

**A RADICAL NOVELIST IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
ENGLAND: ROBERT BAGE ON POVERTY,  
SLAVERY AND WOMEN**

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the progression of Robert Bage's development as a novelist by looking at his main campaigns for social reform through literary undertakings, namely:

- to improve the social standing of the impoverished,
- to work towards the emancipation of slaves,
- to reform the educational system for women.

Little has been previously written about Bage's personal contribution to any of these campaigns and a good amount of new biographical research has been introduced to show how he put into practice the things in which he believed. Within this structure is an argument that historical events, at local, national and even international level, helped change his perspective on life and society at the same time as his approach to novel-writing changed.

It has been noticed by all commentators who have discussed Bage's literary works that the last two novels outshine the first four. An attempt will be made to show how his literary direction altered; what changes actually took place, and what may have contributed to the changes. To achieve this and at the same time help introduce one of our more radical and accomplished eighteenth-century English authors to readers who may be unfamiliar with him and his novels, two chapters concentrate on his life giving factual and chronological accounts which contain significant new information about the author and correct a few errors from former biographies. Emphasis is given to the novel-writing years and the information included has been specifically chosen to support the main argument under discussion. The second of these biographical chapters

details the last decade of Bage's life and examines what effects the American Revolution, French Revolution, Birmingham Riots of 1791, other major historical incidents and Bage's personal affiliations may have had on his life and writings as they appear within the context of the three social concerns bulleted above. How his approach to these concerns took on a more mature guise is the subject of the literary-critical chapters which deal with poverty, slavery and women's advancement. Each of these topics, in its own way, shows just how important he considered a good educational system was to human progress. As far as my reading goes no authority has ever tried to assess the reasons why his reputation rests largely on the last two novels, which all consider to be his best. Likewise nobody has questioned whether this evolution was in any way influenced by external events and a change in his personal ideas and beliefs. That is the purpose of this thesis.

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## TIMELINE

03/1730	The date Robert Bage gives for his birthday.
05/1733	Elizabeth Woolley baptised at Wychnor.
1746-7	A series of deaths leaves Robert in charge of Darley Abbey Paper Mill, Derby.
12/11/1749	Elizabeth's father, Paul Woolley of Wychnor buried at Barton-Under-Needwood.
1749-1758	Elizabeth (Mrs Woolley senior) takes responsibility for the Swan Inn and farm at Wychnor.
08/1751	Robert Bage marries Elizabeth Woolley. He takes an apprentice, William Wood.
02/1752/3	First son Charles baptised at St Alkmund's.
03/1753	Robert advertises tenancy of Darley Abbey Paper Mill and buys Elford Mill.
01/1755	Second son Edward baptised at St Peter's, Elford.
1756c	Bage meets Erasmus Darwin. Starts trading with Hutton
10/1758	Third son John baptised at St Peter's, Elford.
1759c	Bage builds a footbridge over the Tame which becomes a matter of contention with the Elford ferryman.
1760	George III accedes to the throne. The Earl of Donegall buys the Fisherwick estate from Samuel Swinfen for £30,250.
3/1761	Hutton agrees to purchase all the paper from Elford Mill.
1765c	Bage goes into partnership with Darwin and others in an Ironworks enterprise. Footbridge contest settled.
1765	Bage takes a seat on the Lichfield Turnpike Trust.
1766	Sells Elford Mill to Earl of Donegall for £2,000 and leases it back at £46 per annum.
1768c	Charles Bage starts his career as a surveyor.
1770	Bage expands Elford Mill without Donegall's permission.
1770	Joseph Williams & Robert Bage are elected Overseers of the Poor at St Peter's, Elford.
01/1770	Ed. Bage becomes an indentured apprentice surgeon.
1772	Bage withdraws £517 from the Wychnor Project.
1773	Day and Bicknell write <i>The Dying Negro</i> .
1775	American War of Independence.
08/1779	Robert Bage and Francis Mundy are witnesses to the marriage of William Bourne, Farmer, and Elizabeth Garlick, spinster.
1779-80	Bage's youngest son, John, under treatment for an unknown ailment.
1780-2	Works on his first novel, <i>Mount Henneth</i> .
1780c	Goes into partnership with George Webb.

1781	The year commences with a new duty on paper.
1781	John Barker, banker and partner at Wychnor dies.
06/1781	Charles Woolley Bage marries Margaret Botevylle, daughter of Thomas Botevylle of Shrewsbury, at St Julian's.
1782	Ironworks at Wychnor fails due partly to Garbett's bankruptcy. Bage loses just under £1,500.
1782	<i>Mount Henneth</i> published anonymously by T Lowndes.
03/1782	Hutton's <i>History of Birmingham</i> published by Rollason and Pearson.
1782	Cornwallis defeated at Yorktown. War with America ends.
July 1782	Shelburne appointed prime minister. Signs the Paris Treaty with America.
1783	Bage's son, John, dies. Buried in Elford cemetery.
1784	<i>Barham Downs</i> published anonymously by G Wilkie.
1784	Slave-trade abolished in Pennsylvania.
09/1785	Edward Bage marries Edith Bourne at Hints.
09/1785	Mary, daughter of Edward & Edith Bage is baptised at Tamworth. Bage becomes a grandfather.
03/1785	First known instance of Bage's involvement in a book club.
1785	Boulton's engineer, John Rennie, visits Elford Mill and measures the efficiency of the wheel.
1787	<i>The Fair Syrian</i> published anonymously by J Walter. In the press December 1786.
11/1787	Bage Emma female christened at Tamworth, daughter of Edward and Edith.
1787	Society for the Abolition of Slave-trade formed.
12/1787	Samuel Pipe Wolferstan gets involved in the society for abolishing the Slave-trade.
02/1788	Wolferstan takes his petition to Haunton, Hailton, Elford, Sawrey and W. Bourne.
1788	Proposal to abolish slave-trade defeated in parliament
1788	<i>James Wallace</i> published anonymously by William Lane at Minerva Press.
1788	Robert Bage becomes a non-resident member of Derby Philosophical Society.
1789	Storming of the Bastille
24/06/1789	Robert Charles Bage, grandson, christened at Tamworth.
1790	Burke's <i>Reflections on the French Revolution</i> published.
1791	Hutton publishes his <i>History of Derby</i> containing a biography of Bage.
1791	Birmingham Riots (summer). Hutton uses Bage's name in Tamworth to obtain lodgings.
1791	Thomas Paine publishes first part of <i>The Rights of Man</i> in response to Burke's <i>Reflections</i> .
1792	<i>Man as He Is</i> published by William Lane's Minerva Press.
1792	Thomas Paine publishes second part of <i>The Rights of Man</i> .

1792	Mary Wollstonecraft publishes <i>Vindication of the Rights of Women</i> .
1792	The Bages sign another petition against the slave-trade. Robert Bage professes lack of religion.
1793	<i>Man as He Is</i> (pirated Dublin edition).
1793	Louis XVI executed. France declares war on England.
1793	Godwin publishes <i>Principles of Political Justice</i> . Treason trials.
1794	Bage moves to Tamworth between late September and early November. Walks into Elford twice a week to supervise.
1794	Priestley emigrates to America.
1794	<i>Hermesprong</i> published by William Lane.
1795	Hutton appears as a witness for Bage against the Excise.
1796	Francis Blick ordained vicar of Tamworth.
1796	<i>Man as He Is</i> (second edition) published.
06/1797	William Godwin visits Bage and writes an account of this meeting to Mary Wollstonecraft.
1798	Bage lobbies (unsuccessfully) for election to Tamworth corporation.
1799	William Hayley amends the latest (10 <sup>th</sup> ) edition of his poem 'The Triumphs of Temper' to praise <i>Hermesprong</i> and <i>Man as He Is</i> . Bage writes to thank him for a copy he sent.
1800	Bage writes to Godwin on behalf of Blick's curate, Richard Davies.
09/1801	Bage dies at Tamworth.
1805	Elizabeth Bage dies on April 21st 1805, aged 72.

## Abbreviations

<i>ABG</i>	<i>Aris's Birmingham Gazette</i>
BA&H	Birmingham Archives and Heritage, Birmingham Central Library
<i>BC</i>	<i>The British Critic</i>
<i>BD</i>	Robert Bage, <i>Barham Downs</i> , 2 vols (London: George Wilkie, 1784)
CB/CH	Letter from Charles Bage to Catherine Hutton, October 6 <sup>th</sup> 1816
CH/HR&C	Letter from Catherine Hutton to Hurst, Robinson & Co, 10 July 1823
<i>FS</i>	Robert Bage, <i>The Fair Syrian</i> , 2 vols (London: J. Walters, 1787)
Godwin, <i>Friends</i>	William Godwin and others, <i>William Godwin. His friends and contemporaries</i> , ed. Charles Kegan Paul, 2 vols (London: Henry S. King & Co, 1876)
Gregory, <i>Fr. Rev.</i>	Allene Gregory, <i>The French Revolution and the English Novel</i> (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915)
Kelly, <i>1780-1805</i>	Gary Kelly, <i>The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976)
<i>Herm</i>	Robert Bage, <i>Hermesprong</i> , 3 vols (London: William Lane, 1796)
<i>Herms.</i> ed. Perk.	Robert Bage, <i>Hermesprong or Man as He Is Not</i> , ed. by Pamela Perkins (Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd, 2002)
Hutt. Memos.	BA&H, MS 495245 [IIR 13], <i>Memorandums from Memory all Trifles and of Ancient Date Begun March the Ninth 1796 By William Hutton F.A.S.S.</i> , 27 March 1761
<i>JW</i>	Robert Bage, <i>James Wallace</i> , 3 vols (London: William Lane, Minerva Press, 1788)
Lewis	Bernard Lewis, <i>Race and Slavery in the Middle East</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
LRO	Lichfield Record Office
<i>MAHI</i>	Robert Bage, <i>Man as He Is</i> , 4 vols (London: William Lane, 1792)
<i>Memoirs, MM</i>	William Hutton, 'Memoirs of Mr Bage', <i>Monthly Magazine</i> , 13 (1802) in BA&H.
<i>MH</i>	Robert Bage, <i>Mount Henneth</i> , 2 vols (London: Thomas Lowndes, 1782).
<i>QR</i>	<i>Quarterly Review</i> , 34 (1826)
Ramsden, <i>YB</i>	Hermione Ramsden, 'A Forgotten Novelist', in <i>Yellow Book</i> , 12 (1897: Jan)

Scott <i>Pref. Mem.</i>	Walter Scott, 'Prefatory Memoir to Bage' in <i>Novels of Swift, Bage and Cumberland</i> , in <i>Ballantyne's Novelist's Library</i> (London: Hurst, Robinson & Co.), IX (1824)
SHR	<i>Scottish Historical Review</i>
Shr.RO	Shrewsbury Record Office
SRO	Stafford Record Office
Suth. <i>N&amp;Q.</i>	John H. Sutherland, 'Bage's supposed Quaker upbringing', in <i>Notes and Queries</i> , 198 (1953)
Suth. <i>Phil. Q.</i>	John H. Sutherland, 'Robert Bage: Novelist of Ideas', <i>Philological Quarterly</i> , 36 (1957)
Tomkins, <i>PN</i>	J.M.S. Tomkins, <i>The Popular Novel in England</i> (London: Methuen & Co, 1932)
VCH	Victoria County History

## Introduction

It was an interest in the hand-made paper industry that first raised my awareness of Robert Bage, who for nearly fifty years was owner of a paper mill at Elford in Staffordshire. Here was a novelist, with six novels to his name, of whom I had never heard — much less his novels — so it seemed natural to conclude that they were of an inferior nature. I managed to obtain a paperback edition of his last novel, *Herm sprong* (1796), but the others were all out of print. Having read *Herm sprong* I wanted more and fortunately, the University of Birmingham had facsimile editions of all six novels which compelled me to read the other five. After discovering that here was a much better than average novelist, with something to say about key issues, it was disconcerting to learn that so little had been written about him and his novels. It pushed me into discovering more about this reticent man with the intention of trying to add to the knowledge already available about him and his novels. This work is in two halves, one biographical, the other critical. In this introduction, after stating the main intentions, source material for the biographical part of this study is presented, followed by an outline of scholarly criticisms of his novels and concluding with a chapter layout for the study as a whole.

The groundwork for extending biographical detail comes from three main wellsprings. The first relates to knowledge about Bage provided by people who actually met him. The second comes from those who read his works and provided biographical introductions with their criticisms. The third, and perhaps the richest, comes from contemporary letters and diaries. Without former studies there would have been nowhere to begin mine. With that in mind the following text looks at earlier biographies and other source material which has added to the value of this research.

The first biography after the death of Robert Bage was written by his friend and trading associate William Hutton for the *Monthly Magazine* in early 1802.<sup>1</sup> It contains one significant error about the novelist's date of birth and is in general rather too sketchy as to dates, people and places, though still an invaluable starting point. Hutton had previously composed several lives of notable Derby men for his *History of Derby*, Bage among them, and he quoted liberally from this in the *Monthly Magazine*.<sup>2</sup> In 1797 William Godwin, on a tour of Staffordshire and the Midlands with Basil Montague, called unannounced on Bage and his letter to Mary Wollstonecraft describing this meeting adds a few details to those given in Hutton's two accounts. There is one noticeable inaccuracy in this too, namely the date of the death of Bage's youngest son, John, is given a decade too late.<sup>3</sup> Also published during Bage's lifetime was Reverend Stebbing Shaw's *History of Staffordshire*, which contains, as well as a sketch of the novelist's achievements, an actual sketch of Bage's mill-house and buildings, engraved by Donaldson.<sup>4</sup>

In collecting biographical information Catherine Hutton wrote to Bage's eldest son, Charles Bage, and the reply she received helps confirm what was generally known about his father.<sup>5</sup> She passed on this information to Sir Walter Scott, but apart from a few extracts from Bage's business letters to Hutton, and a literary critique by Scott himself, little was added to

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<sup>1</sup> William Hutton, 'Memoirs of Mr Bage', *Monthly Magazine*, 13 (1802), 478-479 (hereafter *MM*).

<sup>2</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 479).

<sup>3</sup> William Godwin and others, *William Godwin. His friends and contemporaries*, ed. Charles Kegan Paul, 2 vols (London: Henry S. King & Co, 1876), (hereafter *Godwin, Friends*), I, 261.

<sup>4</sup> Donaldson came to live with Stebbing Shaw in 1796 suggesting he was not from the locality. He could be the engraver from Edinburgh who specialised in anatomy, Thomas Donaldson (fl: 1755-1800).

<sup>5</sup> MS 486804, Inner Iron Room 12 L52.41. Charles Bage, letter to Catherine Hutton, October 6<sup>th</sup> 1816 (MS hereafter CB/CH).

biographical knowledge available from other sources.<sup>6</sup> Bage's business letters are themselves historical documents of large importance to the hand-made paper industry, and also include a few references to his life as a businessman and a novelist.<sup>7</sup> Most other sketches of Bage as a person derive from these sources, with in most cases repetition of original errors, and it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that anything new was added to what was already known. Gary Kelly's scholarly study of radical novelists of the late eighteenth century, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805*, points to a small number of previously undocumented leads; one regarding a letter from Bage to Godwin. Kelly's study was followed shortly afterwards by Peter Faulkner's contribution to the Twayne's English Authors' Series, *Robert Bage*. As well as providing literary criticism, which owes much to Kelly, it contains a chapter on the *Life and Times*, adding occasional extra details from deeds.<sup>8</sup>

A previously untapped source of information concerning the Staffordshire novelist is in the Public Record Office at Stafford and covers the period 1776-1820. The diaries of the antiquarian Samuel Pipe-Wolferstan are a meticulously detailed account, not just of life in the Staffordshire town of Tamworth and surrounding areas during the period while Bage was living there, but detail Wolferstan's own contribution to the abolition of the slave-trade, a cause for which he fought unswervingly until his death in 1820. Contained in them is an invaluable insight into the period for areas where Wolferstan had connections: Staffordshire, the Midlands, and other regions, London included. They make a refreshing change from the dowdy church and castle histories which tend, by and large, to perpetuate and

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Scott, 'Prefatory Memoir to Bage' in *Novels of Swift, Bage and Cumberland*, in *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* (London: Hurst, Robinson & Co.), IX (1824), (hereafter Scott *Pref. Mem.*) pp. xvi-xxxiv.

<sup>7</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, ed. Sarah W. R. Smith, Twayne's English Author Series (Boston: Twayne), CCIL (1979), 11-35 (hereafter Faulkner, *Robert Bage*).

glorify the achievements of the good and great. More importantly for the purpose of this study they shed new light on the life of Robert Bage.<sup>9</sup>

During his lifetime Bage was a popular and well-selling author but such was the decline of his reputation he was called a forgotten novelist by Henry Kirke in 1869:

enough has been said and quoted to shew that Robert Bage was no common writer, but one whose work deserves a better fate than to be neglected and forgotten, and who certainly deserves to be placed in the highest rank of Derbyshire worthies.<sup>10</sup>

Hermione Ramsden also calls him a forgotten novelist nearly thirty years later.<sup>11</sup> What caused this decline, as well as a general change in public opinion due to the wars with France, was a review which accompanied the Ballantyne's republication of three of Bage's novels. It was written by Scott's son-in-law, J. G. Lockhart, who allowed personal prejudices to cloud his judgment. Lockhart's review was little more than a tirade against Bage as a rural working tradesman, rather than an analysis of the content of his novels. Unfortunately the denigratory content of the review stuck and Bage's reputation would remain tainted for at least another century, while Lockhart earned quite a reputation for adversely criticizing not just Bage but other talented writers, including Henry Fielding and Alfred Lord Tennyson.

The main purpose of this project is to examine Bage's development as a novelist through his campaigns for social reform. There are a number of

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<sup>9</sup> A welcome typescript of these diaries was made in the twentieth century by Samuel's great grandson Hercy Francis Pipe-Wolferstan, but the index under Bage only refers to a Tamworth doctor of that name, this being Robert's son, Edward.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Kirke, 'Robert Bage—a Derbyshire Worthy', in *The Reliquary*, 1<sup>st</sup> ser., 10 (London and Derby: 1869-1870), p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Hermione Ramsden, 'A Forgotten Novelist', in *Yellow Book*, 12 (1897: Jan), pp. 291-305 (hereafter Ramsden, *YB*).

areas in which he advocates social reform: duelling, war, arranged marriages, divorce, education, religion, class divisions, hereditary titles and government, but the intention here is to concentrate on just three areas for which he had special concern: the plight of the poor, opposition to the slave-trade and improvements in the educational system, particularly for women. Bage was a writer of his times and it will be observed that he was creating fiction when radical thought in literature was reaching a peak, when Europe and America were undergoing, and later underwent, revolutionary governmental changes, when the Midlands was at the centre of an industrial revolution, when merchant businessmen with new money were questioning the old order and old values, and when educated men and women were starting to debate the efficacy of a predominantly patriarchal society.

An ancillary purpose of this study is to determine the most relevant reasons for the change in narrative direction which took place between the publication of his first four novels, *Mount Henneth* (1782), *Barham Downs* (1784), *The Fair Syrian* (1787) and *James Wallace* (1788), and the last two, *Man as He Is* (1792) and *Hermesprong* (1796). To claim that there were such changes is not new. Various commentators have perceived differences between the first four, or the first three or four, epistolary novels, and the last two non-epistolary ones, and for different reasons. Among these are Allene Gregory, Hermione Ramsden, Peter Faulkner, Harrison R. Steeves, J. M. S. Tompkins, John Sutherland and Gary Kelly. In determining the reasons for change the similarities and differences of their comments are summarised in this introduction, though it is fair to say that two of them, J. M. S. Tompkins and Harrison R. Steeves, do not give any expanded explanations of their observations and in each case their remarks are confined to two sentences. However, that these, and others, noticed or acknowledged a change is significant, especially when it concerns a novelist as little recognised as Bage, about whose literary output

there is a dearth of criticism. I will try to place their observations within the historical context of the period. In essence Bage's ideas on social reform are assessed against the changing political intrigues and personal challenges that were ongoing within his own life and in his locality. Any detailed exploration of the reason for such changes, as far as my reading goes, is new research.

Bage was writing at a time when historical events threatened to revolutionise the long-evolved structure of Western monarchies. Three revolutions, the one in America, the one in France and the industrial revolution had a huge impact on living conditions, political intrigues and expectations of the underprivileged, so it is hardly surprising that such significant and far-reaching transformations found their way into Bage's novels in one form or another. Allusions to the American War, the revolution, and the aftermath of each, can be found in *Mount Henneth* (1782) and *The Fair Syrian* (1787) where they give Bage an opportunity to discuss republican ideas, the futility of war and advancements in the educational system. The industrial revolution was taking place within a few miles from where he lived and worked and events in Paris, unfavourably portrayed in English newspapers and harshly criticised from the pulpit, would soon lead to the Birmingham Riots of 1791, a distinct turning point in Bage's personal beliefs, after which he said he had less inclination to socialise publicly. After the riots he became particularly disillusioned with society as surviving letters and contemporary journals show. Local gossip in favour of church and state led him to become even more of a 'hermit', as he put it to William Hutton, and less prepared to associate with his fellow man.<sup>12</sup> He may always have been a recluse to a certain degree since there were few in his locality who could match his intellect, particularly when living in the small and picturesque village of Elford. As his son, Charles

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<sup>12</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, July 25, 1791.

wrote: ‘he shunned the little society he might have had because he could not relish the conversation of those whose minds were less cultivated than those of his favourite authors.’<sup>13</sup> Despite not being much of a socialite he continued to take an active interest in local public life, education, ecumenical affairs and social events of a literary and political nature.

His last two novels, *Man as He Is* (1792) and *Hermesprong* (1796), were both written after the French revolution, and Bage, as a novelist of ideas, showed himself to be knowledgeable about current historical developments and the people who made them happen. It has been observed by Peter Faulkner that the conclusion of *Man as He Is* provides its reader with a clear statement of opposition to Burke’s *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790), in a passage in which Burke is referred to as ‘an English senator’. This observation had been made previously by Gary Kelly.<sup>14</sup> Faulkner further observes that earlier in the novel Bage makes an apostrophe ‘in his own person to comment on the similarity between Miss Zaporo’s views and those of Edmund Burke’.<sup>15</sup> Such criticism was against establishment opinion, because in newspapers of the day any opposition to the views of state, church or judiciary was either denigrated by columnists or lampooned by cartoonists like James Gillray, who was ever ready to expose potential reformers to ridicule. The increasingly patriotic and anti-Jacobin press entered the argument with fervour and due to opinions considered to be against the establishment prompted the *British Critic* to claim that the author of *Hermesprong*, was ‘a friend to many principles which, having been tried, have been found destructive of the end they proposed to accomplish, and to generate, not a greater equality of human

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<sup>13</sup> BA&H, MS 486804, Inner Iron Room 12 L52.41. (CB/CH).

<sup>14</sup> Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 37 (hereafter Kelly, *1780-1805*). Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 119. Miss Zaporo is a Transylvanian Roman Catholic who notices flaws in her faith but is too indoctrinated to entertain ideas contrary to the church’s teaching, unlike her father, who changed his persuasions because of its teaching.

comfort, but confusion and misery to thousands.’<sup>16</sup> Such condemnation became standard for almost all Jacobin novels except for criticism coming from the *Analytical Review*, which continued to praise the radical literati.<sup>17</sup> Even so, Bage, unlike other of his contemporary Jacobin novelists, still received some praise for his ‘humorous attempts’ and readers were informed they could become ‘wiser and better by a perusal of’ *Hermesprong*.<sup>18</sup> Even the conservative *British Critic* had to concede that *Hermesprong* is ‘far superior to most publications of its kind’ and was happy to bestow reverence for the character of *Hermesprong* ‘if such could anywhere be found.’<sup>19</sup> It is indicative of the speed of change that four years later the *Anti-Jacobin Review* lumped *Man as He Is* and *Man as He Is Not*, the alternative title to *Hermesprong*, together with Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond* and ‘above all, that most impudent, malignant, and audacious heap of absurdity by Mrs. Inchbald, called “Nature and Art”’, a comment made in criticism of Jacobin literary portrayals of characters from the same mould as the grand inquisitor in Godwin’s *St. Leon*.<sup>20</sup>

Of those who noted the change in direction it was Allene Gregory who first pointed out that the last two novels, the most radical (and the two considered to be his best), were not included when Scott reproduced three of Bage’s novels for his Ballantyne English novelists’ collection.<sup>21</sup> It is an accepted view, even from those who may not have shared his politics, that the last two novels outshone his earlier ones. Scott may have had political reasons for not including the best, and certainly the political persuasions of *Man as He Is* and *Hermesprong* were no longer fashionable. Fifty years

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<sup>16</sup> *The British Critic* (London: Printed for F and C Rivington, April, 1796), 15, (hereafter *BC*).

<sup>17</sup> M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2001, p. 193.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Citing *Critical Review*, June 1798.

<sup>19</sup> *BC*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* (London: J. Whittle, C. Chapple, T. Pierson (Birmingham), Bell and Bradute (Edinburgh), Brash and Reid (Glasgow), J. W. Fenno (New York)), III, Feb 1800, 152, note.

<sup>21</sup> Allene Gregory, *The French Revolution and the English Novel* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915), pp. 178-9 (hereafter Gregory, *Fr. Rev.*).

after Bage's death John Gorton, in his *Biographical Dictionary*, wrote: 'The last two, which appeared, when the author was nearly seventy years of age, were decidedly superior to the preceding'.<sup>22</sup> Hermione Ramsden called the last two 'his masterpieces'.<sup>23</sup> As Steeves dismissively put it after discussing the first three novels, 'we can afford to deal briefly with Bage's next novel, *James Wallace*. It is scarcely more interesting than *The Fair Syrian*, and there are two to come which will be more worth our attention.'<sup>24</sup>

Scott in *The Novels of Swift, Bage and Cumberland with prefatory Notices* included biographical introductions which were later reprinted in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*. Despite not publishing Bage's most acclaimed novels, Scott makes reference to *Man as He Is* and *Hermesprong* in his prefatory notice, and to his credit publishes the earlier novels even though personally 'differing entirely both from his [Bage's] political and theological tenets'. Nevertheless he still admits the novels 'as works of talent and genius'.<sup>25</sup> Bage, in Scott's opinion, rather than composing a narrative, extends and infuses 'his own political and philosophical opinions'.<sup>26</sup> Although coming from a different, more liberal, perspective Gregory agrees with this point of view. Neither of them sees Bage as a threat to society but Scott mildly rebukes him by stating that if his principles were acted upon by 'fiercer' men than himself, vice would be introduced into society.<sup>27</sup> Thus the liberal reform promised from the

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<sup>22</sup> John Gorton, *General Biographical Dictionary, A New Edition* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851). No page numbers; under the column BAG.

<sup>23</sup> Ramsden, *YB*, pp. 291-305 (p. 293)

<sup>24</sup> Harrison R. Steeves, *Before Jane Austen, The Shaping of the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 280 (hereafter Steeves, *Before Jane Austen*).

<sup>25</sup> Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott in six volumes*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: the author, Biographical Memoirs, Cadell & Co.), III (1827), 545 (hereafter Scott, *Misc. Prose*). The biographical-critical account of Bage's life is a republication from Scott's 'Prefatory Memoir to Bage' first published in the *Novels of Swift, Bage and Cumberland*, in Ballantyne's Novelist's Library (London: Hurst, Robinson & Co.), IX (1824).

<sup>26</sup> Scott, *Misc. Prose*, 542.

<sup>27</sup> Scott, *Misc. Prose*, 555.

literature of Bage and other novelists associated with the Jacobin school had gone into decline and a renewed patriotic stance, promoting chivalry and honour, was re-established in English fiction.

Gregory portrays Bage as a novelist whose theories crystallised by the outbreak of war in 1793 into a demand for 'genuinely radical changes', endorsing the principles of Thomas Paine and the American republican model, with a further hope that peace and liberty would return to France soon. She is convinced that Bage seeks no Utopian anarchy even at his most revolutionary.<sup>28</sup> Thus she sees the change in direction of the last two novels in part as a result of the events in France and in part through the radical influence of Paine's political writings. A crucial aspect of her analysis is the distinction she makes between revolutionists and reformers, putting Holcroft, Godwin and Shelley in the former category, and Bage in the latter.<sup>29</sup>

Gary Kelly gives the most detailed evaluation of Bage's development as a novelist in terms of revolutionary events. He takes issue with Allene Gregory by suggesting that Bage was merely responding to the 'disquisitions' of the day as he had done with the Irish controversy, the American controversy 'and all other public issues of the 1780s'. He calls to his defence a review in the *English Critic* and argues that if 'there is any change in Bage's last two novels it is due as much to the change in the times and the normal development of Bage's talents as to any sudden change in his outlook on life'.<sup>30</sup> He goes on to note that *Man as He Is* is pre-revolutionary and the only Jacobin statement comes in the concluding paragraph.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, by the time *Hermesprung* was published there had been political changes, like the temporary removal of *habeas corpus*,

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<sup>28</sup> Gregory, *Fr. Rev.*, p. 179.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory, *Fr. Rev.*, p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> Kelly, *1780-1805*, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> Kelly, *1780-1805*, p. 37.

the treason-trials of 1793 and 1794, and the mob riots that caused Priestley to emigrate, making the adoption of a pro-revolutionary stance ‘dangerous’ and ‘increasingly embarrassing’.<sup>32</sup>

J. M. S. Tomkins noted that with *Barham Downs* as well as *Mount Henneth* the stories are of no great significance while most of the characters have ‘special moral ideas. But in the later books he tended to express his opinions more in conversation than in action, and except in *Hermesprong* the connection between opinions and story is very loose.’<sup>33</sup> She observes a difference between the first two novels and the later ones. John Sutherland provides a reason for the difference, though he does it in defence of his proposition that Bage is a ‘novelist of ideas’, like Thomas Love Peacock and Aldous Huxley, rather than in support of J. M. S. Tompkins.

In the course of Sutherland’s paper he contends that Bage is only to some degree a didactic novelist based on the literary association with Holcroft and Godwin, and that any didacticism rests mainly on his last novel *Hermesprong*. As Sutherland notes, Vaughan Wilkins also connects Bage with Thomas Love Peacock, calling him a stepping-stone between Voltaire and Peacock, but Wilkins comes to the conclusion that Bage is ‘a novelist of doctrine or purpose’.<sup>34</sup> Towards the end of his article Sutherland concedes that Bage is more of a bridge between the didactic novelists of the eighteenth century and the ‘novelists of ideas’ of the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> Sutherland’s real contribution in discussing the first four novels in contrast to the last two is in the presentation of a view that

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<sup>32</sup> Kelly, *1780-1805*, p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> J.M.S. Tomkins, *The Popular Novel in England* (London: Methuen & Co, 1932), p. 196, (hereafter Tomkins, *PN*).

<sup>34</sup> Suth. *Phil. Q.*, 36 (1957) 211-220 (p. 211). Robert Bage, *Hermesprong*, ed. by Vaughan Wilkins (London: Turnstile Press, 1951), p. v, vii.

<sup>35</sup> Suth. *Phil. Q.*, 36 (1957) 211-220 (p. 219).

his epistolary novels have more action and adventure, something J. M. S Tompkins puts rather more succinctly.<sup>36</sup> Of other earlier commentators, Hermione Ramsden observed that only after Bage had discarded the epistolary style for a style of his own could his novels be considered likely to endure.<sup>37</sup>

Criticism of his development as a novelist continues into the twenty-first century. Pamela Perkins has discussed Bage's Jacobin sympathies which she sees as manifesting themselves in the way he deals with women and sexuality.<sup>38</sup> She observes that in *Miss Fluart*, from his last novel, there is a new woman character, one who prefers to remain single, rather than conform to a traditional marital ending provided by novels of the day, including earlier novels by Bage.<sup>39</sup> He does not, however, disappoint his traditional readers because his other heroine, Caroline Campinet, eventually marries the eponymous hero, though it is uncertain whether or not she will, and this adds a narrative intrigue to the overall instructive nature of the novel.

This then, in brief, covers biographical sources and the canon of criticism on Bage's development as a novelist. To look at his development in more depth, we need first to know something of Bage as a person, then to see how his life as a businessman, family-man, novelist and prominent rural figure changed over the years, and how such changes impinged upon his writing. The first chapter, 'Before the Birmingham Riots', introduces several new aspects to what is known about Bage as a man. An attempt is also made to correct some minor historical inaccuracies. Though much could be written about Bage's life and work as a papermaker and corn

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<sup>36</sup> Tompkins, *PN*, p. 196.

<sup>37</sup> Ramsden, *YB*, pp. 291-305 (p. 293).

<sup>38</sup> Robert Bage, *Hemsprong or Man as He Is Not*, ed. by Pamela Perkins (Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd, 2002), p. 23 (hereafter Bage *Hems*. ed. Perk.).

<sup>39</sup> Bage *Hems*. ed. Perk., p. 31. *Suth. Phil. Q.*, 36 (1957) 211-220 (p. 219).

millers, that aspect is only touched upon in the first chapter. As mentioned his letters to William Hutton in Birmingham Local Studies are rare historical documents and of substantial significance to the hand-made paper industry but since no mention about papermaking is made in his novels it is not relevant to this study. The only incidents in which his knowledge of mills is apparent come in *Barham Downs* when a sluice-gate is opened to deter marauding troops and in *The Fair Syrian* when a millstone shatters.

An attempt is made to place Bage's campaigns and comments in their religious, social and educational categories and to show that the Birmingham Riots of summer 1791 led to a crucial change in his personal philosophy which can be seen most strikingly in his last novel. It is argued that Bage was affected by historical events and consideration is given to how local affiliations had an influence upon his outlook on life and what opinions he formed as a result. It further tries to evaluate how Bage was personally affected by the riots, how his religious beliefs changed shortly afterwards, and how his views on society were amended due to the riots. An opportunity is taken to look at his changing religious beliefs and consider what effect, if any, the personal changes to his own beliefs may have had on his novels.

Scott claimed Bage was educated a Quaker; Sutherland disputed this. The Wolferstan diaries show him to have been a church man, yet he told Godwin he was a materialist. Bage was on close terms with two members of the Lunar Society, John Whitehurst and Erasmus Darwin. He belonged to at least one literary society as well as the Derby Philosophical Society, all of which gave him access to books he might otherwise have found difficulty in acquiring. He was a patron of the theatre yet thought himself a recluse, so in some ways he was as complex an individual as some of the characters he created. Greater consideration of his diverse religious

affiliations and artistic and philosophical connections are considered in the second chapter which deals with the last decade of his life.

Each of the three critical chapters contains a short introduction which aims to bridge the gap between what is known about Bage's personal contributions to the subject matter under discussion and the crusading of his novels. Thus in the chapter entitled 'Rich and Poor' the main body of the criticism is about social disadvantage and the poor, and it takes a critical look at Bage's redirection from his earlier more Utopian stance towards more achievable and realistic objectives by empowering the socially-disadvantaged through education. By the last novel there is some acceptance of lower expectations for the poor with an observation that all people cannot be rich, even though they can improve. Having the necessities of life is by this time seen to be the real key to contentment. Particularly in his earlier works Bage frequently overstates the poverty issue by depicting distress in its most severe form and consideration is given to whether this was an effective means of addressing social misery, or whether he was simply emulating the common and picaresque tradition of some of his favourite authors, such as Voltaire, Le Sage and Smollett, for example, for whom poverty is no more than a literary device. *Barham Downs* is a novel of mercantile failure and as such shows that honest traders can feel the effects of social distress as much as the very poor, while unscrupulous agents can, at least for the short term, thrive and prosper. By his third novel, *The Fair Syrian*, the solution to privation is shown to be education. This is particularly emphasised in his last two novels in which a privileged education and the accumulation of knowledge, usually accompanied by wealth, are shown to be no guarantees of common sense and reason. The aftermath of the French Revolution, the Birmingham Riots and parliamentary acts resulting from fear of a spread of republicanism, removed some basic human rights, which meant writers and orators had to be careful how they couched their arguments. *Man as He Is*

lobbies for an improved educational system. *Hermesprong*, his last novel, takes recent trends into account and Bage actually proposes an end to rioting by examining the cause of grievance on all sides then trying to find a mutually acceptable solution within the law. Parliamentary peers, aristocrats and their toadies are made to look ridiculous through their actions, much as they were in earlier novels, but there is more maturity and more sophistication in these portrayals even if they are still inflated for literary effect.

The chapter 'Slavery and Freedom' looks first at his own contribution to the Staffordshire anti slave-trade campaign then goes on to consider his two main contributions in which slavery features, that is, the enslavement of Honoria Warren in *The Fair Syrian* and 'Fidel's story' from *Man as He Is*. It is argued that Honoria's narrative, concerned with the older Eastern slave-trade, contains many of the standard ingredients of the exotic Eastern tale: the preservation of honour with close and unbelievable escapes presented in a traditional and picaresque way. *Man as He Is*, on the other hand, looks at the more recent and more topical African slave-trade to the Americas. Instead of the fanciful narrative which enabled Honoria's escape from sexual slavery, and even from sex — which Bage himself concedes is sometimes fantasy — Fidel's story is a convincing account of the physical and sexual abuse of slaves in the Jamaican plantations. To demonstrate just how true to life this latter narrative is, and how oblivious planters were to the rights and needs of slaves as human beings, the diaries of planter Thomas Thistlewood have been used to show the realism found in Bage's portrayal of slaves and the way they were actually treated and mistreated. That is not to say Bage's knowledge of the Eastern slave-trade was insignificant. He knew, for example, that white slaves often came from Georgia, as with Amina, who befriends the fair Syrian, and that manumission through good deeds was more easily achievable than in the West. In fact there is only one evident inaccuracy in his tale. Honoria as a

white slave was seen not to have been as desirable in the slave-market as a slave with darker skin might have been. In reality white slaves were at a premium.

‘Bage and women’ looks at the real women in his life followed by the women he creates for his literary campaign. ‘Towards education for women’ considers how the emphasis has turned to stronger females, who become, in his last two novels, the main characters, where previously his most interesting females only had minor roles. Miss Carlill in *Man as He Is*, and Miss Fluart in *Hermesprong*, are unique to eighteenth century fiction. The former is based on a real Quaker character, Molly Knowles, and the latter is a progressive free-thinker who uses intellect and guile to save Caroline Campinet from a forced marriage. His earlier novels contain liberated, interesting and philosophical women but these were in need of fuller development; another reason why the last two novels elevated themselves above their predecessors.

Each of the chapters on human rights looks first at his earlier novels to see how Bage brought these causes to the attention of his readers. These observations are then assessed against the manner in which he expressed similar opinions in the last two novels by looking for any significant narrative redirections and their possible causes, such as historical events. It considers too whether, as Kelly suggests, his change in narrative direction can be ascribed to a gradual evolution in his work.

Early criticism was very favourable and tributes to his skill as a writer come from his literary contemporaries, writers as diverse as William Godwin, William Hayley, William Cowper, William Hutton, Catherine Hutton, Mary Wollstonecraft, Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Sir Walter Scott. They show him to have been a penetrating thinker whose novels had purpose. The first seven of these writers shared Bage’s political sympathies

and would in all likelihood have considered his last two novels to have been his most progressive. While it is key to note that Scott, who did not share Bage's political sympathies, omitted *Man as He Is* and *Hermesprong* when he republished three of his novels, they are by contrast the only two novels referred to in Hayley's revision of *The Triumphs of Temper*; the two which caused Wollstonecraft to enthuse about his 'mode of instruction' and the two which determined Godwin to visit him at Elford Mill.

Appendix A gives details of the editions into which Bage's novels went, and from this it can be seen that *Hermesprong* was by far the most popular. Appendix B gives a list of known translations.

## Chapter 1 Before the Birmingham Riots

This chapter and the next, while being biographical, concentrate on the period Bage worked as a novelist, while his earlier life, the first fifty years, is simply sketched over. Consideration is given to key points in his life, some taking place before he became a novelist, especially if these are thought to have affected his writing later. For example, the importance of his failure as an ironmaster impacts upon his second novel, *Barham Downs*, in the form of hounding by creditors. Likewise, his religious beliefs underwent significant change, especially after the Birmingham Riots when he claimed to have lost his faith and, although it is known he still went to church, he presented himself as a secularist to those who met him. There has been much speculation about Bage's religious belief and some consideration will be given to this especially since Quakers appear in his novels and are portrayed more favourably than any other denomination in terms of moral integrity.

### The formative years (1730 - 1764)

Robert Bage, according to his own account, was born on 28 February 1730.<sup>1</sup> It is assumed that George Bage of Darley Abbey was his father who according to Hutton was remarkable only for having had four wives.<sup>2</sup> His mother died shortly after his birth. At an early age, Hutton tells us, Bage was put out to school.<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Tacchella, a master at Derby Grammar School at the beginning of the twentieth century, believed Bage to have

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<sup>1</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 11 March 1800, 20 March 1801. His date of birth would have been 11 March following the change from Julian to Gregorian calendars.

<sup>2</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478).

<sup>3</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478).

been a scholar there but provides no hard evidence.<sup>4</sup> As a child he was taught Latin but later taught himself some more modern languages.<sup>5</sup> While still an apprentice a number of family deaths left him in charge of Darley Abbey Paper Mill on the outskirts of Derby.<sup>6</sup> By the time of his marriage (3 August 1751) he was running the paper mill at Darley Abbey and had taken an apprentice called William Wood.<sup>7</sup> He married Elizabeth Woolley of Wychnor, the daughter of innkeepers Paul and Elizabeth Woolley, who ran the Swan at Wychnor Bridges.<sup>8</sup> Robert and Elizabeth were wed at All Saints, Mackworth, and they settled in Derby where their first baby, Charles was baptised in 1753. That year the family moved to the village of Elford in Staffordshire.

While paying off his mortgage he fathered two more sons, Edward in 1755 and John in 1758. Between the births of his second two sons William Hutton, who was expanding his Birmingham business interests, came to visit Bage at the Swan, and their trading attachments were strengthened when Bage agreed to supply him with paper for a new warehouse at Birmingham.<sup>9</sup>

Erasmus Darwin moved to Lichfield shortly after this agreement was made and it was not long before the physician and papermaker were companions.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Derby School Register, 1570-1901*, ed. B. Tacchella (Birmingham and Derby: 1902), pp. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Godwin, *Friends*, I, 261.

<sup>6</sup> National Archives, Prob 11/756, Will of John Bage of Calke. Parish records show George Bage junior was buried at St. Alkmund's, 13 June 1747.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred H. Shorter, *Paper Mills and Paper Makers in England 1495-1800* (Hilversum: Paper Publications Society, 1957) p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> Parish register of Mackworth All Saints. It was long thought that Elizabeth Woolley came from Mickleover but this is due to a misreading of the marriage register. The entry reads "Robert Bage of Derby and Elizabeth Woolley of Whichnover were married". Over the years Whichnover became shortened to Whichnor or Wichnor and today is called Wychnor. Catherine Hutton discovered that Elizabeth came from Wychnor but either Scott chose not to use the information or it came too late to be included, National Library, of Scotland, MS. 937. (ff 4-5) 4, letter from Catherine Hutton to Hurst, Robinson & Co, 10 July 1823 (hereafter CH/HR&C).

<sup>9</sup> William Hutton, *Life of William Hutton (1723-1815)*, ed. by Catherine Hutton, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Printed for Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, and Beilby and Knotts, 1817), p. 165.

Bage told William Godwin in 1797 he had known Darwin forty years.<sup>10</sup> Little survives of their friendship except that Darwin's second wife, the former Elizabeth Pole, informed Godwin that Bage was the doctor's 'very particular friend'.<sup>11</sup> There are occasional mentions of Bage in Darwin's letters after the two literary men became involved in an ironworks business together at Wychnor but little to unite them directly in their literary undertakings other than involvement of book clubs, and scientific and philosophical pursuits. Lichfield was where Darwin lived and to visit that city Bage had an inconvenience in his path: the river Tame. There was a ferry about a mile from Elford Mill, so to avoid this long detour Bage had a footbridge built, probably in 1759, and he allowed some other local residents to use it. A legal action in pursuit of the ferryman's interest dragged on for five years until the Earl of Suffolk eventually accepted Bage's submission and paid all costs himself through his legal representative, Joseph Timpson.<sup>12</sup> A probable reason for the invalidation of this case was a petitioning of parliament for a new even bigger bridge at Elford mill which was approved and subsequently built.<sup>13</sup>

Walking was a passion for both Hutton and Bage (a passion too which Bage would bestow upon his fictional character Charles Hermsprong), and in March 1761 Hutton and Bage walked together to Lichfield Market, where they 'witnessed drunkards quarrelling at the Elections.'<sup>14</sup> The cathedral city of Lichfield, like other rotten boroughs, had a reputation for improper elections. Bage's landlord, the Earl of Donegall, and John Levett, of Wychnor Manor, were guilty participants in campaign irregularities, and

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Collected letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Wardle, R. M. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 398-9 (hereafter *MW Letters*, ed. Wardle et al).

<sup>11</sup> *MW Letters*, ed. Wardle et al, 398-9.

<sup>12</sup> BA&H, Elford Hall Calendars, 664. (See also Elford Hall Calendars, 648, for a letter of advice and intention to proceed against Bage).

<sup>13</sup> *The Victoria History of the County of Stafford*, ed. M. W. Greenslade (London: University of London Historical Research, 1899-), XIV, *Lichfield*, ed: C. R. Elrington (1990) 240.

<sup>14</sup> BA&H, MS 495245 [IIR 13], *Memorandums from Memory all Trifles and of Ancient Date Begun March the Ninth 1796 By William Hutton F.A.S.S.*, 27 March 1761 (hereafter Hutt. Memos.).

Donegall may well have provided a model for Lord Grondale in *Hermesprong*. After their walk together Hutton dined with Squire Swinfen but there is enough ambiguity to be uncertain whether Bage dined with them too.<sup>15</sup> Whether he did or not the following day another agreement between wholesaler and papermaker was struck. Hutton was by now prospering in the stationery business and further cemented his relationship with Bage by offering to buy all the paper Elford Mill could supply.<sup>16</sup>

Bage was an honourable and honest man, who largely kept his part of the bargain, but as Hutton got richer Bage found it increasingly difficult to accept the prices offered by the self-made Birmingham businessman. There were odd occasions when he sold his produce elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> And there were other times when he would seriously threaten.<sup>18</sup> There is one recorded occasion when he gave a ream away to Wolferstan.<sup>19</sup> The only advantage to Bage of accepting lower than market prices was insurance that none of the paper produced at Elford mill would be left on his hands.

Though Bage got involved in several enterprises over the years he had a propensity towards learning and kept up-to-date with the expanding knowledge of the day, a knowledge which would later help embellish his literary works. In 1760 or thereabouts, he engaged a teacher in Birmingham, Thomas Hanson, and spent the three hours one day a week, which he had formerly reserved for reading, to take instruction in mathematics.<sup>20</sup> Hanson was a mathematician, surveyor, and astronomer,

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<sup>15</sup> BA&H, MS 495245 [IIR 13], Hutt. Memos., 27 March 1761. Samuel Grundy, who changed his name to Swinfen, was a self-made man like William Hutton. On his death Swinfen Hall passed to Samuel's nephew, John Grundy, who also changed his name to Swinfen. John Swinfen was almost certainly a model for Sir John Wing in *Hermesprong*.

<sup>16</sup> BA&H, MS 495245 [IIR 13], Hutt. Memos., 28 March 1761.

<sup>17</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters. 12 March 1782 and 23 May 1795.

<sup>18</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters. 28 March 1785, 22 October 1788, 10 May 1796, 24 September 1799, 11 March 1800 and 5 April 1800.

<sup>19</sup> SRO (hereafter SRO), D1527/22 (1797), Wolferstan Diaries, 20 Jan.

<sup>20</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478).

and is described as having been ‘blunt and open in his conversation, punctual and sincere in his undertakings, and strictly honest in all his dealings.’<sup>21</sup> Hutton was occasionally present at their mathematical evenings.

As I was intimate with both, I sometimes attended, and before the scholar had been a month, I could easily perceive, though no adept myself, he was able to teach his master, nay, even set him fast. Perhaps part of this victory might arise from the easy fluency with which Mr. Bage delivered himself, while the master of figures was better formed for thinking than speaking.<sup>22</sup>

This mathematical knowledge was not necessary for papermaking, his main industry, but early in their friendship Darwin and Bage became business partners in an enterprise in which it might have had greater significance. It was an ironworks business based at Wychnor, an enterprise that would ultimately fail. To fund it Bage sold Elford mill to the Earl of Donegall in 1766 before going into partnership with Erasmus Darwin, Samuel Garbett, a Birmingham businessman and entrepreneur with contacts at the highest level, including prime-ministerial, and John Barker, a Lichfield banker, nailmaker and haberdasher.<sup>23</sup> Bage was not legally involved until after the other three partners had taken the initial risk. An agreement of 14 May 1764 to ‘make a Cut Canal or Ditch, fourteen feet wide’ and of a depth thought necessary, across the turnpike road between Wychnor Bridges and the Swan, only contains the names of Darwin, Barker and Garbett.<sup>24</sup> Although Bage was working behind the scenes at that time he was still paying off his mortgage. His expertise in running mills would have been called upon in suggesting the location of the

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<sup>21</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, Monday Sept 26th 1796, p3, obituaries (hereafter *ABG*).

<sup>22</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478).

<sup>23</sup> SRO, D3219/23-25, Elford Mill, deeds 1702-1804

<sup>24</sup> Lichfield Record Office, (hereafter LRO) D/15/2/2, Lichfield Turnpike Trust Book.

ironworks and the diversion of the canal.<sup>25</sup> Barker was a banker who received subscriptions in 1770 for the Trent and Mersey Navigation Canal as he did for the Lichfield Turnpike Trust.<sup>26</sup> Subscribers to the navigation included John Levett, Matthew Boulton, Dr Small, John Wilkinson, Mr Bentley, Mr Lloyd, Dr Ash, Sir Edward Littleton and Sir Roger Nudigate together with the partners Bage, Darwin, Garbett and Barker.<sup>27</sup> There are letters from Barker to Matthew Boulton from 1764 to 1776 which show Boulton was kept well-informed of what transpired at Wychnor.<sup>28</sup> The earliest known letter of Robert Bage is also to Barker enquiring about what happened to '220 tons of iron from Captain Kneeshaw at Hull'.<sup>29</sup>

Bage's eldest son, Charles, may first have acquired an interest in the structure and strength of iron by observing manufacturing processes at the Wychnor ironworks and slitting mill which made rods, hoops, sheets and nails.<sup>30</sup> Charles Bage went on to become one of the pioneers of structural iron beams, consulted by both Thomas Telford and William Strutt. While Charles was pursuing what would become for him an illustrious career in surveying and the design of iron beams, his brother, Edward, had been apprenticed from 1770 to Tamworth surgeons, James Oldershaw (occasionally spelled Aldershaw) and Walter Lyons.<sup>31</sup> About this time Bage took it upon himself to pull down a dwelling and have constructed a drying house for his paper. He further removed stones and utensils from the corn mill with the intention of expanding his business. But this was done without seeking the Earl of Donegall's permission and Bage was

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<sup>25</sup> Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin: A life of unequalled achievement* (London: Giles de la Mare, 1999), p. 53 (hereafter King-Hele, *Darwin*).

<sup>26</sup> *ABG*, 27 Aug 1770, p. 2, col 4.

<sup>27</sup> *ABG*, 27 Aug 1770, p. 2, col 4. The meeting was held on 18 August 1770 at Lichfield, and a committee of at least five of these 59 subscribers were eligible to meet "from Time to Time".

<sup>28</sup> BA&H, Matthew Boulton General Correspondence. See letters of 12 April 1764 and 8 April 1776.

<sup>29</sup> SRO, William Salt Library, S.MS.478/2/2, 8 Nov 1773.

<sup>30</sup> King-Hele, *Darwin*, p. 52

<sup>31</sup> *Eighteenth Century Medics, Subscriptions, Licences, Apprenticeships*, Typescript 'Project for Historical Biobibliography', compilers and editors, P. J. and R. V. Wallis with the assistance of T. D. Whittet (Newcastle Upon Tyne: 1985), p. 44.

bound in the sum of £500 to have it rebuilt within six months, with the further demand that the new buildings and improvements would become the property of the Earl.<sup>32</sup> Retribution may have come much later when the financial affairs of Donegall were already being queried and Bage may have taken that opportunity to portray the Earl as the gouty and promiscuous Lord Grondale in *Hermesprong*.<sup>33</sup>

The Wychnor ironworks still operated in the nineteenth century but the business between these entrepreneurs ceased due to Garbett's bankruptcy and his problems with the Carron Company in 1782. Some of the Carron interests had to go and the ironworks became a sacrificial lamb.<sup>34</sup> Several other factors made the Wychnor works no longer viable. In 1781 Barker died leaving nobody in overall control of the enterprise, and while his wife continued running the bank after his death, it is evident the remaining entrepreneurs wanted to sell the works, even though they knew the price would be low.<sup>35</sup> Darwin had married again and moved out of the immediate area while the affairs of Birmingham partner, Samuel Garbett, were under increasingly close scrutiny. The eventual demise left Bage with a personal loss of £1500.<sup>36</sup> Erasmus Darwin lost the same amount yet this experience, distressing as it was, provided the novelist with an insight into the ventures and risks of investment which would give him knowhow and inspiration for the bankruptcy of Henry Osmond in his second novel, *Barham Downs* (1784).

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<sup>32</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 18. SRO, William Salt Library, MSS, M. 761/20.

<sup>33</sup> SRO, D1527/15 (1790), Wolferstan Diaries, 22 December. Wages had not been paid to Fisherwick staff but they stayed on. Donegall had recently married again and it seems like this marriage temporarily saved the estate, which was sold in lots in 1808.

<sup>34</sup> John M. Norris, 'The Struggle for Carron, Samuel Garbett and Charles Gascoigne', in *The Scottish Historical Review*, 37 (1958), 136-145 (p. 139) (hereafter Norris, Carron, *SHR*).

<sup>35</sup> King-Hele, *Darwin*, p. 182.

<sup>36</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs, MM*, 478-479 (p.479). See also *Review of the State of Samuel Garbett (of Birmingham) his affairs, 1774* (2), 34, which shows that in 1772 Bage received £517..5..3 (probably from a total investment of £2000) and that the loss to the ironworks that year was £902..1..1. King-Hele, *Darwin*, p. 178. Erasmus Darwin also lost £1500.

## Epistolary novelist (1782-1790)

The novel-writing years cover the last two decades of Bage's life and this section looks at the first. In 1781, Bage's eldest son Charles married Margaret Botevylle, a young woman educated by her father, Thomas, a Shrewsbury apothecary.<sup>37</sup> Erasmus Darwin married that year too and while the two weddings were being planned Bage was working on his first novel, *Mount Henneth* (1782). In the preface he relates how it had been almost two years, his three daughters assured him, since he had made each of them a present of a silk gown, with an accompanying remark that there had recently been an 'an amazing expansion' of the female side of his family.<sup>38</sup> Since he had no daughters of his own this expansion could only refer to his sons' wives, or wives-to-be.

*Mount Henneth* was sold to Thomas Lowndes for £30.<sup>39</sup> It was in the shops and circulating libraries in 1782, a year which saw a new tax on paper introduced to pay for the war in America and previous wars which had helped run up the national debt. Bage was as critical of the Excise as he was of William Hutton and he labelled its officers 'Insidious Rascals!'<sup>40</sup> Tax on paper grew, almost exponentially, until it brought about the closure of many small mills. Bage felt the pinch and would soon be seeking sizes of mould which would be least damaging in terms of duty on paper 'till the exterminating angel shall exercise his office upon all Excise men, or till the Lord gives them grace.'<sup>41</sup> *Mount Henneth* received good notices. *The Critical Review* praised it for its vivacity and wit.<sup>42</sup> Samuel Badcock complimented the novelist for his 'sprightly manner of reasoning on a

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<sup>37</sup> Shrewsbury Record Office, (hereafter Shr.RO) D3651/557, draft marriage settlement of 1781. See also Parish Records of St Julian, Shrewsbury, 14 June 1781.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Bage, *Mount Henneth*, (hereafter Bage, *MH*) 2 vols (London: Lowndes, 1782), I, ii.

<sup>39</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 479).

<sup>40</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters. 23 March 1785.

<sup>41</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters. 18 September 1787.

<sup>42</sup> *Critical Review*, 54, Aug 1782 p. 152.

subject which graver politicians have not discussed with more solid argument, in long orations in the house, or in laboured productions from the press'.<sup>43</sup> A few miles away from Elford a young lawyer and acquaintance of Robert Bage, Samuel Pipe Wolferstan, began reading *Mount Henneth* to the womenfolk at his Statfold estate apparently unaware that the author was a personal friend. He records that on Sunday 3 November 'Read Mount Henneth a novel to women'.<sup>44</sup> He finished it three days later. On the Friday following Wolferstan had learned the identity of the novelist and Robert Bage, 'author of M<sup>t</sup>. Henneth', was invited to Statfold, together with some of their mutual Tamworth friends, James Oldershaw, Mr and Mrs Lyons, and J. Freeman, but a bad frost prevented Bage making the journey. Indeed, the frost was so severe, James Oldershaw, 'staid all night'.<sup>45</sup>

## Literary and philosophical attachments

Bage's spirit of enquiry is borne out by his rural membership in 1788 of the Derby Philosophical Society, one of a few groups in which Darwin was primarily involved.<sup>46</sup> The friendship between Darwin and Bage began around 1757, about the same time Boulton and Darwin were regularly meeting their mentor and co-founder of the Lunar Society, John Whitehurst, one of 'two acquaintances' of Bage's youth; Godwin could not recall the second.<sup>47</sup> Jenny Uglow notes that Whitehurst, as an older man, was the main figure the younger Lunar members looked up to for their own experimental development.<sup>48</sup> Matthew Boulton had property and family interests in the Lichfield area from where the Robinson sisters, both of

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<sup>43</sup> 'Mount Henneth, A Novel in two volumes', *Monthly Review*, 66, Feb 1782, pp. 129-131.

<sup>44</sup> SRO, D1527/7 (1782), Wolferstan Diaries, 3 November.

<sup>45</sup> SRO, D1527/7 (1782), Wolferstan Diaries, 8 November.

<sup>46</sup> King-Hele, *Darwin*, p. 198.

<sup>47</sup> *MW Letters*, ed. Wardle et al, 398-9.

<sup>48</sup> Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men, the friends who made the future* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), (hereafter Uglow) pp. 58-59.

whom he would marry, came. It was around Derby and Lichfield that the philosophers first got together, and Derby where their mentor, Whitehurst, lived and from where Bage and Hutton came.

In *Man as He Is* (1792) Matthew Boulton and Erasmus Darwin are praised, respectively, as a gentleman and proprietor having a 'manufactory at a small distance from the town [Birmingham], scarce better known in England, than in France and Italy, Holland, Germany, and Russia, or wherever commerce has displayed the British flag'; and 'the celebrated author of the botanic garden, to whom all arts and all sciences have obligation'.<sup>49</sup> Other members of the Lunar Society given a mention in *Man as He Is* are James Keir (Heir in the novel) as 'translator and elucidator' of Macquer's chemistry and Joseph Priestley (Priestly in the novel) as a magician capable of raising storms, a pun on his chemical experiments as well, perhaps, as the very recent Birmingham Riots.<sup>50</sup>

Bage told Godwin that John Whitehurst was one of his early friends. Both Robert, and his son, Charles Bage, subscribed to Whitehurst's *An Inquiry into the Original State of the Earth* (1778) as did Matthew Boulton, Erasmus Darwin, Thomas Day, Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Priestley and John Wilkinson yet not a single letter of correspondence has survived between any member of the Lunar Society and Robert Bage, not even between him and Erasmus Darwin. Samuel Pipe-Wolferstan, who was also a subscriber, was a friend of Erasmus Darwin and Robert Bage, yet no letter between any of them has survived either, even though it is known that Wolferstan wrote to both.<sup>51</sup> Desmond King-Hele, while noting there is no extant correspondence between Bage and Darwin, observes that no letters have survived either from Darwin's other close friends, including

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<sup>49</sup> Bage *MAHI*, II, 216, 220.

<sup>50</sup> Bage *MAHI*, II, 216, IV, 43.

<sup>51</sup> SRO, D1527/10 (1785), Wolferstan Diaries, 16 January and 6 March, D1527/6 (1781), Wolferstan Diaries, 17 March).

John Whitehurst and Joseph Wright, yet they were in regular contact.<sup>52</sup> There is, however, one item which shows that Bage was occasionally in the company of other leading lights of the Lunar Society as well as Darwin. *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* reported on a canal committee, convened in 1770, which puts four of the Lunar friends and Bage together at the same meeting.<sup>53</sup> James Watt moved to Birmingham in 1774, and although becoming a partner in Boulton's manufactory at Soho, and a member of the Lunar Society, it is members with Staffordshire connections, with the exception of Priestley, to whom Bage primarily gives mention. Garbett was the man who instructed Matthew Boulton in the complex and intricate ways of doing business.<sup>54</sup> Boulton's affluence, which was never absolutely assured, and Garbett's bankruptcy, show the close dividing-line between success and failure in industry. With Garbett being Bage's partner, and a friend of Lansdowne, it is not inconceivable that the novelist met with the future prime minister, with whom Priestley travelled Europe as a tutor to his son, raising speculation that Shelburne may have been a model for Sir George Paradyne, and Priestley a model for Lindsay, in *Man as He Is*. It has been observed by Perkins that in the figure of Paracelsus Holman in *James Wallace*, although only a lightly-sketched character, Bage might have captured 'some aspects of Erasmus Darwin'.<sup>55</sup> Darwin gave lectures in his Lichfield days and there can be little doubt that Bage went to some of these. Unfortunately the only concrete evidence of his presence at lectures outside of Derby Philosophical Society is at two presentations given by Mr Booth in late 1784: one on a miscellaneous subject; and the

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<sup>52</sup> King-Hele, *Darwin*, p. 310.

<sup>53</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 27 Aug 1770, p. 2, col. 4. The four Lunar members were Matthew Boulton, William Small, John Wilkinson and Erasmus Darwin. By proxy this could almost be extended to five since Bentley was there whose partner, Josiah Wedgwood, had his leg amputated three months earlier.

<sup>54</sup> Uglow, p. 22.

<sup>55</sup> Pam Perkins, 'Scientific Amusements: Literary Representations of the Birmingham Lunar Society', *LUMEN*, 25 (2006), 57-71 (p. 67).

other on astronomy.<sup>56</sup> John Marshall took notes of a miscellany lecture by Booth in Leeds which show it to have been concerned with water wheels and steam engines, and would thus have been of relevance to a water-mill proprietor.<sup>57</sup> Bage likely attended several of Booth's lectures. On 27<sup>th</sup> November Wolferstan records that 'At Elford rode Will's horse to Booth's Pneumat<sup>l</sup> lecture', while on 13<sup>th</sup> December the Bages were in company with Booth and other friends at Harding's until the early hours. Booth's optical lecture was given at the Castle Hotel, Tamworth.<sup>58</sup>

It is not possible to put a date as to when Bage's literary interest was first aroused, though Godwin tells us he was 'fond of poetry' in his younger days.<sup>59</sup> Mixing with people like Erasmus Darwin, Francis Noel Clarke Mundy, Thomas Gisborne, Brooke Boothby, William Hutton and later Samuel Pipe Wolferstan suggests literary connections from his arrival in the Lichfield area. Desmond King-Hele speculates that Bage's 'light literature . . . helped point the way for Darwin, who was to do the same at the age of fifty-seven'.<sup>60</sup> William Hutton's literary output was large, and while he may not always have been punctilious in historical detail, his works are well-written and a pleasure to read, even today.

As well as his interest in science Bage belonged to at least one literary gathering and very possibly went along to others, of which there were

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<sup>56</sup> SRO, D1527/9 (1784), Wolferstan Diaries, 13 December and D1527/9 (1784), 22 December. This is most likely Benjamin Booth, an itinerant lecturer, whose lectures were also attended by Charles Bage's partner, John Marshall, in Leeds. For an account of Booth's lectures as noted by Marshall, see Margaret C. Jacob, 'Mechanical Science on the Factory Floor: The Early Industrial Revolution in Leeds', *History of Science*, 45, 2 (2007), 197-222 (pp. 203-207). Charles Bage, Thomas Benyon, Benjamin Benyon and John Marshall had a flax-mil at Ditherington, Shrewsbury. Matthew Boulton provided them with a steam-engine.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret C. Jacob, 'Mechanical Science on the Factory Floor: The Early Industrial Revolution in Leeds', *History of Science*, 45, 2 (2007), 197-222 (p. 217, endnote 40).

<sup>58</sup> SRO, D1527/9 (1784), Wolferstan Diaries, 18 December.

<sup>59</sup> Godwin, *Friends*, I, 264.

<sup>60</sup> King-Hele, *Darwin*, p. 177.

several in the Midlands.<sup>61</sup> Very little has been written about the first Lichfield Book Club, literary circle or literary society as it has also been called, except it is thought that Erasmus Darwin set it up about 1773.<sup>62</sup> In its early days it is said to have met at Erasmus Darwin's house and Anna Seward went along as did Brooke Boothby, Francis Mundy, Erasmus Darwin junior and — when they were in the area — Thomas Day and Richard Lovell Edgeworth.<sup>63</sup> This society kept going almost until Darwin's second marriage and his move to Derby in 1781. The Book Club, as Wolferstan called more than one society, met from 1772 mostly on the first Tuesday in the month at a variety of locations. After 1782, it met most often on the first Monday, but occasionally on other days in Tamworth. In December 1781 a new Book Club was formed and Wolferstan records being at its first meeting.<sup>64</sup> By April the following year he is setting down several 'poems & C for Book Club'.<sup>65</sup> In 1785 we first learn of the Bages' involvement in book-societies when Wolferstan seeks further advice on Rushall mill at Tamworth book club. Nine days earlier Wolferstan had finished reading *Barham Downs*.<sup>66</sup> This may have been on the reading list. The next month he 'wrote to Bage ab<sup>t</sup>. books for Club tomorrow'.<sup>67</sup>

As well as forging a career as a surveyor Charles Bage had started up as a Shrewsbury wine merchant and by 1783 was established in the trade.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile his brother Edward had gone into partnership with Walter Lyon, senior partner in a Tamworth medical practice, following the

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<sup>61</sup> John Goss, 'Bage, books and book-clubs', *Birmingham Historian*, 34 (2009), 31-34.

<sup>62</sup> King-Hele, *Darwin*, p. 117.

<sup>63</sup> King-Hele, *Darwin*, p. 118.

<sup>64</sup> SRO, D1527/6 (1781), Wolferstan Diaries, December accounts.

<sup>65</sup> SRO, D1527/7 (1782), Wolferstan Diaries, 8 April.

<sup>66</sup> SRO, D1527/12 (1785), Wolferstan Diaries, 28 January.

<sup>67</sup> SRO, D1527/12 (1785), Wolferstan Diaries, 6 March.

<sup>68</sup> *Bailey's Western & Midland Directory or Merchant's and Tradesman's useful COMPANION for the Year 1783*, p. 361.

retirement of Lyon's father-in-law, James Oldershaw.<sup>69</sup> Two of Robert's sons were well on their way to successful and respectable careers for themselves. Very little is known about the third son, John, except that he died 18 March 1783, aged 25. Tamworth historian, H. C. Mitchell, claims that one of Bage's sons 'had served his articles as a solicitor' in Tamworth.<sup>70</sup> If this assertion is correct, it could only have been John. What is known about John is that he was ill for more than three years before his death. A prescriptions book, wrongly thought to have been that of Robert Woody, shows that Mr Bage's boy was visited and prescribed for five times between June and August 1779. In April 1780 he is no longer referred to as Mr Bage's boy but Mr J. Bage in his own right, indicating that he had turned twenty one.<sup>71</sup> A slate gravestone in a good state of preservation can be found in Elford churchyard today in memory of the young man.<sup>72</sup> For the Bage family it was a major tragedy right after the demise of the Wychnor forge, ironworks and slitting-mill business, and was one of the lowest points in the Bages' lives. Robert Bage told Godwin the loss had left him 'solitary and melancholy.'<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> SRO, Hints Parish Church, Overseers of the poor accounts. Disbursements were made to Lyon and Bage from 1779 until 1797, then Bage was paid alone from 1799 until 1803, after which he must have taken Robert Woody (1770-1823) into partnership. Woody and Bage received disbursements until 1808 after which time Edward Bage moved to Shrewsbury, for health reasons. He died there in 1812.

<sup>70</sup> *Tamworth Herald*, Mitchell, H. C., 'A Popular Novelist', 12 June 1937.

<sup>71</sup> Royal College of Physicians, London, MS-WOOD/657. This item is claimed to be the manuscript prescription book of Robert Woody (1770-1823), Surgeon, of Tamworth. However the dates do not fit. It was presented to the college by Mr Claude Hollins of 24 Sussex Place, Regents Park on 17 Nov 1921. Mr Hollins was a relative of Edward Hollins, grandson of Robert Woody. The prescription book runs from 15 May 1779 to 29 April 1780. It restarts 19 February 1824. This would make Robert Woody 9 when it started and dead when it finished. Prescriptions are quite indecipherable and written using some shorthand technique. Patient names are quite clear and include the Comberfords, Wolferstans, Mr Brindley, Mr William Lyon, Mr Harding, Mr Oldershaw, Mr Bourne, Elford, Mr Kemp Bourne, Mr Mousley, Mr Webb of Harlaston, Mrs Cotton, Watchmaker and the Bages. It is most likely the prescription Book of Walter Lyon, senior partner to Edward Bage from 1779, a time after which James Oldershaw appears to have retired.

<sup>72</sup> I am indebted to Mr Hodgetts of Webbs Farm, Elford for pointing this gravestone out to me. Older residents of Elford, H.C. Mitchell says, related the story that the inscription was the work of the "Elford poet". It reads: "Near this place lies the remains of John, the son of Robt. and Eliz. Bage. He died the 18th March, 1783, Aged 25. Less lamented for conspicuous Talents, than for the mild, endearing Virtue that adorned a liberal, and ingenuous mind."

<sup>73</sup> Godwin, *Friends*, I, 264. Godwin's information is from workers at Elford Mill. Either he misheard or they gave the wrong year. John's death is ten years too late.

Bearing his personal grief and business losses he fictionalised the way creditors close in on a distressed but basically solvent merchant in his next novel, *Barham Downs* (1784). There is enough evidence to conclude that Bage worked on this novel from the actual letters which passed between him and William Hutton. Catherine Hutton almost says as much through information she gave to Scott about Bage's correspondence with her father.

The communication is extremely interesting, and the extracts from Bage's letters show, that amidst the bitterness of political prejudices, the embarrassment of commercial affairs, and all the teasing technicalities of business, the author of *Barham Downs* still maintained the good-humoured gaiety of his natural temper. One would almost think the author must have drawn from his own private letter-book and correspondence, the discriminating touches which mark the men of business in his novels.<sup>74</sup>

Peter Faulkner finds it regrettable that only 'some 150 letters survive out of the thousand which Hutton says he received from Bage'.<sup>75</sup> Bage's letters to Hutton date from 1785 excluding one of December 1782. While this is not absolute proof that some of the correspondence in *Barham Downs* came from Bage's letter-book there is a story which is almost the same as one repeated in Hutton's history of his own life. While the novel does not mention exactly where the farm concerned is based, calling it Norton, in Hampshire, it almost certainly relates to land Hutton bought at Wythall in the parish of Kings Norton, Worcestershire. Having lost one tenant who thought the land could 'bring forth silver if not Something better' Hutton consulted Bage on its potential.<sup>76</sup> In his *Life of William Hutton* the stationer tells the full story of which only a part appears to have been told in *Barham Downs*, namely that his tenant was getting further and further behind with his rent, and living extravagantly, to such a point that on Hutton's last visit there his tenant had flown. He 'owed me one hundred and fifty-eight

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<sup>74</sup> Scott *Pref. Mem.*, p. xvii.

<sup>75</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 24.

<sup>76</sup> BA&H, MS Hutton/Beale Collection, 25.

pounds, and had left the farm in such a ruined state, that I could not let it except at a reduced rent. I lost the whole of what he owed me.’<sup>77</sup> In *Barham Downs* London lawyer William Wyman promises to keep his correspondent, Henry Davis, informed as to the outcome after advising his tenant to find another farm if he could not pay the rent. The abandonment of the farm did not happen until the year after the publication of *Barham Downs* but Bage nevertheless left this unfinished story in his novel without subsequent reference to it.<sup>78</sup> Hutton was a commissioner of the Court of Requests for fifteen years, involved in settling legal disputes, and there can be little doubt that he furnished Bage with a good few stories to embellish his novels, including one which involved his younger brother, Samuel, an excerpt omitted from the *Life of William Hutton*, but later published in Llewellyn Jewitt’s reprint from original manuscripts.<sup>79</sup> This story relates to a seduction by a soldier and is very similar to the downfall of Kitty Ross in *Barham Downs*. As with his first novel *Barham Downs* was quite favourably received. Badcock was reviewer again for the *Monthly Review* and while praising it for its leading principle of ‘good sense’ censured it for ‘lenity of sentiment, which hath a strong cast of irreligion and infidelity.’<sup>80</sup>

As he did with *Mount Henneth* Pipe Wolferstan would soon finish reading *Barham Downs* and his friendship with the novelist would deepen. For some time he had been in consultation with Bage regarding mills he had at Rushall, a suburb of Walsall. Wolferstan took Bage along with him on Tuesday 25 January 1785 to inspect these mills, one which was a windmill. There was something wrong with a vane and point. Wolferstan had spoken

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<sup>77</sup> Llewellyn Jewitt, *The Life of William Hutton and the history of the Hutton Family*, 2nd edn (London: Frederick Warne & Co, 1872), (hereafter Jewitt, Hutton) p. 203.

<sup>78</sup> Robert Bage, *Barham Downs*, 2 vols (London: George Wilkie, 1784), (hereafter Bage, *BD*), I, 167-177.

<sup>79</sup> Jewitt, Hutton, p. 41.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Barham Downs: a novel in two volumes by the author of *Mount Henneth*’, *Monthly Review*, September, 1784, 71, p. 223.

with Tamworth engineer, bridge-builder and timber merchant, Thomas Sheasby, to see what could be done to rectify it.<sup>81</sup> Eventually Bage would invest in this mill.<sup>82</sup>

Mills were Bage's livelihood and while he helped Wolferstan he also helped one of Boulton and Watt's millwrights. In August 1784 the brilliant Scottish engineer, John Rennie, visited a number of mills in the Midlands taking measurements on the size and efficiency of their engines. This meticulous and time-consuming work was executed at paper mills and Bage's mill was one of these, as was the Fowlers' at Tamworth, who were also papermakers.<sup>83</sup>

In August 1785, a bond of £100 was drawn up for the marriage between Edward Bage, physician, and Edith Bourne.<sup>84</sup> On the first day of September they were married at Hints.<sup>85</sup> Three weeks later a baby, Mary, was christened at St Editha's, Tamworth.<sup>86</sup> Robert and Elizabeth were grandparents for the first time. Edith was pregnant again by the time Bage's next novel, *The Fair Syrian*, was published in 1787. It was a third novel with yet a third publisher, John Walter, whose main interest was his newspaper the *Daily Universal Register*, renamed *The Times* on its third birthday, January 1788. It is the longest surviving daily newspaper in the country. John Walter would shortly afterwards sell all his novel-publishing stock to William Lane who published Bage's last three novels.<sup>87</sup> Catherine Hutton, who was clearly enamoured of Bage's talents, had probably praised *The Fair Syrian* to excess because in May 1787 the novelist writes:

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<sup>81</sup> SRO, D1527/10 (1785), Wolferstan Diaries, 16 January.

<sup>82</sup> SRO, D1527/14 (1789), Wolferstan Diaries, 7 April.

<sup>83</sup> Quarterly Papers on Engineering, Vol 4, Experiments made by the late John Rennie on the power of water wheels, Iohan Weale, London 1845, part VIII, pages 6-7

<sup>84</sup> LRO, Marriage Bond, Aug 26, 1785 "to be held by Matthew Lamb or his tertain Attorney."

<sup>85</sup> SRO, Hints parish register, 1 September 1785.

<sup>86</sup> SRO, parish register of St Editha's, Tamworth.

<sup>87</sup> William Lane bought all John Walter's stock in 1791.

Dear Miss Hutton was the harbinger of peace and good will from the reviewers. I knew she had good judgement. I knew also that her encomium would go beyond the just and proper bounds; But I also believed she would not condescend to flatter without some foundation.<sup>88</sup>

Having to bicker for a fair price for his paper was always a problem for Bage. In June, 1787, he is found addressing Hutton, not with his most common appellation of ‘Dear Will’ but as the ‘author of the History of Birmingham’.

That I am desirous, truly desirous, of cementing our connexion rather than weakening it — for the truth of this — I appeal to my actions. But I must have profit for I cannot live by Fair Syrians.<sup>89</sup>

The only guide to what he actually received from his publishers comes from Hutton’s memoir, and cannot be totally relied upon. He tells us Bage got nearly ‘the same terms’ for his other books as he did for the first, that is, £30.<sup>90</sup> It is known however that William Lane paid between five to one hundred guineas to his authors.<sup>91</sup> Bage with his next novel would become one of the most popular authors on Lane’s list.<sup>92</sup> Just before its publication he became a grandfather again with the birth of Emma.<sup>93</sup> He continued going to literary meetings and on Sunday 6 April 1787 Samuel Pipe-Wolferstan settled with him for two years of missed subscriptions and other debts to a local book club, almost certainly Tamworth, in which Bage may have had an official role. Wolferstan decided to resign.<sup>94</sup> That same

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<sup>88</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 9th May 1787.

<sup>89</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 6th June 1787.

<sup>90</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-9 (p. 479).

<sup>91</sup> Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press 1790-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939 (for 1935)), p.72.

<sup>92</sup> Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press 1790-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939 (for 1935)), p.72.

<sup>93</sup> Edward and Edith Bage baptised Emma at St Editha’s, Tamworth on 16 November 1787.

<sup>94</sup> SRO, D1527/12 (1787), Wolferstan Diaries, 6 May.

year Bage wrote to Hutton: ‘I want to become a member of your grand book society. Can you get me the rules and articles?’<sup>95</sup>

In terms of publications Bage and Hutton were matching each other book for book. Hutton published his third, *Courts of Requests*, in 1787. *James Wallace* was published a year after *The Fair Syrian*. Hutton was upset to have learnt about its publication from a second party, and told Bage as much. Bage defended his action.

why abusest thou me?

Didst thou not know of Mount Henneth and Barham Downs before publication? Yea — thou didst. I think thou didst also of the Fair Syrian. Of what then dost thou accuse me? Be just.<sup>96</sup>

Hutton’s next publication was *A Dissertation on Juries* (1789), a sixty page addendum to his *Court of Requests*, and Bage asked for a copy.

And hast thou dared to lift thy sacrilegious pen against Juries? Against the English Palladium? Tremble then. I will hold thee up to public justice, in my next work. Send me thy book though when printed; that I may set about abusing it with a decent knowledge of its contents I'm not sure that every critic takes this pains.<sup>97</sup>

Bage was further not sure, when he read the ‘pamphlet’ as he called it, whether it was not with more pleasure than any of Hutton’s other works, but argued that sometimes the commissioner raised his pen against the institutions themselves rather than the abuse of them.<sup>98</sup> As Bage’s novels were increasing, from two volumes to three, Hutton’s publications seemed to be decreasing, though he was working on *A Description of Blackpool*, published in 1804, and *The Battle of Bosworth Field*, published in 1788. It would be four years after *James Wallace* was published before Bage’s next

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<sup>95</sup> *Tamworth Herald*, Mitchell, H. C., ‘A Popular Novelist’, 12 June 1937.

<sup>96</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, an undated letter between August and 22 October 1788.

<sup>97</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 18 March 1789.

<sup>98</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 29 April 1789.

novel *Man as He Is* appeared. Prior to this Hutton published his *History of Derby* (1791), which includes biographies of both Bage and Whitehurst. It is possible that details for the biography of Whitehurst, in the *History of Derby*, were provided by Bage. Hutton never actually met Whitehurst.<sup>99</sup>

By 1788 Bage was well-established as a novelist and that year he joined the Derby Philosophical Society as a rural member. It is not beyond probability that Edward rode along with him to some of the meetings because it seems Musson and Robinson came across a Doctor Bage in records of the society and assumed this person to be Robert.<sup>100</sup> When Bage joined on 7th June he paid the full subscription of a guinea. This was returned to him by Darwin because he had not then been in the society six months.<sup>101</sup> In July 1789 Bage was also returned postage when Mr Jackson sent him a wrong parcel of books.<sup>102</sup>

Charles and Margaret Bage at Shrewsbury had no children themselves while Edward and Edith had another baby, a boy, Robert Charles, baptised at Tamworth in June 1789.<sup>103</sup> Just before Christmas, 1789, Robert Shorthose, who had married the mother of Bage's wife, Elizabeth, had his will written for him. It excluded Shorthose's wife, though she was still alive, and excluded too Robert and Elizabeth Bage. Instead £50 was left to Mary Wilkes, a servant of the Shorthose household, with provision for an

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<sup>99</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters. In the winter of 1789-1790 Bage explains how he has been making enquiries of his Derby acquaintances, probably after, or before, meetings of the Derby Philosophical Society, regarding intelligence about the history of Derby. It seems Hutton was trying to find out if Derby had ever had a castle because of the place name Castle Fields. See letters of 18 November 1789, 2 December 1789 and 24 January 1790. Bage also made enquiries on Hutton's behalf for the Birmingham historian's *Battle of Bosworth Field*, Pearson and Rollason, Birmingham 1788.

<sup>100</sup> A. E. Musson, Eric Robinson, *Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester: Gordon and Breach, Manchester University Press, 1969), p. 163.

<sup>101</sup> BA 106 Ms (9230), Ledger of the Derby Philosophical Society, Derby Local Studies Library, 52.

<sup>102</sup> BA 106 MS (9229), Derby Local Studies Library.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Charles Bage baptised at Tamworth, 24 June 1789, Parish Records. He died only six months after his grandfather and was buried 9 March 1802, aged 13. Palmer, Charles Ferrers, *History of Tamworth*, 1865, 303.

apprenticeship for her son, William, who after completion and upon coming of age would inherit 'his' lands at Barton Under Needwood.<sup>104</sup> By Paul Woolley's will these lands should not have been 'his' and should actually have gone to Woolley's daughter, Elizabeth Bage.<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth's mother, Mrs Shorthose, died in 1790.<sup>106</sup> As a landlord Robert Shorthose appears to have been undiplomatic and argumentative. William Hutton observes that in 1786: 'Having slept at Wychnor Bridge, and seen the Landlord quarrel with his guests, I travelled to Derby, Heard Pilkington preach, Author of History of Derbyshire'.<sup>107</sup>

What was essentially the rightful property of Elizabeth Bage passed into the hands of a servant's child, fathered by her mother's second husband. It seems more significant than coincidental that Bage wrote his will less than three weeks after the death of his mother-in-law and it was a tightly written document. It leaves his estate to his wife but states that should she remarry all this 'shall be absolutely null and void to all intents and purposes' and property willed to her would then pass to his sons, with £200 going to his wife twelve months after her marriage.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> LRO, Wills, Will of Robert Shorthose of Wychnor Bridges, 12 May 1797.

<sup>105</sup> LRO, Wills, Will of Paul Woolley, 23 March 1753.

<sup>106</sup> Elizabeth Shorthose died September 2nd, 1790, and was buried at Barton-Under-Needwood.

<sup>107</sup> BA&H, MS 495245 [IIR 13], Hutt. Memos., 17 Sept 1786.

<sup>108</sup> LRO, Wills, Will of Robert Bage, 19th September 1791. Proved 8th February 1802.

## Chapter 2 The last decade

In the summer of 1791, while Bage was putting the finishing touches to *Man as He Is*, an event known as the ‘Priestley Riots’, or the ‘Birmingham Riots’, shook the Midlands. Religion was very much at the root of these riots and Bage was indirectly affected. So troubled was he by the riots that he lost his faith and shunned society because of the ‘Church and King’ attitudes of most people he met.

Bage’s development as a novelist underwent a clear transition which several authors have previously commented upon. This may be, to some extent, due to the change from the epistolary form, and it has been mentioned how this gave him greater freedom. However two major events took place between the publication of *James Wallace* (1788) and *Man as He Is* (1792). The first was the overthrow of the monarchy in France followed by the establishment of a republican state. This in its turn was followed by the Terror and the French declaration of war the year after *Man as He Is* was published. The second was the Birmingham Riots which took place in the summer of 1791. There were strong, if unfounded, fears that republicanism would spread to England. What followed was a temporary abolition of a basic tenet of the English judicial system: *habeas corpus*. This last act in 1794 allowed for incarceration without trial and was not lifted till after Bage’s death. Though all these events were of significance the Birmingham Riots had a particularly telling effect, not just on Bage’s novels, but also on his life and philosophy.

He lived twenty miles from Birmingham and was not directly affected by the riots, but the Hutton family was and this was troubling for Bage. Dissenters and their properties were attacked in the riots and as a result Joseph Priestley’s house, laboratory and library were plundered and burnt

to the ground, both Old and New Presbyterian Meeting Houses were destroyed by fire, William Hutton's town house and his house on Bennett's Hill were ransacked and set alight by the mob, and all his money stolen. Other dissenters like John Ryland of Easy Hill, William Russell at Showell Green, John Taylor at Moseley Hall, and Reverend John Hobson of Balsall Heath had their properties destroyed too and 14 July 1791, according to Hutton, would go down in local history 'with disgrace for ages to come.'<sup>1</sup> The Birmingham Riots were a disgrace, but soon forgotten. As Pamela Perkins has noted Scott never even mentions the rioting while she shrewdly observes that it was an 'event which, it is clear from Bage's letters, added greatly to Bage's distaste for the political views shaping government policy during the last decade of his life.'<sup>2</sup>

Hutton sought refuge in Tamworth where, using Bage's good name and reputation, procured lodgings at the Castle Inn.<sup>3</sup> Bage was critical of the Huttons for not coming to stay with him in Elford instead of a Tamworth hotel but in the aftermath he was both helpful and sympathetic. 'Think no more of thy bill at the Castle', he wrote to Hutton, 'What is the meet<sup>g</sup> at Coleshill for?'<sup>4</sup> In this, the only reference he ever makes to a religious meeting in any of his letters to Hutton, it would seem that the Coleshill meeting made a collection on behalf of the sufferings of William Hutton and his family; unless another interpretation can be put on it.

It had been a frightening series of events, traumatically affecting the Hutton family, at a time when William's wife, Sarah Hutton, was already ill. Both William and his daughter Catherine would describe these riots in vivid detail in their memoirs. Directly after the riots Bage's whole regard

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<sup>1</sup> Jewitt, Hutton, p. 225. A first-hand account of these riots written by William Hutton is given in the above book, pp. 210-254.

<sup>2</sup> Bage *Hermes*. ed. Perk., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Jewitt, Hutton, p. 237.

<sup>4</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 20 October 1791.

for his fellow man diminished. For him it was a turning-point and from this time onwards he sought social company less frequently. He wrote to Hutton:

In this country, it is better to be a churchman, with just as much common sense as heaven has been pleased to give on an average to Esquimeaux, than a dissenter with the understanding of a Priestley or a Locke. I hope Dear Will, experience will teach thee this great truth and convey thee to peace and orthodoxy, pudding and stupidity.<sup>5</sup>

Offering this counsel for Hutton and his family sees Bage at his most serious, his most pragmatic, tendering advice he saw as essential for a comfortable life. There is nothing in Bage's writings which would label him an Anglican, quite the opposite, yet he was married in an Anglican church, was a churchwarden at St Peter's, Elford, was trustee of a church school charity, an overseer of the poor, paid his tithes and behaved in public as any other God-fearing churchman might be expected to behave. He was even buried at St. Editha's, Tamworth. Ostensibly he was an Anglican. But as the novel was a vehicle for his political and sometimes religious expression, the Anglican Church, as a powerful and well-evolved establishment, was an institution through which he could question views shared by the majority of the Church of England members. Bage was doing the orthodox thing, because orthodoxy brings 'peace' and while it might bring 'stupidity' it brings also 'pudding'. After advising Hutton to do the same he continues:

Since the riots, in every company I have had the misfortune to go into, my ears have been insulted with the bigotry of 50 years back — with damn the presbyterians — with church and King huzza and with true passive obedience and non resistance — and may my house be burnt too if I am not become so sick of my species and as desirous of keeping out of its way, as ever was true hermit.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 25 July 1791.

<sup>6</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 25 July 1791.

Derby Philosophical Society wrote letters of sympathy to the victims of the Birmingham Riots. It was a worrying time for philosophical and corresponding societies and those who attended them, many coming from dissenting backgrounds, and therefore the potential target of rioters. So worrying was it that some societies would not collectively sympathise with the Birmingham victims.<sup>7</sup>

Bage had not changed his opinion eighteen months later. ‘No man’s ear is open to anything but Church and King — and Damn the French, and Damn the Presbyterians. I abstain from all society because respect for my moral principles is scarcely sufficient to preserve me from insult on account of my political.’<sup>8</sup> Not only did he begin to withdraw from society after the riots, but any religious beliefs he previously held were, to all intents and purposes, abandoned. He shocked Pipe Wolferstan by professing he had no sense of religion and no expectancy of seeing his former book club colleague ‘after this life’.<sup>9</sup> This change in direction in 1792 proved to be the same philosophy he shared with Godwin five years later.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever his religious or non-religious beliefs at various points in his life, the Birmingham Riots caused him to make personal reassessments. While it is true that the aftermath of the French revolution created concern amongst liberal thinkers by the time Wolferstan announced the French declaration of war to Bage the novelist had already rethought his religious and personal beliefs.<sup>11</sup> The Birmingham Riots were almost certainly the cause of this change yet the cause of the riots, as Priestley himself concluded, came from the pulpit of Anglican churches, and this must have

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Robinson, ‘An English Jacobin: James Watt, Junior, 1769-1848,’ *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 11, 4 (1955), 349-355 (pp. 350-351).

<sup>8</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 21 January 1793.

<sup>9</sup> SRO, D1527/17 (1792), Wolferstan Diaries, 24 February.

<sup>10</sup> *MW* Letters, ed. Wardle et al, 398-9.

<sup>11</sup> SRO, D1527/17 (1793), Wolferstan Diaries, 12 February.

been disturbing for all liberal-minded people, though some of the Anglican clergy, Gisborne for example, were liberal-thinkers and like those with whom they mixed, including Bage and Wolferstan, slave-trade abolitionists.

Before the Reverend Francis Blick became rector at Tamworth in 1796 there was a three-year spell when the Reverend Michael Baxter was in office. *Hermesprong* was published the year Blick took over. He had formerly been curate at Sutton where he was banned from preaching by his rector, John Riland, for preaching an inflammatory sermon against certain sects and parties ‘in contradiction to man’s doing his duty, by moral conduct, in keeping the law.’<sup>12</sup> This was at the end of January 1791 only a few months before the Birmingham Riots. Blick, with the support of some partially-biased but influential people, published what was probably a sanitised version of his original ‘for I have now revised my sermon’ he wrote.<sup>13</sup> Both this and a sermon he preached the previous year finished with rebukes of ‘doctrines taught in some Christian churches’. Blick may have taken his lead from the Rev. Spencer Madan, rector of St Philip’s, Birmingham, who in February 1790 preached a sermon equating Presbyterians with Republicans, which was swiftly challenged by Joseph Priestley. Though the biblical texts on which these sermons were based are not the same the terminology within them is quite similar. Madan was a subscriber (10 copies) to Blick’s sermon, a publication which also contained the correspondence between Blick and Riland. Faulkner, quoting Schofield, tells how children in Birmingham were taught to write ‘Madan for ever, Damn Priestley, No Presbyterians, Damn the Presbyterians’.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Francis Blick, *A sermon preached at Sutton Coldfield Parish Church (including correspondence)* (Birmingham: Thomas Pearson, 1791), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Blick, *A sermon preached at Sutton Coldfield Parish Church (including correspondence)* (Birmingham: Thomas Pearson, 1791), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 25. Schofield, *Lunar Society* p. 358.

In December 1793 Wolferstan had Blick round to dinner one Saturday night. The next day he took his son, Stanley, to Sutton where they heard the curate read ‘uncommonly well — his rector who will not let him preach, did it himself’.<sup>15</sup> However by early 1798 Wolferstan was of a totally different opinion about Blick who had by then been the Tamworth vicar for more than twelve months. Coming away from one of his sermons in St Editha’s, Wolferstan was unable to ‘conceive how I could be so partially stricken at Sutton end of 1793’ and as he walked along the street with Bage, who was supporting on his arm, Clementina, the widow of the long-serving rector of Tamworth and Elford, William Sawrey, the novelist observed ‘I have seen all theatres.’<sup>16</sup>

William Sawrey died in 1792. Almost all the time Bage was at Elford, and long before his arrival Sawrey had been rector of both parishes — Elford and Tamworth.<sup>17</sup> As another anti-slavery campaigner Bage would have known him well. After his death Sawrey added a legacy of £30, put out at 4.5% interest, to the Elford school charities of which Bage was a trustee. A clause in Sawrey’s will donates any ‘books on philosophy and science not wanted by his wife to Rev<sup>d</sup>. John Walker his curate’.<sup>18</sup> Walker did not stay long after Sawrey’s death resigning his curacy in 1793.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile the incumbent Michael Baxter, unlike Sawrey, was only rector of Tamworth and not Elford, as would be Blick after him. Responsibilities of the Tamworth curate, Richard Davies, may well have increased during this period. In *Hermesprong* Bage wrote ‘if you desire to see a contrast to Dr. Blick, you may find it in his curate’ who ‘from the bountiful rector of

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<sup>15</sup> SRO, D1527/18 (1793), Wolferstan Diaries, 28 December.

<sup>16</sup> SRO, D1527/23 (1798), Wolferstan Diaries, 21 January.

<sup>17</sup> SRO, S. MS. 478/19/15 (letter possibly to Stebbing Shaw about lack of trace of Hastings family 9 Mar 1789 in which he mentions Sawrey was curate at Elford from 1733 and rector since 1745). He was rector at Tamworth from 1757 until his death in 1792.

<sup>18</sup> LRO, Wills, 1 Aug 1792, William Sawrey.

<sup>19</sup> SRO, D1527/18 (1793), Wolferstan Diaries, 1 October.

Grondale has forty-five pounds per annum, for doing half the duties of Grondale, and the whole of Sithin, a village a mile hence'.<sup>20</sup> Blick was not ordained until 1796, but it seems he was at Tamworth as a schoolmaster from at least 1795.<sup>21</sup> Bage, through his associations, would have known Blick was a prospective candidate during the interregnum.

In the summer of 1797, radical writer and novelist William Godwin (1756-1836) did a tour of the Midlands with Basil Montagu. They stopped off at Etruria and met up with the Wedgwoods. Godwin sought an audience with Erasmus Darwin but, finding the doctor out, was impatient to move on and meet Bage. His diary notes: 'June 14 W walk w Bage: dine at Tamworth: Bage calls: sup at Bage's w Davis'.<sup>22</sup> Three years after the visit, in which the two novelists found they had much in common, Bage reminded Godwin of their supper together with Richard Davies when he wrote asking him to use his auspices to try and secure a living 'for a clergyman friend of his who . . . suffered because of his political unorthodoxy.'<sup>23</sup> Bage is found working on behalf of a liberal Anglican curate opposed to mainstream dogma, who happened to be Reverend Francis Blick's curate. Wolferstan was also friendly with Davies, and with Davies' wife, and separately records the enmity which existed between Blick and his curate, and their different church philosophies. Bage went even further and lampooned Blick as the fawning vicar in *Hermstrong*, even going so far as to call the character he created by the same name, Dr Blick, uncommon in fiction of the period. Catherine Hutton, in her own novel, *The Miser Married* (1813), wrote of the clergyman from *Hermstrong*:

Doctor Blick is a new character — on paper. In common life it abounds all over the kingdom; but the many do not see it, and the few dare not tell it. Party and

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Bage, *Hermstrong*, 3 vols (London: William Lane, 1796), (hereafter Bage, *Herm*) I, 109.

<sup>21</sup> W. K. Riland Bedford, *Three Hundred Years of a Family Living, being a History of the Rilands of Sutton Coldfield* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1889), p. 128.

<sup>22</sup> Godwin, *Friends*, I, 248.

<sup>23</sup> Kelly, *1780-1805*, p. 6, footnote referring to a letter from Bage to Godwin dated 1st June 1800.

politics have made dreadful havoc with the christian charity of Englishmen; and, especially, of the English clergy.<sup>24</sup>

The alternative title to *Hermesprong* is *Man as He Is Not*. Richard Lovell Edgeworth was reading it in 1797 and wrote to Maria how he was ‘much pleased with the original good sense’ and that ‘part of it is Dr Darwins’.<sup>25</sup> Blick in this novel is most evidently man as he was. Without going into superfluous detail Blick’s treatment of his curate, Davies, in real life, is similar to Blick’s treatment of his curate, Woodcock, in *Hermesprong*. Davies was ‘doomed to support the dignity of the cloth, and a young and increasing family, on very precarious and inadequate finances’ while Woodcock ‘is married; has four daughters’, and has responsibilities for two parishes.<sup>26</sup> Davies is described as having ‘learning and talent’ and ‘has rather incurred suspicion than certainty, of his tendency to opinions held in abhorrence by every good member of Church and State’ while Woodcock is ‘learned too, and liberal in his opinions’ but to Dr Blick he is a parson ‘tainted with principles almost republican!’<sup>27</sup> This was the same accusation levelled at Joseph Priestley. Woodcock’s curacy under Dr Blick was in jeopardy as may have been that of Davies in real life.<sup>28</sup> On 14 November 1800 Bage, speaking of Davies, told Wolferstan he was ‘not sure he’d keep his curacy under Blick’.<sup>29</sup> Davies, who taught Wolferstan’s son, Stanley, later became a tutor at Leicester Grammar School. In fairness Blick actually supported his appointment at Leicester and, although Stanley

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<sup>24</sup> Catherine Hutton, *The Miser Married* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1813), III, 193-194.

<sup>25</sup> Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 10, 166 (7) Letter 155. Letter from Richard Lovell Edgeworth (Belfast) to Maria Edgeworth (Edgeworthstown), 2 March 1797.

<sup>26</sup> Oxford University, Bodleian Library, Abinger Collection, Letter to William Godwin from Robert Bage (when I consulted this on 15/12/2006 the collection was being recatalogued. Bage, *Herm*, I, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Oxford University, Bodleian Library, Abinger Collection, Letter to William Godwin from Robert Bage. Bage, *Herm*, I, 133, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Bage, *Herm*, I, p. 139. As well as the letter to William Godwin from Robert Bage, the lawyer Samuel Pipe-Wolferstan observed Blick’s treatment of the Davies family and felt obliged to speak to Blick on one occasion on behalf of Mrs Davies regarding pew seating in St Editha’s church. (Wolferstan diaries 12 Aug 1798, 15 Aug 1800).

<sup>29</sup> SRO, D1527/25 (1800), Wolferstan Diaries, 14 November.

Wolferstan did not go to Leicester Grammar School, which by then was in terminal decline, Davies remained in contact with the Wolferstan family long after he had left the borough.

Walter Scott, who was furnished with biographical details by Catherine Hutton, suggested that Bage ‘from his peculiar style’ had at one time been ‘educated a Quaker’ but had wandered ‘into the wastes of scepticism’.<sup>30</sup> Bage’s ‘supposed Quaker upbringing’ was argued against by John H. Sutherland on the grounds that the familiar second-person pronoun forms of ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ only became unfashionable in ‘the course of the eighteenth century’.<sup>31</sup> Whether or not Bage was ever educated a Quaker, may be long debated. There was a strong secular side to the novelist’s personality. William Godwin learnt that Bage ‘has thought much, and, like most of those persons I have met with who have conquered many prejudices and read little metaphysics, is a materialist. His favourite book on this point is ‘*Système de la Nature*.’<sup>32</sup> *Système de la nature* was a work written under the pen-name J. B. Mirabaud which attacked religion as being detrimental to human progress and basically untrue.<sup>33</sup>

1792 saw the publication of Bage’s fifth novel, *Man as He Is*. It was advertised as being in the press in October, 1791.<sup>34</sup> Bage kept Hutton in the dark again about its publication.

Thou sayest something in thy last about authorship — which makes me suspect thou hast heard a rumour of my publishing lately. I have taken great pains, and sunk money to Lane in the price, not to be known any more as a novel writer —

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<sup>30</sup> Scott, *Misc. Prose*, 543.

<sup>31</sup> John Sutherland, ‘Bage’s supposed Quaker upbringing’, in *Notes and Queries*, (hereafter *Suth. N&Q.*) 198 (1953), pp. 32-33 (p. 32).

<sup>32</sup> Godwin, *Friends*, I, 264.

<sup>33</sup> Holbach, Paul-Henri Dietrich, baron d’ published *Système de la Nature* in 1770.

<sup>34</sup> *The English Novel 1770-1829, A Bibliographical Survey of Prose and Fiction Published in the British Isles, Vol 1 (1770-1799)*, co-eds. James Raven, Peter Garside and Rainer Shöwerling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), I, 297-302, quoting *The Star and Daily Evening Advertiser*, "In the Press" 26 Oct 1791.

The title of my last I even concealed from my sons — and yet — the report goes strongly that *Man as he is*, is mine.

What character it will have I know not; but if thou hearest anything said of it in Birm<sup>m</sup> — if good let me know — if bad keep it to thyself. I can digest flattery but hate correction.<sup>35</sup>

His arrangement not to be known as a novelist was short-lived. A printed catalogue from 1796 lists *Man as He Is* as selling at 14 shillings for the four volumes and is advertised as being ‘by the author of Barham Downs’, information which appears nowhere in any volume of *Man as He Is*.<sup>36</sup> Thomas Holcroft gave this work a glowing notice in the *Monthly Review*. So impressed was he, as a fellow Jacobin novelist, that he soon passed the book to his friend Godwin who read it in just over a fortnight during March 1793.<sup>37</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft reviewed the second edition saying that the ‘mode of instruction here adopted is indeed so graceful, that few people of sensibility, we suppose, can read this work without wishing to know more of a writer who thus steals on their affections.’<sup>38</sup> After this review it was mentioned that *Hermsprong* would be covered in the next issue, which it was, and Wollstonecraft was much happier with the plot.

Having moved to Tamworth in 1794 Bage was further from his old friends at Derby and closer to his son Edward, daughter-in-law, Edith, and grandchildren, Emma, Robert Charles and Mary. It is known they lived and had a medical practice on Market Street and that Bage and his wife moved in with them. They may have been tenants of Walter Lyons, a surgeon who was related through marriage to Bage’s Elford friend, William Bourne.

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<sup>35</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters. An undated letter coming, if filed correctly, between 2 August 1792 and 24 September 1792.

<sup>36</sup> John Lowe, *John Lowe’s Catalogue*, Birmingham, 1796, p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 146 (hereafter Kelly, *1780-1805*).

<sup>38</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Janet Todd & Marilyn Butler, assistant ed. Emma Rees Mogg, 7 vols (London: William Pickering, 1989), (hereafter *MW*, ed. Todd, et al) VII, 472-3.

Bage was different from most novelists in that he kept his authorship private even after he was successful. Anonymity was commonplace at the time, especially with first novels, perhaps in case they were adversely criticised, and although Bage was known to some in South Staffordshire, and a few in Birmingham, in London's society there was much speculation as to who wrote these progressive works. Cowper had heard rumours that William Hayley had written *Man as He Is*, but discounted them to his cousin, Lady Hesketh.<sup>39</sup> He also wrote to Hayley telling him how he had contradicted this report.<sup>40</sup> The first volume of *Man as He Is* remained on Cowper's study window 'this twelvemonth, and would have been returned unread to its owner, had not my cousin come in good time to save it from that disgrace. We are now reading it, and find it excellent, — abounding with wit and just sentiment, and knowledge both of books and men.'<sup>41</sup>

Hayley, who wrote poetical tributes to many authors of the day, including Erasmus Darwin, would eventually write one to Bage. He amended perhaps his most famous poem, *The Triumph of Temper*, to have the heroine of that piece sneaking *Man as He Is* under her pillow.<sup>42</sup> Hayley sent Bage a complimentary copy of this and Bage wrote to thank him.<sup>43</sup> Although the poet laureate from 1790 was Henry James Pye, Erasmus Darwin and William Hayley were among the best-read poets of the day. Darwin wished to have been considered for the laureateship, while Hayley was actually offered it, but turned it down. Significantly, Hayley did not

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Correspondence of William Cowper, in four volumes*, 4 vols (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), IV, 387 (to Lady Hesketh, probably March, 1793).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. IV, 407 (to William Hayley, Weston, 21 May 1793).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. IV, 477 (to Samuel Rose Dec 8, 1793).

<sup>42</sup> William Hayley, *The triumphs of temper, a poem in six cantos*. 10<sup>th</sup> edition, corrected, London, 1799, Gale Group. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>.

<sup>43</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng Lett C 19 fol 38. (Letter from Bage to Hayley thanking him for the copy).

amend *The Triumphs of Temper* to include any of Bage's earlier works, just the two for which the novelist became best known.

Most popular among the other radical novelists were Thomas Holcroft and William Godwin. Holcroft reviewed *Man as He Is*, and was impressed enough to pass on the four volumes to his friend Godwin who read the novel in just over a fortnight during March 1793.<sup>44</sup> William Godwin was impressed too and decided to pay Bage a visit on a trip he made to the Midlands shortly after his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, had reviewed *Hermesprong* and the second edition of *Man as He Is*. From this visit something is known about Bage's communication skills for he kept Godwin so captivated the London novelist forgot he had not had breakfast.<sup>45</sup> Hutton too talked of the 'easy fluency' of Bage's conversation, and Godwin considered his achievement as a provincial novelist an example 'of great intellectual refinement, attained in the bosom of rusticity'.<sup>46</sup>

Why *Man as He Is* and *Hermesprong* caught the attention of the London literary circles when there were four perfectly readable, amusing and provocative novels, which had all received good notices, preceding them, is not easy to determine. There had been the revolution in France, to add to the one in America almost a decade before; and there may have been much optimism in some quarters for governmental reform in England, an optimism which Bage would have shared. It could have been that his later novels were considered compatible with peaceful reform and popular among a growing populace in favour of radical change. Partly in response to a dissertation by Richard Price and against the background of the French Revolution the establishment position was put by the powerful penmanship

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<sup>44</sup> Kelly, *1780-1805*, p. 146.

<sup>45</sup> Godwin, *Friends*, I, 264.

<sup>46</sup> Godwin, *Friends*, I, 264.

of statesman, Edmund Burke.<sup>47</sup> His treatise, totally opposed to revolution, almost certainly united writers influenced by Rousseau, since Godwin and Wollstonecraft joined Paine and Brooke Boothby in adding their own contributions to the debate. However, over the next decade, it was Burke and his followers who would prevail. Certainly the treason trials had an effect on *Hermesprong*, though *Man as He Is* ends with a refutation of Burke's criticism of the French revolution. The Birmingham Riots had the most obvious impact on his last novel noticeably in the portrayal of Blick as a pulpit agitator, while *Hermesprong* himself managed to quell a potential riot by listening to the rioters' grievances, rather than antagonising them.

As well as his literary and scientific interests, we know from Hutton that Bage had a strong interest in music.<sup>48</sup> He was friendly with the Tamworth violinist, Godfrey, himself a friend of John Alcock, Tamworth organist, who wrote the novel, *The Life of Miss Fanny Brown* (1771) to which Bage subscribed. He also continued to enjoy watching local theatrical productions, one of which was called 'The Jew and my grandmother'.<sup>49</sup> He even became a focal point of discussion in the locality when the Hardings and Wolferstans 'chatted on Old Bage as characterised by Hutton & C, & Mrs would have them dine.'<sup>50</sup> Catherine Hutton met Edward Bage when she visited the Bages at Tamworth in 1797. It seems Robert was not able to give her his attention, having amused himself making double-pott paper, but 'it was no amusement [not] to be able to make more of Miss Hutton's coming to Tam<sup>h</sup>; I request thou wilt inform her of my regret — and of my desire to make myself amends'.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (London: T. Cadell, 1789).

<sup>48</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 479).

<sup>49</sup> Stafford Record Office (hereafter SRO), D1527/21 (1796), Wolferstan Diaries, 24 May.

<sup>50</sup> SRO, D1527/23 (1798), Wolferstan Diaries, 21 November 1798. The 'Mrs' was Elizabeth (formerly Jervis), and herself a novelist. For an insight into the life and publications of Elizabeth Pipe-Wolferstan see Elizabeth Jervis, *Agatha — or a narrative of recent events*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, ed. by John Goss (Guildford: Grosvenor House Publishing, 2010), pp. v-xxx.

<sup>51</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, July 4 1797.

In 1798 an outstanding account was settled which Bage had been pursuing for eight years. Little has been written of the other side of his industry at Elford mill, that of a corn miller. But at some time he supplied John Walters' nephew with 'Sundry sacks of meals' for which he and John Godwin, were owed about fifty pounds and had not been paid. In his first quest for settlement Thomas Hutton, senior, let Bage know he had found the whereabouts of John Walters' widow, but it seems he kept the details of his meeting to himself irritating Bage into writing with his usual sarcastic tone:

In thy last mention was made of Mrs Walters, whom thou hast seen and talked with. It should be indecent to know what passed betwixt two people of different genders; but what related to me, will be very acceptable \_\_\_\_ So praying God to give thee all the comforts of an author.<sup>52</sup>

For some reason it transpired that this outstanding bill could not be paid until Mrs Walters passed on. At the time of her death Thomas Hutton, senior, was in decline and Bage wrote to William asking him to:

enquire out & send me the name & address of the Executor of Walters, husband of that Mrs Walters, whose life I set thee to watch over, but who died notwithstanding, a little less than 7 months since.<sup>53</sup>

John Walters had been a publican who at one time lived on Mount Pleasant, or Paradise Row, or both. According to scribbling on the back of one of Bage's letters under the terms of Mrs Walter's will members of the family were to receive legacies of £200 each. Bage wrote to Hutton asking him to make sure that the Walters were not paid before him.

The eccentric Hutton was often an embarrassment and easy prey to people with whom he did business. Two bundles of white half-pound paper had

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<sup>52</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 28 Jan 1791.

<sup>53</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 9 Nov 1797

accidentally been ‘wetted’ and returned to Bage. This led to an argument between Hutton and the boatmen. The stationer refused to pay freight thus delaying delivery.<sup>54</sup> It was difficult enough to get boats to take shipments of paper, because of the weight and consequent displacement of water, which made the boat sit lower in the canal. Also there was no increase in pay for the boatmen, and finally it meant an extra stop.<sup>55</sup> On at least one occasion Bage's paper lay ‘safe’, as he put it, at Whittington Wharf, because the vessels were already full when they arrived.<sup>56</sup> Hutton — though a shrewd businessman — often lacked tact whereas his badly-used friend and supplier was more of an intellectual, a diplomat and almost always prepared to compromise to keep the cogs of commerce oiled. Shortly after this incident Bage summed up the main problem in a letter to Hutton's son, Thomas, calling his father a ‘kind of Comet, very irregular in its orbit. He is here, there, and every where . . . And is not he apt to be taken with fits? Fits of spleen I mean’.<sup>57</sup>

Hutton's eccentricities were one thing but even more relevant to Bage and the trade at which he worked was that the burden of taxation fell not on the stationer but on the papermaker and forty years after his death the hand-made paper industry was all but dead.<sup>58</sup> Bage was quite desperate for a fair price in order to pay his workers and the excise man, while the Huttons never really took his pleas of poverty seriously. He continued making them right to the very end of his life where they seem to take on a much more dissatisfied tone. Thomas Hutton was largely running affairs at Birmingham after 1793 when his father made a gift of the company, although William still retained an interest. It is possible that the son was

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<sup>54</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 30 March 1799

<sup>55</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 12 Sept 1793

<sup>56</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 6 Nov 1794

<sup>57</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 21 April 1798.

<sup>58</sup> John Goss, ‘Excise duty and West Midland Paper Mill Decline (1780-1860)’ in *The Birmingham Historian*, 11 (1994), 5-9.

slightly less greedy. Bage's wit, which had made him one of the best-loved novelists in the country, never left him and as the years passed he continued to ask for rectitude in as kindly a manner possible, sometimes playing on his long attachment to the Huttons. He wrote to Thomas:

Without considering whether friendship is of inheritance, I always thought you my friend, and was happy to think so. Be it perpetual. I will do nothing to forfeit it, except abuse you now and then for loving profit so well as to monopolize it, without reflecting that I love it also, and ought, without pretending to an equality, to have a small proportion . . . I was going to shew you how very small it was for fine pott at 18s for 36lb but as you say you believe yourself incorrigible, in this particular, I will not wear my poor pen to the stumps in vain.<sup>59</sup>

Bage further points out that he could make what few rags he had into Crown paper and had refused seven pence halfpenny a pound at Wallsall, Stafford and Lichfield, in order to sell it to the Huttons in Birmingham for sixpence. He was already ill and the winter of 1800/1801 did little to improve his health. It was unusually damp and he complained that the 'drying weather has been so bad lately that we could not get forward with the Caps and Sugar, which we are now making for you.'<sup>60</sup> In his next letter he advised Hutton to direct his anger at the winds and fogs and not at him.<sup>61</sup> He complained too about the increase in price of London and German rags but said he must buy in April if he was able 100 tons of linen rags.

On the afternoon of 5th January 1801 Samuel Pipe Wolferstan met Bage in Tamworth and walked down the street with him. The old writer told his fellow anti-slave campaigner that he did not expect to live much longer, that he was unable to entertain or be entertained, and that he had not heard

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<sup>59</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 24 Sept 1799.

<sup>60</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 7th January, 1801 (1800 is written as the letter date but it was 1801). Caps is colloquial for foolscaps and Sugar was paper used for wrapping sugar — traditionally blue.

<sup>61</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 24th January 1801.

a conversation for years.<sup>62</sup> Wolferstan had borrowed £1000 from Bage in the previous year which was promptly paid back with interest after the novelist's death.

In March Bage wrote to the Huttons 'I cannot say all I have to say — for I'm very unwell.' Despite that he expressed a wish to call on Miss Hutton, when he could make it a reality.<sup>63</sup> By June he was somewhat better and able to conduct his business again.<sup>64</sup> There is no significant gap in his letters and there was a short period when he did not visit Elford Mill but took care of his affairs solely from Tamworth. One letter from this period shows the power of his pen had lost none of its cogency as he upbraided Hutton yet one last time for his tightfistedness.

Yesterday was ordered from the wharf as under. All of which I hope you will think is charged with great moderation . . . The Poll indeed you must charge yourselves — Remembering if you please that we pay the excise 12/6 to 13 .0 per ream And that this species of rag is now at 2½ a pound.

But the thing of most consequence is the discount — The Word must be struck out of our vocabulary — for it would make a dog grin. After having paid £100 to the king, god bless him, to pay you 50 shillings more — Or if the word is so delicious in your ears, you must confine it to the value of the paper — after the excise is deducted  
Yrs Always Rbage<sup>65</sup>

Charles Bage recalled that his father although gregarious as a younger man continued to enjoy his pen, book and 'a pool of quadrille with the ladies', though he said at the time of writing, 1816, that he himself had flown the family nest some forty years earlier.

On Tuesday 1st September 1801 Bage died. The day before it is said he

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<sup>62</sup> SRO, D1527/28 (1801), Wolferstan Diaries, 5 January.

<sup>63</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 26th March, 1801.

<sup>64</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 6th June, 1801.

<sup>65</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 12th May 1801

had been at Elford Mill.<sup>66</sup> Nothing is known about the illness which caused his death other than it was exacerbated by damp weather and had gone on for a long time. Edward Bage was a surgeon and apothecary near at hand so it can only be assumed Robert got the best treatment a doctor and devoted son could provide within the bounds of medical knowledge of the day. Pipe Wolferstan simply recorded in his diary for 1 September, in square brackets '[R<sup>t</sup>. Bage died]'. There were local tributes. The Derby Mercury and Staffordshire Advertiser carried the following item in their deaths' columns.

at Tamworth, in the 72nd year of his age, after a long and painful illness, Mr. Robert Bage, of that place. The kind and benevolent affections were closely interwoven with his nature, and his mind was of a firm and manly cast, and of the most scrupulous integrity. His gentle and unassuming manners formed a striking contrast to the vigour of his understanding. He was distinguished by great mental acquirements, and was author of *Hermesprong*, and other admired literary productions.<sup>67</sup>

Hutton's testimony to Bage appeared in the Monthly Magazine after he discovered nobody else had written an obituary. The *European Magazine*, which at one time favourably reviewed both *Hermesprong* and *James Wallace*, contained only a short obituary.<sup>68</sup>

Thus ended the life of one of England's prime novelists, a man small in stature, but tall in literary ability and achievement, a private man whose personal history was to remain a private affair until he made such disclosures in *Hermesprong* which were almost certainly designed to shock elements of the Tamworth gentry, not least, the Reverend Blick, who ironically recorded Bage's correct age at the time of burial. The entry in the

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<sup>66</sup> Alfred Wallis, 'Robert Bage, Paper-maker and Novelist', reprinted in the Derby Mercury, 25th October, 1871 from *The Press and St James Chronicle*, London, September 1st, 1871.

<sup>67</sup> *Derby Mercury*, September 10, 1801, p. 4, col. 3 and *Staffordshire Advertiser*, Sep 12 1801.

<sup>68</sup> The review briefly mentions that he was in his 72nd year and the author of *Hermesprong* and other literary works. This was wrongly stated as being his 73rd year in Alfred Wallis, 'Robert Bage, Paper-maker and Novelist' reprinted in the *Derby Mercury*, 25th October, 1871 from *The Press and St James Chronicle*, London, September 1st, 1871.

parish register shows that Bage was buried at Tamworth on 4th September aged 71. In between Robert and Bage, in another hand from Blick's, possibly that of his curate, Davies, are the words 'Author of Hermsprong &c'. There is irony here since Bage lampooned Blick in that very same novel.

Bage, who had moved so many readers with his witty, poignant and thought-provoking novels, was missed by more than just his immediate family. Hutton recorded 'the loss of my most worthy friend, Mr. Robert Bage, whom I had known sixty-six years, and with whom I had lived upon the most intimate terms of friendship fifty-one. A person of the most extraordinary parts, and who has not left behind him a man of more honour or generosity. I have lost my oldest friend.'<sup>69</sup> Bage's loss of faith confirms to some extent Hutton's comments. 'Though a diminutive figure, yet one of the most amiable of men; and though barely a Christian, yet one of the best.'<sup>70</sup> While Bage might have appeared 'barely a Christian' to Hutton, who was a regular churchgoing Presbyterian, it seems he still retained some of his faith. He continued going to St Editha's, was friendly with the Tamworth and Wilnecote curate and school-teacher, Richard Davies, and when in October 1800, and very ill, he rode with George Webb to see the Huttons, he is found to have said a last goodbye to William's grand-nephew, Samuel: 'Farewell, my dear lad, we shall meet again in Heaven.'<sup>71</sup> Aware he was dying Bage probably took his partner, George Webb, who ran the paper mill at Shugborough, and later took over at Elford, to introduce him to the Hutton family.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Jewitt, Hutton, pp. 280-1.

<sup>70</sup> William Hutton, *History of Derby* (London: J. Nichols, 1791), p. 298.

<sup>71</sup> Jewitt, Hutton, p. 171 (footnote).

<sup>72</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478). Hutton says Bage's easy-going nature could be summed up from 'a remark when we travelled in a chaise from Wolsey bridge to Tamworth in October 1795—he had then been in partnership with a person in another concern near 15 years—"that they had never had one word of difference since they met."'

From Wolferstan's diary we learn that Thomas Gisborne appears to have preached a memorial service on Sunday 13 September which in the morning reduced the Statfold lawyer to tears. In the evening Wolferstan could not read a column of Ecclesiastes without dozing and reflected over the words Gisborne had used: 'so many have slept the sleep of death'. He further pondered whether 'those so sleeping' had 'no more hope than Bage once expressed to me.'<sup>73</sup> Here he is referring to that occasion, shortly after the Birmingham Riots, when Bage 'professed he'd no sense of religion, nor any expectation to see me after this life.'<sup>74</sup>

The importance of Bage's change in religious belief and his embracing of secularism cannot be underestimated and in his last novel he introduces two new characters for whom religion is not as important as the reform of society through education and alternative approaches to the provision of life's necessities. In the three following chapters his campaigns against impoverishment, the slave-trade, and educational reform for women, are considered through observations of his fiction. Each of the following chapters contains further elements of biography where this is considered apposite to the textual observation under discussion.

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<sup>73</sup> SRO, D1527/26 (1801), Wolferstan Diaries, 13 September.

<sup>74</sup> SRO, D1527/17 (1792), Wolferstan Diaries, 24 February.

### Chapter 3 Rich and poor

For Bage education was seen as paramount in relieving the distress and deprivation of the rural and urban poor. In this belief he took a proactive role, not just relying on the power of fictional persuasion, but through educational charity work. As a mill-owner he was also a provider of work. Bage's involvement, both in the Reverend Hill charity and on committees like the turnpike trust and Lichfield navigation, discounts speculation from certain quarters that he had no dealings with the gentry and aristocracy. John Gilbert Lockhart questioned how the son of a papermaker thought himself fit to paint the manners of English ladies and gentlemen.<sup>1</sup> And even Vaughan Wilkins in his introduction to a 1951 publication of *Hermesprong* speculated:

I have, by the way, a strong feeling that Bage did not care for lords; but I also have a deep suspicion that he may never have met one to speak to in all his worthy middle-class life. Lord Grondale in *Hermesprong*, for instance, is twice as large as life, murky in character and sultry in behaviour—quite preposterously naughty.<sup>2</sup>

Characteristically and sardonically, Bage foresaw possible criticism of this nature and in a digression from the narrative of *Man as He Is*, after ironically praising George Paradyne, the wayward hero, he addresses his would-be critics in a manner worthy of Henry Fielding.

Answer this ye critics. And the critics answered—to endue a young rich gentleman of quality, in the reign of George the Third, with too many virtues, is to violate the rules of probability so much, that—‘That what?’

‘Excuse, us Mr. Editor,—This true history of your's smells enough of the lamp already. We a little suspect your line of life. It may appear to some, that you

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<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, 34 (1826) (hereafter *QR*), pp. 367-370.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bage, *Hermesprong*, ed. by Vaughan Wilkins (London: Turnstile Press, 1951), p. ix.

never saw a gentleman.’ But the critics are mistaken. I have seen some very good ones.<sup>3</sup>

William Hutton wrote favourably of Bage’s humane treatment of his servants and animals. Poverty was a major concern, and in *Man as He Is*, Cornelia Colerain’s black servant, Fidel, gives what is left of her belongings to the poor, even though she herself has lost her home and fortune. As well as such episodes from his novels, aspects of his personal life show Bage was much concerned for the poorer members of society. In autumn 1794 when his workmen ‘with mighty clamour’ demanded an increase in wages he wrote to Hutton that he must comply ‘for they are low’ pointing out that his stationer friend was the one who benefited from these low wages.<sup>4</sup>

All accounts of Bage as a man suggest that he was very tolerant of the frailties of humankind. His novels suggest it too. That is not to say he was prey to the worldly-wise. When he saw injustice he addressed it as in the case of Mrs Bannister, the wife of a Birmingham master sawyer, Thomas Bannister. Mrs Bannister was being supported, most likely by Elford parish, and Bage requested that Thomas Hutton senior, William’s brother, search ‘in his walks’ the timber-yards for intelligence of Bannister’s whereabouts. Bage was unequivocal in his condemnation: ‘as we hear he is well able to maintain her himself, we had rather he did it’.<sup>5</sup> Little more than two years later he would have Mr Brown, guardian of young Gregory Glen, the narrator of *Hermesprong*, say ‘that when people took the trouble to beget children, they ought to take the trouble to provide for them.’<sup>6</sup> His concern for the plight of orphans and neglected mothers permeates his writings.

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<sup>3</sup> Bage *MAHI*, III, 32.

<sup>4</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 27 Sep 1794.

<sup>5</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 21, Nov 1793.

<sup>6</sup> Bage *MAHI*, I, 8.

There is one final historical reference which shows Bage's sympathy for the poor remained unflagging to the end of his life. Keeping grain-prices low was essential for the feeding of those on low or no incomes but price-fixing on the grower was an ever-present problem. It was September 1800 when Wolferstan, before meeting at the corn-exchange with F William Paget, Repington, Inge and Sir Robert Lawley, passed 'an interim with old Bage,

who strongly argued & pos<sup>y</sup> much convinced, all this interference with, so far as to fix the price upon the grower, is wrong — far better subsc<sup>f</sup>. to fetch Am<sup>n</sup> corn from Liverpool'.

Wolferstan put the case as Bage had presented it,

but 'can't raise a capital' said Sir R. L. — so no farther notice taken'. They 'cried, for selling, to poor, at 10/6 — & that excellent barley, of Peel's, was on sale at 6/6.

Joseph Heath, a miller who at one time ground Bage's corn for him, and William Harding were of the same mind as Bage and Wolferstan about bringing in American imports, then Robert Peel arrived 'who expressed self rather in a mid way'.<sup>7</sup> Peel, a member of parliament and industrialist, was father of the future Prime Minister, and quite as indeterminate as his son. When imports forced down the price of corn protectionist farming policies were introduced on imported grain; a series of acts known as the Corn Laws followed. The opinion of Sir Robert Peel junior fluctuated over the imposition of Corn Laws for many years. Eventually he supported the removal of tariffs on foreign imports, a principle over which he resigned, coming round to the view Bage had expressed to Wolferstan, which Wolferstan had passed on to Peel's father.

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<sup>7</sup> Stafford Record Office (hereafter SRO), D1527/25 (1800), Wolferstan Diaries, 20 September 1800.

## Social disadvantage and the poor

In previous sections events and personal affairs that shaped Robert Bage's fiction were sketched out. His strong belief in social justice and reform can be found in more than thirty-five years of service to school charity work, involvement in the anti-slave-trade campaigns and a concern for the parish poor. Writing about Bage his friend Hutton tells how he was well-regarded through 'his treatment of his servants, and even his horses, who all loved him, and whom he kept to old age.'<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising therefore to find that a philanthropist with a talent for literary expression directed the arguments of his novels towards social and educational reform. He achieved this by concentrating his concerns for improving the social standing of the poorer elements of society; and the Utopian endings of his early novels would be replaced by more realistic and perhaps even achievable social aims by the time he wrote *Hermesprong*.

Walter Allen labels Bage a 'doctrinaire novelist proper' and suggests that with him the class-war enters fiction, calling him a 'thorough-going radical' and sympathiser with the French revolutionaries, one who attacks 'feudalism and the notion of aristocracy'.<sup>9</sup> However to be a doctrinaire novelist is somewhat at odds with being a 'novelist of ideas', which Bage is, as far as Sutherland is concerned.<sup>10</sup> Both these views can be right, more or less, but only when considering works from different periods. Whether he was a 'thorough-going radical' is open to conjecture and Allene Gregory suggests he was not. She saw him more as a constitutional monarchist distinct from the class of revolutionists, like Godwin and

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<sup>8</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478). William Wood married Mary Bottoms at St. Peter's, Elford on 12 October 1760 at which time he was described as a "paper man". The source is St Peter's parish records, Elford, transcribed by William Read of Leicester and dated 17 October 1936.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Allen, *The English Novel, a short critical history* (London: Phoenix House, 1954), p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> John H. Sutherland, 'Robert Bage: Novelist of Ideas', *Philological Quarterly*, 36 (1957) 211-220 (p. 219).

Holcroft; she preferred to put him into a class of reformers.<sup>11</sup> By claiming that Bage is a sympathiser with the French revolutionaries Allen had in mind his last two and most widely read novels, both of which were written after the French revolution, and both of which fictionalised some elements of French revolutionary thought, favourable and unfavourable. Although his radical political beliefs are less apparent in his earlier novels there are hints of the sophistication and clarity to come, while his real sympathy lies with those in poorer circumstances than himself — a constant objective which is as evident in *Man as He Is* as in *Hermesprong*. The devastating effects of poverty found in all his novels are sometimes depicted with hyperbole. Poverty is too often tempered by implausible acts of generosity from the more wealthy and altruistic characters who bail out poor people in danger of losing their homes, and find work for those who have lost their livelihoods. That is not to imply that the middling order is excluded from hard times, or that Bage would neglect to address the problems facing this section of the community. Newspapers of the day had weekly lists of merchants and tradesmen who had suffered bankruptcy. It happened to Bage's business partner, Samuel Garbett, and Bage himself lost a large amount of money in the Wychnor Ironworks project, giving him first-hand experience of the response of creditors to mercantile failure. This loss was a fortune in those days, as Desmond King-Hele has noted, and its deleterious effects would find some expression in the character of Henry Davis in *Barham Downs*.

In the social order of the eighteenth century the lowest in terms of poverty, sickness and disadvantage comprised urban and rural workers who John Rule calls 'the labouring poor'.<sup>12</sup> It is this group, the neediest, for whom Bage has the largest concern. He draws attention to the plight of poverty by

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<sup>11</sup> Gregory, *Fr. Rev.*, p. 119.

<sup>12</sup> John Rule, 'The Labouring Poor', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by: H. T. Dickinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2002), pp. 183-195, *passim*.

deliberate overstatement to which he adds a gratuitous excess of pathos. This is almost always followed by moderate, or sometimes extremely generous, benefactions to alleviate the distress which provides ammunition to critics like Walter Allen who doubts that a character like Hermsprong could ever exist in real life; a message first put forward by the *British Critic*.<sup>13</sup>

It is of some credit to Bage that Allen thinks him a sympathiser with the French revolutionaries, because although he lets his characters speak for themselves there is an inherent message which permeates all his novels, that the social class structure as it stood in his day was undesirable and in need of change. However it was not the French Revolution he was so much in sympathy with as the American Revolution. Allene Gregory concludes that Bage thought the American system to be the 'most perfect' and that after the French revolution he was holding hopes that 'France will return to liberty and peace.' She further argues that 'even in the height of his revolutionary fervour Bage desires no anarchistic Utopia' and nowhere suggests it is 'essential' for England to become a republic.<sup>14</sup> Bage's Utopias, while not being anarchic, are a relevant feature of his first two novels and in his early works he could visualise small hand-picked communities working together towards the better good; not unlike the early family settlements in North America, on which his ideas may well have been modelled.

Peter Faulkner calls Bage's first novel, *Mount Henneth* (1782), a practical Utopia.<sup>15</sup> It was certainly Utopian in its ideal, but whether it, or any society based on the model, would work in practice is highly debatable. Human nature, being what it was, and is, would eventually see it develop into a

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<sup>13</sup> *BC*, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory, *Fr. Rev.*, p. 179.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Faulkner, Robert Bage, ed. Sarah W. R. Smith, Twayne's English Author Series (Boston: Twayne), CCIL (1979), 36-56.

hierarchical society, with a sophisticated legal and governmental structure and thus open to pressure-group power, external influences and bribes. This was what happened in Courtney Melmoth's *Shenstone Green* (1779), to which *Mount Henneth* is meant to be a workable alternative; workable because the community has been hand-picked rather than being open to all-comers.<sup>16</sup> While this was his opinion in 1782 it had changed radically by 1796 when Bage was unable any longer to envisage a workable commune on the European side of the Atlantic. By the time *Hermesprong* was published his hero more realistically falls in love and enters into a traditional marriage. These differences mark an important change in direction, but there are similarities too between the last two and his former works. For example, the ideal community was not completely abandoned. When it appeared *Hermesprong's* marriage would be prevented by parental intervention the hero contemplated a society of friends 'within a two mile ring' on the Potowmac, where he owned land. One of his chosen party was the liberated Maria Fluart, whom *Hermesprong* loved 'with every sort of love but one', and a woman who loved *Hermesprong* equally, but Caroline better. She informed him that if Caroline was not among the party they would have to 'grub wood' by themselves.<sup>17</sup>

One story of dire want included in *Mount Henneth* is that of a lame ex-soldier, John Morgan, who is brought before the Justices for stealing turnips from a field. He has lost an arm fighting for England in America, had a leg shot off in 'an engagement with a French privateer', and has no pension due to having worked as a slave-driver in America. Hunger, claims the soldier, was the force which drove him into the turnip field.<sup>18</sup> Bage relates the episode in a detached and ironic fashion.

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<sup>16</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 36-37. Courtney Melmoth was a pseudonym of Samuel Jackson Pratt.

<sup>17</sup> Bage, *Herm*, III, 239-240.

<sup>18</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 92-96.

In one of these [skirmishes] where we had come to close quarters, I had the luck to be well pinked and flashed; and having retreated as long as I could run, at length I laid me down quietly to die like a hero. I had not the least doubt of being dead, when a smart pain on the top of my forehead opened my eyes in an instant; and what should they behold but a young Iroquois gentleman, about twelve years old, busily employed in learning to scalp. I seized the young dog by the throat with my left hand, for I had no use of my right, and should have squeezed his soul out, if his cries had not brought two of our own female plunderers to his assistance. By their help I was got back to camp, where the surgeon dressed my wounds, and the next morning, to save time, sawed off my arm, and seared the stump. This was the most lively sensation I had ever experienced, but then it was glorious, and soldiers should be content.<sup>19</sup>

This mixture of comedy and tragedy is a much-used literary device and as Faulkner observes Morgan is a stock character found in several novels of the period.<sup>20</sup> The criticism Bage makes here is not primarily about the injustice and the horror of war, bad though that might be, so much as an attack on the English political and judicial system, and the fact that a lame, starving war veteran who lost his means of earning a living in the service of his country, a cripple who is forced by hunger to steal turnips, could ever be brought before the Justices. As Morgan himself argues: ‘I own it makes me mad when I think of having been in fifteen engagements, shot through and through, and came home poor and penniless, to be whipped for eating turnips.’<sup>21</sup> In putting forward his case it sets two justices at loggerheads, the milder one seeking his release, and the harsher one wanting him whipped, until James Foston intervenes. He gives the soldier half a crown to feed and clean himself up, after which he is invited to Henneth Castle to relate his story. When this is heard in detail John Morgan is found useful work within the community and his problems are, at least in the short term, solved. That Bage saw education of the poor as a means of improvement, becomes more evident in his third novel, *The Fair*

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<sup>19</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 92-93

<sup>20</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 42.

<sup>21</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 85.

*Syrian*, yet the ill-fated Morgan was not illiterate. He had had an education, like other poor characters in Bage's fiction, in his case having learnt to write in the Staffordshire village of his youth. It is only towards the end of the novel when Morgan tries unsuccessfully to communicate written intelligence of the whereabouts of Miss Melton, that he realises he has left behind the hand 'he had learned to write with at Ticonderoga.'<sup>22</sup> Bage drew on real events to illustrate his fiction and the Staffordshire village he had in mind may have been his own village of Elford, which had the charity school, of which he was a trustee.

The Earl of Donegall, like Bage's other aristocratic neighbour, Lord Suffolk, at least for the time each spent at his country residence, were also trustees of the Reverend John Hill charity which provided for a schoolmaster to teach the poor children of Elford.<sup>23</sup> That schoolmaster from 1751 was William Darlaston.<sup>24</sup> The other trustee was wealthy Elford farmer William Bourne. It is likely Bage met Bourne through Elizabeth (Woolley) Bage. The Elford charities have early Woolley connections when John and Emma Newbold and Alice and Rebecca Woolley conveyed to the Elford parson, Thomas Moore, in 1701, 'two cottages and a croft. . . to the use of the schoolmaster of Elford'.<sup>25</sup>

Several plots of land were owned by Elford school charities but these appear to have changed name and it is no longer easy to identify them. Robert Bage and his friend and neighbour, William Bourne, were trustees from at least 1762.<sup>26</sup> There is a benefactions tribute to the services Bage,

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<sup>22</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 163. Ticonderoga was a fort in British hands in 1759, American hands in 1775, recaptured by the British in 1777, and abandoned after the battles of Saratoga in October that year.

<sup>23</sup> *Charity Commissioners Reports, County of Stafford, 1818-1837*, P. S. King & Son, 1895, 339.

<sup>24</sup> SRO, D3094/10/1/6 4/6/1762.

<sup>25</sup> George Griffith, *The Free Schools and Endowments of Staffordshire* (hereafter Griffith, *Free Schools*) (London: Whittaker & Co, 1860), p. 470.

<sup>26</sup> SRO, D3094/10/1/6 4/6/1762. For at least thirty four years Bage, Bourne and Donegall were trustees of the Hill charity and Edward Astbury had erected a dedication in Elford church which is still there today.

Bourne, Donegall and Edward Astbury, gave to the school charities and this was erected at the expense of Astbury in Elford Church in 1796. The charity school was still functioning in 1860 when approximately one hundred pupils 'of both sexes' were in attendance, about 80 of them from Elford village.<sup>27</sup> Like the Philadelphian Quaker farmer in *The Fair Syrian* education was everything to Bage.<sup>28</sup>

Indication of his concern for more equal educational opportunities for labourers, balanced with agricultural lessons for the educated, comes in the Henneth Castle constitution, which proposes that the community will accept 'Any man of learning who will take the trouble to compare the utility of Greek and Latin, with plough driving, and assign the preference without partiality.'<sup>29</sup>

A similar story to that of Morgan may be found towards the end of the same novel when a young carpenter trying to support his widowed sister with two young children falls ill. He is accosted by both bailiff and press-gang, 'a pair of events, which never coincided before that I know of, though extremely common in their separate capacities'.<sup>30</sup> Dr Gordon borrows money from his friends to pay off their debts and enough work is found for both of them in Henneth village which Julia Foston is determined to turn into a town. As a symbolic gesture to this good news Doctor Gordon throws his hat at an inoffensive chess set and down fall 'kings, queens and bishops'.<sup>31</sup>

If between the pages of *Mount Henneth* can be found a safe haven for the rural poor of good character those finding sanctuary in *Barham Downs* are

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<sup>27</sup> Griffith, *Free Schools*, p.472.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Bage, *The Fair Syrian*, 2 vols (London: J. Walters, 1787), (hereafter Bage, *FS*), I, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 240-1.

<sup>30</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 213.

<sup>31</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 216.

merchants and shopkeepers. Kitty Ross, new to London, gives power of attorney to a self-styled merchant called Mr Cromford, who is a creditor to the estate of her late benefactor, Mr Arnold. Cromford returns bills almost too quickly until Kitty gets a letter from a shopkeeper in the Kings Bench prison, a Mr Hunt. Through Cromford's offices, the shopkeeper, who claims he could have paid off his debt in eight days, finds himself in prison incapable of dealing with his affairs. On receipt of this letter Kitty is distressed and goes to the shop which she finds is shut. An apprentice boy escorts Kitty to a parlour behind the shop.

A pretty-featured young woman, with a face pale as death, and expressive of unutterable anguish, sat suckling an infant of three months old at the breast, and holding in her other arm a sweet girl of a year and a half. Miss Ross, unable to speak, threw herself into a chair, and in spite of every effort to the contrary, fairly fainted away. Miss Singleton recovered her by the help of a smelling-bottle, and she was relieved by a copious shower of tears. All this, Mrs Hunt observed, with a look of silent amazement. A very decent maid-servant had slipped into the room, and whispering her mistress the name of her guest, took from her the eldest girl. As soon as Miss Ross was able to speak, she spoke, and taking Mrs Hunt by the hand, bid her be comforted, and everything should be done to remedy this unhappy event.<sup>32</sup>

Bage portrays similar scenes to this time and again. In her attempts to right the wrong Kitty Ross becomes victim of a clever piece of commercial skulduggery which Bage again believes is 'singular'. She has to return to her premises for money to pay a debt to herself as she stands bail for the release of Hunt only to find that the money Cromford returns her is in notes used for Hunt's release and none of Cromford's own. She is further informed through a clerk that Cromford can no longer act on her behalf, because she appears to have been acting on her own. He was not desirous 'any longer to be the agent of a lady of such a capricious turn.'<sup>33</sup> When knowledge gets around that Hunt has been in prison it generates a run

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Bage, *Barham Downs*, (hereafter Bage, *BD*) 2 vols (London: G. Wilkie, 1784), I, 52-3.

<sup>33</sup> Bage, *BD*, I, 54.

amongst his creditors. Feeling it is her fault Kitty loans the shopkeeper the money to pay them off and waives the original debt. Then she engages the lawyer William Wyman, who will later become her husband, to seek redress against Cromford.<sup>34</sup>

This scene of good will and trust overcoming poverty is a common feature of Bage's novels, but *Barham Downs* stands alone as a novel portraying the attitudes of creditors precipitating the downfall of honest businessmen at the slightest hint of bankruptcy. The shopkeeper, Hunt, is only a minor character but the merchant, Davis, who changes his name from Osmond, is the central male. The change in name takes place to enable him to retire from society to Barham Downs and the necessity has been brought about by a series of misfortunes. A sugar ship on which he has cargo goes down and is only partly insured. To add to his troubles his brother, Sir George, a mathematician, marries Lucy Strode, the woman to whom Davis was betrothed until his business interests began to fail. Although a bankruptcy charge is laid against Davis, and despite getting no support from his brother, he pays off all his creditors with a little help from William Wyman, and with what remains, obtains '£150 per annum, an annuity for life.'<sup>35</sup>

Bage would have written *Barham Downs* with a heavy heart. To add to the financial losses he suffered in the Wychnor ironworks collapse, his youngest son, John, died in March 1783, aged twenty-five.<sup>36</sup> The inscription on John's gravestone reads: 'Less lamented for conspicuous Talents, than for the mild, endearing Virtue that adorned a liberal, and

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<sup>34</sup> Bage, *BD*, I, 57.

<sup>35</sup> Bage, *BD*, I, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Godwin, *Friends*, I, 262. Godwin wrote to Mary Wollstonecraft in 1797 that before meeting Bage they had sought information and learnt that he had moved to Tamworth five years previously "upon the death of his younger son, by which he found his life rendered solitary and melancholy". This letter gave birth to the idea that John Bage had died in 1793.

ingenuous mind.<sup>37</sup> Two years earlier, John Barker, the Lichfield banker and a partner with Bage, Darwin and Garbett, had also died.<sup>38</sup> In a letter to Barker written in 1773 Bage ponders what happened to a cargo of iron which had not arrived in Hull.<sup>39</sup> If it had gone the same way as the cargo belonging to Davis then Bage would have been drawing from personal experience as he did with the demise of the Wychnor ironworks for the close encounter with bankruptcy. Catherine Hutton claimed the Wychnor quartet extended their ‘business beyond their capital, by importing, as well as manufacturing iron. The consequence was that they sustained great loss, and disposed of their works to great disadvantage.’<sup>40</sup>

The actual bankruptcy of his partner, Samuel Garbett, the Birmingham businessman, would have shown Bage the way creditors behave. Garbett was hounded by his own son-in-law, Charles Gascoigne, someone to whom most families in similar circumstances might have looked to for support, but the full circumstances are not absolutely clear since Garbett’s financial affairs, shares and family holdings were made deliberately complicated. If there was real family enmity there is irony in that Gascoigne was first given a share in Carron, the company of which Garbett was the main shareholder, due to his ‘talent for business.’<sup>41</sup> Garbett was declared bankrupt in 1782. He wrote to the prime minister, Lord Lansdowne, informing him that every creditor who had proved a debt against him before the Commission of Bankruptcy had signed his Certificate which was also signed by the Lord Chancellor and that he was ‘perfectly free.’<sup>42</sup> Garbett continued trading as a respectable Birmingham

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<sup>37</sup> Monumental inscriptions, St Peter’s Churchyard, Elford.

<sup>38</sup> *The Victoria History of the County of Stafford*, ed. M. W. Greenslade (London: University of London Historical Research, 1899-), XIV, *Lichfield*, ed: C. R. Elrington (1990) 234. King-Hele, *Darwin*, p. 177.

<sup>39</sup> SRO, William Salt Library, S.MS.478/2/2.

<sup>40</sup> CH/HR&C, MS. 937. (ff 4-5) 4.

<sup>41</sup> Norris, Carron, *SHR*, 37 (1958), 136-145 (p. 138).

<sup>42</sup> Birmingham Local Studies, 510638-41 [over ZZ 61 B], letter from Garbett to Lansdowne, 21 August 1782.

businessman, whose advice was sought by many, including Matthew Boulton. He tried to get his creditors to accept £10,000 in 1801 as a full settlement yet he remained bankrupt until his death in 1803. Following Barker's death his widow wanted to sell the ironworks. Garbett was troubled by creditors, Darwin had married and moved to Radburn Hall in Derbyshire leaving Bage alone living in the vicinity where the ironworks were located.<sup>43</sup> One item of good news amidst all this sorrow was that the war with America had come to an end, an event which Bage, who opposed and ridiculed war, would have welcomed.

Loss of his interest in the Wychnor ironworks and the loss of his son were major events in the novelist's life. They were significant in the way he approached his second novel which is very much about loss; the loss of credit, the loss of family, even the loss of virginity, and the determination of Davis to become a hermit which, if successful, would have led to the loss of society, a choice Bage himself would seek to make following the Birmingham Riots. The major difference between *Mount Henneth* and *Barham Downs* is that the poor are drawn from two distinct sections of society. Morgan, the one-armed, one-legged soldier in *Mount Henneth*, was the son of a Welsh labourer, with no shoes or stockings and little work, who sought his fortune in Staffordshire turning his hand variously to the jobs of shepherd, labourer and apprentice ploughboy. He was just making his way when a pretty unmarried village girl 'did me the honour to choose me out of several young men of the place, to be the father of her child.'<sup>44</sup> By comparison the poverty found in *Barham Downs* has its roots in mercantile and retail failure, and family discord, and it appears that events in Bage's personal fortune had a direct influence upon the plot, though it is not until the next novel that any plausible solution to poverty is offered.

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<sup>43</sup> It is noteworthy that the Wychnor ironworks continued operating into the next century.

<sup>44</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 89.

For Bage education is the main antidote to poverty, and for other problems of inequity, as it is the key to all social development and healthy debate. Republicanism provides another potential solution because it offers, at least in theory, opportunities for all its citizens through a democratic electoral system. In his early works his vision of a fairer society looks towards a selective communal existence, where like-minded individuals contribute whatever skills they have, towards the common good of the society. This was how America had developed into a republic from the early days when settlers formed their own communal societies and there is evidence to show that it was this kind of co-existence Bage sought in *The Fair Syrian* (1786). A Philadelphian Quaker farmer, making reference to the works of both William Penn and Thomas Paine, argues with the Marquis de St. Clair against monarchy and orthodoxy in favour of republicanism. 'Education is all in all', is the Quaker's conclusion.<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately, when dealing with inequalities and the sufferings of the very poor Bage tends to overstate what is intended. One of his many examples of hyperbole in seeking sympathy for a minor character can be found in *The Fair Syrian*. Amington meets an old man who relates a woeful story of how his wife long ago left him for a count. In attempts to get her back the count fabricates charges against the farmer which lead to the man losing tenancy of his farm, the whole of which forces him to seek his fortune abroad. He leaves behind a daughter who reminds him so much of her mother that he cannot bear to stay with the child, and pays for her education putting her into the care of the kindly Doctor Maret. He then leaves to fight as a soldier of fortune. He fights in Germany, Russia and elsewhere but is eventually captured and enslaved in Turkey. After earning his freedom by saving the owner's daughters (recounted in the next

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<sup>45</sup> Bage, *FS*, I, 41.

chapter) he decides to return to his own daughter thirty years after leaving France. Upon hearing this tale of adventure, and at the old man's invitation, Amington walks with him to the mill where the daughter he abandoned, her husband and grandchildren are in occupation. What should be a joyful homecoming turns out to be a tragedy beyond imagination. The occupants outside the mill have vacant expressions, the cause being the death of the old man's son-in-law, killed 'on the spot' when not 'half an hour' previously a stone shattered into a thousand pieces. Matters get worse as the old man just finds time to introduce himself to his daughter before she dies of grief leaving behind a group of orphaned children. The old man himself is only saved from the same fate by Amington who places 'before his eyes the necessity of living for the children's sake.' He then pays off some small debts and believes he has 'smoothed the path of life for the little ones and given the old man all the comfort he is able to receive.' This last gesture is typical of Bage's conviction that anyone with a little spare money can help in the fight against poverty. Such stories, it would seem, are included to prick the consciences of the wealthy and demonstrate what better-off members of society should be doing with their surplus money. This kind of episode appears in one form or another in all his novels.

The alleviation of distress through financial aid is what Kitty Ross does in *Barham Downs*, what James Foston does in *Mount Henneth*, what Sir George Paradyne and Cornelia Colerain do in *Man as He Is*, what Honoria Warren does in *The Fair Syrian* and what *James Wallace* and *Hermsprong* both do in company, with a number of lesser characters. Hutton tells us of Bage's charity, but for all his generosity it was somewhat naive of the novelist if he thought by including in his novels a pathetic tale or two he could engender much sympathy for secondary characters who only have a cursory claim to existence in the plot, even though it was this sector of the community for which he had the most concern. Moreover he is unlikely to

have convinced any reader to part with money through these outlandish stories who might not already have been prepared to do so anyway.

As a novelist of ideas, Bage allows freedom of expression to all, and it is not uncommon to find his characters changing direction in the course of a novel. Main male characters, usually wealthy, young and frivolous, spend their money recklessly in the pursuit of pleasure until it dawns on them that this is deleterious to their wellbeing, their pocket and the family estate. Main female characters, usually beautiful, faithful and intelligent, are always more mature, level-headed and much less fickle. It is surprising therefore to find that it is a minor female character in a later novel, richly-dressed, physically unattractive and rude, whose fancy takes ‘flight into the region of metaphysics’ and whose philosophy changes with every new idea, who shows abject and uncompromising heartlessness when it comes to the poor trying to eke out a living as tenants. Miss Haubert, from *Man as He Is*, presents readers with a flexible if inconstant outlook and when she is first encountered sticks rigidly to ‘Mr. Hume’s system of universal non-existence’ believing that it cannot be confuted even by Dr. Reid.’ In reaching this position the reader learns she clung for a while to ‘the monades and pre-established harmony of Leibnitz’ found ‘all things in God’ through Malbranche, noting that ‘ideas, although begotten by outward objects, were born and brought up within; and that the mind, let it look out as sharp as it would, could hear, see, smell, taste and touch nothing but these ideas whatever’ according to Locke. This was until the Bishop of Cloyne taught her the opposite. Her progression eventually brings her, despite Descartes, back to Hume and the concept that ‘it is very likely that there was no existence whatever’.<sup>46</sup> But these high-flown ideas, which amount to a useful summary of philosophical thought of the period, are lost on more down-to-earth and straight-talking characters, like Miss

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<sup>46</sup> Bage, *MAHI*, I, 157-159.

Carlill, who confesses she does not understand them. Bage uses the same contradictory device alluding to philosophical thought in a letter from Lady Bembridge to her brother Sir John Amington in *The Fair Syrian* where her early education rested on ‘Locke, who taught me to think; Hurd, who taught me to believe; Hume, who taught me to doubt; and the Bishop of Cloyne, who taught me that every thing was nothing, and the world a dream’.<sup>47</sup>

Miss Haubert’s heart fails to be softened by any philosophy or any philosopher. When one of her tenant farmers dies, his wife cannot afford to pay the rent so one of the poor woman’s two milking cows is taken from her in compensation. She can still just about feed her children, but her situation worsens until Miss Haubert instructs the bailiff to take the other cow. Were it not for the intervention of Miss Colerain, who gives the farmer’s wife a replacement cow, the widowed family would have starved. Miss Haubert resents this intervention and orders her tenant to quit. Again Miss Colerain comes to her rescue, providing the widow with another farm, ‘on which she now does very well’.<sup>48</sup> This is typical of how Bage believes people should respond on behalf of the poor, and this type of story occurs regularly throughout his novels. Miss Haubert is ostensibly rich, has a good education, with tastes literary and scientific, yet she lacks compassion towards the less fortunate. Her character does not change, only her philosophy, and by the end of the novel the ‘total non-existence of existence of Mr. David Hume, has given way to the system of Mr. Robert Younge; who, finding that those who made matter of nothing, or nothing of matter, has contrived it another way.’<sup>49</sup> The comparison between Miss Haubert, who lacks sympathy, and the main female character, the caring Miss Colerain, enables Bage to get his concerns for the poor brought more

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<sup>47</sup> Bage, *FS*, I, 184.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Bage, *Man as He Is*, 4 vols (London: William Lane, 1792), (hereafter *Bage MAHI*) I, 161.

<sup>49</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 271.

forcefully to the reader's attention. He questions the root causes of poverty, as in the example of Miss Haubert's treatment of her tenant, by contrasting the haves with the have-nots. Miss Colerain herself loses much of her fortune through the irregularities of her father's clerk.

J. M. S. Tompkins was one of the earliest commentators on Bage to note the French literary influence in his novels, especially in the way fiction and philosophy were interwoven as in the French philosophical tale. Peter Faulkner has commented upon the political changes that took place immediately after the publication of *Man as He Is*, namely that the 'early idealism of the French revolution had been followed in 1792 by the Terror' which itself was followed by war with France in February 1793.<sup>50</sup> Bage's unspoken support for republicanism and his acknowledgment of French literary giants in *Man as He Is* made him, in theory, a possible target for Francophobes, and he may have been saved from persecution only because he lived in an isolated village, then a market town, and both in Elford and Tamworth he appears to have kept a reasonably low profile. Until the publication of Stebbing Shaw's *History of Staffordshire* (1798-1801) he was not widely-known even in his own county. There may have been more enquiry into who this anonymous writer was had he lived in London, but then his life might then have become less comfortable. After all, Thomas Holcroft was imprisoned for five months without conviction following the suspension of *habeas corpus* in 1794, and although eventually acquitted over a fabricated charge of trying to incite meetings against the King, it demonstrates the new powers government in England could impose, even on playwrights and novelists with modest reputations. Thomas Holcroft and William Godwin were both fiction-writers of the Jacobin ilk. Miss Tompkins calls Bage the precursor to the English revolutionary group of writers who believed that man, if not brought to a state of perfection could

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<sup>50</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 29.

at least be 'infinitely improved' by means of education and reason and through getting rid of certain punitive laws and customs. Those laws and customs, as the next two chapters show, were the ones which perpetuated slavery and opposed the advancement of women's rights as well as militating against the poor. For Bage there were two ways to go about the alleviation of poverty, a short-term solution in which many could participate by simply being generous to unfortunates, and a long-term solution the aim of which was to change laws to protect the poor and make education freely available for everyone. The short-term solution does not address the cause of the problem but simply brings relief whereas the long-term solution treats the root causes of the problem. That Bage was sincere is not in doubt but sometimes it seems his storytelling can be embellished to such an extent that it may have the opposite effect to what is intended and may, occasionally, even suspend belief. The middling poor who sold their services are much more believable beings, show a high level of intelligence, and are portrayed with a respectful reverence.

Being poor was a handicap to obtaining a good education but no handicap to common sense as demonstrated by characters like Sir George Osmond's steward Timothy Thistle in *Barham Downs*, a man who for wit and wisdom provides aspects of that servile superiority in master-servant relationships which would later find fuller embodiment in characters like P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves. Timothy Thistle provides a worthy example of a loyal servant to whom age has given wisdom, a man who chooses his words carefully and who offers advice with rare if sometimes cynical witticism. When it becomes apparent that Lucy, Sir George's wife, is having an affair with Lord Conollan, Thistle is questioned by Sir George as to what he knows of the affair, and why he has decided to keep this information to himself.

The master of this respectable house hath too much knowledge, and too little understanding; the mistress too much vanity, and too little virtue.

And pray, most sententious and understanding sir, how came you to have any knowledge of an affair so atrocious, and conceal it?

Either it would trouble your honour, or it would not; in the first case, it would have been prejudicial; in the latter, useless.<sup>51</sup>

When questioned further Thistle confesses he has acquired what knowledge he has of the affair from his ears, eyes and intellect. The rustle of silks, a whisper and a speaking couch were noises which provoked his curiosity, and what he saw later, when related to his master, affects Sir George to the point of revenge. He is wise enough to seek Thistle's advice on what form this revenge should take. His steward advises that if he challenges Conollon he 'will run you through the body. This is ample reparation on his part: And you will die with the comfort of having done all that *honour* requires.'<sup>52</sup> Unlike some of Bage's other characters Sir George turns out to be no fool to honour and seeks to pursue his revenge through 'discovery, divorce and damages', vowing that the lovers 'shall know that science may be called the mother of invention, as well as necessity.'<sup>53</sup>

In all his novels Bage included, as other novelists do, stories based on destitution and despair designed to play on the emotions of his readers. More often than not they are centred round hard-working people or merchant families who through no fault of their own find themselves in extreme hardship. These could be leading characters like Henry Davis in *Barham Downs* (1784), Cornelia Colerain in *Man as He Is* (1792), Honoria Warren in *The Fair Syrian* (1786) and the eponymous *James Wallace* (1787); or those helped out of poverty and despair by the good deeds of philanthropists as witnessed by Arnold's hospitality to Kitty Ross and her

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<sup>51</sup> Bage, *BD*, I, 102.

<sup>52</sup> Bage, *BD*, I, 104.

<sup>53</sup> Bage, *BD*, I, 105.

own efforts to help the London poor after coming into Arnold's inheritance. Generosity towards the poor is pandemic in his works and nearly all his protagonists including two of his most memorable, Cornelia Colerain and Charles Hermsprong, are infected with the generosity virus.

By all accounts Bage was a generous man himself. There are records of his concerns for the less privileged found in his letter to Godwin on behalf of the Reverend Richard Davies, and in a proposal to Samuel Pipe-Wolferstan of a solution to the staple food problem when there were grain shortages and price-fixing in 1800. Bage believed that price-fixing for growers was wrong and that it would be 'far better' to fetch American corn from Liverpool.<sup>54</sup> There was a corn-exchange at Tamworth and Wolferstan tried to convince local landed and titled gentry, Sir Robert Morley, William Inge and William Paget, and later Robert Peel senior, of Bage's suggestion, but to no avail.<sup>55</sup> The banker, William Harding, argued a similar case to Bage while Peel, who grew 'excellent barley' sat on the fence.<sup>56</sup> Forty-six years later, during the devastating Irish potato famine, Peel's son and Prime Minister, Sir Robert, who had formerly supported protectionist agricultural policies, came round to the need for duty-free American corn imports.

Bage was a social idealist and he would become progressively more realistic towards the end of his life. The turning point for him appears to have been the summer of 1791 when rioters burnt down homes and meeting houses of dissenters, a period at which his letters take on a new gravity. Evaluating exactly where Bage stood in his concerns for the poor is complicated by this local historical event in which there were partially successful attempts to destroy the residences of his friend and business-trader, William Hutton. The rioters attacked Hutton's town-house and his

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<sup>54</sup> SRO, D1527/25 (1800), Wolferstan Diaries, 20 September.

<sup>55</sup> SRO, D1527/25 (1800), Wolferstan Diaries, 20 September.

<sup>56</sup> SRO, D1527/25 (1800), Wolferstan Diaries, 20 September.

family-house at Bennett's Hill causing the stationer to flee with his family to Tamworth. From this time onwards Bage's faith in humanity would never be quite the same. At the time of the riots, in June 1791, his penultimate novel, *Man as He Is*, would most likely have been at the printers, and the only novel that can reasonably be discussed within the context of this change in thought is *HermSprong* (1796). Ironically, it is not the rioting poor that stand accused in this novel so much as the landed elite and the established church — those who actually, if not actively, encouraged revolt. The Birmingham Riots did not change Bage's concern for the rights of the poor but they certainly helped enforce his opinion that social change should not be brought about by anything other than peaceful and democratic means.

In *HermSprong*, Lord Grondale, a mine-owner, becomes worried, with his like-minded cronies, that a mob of miners is about to attack his house. The mob eventually disperses, but when it is learnt that HermSprong was among the miners and giving them money it confirms the suspicions of Grondale, supported by his lawyer, Corrow, and the sycophantic Reverend Blick, that HermSprong is a 'French spy'.<sup>57</sup> The truth however turns out to be much different. HermSprong actually knocks down a miner for calling him a French spy and tells him in no uncertain terms he is a loyal subject of the king. The money he is seen giving the miners is intended for those with poor families. At HermSprong's trial a junior justice of the bench, who was present at the miners' gathering, informs the court of the truth, and thus HermSprong is acquitted.

This might seem like the same response to poverty that is found in his earlier novels, that is, if the better off give alms to the poor it alleviates the distress, but what is different here is that the poor are potentially rebellious,

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<sup>57</sup> Bage, *Herm*, III, 179.

complaining of low wages and harsh living conditions. Here the recent history of the Birmingham Riots has made its way into his fiction and a possible solution is offered. There is a danger that things could easily get out of hand and turn nasty. Such an event cannot be dealt with in the same way as that of a rural tenant family which suddenly finds itself homeless. Hermsprong, reasons and remonstrates with the miners, to the chagrin of Grondale's lawyer who points out that Hermsprong has read *The Rights of Man* and must therefore be a French spy. Preparation is made to bring him before the court. A miner, the one who is knocked down, accuses Hermsprong of being one of 'King George's spies, and no better than your master.'<sup>58</sup> Here the black humour works in that both sides in the dispute consider him to be a spy for the opposing side.

Hermsprong manages to disperse the crowds with logic and reason, while agreeing that their wages may not provide them with the superfluities of life, he contends that these unhappy times require more 'frugality and forbearance' pointing out that 'we cannot all be rich; there is no possible equality of property which can last a day.'<sup>59</sup> What a far cry that statement is from the ideal society set up at the end of his first novel.

Kelly notes how the suspension of habeas corpus, the treason trials of 1793-4, and the 'Two Acts' of parliament 'stifled English Jacobinism'.<sup>60</sup> Faulkner adds to this that the war with France of 1793 and the Terror made English radicalism even more 'politically suspect'.<sup>61</sup> Mona Scheuermann covers Hermsprong's trial in the most detail and makes comparisons of his arguments to those used by the very articulate accused, who were prosecuted in the treason trials. Hermsprong is exonerated in his fictional trial as were Horne Tooke, Thomas Hardy, John Thelwall and Thomas

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<sup>58</sup> Bage, *Herm*, III, 197.

<sup>59</sup> Bage, *Herm*, III, 196-7.

<sup>60</sup> Kelly, 1780-1805, p. 38.

<sup>61</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 29.

Holcroft in real trials which inspired the fictional one; but with different juries, or justices, the outcome might have been otherwise, leading Scheuermann to conclude that the 'system does work, but the safety afforded by it is in fact tenuous, as recent events had demonstrated.'<sup>62</sup> In the four years between the appearance of *Man as He Is* and *Herm sprong* events at home and abroad changed public opinion to such a degree that the freedom of speech that was acceptable in 1792 had been eroded by war, riots and the treason trials and more guarded comments were afterwards necessary. Words from that time onwards had to be carefully chosen, and worse was to come. The 'Two Acts' made speaking and writing just as treasonable as any physical means of sedition, and inciting hatred against the state, or the calling of public meetings, unless licensed, were illegal.<sup>63</sup> In *Mount Henneth*, Dr Gordon throws his hat at a chess-set and Kings, Queens and Bishops fall, while *Man as He Is* finishes with the French people laughing at Burke's notion that men have no proper rights.

Some rights, at least, they said, might be allowed to man; the rights of suffering, and of paying taxes; these no courts would dispute.— But if, said they, men have no rights, they have wills at least; and Kings, Lords, and Priests, shall know it.<sup>64</sup>

In *Herm sprong* the tone is more reserved and the hero says 'to revile your king, is to weaken the concord that ought to exist betwixt him and all his subjects, and to overthrow all civil order.'<sup>65</sup> Faulkner believes the reader expects irony here but is left confused.<sup>66</sup> Similarly in Bage's letters there are instances when he talks about paying excise to the king with what could be construed as either a respectful or a sarcastic 'God bless him'

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<sup>62</sup> Mona Scheuermann, *Social Protest in the Eighteenth Century English Novel* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1985), p. 218.

<sup>63</sup> Mona Scheuermann, *Social Protest in the Eighteenth Century English Novel* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1985), p. 218.

<sup>64</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 272.

<sup>65</sup> Bage, *Herm*, III, 198.

<sup>66</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 136.

which also leads to confusion, though there is little doubt that Hutton, to whom the letters were addressed knew what was intended.<sup>67</sup> When Hermsprong is talking to the Cornish miners it is as though Bage is exploring a means by which the Birmingham Riots may have been prevented. The Derby Philosophical Society, to which Bage belonged, sent Priestley a letter of concern and support after the Birmingham Riots, but in *Hermsprong* Bage seeks a means of deterrence which would make such letters unnecessary.

Lords, knights and the very rich come in for condemnation for their misdoings and lack of personal integrity, though this is balanced by the inclusion of generous and caring beings, who largely come from the mercantile or professional classes. Lord Grondale in *Hermsprong* (1796) is the epitome of an eighteenth-century stereotype: a gouty aristocrat whose demands of duty from his daughter Caroline Campinet, ordered to marry a stupid baronet, are well and truly surpassed by Lord Grondale's own deviation from the straight and narrow, by living in sin with Mrs Stone, on the one hand, and his flirtations with Caroline's friend, Maria Fluart, on the other. Similarly, Justice Whitaker in *Barham Downs* (1784) is happy to have either of his daughters marry Lord Winterbottom just to boost his own prestige and social standing oblivious to the fact that the impecunious Winterbottom is after Whitaker's money, and oblivious too to his daughter's disdain for this Lord and member of parliament who she thinks of as 'an odious man'.<sup>68</sup> Bage offers advice for bankers, businessmen, lords, ladies and even monarchs, many of whom he thinks are spiritually bereft. This advice has some of its origins in Friends' writings and teachings, and similarly in the discourses of Tom Paine.

In dealing with class differences and the needs of the poor it is as much the

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<sup>67</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 28 March 1787, 13 Nov 1787 and 12 May 1801.

<sup>68</sup> Bage, *BD*, I, 142.

misuse of money by those who have it, lords and barons, that causes poverty, as any laziness or innate fault on the part of the victims. There can be little doubt that Bage saw the peerage of the realm as a stumbling-block to progress. Most of the mercantile class, new money and the industrial masters emerge from his novels largely unscathed. It is the indolent and titled rich who make a much more obvious target for him, and he caricaturises them as successfully as any cartoonist. They are portrayed larger than life, people like Lord Grondale who is bloated out into a gout-ridden lecher, whose eyes for the young and intelligent Miss Fluart interfere with the clear working of his brain. But perhaps the silly, foppish, Sir Philip Chestrum, whom Grondale wants, indeed instructs, his daughter to marry, best personifies the self-centred arrogance of the class as Bage saw it. There is a passage in *Hermes* where Chestrum clumsily attempts to pay court to Grondale's daughter, Caroline Campinet. He does this by bragging about how noble his family is on his mother's side, the Raioules, asking her whether she prefers the name Raioule to Chestrum. Caroline confesses it is softer and has more vowels (in fact it has all the vowels). He wants to know how far back she can trace her family adding that Lady Chestrum 'goes back by her father to Richard the First.' 'I fancy,' said Miss Campinet, 'my father goes up to Noah, if not to Adam.'<sup>69</sup> Chestrum does not find her humour funny, pointing out that people of family need to be more careful now with levellers about, and that title is the only thing of importance, because 'new families' are 'springing up like mushrooms.' She puts his mind at ease by telling him these new families 'will be old in time.'<sup>70</sup> In trying to correct Chestrum, and men in general for pride over the same silly things, she offers a key to a different outlook on life: 'Men may be poets, philosophers, artists—every thing that adorns or improves society.'<sup>71</sup> Her comment falls on stony ground while Chestrum

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<sup>69</sup> Bage, *Herm*, II, 142.

<sup>70</sup> Bage, *Herm*, II, 143.

<sup>71</sup> Bage, *Herm*, II, 144.

harps on about his family, his toilet habits and all other kind of ridiculous ramblings in pursuit of her hand. There can be no clearer statement in any of his novels that the Grondales and Chestrums of the country are responsible for the inequalities in the distribution of wealth and their arrogant attitudes perpetuate injustices against the poor, against women, and against all people who would otherwise be free, with freedom of expression and education. Lamprooning them, for Bage, is a legitimate objective.

He has less time still for the toadies subservient to lords, as the Right Reverend Doctor Blick plays to Grondale in *Hermstrong*, and to a lesser extent, Reverend Delane plays to Winterbottom in *Barham Downs* during the subtle abduction of Anabella. Wiser characters can see through the creeping parson who, when he learns that Hermstrong is the legitimate heir to Grondale Hall, tries to turn his attentions in that direction with an ingratiating letter in which he asks forgiveness. Hermstrong's response begins: 'I forgive you, Sir, but do not like you. You will discover frankness to be my vice, and it will incur your displeasure. I fear we shall not be cordial neighbours.'<sup>72</sup>

Towards the end of his life Bage wrote to Hutton that he must visit those in prison in the coming April of 1801, and because he was also talking about purchasing scarce linen rags from London, the prison he intended to visit was almost certainly in the capital.<sup>73</sup> This is the only mention of prisons made in any of his letters but there are a number of imprisonments in his novels. James Wallace finds himself incarcerated for debt while the Fair Syrian is imprisoned for murder. Even while Honoria Warren is standing

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<sup>72</sup> Bage, *Herm*, III, 264.

<sup>73</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, 24 Jan 1801.

trial for a crime she did not commit she is 'generous to profusion to the poor prisoners, confined for debt, and has actually freed no less than six.'<sup>74</sup>

Although Bage shouldered heavy financial losses in his enterprise at Wychnor he never knew poverty as the very poor knew it. He remained however a champion of their cause. While he could only sympathise with those who were destitute he could empathise with merchants whose businesses had failed, or were on the brink of failure. Perhaps this is why his portrayal of the mercantile class is so believable while some of his tales of woe, misery and poverty of the underprivileged are overstated almost to the point of absurdity.

Another concern for Bage is the mistreatment of animals, an issue which he addresses from time to time as with Dr Gordon's self-accusatory condemnation of vivisection, when the doctor questions how many animal bodies 'have I hacked and hewed in order to discover the pre-disposing and proximate causes of pleasure and pain' only to have 'discovered nothing.'<sup>75</sup> Earlier it has been revealed that ever since 'Dr. Priestley found out that the soul of man is made of the same materials as the body' parsons no longer treat it and it is left to physicians to administer for patients' vices.<sup>76</sup> Dr Gordon's awareness and concern for the rights of animals in experimentation forms a sharp contrast to Miss Carodoc's lack of feeling, in the same novel.<sup>77</sup> This juxtaposition of contradictory thought typifies how the 'novelist of ideas' presents more than one side to an argument. However, it remains clear, even when allowing an adverse opinion, where the novelist's sympathies lie.

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<sup>74</sup> Bage, *FS*, I, 153.

<sup>75</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 109.

<sup>76</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 56.

Bage pays particular attention to the welfare of horses in *Man as He Is*. One of Sir George Paradyne's servants, Wavel, seeks to evict poor tenants while Sir George is on the Grand Tour, and also seeks to have a retired horse sold as a coal-carrier when it ought to be put out to grass; but his old, trustworthy steward, Cartwright, saves it from such a fate, after Sir George writes to him that humanity 'is shewn in taking care of dumb animals, whom we fetter and prevent from looking after themselves.'<sup>78</sup> This is the same novel in which, after Sir George announces his forthcoming marriage, that his mother, Lady Mary, reputedly kills 'two pair of very fine chariot horses in lamenting her troubles.'<sup>79</sup> The fettering, or hobbling, of horses must have struck Bage as very similar to the shackling of slaves. Indeed, he makes the parallel quite plainly in *The Fair Syrian* at the slave-market in Basra.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Bage, *MAHI*, III, 7-10.

<sup>79</sup> Bage, *MAHI*, IV, 267.

<sup>80</sup> Bage, *FS*, II, 83.

## Chapter 4 Slavery and Freedom

Clear evidence of Bage's reassessment of philosophical ideas comes only six months after the Birmingham Riots. The Bages were opposed to the slave-trade and worked together with Wolferstan and Gisborne on behalf of the Staffordshire campaign, as will be noted. There was, however, more than just the Staffordshire campaign for the abolition of the slave-trade that kept Wolferstan in touch with Bage. There was a common love of literature, an interest in political events, and when he sought advice on mills, the young Statfold lawyer would often consult Bage as a matter of course. On 20 November 1787 he was thinking of advertising the tenancy of Rushall Mills, at Walsall, one of which was a windmill. A week later he 'rode to Old Bage to get Adv<sup>1</sup> into Shrewsbury' having already sent adverts to Birmingham, Coventry and Leicester.<sup>1</sup> Shrewsbury was where Bage's eldest son Charles was living. During the next month, having gone down to London to link up with the Quaker preacher, Mary Capper, and other dissenting friends — including William Lindsey at his new Unitarian chapel — Wolferstan makes his earliest connection with the society for the abolition of the slave-trade, taking with him a letter of introduction to the society from Nicholls.<sup>2</sup> Soon he was embracing the cause and in February 1788 got signatures for the first Staffordshire petition calling at Haunton, Harleston and Elford, before sending the petition to Alder mill, where the Fowlers, a respected Quaker family of Tamworth, also made paper.<sup>3</sup>

By January 1792 Wolferstan was on his way to Lichfield. From his Statfold estate, the most direct route was through the village of Elford, but on this occasion it seems he took a detour through Edingale first. Bage was

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<sup>1</sup> Stafford Record Office (hereafter SRO), D1527/12 (1787), Wolferstan Diaries, 26-27 November.

<sup>2</sup> SRO, D1527/12 (1787), Wolferstan Diaries, 25 December.

<sup>3</sup> SRO, D1527/13 (1788), Wolferstan Diaries, 8 February.

not well, and Wolferstan called to inform him that Hatchett's opinions were varying. From his chamber window the novelist called back to say he never thought Hatchett capable of forming an opinion.<sup>4</sup> Thomas and Dorothy Hatchett had a large farm at Edingale and Wolferstan was their landlord.

Wolferstan, after his recruitment to the cause, was a tireless campaigner against the slave-trade and in contact with Quaker families at the leading edge of the campaign, including the Hoares.<sup>5</sup> Families with whom Bage was acquainted who were involved in the campaign were the Darwins, Gisbornes and Wedgwoods through Derby Philosophical Society; the Oldershaws, Lyons and Hardings through family connections; and Willingtons, Oakes and Fowlers through business connections. Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce mobilised campaigners across the country to get together petitions to parliament with the names of the local gentry opposed to the African slave-trade. Among leaders of the Staffordshire campaign, as well as Wolferstan, was the Reverend Thomas Gisborne, of Yoxall Lodge, another literary philosopher and associate of Robert Bage and Erasmus Darwin. Together with twenty-two other seated gentlemen Gisborne and Wolferstan wrote to the High Sheriff of Staffordshire, Moreton Walhouse, urging him to advertise a meeting of Staffordshire 'Gentlemen, Clergy and Freeholders'; the letter was delivered by John Sneyd to the High Sheriff on 1 February 1792.<sup>6</sup> Bage was involved at some level and almost certainly signed the petition as he did in 1788. After the Stafford meeting Pipe Wolferstan took refuge with the Bages at Elford mill. It is not clear whether Robert Bage had travelled with this group but Wolferstan records that the rain came on and he found it

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<sup>4</sup> SRO, D1527/17 (1792), Wolferstan Diaries, 13 January.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Hoare jr (1751-1825) was a Quaker banker and one of the original members of the committee for the abolition of the slave-trade. He was the treasurer of the committee. His brother was Jonathan Hoare (1752-1819).

<sup>6</sup> SRO, D260/M/F/4/8.

‘opportune to stop at Bage’s & got d<sup>n</sup> with them & son’s wife’.<sup>7</sup> Wolferstan’s own son, Stanley, was not quite seven years old, suggesting that the ‘son’s wife’ referred to was Edward Bage’s spouse, Edith. Wolferstan informs that Edward was still on his way back from Alrewas but the lawyer did not await his arrival.<sup>8</sup> Instead, after having a conversation with Robert Bage, in which the novelist informed him he had lost his Christian faith, Wolferstan went to T. Willington, attorney, at the New Bank in Tamworth where he found Byng, the Unitarian minister, and another Unitarian, William Harding — whose daughter, Ann, would later marry Charles Bage and whose son, Samuel Tuffly Harding, would marry Bage’s granddaughter, Mary — all voicing concerns that they would likely do harm by openly assisting him.<sup>9</sup> So soon after the Birmingham Riots many dissenters felt vulnerable. Wolferstan therefore moved on to ‘Old Fowler’s’ with T. Willington forwarding the petition from the ‘Quakers & Oakes’ then awaiting the arrival of Bail and Harper from London.<sup>10</sup> The next day the town crier called for a meeting at Tamworth Town Hall where those not in full agreement were drafting amendments, to the chagrin of Wolferstan. Further signatures were obtained in the region and three days later Wolferstan met with the Fowlers, Heath and Bowles at the door of Freeth, and ‘accordingly took leave of petition in Street’.<sup>11</sup>

The extent of Bage’s non-literary contribution against the slave-trade can be gleaned from Wolferstan’s diaries. There are occasions when the Stafford lawyer is found at the Bages going over a paper, or discussing the latest issue of the Gentleman’s Magazine.<sup>12</sup> That Robert Bage, like other

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<sup>7</sup> SRO, D1527/17 (1792), Wolferstan Diaries, 24 February.

<sup>8</sup> SRO, D1527/17 (1792), Wolferstan Diaries, 24 February.

<sup>9</sup> SRO, D1527/17 (1792), Wolferstan Diaries, 24 February.

<sup>10</sup> SRO, D1527/17 (1792), Wolferstan Diaries, 24 February. Charles Oakes was an attorney and Town Clerk of Tamworth.

<sup>11</sup> SRO, D1527/17 (1792), Wolferstan Diaries, 29 February.

<sup>12</sup> SRO, D1527/7 (1782), Wolferstan Diaries for May of that year. Wolferstan called on Bage and Godfrey for the Gentleman’s Magazine with speeches of Lord Townshend and Fortescue.

literary friends, was committed to the abolition of the slave-trade is not in question. What he did behind the scenes may never be fully known, but his personal campaign through literature can be found in the *Fair Syrian*, and, regarding the African slave-trade, even more explicitly in Fidel's tale from *Man as He Is*. This is the longest of his novels for which Bage abandons the epistolary form, a progression allowing him greater freedom for plot and character development.

While Bage's religious and social beliefs changed with the Birmingham Riots it can be seen that his opposition to slavery remained constant. Wolferstan took the petition of 1788 to Elford, for the Bages, Bournes and Sawrey to sign, and with the petition of 1792 the novelist appears to have been just as strongly involved in opposition to the slave-trade. For the Staffordshire campaign Wolferstan regularly sought the opinions of other like-minded gentlemen from Tamworth and district, and in July 1797 he is found chatting 'on Stafford Meeting' with William Harding and Thomas Willington 'at Old Bage's'.<sup>13</sup> By this time Bage had been supporting the Staffordshire efforts for almost a decade from when the first petition was taken to Elford. By the time of the second petition *Man as He Is* had been published. The novel contains an emotional plea against the African slave-trade presented from the viewpoint of a former slave, and its purpose is clearly to arouse sympathy against the maltreatment, beatings, murder and rape of slaves.

## **Slave-trade issues — East and West**

Bage's opposition to the slave-trade in his novels takes a change in narrative direction from a conventional story-telling approach, that is, by

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D1527/9 (1784), 7 May 'asked Hilliard and Bage for news'. D1527/19 (1794), 22 August, 'turn'd over a paper at Bage's'. D1527/20 (1795), 8 February, 'an ho<sup>s</sup>. with T. Will<sup>n</sup>. at Bage's newsp<sup>r</sup>'.

<sup>13</sup> SRO, D1527/22 (1797), Wolferstan Diaries, 18 July.

presenting the tale as an exotic adventure in which the heroine escapes the dangers, towards a story of strong condemnation that does nothing to spare his readers' sensibilities, in his penultimate novel. Honoria Warren's description of her enslavement in Bage's third novel *The Fair Syrian* (1787) is considerably different from Fidel's Story of his enslavement in *Man as He Is* (1792). The former contains unbelievable elements in keeping with the traditional Eastern tale while the latter is much more true to life as it existed towards the end of the eighteenth century. An important part of this comparison hinges on the historical differences between slavery in the East and West, and an attempt will be made to assess how Bage, and others he knew who opposed the practice of slavery and the traffic of slaves, adapted their literary publications as an important aspect of the campaign. The novelist's sympathies with Clarkson and other abolitionists to bring the slave-trade to an end was the same objective many sought in Midland philosophical and corresponding societies, including well-known figures like Erasmus Darwin, Thomas Day and Josiah Wedgwood.

Thus, at the time Robert Bage was confronting issues of Middle Eastern slavery in *The Fair Syrian*, there was a growing campaign to abolish the slave-trade between Africa and the Americas, yet few campaigners, historical or literary, were looking at the older trade still prevalent in Arab countries. This was a trade which had developed into a seemingly acceptable part of Middle Eastern culture and society by the eighteenth century. It had become so acceptable that hardly anything adverse was written about Eastern slavery, even in the West. It is of significance, therefore, that Bage was able to explore and raise awareness of a subject almost neglected by novelists and historians of his day, and, against the common trend, was able to use Eastern slavery to address the basic human-right of an individual to be a free person. Of course, this is not a straightforward argument, because Bage's characters have complex and contradictory personalities, and even when the line of reasoning seems to

be conclusively one-sided, Bage has a talent for introducing another character to take an opposing viewpoint. Slavery, in one form or another, appears in most of his novels, but it is in *The Fair Syrian* where it first becomes a major topic. In traditional style, the heroine is rescued from dishonour against all odds. This is the standard tale and as a novel it provides yet another example of the influence the *Thousand and One Nights* (1704-1717) had on Western literature, but at the same time it lays claim to being more than just an oriental tale; it is an oriental tale with a purpose. Steeves brings attention to the way oriental romances took their origin from Antoine Galland's French translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*, 'translated promptly into English', and points out how Eastern tales written in English became more 'purposeful'. He further concludes that in oriental tales written in the West debates arise comparing the two societies, Eastern and Western, and this is largely to the detriment of the West.<sup>14</sup> *The Fair Syrian* is no exception and makes this Eastern-Western comparison, especially through characters like Warren, Honoria's father, an Englishman who settled in Syria, and Abu Taleb, who murders his own son in an act of family honour. So it could be argued that Bage was not actually campaigning against the Eastern slave-trade so much as presenting an exotic adventure tale which had an enslaved merchant's daughter as its heroine. However, Bage's concerns for social justice are an element of all his novels, and there is usually a moral intent in the telling.

There is some indication to suggest that Thomas Day's story of *The Grateful Turk* from *Sandford and Merton* may have influenced one episode in the *Fair Syrian*, more of which shortly. Bage, in three of his novels and two of his letters to Hutton, makes favourable mention of another Lunar Society member, Joseph Priestley, a dissenter who was fervently opposed to the slave-trade. Hutton, a Presbyterian like Priestley, was likewise an

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<sup>14</sup> Steeves, *Before Jane Austen*, pp. 226-7.

opponent of the slave-trade, though not a crusader. Hutton's tolerance of religious sects was quite even-handed but while he spoke favourably of Quakers and other dissenters he was critical of the established Church following the Birmingham Riots, or at least critical of those who rioted in the name of Church and King. He does not blame the Church directly for the riots but observes that 'she has been unfriendly to the Dissenters in England and the slaves in America.'<sup>15</sup> The comparison Hutton makes between dissenters and slaves is noteworthy, since in his view, both were being persecuted by the establishment, but there is nothing likely to raise alarm within the establishment from the gentle way in which he presents the argument.

It has been suggested that Bage had a Quaker background though this has not been proven.<sup>16</sup> What cannot be disputed is his sympathy towards Quakers as a group, both through characters in his novels, who always take the moral high ground, and through his own philosophy which has a lot in common with the Quaker way of life. For example, he opposes duelling and war, shows care and concern for the rights of animals, and strives to treat women as equals at least, it might even be argued as superiors, since Miss Carlill (*Man as He Is*) and Miss Fluart (*Hermesprong*) are arguably his two strongest characters with more power over men than feminine charm alone can achieve. Quakers were at the forefront of the anti-slavery lobby, though some of its leading lights, William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, were not members of The Society of Friends. Neither was Thomas Gisborne, an Anglican reverend and a not too distant neighbour of Bage, who the novelist was in touch with through meetings of the Derby Philosophical Society, and who preached a memorial service for Bage which reduced Wolferstan to tears. Wolferstan was another friend of the

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<sup>15</sup> Jewitt, Hutton, p. 224

<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Misc. Prose*, 543. John Sutherland, 'Bage's supposed Quaker upbringing', in *Notes and Queries*, 198 (1953), pp. 32-33 (p. 32).

Bages, who was also a church man. Together they worked locally to raise awareness and support on behalf of Clarkson and the committee for the abolition of slavery.

There is a much-quoted passage from *The Fair Syrian*, even used by Andrew Beckett in his review for the *Monthly Magazine*, in which a Philadelphian Quaker argues for independence from a colonial power whose purpose in colonising is to extract taxes from the occupied country. Again, it is an argument opposed to injustice, and it is hardly surprising, yet quite in character, to see a Quaker putting the case against oppression and occupation, when so often it is the indigenous population of occupied countries which becomes the forced labour of the occupying force. Bage takes little incidents like this to put forward his own viewpoint in what has been called his novels 'of purpose'.<sup>17</sup> In the previous chapter it was noted how the fate of an old man, who Amington meets in France, turns sour when his son-in-law is suddenly killed after a millstone shatters. This brings on the death of his daughter through grief. This same old man-of-sorrows, had earlier been sold as a slave in Bulgaria and several other times to Turkish slave-owners, eventually earning his freedom by saving two of his last slave-owner's daughters.<sup>18</sup> Again, as with the fair Syrian herself, the slave is white, but this time of French birth, and male. His poverty at home, and his wife's infidelity, leads him to seek his fortune elsewhere. His last slave-owner turns out to be a Georgian who while paying lip-service to Islam in the cities follows a wholly different lifestyle at home. After saving the lives of his master's daughters, when they are washed downstream and in dire danger of drowning, the French slave, whose name we never learn, is tempted to accompany his master's family back to Georgia, as a free man. He chooses instead to return to his native France to

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<sup>17</sup> John H. Sutherland, 'Robert Bage: Novelist of Ideas', *Philological Quarterly*, 36 (1957) 211-220 (p. 211). Robert Bage, *Hernsprong*, ed. by Vaughan Wilkins (London: Turnstile Press, 1951), p. v, vii.

<sup>18</sup> Bage, *FS*, II, 216-224.

be reunited with his own daughter. In the reward of freedom for the saving of life there are echoes of the tale of 'The Grateful Turk' from Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* although in that story the rescue is from a fire. Drownings, or near drownings, feature several times in the novels of Bage and the observation is briefly discussed later in this chapter.

The Eastern slave-trade, in existence from biblical days, was a forgotten cause. It had been around so much longer than the African slave-trade in the Americas and it had developed its own laws of existence. According to the teachings of Islam there were only two circumstances in which slavery could arise: being born into it or being captured in war, or more specifically being captured in a holy war or j'had.<sup>19</sup> However, slaves in the East were often treated as part of the family, and manumission was much easier to attain than in the Americas. This had its downside for a society in which slavery was considered acceptable, or indeed, even desirable. Eastern slavery had evolved into a system which could be perceived as having a human face, and this made it unsustainable. Manumission, and the fact that eunuchs were incapable of reproducing, led to a shortage of slaves in Islamic countries.<sup>20</sup> To bolster supply enslavement took place through tribute (where an occupied country was obliged to provide a certain number of slaves to the occupying country); and also through the purchase of existing slaves in the markets of Arab countries, as well as hereditary bondage and captivity. The majority of white slaves, who were considered more desirable, came from the Caucasian regions of Georgia and Circassia.<sup>21</sup> Amina in *The Fair Syrian* was Georgian.

The process of abolition in the East lagged behind that in the Americas but the trade in white slaves was virtually over by the end of the nineteenth

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<sup>19</sup> Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), (hereafter Lewis), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, pp. 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, p. 11.

century, due mostly to the British occupation of Egypt in 1882.<sup>22</sup> It has been necessary to provide a selective history of slavery in the Middle East in order to suggest what knowledge Bage held about the trading of slaves in that region, and how he drew upon this knowledge when he wrote *The Fair Syrian*. He appears to have been sufficiently well-informed to give credibility to many aspects of Eastern culture found in his work and to make his third novel a readable adventure without being diverted by the even more unbelievable and fantastical anomalies found in many novels of the genre.

Volume two of *The Fair Syrian* is devoted largely to the capture, plight and enslavement of Honoria Warren, who becomes a prisoner both in Turkey and in Ireland. In her first captivity she struggles desperately to preserve her honour against all probability as she passes through the hands of several slave-owners. Honoria is the daughter of a merchant from England who is born in Syria and spends her early life there. She begins by telling how as a child she was frequently in the company of Saif Ebn Abu, the son of her father's friend, a young man who falls for her charms, and although his modest and timid advances are in no way reciprocated, either emotionally or from a religious viewpoint, and although she has 'not the least taste for adorning a haram', she feels a degree of pity for the pain she was inadvertently causing him. Saif, after becoming a soldier with some success in dispensing banditti, changed from being a modest youth into a tyrant; one who is determined to have Honoria any way he can. His first approach is to her father, who reminds him she is a Christian, and he a Moslem. When he suggests she could change her religion and be one of his wives her father swears he will kill his daughter first with his own hands.<sup>23</sup> That night Saif sends soldiers to raid her father's house. Father and daughter are abducted and separated and thus begins the fair Syrian's fight

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis, p. 82.

<sup>23</sup> Bage, *FS*, II, 48.

to preserve her honour. Although this is romance in the tradition of Arabian Nights, Bage applies English standards of honour and her father's pledge to kill his daughter with his own hands is a prelude to her own attempted suicide.<sup>24</sup> This is a standard by which eighteenth century readers of fiction, and society in general, would have felt comfortable that the expected and honourable thing was being done, death before dishonour. Bage, however, provides more than just a traditional tale of enslavement and rescue; he expands the definition of confinement and freedom, enabling English readers to empathise more readily with Honoria. He brings into focus the wider slavery issue for the majority of his readers, comprising a predominantly white and female readership, whose individual imaginations can easily allow them to identify with the heroine in the exotic Middle East, and at the same time make a judgment between what is possible in fiction and what actually happens in their own domestic environments. As a result he questions established roles for women, as mothers and wives, allowing them to conclude that many of them are in a situation not totally dissimilar from that of Honoria, in some cases little more than slaves in their own homes. This is further emphasised when Honoria's release from Eastern slavery is brought about through the purchase of her by an Irish lady, Mrs Lingard, who 'wanted a domestic slave.'<sup>25</sup> This well-intentioned purchase also physically separates Honoria from Amina, a Georgian sex-slave who has made it her vocation to protect the fair Syrian and offer along the way rare gems of philosophical insight not found in any literature of the day.

Amina, after nine years working in harems, is given by Bage wisdom and perception into human nature and resolve under oppression. Bad luck when it comes our way should not be 'doubled' by sadness, she says, or 'half

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<sup>24</sup> Bage, *FS*, II, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Bage, *FS*, II, 90.

your woes at least are of your own making.’<sup>26</sup> When questioned about her ‘impurity’ in sleeping with a succession of men outside of marriage she indicts society for its duplicitous morals by stating that beautiful Georgian girls, if they cannot be found husbands at the right price, are sold into sex-slavery, as are the daughters of priests, whereas those who are ugly are found husbands and taught what a virtue it is to be chaste. Steeves looks on the exchange of arguments between Honoria and Amina as ‘a trial balloon for the consideration of sex upon more objective grounds than the puritan’.<sup>27</sup> As a novelist of ideas, as Sutherland calls him, Bage is simply giving Amina her own perspective on life. While she is first and foremost a human being, not a commodity, she has full entitlement to a point of view, and having been bought and sold many times, as well as coming to terms with her fate, it is reasonable to assume her point of view has been coloured by her experiences of life in the haram. So in a way she does not really represent a model for the emancipation of sex-slaves but more a model for the emancipation of women in general. Readers are allowed to reach this conclusion not through the words of any knight rescuing and carrying away the maiden, or even through a narrator, but through the slave herself, a character with whom women should be able to relate (since she possesses wisdom and humanity, tact and generosity, and other assets which could easily be overlooked on the altar of her native beauty). She is a new type of fallen woman, described by Faulkner as a predecessor to the ‘golden-hearted prostitute of later fiction.’<sup>28</sup> Amina, though fascinating, is only a minor character and would have benefited from further development.

Honoria’s enslavement is different from the more common portrayal of slavery: that of shackled black slaves forced to serve white masters and

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<sup>26</sup> Bage, *FS*, II, 79.

<sup>27</sup> Steeves, *Before Jane Austen*, p. 280.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Faulkner, Robert Bage, ed. Sarah W. R. Smith, *Twayne’s English Author Series* (Boston: Twayne), CCIL (1979), 83.

mistresses in the plantations of British and other European empires. In this story it is a white woman forced into the Turkish slave-trade, a trade in human cargo which predates Western colonial slavery, going back to the Ottoman Empire and before. In literature there is nothing new in Eastern tales of captivity. There are the captivities of Pekuah in Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) and Astarte in Voltaire's *Zadig* (1747), but the fair Syrian is not of royal stock and not a stereotype. Being the daughter of a merchant she represents the emerging class to which Bage belongs and is thus unlikely to be rescued from her enslavement by the stock knight. Similarly, she is unlikely to receive the privileges of royals in captivity. Although called the fair Syrian, Honoria is not of Syrian extraction and this, in Bage's portrayal, makes her less desirable. In reality being white, and the novelty of being of English descent, would have made her even more desirable, and this is one of the few weaknesses in an otherwise believable exposition of Eastern slavery. White slaves were at a premium and fetched three to ten times as much as Abyssinians and blacks.<sup>29</sup> Amina, coming from Georgia, would also have been classed as white. That both women were non-Muslims is accurate. Islam forbade the owning of Islamic slaves by Muslims but openly encouraged the enslavement of non-believers.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the novel Honoria is fighting off male advances, first of Saif Ebn Abu, who, when he cannot persuade her to become one of his wives, vows to take her forcibly. To achieve these ends she and her father are abducted and separated one night, and Honoria is told by Saif that she is now his slave. In the first of a series of fortunate coincidences before he can satisfy his desires Saif is called away to war, and while he is away the banditti from whom he has acquired his castle return and take Honoria hostage. Remarkably, they do not try to rape her and she is sold, together

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<sup>29</sup> Lewis, pp. 74-5.

<sup>30</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 379.

with Amina, at the slave fair in Basra to a rich Syrian. Amina tries to protect Honoria by strongly arguing her worth in financial terms if she is not abused; how much her father would pay for her safe return. Despite this their master eventually decides to sell both women, but before doing so wishes to rape the maiden himself. She attempts to take her life to avoid being raped, and after her recovery, in an incident which Bage himself describes as ‘very extraordinary and almost fabulous’, her master dies of an overdose of sexual stimulants in preparation for the virgin sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> With the statement ‘very extraordinary and almost fabulous’ the novelist indicates that he too cannot believe it, and this toying and teasing is a device he uses for literary effect elsewhere.<sup>32</sup>

Being aptly named Honoria, her fight to preserve her honour is a theme which extends well beyond her period of captivity and enslavement. There is even an occasion when she has to defend herself against the advances of her rescuer, Sir John Amington, and another against Amington’s brother-in-law, Lord Bembridge. The main argument regarding *The Fair Syrian*, however, is that this portrayal of slavery is deemed to be, to some extent, palatable. There are no beatings, lashings or rapes, and the captivities, which admittedly contain the element of impending doom, are resolved in an almost gentile manner. Five years later however, when *Man as He Is* was published, Bage’s approach to slavery was very different and abuse in the plantations, in all its horror, was brought to readers’ attention. William Beckford’s oriental tale, *Vathek* (1786 English translation), goes to the other extreme in its depiction of Eastern horror, including the sacrifice of 100 children, but this is again a fantasy which, as Steeves notes, is an

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<sup>31</sup> Bage, *FS*, II, 89.

<sup>32</sup> Bage, *Herm*, I, 52. “Great, indeed, were the chances against finding any one upon this dreary spot, and infinite against finding a man, undaunted by danger, and capable of preserving his recollection at the moment of terrible surprise”. This again was Bage playfully telling his readers that he is giving them what they expect, and comes after Hermsprong had stopped a spooked horse to save Caroline and her aunt from careering over a cliff.

‘inferior imitation’ of the *Thousand and One Nights* and as a modern teller of magical tales ‘confronts incredulity’.<sup>33</sup>

All kinds of slavery are portrayed in *The Fair Syrian*. Sex slavery manifests itself in Honoria Warren’s captivity in the Middle East. This is followed by her imprisonment in Ireland for a murder she did not commit, though these two incidents are presented out of sequence, with the exotic tale told as a back story. There is a sense almost that Honoria is unhappily enslaved by her own chastity especially when judged alongside the happy Georgian, Amina’s, liberated attitude to sex. Bage’s unease over enslavement extends beyond human predicaments, and he draws on a power of a lively imagination to reveal his concerns also for the rights of animals.<sup>34</sup>

And now came on the great fair of Basra. The camels and other four-footed slaves were sold in the morning. We, who stood on two, later in the day. The male slaves, chained two and two, were ranged together in the market place; the females, in little shops around, tricked out in all the tinsel ornaments of finery.<sup>35</sup>

The main narrative device is a fascination created by Honoria’s determination to preserve her chastity at all costs. Charlotte Lennox uses the same technique in *The Female Quixote* (1752) though the dangers facing Arabella are imaginary and any real ones are of her own making. Just as Honoria has Amina as a foil against her undoing, Arabella has the flirtatious Charlotte. *The Female Quixote* is a powerful and witty parody of Cervantes’ epic romance narrative which so influenced eighteenth century fiction. Honoria and Arabella pursue adventures commonly thought to be the domain of men. There is no borrowing of plot, but Bage hints at a

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<sup>33</sup> Steeves, *Before Jane Austen*, p. 236.

<sup>34</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478). Hutton wrote “His humanity will appear from his treatment of his servants, and even his horses, who all loved him, and whom he kept to old age”.

<sup>35</sup> Bage, *FS*, II, 83.

connection between Osborne, the correspondent of Sir John Amington, and Sir George Bellmour, in *The Female Quixote* by giving him the same name.

In *The Fair Syrian* Osborne is in love with the sister of Amington, called Emelia, who early puts an end to his dreams by marrying Lord Bembridge. Towards the end, when Lady Bembridge is free again, Osborne realises that his love for her is still a potent power. By this time he has inherited a title, Lord Belmour, while she is being pursued by another suitor, Lord Konkeith, a situation not satisfactorily resolved in Bage's romance. In *The Female Quixote* Bellmour, though in love with Arabella, at the end marries Glanville's sister to whom he has made a former pledge. Despite minor loose ends not always being tied Bage has a rare gift for maintaining reader interests.

In his next novel *James Wallace* (1788) the subject of slavery is touched upon when Wallace saves the beautiful Estella Udivido and her family from captivity. Estella's fate was to be held for ransom by the Algerian Moor, Mustouf, after he had first taken his will of her, but only on condition that the ruling Dey did not abduct her as one of his own sex-slaves.<sup>36</sup> The anti-slavery philosophy is propounded by Wallace early in the novel when he seeks to leave the services of an upper-class scoundrel of the first order, Scovel, who he meets when imprisoned for debt.

I answered it was a servant's privilege in all countries where slavery was abolished, to quit his service when it became too heavy to be borne; and that, in my opinion, nothing was so heavy to be borne as a command to do evil: I requested, therefore, my dismissal, and asked no more of him than a bare sufficiency to return to England.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Bage, *James Wallace*, 3 vols (London: William Lane, Minerva Press, 1788), (hereafter Bage *JW*) III, 5-9.

<sup>37</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 183.

Scovel has requested Wallace's help to seduce and elope with a watchmaker's daughter. To prevent Wallace from reporting his intentions to the authorities Scovel gets his servant thrown into prison on false charges. In Bage's novels there are many incarcerations of innocent protagonists as well as a variety of enslavements. The key difference in the above statement is that between servant and slave, and James Wallace, while being imprisoned is not enslaved. When Bage addresses slavery next it concerns a slave who becomes a servant.

Following the publication of *James Wallace* four years would elapse before Bage's next novel appeared, and in it he draws attention to the inhumanity of slavery using Fidel's story from *Man as He Is* as the main example. This story within a story puts him in the same literary anti-slavery lobby as Erasmus Darwin, and Darwin's circle of friends. He is every bit as powerful a storyteller, but the main argument is that in those four years between the two novels Bage had moved on from his former Utopianism towards pragmatism, reality and the art of the achievable. There are several possible reasons for this: firstly, he was planning to move home, from the peaceful village of Elford into the market town of Tamworth, where he would be near his middle son, Edward, who was a doctor there. This would be for him less of a communal existence where villagers were reliant on one another for survival of the village to experience more of the thriving economy of an expanding and important town; secondly, there was growing unrest fuelled, Priestley believed, by the Anglican church which would lead to the Birmingham Riots. Bage was involved in church life at Elford and would have been disappointed that some poor people, whose cause Bage sought to address, had resorted to cudgels and matches in attempts to destroy the home of his friend, William Hutton, while completely destroying that of Hutton's friend, Joseph Priestley and a number of meeting houses. Taking a wider view, the optimistic cause of republicanism was being brought into disrepute by

events in France in which many aristocrats were guillotined without proper trials. Monasteries were disbanded and captured celebrants faced execution, including sixteen Carmelite nuns from Compiègne ten days before the terror came to an end.<sup>38</sup> We may never know exactly what caused Bage's change in direction, perhaps a combination of influences, but from the time he wrote his penultimate novel something had changed in his approach to writing. He told Hutton he no longer wished to be known as a novelist, and started afresh, with no reference on the title page to his former novels. He also changed his narrative mode from epistolary to omniscient, and most telling of all, he introduced greater realism into his work. Dropping the epistolary mode had widened his options. Sutherland argues that the epistolary form lends itself to melodramatic events with the characters geographically separated and thus able to discuss adventures in which they are involved diversely at a distance in the traditional mould of Richardson's and Fielding's fiction.<sup>39</sup> Abandoning this form enabled him to sit his characters together round a table, if he chose, or to follow their adventures and misadventures on the grand tour, or to be present at nuptial events and other gatherings without needing recourse to an epistolary narrator.

The human nature of slave-master relationships, and the way Bage allows each to express an opinion, enforces the label that he was a novelist of ideas. Just as there are good and bad slave owners in the Middle-East in *Man as He Is* there are good and bad planters in the West Indies. Bage is clearly against the trade in human cargo but he is enough of a realist to concede that while slavery was ongoing there were 'owners' who treated their slaves with more compassion than others, and that it was the duty of a

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<sup>38</sup> A twentieth century account of this well-documented event is: William Bush, *To Quell the Terror: The Mystery of the Vocation of Sixteen Carmelites of Compiègne Guillotined July 17, 1794* (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> John H. Sutherland, 'Robert Bage: Novelist of Ideas', *Philological Quarterly*, (hereafter Suth. *Phil. Q.*) 36 (1957) 211-220 (p. 214).

free-thinking novelist opposed to the slave-trade to portray these in a more favourable light than those who whip, torture and otherwise mistreat their slaves. This was very much the short-term compromise which Olaudah Equiano, a freed slave, sought to bring about through his autobiography. Equiano visited Birmingham in 1789. He was met by Matthew Boulton, Joseph Priestley and ironically, Samuel Galton, who supplied African traders with muskets.

Bage's main contribution to the campaign against the African slave-trade is Fidel's story from *Man as He Is*. It is told by a black servant, a former employee of Miss Colerain, but at the time of the telling, which looks back on a harsh life as a slave in Jamaica, he is in the employment of the book's hero, Sir George Paradyne. At twelve years old Fidel (formerly called Benihango), is sold by his father to a Liverpool merchant for a Birmingham musket and 'and a small quantity of powder and shot'.<sup>40</sup> He is taken captive in Benin, from where Equiano also claims to have come. In calling the weapon for which Fidel was bought a 'Birmingham musket' rather than simply a 'musket' Bage may be trying to prick the conscience of Galton, who was censured by the Society of Friends in 1795 for arms manufacture, though there were other lesser-known small-arms dealers and manufacturers in the city as well, and Birmingham became infamous for supplying guns to the colonies.<sup>41</sup> Fidel is fortunate enough to survive the crossing. As time passes he works for one of the better plantations, is given an education in Kingston, and grows up to be a trusted slave with responsibility for one of his master's plantations, which he manages well. Fidel is in love with a young black woman, Flowney, a domestic slave to the Benfields. They are engaged to be married but it is soon revealed

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<sup>40</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 229.

<sup>41</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 303.

Benfield's son lusts for the slave-girl, however much she rebuffs his advances.

Master Benfield's son, who Fidel has previously saved from drowning, takes over the plantation. There are similarities in this story between the father of Saif in the *The Fair Syrian* and Master Benfield, and between Saif himself and young Benfield, who are both much more ruthless than their fathers. The whipping of slaves becomes increasingly severe and more frequent under the younger Benfield's control, and when questioned by Fidel about the purpose of such cruelty, Benfield says it is to make the 'dogs' work. Fidel argues that if slaves were treated like dogs they would be much better off, to which Benfield replies 'dogs were a superior species of animal to negroes, and had better understandings'; then he knocks Fidel down.<sup>42</sup> When Fidel gets up intent on retribution, Benfield runs off, and the kindly Master Colerain purchases the slave to save his life. John Colerain, father of the heroine, is opposed to the mistreatment of Black slaves and hopes to live to hear the 'question discussed by a British parliament'.<sup>43</sup> When his new master gets knocked into Kingston bay and is in danger of drowning 'Den I did jump in, and I did hold him bove water, as I did young Masser Benfield, till the boat came and took us bode in.'<sup>44</sup>

Fidel will not leave Flowney to go to England with his new master, and Flowney's mistress will not sell her to Colerain who is due to return to Jamaica in three years. Fidel is left on loan to old Mr Benfield in charge of one of the family plantations. After two years the estate is thriving. But the two lovers are ten miles apart which leaves Flowney at the mercy of the younger Benfield and his cruel overseer, Stukeley. Shortly before John Colerain's return she is raped by Benfield and then given to Stukeley to

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<sup>42</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 233.

<sup>43</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 236.

<sup>44</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 237.

rape. Afterwards Stukeley has her publicly flogged to quieten her 'lamentations' after which mistreatment she drowns herself. When he learns of the flogging and suicide, Fidel kills Stukeley in a duel for which he stands trial, and is acquitted, before returning with Colerain to England.

Flowney drowned herself. Fidel saved Benfield, who was the cause of Flowney's suicide, from drowning. He also saved Colerain from drowning. (Drownings feature regularly in Bage's novels.) Bage's narrative change regarding reward and punishment is significant. Black slaves are seen as a sub-species as demonstrated by the younger Benfield's remark, who considers them lower than dogs, even though his life had been saved by Fidel. The younger Benfield was a bad planter, while Colerain was a good planter. But even Colerain does not reward Fidel with his freedom: 'you saved my life Benihango; I must make yours comfortable if I can.'<sup>45</sup> Instead, he offers Fidel the option to stay and oversee a plantation on his behalf or return to England with him. Fidel chooses the former to be close to Flowney. When he saved Benfield he was only a boy and his reward then was to serve the planter's son through his education, which gave Fidel the opportunity to read and write. Benfield's gratitude was seemingly endless 'who did say many times the first year, dat he did owe his life to me; dat he never could make me de sufficient satisfaction, and if ever I did come to be his property, I should see'.<sup>46</sup> The importance of education was paramount in Bage's philosophy. Inadequate or misguided educational systems, like finishing-schools, were criticised and it would seem that Kingston school produced a change in the character of Benfield for the worse, while Fidel showed there was no difference between black and white people in that he learned to read and write because he 'had little else

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<sup>45</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 238.

<sup>46</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 232-3.

to do'.<sup>47</sup> After Benfield's graduation Fidel was sad 'to see dat he did love cruelty for cruelty's sake; and de poor negro was used worse and worse.'<sup>48</sup>

At the time he was writing this Bage was involved in the South Staffordshire petitioning against the African slave-trade to the West. The key argument from Bage's point of view is not so much the difference between slavery in the East and West, though the two novels discussed show he was well aware of the differences, but how Black Africans were considered barely human; in essence a commodity. Bage was careful not to create a rebellious slave, but one who had some education, and a kindly heart, much more endearing than any of his masters. In that respect he might be compared to the celebrated and feted Equiano, who was one of the few former slaves who wrote about his experiences in the eighteenth century. The diaries of Thomas Thistlewood, a planter, show that Bage had a very good understanding of what went on in the plantations, regarding masters and slaves. Slaves did drown themselves.<sup>49</sup> Thistlewood mentions several slaves by name who killed themselves and several others who threatened to kill themselves.<sup>50</sup> In total he recorded a personal tally of '3852 acts of sexual intercourses with 138 women . . . 2142 times with one slave, Phibbah' and '374 acts with 63 partners from other plantations'.<sup>51</sup> He allowed other white men to rape his slaves and if the slaves refused they were whipped.<sup>52</sup> Bage brought this sexual abuse of slaves to light through his fiction. He did not ignore the suffering in *Man as He Is*, or try to make it palatable and fantastic, as in *The Fair Syrian*, and in that respect

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<sup>47</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 233.

<sup>48</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 233.

<sup>49</sup> Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, & Desire Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 263.

<sup>50</sup> Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, & Desire Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 264.

<sup>51</sup> Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, & Desire Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 156-157.

<sup>52</sup> Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, & Desire Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 161-2.

he may be singled out as one of the most progressive of novelists among his contemporaries.

Bage includes in his novels tales which could well stand on their own as short stories and none more so than those in *Man as He Is*. As Steeves points out these 'digressions' impinge upon the 'central theme' but are nevertheless entertaining in their own way.<sup>53</sup> Fidel's story is quite believable, and has the common ingredients of good master, bad master, kindness and cruelty, and the theme of lovers separated by slavery. The separation of lovers was also the subject matter of a poem by John Bicknell and Thomas Day, *The Dying Negro* (1773). The poem condemns the exploitation of a black man not just through enslavement and his forcible separation from the one he loves. Day and Bicknell used a newspaper account of a sea captain's black servant who for the love of a white domestic servant ran away to get christened so that he could marry his beloved. Recaptured and incarcerated on board a vessel in the Thames the estranged lover shoots himself through the head. *The Dying Negro* is Day and Bicknell's attempt to write his suicide note. It became popular, and Clarkson singled it out as an important contribution to the anti-slavery campaign.<sup>54</sup> However in this borrowing from life two things suggest that the black who killed himself, the one on whom the poem is based, was not a slave, because he is called a 'servant' in the newspaper report and were he a slave on board a vessel he is unlikely to have had access to a gun. In *Man as He Is* there is a dividing line between the servant, which Fidel becomes, and the slave, which he was before.

When Maria Edgeworth made her contribution to slave literature, *The Grateful Negro* (1801), it contained the usual ingredients, a thoughtless

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<sup>53</sup> Steeves, *Before Jane Austen*, p. 284.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808), I, 82.

planter, Jefferies, with a cruel overseer, Durant, who is about to sell the slave Caesar to pay his master's debts, an act which would separate the slave from his wife. As it happens a kind planter, Edwards, with an excellent overseer steps in. Instead of the lovers being separated they are united and found a cottage. On the eve of a slave insurrection Caesar is torn between loyalty to his fellow slaves and his debt to Edwards. The central message is the same as that of Bage: good planters prosper.

Day, in his children's novel, *Sandford and Merton* (1783-1789), introduces Tommy Merton, the spoilt son of a Jamaican cane-planter who gets a rude awakening at school in England when he finds he has to work for his keep alongside the kindly son of a farmer, Harry Sandford. In contrast the heroine of *Man as He Is*, Cornelia Colerain, is the highly-principled and beautiful daughter of a merchant, with interests in the West Indies. John Colerain has amassed a considerable fortune but falls victim to an untrustworthy and promiscuous clerk in England, who given the chance would have run off with Colerain's daughter as well as his fortune, but only gets the latter. These troubles cause John Colerain deep distress and shortly afterwards he dies leaving Miss Colerain prey to his creditors. The bailiffs repossess her home, the White House at Comber. In *Man as He Is*, Bage tells his readers over and over again, it is a true history. Anna Letitia Barbauld was the first to notice a similarity to the character of Miss Carlill and the real life Quaker, Mary Knowles, wife of the anti-slavery campaigner and physician, Thomas Knowles.

But the best sustained character is that of Miss Carlill, a quaker, in which the author has exceedingly well hit off the acuteness and presence of mind, and coolness of argument, by which the society she is supposed to belong to are so much distinguished. In her dialogue with a high-church clergyman, she is made to have much the better of the argument as the late Mrs. Knowles was said to have had in a debate with Dr Johnson. It is easy

to see how much the author delights himself in the dry humour and poignant retorts by which she is made to support her argument.<sup>55</sup>

Had she pursued this line of argument she would have discovered that just as Day had based *The Dying Negro* on a real event Bage had based *Man as He Is* on real events too, albeit fictionalised. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into any great detail but Reverend Holford represents Samuel Johnson, Miss Carlill represents Mary Knowles and Miss Colerain represents Jane Harry, daughter of a Jamaican planter and a mulatto woman called Charity Harry. Samuel Johnson was fond of Jane Harry until she became a Quaker, and allegedly lost much of her fortune. Mary Knowles' husband, Dr Thomas Knowles, was one of four members of the original committee for the abolition of slavery, and Jane Harry left provisions in her will for the manumission of all her mother's slaves in Jamaica (though it seems unlikely that this happened).<sup>56</sup> Bage's fellow anti-slave-trade campaigner, Samuel Pipe Wolferstan, though younger than Bage, may have passed on the Fidel story, or it may have been Thomas Gisborne, fellow-member of the Derby Philosophical Society, or even Erasmus Darwin. An even more likely candidate is Mary Capper, who knew Bage, and was also friendly with the Knowles family. Before the novel starts Bage claims that a deviation from virtue is a deviation from happiness, that some of his friends believe this and some do not, 'who, for the benefit of the universe, have put into my hands the papers whence I have extracted the following true history.'<sup>57</sup> Edgeworth, when writing to his daughter Maria, says part of *Hermesprong* was 'Dr. Darwin's' but here

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<sup>55</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, *The British Novelists, with an essay and prefaces biographical and critical*, 50 vols (London, F. C. & J. Rivington, 1810), xlviii, preface.

<sup>56</sup> Will of Charity Harry, proved 11 July, 1794. By the time of her death, both Jane (Harry) Thresher and her husband, Joseph Thresher of Worcester, M.D. were dead. According to Charity Harry's will her daughter laid aside £700 for the manumission of her mother's slaves. The will names seven slaves to be released and a former sea-captain, John Boyd, is sent to England to receive the £700. Earlier in the document a number of slaves are willed to various family members.

<sup>57</sup> Bage *MAHI*, I, 1, Exordium.

he might have confused *Man as He Is Not* with *Man as He Is* for which Darwin may have supplied Bage with anecdotes.<sup>58</sup>

Darwin would tackle the thorny issue of slavery in his *Botanic Garden* (1789-1792), a two volume poem personifying plants, a copy of which is found in the library of Miss Colerain.<sup>59</sup> Mary Knowles was a friend of Matthew Boulton from their Staffordshire days. All the Lunar Group members were opposed to slavery, Day, who has been mentioned, Josiah Wedgwood especially (and his partner Thomas Bentley) though Matthew Boulton, some of whose business relied upon selling steam-engines to customers who traded with the colonies, was more cautious in his clandestine donations.<sup>60</sup>

Bage may have intended telling a story concerning the black servant Scipio, who saved the life of James Lamoude's father, a merchant with trade in the West Indies. But he either forgot or retained it for his next novel where, if this theory holds true, it appears as Fidel's Story, previously outlined. Twice he hints at this story. The first is when Wallace is giving a family history of the Lamoundes to Paracelsus Holman in which he mentions that James Lamoude senior recommended Scipio to James junior's 'particular kindness' because of his 'solid sense and undoubted attachment'.<sup>61</sup> The second is a stronger hint: 'After breakfast my brother was beginning to entertain Miss Thurl with a little history of Scipio, who has, indeed, great claim upon the kindness of our family; for he once saved my Father's life.'<sup>62</sup> The 'little history' remains a little mystery.

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<sup>58</sup> Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 10, 166 (7) Letter 155. Letter from Richard Lovell Edgeworth (Belfast) to Maria Edgeworth (Edgeworthstown), 2 March 1797.

<sup>59</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 226.

<sup>60</sup> BA&H, Matthew Boulton pocket-book accounts for 1789 in which he records "Subscription against ye Slave trad 2 2 0."

<sup>61</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 284.

<sup>62</sup> Bage *JW*, II, 225.

Scipio is the black servant of James Lamounde who helps keep his master on the straight and narrow on his grand tour. He is, like Fidel in *Man as He Is*, the idealised negro, one who, generally in contrast to his master, does everything with propriety, nothing wrong. Day's *Dying Negro*, Wedgwood's medallion struck for the emancipation of slaves, and Darwin's poetical references in the *Lives of Plants* and *The Botanic Garden* also raise awareness of the plight and condition of slaves. These conditions are brought to the readers' attention with Bage's personal campaigns in *The Fair Syrian* and *Man as He Is*. His concern for a more just world goes beyond the slavery issue extending to master-servant relationships, inherited wealth as a hindrance to progress of the growing mercantile class, and other class and religious divides. By making Scipio black he is moralising on class and race grounds at the same time. His more respectable servants are almost always superior in integrity and honesty to their masters.

Bage's nominal model probably comes from Le Sage's *Gil Blas* where Scipio is the semi-reformed rogue who as valet, private secretary and steward to the hero, engineers among other schemes his master's affairs and finally his marriage. *Gil Blas* was himself a former servant and the French literary influence is evident in Bage's Scipio. Elements of the picaresque novel can be found in the characters of Mr Scovel, Sir Everard Moreton, Captain Islay and to some lesser extent James Lamounde. James Wallace and his Scipio, however, are too moral and honest to be included among these deviants from foreign literature, but the Cervantes' Panza descent is just as much in evidence.

Equality was the cry of French revolutionaries, freedom from motherland-taxes was the cry of American revolutionaries and freedom from American domination would become the cry of Native Americans. Towards the end of *Hermesprong* (1796) when it is revealed the eponymous hero is really a

baronet, he locks horns with the doughty Miss Fluart when she advises him to be patient and submissive after Caroline Campinet has returned to attend her ailing father.

‘Patience and submission, my dear Miss Fluart, are not the qualities of a savage,’ Sir Charles replied; ‘we allow not the language of tyranny, even from pretty mouths.’

*Miss Fluart.* ‘Savages are wonderful beings. You have no objection to the language of slavery from pretty mouths.’

*Herm sprong.* ‘I have not all the savage ill qualities. I learned to hate the language of slavery in all its forms, especially in the form of adulation. I consider a woman as equal to a man; but, let it not displease you, my dear Miss Fluart, I consider a man also as equal to a woman. When we marry, we give and we receive. Where is the necessity that man should take upon him this crouching mendicant spirit, this excess of humiliation?’<sup>63</sup>

Slavery does come in many forms — not just in the form of the recognised slave-trade. In Bage’s fiction he seeks to address the injustices of any kind of enslavement whether it be that of Africans, that of serfs, that of sex-slaves or that of women and servants in general. It is this broad attack on a variety of fronts which singles him out as a novelist with progressive and liberal ideas well in advance of his times. Where others might consider raising their swords to impose, or oppose, hegemony he uses the pen in flagrant condemnation against the perpetrators of any and all forms of slavery. This is accomplished with humour, wit and satire, without sacrificing the inherent message which is clearly stressed in the story-telling: that individual freedom of life and expression is a basic human right.

This chapter began by exploring how Bage told an oriental tale of slavery, *The Fair Syrian*, which follows the adventures of Honoria Warren in an almost palatable and fantastic way, a tale in which none of the horrors of

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<sup>63</sup> Bage, *Herm*, III, 230-1.

the Eastern slave-trade, or Eastern culture, is more than touched upon. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that his view of the Middle East, while accurate in a lot of ways, is idealised, and his comparison of the East and West is favourably partial to the East, in line with most other Eastern tales written in the West; Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) which is replete with fantastic horror, if not condemnation, being an exception. The oriental story of *The Fair Syrian* uses the same narrative devices of honour and chivalry and sustained humour as Lennox's *The Female Quixote* to show that it was as much a tale of the expectations of preserving chastity as a tale of slavery. By comparing the slavery aspects with those in Fidel's story it is seen that Bage, as well as embarking on a narrative change in direction, had become more accurate in his portrayal of slavery and communal societies in the interim between the writing of *The Fair Syrian* and *Man as He Is*. This change, in which he told Hutton he no longer wished to be known as a novelist, coincided with the campaign that was going on throughout South Staffordshire, and the sexual abuse and whippings in the later novel closely matches what actually took place as recorded in the diaries of Thomas Thistlewood. *The Fair Syrian*, while always in danger of being raped, escapes in the fantastic way heroines of fiction often did, and do, but for Fidel and Flowney the true horror of slavery was depicted without sanitisation for his readers. Reality had entered his novels; Utopia was a thing of the past.

## Chapter 5 Bage and women

William Hutton describes Bage's wife, Elizabeth, as 'a young lady, who possessed four accomplishments which seldom meet in one woman, fortune, beauty, good sense, and prudence; I may add a fifth, necessary for the peace of a family, good nature. I have reason to think he found more happiness in domestic life than is usually experienced.'<sup>1</sup> This is one of the few references to Elizabeth Bage and, for all Bage's enthusiasm for the equality of the sexes, very little survives about her character or her life. On the odd occasion when Bage mentions her in his letters to Hutton it is generally in a jocular manner, as when reprimanded for not eating his breakfast quietly, which 'I do when my house does not smook, or my wife scold, or the newspapers do not tickle me into an irritation, or my men clamour for another increase of wages'; or after the Huttons returned from Germany, 'If thou art risen from the dead I shall be glad to know what thou hast seen — so will my wife — and hast thou sugar enough?'<sup>2</sup> At a time when women and their viewpoints were given little attention it is surprising, considering Bage's ideas on equality for the sexes that more has not come to light about Elizabeth Bage. Either she was treated as a 'pedestal woman', set apart from the rest of womankind because she was the wife of a man of standing; or she was too modest to be involved in public life. Similarly, what is known about Hutton's wife was only made available through the autobiographies of Hutton and his daughter, Catherine; and even then there is little to say about Sarah Hutton other than she was a lady of her time whom Hutton loved very much. Significant factors in the Bages' marital relationship, as well as the births of their three sons, are that Elizabeth's dowry would have paid for the family move from

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<sup>1</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478).

<sup>2</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters, undated 1795 and 9 April 1790. Sugar is a type of paper.

Derby to Elford, that as a married couple they remained together until the novelist's death. Bage says little about her in his letters, but little about anybody, male or female, including his sons.

Elizabeth, as the landlady's daughter, would have helped with the running of the inn, and her mother, or Elizabeth herself, may have given Bage inspiration for a light-hearted portrayal of the landlady of 'The Falcon' in *Man as He Is*, a falcon being a very different bird from a swan. Calling her Mrs Bane, a name only one letter different from Bage, may be a light-hearted pun on bane of one's life.

The hostess, Mrs. Bane, a widow, to a fine open good humoured countenance, added great personal gravity, perhaps equal to 250lb. avoirdupois; and was besides a very reputable and respected good woman.<sup>3</sup>

Bage had no daughters of his own, only step-daughters, yet in the preface to *Mount Henneth*, his first novel, he is found jocularly bowing to convention by promising his daughters new silk-gowns because they had reminded him it had been some while since he had bought any for them. From what is known of two of his 'daughters', Margaret Botevylle and Edith Bourne, they could hardly be described as conventional themselves. Margaret Botevyle, who married Charles Bage in 1781, had a home education, something of which her father, Shrewsbury apothecary Thomas Botevylle, was proud. And three weeks after Edith Bourne married Dr Edward Bage their baby, Mary, was baptised at Tamworth. There was no mention of new gowns in the preface to *Man as He Is*. Instead Bage criticises the conventional education of women because all they seem to be taught is how to dress and behave fashionably. As with his opposition to the slave-trade there is no significant change in his stance on the need for

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<sup>3</sup> Bage *MAHI*, I, 84.

educational reform for women from his first to last novel, but there is more conviction in his belief that this reform was necessary.

It is known from the contents of a letter from Charles Bage to Catherine Hutton that in later life Bage preferred a game of cards with women rather than being in the company of those who had not read his favourite authors, and consequently with whom he had little in common.<sup>4</sup>

### **Towards education for women**

In the previous chapter Bage's opposition to slavery was discussed and part of the discussion concentrated on women whose freedom had been taken from them. Some cultural differences between East and West were observed through the characters of Flowney from *Man as He Is* and Honoria Warren from *The Fair Syrian*. Other forms of female servitude played upon Bage's mind: a maidservant towards a master or mistress, and that of a daughter towards her parents. To address this he constructed literary sub-plots and other devices which encouraged emancipation from the domestic and filial duties imposed upon women by conventions of the day, redirecting his readers towards education in the sciences and education in alternative lifestyles.

Between the publication of *James Wallace* and the publication of *Man as He Is*, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) was published in opposition to the new Republic in France. Its main argument was that anarchy could ensue if society did not rely on established social, political and religious structures. Corresponding societies, political societies and philosophical societies had been springing

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<sup>4</sup> BA&H, MS 486804, Inner Iron Room 12 L52.41. CB/CH.

up for many years and were largely made up of free-thinkers, secularists and dissenters who debated alternatives to the *status quo*. Central government was alarmed that revolution might spread to England from across the channel. To prevent any event of this nature becoming reality public figures like Burke presented the government position while caricatures appeared in the popular press belittling scientists and dissenters like Joseph Priestley and politicians like Charles James Fox. Sermons were preached from the pulpits to further denigrate dissenters and engender loyalty to the Church and King. As discussed in previous chapters, the cumulative effect of these verbal tirades led to the Birmingham Riots of 1791. They had a profound impact on Bage, most likely because his friend, William Hutton, was a sufferer. In *Man as He Is* Bage opposes Burke's *Reflections*, as much as fiction is capable of doing, while Tom Paine factually challenges it in his *Rights of Man* (1791–2). Also in *Man as He Is* Bage argues for a proper education for women at the same time that Mary Wollstonecraft pursues similar objectives in *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), a book Bage would read and praise in his next novel, *Hermsprong* (1796). It is against this background that a change can be seen in Bage's fiction, not a total or immediate change but something that had been developing in his earlier novels leading to a greater need for educational reform, especially for women, in his last two. That change manifests itself in his support for women's progress, and the way his main female characters become more commanding, stronger, more radical and quite different from other fictional heroines of the day, including those found in his first four novels.

Despite this difference Bage is supportive of women in his earlier novels, just to a less developed extent. Influenced by those people with whom he associated, he developed his strong and liberated female characters gradually until they became more strikingly endearing than his earlier female creations, which were not much different from other heroines found

in the mass of novels generated in Leadenhall Street and elsewhere. In his earlier novels it is minor females who make the biggest impact. It is as though the supporting roles of free-thinking women in his earlier novels were a test of public reaction to this new type of female character, to find out just how far he could put the case against domestic servitude, filial duty and a lack of education for women. When there was no adverse reaction to this kind of experimentation in the early works it left him free to experiment further. That progression though slow and deliberate led to the creation of new female characters.

By the time *Man as He Is* and *Hermesprong* were published his two most dominant women characters, neither of whom was the heroine, had a deep understanding of men and were capable of articulating clear philosophical and moral opinions. It was at a time when the climate was changing politically and the French revolution, in which so many reformers had placed their hopes, was degenerating with the 'Terror', while in the Midlands the impact of the Birmingham Riots deeply affected Bage. It is evident that 'Church and King' mentality was not confined to Birmingham but was just as prevalent in Tamworth. Incidents closest to where Bage lived had the most profound effect on him, and this can be seen from the change in tone of his letters, and his desire to shun company in his locality. He still followed his political and scientific pursuits with visits to Birmingham for mathematics lessons from Thomas Hanson, with less frequent visits to Derby, where he would occasionally meet with the illuminati of the Derby philosophical society, in particular his long-time friend, Erasmus Darwin. Darwin, and for that matter Whitehurst, another of Bage's early friends, and formally a Derby man, were both strong proponents of education for women. This was a tenet of philosophical societies in general in the eighteenth century, particularly evident in those in which Darwin was involved, although as Paul Elliott has been careful to

note these societies excluded women as members.<sup>5</sup> Richard Lovell Edgeworth, like Darwin and Whitehurst, a member of the famous Lunar Society, in collaboration with his novelist daughter, Maria, co-wrote *Practical Education* (1798), a treatise offering among other educational reforms alternative ideas for the education of women.<sup>6</sup> They were not the only educators from the Lunar Society and not the only father and daughter duo. James Keir drew on his translation of Macquer's *Chemistry* (1771) and his own *Mineralogy of the South-west part of Staffordshire* (1798) into *Dialogues on Chemistry between a father and his daughter* in a series of conversations between him and his daughter, Amelia.<sup>7</sup> Though it is true that women do not appear on membership lists of philosophical societies in the Midlands many went to philosophical and scientific lectures. This is clear from Joseph Wright's philosophical paintings and from the Wolferstan diaries.

Bage, not being resident in Derby, could only be a country member of the philosophical society there. Two founder members, his friend, Erasmus Darwin and the Reverend Thomas Gisborne, like Edgeworth and Keir in Birmingham, wrote treatises aimed at re-evaluating the education of women and changing their roles in society.<sup>8</sup> That these books were published within twelve months of one another shows the wave of active campaigning for an improvement in women's rights and educational reform which was propagated through most of the philosophical, corresponding and literary societies. It was a wave which Bage had caught four or five years earlier with *Man as He Is*. In this novel he informs his

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Elliott, 'The Derby Philosophers: Urban Scientific Culture and Society in Provincial England, c. 1750-1850' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2000), p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (London: J. Johnson, 1798).

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm McKinnon Dick, 'Discourses for the new industrial world: Industrialisation and the education of the public in late eighteenth-century Britain', *History of Education*, 37, No. 4 (2008), 567-584 (p. 583).

<sup>8</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education* (London: J. Johnson, 1797) and Thomas Gisborne, *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: printed for T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1797).

readers from the very start that women of this age are in need of education, and not the kind that teaches them to ‘dress with vanity, and behave with pride’.<sup>9</sup>

Money was not as important to Bage as personal integrity, a quality of his which was never in question. As Hutton tells us Bage believed fraud was beneath a man.<sup>10</sup> His obituary claims him to be ‘of the most scrupulous integrity’ and Scott, from biographical information supplied by Catherine Hutton, adds to this that his ‘integrity, his honour, his devotion to truth, were undeviating and incorruptible’.<sup>11</sup> Distancing himself from the first four novels was not in effect a bad idea especially since it is in the last two novels, which nearly all critics give most acclaim, which his strongest female characters appear. In *Man as He Is* (1792) a Quakeress, Miss Carlill, as well as possessing the highest moral standards and standing, has the will and intellect which enable her to win debates with an authoritarian high-churchman, the Reverend Holford, and she and her friend, Cornelia Colerain, even grace the table of the Lunar Society, while in *Hermesprong* (1796), it is Maria Fluart, a traditionally-educated young woman who demonstrates revolutionary principles of how women should use their specific talents to best advantage in a patriarchal society. There are hints of Bage taking exception to the traditional female role in earlier novels through characters like the liberated Miss Caradoc in *Mount Henneth*, characters like Amington’s sister, Amelia, before her marriage and after Lord Bembridge’s death in *The Fair Syrian*, and also from *The Fair Syrian*, Amina, the Georgian sex-slave discussed in the last chapter. Unfortunately from a women’s progress perspective these are all minor characters and in need of further exposure and development to make them more rounded, a purpose Bage more successfully fulfils in his last two

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<sup>9</sup> Bage *MAHI*, I, iii.

<sup>10</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478).

<sup>11</sup> Scott, *Misc. Prose*, 540. Catherine Hutton repeats this character note in her novel *The Miser Married* (London, 1813), iii, p. 195.

novels. Although that observation is crucial to the argument presented in this thesis it is necessary to look in more depth at the earlier novels to see just how his support for the progress and development of women evolved, and his first novel is a good place to start.

As the reader approaches the happy and traditional ending of *Mount Henneth* there comes into perspective an overhanging prenuptial questioning as to just how blissful marriage might in reality be from those who have only observed it from outside. Julia Foston writes to Laura Stanley:

Many and fierce have been the contentions between Messrs. the Cheslyns and doctor Gordon on the one part, and three spinsters of the names of Camitha, Ann, and Julia, on the other. The first contending to reduce the latter into bondage, and the latter, yet a little while, to preserve their liberty.<sup>12</sup>

It might be noted Bage's opinion of marriage is often quite cynical and his letters and novels tend, in a jocular way, to indicate that marriage is a reasonably good cure for love.<sup>13</sup> In *Mount Henneth* these six soon-to-be-wed characters, increased to eight with Laura and Tom Sutton, are quite conventional even though their desire to live in communal co-existence might be described as unconventional, and while it can be argued that his women are questioning individuals the questions they raise are within acceptable standards of male and female behaviour of the period. It is the men who are destined to pursue philosophical followings while the women attend to communal pleasures.<sup>14</sup> As role models these women provide little that is new and little that is likely to change society. However Steeves

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<sup>12</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 238-239.

<sup>13</sup> BA&H, MS 486802 II R 29, Robert Bage Letters. There is an undated letter to Hutton, probably written in early 1795, in which Bage talks of his wife scolding him. There is another, probably 21 November 1796, which he starts "When I was in love I could scarce have a greater disposition to oblige my fair one than I now have, thee." As with his novels there is sarcasm in the letters and his marriage, according to Hutton, was a happy one.

<sup>14</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 306-7.

suggests that Laura is ‘almost a new creation’ with her open-mindedness and frankness and that both she and her friend, Julia, have brains and use them, a virtue which is uncommon in fiction of the period.<sup>15</sup> For the development of the novel there is a sense of a new awakening in Bage and even in his first work one character clearly breaks the mould of convention. She is Miss Caradoc, a truly liberated young woman who points out, to the embarrassment of the rest of the female company, the goings on in a field between a mare and an ass, then defends in ‘the science of generation’ Leeuwenhoek’s system against the egg system favoured by her brother. They finish with a debate on circumcision which prompts John Cheslyn to comment on the ‘novelty’ of hearing such words ‘from the mouth of a woman’.<sup>16</sup>

Miss Caradoc has her own hall of philosophy where visitors are ‘entertained with puppets dancing in water, electric shocks, and the humours of a magic lantern. Phosphoric letters shine upon the darkened wall, and living vipers crawl upon the ceiling’.<sup>17</sup> In the pursuit of science she minces up snails, ‘kills cats in an airpump and generates eels in vinegar’.<sup>18</sup> Miss Caradoc is arguably the most interesting female character in the book but unfortunately she does not appear until the second volume and subsequently remains underdeveloped in terms of what she might have become. Reference to the air-pump evokes an image of Joseph Wright’s famous painting of that name in which a bird of the parakeet family is almost asphyxiated as part of an experiment. In Wright’s painting there is obvious disgust on the faces of children watching the experiment but disgust does not appear to enter the mind of Miss Caradoc. For her it is science for the sake of science. Her hall is described as being a place where all ‘the philosophic sorcery was performed, which Ozanam taught, and

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<sup>15</sup> Steeves, *Before Jane Austen*, p. 274.

<sup>16</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 57-8.

<sup>17</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 82-3.

<sup>18</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 56.

Hooper compiled'.<sup>19</sup> Bage here is drawing on his own knowledge of mathematics which would have been expanded in sessions with the mathematician, astronomer and surveyor, Thomas Hanson.<sup>20</sup> He told his fellow Jacobin novelist, William Godwin, that had it not been for a lack of books he might have written something other than novels.<sup>21</sup>

In Bage's works, chastity and honour have a high ranking in line with fiction of the period. What makes his novels different is that the fallen woman is not normally condemned. But neither is she given free permission to do as she will. Perhaps a clause from the constitution drawn up for admittance into the Henneth Castle community best illustrates what Bage considered the reading public might find acceptable behaviour for womankind, at least in his early work. The community admits any 'lady who having by accident slid in her youth, hath recovered the lapse by a chastity of ten unspotted years, and a prudence that hath sustained all the attacks of calumny, save only those of beaux and ancient maiden ladies at the tea table'.<sup>22</sup> By today's standards ten years of chastity imposed against a 'fallen woman', whose fall was not her fault, would be considered extremely harsh. This helps put everything into context for eighteenth-century fiction, which was to become even more prudish in the next century and evoke criticism, on moral grounds, from Sir Walter Scott, who believed Bage had extended the debauchery of male heroes to the 'female sex, and seems at times even to sport with the ties of marriage'.<sup>23</sup> Bage's allusion to the slip being 'by accident' is most likely incorporated into the constitution to admit women like Caralia, who was raped by Sepoys but who Foston, the leading force behind the Henneth Castle community,

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<sup>19</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 83. Jacques Ozanam, *Récréations mathématique et physiques* (1694) was a standard, and William Hooper was an 18<sup>th</sup> century mathematician and astronomer.

<sup>20</sup> Hutton, *Memoirs*, *MM*, 478-479 (p. 478).

<sup>21</sup> Godwin, *Friends*, I, pp. 261-264.

<sup>22</sup> Bage, *MH*, II, 241.

<sup>23</sup> Scott, *Misc. Prose*, 548.

marries against convention. The clause would also have allowed admittance for Kitty Ross who appears in his next novel, *Barham Downs*, a woman who Scott believed had no right to ‘assume a place among the virtuous of her sex as if she had never fallen from her proper sphere.’<sup>24</sup>

Kitty Ross, though not the main female character, is the one best equipped for teaching new ideas on moral judgment. Kitty is the victim of a prejudiced society which makes examples of women who lose their virginity outside of marriage. Seduced at sixteen, to stay in her home and village becomes an impossibility, so she heads for Ireland to try and reunite with the father of her unborn child. To add to her sorrows she is raped on the journey and miscarries. Condemnation comes from her father, her stepmother, her village, Miss Amelia Delane, daughter of a fawning clergyman with a rout-loving wife who together plan the downfall of the heroine, Annabella Whitaker, and the landlady where the rape takes place, who has much less concern for the damaged child as the ruin of her ‘house’s reputation’.<sup>25</sup> Kitty, however, is not without support and this is provided by the more sensitive and caring characters in the novel, those with whom most readers would sympathise, the kindly apothecary, Dr Arnold, the Whitaker sisters, and the main male characters, Henry Davis and William Wyman, the latter whom Kitty marries; again against convention. It is the new approach to the loss of female honour which sets Bage apart and irritates Scott who believes ‘there must be, not penitence and reformation alone, but humiliation and abasement, in the recollection of her errors’ and ‘to compromise farther, would open a door to the most unbounded licentiousness’.<sup>26</sup> Later in the novel when Sir George Osmond hears about a seduction on his estate it leads him to observe how heavy is the burden of anxiety Molly Paterson has to bear ‘because the laws of

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<sup>24</sup> Scott, *Misc. Prose*, 549.

<sup>25</sup> Bage, *BD*, I, 293.

<sup>26</sup> Scott, *Misc. Prose*, 550.

nature and society are at variance'.<sup>27</sup> If Bage's philosophy regarding the fallen woman could be encapsulated in a few words it is to be found on the same page in a much-quoted observation that society punishes man too little for an offence for which it punishes woman too much (quoted or referred to by Kelly, Faulkner and Tompkins).<sup>28</sup> Parish laws were particularly harsh towards women. Even as late as 1795 widows could have their children taken from them if they married again and relocated, but the harshest punishment fell upon an 'unmarried pregnant woman, who could still be compulsorily removed back to her own parish on the bare possibility of her becoming chargeable' to the parish in which she lived.<sup>29</sup>

In *James Wallace* the complexity and fickleness of human nature is well captured following the seduction of Rachael Potts, a maid-servant. Bage turns this serious affair into light humour. The instrument of her undoing is Thomas Gamidge, son of the family to whom Rachael is a servant. Mr Gamidge senior is a justice, but his wife feels herself quite as well equipped to pass judgement on the young ruined girl. 'What vile man have you been connected with, you abominable strumpet?'<sup>30</sup> Rachael remains silent through a barrage of accusations and insults until she is brought before Mr Gamidge.

'Rachael Potts, you stands indicted before me, Thomas Gamidge, Esq; justice of the peace and quorum, for the wicked and heinous sin of fornication. Rachael Potts, I suppose you knows what fornication is? I hopes I have no occasion to instruct you in the nature of it: It is a thing abhorred by God and man, and nobody never commits it without lustful and evil desires.'

'And all manner of concupiscence you nasty slut,' adds Madam Gamidge.

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<sup>27</sup> Bage, *BD*, II, 189.

<sup>28</sup> Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 42 (hereafter Kelly, 1780-1805). Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 66. Tompkins, *PN*, p. 203.

<sup>29</sup> J. D. Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century: a study in the life and labour under the squirearchy*, 2nd edn. (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966) p. 274.

<sup>30</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 85.

‘What say you, Rachael Potts, guilty or not guilty?’—Rachael answered only with tears, and she was beautiful in tears.<sup>31</sup>

Mrs Gamidge would like to see Rachael whipped and the father sent to a house of correction. Mr Gamidge insists that the wretch will marry her and make her an honest woman. There then follows a scene where the Justice does indeed try to instruct the young girl in the nature of fornication, until, to avoid further advances, she confesses that his son is the father of her predicament, and in a neatly contrived Malapropism informs the Justice it would be ‘so like in — in — incense — God would never forgive me’.<sup>32</sup> This comedy is lost on Gamidge, whose son, another Thomas, wants to marry Rachael. But Mrs Gamidge would rather James Wallace accommodate the pretty and pregnant maidservant and to such an end she offers a bribe of one hundred pounds.<sup>33</sup> Wallace would rather have the ‘getting’ of his own children and after the Gamidge’s daughter throws herself at him he plans a hasty retreat to escape having the getting of his own children too early in his career and life.

Thomas, junior, tells James Wallace on the day Wallace is dismissed, that he intends to marry Rachael within a week despite what his parents think.<sup>34</sup> However a letter from his sister, Mary, a fortnight later, while expressing strong feelings for James, simply informs that Thomas is hearing enough about his sins with Rachael from his parents, but no mention of any marriage is made.<sup>35</sup> And nothing further is heard of the Gamidges. This episode, unlike falls from grace in former novels, is not accompanied by any pronouncements from correspondents or protagonists as to the morality or otherwise of the lovers’ actions. Instead the diversion from the main plot is left to speak for itself. The Justice and his wife take the moral

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<sup>31</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 86-7.

<sup>32</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 112-3.

<sup>34</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 120.

<sup>35</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 145-6.

high ground in condemning the maidservant and her lover, but only until they learn it is their son who has made her pregnant. While still being condemnatory their attitudes change markedly. No longer are they insisting that the 'wretch' marry Rachael, but they are actively seeking ways to prevent such an event. The parents do not want the family image tainted by introducing servile blood into it. Thomas junior, however, believes that because Rachael is from a lowly situation her requirements and expectations will not be as high, and she will be more frugal with the purse-strings.<sup>36</sup>

Little has been said about *James Wallace* as a novel aimed at changing the lot of women. Indeed little can be said about it in that respect. Women, it seems, fall for James Wallace in much the way that they fell for Tom Jones. Unlike Fielding's hero, James is morally incorruptible and continually runs away from those who would have him close to their bosoms, their bodies and their hearts. He remains innocent in the ways of physical passion until he marries the object of his desire, thus fulfilling the novel's intent from a perspective of plot. By this time he has come into an inheritance, proved himself in the ways of bravery and commerce, and is thus a fitting partner for a wealthy merchant's daughter. In some ways James Wallace is the masculine equivalent to Honoria Warren, chaste, desirable and unobtainable. For him it is convention and class-division that keeps him from the woman he loves, Julia Lamoude; the same expectations of society keep Julia from James.

The Lamoude family business, the reader learns, was built upon mercantile success and Julia becomes Wallace's employer on the recommendation of her brother, James Lamoude. It was Lamoude who engineered Wallace's release from a wrongful imprisonment in France.

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<sup>36</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 100.

Wallace is a humble yet educated footman, who advances by setting a good example to his employer and her Uncle Paul in managing the family business. As his popularity increases he is in a position to instruct Julia in the benefits of giving away her money to the poor, as mentioned in the chapter addressing poverty. Other female characters who fall for his charm as well as Mary Gamidge and Julia, are Julia's aunt Rebecca, and later, when James becomes a merchant trader in Spain, the beautiful Estella Udivido. Of those who throw themselves at him Julia's aunt, Rebecca, is perhaps the most interesting. Her two brothers, James and Paul, are educated and given trades but her chance of an education is dismissed with a single sentence: 'As for Beck, she's as well where she is; the less girls learn, the better'.<sup>37</sup> Their father wills his estate with three parts to Paul, two to James and one to Rebecca, who 'was unable to comprehend the reason for this difference: Daughters were the gift of God as well as sons, and, in her judgment, to the full as deserving'.<sup>38</sup> Her brother, Paul, however, is of the belief that the 'proper duties of a woman are to breed, to spin and make puddings'.<sup>39</sup> When Wallace gets accidentally wounded intervening in a duel he receives the daily attention of this elderly maiden aunt who soon proposes marriage to him.<sup>40</sup> His visits from Julia, while being less frequent, mean much more to him. When the servants start talking, despite being in love, James takes the opportunity to go to sea to avoid the unwanted attention of Rebecca and what seems, at least at that point in the plot, like an impossible future with Julia. As far as the progress of women is concerned *James Wallace* is perhaps the least progressive of the six novels. For the progress of Bage as a writer, however, there is a big development, in the 'show me, don't tell me' way he lets the reader decide what is right or wrong, as with the seduction of Rachael Potts. The novel's merits lie elsewhere, in being the first novel with a mercantile business theme, and in

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<sup>37</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 252.

<sup>38</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 255.

<sup>39</sup> Bage *JW*, I, 276.

<sup>40</sup> Bage *JW*, II, 179.

its experimental off-setting of, and contrast between, the virginal James Wallace and the rakish Sir Everard Moreton, whose main aim is to deflower Paulina and as many other young women as he can. Although the conclusion is unsatisfactorily traditional there are times when both James and Julia become perplexed that the daughter of a merchant can fall for her footman. Julia even gets criticized by Paracelsus Holman, a philosophical friend to James, about her treatment being the cause of James departure to sea. She asks for his opinion as to a match between 'the reformed sailor', as a pirated edition subtitles the novel, and herself, witnessed in the following exchange.

'Could you, as a friend, Mr. Holman, advise me to an union with Mr. Wallace?'

'Yes — if your aim was happiness. — No — if it was splendour and parade.'

'Consider, Sir—I have against me the customs of society—its opinions—its proprieties.'

'Yes—the chaste maiden sisterhood of fifty will wag its tongue against you. If, like the sensitive plant, you shrink at the touch of fools—think not of James Wallace. He believes you to be one of the very small number of mortal men and women, who think for themselves.'

'Perhaps you despise the opinions of the world too much.'

'When they are founded in folly, Miss Lamounde.'

'Folly to you, may be wisdom to others.'

'It is my misfortune, Madam, to be left often in a small minority.'<sup>41</sup>

While James Wallace, like Hermsprong, is very much 'man as he is not' female characters rather predictably fit the category of 'woman as she is' at least up to 1788. Miss Lamounde cannot love her footman because of convention, even though James Wallace considers her to be a person who thinks for herself, the opinions, customs and proprieties of society prohibit the union. Indeed it is not until he comes into a fortune that James is seen to be a suitable match for Julia.

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<sup>41</sup> Bage *JW*, III, 65-6.

However his next novel, *Man as He Is*, introduces a much more forceful woman, who knows her mind and speaks it. Miss Carlill, a character based on a real person, the famous Quaker, Mary Knowles, shows intelligence as well as fortitude.

From his very first novel the domestic plight of women before and after marriage is observed, seen through the women's own correspondence, and often presented to the reader in a light-hearted way characteristic of the novelist's earlier style. His last two novels are much different and there are significant improvements. The wit remains but, among other novel-writing conventions, the epistolary form is dropped leaving him free to make overall observations and conclusions which were previously unavailable to him. Although there was greater freedom from dispensing with the epistolary form his penultimate novel had shortcomings. One fault of *Man as He Is*, and one which Bage himself acknowledges, is plot development. In the preface he notes this failing and even questions whether or not the work is a novel at all.<sup>42</sup> Despite his own misgivings as a piece of fiction it was very well received and some thought it to be his best novel.<sup>43</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, while questioning its structure, singled it out for special praise wondering why more was not known of an author so capable of playing on his readers' emotions.<sup>44</sup> *Man as He Is* was experimental and Bage knowingly left it flimsy in structure whereas his last novel, *Hermesprong*, was structurally tight. It might be construed from this that he had heeded Wollstonecraft's criticism, except she never made the criticism of *Man as He Is* until just after *Hermesprong* had been published, and, more pertinent, his plots and sub-plots are so ludicrously of the genre in the earlier work, that it is clear he is often satirising the novel as a stereotypical

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<sup>42</sup> Bage *MAHI*, I, vi-vii.

<sup>43</sup> Tomkins, *PN*, p. 196. Steeves, *Before Jane Austen*, p. 282. Anna Letitia Barbauld, *The British Novelists, with an essay and prefaces biographical and critical*, 50 vols (London, F. C. & J. Rivington, 1810), XLVIII, preface.

<sup>44</sup> *MW*, ed. Todd, et al, VII, 472-473.

literary form.<sup>45</sup> This was not a new development because he had always lampooned the form and shamelessly borrowed or amended plots to the greater goal of reforming society. Steeves found a question ‘lurking in the background of *The Fair Syrian* and *James Wallace*’ as to ‘how far the observance of moral conventions should be permitted, in personal opinions and conduct, to impair the freedom or cloud the happiness of others’.<sup>46</sup> Novels, for Bage, were vehicles enabling him to point out the failings of society and raise awareness of, and sympathy for, issues like poverty and the immorality of the African slave-trade. Arguably though his main campaign was aimed at improving the educational opportunities for women, and since Bage believed education was of the utmost importance for progress, he foresaw that educated women would be able to liberate themselves from the encumbrances which held them back, namely, filial duty, dowries and the lack of rights in society. By giving his readers female role-models of a kind unheard of at the time it would offer a way forward for a gender which had no voting rights and very few other rights.

While plot has been pointed out as one of his weaknesses, characterisation is a strong point for Bage, although everyone does not agree with this observation. Faulkner, certainly, when discussing his epistolary novels, finds the vehicle not ‘appropriate for his undertaking, which involved neither Richardson’s psychological probing nor Smollett’s humorous characterization, but rather a concern with social ideas’.<sup>47</sup> Despite Faulkner’s misgivings nearly all Bage’s characters, male and female, are true to themselves and each is imbued with traits which are easy to distinguish from each other and the literary stereotypes which had preceded them. Bage had no intention of trying to emulate Richardson and it is difficult to argue with Steeves who calls him ‘anti-Richardsonian in a

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<sup>45</sup> A good example of this can be found at the beginning of *Hermesprong* where the hero rescues the woman readers rightly suspect he will marry from going over a cliff on a spooked horse.

<sup>46</sup> Steeves, *Before Jane Austen*, p. 282.

<sup>47</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 100.

very explicit sense'.<sup>48</sup> If anything Bage's literary debt to English novelists is to Smollett and Fielding and he is of that school which used humorous sub-plots and digressions to enable characters to speak their minds in intelligent discourses intended to persuade sceptics. So while Miss Carlill and Miss Fluart are in some ways strongly self-opinionated, it is very easy to tell them apart as characters, both in attitude and conversational tone.

There is something slightly prudish in the character of Miss Carlill, whose spoken condemnation of loose morality coupled with forgiveness is constant with her religious Quaker beliefs, whereas the flirtatious Miss Fluart resorts to well-tried womanly guiles to attain a successful conclusion on behalf of her friend, Caroline Campinet. Both these free women are highly intelligent and far removed from what was expected of eighteenth century women and heroines of novels. The traditional heroine is always present in his novels, being chased in a Quixotic way by the hero, but with the arrival of his last two novels it is the friends and confidantes of the heroines who stand out as women most worthy of being emulated for the benefit of female progress. Caroline Campinet is a somewhat vapid and dutiful daughter, torn between her love for Hermsprong and the perceived obligations of a daughter to her father. She knows her mind, at least she knows she does not want to marry Sir Phillip Chestrum, her father's choice and an aristocrat whose only claim to any skills, social or intellectual, is his title. Miss Colerain, the traditional heroine in *Man as He Is*, serves a similar purpose but has a resolve of her own. For her it is not any duty to her father that keeps her apart from the hero, Sir George Paradyne, so much as Sir George's own folly in pursuing the vices of this world on the grand tour. Peter Faulkner has observed that it is an 'open question' that if Miss Colerain had taken the advice of Miss Carlill and accepted Sir George, without putting him through 'the probationary period most

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<sup>48</sup> Steeves, *Before Jane Austen*, p. 273.

fictional lovers had to endure' he might not have gone astray.<sup>49</sup> But then there would not have been a narrative through which to present a case for social reform. In both of Bage's last novels advice is sought, not through the object of these men's passions, but often through the stronger women, whose undeniable strengths lie in their level-headedness and wisdom. Heroines, if by heroines are meant the ones who end up marrying the main character, are not the women who arouse the most reaction in his readers. Instead, it is their bosom companions, and it is this contrast of the new liberated woman matched against society's ideal role-model that sets Bage apart from many of his literary contemporaries, enabling him to point the way towards a new form of social relations. For him the main way forward for women's progress is through education and he uses educated women, and men, to point out the gender-based shortcomings of society. For example, when Sir George Paradyne is sick for want of the love of Cornelia, his sister, Emilia, tries to comfort him.

The book of nature still lies open before you. Is there in this, nothing you can read with pleasure? Of so many wise and sensible men in every part of Europe, who form their happiness in an attention to her operations, are you the only one to whom she presents nothing interesting? The elements are all before you; compound and decompound them for yourself. You must be a bad chemist, if you can extract no felicity from penetrating into the curiosities which surround you.<sup>50</sup>

He responds by saying that in the book of nature before him man is the only animal with the 'exquisite privilege of being most heartily sick and weary of himself.' He continues:

If man could have taken to himself the epithet of wise, on any just foundation—sure in six thousand years, and sixty thousand communities—some one would have formed a religion without ridicule; a government without corruption.

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<sup>49</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 108.

<sup>50</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 197.

I spare the ladies. Only tell me, my sweet Emilia, in your circles of good company, how high in the mind of the fair sex stand science, probity, and honour? As high, think you, as coaches, cards, and diamonds? I grant you they have virtues, luminous virtues, at a ball; and coruscations at an opera, that set the heart of man on fire.<sup>51</sup>

These exchanges by letter come towards the end of the last book but they are the same opinions Bage expressed in the preface to the first. He then enters the discussion as author.

It is not for the benefit of this history that I have noticed these letters; it is only to shew my fair readers what abominable creatures men may be when they are in love, or in any passion, and crossed in it. For howsoever Sir George may endeavour to conceal it from himself, my humble opinion is, he was in love; and as love is so apt to upset poor reason, we must on that account pardon him his terrible opinions—if we can.<sup>52</sup>

Not for the first time Bage questions the power of passion over the clear process of judgment. Sir George having returned from the Grand Tour during which he indulged himself in numerous vices, has now repented of his sins. He still desires the attention of the woman with whom he first fell in love, Cornelia Colerain. While he compares her to a Madonna on the wall of his sickroom he questions the credentials of the women who have helped bring him down, the ones who think less of science, probity and honour than of coaches, cards and diamonds. Bage apologises on behalf of Sir George and hopes his fair readers will forgive the baronet on account of his young age. He excuses his own involvement in the saga by saying he simply finds it ‘recorded that Sir George unthought his former thinkings; and paid a slumbering tribute to the dignity of man, and the charms of woman. Whether my fair readers will admire or reprobate this versatility of sentiment, is not for me to predict. My business is to shew them — Man.’<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 201.

<sup>52</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 202.

<sup>53</sup> Bage *MAHI*, IV, 204.

His business was to show them, and what he showed them was not just man, because he also showed them that some women, while being morally staunch, had intellect which surpassed the expectations of society, while men, especially under the influence of love or passion were intellectually weak, vulnerable and fickle. The comparison Sir George makes of Cornelia Colerain to a Madonna typifies the 'pedestal woman' syndrome, a figure of purity and mental strength of whom he feels himself unworthy. While he lies in his sickroom he is full of high thoughts and renounces his past actions, but Bage the storyteller, is not going to easily forgive him his past actions, and coincidence is yet to bring the baronet further down. In his mental anguish Sir George takes a walk to the pier where the first woman to disembark is Lady Ann Brixworth, a 'lady' who has a somewhat tarnished reputation and with whom he was rather more than familiar on the Grand Tour. His former lapses are either witnessed by or brought to the attention of Miss Carlill and Miss Colerain. As she disembarks Lady Ann is unaccompanied and invites Sir George to take her arm and escort her home. This he does and upon arrival accepts an invitation to take tea. Unbeknown to him, but rather predictable from a reader viewpoint, Miss Carlill and Miss Colerain are passengers on the same boat, and when he notices them through Lady Ann's window he questions how fate can play so many cruel tricks on him, for they have clearly seen Lady Ann engage him. This is 'man as he is', a weak and changeable being, brought further into disgrace by circumstances beyond his control; and a novelist's craft.

The main female characters, on the other hand, are clear-thinking, rational, pure and reasoning. They are not looking for gaiety and parties, but stability and reliability. They have intelligence, resolve and understanding, qualities which create a stark contrast when pitted against the behaviour of their male counterparts. As Pamela Perkins has observed, some of Bage's comments can be 'predictably deprecating and condescending', presumably as a result of the times in which he lived, coupled with a need

for fulfilling the expectations of his readership, but she balances this by commenting that storylines which so shocked Sir Walter Scott are ‘refreshingly modern’ and rational by today’s standards.<sup>54</sup>

*Hermesprong* is the novel for which Bage is best known and most striking of all female characters in any of his works is Maria Fluart. She is a woman with a purpose, who uses a full armoury of womanly attributes to achieve her end, that is, the rescue of the novel’s heroine, Caroline Campinet, from a forced marriage to the inept and unappealing aristocrat, Sir Philip Chestrum. One of these weapons is flirtation. She unashamedly flirts with Lord Grondale, father of Caroline and the one forcing his daughter into marriage, to expose one of his lordship’s many flaws, a weakness for the charms of a young, intelligent and attractive woman; a coquette according to Sandro Jung.<sup>55</sup> One important aspect Jung exposes is the difference between Maria Fluart, as a fully-rounded and assured character, to Peggy Whitaker and her flirtations in *Barham Downs*. Peggy Whitaker is the sister of Annabella, who flirts with Sir Ambrose Archer with the promise ‘And, oh! how grateful should I be to the man who serves — perhaps who saves, my sister!’<sup>56</sup> Sir Ambrose does indeed help save Annabella and Peggy Whitaker keeps her promise by marrying the older baronet. From a literary angle there is nothing new in such an ending, but it serves to demonstrate how Bage developed his characters, in that Maria Fluart, although her purpose was similar to that of Peggy Whitaker, that is to save a woman from a marriage which would have been unacceptable to her, there is no trade, and no promise involved. Pamela Perkins notices in her introduction to *Hermesprong* that Miss Fluart does not conform to literary convention, since she remains, like the narrator, Gregory Glen,

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<sup>54</sup> Bage *Hermes*. ed. Perk., pp. 23-24.

<sup>55</sup> Sandro Jung, ‘The “new” woman in the late eighteenth century: Miss Fluart and coquetry in Robert Bage’s “Hermesprong”’, in *The Figure of the Coquette in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Shelley King (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008) pp. 125-140.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Bage, *Barham Downs* (London: George Wilkie, 1784), II, 55.

single at the end of the novel.<sup>57</sup> Catherine Hutton, in her novel, *The Miser Married*, gives a worthy description of Maria Fluart, as she does a few other characters from *Hermsprong*.

Miss Fluart is the second female personage in almost every novel. The heroine is always tender and sentimental; so is Miss Campinet. Her friend, by way of contrast, is generally lively, and, if the author know how to make her such, arch and witty; so is Miss Fluart. But, from the days of Richardson, who first drew the character, and called it Charlotte Grandison, to the present, never did I meet with Miss Fluart's equal; she is always arch, and always witty; yet seldom, very seldom, oversteps the modesty of nature. Her scenes with Lord Grondale, particularly that in which she presents herself to be married, instead of Miss Campinet, are inimitable.<sup>58</sup>

As a lady who stayed single herself, Catherine Hutton gives a fair summary of a female protagonist with whom it is hard to find a literary equal, and it is often, as she says, in the scenes with Lord Grondale that her personality shines through. She is not alone in this judgment. Gary Kelly notices how different Maria Fluart is to any other main character, though he observes such tendencies in secondary characters ‘with Jacobinical rebelliousness’ and questions if Bage got the character idea from the coquettish Miss Milner in Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story* (1791).<sup>59</sup> Whether that is the source of the idea is not known but the two characters are so different in that Miss Milner, later Lady Elmwood, is unreliable and weak-willed whereas Maria Fluart is dependable and strong-willed to the point of danger.

Wordplay was a favourite pastime with Bage in the naming of characters. Jung believes her name to be a pun on the word ‘flirt’. Just as likely it is a pun on Mary Stuart, Mary Queen of Scots. In the eighteenth century the

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<sup>57</sup> Bage *Herms*. ed. Perk., p. 51.

<sup>58</sup> Catherine Hutton, *The Miser Married*, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown of Paternoster Row, London, 1813, III, 193.

<sup>59</sup> Kelly, 1780-1805, p. 44.

letter 'f' looked very similar to the letter 's' causing confusions to arise and wit to arise from the confusions. A short 'l' as the second letter could easily lead to a misreading of Fluart for Stuart. But what cements the connection is the disguise that enables Caroline Campinet's escape from a forced marriage, which at the same time presents Miss Fluart as the veiled bride-to-be. Mary Stuart used disguise in the popularised legend that enabled her escape from Lochleven Fortress. Bage borrowed and amended plots from several sources, Smollett and Le Sage among them, and it seems in this instance from reality. Mary Stuart's life would have been local history to Bage since she was also imprisoned at Tutbury Castle. The wedding scene produces Maria Fluart's final torment of, and victory over, Lord Grondale, in her bid to save Caroline. But it is her wit and banter with Hermsprong round the dinner table that just as forcefully shows her to be a new woman in English literature and society. The crucial observation is that Maria Fluart, unlike earlier rebels to convention, is fully-developed and independent in her views on life, society and education.

Women's education lies at the heart of the writings of Bage and while he may have influenced Mary Wollstonecraft in some sub-plot devices for *Maria* she influenced him too, especially with her writings on education. John Sutherland calls Bage a 'novelist of ideas' likening him to Thomas Love Peacock and Aldous Huxley in giving his characters free rein to express themselves as they will within the confines of the plot. Such writing requires of its author great objectivity and this freedom of expression is nowhere more evident than in a dinner party hosted by the Sumelins. Mr Sumelin is a banker. His daughters have been educated at boarding-schools and the elder, Harriet, like her mother, is a typical lady of fashion, saved by Hermsprong from the clutches of her father's crooked clerk with whom she eloped to France; a service which made her a sworn enemy of Hermsprong. The younger daughter, Charlotte, was at the same seminary at the same time as the free-thinking intellectual, Miss Fluart, and

thus took her education from her friend rather than from her tutors or parents.

Mr Sumelin believes women have too much freedom and Hermsprong agrees if he means freedom to visit balls and Ranelaghs. Then making an exception to this rule, he praises Miss Campinet and Miss Fluart by doubting it is possible to find two such liberated women together outside the present company. Miss Fluart, who is clearly enjoying the exchange, does not wish to be made an exception on any account, for flattery is Hermsprong's Achilles' heel, a failing for which he is several times brought to task, but he counters:

Be not angry with me, my dear Miss Fluart; be women what they may,— I am destined to be an adorer. Be angry at Mr. Sumelin here, the indiscriminating Mr. Sumelin. Be angry at Mrs. Wolstonecroft, who has lately abused the dear sex, through two octavo volumes. Who affirms that the mode of their education turns the energies of their minds on trifles.<sup>60</sup>

At this dinner, through the spoken thoughts of Hermsprong, Bage emphasises the need for educational reform on behalf of women away from routs and Ranelaghs in the direction of physics and metaphysics.<sup>61</sup> It is virtually the same message he preaches at the beginning of *Man as He Is*. He calls to his argument Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* and again the establishment education of women comes in for condemnation. In these last two novels women's educational development becomes a main objective and the substance of Bage's message is that any woman can be like Miss Carlill or Maria Fluart if the 'trifles' of fashion, deportment and duty are replaced by subjects which enable women and girls to rationalise the injustices conventions of society were inflicting on them by grooming them solely for the duties of mother

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<sup>60</sup> Bage, *Herm*, II, 168.

<sup>61</sup> Bage, *Herm*, II, 167.

and wife. Bage had kept up-to-date with the latest thought, presented by a woman who today is regarded as a pioneer in the women's movement, and passed on advice for any progressive woman to read. His defence of the 'fallen woman', a feature in his earlier novels, is no longer at the forefront of his approach to women's rights. That line of argument he discarded with the seduction of Rachael Potts in *James Wallace*. While it was important for him to point out the inequalities in the sexes, and how standards applied to seducers and seduced were incongruous, Bage was seeing the bigger picture. If women could analyse what was preventing their progress as human beings on an equal footing with men, all their other problems could be more easily resolved. He was not calling for a university education so much as a universal education. He gave his women readers increasingly radical role-models, female characters for whom marriage was not the prime objective, women who could reason men out of their wits and stupidity; educated women who could see upon what their future depended. In comparison to Mrs Sumelin her husband was quite progressive, yet Hermsprong saw him as lacking discrimination in his assumption that women had too much freedom, when his own belief — and it may be assumed from that Bage's too — was that they had too little.

The Reverend John Hill Charity provided for the education of the poor 'of both sexes' of Elford village.<sup>62</sup> Bage, as a trustee, was helping to put into practice what he espoused in his last two novels — equality of education for boys and girls. His friend, Erasmus Darwin, and other liberal members of the Lunar Society, sought improvement in the education of women and girls, and he too left behind works which aimed at progressive development in standards and which included subject-matter away from the traditional expectations of an educated woman. The curate and schoolmaster for whom Bage sought Godwin's intervention, Richard

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<sup>62</sup> George Griffith, *The Free Schools and Endowments of Staffordshire* (London: Whittaker & Co, 1860), p. 472.

Davies, was an educationalist, which may have been one of the reasons Bage was attracted to him. He was still a master at Leicester Free Grammar School and curate at St. Margaret's when he got the parish to set up St. Margaret's Charity School by subscription.<sup>63</sup>

It can be seen from this chapter that Bage, who had previously shown some concern for the education of women, in his last novel creates a match for the hero, an endearing person of the opposite sex who is not the heroine, nor even competition for the heroine. The match is present on a purely cerebral level. Miss Fluart has been traditionally educated, but rebels against the manners and etiquette expected of women. She is bold and daring, and even teasing, when she needs to be, but all the time she is concerned with the main objective, the salvation of Caroline, and if that means recourse to a pistol, which it does, Miss Fluart is bold enough to brandish one. If Hermsprong is *Man as He Is Not* — the novel's alternative title — Maria Fluart is almost certainly intended to be woman as she is not, or was not at the time he was writing. Bage gives his readers two unique characters, role-models who are not linked by physical desires and not in love with one another, yet united in an intellectual sense. This is a far cry from *Man as He Is*, in which Sir George Paradyne gambles and parties his way round Europe and almost ends up losing the pure, intellectually-superior if caring heroine, because of his wayward lifestyle. Sexual attraction is not an overriding issue with the main characters that populate *Hermsprong* and this in itself shows continued progress. In *Man as He Is* Miss Carlill presents an example of female emancipation and makes a

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<sup>63</sup> Building of the school was completed in 1810. In 1821 it had 100 pupils, which a quarter of a century later had increased to approximately 100 boys and 70 girls. Davies rose to head master of the failing Free Grammar School in 1816, after which the number of boarders increased from zero to 15 and free scholars from 14 to 25. When he died in 1841 the school died with him, but in 1834 a new school had been built attached to St. Margaret's and by 1846 the two schools together were educating approximately 500 scholars. VCH, Leicester, ed. R. A. McKinley (1958) 4, pp.328-335. William White, *History, Gazeteer, and Directory of the County of Leicestershire* (Sheffield: Printed by Robt. Leader, 1836) p. 99.

significant advancement in terms of women's rights. She takes on the establishment in the dominating form of the Reverend Holford, and like Mary 'Molly' Knowles, the model she was based on in real life, did with Samuel Johnson, obtains a resounding intellectual victory. This in itself was not commonplace in novels, but Miss Fluart went even further. She was, as Catherine Hutton noted, the 'second female' found in nearly every novel from Richardson's *Charlotte Grandison* onwards, but as she also noted Miss Fluart excelled all her predecessors in intellect and wit. She may be described as the 'second female' in terms of plot but in essence she was the first in terms of characterisation. Caroline Campinet was the love of Hermsprong's heart, but might just have been any heroine from any novel, whereas Maria Fluart was a new creation whose like had never previously been portrayed in English literature. She had bloomed from the budding possibilities found in earlier novels and become a rare spectacle to behold. Her precursors had been largely minor characters: Miss Caradoc, Amina and Emelia Paradyne. Miss Caradoc showed that science could be for girls too. Amina showed that women need not be inhibited by social and filial convention. Emelia showed that women could philosophise as well as men. Honoria Warren, *The Fair Syrian*, who until Miss Carlill was the strongest main female of Bage's creations, still succumbed to convention, and so did Miss Carlill within the bounds of her religious beliefs, but Maria Fluart was not constrained by any popular conventions. She was a liberated intellectual with no equal in literature, and an exemplar for women's progress.

In terms of development as a novelist the progress for Bage steadily gains momentum until it reaches new possibilities. In his first novel he marries off his sets of characters and leaves them to enjoy their Utopian togetherness at Henneth Castle. There is no such fairy-tale ending for Hermsprong, just a passing mention of setting up a society of friends on the Potowmac if his marriage to Caroline is prevented by Lord Grondale.

Bage can no longer see any Utopia on the European side of the Atlantic, such as the one established in Wales in *Mount Henneth*, nor can he even see the mutual congruity found in *Barham Downs* where the protagonists are joined together in multiple weddings willing to share their individual talents. In *The Fair Syrian* a move away from communal coexistence can already be detected at the end when the leading characters plan to share one another's company on a reciprocal basis, in the British Isles and France, and *James Wallace* has a predictable ending — with the footman marrying his mistress. In all his novels matrimony was simply the end-product of plot for Bage and the narrative a vehicle for political expression, first notably found in *Man as He Is* where he quickly sketches over the marriages at the end before getting back to the novel's purpose, refuting Burke's conjecture that man has no rights. Throughout this work he makes his own asides with some clear responses to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, snide author comments like 'Am I a bishop? that I should deviate from the plain path of truth, and take the high priori road to ipse-dixitation?'<sup>64</sup> In *Hermesprong* he creates larger than life characters, to defend the rights of women and those living in poverty. Gary Kelly believes that Bage, and the other male Jacobin novelists:

learned from women that logic is not necessarily truth, and that facts are not the only knowledge. If they taught their female friends to add a new philosophical rigour and historical perspective to their fictions and their lives, they themselves learned that there were other ways of feeling, of philosophising, and of writing, than those traditionally practised by men.<sup>65</sup>

These feelings led to the creation of characters as diverse and developed as Gregory Glen, Charles Hermesprong and Maria Fluart. It was a leap in literary characterisation and a leap in the development of the English novel.

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<sup>64</sup> Bage *MAHI*, III, 134-5. This was before Jeremy Bentham coined the word ipsedixitism, meaning dogmatic and unsubstantiated self-assertions. Here Bage may be referencing a couplet from Alexander Pope's *Dunciad*, 'We nobly take the high Piori Road, /and reason downward, till we doubt of God.'

<sup>65</sup> Kelly, 1780-1805, p. 266.

Whether Bage's personal progression was partly a result of external events, like the French Revolution and the Birmingham Riots may remain a matter of conjecture, but other authors who produce their best books first often struggle to produce anything as good, and there are few, if any, who would argue that Bage's last two novels were his best.

## Conclusion

Bage has been described as a ‘provincial novelist’, a ‘Jacobin novelist’, a ‘revolutionist’, a ‘novelist of ideas’, a ‘novelist of doctrine or purpose’ a ‘doctrinaire novelist proper’ and ‘a thorough-going radical’. Without delving into the semantics of these descriptions, or others, this study has aimed to show that Bage was indeed a radical thinker, in the progressive and political sense of the word, both in the intent of his novels and in his personal involvements outside of his literary productions. If he felt he saw injustice he saw the need for that injustice to be addressed, seeking to create changes in political, economic, and social conditions not simply through his novels, but through organised campaigns, groups and societies in which he was actively involved. The best way by which any progress could be achieved, in his opinion, was through education, and that meant a rethink in what was then being taught, and a reassessment of teaching models that already existed in the country, and abroad. The educational system, as it stood, perpetuated an elitist, male-dominated society which was content with the preservation of the *status quo*, a society that saw little wrong in poor people remaining in poverty; little wrong in women continuing to be totally answerable to fathers and husbands; and little wrong in Africans being forcibly taken from their homelands to work in West Indies plantations with neither remuneration nor expectation of freedom; often being subjected to abominable abuse. There were other educational thinkers who sought the same objectives as Bage — some of whom he knew, others who he may have known — but progress was slow-moving and there were many more opposed to change of any kind, including the establishment press, a large number of parliamentarians and the hierarchy of the church.

Little changed after Bage’s death in the short-term except the Napoleonic

wars led to greater patriotism, and novelists of his persuasion and politics were soon out of favour. *Hermesprong* has continued to be published until this day but Bage's reputation as a novelist went into decline following an unjust critique in the *Quarterly Review*. In quoting Scott's account Lockhart systematically omitted favourable criticism and, unlike Scott, called Bage a 'very inferior novelist . . . whose works have thus been recalled from an oblivion which we cannot help thinking they merited'. He denigrated Bage's character further using as leverage the name of England's best-known historical novelist of the day, his father-in-law.

Sir Walter, after exposing with just ridicule the style of gross and senseless caricature in which Mr. Bage, the son of a miller, and himself a paper-maker in a little country town, has thought fit to paint the manners of English gentlemen and ladies, proceeds, as follows, to notice the far graver offences of which his pen had been guilty.<sup>1</sup>

The part Lockhart quotes is about fourteen hundred words long whereas Scott's total memoir is five times that length. Unfortunately for Bage's reputation Scott tended to deliver his adverse criticism in a continuous diatribe making it easy for a bigoted reviewer to lift the lot and ignore the agreeable comments which precede and follow it. This is precisely what happened. It is hardly surprising then that Lockhart wanted more of this kind of prefatory writing. His reason, it can only be assumed, was as an immunisation against having to read the whole works and as a means of avoiding the labour of writing his own review. He finished:

It is, in truth, a melancholy matter of reflection how largely the works, not of Bage merely, but of the true classics of the English Novel, stand in need of being introduced with preliminary cautions such as we have now been quoting.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *QR*, pp. 367-370

<sup>2</sup> *QR*, pp. 367-370

Heavily biased as it was this review did no end of harm. The entry for Bage in *Chambers Cyclopædia of English Literature* appears directly under that of his lifelong friend and one-time business partner, Erasmus Darwin. It is a short regurgitation of Lockhart's damning and slanted attack. It condemns Scott for including his work in the 'British Novelists when he was excluding so many better stories.' Unfortunately we are not informed what these better stories are because quite a few who have read Bage would be queuing up to read them too — if they exist. Clearly, unlike Scott, the person who wrote this biography for Chambers had no more read the novels than Lockhart had and most likely had only read the *Quarterly Review*. The final insult concludes *Hermesprong* and *Barham Downs* were his best works, containing 'good satirical portraits, though the plots of both are crude and defective.'<sup>3</sup> This was published at the end of the Victorian era around the time when Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* was getting such a bad press from church and state for its title character, Jude Farley, living in sin. Hardy was alive and could do something about it. His response was to stop writing novels. Nineteen years later and Chambers Cyclopædia had not changed a word of its entry.<sup>4</sup> Later there was no entry for Bage.

It is not possible to leave behind the gems of literature Bage created without someone taking an interest. It is not possible to read his books without being impressed at how modern they were, and are, in their outlook. In the early nineteenth-century Messrs Longman prepared to republish all six novels if the group could be supplied with an accompanying biography.<sup>5</sup> They approached Anna Seward. She was unable to give them any knowledge of a man who it seems avoided her. She wrote back saying she had heard about his 'works of imagination' from the Darwins but had

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<sup>3</sup> Chambers Cyclopædia of English Literature, W. R. Chambers Limited, London & Edinburgh, p.572, 1903 Edition.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, (1922 Edition).

<sup>5</sup> Shr.RO, Watman's news cuttings, Vol. 6, Wednesday July 19, 1848, pp. 58-59.

never read them. Apparently Miss Seward sent Bage a note once expressing a desire to meet him at Morgan's, a Lichfield bookseller, but he did not respond and did not turn up. She said of him he was a man whose genius had 'pervaded the obscurity of a *limited education*' but of whose life she knew nothing. The Shrewsbury newspaper from which this cutting comes took issue with what they called Anna Seward's patronising manner and suggested this facet of her character was the reason for his 'treatment of her invitation.' The article adds:

Thus, the publication of the biography of Bage, and the reprint of his works never took place; and his novels may now be considered as out of print, or to be procured with difficulty; though at the latter end of the late and the beginning of the present century they enjoyed a popularity far above all other works of the kind incident to the time, and are greatly superior to most of the novels reprinted in this all-publishing era.<sup>6</sup>

By the advent of the twentieth century the British Museum could only lay its hands on a French version of *The Fair Syrian*.<sup>7</sup> Others with a literary interest have discovered Bage's novels independently over the years; lamenting the fact that they were out of print. In 1923 Michael Sadleir met with Arthur Hutchinson at the Omar Khayam Club. They discovered they had a mutual fondness for the novelist.

During my four years' acquaintanceship with Hutchinson we had grown intimate as only persons can whose hobbies are identical. We exchanged lists of desiderata; we made up check-lists of works by specified authors from the advertisement leaves at the end of volumes; we had a common enthusiasm for Robert Bage, and planned to republish his cynical and strangely modern novels with a biographical introduction and critical comments. Hardly a day passed without our either meeting or telephoning or writing, and whenever I could play truant from my office,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes*, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, (New York: Putnam, 1907–21), XI, The Period of the French Revolution, George Saintsbury, XIII, The Growth of the Later Novel, § 9 Robert Bage: Hermsprong.

we would visit those booksellers who dealt in our particular quarry.<sup>8</sup>

It was a quest to popularise once again the works of a man whose popularity should never have gone into decline. Once more the desire, undoubtedly genuine, did not materialise. Hutchinson, a real eccentric, died and perhaps Sadleir's enthusiasm for publication died too.

One of the purposes of this study, as well as those mentioned in the introduction, was to try and show what an intelligent, thinking and underrated novelist Robert Bage was, and to introduce to those who may not have heard of him aspects of his life which show him to have taken an active role in the causes which he espoused in his novels, especially the three covered in this study; the alleviation of poverty, the abolition of the slave-trade and an improvement for women. The discerning few who kept his reputation alive for two hundred years prevented his works from slipping into total obscurity and gradually his reputation is becoming re-established.

Constitutionally, the slave-trade was prohibited in England in 1807, followed by America in 1808. The Reform Act of 1867 enabled male householders to vote. Unions were legalised in 1871. Women in England, aged 30 or over, could vote in elections after 1918 and anyone, male or female, aged 21 or over, had the right to vote after 1928. In terms of equal pay and equal rights for women there has been continued improvement. Divorce is an option for unsatisfactory relationships. Education is freely available. There are safety buffers for those in poverty or poor health. The dowry system no longer prevents the vast majority from marrying, or living together. Duelling is almost a thing of the past. Animals are

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Sadleir, *Passages from the Autobiography of a Bibliomaniac*, The introduction to *XIX Century Fiction, A Bibliographical Record*. London, Constable. 1951, made available on the web with kind permission of © Richard Sadleir.

considered, by most, to have at least some rights. Individuals are, on the whole, entitled to practice the religion, belief, or non-belief, of their choice without intervention from church or state. Only Bage's opposition to the futility and stupidity of war has gone unheeded. While he never lived to see any of the progressive causes he espoused enacted by parliament, his novels remain fresh today, even if they would no longer be called radical. If a more equitable society can be measured by the legal enactment of progressive ideas then a lot of progress has been made since the days when Bage was writing, and he, through his novels and his personal conduct, can be said to have made a worthwhile contribution to the debate and advancement of society.

## Appendix A English editions

As with most good literary works rogue editions appeared and all of Bage's novels were quickly taken up by the Dublin pirates with the exception of *James Wallace*, which took forty years before making any impression on the Irish press.

### Mount Henneth

*Mount Henneth*, W. Lowndes, London, 1782 (2 vols).

*Mount Henneth*, Dublin, for Messrs Price, Whitestone, Sleater, 1782 (2 vols).

*Mount Henneth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, W. Lowndes 1788 (2 vols).

*Mount Henneth*, Ballantyne English Novelists, Walter Scott edition, 1824.

*Mount Henneth*, New York, London; Garland 1979 (Facsimile of Dublin edition of 1782) (2 vols).

### Barham Downs

*Barham Downs*, G. Wilkie, London, 1784 (2 vols).

*Barham Downs: or Memoirs of the Whitaker Family. With Anecdotes of Lord Winterbottom*, S. Colbert, Dublin, 1786 (2 vols).

*Barham Downs*, Ballantyne English Novelists, Walter Scott edition, 1824.

*Barham Downs*, New York, London; Garland 1979 (facsimile of Wilkie edition of 1784) (2 vols).

### The Fair Syrian

*The Fair Syrian*, J. Walter; J. Bew; London, P. Sandford, Shrewsbury, 1787 (2 vols).

*The Fair Syrian*, Messrs Gilbert, Byrne, etc, Dublin, 1787 (2 vols).

*The Fair Syrian*, New York, London; Garland, 1979? (2 vols) (facsimile of J. Walter edition of 1787).

### **James Wallace**

*James Wallace*, William Lane, London, 1788 (3 vols).

*James Wallace*, New York, London; Garland, 1979? (facsimile of Lane edition of 1788) (3 vols).

*James Wallace*, Ballantyne English Novelists, Walter Scott edition, 1824.

*James Wallace, or the reformed sailor*, Dublin, 1828.

### **Man as he is**

*Man as He Is*, William Lane, London, 1792 (4 vols).<sup>9</sup>

*Man as He Is*, P. Wogan, P. Byrne, B Smith, Dublin, 1793 (2 vols).

*Man as He Is*, William Lane, London, 1796) (4 vols) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

*Man as He Is*, A. K. Newman?, London, 1819 (4 vols) 3rd edition.

*Man as He Is*, New York, London; Garland, 1979? (facsimile of Lane edition, 1792 (4 vols).

### **Hernsprong**

*Hernsprong, or Man as He Is Not*, William Lane, London, 1796 (3 vols).

*Hernsprong, or Man as He Is Not*, Brett Smith for P. Wogan, P Byrne, J. Moore and J. Rice, Dublin, 1796 (2 vols).

*Hernsprong, or Man as He Is Not*, William Lane, London, 1799 (3 vols) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

*Hernsprong, or Man as He Is Not*, a novel by the author of *Man as He Is*, W. Duane, Philadelphia, 1803 (2 vols). (Series: Early American imprints. Second series ; no. 3709. Notes: Published also under title: *Man as He Is*

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Waring Darwin, son of Erasmus and father of Charles, had his own copy of this book. He was a friend of Robert Bage's son, Charles, and both lived in Shrewsbury.

*Not, or, Hermsprong*. Microfiche. Worcester, Mass. : American Antiquarian Society, [199-?]. 6, microfiches ; 11 x 15 cm (Early American imprints. Second series ; no. 3709). References: Shaw & Shoemaker 3709  
Format: Book.

*Man as He Is Not; or Hermsprong*, A. K. Newman, London, 1809, 3 vols, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

*Man as He Is Not, or Hermsprong*, Mrs Barbauld's edition British Novelists Series. Vol. 48, F. C. & J. Rivington, London, 1810.

*Man as He Is Not, or Hermsprong*, Mrs Barbauld's edition British Novelists Series. Vol. 48, F. C. & J. Rivington, London, 1820.

*Man as He Is Not or, Hermsprong*, Chiswick, printed by C. & C. Whittingham for C. S. Arnold, Hurst, Chance & Co and Simpkin & Co, London, 1828. (Title-page vignette).

*Hermsprong, or Man as He Is Not*, Edited by William Vaughan Wilkins, Turnstile Press, London, 1951.

*Hermsprong, or Man as He Is Not*, Folio Society edition, London, 1960. (Drawings by Cecil Keeling). Introduction by B. C. R.

*Hermsprong, or Man as He Is Not*, New York, London; Garland, 1979? (3 vols). (Facsimile of Lane edition, 1792).

*Hermsprong*. Introduction to *Éditions d'Aujourd'hui* by Pierre Vitoux, 83120 Plan del la Tour (Var) France, 1980 facsimile of 1796 edition in English.

Robert Bage's *Hermsprong, or, Man as He Is Not* / edited, annotated, and with an introduction by Stuart Tave, London, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982? (Facsimile of Lane's 1<sup>st</sup> edition).

*Hermsprong; or Man as He Is Not*, edited with introduction by Peter Faulkner, Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985. (Paperback).

*Hermsprong; or Man as He Is Not*, edited with introduction by Peter Faulkner, Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989. (Paperback).

*Hernsprong; or Man as He Is Not*, edited with introduction by Pamela Perkins, Broadview Press, Peterborough, Ontario, Ormskirk, Lancashire and Rozelle, NSW, 2002.

## Appendix B Translations

### French

#### Barham Downs

*Anna Bella, ou les Dunes de Barham* [Texte imprimé], traduit de l'anglais de Mackensie [2sic], par Griffet de La Baume, Paris: Pigoreau, 1810, 4 vol. in-12, Attribué à Robert Bage.

The above translation was wrongly supposed to have been written by Edinburgh author Henry Mackenzie. It was translated by the poet Griffet de La Baume, who also translated Tom Paine's *To the inhabitants of America* (1779). The translator took several liberties with *Barham Downs*. As well as attributing the work to the wrong author he gave it an alternative title, 'Anna Bella'. In his introduction he claims, not without a degree of justification, that having two strong female characters, that is Kitty Ross as well as Annabella Whitaker, the reader ought to be clear that Annabella is the main heroine. Furthermore where there were author apostrophes, that is, where Bage in the original addresses his 'fair readers', Griffet de la Baume gives his own thoughts, rather than Bage's. Griffet de la Baume also translated the letters of novelist Laurence Sterne.

Facing the title page is a plate of the translator in a wig, with the following verse, which may have been an epigraph he composed for himself. However, he did not die old.

Avec des Moeurs dignes de l'Age de Or,  
Il fut un Ami sûr, un Auteur agréable,  
Il mourut vieux comme Nestor,  
Mais il fut moins bavard et beaucoup plus aimable.

With manners worthy of the Golden Age,  
He was a sure friend, an agreeable author,

He died old, like Nestor,  
But was less talkative and much friendlier.

In the British Library copy there is what appears to be a frontispiece missing and this may have been an illustration.

### **The Fair Syrian**

*La Belle Syrienne* [Texte imprimé], roman en trois parties, par l'auteur du 'Mont-Henneth' et des 'Dunes de Barham' (Robert Bage), Londres et Paris: Briand, 1788, 3 vol. in-12, Mercier, Louis Sébastien. Trad.

Louis Sébastien Mercier was a French author and translator and today his *Tableau de Paris*, 1788, is a classic of French history covering the time immediately preceding the revolution. Bage almost certainly read and used this for characters in *Man as He Is*.

### **James Wallace**

*La constance dans l'adversité ou l'histoire de James Wallace* Traduite de l'anglois. Bruxelles: chez H. Dujardin; et à Paris: chez Defer de Maisonneuve., French Translation: Brussels and Paris, 1789.

### **Hermesprong**

An edition of 1811 was published as *L'Americain, ou L'homme comme il n'est pas*, par l'auteur de *L'homme comme il est* [i.e. Robert Bage] traduit de l'anglais par le traducteur du Polonoia [i.e. Baron de Gabriel-Louis Terrasson Senevas and Mme. (Alexandrine Dodun de Keroman) Senevas] Chez Guillaume, Paris, 1811. (2 vols)

Between pages 28 and 29 in the British Library edition there appears to be a page missing, possibly an illustration.

There was a short announcement about the above translation in *Mercure de France, Journal Litteraire et Politique*, 1811, p. 384 *L'Americain, ou L'homme comme il n'est pas*, par l'auteur par le traducteur du Polonais.

Deux vol. In-12. Prix 4fr 50c franc de port. Chez L. M. Guillaume, lib., place Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

### **German**

All six novels were translated into German. Hutton wrote that Bage's books 'travelled to the Continent, passed through the Frankfort press, and appeared to the world in a German habit.'<sup>1</sup>

### **Mount Henneth**

Translation into German, *Henneth Castle; oder, der glückliche kauf* (Leipzig: Schickert, 1783). It translates as *Henneth Castle; or the Fortunate Purchase*. No copy of this appears to have survived. It is mentioned in *The English Novel 1770-1829, A Bibliographical Survey of Prose and Fiction Published in the British Isles, Vol 1 (1770-1799)*, co-ed. James Raven, Peter Garside and Rainer Shöwerling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), I, 311; cites Mary Bell Price and Lawrence Marsden Price *The Publication of English Literature in Germany in the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1934). Norbert Besch, Udolpho Press, kindly supplied the full title and title translation.

### **Barham Downs**

*Die Brüder* / [**Robert Bage**]. Aus dem Englischen [Carl Gottfried Schreiter]. Frommann (Zullichau, Leipzig) Erster Theil (1787), S Zweyter Theil (1788). *The Brothers* was the title given to *Barham Downs* when it was translated into German in 1787/1788.

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<sup>1</sup> Jewitt, Hutton, p. 172.

### **The Fair Syrian**

*Honorie Warren*, Aus dem Englischen. Erster Band 282 S, Zweyter Band 306 S. \*. Mit zwey Titelkupfern. Frankfurt und Leipzig:1788. Trans: Johann Gottfried Seume.

There is a long review with passages from the novel in *Allgemeine Literatur – Zeitung*, Freytags, den 27ten August 1790, Numero 253, 161-4.

### **James Wallace**

*Geschichte Georg Cumberlands oder Standhaftigkeit im Unglück*. (Übersetzt von Christian August Wichmann) 3 Bände. Leipzig. Weygand 1791. 310, 288, 263.

Wichmann passed this translation off as his own work changing the name from James Wallace to Georg Cumberlands. German antiquarian Uwe Turzynski recognised that the work was superior to any novel Wichmann had produced and I am indebted to him for sharing this information.

### **Man as He Is**

*Der Mensch wie er ist*. Nach dem Englischen II Mit 1 kupf. Berlin und Stettin. The British Library hold a copy of this German translation of 1798: *Modern Language Notes*, Vol 51, No 2 (Feb., 1936) p124 reveals that this was translated by Friedrich Heinrich Bothe (1770-1855). In a letter of Dec 13, 1797 Bothe wrote to Nicolai for an advance of 50 Rthlr. It would seem Bothe was having the same problems Bage was having with Hutton in England. He cried poverty and used his ailing mother to try and get Nicolai to increase his rates from 4 taler to 5 taler per page.<sup>2</sup> This title was changed with another, even shorter version, called *Der Mensch ohne Maske*.

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<sup>2</sup> Pamela F. Selwyn, *Everyday life in the German Book Trade. Friedrich Nicolai as bookseller and publisher in the age of enlightenment* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), pp. 348-9.

*Der Mensch ohne Maske*: Ein Roman; Zwey Theile/ Naci Englishen **eines** hinterlassen Manuscripts **vom** verfasser Yoricks empfindsamen Reisen durch Frankreich **und** Italien. Laurence Sterne, 1799.

This is the same translation as *Der Mensch wie er ist*, further abridged. Here again it appears Bage was not given due credit for his book which was published in Germany two years before his death. It does not give the translator, although letters from Bothe about *Der Mensch wie er ist* do, and apart from abridgments it is an exact translation of former text, and this shows it to have been Bothe, even though the English author is wrongly assumed to be Laurence Sterne.

Unlike *Der Mensch wie er ist* there are two illustrations to this work, one a vignette, both by the Viennese engraver Karl Robert Schindelmayer.

### **Herm sprong**

*Herm sprong: Oder Adelstolz und Menschenwerth*; published by Liegnitz und Leipzig: bey David Siegert, 1799.

The above is mentioned in *Handbuch der Deutschen Literatur seit der mitte des Achtzehnten Jahrhunderts bis auf die neueste zeit*, F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig, 1823, 2 vols, 2<sup>nd</sup> vol,

### **Russian**

#### **Man as He Is**

Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin translated part of *Man as He Is*, the story concerning the madness of Mr Mowbray brought about by the extravagances and proclivities of his wife. (See *N. M. Karamzin, A Study of his Literary Career 1783-1803*, A. G. Cross, Southern Illinois University Press, Feffer & Simons, Inc, 1971 pp162 and 164). This on its own is a powerful story which Mrs Barbauld also singled out for special mention in her introduction to *Herm sprong* in *The British Novelists, with an essay and*

*prefaces biographical and critical*, Mrs Barbauld, Vol XLVIII, London, Richard Taylor and Co, 1810. The extract Karamzin translated is in *Panteon inostrannoi slovestnosti*, 3 vols (Moscow: 1798) 2, pp. 73-92.<sup>3</sup> A. G. Cross references the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of Panteon (Moscow: 1818) 2, pp. 337-343.

## Swedish

### Mount Henneth

Leonhard Johan Chenon, translator. *Berget Henneth. Dygdens och wönskapens fristad. En angelsk roman, I brev författad*

Publisher: Nyköping: Tryckt hos Joh. P. Hammarin (1796). This is the first paperback edition of any of Bage's novels. It might be worth noting that Chenon was a supporter of Linnaeus and wrote a paper in his defence.

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Olga Baird for searching the archives of the University of Petersburg collections to locate and make for me a copy of this extract.

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