towards modernism: a temperamental attachment to a more rooted and serene literary mode was combined, in him, with a fascination with what was difficult and oriented towards destruction in the writing of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors. His admiration for the healthy and quotidian elements in Wordsworth, Keats, Orwell and Howells is matched by his admiration for Freud's pessimism or Hegel's concept of a painful but ultimately enabling alienation.

Taking our cue from Trilling (and, as I will argue later, Lukacs), it is possible to understand modernism's point of departure from earlier literature as a movement from 'attachment to reality' to 'the idea of unconditioned spirit,' or, to anticipate my argument, from an accommodating response to the opposed imperatives of empiricism and idealism towards a more thoroughly idealist response.

Trilling and Lukacs were not the only critics to point to
weaknesses and dangers in the modernist enterprise. Edmund Wilson and Yvor Winters, and, more recently, Richard Poirier and John Carey, have been very critical of some aspects of modernist writing. Wilson was an extraordinarily sanguine critic, and not given to sweeping judgements, negative or positive; but even he is compelled to complain of 'the lack of ventilation' in the 'shuttered house' of the "world of private imagination in isolation from the life of society" which he thinks is characteristic of the creations of Proust, Joyce, Valery and so on (Axel's Castle 292). Winters's hostility to most modernist writing, especially that of Eliot (he thought very highly of Valery and Baudelaire) was unremitting. Unfortunately, Winters's very logical consistency marred much of his evaluation, causing him to dismiss literally all of Romanticism and uphold the merits of poets who are virtually unread today. (Winters shares with Irving Babbitt and T.E. Hulme a violent, almost obsessive antipathy towards Romanticism, which he equates with irrationalism and lack of restraint; like Babbitt and Hulme, he seems to forget that Goethe, Schiller, and Wordsworth, arguably three of the most important figures of Romanticism as a whole, were as critical of irrationalism and Romantic excess as any modern.) Poirier draws attention to the 'thin or boned-up erudition' of Eliot, Joyce et al, to the way in which, in modernist writing generally, difficulties are carefully placed in the path of the reader, and vast learning (in the poet or novelist or critic) is hinted at, without always being
demonstrated. Carey's main target is the snobbishness and elitism of the English modernists, which he compares tellingly with the middle-class virtues (now rarely celebrated in English studies) of writers like Arnold Bennett, Gissing and Wells.

These charges of irrationalism, obscurity, and elitism do not strike me, however, as going to the root of the problem (in fairness, they were not perhaps, intended to do so by these writers). I have chosen to concentrate on Trilling and Lukacs because they seem to go deeper, to the idealism that modernism inherited from Romanticism, and to the posture of alienation and isolation that often accompanied this idealism.

Modernism and Romanticism

In recent years a number of influential studies have insisted on the continuities between literary and philosophical movements that earlier scholarship, for the most part, had tried to keep apart. This might be the result of a certain tendency to construct broad historical and philosophical syntheses, a tendency that is in part a reaction against the epistemological and speculative asceticism of the New Critics. Alternatively, it may just be that with the passage of time, ruptures and rebellions that appeared total and dramatic to the would-be rebels fall into perspective as little local battles, with overarching structures largely invisible to the protagonists becoming visible to scholars of a later period. So Frank Kermode, in his persuasive Romantic Image, argues that modernism is
substantially a development of the main current of Romantic thought, notwithstanding the claims of T.E. Hulme, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound that they were `classicists.' Of course Kermode makes it easier for himself by setting up Yeats (a self-confessed `last romantic') as the paradigmatic modernist rather than T.S Eliot or Pound; even so, Kermode's tracing of the continuities between Romanticism and modernism through "the twin concepts of the isolated artist and the supernatural Image to which he gains access"(163), and his exposure of the contradictions in Hulme's argument that he and his associates were writing `classical,' not Romantic poetry (Hulme's being the most determined and articulate effort to detach modernism from Romanticism), are very convincing.

Poststructuralism and postmodernism are widely perceived as opposed to, indeed destructive of, modernism. But Gerald Graff and Andreas Huyssen have elaborated the links and continuities between modernism, on the one hand, and postmodernism and poststructuralism on the other, and it appears much more likely that the latter movements (especially poststructuralism) have developed out of principles which were quite central to modernism. Graff, for instance, points out that the poststructuralist hostility to ideas of language as referential was prefigured by modernist (and New Critical) opposition to the idea that poems referred to anything but themselves/ Many of the points Graff makes have been made before; what is interesting is that he does not make them merely to disparage poststructuralism,
but to point to certain crucial weaknesses in the modernist movement itself. In this he somewhat resembles Yvor Winters, whose drive towards consistency impelled him to reject most of the Romantics because of the pernicious effect he believed them to have had on the modernists. Andreas Huyssen, carefully distinguishing between postmodernism and poststructuralism, argues that the latter, "in its obsession with ecriture and writing, allegory and rhetoric, and in its displacement of revolution and politics to the aesthetic" is, literally, a theory of modernism, but without the characteristic modernist angst (After the Great Divide 207-8).

Perhaps inevitably, there have been theories that establish continuities between Romanticism and poststructuralism. Richard Rorty has pointed to the idealism (in the sense of believing that the human mind, or in this case, textuality itself, shapes reality) of the poststructuralists, comparing them to nineteenth century idealists. Juliet Sychrava, in her extraordinarily wide ranging and well documented Schiller to Derrida, also places poststructuralism in a line of descent from idealist theories of criticism. And Leonard Jackson, in The Poverty of Structuralism, has argued that "underlying traditional literary criticism is a sophisticated realist and materialist theory of the world; while much modern textual theory is idealist textual mysticism" (2).

What emerges from these various syncretic studies is not necessarily the reassuring (or depressing) certitude that nothing ever changes, that Romanticism and modernism and
poststructuralism are, at bottom, the same thing. What these studies do permit, even encourage, is the tracing of new genealogies, the following of the fortunes of a concept; something that was not possible earlier, when we knew—or thought we knew—that Romanticism was not modernism, and that both were distinct from poststructuralism.

Our unwillingness to accept that modernism is largely a development of Romanticism comes, I think, partly from the modernists' own emphatic understanding of their difference from their predecessors (T.E. Hulme being a crucial figure in this context); but the deciding factor appears to be the consensus that the Romantics were Nature poets, while the modernists, especially T.S. Eliot and Joyce, via Baudelaire and Laforgue in Eliot's case, were poets of the city. (I would like, if possible to sidestep the perils of a direct attack, so I shall make no attempt to define modernism. After Bradbury and McFarlane's book or Ellmann and Feidelson's, the effort would seem to be both dangerous and superfluous. I shall assume that, for those in English studies, the writings of T.S. Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Woolf, and Wyndham Lewis will offer enough by way of suggestive family resemblances to define the field; and that the discussion of indebtedness to and differences from Romanticism and poststructuralism, as well as the discussion of the critiques of modernism by Trilling, Lukacs and Yvor Winters will, between them, clarify my meaning.) As David Perkins puts it:

Because Eliot endowed his material with an almost
visionary intensity, his poetry might from some points of view be thought "Romantic." But no reader in 1922 would have seen it this way. To dwell on the modern city, especially on the more sordid aspects of it, was to break dramatically with the Romantic tradition in poetry. The legacy of the great Romantic poets of England had created a persisting assumption that poetry would present nature or landscape.... In addition, when the Romantic poets dwelt on evil and tragedy they used images that were not only imaginatively heightened but also agreeable.... Because The Waste Land broke the fixed association between verse and the agreeable, the beautiful, or the ideal, it seemed to many readers not merely un- but anti-poetic. (Perkins 501)

This understanding of the Romantics as primarily Nature poets, I shall argue, becomes much more difficult to sustain when one places the English Romantics in the context of European Romanticism, and more especially German Romanticism; it is not enough to say that the English Romantics emphasized Nature rather more than their German counterparts (which is not even true as far as Schelling is concerned), and that that is a sufficient criterion of difference. What does happen when the English Romantics are studied in the context of European Romanticism is that the task of definition becomes far more difficult, and certainly "Nature" drops out as the single overarching defining feature. In fact, Arthur. O. Lovejoy, in a celebrated discussion
of the difficulties of defining Romanticism, concluded that "any attempt at a general appraisal even of a single chronologically determinate Romanticism—still more of "Romanticism" as a whole—is a fatuity" (252). Rene Wellek, responding to what he saw as Lovejoy's "challenge to exhibit some common denominator" in the various Romanticisms, defended the critic's right to speak of a single Romanticism, and concluded (at any rate to his own satisfaction) that "the basic argument [had] been won" (4). While my sympathies are with Wellek, Lovejoy's argument is incisive, and moreover points to something very characteristic about discussions of Romanticism: that they rely excessively on what Wittgenstein called family resemblances. In the case of Romanticism, for instance, after reading perhaps a dozen accounts of its origins and characteristic features, I drew up my own list of features, (restricting myself to the smallest number of what seemed to be essential features) which goes as follows:

1) Philosophical idealism
2) Celebration of Nature
3) Political radicalism
4) Rejection of Enlightenment rationality
5) The posture of alienation and isolation

On comparing the list with another of poets and thinkers generally considered Romantic, I found that no single figure could be easily associated with all the features. Wordsworth is usually considered the pre-eminent Nature poet in the English language, and was probably politically radical in his youth, but
(as I will argue) had a very ambivalent attitude towards idealism, certainly did not reject Enlightenment rationality in any simple sense, and emphatically rejected the posture of alienation. Coleridge, perhaps the closest among the English to the German idealists, is usually regarded as a conservative, and, like Wordsworth, would not have wanted to be perceived as rejecting rationality or embracing alienation. Goethe (the young Goethe is often cited as one of the seminal figures of German Romanticism) was scathingly critical of idealism, of political radicalism of the revolutionary type, and, most of all, of the posture of alienation. Moreover, he and Schiller went out of their way to analyse and criticise Romanticism, and to distance their own positions from it. Shelley, who certainly was radical and embraced alienation and despair (for which he was mercilessly satirised by Peacock) is close to being a pure case; but even he would not have seen himself as rejecting Enlightenment rationality. Keats is a difficult figure to place, as none of the categories, save the emphasis on Nature, seem to capture his oeuvre. Byron, with his allegiance to Dryden and Pope and his respect for a certain "documentary realism" is not caught either. And I am fairly sure that experts on German Romanticism will have a similar problem with Fichte, the Schlegels, Schelling, Novalis and Tieck.  

There is also the argument, usually made by Marxist critics, that the English Romantics' emphasis on the healing powers of 

*Nature was essentially an evasion of the more overtly political*
legacies of the French Revolution. While some of these critics seem to imagine that Wordsworth's (to take the most familiar target) professed love for pleasing landscapes was almost entirely a function of his desire to ignore poverty and industrialization, a perspective that is as one-sided and reductive as the view that contemplating these landscapes was all one needed to do to stave off hunger and death, it certainly is more difficult today to see the English Romantics' relationship with 'Nature' as a simple one, unconnected with political reform or questions of epistemology.

With this awareness, then, that the preoccupations of the English Romantics may have been rather different from what we were led to believe they were from prolonged and selective exposure to soothing images of daisies, daffodils, nightingales, green fields, and contented peasants, the difficulties of perceiving the links between modernism and Romanticism are diminished.

Modernism and the Isolated Artist

The feature that Romanticism and modernism most conspicuously have in common is one that Frank Kermode drew attention to in Romantic Image: the isolation and alienation of the artist. Henry James, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, Robert Musil: the list of writers and artists who either exemplified or drew attention to the necessity of isolation is endless. Kermode's discussion of this necessary
isolation is, on the whole, sympathetic. In a sense, he accepts the modernists' own understanding of their situation as heroic. If Edmund Wilson's well known—and much earlier--The Wound and the Bow is a more ambivalent treatment of the same subject, Trilling's several attempts to come to terms with it represent a struggle to understand and be fair to modernist celebration of isolation that tends to spill over into outright hostility. In "Art and Neurosis" he firmly rejects the idea that neurosis and alienation are the price the artist pays in order to create: ' 

[The artist] is what he is by virtue of his successful objectification of his neurosis, by his shaping it and making it available to others in a way which has its effect upon their own egos in struggle. His genius, that is, may be defined in terms of his faculties of perception, representation, and realization, and in these terms alone. It can no more be defined in terms of neurosis than can his power of walking and talking, or his sexuality. (170)

In "The Fate of Pleasure," he notes dryly that "our contemporary aesthetic culture does not set great store by the principle of pleasure in its simple and primitive meaning and it may even be said to maintain an antagonism to the principle of pleasure" (72). Against this gloomy posturing, Trilling holds up Wordsworth's and Keats's healthy celebration of "the grand elementary principle of pleasure." In "William Dean Howells" he defends Howells's naturalism, his vulgarity, his "accumulation of
the details of literal reality" (94), his invitation to the novelist to "deal with the smiling aspects of life" (102). Given what we know about Trilling's tastes, his fastidiousness in literary matters, his defence of Howells is obviously much more a matter of redressing the balance, of correcting a tendency towards celebrating alienation that seemed to have gone too far, than a straightforward preference. The fact that Trilling chose to defend a writer who was by then a sort of symbol of vulgar realism is an indication of how far in the contrary direction Trilling thought modernist high art had gone.

Sincerity and Authenticity is the work in which Trilling comes closest to establishing a connection between modernism and certain strands of Romanticism, and to expressing his sense of the inadequacy of both. In his discussion of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, Trilling reminds us that Hegel rejects the 'honest soul' and praises the "disintegrated consciousness" (42), which represents "Spirit moving to its next stage of development" (44). As the discussion proceeds to Goethe's Sorrows of Young Werther and Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy, and then to Rousseau's Confessions, we realize that Trilling is dealing with a characteristic feature of Romanticism as well as modernism: the idea of the necessary alienation of the artist. He brings together versions of the Romantic cult of the Self (Hegel, Nietzsche, Robespierre) and sets them against Jane Austen's non-philosophical, non-political "defence of the 'honest soul'". And Trilling concludes that Jane Austen is right, and that "things
are not what they will become but what an uncorrupted intelligence may perceive them to be from the first" (77). Hegel is wrong, Trilling implies. It is not the dialectical method of Hegel but the categorical imperative of Austen (and Kant) that will save us.

Trilling's argument and position are hard to pin down in *Sincerity and Authenticity* but his hostility to certain features of what is recognisably Romanticism is obvious. He is concerned, as always, with the danger that the posture of alienation cuts the artist off from real life and work, and he is concerned that intellectuals are fetishizing culture. Trilling does not explicitly lay out the connection between idealism and the "disintegrated consciousness"; he is more concerned with the effect of the latter as a *fait accompli*. Without quite saying that its effects are pernicious, Trilling makes it quite clear that his sympathies are with "the militant categorical certitude with which *Mansfield Park* discriminates between right and wrong" (79).

As a critic of the cult of alienation, Trilling had distinguished forbears. Goethe and Schiller fought a lifelong battle against Romantic excess, Goethe going as far as to declare Romanticism a disease. Goethe's target, like Trilling's, was the posture of gloomy but heroic isolation, often merely a justification for idleness and irresponsibility. Among the English, nobody satirised this particular affectation of the Romantics more memorably than Thomas Love Peacock, Shelley's
friend, and the person chiefly responsible for Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*.¹⁰

Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the English Compromise

The idea of the isolated and alienated artist has at any rate received critical attention, even if much of it has been negative. There is, however, a rather different type of continuity between Romanticism and modernism, one that has received less attention: the shared understanding that the poet creates reality, most obviously his own, but possibly also that of human society in general. This is the attitude I am referring to when I use the term "idealism." The *lo ci classicus* of this position among the English Romantics would be Coleridge's discussion of the poet, who "brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity" and "the synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination" (173-74) in *Biographia Literaria* and Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*. With the modernists, Shelley's legislator, even less acknowledged, arguably plays an even larger role in the poet's self-conception. If the modernist poet or novelist is perceptibly further from the centres of actual power than his Romantic predecessor, the poet, perhaps in angry reaction, may feel even more intensely that he is creating an autonomous world. This attitude, in both Romantic and modernist forms, is derived, or has the same source, as philosophical
idealism. The idealism I have been referring to has its theoretical roots in the philosophical writings of Kant, Fichte and Hegel (the idealism of Bishop Berkeley seems to have been less influential, probably because of Berkeley's paradoxical closeness to empiricism). Briefly, Kant, responding to David Hume's empiricism, which seemed to deny human agency and therefore the possibility of morality, argued that we can only know the world through our mental constructions (the categories of space, time, number and so on). Kant's constructivism is modified by his insistence that there is a realm of the unknowable, constituted by things-in-themselves, forever beyond our conceptual reach; in this sense he is a dualist, hedging his bets between empiricism and what he undoubtedly foresaw as a dangerous idealism. His German successors, among them Fichte and Hegel, seeing Kant's dualism as the result of timidity or misplaced caution, developed a much more thoroughgoing idealism, in which all reality is constructed in and through our mental categories. This development was naturally regarded with considerable irritation, and some fear and revulsion, by those who continued to regard themselves as empiricists. In Britain the empiricist tradition, with its roots in the theories of Locke and Hume, was particularly strong. Some idea of the resistance offered to the efforts of those who wished to adapt German idealism to English conditions can be got from reading the early parts of Biographia Literaria or the satires of Thomas Love Peacock. As late as 1912, Bertrand Russell was warning against
the dangers of an untrammelled idealism, in terms that all empiricists would understand:

Greatness of the soul is not fostered by those philosophies which assimilate the Universe to Man... the view which tells us that Man is the measure of all things, that truth is man-made, that space and time and the world of universals are properties of the mind, and that, if there be anything not created by the mind, it is unknowable and of no account to us...is...untrue [and] has the effect of robbing philosophic contemplation of all that gives it value, since it fetters contemplation to Self. (qtd. in Barber 37)

In his German and English Romanticism, Rene Wellek draws attention to the utilitarian and empiricist climate of opinion in Wordsworth's time, and contrasts it with that in Germany during the same period:

In England, there was no parallel to the German idealistic philosophy; academically, Common Sense philosophy was in the saddle, and unofficially, the influence of Utilitarianism was spreading at that time.... The German Romantics were confronted with the enormous prestige of the philosophy of Kant and Fichte and had a systematic philosopher and ally in Schelling.... In England, only Coleridge tried to speculate as a philosopher, and he drew heavily on the Germans; Shelley and Wordsworth were either confined to
the British empiricist tradition or went back to Plato.

("German and English Romanticism" 31)

The argument that the German Romantics were profoundly affected by philosophical idealism is hardly likely to be opposed; the argument that Coleridge was successful 1) in understanding the German version of philosophical idealism and 2) in infusing his understanding of it into English poetry and criticism is likely to meet with considerably more resistance."

Whatever the strength of Coleridge's allegiance to idealism (and there is a strong argument to be made for his concept of 'imagination' being a brilliant naturalization of German idealism in the English context), there seems little doubt that Wordsworth's attitude to idealism was ambivalent in the extreme. It is this ambivalence, I will try to show, that becomes the characteristic feature of English Romanticism and of much subsequent English prose and poetry. It is only with modernism that this ambivalence, or accommodation, gives way to a more thoroughgoing idealism.

Coleridge's celebrated attack on Wordsworth's theories, in *Biographia Literaria*, represents, among other things, idealist opposition to Wordsworth's residual empiricism. I believe that the extent to which the disagreement between Wordsworth and Coleridge has been treated as a more or less technical dispute between two practising poets has obscured the genuine philosophical differences. Coleridge's persistent efforts to make his and Wordsworth's poetry conform to the requirements of
philosophical idealism were resisted by Wordsworth, "for whom the thought that what we see and hear is in our own minds is alarming, and reduces the world to a dreamlike and insubstantial state/" as Mary Warnock puts it (Imagination 103). What Wordsworth worked out, in his poetry and his prose, was a compromise, a successful amalgam of empiricist and idealist influences. I would not want to push the argument too far; to imply, for instance, that this particular amalgam cannot be found before Wordsworth (one has only to remember certain passages in Milton, and, above all, Shakespeare to realise the folly of making such an argument). But as exemplifying a self conscious art of reconciliation between these two philosophical extremes, in the English speaking world; in this respect I believe Wordsworth was a pioneer. As Basil Willey observes:

Wordsworth was the kind of poet who could only have appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, when mythologies were exploded, and a belief in the visible universe as the body of which God was the soul alone remained. (86)

I also would not want to make the argument that Wordsworth's influence was decisive; it is difficult to believe that the English empiricist tradition would not have thrown up considerable resistance to idealist trends, even in the arguably more susceptible areas of art and culture. Wordsworth's particular virtue, however, was that while he placed empiricism in a somewhat subsidiary role (to the shaping imagination), he
never lost his poetic grip on the actuality of experience and the specific data of shared observation.

Coleridge, in a passage from his Notebooks, writes:

In looking at the objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering through the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were by asking, a symbolic language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new. (quoted Warnock 83)

Wordsworth, on the other hand, declares that

The powers requisite for the production of poetry are: first, those of Observation and Description,—i.e., the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the describer. (Preface to Poems [1815] 626)

Willey draws attention to the passage in The Prelude in which Wordsworth most clearly states his position in regard to the plastic Imagination on the one hand and the subservience to 'external things' on the other:

A plastic power
Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
A local spirit of his own, at war
With general tendency, but, for the most,
Subservient strictly to external things
With which it communed. (Prelude 2, 362-68)

This particular to-and-fro movement of Wordsworth's intellectual allegiances is a constant feature of his writing. The idealist thrust of `plastic power' is immediately balanced by the `strict subservience' of this power to `external things.' The passage quoted earlier from the 1815 Preface ("The powers requisite for the production of poetry...") is immediately followed by another in which Wordsworth emphatically declares that the poet's descriptive powers, though indispensable, should not be relied on for any extensive period of time, as this would imply that the "higher qualities of the mind" were "in a state of subjection to external objects." This oscillation, noticeable in the prose, is much less marked in the poetry, where a quite remarkable fusion takes place, and descriptive passages are loaded with emotional colouring, without very much loss of sensuous specificity. This peculiarity (as I am arguing it must have been then) of Wordsworth's poetry has rarely been more eloquently attested than by John Stuart Mill, who owed to his reading of the poems his recovery from a dangerous nervous breakdown in 1828:

In the first place, these poems addressed themselves powerfully to one of the strongest of my pleasurable susceptibilities, the love for rural objects and natural scenery....But Wordsworth would never have had any great effect on me, if he had merely placed before me beautiful pictures of natural scenery.... What made
Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. (Autobiography 95)

According to Willey, Wordsworth had no choice but to use, as poetic material, "the fact-world of modern scientific consciousness [as] the primary datum." But this world, "essentially fixed and dead" had to be "brought to life by the modifying colours of the imagination" (88). Willey points out that Wordsworth is equally careful to avoid the perils of subjectivism (exemplified, for a later age, by Shelley) and of a plodding realism: "there must be intensification without distortion" (Willey 91).

Willey's remarks on what I have been calling Wordsworth's accommodation are particularly suggestive:

The belief that Wordsworth constructed out of his experiences was a belief in the capacity of the mind to co-operate with this `active universe,' to contribute something of its own to it in perceiving it, and not, as sensationalism taught, merely to receive, passively, impressions from without....[He hoped that] poetry might be delivered from the fetters of the mechanical tradition without being allowed to fall into disrepute as `unreal' or `fanciful'. (87)

Where I have been discussing Wordsworth's accommodation in terms of empiricism and idealism, Willey talks of facts and
Of the two elements of which these states are composed, fact and value, Wordsworth is equally sure of both. He is sure of the fact, because he knows no man has observed it more intently; he is sure of the value, because this was intuitively apprehended in himself. . . . But it was only as long as his mind was dealing thus nakedly with observed fact that Wordsworth could feel this conviction of truthfulness. Any translation of his experience into myth, personification or fable . . . is inevitably a lapse towards a lower level of truth.

Wordsworth's reconciliation of empiricist and idealist currents of thought seems to have fed into two distinct, but related traditions, one related to poetry proper, the other to critical prose. On the one hand, a carefully observed natural world was balanced or supplemented by an equally careful observation of the poet's own emotions; on the other hand, some sort of division of powers was tacitly assumed, with a sensuous and imaginative poetry attended by a humbler, more empirical criticism. This latter especially, I have been suggesting, was the chief legacy of English Romanticism to what we have been calling English studies. The strength of this legacy can be demonstrated by the fierceness of the critical attack on carelessly observed natural phenomena. Shelley, in one of his most famous poems, the "Ode to the West Wind" wrote:
Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like Earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean....

And here is Leavis, at his most devastating, on Shelley's phrase "Loose clouds like Earth's decaying leaves are shed":

In what respects are the `loose clouds' like "decaying leaves'? The correspondence is certainly not in shape, colour or way of moving. It is only the vague general sense of windy tumult that associates the clouds and the leaves; and, accordingly, the appropriateness of the metaphor `stream' in the first line is not that it suggests a surface on which, like leaves, clouds might be `shed,' but that it contributes to the general `streaming' in which the inappropriateness of `shed' passes unnoticed. ("Shelley" 269)

Ruskin, one assumes, would have satisfied Leavis's strict criteria, at least as far as cloud descriptions were concerned:

They are nearly always arranged in some definite and evident order, commonly in long ranks reaching sometimes from the zenith to the horizon, each rank composed of an infinite number of transverse bars of about the same length, each bar thickest in the middle, and terminating in a traceless vaporous point at each side; the ranks are in the direction of the wind, and the bars of course at right angles to it; these latter are slightly bent in the middle. (quoted in Hough 9-10)
And Ruskin can (and does) go on like this for pages and pages. But he also, after an account of St. Marks Place in Venice which is arguably one of the finest bits of descriptive writing in English prose, casually mentions that the colours he has been expatiating upon are less lovely than the 'soft iridescence' of the plumes of the doves which nest in the church.\textsuperscript{13}

With Gerard Manley Hopkins, again, the closeness of attention to visual detail is almost obsessive; but this detail, which so dominates his journal entries, is, in the poems, completely subordinated to Hopkins' religious feeling and reverence for natural beauty.

The strength of this empiricist accommodation to idealism is admitted even by those who are most hostile to it, although they are likely to describe it in less flattering terms than I have done:

While Europe was passing through its major critical systems—classical philology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, structuralism—English criticism managed to survive essentially unscathed, so deep were its roots in a commonplace philistine empiricism. It was such philistine empiricism which powered the 'neo-liberal' enterprise, and continues to do so today. (Eagleton, Against The Grain 47)

From Eagleton's point of view, it is an outrage that 'philistine empiricism' should prove so obdurate, so resistant to fresh intellectual currents. A.D. Nuttall, who does not think it
an outrage, is nevertheless surprised by the "special craving for intensity" (A Common Sky 272) or "hunger for reality" (273) he finds in the writing of Wordsworth, Blake, Ruskin, Lawrence, G.K. Chesterton, and Leavis, among others. And it is not only English poetry and the novel that are marked by this hunger for reality. "Reality, truth, life, vividness, 'there-ness'. These are the watchwords of modern criticism" Nuttall writes (A Common Sky 267)."

Modernism and Idealism

Virginia Woolf's urbane insistence, in 1925, that "the sooner English fiction turn[ed] its back upon" Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy, "the better for its soul" seems to have had its effect. They have been so cold-shouldered in English departments that John Carey can actually sound scandalously revolutionary by suggesting that we take Bennett seriously again."

Woolf's condemnation of Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy is on the grounds of their 'materialism.' "They are concerned not with the spirit but with the body," and "the writer seems constrained, not by his own free will... but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant... to provide a plot... and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour" (2033-34). She goes on to recommend, famously, that novelists keep in mind that
"Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (2034).

It is a masterly turning of the tables on the hapless 'Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy,' who begin to sound like a shabby firm of undertakers by the end of Woolf's dismissive critique. The very thing a writer of a realist novel prides himself or herself on, that his or her characters, if they came to life, would not surprise the denizens of the real world, is dismissed by Woolf as so much dreary, bourgeois nonsense. The life within, the mental life of the characters, is what counts.

A curious feature of Woolf's criticism of the realism of the writing of Wells and Bennett is the way social snobbishness is deployed against such writing. Of Wells's books she writes: "Yet what more damaging criticism can there be both of his earth and of his Heaven than that they are to be inhabited here and hereafter by his Joans and his Peters?" (2033).

Shades of Arnold's 'Wragg'! And this passage rather ominously echoes an earlier idealist, attacking an earlier realist. In response to Wordsworth's desire to use as a poetic resource "a selection of language really used by men," amid scenes of "low and rustic life," Coleridge wrote that "the best part of human language, properly so called, is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself" and that the process by which this elevated usage came into being had "no place in the consciousness of uneducated man" (197).16
Woolf's dismissiveness towards "the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story" that her predecessors prided themselves on, marks an important shift in artistic sensibility. **Idealism** had been formally approved by one of the most important of the **modernists**, and realism had been relegated to the literary hinterland, to hackwork and journalism. Of course, there were people like T.E. Hulme, whose strictures on Romanticism were made much of by Pound and Eliot, and whose objections to Romanticism seem to come from his empiricist background. "The great aim is accurate, precise, and definite description" he writes, in a phrase that recalls generations of sturdy English common sense. But Hulme's writing is more anomalous than it seems; Eliot's endorsement of Hulme's theories was strategic, and by the time of *Four Quartets* Eliot was exploring a mystical-nostalgic mode very far from whatever realism there was in *The Waste Land*.37

Georg Lukacs, in "The Ideology of Modernism" launches what must still be the most famous attack on the subjectivism of modernist writing.18 Ahistorical, melancholy, pathologically obsessed with psychological detail (and with the detail of psychological pathologies), lacking in intellectual content: these are the terms in which Lukacs dismisses the writing of Joyce, Kafka, and Musil.

Moderns obsessively portray `the disintegration of personality':

*Attenuation of reality and dissolution of personality*
are... interdependent: the stronger the one, the stronger the other. Underlying both is the lack of a consistent view of human nature. Man is reduced to a sequence of unrelated experiential fragments; he is as inexplicable to others as himself.... The dissolution of personality, originally the unconscious product of the identification of concrete and abstract potentiality, is elevated to a deliberate principle in the light of consciousness. ("Ideology of Modernism" 26)

Lukacs is very close to Trilling when he comments on "the poetic necessity of the pathological" in modern literature (29); as a Marxist, however, he associates the pathology with "the prosaic quality of life under capitalism" rather than with the misplaced desire to embrace a greater variety of experience or ascend to a higher spiritual state.

For Lukacs, the tendency of modernist subjectivism is towards "the destruction of literature as such" (45). He also quite explicitly lays out the logic of the relationship between idealism and Romanticism that Trilling implies in Sincerity and Authenticity. In The Theory of the Novel he writes:

The precondition and the price of this immoderate elevation of the subject is, however, the abandonment of any claim to participation in the shaping of the outside world. The romanticism of disillusionment not only followed abstract idealism in time and history, it
was also conceptually its heir. (117).

Gerald Graff's *Literature Against Itself* is an unusually lucid and accessible account of the various theoretical relativisms that have threatened the English studies status quo. Graff often sounds like Yvor Winters; Winters believed that "the work of literature, in so far as it is valuable, approximates a real apprehension and communication of a particular kind of objective truth" (*In Defense of Reason* 11), and Graff believes that literature should "preserve the distinction between the real and the fictive, and... help us resist those influences...that would turn lying into a universal principle" (*Literature Against Itself* 12). Graff makes two interesting (and interestingly related) arguments. One is that the "most significant achievement of the New Criticism... was its popularization of the modernist idea of literature and along with it modernist assumptions about language, knowledge, and experience" (*Literature Against Itself* 5); the other is that the New Critics' "hostile...view of the referential powers of language" (6) opened the way for the far more radical anti-representational theories that followed. In a sense, Graff argues, modernism has only itself to blame for the excesses of poststructuralism and the other anti-representational theories. This concept-tracing exercise tends to gain momentum as it goes along, and Graff is compelled to concede that moral and epistemological nihilism can be traced back to Romanticism, and to Kant's unintended, immanent radical relativism:

...in the absence of any appeal to such a coercive
reality to which the plurality of subjectivities can be referred, all perspectives become equally valid.... The logic of romantic transcendental philosophy led to a relativism that was certainly antithetical to what most romantic thinkers intended. (Literature Against Itself \( \text{\textcopyright39} \))

I find Graff's theories quite convincing; indeed these theories started me thinking about the continuities between modernism and poststructuralism. However, Graff seems to stake everything on literature being, somehow, 'true'; a dangerous enterprise when positivism seems to have disappeared from even the hard sciences and analytical philosophy.

Juliet Sychrava's Schiller to Derrida is probably, to date, the most ambitious and thoroughly researched effort to establish the idealism of poststructuralism. Tracing the Romantic-Classic divide back to Schiller's On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature, where what we have come to know as Romantic and Classic are discussed as the 'sentimental' and the '"naive,' she argues that the sentimental, or idealist tendency has steadily displaced the naive or realist mode (this displacement, according to Sychrava, accounts for the fact that Wordsworth is considered a major poet while John Clare is not):

Comparing Schiller's aesthetic with Derrida's, I trace a development from Schiller through the Romantics and Coleridge to post-structuralist thought: a 'sentimental' tendency whereby radical modernity
articulates itself against a `naive' which it sets up as a target for that purpose. (Syhrava 5)

Schiller himself was `fundamentally idealist,' she believes, and the way in which he sets up a `naive' straw man only to knock it down again and celebrate his own form of idealism has become a sort of paradigm for idealist critics of succeeding generations. Poststructuralists also, Syhrava feels, set up a simplistic version of the autonomous, centred, fully present author or text and then demolish this concept, which nobody believed in anyway (interestingly, it occurs to one that people may start believing in such authors or texts now that poststructuralists have attacked the concept; stranger things have been known to happen).

In a discussion of the distinction between Schiller's conception of play and Derrida's, she captures the paradoxical double movement of the trajectory of recent criticism, at once more idealist and more imprisoning:

...in Schiller play is contained within a system, in Derrida play will be made unlimited as the system is unframed.... The effect of unframing is to bring relativism into the `text' or `system,' and yet, in contradictory fashion, to assert more forcefully the absolute nature of that system. Whereas Kant's metaphysic by excluding the transcendental insists on the limits of its own domain: `the bounds of sense,' Schiller's or Schelling's systems assert their access to the absolute, whilst Derrida's has no bounds at all
and includes everything. Thus as the sentimental tradition progresses, it becomes at once more relativistic and more absolutist. (Sychrava 192)

My argument in this chapter owes a great deal to Sychrava's; since, like her, I too wish to defend the claims of realism against those of idealism, I have found the argument convincing as well as useful. My only serious disagreement with her argument is in her understanding of Schiller's and Wordsworth's response to idealism. Both, in her reading, are far more sympathetic to idealism than the evidence suggests they were. Wordsworth is more like Clare than Sychrava allows, and Schiller ends his On the Naive and Sentimental with a warning against an unbalanced idealism that is far more severe than his earlier warning against excessive realism. Schiller incurred the enmity of the entire younger generation of Romantic idealists by criticising their lack of realism. He said of Jean Paul and Holderlin that they suffered from "a lack of aesthetic nourishment and influx from outside and opposition of the empirical world in which they lived." Both Schiller and Wordsworth, I would suggest, had considerable insight into the potential for transcendence as well as the dangers inherent in idealism.

In addition to Sychrava's sophisticated theoretical arguments for the existence of an increasingly idealist tendency in English literary criticism (or, An Increasingly Sentimental Journey, as she puts it), there is other evidence of this tendency. Geoffrey Hartman, for instance, no longer believes, as
T.S. Eliot did, that criticism cannot be an autotelic activity. This move is idealist in its refusal to accept boundaries; for the idealist critic, the poem or novel is a pretext rather than a text. An idea that Oscar Wilde exploited as scandalous, in "The Critic as Artist" has become the serious claim of university teachers. More significant, even, than Hartman's insistence on the equivalence, in terms of importance, of criticism and poetry, is Paul De Man's consistent efforts to idealize Wordsworth's poems. Here is De Man on Wordsworth's feeling for landscape:

As one watches the progress of a poet like Wordsworth, however, the significance of the locale tends to broaden into an area of meaning that is no longer literally bound to a particular place. The significance of the landscape is frequently made problematic by a succession of spatial ambiguities/to such an extent that one ends up no longer with a specific locale but with a mere name, of which the geographical existence has been voided of significance. ("Fragment" Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism 99)

This as a description of a poet who risked the amused contempt of posterity by measuring a puddle from side to side! In Samuel Weber's quite brilliant formulation (used in connection with a different essay by De Man), De Man's project "can be described as an attempt to (re)-introduce the perspective of German romanticism into English language literary criticism"
Conclusion

Beginning with the idea, in the first chapter, that a liberal education could be understood as being in an oppositional relationship with liberalism, I went on to argue that another kind of oppositional relationship structured the component of university education we call the humanities. In Britain, this humanistic opposition to the influence of the sciences came to be associated primarily with English studies. A distinctive blend of empiricist and idealist influences, I argued, was the characteristic feature of the criticism that emerged from English studies. This blend, or accommodation, had its approximate beginnings in the practice of the English Romantics, especially that of Wordsworth. Modified for use in the humanities, with 'imagination' allowed free play in poetry and the novel but allowed only a diminished role in criticism, where the empiricist legacy was much stronger, this accommodation has served tolerably well; it has been an influential response to the twin dangers of an increasingly technological civilization and an excessively subjectivist reaction to and withdrawal from this civilization. Since the dominance of modernism, but much more so in the last two decades, this subjectivist or idealist response appears to have been very much in the ascendant in English studies. The status of empiricism and realism in English literary criticism must certainly be linked with their fortunes in the sciences. If
the trajectory suggested by the names of Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend in the philosophy of science is anything to go by, even the sciences have been overtaken by a wave of relativistic and anti-realist theory. Popper's thinking already represented a move away from hard-nosed logical positivism; and Kuhn and Feyerabend represent positions increasingly distant from classical empiricism and realism. I am suggesting that it is possible that the increasing idealism and subjectivism of contemporary literary criticism may be linked to the growth of relativistic thinking in science, philosophy of science, and analytic philosophy.

In the light of recent developments in English studies, Lukacs's harshly critical analysis of modernism deserves re-reading, as does Trilling's more ambivalent response. It strikes me at any rate as quite plausible that the subjectivism of modernism prepared the ground for the anarchic self-indulgence of much poststructuralist criticism. This may also explain the difficulty faced by many of those who are troubled by the advent of poststructuralism when they wish to criticise poststructuralist writing: we are, if only by default, all modernists now, and for reasons I have explored it is difficult to attack poststructuralism from modernist premises. Disentanglement from the excesses of poststructuralism will only follow what is likely to be the far more painful disentanglement from literary modernism. The fact that Marxists have been the most ferocious and effective critics of poststructuralism is no
accident. Economic materialism has its roots in empiricist and realist observation of the world. Marxists know, as Lukacs did, that to endorse idealism or subjectivism unqualifiedly is to accept the "abandonment of any claim to participation in the shaping of the outside world."

Earlier in this chapter I quoted Terry Eagleton's comment that the "philistine empiricism" that underlay English criticism also powered "the neo-liberal enterprise." I think those who are in sympathy with liberal goals should take this argument seriously. I think Eagleton is right to the extent that there is indisputably a connection between criticism and whatever political dispensation one is living under, even, or especially, if that political dispensation is as seemingly neutral as liberalism. In the first chapter of this thesis I argued that liberal education may, in the past, have served liberalism by criticising liberalism, especially liberalism in its most utilitarian manifestations ("powering" liberalism in ways perhaps not suspected by Eagleton). But this liberal education, and the liberalism it both combated and sustained, are things of the past. The liberal education described by Newman, Mill and Arnold, confronted a young and optimistic liberalism; more to the point, it was a peculiarly English form of liberalism that drew ideological sustenance from Locke and Mill, a liberalism Benjamin Barber has appropriately called empiricist liberalism. By the 1970s, if not earlier, the significant focus in the English speaking humanities had shifted to the United
States, where a very different kind of liberalism was dominant. Especially after John Rawls's 1971 *A Theory of Justice*, the most influential type of liberal theory has been characterised by a resolute shedding of utilitarian and empiricist foundational baggage, and a move towards grounding liberalism in a Kantian understanding of rights and duties. This move has proved to be immensely energizing for liberal theory in general, as well as fruitful of further, or accessory, theories; but the relationship of the humanities as a whole to the dominant liberal ethos is unclear.

To make an already confusing situation even more chaotic, a powerful critique of foundationalist defences of liberalism has been launched, associated with the names of Oakeshott, MacIntyre, J.G.A. Pocock, Rorty and others. The writings of these theorists constitute a very powerful critique of existing forms of liberalism, and point to the possibility of a completely different liberalism coming into existence, one which has shed its hubristic claims to uniqueness and inevitability, and offers itself as merely one of many forms of political organisation. If, as is likely, liberalism increasingly looks for justifications not in the success of science or capitalism, or in totalizing and arrogant claims of unique virtue or knowledge, but in the description of the historical growth of a valuable individualism (one among many, and not necessarily better than any other) and the way of life associated with it, the humanities, and with it, English studies, is bound to change, perhaps beyond recognition.
NOTES

1. See especially his "Joyce and The Revolution of the Word" in The Critic as Anti-Philosopher.

2. Norman F. Cantor's Twentieth-Century Culture: Modernism to Deconstruction discusses the ways in which literary criticism helped popularise modernist writing. Graff's Literature Against Itself makes a similar point.

3. Trilling is probably more often thought of as one of the early and most articulate expositors of literary modernism, largely on the basis of "On the Teaching of Modern Literature." But I would argue that a survey of all his critical writing demonstrates a considerable hostility to the central tenets of literary modernism. This is most obvious in Sincerity and Authenticity and Beyond Culture. And even "On the Teaching of Modern Literature" is far from being a whole-hearted endorsement of modernist writing.

4. See Literature Against Itself, 31-62 and 129-149.


7. On the whole, though, there appears to be more unity among the German Romantics, largely because of the prestige and influence of Kant's philosophy, which influenced them all, as Wellek points out in "German and English Romanticism: A Confrontation." Idealism seems to have been a unifying feature in Germany in the way Nature' was a unifying feature in England. For a very interesting discussion of why the French, the English and the Germans developed distinctive Romanticisms in terms of such unifying features, see Edwin Berry Burgum's "Romanticism."

8. Burgum's theory is that the French Revolution produced very different reactions in England, Germany and France because of the different levels of socio-economic development of the three countries. Taking the 'trinity of liberty, equality, fraternity' seriously/ he argues, was "premature for Germany, essential for France, and dangerous for England" (145). For some idea of the range of recent Marxist and poststructuralist criticism of English Romanticism, and some good orthodox criticisms of these, see Romantic Revolutions: Criticism and Theory.

9. Walter Kaufman's From Shakespeare to Existentialism has been very useful, especially in its discussion of Goethe's relationship with the younger German Romantics.
10. In Nightmare Abbey, the satirical novel in which Shelley, Coleridge and Byron are caricatured, Peacock mercilessly exposes the hypocrisy and absurdity of the pretensions of the Romantics. The Byron character, Mr Cypress, talks like this:

There is no worth nor beauty but in the mind's idea. Love sows the wind and reaps the whirlwind. Confusion, thrice confounded, is the portion of him who rests even for an instant on that most brittle of reeds--the affection of a human being. The sum of our social destiny is to inflict or to endure.

The Coleridge character, Mr Flosky, is the butt of the most sustained ridicule, speaking relentlessly transcendentalist and opaque English, and at one point being made to admit "I never gave a plain answer to a question in my life." Scythrop (Shelley) lives in the gloomy Nightmare Abbey with servants chosen on the basis of their names--Raven, Crow, Skellet, Diggory Deathshead; he drinks Madeira out of a skull, is having an affair with two women simultaneously, threatens to shoot himself if neither of them accepts him, and urges his butler to adjust the time on the clock when his death hour approaches. Beneath the parody is much shrewd criticism. Coleridge's obscurity, Byron's gloomy posing, Shelley's inability to criticise his own actions from a moral position: all these are pointed up, perhaps more effectively than they would have been in non-satirical prose. And Peacock is no stolid empiricist. One of Shelley's best friends, he was himself a poet and critic, and on other occasions showed he could appreciate the greatness of Wordsworth, at any rate.

Peacock's work represents the peak of this satirical anti-Romantic genre: W.H. Mallock's later satirical attacks on Pater and Swinburne, though amusing, are much cruder, and Max Beerbohm's satire Enoch Soames, though quite as hilarious as anything in Peacock, has a different target, the posing of the would-be Romantic artist (here the fin-de-siecle version). By the time of Eliot's Prufrock the Romantic artist has been transmogrified into a part-comic, part-tragic and ineffectual figure, measuring out his life in coffee spoons and unable to force the moment to its crisis.


12. The controversy about Coleridge's debt to the German philosophers and his own philosophical capacities has raged from Coleridge's time to ours. Rosemary Ashton's The German Idea: Four English Writers and the reception of German Thought 1800–1880 is a very clear account of Coleridge's indebtedness, especially to Kant. Arthur O. Lovejoy, Rene Wellek, Mary Warnock, Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, and George Watson are among other writers who have discussed Coleridge's understanding and influence vis-a-vis German philosophy.

14. Nuttall himself is not proof against this "special craving for intensity" or peculiarly English curiosity about empirical facts. There is a hilarious description, in his A New Mimesis, of his attempts to ascertain whether Wordsworth could actually have skated across the "reflex of a star" as he claimed to have done in The Prelude. Nuttall goes to the extent of writing to a friend in Canada to ask if it is possible; the friend is not sure if it is. But another friend, a physicist, gravely suggests "that it could be done only by flinging out a leg while at the same time holding the head steady in something approximating to its initial position" (191). What is remarkable about all this is the seriousness with which Nuttall pursues these enquiries.

15. Carey's The Intellectuals and the Masses is a savage attack on the elitism of the modernists; he is quite open about his admiration for writers like Bennett and his dislike of Virginia Woolf and Wyndham Lewis.

16. Marx, in The German Ideology, argues the inevitability of the association between idealism and conservatism, and would not have found Coleridge's politics surprising, being familiar with Hegel's.

17. It is likely that Eliot valued Hulme's attacks on Swinburnish ecstasy for reasons of his own. In Patrick Parrinder's Authors and Authority: English and American Criticism 1750-1990, there is a brilliant piece of literary detective work which demonstrates that Eliot's real target in The Sacred Wood was not Arnold, as critical predecessor, but Swinburne, as poetic predecessor. Parrinder writes: "After The Sacred Wood it was Swinburne's destiny to languish unread, while Eliot emerged as the unchallenged possessor of the bardic crown" (222).


19. Stanley Rosen makes a similar argument in Hermeneutics As Politics, where he traces the genealogy of postmodernism, which sees itself as attacking the Enlightenment, back to the "internal incoherence" of Kant, one of the greatest of Enlightenment thinkers.

20. Quotes in Wellek's History of Modern Criticism 244.
21. Hartman has made these claims on behalf of criticism in Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today (see especially the chapter “Literary Commentary as Literature” 189-213). His efforts to demonstrate precisely how criticism can go about competing with literature are unfortunately demonstrated in his Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy, reading which ought to convince many of the merits of criticism retaining its earlier, attendant, function.

22. John Bayley has a marvellously subtle analysis of Harold Bloom's `evasion of the real,' his hostility to a poem `exactly itself' in "A poet insufficiently himself?: Bloom on Stevens" in Selected Essays. Bayley's irritation with Bloom's mysticism and idealism, I would argue, demonstrates the continuing strength of the empirical tradition in British literary criticism. Bayley's examples of images that are `exactly themselves' are revealing:

...the poetry that is exactly itself has no need to evade its provenance, because the objects in it and the story in it have their own selves which can be like nothing else. The armour of Achilles refuses to dwindle on the road towards meaning and `reality,' any more than the kidney which that other Bloom bought to eat for his breakfast, or the exquisite backside which Alisoun projected from the shop-window. (26)

23. In his The Conquest of Politics, Barber discusses Bertrand Russell's political writings and identifies Russell as one of the last of that long line of British philosophers whose work epitomized an extraordinary alliance, both dynamic and fruitful and at the same time misleading and corrosive to politics: the liaison between empiricism and liberalism.... If we count Hobbes as a dubious forefather and trace the lineage from Locke and Berkeley down through Hume and Mill, then Russell is indeed the last empiricist liberal, the last to try to wring from the justificatory enterprise arguments that both describe the world and prescribe human conduct in the social setting. (26)

That this form of liberalism was extraordinarily powerful in its time is sometimes obscured by the fact that Russell and Popper are no longer taken very seriously by liberal theorists; that it is now almost completely discredited is obvious from the tone of theorists like Barber, for whom "[to] insist, as liberals have always done, that the criteria by which we elucidate standards of knowledge must somehow correspond to the criteria by which we fashion a common life is a particularly pernicious kind of folly" or John Dunn, who writes of the "forlornness of any image of a culture founded upon epistemic rationality, any culture in which the external and objective dictates to the human and the existential how in general the latter has good reason to be" (Rethinking Modern Political Theory 147).

Interestingly, both Barber and Dunn are at least as critical
of the liberalism of Rawls, Robert Nozick and Ronald Dworkin as they are of the earlier, empiricist variant. Their writings, together with those of Oakeshott, John Pocock, Alasdair Maclntyre, Richard Rorty, and John Gray, constitute a very powerful critique of existing forms of liberalism, and point to the possibility of a completely different liberalism coming into existence.

24. Oakeshott and Pocock are perhaps the most important of these theorists; see especially Oakeshott's Rationalism in Politics and Pocock's The Machiavellian Moment and His Virtue, Commerce, and History. Oakeshott has consistently rejected the chief assumption of most liberals, that politics and social organisation were best treated as amenable to 'rational' reorganization. In his insistence on the importance of traditional resources, he has been seen as sharing the conservatism of Burke; but in the importance he attaches to individual freedoms, and the protection of these from the encroachments of political authority, he is more like Mill, and thus closer to many liberals. Oakeshott's influence appears to be growing, and is likely to help usher in a liberalism that is less rationalistic, and more given to justifying itself as 'the way we do things here.' This is obviously close to the liberalism Richard Rorty espouses, though his engagement with poststructuralism and postmodernism helps produce a very different tone from that of Oakeshott (for a clear statement of Rorty's position, see his Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth, especially the essay "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism" (197-202) and Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity). Pocock's influence has been mainly to undermine liberalism's tendency to universalize liberalism by reading it back into the thought of earlier periods; his work demonstrates the centrality of a civic republican tradition in periods in which it was assumed that a utilitarian liberalism was dominant. Maclntyre's attacks on liberalism also emphasize the specificity and limited duration of the 'tradition' of liberalism, and its weaknesses when compared with the resources of Augustinian Christianity. John Dunn and John Gray are other theorists who emphatically reject liberalism's universalistic claims; Gray in fact, I think quite accurately, associates liberalism's failures with the arrogance of such claims. So the general tendency (apparent even in Rawls's later writings, such as Political Liberalism) is to withdraw from claims of universality and the cunning of reason' and to offer pragmatic defences.