31 The fragment

Sophie Thomas

In March of 1818, an impressive collection of architectural fragments arrived on English shores, aboard HMS *Weymouth*, from the Roman ruins of Leptis Magna on the Libyan coast of North Africa. The contents of this shipment were listed as having included an extensive assortment of granite and marble columns, capitals, pedestals, pieces of cornice, inscribed slabs, and various fragments of sculptured figures (for example, 'Statue in halves Head and Feet deficient'). Also part of the shipment, taken on board at Malta, was the bust of Ramses (now in the British Museum) that inspired Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias'. Such large-scale plundering of ruins abroad was not unusual at this time—this is in fact only a few years after Lord Elgin acquired a number of fragmentary marbles from the Parthenon in Athens. For the early nineteenth century, though, the cultural importance of these bits and pieces can be inferred from two things that happened to them next. First of all, nothing: they languished in a disorderly heap in the courtyard of the British Museum for eight years. Then, in 1826, King George IV's architect, Wyatt, came up with a plan to erect them in the king's gardens, on the southern shores of Virginia Water, an artificial lake in Windsor Great Park. Wyatt refashioned them into what he referred to as his 'Temple of Augustus', in which he arranged the fragments to convey the impression of a temple in ruins, suggestively submerged in the landscape, through which the king could pass on his private ride to the lake.

Two aspects of the contemporary attitude to fragments can be deduced from this story: confusion, on the one hand, and pleasure on the other. Confusion not only because the king's men were at a loss as to what to do with that assortment of ruins—what indeed can one do with something that is not complete?—but also because fragments are, by definition, disturbing entities. They play upon the imagination by promising or suggesting more than what they are, while reminding the viewer or reader that what they promise can never be recovered or fully experienced. Fragments simultaneously raise and disavow the possibility of totality and wholeness, thus becoming suitable figures for all manner of disruption and discontinuity. The more evocative aspects of the fragment may even be felt as threatening and haunting, perhaps especially where the fragment in question is a ruin: for ruins bring us an element of the past embedded or locked into the present, suggesting the uncanny suspension of time and history. The solution in the case of the Leptis Magna ruins was finally to make those

architectural fragments into a folly, to harness ambivalent fragmentariness and use it playfully.

Fragments, fashion, and fakery

This was certainly in keeping with the more frivolous side of the fashion for fragments that had emerged distinctively in the eighteenth century, when the wealthy regularly erected sham ruins in their gardens for picturesque effect. The very idea, of course, of building a ruin is intriguingly paradoxical. All ruins require a kind of double vision, whereby they are perceived both in their current ruinous state and in their formerly whole one. A sham ruin, however, had to be predicated on a building that had never actually existed, and fooling the viewer was an important measure of success. This vogue had a direct literary equivalent: not only were fragmentary texts increasingly published and read on their own terms, but sometimes, as in Thomas Chatterton's *Rowley* poems of 1777, which claimed to be the recovered work of a fifteenth-century monk, found secreted away in a rural church, they were actually hoaxes or forgeries—modern compositions faked up to look like ancient texts. Another good example of this was James Machperson's *Ossian* poems, which purported to be the rediscovered and translated relics of a blind Scottish poet from the third century (see *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp. 448, 630). These were popular texts well before the controversy that followed upon the discovery that they were hoaxes.

The taste for fragmentary forms had become so widespread that in 1813 Francis Jeffrey, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, was prompted to remark that 'the greater part of polite readers would now no more think of sitting down to a whole Epic than to a whole ox'.[1] Marjorie Levinson, in her study of the Romantic fragment poem, has argued that the phenomenon of the hoax poems contributed to the popularization of the fragment, by bringing out its potential literariness. She suggests that it helped to cultivate a sympathetic readership, one willing to engage creatively in the reading process as an act of imaginative completion. It was no doubt the case that by the end of the eighteenth century fragments had become marketable in a way that made it possible for serious writers to publish their own literary remains while they were still very much alive. We should keep in mind, though, not only the importance of the ruin industry (and its attendant *sentiment des ruines*) for fuelling this fashion, but also the impact of the popular sentimental novels of the eighteenth century, which skilfully made use of the fragment for both comic and emotional effect.

In one of many amusing episodes in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* of 1768 (a text, like Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, that is thoroughly fragmentary and digressive), Yorick's servant brings him his butter upon a bit of paper, which, once turned over, is found to have upon it a fragment of narrative in faded old French. The novel's hero, thoroughly engrossed by this dramatic tale (which Sterne includes verbatim for the

reader), translates it as far as he can—but it is soon revealed that the continuation, contained on a second sheet of paper, has been wrapped around a bouquet of flowers and given by the servant to his lover, who in her faithlessness has already passed it on to another, and so on. Narrative suspense, like erotic impulse, must remain undischarged. In a similar vein, Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, of 1771, is entirely made up of scraps of found manuscript, which the fictive editor must arrange—and indeed rescue, for example, from use as gun wadding. Digressions, strategic ellipses, and the interpolation of apparently unrelated stories are meta-fictional devices of long standing; the explicit use of fragments in sentimental novels, though, emphasized (and often satirized) qualities of spontaneity and immediacy, values much privileged by the eighteenth-century cult of Sensibility (see *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp. 102–14). The fragment was thus (artfully) deployed as a consummately artless form.

The ruin and the unfinished

Because it is a spatial object, a ruin is a particularly accessible and familiar form of the fragmentary. It illustrates nicely the primary definition of 'fragment' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as 'a broken off, detached, or incomplete part . . . a part remaining when the rest is lost or destroyed'.[2] Like a fragmentary piece of antique sculpture, the ruin generally presents a historical object eroded by the effects of time and chance, by the activity of man and/or nature. The contemplation of ruins is often construed as a melancholy activity—one which (like fragments in general) invites the viewer to reflect on the relation of part to whole, presence to absence, and present to past. Ruins particularly evoke an awareness of past accomplishment and present loss. This is especially the case for classical Greek and Roman architecture and sculpture, which are seen to embody particular aesthetic and cultural ideals that were still potent—indeed whose potency was renewed, even rediscovered—in the period (see *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp. 539–40).

A good example is the statue of the Venus de Milo: unearthed in 1820 by a peasant digging in his field, on the island of Melos, the statue was immediately hailed as the finest example of a nude female figure to survive from Greek antiquity. The statue, however, was further damaged during the diplomatic fracas that followed its discovery—and its final arrival in Paris was greeted by competing schemes for its restoration, founded upon varying (but equally passionately held) views of the whole as it *must have been*, and often based upon the ambiguous evidence of a few spare parts unearthed at the same time. While the statue enthralled successive generations of Romantic writers and artists, controversy raged throughout the nineteenth century over questions of its dating, its precise provenance, and the mode, as well as the desirability, of its reconstruction.[3]

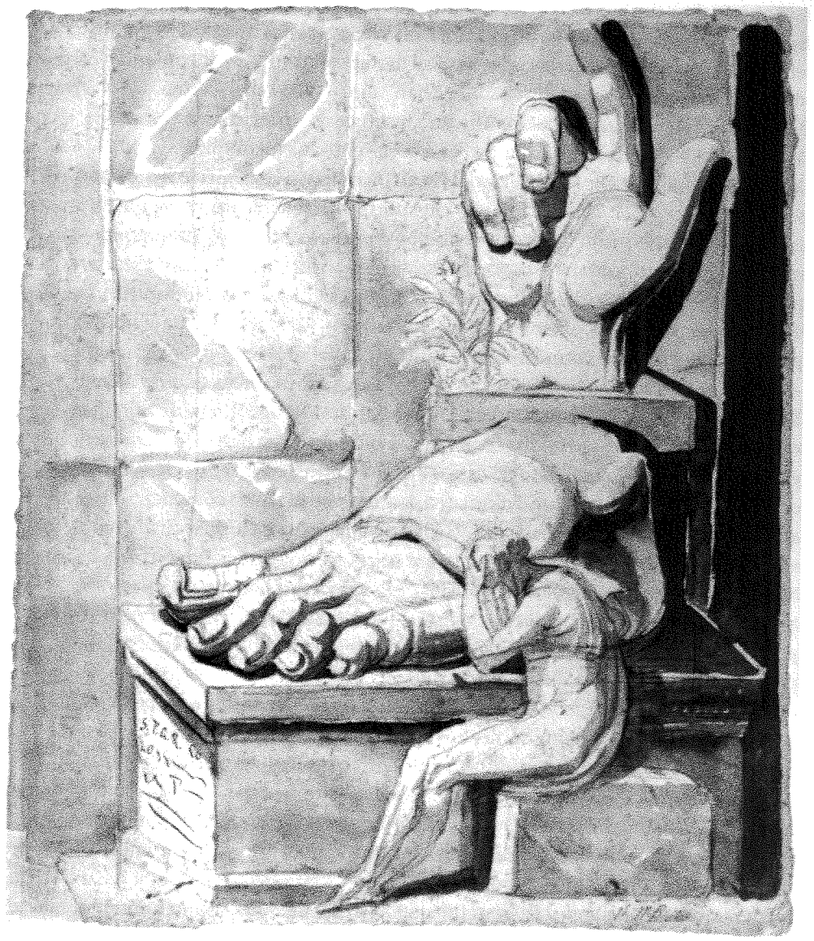

Fig. 9 'The Artist Overwhelmed by the Grandeur of Antique ruins', by Henry Fuseli.

Ruins such as the Venus, however, represent only one kind of fragment: a material and spatial one that we tend to associate with the past. Readers of Romantic-period literature encounter a surprising number of canonical literary texts that are fragmentary for many different reasons: Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel'—even his *Biographia Literaria* which was undertaken in the first instance as a preface to a volume of poems; Wordsworth's *Prelude*—also intended as a preface, to his incomplete work *The Recluse*; Keats's *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, both incomplete attempts to write on the same subject; Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*—cut short, with terrible irony, by his death. Any full edition of the poetic works of period authors reveals a surprising number simply entitled 'fragment', and the list above is only a partial one, intended to present a range of possibilities for which the second *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of 'fragment' would be apposite: 'an extant portion of a written work which as a whole is lost; a portion of work left uncompleted by its author; a part of anything uncompleted'.

In most cases, rather than being the remnants of past wholes, such fragmentary texts held out the promise of future completion; and although their authors had every intention of finishing them, that completion often became either practically or inherently impossible. Coleridge's 'Christabel' is a case in point. Though compared by a contemporary reviewer to a 'mutilated statue, the beauty of which can only be appreciated by those who have knowledge or imagination sufficient to complete the idea of the whole composition', the poem is in fact not one fragment, but an assemblage or sequence of fragments.[4] To each of its two main parts, written at a three-year interval, Coleridge appended concluding poems that were, in one case at least, composed for an entirely different occasion. As in the case of the Venus de Milo, the problems are thus intensified by the presence of spare parts that the whole cannot readily assimilate. Readers of the poem, moreover, have often remarked upon an apparent gap or void lurking somewhere in the conception as well as the execution of the poem—something not just missing but also concealed. Its Gothic central drama, of the encounter of the virtuous young Christabel with the spell-binding and demonic figure of Geraldine, whom she encounters while praying at midnight in the woods, is not only left unresolved, but also inflected throughout by paralysis, anomaly, and a sense of things disturbingly out of place.

For reasons arising arguably from the poem itself, Coleridge found himself unable to go on. And yet, like the case of the Venus de Milo, projected endings abound and the poem has always invited speculation not only about *if*, but about *how*, it could continue. Although Wordsworth would deny that Coleridge ever had a specific conclusion in mind, a number of phantom endings—by turns appealing and implausible—have been passed down by Coleridge's son Derwent, and his biographer James Gillman. Coleridge, for his part, persistently claimed to have the whole poem in his head, and attached a brief preface to the poem to this effect when he first published it in 1816: 'as, in my very first conception of the tale, I had the whole present to my mind, with the wholeness, no less than the liveliness of a vision; I trust I shall be able to embody in verse the three parts yet to come'.[5] In spite of this optimism, it is clear that Coleridge

ultimately felt himself to be thwarted or blocked by the poem's central 'Idea', which he identified as 'the most difficult, I think, that can be attempted to Romantic Poetry—I mean witchery by daylight'.[6]

Aesthetic and antiquarian contexts

We have already seen how the eighteenth century regarded and valued the ruin as a picturesque motif. Fragmentariness comes up often in the work of key theorists of the picturesque (see *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp. 646–7). William Gilpin, for example, argued that the ideally picturesque landscape included varied and contrasting terrain and partial concealments of the view, while suggesting intricate (even rough) surfaces, motion, and change. Nothing completed this 'picture' more effectively, however, than a fortuitously located ruin—'the elegant relics of ancient architecture; the ruined tower, the Gothic arch, the remains of castles, and abbeys'—with its evocative antiquarian appeal.[7] But the fragment found a place in other central aesthetic discourses of the eighteenth century, most notably in that of the sublime (see *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, p. 723). The fragment is related to the sublime in so far as it represents what eludes representation, and conveys a limitlessness that cannot be reduced to a concrete, finite, or present object. Edmund Burke, in his influential treatise of 1757, identified obscurity, vastness, infinity, and terror as key producers of sublime effects. The first three of these particularly relate to situations in which the whole is impossible to see or grasp, where boundaries or limits have been effaced or obscured. Burke also argued that a pleasurable experience of the infinite could be aroused by an unfinished object, such as an artist's sketch, because 'the imagination is entertained with the promise of something more, and does not acquiesce in the present object of the sense'.[8]

The pursuit of picturesque scenery and sublime experience fuelled the tourist industry both at home and abroad; antiquarian interests similarly encouraged the commodification and domestication of various fragmentary forms (see *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp. 328–38). At home, antiquarianism popularized an interest in the historical features of the English landscape, but it had a literary component too, for example in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a compilation inspired largely by Macpherson's purported Ossian poems, or in Walter Scott's ballad collecting. The impulse to collect demonstrates the power of part objects to represent, even recover, lost cultures through their artefacts. The profusion and popularity of sculpture galleries in the eighteenth century attests, in a similar vein, to the broad interest among the wealthy in acquiring and displaying objects, relics, from their experience abroad on the Grand Tour. This demonstration of taste and cultural authority encouraged a flourishing trade in casts and copies, but it underlay serious collecting, such as that of Charles Townley, whose extensive gallery of classical marbles was purchased by the

British Museum in 1805 (see *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, pp. 187–97). Perhaps the most momentous episode from this period, however, was Lord Elgin's acquisition, as controversial then as now, of marbles from the Parthenon. He collected various fragments of figures and friezes from the site, with the permission of the Turks who then controlled Athens, and he subsequently offered them for sale to the English government. It is likely that this expensive venture saved them from destruction, but it was denounced by many at the time—by Byron for example in *The Curse of Minerva*—as an act of vandalism.

Responses

The prominent place of the fragment in the Romantic period is linked to a wide range of cultural and philosophical preoccupations—from changing aesthetic ideals to increasing historical self-consciousness. In many instances, ruin and fragmentation are themes rather than physical features of the work. They may be linked to the aspirations and limitations of the human condition. Their presence may also reflect an acute awareness of one's own historical moment. Here, a sense of melancholy, and conservative nostalgia, may well be implicated; on the other hand, the ruin may be seen more positively as a sign that decline is an inevitable feature of oppressive, authoritarian, institutions (the monastery, the baronial pile), and may reorient the viewer's thoughts towards ideas of progress and change. As Anne Janowitz's has shown in her study, *England's Ruins*, the ruin motif in English poetry has important political and historical dimensions; it has done much to shape British national identity, and to encourage nationalist feeling—feeling of the very kind now, ironically, prompting Greece to argue for the return of the Elgin marbles.

Keats's sonnet, 'On Seeing the Elgin Marbles', charts the poet's reaction to his first sight of the fragmentary sculptures, to which his friend Haydon memorably introduced him in 1817. The marbles epitomize the achievement of classical art, but the poem, while implicitly celebrating their impossible perfection, is not about how they look, but rather about thoughts of death and poetic inadequacy. The broken sculptures are, it seems, experienced by the poet as a source of distress: these 'dim-conceived glories of the brain' (l. 9) are oppressively burdensome. Human mortality 'weighs heavily . . . like unwilling sleep' (l. 2); the poet sees in them heights ('each imagined pinnacle and steep | Of godlike hardship'(ll. 3–4)) that his inevitable death will prevent him from scaling. In his distress, he compares himself to 'a sick eagle', that can only look impotently at the sky, powerless and marginalized in his own domain. The poem's sestet reflects pointedly on the force of such fragments ('these wonders'), by linking the sense of disturbance they evoke—'a most dizzy pain'—to the mingling of beauty and decay, to prized objects and their wasting: 'Grecian grandeur with the rude | Wasting of old Time' (ll. 11–14).

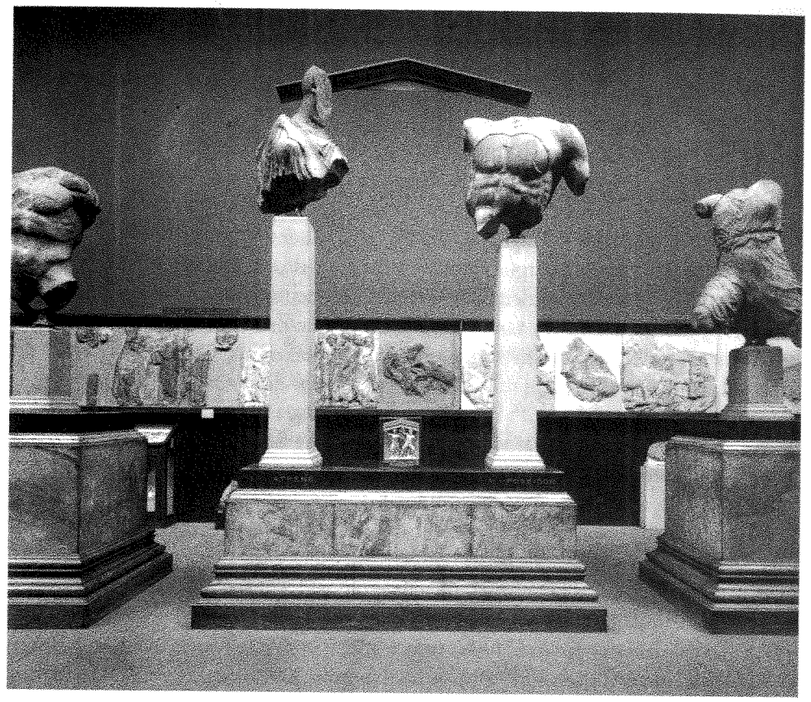

Fig. 10 Fragments of the Elgin marbles.

By contrast, Shelley's sonnet 'Ozymandias' presents not the force but the farce of the fragment: impotence is not the poet's problem, but that of the tyrant, who builds himself up (literally) and believes he is immortal. Inscribed, with terrible irony, on the pedestal upon which his massive statue once stood, is the declaration 'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings, | Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!' (ll. 10–11). Ozymandias derives from a Greek version of the name for the Egyptian pharaoh, Ramses II, and it is alleged that Shelley's poem was inspired by the sight of the colossal granite head of the pharaoh, which was hauled across the desert from the temple at Thebes, brought to England with the ruins of Leptis Magna, and put on display in the British Museum. In the sonnet, the statue's frowning face, with its 'sneer of cold command' (l. 5) lies shattered and half sunk in sand; his 'vast and trunkless' (l. 2) legs still stand, looking faintly ridiculous, but 'nothing beside remains' (l. 12) in the unfrequented expanse of desert in which he is said to lie. The artist is cannier than the ruler in this vignette, as the work of the sculptor, who 'well those passions read' (l. 6), has outlasted the works of the pharaoh himself. The fragments here function as an ironic warning against the dangers of self-aggrandizement, as well as a reminder of the evitable decline and fall of empires. But perhaps there is also an element of satire in the lightness of the poem's treatment of its subject, directed against the melancholic view of the ruin as the repository of inaccessible truths, one that leads to the veneration of old tyrannies (on Keats and Shelley, see also the chapter on 'The sonnet').

Form or genre?

Shelley and Keats's sonnets enable us to see how a preoccupation with fragments operates in a broader cultural context, one that includes art, architecture, and archaeology. But to what extent can the fragment be considered a distinct form or genre in Romantic writing? From sentimental novels to canonical Romantic poems, we have seen examples of works planned and executed as fragments, which suggests at least a certain generic coherence—one that could extend to literary texts whose fragmentation, though circumstantial or accidental, nevertheless features prominently in the published work. Such is the prevalence of fragments in the Romantic period, that one commentator has claimed that the fragment should be regarded as the 'ultimate' Romantic form—'ultimate in the sense that it matches Romantic ideals and tone as fully and completely as the closed couplet matches the ideals of eighteenth-century neoclassicism' (see also the 'Introduction').[9]

On the surface, the fragment seems the epitome of minor or marginal forms. Maxims, aphorisms, anecdotes, *pensées*, marginalia—all depend, to different degrees, on the relationship of contraction (of expression) to unfolding (of meaning). The long tradition of such writing, from Montaigne's essays, to Pascal's *Pensées*, and the English and French moralists (Shaftesbury, La Rochefoucauld, Chamfort) informs the use of

fragments in a deliberate manner that takes positive advantage of what might otherwise be the result of contingency and accident. This tradition stands behind the more radical use of the fragment made by the German writers of the Jena circle (chiefly the Schlegel brothers, and Novalis) who made it a central feature of their literary theory and practice. In their view, the fragment was the Romantic genre par excellence, and, appropriately, their arguments were made in series of remarkable philosophical fragments published in their journal, the *Athenaeum*.

Many of these fragments convey a reflection (often ironically stated) on the fragment itself, and thus on the practice of their authors: 'Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written' (*Athenaeum Fragment* 24). Or: 'In poetry too, every whole can be a part and every part really a whole' (*Critical Fragment* 14). Written as a series (not one but many: a collection even) of evidently complete statements, their fragments urge the independence of the fragment from other forms: 'A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog' (*Athenaeum Fragment* 206).[10] The *Athenaeum* fragments play explicitly on a dynamic of complete incompletion in so far as each fragment is thought to enfold completion and incompletion within itself. In spite of their individual distinctiveness, these fragments must also be seen to add up (though not in a straightforward or teleological way). They are more than straightforward aphoristic statements, since they intermix the generic conventions of the aphorism with inherently inconclusive reflections—sketches, perhaps, of a systematic philosophy of literature. Even more precisely, the work of the Jena circle puts the very possibility of the whole into question, while celebrating the fragment as the only effective mode of engagement with a subject that exceeds presentation: an ideal form for the Ideal, so to speak, the elusive 'literary absolute'.

The theoretical problems and enticements of the fragment were an important part of German Romantic discourse: less so in England, in spite of the proliferation and popularity of fragmentary works there. Obviously there is a great deal of difference between the fragments of the *Athenaeum* and the fragment of *The Prelude*. Many recent critical works on the fragment, such as Marjorie Levinson's *The Romantic Fragment Poem* and Elizabeth Wanning Harries's *The Unfinished Manner*, work hard to distinguish different kinds of fragments from one another. Levinson's taxonomy includes the true, the deliberate, the completed, and the dependent fragment; Harries asserts that we must distinguish the 'consciously generic' fragments prevalent in the later eighteenth century from, on the one hand, those of Schlegel (dismissed as merely 'pithy, ironic aphorisms'), and, on the other, those high-Romantic fragments that derive from 'some disproportion between idea and execution'—those ambitious poems conceived 'in terms that made conclusion impossible'.[11]

Finally, though, it is important to think about the characteristics that all fragments share, particularly since these bear directly—and disruptively—on the question of genre. All fragments occupy an ambivalent space between parts and wholes: as both

more than the part and less than the whole, they belong to neither. By definition, they are what disturbs categorization, even such categorization of the fragment as a form. If the fragment's mode of fulfilment is *other* than through the unified whole, if it functions on the basis of deferral, interruption, or what Maurice Blanchot refers to as 'unworking', then it is precisely what *deforms* form. The fragment is the 'form' of formlessness. As a figure for insufficiency or cessation, it constitutes (if any) the genre of the nearly: nearly a genre. This has implications for the reading of fragments, as they are arguably indexes of the unreadable, but also for literary criticism. Hans-Jost Frey, in his study *Interruptions*, asserts that literary scholarship and the fragment are actually incompatible. The fragment, as that which interrupts meaning, and whose structure is an 'inexplicable interruption', undermines the distinctions that criticism depends on, such as a clear sense of the limits and borders of texts—of what is inside or outside a text, of what marks it off for the purposes of study. Understanding the fragment (which for Frey always means integrating it, making it into a whole) has the effect of suppressing fragmentariness, since it creates 'context' where relations insistently break off.

The afterlife of the Romantic fragment

In spite of the challenge the fragment presents for criticism, over recent decades a number of works, such as those by Thomas McFarland, Marjorie Levinson, and Anne Janowitz, have resituated the fragment as central to Romantic concerns. Where once literary critics emphasized the importance of the organic whole in Romantic aesthetic ideology, we now privilege the fragmentary and the discontinuous. One might suggest here that shifts in critical fashion reconstitute their object of study. Although many of the most decisive theoretical interventions of recent centuries directly engage either the question or the form of the fragment, certainly part of the current taste for fragments can be derived from the impact of post-structuralist theory, where the problems for signification presented by fragments illuminate features and effects (dispersion, unworking, discontinuity) of textuality more broadly. Moreover, many key concepts for deconstruction entail the logic of the fragment.

Does the fact that the fragment is unfinished mean that we will never be finished with it? The Jena Romantics advanced the view of Romantic poetry as perpetually in the process of self-achieving, but never achieved in the sense of being finished, fixed, or finite: 'the romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never perfected' (*Athenaeum Fragment* 116).[12] How, then, does an unfinished Romanticism relate or extend to the concerns of the present? Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy have argued that the Romantic project is still underway: 'Romanticism will always be more than a period ... in fact, it has not yet stopped in-completing the period it began.'[13]

Romantic assumptions, in their view, still govern current literary-critical and theoretical practices. Or, to put it differently, one could argue that the prominence of the fragment in Romanticism is a response to the dilemmas of representation—a dilemma to which Romantic writers responded, and with which we are still preoccupied.

If the fragment directs us, finally, towards the future, it is only fitting here to consider a final example that evokes (but with a difference) Wyatt's 'Temple of Augustus' at Virginia Water, with which we began. In the park at Ermenonville near Paris, where Rousseau is buried, is to be found a 'Temple of Philosophy', modelled on the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli. What first appears a ruin, with some of its fragments strewn around it, is in fact only half-built: those stones on the ground are waiting to be erected. The names of six Enlightenment philosophers are inscribed on the temple's columns (Newton, Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau, William Penn, Montesquieu), along with a Latin word characterizing each. Several spaces, however, are left blank, awaiting the names of those to come, future philosophers who will accomplish what remains impossible: the 'completion' of all knowledge. The temple as a whole is dedicated, somewhat contradictorily, to Montaigne, 'who had said everything'. The keyword there is perhaps 'had': all *had* been said, but now, everything remains to be said (again).

READING: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan'

Part or whole?

Coleridge's best-known fragment poem, 'Kubla Khan', is thought to have been written in 1798, during the productive period of the *Lyrical Ballads* project, a period that included 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel'.[14] There are, indeed, some notable similarities between 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan'. Both were first published along with 'The Pains of Sleep' in a slim volume of 1816—itself a fragment, it has been noted, of a proper book. More significantly, both poems share a distinctive (and disjunctive) two-part structure, prefaced by a lengthy prose note describing the history of the poems' composition, that introduces the theme of fragmentation, and alerts the reader to the author's intention, eventually, to complete the work. In the early published version of the preface to 'Christabel', Coleridge confidently claimed, as we have seen, that he had the whole poem in mind and would one day write it. In the more lengthy preface Coleridge added to 'Kubla Khan', he made no such claim: the preface tells the story of the loss of his vision, thanks to the untimely visit of the man from Porlock. Interestingly, though, 'Kubla Khan' explicitly projects, in the very terms of the poem, the existence of a *potentially* comprehendible whole (the possibility of a unifying poetic vision is at least one of its major themes), while 'Christabel' does not.

The fragment's most characteristic feature, as I have argued above, is its ambiguous location between the part and the whole: it is, at the same time, more than the part and yet less than the whole. Readings of 'Kubla Khan' have been thoroughly preoccupied by this problem. The poem has been assailed with competing claims for its wholeness, its partialness, its partial wholeness, and because its status as fragment is so much debated, the poem can be said to display the essential ambivalence of the fragment. In its own time, its fragmentary status was either cause for outright dismissal (as Hazlitt famously complained, 'The fault of Mr Coleridge is that he comes to no conclusion'), or, occasionally, open lament ('Still, if Mr Coleridge's two hundred lines were all of equal merit with the following which he has produced, we are ready to admit that he has reason to be grieved at their loss').[15] In ours, the poem has been appreciated as much for its fragmentariness as for the 'wholeness' of its remains, though each perspective depends upon the other, by contrast, for its explanatory force. In this we see that the two perspectives are closely intertwined: necessary parts, even, of the same view.

Clearly it is not so much the poem itself as its relation to the preface that makes the poem such an exemplary fragment. Generations of critics and readers have found the poem formally satisfying in spite (or perhaps because) of its enticing, but partial, articulation of visionary experience. The poem has been often read as the symbolic part of an unavailable but promising whole. The addition of the preface, however, complicates matters: so much a

literary, self-conscious fiction in its own right, it makes an enormous difference to how we understand the poem. In describing the genesis of the poem, the preface establishes the conditions for its reading. By identifying and even re-enacting key themes such as the power of poetic vision and the loss of inspiration, the content of the preface further complicates those themes. Superficially, 'Kubla Khan' becomes a fragment poem because the preface claims that it is. But the close connection between preface and poem makes it apparent that Coleridge is not simply, or only, providing an inventive explanation for the poem's relative incompletion. Rather, he is responding to tensions, or difficulties, present in the poem itself—tensions that, as the preface and particularly the combination of preface and poem demonstrate, resist resolution.

The preface

Coleridge's addition of the preface is not without precedent. Many other poems contain brief prefatory notes, or epigraphs, that inform or guide the reader. Coleridge wrote this preface for the poem's first publication, and it has posed editorial problems ever since. Some editors have suppressed it entirely and anthologized the poem on its own; or, in other cases, printed only part of the preface (usually leaving off the first paragraph and the conclusion); in still other cases, the preface has been reduced to a (rather lengthy) footnote. A number of reasons have been advanced for the writing of this preface, few of them flattering. Some critics find it an expression of Coleridge's embarrassment or lack of confidence about the poem (which is also suggested by the delay in publishing the poem, a delay of nearly twenty years after its initial composition). Others argue that Coleridge anxiously attempts to deflect judgement by claiming that the poem is incomplete—even though it has the ring of termination about its final lines. It has also been suggested that Coleridge creates the prefatory fiction to evade responsibility, a possibility raised by his disclaimer that the poem is a mere 'psychological curiosity', whose publication is justified by Lord Byron's admiration, rather than by its literary merits.

Other, more positive, justifications for the preface are often advanced. David Perkins, for example, argues that Coleridge wished to impose a 'plot' upon the poem to compensate for an internal lapse: without the explanation advanced by the preface, the poem would consist only of two separate, discontinuous (though related) passages. Broadly put, this two-part structure is shared by certain examples of Romantic lyric poem (Keats's 'Ode to Psyche', Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind') in which the first part postulates a challenge or ideal that the poet aspires to reach or overcome, while the second, following from that, offers a concluding 'credo', a personal statement perhaps of desire or ambition. Because 'Kubla Khan' fails to integrate two such parts, Perkins suggests that Coleridge solves the problem by superimposing a narrative: the introductory note both explains the structure of the poem and converts it into the 'dramatic enactment' of a story. The preface, while suggesting a certain unity, invites us to locate the interruption occasioned by the visitor from Porlock, and

identify the scattered fragments. The theme of lost inspiration is, one might say, represented as it occurs.[16]

Similar debates surround the untimely interruption of the person on business from Porlock, whose entry, given the above, could well be a Coleridgean expedience rather than a real historical occurrence. But his potentially fictional status matters little; he makes his mark, both cutting short and defining the structure of the poem. For many readers, he has come to represent the end of poetry, or more specifically, a stone cast on the smooth surface of visionary, poetic inspiration—akin to Sara's reproving glance in 'The Eolian Harp', which serves somehow to curb the poet's imaginative flight. Elizabeth Harries argues for his membership in a 'generic cast of characters'—'a descendant of those many careless and unpoetical figures who destroy or mangle manuscripts in countless novels'.[17] Leslie Brisman goes so far as to suggest that his entry 'might be called a primal scene of interruption', where Porlock is the serpent in the garden of poetic paradise—a place of original and immediate inspiration.[18] By contrast, Kathleen Wheeler proposes that the man from Porlock may be 'a personification of a faculty of the mind', and reads his intervention as having ironical, not anti-aesthetic, force.[19] Regardless of the effects of his intervention, he is as often perceived as a very creative invention indeed.

Towards the end of his preface, Coleridge illustrates the dispersal of the poet's vision with a passage, a fragment, taken from another of his poems, 'The Picture; or, the Lover's Resolution' of 1802. The lines he excerpts (ll. 91–100) describe the fragmenting of a surface of a stream, so that the charm produced by the reflection (in the poem, of a fair maiden) is broken. The downcast youth (beholder of this vision, thus a reflection of the poet) is urged to stay, with the promise that the fragments of the dispersed vision will reunite and again become 'a mirror'. While Coleridge uses these lines to describe the loss of his own vision (he claims that 'with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast'), he admits that in his case there was, 'alas! [no] after restoration of the latter' (ll. 31–4). Nor, for that matter, had there been in the case of 'The Picture', where the return of the stream's smooth reflective surface revealed only that the fair maiden had fled. Ironically, 'Kubla Khan' re-enacts the very aspect of 'The Picture' that Coleridge suppresses in the preface.

However one views it, the preface both echoes and repeats important structural and thematic aspects of the poem. In spite of the clash of genres ('plain' prose for the preface and 'sublime' verse for the poem) and disparate locations (a lonely Somerset farmhouse versus the exotic Xanadu), a similar scene is played out: at centre stage is the character and activity of the poet. In the preface, the poet's activity is the result of chance, of a drug-induced slumber overcoming him while reading *Purchas his Pilgrimage*. Once the slumber ends, the poet must hasten 'instantly and eagerly' to record his 'distinct recollection of the whole' (ll. 23–5). The fragility of this operation is, of course, exposed by the untimely entry of the visitor from Porlock.

The poem

The poem itself (like the preface) begins with a description of the contents of the poet's dream. The first stanza details the Khan's paradisal pleasure ground with its dome, its sacred river, and its caverns. The creative activity of the Khan is in considerable contrast with the efforts of the poet in the preface. Where one creates by decree, by simple verbal utterance, the other labours with 'pen, ink, and paper' (l. 24) to arrest his vision before it slips away. The passionate, if hypothetical, terms in which Coleridge dramatizes poetic creation in the third stanza (or second part) of the poem register this disparity by presenting an inspirational ideal—a model of a poet who, like the Khan, is fully possessed by his vision. Not surprisingly, then, Coleridge emphasizes the delirium of the poet in the preface. This serves to ennoble his failure, while indicating a degree of closure by framing both preface and poem as a thematic unit. This effect is especially interesting since it is this final passage, with its celebration of the power of the poet, that is felt to be a satisfying conclusion to the poem *as it stands*, and that thus, for readers who consider the poem whole, renders the preface unnecessary.

Further analogies between preface and poem are remarked upon by Kathleen Wheeler. Looking at the basic structure of the poem, one observes that the first part (ll. 1–36) offers an account of the poet's dream, and the second part (the final stanza), a meditation on its recovery; this two-part structure is also present in the preface. The last portion of the poem, often referred to as an epilogue, is thus (like the preface as a whole) distinct from the main body of the poem. When the poem and preface are structurally examined in this way, its internal fragmentation becomes more obvious. Both preface and epilogue, Wheeler suggests, refer to part one of the poem and maintain a certain aesthetic distance from it. Both attempt to make constructive sense of a prior experience: in the preface, the 'author' is trying to build a poem (to put it bluntly) and in the epilogue, the poem's narrator 'would build that dome in air, | . . ., those caves of ice!' (ll. 46–7). In keeping with a common change in register from a representation of immediate experience to its mediation and reception, the preface and the poem begin in the descriptive third person and then shift into the first person. Finally, I would suggest, in their respective second parts, both express ambivalence about what has been achieved: Coleridge's self-quotation from 'The Picture', while implying the possibility of a restored 'Kubla Khan', rehearses, as we have seen, a moment of loss; and in the second part of 'Kubla Khan', the triumph of the imagination is couched, logically and grammatically, in the conditional ('*Could I* revive within me' (l. 42, emphasis added)).

This sketch of thematic and structural echoes reveals how closely integrated preface and poem are. They thus appear to present a unified front, but we nevertheless perceive profound disjunctions—disjunctions perhaps typified by that infinitely deep romantic chasm, and by the poem's irreconcilable oppositions, by its successive scenes of fragmentation and division, by the dialectic of fragmentation and totalization present in both preface and poem. Perhaps the most rigorous reading of the poem's fragmentariness has been undertaken by Timothy Bahti in his article, 'Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and the Fragment of Romanticism'. Bahti examines and exposes the endless play of 'self-reflecting notions of part and whole,

fragment and totality' in the language and structure of the poem. In the first stanza, several dichotomies and oppositions are established and split apart, and this process is repeated in subsequent stanzas. Particularly noteworthy are the oppositions between finite and infinite, between the outside and the inside ('girdled round' and 'enfolding'), and between 'the hyperbolic and the defined'. As a scene of fragmentation, the second stanza splits apart such oppositions (in the fountain, for example, 'Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst | Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail' (ll. 20–1)). Rapid part/whole inversions are expressed through such terms as 'amid' and, of course, 'fragment', and Bahti observes that this fountain of fragments may be understood as the very origin of the poem. Close observation reveals that in this sequence of divisions, whereby 'a part within a whole becomes a whole for yet another part', the categories of parts within wholes, fragments of pre-existent totalities, finally invert themselves.[20]

Coleridge's extended preface is not only a rhetorical tour de force, but also a key factor in the debate about the poem's status as fragment or unified whole; until the preface was taken seriously, the problem of the 'fragment' of 'Kubla Khan' was largely overlooked. Critics have observed that the addition of the preface, in emphasizing a disjunction, disrupts an apparently complete poem—a self-destructive poetic act. On the other hand, the revisionary effect of the preface is seen to turn the poem from an achieved, finite artefact into an open-ended fragment symbolizing an infinite array of meanings beyond itself—which would be a vote for creative possibility. Many readers of the poem tend, not surprisingly, to occupy a compromise position on whether or not the poem is finally fragmentary.

Discussions of the poem often return to the preface and its insistent force, which is an effect of the troublesome person from Porlock, whose arrival, if slightly comic, has serious implications. Coleridgean interventions—such as this mysterious figure, or the putative friend (Coleridge himself) whose letter interrupts the philosophical preparation for Coleridge's exposition of his theory of the imagination in *Biographia Literaria*—do not occur only as external interruptions, fabricated or real. They are more frequently internally generated, arriving in the form of negligence or forgetfulness, as failures of memory or of the will. The intervention, though apparently external, reveals an internal lapse. But problems arise around the question of textual identity as well as integrity. Which poem are we reading: the one on the page before us or the one projected around it? If a fragment of a poem claims to represent (or 'symbolize') a whole poem, can it also claim to *be* that poem? A poetic text is never identical with all the meanings it may signify. Yet if the signified text is never exactly the same as the text before us, how much more true this must be of the fragment, where the 'whole' text is signified in absentia, and where there is an overtly ambiguous relationship between the poem and its extra-poetic surround.

If it is difficult for readers to agree on whether or not 'Kubla Khan' is really a fragment, part of the problem is that the 'fragment' is by definition an unstable concept. The fragment's key feature, as I have suggested, is that it is caught up between partiality and wholeness, identifiable with neither term, but conceptually dependent on both. Clearly, more than just the preface is at stake. 'Kubla Khan' does not necessarily suffer as a poem because it has been 'interrupted', but it is the case that Coleridge's introductory note

compounds (rather than simply adds to, or even clarifies) a complex of representational and interpretive difficulties that its fragmentary status makes impossible to ignore. The poem exemplifies the irresolvability of the fragment as either part or whole since the problem of fragmentation is apparent on so many levels: it is at work *in* the work, it guides Coleridge's reading and presentation of his work, and it represents a major preoccupation for literary criticism. For 'Kubla Khan' is experienced not only with both extremes (visionary wholeness and fragmentation) in view, but more precisely in the ambivalent and richly suggestive space between those extremes. (For a contrasting reading, see the chapter on 'Formalism'.)

FURTHER READING

Chambers, G. E., 'The "Ruins" at Virginia Water', *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, 54 (1953–4), 39–52. An intriguing and thorough account of the Leptis Magna ruins and their transport to London.

Frey, Hans-Jost, *Interruptions*, trans. and introd. Georgia Albert (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996). An exploration of fragmentation from a critical and theoretical perspective, which performs its observations through the inclusion of short fictional texts and meditations.

Harries, Elizabeth Wanning, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, Va., and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994). This book discusses the eighteenth-century cultural context, and is helpful for understanding the fragment in Romanticism.

Janowitz, Anne, *England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Examines the poetics of fragments and ruins, using generic analysis to explore the political and historical dimensions of the subject.

Levinson, Marjorie, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986). Levinson brings a New Historicist approach to readings of a number of canonical Romantic fragment poems, emphasizing their epochal specificity, and their ideological determinants as a form.

McFarland, Thomas, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). McFarland's account is largely phenomenological, and views fragmentation, ruin, and the unfinished (his 'diasparactive triad'), as endemic not only in Romanticism, but also in all human endeavour.

Rauber, D. F., 'The Fragment as Romantic Form', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 30 (1969), 212–21. One of the first critical texts to argue that the fragment has a privileged place in the Romantic period, and is implicated in key Romantic concepts such as infinitude, the sublime, and the imagination.

Schlegel, Friedrich, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, foreword by Rodolphe Gasché (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). Brings together, with a helpful introduction, the fragments published in the *Athenaeum* by Schlegel and his circle.

Thomas, Sophie, 'The Return of the Fragment: "Christabel" and the Uncanny', in *Bucknell Review*, 45: 2 (2002), 51–73. Examines the fragmentary status of 'Christabel' from a psychoanalytic perspective, with an emphasis on the problems of reading and interpreting fragmentary works.

Woodward, Christopher, *In Ruins* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001). A wide-ranging and accessible exploration of the appeal of ruins, across cultures and epochs.

NOTES

1. Jeffrey makes this remark in a review of Byron's *The Giaour, a Fragment of a Turkish Tale, Edinburgh Review*, 21 (July 1813), 299.
2. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, 1993), p. 1018.
3. For an excellent account of the Venus, and the cultural and psychoanalytic significance of its fragmentary state, see Peter Fuller's *Art and Psychoanalysis* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980).
4. Josiah Condor, in the *Eclectic Review*, 2nd ser. 5 (June 1816).
5. *Poetical Works*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (1912; London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 213.
6. *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), i. 409–10 (1 July 1833).
7. Essay II, 'On Picturesque Travel', in *Three Essays* (London, 1794), p. 46.
8. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 77.
9. D. F. Rauber, 'The Fragment as Romantic Form', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 30 (1969), 214–15.
10. The *Athenaeum* fragments cited here are from Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, foreword by Rodolphe Gasché (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 21, 2, 45.
11. Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, Va., and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994), p. 2.
12. Schlegel; *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 32
13. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Genre', *Glyph*, 7 (1981), 2; see also *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988).
14. All line references to the poem and preface are from *Poetical Works*.
15. Hazlitt, *The Examiner* (2 June 1816); reviewer unknown, *Literary Panorama*, 2nd ser. 4 (July 1816).
16. David Perkins, 'The Imaginative Vision of *Kubla Khan*: On Coleridge's Introductory Note', in J. Robert Barth and John L. Mahoney (eds.), *Coleridge, Keats, and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream* (Columbia, Mo., and London: University of Missouri Press, 1990).
17. *The Unfinished Manner*, p. 159.
18. Leslie Brisman, *Romantic Origins* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 30–7.
19. Kathlean Wheeler, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 39.
20. 'Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and the Fragment of Romanticism', *Modern Language Notes*, 96 (Dec. 1981), 1038–40.

32 Forgeries

Debbie Lee

'There are upwards of 10,000 practising scoundrels in London, whose manoeuvres are daily directed against its unsuspecting inhabitant', wrote William Kidd in his 1832 book *London and All Its Dangers, Frauds, Iniquities, Deceptions, &tc.* Kidd was not the only one warning Britons to beware of impostors and forgers. On any day, a person in Romantic England could open one of the newspapers to find headlines like: 'Infamous Impostor', 'Singular Case', 'Fabrication', 'Celebrated Hoax!' Impostors and forgers were important figures not only in London street culture, but also in Romantic literature and history.

Impostors and forgers routinely disrupted seemingly stable cultural categories. Cross-dressers like Mary Lacy and Mary Talbot, who put on men's clothes and sailed with the British navy, or Monsieur D'Eon, the French diplomat and spy who at mid-career and mid-life suddenly announced that *he* was *she*, cast serious doubt on the construction of gender in the period. Class-crossers like Beau Brummell, who died a poverty-stricken beggar but who spent much of his life as the court dandy and friend of George IV, or Edward Wortley Montagu, who gave up the life of an aristocrat to live as a chimney sweep, disputed the official view of the social world in which a person's identity was largely determined by inheritance. Travel hoaxes, among the most notorious Christian Frederick Damberger, the Wittenberg printer whose fake travel narratives to Arabia and Africa confounded British journalists, and Mary Baker, a Devonshire servant who styled herself the exotic Javanese royalty 'Princess Caraboo', raised questions about the European desire to describe national characteristics and then categorize people according to a fixed system. Poetic forgeries, those of James Macpherson, Thomas Chatterton, and William Henry Ireland, challenged the myth of original poetic genius. Disrupting fixed Romantic forms became the de facto vocation of impostors and forgers.

Because of their disruptive qualities, these characters also tell us a great deal about the time and place in which they lived. One of the things impostors and forgers make strikingly clear is the period's idolatrous worship of authenticity and truth. It is what underlies Wordsworth's claim that poetic truth could be found in the language of 'real men'; or J. M. W. Turner's sublime images of uncorrupted English landscapes and ancient castles; or the move, in all art and literature, away from the artificiality of neoclassicism. In fact, when we think of this stretch of history, liars and frauds, the