Introduction: Literary Persuasions

DISINTERESTED PARTIES

In *Great Expectations* (1860–1), Pip and Herbert watch Mr Wopsle perform the lead role in *Hamlet*. Nearly everything that could go wrong does go wrong, and soon even the Prince of Denmark himself is the subject of the audience's laughter:

> Upon my unfortunate townsman all these incidents accumulated with playful effect. Whenever that undecided Prince had to ask a question or state a doubt, the public helped him out with it. As for example; on the question whether 'twas nobler in the mind to suffer, some roared yes, and some no, and some inclining to both opinions said 'toss up for it;' and quite a Debating Society arose. When he asked what should such fellows as he do crawling between earth and heaven, he was encouraged with loud cries of 'Hear, hear!'[1]

The drama begins to resemble a scene from the floor of the House of Commons, with some members chiming in 'Hear, hear', others murmuring their disapproval from the back benches. Wopsle is translated from player to orator, and Pip finds himself 'feeling keenly for him, but laughing, nevertheless, from ear to ear' (p. 255); even Pip's recollection is inflected with the audience's cries, for 'ear to ear' echoes 'Hear, hear'. After the farcical performance, Herbert and Pip dine with Wopsle, sitting up with him until two in the morning to indulge him in his pipe dreams for 'reviving the Drama'. When Pip retires to bed, mulling over his chances with Estella, we begin to sense one reason why he felt so keenly for the actor. The chapter ends as he falls asleep: '[I] miserably dreamed that my expectations were all cancelled, and that I had to give my hand in marriage to Herbert's Clara, or to play Hamlet to Miss Havisham's Ghost, before twenty thousand people, without knowing twenty words of it' (p. 258). It's as though Pip sees his own predicament in

[1] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Charlotte Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1996), 254. Subsequent page references are given parenthetically in the text.

Wopsle's—full of great expectations, haunted as well as taunted by voices off-stage, a public figure faced by the nightmare of a demanding audience.

This scene, like many others in *Great Expectations*, is itself haunted by a book that appeared a year before it began its serial run: Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (the phrase 'great expectations' is employed by an orator in the first chapter of Smiles's book).[2] *Self-Help* (1859) tells of another who was trying to make his way in the world, Benjamin Disraeli:

> As an orator too, his first appearance in the House of Commons was a failure. It was spoken of as 'more screaming than an Adelphi farce'. Though composed in a grand and ambitious strain, every sentence was hailed with 'loud laughter'. 'Hamlet' played as a comedy were nothing to it. But he concluded with a sentence which embodied a prophecy. Writhing under the laughter with which his studied eloquence had been received, he exclaimed, 'I have begun several things many times, and have succeeded in them at last. I shall sit down now, but the time will come when you will hear me.'[3]

The Times report of the speech makes for entertaining reading—' "Nothing was so easy as to laugh" (Increased laughter)'[4]—and when Disraeli finishes up with the prophecy 'you will hear me', his audience eagerly chimes in: 'Hear, hear.'[5] Like Wopsle's, Disraeli's 'grand and ambitious strain' is the occasion for 'playful effects', something akin to *Hamlet* performed as a comedy of errors. But Disraeli was proved right (this is why Smiles is telling the story), rising to the top of the greasy pole of politics despite his inauspicious start. Significantly, when we come across Wopsle again later in Dickens's novel, we find that he is no longer playing the Prince who loiters at the edge of court, but 'a plenipotentiary of great power' who has 'a gracious dignity' and is addressed as 'Your Honour' (pp. 383–4).

Much of Dickens's fiction—and much other nineteenth-century writing—is shadowed in this way by oratorical trials and tribulations. When Wopsle finds his soliloquies reshaped into dialogues by a 'Debating Society', his predicament is a miniature version of a larger development that sees literary rumination involved in scenes of debate and persuasion. On the jubilee of the Oxford Union in 1873, a reporter for *The Times* enthused:

> In the course of these fifty years we have become a nation of public speakers. Everyone speaks now . . . Eloquence is but a facility, or instrument, or weapon, or accomplishment, or, in academic terms, an art . . . We are now more than ever a debating, that is, a Parliamentary people.[6]

[2] Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance*, ed. Peter W. Sinnema (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2002), 19.

[3] Ibid. 34. [4] *The Times*, 8 Dec. 1837, 3e–f. [5] Ibid. 3f.

[6] *The Times*, 23 Oct. 1873, 7b.

These multiple definitions of 'eloquence' invite a question. If eloquence might be an art in a nation of public speakers, then what could art become? During the nineteenth century, a commitment to literary eloquence involved consideration of how far it might, or should, be both a 'weapon' and an 'art'. This book explores how four writers responded to a debating, parliamentary people, and examines the ways in which they and their publics conceived the relations between political speech and literary endeavour. It envisages literary 'persuasion' not just as an attempt to get someone to adopt a position (although it is sometimes that), but also as a certain kind of disposition—one drawn to the study of conflicting allegiances and principles. Such a persuasion—asking questions, stating doubts—partakes of the nature of 'that undecided Prince' that Wopsle was playing, and it echoes throughout the period.

As *The Times* suggests, the century witnessed an expansion in audiences for political debate. A demand for public speaking stimulated discussion about whether the rhetorical impulse of oratory to move listeners to action should be combined with or kept at a remove from the aesthetic impulse of literature. Alongside the growth of the talking world ran an emerging conception of art as a sphere detached from the encroachments of contemporary socio-political debate. The influence of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) helped to foster these visions of detachment, as Coleridge and others imported the philosopher's notions of aesthetic disinterestedness into discussions of literature.[7] Kant's *Critique* includes a distinction between poetry and rhetoric: poetry 'expands the mind by setting the imagination free', whereas rhetoric—a duplicitous ally in the war for freedom and enlightenment—'borrows from the art of poetry only as much as it is necessary to win minds over to the advantage of the speaker before they can judge and to rob them of their freedom'.[8] However, a subsequent footnote gestures towards a less stable sense of opposition that would be echoed throughout the forthcoming century:

> I must confess that a beautiful poem has always given me a pure enjoyment, whereas reading the best speech of a Roman popular speaker or a contemporary speaker in parliament . . . has always been mixed with the disagreeable feeling of disapproval of a deceitful art, which understands how to move people, like machines, to a judgment in important matters which must lose all weight for them in calm reflection.[9]

This confession of 'mixed' feelings comes from an appreciation that trying to move people to consideration of 'important matters' is not merely to be

[7] See Paul Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics', repr. in Peter Kivy (ed.), *Essays on the History of Aesthetics* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1992), 3–64.

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 203–4.

[9] Ibid. 205.

scorned. Arguments for a rigid separation of political from 'calm' aesthetic judgements may lead to an inert quietism—what, one might ask, are people meant to be *reflecting on* when they partake of their 'pure enjoyments'? Kant was alert to this danger, and conceived aesthetic experience as distinct, yet not wholly dissociated from, the interests of practical reason and morality.[10] His sense that the art of the orator 'borrows' and breaks from that of the poet also suggests an enduring link between poetics and rhetoric. Here, though, it is worth noting that his reference to the 'contemporary speaker' alongside the classical orator is a microcosm of a more general nineteenth-century development in which literary writing is seen to be steadily more specialized as the political public expands.

The *OED* helps to chart this shift. As the earlier, broader sense of 'literature' as 'polite or humane learning' starts to become '*rare* and *obsolescent*' (the last citation of this meaning dates from 1880), so the dictionary observes the rise of literature as a particular 'body of writings' (1812): 'applied to writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect' (a new set of cognates also highlights increased specialization: 'literarily' (1825), 'literatize' (1836), 'literarian' (1866), 'literariness' (1877), 'literaryism' (1879), 'literose' (1888)). The temporal overlap in the primary definition between old and new meanings of 'literature' suggests an ambiguity concerning exactly what 'claims to consideration' this form of expression had in the period. From one perspective, the writer is required to make himself heard from amid a cacophony of political voices, and to address the concerns raised by a 'parliamentary people'. (Another set of neologisms alerts us to the company that writers kept: the first citation of 'oratorical' to describe a person is in 1801; one can 'oration' oneself from 1802; 'oratorize' is cited as a transitive verb from 1853; 'oratiuncle' (1832), 'orational' (1840), 'oration-like' (1845), and 'oratist' (1860) also appear on the scene.) From another perspective, 'literature' is itself increasingly defined as a world away from such voices, a space where one might escape the din of the oratists and their oratiuncles.

In a speech on 'Politics and Literature', William Gladstone hinted at these seemingly opposed trends. The politician hoped that

> the *absolute integrity of mental labour and enquiry* might never be compromised in whole or in part by the seductions of immediate popular applause. (Hear, Hear). With this reservation he rejoiced that men like Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens and Alfred Tennyson had received from the public such an acknowledgement of their works as was a substantial evidence of gratitude, if not an adequate reward, and in the nature

[10] See Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

of an *absolute guarantee of the freedom and independence* of the modern literary work. (Cheers).[11]

The studied sentences and polished periods have their charm, but 'Hear, Hear' follows so quickly on the heels of Gladstone's worries about 'applause' that we are perhaps inclined to smile rather than to cheer. Having more time than the audience, a reader can note that the orator's 'absolute's point to a mixed state of affairs: the first suggests that literature's relations with the 'immediate' are to be avoided; the second asserts that, for these writers, the contemporary public has been the guarantee of 'freedom'.

The writers who appear in the following chapters would not have been entirely at ease with Gladstone's eulogy. Their negotiations with an increasingly political public show that the integrity of 'the modern literary work' often involved a mediation between the 'immediate' and the 'independent'. The politician may vaunt the 'freedom' of literature from immediate public debate, but the cost of such freedom might entail a view of literary achievement that precludes formative socio-political influence. Even as they felt the need for a form of eloquence in which immediate commitment could be tempered by other considerations, Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, and Joyce were aware that a disinterested independence might shade into an irresponsible indifference. One reason for focusing on these writers is that their struggles are representative of a dilemma faced by others in the period. As Philip Davis has observed:

> Two opposite but mutually linked tendencies were going on at the same time, as though struggling to belong together: on the one hand, the establishment of literature as a distinct and defended area, also a separate profession and even an industry; on the other, within those forms, a counter-tendency which internally recommitted art—in its content, in its urgency—to the service of the world outside.[12]

My interest lies in how writers sought to bring these opposing tendencies into fruitful dialogue, and in how they aimed to cultivate a 'literary' detachment that could gain critical purchase on political arguments without being conceived as a culpable isolation from them. Such a study needs to reflect on the kinds of responsibility that writers have when they seek to address political issues in their work, and to examine the ways in which a style of writing might act as a spur to, or disclaimer of, political sympathies.

Matthew Arnold's deliberations over the value of 'Culture' and 'disinterestedness' bring these questions into sharper focus. Arnold's presence at many of the 1866–7 reform debates in Parliament prompted him to write those articles that would make up *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), a book that continually

[11] *The Times*, 16 June 1879, 6a; my emphasis.

[12] Philip Davis, *The Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 238.

objected to the uncultured polemics of contemporary political argument. 'Culture is of like spirit with poetry,' he claimed, and this spirit was being neglected by the party spirit at Westminster. Arnold's book takes its bearings from the speech it hears, opening with the words 'In one of his speeches a short time ago . . . ', going on to criticize those orators who were for and those who were against reform, and dreaming at its close of an eloquence that would contain a 'power of disinterested play of consciousness' to answer 'any House of Commons' orator, or practical operator in politics'.[13] This emphasis on the 'power' of disinterestedness and the alignment of 'culture' with 'poetry' suggest that the aesthetic realm might help to address and redress political problems.

This suggestion is full of promise and fraught with danger. Arnold asserts that the disinterested business of the believer in culture is 'to get the present believers in action, and lovers of political talking and doing, to make a return on their own minds'.[14] This mention of 'a return' is a return to a passage in Arnold's earlier lecture 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1864). There he asked writers to cultivate an impulse that pulls against the polemical. His gloss on Burke's ending to *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791) explains the quality of this impulse:

> That return of Burke upon himself has always seemed to me one of the finest things in English literature, or indeed in any literature. That is what I call living by ideas: when one side of the question has long had your earnest support, when all your feelings are engaged, when you hear all round you no language but one, when your party talks this language like a steam-engine and can imagine no other,—still to be able to think, still to be irresistibly carried, if so it be, by the current of thought to the opposite side of the question.[15]

Just as Kant felt that rhetoric could 'move people, like machines', so Arnold fears the growth of party-political language that can encourage you to talk like 'a steam-engine'. This 'return upon' the self is praised as a model of '*disinterestedness*',[16] but admirers of such a return should also note its proximity to what Arnold in his 'Preface to *Poems*' (1853) denounces as 'the dialogue of the mind *with* itself, a dialogue in which 'disinterested objectivity' is not intensified but dissipated by a situation where 'there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done'.[17] For Arnold, literature must lend its peculiar

[13] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 67, 55, 186.

[14] Ibid. 184. [15] Ibid. 35.

[16] Ibid. 37; Arnold's emphasis. This quality is again conceived by Arnold as 'keeping aloof from what is called "the practical view of things" . . . leav[ing] alone all questions of practical consequences and application'.

[17] Matthew Arnold, 'Preface to *Poems*', in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Miriam Allott, 2nd edn. (London: Longman, 1979), 656; my emphasis.

eloquence to 'the opposite side of the question', but this eloquence must not tend towards a reflexivity that turns political amplitude into a passive or unprincipled loss of bearings. In the passage above, Arnold's own oscillation between active and passive voices ('still to be able to think, still to be irresistibly carried') gives distilled expression to this dilemma.

Arnold's enquiries into the varying implications of disinterestedness point to how difficult it is to achieve—and to define—a balance between affirmation and concession that is at once politically responsive and responsible. As Henry Sidgwick astutely observed in a review of Arnold's work: 'All this criticism of action is very valuable; but it is usually given in excess, just because, I think, culture is a little sore in conscience, is uncomfortably eager to excuse its own evident incapacity for action.'[18] Such excuses can also lead to claptrap, as George Eliot (an admirer of Arnold and of disinterestedness) suggests when her narrator swoops on Mr Brooke in *Middlemarch* (1871–2):

> And here I must vindicate a claim to philosophical reflectiveness, by remarking that Mr Brooke on this occasion little thought of the Radical speech which, at a later period, he was led to make on the incomes of the bishops . . . if he had foreknown this speech, it might not have made any great difference. To think with pleasure of his niece's husband having a large ecclesiastical income was one thing—to make a Liberal speech was another thing; and it is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view.[19]

From this angle, a return upon the self that goes beyond the language of 'your party' is a disingenuous rhetorical manœuvre: self-interest masquerades as large-mindedness. Still, Eliot's wry take on Brooke's pale imitation of disinterestedness is itself disinterested, for the free indirect style through which we learn that 'it is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view' is a model of what it describes. The compound narrative voice belongs to the author and to Mr Brooke, acknowledging the value of Arnold's ideal even as it draws attention to how it might be misused.

The ideal has fared less well since Sidgwick and Eliot offered their even-handed contributions to the debate. A hundred years later, Paul Goodman conceded that 'Some of us . . . have been fighting a losing fight to save "disinterested"', before stressing that the term should not be seen as a synonym for either 'uninterested' or 'impartial', but might be better defined as a 'non-attached attitude'.[20] William Empson also spotted a sea-change when reviewing Raymond Williams's *Keywords* (1976) a few years later. Williams had expressed

[18] Henry Sidgwick, 'The Prophet of Culture', *MacMillan's Magazine*, 16 (Aug. 1867), 271–80, pp. 279–80.

[19] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998), 61.

[20] Paul Goodman, *Speaking and Language: Defence of Poetry* (New York: Random House, 1971), 132–3.

consternation that 'Disinterested is still used, with what are intended to be positive implications' by 'those' who wish to associate the word with ' "undogmatic" concern'. Empson intimates that ' "Those" are the bosses . . . deceiving the workers with their tainted words', and he is bracingly direct about the tainted aspect of Williams's own words: 'why *still*, and where does *dogma* come from? Surely, at any date, in a football match, you want a ref who hasn't been nobbled by either side? . . . I grant that the ref should not be too bored to pay attention, but an appearance of decent coolness is expected of him.'[21]

Empson's metaphor usefully conceives disinterestedness as a form of engaged yet fair-minded arbitration, but subsequent contributions to the debate by both deconstructive and Marxist critics tend towards suspicion. Jacques Derrida sees those who appeal to the concept as making a disingenuous claim to 'interestlessness', while Pierre Bourdieu claims that the term 'really' means 'indifference . . . the refusal to invest oneself and take things seriously'.[22] The term is, I think, redeemable, and it can be made to allow for a more capacious sense of how literary writers conduct their political investigations. But it needs to be considered less as a specific ideology or as a set of prescriptions, more as a method—a *form* of enquiry, rather than a repository for a settled political *content*. Hazlitt, for example, would have baulked at some aspects of Arnold's politics, but his passionate defence of disinterestedness as a fulcrum, not a terminus, is based on his faculty, as David Bromwich puts it, 'of holding two opposed ideas in his mind at the same time': 'he believed "disinterestedness" meant not excluding all interests but being open to an unpredictable plurality of them . . . if [the action] is responsive to many interests, and settled in its service to none, we are making sense when we praise it as disinterested.'[23]

Instead of approaching or reproaching literary texts primarily for their political commitments, we might focus on how writers negotiate contending political demands in and through their work, and on how the literary arena can be considered one in which political questions are raised, entertained, and tested—not only decided or 'settled'. The conflicts and divided loyalties embodied in this arena need not be construed as a merely impracticable or disingenuous hedging of bets. They might also be seen as models of responsible political conduct, for their willingness to engage with multiple and sometimes

[21] William Empson, 'Compacted Doctrines' (1977), in *Argufying: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. John Haffenden (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 185–6.

[22] Jacques Derrida, 'Economimesis', *Diacritics*, 11 (June 1981), 3–25, p. 15; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 34.

[23] David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic*, 2nd edn. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 22, 80, 86.

contradictory values can prepare the ground for a richer political response in future. Like Arnold, Hazlitt appreciated the literary aspect of Burke's oratory for precisely this reason; he once asserted that 'Burke's eloquence was that of the poet,' and compared it with Chatham's:

> I cannot help looking upon him [Burke] as the chief boast and ornament of the English House of Commons . . . Chatham's eloquence was calculated to make men *act*; Burke's was calculated to make them *think* . . . Chatham supplied his hearers with motives to immediate action: Burke furnished them with *reasons* for action which might have little effect upon them at the time, but for which they would be wiser and better all their lives after. [24]

Investigating the grounds of action might sometimes be preferable to inciting it; Burke's disinterested exploration of 'reasons' would often involve the weighing up of opposing claims and incompatible goods. This book is a defence of such a process, and of the potential strength of a politically divided as well as a decisive mind. It envisages disinterestedness as a form of internal struggle, and as a detached yet enabling form of curiosity—an impulse, to adopt Arnold's praise of Burke, that is sympathetically drawn towards 'the opposite side of the question' even as it seeks to engage critically with that opposition.[25]

Debates about disinterestedness are now seen as primarily aesthetic in nature and context, but it is striking how often nineteenth-century defences of the ideal return to oratorical figures or to scenes of rhetorical persuasion: Arnold's sense of the 'opposite side of the question' is shaped by his engagement with the voices in Parliament; Hazlitt's praise of 'poetic' eloquence leads him to the 'chief boast' of the House of Commons. Others who echoed Arnold's terms, if not his politics, also found themselves gravitating towards oratorical debate. When John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859) supports the need to 'attend equally . . . to both sides', he begins by praising Cicero's willingness to study his adversary's case with greater intensity than his own: 'What Cicero practised as the means of forensic success, requires to be imitated by all who study any subject in order to arrive at the truth.'[26] Mill's subsequent emphasis on disinterestedness is based on this oratorical model, although he revises Cicero's position as enlightened

[24] William Hazlitt, 'Character of Mr Burke' (1807), in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: Dent, 1930–4), vii. 302–3.

[25] For other discussions that pursue this line of enquiry, see David Bromwich, 'The Genealogy of Disinterestedness', in *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 106–32; Eugene Goodheart, *The Reign of Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 62–81; and Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[26] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1991), 42–3.

'advocate' to a focus on that 'judicial faculty which can sit in intelligent judgement between two sides of a question': 'it is not on the impassioned partisan, it is on the calmer and more disinterested bystander, that this collision of opinions works its salutary effect.'[27] Note '*more* disinterested': Mill is not claiming that the bystander is not emotionally involved; disinterestedness is not absence of interest, but an attempt to mediate between interests.[28]

To view disinterestedness, then, exclusively as a retreat into an autotelic aesthetic realm is to overlook other sources of its hold on nineteenth-century imaginations. The versions of disinterestedness formulated by Hazlitt, Mill, and Arnold are also indebted to a long-standing ideal of *public* debate; as Quentin Skinner notes, a central feature of classical rhetorical theory is 'the contention that there are two sides to every question, and thus that one can always argue *in utramque partem*'.[29] This was an informing principle of the Sophists. Aristotle would subsequently note that 'one should be able to argue persuasively on either side of a question', and Cicero observes that 'we must argue every question on both sides'.[30] The modern vocabulary of disinterestedness has much in common with the earlier classical tradition, just as some modern concerns about this vocabulary mirror older criticisms of the role of rhetoric in society. The central ideal, *in utramque partem*, was seen by its defenders as evidence of sophisticated probity in matters of civic concern, but denounced by others—Plato, most prominently—as an indication of sophistical relativism or irresponsible demagoguery.[31]

This debate is echoed in Arnold's sense that disinterestedness can help to create an enlightened 'return upon' the self through an engagement with 'the opposite side of the question', and in his corresponding fear that 'the dialogue of the mind with itself' may lead to cultural and socio-political paralysis. It is significant in this respect that Arnold's concern in his 1853 Preface about the state of modern poetics is accompanied by his decision to cut his poem 'Empedocles upon Etna' from his collection, for Empedocles was seen as the supreme *rhetor* (sometimes even as the inventor of the study of rhetoric) and was teacher of Gorgias (father of the Sophists). Arnold observes that Empedocles has lived on to a time when 'the influence of the Sophists [had begun] to prevail' over a spirit of 'disinterested objectivity'.[32] Behind

[27] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, 58–9.

[28] In *Utilitarianism* (1861), Mill associates disinterestedness with 'devotion', 'duty', and 'love', and in *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) with a 'zeal to benefit others', 'conscience', and 'public spirit'; see *On Liberty and Other Essays*, 160–1, 171, 251, 298.

[29] Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.

[30] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, I. i. 1; Cicero, *de Oratore*, I. xxxv. 158.

[31] See Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 128.

[32] Arnold, 'Preface to *Poems*', 656.

his distrust and suppression of this poetic voice, then, lies a larger concern about where a rhetorical commitment to dialogue might lead in both literary and political realms. Arnold's shifting attitude towards his own work stages a broader crisis: if modern literary expression harbours a rhetorical desire to engage and persuade audiences, then its own inclination towards 'the opposite side of the question' will need to be watched, lest this movement inspires a slide from 'disinterested objectivity' to dispiriting apathy or sophistry.

Consideration of the opportunities and the risks presented by the search for disinterestedness involves an engagement with recent debates about the political inflections of the aesthetic realm. Since the last decades of the twentieth century, a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' has denigrated the category of the aesthetic and its associated value of disinterestedness, seeing it as a form of indifference towards politics, or as a disguised mode of ideological assimilation—a continuation of circumspect (usually translated as 'right-wing') politics by indirect means.[33] Terry Eagleton has recently complained that disinterestedness is a notion 'almost universally scorned by the cultural left nowadays',[34] but he declines to mention that his work has helped to foster and maintain such scorn. His final reference to the term in his *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, for instance, claims that the relation between 'truth' and 'disinterestedness' is merely 'one of the most powerful ideological ploys of liberal humanist thought . . . which it is important that radicals should sever'.[35]

Eagleton's book is, in fact, a microcosm of the larger historical shift in attitudes. It begins by warning against a facile equation of the aesthetic with any particular ideological position, announcing that aesthetic achievement need not only be a form of indifferent quietism or a cipher for the prevailing ideology, but can also provide the foundation for an enabling critical insight into political praxis. Attentiveness to dual potential, however, soon turns into a narrative of steady decline, as the focus moves from the aesthetic as formative self-analysis to the aesthetic as failed social activism. By the time we get to Eagleton's digest of Adorno, the category has become 'a rationale for political inertia':

> *praxis* is a crude, blundering affair, which could never live up to the exquisite many-sidedness of our theoretical insights. It is remarkable how this Arnoldian doctrine is still alive and well today, occasionally in the most 'radical' of circles . . . From Romanticism to modernism, art strives to turn to advantage the autonomy which its commodity status has forced upon it, making a virtue out of grim necessity. Autonomy in the worrying sense—social functionlessness—is wrenched into autonomy in a more

[33] See, e.g. Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[34] Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 133.

[35] Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 378.

productive sense: art as a deliberate turning in upon itself, as a mute gesture of resistance to a social order which, in Adorno's phrase, holds a gun to its head . . . this negative aesthetics thus proves too feeble a basis on which to found a politics.[36]

This is a characteristic move of Eagleton's book—impersonating an argument by caricaturing it—for Adorno does not see either '*praxis*' or 'art' in these terms. What speaks volumes here, though, is Eagleton's own language. While art's deliberate 'turning in upon itself' reminds one of Arnold's admiration for Burke's disinterested 'return upon the self', Eagleton's crucial addition 'turning *in*' reduces the Arnoldian goal of ameliorative self-reflexivity to an impotent, self-involved posturing. Earlier, Eagleton is more accommodating, referring not to a 'doctrine', but to 'an Arnoldian large-mindedness, impartially weighing competing interests with an eye to the affirmative whole'.[37] During the course of the book, this conception of Arnold's ideal has been pessimistically pared down to a one-sided view of his work. Moreover, by claiming that autonomy was originally something 'forced upon' art, Eagleton indulges in a determinism through which art becomes the mere repository of socio-political change rather than, as he previously suggested, an impetus to it. The verbs continue to conspire against art even when the critic admits that autonomy may be 'productive' (this form of autonomy seems untenable when it is described as being 'wrenched' from the 'grim necessity' of the preceding form). There are no human agents here ('art strives to turn'), just 'isms' and passive structures ('Autonomy . . . is wrenched into'). From an initial recognition of the artist's ability to effect change, we have reached a dead end in which aesthetic expression proves itself feeble in the face of political exigency.

Eagleton's language enshrines an approach that has exerted lasting influence on literary studies. Discussion of the aesthetic as a way to expand conceptual horizons gives way to a view of the aesthetic as an indifferent or impotent stance on any practical political effort whatsoever. Adorno offers a way out of this dismal end-game, for he has a more mobile sense of how the aesthetic might help to 'found a politics'. He points out that artists need not advocate 'a particular partisan position' to be considered 'committed'; they may rather 'work toward an attitude': 'Art is not a matter of pointing up alternatives but rather of resisting, solely through artistic form, the course of the world, which continues to hold a pistol to the head of human beings.'[38] Adorno, then, considers artistic form not as 'mute' (as Eagleton suggests), but as the most powerful means available to artists to appeal to their audiences, for

[36] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 363, 370.
[37] Ibid. 163.
[38] Theodor Adorno, 'Commitment', in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991–2), ii. 79–80.

his emphasis on form rather than content accords art a non-propositional character that can lead to a different way of life.[39]

In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Adorno's dialectical conception of art as 'autonomous' and as '*fait social*' leads to the assertion that 'art does not come to rest in disinterestedness. For disinterestedness immanently reproduces—and transforms—interest.'[40] That is, disinterestedness is achieved not in spite, but because, of an attentiveness to other points of view. Disinterestedness stays interested even as it seeks to resist certain forms of interest, and this resistance is a form of *response*. The emphasis on 'transformation' again leads Adorno to artistic form: 'Real denunciation is probably only a capacity of form . . . Artworks exercise a practical effect, if they do so at all, not by haranguing but by the scarcely apprehensible transformation of consciousness.'[41] Praxis, then, is not seen as 'a crude, blundering affair' by Adorno; on the contrary, it is part of what art *is*. His proposal that art 'is less than praxis and more . . . as the negation of practical life, it is itself praxis'[42] is similar to Arnold's view that 'it is only by remaining collected, and refusing to lend himself to the point of view of the practical man, that the critic can do the practical man any service'.[43] In contrast to demands for propositions and a directly political content in art, a step back from the terms of the debate—and from the terminology of the debaters—is here envisaged as the way to ameliorative action through art.[44]

Adorno's stridency about form ('*solely* through artistic form') has its own hesitancies ('*probably* only a capacity of form'), and while the writers I discuss were often averse to 'haranguing' their audiences, they were also aware that dedication to a 'scarcely apprehensible transformation of consciousness' might be a luxury that urgent political circumstances do not always grant. Each sought to develop a form of public eloquence that could mediate between a commitment to circumstance and a need for circumspection, and a study of this dual concern needs to be attuned to the outspoken as well as to the oblique political inflections of literary writing—to content as well as to form.

Instead of abstract discussions of the politics of the aesthetic, George Levine calls for another kind of emphasis:

There must be a distinction between aspiration to some impossible ideal disinterested stance, and the effort to resist, in certain situations, the political thrust of one's own

[39] See Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 90–147.

[40] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone, 1997), 13.

[41] Ibid. 230, 243. [42] Ibid. 241. [43] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 41.

[44] Adorno and Arnold thus echo what Paul Guyer refers to as the 'deepest lesson' of Kant's aesthetics, a lesson also explored in Schiller's *On The Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795); see Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 94–130.

interest in order—in those situations—to keep open to new knowledge of alternative possibilities and to avoid the consequences of simple partisanship. There is something utterly nihilistic, not to say counterproductive, about the extension of the truism that everything is political into a practical obliteration of all grades of interest in all circumstances . . . If *everything* is political, discriminations between, say, a classroom debate and a political debate, between a novel and a campaign speech, are mere mystifications.[45]

Levine's language is cagey, but responsibly so, for locating and defining distinctions between 'grades of interest' is a difficult business. Discriminating between the political tenor of a literary text and a campaign speech is one way of doing this, however, and an instructive way forward if we are to test and revise the thesis that a 'disinterested stance' is either impossible or inconsequential. By focusing on oratorical as well as on literary styles between the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this book suggests correction along the lines hinted at by Levine when he notes that 'literature cannot be imagined as somehow divorced, by way of the aesthetic, from moral and political issues; yet no criticism that refuses distinctions between aesthetic and instrumental functions of language can do justice to either the aesthetic or the ideological'.[46] I aim to calibrate the ways in which writers resisted a 'divorce' between literature and politics even as they attempted to formulate distinctions between aesthetic and instrumental languages in their work.

Calls for an understanding of literature as rhetorically motivated yet also rhetorically hesitant continue to be made by writers as well as by critics. One of the perplexed voices in Geoffrey Hill's recent collection *Speech! Speech!* asks: 'Why and how|in these orations do I twist my text?'[47] The following chapters return frequently to these questions. In search of a way in which a politically engaged imagination might effect a *rapprochement* between positive 'action' and contemplative 'return', Hill has voiced the need for writing that includes 'cross-rhythms and counterpointings' and 'the antiphonal voice of the heckler' within its own structure; he praises a style that is 'a recognition and a resistance; it is parenthetical, antiphonal, it turns upon itself'.[48] Again, this definition of literary achievement involves an oratorical imagining ('the antiphonal voice of the heckler'). It also echoes the language of Arnold himself. Hill's words recall Arnold's 'return upon the self', and while he expresses concern about Arnold's 'trim formulas', he goes on to observe:

[45] George Levine, 'Reclaiming the Aesthetic', in Levine (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ideology*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 3, 14–15.

[46] Ibid. 9.

[47] Geoffrey Hill, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2006), 205.

[48] Hill, *The Lords of Limit* (London: André Deutsch, 1984), 90, 94.

When Arnold praised a paragraph in Burke's 'Thoughts on French Affairs' as 'one of the finest things in English Literature' he reversed significantly an order of precedence. Burke's concern was not with 'literature' in the hypostatically pure form. In Arnold's statement the 'literature' is central, the politics a catalyst in the creation of the integral substance. This is not to suggest that Arnold was unconcerned with the politics but rather that he saw literature as containing politics within a sphere of more precisely adjusted anxieties.[49]

What Hill means by 'literature' in 'the hypostatically pure form' is, I take it, something akin to the *OED*'s modern definition of literature as a specialized, imaginative 'body of writings'. Arnold's reversal of 'an order of precedence' would seem to point towards that shift whereby literature becomes steadily more isolated from 'polite and humane learning'. However, such a reversal of precedence cannot be complete while literature is still seen as 'containing politics'. Hill's language raises the question of how literature 'contains' politics (to contain is 'to hold, comprise, include' but also 'to restrain, hold in, keep in check'), and to what, exactly, literary anxieties are being 'adjusted' when they attempt such containment. These questions preoccupied many writers between the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For them, politics was not only a 'catalyst' for literary expression (catalysts do not themselves change during the chemical process); it was a realm that could be influenced and shaped by that form's creative interventions. That is to say, literature itself was conceived as a mode of rhetorical persuasion and as a 'hypostatically pure form'.

DEBATING SOCIETIES

A 'Debating Society arose' when Wopsle took to the stage, and any argument for rereading literature from within the context of nineteenth-century oratorical developments needs to defend its interest in speaking places as well as in written pages. It did not always prove easy to disentangle the two realms; Carlyle, as ever, was tetchily alert to the signs of the times:

But does not, though the name Parliament subsists, the parliamentary debate go on now, everywhere and at all times, in a far more comprehensive way, *out* of Parliament altogether? Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a *Fourth Estate* more important far than they all. It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact,—very momentous to us in these times. Literature is our Parliament too![50]

[49] Ibid. 107.

[50] Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841), in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. H. D. Traill, 30 vols. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896–9), v. 164.

Carlyle's sense of 'literature' hovers between older and newer senses of the word, referring to press and print culture generally but also gesturing towards the implications of these developments for writers of fiction, drama, and poetry. The shift from the figurative to the literal is tempting—we might see the literary realm itself as a parliament in which different voices are represented—but it should also be noted that writers often tried to resist the evolving party-political terms of debate, and to circumvent and extend parliamentary procedures in their work.

Carlyle's strictures echo the observation in *The Times* that 'We are now more than ever a debating, that is, a Parliamentary people'. The nineteenth century was the most insistently parliamentary age in Britain's history. As Henry Reeve observed when discussing the effects of the 1832 Reform Bill: 'Parliamentary Government has been established in this country with greater purity and efficiency than it ever possessed before'.[51] For many, parliamentary rule meant government by talk. During the early decades of the century, as Boyd Hilton observes, 'the focal point of politics was no longer the closet nor yet the ballot box but the division lobby . . . what was said in the Commons actually swayed the outcome of legislation'.[52] At certain times, the Commons could make and unmake governments: between 1841 and 1865, of the six parliaments elected, each brought down at least one ministry without recourse to a general election.[53] That is not to say that oratorical prowess was the consistently predominant factor in shaping either policy or votes.[54] Still, although a speech might fail to change immediate opinion or personnel in Westminster, eloquence had a considerable effect on the longer-term balance of power in the Commons—as Burke observed: 'If a man speaks well, he gradually establishes a certain reputation and consequence . . . though not one vote is gained a good speech has its effect.'[55]

Many subsequent politicians shared this outlook. Looking back to a time when 'the pen was . . . a more formidable political engine than the tongue', Macaulay remarked how times had changed and how 'the orator . . . has to a

[51] Henry Reeve, 'Earl Grey on Parliamentary Government', *Edinburgh Review*, 108 (July 1858), 271–97, p. 272.

[52] Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England, 1783–1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 209.

[53] T. A. Jenkins, *Parliament, Party and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 36.

[54] See Michael Rush, *The Role of the Member of Parliament since 1868: From Gentlemen to Players* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 183–7.

[55] Edmund Burke, cited in James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill and L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934–50), iii. 233–4.

great extent superseded the pamphleteer'.[56] The *OED* documents the shift: in 1839 *Blackwood's* coined a phrase when it referred to 'the parliamentaryism of the nineteenth century'; 'parliamentarian' began to refer to 'a skilled and experienced parliamentary debater'(1834), while the adjective 'parliamentary' to describe the language of Parliament is recorded as dating from 1818. Alongside these developments came new words for those engaged in debate: 'speech' was used as a verb (meaning 'to direct a speech *at* a person' (1826)), and its cognates took on increasingly varied shapes as public speakers came to the foreground of national attention: 'speechification' (1809), 'speechment' (1826), 'speechful' (1842).

As Carlyle observed, a crucial factor in the development of the age of 'speechification' was the expansion of the press. During the eighteenth century, the standing order prohibiting the recording or publication of parliamentary debates meant that access to such voices was sporadic. Digests and recollections in public journals were renowned for the artistic licence of their 'recreations'—as Dr Johnson handsomely remarked of his methods: 'I took care that the WHIG DOGS should not have the best of it.'[57] This state of affairs began to change; by 1780, the *Morning Chronicle* noted 'the present rage for Debate, which seems to inflame all ranks of people',[58] and the flames were fanned by changing rules and attitudes in the House. Discussions lengthened when the rule stipulating that an MP could speak only once in a debate was relaxed,[59] and although at the end of the 1700s one could still be jailed for reporting debates, Westminster had abandoned its efforts to enforce the standing order.

MPs duly began to refashion themselves rhetorically by developing styles that could mediate between those listening at Westminster and those reading the newspapers. Print 'historicized the speech (or a version of it), took possession of it and gave it an extra-parliamentary dimension. It brought wider opportunities for the critical discussion and interpretation of debates and for the assessment of an orator's performance and reputation.'[60] What was

[56] Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'The Life and Writings of Addison', *Edinburgh Review*, 78 (July 1843), 193–260, p. 221.

[57] Samuel Johnson, cited in Benjamin Beard Hoover, *Samuel Johnson's Parliamentary Reporting: Debates in the Senate of Lilliput* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953), 55.

[58] *Morning Chronicle*, 5 Apr. 1780.

[59] P. D. G. Thomas, *The House of Commons in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 193.

[60] Christopher Reid, 'Whose Parliament? Political Oratory and Print Culture in the Later Eighteenth Century', *Language and Literature*, 9 (May 2000), 122–34, p. 127.

once perceived by MPs as a threat (the 'critical' discussion of their speeches) would slowly come to be seen as an opportunity, for if print took possession of their words, it also allowed their words to take possession of the public. In 1850 the opening of the new Houses of Parliament was delayed for two years while a glass roof was installed so that speeches could be heard in the reporters' gallery. Bagehot remarked how times had changed: 'only those members have been discontented whose speeches have *not* been adequately reported.'[61]

William Cobbett's *Parliamentary Debates* (1802–) were the first elaborate and connected record of parliamentary discussion published in England, and *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* came into official being in 1812 when Cobbett's *Debates* was sold to the Hansard family. Never before or since had so many pages of print been devoted to political oratory, and the rise of *The Times* was an important influence on these developments. While Parliament was in session, between a half and three-quarters of its news columns were dedicated to parliamentary reports.[62] *The Satirist* referred to an 'age of oratory and politics . . . we have so many volumes of parliamentary debates',[63] and Hazlitt proclaimed that 'the manufacture of newspapers and parliamentary speeches, have exceeded all former example'.[64] Examples continued to be exceeded; fifty years later, Henry Traill calculated that *The Times* devoted approximately 1,500 lines of print per day to a 'deluge of political talk'.[65] Looking back on the nineteenth century, William Murphy recalled: 'Then was the era of the political orator's power. A speech delivered in the House of Commons in the evening was read next morning at a million breakfast tables, and discussed in the afternoon in thousands of workshops and mills.'[66]

G. H. Francis spoke for many when he emphasized the importance of contributing to the deluge: 'publicly and ostensibly powerful you will never be, unless you have mastered the art of oratory'.[67] Francis's 'you' is referring not only to those inside the House; it points to the links between public speaking and the development of democracy—much to the chagrin of Carlyle, who complained in his journal that '*Democracy*' involved 'the Talking

[61] Walter Bagehot, 'Parliament and the Press' (1875), in *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman St John-Stevas, 15 vols. (London: *The Economist*, 1965–86), vii. 300.

[62] See W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, 6 vols. (London: John Murray, 1910–20), ii. 840.

[63] *The Satirist*, 1 Mar. 1811, 234.

[64] Hazlitt, 'Standard Novels and Romances' (1815), in *Complete Works*, xvi. 20.

[65] Henry Traill, 'The Plague of Tongues', *National Review*, 6 (Jan. 1886), 616–30, pp. 618, 630.

[66] William S. Murphy, *The Genesis of British War Poetry* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1918), 39.

[67] G. H. Francis, *Orators of the Age* (London: Nickisson, 1847), 2.

Necessity'.[68] In 1850 he growled: 'Talk, talk . . . To wag the tongue with dextrous acceptability, there is for human worth and faculty, in our England of the Nineteenth Century, that one method of emergence and no other . . . Vox is the God of this Universe.'[69] *Vox* was not yet *vox populi*, but it was loud enough to be heard by many as a portent of things to come. Marx also emphasized how parliamentary systems created the tastes by which they were to be relished:

> The war of the orators at the rostrum evokes the war of the printing presses; parliamentary debaters are necessarily supplemented by debaters in the salons and saloon bars . . . The parliamentary regime leaves everything to majority decision, why then should the great majorities outside parliament not want to make decisions? When you call the tune at the pinnacles of power, is it a surprise when the underlings dance to it?[70]

The movement from spoken oratory to the printed page, and then from the need to discuss it over a drink to the formation of a written petition, forms an analogy that accords with Marx's sense of the public as an imitation parliament. The increased focus on the speaking place at Westminster ('*parlerment*': 'speaking-place') was to lead to another development that raised the volume still further: the platform.

Political movements made increased use of the platform in the early decades of the century.[71] Moreover, politicians began to use new spaces to influence the public, from the growth of the 'political dinner' as a mode of public address to the increased focus on speech making at elections.[72] Extra-parliamentary oratory and rituals went some way towards drawing new members of the community into the political process; non-voters also played an active part in the election drama, through heckling and joining (illicitly) in the show of hands during voting. The platform was effecting a shift in conceptions of the political nation. By 1845, Francis could observe that 'The "pressure from

[68] Thomas Carlyle, quoted in James Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of his Life in London*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1884), i. 429.

[69] Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), ed. M. K. Goldberg and J. P. Seigel (Ottawa: Canadian Federation for the Humanities, 1983), 15, 241.

[70] Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852), in *Marx: Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 71.

[71] See John Belchem, 'Radical Language and Ideology in Early Nineteenth-Century England: The Challenge of the Platform', *Albion*, 20 (1988), 246–60; James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[72] See Peter Brett, 'Political Dinners in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain: Platform, Meeting Place and Battleground', *History*, 81 (Oct. 1996), 527–52; Frank O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England, 1780–1860', *Past and Present*, 135 (May 1992), 79–115.

without" is now looked to as the ready solution of all political difficulties and dilemmas . . . The whole empire is from time to time under the influence of public speakers.'[73] Many groups employed public speeches and lectures to further their causes, and the platform steadily gained respectability as the century progressed.

Gladstone's career highlights the shift in attitude. In 1856 he expressed concern that 'The inter-sessional speeches of members to their constituents present us with the picture of something like a confessional for politics, brought under the public eye.'[74] However, the reform crisis of 1866–7 encouraged more MPs than ever to take to platforms outside the House. In the first extended study of the phenomenon to appear in England, Henry Jephson observed:

> That every minister who had to undergo re-election had felt himself compelled to appear on the Platform before his constituents, and to take them, and through them, the country, into his confidence, was such a recognition of the Platform as had in earlier times never been dreamed of.[75]

Jephson's shift from 'constituents' to 'country' underlines the growth of the political nation that the 1867 Act helped to secure, and the platform was increasingly 'recognized' after the act. The growing challenge to the authority of the Commons through appeals to 'the people' was exploited by Gladstone himself in his widely publicized Midlothian tours, and the sense of an audience outside Westminster became a key part of political oratory. From the 1870s, many important policy statements were made *outside* parliament,[76] and the rise of the figure of the 'charismatic leader' centred on the image of the orator moving mass crowds.[77]

By 1883, John Wodehouse could complain that public speeches were more of a necessity than an opportunity:

> They are one of the duties in public life with which unfortunately one cannot dispense, and I am sorry to say that in this country 'going to the stump' has become a recognised

[73] [G. H. Francis], 'Contemporary Orators: Sir Robert Peel', *Fraser's Magazine*, 31 (Apr. 1845), 379–91, pp. 380–1.

[74] William Gladstone, 'The Declining Efficiency of Parliament', *Quarterly Review*, 99 (Sept. 1856), 521–60, p. 554.

[75] Henry Jephson, *The Platform: Its Rise and Progress*, 2 vols. (1892; repr. London: Cass, 1968), ii. 442.

[76] See H. C. G. Matthew, 'Gladstone, Rhetoric, and Politics', in Peter Jagger *Gladstone*, (ed.), (London: Hambledon, 1998), 213–34.

[77] See Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 369–425.

part of the business of politics and will become more and more indispensable, every year, as democracy gains in strength.[78]

Although the business is recognized, Wodehouse's quotation-marks try to hedge off the new language it creates. The verb 'to platform' is recorded as being first used in 1859, and it was followed by a string of new associates: 'platformism' (1866), 'platformally' (1870), 'platformistic' (1892), 'platformish' (1892). By the 1880s, miniature Houses of Parliament had sprung up in many areas of the country, modelling themselves on proceedings at Westminster. Blanchard Jerrold observed of this 'growth of bibulous discussion-assemblies' that 'there might be a member for High Street in each House'.[79] The transformation of high politics to the high street is a succinct marker of how a fascination with speaking places had changed the face of popular political reaction. This imagined participation in the government of the nation was not seen merely as an impotent echo of the voices at Westminster, but as a potential influence on those voices.

Such developments coincided with the steady erosion of parliamentary influence as the century drew to a close. Changes in parliamentary procedure allowed party leaders to dictate discussions in the House. Nights set aside for government business rose from two to four, and the implementation of the *clôture* (or 'closure') meant that debates could be brought to an end with the consent of the Speaker.[80] Henry Maine gravely predicted that the closure 'will probably lead to a constitutional revolution, the House of Commons abandoning the greatest part of its legislative authority to a Cabinet of Executive Ministers'.[81] Such predictions proved true. As parliamentary supremacy finally gave way to Cabinet government, so the demand for press coverage of discussions on the floor of the House petered out. By 1905, Alfred Kinnear could observe: 'It may be said that verbatim reports are now uncalled for. They are as dead as the Dodo.'[82] The era of government by talk was coming to an end.

The vexed, intimate relations between oratory and literature are not peculiar to the nineteenth century, but they are, then, particularly relevant to it (the

[78] John Wodehouse, quoted in J. Powell (ed.), *Liberal by Principle: The Politics of John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley, 1843–1902* (London: Historians' Press, 1996), 167.

[79] Blanchard Jerrold, 'On the Manufacture of Public Opinion', *Nineteenth Century*, 13 (June 1883), 1080–92, p. 1092.

[80] See Edward Hughes, 'The Changes in Parliamentary Procedure, 1880–1882', in Richard Pares and A. J. P. Taylor (eds.), *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier* (London: Macmillan, 1956), 289–319.

[81] Henry Maine, *Popular Government: 4 Essays* (London: Murray, 1885), 95.

[82] Alfred Kinnear, 'Parliamentary Reporting', *Contemporary Review*, 87 (Mar. 1905), 369–75, p. 369.

prominence of religious and barristerial public speakers are other landmarks of the age).[83] Recent literary criticism has tended to concentrate on what might be termed 'the politics of form' in order to chart the relations between literary and political realms, but this approach can be enriched by dwelling on the political languages most widely disseminated and discussed during the period itself—supplementing work on the politics of form with a concurrent attentiveness to the forms of politics. This study involves deliberately varying approaches to the material: local engagements of writers with rhetorical *topoi* (such as paralipsis, *circumlocutio*, litotes, *restrictio*), political orators, and styles stand alongside more general considerations of how various types of concession might operate in vocal and printed addresses, or of the ways in which the responsibilities of a writer to his audience can be aligned with those of a politician to his constituents. Public speaking is, therefore, conceived and studied as a spoken and a written phenomenon. Indeed, around the beginning of the nineteenth century, 'volume' came to refer to something you could hear as well as to something you could see (the *OED* gives 1801 for the first citation of 'volume' as 'the compass of a voice'). Two other examples from the mid-century hint at crossovers between the visual and the aural; 1850 sees the first recorded instance of the verb 'voice' applied to 'writings', while 1855 witnessed the word 'audience' being used to refer to 'readers of a book'.

These developments suggest that grand narratives of the century as breaking with an oral past, instituting a decisive shift to print culture, stand in need of revision.[84] A brief survey of some intersections between speech and print reveals the protean culture in which writers were located. While the diction and cadences of political speeches were pored over on the printed page, written texts were read aloud. As MPs took to the platform to influence their audiences, writers embarked on reading and lecture tours to disseminate their work.[85] Ruskin may have been appalled by 'this age of lecturers', but he also claimed that *Modern Painters* was 'itself a lecture with no conclusion', and he soon mounted the platform to provide a spoken rendition and extension of his printed

[83] See Robert H. Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit: Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1998); Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology*? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Joseph S. Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

[84] See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982). For a revisionary argument, see John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[85] See Philip Collins, *Reading Aloud: A Victorian Métier* (Lincoln: Tennyson Society, 1972); Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain, 1870–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 575–614.

words.[86] Readers were also keen to get in on the act. Reading and speaking manuals flooded the market, urging people to recite works of literature aloud.[87] One manual aimed to help 'every one engaged in *speaking* or *writing* for the public', as if both types of eloquence required the same skills.[88] Another begins by insisting that 'you must learn to think aloud' in the act of reading if you are to learn to be a proficient public speaker, and, with the assistance of Lord Brougham, Edward Cox founded a Public Reading Association that invited members of the public to read literature to an audience.[89]

The public vocalization of literature was encouraged as a way of integrating an increasingly literate community into responsible citizenship. A monthly journal devoted to elocution and oratory was set up, announcing that public speaking was 'an accomplishment without which no man or woman can be considered to have received a proper education'.[90] To better your speech was to better your station, and literature was often enrolled in the cause. *Live and Learn*, for example, a manual that went through twenty-eight editions in seventeen years, encouraged readers to 'Take, every morning, some passage from a good writer, poetry or prose; mark every letter and syllable with respect to which a mistake is likely to occur, using a good dictionary in the case of the slightest uncertainty; pronounce each word several times by itself'.[91] 'Taking' literature every morning, perhaps along with the paper, and reading the former aloud before then reading voices on the pages of the latter, underlines how the permeable boundaries between speech and print were related to those between politics and literature.

The presence of literary culture in political life is highlighted by the practice of politicians, many of whom made frequent allusion to literary texts during debate. Disraeli noted that, not only were MPs quoting 'Byron & Tennyson' (poets, at least), 'But Bright & Cobden, & all those sort of people, are always quoting Dickens & *Punch*, &c'.[92] Notwithstanding Disraeli's sneer, the

[86] John Ruskin, *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903–12), xii. 387, xxii. 511.

[87] See Donald C. Stewart, 'The Nineteenth Century', in Winifred Horner (ed.), *The Present State of Scholarship in Historical and Contemporary Rhetoric* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 151–85.

[88] Chauncey Goodrich, *Select British Eloquence* (London: Sampson Low, 1852), p. iii; my emphasis.

[89] Edward Cox, *The Arts of Writing, Reading and Speaking* (London: Crockford, 1863), 2.

[90] Anon., *Speech*, 1/1 (Oct. 1889), 1. On the gendered aspects of public speaking in the period, see the essays in *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 29 (Spring 2002).

[91] Anon., *Live and Learn: A Guide for All Who Wish to Speak and Write Correctly*, 28th edn.. (London: Shaw, 1872), 160–1. See Lynda Mugglestone, *'Talking Proper': The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[92] Benjamin Disraeli, *Disraeli's Reminiscences*, ed. Helen M. Swartz and Marvin Swartz (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), 98.

fact that politicians even quoted such texts suggests that they were still felt to carry political weight and authority even as the 'literary' was becoming increasingly defined as a realm apart from such debate. John Bright highlights the suppleness of the technique; in Birmingham in 1858 he observed the plight of 'the poor half-starved farm-labourer' before saying:

> You know what a Peer is. He is one of those fortunate individuals who are described as coming into the world 'with a silver spoon in their mouths'. Or, to use a more polished and elaborate phraseology of the poet, it may be said of him—
>
> 'Fortune came smiling to his youth and woo'd it,
> And purpled greatness met his ripened years'.[93]

The poet's written words are enlisted into what 'may be said' against the Lord through the pressure of Bright's appositions. The 'silver spoon', when polished up, exerts a pressure on '*purpled* greatness' and '*ripened* years' that pushes the figurative into the literal, for the excessive wining and dining of the Peer points to a constitution which allows others to starve. Such rhetorical flights of fancy led many to conceive oratory itself as a form of literary endeavour. T. H. Escott looked back over his career as a reporter and said that in the 1870s 'parliamentary speaking was still studied and practised as a fine art, not merely as a civic function'.[94] Bright's speeches were published as models of oratory and literature in the 'popular-classical' Everyman's Library until 1907, and, in his preface to the collected edition of the speeches James Rogers was impressed by 'the artistic value of these compositions, which will give them now, and will give them hereafter, so high a place in English Literature'.[95]

In this environment, Parliament was seen as a form of literary entertainment. William White noted that 'the mania outside the House to hear a speech is stronger even than the mania inside to make one', and called Parliament 'the theatre of St. Stephen;'[96] while *The Times* exclaimed: 'They say that we have lost as a nation our theatrical taste, but the truth is Parliament is our theatre.'[97] The drama of politics continued outside Westminster, and Bulwer-Lytton's observation that 'The man who writes a play for Covent Garden ought to remember that the Theatre is but a few paces from the Hustings' carried extra

[93] John Bright, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by John Bright, M.P.*, ed. J. E. T. Rogers, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1868), ii. 9, 15.

[94] T. H. Escott, *Platform, Press, Politics and Play* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1895), 325.

[95] Bright, *Speeches*, i. p. vi. See also the section on 'Political Orators' in A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (eds.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, xiv: *The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 119–37.

[96] William Hale White, *The Inner Life of the House of Commons*, ed. Justin McCarthy, 2 vols. (London: Unwin, 1897), i. 157, ii. 156.

[97] *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1859, 2c.

weight in an age where political rallies were held in the theatre.[98] 'A few paces' was an exaggeration in this instance; in Covent Garden, politics and theatre shared the same stage. *The Times* observed of the Anti-Corn Law meetings held at the venue that 'maids and matrons flock to the theatres, as if it were but a new "translation from the French" '.[99]

The political orator was a celebrity.[100] *The Times* observed that readers 'expect to be told not only what [he] said, but how he looked when he said it, how he took the answer of the other side, and how he looked when he replied to it'.[101] The allure of a seat in the Lords or the Commons also brought literary and cultural figures into the fray: as well as the poet-lords (Byron and Tennyson) and novelists-turned-MPs (Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton), John Stuart Mill, Trollope, Dickens, Thackeray, Bagehot, Arnold, and Conan Doyle were either asked to stand, or did stand for Parliament. Literary-political crossovers were further highlighted by an irreverent supplement to *The Times*—referred to by one Chancellor of the Exchequer as 'that publication so familiarly known to all Members of this House'[102]—*Punch*. The journal forged a political satire that drew frequent analogies between literary sources and political speeches and events. In the 1840s Peel appeared in its pages in the guise of various Dickens characters, including Nicholas Nickleby, Joseph Bowley, and Oliver Twist: 'We have heard that MR. CHARLES DICKENS is about to apply to the Court of Chancery for an injunction to prevent SIR ROBERT PEEL continuing any longer, in his capacity as Premier, the character of MR. PECKSNIFF, as delineated in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, that character being copyright.'[103] David Vincent's sense of a contemporary audience accustomed to moving from 'politics as reasoned arguments to politics as entertainment to entertainment alongside politics' is clear from such sprightly examples.[104]

Oratorical and literary realms, then, met and parted company in many ways throughout the period, and a sustained focus on four authors writing between the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries stands in need of some explanation. The writers are chosen partly because of their popularity and influence; they are representatives as well as focal points, and might stand as synecdoches for the larger history of relations between writers and speakers in

[98] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 'On Art in Fiction', *The Monthly Chronicle*, 1 (Apr. 1838), 138–49, p. 146.

[99] Quoted in Donald Read, *Cobden & Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership* (London: Camelot, 1967), 54.

[100] See Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 33–4.

[101] *The Times*, 7 Feb. 1874, 9b.

[102] *Hansard*, cxxxvii. 781 (19 Mar. 1855).

[103] *Punch* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1844), vii. 25.

[104] David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England, 1750–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 210.

the period. They also sought, in varying ways, to create a printed speech that could offer indirect resistance to the terms of evolving political debate. The focus is on novels and poems, not on plays, because a recurrent concern of this book is to show how printed words and private scenes of reading might form reflective yet engaged counterpoints to fast-paced vocal utterances and immediate crowd responses.[105] The opening sections of each chapter situate the writer in relation to his peers, but these peers are given cameo roles rather than lead parts because one of my central contentions is that oratorical culture was not a sporadic influence, but a formative principle across the whole span of these prominent literary careers. Each chapter claims that, in order to shed new light on each author's socio-political engagements, we need to remain attentive—as he did—to political oratory throughout his early and late writings.

Byron was born in the year in which *The Times* came into existence (1788), and he was an avid reader of the oratory that commanded unprecedented space in early nineteenth-century newspapers. He was also the first popular writer in these new historical circumstances to have trained for and begun a career in Parliament, and thus provides a valuable starting-point. Chapter 1 examines his engagements with Whig, Tory, and radical oratory in his speeches and poetry, and ends by looking in detail at the biggest-selling literary work of the Romantic period, *Don Juan* (1818–24). Dickens provides the most varied body of spoken and written engagements with Liberal reform rhetoric in the nineteenth century, and—as Davis notes—he reaches 'further down and further across the social scale than any of his contemporaries'.[106] His novelistic debut, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–7), takes its bearings from his apprenticeship as a parliamentary reporter, and was published in volume form a few months before *Hansard* first went on sale to the general public. Chapter 2 considers how his diverse careers as shorthand writer, journalist, speaker, and public reader informed his attempts to shape the Victorian periodical novel into a mode of civic eloquence.

Chapter 3 aims to offer new insight into perhaps the most significant poetic development of the age—the dramatic monologue—by looking at how the printed voices of Tennyson's early poems were shaped by orators at the Cambridge Union and beyond. It then charts the ways in which the Laureateship asked the poet to speak *for* as well as *to* his public, exploring how Tennyson's reading of imperialist oratory (and his long-standing relationship with the most famous orator of the age, William Gladstone) influenced

[105] On the theatre, see Julia Swindells, *Glorious Causes: The Grand Theatre of Political Change, 1789 to 1833* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[106] Davis, *Victorians*, 205.

the rhetorical structures of *Maud* (1855) and *Idylls of the King* (1859–85). Chapter 4 focuses on Joyce and 'the Irish question'. The aims of Irish eloquence were recurring features of political debate, partly as a result of the Act of Union that saw Irish politicians enter Westminster in 1801. Born in the year that *clôture* was implemented (1882), Joyce is the last writer who had persistent recourse to the styles of Victorian oratory in his work. Indeed, the closure was itself instituted to combat Irish obstructionism in the Commons, and the loquacious tactics had a key part to play in the erosion of parliamentary autonomy at the end of the century. The chapter considers Joyce's early work, and ends with a sustained focus on *Ulysses* (1922), thinking through the implications of the writer's choice to structure his masterpiece around the figure of the most renowned orator in the classical literary tradition.

This book is primarily concerned to chart how writers envisaged their work in relation to contemporary political voices, but it also considers how modern debates about relations between poetics and rhetoric are inflected by classical forbears. Three of the four authors studied were classically trained, and Dickens's early years as a parliamentary reporter involved prolonged exposure to the voices of those who were educated in the same tradition. This tradition acknowledged that poetics could inform and enrich political debate—Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian all recommended the study of poetry as part of a sound rhetorical training and quoted poets as examples of procedure to be emulated. As Jeffrey Walker has recently shown, even as distinctions were made between poetics and rhetoric, epideictic 'literaturized' forms of rhetoric (concerned with the 'forming' of opinions) were also seen as the foundation of pragmatic modes of persuasion in parliaments or courts (concerned with making decisions). That is, civic eloquence was descended from poetic discourse—epideictic modes were formative influences rather than ornamental afterthoughts.[107] The emergence of the categories of the 'literary' and the 'aesthetic' in the nineteenth century is informed by this heritage. Post-Romantic discussions are full of oppositions—as Walker puts it, '"Rhetoric" and "poetry" align with the practical and the aesthetic, the mundane and the ineffable, manipulation and truth, constraint and freedom, and so forth.'[108] However, these oppositions are constantly being tested by writers who sense the value of forms of literary eloquence that may seek to shape opinion by offering something more than the clear statement of an opinion.

When Aristotle defended the central ideal of classical rhetoric, he observed: 'One should be able to argue persuasively on either side of a question . . . in

[107] Jeffrey Walker, *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[108] Ibid. 329.

order that it may not escape our notice what the real state of the case is.'[109] Like Arnold and his contemporaries, Aristotle had concerns about the ethical and socio-political dangers of such reflexive and reflective powers, but considered that—if rhetoric was to be an 'art'—it would need to face these dangers rather than to avoid them by abandoning the ideal. A commitment to arguing on both sides is an acknowledgement of the inescapability of conflicting attachments and callings: rhetoric 'is concerned with the sort of things we debate . . . And we debate about things that seem to be capable of admitting two possibilities.'[110]

The art of modern literary eloquence shares this perspective, and is founded on an appreciation of literary style as a form of conduct as well as a mode of persuasion. Eugene Garver writes:

> An art of rhetoric never stops being a capacity for arguing both sides of a question . . . despite this ethically troubling status, rhetorical activity . . . is itself valuable, even if not all its products are valuable . . . An art which proves opposites creates mistrust. Today we don't need to be reminded of this mistrust. But we do need to know about its nobility.[111]

Literary eloquence can embody this nobility, for it offers us a form of expression that stands by what it says in two senses: we 'stand by' our utterances when we commit ourselves to them; but we also 'stand by' such utterances when we reconsider them, stand back to survey them from a more disinterested perspective, acknowledging and incorporating counter-claims. As Empson once wrote, such an imagining 'combines breadth of sympathy with energy of judgment; it can keep its balance among all the materials for judging'.[112] This is the poised conviction that a literary persuasion may carry.

[109] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, I. i. 12. [110] Ibid.

[111] Eugene Garver, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 180, 212, 248.

[112] William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935; repr. New York: New Directions, 1974), 64.