

PARTIAL AND IMPARTIAL CRITICISM IN THE MAJOR
LITERARY PERIODICALS 1800-30

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NOTE

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I have followed convention in using the word Review (capital R) to mean a periodical as a whole, and the word review (small r) to mean an article appearing in such a periodical. Except where I have given an indication to the contrary, books referred to are published in London, or by the Oxford and Cambridge University Presses. Attribution of reviews to specific reviewers has been based on the bibliographies by A. Strout and H. and H. Shine, and the first volume of the Wellesley Index.

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INTRODUCTION

Anybody foolhardy enough to attempt a survey of thirty years of periodical literature probably deserves the multitude of problems with which he is presented. The most immediate is one of scope. Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the vast number of minor periodicals which existed alongside the Edinburgh Review, the Quarterly Review, and Blackwood's Magazine, and to the very good criticism which they often contained. A study of all these periodicals over a period of three decades would prove a work of a lifetime, and perhaps in the end be as self-defeating as Casaubon's 'Key to All the Mythologies'. I have concentrated on the three major periodicals, all of which enjoyed an enormous circulation and exercised an unprecedented influence, in an attempt to re-establish a sense of perspective. It is interesting to know what the Lady's Magazine thought of Coleridge, but of far more importance to trace the development of the poet's reputation in those periodicals which shaped and reflected contemporary tastes and attitudes. The terminal date of this study, 1830, is of course arbitrary, but it is late enough to allow an examination of reviews hitherto unnoticed but of relevance both to the reputations of individual writers and to the development of the periodicals.

My purpose in this thesis is threefold. The historical importance of the major periodicals is unquestioned, and any attempt to chronicle their activities as accurately as possible would seem to be of value. But to do this we must come to some understanding of the many and varied pressures which influenced

their judgements. No single extract from one of these periodicals is reliable as a statement of contemporary opinion, nor of the policy of the individual Review, nor even of the reviewer's own thoughts upon the matter. It only becomes of value when placed firmly within its overall context: a context which involves date of publication, general and specific reviewing practices, the choice of reviewer, and a multitude of other considerations. My first aim has been to recreate at least some of this complexity, although the amorphous and ephemeral nature of periodical literature has made this a difficult undertaking.

My second aim is a continuation of the first in so far as I have tried to show how the Reviews both illustrated and helped to create contemporary critical attitudes. The demise of eighteenth-century literary theories and the development of more specifically nineteenth-century ways of thinking can be seen very clearly in the pages of the periodicals. Not that I wish to simplify or claim strict chronological progression for the development of certain critical trends, but the Reviews provide a unique means of observing changes in literary fashion.

My third aim is the most difficult to define. Whilst reading these three periodicals I have tried to identify those reviews and articles which seem to offer what I can only, lamely, describe as good criticism. In doing so I lay myself open to the charge of replacing one literary fashion by another; in other words, praising that which merely corresponds with my own critical predilections or those of my time. To some extent this is inevitable, but I have attempted to notice those critiques and articles which seem to approach the work of literature they are discussing with as much humility and lack of prejudice as is

humanly possible. As I hope to show in the course of my thesis, this is neither as easy nor as modest a claim as it sounds. The ability to accept a work on its own merits, particularly work which challenged conventional beliefs and preconceptions, was and is a rare critical attribute.

Apart from scope and purpose, the other major problem confronting me has been one of organization. I have tried to overcome this by dividing my thesis into two. The first part deals with general issues involving the organization, running, and impact of the periodicals, as well as discussing, in general terms, the identifiable prejudices and biases at work within them. The second and larger section examines the reception given to the leading authors of the period, and attempts to examine in detail some of the motives underlying these judgements. It is here that I attempt to evaluate the criticism found in the three periodicals.

Since I began this study, two very fine books have appeared which deal with the early nineteenth century periodicals, one by John Hayden and the other by Theodore Redpath. Hayden's book is an invaluable guide to the great mass of reviewing which took place at this time, but he quite deliberately sacrifices perspective for scope. Redpath concerns himself with Byron, Shelley, and Keats, and provides a sensitive and valuable account of the reception given to their work by over a dozen periodicals. My concern has been exclusively with the three major periodicals, and with the biases and prejudices underlying their literary judgements. This has often led me to conclusions which differ from those expressed by Redpath and Hayden, but my debt to them remains considerable.

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PART ONE

The chapters in this section attempt to illustrate some of the issues underlying the structure and development of the three major periodicals. My purpose is not to provide a detailed history of the Reviews, but to draw attention to the complexity of their organization, to emphasize those things which materially affected their judgements, and to give an account of contemporary reviewing practices.

The first chapter discusses the founding and development of the three periodicals, and is followed by an examination of important general issues which influenced all of them. Jeffrey and Scott deserve special attention because of the unique contribution they made to periodical literature: Scott's importance is often underestimated, and Jeffrey's reputation too often hinders a fair assessment of his critical writing. Chapter four discusses the roles played by editors and publishers, and the extent to which they influenced their periodicals. The two concluding chapters examine the political, social, and moral attitudes which become of major importance when we examine later in the thesis the reception given to individual authors.

My concern throughout is to show how misleading it is to view any extract from one of these periodicals as representative. The periodicals with which we are concerned were highly complex structures, and only by being aware of this complexity and the way in which they functioned can we evaluate their contribution to the critical thinking of their time and to literary criticism generally.

Chapter One

The Edinburgh Review

On October 10 1802 Edinburgh awoke to the lusty cries of a new-born infant. Conceived in a moment of irresponsibility, it was to survive its uncertain infancy and the fears of its parents. Carrying the name of its native city and bound in the buff and blue colours of its party, the Edinburgh Review embarked on a career which covered more than a century.

Although there is little doubt as to paternity, the conception of the periodical remains something of a mystery. John Clive in his study of the Edinburgh Review provides the most succinct account of its founding:

some time in the late winter of 1801-1802 Sydney Smith, the undisputed father of the Review, suggested the idea to Jeffrey and Horner, as they were discussing various possible literary projects. These three took a larger group, including Brougham, into their confidence, and the first number was planned in the spring and summer of 1802, with Smith and Jeffrey performing the bulk of the editorial chores. Brougham, though a contributor to the first number which appeared on October 10, 1802, was not admitted into the 'inner circle' until the following year. Jeffrey became sole editor in May, 1803, but the inner circle - Smith, Horner, and Brougham - continued to be his closest and most influential editorial advisers.¹

All the founder-members were young, energetic, and dissatisfied with the apparently limited opportunities offered by their careers. They shared common political beliefs, met regularly at the Speculative Society or Academy of Physics in Edinburgh, and in some cases had attended the same school and university. Public life in Edinburgh

1. John Clive, Scotch Reviewers: The 'Edinburgh Review' 1802-15 (1957), 25-6.

was dominated by the Tory faction led by Lord Melville, and Jeffrey, Horner, and Brougham risked both careers and reputations in supporting a periodical of such obvious Whiggish leanings.

None of them realized that their brain-child, founded in a moment of high spirits, was to dominate the discussion of politics and literature for the next twenty years.

Response to the Review was mixed and, not surprisingly, partisan. Henry Cockburn, a Whig himself and friend and biographer of Francis Jeffrey, claimed that 'the learning of the new Journal, its talent, its spirit, its writing, its independence, were all new....'¹ Alexander Murray, a friend of Archibald Constable the publisher of the Review, outlined what he considered to be its strength:

The leading feature of the work is a bold systematical defence of the various departments of literature, morality, and science....This defence is carried on, not by the old method of calling names, but by explaining, in an abler way than they have been illustrated hitherto, the fundamental laws of criticism, morals, and science....If this Review continue vigorous we shall conquer the south and retain the conquest for ever.²

One of Constable's partners reported a very different reaction from William Roscoe, author of a Life of Lorenzo de Medici (1795):

[Roscoe] talked much of the reviews of his works, and of the Edinburgh in particular, with the greatest contempt. He says there is neither sense, taste, candour, learning, nor English writing in it....³

Such divergences of opinion soon became commonplace; perhaps the most

1. Lord Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey (Edinburgh, 1852), i, 131.
2. Thomas Constable, Archibald Constable and his Literary Correspondents (Edinburgh, 1873), i, 258-9.
3. Ibid., i, 77.

objective assessment came from Walter Scott in a letter of 1804 to an obviously disapproving George Ellis:

I quite agree with you as to the general conduct of the Review, which savours more of a wish to display than to instruct; but as essays, many of the articles are invaluable, and the principal conductor is a man of very acute and universal talent.¹

But whatever the nature of the reaction to the Review, there can be little doubt about the extent of its impact. The first number attracted widespread attention, and by the fifth number its success was assured.²

Sydney Smith edited the first number, and Brougham was probably right when he claimed that the Edinburgh Review owed its initial success to 'the wise advice which Smith administered to Constable at the conclusion of his short reign as quasi-editor'.³

1. Letters of Sir Walter Scott, ed. H.J.C.Grierson (1932-37), 12 vols. 1787-1807, 216. [Since the volumes are not numbered, reference is to the dates covered by each individual number.]

2. The fifth number marked a turning point in the history of the Review. Before beginning the venture Jeffrey had written to one of his friends: 'We are bound for a year to the booksellers, and shall drag through that, I suppose, for our own indemnification....' (Cockburn, ii, 63.) The year was now up, Jeffrey took over full editorship, and the Review took on its characteristic format. Instead of varying between 20 and 29 reviews per number, this figure stabilized at about 18. Walter Scott now became a contributor: in the first four numbers Lord Murray, Sydney Smith, Thomas Brown, John Stoddart, and Henry Brougham, had all helped Jeffrey with the literary reviewing, but this was now left in the much more capable hands of Jeffrey and Scott. After the appearance of the fifth number, Jeffrey wrote to Francis Horner, now in London: 'I hope we shall never again get into such a scrape as we are just coming out of....But we shall never get on comfortably unless we enlarge our phalanx by the association of two or three new recruits' (Cockburn, i, 86). These were soon forthcoming, and the Review went on from strength to strength.

3. Hesketh Pearson, The Smith of Smiths (Penguin Books, 1948), 60.

As well as advice, Smith continued to contribute reviews on the game-laws, hunting, class warfare, Methodists, and the penal system. Given the assorted and controversial nature of such topics, it was not surprising that he claimed that the 'whole of my life has passed like a razor - in hot water or a scrape'.¹ But it is to Francis Jeffrey, who from 1803 to 1829 guided the Review through all manner of scrapes and water of varying temperature, that much of the credit must be given for the Edinburgh's success. John Murray, with his usual astuteness, realized the importance of Jeffrey and when the handling of the Review in London passed from Longman's business to his, he wrote to Constable:

I want very strongly to press upon your mind the necessity of fixing Mr. Jeffrey irrevocably to yourself, for, as in all hazardous and important cases, we must take in extremos and possibilities....²

One of Jeffrey's greatest problems in establishing the Review was his own contributors. Generous payment to both editor and contributors put reviewing on a new footing,³ but this did nothing to eradicate personal tensions. Francis Horner disliked Smith's and Brougham's style of reviewing, and Brougham believed that Smith was attempting to exclude him from the inner councils of the Review. In 1803 Horner wrote to Jeffrey:

With regard to Brougham I had suspected what you told me from a letter he wrote me some days ago in which he throws out indiscreet hints and threats of a rival review and an opposition....I do not want to know anything more particularly about Brougham's intrigues, for I have no interest in such pitiful anecdotes....⁴

1. Pearson, 246.

2. Constable, i, 369-70.

3. The editor was paid £200 p.a. (£50 per number), and contributors ten guineas (later sixteen guineas) per sheet (sixteen pages). See Clive, 33-4, for further information on the rates of pay.

4. Chester New, Life of Henry Brougham (1961), 17.

Brougham continued to circulate reports about Jeffrey's resignation and the imminent demise of the Review despite his continued association with it.¹ In fact, with Jeffrey, he was the most prolific contributor, and had much to do with shaping its political attitudes.

Apart from Jeffrey, another reason for the Edinburgh Review's success was its aggressiveness. The eighteenth-century tradition of anonymity was preserved, and this not only protected the reviewers but also created an air of omniscience which became even more effective when combined with severity. Sydney Smith makes this clear in a letter to Harriet Martineau:

We were savage. I remember how Brougham and I sat trying one night how we could exasperate our cruelty to the utmost. We had got hold of a poor nervous little vegetarian, who had put out a poor silly little book; and when we had done our review of it, we sat trying to find one more chink, one more crevice, through which we might drop one more drop of verjuice, to eat into his bones.²

It was this type of reviewing which undoubtedly contributed to the initial success of the Edinburgh Review, and its continued, sometimes unprincipled, search for controversy marked a new development in the history of reviewing. The correspondence of most of the major literary figures of the period is littered with imprecations against the Reviews (Coleridge, in particular, had a colourful line in invective when writing of the Edinburgh).

Apart from its aggressiveness and sensationalism, the Edinburgh was constantly under attack because of its politics.³ It is perhaps

1. Constable, i, 249 and 250.

2. Pearson, 49.

3. See chapter five for a fuller discussion of the Reviews and politics.

misleading to merely use the term Whig to describe its political beliefs.¹ The Whig party was undergoing a transition during the early part of the nineteenth century, and certainly in 1802 it was dominated by factions. Matters were further complicated by the special situation existing in Scotland. Melville and the Tories were so completely in control that any opposition was labelled 'Jacobin', with all the attending fears that the term implied. But given these considerations, the Review was Whig in so far as the term has any general meaning. It is misleading to suggest, as J.O. Hayden does, that

The Edinburgh, when dealing with general political questions, was sometimes Whiggish...but its premises were always liberal.²

Liberalism is far more difficult to define than Whiggism, and Hayden's distinction between attitudes and premises is more than a little suspect. It is true that the Edinburgh Review always maintained its independence, and that Henry Brougham, its main political contributor, never became an orthodox Whig, but the buff and blue covers clearly indicated the nature of the Review's allegiance.

Initially the Edinburgh maintained a moderate tone in politics despite its sympathy with the Whigs. Brougham had yet to decide where to offer his support (he flirted briefly with the Tories), and Jeffrey's natural caution asserted itself. It was possible for a Tory to write for the Review, as in the case of Scott, and the

1. Clive, chapt. iii, offers a detailed and comprehensive account of relations between the Whig party and the Edinburgh Review.

2. John Hayden, The Romantic Reviewers 1802-1824 (1969), 21.

undoubted quality and interest of the new periodical overcame the fears of its Tory readership.

But confidence grew with the success of the periodical, and the political scene became increasingly tense and uncertain. Jeffrey's instinctive interest in politics and that element of recklessness which co-existed with his caution gained the upper hand, and the Review became increasingly partisan. The Tories soon became aware of this and plans were made to establish a periodical of their own. All came to a head with the publication in the number for October 1808 of the famous review "Don Pedro Cevallos on the French Usurpation of Spain".

The review, written jointly by Brougham and Jeffrey, was in praise of the Spanish patriots who were rebelling against Napoleon. This would seem innocuous enough since Britain was fighting the Napoleonic Wars, but John Clive points to three things in the review which made it so controversial:¹ Brougham and Jeffrey took the opportunity to counteract the fears that the cry for liberty and equality necessarily meant Jacobinism; they criticized both the English and Spanish upper classes and praised 'the bulk, the mass of the people'; and they advocated constitutional change to prevent popular unrest in Britain. The result can be imagined: subscriptions were cancelled, pamphlets and letters of protest proliferated, and earlier suspicions of the Review were confirmed.

1. Clive, 110-12.

The Don Cevallos article was important in the history of the Review for two reasons. It undoubtedly hastened the establishment of the Quarterly Review, and so provided the Edinburgh with a competitor of equal weight and standing, if not of talent. And it marked a polarization of attitudes: the Edinburgh Review could no longer attempt to be all things to all men. In politics it was Whig, in the eyes of its enemies even Radical, and its judgement on all matters was now even more open to suspicion of bias or prejudice.

The second decade of the century was dominated by the Edinburgh and the Quarterly. Each periodical had a circulation of from twelve to sixteen thousand copies with an actual readership of four or five times that number. Nobody challenged the supremacy of the two quarterlies, and it was not until the appearance of Blackwood's Magazine in 1817 that their somewhat fossilized nature became apparent.

It is impossible to plot the decline of the Edinburgh with any accuracy. After the foundation of the Quarterly it continued to fight for Catholic Emancipation and the complete abolition of slavery; it also took up the causes of criminal law reform, the abolition of the Test Acts, municipal reform, poor-law reform, and many other such issues. During this time it also reviewed all the major authors of the period, ranging from the 'This will never do' review of The Excursion to more perceptive reviews of Keats and Byron.

But reviewing by its very nature is ephemeral, and as the novelty of the Review waned it became increasingly a victim of its own ponderous format. In January 1825 Jeffrey wrote to a friend:

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Can you lay your hands on some clever young men who would write for us? The original supporters of the work are getting old, and either too busy or too stupid, and here the young men are mostly Tories.¹

Hazlitt, himself a contributor, was less than kind when he suggested in 1829, on the occasion of Jeffrey's retirement, that the Edinburgh was not only a collection of pamphlets, but the same pamphlets four times a year:

This makes the town no longer on tip-toe for the arrival of the Edinburgh Review - it comes up like a coal-barge, and not like a pleasure yacht.²

But it was more than merely the loss of novelty or even of originality. The political situation had changed drastically since the Review's inception; and in 1831, after the Whigs had come to power, Sydney Smith wrote:

The Review began in high places (the garrets) and ends in them. It will seem very odd to me to pass into Downing Street and to see all my old friends turned into official dignities.³

Some years later he looked back on his career as an Edinburgh Reviewer with a touch of pomposity and self-satisfaction unusual in him:

To set on foot such a Journal in such times, to contribute towards it for many years, to bear patiently the reproach and poverty which it caused, and to look back and see that I have nothing to retract, and no intemperance and violence to reproach myself with, is a career of life which I must think to be extremely fortunate.⁴

This is unashamedly a mood of nostalgia. Literature and politics had taken new directions, and the nature of reviewing had also changed as

1. ER, cxcvi (Oct., 1902), 296.

2. John Clive, "The Edinburgh Review", History Today, II (1952), 850.

3. Pearson, 230.

4. The Works of Sydney Smith (1848), i, vi.

had been evident from the pages of the Edinburgh itself. Macaulay's famous article on Milton which appeared in 1825 differed in length, style, and tone from anything previously published, and it heralded a new age and a very different role for the Edinburgh. Never again was it to hold the centre of the stage in the way that it had done in the first decade of its existence. Its greatest days were over.

The Quarterly Review

The Quarterly Review was founded seven years after the Edinburgh Review in 1809. It was published in London by John Murray, and William Gifford, poet and satirist, was its first editor. Similar in format to the Edinburgh, its early history was more complex and problematical than that of its rival. Indeed the reasons for John Murray embarking upon what Walter Scott called 'this great and dubious undertaking' are themselves in question. Mrs. Oliphant, in her history of a rival publishing house, sees the matter very much in financial terms; Murray had lost the London contract for the Edinburgh Review, and now realized that a profit was to be gained from a periodical which could emulate the Edinburgh's success.¹ Certainly any competition with Constable was financially desirable, as Scott remarked when writing to Murray about Ballantyne's attempt to set up in business:

[Ballantyne's] making a stand is most essential to the Review & all our other plans for every other book-seller here has sunk under the predominating influence of Constables house & they literally dare not call their souls their own.²

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1. Margaret Oliphant, Annals of a Publishing House (1897), i, 32.
 2. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 183-4.

This was also the time when Murray was attempting to become Scott's publisher, and he possibly saw the Quarterly as a way of weaning him away from Constable. Scott had quarrelled violently with Constable, and his help with the new Review was one way of asserting his independence.¹

But politics rather than the machinations of booksellers are usually given as the major reason for the establishment of the Quarterly. Undoubtedly George Canning, John Wilson Croker, and John Hookham Frere played a large part in planning the Quarterly, but it is misleading to see them as founders of the Review. John Murray was merely being politic when, in a note which accompanied Canning's copy of the first number of the Quarterly, he referred to it as 'a work which owes its birth to your obliging countenance and introduction of me to Mr. Gifford'.² In fact a plan for a Tory Review had been in Murray's mind for nearly two years, and although he approached Canning about it in 1807 it was not until 1809 that any support was forthcoming. From the very outset the Review was closely allied to the Tory government, but it originated with Murray and existed independently of any specific government support or patronage. Admittedly the opening article in the first number was overtly partisan; it was a reply to the Edinburgh's Don Cevallos review, and was partly written by Canning himself. But this does not reflect the general conduct of the Review, and indeed Gifford and Murray all too often had reason to complain of the government's

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1. Edgar Johnson, Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown (1970), i, 304.
 2. Samuel Smiles, A Publisher and His Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of John Murray (1891), i, 152.

persistent inability to recognize the opportunities open to them.

In 1812 Gifford wrote to John Barrow lamenting the government's refusal to use the Quarterly as a vehicle for political propaganda,¹ and eight years later he reiterated his complaint to Murray:

I have no patience with these Cabinet people. When it is too late they rub their eyes and begin to see that the Review might be of the 'utmost importance' to them, but they never condescend to write a thought on it when there is both time and an earnest will to serve them (i.e. the country), and nothing wanting but the means which they are called on to supply. How often has this been urged! Yet who of them procures us a single line?²

Nor did the Quarterly's consistent support for the Tories bring any material advantage either to publisher or editor, as Murray somewhat disconsolately informed Robert Southey in 1828:

I have received many personal civilities, and I own obligations to the Whigs, but the Tories! I paid to the utmost their under-secretaries of state, secretaries of state, bishops, and even two prime ministers, for advocating their own cause. They took my money, but never did they confer the slightest favour in return either upon Gifford or myself. So much for my Tory relations....³

But politics and profit were the general issues underlying the founding of the Quarterly; the immediate impetus undoubtedly came from the resounding success of the Edinburgh Review. Envy, admiration, and fear were the predominant emotions of those involved in establishing the rival periodical. Scott was more urbane than most when he informed a friend that

it has, tho' rather too late, been resolved upon, to attempt to divide the public with the Edinburgh Reviewers, & try if it be not possible by a little learning & fun upon the other side of the question to balance the extensive & extending influence which that periodical publication has acquired.⁴

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1. M.F. Brightfield, John Wilson Croker (1940), 163-4.
 2. Smiles, ii, 52-3.
 3. Ibid., ii, 263.
 4. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 164.

Canning, more rhetorically, told Barrow that the Quarterly's object was 'to counteract the virus scattered among His Majesty's subjects through the pages of the Edinburgh Review',¹ and Southey thought that its purpose was 'to keep up the heart and honour of the country in opposition to the base politics of the Edinburgh'.²

Jeffrey and his compatriots were not unduly concerned, although they were quick to recognize the merit of their rivals. Jeffrey wrote to Horner after seeing the first number of the Quarterly:

It is an inspired work, compared with the poor prattle of Cumberland. But I do not think it very formidable; and if it were not for our offences, I should have no fear about its consequences....do not let yourself imagine that I feel any unworthy jealousy, and still less any unworthy fear, on the occasion....I do rejoice at the prospect of this kind of literature, which seems to be more and more attended to than any other, being generally improved in quality, and shall be proud to have set an example.³

This complacent and equable attitude did not last long. Open conflict between the two periodicals could not be long delayed, and as the political situation deteriorated so they became more violently partisan. Hazlitt's comments on the Quarterly in The Spirit of The Age are extreme, but they give some indication of the depth of feeling which characterized the rivalry between the two periodicals:

This Journal, then, is a depository for every species of political sophistry and personal calumny. There is no abuse or corruption that does not there find a jesuitical palliation or a barefaced vindication. There we meet the slime of hypocrisy, the varnish of courts, the cant of pedantry, the cobwebs of the law, the iron hand of power....No statement in the Quarterly Review is to be trusted: there is no fact that is not misrepresented in it, no quotation that is not garbled, no character that is not slandered, if it can answer the purposes of a party to do so.⁴

1. Smiles, i, 166.

2. New Letters of Robert Southey, ed. K. Curry (New York and London, 1965), i, 497.

3. Cockburn, i, 192-3.

4. Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P.P. Howe (1932), xi, 124.

Some attempt was made to avoid the situation which gave rise to such sentiments. Murray disapproved of direct attacks on the Edinburgh and maintained that they only helped to advertise the rival periodical. All too often he was opposed by his editor and contributors, as is shown in a letter Ellis wrote to him about a review of Clarke's Travels in the Quarterly's seventh number:

I have now erased, in conformity with your wishes, some of the allusions to the E.R.... You will readily believe that I am never very anxious to enter the lists with our adversaries, and I generally wish to avoid it, because it is certain that, if in such a conflict we should ever be guilty of the sort of grossness which they employ, we should injure ourselves with rational readers. But I cannot agree with you in thinking that when they have formally thrown down the gauntlet (as they have done on the subject of Dr. Clarke), we are bound altogether to abstain from noticing their defiance....¹

Southey and Scott would have preferred that the gauntlet remain firmly where it was in such cases, but their advice was rarely taken.

At the outset of the Quarterly, Murray, a more timid man than Constable, was afraid that any deliberate attack on the Edinburgh might well damage the fortunes of his own periodical. It was this which made him oppose Gifford's decision to publish the Reverend J. Davidson's review of A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review against Oxford.² Murray, in some distress, wrote to Gifford:

I do entreat you to feel for me before you finally determine upon the insertion of the Oxford article. I cannot yet manage to make the Review pay its expenses, and it is only in the hope of having continually such a number as we expected to put forth this time, that I can in prudence proceed.³

The article was published, the Quarterly survived, and Murray's courage rose accordingly.

1. Smiles, i, 184.
2. QR, iv (Aug., 1810), 177-206.
3. Smiles, i, 181.

Davidson's article also highlighted another problem, since the number in which it appeared was nearly six weeks late. The late or non-appearance of numbers was a curse of contemporary reviewing, and a six-week gap would have caused the downfall of many a periodical. It is a measure of the early strength of the Quarterly that it survived this and other problems faced by new periodicals. Naturally it took time to establish itself, and Isaac D'Israeli was a little premature when he wrote to Murray about the third number of the Review:

[the Quarterly] has not yet invaded the country. Here [i.e. in Brighton] it is totally unknown, though as usual the Ed. Rev. is here; but among private libraries, I find it equally unknown. It has yet its fortune to make.¹

Murray was despondent about the early English sale of the Review, but Scott reported much better progress from Scotland:

it is needless to say that a steady & respectable sale is just better than no sale at all. Here we have been more fortunate. - Ballantyne has only about 30 left of the last 200 received by sea & thinks he could easily have sold double the number forwarded - many announce themselves as steady customers & I have no doubt you may sell 1000 in Scotland quarterly.²

Scott may have been merely comforting Murray, but within a year the Quarterly had a circulation of 5000 copies and Murray's initial investment of £5000 in establishing it was paying a profit.

Comparisons with the Edinburgh were inevitable, and, as Murray told Canning, not always favourable:

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1. Smiles, i, 164.
 2. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 182.

I find that, upon comparison with the E.R., we are thought to want spirit, and we require a succession of novelty to attract public attention before we shall be sufficiently read to render our counteracting arguments and principles decidedly serviceable to our cause.¹

But the Quarterly held its own, and on 10 February 1810 Scott, whilst acknowledging the strength of the Edinburgh, looked forward to better days:

The Edinburgh has at length come forth and with a good deal of spirit; but we will be better prepared for them the next time, and at least divide the public with them.²

Eventually the Quarterly did divide the public with its competitor, but this was due more to its political convictions than any superiority in the art of reviewing. At times it was perceptive and penetrating, but it never achieved the brilliance and panache of the Edinburgh at its best.

Much, of course, depended on the contributors. The Quarterly was faced with an immediate problem in that the most able reviewers were already writing for the Edinburgh, but with the hardening of political attitudes and the furore caused by the Don Cevallos article many changed sides and others equally talented appeared for the first time. The list of contributors to the Quarterly is a distinguished one, but the greater part of the reviewing was in the hands of relatively few people.³ Southey, John Barrow, and Croker, along with Gifford, were the leading contributors, and among them they wrote over three hundred reviews.

1. Smiles, i, 153.

2. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 297.

3. See Hill and Helen Shine, The Quarterly Review under Gifford (Chapel Hill, 1949) for details of contributors.

The tone and style of the Quarterly owed much to these men, and in them we see both the strength and weakness of the Review. Southey and Barrow were conscientious and thorough, and Barrow's reviews of travel books and accounts of geographical explorations were particularly important in establishing the Quarterly's reputation. But both men could also be extremely dull, and Southey did not take kindly to editorial attempts to make his contributions more attractive to the general reader. He was a man of great talent and miscellaneous learning but also obstinate and self-opinionated, and his correspondence with Gifford gives an insight into the difficulties faced by the editor when dealing with one of his most important contributors.

Surprisingly, Southey did not review very much literature. He was mainly interested in biography and the history and geography of Spain, Portugal, and South America, but he contributed major reviews and articles on the religious and social problems of the age. Barrow too wrote on such issues as the slave-trade, paupers, emigration, and the bullion question, but his central interest remained geographical exploration.¹ He and Southey provided the authority and erudition which formed the basis of the Quarterly's success, but neither of them possessed the journalistic instinct which was essential if the Review was to become popular.

1. The advantages of his enthusiasm and expertise can be seen in his reviews of books on China. The Shines point out that Barrow dealt seriously and sympathetically with the Chinese language. This was very different from the Edinburgh which made fun of it.

It was Gifford, often altering and tailoring other people's reviews, and John Wilson Croker who provided what Croker in a letter to Murray called 'the piquant':

The public is so fastidious and indeed so blasé that its appetite requires a great deal of the piquant. Mere solidity and information will not do; there must be something to awaken the fancy or to stir the passions.¹

Croker in some ways filled the role played by Henry Brougham for the Edinburgh; he was responsible for many of the more vicious attacks on contemporary authors, including the infamous review of Keats.

Hill and Helen Shine write of him:

When such "fools" were to be cut up in slash reviews, Croker was the reviewer who could do it with effect and who would do it with relish. The technique of slash reviewing was of course not peculiar to him. But it was more characteristic of his short reviews - they were reviews, not essays - than of any other main Quarterly figure besides Gifford.²

They go on to point out that Croker's vast knowledge of contemporary history made him an invaluable contributor, and that the rather tenuous relationship between the Quarterly and the government owed more to him than any other minister. His ultimate importance, however, resided in his brilliant but cynical and unscrupulous demolition of any author who transgressed against the Quarterly's political or literary convictions.

A man totally opposed to such conduct was Walter Scott, who played an important but ill-defined role in the establishment of the Quarterly. He was almost certainly offered the editorship before Gifford, and gave a great deal of help and encouragement

1. Brightfield, 337.

2. H. and H. Shine, xiv.

to Gifford and Murray.¹ After these early months he had little to do with the Review except as an occasional contributor until 1825 when his son-in-law, J.G.Lockhart, became editor, but this initial help was essential. He had enthusiastically welcomed the idea of a Tory Review, and he was determined to do his utmost to help:

I will lay down my head in despair if this well-laid scheme is defeated by our own want of exertion. But I have no fear of it. I was never in my life subject to impressions of that nature; and in this case I will fight upon my stumps, like Widderington, and to the stumps, both of my pen and my sword, if need be.²

Unlike the knight in the ballad of Chevy Chase, Scott's legs were quite safe, but there was a great deal of speculation about his association with the Quarterly. The nature of his aid to the Review is best illustrated in a letter he wrote to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe (17 February 1809):

The good folks in Dumfriesshire do me too much honour to suppose that I am the manager of the "Quarterly Review". I am a sincere well-wisher and humble contributor to the work; but the whole controul is in Mr. Gifford, and eke the responsibility.³

The responsibility may have been Gifford's, but he was given plenty

1. Scott wrote to his brother Tom on 19 November 1808 that 'The management of this work was much pressed upon me; but though great prospects of emolument were held out, I declined so arduous a task, and it has devolved upon Mr. Gifford....(Scott, Letters 1808-11, 130.) Gifford wrote to Scott: 'Every word that you have written convinces me that you have declined (I know not for what reason) a department for which you are so much better qualified than the person whom your partial judgement has recommended to it'. (Ibid., 130n.) One reason for Scott declining the editorship (apart from the demands made on his time by his literary work and his law business) was his delicacy over his social standing - editing periodicals was not an occupation normally undertaken by gentlemen.

2. Smiles, i, 148.

3. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 166-7.

of advice, particularly by Scott, on how to conduct the Review.

Murray, whose early relationship with Gifford was uneasy and strained, used Scott as a means of indirectly influencing his editor. He wrote to Scott:

Our friend Mr. Gifford, whose writings show him to be both a man of learning and wit, has lived too little in the world lately to have obtained that delicacy and tact whereby he can feel at one instant, and habitually, whatever may gratify public desire and excite public attention and curiosity.¹

Scott wrote several letters to Gifford about the Quarterly, and the editor remained remarkably equable in the face of all this advice.

Scott's practical advice was good.² He pointed out that the Edinburgh Review was 'entirely uninfluenced by the Booksellers who have contrived to make most of the other reviews mere vehicles for advertising and puffing', and he stressed the need to put the Quarterly on a business-like footing by paying both editor and contributors. He urged Gifford to exercise strict editorial control in 'selecting curtailing and correcting the contributions', and to emulate Jeffrey in 'giving life & interest even to the duller articles of the Review'. He also reminded Gifford of the need for regularity in publishing each number on time, of the advantage of an established corps of reviewers, and of heralding the birth of the Review with a really resounding number. Most of this advice was followed.

Scott had equally clear-cut views on the political and

1. Smiles, i, 109.

2. See Scott, Letters 1808-11, 100-09 for the letter containing the advice summarised below.

literary aspects of the Review. He wrote to Murray:

The points on which I chiefly insisted with Mr. Gifford were that the Review should be independent both as to bookselling and ministerial influences - meaning that we were not to be advocates of party through thick and thin, but to maintain constitutional principles. Moreover, I stated as essential that the literary part of the work should be as sedulously attended to as the political, because it is by means of that alone that the work can acquire any firm and extended reputation.¹

But Scott knew that the maintenance of those 'constitutional principles' was only possible if the Review had access to reliable political information. He wrote to George Ellis:

From the Government we should be entitled to expect confidential communications as to points of fact (so far as fit to be made public) in our political disquisitions.²

As we have seen, this was not forthcoming, and it would probably have only added to the increasingly partisan tone of the Review. Scott's ideal of a Review which was 'indulgent and conciliatory as far as possible upon mere party questions - but stern in detecting and exposing all attempts to sap our constitutional fabric'³ proved in the end to be vain. So indeed did his attempt to persuade those running the Review that 'there is policy, as well as morality, in keeping our swords clear as well as sharp, and not forgetting the gentlemen in the critics', and that 'decent, lively, and reflecting criticism, teaching men not to abuse books only, but to read and

1. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 124.

2. Ibid., 122.

3. Ibid., 127.

to judge them, will have the effect of novelty upon a public wearied with universal efforts at blackguard and indiscriminating satire'.¹

The betrayal of this ideal probably played a part in hastening Scott's withdrawal from an active part in the Review. His letters of the years 1808-10 bear witness to the tremendous effort he made in helping establish the Review, whether he was advising Gifford, comforting Murray, or sending 'aid from the North' in the shape of reviews written by himself or by one of the many contributors he had introduced to the Review. Murray valued his help immensely, and Gifford eventually came to appreciate his worth. Scott was of particular help in the early days of the Review when there was considerable friction between editor and publisher, but this eventually gave way to an enduring friendship. Once the Review was established Scott's help was no longer essential, and he had many other literary commitments at this time. He remained a contributor, and he was to play a major part in a later phase of the Review's history.

After an uncertain start the Quarterly prospered. The fifth number (for Feb., 1810) was well-received, although it was late and was still not making a profit. Isaac D'Israeli, never one of Murray's most optimistic correspondents, wrote:

I now conceive, when you have once established a regular period of publication, that you have good writers enough to secure a regular sale and an increasing one, besides the chance occasionally of getting at some great and commanding article.²

1. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 128-9.

2. Smiles, i, 180.

The Quarterly never achieved regularity of publication, but it did secure a large circulation.¹ By 1816 it was selling seven thousand copies in England, and Murray wrote to Blackwood instructing him to print another thousand for distribution in Scotland.² In March 1817 Murray wrote to Byron telling him of his plans to increase the circulation from ten to twelve thousand copies.³ In fact a few months later this had risen to fourteen thousand copies, and Murray made good his boast that 'the sale is not exceeded by the Edinburgh Review'. Not everybody believed that the quality of the Review was reflected in its circulation figures. Peter Elmsley, a regular contributor, wrote to Murray:

I think you have not been very brilliant of late. I must say that there is as great a difference between Jeffrey's best papers and your politics as between Handel and his bellows-blower.⁴

But there is no doubt that the Quarterly had become extremely influential.

Even Shelley had to admit that

The quarterly is undoubtedly conducted with talent great talent & affords a dreadful preponderance against the cause of improvement.⁵

This success was not unaccompanied by problems. Gifford was in continual ill-health, and this was partly responsible for the late appearance of so many numbers of the Review. By 1822

1. Delay in publication seems to have caused a momentary drop in circulation from 5000 to 4000 in 1813. See R.B.Clark, William Gifford: Tory Satirist (New York, 1930), 25.

2. Oliphant, ii, 3.

3. Smiles, i, 383.

4. Ibid., i, 284.

5. Letters of Shelley, ed. F.L.Jones (1964), ii, 81.

his health had deteriorated even further, and John Wilson Croker began to take over many of the editorial duties. He edited the whole of number 56 of the Review (January, 1823), and most of the work for the following five numbers was undertaken by him, Barrow, and Murray. John Taylor Coleridge, nephew of the poet, also assisted with the editing, and Gifford took more kindly to him than he did to Croker. The situation deteriorated rapidly: in 1824 number 60 appeared in August instead of January, and the April number was eventually published in December. Gifford realized that he could not continue and resigned as editor.

He was replaced by John Taylor Coleridge, who edited the Review for nearly two years before being succeeded by John Gibson Lockhart. It is not clear whether Coleridge's appointment was meant to be permanent; he seems to have accepted it somewhat reluctantly, and the growth of his practice as a barrister on the western circuit made it increasingly difficult for him to carry out his editorial duties. Certainly his term of office was not successful. Constable, as usual keeping an eye on his competitors, wrote to Cadell in October 1825:

Very Private. - I understand the visit of John Gibson Lockhart to London was a literary one, and that he is to be editor of the Quarterly Review. This I have no doubt is a wise measure on both sides. The Quarterly has been considered as falling for some time - the Number which has just appeared is a very dull one.¹

Coleridge himself wrote to Murray and expressed the hope that the Review might 'flourish under [Lockhart's] guidance longer and better than it has under mine'.²

1. Constable, iii, 374.

2. Scott, Letters 1825-6, 297n.

The manner of Lockhart's appointment was of such a complicated nature that it is perhaps wisest to follow Scott's advice and 'puzzle [our] brains no more about it'.¹ After various negotiations involving Murray, Benjamin Disraeli, and Scott, Lockhart arrived in London at the end of 1825 as the new editor of the Quarterly. His appointment aroused the wrath and hostility of several of the Review's senior and leading contributors,² and a

1. The Journal of Sir Walter Scott, ed. W.E.K. Anderson (1972), 20.

2. Southey and Croker were particularly opposed to his appointment. Ostensibly the objections were to Lockhart's connections with Blackwood's Magazine and to the part he played in the death of John Scott, but much of the trouble was really the culmination of many years of personal friction. As early as 1822 Southey had informed Grosvenor Bedford of his intention to start a rival to the Quarterly if Coleridge was not made Gifford's successor: 'Murray's conduct has not been such as to make me feel bound to him in the slightest degree; and no future Editor shall ever treat my papers as Gifford has done'. [A. Lang, Life of J.G. Lockhart (1897), i, 360.] Possibly Southey saw himself as editor, although all who knew him must have agreed with Gifford who told Barrow that he was convinced 'that the gentleman in the North would, in a few numbers, ruin the Review if he had the management'. (Smiles, ii, 162) But if Southey did not want the editorship himself, he was determined that J.H. Coleridge should have it. He suggested Coleridge to Murray in the first place, and thought the appointment delayed because of Gifford's prevarication. His conjectures for the reasons for the delay cast an interesting light on some of the tensions and influences at work within the Review: 'The reasons I take to be these: - a natural unwillingness in Gifford formally to resign even in part a management which he can no longer direct; - a notion as natural in Murray that he may get the business done at a cheaper rate, & be in great measure his own manager; - an apprehension on the part of both that the Journal in John Coleridge's hands would take its bias in some degree from me, for I am considered by Murray as too bigotted, & by Gifford as too liberal; the certainty, alike unwelcome to both, that no articles would be admitted which could have no other effect than to wound the feelings & injure the fortunes of an obnoxious author; - that there would be none of that injustice and cruelty (for example) which was shown towards Keats - lastly an overruling influence at the Admiralty' (Scott, Letters 1823-25, 377n.). Southey took Coleridge's eventual resignation from the editorship and the appointment of Lockhart as a personal insult. The other major opposition to Lockhart came from Croker and, to a lesser extent, Barrow - 'the overruling influence at the Admiralty' as Southey described them. The reasons for Croker's hostility are obscure; it is unlikely that he wanted the editorship for himself, but possibly he was afraid that Lockhart might dilute the older brand of Toryism with ideas imported from Blackwood's.

great deal of bitterness and ill-feeling was created.

It is impossible to assess the full impact of this on the Quarterly. Certainly the loss of Croker, who did not write for the Review again until 1831, was a major blow. He might have prevented the débâcle over the issues of Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform both of which the Quarterly opposed only to be confounded when both causes succeeded. The most important effect of the furore surrounding Lockhart's appointment, however, was the damage it did to his prestige and influence as editor. Following Gifford who had edited the Review so successfully for so long was difficult enough, but it was made immeasurably harder by what had happened. Nor had Lockhart the kind of personality necessary to tackle the problems which now faced him. Scott wrote to him in December 1825:

I for[e]see from your natural modesty of nature you will have difficulty in ruling your contributors but you must in some cases be absolute.¹

In fact it was his publisher, not his contributors, who provided his first problem. In desperation he wrote to Scott:

If Murray were dead or locked-up, something might indeed be done: but he is a sore botheration in every possible way & shape.²

Eventually the two men came to some kind of agreement, and Lockhart seems to have followed Gifford in becoming an unofficial reader for the publisher.

Lockhart's diffidence and inexperience were also all too evident in his handling of Southey. Southey threatened to leave the Quarterly and assist with another Review which was about to be

1. Scott, Letters 1825-6, 343.

2. Ibid., 1826-28, 67n.

established if Lockhart did not let him write on the question of Catholic emancipation. Much against Scott's advice¹ Lockhart gave way, and Southey produced an article which in its rabid prejudice went very much against the mood of the country as a whole. To make matters worse the number containing the article appeared a few days after the passing of the Catholic Relief Act.

In his early days as editor Lockhart depended heavily on Scott's help and encouragement. Scott again became a regular contributor, although characteristically he disliked reviewing serious literature since it 'is unfair in one who writes so much himself. It is as if I swept away the snow to prepare smoot[h] ice for my own cast'.² He never lost his belief in the Quarterly as a disseminator of 'sound Constitutional principles', and made a very determined attempt to forge a closer relationship between the Review and the Tory government.³ But apart from this his influence over the running of the Review seems to have been marginal. Perhaps it would have helped if it had been greater. From the outset Lockhart failed to give impetus or direction to the Quarterly, and the first numbers he edited were praised on the grounds that they were 'unexceptional' and 'gave offence to no-one'. Even the advent of Wellington's government, which gave Scott new hope, gave Lockhart little comfort. He wrote to Murray:

1. Scott wrote: 'Southey [is] as much a fanatic as e'er a Catholic of them... - in point of reasoning and political judgement he is a perfect Harpado - nothing better than a wild bull'. (Scott, Letters 1828-31, 25.)

2. Scott, Letters 1825-6, 307.

3. See pp. 114-16 below.

The fact is, we all feel that the accession of the Tories, which gives light and life to so many concerns, is a damper on the poor Review. Milman apprehends that Croker, in the business of eulogy and defence, will be more an incumbrance than a help; and he, like me, is excessively anxious to see new hands and young blood. Alas! we are all getting old, and it is so difficult to whip up stirring interest about any subject in jaded bosoms.¹

It had not been so difficult nearly twenty years before.

Blackwood's Magazine

Factually the history of Blackwood's Magazine is simpler and shorter than that of the two great quarterlies, but it is impossible to do justice to its exotic and extraordinary character. It exploded into life with a blasphemous skit on Edinburgh society;² it thought nothing of publishing several contradictory articles by the same author on the same subject; it cheerfully gave birth to the monstrous Noctes Ambrosianae; and it could carelessly destroy the work and reputation of any author to whom it took an impulsive dislike.

In form and content it was very different from the Edinburgh or the Quarterly. It appeared on the twentieth of each month published by William Blackwood of Edinburgh. It made a false start under the editorship of the unlikely-sounding Cleghorn and Pringle, but its true history commenced with the seventh number of October 1817. It was run by Blackwood himself with the help of John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart. It was Tory in politics, and drew its

1. Smiles, ii, 269.

2. This was the famous Chaldee MS. It was a satirical sketch of contemporary Edinburgh society using Biblical setting and phraseology.

contributions from a wide and varied collection of predominantly Scottish men of letters. It published articles on virtually anything, and also printed poetry and short stories. Only after very careful scrutiny dare one take any of its reviews or articles at face value.

It is therefore not surprising that historians of periodical literature have been reluctant to take Blackwood's Magazine seriously. In fact a close study of it is extremely valuable and also very necessary, since after 1820 it rivalled the Edinburgh and Quarterly in importance. Thomas De Quincey wrote to William Blackwood in March 1830:

it is an "almighty" absurdity for a writer in the 'Quarterly Review' to conceit himself as standing upon higher ground than one in 'Blackwood's Magazine'. The one, with every allowance for its talent and knowledge (though often God He knows, ponderous as nightmare), notoriously owed much, everything almost, to the name and prestige of the aristocracy, which from its earliest appearance gave it countenance and support. It was a pet child of the family. The other made its way as a foundling or an adventurer would, and by mere absolute weight of power, not counting upon favour, but trampling upon opposition.¹

Blackwood's victims would have probably used a different word from 'foundling'.

The success of the Magazine was undoubtedly due to the personalities of the three men running it. In different ways this was equally true of the Edinburgh and the Quarterly, but neither of the quarterlies possessed Blackwood's blatant emphasis on personality. This found its wildest expression in the Noctes Ambrosianae, with their extraordinary mixture of real and fictional

1. Oliphant, i, 434.

characters, but each number set out to be as ostentatious as possible. Unfortunately this often obscured those articles of real merit.

The most important member of the Blackwood's triumvirate was William Blackwood himself. As with the Quarterly Review, the economics of bookselling played an important part in the founding of Blackwood's Magazine. As an Edinburgh bookseller Blackwood, even more than Murray, was in competition with Archibald Constable, and a successful rival to the faltering Edinburgh Review offered substantial financial reward. Blackwood had already shown himself to be an enterprising man of business, and the Magazine was a daring but characteristic speculation.¹ The precise nature of his control over his periodical and his relationship with John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart are discussed in chapter four,² but there can be little doubt that he supplied the stability and continuity that was essential to the Magazine's success. Mrs. Oliphant describes one of the major tasks he undertook:

...the record of these early years of the Magazine is one continued strain of effort on [Blackwood's] part to collect around him, and to secure for his undertaking, the assistance of every man of note whom he happened to come across.³

In this way he was successful, although his real genius is best shown in the way he recognized the talents of such unlikely characters as William Maginn and James Hogg. Having secured their assistance Blackwood was far too astute to treat his contributors as mere

1. See J.G.Lockhart, Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk (1819), ii. 186, for an account of Blackwood's book shop, and a tribute to its owner's enterprise in setting up in business in Edinburgh's New Town.

2. See pp.90-3 below.

3. Oliphant, i, 361.

hacks:

I never did, and never will, hold out money in itself as the inducement for men of talents to write for 'Maga'. What I have always been anxious for, is that able men should write on such subjects as they themselves felt an interest in, and, never to print any article without paying liberally for it.¹

The comment is as reported by Mrs. Oliphant; and any undertones of Pecksniffery probably come from her rather than Blackwood who, in any case, was only following the precedent set by the quarterlies. He was out to make money, and he tailored his moral values accordingly. When the Chaldee Manuscript caused such a stir, he wrote to his London agents claiming that the manuscript was the editor's responsibility and that it had been inserted as a mistake.² The 'editor' made a useful whipping-boy on a number of occasions.

Blackwood's philosophy when under fire (and this happened on innumerable occasions in the early years of the Magazine) was to sit tight, as he explained to John Murray in October 1818:

My rule always was in all my difficulties for the last twelve months, to put the best face upon everything, and even with regard to articles which I have done my utmost to keep out or get modified, I never once admitted they were wrong. If any one perceives that we are uneasy or doubtful, then they pour in their shot like hail.³

At times the activities of his magazine occasioned him some remorse, but in the following letter to Maginn one suspects that it is the loss of readership which affects him most:

1. Oliphant, i, 439.

2. Ibid., i, 136.

3. Smiles, i, 485.

'Maga' has been much injured by the coarse and reckless vein in which many things have been written. Anything approaching to grossness or profane feeling make it a sealed book to many families, and every little slip is magnified into a mighty offence....You and L[ockhart] are apt to get into this strain; and then the work is often so much to my taste, that I do not perceive the wretchedness till it is too late.¹

The wry recognition of his own weakness is typical of the man, and it was his determination, tact, and ability which held the Magazine together during its first chaotic years.

But however much the Magazine owed to Blackwood, its essential character depended on John Wilson, the 'Christopher North' of the Noctes Ambrosianae. He is the most extraordinary character that we meet in the history of these periodicals. He was a man of tremendous physical and mental energy, and as well as being a leading contributor and undertaking many of the editorial duties of Blackwood's he was also a poet, critic, and professor of Moral Philosophy. Thomas Carlyle was fascinated by him when they met, and he wrote to his brother:

Last night I supped with John Wilson, Professor of Moral Philosophy here, author of the 'Isle of Palms', &c., a man of the most fervid temperament, fond of all stimulating things, from tragic poetry down to whisky punch. He snuffed and smoked cigars and drank liquors, and talked in the most indescribable style....I had scarcely either eaten or drunk, being a privileged person, but merely enjoyed the strange volcanic eruptions of our poet's convivial genius. He is a broad sincere man of six feet, with long dishevelled flax-coloured hair, and two blue eyes as keen as an eagle's.²

Lockhart, of course, knew him much better, and he stressed that

1. Oliphant, i, 402-3.

2. J.A.Froude, Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life (1890), i, 412-3.

aspect of Wilson's character which he knew to his cost to be uppermost:

he is a most fascinating fellow; and a most kind-hearted, generous friend; but his fault is a sad one, a total inconsistency in his opinions concerning both men and things. And thus it is that he continually lauds and abuses the same person within the space of a day....¹

This inconsistency made Wilson an extremely unreliable contributor to the Magazine, and his letters to Blackwood range from apologies for his dilatoriness with promises to work harder, to amazement and indignation that a number managed to appear without containing any of his contributions. But it was this 'inconsistency' which made him such a successful practical joker: he found no difficulty in presenting with passion and conviction several opposing views of the same subject, and he was prepared to take his jokes to frightening lengths. He was a volatile and irresponsible man, and he gave a momentum and enthusiasm to Blackwood's Magazine which often made it appear juvenile and callow, but which at times was richly comic and life-enhancing. He was not a good critic; Jeffrey's condemnation of Wordsworth shows a far greater awareness of the nature of the poetry than all the plaudits heaped upon it by Wilson. Nor was he even a good poet; but he made a surprisingly successful professor of Moral Philosophy.² The scope for self-dramatization offered by the lecture room was similar in some ways to that offered by Blackwood's; the results in both cases were at times exhilarating and exciting.

1. A.Lang, Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart (1897), i, 93-4.

2. Mrs. Gordon, Christopher North: A Memoir of John Wilson (Edinburgh, 1879), 238-9.

John Lockhart was a man of very different personality.

Mrs. Gordon, John Wilson's daughter, gives a portrait of him which accords with most contemporary descriptions:

Mr. Lockhart's pale olive complexion had something of a Spanish character in it, that accorded well with the sombre or rather melancholy expression of his countenance; his thin lips, compressed beneath a smile of habitual sarcasm, promised no genial response to the warmer emotions of the heart. His compact, finely-formed head indicated an acute and refined intellect. Cold, haughty, supercilious in manner, he seldom won love, and not unfrequently caused his friends to distrust it in him, for they sometimes found the warmth of their own feelings thrown back upon them in presence of this cold indifference.¹

Lockhart, aware of the impression he created, attempted to defend himself in a self-portrait in Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk.²

He denied that his character inclined only towards 'an unrelenting subversion of the pretensions of others', or that he exposed the incongruities of life merely to 'gratify a sardonic bitterness in exulting over them, or to nourish a sour and atrabilious spirit in regarding them with a cherished and pampered feeling of delighted disapprobation; like that of Swift'. None the less, the character of the Scorpion given him in the Chaldee Manuscript proved to be more than justified, as witnessed by his attacks on Playfair, Hunt and the 'Cockney School', and various other luckless authors.

However, he undoubtedly played a major part in the success of the Magazine; Scott thought that he was largely responsible for the decline in the prestige of Jeffrey and the Edinburgh Review,

1. Gordon, 188.

2. iii, 134-7.

and that through his articles in Blackwood's he made the possibility of an alliance between the Whigs and the Radicals 'a matter rather of public ridicule than public danger'.¹ But he was always uneasy in his role as a reviewer, as a friend of Constable's realized when suggesting ways of countering his attacks on Leigh Hunt:

I think somebody, to mortify Lockhart in the tenderest point, should attack the criticism on Hunt quoad its own vulgarity, and the motto might be, 'Set a thief', etc., for you will observe that the thing is written with an affectation of vast refinement.²

Scott made use of Lockhart's concern with social status when trying to persuade him to sever his connections with the Magazine. It was certainly this concern which made him hesitate before accepting the editorship of the Quarterly Review; Jeffrey, by insisting that all his contributors accepted a fee, had made it acceptable for a gentleman to earn money from reviewing, but it was a different matter to earn one's living from such a source. Lockhart's possibly excessive sensitivity in this matter helps explain in part his attacks on the social inferiority of Hunt and Keats, and the allowances he made for the more socially-acceptable Shelley.

Even after becoming editor of the Quarterly, Lockhart did not stop contributing to what Scott once called 'this mother of mischief'. This, however, left him in a somewhat equivocal position, particularly in regard to Canning and the Tory government.³ There were also other problems: on one occasion both

1. Scott, Letters 1823-25, 479.

2. Constable, ii, 351.

3. See 11416 below.

Blackwood and Wilson thought that Hogg had been unfairly treated in the Quarterly. Lockhart apologised but pointed out that Scott, now in failing health, had been attacked in one of Wilson's Noctes.¹ Despite such disagreements, Lockhart remained in contact with the Magazine which he had helped to establish with such success.

That success, at least at the outset, was due to Blackwood's disregard of the laws of libel. One estimate suggests that during its first five years the Magazine paid out at least £830 in damages.² Hazlitt sued (with Jeffrey as his counsel) because of the attacks upon him, but settled out of court.³ John Leslie won his action in 1822, although the damages were much less than he expected.⁴ Three years later an Irishman called Martin threatened Wilson with what would have been his third libel suit in three years.⁵ Others took the law into their own hands, and either defended themselves in pamphlets or letters, or else demanded a more permanent form of satisfaction. Hogg had to flee Glasgow on one occasion, Leigh Hunt challenged both Lockhart and Wilson to duels, and, more tragically, John Scott lost his life as a result of a duel occasioned by one of Lockhart's articles.

Public reaction to all this ranged from the somewhat ponderous lamentations of Henry Mackenzie, Thomas McCrie, and

1. Oliphant, i, 249.
2. John Bull's Letter to Lord Byron, ed. A.L.Strout (1947), 36.
3. Herschel Baker, William Hazlitt (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), 370-81.
4. Oliphant, i, 177 and 179.
5. Ibid., i, 277ff.

Fraser-Tytler (unkindly labelled the Literary Oracles by Mrs. Oliphant),¹ to Scott's laconic observation that

I know few people who have not glass windows in their heads in the sense which ought to prevent them from flinging stones.²

Blackwood defended the Magazine as best he could; often obsequiously, sometimes by arrogantly claiming that most of the fuss was caused by those who most deserved lampooning.

The outcry against Blackwood's had two important specific consequences, apart from the notoriety which helped to establish it. In August 1818 John Murray bought a half-share in the Magazine, and started to promote its sale in London. Murray claimed to have raised the circulation by five hundred copies almost immediately, and by early 1819 the London sale of the Magazine stood at two thousand copies.³ But despite reassurances from Blackwood, Murray became increasingly worried by the scandals surrounding the Magazine and eventually withdrew from it in December 1819. 'Christopher North' publicly and defiantly claimed that this was due to the fear that Blackwood's would eclipse the Quarterly, and certainly Murray seems to have harboured some suspicions that Blackwood was stealing his contributors and retarding the sale of his own Review.⁴ His withdrawal meant that Blackwood's lost an important centre of distribution in London, and, perhaps more importantly, an antidote to its Scottish bias.

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1. Oliphant, i, 173-7.
 2. Scott, Letters 1817-19, 213.
 3. Smiles, i, 480-96.
 4. Brightfield, 178.



Scott also decided that he could no longer support a periodical which he had once described as 'charming manly liberal and spirited'.¹ He had only agreed to provide the occasional contribution in return for his protégé, William Laidlaw, being found some employment with the Magazine. He was somewhat taken aback by the Magazine's method of operation, as he wrote to his friend Charles Sharpe in December 1818:

But you may imagine how I stared when I first saw what sort of company I had got into....As for any chance of the Magazine giving future offence I think it is highly unlikely - Blackwood's alarm seemd sincere though I daresay founded on no consequences but such as affected his own interest.²

His hopes were too sanguine, and the Magazine lost a powerful and influential supporter.

Scott had viewed the birth of Blackwood's with some amusement:

The feuds of the booksellers[Blackwood and Constable] are most diverting & I have no doubt the rival Magazines like opposition coaches will run the race untill their efforts to outstrip each other shall overthrow one or both.³

Certainly Blackwood's was not overthrown, and despite claims by Scottish Whigs that its sale was 'declining all over Scotland',⁴ by 1822 Blackwood could remonstrate with Hogg when sent an article in the old Chaldee style:

the Magazine is now too serious a concern to be trifled with. It has got quite above attacks and malignities,

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1. Scott, Letters 1817-19, 323.
 2. Ibid., 208-9.
 3. Scott, Letters 1815-17, 508.
 4. Constable, ii, 371.

and I shall take good care never again to give them any handle for saying that they were entitled to speak of it as they once did.¹

There were complaints about the way the Magazine was managed;

William Maginn listed some of them in a letter to Blackwood:

first, too much locality of allusion: I know a quantum suff. of such things is of great use in spreading a sale, but there is a limit. Secondly, occasional coarseness, which annoys the Englishman. Thirdly, the attempts of minor correspondents to imitate the audacious puffery of the Magazine, which can be done by W[ilson] only.²

Maginn was not the most reliable of critics, but others echoed his complaints.³ None the less, by 1825 the Magazine was strong enough to withstand the loss of such a major contributor as Lockhart.

Although Alexander Blackwood warned his father that 'Mr. Lockhart's leaving you will be eagerly caught hold of by all your enemies as a sign that the Magazine is not doing',⁴ his forebodings were

unfounded, and at the end of 1829 Blackwood wrote to another of his sons:

'Maga' is going on flourishingly as ever, and is now looked up to universally as the first Tory organ. I have more communications sent me than I can make use of, and my great difficulty is keeping back what may be called good articles, and obtaining articles of a novel and striking kind.⁵

This was expressed more graphically a few months later by De Quincey when he wrote to say that he had heard that " 'Maga' has of late

1. Oliphant, i, 350.

2. Ibid., i, 396-7.

3. Brightfield, 230 and Oliphant, i, 326-7.

4. Oliphant, ii, 52.

5. Ibid., ii, 91.

been thundering and lightening with more splendour than ever".¹

The storm had raged for nearly thirteen years, but in that time Blackwood's made an important and substantial contribution to periodical literature, and one that the thunder and lightning should not blind us to.

1. Oliphant, i, 433.

Chapter Two

The Literary Review: Its Role and Influence

It is often forgotten that the periodicals of the early nineteenth century inherited a long-established reviewing tradition. The contribution to the development of the literary Review made by the Monthly Review, Critical Review, Analytical Review, and British Critic is too often ignored. Admittedly their combined monthly circulation did not equal that of the Edinburgh Review at its height, but their development during the second half of the eighteenth century was extremely important.

Derek Roper, in a study of the monthly periodicals,¹ shows how they were far from being either hack-work or advertising organs for booksellers. He attributes their decline to two factors: their desire for comprehensiveness, which became impossible with the tremendous growth of publishing at the end of the eighteenth century; and the breakdown of the Augustan critical synthesis with the accompanying loss of direction and coherence in writing about literature. This latter problem also affected the new quarterlies, but there can be little doubt that one of the monthlies' major problems was their increasingly quixotic attempt to record every new book. It certainly contributed to their dullness owing to lack of selectivity, the mediocrity of many of the books published, and increasingly dreary catalogues which

1. Derek Roper, The Reviewing of English Literature c. 1789-1802, B.Litt. Thesis (Oxford, 1959). Shortly to be published by Methuen under the title Reviewing Before the Edinburgh.

took up much of each number.

The Edinburgh Review changed this by quickly establishing the principle of selectivity in its choice of books to review, but the major innovation was the prominence given to the reviewer. The monthlies had a tremendously high proportion of extract to comment; in an average review of new poetry only a quarter of the space would be devoted to critical commentary.¹ Jeffrey, by guidance and example, transformed the review into a vehicle for specific and controversial literary criticism. But this was not pure gain: if the monthlies failed because of their adherence to a restricted and out-dated role, the role of the new quarterlies at times became too elusive and amorphous.

Any attempt at definition is hindered by the aura of irresponsibility and sensationalism which surrounded the founding of the Edinburgh Review and, later, Blackwood's Magazine. High spirits and the desire to outshine staid competitors are the excuses normally given for this, but two other motives have to be considered.

The first of these is that the new style of reviewing provided an excitement and sense of power difficult to resist. Sydney Smith once boasted that he never read a book before reviewing it since 'it prejudices a man so',² and Scott betrayed a similar attitude in a letter to Charles Sharpe:

As for the Review, perge, perge! - fear nothing; you have yet to learn the magic virtue of calling yourself we. I never knew the emphatic force of that pronoun till I became a reviewer, and then I no longer wondered at its being a royal attribute.³

1. Roper, 159-60.

2. Pearson, 57.

3. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 148.

Unfortunately too many reviewers turned out to be tyrants rather than benevolent despots.

Secondly, and more importantly, the Edinburgh Review and, again, Blackwood's Magazine owed much of their initial success to an uninhibited and sometimes unprincipled disregard for reputation. Coleridge bitterly complained that the readers of the Edinburgh were only interested in politics, personality, and scandal:

Now three fourths of English Readers are led to purchase periodical works, even those professedly literary, by the expectation of having these Passions gratified, of which we have melancholy proof in the great sale of the Edingburgh Review....¹

Scott took an equally jaundiced view of the readers of the Quarterly:

it is inconceivable how coarse & voracious their appetite is for anything that contains spunk & dash; still [sic: read 'style'] they never mind nor are they solicitous about justice - make them laugh...make them laugh and you have them sure.²

This raises the issue of the part played by such considerations in the assessment of an author's work: were Jeffrey's attacks on Wordsworth and Lockhart's on Hunt occasioned only by a desire to increase the circulation of their periodicals? Each case must be considered on its own merits, but it is worth remembering that the eighteenth-century satiric tradition made personal invective less horrifying to a contemporary audience than it is to us. Certainly by 1789 'tolerance prevailed in the republic of letters',³ but the tradition exemplified in its later manifestations by such writers as Churchill and Junius was by no means moribund.⁴

1. Collected Letters of S.T.Coleridge, ed. E.L.Griggs (1959), iii, 141.

2. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 156.

3. Roper, 48; for a less favourable interpretation see Scott, Letters 1808-11, 128.

4. It was perhaps most obviously alive in the work of James Gillray and other caricaturists of the period.

This in no way lessens the responsibility involved in any act of public criticism. Richard Woodhouse, incensed by the Reviews' treatment of Keats, touched upon a major issue when he wrote:

And shall we not excuse the errors, the luxuriances of youth? are we to expect that poets are to be given to the world, as our first parents were, in a state of maturity? are they to have no season of Childhood? are they to have no room to try their wings before the steadiness & strength of their flight are to be finally judged of?¹

It was an issue also discussed by Henry Brougham in his review of Byron's Hours of Idleness,² but he merely employed the truism that the very act of publication implicitly accepts the possibility of adverse as well as favourable criticism. The Reviews often fell back on this when justifying unduly severe attacks on authors, although on occasion they did make concessions to youth and inexperience. Such excuses were not needed by the monthlies of the previous century, since they did not see themselves as primarily literary critics. On the whole their attitude towards literature seems to have been more lenient and possibly more constructive,³ but the stringent and penetrating criticism of the later periodicals at their best offered something of equal worth.

At their worst, the Reviews made appalling and sometimes tragic blunders. One such instance was Gifford's reference to Lamb's remarks on Ford as the 'blasphemies of a poor maniac'.

1. The Letters of John Keats 1814-21, ed. H.L. Rollins (1958), i, 384.

2. ER, xi (Jan., 1808), 285-9.

3. Roper, 158-61.

When he learnt of the Lambs' precarious state of mental health, he wrote to Southey:

Had I been aware of one of the circumstances which you mention, I would have lost my right arm sooner than have written what I have!¹

But at least Gifford avoided bloodshed during his career as editor of the Quarterly. John Scott was mortally wounded in a duel which resulted from an article in Blackwood's,² and even Jeffrey and Tom Moore got as far as aiming unloaded pistols at each other.³

This atmosphere of vendetta and personal animosity not only makes it difficult to differentiate between genuine critical disagreement and disguised abuse, it also brings into question the role of the periodicals in contemporary literary history. The matter is further confused by that charge so often levelled by authors against their critics which is perhaps best summed up by Pope's dictum 'Let such teach others who themselves excell, And censure freely who have written well'. We shall see how Carlyle suspected Jeffrey of being a frustrated author, and Moore, whilst recognizing the talent of the reviewers, doubted the validity of their criticism:

[Critics] expose a vast deal of absurdity, to be sure; and if it is of much importance to know why we are pleased or displeased, they tell us, - but I am quite certain that the watchful rigour they exercise in these days is, among other things, fatal to the little genius that's left us....It is

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1. See Smiles, i, 200-01 for details of this incident.
 2. See Scott, Letters 1819-21, 348n. - 350n. for a full account of this.
 3. See Lord John Russell, The Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Thomas Moore (1853-6), i, 199-207 for Moore's account of the duel.

the talent of our present race of critics that makes them as pernicious as they are formidable. No man of sensibility or modesty...can write a line without having the dread of these persons before his eyes; and he who is obliged to pick his steps will never win the Olympic race....few of these fellows have the creative power. They are (as I've often thought and said) like able-bodied eunuchs: they can knock down a man, but they cannot get one.¹

Scott changed the simile but not the meaning when he likened critics to 'a sort of tinkers, who, unable to make pots and pans, set up for menders of them, and, God knows, often make two holes in patching one'.²

In this century the literary Review has taken on a self-conscious and somewhat exalted role, as for example in T.S. Eliot's claim that it

should maintain the application, in literature, of principles which have their consequences also in politics and in private conduct; and it should maintain them without tolerating any confusion of the purposes of pure literature with the purposes of politics or ethics....³

Not surprisingly there are few early nineteenth-century exemplars of this definition, although Scott and others attempted at times to lay down similar theoretical guidelines. But the gap between theory and practice always remained disturbingly wide, and it is impossible to arrive at any concensus of contemporary opinion as to what the Reviews were, or what they should have been.

When definitions were attempted, they were often the result of ulterior motives. Such was the case when John Murray,

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1. The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt, ed. Thornton Hunt, (1862), i, 92-3.
 2. Scott, Letters 1787-1807, 243.
 3. T.S.Eliot, "The Function of the Literary Review", The Criterion, iv (1923).

extremely perturbed by the antics of Blackwood's Magazine in which he had a financial interest, wrote to William Blackwood:

- The prominent feature of the Magazine should be literary and scientific news, and most of all the latter, for which your editors appear to have little estimation, and they seem not to be the least aware that this is ten times more interesting to the public than any other class of literature at present....¹

Sir Francis Palgrave, then Francis Cohen, made a similar point, but this time the bias came from his utilitarian philosophy:

In the present state of society, intellectual cultivation is so extensively diffused that the opinion of the 'Critic' is necessarily anticipated by the sound judgment of the world at large.... Hence the most important part of the duty of the contributors to a periodical publication is that of supplying the public with the facts and the current information which they need.²

Although it would be wrong to underestimate the importance of the Reviews as disseminators of medical and scientific information,³ it was their controversial and provocative comments on politics and literature which captured the public's attention. Whether such comments aided or actively hindered the development of the literature of the period is a question which must be examined later. To many people the Reviews were typified by Shelley's contemptuous comment that 'Priests & Eunuchs have their privilege',⁴ but more commonly they were regarded as part of that historical process which ultimately divided good literature from bad. This latter view is implicit in a piece of fatherly advice that Scott gave to Lockhart:

1. Oliphant, i, 159.

2. Smiles, ii, 161-62.

3. Jeffrey in the Edinburgh supported the campaign for smallpox inoculation at a time when it was opposed by prejudice and self-interest, and Dr. Gooch's article in the Quarterly in 1825 hastened the passing of the Quarantine Act.

4. Letters, Jones, ii, 299.

There is a custom among the South American Indians to choose their chief by the length of time during which he is able to sustain a temporary internment in an owl's nest. Literary respect and eminence is won by similar powers of endurance.¹

One cannot help feeling that sitting in an owl's nest was probably preferable to having to face Jeffrey at his worst.

If it is difficult to define the role played by the periodicals, it is equally difficult to assess the nature and extent of their influence. A great deal of conflicting evidence (often by its very nature unreliable and disjointed) can be amassed which in the end does little to clarify the problem. There are, however, three areas which deserve consideration, although it is outside the scope of this present study to examine them in depth.

The first of these involves the question of readership. Circulation figures are in themselves inadequate, since each copy sold probably passed through many hands. Any drawing room with pretensions to fashion possessed the current number of one or more of the major periodicals, and the country gentry and professional classes saw the Reviews as at least one way of alleviating the provinciality of their lives. Once read, the most recent number was lent to friends and neighbours before coming to rest in the corner of somebody's library. It was possible to buy bound sets of the back numbers of the Reviews, which often went through several editions.² This means that the known circulation figures possibly have to be quadrupled if the number of people who had access to the periodicals is to be gauged. The figure that results,

1. Andrew Lang, The Life and Letters of J.G.Lockhart (1897), ii, 23.

2. Constable records how the Prince of Wales's secretary bought sets of the Edinburgh Review and the Farmer's Magazine before becoming a subscriber to both. (Constable, i. 348.) See also Southey, New Letters, Curry, ii, 348, for a reference to the reprinting of Southey's contributions to the Quarterly.

remembering that the Edinburgh commanded a circulation of fourteen thousand at its height, speaks for itself.

But such figures do not tell us why people read the periodicals. Politics often determined the choice of Review. The increasing Whig bias of the Edinburgh in its early years lost it many readers, including the Earl of Buchan, who ceremoniously kicked it out of his house after he had read the Don Cevallos article. The Quarterly attracted many readers from its competitor in 1809, and although many people took both periodicals, there was an inevitable polarization of political attitudes. Scandal, too, seems to have had a considerable effect on circulation, and Blackwood's Magazine (like Private Eye) thrived in spite of innumerable libel suits. Wordsworth banned it from the house, but Dorothy and Mary managed to read it surreptitiously. But it was another unworthy motive which was perhaps most potent. Byron records how

[At School] I was...~~remarked for the extent and readiness of my~~ general information [which was] so great on modern topics as to induce a suspicion that I could only collect so much information ¹ from reviews, because I was never seen reading.

Scott put it rather more bluntly when arguing that booksellers should always keep a plentiful stock of books which were in fashion:

If the demand increases and cannot be rapidly supplied people borrow from each other, or according to a yet more common practice see all about it in the Reviews and escape the disgrace of ignorance which ten chances to one was their chief motive for purchasing the book.²

1. Byron's Works: Letters and Journals, ed. R.E.Prothero (1901), v, 452.

2. Scott, Letters 1815-17, 411.

But whether it was politics, scandal, or a desire for fashionable information, there can be no doubt that the periodicals commanded the attention of an astonishingly large proportion of the reading public.

As a result of this popularity the Reviews possessed a great deal of power, and the second point of general interest is the extent to which they managed to influence the major authors of the period. Each major author was attacked by at least one of the three periodicals at some point in his career, and their reactions to these attacks show a remarkable similarity. Assumed indifference only thinly disguises the profound shock that many of them felt. Wordsworth responded by increasing his isolation from the literary world of his day; Byron and Shelley were forced even further into that extremism which so alienated them from their audience; and Coleridge indulged in an orgy of rage and self-pity. Perhaps the most tragic case was that of Keats, who was denied the public notice that might have made the last year of his life somewhat happier. But despite the anger and frustration occasioned by the Reviews, it seems unlikely that their criticism had any specific effect. There is little or no evidence to suggest that a leading writer of the period ever revised his work as a result of an unfavourable review, or that any substantial shift of aesthetic principle resulted from a sustained attack upon an author. Whether or not certain beliefs and attitudes became more entrenched as a result of such attacks is another matter, and such questions can only be answered by a close examination of the careers of individual writers.

If all this might seem a triumph for artistic integrity,

it must be remembered that it was often only achieved at considerable cost. The true significance of the periodicals lies in the way in which they created public attitudes towards contemporary literature. For those authors who did not conform to the criteria laid down by the Reviews there was the constant struggle for recognition, often coupled with financial insecurity. Indeed, one of the most concrete ways of assessing the Reviews' influence is to examine the effect they had on the sale of books.

As early as 1806 John Murray warned of the need for advertising, since

it occasions many people to order or buy the book immediately, who would otherwise have waited for the opinion of their Review, and, had this proved cold or unfavourable, would not have been purchasers.¹

Byron took the opposite view, but still acknowledged the power of the periodicals, when he suggested that even an unfavourable review could promote the sale of a book since 'it keeps up controversy, and prevents it being forgotten'.² Certainly there are examples of books selling well despite unfavourable reviews. Isaac D'Israeli wrote to Murray about a poem by James Grahame:

I see there is a third edition of 'The Sabbath', in spite of the cold insolence of the Edinburgh Review.³

Naturally, favourable reviews were considered to have aided sales, and Southey wrote to Murray:

I do not know to whom I am obliged in Blackwood for a reviewal of the Colloquies: but it is kindly done, and likely to promote the sale.⁴

1. Constable, i, 348.

2. Byron's Letters and Journals, ed. L. Marchand (1973), i, 136.

3. Smiles, i, 50.

4. New Letters, Curry, ii, 348.

But it is impossible to make any simple correlation between the Reviews' reception of a book and its eventual popularity or lack of it, as Scott made clear in a letter to Anna Seward:

I think Southey does himself injustice in supposing the Edinburgh Review or any other could have sunk Madoc even for a time. But the size & price of the work, joind to the frivolity of an age which must be treated as nurses humour children are separate reasons why a poem on so chaste a Model should not have taken immediately.¹

As always, no single factor can be taken in isolation.

There is, however, strong evidence to support the assumption that poor reviews could kill or severely curtail the sale of a book. Hazlitt's Lectures on the English Poets (1818) was attacked by the Quarterly Review, and, after a promising start which included a second edition within a year, sales fell away rapidly.²

Coleridge claimed that

The Sale of the Christabel sadly disappointed Mr. Murray. It was abused & ridiculed by the Edingburgh Review: and the Quarterly refused even to notice it....³

Coleridge obviously thought that no review was worse than a bad one.

It was different in Wordsworth's case, as T.M. Raysor points out in his study of the poet's reputation. He claims that with the unfavourable reception of Poems in Two Volumes of 1807,

Wordsworth's name was certainly trampled under foot, not only by Jeffrey, but by the whole body of critics; and the reading public seems to have accepted their adverse judgment. The burst of publication in 1814 and 1815 enabled Wordsworth to gain ground once more, but the ground gained was in the opinions of the enlightened few, and emphatically not in the opinions of whatever general reading public poetry may hope to have.⁴

1. Scott, Letters 1787-1807, 379.

2. Baker, Hazlitt, 254.

3. Letters, Griggs, iv, 650n.

4. T.M.Raysor, "The Establishment of Wordsworth's Reputation", JEGP, liv (1955), 71.

And of The Excursion:

...Jeffrey's attack in the Edinburgh Review seems to have killed the sale. The other Reviews, which had supported him in his viciously abusive review of the Poems of Two Volumes of 1807, were now clearly against him, but his influence on the public seems to have been as great as before, probably because his harshness must have seemed partly justified by the limitations of The Excursion itself.¹

Raysor agrees with De Quincey's claim that Wordsworth's reputation was in the ascendancy by the end of the third decade of the century, but it is obvious that the Reviews, particularly the Edinburgh, severely hampered the sale of Wordsworth's poetry.

The problem of the Reviews' effect on the sale of books deserves a detailed investigation beyond the scope of this present study. Obviously their effect could be detrimental, and their influence was powerful and decisive. It was also world-wide. Thomas Scott wrote to his brother of a Captain Norton, an Indian chief who had translated the Scriptures into Mohawk and was about to publish a book of travels. The Captain was afraid that the Edinburgh Review would not treat his book favourably, and Walter Scott wrote to his brother:

I beg my compliments to the hero who is afraid of Jeffrey's scalping knife.²

It was a fear shared by lesser men than an Indian chief.

1. Raysor, 65.
2. Scott, Letters 1811-14, 503.

Chapter Three

Jeffrey and Scott

In 1818 John Gibson Lockhart wrote of Francis Jeffrey:

Mr. Jeffray is an advocate before the parliament of Edinburgh, and is supposed to be surpassed by few of his brethren, either in the dexterity or eloquence of his judicial pleadings....His writings manifest, indeed, the most complete possession of all those faculties which form the armour of a pleader. He can open his case in such a way as to make you think favourably of the blackest, or suspiciously of the fairest cause.... The question with him is never, which side is the right, but which side he has undertaken to defend....So acute a man as he is cannot conceal from himself the fact, that however paramount may be his authority among the generation of indolent and laughing readers to whom he dictates opinion, he has as yet done nothing which will ever induce a man of research, in the next century, to turn over the volumes of his Review.¹

But as 'Dr. Peter Morris', Lockhart saw Jeffrey's abilities in a rather different light:

His conversation acted upon me like the first delightful hour after taking opium....I never before witnessed any thing to be compared with the blending together of apparently little consistent powers in the whole strain of his discourse. Such a power, in the first place, of throwing away at once every useless part of the idea to be discussed, and then such a happy redundancy of imagination to present the essential and reserved part in its every possible relation, and point of view - and all this connected with so much of the plain sçavoir faire of actual existence, and such a thorough scorn of mystification, it is really a very wonderful intellectual coalition.²

Lockhart, in his many personae, neither desired nor achieved consistency

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1. BM, ii (March, 1818), 675-76.
 2. Lockhart, Peter's Letters, i, 72-3.

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in his judgements, but this divergence of opinion is typical of the response to Jeffrey and his work. Jeffrey as editor and reviewer is dealt with elsewhere; here I am concerned with the personality of the man who more than any other dominated three decades of periodical literature. No contemporary could discuss the Reviews without implicitly discussing Jeffrey, and he stands at the centre of any modern study of the periodicals. Any sketch must be incomplete, and I can only hint at the major contradictions which seem to me to lie at the centre of his character.

To some of Jeffrey's contemporaries his character needed no explanation whatsoever. Anna Seward, writing to Constable in 1806, used a comparison which inevitably became a cliché:

Not even you can teach me to esteem him whom you call 'your little friend Jeffrey', the Edinburgh Reviewer. Jefferies ought to have been his name, since so similar his nature. On his self-placed bench of decision on poetic works, he is all that Jefferies was when tyranny had thrown the judicial robe on his shoulder.¹

Robert Southey, a more distinguished victim, displayed even more pique in his dismissal of his opponent:

I met Jeffrey the reviewer of Thalaba and Madoc; even if my temper had been more irascible, the sight of a thing not above five feet two would have quitted me. In argument he was quick, conceited and as shallow as heart could wish.²

A more irascible Southey would be hard to imagine, but the intensity of his antipathy towards Jeffrey was shared by many others.

Undoubtedly Jeffrey deserved a great deal of the hostility felt

1. Constable, ii, 25.

2. New Letters, Curry, i, 406.

towards him, but the strength of feeling that he engendered makes it very difficult to arrive at an objective assessment of his character.

Unfortunately defences of him by his contemporaries are usually unsatisfactory. David Constable, writing after the critic's death, dealt only in platitudes:

his sound and discriminating judgement made him a lover of good men wherever he found them - whatever was generous and disinterested he could duly appreciate. He was a sincere hater of whatsoever was base, time-serving, or ignoble, but while he possessed powers of withering and contemptuous reprobation and reproof where it was due, these powers were always tempered by an amiable humanity, and he could make full allowance for the ignorance and frailty and corruption of poor human nature.¹

But as is all too easily demonstrable, Jeffrey used those powers of 'withering and contemptuous reprobation and reproof' where it was obviously not due. It was this problem which Lord Cockburn tried to overcome in his biography of his friend:

Blaming and exposing become arts; in which it is very tempting to excel; and for which readers are ready to pay more than for better matter. Different critics fall into this habit in different veins, and under different feelings. When Jeffrey gave way to it, it was generally from mere lightness of spirit. Totally devoid of ill nature, and utterly unconscious of any desire to hurt, he handled the book as a thing to be played with; without duly considering that the gay and moral pleasantries of Horace might produce as much distress as the declamatory weight of Juvenal.²

This is unconvincing; Jeffrey's irresponsible criticism cannot be justified in terms of high spirits. Neither, however, should this one aspect of his work be allowed to stand as wholly representative. Cockburn makes an important point when he writes

1. Constable, ii, 222-3.

2. Cockburn, Life of Jeffrey, i, 289.

of the Edinburgh:

In spite of all its severity, there is no work of the kind where applause has been conferred more generously, or with more valuable illustrations of its grounds.¹

But what was it that caused Jeffrey to treat authors as a magistrate would poachers, or (to use Scott's image rather than Hazlitt's) hunt down bards 'like a country squire coursing after game'? Sydney Smith found the answer in two character traits:

if you could be alarmed into the semblance of modesty, you would charm everybody; but remember my joke against you about the Moon and the Solar System; - 'Damn the solar system! bad light - planets too distant - pestered with comets - feeble contrivances; could make a better with great ease'.²

and

I exhort you to restrain the violent tendency of your nature for analysis, and to cultivate synthetical propensities. What's the use of virtue? What's the use of wealth? What's the use of honor? What's a guinea but a damned yellow circle? What's a chamberpot but an infernal hollow sphere? The whole effort of your mind is to destroy. Because others build slightly and eagerly, you employ yourself in kicking down their houses, and contract a sort of aversion for the more honorable useful and difficult task of building well yourself.³

Smith also acted as Jeffrey's conscience at other times, particularly when in 1814 he asked if the attacks on Wordsworth did not 'wear in some little degree the shape of persecution'.⁴

The bent of Jeffrey's mind was not, however, entirely destructive. His early letters display a hesitancy and lack of

1. Cockburn, i, 289.

2. Letters of Sydney Smith, ed. N.C. Smith (1953); i, 121.

3. Ibid., i, 95-6.

4. Ibid., i, 250.

confidence greatly at odds with his later reputation. In 1798

he wrote to a friend bemoaning the loss of that 'visionary gleam':

...these poetic visions bestowed a much purer and more tranquil happiness than can be found in any of the tumultuous and pedantic triumphs that seem now within my reach; and that I was more amiable, and quite as respectable, before this change took place in my character. I shall never arrive at any eminence either in this new character....¹

Two years later he was still in doubt:

My ambition and my prudence and indolence will have a pitched battle, and I shall either devote myself to ambition and toil, or lay myself quietly down in obscurity and mediocrity of attainment.²

But as one might expect, 'Judge Jefferies' was not entirely absent.

As early as 1792 he wrote to a friend announcing his intention

'in a year or two to correct the depravity of taste, and to revive

the simple and the sublime in all their purity, and in all their

majesty'.³ From the tone of that remark it was clear that he was

to make his attempt not as a poet but as a critic.

Contradictions in Jeffrey's character were also observed

by Walter Scott who, like Smith, knew him extremely well. In

1806 he wrote to Anna Seward outlining some of his friend's

faults:

he often makes his best friends lose patience by that love of a severity which drives justice into tyranny but in fact I have often wondered that a man who loves and admires Poetry as much as he does can permit himself the severe or sometimes unjust strictures which he fulminates even against the authors whom he most approves of & whose works actually afford him most delight....

1. Cockburn, ii, 34.

2. Ibid., ii, 44.

3. Ibid., ii, 9.

In common life the lion lies down with the Kid for not to mention his friendship for me now of some standing he had the magnanimity (absolutely approaching to . . . chivalrous reliance upon the faith of a foe) to trust himself to Southey's guidance in a boat on Windermere when it would have cost the poet nothing but a wet jacket to have overset the Critic & swam triumphantly to shore & this the very day the review of Madoc was published.¹

Scott was always at pains to distinguish between the man and the critic: in a letter to Southey he claimed that Jeffrey was that 'old character the best good man with the worst natured Muse (if there be a Muse of Criticism) that ever wielded the quill of an Aristarchus'²; and to another friend he wrote that Jeffrey 'considering the strength & sharpness of his teeth and claws is the tamest lion you ever saw in your life'.³ In his letter to Southey, however, Scott admitted that he and Jeffrey differed 'in many most material points of taste', and it was this that he stressed some six years later when writing to Joanna Baillie to warn her that Jeffrey disliked the third series of her Plays on the Passions:

our very ideas of what is poetry differ so widely that we rarely talk upon these subjects. There is something in his mode of reasoning that leads me greatly to doubt whether, notwithstanding the vivacity of his imagination, he really has any feeling of poetical genius or whether he has worn it all off by perpetually sharpening his wit on the grindstone of criticism.⁴

Given fundamental differences on points of literature and politics,

1. Scott, Letters 1787-1807, 288-9.

2. Ibid., 292.

3. Ibid., 402.

4. Ibid., 1811-14, 60.

it is a little surprising that the friendship between the two men endured for so long.¹

The description which perhaps best sums up Jeffrey's character, however, came not from Scott or Smith but from Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle wrote in his journal:

Jeffrey's essential talent sometimes seems to me to have been that of a Goldoni, some comic dramatist, not without a touch of fine lyrical pathos. He

1. Their friendship survived even Jeffrey's unfavourable review of Marmion and the part played by Scott in founding the Quarterly. Scott was certainly hurt by the review of his poem, although he wrote to several friends denying any such feeling. His two major biographers differ somewhat in their interpretation of this incident: Lockhart, obviously aware of the nature of Scott's friendship with Jeffrey, treats the whole thing lightly, and humorously recounts Mrs. Scott's bellicose comments to her husband's friend [J.G. Lockhart, The Life of Sir Walter Scott (1837), ii, 146-9.]; Edgar Johnson tends to cast Jeffrey as the villain of the piece. (Johnson, Scott, i, 280-3.) Scott in a letter to Joanna Baillie attempted to describe his feelings about the matter, and in doing so cast a very revealing light on his attitude to Jeffrey: 'I have no fault to find with his expressing his sentiments frankly and freely upon the poem yet I think he might without derogation to his impartiality have couched them in language rather more civil to a personal friend and I believe he would have thought twice before he had given himself that air of superiority in a case where I had any chance of defending myself. Besides I really have often told him that I think he wants the taste for poetry which is essentially necessary to enjoy and of course to criticize it with justice. He is learn'd with the most learn'd in its canons and laws skilled in its modulation and an excellent judge of the justice of the sentiments which it conveys but he wants that enthusiastic feeling which like sun-shine upon a landscape lights up every beauty and palliates if it cannot hide every defect. To offer a poem of imagination to a man whose whole life and study has been to acquire a stoical indifference towards enthusiasm of every kind would be the last as it would surely be the silliest action of my life. This is really my opinion of Jeffrey not form'd yesterday nor upon any coldness between us for there has been none'. (Scott, Letters 1808-11, 116-7.) Whatever his reaction, it is extremely unlikely that Jeffrey's unfavourable review had very much to do with Scott's decision to help with the Quarterly - politics not injured pride determined that.

is the best mimic in the lowest and highest senses I ever saw. All matters that have come before him he has taken up in little dainty comprehensible forms; chiefly logical - for he is a Scotchman and a lawyer - and encircled with sparkles of conversational wit or persiflage; yet with deeper study he would have found poetical forms for them, and his persiflage might have incorporated itself with the love and pure human feeling that dwells deeply in him. This last is his highest strength, though he himself hardly knows the significance of it; he is one of the most loving men alive; has a true kindness not of blood and habit only, but of soul and spirit. He cannot do without being loved....

He will talk of nothing earnestly, though his look sometimes betrays an earnest feeling. He starts contradictions in such cases, and argues, argues. Neither is his arguing like that of a thinker, but of the advocate - victory, not truth. A right terrae filius would feel irresistibly disposed to wash him away. He is not a strong man in any shape, but nimble and tough.

He stands midway between God and Mammon, and his preaching through life has been an attempt to reconcile them. Hence his popularity - a thing easily accountable when one looks at the world and at him, but little honourable to either. Literature! poetry! Except by a dim and indestructible instinct which he has never dared to avow, yet being a true poet in his way could never eradicate, he knows not what they mean. A true newspaper critic on the great scale; no priest, but a concionator.¹

Many of Carlyle's assertions can be supported from other sources: Jeffrey's reviews abound in law imagery, and others spoke of his desire to appear as prosecuting counsel in his role as reviewer; his early letters suggest the growth of some kind of poetic faculty; and various acts of generosity testify to that 'true kindness... of soul and spirit'. Many other friends also observed his love of argument, the sacrifice of wisdom to wit, and the strange combination of levity with an inborn pessimism. But Carlyle's final comments are the most interesting: the existence of that

1. Froude, Carlyle's Early Life, ii, 129-31.

'dim indestructible instinct which he has never dared to avow, yet being a true poet in his way could never eradicate', accounts for much of Jeffrey's undeniably perceptive criticism; and the concluding judgement of him as 'a true newspaper critic on the great scale' may help explain the ultimate limitations of that work. It is a problem we must come back to: my contention at this point is that underlying Jeffrey's reputation as a slayer of defenceless poets is a complex personality which deserves a more stringent critical examination than it has as yet had. His influence and stature also demand an unbiased assessment of both man and critic.

Walter Scott has already received such treatment, but even so his importance in the history of the periodicals is often underestimated. Although neither editor nor regular contributor, at one time or another his help was essential to the success of each of the three periodicals. His early contributions gave the Edinburgh Review stability and expertise at the turning point in its career. He helped to found the Quarterly Review, and gave both-practical and moral support to William Gifford; many years later he did the same when his son-in-law, J.G.Lockhart, took over the editorship of the Review. But his real importance lay in his reputation, as the founders of Blackwood's Magazine were astute enough to realize. Wilson was not exaggerating when he wrote to William Blackwood 'Get Scott, and you get everything'.¹ Eventually Scott broke with

1. Oliphant, i, 144. Scott's help was obtained in return for Blackwood's employing William Laidlaw, one of Scott's protégés. As Mrs Oliphant records, "Laidlaw got his steady remuneration...and Blackwood got the invaluable name, and not a few effective lines and paragraphs quickly divined by the public" (Oliphant, i, 156).

the Magazine, but Blackwood's continual efforts to avert this show the importance he attached to Scott's name.

But it was not simply a matter of practical assistance; Scott, even though he contributed relatively little, exerted a great deal of influence both on and through the pages of the two leading quarterlies. As collaborator and adviser he constantly strove to persuade those in charge of the Reviews to leaven their censure with a little humanity, and as a contributor his reviews displayed a breadth of reading and a magnanimity which offered a welcome alternative to the more unprincipled efforts of some reviewers. A study of early nineteenth-century reviewing practices does not strengthen one's belief in human nature, and Scott's humanity, kindness, and honesty, are rare attributes. Such a comment implies a comparison with Jeffrey who is often seen as being singularly deficient in such qualities. Such a comparison is important, not because it allows moral judgements to be passed on either man, but because it enables us to realize the very different conceptions they had of the critic's role.

Scott believed in the importance of literary criticism, if that term can be used to cover both literary journalism and more scholarly endeavours; his support for all three periodicals and his editorial labours testify to that. He did not believe, however, that this activity could best be carried out by establishing a literary tribunal to whom every author was brought for judgement (perhaps such a procedure seemed too akin to events in France in 1793-4). He wrote to Joanna Baillie in 1817 after having received the MS of her unpublished poem

on Columbus:

You see that like all the world I start up a critic at the sight of a manuscript....But I differ from most critics in supposing the authors own opinion of far greater consequence than that of any friend whatsoever....¹

He disapproved of slashing reviews, and wrote to George Ellis on one occasion:

...nor have I either inclination or talents to use the critical scalping knife, unless as in the case of Godwin, where flesh and blood succumbed under the temptation.... But in general, I think it ungentlemanly to wound any person's feelings through an anonymous publication, unless where conceit or false doctrine strongly calls for reprobation.²

Scott's motives are a little mixed here; genuine kindness is reinforced by his concern that public invective is ungentlemanly (caste is a perennial problem with Scott when discussing the role of the Reviews), but underlying all this is the belief that literary criticism is based on taste rather than immutable universal laws:

I do not at all like the task of reviewing & have seldom myself undertaken it - in poetry never - because I am sensible there is a greater difference of tastes in that department than in any other and that there is much excellent poetry which I am not now-a-days able to read without falling asleep & which would nevertheless have given me great pleasure at an earlier period of my life - Now I think there is something hard in blaming the poor cook for the fault of ones own palate or deficiency of appetite.³

Here, of course, we approach the basic difference between Scott and Jeffrey, as one of Scott's friends realized:

It struck me that there was this great difference - Jeffrey, for the most part, entertained us, when books were under discussion, with the detection of faults, blunders, absurdities, or plagiarisms: Scott took up the matter where he left it, recalled

1. Scott, Letters 1815-17, 476.
2. Ibid., 1787-1807, 216-17.
3. Ibid., 1787-1807, 398.

some compensating beauty or excellence for which no credit had been allowed, and by the recitation, perhaps, of one fine stanza, set the poor victim on his legs again.¹

There are several possible reasons for this difference in approach: Jeffrey was a professional critic whilst Scott was primarily a creative artist; Jeffrey is often seen as the last defender of Augustan literary standards whilst Scott is sometimes claimed as a Romantic; and there are obvious and important temperamental differences. None of these is a satisfactory explanation on its own: Scott's substantial aid to the periodicals shows that he was no enemy of the professional critic; Scott is as often seen as an Augustan as a Romantic; and differences in character need not necessarily result in such fundamental differences in approach to literature. But taken together they form a more convincing picture. Margaret Ball in her sensible and sympathetic account of Scott's literary criticism writes:

By temperament, then, Scott was enthusiastic over the past and cheerful in regard to his own day; he was imaginative, practical, genial; and these traits must be taken into account in judging his critical writings. These and other qualities may be deduced from the most superficial study of his creative work. The mere bulk of that work bears witness to two things: first that Scott was primarily a creative writer; again, that he was of those who write much rather than minutely. It is obvious that to attack details would be easy. And since he was only secondarily a critic, it is natural that his critical opinions should not have been erected into any system. But while they are essentially desultory, they are the ideas of a man whose information and enthusiasm extended through a wide range of studies; and they are rendered impressive by the abundance, variety, and energy, which mark them as characteristic of Scott.²

1. Lockhart, Life of Scott, ii, 156-7.

2. M. Ball, Sir Walter Scott As A Critic Of Literature (New York, 1907), 16.

Thus the predominance of the artist over the critic and Scott's own temperament are seen as the major factors in forming his critical attitudes, but the intellectual preconceptions of both Scott and Jeffrey are of extreme importance as Miss Ball recognizes:

The period was transitional, and Jeffrey did not go so far as Scott in breaking away from the dictation of his predecessors. But his attitude was on the whole more modern than the reader would infer from the following sentence in one of his earliest reviews: "Poetry has this much at least in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question". He considered himself rather an interpreter of public opinion than a judge defining ancient legislation, but he used the opinion of himself and like-minded men as an unimpeachable test of what the greater public ought to believe in regard to literature....It was Jeffrey's dogmatism and his repugnance to certain fundamental ideas which were to become dominant in the poetry of the nineteenth century that lead us to consider him one of the last representatives of the eighteenth century critical tradition. Scott praised the Augustan writers as warmly as Jeffrey did, but he was more hospitable to the newer literary impulse. "Perhaps the most damaging accusation that can be made against Jeffrey as a critic," says Mr. Gates, "is inability to read and interpret the age in which he lived".¹

There is a great deal of truth in this, although the suggestion (and Miss Ball is too astute to make it more than that) that Jeffrey was 'one of the last representatives of the eighteenth century critical tradition' is open to question. Jeffrey wished to make literary criticism both public and controversial, and so increase its status (which in turn would add to the importance of his Review). He believed that this could best be done by establishing a tribunal to which all works of literature would be brought for judgement; inevitably, this meant that taste

1. Ball, 134-5.

became a matter of law, and that those offending against it were punished accordingly. This does not mean that this law was necessarily 'Augustan'. As Miss Ball points out, it was based on the collective opinion of Jeffrey and like-minded men, and as such was incapable of the kind of codification that Jeffrey often pretended it possessed. Certainly the 'laws' that Jeffrey attempted to implement have traces of an earlier literary tradition about them since this was the tradition in which he was educated, and undoubtedly they were hostile to the new forces at work as Mr. Gates points out. But this does not make them Augustan, nor does Mr. Gates's comment allow for Jeffrey's more positive achievements. As a critic he did respond to certain impulses of the new age, even if somewhat grudgingly, as we shall see in his criticism of Byron. As the editor of the Edinburgh Review he made the discussion of literature a thing of public moment, and so gave a new direction and impetus to literary criticism.

Scott's achievement as a critic was very different. Miss Ball points out how his criticism 'was largely appreciative', lacking in any 'fixed theory of literature which could dominate his mind when he approached his work', and prompted by a conviction that 'its supreme function [was] to be elucidation'. She is not, however, uncritical in her appreciation:

The thing that is waiting to be said is of course that his criticism is distinguished by common-sense. Whether common-sense should really predominate in criticism might perhaps be debated; the quality indicates, indeed, not only the excellence but also the limitations of his method. For example, Scott was rather too much given to accepting popular favor as the test of merit in literary work, and though the clamorously eager reception of his own books was never able to raise his self-esteem to a very high pitch, it seems to have been the only thing that induced him to respect his

powers in anything like an appreciative way. His instinct and his judgment agreed in urging him to avoid being a man of "mere theory", and he sought always to test opinions by practical standards.¹

This is the nub of the matter: as a pragmatic, sensitive, good-tempered critic, Scott could be extremely successful as witnessed by his reviews of Byron's Childe Harold, Jane Austen's Emma, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, and other novels that he reviewed for the Quarterly. Patrick Cruttwell writes of 'a mind humorous and wise, extrovert and sane',² and who is to say that these are not important qualifications for a critic? These are to be valued in Scott, but at the same time we must follow Miss Ball in recognizing his limitations. Jeffrey might often have been wrong, but his criticism possessed a rigour and a conviction of the importance both of literature and its public criticism which is often lacking in the more easy-going Scott. Our preference for one man or the other will depend on our own temperament and beliefs about the function of criticism. What we must do is acknowledge the importance of both men at a time when the public criticism of literature was coming of age.

1. Ball, 14.

2. P. Cruttwell, Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Blake to Byron (1957), 110. As quoted by Edgar Johnson, Scott, ii, 1256.

Chapter Four

Editors and Publishers

To a modern reader the extent and arbitrariness of editorial control is one of the most surprising features of the management of the periodicals. It is yet another reason for not taking an article or review as representative of a single reviewer's standpoint, and increases the need to see the Reviews as organic and developing structures which must be examined in their overall context.

But it is not simply a matter of determining to what extent individual editors interfered with specific contributions. Cries of outrage at editorial mutilations abound in the letters of all those who wrote for the periodicals: Sydney Smith ruefully complained that Jeffrey always ruined his best jokes, and Southey, whose temper grew shorter as his reviews grew longer, threatened resignation on several occasions if Gifford dared to tamper with one more article. Editorial control, however, was not as unprincipled as disgruntled reviewers sometimes suggested, and this chapter examines the conventions which somewhat tenuously informed the actions of Jeffrey and Gifford.

Before doing so one must ask to what extent the editors were their own masters. Some of the issues which threatened their objectivity are discussed in subsequent chapters, but the most obvious source of undue influence was the publisher who owned the Review.

In the case of the Edinburgh Review this influence appears to have been minimal. In a letter to Francis Horner in 1804 Jeffrey recorded the following incident in terms which perfectly summed up his relationship with his publisher:

Happening to be long in bed yesterday, I found myself under the necessity of giving audience in that dignified posture to Constable & Co., who came dutifully to offer their congratulation, and to receive their orders, on my return.¹

There is little evidence to suggest that Constable interfered with the running of the Review. In its early days he helped to recruit contributors, and he could do little else but accept responsibility when friends upbraided him for articles in the Review which they found offensive. But he realized that Jeffrey would only continue as editor if given a completely free hand, and of all three publishers in whom we are interested he had the least to do with the running of his periodical.

Jeffrey's concern for his social standing was one reason for his determination not to be influenced in any way by Constable. As the Edinburgh Review wrote in 1902 when looking back to its origins in the previous century:

It is difficult in these days to realize the sort of coy feeling with which men regarded any direct pecuniary relations with the press.²

Jeffrey overcame this coyness by insisting on payment for all, but some uneasiness obviously remained. He wrote angrily to Horner

1. Cockburn, ii, 89.

2. ER, cxcvi (Oct., 1902), 285.

telling him that he must not 'fancy that I am to take your orders as if I were a shopman of Constable's',¹ and, if nothing else, the desire to avoid such an impression was sufficient to ensure his independence from his publisher.²

This independence meant that Jeffrey was faced with the formidable task of running the Review virtually single-handed. On more than one occasion approaches were made to Constable suggesting, in the words of one suppliant, 'that Jeffrey should take some coadjutor, for his attention is too much distracted'.³ But apart from his brief visit to America in 1813, he remained in control until his retirement from the Review in 1829. His job was extremely onerous: not only did he have to revise and arrange each number, he also had to be aware of which new books in a vast range of subjects were most suitable for reviewing. His most difficult task, and one which was crucial to the success of the Review, was to recruit and control his contributors.

In the early days he found this particularly distasteful, and in his letters to his friends he was conscious of appearing as 'a common dun' in his entreaties for reviews. Again, class-consciousness comes to the fore, and he begged Horner not to

1. Cockburn, ii, 84.

2. The extent of his control is further emphasized by the peremptory tone of his letter to Constable concerning his replacement whilst in America: 'You will consult chiefly with Mr. Thomson in any emergency that may occur. I have the most perfect confidence both in his judgement and in his friendship for me....' (Constable, ii, 215.) His concern with social status is underlined by his comment that 'The publication is in the highest degree respectable as yet [1804], as there are none but gentlemen connected with it'. (Cockburn, ii, 74.)

3. Constable, ii, 387.

think that he had made 'a trade of this editorship' or that the Review was meant for anything more than their own private 'amusement and improvement'.¹ Once the Review was established, however, it was the contributors who sought out Jeffrey.

From the outset he was anxious that his contributors should see that they were being dealt with fairly. Since they were paid by the sheet he was reluctant to undertake the longer and more remunerative articles himself,² and at one point he considered giving up writing rather than risk the charge of selecting the easiest and most important articles for himself.³ Having insisted that all should accept payment, he made sure the payment was prompt: on one occasion he offered to pay a ten pound bonus from his own pocket to a contributor whose fee had been delayed.⁴ By such fair and punctilious treatment he quickly established a remarkable measure of discipline over his contributors:

The merit of getting so many writers to forego the ordinary jealousies of authors and of parties, and to write invisibly, and without the fame of individual and avowed publication, in the promotion of a work made up of unconnected portions, and assailed by such fierce and various hostility, is due to him entirely.⁵

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1. Cockburn, ii, 83.
 2. Jeffrey's contributions to the Edinburgh declined once it was firmly established. He wrote approximately sixty-four reviews for the first twenty numbers; fifty-two for the next twenty; thirty-three for the twenty following; thirty-one for the next twenty; and only fifteen for the final forty-three numbers that he edited. However, the first article in each number was usually of significance both in terms of length and subject matter, and forty-five of the first one hundred numbers of the Edinburgh began with a review or article by its editor. It was one of the ways in which Jeffrey controlled the attitude of the Review, and also maintained its consistency of tone.
 3. Cockburn, ii, 82.
 4. Constable, ii, 216.
 5. Cockburn, i, 302.

Jeffrey was not quite so confident. He once likened himself to a feudal monarch whose throne was threatened by 'the presumptuous crests of my nobles'¹, and in the years preceding the furore created by the Don Cevallos article he allowed the Edinburgh to reflect the opinions of his more outspoken contributors. The public outcry in 1809 disturbed him, and he admitted to Francis Horner in a letter of 1810 that the Edinburgh was becoming too factious both within itself and publicly:

However, I issue laudable edicts, inculcating moderation and candour, and hope in time to do some little good. A certain spice of aristocracy in my own nature withholds me from the common expedient of strengthening myself by a closer union with the lower orders; but I would give a great deal for a few chieftains of a milder and more disciplined character.²

In fact his control was such that it was either caprice³ or policy which prompted him to allow the Review to take up an extreme position at this time: the remark about the 'certain spice of aristocracy' is interesting and only confirms the impression that he was much more the absolute than the feudal monarch.

This absolutism not only appealed to Jeffrey's personality, it allowed him to give a remarkable degree of consistency to the Review. Once Smith, Brougham, and Horner had left Edinburgh for

1. Cockburn, ii, 129.

2. Ibid., ii, 129.

3. This element in Jeffrey's character is illustrated in a letter of 1803 when calming the fears of a friend that he would be led astray by the other founder-members of the Review: 'if I do not overrate my steadiness, I am in no great danger from that kind of seduction. I will go a certain length, out of curiosity, and by way of experiment, but I hope I can stop where I have determined to stop....' (Cockburn, ii, 77.)

England and the Review had grown in importance and scope, it was only by his supervision that this was made possible. S.T.

Coleridge, bowing to the inevitable, recognized this when writing to Jeffrey about the alterations made to his review of Thomas Clarkson's History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade:

your character and interest, as the known Editor of the Review are pledged for a general consistency of principle in the different Articles with each other; and you had every possible Right to alter or omit ad libitum....¹

It is impossible to gauge to what extent Jeffrey tailored and rewrote the contributions sent him, but one example taken from a letter of 1819 suggests that at times it was quite extensive:

I have just got done with another Review [i.e. ER, xxxi (Mar., 1819)]. I have more vamping and patching than writing. That of Rogers' little poem and Campbell's specimens are all I have written wholly; though there is more of my hand than there should be in the very long article on the abuse of charities.²

The 'vamping and patching' was carried out for a variety of reasons apart from the concern with consistency of principle: length, relevance, and entertainment value were also of importance.

We have seen how controversy helped to establish the Edinburgh, and Jeffrey was always conscious of the need to provoke and entertain his readers. This did not prevent his printing long and erudite reviews when he felt these to be most appropriate, but neither did he miss the opportunity to publish more sensational

1. Letters, Griggs, iii, 148.

2. Cockburn, ii, 187.

material. In the early days he even considered that 'we should make one or two examples of great delinquents in every number'¹; although not all his contributors agreed, as Sydney Smith explained when refusing to slate a book of which his editor particularly disapproved:

I think the book very ill-done; still, it is done by an honest worthy man who has neither bread nor butter. How can I be true under such circumstances?²

However, such scruples could be overcome and direct editorial intervention avoided if contributors were chosen carefully:

Walter Scott has, in a manner, offered to do Godwin's Life of Chaucer; and as he understands the subject, and hates the author, I have a notion he will make a good article of it.³

By such means Jeffrey ensured that the tang of controversy did not disappear from the Review.

The Edinburgh did not remain static throughout the period of his editorship. One of the most notable changes was in the nature of reviewing itself. In the number for January 1809 Jeffrey reviewed Cromek's Reliques of Burns;⁴ despite some digression about the advantages of natural education, it is a sympathetic and straightforward assessment of Burns's achievement. In length and style it is typical of the Edinburgh's early reviews, and it includes a hit at Wordsworth for good measure. Twenty years

1. Cockburn, ii, 86.
2. Pearson, 157.
3. Cockburn, ii, 86.
4. ER, xiii (Jan., 1809), 249-76.

later the Edinburgh returned to Burns, this time with a review by Thomas Carlyle of Lockhart's Life of Burns.¹ The difference is startling: not only is Carlyle's review much longer, it also acts far more obviously as a vehicle for Carlyle's own thinking. The immediacy and contemporary reference of Jeffrey's review has been replaced by a grandiloquence matched only by that of another Edinburgh reviewer at this time, Thomas Macaulay. The Edinburgh's original policy of providing immediate and provocative critical responses to new literature had been replaced by one which substituted the polished literary essay. Admittedly the decline of the Edinburgh in the third decade of the century indicated the need for a new approach, but the marked decrease in Jeffrey's own contributions suggests that it was one with which he did not fully sympathize.² His greatness lay in establishing and controlling a periodical which responded immediately to the events of its own time. Inevitably its approach became dated and somewhat stereotyped; it was eclipsed by Blackwood's Magazine, which replaced controversy with scandal, and politically the Westminster Review became more important. The Edinburgh Review which entered the Victorian age was a very different one from the one founded thirty years previously.

Never the less, under Jeffrey it established a new reviewing tradition. Openly political and obviously biased in matters of literary taste, it was rarely guilty of bowing to unacknowledged pressures. Constable was forced to remain aloof,

1. ER, xlvi (Dec., 1828), 267-312.

2. He and Carlyle argued over the review of Burns. Jeffrey found it 'long and diffuse', and wanted it cut by as much as half. When Carlyle received the proofs he found the article much shortened, but he replaced many of the omitted passages and insisted that it should be published in its entirety or not at all. Surprisingly Jeffrey gave in. Significantly, he objected most to examples of Carlyle's 'mannerism and affectation' - the very things that give the review its distinctive quality. (See Froude, Carlyle, ii, 39-45.)

and Jeffrey's editorial policies were fashioned by his own beliefs and actions. To this extent it was objective, but the treatment given to each book depended on editorial policy, the needs of the individual number in which the review appeared, and the attitude of the reviewer. In this context impartiality must remain a relative term.

The example of the Edinburgh was not lost on those who established the Quarterly Review. Scott, in his letter of advice to Gifford, claimed that the Edinburgh owed much of its success to the fact 'that it is entirely uninfluenced by the Booksellers who have contrived to make most of the other reviews mere vehicles for advertising & puffing off their own publications or running down those of their rivals',¹ and on expressing similar views to Murray, the Quarterly's owner and publisher, he received the following reply:

With respect to bookselling interference with the Review, I am equally convinced with yourself of its total incompatibility with a really respectable and valuable critical journal. I assure you that nothing can be more distant from my views, which are confined to the ardour which I feel for the cause and principles which it will be our object to support, and the honour of professional reputation which would obviously result to the publisher of so important a work.²

Murray does go on to say that it would be silly to pretend that he was not out to make a profit as well, but, as in the case of Constable and the Edinburgh, there is little evidence to suggest that he seriously infringed these high-minded principles. However, his relationship with his editor and the extent of his involvement

1. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 102-3.

2. Smiles, i, 112.

in the running of the Review were very different from Constable's.

Gifford, as editor, laboured under certain disadvantages. Unlike Jeffrey he was not a founder member of his Review, and he did not enjoy the confidence of all those who helped establish it. He also had to work within the shadow of Scott; Scott had probably been offered the editorship, and although he refused it he played a substantial part in establishing the Review. Gifford's chronic ill-health was also a tremendous disadvantage in what was a taxing occupation.

It is not surprising that Murray was loth to relinquish sole control of the Quarterly to a man he hardly knew, nor that Gifford at first seemed ill-at-ease and unsuited to the job. Murray's constant interference¹ and his worried consultations with Scott, of which Gifford must have been aware, hardly created confidence. Murray also recruited most of the Review's contributors, of whom some, particularly Scott and Southey, communicated far more with him than with Gifford. Samuel Smiles engages in a splendid piece of double-talk when trying to explain the working relationship between editor and publisher:

Mr. Murray was, even more than the Editor, the backbone of the enterprise: he was indefatigable in soliciting new writers for the Quarterly, and in finding the books fit for review, and the appropriate reviewers of the books. Sometimes the reviews were printed before the Editor was consulted, but everything passed under the notice of Gifford, and received his emendations and final approval.²

Such a situation could not last, as Gifford explained in a note

1. Murray wrote numerous letters to Gifford about the Review, and suggested alterations and omissions for reviews in the fifth number of the Quarterly. (Smiles, i, 176).

2. Smiles, i, 154.

to Murray:

The delay and confusion which have arisen must be attributed to a want of confidential communication. In a word, you have too many advisers, and I too many masters. I can easily account, and still more easily allow, for the anxiety which you feel in a cause where so much of your property is embarked, and which you will always find me most ready to benefit and advance; but for this it will be necessary to have no reserves; in a word, we must understand each other.¹

This understanding did not come immediately, but many of the tensions were dissipated after a particularly heated clash between Gifford and Murray over the policy to be pursued towards the Edinburgh Review. Murray felt that attacks on the Edinburgh only weakened the Quarterly but Gifford disagreed, and, after much mutual recrimination, won the day.² Smiles claims that from 1811 onwards

the best understanding prevailed between Mr. Murray and the editor of the Quarterly. Their intercourse was continuous; and as they knew each other better they esteemed each other the more. They became fast and intimate friends; holding nothing back from each other, but taking counsel on all matters relating not only to articles for the Quarterly, but to new manuscripts offered to Mr. Murray for publication.³

On the whole this seems to have been the case. Murray continued to play a large part in the Review's affairs, but it is noticeable that after 1811 Gifford's name occurred more frequently in Murray's correspondence with his contributors: Scott in 1815 agreed to read and possibly correct an article on Crabbe 'should Mr. G[ifford] wish it',⁴ and three years later he sent a review on Hogg for publication 'if it should find favour in Gifford's eyes'; Croker also wrote to Murray about a review dealing with Henry Brougham

1. Smiles, i, 157.

2. See Smiles, i, 181-2 and Clark, 175-6 for accounts of this disagreement.

3. Smiles, i, 192.

4. Ibid., i, 291.

which he was preparing 'for Mr. Gifford's final correction'.¹

Gifford himself wrote to Murray in 1814, in a tone much more relaxed and confidential than in earlier days:

It makes me quite happy to find you beating up for recruits, and most ardently do I wish you success.²

Never the less, Murray continued to exercise a great deal of influence over the Review's contributors. On some occasions he acted as a go-between, on others he solicited contributions on his own authority. Scott is perhaps a special case, given his close friendship with Murray, but even as late as 1817 he left the decision on whether or not to publish his review on Byron not primarily to Gifford but to Murray.³ Jeffrey would not have allowed his publisher that kind of decision.

Murray also found it impossible to refrain from offering advice. His confidence, an uncertain thing at best, ebbed and flowed according to which acquaintance or correspondent he had consulted most recently about the Review's state of health, and Gifford wrote to him in desperation in the spring of 1812 accusing him of listening to too many 'bad advisers, and the consequence is that many things are postponed which would have done well, and now only seem to create enemies'.⁴ But this storm, like so many others, was weathered, and on his retirement in 1824 Gifford wrote to Canning:

1. Smiles, i, 260.

2. Ibid., i, 262.

3. Scott, Letters 1815-17, 363-4.

4. Smiles, i, 203.

I have laid aside my Regalia, and King Gifford, first of the name, is now no more, as Sir Andrew Aguecheek says "than an ordinary mortal or a Christian"....It is now exactly sixteen years ago since your letter invited or encouraged me to take the throne. I did not mount it without a trembling fit; but I was promised support, and I have been nobly supported. As far as regards myself, I have borne my faculties soberly, if not meekly. I have resisted, with undeviating firmness, every attempt to encroach upon me, every solicitation of publisher, author, friend, or friend's friend, and turned not a jot aside for power or delight.¹

The self-satisfaction may be forgiven, for the boast seems to have been substantially true.

Both Jeffrey and Gifford likened themselves to monarchs, but a different metaphor is needed to illustrate one essential difference between them. Jeffrey led his men from the front, often quite literally given the the high proportion of the Edinburgh's opening articles which he wrote, and therefore imposed his authority and personality upon his Review not only as an editor but as a leading contributor. Gifford, on the other hand, wrote very little,² and in Clark's words 'exerted his influence and expressed his personality through his editorial prerogative of cutting, changing, augmenting, and correcting the reviews furnished by others; and in some instances he exercised this prerogative freely'.³ In altering and tailoring the reviews he was only following Jeffrey's example and Scott's advice, but he did so in his own fastidious and peculiar manner. He once wrote to Murray:

1. Smiles, ii, 162-3.

2. See Clark, 187-201 for an account of Gifford's own contributions to the Quarterly.

3. Clark, 177.

I never saw much merit in writing rapidly. You will believe me when I tell you that I have been present at the production of more genuine wit and humour than almost any person of my time, and that it was revised and polished and arranged with a scrupulous care which overlooked nothing....no permanent reputation can be founded on thoughts thrown out at random, how ever brilliant, unless clothed in appropriate terms.¹

Much of Gifford's time was spent in reworking and polishing the contributions sent him in an attempt to find those 'appropriate terms'; a necessary job, particularly if there was a paucity of good material.² But from the outset he was accused of failing to insert sufficient wit and variety into the Quarterly; in Scott's words of not 'making a cake of the right leaven for the present generation'.³ His fastidiousness did little to alleviate the dullness of much of the Quarterly's prose, and a great deal of harm by often delaying the printing of the Review. Murray wrote to him on one occasion:

Long before this, every line of copy for the present number ought to have been in the hands of the printer. Yet the whole of the Review is yet to print. I know not what to do to facilitate your labour, for the articles which you have long had lie scattered without attention, and those which I ventured to send to the printer undergo such retarding corrections, that even by this mode we do not advance.⁴

Gifford never reformed, and delay in publication became one of the Review's perennial problems.⁵

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1. Smiles, i, 193-4.
 2. Croker found this when editing number 56 of the Review because of Gifford's ill-health. Murray wrote to him: 'We are certainly not fortunate in having even an average sample of talent or interest in the papers sent in - but it shows what a desert the Editor has occasionally to fertilize!' (Brightfield, Croker, 181)
 3. Scott, Letters 1808-11, 225. Much of Scott's disgust stemmed from the Quarterly's initial reluctance to take up cudgels against the Edinburgh; but this was Murray's doing, not Gifford's.
 4. Smiles, i, 156-7.
 5. Oliphant, ii, 10.

As in Jeffrey's case, it is impossible to assess the extent of Gifford's editorial intervention. Hill and Helen Shine offer the best summary:

Sometimes the proportions of an article needed change. For example, an inadequately illustrated article might be supplemented by additional extracts from the book under review; an additional part might be inserted in another article for the sake of completeness; or, on the other hand, an overlong article might be condensed, or divided. Sometimes the summarizing critical judgment in an article needed change. For example, the expression of a harsh judgment might be sharpened.¹ Sometimes, however, a much more involved change in matter or manner was needed. For example, a reviewer's expression of his individual point of view on a public issue might need to be brought in line with the general policy that The Quarterly was supporting at the time; or, if the contents were eminently satisfactory and only the style was somewhat out of keeping with the periodical's standard, parts might be rewritten for the sake of effectiveness. Or special circumstances might even call for the most sweeping changes of all. For example, once when refusal of a slovenly written article would have been impolitic, Gifford seems to have reorganized the materials; or, finally, a brief article that seems to have lain in limbo too long to be returned and that may have been needed as a stop-gap, had its contents realigned and its tone changed. Since there is no evidence to show that the circumstances involved in the last two examples were regular in their recurrence, we may suppose that the extent of editorial revision exemplified in them was rare. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the circumstances involved in the other seven illustrations were more frequent in occurrence.²

This frequency naturally led to friction between Gifford and his contributors, despite Smiles's somewhat sanctimonious claim that the editor never lost their 'friendship and support'.³ Gifford lacked something of Jeffrey's personality, and his authority, especially with his senior contributors, had suffered a little because of his equivocal position in the early days of

1. Gifford also occasionally softened the tone of a review. See Smiles, i, 162 and ii, 130.

2. Shine, xvii. Also see Clark, 178-181.

3. Smiles, ii, 176.

the Review. Most of his contributors accepted his decisions,¹ but Robert Southey provided a particular problem. Gifford recognized his importance and once described him as 'the sheet anchor of the Review',² but he had to endure a great deal of recrimination and short-tempered protestation from him. He rarely gave way, and when, in his last days as editor, he printed one of Southey's articles without alteration it was taken as a 'melancholy and menacing symptom of decay'.³ That he kept Southey's support without seriously compromising his own integrity is some measure of his success as editor.

Unfortunately, it was not emulated by his successor. We have seen how the manner in which Lockhart was appointed weakened his position as editor; a position already made difficult by Gifford's reputation, the extent of the former editor's powers (whether feudal, absolute, or constitutional), and the unwillingness of long-established reviewers to be ruled by a man known best for his association with Blackwood's Magazine. However, as we saw in the first chapter, Lockhart's first problem was Murray,⁴ although eventually the two men became reconciled to each other and worked together amicably.

1. Croker supported 'the despotism of the Editor' (Smiles, ii, 44), as did Scott despite the occasional grumble (Letters 1817-19, 35).

2. George Ellis said of Southey: 'his articles are always attractive; not indeed by their spirit, but by their candour, and by a luminous method and arrangement of his materials. Besides, he always conveys information....' (Smiles, i, 177).

3. Lang, Lockhart, i, 359.

4. See p. 30 above.

It was Scott, not Murray, who was really in the best position to exert undue influence on Lockhart. He became a regular contributor again, although characteristically he did not take advantage of his position, and on reading Lockhart's criticism of his review of Pepys, he wrote:

You will unceremoniously point out whatever you object to, which will be a great favour, and I hope you will not confine it to style alone.¹

Whilst offering advice and encouragement, he seldom interfered with the running of the Quarterly.² On one occasion he refused to review a work on the grounds that 'I cannot write any thing about the author unless I know it can hurt no one alive', and he gently chided Lockhart for his offer of secrecy since 'What I consider right to do I am not anxious to conceal from any one and what is not right should not be done at all'.³ He rarely pitched his advice any higher.

But he had grave doubts about Lockhart's suitability for the editorship.⁴ Lockhart was indecisive in handling contributors like Southey, and the first numbers he edited gave few signs that the Review was to be given new impetus or direction. The situation was very different from the one that had faced Gifford

1. Lang, Lockhart, i, 404-05.

2. The only exception is Scott's attempt to foster closer relations between the Quarterly and the Tory government. See chapter five.

3. Scott, Letters 1826-28, 29.

4. See p. 30 above.

in 1807, and it called for a different approach and a different kind of periodical. Lockhart was not the man to provide either.

It was Jeffrey and Gifford who fashioned their Reviews. Through their practices certain essential conventions were established: editorial authority was absolute, contributors were paid and their contributions were considered to be the property of the Review,¹ consistency of principle was at least attempted, and the Reviews were kept free from the accusation of puffery and trade interference. There were less noble characteristics: both Reviews were unashamedly political, and both were prepared to further political aims and create public interest by unprincipled attacks on individual authors. And they were distinctly products of their own age, and as times changed they failed to respond accordingly. The Edinburgh attempted to alter the nature of its reviews, and the Quarterly thought about returning to its original form,² but in some ways they fed off each other, and the decline of one meant the decline of the other.

The questions asked in this chapter have little relevance

1. The Shines (p. xviii) point out that, by insisting that the reviews belonged to the periodical rather than the reviewer, editorial intervention was both honest and ethical.

2. In a letter to Murray, Lockhart writes of the need to restore the Quarterly to its 'original plan and arrangement', although he seems to be talking mainly about the length and number of reviews in each number. (Smiles, ii, 265).

to Blackwood's Magazine. At times it appeared to have no editor at all, and at others a superabundance of them, whilst consistency and impartiality were principles to be eschewed at all costs. Our only concern is with the part played by Blackwood, Wilson and Lockhart in running the Magazine.

It was generally thought that Wilson and Lockhart were the editors, and John Murray, who had a financial interest in the Magazine during its first few months, mistakenly thought that it was going to be run on conventional lines when he wrote to Blackwood:

Your editors want tact as to the public interest; and by having two, in fact you have no editor: they are more intent on their own writings than in collecting materials from others, and in abridging, altering, adding to, and improving the contributions that are sent to them....¹

He was quite right. It was Blackwood himself who undertook most of the usual editorial duties: he altered and curtailed articles and reviews, often in consultation with Wilson;² and he recruited most of the major contributors to the Magazine. He also undertook most of the administrative work, which was considerable since the Magazine was published monthly. Wilson and Lockhart assisted in these tasks,³ but their function was to provide the material which would establish the style and tone of the Magazine. Mrs. Oliphant offers the most authoritative account of the arrangement which existed between

1. Smiles, i, 481.

2. Oliphant, i, 310 and ii, 35. Wilson told a friend that he agreed so entirely with Blackwood's judgement on prose tales to be published in the Magazine that he never bothered to give an opinion on them, but he did expect to be consulted about poetry.

3. On at least one occasion Blackwood felt that they were not providing the support that they had promised him. See Oliphant, i, 268.

the three men in the early years:

[the editorship of] the Magazine was...in commission, the committee of three occupying intermittently the supreme chair - one number sometimes in one man's charge, sometimes in another's, now one judgement uppermost and now another, but the veto always in Blackwood's hands....¹

This did not prevent the elusive editor or publisher being invoked when the occasion demanded it, and often 'the publisher lamented the self-will of the Editor, and the Editor vituperated with much force the obstinacy of the publisher'.²

Not least of Blackwood's achievements was his handling of Wilson and Lockhart. He willingly acknowledged that Wilson was 'the Genius and the Living Spirit' of the Magazine,³ but, as Mrs. Oliphant points out, managing him was a task which needed 'constant attention, watchfulness, and a great patience'.⁴ It was, however, essential: Wilson was volatile and irresponsible, incapable of running the Magazine, but he more than anybody gave it its distinctive character. Lockhart also played an important role as a contributor and an instigator of practical jokes, but less prominently after the first three or four years. Both men were, in Scott's words, 'rather kittle on the point of honour',⁵ and on occasions they treated Blackwood as a social inferior. He was wise enough to overlook most of this, and he

1. Oliphant, i, 185-6.

2. Ibid., i, 150n.

3. Ibid., i, 308.

4. Ibid., i, 307.

5. Scott, Letters 1817-19, 221.

remained on good terms with both men.

Although Blackwood's Magazine was run by its publisher, it was not used extensively to puff his own wares. Its main purpose was to entertain, to obtain as much notoriety as quickly as possible. There was no editorial policy as such; the three men most concerned with running it shared an instinctive sympathy which made fundamental disagreement rare. It was a far cry from Jeffrey's striking out sentences to make a review conform to the Edinburgh's policy, or Gifford's carefully polishing the prose of one of his more careless contributors; but then Blackwood's was a very different kind of periodical.

Chapter Five

Politics and the Reviews

One of the few certainties that we are faced with in a discussion such as this is that the Reviews were indeed political. In fact their politics were so obtrusive that the effect, as Coleridge wryly pointed out, was sometimes the opposite of that intended:

I cannot read a page of the Examiner without a temptation to become a Jure Divino Legitimist - or of the Edingburgh Review, without an inkling after Toryism - or of the Quarterly Review (Southey's Articles by no means excepted) without downright whispers of the Devil to be a Rebel.¹

That the Edinburgh was Whig and the Quarterly and Blackwood's Tory would seem to be a truism that needs little modification. Unfortunately the situation was a great deal more complex than this suggests and, although this is not the place in which to discuss the periodicals' responses to the many complex issues which made up one of the most turbulent periods of the nineteenth century, it is important to trace the general political stance which they adopted. In particular, we must assess the extent to which they were independent of the factions to which they acknowledged at least nominal allegiance, and we must identify those issues which were to have a particular bearing on their judgement of contemporary literature.

The most concise account of the Edinburgh's political

1. Letters, Griggs, iv, 902.

attitude is to be found in an article by John Clive. Clive sets out to disprove two misconceptions about the Edinburgh: 'that it was nothing but a tool of the Whig party; that it catered to the aristocracy alone....'¹ He writes:

Politics meant first of all zeal for reform: opposition to the slave trade, to the Test and Corporation Acts, to the sale of army commissions, to the existing game laws; support for Catholic emancipation, parliamentary, legal, and penal reform, all projects for the diffusion of useful knowledge. It also meant that the Review generally sided with the Whig opposition, especially after Brougham began to use the periodical as a means for his own political advancement.

(119)

Clive goes on to argue that the Edinburgh was not in any sense the Whigs' creature. The Don Cevallos article provoked as much anger from the Whigs as from the Tories, and the Edinburgh was also much more aware of the need to appeal to a wider spectrum of society than was the Whig party as a whole:

There were other occasions [apart from the issue of parliamentary reform] on which the Review showed itself more aware than the official Whigs of their disastrous alienation from the people, though it must be added that its important function as the party's radicaliser was intermittent rather than consistent.

(120)

That it could act at all as the party's radicaliser was due to the final point of substance made by Clive:

But as one reads through the Edinburgh during Jeffrey's tenure as editor (1802-29), one is continually struck by its tone of moral indignation about the indolence, opulence and frivolity of the upper classes, as contrasted with the virtue and industry of 'all those who are below the sphere of what is called fashionable or public life, and who do not aim at distinctions or notoriety beyond the circle of their equals in fortune and situation' [ER, xx (Nov., 1812), 280n.]. That is how Jeffrey defined what he called the 'middling classes': it was for them that the Review reserved its highest

1. John Clive, "The Edinburgh Review: The life and death of a periodical", in Essays in the history of publishing: Longman 1724-1974, ed. Asa Briggs (1974), 113-40.

praise and its never-ceasing pedagogical efforts. Adam Smith, not Algernon Sidney, headed the hagiology of the Edinburgh reviewers.

(120)

The political issues listed by Clive, the general but by no means slavish support of the Whigs, and the appreciation of the worth of the middle classes, are the most important things to be borne in mind. Coupled with these must be a recognition of the effect that the Edinburgh's 'Scottishness' had on its political attitudes, and also an awareness of Jeffrey's influence both as editor and contributor. But, firstly, a rather more detailed account of the Edinburgh's political development is necessary.

We have seen how the Edinburgh owed its inception, at least in part, to politics: young men of similar political persuasion, living in a city dominated by a faction whose politics they deplored, decided to take the fight to the enemy. In the three decades that followed the Review's political development falls roughly into three phases: first, an increasing move to the left, which culminated in the Don Cevallos article in 1809 and the founding of the Quarterly Review; then a somewhat more cautious approach, but one which centred round parliamentary reform and an increasing recognition for the Whigs to engage in some kind of alliance with the more Radical or popularist groups; and from 1822 onwards, with the death of Castlereagh and the rise to power of Canning, a gradual decline in influence as the political situation underwent a transformation and as the Westminster Review responded more readily to the new social forces at work. This last point illustrates the nature of the Edinburgh's relationship with the Whigs: although far enough to the left to recognize the need for some

kind of understanding with the Radicals, and although ready to support the middle classes at the expense of the landed aristocracy, it was neither flexible enough in its political philosophy nor tied closely enough to the Whig party to exercise much influence at the time when the Whigs finally came to power.

In 1802 the issues which dominated political discussion were the war with France and the abolition of the slave trade, and, at home, Reform and Catholic Emancipation. John Clive discusses the Review's response to these in some detail in his book on the Edinburgh,¹ and there is no point in retreading this ground. Three issues emerge from his discussion, however, which are of particular significance in assessing the way in which the Edinburgh's political beliefs influenced their assessment of literature. The first of these concerns the Review's attitude towards France. At this time the French Revolution still haunted the public mind, and the cry of 'Jacobin' retained much of its potency. Clive claims that

On the whole, the reviewers consistently devoted their efforts to a reasoned defence of what they considered to be the positive aspects of the French Revolution, a defence whose corollary was vigorous condemnation of anti-Jacobinism as a rationale for opposition to liberal views and moderate reforms.²

He prefaces this comment, however, by acknowledging some examples of 'a negatively Burkean attitude towards the French Revolution'. As we shall see in chapter seven, this 'Burkean attitude is to be found in abundance in Jeffrey's attacks on the Lake poets.

1. Clive, Scotch Reviewers, 71-123.

2. Ibid., 95.

It is all very well for Clive to write of the Edinburgh's defence of the French philosophes, but Rousseau was one of the sticks that Jeffrey used to beat Wordsworth with. If, as Clive argues, 'throughout its early career the Review valiantly attempted to put the discussion of the Revolution on a higher and non-polemical level',¹ then the attack on the Lake School is even more unprincipled than it appears at first sight.

The second issue which emerges from Clive's discussion of the early years of the Review also concerns France. The Edinburgh consistently opposed the war with France, even to the extent of preparing an article denouncing the war just as the battle of Waterloo was about to be fought (once the result was known the article was cancelled and replaced, appropriately enough, by one entitled 'Gall and his Craniology').² This determination to oppose the war despite the hostility that this aroused amongst many Whigs explains, in part, the Edinburgh's favourable reaction to the first two cantos of Childe Harold. The earlier attack on Hours of Idleness had been, as Byron himself noted, 'scurvy treatment from a Whig Review, but politics and poetry are different things....'³ He must have been pleased to find when reading the review of Childe Harold that they were not that different.

The other issue raised by Clive which has ramifications of a literary nature concerns utilitarianism. Clive claims that a 'definite tendency towards Benthamite ideas begins to manifest

1. Clive, Scotch Reviewers, 97.
2. Smiles, i, 270.
3. Byron's Letters and Journals, ed. L. Marchand, i (1973), 159.

itself in the course of the year 1806'.¹ James Mill became a contributor to the Review two years later, and Clive detects further signs of Benthamite utilitarianism.² Certainly Jeffrey's praise of the moral utility of Maria Edgeworth's novels and tales might reflect this influence, but on the whole it does not seem to have affected the Edinburgh's approach to literature to any great extent.³ And the political implications of the Edinburgh's comments on the Lakers point more to a traditional Whig belief in historical continuity and the sanctity of the Constitution (poetical not political in this case).

1809 saw a watershed in the Edinburgh's history. Jeffrey was undoubtedly frightened by the outcry raised against the Review after the appearance of the Don Cevallos article, and determined on a more cautious policy. A caveat is necessary here however. Although the Edinburgh in the years up to 1809 moved to the left of the Whig party (due mainly to Brougham's influence, but also with Jeffrey's connivance), it must not be thought that it ever systematically advocated revolutionary or even radical changes. As Clive points out, it continually vacillated between the extremes of Jeffrey's article on Cobbett⁴ which upheld the Whig doctrine of the balance of the Constitution (which even the Whigs realized was by this time nothing more than 'the shadow of a shade'⁵) and which argued

1. Clive, 93.

2. Ibid., 92-5.

3. Only one review reflects a common utilitarian belief that literature was of about as much value as pushpin, and that might have been an elaborate practical joke. See ER, xxiv (March, 1821), 134-39.

4. ER, x (July, 1807), 386-421.

5. Clive, 106.

that Cobbett's ideas on reform were dangerous and unnecessary, and the Don Cevallos article which was exceptional in its overt demand for constitutional reform. On the whole, W.S.Ward's comment seems correct:

Political "rightness" not infrequently determined whether a poem was approved or condemned. Whigs and Tories might vie with one another in "puffing" their respective poetical candidates, but when the fundamental political status quo was at stake they spoke as one voice.¹

Certainly the Edinburgh attacked authors like Lady Morgan and William Pratt for their political extremism, and Jeffrey's willingness to see some kind of alliance between the Whigs and the more moderate Radicals was a matter of political expediency and hid a deep-rooted fear of the real aims of the Radical movement.² Clive warns that anyone 'who seeks to find in the Edinburgh Review between 1802 and 1815 an advanced liberal organ, commending to a reluctant aristocracy the democratic wave of the future, will certainly be disappointed',³ and a little later he writes:

As a loyal Whig who prided himself on 'a spice of aristocracy in my own nature' Jeffrey had not the slightest desire to end the predominance of the power of landed property or to institute democracy. He was simply frightened of what would happen if the governmental structure did not yield to popular pressure in order to preserve a society otherwise (he thought) threatened with complete subversion. In that sense the Radical criticism of the Edinburgh Review by men like Leigh Hunt and William Cobbett, was certainly correct. For Jeffrey, no less than Lords Grey and Grenville, thought that the Whigs should ~~both~~ have their cake and eat it as well.⁴

But such a position soon became impossible. Peace in Europe in 1815 meant that attention became more and more focussed

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1. W.S.Ward, "Some Aspects of the Conservative Attitude toward Poetry in English Criticism, 1798-1820", PMLA, lx (1945), 387.
 2. See Froude, Life of Carlyle, ii, 136, for comment on Jeffrey's attitude towards the Radicals.
 3. Clive, Scotch Reviewers, 120.
 4. Ibid., 122.

on events at home. It was a period of acute unrest occasioned by the financial problems brought by the ending of the war. In 1815 the Corn Law was passed which prohibited the importation of corn until it reached eighty shillings a quarter, and this considerably increased the sufferings of the poor. As G.M. Trevelyan points out 'the Corn Law of 1815 was an object lesson in the need for Parliamentary Reform',¹ but instead the government responded to civil unrest with a policy of repression. A campaign against Radical newspapers was instigated, and in 1817 Cobbett fled to America. In 1819 repression took on a more tangible form with the Peterloo massacre, and this was quickly followed by the passing of more legislation this time in the shape of the Six Acts (perhaps better known as the 'Gagging' Acts). Trevelyan suggests that Peterloo was 'the moral death-blow of the old Toryism',² and certainly the trial of Queen Caroline which followed in 1820 discredited both the monarch and the Tory government which lent him grudging support.

During this period three issues dominated political discussion in the Edinburgh Review: reform, Catholic Emancipation, and the conditions and education of the working classes. Reform had, of course, been an ever-present issue, but conditions now meant that this became the most imperative of the three. Jeffrey wrote many of the reviews and articles which dealt with it, and as early as 1806 he wrote a letter to Francis Horner which outlined

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1. G.M.Trevelyan, British History in the Nineteenth Century 1782-1901 (1934), 188.
 2. *Ibid.*, 190. See R.J.White, Waterloo to Peterloo (1957), for an account of these years.

his basic position with regard to the need for parliamentary reform.¹

He begins:

I agree with you entirely in thinking that there is in the opulence, intelligence, and morality of our middling people a sufficient quarry of materials to make or to repair a free constitution; but the difficulty is in raising them to the surface.

(110)

Later he writes:

The antiquity of our government, to which we are indebted for so many advantages, brings this great compensating evil along with it; there is an oligarchy of great families - borough-mongers and intriguing adventurers - that monopolises all public activity, and excludes the mass of ordinary men nearly as much as the formal institutions of other countries.

(112)

Earlier he had warned that

There is a great partition set up between the energy that is to save the country, and the energy that is to destroy it; the latter alone is in action, and the other cannot get through to stop it. I scarcely see anything but a revolution, or some other form of violence, that can beat down the ancient and ponderous barrier.

(111)

These are the preoccupations which occur time and again in Jeffrey's articles on reform in the Edinburgh: belief in the abilities and stability of the middle classes; a dislike of that 'oligarchy of great families' which is the unfortunate product of an otherwise sound Constitution; and a fear of revolution coupled with a pessimism which sees such a cataclysm as inevitable and even possibly necessary.²

1. Cockburn, ii, 110-13.

2. The order of precedence of these factors altered as the political situation changed, as can be seen very clearly from Jeffrey's letters. He wrote to his father-in-law in 1815: 'You are too desponding as to the future prospects of America. She will breed an aristocracy by and by, and then you will get rid of all your vulgar miseries. Only take

care that you do not cast off your love of liberty along with them' (Cockburn, ii, 147). As the situation worsened in Britain such a balance between power and liberty became increasingly difficult to hold, and in 1821 Jeffrey wrote to John Allen: 'The practical question upon which every man should now be making up his mind, is, whether he is for tyranny or revolution; and, upon the whole, I incline towards tyranny; which, I take it, will always be the wise choice for any individual, especially after his youth is over....' (Cockburn, ii, 192). Despite the attractions of tyranny, Jeffrey never lost his belief in reform both as a principle of political philosophy and as an expedient for avoiding revolution: 'My notions of parliamentary reform are in the Review; and I am perfectly clear that it would have no effect at all in relieving even present distresses. Yet of late I cannot help doubting whether some reform has not become necessary - if it were only to conciliate and convince the people. If they are met only with menaces and violence we shall be drenched in blood....' (Ibid., ii, 189). In fact his articles in the Edinburgh supported reform much more strongly than this letter suggests, but it was still a circumscribed concept of reform and very far from that advocated by the Radicals. None the less, Jeffrey's letters display a constant concern that the Whigs should make a stand on reform, even if this involved some form of alliance with Radical groups. But again the aim in view is a limited one: his anger at the 'general poverty and extravagance of all the upper classes' (Ibid., ii, 199) is balanced by the fear that 'The body of the people, again, are so poor, and their prospects so dismal, that it is quite easy to stir them up to any insane project of reform....' (Ibid., ii, 198). In 1817, before the worst of the repression, he could write: 'Now the great fallacy here is, that the increase of weight on the side of the people consists chiefly in an increase of intelligence, spirit, and activity, and the mere wealth and influence of a selfish kind can never be either safely or properly set against this sort of power and authority. In fact, it does not require to be counterbalanced at all; for it leads not to the elevation of the commons merely, but to the general improvement....' (Ibid., ii, 171). Five years later his pessimism had got the upper hand, although he differentiated between his personal views and those he expressed in the Review: 'It is always a duty to profess in public an entire reliance on the ultimate prevalence of reason and justice, because such doctrines help powerfully to realize themselves; but in my heart I am far from being such an optimist....' (Ibid., ii, 197). His pessimism was unjustified; the Reform Act was passed ten years later.

The Edinburgh's campaign for Catholic Emancipation was also waged throughout Jeffrey's reign as editor. As with its opposition to the war with France, it was an issue which made the Review few friends even among the Whigs. Given this, and the

attacks on Methodism written largely by Sydney Smith (not the most conventional of clergymen), it is not surprising to find a friend of Constable's writing to the publisher in 1812:

I must be circumspect as an angel walking among fiends, for it is said I have been represented as devoid of religion - a writer in the E.R....¹

It was, however, a serious charge. . Lockhart attempted to prove that the purpose of the Edinburgh was to undermine Christianity, and, according to his biographer, only failed because he overstated his case:

If Lockhart had confined himself to saying that the Christian faith, in the eyes of his opponents, was a respectable form of opinion, useful in discouraging the excesses of the populace, and (if taken in extreme moderation) not unworthy of the patronage of men of taste, Lockhart might have made good his argument.²

The tone of eighteenth-century rationalism which is sometimes found in the Review provides some justification for Lang's remark, but apart from its belief in Catholic Emancipation, the Edinburgh's attitude towards religion was extremely orthodox. If it ever strayed from the path of righteousness, Sydney Smith was the first to complain and make sure that such instances were few and far between.³ This not only applied to matters of Christian doctrine: on questions of conventional morality the Edinburgh rarely deviated from the norms of strictest propriety. We shall see the importance of this when we come to consider the Review's response to Byron and Shelley.

1. Constable, i, 327.

2. Lang, Life of Lockhart, i, 180.

3. Pearson, Smith, 256-57.

The other issue which concerned the Edinburgh in the second decade of the century was the need to improve the conditions and education of the working classes. Clive sums up the Review's early attitude:

These ranks [i.e. the working classes] were not to remain plunged in darkness. Jeffrey approvingly cited one author's demand for the instruction and illumination of the lower orders whom the division of labour had reduced to unthinking machines.¹

This attitude seems to have been maintained by the Review. In 1810 a correspondent of Constable's wrote applauding an account of 'The Tracts on the Education of the Poor', and expressing his own conviction that 'the evils apprehended from educating the poor are a mere nonentity....A populace that cannot read is fated² to be ignorant...'. Jeffrey was also very desirous to see an improvement in conditions as well as education, and in 1817 he wrote enthusiastically to Dr. Chambers about an article on pauperism that he had just received ~~from~~ him and expressed a conviction that an extended campaign in the Review might result in the abolition of the Poor Law.³

The Edinburgh's attitude towards the working classes does not have any overt relevance to its treatment of literature, but it is rooted in the same beliefs and convictions that informed its thinking on the more important issues of reform and Catholic Emancipation. Once again it must be stressed that the Edinburgh was not an organ of advanced political thought, but rather that it spoke from a position of considerable middle-class strength.

1. Clive, 137.
2. Constable, i, 294-5.
3. Cockburn, ii, 174.

Yet, as Clive points out, its attitude towards the middle class was extremely ambiguous:

In the attitude of the Review towards the aristocracy and the middle class, one finds a curious ambivalence: on the one hand, respect for the culture and learning of the higher ranks and disdain for the vulgarity and gaucherie of the bourgeois; on the other, a feeling, not, one may venture to suppose, unconnected with the Review's place of origin, that idle opulence and widespread profligacy among the upper classes stand in detrimental contrast to the virtuous industry of those below them.¹

This is of major importance in understanding the Edinburgh's attitude towards literature of its own time. As we shall see, reviews of Byron, Shelley, Hunt, Keats and Hazlitt were all influenced by political prejudice centering on the kind of issues discussed in this chapter - the response to Hunt and the uneasy relationship with Hazlitt, for example, owed much to the very real gap that existed between Whig and Radical thinking, and we have already noted how the response to Childe Harold and the attack on Wordsworth was prompted by or employed the terminology of current political debate. Underlying all this, however, was the much more complex and less-clearly defined attitude towards class. Quite simply, Byron and Shelley were gentlemen whilst Hunt and Hazlitt were not. The ramifications of this were, as we shall see, very far from simple.

The last phase of the Edinburgh's political development with which we are concerned spans the years 1822-1832. The death of Castlereagh and the rise to power of Canning under the nominal leadership of Lord Liverpool resulted in an important shift in

1. Clive, 145-6.

British politics.¹ Canning's 'resolute and patriotic liberalism'² brought him into closer contact with the Whigs than with the more extreme elements in his own party, and by 1826 'an almost open alliance between Canning and the Whigs had won victories over currency and corn, while their tactical silence had advanced Catholicism'.³ This alliance became a more formal coalition in the early months of 1827 after Liverpool had been incapacitated by a stroke, but Canning himself died in August of that year and Goderich's ministry collapsed in January 1828. Wellington was now called upon and would have found places for many of the coalition Whigs if they had not decided to resign and regroup the opposition. The terminology which is of at least limited applicability when discussing the politics of the first two decades begins to break down at this point; Whig and Tory now give way to Ultra-Whig, Ultra-Tory, Liberal, and Conservative. Wellington's government was forced by events in Ireland to push through the legislation which resulted in Catholic Emancipation despite an intense 'No-Popery' campaign in the country, the opposition of the King, and their own and their party's convictions. Trevelyan claims that this action by Wellington and Peel 'was a course which only two very strong and disinterested men would have taken',⁴ but to many it was a gross betrayal. It was a shock which was to help in the destruction of the Tory party in the form in which it existed in the early part of the nineteenth century, and the job of

1. For a detailed account of these years see K.G. Feiling, The Second Tory Party 1714-1832 (1959), 304-96.

2. Feiling, 353.

3. Ibid., 342.

4. Trevelyan, 217.

demolition was completed in the autumn of 1830 when Wellington was forced to resign, Grey came to power, and the events which were to culminate in the Great Reform Act of 1832 got under way.

The effect of all this on the Edinburgh has never been examined in any great detail, but its general implications are clear. During this period most of the causes taken up by the Review came to a successful conclusion,¹ and one would expect this to be a time of great activity and popularity for the periodical. But the Edinburgh began life as a protagonist in a specific political drama; it had learnt its lines, and it knew what kind of cues to expect from the Quarterly. Much of its popularity (and hence its influence) stemmed from its vociferous emphasis on party politics, even if its most important work cut across party lines. However much it may have antagonized the Whigs by its attitude towards the war with France and even, at times, to reform and Catholic Emancipation, there was no doubt as to who¹ its friends and enemies were. In the changed political situation after 1822 this was no longer so clear. Brougham undoubtedly attempted to use the Edinburgh in pursuance of his policy of an alliance with the Canningites (an alliance which, of course, he had every intention of leading), but the Review's importance had now begun to decline. It still spoke on the issues which had always exercised it, but it was no longer in touch with the political reality underlying them. As Feiling says, 'an angry zigzag line ran across parties',² and the Edinburgh was no longer certain of its ground. In a

1. See Cockburn, i, 296-300 for a list of the Edinburgh's achievements.

2. Feiling, 324.

letter just after Canning's death, Jeffrey wrote to Henry Cockburn:

Our best hope...is that no farther coalition should be attempted, but the ministry allowed to settle itself in an anti-catholic, legitimate, intolerant basis, and see how it can maintain itself against Ireland, and reason, and manufacturers, and common-sense?¹

But it was not only the Tories that were out-of-touch with the manufacturers and the exponents of common-sense (a word which, significantly, has connotations both of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham). Such people were more likely to turn not to the pages of the Edinburgh but to those of the Westminster Review. If the earlier policies of the Edinburgh had been vindicated, it had yet to formulate those which were going to deal with a very different social, political, and economic situation.

In terms of reviewing literature, the events of this third decade of the century were not particularly significant. The most important specific point is that the alliance and finally the coalition with the Canningite Tories meant that the gap between Whigs and Radicals became even greater.² Consequently, the 'Cockneys' and any author connected with Radical politics was likely to find the Edinburgh somewhat more hostile than perhaps it had been in the past - Hazlitt is a case in point. But on the whole the blurring of party politics meant that political bias was less pronounced in the Edinburgh - politics could no longer be used quite so easily to replace proper critical response.

Finally, two other points need to be made about the

1. Cockburn, ii, 224.

2. Feiling, 324.

Edinburgh. The first concerns its geographical location. The implications of English bards and Scotch reviewers are discussed in the next chapter, but there can be little doubt that conditions in Edinburgh made for a greater polarization of political attitudes than perhaps occurred elsewhere. Sir Walter Scott in 1822 described the division of opinion in the city (and Scotland as a whole), and stressed how what he saw as the Whigs misguided opinions resulted in part from the closed circle within which they lived:

I do not believe there is one of them (known to me) who would wish to push reform as far as revolution. But then they live so much amongst themselves, are so much accustomed to prôner each other that they very naturally overrate their own effective talent and conceive it adequate to set the revolutionary stone a rolling and then to stop it with their quills when it is in mid descent down the hill: and this I may be excused for doubting.¹

What Scott saw as one of the great weaknesses of what he called 'the reviewing Whigs' had been one of their major strengths, but unless such groups can in some way be self-renewing they all too easily become stultified cliques. In 1802 it had not only been necessary but also exhilarating to band together to oppose the forces of oppression in an Edinburgh dominated by Melville and his cronies, but (partly as a result of their own efforts) the situation had now changed and it was the turn of the Tories:

The fame of Jeffrey and his friends drew after them for a long time the great proportion of the young lawyers and better informed youths about Edinburgh. This has received a powerful check from Blackwoods Magazine and its supporters and the tide now sets the other way.²

1. The Letters of George IV, ed. A. Aspinall (1938), ii, 541.

2. Ibid., 541.

It was a tide that the Edinburgh was no longer in a position to stem.

The other point to be made concerns Jeffrey. Jeffrey in his cast of mind and general political attitude was undoubtedly a Whig,¹ and this was bound to be reflected in a periodical over which he exercised such a large measure of control. Those who claim that the Edinburgh was 'liberal'² or, at the other extreme, 'the accredited organ of the Whig party'³ put too much emphasis on the part played by other major contributors. It was Sydney Smith who claimed that he had 'made use of what little powers of pleasantry I might be endowed with to discountenance bad and to encourage liberal and wise principles',⁴ and it was Henry Brougham who (usually for personal ends) tried to tie the Edinburgh very closely to the Whig party.⁵ But it was Jeffrey who, as editor, selected which articles and reviews were to be printed, rewrote them when necessary, and made sure that certain broad political principles were adhered to. Those principles, as far as any definition is valid at this time, can best be described as Whiggish, but Jeffrey was quite prepared to allow a great deal of latitude to his contributors as long as they kept within the general guidelines that he set:

In substance it appeared to me that my only absolute duty as to political discussion, was, to forward the great ends of liberty, and to exclude nothing but what had a tendency to promote servile, sordid, and corrupt principles. As to the means of attaining these ends, I thought that considerable latitude should be indulged,

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1. See pp. 148-9 below for a further discussion of this.
 2. Hayden, 21.
 3. A. Aspinall, Lord Brougham and the Whig Party (Manchester, 1927), 252.
 4. Pearson, 354.
 5. C. New, The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830 (1961), 60.

and that unless the excesses were very great and revolting, every man of talent should be allowed to take his own way of recommending them. In this way it always appeared to me that a considerable diversity was quite compatible with all the consistency that should be required in a work of this description, and that doctrines might very well be maintained in the same number which were quite irreconcilable with each other, except in their common tendency to repress servility, and diffuse a general spirit of independence in the body of the people.¹

An inflated claim, perhaps, but one which has the substance of truth. The Edinburgh did oppose many things that were 'servile, sordid, and corrupt', but it did so from a position of middle-class security and one that it was never willing to compromise. Whatever political label we may give to the Edinburgh that is a fact which must always be borne in mind.

The Quarterly presents a different problem to that of the Edinburgh. Whereas the nature of the Edinburgh's politics and their relationship to its reviewing of literature are very complex, the Quarterly's political beliefs are all too obvious. Walter Graham offers a severe but accurate assessment of them when he writes:

The Quarterly Review was above all else the defender of the Established Church, the palladium of privileged Aristocracy. Religion and the Law, the King and a narrow, orthodox morality, could not be forgotten. The Edinburgh's critical articles often contained political aspersions, and Jeffrey frequently formed his judgements on other than literary grounds. But it is true and natural that Quarterly reviewers showed a much greater inclination to partiality on matters affecting Church and Crown. Whatever tended to decrease general respect for the established order, the Church, the monarchial form of government, the laws, the King,

1. Cockburn, ii, 151-2.

and the landed aristocracy, was evil. Modified and varied by its applications, this was always the major consideration.¹

Such a decided tone in politics means that we must ask to what extent the Quarterly was prepared to support the party which upheld these principles, and if it was ever the tool of the Tory government. We saw in chapter one how Canning, Croker, and Frere played a part in establishing the Review, and how its inception was a direct result of the political challenge offered by the Edinburgh. Certainly Canning's influence was important, and Myron Brightfield in his biography of Croker suggests that in its very early years the Quarterly came very close to acting as the government's mouthpiece:

The review had been founded with a political purpose; it felt obliged to match with each issue the political manifestoes of its rival, the Edinburgh Review. At first the Quarterly was eminently able to do this. The papers on current political themes, written by Canning and George Ellis, had an authority which indicated that the review was a Government organ. But Canning soon left the Cabinet because of his quarrel with Castlereagh; he thus lost touch with the center of political affairs. Since, after 1812, no other high-ranking member of the Government could be found to fill Canning's place, the result was that the political connections of the review became very weak.²

This weakness was a cause of great concern to Gifford and Murray who would gladly have seen the close ties with the government maintained, and they were disappointed at the lack of interest shown in the Review.³ There were exceptions: Croker's article on Brougham seems to have been postponed and then cancelled at Canning's request;⁴ Canning and Croker also persuaded Gifford to

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1. Walter Graham, "Some Infamous Tory Reviews", SP, xxii (1925), 501.
 2. Brightfield, 163-4.
 3. See pp. 31-2 above.
 4. Smiles, i, 260.

add the 'pungent wit, the Attic salt' to an article attacking Brougham's ideas on education;¹ and Croker's vast knowledge of the French Revolution and his views on Napoleon were clearly expressed in the Review. On the whole, however, there is little evidence to suggest that the Quarterly was ever used by the government to systematically expound its policies.

This was much to the chagrin of the Quarterly. Gifford eventually admitted defeat, but when Lockhart took over an attempt to create a closer relationship with the government was made. It started badly: Scott and Lockhart had been led to believe that Canning welcomed Lockhart's appointment as editor of the Quarterly, and an opportunity arose to test his goodwill in the early months of 1827. A post at the Excise became vacant and, at his daughter's request, Scott suggested Lockhart's name. Scott was astonished when Canning declined on the grounds that he was aware that Lockhart had been brought from Scotland to attack him and the government's policies in the manner of Blackwood's Magazine. Scott soon convinced him that this was untrue,² but no arrangement with the government seems to have been arrived at.

By 1828 the Duke of Wellington formed his first government, and Scott tried again by writing to Robert Peel:

I can not help thinking the rendering the support of such a work during the general if not total defection of the daily press a matter of some consequence...so it is with this purpose that I am thus far intruding myself on your valuable time to know whether and by what means such a confidential channel could be opened

1. Smiles, ii, 49.

2. Scott, Letters 1826-8, 163-6.

between the Editor and the Government as may make him aware how and when the services of the work may be made effectually and [sentence incomplete].¹

Lockhart, meanwhile, had met the Duke of Wellington whilst in Brighton, and he wrote to Murray:

I have a message from the D[uke] of W[ellington] to say that he, on the whole, highly approves the paper on foreign politics, but has some criticisms to offer on particular points, and will send for me some day soon to hear them.²

No means of regular communication resulted from this, and in 1830

Lockhart wrote to his old friend William Blackwood:

I have for the 'Q[uarternly] R[evue]' resisted giving the smallest pledge to any Minister (except indeed to the Duke of Wellington on his first coming in), and nothing shall ever induce me to put faith in any Minister's professions again. We are fighting the same battle, though in somewhat different methods....³

In fact by this time it was very doubtful whether the Quarterly and the government were fighting the same battle.

The political realignment that took place after 1822 affected the Quarterly as much as the Edinburgh:

By the same token of their differing principles, the Tories found themselves in continual danger of a split within the party. Canning's accession and Peel's conversion to Catholic Emancipation made these dangers into actualities. The resulting divisions caused civil warfare in the Tory press. The Standard was founded to oppose Canning, the Literary Gazette supported him, the Quarterly kept silence, Blackwood's joined the Old Tories.⁴

1. Scott, Letters 1826-8, 414. Scott also wrote to Sir William Knighton: 'Lockhart's connection with the work ends in a few months & Murray is I presume desirous of renewing it. But I think the Editors continuing in office will much depend upon his being able to obtain some confidential channel through which he may obtain a hint from time to time what he is to do & what forbear. I must tell you in great confidence his situation at present a great deal cripples his power of being useful. Members of the government holding situations of consequence propose to him articles of the most opposite tendency without his having the means of knowing which with a view to his Majesty's service he ought to prefer' (Ibid., 421).

2. Smiles, ii, 270.

3. Oliphant, i, 246-7.

4. Brightfield, 264.

The Quarterly did not remain silent long, and the main reason for this was Robert Southey. We have seen how the controversy surrounding Lockhart's appointment and his own lack of personal authority allowed Southey to gain the upper hand over his editor.¹ The results of this were extremely serious for the Quarterly: not only was Southey 'one of the most conservative influences in the Quarterly circle' but 'he did much to give the Review, for a period of twenty years at least, the character of narrowness and intolerance which was peculiarly his own'.² More specifically,

Intentionally or not, he gave support to the group of ultra-Tories, who, in the later years of Gifford's editorship and the few years following his retirement, represented neither the whole party, nor - as had been the case at the beginning - the Administration. (98-9)

This was seen in his rabid opposition to Catholic Emancipation, parliamentary reform, and the repeal of the Corn Law. In particular, the fiasco in 1828 when his article denouncing any attempt at Catholic Emancipation appeared a few days after the Bill had passed successfully through Parliament showed the extent of his alienation from the Tory government.³ As Graham writes:

for thirty years Southey was the intolerant champion of and abettor of a group of Ultra-Tories, notorious as the enemies of freedom. Indeed, he outdid them all in his intense, unyielding, almost fanatical zeal for the King and the Church and for repressive legislation to prevent any change in an outworn political and social order. (109)

Unfortunately, by countenancing this, Lockhart forced the Quarterly so far to the right on the central issues of the time that it lost contact with the government that it had supported for so many

1. See pp.29-30 above.

2. Walter Graham, "Robert Southey as Tory Reviewer", PQ, ii (1923), 99.

3. See Scott Bennett, "Catholic Emancipation, the "Quarterly Review", and Britain's Constitutional Revolution", Victorian Studies, xii (1968-9), 283-304 for an account of the extent of Southey's influence in determining the Quarterly's attitude to parliamentary reform.

years. Perhaps, like the Edinburgh, it was too old a dog to learn new tricks, but at least the Edinburgh could take some comfort from the changes that were taking place; the Quarterly could only go on barking.

The somewhat alarming clarity and simplicity of the Quarterly's political beliefs are all too obvious in its reviews of literature:

Little of its failure [to recognize the great literature of the first half of the nineteenth century] was the result of adherence to eighteenth century pseudo-classical traditions....Nor was personal animosity, though this frequently developed in the course of a literary feud, very largely responsible.

The rationale of Quarterly criticism is to be discovered in Tory reverence for the crown, loyalty to the ancient constitution of the state, the aristocratical principles, "the defence of property (the landed interests) from the people", and fidelity to the apostolical hierarchy of the Church of England.¹

We shall discover the truth of this when we come to examine the Quarterly's response to the Cockneys and to Wordsworth and the other Lake poets. A similar problem to the one faced by the Edinburgh arose when it came to review Byron and Shelley, but its religious and political bigotry eventually overcame any scruples it might have had about breaking caste by denouncing lords and gentlemen.

Scruples of any sort were almost unknown to the other major Tory periodical. As usual Blackwood's Magazine defies strict definition, but its general political affiliations are clear enough. It began life, in De Quincey's words, as 'a foundling or an adventurer',² and its first task was to take up cudgels against

1. Graham, "Some Infamous Tory Reviews", 515.

2. Oliphant, i, 434.

the Edinburgh Review:

The fact is there is a great and laudable spirit of Toryism sprung up among our young men and especially the junior brethren of the bar with whom Whiggery was much in vogue five or six years since. But now the laughers quizzers &c are allmost all anti-whigs and the Reviewers sit very sore under the discipline which they used to administer to others.¹

Scott had some reservations about the nature of that discipline, but reconciled himself to it with the thought that 'those who have set the example in such a kind of warfare are not entitled to consider themselves as ill-used when met by sharp-shooters of their own description'.²

Blackwood's sharp-shooting was not only aimed at the Edinburgh; Lockhart, in the days when he was so closely connected with the Magazine, wrote to one contributor:

I hope you will write something off the line of the 'Edinburgh Review'; for admirable as it is, I think it is now a little stale - still more off the line of the blundering and bigoted pedantry of the 'Quarterly' and its crew. I am sure you loathe Croker and Southey's politics as much as myself.³

But Lockhart and the Magazine were to part company, both physically and politically. In 1827 Blackwood's 'joined the anti-Canning faction',⁴ despite warnings and remonstrances from Lockhart who still kept in contact with his former colleagues.⁵

From this point on Blackwood's became the champion of the High Tories. It attacked Peel and Wellington because of their

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1. Scott, Letters 1819-21, 329.
 2. Ibid., 1817-19, 248.
 3. Oliphant, i, 187.
 4. Brightfield, 231.
 5. Oliphant, i, 240-1.

stand on Catholic Emancipation, it campaigned against Free Trade, and opposed any attempt at parliamentary reform.¹ The vigour of its political discussions alarmed S.T. Coleridge who wrote to Blackwood in 1829:

I see but one rock the Magazine is likely to strike on: the (only however of late) increasing proportion of space allotted to party politics, and especially to political economy.²

In fact the reverse was true, and Blackwood wrote to his son in the same year:

I am happy to say [the Magazine] is going on most flourishingly, for we now sell upwards of 7000 copies. The consistency with which it has supported its principles all along, both with regard to politics, trade, and religion, has given it a character and importance which few or no periodicals possess.³

Two years earlier he had written:

My Magazine...is the only journal which has espoused the cause of the High Tories, and for years attacked the Liberals and Free Trade Political Economists. All parties now admit that our papers have displayed more talent than has ever been brought forward on our side of the question, and the High Tories will now find it still more their interest to patronise the Magazine as their organ, in the same way as the Whigs have always supported the 'Edinburgh Review'.⁴

The effect of Blackwood's politics on its reviewing of literature is very much more difficult to evaluate than is the case with the Edinburgh or the Quarterly. Obviously their infamous attack on the Cockneys was politically inspired, and part of a more general vendetta against the Radical press. But

1. When upbraided by Croker for the Magazine's attacks on Wellington's government, Blackwood replied that he also regretted it but found difficulty in controlling his contributors (Brightfield, 232). A typical piece of Blackwood evasion.

2. Oliphant, i, 414.

3. Ibid., ii, 88.

4. Ibid., ii, 75.

their abuse was often indiscriminate, and Croker wrote to

Blackwood complaining of attacks on two very sound Tories:

I have to thank you for your last number, which I like much better than the former. I own I was distressed at the attacks on Messrs. Wordsworth and Coleridge, who are certainly respectable writers, to say the least of them, and, I understand, worthy men.¹

Political bias plays a major part in Blackwood's treatment of literature, but the nature of the Magazine means that this is rarely consistent either in its own terms or in relation to the overall political attitude of the periodical. Each review or article has to be dealt with on its own terms. Indeed that is true with both the Edinburgh and the Quarterly, but an understanding of their general political beliefs should help provide the perspective that such a detailed study requires.

1. Brightfield, 229.

Chapter Six

Partial or Impartial?

Impartiality is at best a relative and circumscribed term when applied to the periodicals, and it is preferable to talk instead of different kinds of partiality. Before doing so and discussing to what extent these were self-consciously employed and how far this involved culpability on the part of the periodicals, there are two other issues which must be taken into account. The first concerns the place of publication of both the Edinburgh Review and Blackwood's Magazine, and touches upon the organization and management of the periodicals and suggests another source of possible bias.

At a time of resurgence in Scottish nationalism we should not find it difficult to sympathize with those Scotsmen who at the beginning of the nineteenth century found in Edinburgh the intellectual centre of Great Britain.¹ The Act of Union was less than a hundred years old when the Edinburgh Review was founded, and Scotland had retained its own legal, religious and educational systems. The eighteenth century saw the flowering of Scottish philosophy, thanks to figures like David Hume, Thomas Reid (the founder of the

1. For accounts of Scotland and Edinburgh at this time see T.C.Smout, History of the Scottish People 1560-1830 (1969); M.Joyce, Edinburgh: The Golden Age (1951); D.Young, Edinburgh in the Age of Sir Walter Scott (Norman, 1965); and for a contemporary account Lord Cockburn, Memorials of his Time (1856) and his Life of Jeffrey, i, 156-61.

Common-sense school) and Dugald Stewart. Adam Smith had been Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow, and John Stuart, third Earl of Bute, became the first Scottish prime minister of Britain in 1762. Smollett, Thomson, Ramsay and Burns represented both the Anglo-Scottish and Scottish literary traditions, and the literary cause célèbre of the eighteenth century, the debate over Ossian, concerned Gaelic poetry. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, thanks to Napoleon's closing of the Continent, Edinburgh was part of the educated Englishman's grand tour, and its university excelled not only in philosophy but in medicine and natural science. But Edinburgh was a city of strange contrasts: it was predominantly middle-class¹ and the preponderance of lawyers and other professional men gave it a tremendous intellectual impetus, but few could speak or write English both rapidly and correctly; it was physically isolated and yet it was the home of the most popular novelist and probably the most successful bookseller of their time; the rebuilding of the city gave rise to a more distinct class consciousness, but at the same time the cult of the untutored genius grew in strength thanks to the work of Hogg and Burns; and it was a Tory stronghold which produced the most influential of all Whig periodicals. Such was the background to both the Edinburgh Review and Blackwood's Magazine.

Both periodicals benefited from the impetus supplied by the close-knit and successful Edinburgh book-trade:

1. In the 1841 census 'bankers, professional men, or capitalists' outnumbered labourers and those engaged in manufacturing industries. (Young, 19)

Ten, even twenty guineas a sheet for a review, £2000 or £3000 for a single poem, and £1000 each for two philosophical dissertations, drew authors from dens where they would otherwise have starved, and made Edinburgh a literary mart, famous with strangers, and the pride of its own citizens.¹

Murray (a Scot by descent, of course) and Longman provided competition from London, but it was the rivalry of equals as exemplified by one city publishing the leading novelist and the other the most popular poet of the time. The importance to the periodicals of Edinburgh as a publishing centre was twofold: it offered accessibility to new and important publications as well as to established and aspiring authors, and it created a self-confidence which helped offset the dangers of parochialism or provinciality.

None the less, Edinburgh was in some ways a limited and restricted society. In 1793 Joseph Ritson, one of the Edinburgh's early victims, described the emigration of Scotsmen to London:

Shoals of Scotchmen are arriving here every day; the difficulty, I should imagine, would be to find one going back. Edinburgh, at the same time, is so very small a place, that you may be easily acquainted with the motions of every individual from your shop-door.²

And in 1818 Jeffrey, possibly with an ulterior motive, denigrated Edinburgh society when dissuading Hazlitt from giving a course of lectures in the city:

in general I think Edinburgh the very worst place in the world for such experiments as you seemed to meditate, both from the extreme dissipation of the fashionable part of its population, and from a sort of conceit and

1. Constable, i, 2.

2. Ibid., i, 501.

fastidiousness in all the middling classes, which, originating at least as much in a coldness of nature as in any extraordinary degree of intelligence, makes them very ready to find fault and decry.¹

Even those more enthusiastically inclined towards the city's society stressed its inbred nature:

The best table-talk of Edinburgh was, and probably still is, in a very great measure made up of brilliant disquisition - such as might be transferred without alteration to a professor's note-book, or the pages of a critical Review - and of sharp word-catchings, ingenious thrusting and parrying of dialectic, and all the quips and quibblets of bar pleading. It was the talk of a society to which lawyers and lecturers had, for at least a hundred years, given the tone.²

Such talk was indeed transferred to the pages of the Edinburgh Review, and the Noctes Ambrosianae in Blackwood's Magazine were the very apotheosis of table-talk, although admittedly not quite of the kind described by Lockhart. In this way Edinburgh imposed a distinctive tone upon its periodicals (Jeffrey's reviews, for example, abound in legal imagery), but it was not one made up exclusively of 'brilliant disquisition'.

Alexander Murray wrote to Constable in 1803 defining what he thought should be the essential Scottishness of Edinburgh reviewers:

I think our reviewers are much more solid and judicious than their southern brethren. Their taste is better, at least I believe so. They must guard against flippancy, prejudice, and Billingsgate, great ingredients in all the Reviews I have ever read. A Scotch Reviewer ought to have the stern countenance of his ancestors who reviewed the troops of Bruce at Bannockburn, while the fate of a kingdom was suspended on their swords. These were few in number, much despised, but deeply felt.³

1. Constable, ii, 218.

2. Lockhart, Life of Scott, iv, 152.

3. Constable, i, 229.

Sydney Smith, however, felt that such attitudes were unlikely to endear the Edinburgh to its English readers:

You must consider that Edinburgh is a very grave place, and that you live with Philosophers who are very intolerant of nonsense. I write for the London not for the Scotch market, and perhaps more people read my nonsense than your sense. The complaint was loud and universal of the extreme dullness and lengthiness of the Edinburgh Review. Too much, I admit, would not do of my style; but the proportion in which it exists enlivens the Review if you appeal to the whole public, and not to the 8 or 10 grave Scotchmen with whom you live.¹

There is a serious point to this: as Smith implies, the English readership was essential to the success of the Review and Jeffrey was too distant, both geographically and temperamentally, to gauge its needs at all accurately. Scotland's own cultural and intellectual traditions at times clashed with those of England, and a situation arose where, as Byron points out in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, 'Scottish taste decides on English wit'. Jeffrey realized this; he acknowledged that his thinking had a 'certain national cast' about it² and that, for example, there was a 'Scotch manner of running everything up to elements, and explaining all sorts of occurrences by a theoretical history of society'.³ It was, however, a more fundamental matter than such comments suggest. David Craig has argued that Scotland in the latter half of the eighteenth century was deliberately living down its past by creating a 'polite' society which disowned its essential Scottishness.⁴

1. Pearson, Smith, 65.

2. Cockburn, ii, 141.

3. Ibid., ii, 139.

4. D. Craig, Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830 (1961), 40-71.

This resulted in Edinburgh looking to and emulating England both socially and intellectually. Although Craig seems to be engaged in a piece of special pleading, his point has to be borne in mind when considering the Edinburgh Review's sporadic reliance on outmoded Augustan critical concepts. Whether this was due to a desire to belatedly ape English taste or whether it was simply a case of the old-fashionedness of Edinburgh intellectual culture allowing the rationalism of the Augustan age to linger on into the Romantic, it is impossible to say. Certainly it had much to do with the distance, both geographically¹ and culturally, between Edinburgh and London.

The relationship of the Edinburgh Review and Blackwood's Magazine to their Scottish background is a very complex one. In some ways it worked to their disadvantage: a different cultural and intellectual tradition alienated them at times from their English readers, and the geographical isolation hindered any immediate response to change in thought and taste, particularly in literature; there were also problems, especially for the Edinburgh, created by the editor's being distant from the majority of his contributors. But there were also important advantages: national vanity undoubtedly played a large part in establishing the Edinburgh Review, and both periodicals drew much of their strength from contact with the vibrant and

1. As well as differences in intellectual attitudes, there were more specific problems created by the periodicals being published in Scotland. Jeffrey found that he had to rely on information from London friends and contributors to keep abreast of current events and that it was more difficult to control his contributors from a distance, whilst Blackwood's found that much of its topical allusion to Edinburgh society only mystified and irked its English readers.

stimulating, if somewhat restricted, society of Edinburgh.

When in 1847 the Edinburgh Review moved to London, it marked the end of an important and exciting era in Edinburgh's history.

The other specific concern of immediate importance brings into question the honesty of the periodicals. We have discussed the extent of the influence exerted by editor and publisher, the importance of political considerations, and the significance of the Scottish background, but more explicit and local issues also threatened the impartiality of each individual article or review. Without wishing to emulate Mr. Puff, even if it were practicable, in distinguishing between every kind of puffery from the puff direct to the puff by implication, it is important to be aware of the pressures created by the close-knit world within which the periodicals operated.

The importunities of hopeful authors was one source of such pressure. Both publishers and editors received many letters begging for favourable reviews.¹ One authoress even attempted bribery by sending Gifford three pounds in return for favourable comments on her novel The Daughters of Isenberg; Gifford donated the money to the Lying-in Hospitals!² That authors attempted to ensure that their books were favourably reviewed is neither surprising nor particularly reprehensible, but in most cases such direct approaches met with a marked lack of success.

1. Constable received letters from such established authors as Amelia Opie, William Godwin, and James Montgomery to this effect, and must have received hundreds more from lesser writers. See Constable, ii, 52-3, 251, and 276.

2. Smiles, i, 180.

Other pressures were more insidious. Contributors as well as editors and publishers were also approached by interested parties. Byron asked Tom Moore to review Coleridge favourably in the Edinburgh and begged that his request remain 'a secret between you and me, as Jeffrey might not like such a project'.¹ He was unsuccessful, but Scott was more accommodating in fulfilling the wish of Lady Davy, 'my very early freind [sic] & parcel cousin',² who wanted him to favourably review her husband's poem Salmonia in the Quarterly. Scott also, and there is no reason to doubt that other leading contributors did the same, wrote favourable reviews of friends whom he felt were in financial need or were worthy of public attention;³ these he placed with whichever periodical he felt most suitable, and at times was also responsible for procuring favourable reviews for his friends and protégés.⁴ It was not unusual for an author to be reviewed by a close friend, or, as in the case of Scott's review of Godwin's Chaucer, if editorial policy demanded it, by somebody with a personal antipathy towards him.

Less usual was the case of Scott reviewing his own novel in the Quarterly.⁵ This is no awful example of the basic dishonesty of the periodicals, but it does raise the

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1. Letters and Journals, ed. L. Marchand (1975), iv, 324.
 2. Scott, Letters 1826-8, 481.
 3. *Ibid.*, 1815-17, 544 and 1817-19, 109-10.
 4. *Ibid.*, 1819-21, 148.
 5. QR, xvi (Jan., 1817), 430-80. It is a review of Tales of My Landlord (The Black Dwarf and Old Mortality). See pp. 454-59 below for a discussion of this review.

question of how they reviewed the work of their leading contributors. In some cases this affected the judgement of the reviewer or the decision of whether or not to publish the review: Scott praised Southey's The Curse of Kehama in the Quarterly although he admitted that he 'could have made a very different hand of it indeed, had the order of the day been pour déchirer';¹ and Gifford decided not to commission a review of Hodgson's Translation of Juvenal since it would, in Murray's words, 'necessarily involve a comparison with Mr. Gifford's own translation, which must of course be praised, and thus show an individual feeling - the least spark of which, in our early numbers, would both betray and ruin us'.² If Gifford had to be praised in the Quarterly, so too did Wilson in Blackwood's: he was furious when he saw the proofs of an unflattering review of his Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life, and this was replaced by a laudatory review which appeared in June 1822.³ Wilson was also responsible for ensuring the safety of at least one author, William Roscoe, who was not only a close personal friend but also one of his wife's relations.⁴

Such examples are necessarily fragmentary and inconclusive, and it is impossible to use them as a basis for general comments

1. Smiles, i, 190.
2. Ibid., i, 111.
3. Oliphant, i, 269-72.
4. Ibid., i, 402.

about the honesty or otherwise of the periodicals. If the Quarterly was kind to Southey because he was a leading contributor, no such considerations influenced Jeffrey when he reviewed Scott's Marmion in the early days of the Edinburgh; nor was Blackwood deterred from slating Hogg, one of his own contributors and authors, in an article to which even his printer objected.¹ However, the examples are sufficient to reinforce the warning that no single review or article can be assumed to be entirely impartial: when Ellis reviewed Byron, for example, it must be remembered, although it may not be important in this particular case, that he was a friend of the poet's; and any review of works by editors or leading contributors must be treated with suspicion.

On one charge, however, the periodicals can be exonerated. Despite insinuations such as Coleridge's that he was abused less in the Quarterly than the Edinburgh because Murray was the publisher of Christabel,² it is evident that the periodicals were not used to puff their owners' wares in any dishonest manner. Books were advertised on the covers and on bills stitched into the Reviews,³ but Blackwood spoke for all when he wrote in 1820:

I would rather see any publication of mine, or of any of my friends, cut to pieces in the Magazine than that there should be the slightest appearance of favour or partiality - for this is perfect destruction to 'Maga', and would render her no better than a petty bookselling job.⁴

1. Oliphant, i, 338.

2. Letters, Griggs, iv, 700.

3. Constable, i, 354; ii, 50 and 472; Oliphant, i, 334; and Smiles, ii, 4.

4. Oliphant, i, 377.

Blackwood himself was joint-publisher of Byron's The Story of Rimini which was attacked by his Magazine, and as agent for Cadell and Davies and other London publishers he was partly the publisher of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound and Hazlitt's Table-Talk both of which aroused immense hostility from the Magazine; Murray when asking Scott to review Miss Waldie's Residence in Belgium reminded him that 'its being my publication is not upon any account in the world to influence you even in the estimation of a hair';¹ and Constable went ahead and published a fourth edition of James Montgomery's The Wanderer of Switzerland despite the Edinburgh's assertion that it was a 'feeble outrage on the public'.² More concrete evidence is provided by examining the favourable or unfavourable response of the periodicals to the books of individual publishers, but this only confirms their freedom from trade influence.³

But, as we have seen, the periodicals at times succumbed to pressures which threatened their impartiality. These pressures, along with such considerations as editorial policy and interference, the choice of reviewer and the place of publication, can be classified together; they are specific and local factors which differ with each review or article and, although their possibility must always be borne in mind when

1. Smiles, ii, 7.

2. Constable, ii, 248.

3. No significant pattern emerged from a study of those books published by Constable or Murray and reviewed in the Edinburgh or the Quarterly.

reading a review, they do not form a general and consistent pattern. There are, however, three main types of bias or prejudice which consistently influenced the literary judgements of the major periodicals.

The most obvious of these is the political. Politics played an important part in the development and functioning of the periodicals, and not surprisingly this partizanship is also to be found in their judgements on literature. There can be little complaint whilst it remains as partizanship, but the periodicals are culpable when aesthetic and literary judgements are used merely as political tools.

The same is true of the second kind of bias, that based on morality. A reviewer cannot be blamed for defending the moral standards of his day, but on many occasions morality is used as a stock weapon against a work that legitimately brought into question contemporary moral beliefs, or as an excuse for attacking an author obnoxious to the Review on very different grounds. We shall see this particularly at work in the response given to the writings of Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and Hazlitt.

Finally, the most complex kind of prejudice found consistently in the periodicals is that based on attitudes to class. We have seen how concern for social prestige influenced those involved in the running of the periodicals: Jeffrey at the outset of his career was intensely worried by the 'risk of sinking in the general estimation, and being considered as fairly articted to a trade that is not perhaps

the most respectable....';¹ Brougham, even in 1813, was appalled at being thought the editor of the Edinburgh;² and Scott, having warned Gifford not to forget 'the gentleman in the critic', was not originally convinced that his son-in-law's position as editor of the Quarterly was quite in keeping with his social status. Class attitudes influenced many aspects of literature at this time to an extent which has yet to be fully realized, and we shall see in the following pages the major part they played in the response given to that literature by the periodicals.

By identifying the various kinds of bias at work within the periodicals, it is possible to see how their response to contemporary literature was influenced by forces which had little to do with aesthetic or literary considerations. It would be naive to suggest that any reviewer could be in a position to make an absolute rather than a relative judgement, and political conviction, religious faith, and moral and social attitudes must inevitably play their part. But in the second part of this thesis we shall see how these often turn to bigotry, and are used to discredit rather than assess the work of an author. But we shall also discover reviews which make a determined effort to terms with the work in front of them, and at least fulfil part of Coleridge's definition of

1. Cockburn, i, 145.

2. Constable, ii, 224-6.

of an honest review in that the reviewer himself 'presents his errors in a definite place and tangible form, and holds the torch and guides the way to their detection'.¹ And at times we shall meet with reviews which transcend their immediate context and offer the modern reader something of value and importance.

1. Biographia Literaria, ed. J.Shawcross (1907), ii, 85.

Part Two

The purpose of this section is threefold: to describe as accurately as possible the reception given to the leading writers of the time by the three major periodicals; to analyze the prejudices and biases which often motivated that reception; and to identify those reviews which offer criticism of lasting value. This means that we have to sustain a double focus: each author has to be looked at from the point of view of the periodicals, and each periodical has to be looked at in the light of its judgements on the authors concerned.

To avoid over-simplification and to maintain this focus each author is dealt with separately, but they have been grouped together under specific chapter headings. These headings illustrate, in an admittedly arbitrary fashion, the most important factors determining the reception given to a specific group of authors. To a large extent these headings coincide with the more usual terms 'Lake School', 'Cockney School', and 'Satanic School', but my purpose is obviously to draw attention to the forces at work within the periodicals. No one factor is ever singly responsible for a judgement on an author as will become apparent from the following pages, but certain generalizations can be made albeit with the usual hesitancy and qualifications. I hope the result will be indeed a double focus, rather than merely double vision.

Chapter Seven

Critical Values Past and Present

Wordsworth

In 1844 Francis Jeffrey looked back on his
criticism of Wordsworth:

I have spoken in many places rather too bitterly and confidently of the faults of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry: And forgetting that, even on my own view of them, they were but faults of taste, or venial self-partiality, have sometimes visited them, I fear, with an asperity which should be reserved for objects of Moral reprobation.¹

Our attitude to Jeffrey can be gauged by whether we see this as a graceful apology for the warmth with which he expressed honestly-held opinions or simply as humbug. Those writing on Jeffrey have tended to fall into two such camps.² All

1. F. Jeffrey, Contributions to the Edinburgh Review (1844), iii, 233n..
2. Much has been written on Jeffrey but the most significant contributions are as follows:
 J.H. Alexander, Two Studies in Romantic Reviewing: Edinburgh Reviewers and the English Tradition; The Reviewing of Walter Scott's Poetry 1805-17 (Salzburg, 1976), particularly i, 103-90.
 W. Bagehot, "The First Edinburgh Reviewers" in Literary Studies (1895), i, 144-87.
 R.C. Bald, "Francis Jeffrey as a Literary Critic", Nineteenth Century, xcvi (1925), 201-5.
 J.M. Beatty, "Lord Jeffrey and Wordsworth", PMLA, xxxviii (1923), 221-35.
 T. Crawford, The Edinburgh Review and Romantic Poetry (1802-29). Auckland University College Bulletin No. 47, English Series No. 8 (1955).
 R. Daniel, "Jeffrey and Wordsworth: the Shape of Persecution", Sewanee Review, 1 (1942), 195-213.
 J.R. Derby, "The Paradox of Francis Jeffrey: Reason versus Sensibility", MLQ, vii (1946), 489-500.
 Lewis Gates, Selections from Essays of Francis Jeffrey (1894).
 Three Studies in Literature (New York, 1899).
 J. Greig, Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review (1948).
 B. Guyer, "Francis Jeffrey's Essay on Beauty", HLQ, xiii (1949-50), 71-85.
 "The Philosophy of Francis Jeffrey", MLQ, xi (1950), 17-26.

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- M.Y.Hughes, "The Humanism of Francis Jeffrey", MLR, xvi (1921), 243-51.
 D.Nichol Smith (ed.), Jeffrey's Literary Criticism (1910).
 A.Noyes, Wordsworth and Jeffrey in Controversy. Indiana University Publications, Humanity Series No. 5 (1941).
 L.Stephen, "The First Edinburgh Reviewers" in Hours in a Library (1899), ii, 241-69.
 C.T.Winchester, A Group of English Essayists of the Early Nineteenth Century (New York, 1910).
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recognize the historical importance of Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth, and either attempt to excuse or justify it or use it as the basis for an attack upon him.¹ This polarization of attitudes leads to two misconceptions which often hinder a proper discussion of the reasons for Jeffrey's hostility towards the most significant poet of his age.

The first of these is the suggestion that our response to Jeffrey's attack on Wordsworth is largely determined by our feelings about the value of Wordsworth's poetry. James Greig in his biography of Jeffrey is the most extreme proponent of this, and even goes so far as to hint darkly that Wordsworth must be held partly responsible for misleading humanity to the point where it sets about its own destruction.² But what matters is not whether Jeffrey's comments support our own judgement or the critical fashion of the time, but whether or not they constitute an honest and valid critical position. Jeffrey's emotional and intellectual constitution made his response to Wordsworth's poetry extremely equivocal. This is not surprising (plenty of other critics have felt the same),

1. The most telling attacks on Jeffrey are made by Noyes and Daniel. Greig's defence of him is more than a little suspect, but Guyer, Derby, and Hughes show that his thinking has much more substance and consistency than allowed by his detractors. The most balanced account is the recent one by J.H.Alexander, but my own views, although very much in agreement with his, differ in emphasis.

2. Greig, 230.

nor is there any reason why mixed feelings should not be expressed in his reviews. But I shall try to show that there were other factors of a more practical and expedient kind which influenced Jeffrey, and that in responding to these he fell short of the standards of impartiality and integrity so often claimed by the Edinburgh.

As well as defending Jeffrey by attacking Wordsworth, there have been attempts to minimise the virulence of his criticism. Most recently this has been done by J.H. Alexander, who argues that 'Jeffrey's public expression of his immense admiration for the Lake poets must not be overlooked'.¹ He goes on to quote some examples of this praise, which in isolation would more than support his statement; but he then gives the game away by claiming that the 'very scale of [Jeffrey's] attack is a tribute to the enemy'.² It was Jeffrey who decided that Wordsworth was the enemy, and no amount of praise can obscure the virulence of the Edinburgh's attack when the reviews are read in toto. Leslie Stephen points out that the 'greatest triumph that a literary critic can win is the early recognition of genius not yet appreciated by his contemporaries', and that whilst 'every critic has a sacred and inalienable right to blunder at times:...Jeffrey's blundering is amazingly systematic and comprehensive'.³ In the case of Wordsworth it undoubtedly

1. Alexander, i, 129.

2. Ibid., i, 130.

3. Stephen, ii, 254 and 255.

was; he was horribly and destructively wrong and nothing can alter that fact. This does not mean, however, that his work can be dismissed out of hand. If Dr. Alexander is mistaken in emphasising the effect of Jeffrey's praise of Wordsworth, he more than proves his point that 'Jeffrey's day to day reviewing is clearly superior to that in the rival Reviews in its unity, its perception, and its stimulating thinking through of each issue at adequate length'.¹

Whatever he may have said about Wordsworth, Jeffrey proves himself time and again to be an intelligent and perceptive literary critic, which is why the underlying reasons for his hostility towards Wordsworth deserve such close attention.

We first need to examine his intellectual make-up. Again there is a division of opinion: Leslie Stephen argues that Jeffrey knew 'as much of metaphysics as a clever lad was likely to pick up at Edinburgh during the reign of Dugald Stewart'² whilst Byron Guyer describes him as

...an empiricist, accepting the validity of phenomenal knowledge constructed by the Baconian method of induction, and accepting David Hume's view of the probability of human knowledge and his empirical view of human ethics.³

Perhaps it comes down to the same thing because Stephen and Guyer agree on two fundamental issues: the eclecticism and Scottishness of Jeffrey's thought.

We saw in chapter six how Edinburgh's intellectual

1. Alexander, i, 190.

2. Stephen, ii, 253-54.

3. Guyer, "The Philosophy of Jeffrey", 22.

traditions helped to fashion the beliefs and attitudes of the Edinburgh Review's founding members. Jeffrey was the only one to live in Scotland throughout his life, and obviously the Scottish philosophical tradition had a great effect upon him. Whilst Hume and Stewart were of major importance, it was another Scottish philosopher, Archibald Alison, who seems to have influenced Jeffrey most.¹ Byron Guyer has shown the importance of Alison's Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste to Jeffrey, and how it seems to have resulted in him formulating certain basic concepts. Guyer sums these up when he writes:

When Jeffrey's philosophy is understood, it is seen that his associationist aesthetics occurs in the framework of his positivistic outlook, and that his positivism prevents his acceptance of any of the philosophical idealisms usually associated with such an aesthetic.²

This covers the three things on which nearly all recent commentators agree: the associationist basis of Jeffrey's theories on art; what Guyer calls his positivism, which seems basically to be a Calvinistic mistrust of the perfectibility of man; and his dislike of idealisms, which he himself calls mysticisms. But whilst these are fundamental to his criticism of Wordsworth (and so show it to be a great deal more systematic and less capricious than his detractors allow), they do not fully explain the reasons for his hostility. There is at the centre of Jeffrey's criticism as a whole an apparent

1. Jeffrey reviewed Alison's Essays in 1811, and the review formed the basis for an essay on beauty which appeared first in the 1824 supplement and then the 1841 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

2. Guyer, op. cit. 18.

inconsistency which must be recognized. Guyer does so when

he writes:

Francis Jeffrey shared these opinions with the essayists of his time: beauty is emotion produced by contemplation of an outer object which suggests ideas and feelings through association; the Elizabethans, including the writers of poetic prose, are the supreme *littérateurs* in human history; Shakespeare no doubt errs but his errors are of little account, since while sacrificing correctness he rose to the heights of creative genius; the literature of the Age of Anne is coldly correct, insipid, and lacking in genius and poetic fervor; the writers of Queen Anne's reign allowed caution to curb their genius; Pope is a moralist and a wit but not a poet; the writers of Jeffrey's age stand above those of the eighteenth century because they possess poetic genius which rises above mere correctness. But Jeffrey did not prefer a literary treatment of the distant past to the ordinary present, and he did not prefer the mysterious to the familiar. He preferred the realistic passages of Scott's historical novels to the poetry; he scorned Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, but he liked Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth; although he believed Keats possessed the highest kind of poetic genius, his personal preference was for the poetry of George Crabbe.¹

That is an accurate summary of Jeffrey's attitudes, but the inconsistency which it reveals cannot be explained away by reference to Alison or any other philosopher who might have influenced him. The inconsistency lies in the man himself.

It takes the form of a dualism both in his sensibility and in his conception of the role of the critic. From Guyer's summary of his attitudes it is quite obvious that he cannot be dismissed simply as a reactionary critic employing outmoded Augustan critical theory. However, whilst he often responds to the spirit of his age, he always draws

1. Guyer, 18.

back from committing himself too far. This caution is apparent in the early years of the Edinburgh Review as a whole, but it is particularly evident in Jeffrey's treatment of the Lake school.¹ Thomas Crawford has shown how in the second decade of the century the Edinburgh responded more readily and less guardedly to Romanticism, and he and Derby have catalogued the more conservative aspects of Jeffrey's and the Edinburgh's earlier thinking. In particular, these include the reliance on rules and laws of taste which are partly natural and partly arbitrary (depending upon the proper operation of the laws of association); a belief in a higher style of writing not understood by untrained minds; an adherence to reason rather than feeling as the basis for critical judgement; admiration of technical virtuosity; and reliance on common-sense and analysis as critical tools coupled with a distrust of the ideas of progress and genius (at least that kind of genius typified by 'emotional expansiveness, lawlessness, and the Titanic pose').² All these things, in Crawford's words, were an attempt to 'extend the world of Newton and Locke to include fresh experiences, not to overthrow that world'.³ But even the attempt to extend that world implies a recognition and response to the new currents of thought and feeling, and suggests the presence of what Derby calls

1. I use 'Lake school' as a term of convenience. For an accurate historical dating of the term see P.A.Cook, "Chronology of the 'Lake School' Argument: Some Revisions", RES,xxviii (May, 1977),175-81.

2. Derby, 493.

3. Crawford, 8.

Jeffrey's 'fundamental sensibility and romantic bent'.¹

This then is one aspect of Jeffrey's dualism: an instinctive response to the new sensibility of the age in conflict with traditional critical precepts. But 'traditional' does not mean Augustan. The pre-Romantic poets had made their impact, as Jeffrey was aware. Also, we find Jeffrey sharing common beliefs with the poets he appears to disapprove of - he and Wordsworth do not disagree on the importance or nature of the laws of association, only on the way they should be applied. Jeffrey was living through a period of transition, and it is not surprising that he should both respond to and yet draw back from the currents of thought eddying around him. This attitude is summed up by R.C. Bald, who writes:

The period to which Jeffrey conceived he belonged had been ushered in by Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith; it really began with Cowper and had been continued by Crabbe, Campbell, and Rogers. Likewise he was fully aware of the great influences at work at the time in the return to Nature and the return to the past. But while no explorers had pushed beyond this point into the hinterland of poetry in 1797, by 1845 settlers had arrived in considerable numbers, and the explorers had penetrated much further. Jeffrey was no explorer; he could only follow uncertainly in the trail of a few of them; but, to say the least, he saw and learnt far more than those who stayed at home. His is the 1797 attitude of mind - that of the Romantic movement immediately prior to the publication of the Lyrical Ballads.

(202)

But this is not quite all, and Bald has to add the rider that

Jeffrey's principal fault is an excessive confidence in his own position. For instance, he knows of no one more competent than himself to compile an

1. Derby, 490.

authoritative volume of Specimens of our Living Poets. His attitude makes him blind to the fact that a powerful and original thinker must necessarily be ahead of his time; so, unfortunately, it becomes one of his critical dicta that 'present popularity...is, after all, the only safe passage to future glory'.

(202)

This excessive confidence, so closely akin to excessive caution, stems from the personality of the man himself. I tried to explore part of that personality in chapter three, and one of my aims was to show the discrepancy between Judge Jeffrey the critic and Francis Jeffrey the man. Examples of Jeffrey's kindness to old ladies and assistance to impecunious men of letters (most notably, Hazlitt) are largely irrelevant to his criticism, but they serve one important function. They show that Jeffrey considered his role as a critic to be a public role, one which he deliberately adopted. In doing so he believed he took on certain responsibilities, one of which was the subservience of his own tastes and opinions to those he believed he should propagate as a critic. This deliberate division between the public and private man is the other important aspect of his dualism, and explains (although it does not excuse) how he could express private admiration of Wordsworth whilst slating him in public. As one would expect since it is part of Jeffrey's dualism, this conception of the critic's role is based on both the old and the relatively new. Jeffrey's belief in 'rules' meant that the critic had to apply them and censure those who fell out of line; but the 'rules' themselves were based on the laws of association. As Dr. Alexander explains:

The basis of Jeffrey's objection to Wordsworth is, Guyer suggests [in his article, 'Francis Jeffrey's Essay on Beauty'], that he conceives of the poet as taking accidental personal associations, valid for the individual, too far in public: 'Jeffrey is simply saying in the language of his day that Wordsworth has mistakenly read his own personality into external nature or into his imaginary creatures'. (79) But the real sin in Jeffrey's view, which Guyer does not emphasise, is that Wordsworth expects the public to share his private emotions....A critic should judge on the basis of universal associations, but he may indulge his own taste in private. Society must be preserved from childishness, and the idea that a poet should create his own taste was anathema to Jeffrey.

(1, 113-4)

There is one other aspect of Jeffrey's view of his role which is important. He writes, looking back on his career, that he

constantly endeavoured to combine Ethical precepts with Literary Criticism, and earnestly sought to impress my readers with a sense, both of the close connection between sound Intellectual attainments and the higher elements of Duty and Enjoyment; and of the just and ultimate subordination of the former to the latter....I have, more uniformly and earnestly than any preceding critic, made the Moral tendencies of the works under consideration a leading subject of discussion....¹

This reinforces Dr. Alexander's explanation of Jeffrey's view of Wordsworth as dangerous to both literature and society, and it is something which is also apparent in Jeffrey's evaluation of Campbell, Rogers, and Moore.

Whilst such an understanding of Jeffrey's dualism is of value to those whose concern is to understand (or defend) him, it still has to be placed in the context of 'This will never do' and equally damaging remarks. Jeffrey, I believe,

1. Jeffrey, Contributions, i, x.

can be justified on the grounds of consistency: there was that in his personality, his philosophy, and his conception of the role of the critic, which provided a basis for his opposition to Wordsworth. I would, therefore, agree to some extent with Dr. Alexander, who sees these things as good reason for arguing that Jeffrey's criticism 'is not merely splenetic or legalistic, but springs from a unified, if limited, intelligence':¹ although I would stress the limitations, particularly as exemplified in his caution and timidity. But even if Jeffrey's reviews of Wordsworth are not 'merely splenetic or legalistic', it is the spleen which predominates and sets the tone of the reviews. This cannot be explained away by the arguments we have considered so far, and we must look further for its causes.

The adjective 'legalistic' gives us one clue. It was a commonplace to talk of 'Judge Jefferies' or, like Charles Lamb, to see Jeffrey in his reviews as always addressing twelve men on a jury. The early reviews of the Edinburgh abound in legal imagery, and the reviewer all too often appears as the prosecuting counsel.² Nor is it simply a question of technique, as Thomas Crawford points out when discussing Jeffrey's belief in the classical Rules:

Jeffrey, it must not be forgotten, was a practising lawyer. His whole conception of 'the Rules' is legalistic: he is pre-eminently

1. Alexander, i, 116.

2. Robert Daniel makes this point very strongly, and several critics have pointed out how the technique of listing the pros and cons of an author's work is very similar to the legal process.

a judge to whom the laws of poetry are parallel to the laws of the land - crystallizations of the common sense and congealed experience of ages. (13)

The legalistic cast of his mind not only helps explain why he should respond to those ideas we have already examined, it also explains in part the tone of the reviews. Wordsworth was not so much the enemy as the accused, or rather the convicted.

As well as his profession, Jeffrey's politics also help explain his antipathy to Wordsworth although not the virulence of his attack. Walter Bagehot, who is not simply trying to 'invoke for [Jeffrey] a gentle oblivion to cover his subsiding reputation',¹ attempts to define the essence of Whiggism as it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

In truth Whiggism is not a creed, it is a character. Perhaps as long as there has been a political history in this country there have been certain men of a cool, moderate, resolute firmness, not gifted with high imagination, little prone to enthusiastic sentiment, heedless of large theories and speculations, careless of dreamy scepticism; with a clear view of the next step, and a wise intention to take it; a strong conviction that the elements of knowledge are true, and a steady belief that the present world can, and should be, quietly improved.²

He also recognized the latent conservatism of such a creed:

The Whigs, it is true, have a conservatism of their own, but it instinctively clings to certain practical rules tried by steady adherence, to appropriate formulae verified by the regular application and steady success of many ages....[The Whigs'] chosen ideal is a body or collection of wise rules fitly applicable to great affairs, pleasing a placid sense by an evident propriety, gratifying the capacity for business by a constant and clear applicability.

(161-2)

1. Clive, Scotch Reviewers, 48.

2. Bagehot, i, 157.

Jeffrey was a Whig, and in a passage which prefigures more modern and elaborate studies, Bagehot sees him in those terms:

The truth is, that Lord Jeffrey was something of a Whig critic. We have hinted, that among the peculiarities of that character, an excessive partiality for new, arduous, overwhelming, original excellence, was by no means to be numbered. Their tendency inclining to the quiet footsteps of custom, they like to trace the exact fulfilment of admitted rules, a just accordance with the familiar features of ancient merit. But they are most averse to mysticism. A clear, precise, discriminating intellect shrinks at once from the symbolic, the unbounded, the indefinite.

(171-2)

Granted the truth of Bagehot's formulations, we can see again that there are fundamental aspects of Jeffrey's character which help explain his antipathy towards Wordsworth's poetry.

For the reasons why this antipathy was turned into public hostility we have to consider Jeffrey's role as editor and reviewer. Again Bagehot makes an important point:

Any one who should expect to find a pure perfection in these miscellaneous productions [Jeffrey's reviews], should remember their bulk. If all his reviews were reprinted, they would be very many. And all the while, he was a busy lawyer, was editor of the Review, did the business, corrected the proof-sheets; and more than all, what one would have thought a very strong man's work, actually managed Henry Brougham. You must not criticise papers like these, rapidly written in the hurry of life, as you would the painful words of an elaborate sage, slowly and with anxious awfulness instructing mankind.

(171)

This should act as a caveat to any discussion of Jeffrey's criticism. His reviews had to be written quickly, and they had to take their place amongst his other work as editor and his professional duties as a lawyer. Modern scholars all too easily treat them as they would the work of a twentieth-century critic, and this is why the arguments put forward

by scholars like Byron Guyer, whilst extremely valuable, are also a little suspect. Although Jeffrey's work as a whole demonstrates the principles underlying it, he did not have time to fashion his reviews quite as carefully and thoroughly as some people imply.

But the appearance of consistency was essential. Jeffrey recognized the importance of the Lake poets (even if in a negative fashion), and 'appreciated that it was important that he should take up a definite critical attitude towards them if the Edinburgh was to be anything more than a series of discrete articles'.¹ Given his innate conservatism, the duality of his sensibility, and, as Greig points out, the fact that 'he had still much to learn both from life and from literature',² Jeffrey's decision as to which line to take is not a surprising one. Time was short, the reviews had to be written quickly, and in such circumstances it was much easier to revert to the known and conventional than to explore the unknown and the challenging. John Hayden puts it somewhat more succinctly when he claims that Jeffrey "had previously created a 'system' of critical attitudes with regard to Wordsworth and must stick with it regardless of the quality of the poetry that confronts him".

There is, however, another and less charitable way of explaining Jeffrey's decision. It is put most damagingly

1. Alexander, i, 128.

2. Greig, 181.

by Leslie Stephen:

But, unluckily, the 'Edinburgh' wanted a butt....
The rising school of Lake poets, with their austere professions and real weaknesses, was just the game to show a little sport; and, accordingly, poor Jeffrey blundered into grievous misapprehensions, and has survived chiefly by his worst errors. The simple fact is that he accepted whatever seemed to a hasty observer to be the safest opinion, that which was current in the most orthodox critical circles, and expressed it with rather more point than his neighbours.¹

I have tried to show that Jeffrey's choice of opinion was not at all simple, but the first part of Stephen's comment is more difficult to refute. The Edinburgh's policy, particularly in its early days, was to attract attention not only by the consistency but also by the severity of its criticisms. Wordsworth was, to some extent, sacrificed to this need:

The REVIEW, in short, carried slashing articles because such articles would sell it, and thereby propagate its political ideas. And to see the Lake poets butchered to make a Scottish holiday became one of the public amusements of the era.²

Daniel's comment is part of a very convincing attack on Jeffrey; but his and Stephen's conclusion that Jeffrey's criticism has no literary value and is only of interest as an historical curiosity does not seem to me to be tenable. Whilst agreeing in particular with the points Daniel makes about the legalistic nature of Jeffrey's mind and the necessary opportunism of a reviewer rushed for time, I believe that there is ample evidence to show that the basis for Jeffrey's

1. Stephen, ii, 258.

2. Daniel, 204.

attack was not simply expediency. This does not mean that the tone of his articles can be defended. He was wrong, and he expressed his opinions in an indefensible manner which did a great deal of harm to Wordsworth's reputation¹ and must now seriously limit his own. However, the reasons for his antipathy to Wordsworth's poetry which lie behind the virulence of tone are important. Jeffrey's was very much the sensibility of 1797, and on reading his reviews we can see the problem that must have been common at the time. The pre-Romantic poets had initiated a change in feeling but critical beliefs and attitudes from an earlier age still lingered on, although often in an attenuated form. A much more marked change took place after 1798, and Jeffrey as a public critic had to decide to respond to it. It is this kind of situation which makes the study of the periodicals particularly rewarding for a modern reader, since we can see the complexity of response underlying the reaction to new and original literature. Jeffrey chose wrongly, and in a way which reflects both on his intelligence and sensitivity and on his honesty and integrity. None the less, he was faced with a very real problem, and it is in the nature of this problem that the real interest of his criticism lies.

Before considering his response to Wordsworth in more detail, there is one other issue which must be discussed. We saw in chapter five how the Edinburgh Review was a Whig not a radical periodical, and Bagehot's definition of

1. T.M.Raysor, "The Establishment of Wordsworth's Reputation", JEGP, liv (1955), 61-71.

Whiggism describes its boundaries very well. Therefore it is not surprising that Jeffrey took exception to Wordsworth's politics. Byron Guyer writes:

In the review of Robert Southey's Thalaba, the Destroyer, Jeffrey singled out the social views of the Lake poets. The critic considered these views characteristic of the group: general discontent with the existing order of society; brooding over the disorder of man's progress; acute horror at war and other human vice; abolition of punishment for criminal and legal offenses; excusing the criminal poor on grounds of their moral necessity while showing no mercy to the criminal rich. The critic opposed these principles on what he considered good evidence, and not out of whim or maliciousness as the Lake poets and their circle of friends asserted. The poet who bewails the disorder of man's progress can have no reason to hope that such sorrowing will touch the heart of the critic who honestly believes that man is not perfectible. Poetry which advocates the abolition of legal and penal systems is not likely to evoke beauty in the heart of the critic who is a brilliant successful lawyer. Jeffrey knew that the legal system of his day was archaic and severe, and much in need of reform. He often defended those who could not pay for counsel, and later as a judge he tempered the harshness of the laws with mercy. The critic as well as the Lake poets was not content with the existing order of society. For over half a century he was active in Whig politics and in public education to effect various reforms. As Lord Advocate he made political history by doing his best to appoint to the many positions under his control the candidates best fitted for them. To such a man, busy with the everyday problems of practical reform, the protests of the poet may seem understandably foolish and hence unpoetic.¹

That there is some truth in this last suggestion that Jeffrey, as a practical reformer, had little time for those 'large self-worshippers And careless hectorers in proud bad verse' is supported by his similar attitude towards Byron's supposed radical views. Also, of course, he was quite right about

1. Guyer, "Jeffrey's Philosophy", 22-3.

Wordsworth and the Lake poets - they did object, at least initially, not merely to abuses but to the social structure as a whole. In an entry in her Grasmere Journal (2 October 1800) Dorothy Wordsworth records a meeting with Charles Lloyd and his wife:

We had a pleasant conversation about the manners of the rich - avarice, inordinate desires, and the effeminacy, unnaturalness, and the unworthy objects of education.¹

One can feel sure that such a conversation would only have confirmed Jeffrey's worst fears. However, as we shall see, it was not politics but attitudes to class which were the root-cause of Jeffrey's disagreement with Wordsworth's social beliefs.

So far I have tried to outline the major causes of Jeffrey's reaction to Wordsworth's poetry. The reviews which express that reaction are scattered throughout the pages of the Edinburgh,² but have been reprinted too often

1. The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt (1959), i, 62-3.

2. The reviews in which Jeffrey comments on Wordsworth and the Lake school fall into two categories. The first consists of reviews of specific works by Wordsworth:

ER, xi (Oct., 1807), 214-31. Poems in Two Volumes
 ER, xxiv (Nov., 1814), 1-30. The Excursion
 ER, xxv (Oct., 1815), 355-63. The White Doe of Rylstone
 ER, xxxvii (Nov., 1822), 449-56. Memorials of a Tour on the Continent

The second consists of reviews of other authors in which occur substantial comments on Wordsworth or the Lake school:

ER, i (Oct., 1802), 63-83. Southey's Thalaba
 ER, vii (Oct., 1805), 1-28. Southey's Madoc
 ER, xii (Apr., 1808), 131-51. Crabbe's Poems
 ER, xiii (Jan., 1809), 249-76. Cromek's Reliques of Burns
 ER, xviii (Aug., 1811), 275-304. Weber's Dramatic Works of Ford
 ER, xix (Feb., 1812), 373-88. Wilson's Poems
 ER, xxvi (June, 1816), 458-76. Wilson's City of the Plague

and discussed too thoroughly to need summarizing here. However, I wish to briefly illustrate and define a little more specifically four central concerns to which I have already drawn attention: Jeffrey's belief in rules and tradition; the associationist basis of his thought; the dualism of his response to the new poetry; and the class basis of his attack on Wordsworth's social attitudes.

The spearhead of Jeffrey's attack on Wordsworth is the constant appeal he makes to established rules of composition and the literary tradition established by authors of the past. The first paragraph he wrote about the Lake school reads:

Poetry has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question; and that many profess to be entirely devoted to it, who have no good works to produce in support of their pretensions. (i, 63)

And he makes the same point with rather more rhetoric and finality in his review of Southey's Madoc:

The ancient and uninterrupted possession of the great inheritors of poetical reputation, must be admitted therefore as the clearest evidence of their right, and renders it the duty of every new claimant to contend with them as lawful competitors, instead of seeking to supplant them as usurpers. It may still be asserted, indeed, that though they may retain what they have possessed, they cannot prevent the further accumulation of their successors; that new sources of poetical beauty may be discovered, which may lower the value of the old; and that untrodden regions may still be explored in that vast domain, sufficiently splendid and fertile to become the seat of a legitimate and independent empire. We have already said, however, that we have no faith in such discoveries; the elements of poetical interest are necessarily obvious and universal - they are within and about all men;

and the topics by which they are suggested are proved to have been the same in every age, and every country of the world.

(vii, 2-3)

He concludes his first review of Wordsworth with the following comments:

Many a generous rebel, it is said, has been reclaimed to his allegiance by the spectacle of lawless outrage and excess presented in the conduct of the insurgents; and we think there is every reason to hope, that the lamentable consequences which have resulted from Mr. Wordsworth's open violation of the established laws of poetry, will operate as a wholesome warning to those who might otherwise have been seduced by his example, and be the means of restoring to that ancient and venerable code its due honour and authority.

(xi, 231)

The position is established: Wordsworth's faults of affectation, exaggeration, egotism, and exclusiveness, all spring from his refusal to abide by these established laws, and his seditious attempt to persuade people to approve his perverted taste is the greatest crime of all. But apart from isolated attempts at definition, these rules and traditional values are invoked by implication (usually by reference to often unspecified writers of the past) and contrast (everything that Wordsworth does is in opposition to them). Obviously Jeffrey could not have appealed to them if they had not corresponded to something, however vague and variable, in the minds of his readers; but his technique is still somewhat suggestive of a confidence trick. In review after review he refers to Wordsworth's disobedience and wilfulness as established facts and the major causes of all his problems, but nowhere does he offer a sustained and comprehensive account of exactly what Wordsworth has transgressed against. One

can make convincing guesses, but nowhere does Jeffrey say exactly what he means.

I have pushed this point to the extent of almost denying the validity of Jeffrey's criticism in order to highlight the method he employs against Wordsworth. Of course his use of words such as reason, decorum, and propriety points to a specific mode of critical thinking, and in his review of Cromek's Reliques of Robert Burns he makes a determined if equivocal attempt to explore the nature of original genius and how it relates to the operation of literature in polite society. None the less, his attack on Wordsworth gains much of its consistency from this continual appeal, not to mere beliefs or customs, but to laws and traditions (natural laws in Jeffrey's eyes). That these are never properly articulated or delineated must call into question the meaningfulness of Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth.

In one respect, however, Jeffrey was very much more specific. In offending against unspecified rules and regulations established by the poets of the past, Wordsworth also offended against the laws of association. Early in his criticism of the Lake school Jeffrey informs his readers that

The end of poetry is to please; and men cannot be mistaken as to what has actually given them pleasure. Accidental associations, indeed, may impose upon them for a season, and lead them to ascribe to the genius of the poet an emotion which was really excited by the circumstances in which they perused him: but this illusion can never be of long duration; and the emotions which he continues to excite under every

variation of circumstances, the feelings which he commands among every class of his readers, and continues to impress upon every successive generation, can only be referred to that intrinsic merit, of which they afford indeed the sole and ultimate criterion.

(vii, 2)

Seven years later in a review of John Wilson's poetry Jeffrey related this more closely to Wordsworth:

Though Mr Wilson may be extravagant, therefore, he is not perverse; and though the more sober part of his readers may not be able to follow him to the summit of his sublimer sympathies, they cannot be offended at the invitation, or even refuse to grant him their company to a certain distance on the journey. The objects for which he seeks to interest them, are all objects of natural interest; and the emotions which he connects with them, are, in some degree, associated with them in all reflecting minds. It is the great misfortune of Mr Wordsworth, on the contrary, that he is exceedingly apt to make choice of subjects which are not only unfit in themselves to excite any serious emotion, but naturally present themselves to ordinary minds as altogether ridiculous; and, consequently, to revolt and disgust his readers by an appearance of paltry affectation, or incomprehensible conceit.

(xix, 374)

This is the real substance of Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth - the reference to immutable laws and traditions is only the show. Obviously the two are connected: great poets according to Jeffrey always exploited the laws of association properly and so confined themselves to writing on 'poetic' subjects. Wordsworth's attempt to break away from this is seen simply as affectation resulting from excessive introspection and vanity. By choosing 'unpoetic' subjects Wordsworth is striking at the very nature of poetry as Jeffrey sees it, and this is why he is presented almost as a literary Antichrist. Jeffrey makes this point very clearly in several reviews,

but it is always overshadowed by the vaguer but more damaging implication that Wordsworth is offending against the entire array of laws poetical and canonical. It gives a sense of enormity to the poet's crimes, and allows the reader to believe that it is his own favourite beliefs and preconceptions which are being so cavalierly dismissed by the erring and egotistical poet.

I suggested earlier that, although Jeffrey's instincts and conception of his role as a public critic led him to attack Wordsworth, there was an ambivalence in his response which stemmed from a dualism in his personality. I do not wish to cite the many examples of Jeffrey praising Wordsworth in support of this, particularly since many follow particularly damaging attacks and are therefore more than a little suspect when taken in context. (Some praise had to be bestowed if Wordsworth were to seem worth these attacks.) The point I wish to make is that even the most favourable comments suffer from a severe limitation, as is shown by the following comment:

We do not want Mr Wordsworth to write like Pope or Prior, nor to dedicate his muse to subjects which he does not himself think interesting. We are prepared, on the contrary, to listen with a far deeper delight to the songs of his mountain solitude, and to gaze on his mellow pictures of simple happiness and affection, and his lofty sketches of human worth and energy; and we only beg, that we may have these nobler elements of his poetry, without the debasement of childish language, mean incidents, and incongruous images.

(xix, 375)

Again it has to do with the workings of association: whilst Wordsworth writes about subjects which are conventionally

'poetical' he often succeeds, but (to Jeffrey's mind) it is when he deliberately and perversely chooses 'unpoetic' subjects that he fails. The affinity with Wordsworth's poetry which Jeffrey occasionally allowed himself to express in public is always circumscribed by his associationist aesthetic.

Finally, one other point deserves consideration.

Dr. Alexander follows Robert Daniel in rejecting the suggestion that 'Jeffrey was swayed chiefly by political considerations'¹ in his attack on Wordsworth, and certainly there is very little overt political comment in his reviews. The most direct comes after Wordsworth's political apostasy, and allows Jeffrey to indulge in jokes about Wordsworth having exchanged the company of leech-gatherers for that of tax-gatherers.² But this absence of direct reference should not blind us to the political implications of much of the imagery and terminology employed in describing the Lake school. Time and again Wordsworth and his fellow poets are described in terms normally reserved for adherents of the French Revolution, and Jeffrey seems to aspire to the mantle of Burke in protecting the kingdom of letters from the attacks made by Rousseau-inspired innovatory republicans. The earlier reviews in particular are peppered with examples of this: the Lakers are described not simply as a school but as a 'formidable conspiracy' and a 'misguided fraternity' (this last word being shot through with sinister implications); they are

1. Alexander, i, 109.

2. The review is of Memorials of a Tour on the Continent [ER, xxxvii (Nov., 1822), 449-56], and also contains references to Waterloo and to the trial of Queen Caroline which are political in the sense of specific 'party' issues.

found guilty of 'treason against the poetical sovereigns' and of 'seducing [their] readers from their allegiance' and so of upsetting 'the ancient and uninterrupted possession of the great inheritors of poetical reputation' with whom every writer must contend 'as lawful competitors instead of seeking to supplant them as usurpers'. And so it goes on: Jeffrey, often facetiously, but quite deliberately plays upon the most potent public prejudice of his age in his attempts to discredit his opponents.

This does not mean, however, that his use of political prejudice was politically inspired. Jeffrey's real objection to Wordsworth resulted not from the specific political implications of the poet's work, but from the much more insidious challenge it posed to the class structure of society. This distinction between political and class prejudice is a very arbitrary one, but it has a limited applicability in the case of the periodicals. However, unsatisfactory the terms 'Whig', 'Tory' and 'Radical', they do indicate certain fundamental political principles. In the case of the Whigs and the Tories, and even many Radicals once the consequences of the French Revolution had become apparent, these principles did not involve any fundamental change in the social organization of the country. The Edinburgh and the Quarterly might well bitterly disagree about the continuation of the war against France, but both profoundly distrusted any attempt to disturb the social order.

Therefore the distinction that needs to be made between

political and class bias is one of degree rather than of kind - whether the issues discussed by the periodicals were specific and related to party politics (however unsophisticated), or whether they pointed to more amorphous and less clearly perceived ideas which involved, not the running and well-being of society, but its fundamental class structure. All three periodicals with which are concerned supported the status quo and this resulted in conflict with the new literary movement, although confusion resulted from the failure of some Romantic poets to perceive the political and social ramifications of their creed. As we shall see in the next chapter, Byron and Shelley posed a particular problem because of the conflict between their radical views (more apparent than real in Byron's case) and gentle birth. No such dilemma existed in the case of Hunt, Keats, and Hazlitt, and they were hammered both because of their political views and because by the very act of writing they usurped their social position and engaged in an activity which was supposed to be the province of gentlemen.

This last point is of particular importance because it raises the whole question of the periodicals' view of the relationship between class and literature. Given their agreement on the rightness of the existing class structure which subsumed even their political differences, it is not surprising to find that such attitudes informed their approach to literature. Thus Blackwood's attack on the Cockneys is not simply an example of Tory reviewers employing class prejudice to discredit

political opponents, since many of the premises on which the attack is based are first expressed by Jeffrey in his reviews of Wordsworth. Although Jeffrey disapproved of the 'moral character' of the Lake school on the grounds of its 'splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society', his real objection came from his conviction that both the theory and practice of the new school threatened the proper relationship between class and literature.

Evidence of this can be found in his review of Southey's

Thalaba:

Now, the different classes of society have each of them a distinct character, as well as a separate idiom; and the names of the various passions to which they are subject respectively, have a signification that varies essentially, according to the condition of the persons to whom they are applied. The love, or grief, or indignation of an enlightened and refined character, is not only expressed in a different language, but is in itself a different emotion from the love, or grief, or anger of a clown, a tradesman, or a market-wench.... The question, therefore, comes simply to be - Which of them is the most proper object for poetical imitation? It is needless for us to answer a question, which the practice of all the world has long ago decided irrevocably. The poor and vulgar may interest us, in poetry, by their situation; but never, we apprehend, by any sentiments that are peculiar to their condition, and still less by any language that is characteristic of it.

(1, 66)

Jeffrey insists that he is only talking of the poor and vulgar as they would appear 'in poetry', but the distinction he makes is clear enough. Other arguments follow about the dubious resemblance between Wordsworth's rustics and the 'real vulgar of the world' and the need to emulate only that which is admirable and excellent. But the incipient

prejudice of all this becomes apparent when Jeffrey writes:

After all, it must be admitted, that there is a class of persons (we are afraid they cannot be called readers), to whom the representation of vulgar manners, in vulgar language, will afford much entertainment. We are afraid, however, that the ingenious writers who supply the hawkers and ballad-singers, have very nearly monopolized that department, and are probably better qualified to hit the taste of their customers, than Mr Southey, or any of his brethren, can yet pretend to be. (i, 67-8)

It is perhaps significant that only later in the review does he attack the Lake school on more obviously political grounds, by which time the more insidious class prejudice has done its work.

The most detailed exploration of the relationship between class and literature comes in the review of Cromek's Reliques of Burns. Jeffrey begins the review by discussing the phenomenon of natural untutored genius, which obviously raises serious objections to the belief that literature is the province only of the educated and socially privileged. He is at great pains to warn that Burns 'was not himself either uneducated or illiterate' and he irritably comments that 'we can see no propriety in regarding the poetry of Burns chiefly as the wonderful work of a peasant, and thus admiring it much in the same way as if it had been written with his toes'. None the less, he returns to the theory, first expressed in a review of The Works of Benjamin Franklin,¹ which outlines 'the effects of regular education, and of

1. ER, viii (July, 1806), 329-30.

the general diffusion of literature, in repressing the vigour and originality of all kinds of mental exertion'. The result of this is that too much reading and education turns those 'whom nature meant for poets, into mere readers of poetry, or...bring[s] them out in the form of witty parodists, or ingenious imitators'. However, in the case of men such as Burns, the situation is very different:

A youth of quick parts, in short, and creative fancy, - with just so much reading as to guide his ambition, and rough-hew his notions of excellence, - if his lot be thrown in humble retirement, where he has no reputation to lose, and where he can easily hope to excel all that he sees around him, is much more likely, we think, to give himself up to poetry, and to train himself to habits of invention, than if he had been encumbered by the pretended helps of extended study and literary society.

(xiii, 251)

But having said this, Jeffrey goes on to examine certain characteristics of Burns's work 'which remind us of the lowness of his origin, and faults for which the defects of his education offered an obvious cause, if not a legitimate apology':

The first is, the undisciplined harshness and acrimony of his invective. The great boast of polished life is the delicacy, and even the generosity of its hostility, - that quality which is still the characteristic as it is the denomination of a gentleman, - that principle which forbids us to attack the defenceless, to strike the fallen, or to mangle the slain, - and enjoins us, in forging the shafts of satire, to increase the polish exactly as we add to their keenness or their weight. For this, as well as for other things, we are indebted to chivalry; and of this Burns had none.

(xiii, 252)

The same objections are made to his treatment of love:

He has expressed admirably the feelings of an enamoured peasant, who, however refined or eloquent

he may be, always approaches his mistress on a footing of equality; but has never caught that tone of chivalrous gallantry which uniformly abases itself in the presence of the object of its devotion. Accordingly, instead of suing for a smile, or melting in a tear, his muse deals in nothing but locked embraces and midnight rencontres....

(xiii, 252-3)

But even worse is to come:

...the leading vice in Burns's character, and the cardinal deformity indeed of all his productions, was his contempt, or affectation of contempt, for prudence, decency and regularity; and his admiration of thoughtlessness, oddity, and vehement sensibility; - his belief, in short, in the dispensing power of genius and social feeling, in all matters of morality and common sense. This is the very slang of the worst German plays, and the lowest of our town-made novels....

(xiii, 253)

One particularly unfortunate result of this in Jeffrey's eyes is Burns's insistence upon his independence:

The sentiment itself is noble, and it is often finely expressed; - but a gentleman would only have expressed it when he was insulted or provoked; and would never have made it a spontaneous theme to those friends in whose estimation he felt that his honour stood clear. It is mixed up too in Burns with too fierce a tone of defiance; and indicates rather the pride of a sturdy peasant, than the calm and natural elevation of a generous mind.

(xiii, 254-5)

Jeffrey has argued himself into a corner: in his attempts to remain consistent with statements made elsewhere in the Review and in his desire to use Burns as a stick with which to beat the Lake poets (he really does know something about peasants), Jeffrey is forced to acknowledge that polite society is not conducive to the writing of poetry; but the logic of his argument takes him even further and he has to admit that literature (as written by men like Burns, and he

has argued that these are likely to be the true poets) poses a very real threat to the social values he obviously believes in. The poet as a threat to society might seem to point to Plato, but if so it is an extremely muddled application of the theories of The Republic. The basis for Jeffrey's arguments and the animus with which they are sometimes expressed seems to result not from philosophical conviction but class prejudice.

This is demonstrated even more fully in his review of

The Excursion:

the wilfulness with which [Wordsworth] persists in choosing his examples of intellectual dignity and tenderness exclusively from the lowest ranks of society, will be sufficiently apparent, from the circumstances of his having thought fit to make his chief prolocutor in this poetical dialogue, and chief advocate of Providence and Virtue, an old Scotch Pedlar - retired indeed from business - but still rambling about in his former haunts, and gossiping among his old customers, without his pack on his shoulders. The other persons of the drama are, a retired military chaplain, who has grown half an atheist and half a misanthrope - the wife of an unprosperous weaver - a servant girl with her infant - a parish pauper, and one or two other personages of equal rank and dignity.

(xxiv, 5)

Jeffrey returns to this point at the end of his review:

Did Mr Wordsworth really imagine, that his favourite doctrines were likely to gain any thing in point of effect or authority by being put into the mouth of a person accustomed to higgle about tape, or brass sleeve-buttons? Or is it not plain that, independent of the ridicule and disgust which such a personification must give to many of his readers, its adoption exposes his work throughout to the charge of revolting incongruity, and utter disregard of probability or nature?

(xxiv, 30)

Even if one accepts that it is a matter of common observation that most pedlars do not talk like poets and that to believe otherwise leads to the primitivist fallacy, the sneering tone

of Jeffrey's comments is unforgivable. He believes that poetry and pedlars do not mix, and the reasons why he does so lie at the heart of the prejudice which I have tried to outline here.

One further point remains to be made in relation to Jeffrey's treatment of Wordsworth. Whatever view one takes of Jeffrey, whether greater weight is given to the consistency and philosophical basis of his thinking or to his obvious prejudices and reviewing tricks, the final judgement must depend on what he said about Wordsworth's poetry. On the credit side he gave generous but very generalized and unspecific praise to Lyrical Ballads; he expressed admiration for one or two rather turgid poems from Poems in Two Volumes; and, most importantly of all, he found several passages from The Excursion (including Book One) worthy of commendation. However, this is more than outweighed by the poems he condemned: in particular he disliked the 'Matthew' and 'Lucy' poems, 'The Thorn', 'The Idiot Boy', and 'There was a boy' from Lyrical Ballads; 'Alice Fell' and 'Resolution and Independence' came in for some rough handling in the review of Poems in Two Volumes; and The Excursion as a whole and The White Doe of Rylstone were dismissed, the first by the most famous sentence that Jeffrey ever wrote, and the second by the comment that 'This, we think, has the merit of being the very worst poem we ever saw imprinted in a quarto volume'. However much truth there may be in some of Jeffrey's criticisms, the fact remains that, with the exception of the first book of The Excursion, he did not praise

one poem which has come to hold a prominent position in the Wordsworth canon. Although Jeffrey's judgement of Wordsworth must be placed in the context of his literary criticism as a whole, and although it is of great historical significance, it does not speak highly of his critical acumen.

The attitude of the Quarterly was far less defensible even than that of the Edinburgh. The first review to appear was of The Excursion.¹ It was written by Charles Lamb at Wordsworth's request,² but it was extensively rewritten by Gifford before publication. Lamb had expected words to be put into his mouth, but he was horrified when he saw the review in print:

I told you my Review was a very imperfect one. But what you will see in the Quarterly is a spurious one which Mr. Baviad Gifford has palm'd upon it for mineThe language he has alterd throughout....Every warm expression is changed for a nasty cold one.... But worse than altering words, he has kept a few members only of the part I had done best, which was to explain all I could of your 'scheme of harmonies', as I had ventured to call it, between the external universe and what within us answers to it....Of this part a little is left, but so as without conjuration no man could tell what I was driving it [at?].³

Nevertheless, it remains a favourable if limited review.

Lamb, unlike Jeffrey, accepts that The Excursion is part of a much larger work whilst recognizing the integrity of the poem as it stands.

The most interesting part of the review, as Lamb acknowledges in his letter to Wordsworth, deals with that " 'scheme of harmonies'...between the external universe and what within

1. QR, xii (Oct., 1814), 100-11.

2. E.V.Lucas, The Life of Charles Lamb (1907), 345. Southey, at Wordsworth's request, persuaded Gifford to offer The Excursion to Lamb to review.

3. Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb, ed. E.V.Lucas (1935), ii, 148-9.

us answers to it". Although this part of the review was truncated by Gifford, it still offers a valuable insight into Wordsworth's attitude to Nature. At times Lamb lapses into the vague mysticism and religiosity which bedevilled so many of Wordsworth's later supporters, but a deeper understanding is illustrated by such comments as the claim that in Wordsworth's poetry 'nothing in Nature is dead. Motion is synonymous with life'.

Lamb also defends Wordsworth's conception of childhood, the use of such a lowly figure as the Pedlar as the hero of the poem, and the belief that fundamental human values are best illustrated by humble people in natural surroundings.

On this last point Lamb claims that

If from living among simple mountaineers, from a daily intercourse with them, not upon the footing of a patron, but in the character of an equal, [Wordsworth] has detected, or imagines that he has detected, through the cloudy medium of their unlettered discourse, thoughts and apprehensions not vulgar; traits of patience and constancy, love unwearied, and heroic endurance, not unfit (as he may judge) to be made the subject of verse, he will be deemed a man of perverted genius by the philanthropist who, conceiving of the peasantry of his country only as objects of a pecuniary sympathy, starts at finding them elevated to a level of humanity with himself, having their own loves, enmities, cravings, aspirations, &c., as much beyond his faculty to believe, as his beneficence to supply.

(110-11)

It is a remark that Jeffrey would have done well to have borne in mind.

The major inconsistency of the review is Lamb's praise of Book Four of The Excursion:

For moral grandeur; for wide scope of thought and a long train of lofty imagery; for tender personal appeals; and a versification which we feel we ought to notice, but feel it also so involved in the poetry, that we can hardly mention it as a distinct excellence; it stands without competition among our didactic and descriptive verse.

(106)

Not only is this untrue, but Book Four is the least representative of that 'scheme of harmonies' which Lamb found so important. There is, of course, a distinction to be made between the overt moral didacticism of much of the poem, and the implied moral basis of the relationship between man and Nature. It is impossible to tell how consciously Lamb perceived this distinction, although earlier in the review he had stressed those features which help to alleviate the poem's didacticism, particularly its narrative interest and the fact that

the prevailing charm of the poem is, perhaps, that, conversational as it is in its plan, the dialogue throughout is carried on in the very heart of the most romantic scenery....

(101)

However, Lamb goes on to offer largely unsubstantiated praise of the poem's moral didacticism: possibly he was merely responding to the poet's avowed intention; or possibly Gifford stepped in to stress the conventional view of the moral basis of narrative poetry. Whatever the cause, it only added confusion to a maimed but sympathetic and sometimes perceptive review.

It was too sympathetic for the Quarterly's peace of mind. The only other review of Wordsworth to appear in its pages was of Poems of 1815 and The White Doe of Rylstone.¹ The reviewer was William Lyall,² and his job was obviously to retreat to much safer ground. He begins by denying that

1. QR, xiv (Oct., 1815), 201-25. In accordance with reviewing policy, only The White Doe could be specifically reviewed.

2. William Lyall (1788-1857) was dean of Canterbury. He was editor of the British Critic 1816-17, and also contributed articles to the Quarterly on Dugald Stewart's philosophy.

'because we admire the poetical talents of Mr. Wordsworth, we are therefore to be numbered as implicitly entertaining all the tenets of his poetical system', and he claims that Wordsworth has not made the best use of his considerable talents. This is Jeffrey's view, and Lyall plays safe by echoing most of the opinions first found in the Edinburgh.

He is also totally opposed to those ideas normally associated with Romanticism. He argues that the purpose of poetry is to amuse and delight, and he frowns on Wordsworth's attempts to make it a 'metaphysical analysis of the human mind'; he sees the 'primary laws of nature', 'elementary feelings', and 'essential passions' as nothing more than that 'moral pleasure and pain which is the appropriate business of poetry to delineate', and which Homer, Virgil, and Milton have all illustrated. (Again Lyall is following Jeffrey who argued that Wordsworth was either perniciously original, merely eccentric, or not original at all. Lyall puts most stress on this last point.) Lyall goes on to level against Wordsworth the commonplace charge of arrogance for devoting himself 'almost exclusively to the delineation of himself and his own peculiar feelings'; and he refuses to accept that the poet, however much a man speaking to men, is in any way a special kind of man:

the merit of a poet does not essentially consist, as is sometimes supposed, in the possession of sensibilities different from or more intense than those of other people, but in the talent of awakening in their minds the particular feelings and emotions with which the various objects of his art are naturally associated.

Surprisingly, he agrees with Wordsworth's rejection of conventional poetic diction, although this is partly due to his search for a 'familiar matter-of-fact way of talking about an art which Mr. Wordsworth seems to think belongs rather to the divine than to human nature'. But he is in basic agreement with Wordsworth's theory, and he grudgingly admits that when the poet's 'theories and eccentricities happen to be laid aside, no writer of the day seems to understand better the exact key in which the language of this ...kind of poetry should be pitched'.

He insists, however, that the lower classes lack the emotional and intellectual subtlety to make them fitting subjects for poetry. Again this is merely apeing other reviewers, and one is forcibly reminded of Lamb's comment in his earlier review, a comment which may serve as a judgement of Lyall's criticism:

A writer, who would be popular, must timidly coast the shore of prescribed sentiment and sympathy. He must have just as much more of the imaginative faculty than his readers, as will serve to keep their apprehensions from stagnating, but not so much as to alarm their jealousy. He must not think or feel too deeply.

(xii, 110)

Miserable circumspection, however, is one of the few things not to be found in Blackwood's treatment of Wordsworth's poetry. The first three contributions appeared in 1817, and were nothing more than a practical joke by John Wilson.¹ These

1. BM, i (June, 1817), 261-66; ii (Oct., 1817), 65-73; and ii (Nov., 1817), 201-04. These took the form of three anonymous letters, all written by Wilson, offering very different views of the controversy surrounding Gilbert Burns's edition of his brother's poetry. Wordsworth became involved after his letter to James Gray of Edinburgh on the subject.

Alan Strout in "John Wilson: 'Champion' of Wordsworth", MP, xxxi (1934), 383-94, lamely argues that each letter may well have 'the ring of truth of the moment' and so demonstrate Wilson's "volatility as a critic, [and] his extraordinary 'tiebeamlessness' as a man". The most unpleasant aspect of this incident was the attack on Wordsworth's 'arrogance' in the third letter.

were followed by five reviews and an article; all were favourable, sometimes adulatory, in tone. The first was written by Wilson and dealt with The White Doe of Rylstone.¹ It places Wordsworth alongside Scott and Byron as one of the three master-spirits of the age, and stresses the moral and philosophical quality of his verse. Like Lamb, Wilson emphasises Wordsworth's love of nature which gives his poetry 'a very peculiar, a very endearing, and, at the same time, a very lofty character'. Again like Lamb, he realizes that objections to Wordsworth's use of rustic life may stem from social prejudice, and he begs that poetry may be judged by elementary human laws and not by artificial and arbitrary distinctions. He concludes with some very favourable comments about The White Doe, and dismisses the objections made to it in the Quarterly:

[it] is a tale written with singularly beautiful simplicity of language, and with a power and pathos that have not been often excelled in English Poetry.

(381)

The article which followed was also by Wilson (like the previous one it was part of a series on the Lake School), and it contains his most profound thought upon the nature of Wordsworth's genius.² He argues that British philosophy

1. BM, iii (July, 1818), 369-81.

2. BM, iv (Dec., 1818), 257-63.

has never ventured upon 'an examination of what human nature internally says of itself, or upon enquiries into the dependance of one feeling upon another'. Wordsworth, with his 'convictions of moral laws existing silently in the universe, and actually modifying events, in opposition to more palpable causes', and his 'knowledge of all the beauties of the human affections, and of their mutual harmonies and dependancies', has attempted to rectify this. In doing so he steps outside the native literary tradition which, in Wilson's view, has always centred on the man of action and the description of external nature, and instead 'searches for some image of perfection to admire, and perceives that the beauty of no limited being can consist in strength, but in its conformity to the moral harmony of the universe'. These are probably the most perceptive comments about the moral structure of Wordsworth's poetry and its use of natural law to appear in any contemporary periodical.

Wilson believes that much of the poet's unpopularity stems from his subordination of feeling to thought, and from the fact that this sort of meditative poetry does not produce 'that strength and vividness of diction, which must ever constitute one of the chief attractions of poetry'. But he believes it possible that Wordsworth may one day surpass even Milton, one of the greatest exponents of such diction, since he conveys a 'more exalted meaning, whether the poetical merit of the vehicle be equal or not'. Wilson even finds it difficult to question the vehicle since Wordsworth's poetry possesses a 'perfect homogeneousness of its spirit', due to its reliance upon certain basic principles which never alter, and create

an atmosphere of contemplation.

Wilson concludes his article by inadvertently echoing Jeffrey. He directs those who wish to understand Wordsworth's philosophy to The Excursion, and those who wish to judge 'how far he possesses the powers commonly called poetical' to the Lyrical Ballads. All in all it is a remarkable article. There is little attempt at practical criticism except by way of illustration, and Wilson took full advantage of the scope offered by Blackwood's reviewing policy in an attempt to define that quality which puts Wordsworth apart from, and above, most of his fellow poets. He succeeds because of his sympathy with the poet's mind and art.¹

This article proved to be the most perceptive of Wilson's contributions on Wordsworth. In collaboration with Lockhart he reviewed The River Duddon in 1820,² and he was the sole reviewer of Sonnets and Memorials two years later.³ Both reviews are extremely laudatory, and their confident tone suggests that Wordsworth by now enjoyed a far more secure and established reputation.

The review of The River Duddon begins by attacking the general standard of literary reviewing, claims that 'ever since Wordsworth began to write, he has fixed the attention of every genuine lover and student of English Poetry', and

1. See A.L.Strout, "Wordsworth and John Wilson: a review of their relationship between 1802-17", PMLA, xlix (1934), 143-83, for an account of Wilson's changing relationship with Wordsworth.

2. BM, vii (May, 1820), 206-13.

3. BM, xii (Aug., 1822), 175-191.

concludes by raising him to the level of 'a genuine English classic'. The later review continues in the same style. It argues that Wordsworth was the first poet to explore all the possibilities of nature, to illustrate the dignity of man, and to know the 'real province of language'. It outlines the debt owed by other poets to his poetry, and proclaims him 'the most ORIGINAL POET OF THE AGE'. However, it praises his political and religious affiliations with an enthusiasm that borders on bigotry, and that casts doubts on the integrity of the review as a whole.

Between Wilson's article and these two later reviews, two pieces appeared in Blackwood's by unknown reviewers. The review of The Waggoner is very short and favourable.¹ The earlier review of Peter Bell, however, is a curious mixture of praise and censure.² The reviewer suggests that Wordsworth could best obtain popularity by anonymously publishing a series of sermons, and, although he concedes that Peter Bell contains 'more of the interest of suspended curiosity than almost any other of the tales of the same author', he sees this as no great achievement. But he praises the poem's diction, finds that the overall impression is one of 'fine effect and profound pathos', and claims that it is equal to anything in Lyrical Ballads.

His most interesting remark is that the poem proves Wordsworth's theory that the emotions create the greatest possible excitement, even when motivated by homely and familiar incidents; but he admits that such incidents should not be used if others of 'a more

1. BM, v (June, 1819), 332-34.

2. BM, v (May, 1819), 130-36.

dignified and agreeable sort' are available. None the less, he has sufficient critical insight to realize that if Wordsworth attempted to base his poems on anything other than the lowly and rustic, he would in all probability lose his greatest claim to originality. Few reviewers realized how important it was for Wordsworth to use incidents from the milieu with which he felt most sympathy, however much he modified it in the process.

Also of particular interest is the reviewer's distinction between

that species of poetry whose ultimate object is to strike the imagination and interest the curiosity, by means of splendid objects and extraordinary events, and that other species which finds its charm upon the exhibition of the relations which sentiments and emotions bear to each other within the human mind.

(132)

This is similar to the distinction made by Wilson in his article of December 1818, when he demonstrated how Wordsworth's poetry differed from that of the native tradition as exemplified by Milton, Scott, and Byron.

By August 1822 eight reviews and an article on Wordsworth's poetry had appeared in Blackwood's Magazine. They seem to justify De Quincey's remark that it was Blackwood's which 'first accustomed the public ear to the language of admiration coupled with the name of Wordsworth'.¹ But it is doubtful if it did any more than this. With the exception of Wilson's article and the strange review of Peter Bell which commented upon Wordsworth's use of rustic life, these reviews lack depth and perception. They

1. The Works of Thomas De Quincey (Boston, 1876), ii, 568.

form a panegyric upon Wordsworth which looks all too suspect in the light of the excessive praise bestowed upon his religious and political principles in the review of Sonnets and Memorials.

The most important contribution to the critical debate about Wordsworth's poetry came not from John Wilson but from Chauncey Hare Townshend.¹ Townshend wrote four articles which appeared in the latter half of 1829,² and they contain by far the most discriminating and valuable comments made in any of the three major periodicals up to this time.³

1. Chauncey Hare Townshend (1798-1868). His first volume of poems appeared in 1821, but he is best known as the friend of Southey and Dickens and for his books on mesmerism. Dr. Jonathan Miller is at present preparing a biography of him.

2. BM, xxvi (Sept., 1829), 453-63.
 (Oct., 1829), 593-609.
 (Nov., 1829), 774-88.
 (Dec., 1829), 894-910.

3. Wordsworth did not share this view, and he wrote to Edward Quinillan: 'The Rev^d Chauncey Hare Townsend is as pretty a rascal as ever put on a surplice. He is one of Southey's most intimate Friends and has been so for a dozen or 14 years - during a good part of that period I have occasionally seen him upon very friendly terms, both at Cambridge, where I had dined with him, at Keswick and at my own House where he has slept - and where he was cordially received twice while this attack upon my person and writings was in process. The thing as an intellectual production is safe in its own vileness. Who that ever felt a line of my poetry would trouble himself to crush a miserable maggot crawled out of the dead carcass of the Edinburgh review'. [The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth 1821-30, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1939), 448.]

Southey too disapproved of the articles, and he seems to have informed Townshend that they were 'obnoxious'. (Ibid., 448n.) In 1840 Townshend wrote a rather abject letter of apology to Wordsworth whom he had criticized in the 'rashness of ignorance' (Ibid., 448n.), but this was not the attitude he had taken when writing to Benjamin Haydon shortly after the publication of his article: 'This said essay did not please the bard, and he wrote to Southey a note, which, in mighty plain terms, declined all further acquaintance with so audacious a profligate. I did not think that literary vanity could be carried

so far, for the essay was anything but hostile. It allotted him, as some think, an undue share of merit, and it was wholly free from anything personal. I only regret the matter on Southey's account, and because I am sorry to lose the acquaintance of Wordsworth's family, who are really amiable. Wordsworth himself I always thought very heavy in hand - the prince of prosers - yet he is a glorious poet. What a paradox! [Benjamin Robert Haydon: Correspondence and Table Talk, ed. F.W.Haydon (1876), i, 380, as quoted by V.Lang, "A Lost Acquaintance of Wordsworth", ELH, viii (1941), 214-15.]

Townshend possessed certain advantages which must be recognized: by 1829 Wordsworth's reputation was more or less established¹ and so Townshend was preaching to at least the partially converted; he was writing a series of articles rather than reviews and so was not confined by normal reviewing practices or by having to confront work just published; and, most significantly of all, he was writing in 1829 not 1798 and so had most of the literature of the Romantic period and the ideas underlying it as part of his cultural background. More specifically, he had read Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, which obviously influences his first two articles.² Although little known, Townshend's work is of considerable importance and so deserves detailed consideration.

His first article deals with Wordsworth's theories as expressed in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads.³ By this time it

1. T.M.Raysor, "Wordsworth's Reputation".

2. This in itself is of importance in evaluating the influence of the Biographia Literaria. The second edition did not appear until 1847, but Blackwood's played an important part in disseminating some of its theories. (See my "John Wilson and the Distinction between Fancy and Imagination").

3. It is probable that Townshend used either the 1815 or 1827 editions of Wordsworth's poetry; the 1815 Preface and Supplementary Essay are referred to in the course of his articles and so form part of the basis for his thinking. His main concern, however, is with the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. All quotations from Wordsworth are as quoted by Townshend, and are placed in double quotation marks to distinguish them from Townshend's own words.

had become a commonplace for commentators on Wordsworth to ridicule these,¹ although occasionally they would stop to examine some of the ideas in more detail. Townshend, however, subjects Wordsworth's theories to a scrutiny which is at once witty, sympathetic, and extremely stringent. His avowed purpose is to strike a balance between Wordsworth's detractors and his admirers, and to show how the peculiarity of Wordsworth's work is not mere childishness of thought and meaning but an interaction of philosophy with low and humble subjects. Since Wordsworth is both poet and theorist, Townshend feels that he can best achieve his aims by discovering to what extent Wordsworth's ideas are original, to what extent correct, and how successfully they are illustrated in his poetry. In particular he discusses Wordsworth's theories about the role of the poet, the function and nature of poetry, and the use of low and rustic life as the best source for "the essential passions of the heart". It is in this article that his debt to Coleridge is most apparent.

He begins by objecting to the Preface on the grounds that poetry should be 'an inspiration and a divine madness' not meted out by 'rule and measure!'. He also argues that Wordsworth's claim to have established an original poetic diction is unremarkable, since this is no more than a poet should do:

I ask, what made the ages of Shakespeare, Cowley, and Pope? Their own genius. It is the era that conforms to the poet, not the poet to the age. And even at one and the same period there have been, and may be, as many different styles of writing, as there are great and original writers.

(455)

1. As early as 1801 Charles Lamb had realized the extent to which the Preface prejudiced the success of the poems: 'I could...have wished the Critical preface had appeared in a separate treatise. All its dogmas are true and just, and most of them new, as criticism. But they associate a diminishing idea with the Poems which follow, as having been written for Experiment on the public taste, more than having sprung (as they must have done) from living and daily circumstances'. (Letters, Lucas, i, 240.)

Wordsworth has, of course, made his own age, and Townshend is responding to ideas which Wordsworth had helped to establish. This is shown when he rejects Wordsworth's assumption that it had long been accepted that an author is supposed "by the act of writing in verse, to make a formal engagement to gratify certain known habits of association", and claims instead that the poet's task is to produce something new - 'to be a creator indeed'. Like Coleridge, Townshend forgets that what was commonplace by 1817 and 1829 needed detailed justification in 1800.

His exalted view of the poet is matched by his conception of the nature and function of poetry. This is shown in the latter part of the article, where he attacks what is perhaps the most suspect part of the Preface - Wordsworth's claim that there is no essential difference between the language of poetry and prose. Townshend believes that there is a difference on two counts: 'in the cast of thoughts, and the nature of the language'. He also argues that the rhythms of prose are different to those of poetry, and issues the timely reminder that unfortunately 'such prose as most resembles poetry is not good'. But he claims that the main difference between the two lies in 'the imaginative use of language', and suggests that this explains the difference between Wordsworth's own poetry and prose. He recognizes the artificial nature of the poet's argument when he suggests that Wordsworth attacks poetic diction as it is called rather than as it really is. He goes on:

[Wordsworth] has attacked a poetic diction founded on a mechanical abuse of language. I wish to uphold a poetic diction founded on the imaginative use of language....

(461)

All this coincides fairly closely with Coleridge's arguments in the Biographia, and perhaps a similar influence underlies a neat piece of practical criticism involving Shakespeare, Gibbon, and Wordsworth's own poetry, with which Townshend proves his point that 'Poetry can speak what Prose hath no voice to utter'.

Not surprisingly Townshend also disagrees with the belief that the poet's words "must, in liveliness and truth, fall far short of that which is uttered by men in real life". On the contrary, bearing in mind Wordsworth's own claim for the poet of greater sensibility and awareness of human nature, it is obvious that

The poet is a man in real life, and a poet beside;
and therefore he can feel not only as a man, but
can, as a poet, give a more faithful utterance to
what he feels.

(462)

Townshend spends even less time in dismissing Wordsworth's explanations of why he chose to write in verse, particularly the lame suggestion that metre somehow averts the danger of painful emotion becoming too excessive. As Townshend somewhat acidly points out:

One should have thought, that with all the precautions which Wordsworth has taken to keep his writings clear of all "gross and violent stimulus", with his choice of "low and rustic" subjects, and adherence to "the real language of men", there could be no "danger that the excitement should be carried beyond its proper bounds".

(462-3)

Townshend's discussion of Wordsworth's use of low and rustic life is also of importance. He objects to Wordsworth's theory on two grounds: he believes that 'a true poet finds the same passions in every sphere of life, and makes them speak a

plain and emphatic language by his own art', and also that

To support life is the great object of the poor, and this object absorbs their powers, blunts their sensibilities, and confines their ideas to one track of association.

(456)

Like most contemporary critics Townshend accepts the associationist basis of Wordsworth's thinking, but he is challenging the poet's idealization of low and rustic life. Although his own comments on the poor are as limiting as this idealization, he does not seem to be guilty of the kind of class prejudice that we saw at work in earlier reviews. He is at his most perceptive when he argues that in claiming that in low and rustic life 'the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature' Wordsworth is simply casting 'the lines of his own mind over [Nature's] whole sphere'. He is one of the few contemporary critics, apart from Lamb, to recognize the properly subjective basis for Wordsworth's use of nature and low and rustic life.

Not all of Townshend's first article is as good as this might suggest: his unfavourable comments on "The Idiot Boy"; his assertion that Wordsworth writes well in spite of his theories; and the claim that Wordsworth's originality lies only in his declaration of intent are all extremely conventional. But his article is important for its detailed examination of the Preface since in this, with the indirect help of the Biographia, he reveals the inconsistencies of many of Wordsworth's theories. He never realizes, however, that many of the impulses underlying the Preface are those which have made his own thinking possible.

Townshend's second article attempts to consider with what success Wordsworth has illustrated his theories, and in doing so it considers three major issues: Wordsworth's lack of popularity; his failure to adhere to what Townshend considers to be the best parts of his theories; and his insistence on following the worst aspects of them. The article as a whole is remarkable for its defence of what might be termed 'the simple Wordsworth' (in John Danby's sense rather than Byron's), and its refusal to indulge in the kind of class prejudice found in other reviews. Although some of Townshend's arguments are suspect, both logically and in regard to Wordsworth's work itself, one can only admire the way in which he consistently refers them both to Wordsworth's prose and poetry.

He begins by considering a central paradox: why is Wordsworth unpopular when he considers popularity to be the touchstone by which his poems must be judged? Unlike other critics Townshend does not blame Wordsworth's choice of subject matter nor his aim to give "immediate pleasure to a human being, possessed of that information which may be expected of him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a man". On the contrary, he sees these as some of Wordsworth's greatest strengths, and claims that the popularity of "We Are Seven", "Susan Gray", and "The Pet Lamb" shows that 'to write naturally on common subjects rather ensures, than forbids, a numerous audience'. He argues instead that unfortunately Wordsworth has 'not generally written in a human or natural manner', and he comments:

As I once before observed, the simplest ballads, detailing the commonest incidents, have been most inwoven with the hearts of men, and have been laid up in the memories of all, while Milton has been quietly laid on the shelf. And why? Because neither science nor learning, nor even high poetical feeling, is required for the comprehension of them. To be a human being is the sole qualification. The very lowest of the vulgar are not bad judges of what is true to nature.

(595)

This last thought and the willingness to refer to Milton and ballads in the same paragraph are very far removed from the comments of earlier reviewers who invoked the ballad and its readers only as a means of ridiculing Wordsworth.

The conclusion that Townshend arrives at is a startling one: if Wordsworth had 'always sung, ... in simple and natural language, he might have been secure of imparting more than common pleasure to all who had hearts to feel or minds to think'.¹ Wordsworth's failure to do so, Townshend believes, results from two faults: his characters only rarely use the real language of men; and when they do so it is often a peculiarly unfortunate selection of human speech. In arguing this Townshend quite readily accepts the principle that good poetry can result from using "a selection of the real language of men, in a state of vivid sensation", and he quotes Shakespeare as proof of this. Unfortunately Wordsworth's attempts all too often result in 'a patched and piebald dialect' since he mixes poetic diction with humble phraseology, and Townshend prefers one or other to the effect achieved by Wordsworth which all too often resembles

1. Townshend is possibly remembering the lines from "Hart Leap Well" in which the poet expresses his intention of piping 'a simple song to thinking hearts'. If so, it is further evidence of his impressive familiarity with Wordsworth's poetry.

'embroidery upon packthread'. Examples from The Waggoner, "The Idiot Boy", and Peter Bell are given to show how Wordsworth 'fails to work in the reader's mind a conviction that such words were really uttered under such circumstances'; Shakespeare is again used to prove how ordinary language can be employed and 'yet the poet speaks in all'; and Wordsworth is taken to task for not using "throughout, as far as is possible, a selection of language really used by men" (Townshend's italics). Townshend believes that all too often Wordsworth 'misses the grace of simplicity, and at the same time loses the advantages of a loftier diction'.

But as well as attacking Wordsworth for this kind of inconsistency, Townshend also argues that the poet has not kept faith with his intention of using common language "purified from what appears to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust". The result of this is that on occasions Wordsworth's fears are justified and his poetry does suffer "from arbitrary connexions of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases". Like Jeffrey, Townshend is using associationist theory, but not simply as a stick with which to beat the poet. His aim is to strike some kind of balance between Wordsworth's theory and practice:

I am far from calling Wordsworth a childish writer;
but it must be owned that he sometimes writes
childishly.

(599)

None the less, Townshend has taken Wordsworth to task not because he believes that the poet's theories about the use of the real

language of men and the choice of common subjects are wrong, but because Wordsworth has not applied them with sufficient thoroughness and rigour. In doing so Townshend comes closer to defending the controversial form and subject matter of Wordsworth's poetry than any other critic writing in the major periodicals.

He continues his article by examining the proposition that Wordsworth has been betrayed into absurdities by trying to fulfil those parts of his theories which are untenable, and here he appears to be much more conventional. His main objection is to Wordsworth's claim that "feeling...gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling". The result, in Townshend's eyes, is that either the poet in trusting to feeling allows the presence of elements which degrade or ridicule that feeling, owing to the overpowering force of association; or that in giving feeling importance not warranted by the action and situation he uses language and illustrations quite out of keeping with it. In other words, the poet 'has, in the first case, derived low subjects from lofty feelings; in the second, he has deduced lofty feelings from low subjects'. Either way the result is incongruity, and in his disapproval of this Townshend seems very close to the attitudes of Jeffrey and his followers.

This becomes even more apparent when he provides examples of how Wordsworth has 'derived low subjects from lofty feelings'. The poem he chooses to attack is "The Idiot Boy", and the following remark seems to belong to an earlier decade:

Really, such compositions as these seem to be published as experiments to ascertain rather the quantum of mankind's credulity, than any important fact.

(602)

Other jokes are made at the poem's expense, and Townshend concludes that maternal love is brought into disrepute and the feeling smothered by 'the overpowering comicality of the action and situation'. Peter Bell and "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" are also criticized: of the first we are asked 'how can we shake with any passion, but that of laughter'; and in the second Wordsworth is accused of failing to illustrate 'his own darling power, Imagination' since that 'he has fallen, over dazzled in the attempt to illustrate her divine energies, most persons will acknowledge, who read the tale of "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" '. Admittedly "The Idiot Boy" has been regarded as a failure more often than not and Peter Bell is not much read, but Townshend's retreat into a conventional and derisive attitude towards these poems is a falling off from his earlier comments.

However, in considering the reverse aspect of his argument, that Wordsworth has 'deduced lofty feelings from low subjects', Townshend again shows himself to be a perceptive critic. He censures Wordsworth's supporters for claiming so ecstatically that their poet 'glorifies the meanest subject, and turns all he touches (even pots and kettles) into gold', and asks if there is not as much danger in 'dignifying what is base, as in debasing what is dignified?' He is worried that in attempting to give common incidents and situations "a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way" Wordsworth only succeeds in the latter, and he suggests that this and other errors may well result from the fact that the poet 'feels intensely, and he gives an over-importance to his own particular feelings....' This is not simply a

reiteration of Jeffrey's argument, and in suggesting that a poet has a responsibility to ensure that what interests him also interests his readers Townshend quotes Wordsworth's own fear that in "giving to things a false importance, sometimes from diseased impulses, I may have written upon unworthy subjects". Townshend believes that he has, and that he has done so because he 'does not go out of himself sufficiently to see things in their due proportion'. Throughout his articles Townshend shows himself a little impatient with Wordsworth's egotism, and at times this seems to endanger his awareness of the importance of self in Wordsworth's poetry (in his first article he wrote of how in describing "the beautiful and permanent forms of nature" Wordsworth was in fact casting 'the lines of his own mind over its sphere'). Townshend's fear is that if Wordsworth becomes too self-centred he will lose his sense of proportion and so destroy the very effect for which he is striving:

This over-importance which Wordsworth gives to his slightest sensations, produces in his writings a solemnity about trifles, a seriousness and energy in little things, which bears the appearance (I believe the appearance only) of affectation - very destructive to the simplicity which he desires should characterise his compositions.

(606)

Townshend also argues that if 'a due regard to proportion be essential to produce the pleasure which the mind takes in her perception of things' it is equally necessary that 'there should be differences and shades of degree in our raptures; a daisy should not impart the same elevation of feeling as a cloud-canopied

mountain, and a man must be near-sighted indeed who can pore upon the one, while the other is towering above him.' Certainly Townshend has failed to appreciate the glory of Wordsworth's near-sightedness, and he can only describe the last two lines of the Immortality Ode as 'very pretty'. And yet some sense of proportion is obviously not amiss.¹ If Townshend dismisses some very fine poems in his search for such a sense, he at least has Wordsworth's sanction for the search in the first place, as he reminds us by yet again quoting Wordsworth's own words in describing the powers of judgement needed by the poet:

Judgment, (he says) to decide how and where, and in what degree, each of these faculties ought to be exerted; so that the less shall not be sacrificed to the greater; nor the greater, slighting the less, arrogate, to its own injury, more than its due.²

(609)

Part of the conclusion of Townshend's article is an attack

1. It is a point recognized by F.R. Leavis when writing of 'Strange fits of passion I have known': 'It is a poem such as only Wordsworth could have written, and it belongs peculiarly to its period. It seems to come close to his characteristic faults, but it has his characteristic virtues....It is completely successful, yet we feel that its poise is an extremely delicate, almost a precarious one, and our sense of its success is bound up with this feeling'. [Revaluation (1936), 202.] More recently, Stephen Prickett has written: 'Wordsworth, for all his painstakingness, was a poet of genius rather than talent. When he is not sublime, he is frequently trivial, sententious, and dull. Indeed, his peculiar genius - often seen at its best in the poems of Lyrical Ballads - lies in living dangerously. The strength of 'We Are Seven' or 'An Anecdote for Fathers' is that the possibility of the banal is always present, and, in these poems, it is always magnificently avoided'. [Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads, Studies in English Literature no. 56 (1975), 9.]

2. This comes from the Preface of 1815. Townshend does not cite the sources of his quotations from Wordsworth's prose.

on Wordsworth's supporters; he claims that a 'blind prostration of intellect to their idol, is indeed the chief characteristic of Wordsworth's proselytes', and that the essence of Wordsworthianism is 'that its king can do no wrong. It is the very popery of poetry'. The final point he makes, however, returns to the central and most interesting part of the article. Again he quotes Wordsworth, but this time from the Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815:

Proportion and congruity, the requisite knowledge being supposed, are subjects upon which taste may be trusted. It is competent to this office.

(609)

What is so impressive about Townshend's attempt to exercise his taste on these matters is that he does so whilst accepting the ideas which inform Lyrical Ballads. He does not argue that incongruity and lack of proportion must inevitably result from Wordsworth's choice of diction and subject matter, but that the poet must exercise some discretion if he is to achieve the effect for which he is striving. That in itself is a remarkable step forward in the reception given to Wordsworth's poetry by the leading periodicals of his day.

Throughout his first two articles Townshend maintains a high standard of critical debate: he constantly refers his arguments to both Wordsworth's poetry and prose, and he offers a sympathetic if balanced (and admittedly sometimes limited) view of Wordsworth's poetry and poetic aims. It is therefore disappointing to find him in his third article indulging in the kind of practical joking found all too often in Blackwood's

with the result that his statements lose much of their cogency and coherence. Ideas expressed in the earlier articles are repeated, but the care in articulating them which is so marked in his earlier writing is now absent. In fact the whole article is so patched and piebald that one wonders, despite the lack of any external evidence, whether it has been written or reworked by other hands.

The article begins promisingly enough by reiterating the belief that the substance of Wordsworth's poetry is to be found in those 'natural thoughts, clothed in simple language, (however lowly the subject,) [which] speak at once to the heart'. Townshend goes on to claim, however, that this is an 'almost self-evident proposition' - he seems to forget that this was far from self-evident to Wordsworth's earlier critics, and nor does he explain how this tallies with a plea he makes later in the article for a return to the poetical standards of the Augustans. The article then gets under way by continuing the attack on Wordsworth's supporters begun at the end of the previous article. In particular they are upbraided for their belief in what Townshend mockingly describes as 'the Revelation':

namely, a certain accordance, which imaginative minds perceive when, shutting out the clamour of the world, they listen to Nature's still small voice, between the external universe, and the internal microcosm of man; a purifying influence exerted through the medium of visible objects upon the invisible mental powers; - a sort of anima mundi pervading all that is; - a sublime harmony between the natural and moral creation.

(774)

In itself this is not a bad description of Wordsworth's aims,

and the last point is similar to Lamb's in his review of The Excursion when he talked of that 'scheme of harmonies' which existed 'between the external universe and what within us answers to it'. Unfortunately Townshend follows his comments with the remark that such an attitude

is, in short, the quakerism of philosophy, the transcendentalism of poetry; a something between the abstractedness of Plato, and the unction of Madame Guion.

(774)

This is very much akin to the prejudice against religious enthusiasm of any kind which Jeffrey employed in his attacks on Wordsworth, and it paves the way for some extremely unsympathetic comments on 'My heart leaps up' and the Immortality Ode, which in turn lead on to the 'practical joke' - a description of a party of Wordsworthians who read the poet's work in a mist of reverential incomprehensibility. However typical of Blackwood's, and it is handled competently enough to suggest that the author was not unused to writing in this manner, it is certainly not worthy of Townshend. Criticisms made in the course of this passage resemble some of Townshend's earlier remarks but lack any real shape or form.

Having attempted to show that 'A praying Quaker, a preaching Whitfieldian, is nothing to a spouting Wordsworthian', Townshend, if he is indeed the author, goes on to discuss The Excursion. Although he acknowledges the beauty of isolated passages, he believes that 'the ground work is a mistake, and the execution, on the whole, a failure'. One criticism, in particular, seems out of keeping with his earlier comments. In attacking the choice of the Pedlar as the hero of the poem he seems to be guilty of the class prejudice displayed by

Jeffrey and others of which he seemed relatively free in his first two articles:

If a Burns, or a Chatterton, be a miracle, a production of nature out of the ordinary course of her creation; if, by possibility, once in a century, a low-born man reaches to high attainments by native vigour of intellect - why choose the solitary instance on which to found a poem of human interest - why make a pedlar utter reflections which are only to be found in the mind of a Wordsworth?

(780)

Townshend then moves on to consider Wordsworth's relationship to his own age and his standing in comparison with other poets. Whilst allowing that 'the taste of the age, about the period when Wordsworth published his first poems, was far gone from nature', he believes that Wordsworth has gone to the other extreme. Thomson and Burns had reduced nature to her simplest garments but Wordsworth strips her naked, and by going to such indecent lengths he has shown himself to be 'less a moulding spirit of the age, than a perverted production of it'. A great deal of time is then spent in justifying this extremely limiting judgement; Wordsworth's lack of popularity is again referred to, but without the understanding and insight displayed in Townshend's second article. Wordsworth is then offered the consolation that even if he is neither as popular nor as talented as Byron he is at least the better man:

If Wordsworth cannot justly be ranked (as his worshippers rank him) the first Genius of the age, still, his lower station on the fair hill of Virtue is more enviable than that of others on the lightning-shattered pinnacle of Vice.

(781)

None the less, this does not excuse Wordsworth's egotism, and we are reminded that 'Self-praise is, of all modes of self-aggrandisement, the least graceful, and the most impolitic'. It is suggested that this 'spirit of self-admiration has made Wordsworth overrate the effects which his poetry has produced on the age' and that whilst attempting to encourage a taste for simplicity he has only managed to appear 'grotesque which is quite opposite to being simple'. In fact, and this is again an echo of Jeffrey, Wordsworth's path to fame has been by way of inconsistency and strangeness, and whilst attacking former poetic abuses he has been instrumental in introducing new ones. In particular, his love of singularity is shown by his desire to classify his poems under various headings, and Townshend is moved to cry 'Away, then, with the theory, and with half the poems founded on the theory'.

The conclusion that is drawn from all this is that neither in his theory nor in his illustrations of it can Wordsworth be seen as an original genius. Although, in his own words, he has often "done well what is worthy to be done" he has never accomplished what "was never done before". Townshend believes that Scott, Southey, Crabbe and Byron have accomplished many of Wordsworth's aims as well if not better than he, and although Wordsworth fulfils Madame de Stael's definition of genius as 'enthusiasm acting upon talent' he has no claims to complete originality. Townshend's judgement is thus a limited but still a surprisingly generous one:

Now, I do not think that Wordsworth is first of any class; but I do think that he excels sufficiently in what belongs to two or three classes, to be entitled (if we look to his best performances) even a great writer.

(784)

Although Townshend has arrived at this judgement by a prolix and ill-defined route, oddly out of keeping with his earlier precise thinking, it is not altogether at odds with his earlier comments. Elements of those earlier arguments reappear although they are not underpinned by quite such rigorous reference to textual evidence. However, even the description of the Wordsworthian walking-party could perhaps be forgiven if the article finished at this point. Unfortunately it does not, and Townshend goes on to make some extremely silly comments. Not the least of these is a suggestion that Wordsworth possessed no style of his own as is shown by the lack of continuity between Descriptive Sketches and Lyrical Ballads:

At one leap, he passed from the extreme of melodious ornament to the extreme of harsh simplicity; and by the rapidity of the transition proved that he possessed no native originality of expression.

(785)

If this is not sufficient, he continues:

It is rather singular that Wordsworth's later poems have sided round to the opinion of the world, and that they approach nearer in style to his early productions. They are less startling, less incongruous, - more ornate, more latinized than those in his middle manner.

(785)

The inference seems to be that this early manner is preferable, and this must raise doubts as to whether these words were written by the same man who so carefully differentiated between

simplicity and affectation, and who talked of Wordsworth's poetry in terms of 'natural thoughts, clothed in simple language'.

Similar doubts are raised by the extraordinary suggestion that all Wordsworth's poetic activity has been motivated by a search for popularity:

Wordsworth sought popularity, in his first publication, by accommodating his style to the then prevailing taste. This gained him nothing. He was overlooked amongst the multitude of conformists. He then bore boldly up against general opinion, raised up a host of haters, and consequently another host of defenders, and chafed himself into notice....At present, since the human mind must ever be uneasy, while evn one Mordecai sits in the gate, his object is to conciliate his literary enemies, yet still to retain his literary friends - an object, I fear, unattainable.

(785-6)

Such an accusation really nullifies the rest of the article.

Townshend returns to the question of the inequality of Wordsworth's poetry arising from the poet's lack of a sense of perspective and proportion, and again a sense of hostility is apparent. The clue to the approach and attitude taken in the latter half of the article comes in the concluding paragraphs: Wordsworth is denied a place alongside Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Thomson, Gray, Collins and Burns because of the inconsistency and inequality of his style and because of the failure of his major work The Excursion. The earlier praise of the simple Wordsworth is forgotten, and the underlying reason for the attack on Wordsworth made apparent when Townshend writes:

In this day, when the correct and classical models of poetical composition are not only deserted, but contemned, - when Pope is looked upon as a mere heartless versifier, and when a place beside Milton is gravely demanded for Wordsworth, there is great need that such questions [as to the relative merit of major poets] should be calmly and impartially discussed.

(788)

As the article progresses the author becomes increasingly intent on defending Augustan concepts of poetry: thus the belief expressed at the beginning that 'natural thoughts, clothed in simple language, (however lowly the subject,) speak at once to the heart' changes to the statement that 'Good writing has but one mistress - Nature, who is the same in all, however variously she may arrange the folds of her decorative mantle....'; hence the preference for Descriptive Sketches rather than Lyrical Ballads; and so the accusation that Wordsworth's only interest is in his own popularity, and that to rank him with the greatest poets would somehow undermine the commonwealth of letters. Given this, the final assertion that whilst 'Wordsworth cannot be classed amongst our highest authors... he may, nevertheless, fairly claim to be associated with the band of true poets in general' seems more than a little hollow.

Whilst Townshend's defence of 'the correct and classical models of composition' seems the most plausible explanation for the nature and severity of some of his remarks, it is not altogether a convincing explanation. Possibly the article is indeed someone else's work, or has been amended and reconstructed by another hand (the account of the Wordsworthian walking-party certainly bears the marks of an interpolation). Whatever the reasons, the article as a whole is extremely disappointing.

Townshend's final article is much better: it displays again the fundamental sympathy with Wordsworth's poetry that we found in the first two, and there is a return to the close scrutiny of individual poems. Townshend's purpose is to praise Wordsworth, and to show that the poet 'is not generally

admired, only because he is not generally known'. In attempting to fulfil this purpose Townshend's aims are extensive:

It will be my endeavour to prove, by appropriate extracts from Wordsworth's poems, that he has displayed great powers of description, in the first place, of external nature; secondly, of nature as connected with some internal passion, or moral thought, in the heart and mind of man; thirdly, of human appearance, as indicative of human character, or varieties of feeling. I shall also attempt to shew, that he has manifested an ability to move the affections by means of simple pathos - that he has occasionally attained a chaste and classical dignity - that he has successfully illustrated religious and moral truths; and, finally, that he has brought the sonnet - that difficult vehicle of poetic inspiration - to its highest possible pitch of excellence.

(895)

It is no small tribute to Townshend that he manages to succeed on nearly all these counts.

In considering the first of these, Wordsworth's success in describing external nature, Townshend displays some intuitive insights into Wordsworth's poetry. When praising some lines from "A Thanksgiving Ode", he notes that the allusion to 'storms gone by'

heightens without disturbing the universal repose, and connects the troublous soul of man with the serene aspect of nature - the memory of the past, with the enjoyment of the present - earth with heaven, in a very happy and beautiful manner.

(896)

Then, after praising Wordsworth for being the first poet to describe mountain scenery with sensitivity and skill, he adds:

[Wordsworth] is not the first descriptive poet, but, it must be confessed, that he is the first descriptive poet of his order. He has given "a local habitation and a name" to the subtle essences of the elements; he has given a voice to storms and torrents.

(897)

He follows this with a discussion of word colour and sound which shows that his comment is not mere rhetoric.

He is nearly as good when proving his second proposition; that Wordsworth has successfully exhibited 'Nature in connexion with some internal passion, or moral thought, in the heart and mind of man'. He writes imaginatively and sensitively of a passage from The Excursion, and he praises 'Nutting' and the skating episode from The Prelude (which first appeared as a fragment in the edition of Wordsworth's poems of 1815). Unfortunately this last poem leads him into a lengthy piece of moralizing, but he never loses touch with the poem itself.

Townshend again chooses the right poems in demonstrating Wordsworth's ability to describe human appearance as indicative of human character. He praises the descriptions of Peter Bell and Margaret (from the first book of The Excursion), and his response to the latter again shows the quality of his critical insight. This is again demonstrated when he moves on to consider the part 'simple pathos' plays in Wordsworth's poetry. We have already seen how he approaches this in his earlier articles, and how it led him to adversely criticize both "The Idiot Boy" and "Harry Gill and Goody Blake". Now, however, he is very much more enthusiastic. Although his praise of "The Forsaken Indian Woman" is a little misplaced, his defence of the Lucy poems (including the last line of 'She dwelt among th' untrodden ways') is one of his greatest triumphs. He also praises "The Childless Father", "Lucy Gray", "We Are Seven" and the story of "Ruth":

Every word seems to fall naturally into its right place, and the rhyme appears to be less a preparation of art, than a necessary consequence of the diction.

(905)

What higher praise could Wordsworth have asked for?

Townshend balances this praise of Wordsworth's 'simple pathos' with an account of him as a religious and moral poet. He first shows how in the sonnet 'Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour' and in "Ode to Duty" Wordsworth is capable of commanding a chaste and severe classical dignity, and then goes on to praise "Resolution and Independence" since it shows how Wordsworth has drawn 'from the simplest elements, fine imagery and a noble moral'. The initial reference to the sonnet and the ode is important since it prepares the way for the praise of "Resolution and Independence" by separating it from the more simple, and hence more contentious, poems.

Finally, Townshend lavishes considerable praise on Wordsworth's sonnets, and in doing so says some interesting things about the nature of the sonnet itself. He refuses to consider the claims of Bowles and Charlotte Smith as sonneteers, since their work really consists of 'pretty songs, or pathetic elegies':

The sonnets of Shakespeare and Milton (however admired by the few) have never been popular, because they address themselves to the understanding as well as the heart, to the imagination rather than to the fancy. Of this stamp are the sonnets of Wordsworth. They may therefore fail to delight the popular palate....but they will be dear to the lovers of original excellence as long as any thinking minds can be found in the community.

(907-08)

The praise that follows is excessive, but Townshend's appreciation

of the form demonstrates his literary intelligence.

In summing up, having stressed that Wordsworth 'is all over poetical feeling. A poet he was born, and a poet he will die', Townshend refers again to Byron. Unlike his comments in his third article, these stress Byron's debt to Wordsworth, and warn that those who praise Byron at Wordsworth's expense are often paying unconscious homage to the latter. But Townshend is now faced with having to substantiate his claim that whilst a great poet Wordsworth cannot be ranked high amongst the band of true poets in general. He reiterates his arguments that the lack of 'any one great, original, and consistent work' and the inequality and singularity of much of the poetry bars Wordsworth from the 'summit of fame', but he then enumerates his many strengths:

...the variety of subjects, which Wordsworth has touched; the varied powers which he has displayed; the passages of redeeming beauty interspersed even amongst the worst and dullest of his productions; the originality of detached thoughts scattered throughout works, to which, on the whole, we must deny the praise of originality; the deep pathos, and occasional grandeur of his lyre; the real poetical feeling which generally runs through its many modulations; his accurate observation of external nature; and the success with which he blends the purest and most devotional thoughts with the glories of the visible universe....

(910)

The spurious distinction between a great and a true poet disappears, and Townshend finds himself testifying to the unquestionable greatness of Wordsworth's poetry.

Coleridge

Indignation is perhaps the predominant emotion provoked by the reviews of Coleridge's work; both in the luckless author himself, and in the modern reader when faced with much that is obviously the product of prejudice and malice. The first review appeared in the Quarterly and was of Remorse.¹ Written by the author's nephew, J.T. Coleridge, it was angrily dismissed by his uncle:

In the Quarterly Review of the Remorse (delayed till it could by no possibility be of the least service to me, & the compliments in which are as senseless & silly as the censures - every fault ascribed to it being either no improba[bi]lity at all, or from the very essence & end of the Drama no dramatic Improba[bi]lity, without noticing any of the real Faults (and there are many glaring and one or two deadly Sins) in the Tragedy) - in this Review I am abused, & insolently reproved, as a man, with reference to my supposed private Habits, for not publishing....²

Coleridge was always incensed by any reference to his failure to write and publish more, and this probably accounts for his reaction. Certainly on this occasion his anger seems misplaced, since the overall tone of the review is conciliatory if a little circumspect. Some extremely interesting general statements about the Lake poets are mixed up with more conventional and biased comments, but the remarks about Remorse seem well-founded and certainly point out the most obvious of those glaring and deadly sins of which Coleridge seemed so aware.

The general remarks about the Lake school occur at the commencement of the review. The reviewer begins by suggesting

1. QR, xi (April, 1814), 177-90.

2. Letters, Griggs, iii, 532.

that the way in which the ideas of the Lakers are 'cursorily scattered through volumes of miscellaneous poetry' is a major obstacle to their success, since this prejudices the reader who often 'proceeds nearly through the book, still ignorant of its characteristic feature; his vanity is mortified, and forgetting that his ignorance should in justice prevent his forming any judgment, he suffers it to be the very groundwork of his condemnation'. This comment is probably meant as a mild hit at Jeffrey, and it certainly it helps to establish the reasonable tone of the review. However, J.T.Coleridge appears not to be as well-informed as he is well-intentioned, as shown by his remark that 'we lament that no one of them [i.e. the Lake poets] should have stated briefly and plainly to the public the nature of their poetical theory' since this appears to ignore the existence of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, unless Coleridge feels that it fails to meet his criteria of brevity and clarity.

One of the most interesting parts of the review comes however, when Coleridge attempts a general definition of the Lakers' poetic theory himself. He notes their 'profound admiration' of Shakespeare and Milton, and then writes:

This admiration was not of the kind which displays itself in the conventional language of criticism; it was real, practical and from the heart; it led to ceaseless study, to imitation of its objects. Analysing by metaphysical aids the principles on which these great men exercised such imperial sway over the human heart, they found that it was not so much by operating on the reason as on the imagination of the reader. We mean that it was not so much by argument, or description, which the reason acknowledged to be true, as by touching some cord of association in the mind, which woke the imagination and set it instantly on a creation of its own.

(178)

Equally interesting, and even more specifically related to the Lake poets' practice, is J.T. Coleridge's comment on their attitude to natural scenery:

They are not the tasteful admirers of nature, nor the philosophic calculators on the extent of her riches, and the wisdom of her plans; they are her humble worshippers. In her silent solitudes, on the bosom of her lakes, in the dim twilight of her forests, they are surrendered up passively to the scenery around them, they seem to feel a power, an influence invisible and indescribable, which at once burthens and delights, exalts and purifies the soul. All the features and appearances of nature in their poetical creed possess a sentient and intellectual being, and exert an influence for good upon the hearts of her worshippers.

(181)

The way in which he points out that such poets are not 'tasteful admirers' nor 'philosophic calculators' but writers who combine a strong emotional response to nature with an awareness that it is both animated and morally purposive is particularly impressive. Unfortunately he somewhat mars this by his next comment that in 'this school...their very excellences are carried to excess'. This is very much more conventional, and is typical of the circumspection that is present throughout the review. Coleridge, in fact, has already suggested that in the case of the Lakers:

the habitual examination of their own feelings tends to produce in them a variation from nature almost amounting to distortion. The slight and subtle workings of the heart must be left to play unobserved, and without fear of observation, if they are intended to play freely and naturally; to be overlooked is to be absolutely restrained. The man who is for ever examining his feet, as he walks, will probably soon move in a stiff and constrained pace; and if we are constantly on the watch to discover the nature, order, and cause of our slightest emotions, it can scarcely be expected that they will operate in their free course or natural direction.

(180)

Coleridge finds this particularly repugnant since 'it should be

at least a principal object of poetry to please generally, and it is one of the highest boasts of genius that its strains, like the liturgy of our church, are not too high for the low and simple, nor yet too low for the wise and learned'. Any reference to the Established Church is usually a sign that the Quarterly is retreating within the bounds of orthodoxy, and Coleridge seems to be echoing ideas about the lack of proportion and balance in the poetry of the Lake school first found in Jeffrey's reviews. Thus the Lakers' attitude to glow-worms, birds-nests, celandines, and daisies too often appear 'strained, and even fictitious' to the ordinary reader who thus loses 'fellowship of feeling with the poet' and consequently his interest in the poetry. Also the 'continual habit of studying these slighter emotions' leads the poet to concentrate on the part rather than the whole with the resultant loss of contact with his readership.

But whilst many of these comments can be traced back to concepts and attitudes of mind first expressed by Jeffrey, they are offered without any of the rancour and hostility that we find in the Edinburgh. Certainly the perception and intelligence of the comments about the function of the imagination and the Lakers' attitude towards Nature more than balance this. Even the silly comments about the depiction of women in the Lakers' poetry ('lofty yet meek; patient and cheerful; dutiful, affectionate, brave, faithful, and pious; the pillars that adorn and support the temple of this life's happiness') and the specific praise of Southey (the Quarterly's leading contributor and, in later years, the chief advocate for Coleridge's appointment as editor) can be forgiven in the light of those earlier comments.

The next review to appear, however, defies forgiveness.

Written by Thomas Moore,¹ it appeared in the Edinburgh² and dealt with Christabel, Kubla Khan, and The Pains of Sleep. As a review it is worthless: there is no attempt to come to terms with Coleridge's poetry and the volume which contains some of his greatest poetry is dismissed as a thing 'utterly destitute of value. It exhibits from beginning to end not a ray of genius; and we defy any man to point out a passage of poetical merit in any of the three pieces which it contains'. Again Coleridge is condemned as a Laker, but in a way which makes J.T.Coleridge's comments seem fulsome in comparison and underlines the stringency and commitment of some of Jeffrey's attacks. Moore can only indulge in invective of the most facile kind.

At the end of the review he clearly demonstrates one of the reasons for his hostility towards Coleridge. He attacks Byron for his praise of his fellow-poet, and then continues:

And are such panegyrics to be echoed by the mean tools of a political faction, because they relate to one whose daily prose is understood to be dedicated to the support of all that courtiers think should be supported?³ If it be true that the author has thus earned the patronage of those liberal dispensers of bounty, we can have no objection that they should give him proper

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1. This review has been ascribed to both Jeffrey and Hazlitt. Elizabeth Schneider argues very convincingly that Moore was the reviewer [see her articles in PMLA, lxx (1955), 417-32, and lxxvii (1962), 71-6, and also Kathleen Coburn's letter in the TLS, 20-5-65]. The attack on Byron at the beginning of the review is out of keeping with the Edinburgh's policy at this time (see chapter eight); this rules out Jeffrey, and suggests a trusted contributor whose reviews were not scrutinized thoroughly. Moore was a friend of Byron's by this time, but friendship counted for little when it came to writing reviews.
 2. ER, xxvii (Sept., 1816), 58-67.
 3. Presumably Daniel Stuart's Courier which was pro-ministerial. Coleridge published a series of articles in the Courier in the autumn of 1816 [see E.K.Chambers, Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Biographical Study (Oxford, 1938), 277.] which may well have appeared before the autumn number of the Edinburgh.

proofs of their gratitude; but we cannot help wishing, for his sake, as well as our own, that they would pay in solid pudding instead of empty praise; and adhere, at least in this instance, to the good old system of rewarding their champions with places and pensions, instead of puffing their bad poetry, and endeavouring to cram their nonsense down the throats of all the loyal and well affected.

(67)

Political bias also played a major part in the other two reviews of Coleridge's work, both by Hazlitt, which appeared in the Edinburgh, but it is of a very different kind from that displayed by Moore. Moore's comments are conventional political invective, but Hazlitt at times offers valid and telling criticism of important aspects of Coleridge's thought.

This is particularly true of his review of The Statesman's Manual,¹ although the overall tone of the review is far from favourable. Personal disillusionment and bitterness played a part in Hazlitt's response, as Coleridge was quick to point out to his friends and acquaintances:

Meantime, Mr F. Jeffray, learning from the Examiner the frantic Hatred with which Mr W. Hazlitt resented and repaid years of more than brotherly Kindness towards him, and shrewdly presuming that from Mr Hazlitt's domestication at my fire-side he must be thoroughly master of all my defects and infirmities, and know better than most men where the knife would be likeliest to pierce and the wound to smart sorest, very consistently both with his character as a man and his functions as a Reviewer, applied to the said W. Hazlitt to review me. Me, I say: for the work was a mere pretext and opportunity.²

The review is undoubtedly damaging; not merely because of the commonplace invective of such comments as '[Coleridge] has given full scope to his genius, and laid himself out in absurdity', but because of the wit and humour with which Hazlitt presses home

1. ER, xxvii (Dec. , 1816), 444-59.

2. The Collected Works of S.T. Coleridge: The Lay Sermons, ed. R.J. White (1972), 244. It is a letter to J.G. Lockhart on a presentation copy of A Lay Sermon.

his attack. Early in the review he complains that Coleridge's

intended conclusions have always the start of his premises, - and they keep it: while he himself plods anxiously between the two, something like a man travelling a long, tiresome road, between two stage coaches, the one of which is gone out of sight before, and the other never comes up with him; for Mr Coleridge himself takes care of this; and if he finds himself in danger of being overtaken, and carried to his journey's end in a common vehicle, he immediately steps aside to some friendly covert, with the Metaphysical Muse, to prevent so unwelcome a catastrophe.

(445)

This has enough truth in it to be maliciously funny, but, as J.

Jackson warns,

Hazlitt writes with such spirit and clarity, and his target was so open to railery on the grounds of being obscure and paradoxical, that the formidable reviewer seems to have much the best of the encounter.¹

But there is more to the review than witty malice, and at one point

Hazlitt's previous admiration for Coleridge seems to break through:

His ideas are as finely shaded as the rainbow of the moon upon the clouds, as evanescent, and as soon dissolved. The subtlety of his tact, the quickness and airiness of his invention, make him perceive every possible shade and view of a subject in its turn; but this readiness of lending his imagination to every thing, prevents him from weighing the force of any one, or retaining the most important in mind.

(447)

The criticism of Coleridge's inability to distinguish in importance between the various shades of meaning are again one of the general criticisms levelled against the Lake school as a whole.

Perhaps the fundamental cause of disagreement between Coleridge and Hazlitt lies in the accusation that

Our Lay-preacher, in order to qualify himself for the office of a guide to the blind, has not, of course, once thought of looking about for matters of fact.... Instead of enquiring into the distresses of the manufacturing or agricultural districts, he ascends to the orbits of the fixed stars, or else enters into the statistics of the garden plot under his window, and, like Falstaff, 'babbles of green fields'....

(445)

1. Coleridge: The Critical Heritage, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (1970), 11.

In some ways this is justified and gives weight to P.P.Howe's comment on Hazlitt's two reviews¹ of The Statesman's Manual:

If the modern reader will have some regard to the condition of the country in this winter, and consider Coleridge's manual as seriously addressed to it, he will not have much difficulty, I think, in admitting these two articles as fair political comment.²

But Hazlitt in his review in the Edinburgh was being precipitate. It was the second Lay Sermon (1817) that Coleridge intended to be, in his own words, a pamphlet on 'temporary Politics, and especially on the commercial and agricultural distresses that followed the Peace....' whilst The Statesman's Manual was a work of 'merely general and metaphysico-theological interest addressed to the Learned'.³ R.J.White, in supporting Coleridge's statement of intent, even goes so far as to suggest that in A Lay Sermon Coleridge was "a pioneer of the modern conception of political economy that expands the 'dismal science' far beyond the narrow confines of what the Germans used to call 'Smithismus'", and that the "heart of the social teaching of A Lay Sermon is to be found in its long and subtle advocacy of what Coleridge calls the enfeebled 'counter-charms to the sorcery of wealth' to right 'the Overbalance of the Commercial Spirit'⁴ - aims with which Hazlitt could only have concurred.

Hazlitt's annoyance at Coleridge's apparent apathy in the

1. The other review appeared in the Examiner for 29 December 1816. It had been preceded by a review of the advertisement to The Statesman's Manual (Examiner, 8 September 1816), See Jackson, 248-62, for these reviews; and White, xxviii-xxxix, for a comment on them.

2. P.P.Howe, The Life of William Hazlitt (1947), 197.

3. White, xxviii.

4. Ibid., xlii.

face of the immediate distresses of the poor undoubtedly gave impetus to his attack. He takes issue with Coleridge on three counts: to argue that the labouring classes should know no more than the Scriptures, and that it is 'generally desirable' for people to know no more than is necessary for them to carry out their own vocations, is as bad as 'the interment of [the Bible] in a dead language' to which Coleridge objects at the beginning of The Statesman's Manual; that the attack on the emergence of the reading public only shows that 'Mr Coleridge himself is as squeamish in guarding his Statesman's Manual from profanation as any Popish priest can be in keeping the Scriptures from the knowledge of the Laity....'; and that Coleridge, in questioning the validity of miracles, is not only guilty of heresy, but seems to be suggesting that a pretence of belief in them might have some utility when addressing the lower classes. The tone and fervour of Hazlitt's denunciation is caught in the following passage:

There is something, then, worse than 'luxuriant activity', - the palsy of death; something worse than occasional error, - systematic imposture; something worse than the collision of differing opinions, - the suppression of all freedom of thought and independent love of truth, under the torpid sway of an insolent and selfish domination, which makes use of truth and falsehood equally as tools of its own aggrandisement and the debasement of its vassals, and always must do so, without the exercise of public opinion, and freedom of conscience, as its control and counter-check. For what have we been labouring for the last three hundred years? Would Mr Coleridge, with impious hand, turn the world 'twice ten degrees askance', and carry us back to the dark ages? Would he punish the reading public for their bad taste in reading periodical publications which he does not like, by suppressing the freedom of the press altogether, or destroying the art of printing?

(450-1)

It is difficult not to respond to this, particularly in comparison with the more turgid and obscure parts of The Statesman's Manual. Personal antagonism, an inability to follow the more

subtle parts of Coleridge's thinking, and a persuasive prose style, account for much of the effect of the review, but in one respect Hazlitt fulfils Coleridge's own definition of an honest reviewer - 'If he has erred, he presents his errors in a definite place and tangible form, and holds the torch and guides the way to their detection'.¹ Hazlitt's opposition to Coleridge is unashamedly political, but this is very different from the baseless malignity of Moore or John Wilson in his review of Biographia Literaria. Hazlitt's review is unfair in places, and it undoubtedly had an adverse effect upon Coleridge's reputation; but there is a thread of honesty and consistency running through it which makes it far more interesting than most contemporary reviews of Coleridge's work.

The same cannot be said of the reviews of the Biographia Literaria which appeared in the Edinburgh² and Blackwood's.³

Hazlitt's review in the Edinburgh is disappointing: he makes a certain amount of political capital out of Coleridge's defence of Southey, particularly since both men now belonged to the political faction which had been responsible for the early attacks upon them both, and also out of Coleridge's assertion that Burke could not be faulted for inconsistency of principle; he continues his argument, begun in his earlier review, that Coleridge's 'metaphysics have been a dead weight on the wings of his imagination - while his

1. Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross (Oxford, 1907), ii, 85.

2. ER, xxviii (August, 1817), 488-515.

3. BM, ii (October, 1817), 3-18.

imagination has run away with his reason and common sense'; and he agrees with Coleridge's comments on Hartley but not on Hobbes, and he dismisses Kant altogether. There is no attempt to discuss the critique of Wordsworth's poetry nor the famous distinction between Fancy and Imagination, although the review is remarkable for a long signed footnote by Jeffrey in which he refutes the charges made against him in the third chapter of the Biographia. The review concludes with some comments upon poetic diction, a discussion of the musical element in poetry (although Hazlitt does not acknowledge Coleridge's own comments on this in chapter fifteen), and a denial of the social usefulness of poets. It is a long and, at times, tedious review which makes little attempt to come to terms with the complexities and implications of Coleridge's book.

Wilson's review in Blackwood's was not lacking in excitement or vigour, but was totally unprincipled:

Wilson finds fault with his victim in every respect, great and petty. Himself co-author of the Chaldee Manuscript, he charges Coleridge with "indecent applications of scriptural language"; and in a footnote he even quotes Hunt's Examiner against him. He sneers at the poet's Greek Ode at Oxford, "which for ever blasted his character as a scholar"; at his gaining inspiration from Bowles' Sonnets, poems which could have an effect only "upon a mind singularly weak and helpless"; at his (and Wordsworth's) contempt for Pope. He sneers at his life....He sneers at his poetry, including Christabel. In short, to summarize the chief sneers: not only does Coleridge ramble capriciously; - he possesses an inveterate and diseased egotism, an insane vanity; he lacks lucidity and consistency in his ideas; he knows less than nothing of Kant; he shows multitudinous political inconsistencies; he lacks personal dignity, and self-respect; he cannot deny that he has abandoned wife and children.¹

After this onslaught nothing would seem surprising, but

1. A.L.Strout, "S.T.Coleridge and John Wilson of Blackwood's Magazine", PMLA, xlviii (1933), 104-5.

Blackwood's treatment of Coleridge became increasingly complicated and contradictory.¹ Two months after Wilson's attack a letter appeared defending Coleridge,² and this was followed by other favourable references to him, although they were interspersed with some satiric attacks including a skit on Christabel.³ By November 1819 Coleridge was contributing to Blackwood's Magazine, and apart from some unpleasantness created by his supposed connection with Leigh Hunt and the 'Cockney School', he was well treated by the Magazine for the rest of his life. The only article to appear after the attack on the Biographia Literaria which is of any interest to us is one by Wilson in the series on the Lake School.⁴

Although it is obviously a favourable review, its opening seems to promise little to a modern reader. The brazenness with which Wilson upbraids his fellow reviewers for exercising to Coleridge's detriment 'those unfair, and indeed wicked arts, by which the superficial mass of readers are so easily swayed in all their judgments', has only been matched in recent times by the Leavis's change of heart over Dickens (and that seems to be more the result

1. Strout, op. cit., gives a detailed account of Blackwood's relations with Coleridge, including details of the five contributions made by Coleridge to the Magazine.

2. BM, ii (Dec., 1817), 285-88.

3. Strout, 106-12.

4. BM, vi (Oct., 1819), 3-12. This is wrongly ascribed to Lockhart by Jackson in his Critical Heritage volume on Coleridge. Strout originally gave Lockhart as the reviewer in his article in 1933, but changed the attribution in his bibliography.

of self-delusion than downright hypocrisy). Wilson echoes some of the usual complaints, although in a somewhat attenuated form: unpopularity has resulted in Coleridge 'exaggerating his own original peculiarities, [and] thus widened the breach every day between himself and the public'; his greatest appeal is to those who have heard him speak and fallen victim to 'the astonishing effects which, according to every report, his eloquence never fails to produce upon those to whom it is addressed'; and even the panegyrics have an emptiness reminiscent of Wilson's essay on Wordsworth.

However, the article comes to life with Wilson's comments on The Ancient Mariner:

From it alone, we are inclined to think an idea of the whole poetical genius of Mr Coleridge might be gathered.... To speak of it at all is extremely difficult; above all the poems with which we are acquainted in any language - it is a poem to be felt - cherished - mused upon - not to be talked about - not capable of being described - analyzed - or criticised. It is the wildest of all the creations of genius - it is not like a thing of the living, listening, moving world - the very music of its words is like the melancholy mysterious breath of something sung to the sleeping ear - its images have the beauty - the grandeur - the incoherence of some mighty vision.

(5)

Any suspicions that this enthusiasm is not founded on a genuine understanding of the poem are dispelled by Wilson pointing to one of the central but often neglected aspects of the poem:

But surely those who cavilled at these things, [i.e. superfluity of imagery, redundant language, and confused narrative] did not consider into whose mouth the poet has put this ghastly story. A guest is proceeding to a bridal - the sound of the merry music is already in his ears - and the light shines clearly from the threshold to guide him to the festival. He is arrested on his way by an old man, who constrains him to listen - he seizes him by the hand - that he shakes free - but the old man has a more inevitable spell, and he holds him, and will not be silent.

(5)

The poem is dramatic and can only take on its full significance if it is recognized as such. Not only the initial statement, but the way in which Wilson constructs his sentences shows how fully he realized this.

His sympathy with the poem is further demonstrated by the way in which he deals with the criticism that the events following the killing of the albatross are out of all proportion to the event itself (to hostile reviewers a typical example of the way in which the Lakers derived strong emotions from trivial causes):

if any one will submit himself to the magic that is around him, and suffer his senses and his imagination to be blended together, and exalted by the melody of the charmed words, and the splendour of the unnatural apparitions with which the mysterious scene is opened, surely he will experience no revulsion towards the centre and spirit of this lovely dream.

(6)

His own surrender to 'the splendour of the unnatural apparitions' is shown by his praise of the stanzas describing the spectre-ship, one of which he considers to be 'perhaps, the most exquisite in the whole poem'. He also quotes at length the passage describing the water-snakes, and recognizes their centrality to the poem. His criticisms that the ballad needed to be 'more interwoven with sources of prolonged emotion extending throughout' and that 'the relation of the imagery to the purport and essence of the piece' should have been closer seem more conventional (although not altogether unfounded), but are compensated for by the claim that 'the effect of the wild wandering magnificence of imagination in the details of the dream-like story is a thing that cannot be forgotten. It is as if we had seen real spectres, and were forever to be haunted'.

But his response to the poem is not merely emotive. He goes on to praise the poem's conclusion but not, as one might expect, because of its conventional moral that 'He prayeth best, who loveth best All things both great and small'. Instead he points out how in the ending of the poem 'The actual surface-life of the world is brought close into contact with the life of sentiment - the soul that is as much alive, and enjoys, and suffers as much in dreams and visions of the night as by daylight'. He also redirects our attention to the Mariner who now seems to belong to another world: 'we do not mean a supernatural, but a more exquisitely and deeply natural world' (my italics). Such comments suggest a response to the poem far beyond the ability of most of Wilson's contemporaries.

The discussion of Christabel is not quite so good.

Wilson makes a false start with a little homily on the need for application and hard work by the poet, since 'Language is a material which it requires no little labour to reduce into beautiful forms....' However, the poem is highly praised:

Mr. Coleridge is the prince of superstitious poets; and he that does not read Christabel with a strange and harrowing feeling of mysterious dread, may be assured that his soul is made of impenetrable stuff.

(9)

The first part of the poem is admired for its atmosphere and truth of description, but particularly for the way in which the true character of Geraldine is gradually revealed to the reader (including the incident with the mastiff ridiculed by Moore in the Edinburgh). It is the contrast between Geraldine's beauty and outward virtue and the power of evil present within her that Wilson finds so fascinating; but prudently he does not try to take his discussion

of the meaning of the poem any further.

The article concludes with some general comments on Coleridge's poetry:

In his mixture of all the awful and all the gentle graces of conception - in his sway of wild - solitary - dreamy phantasies - in his music of words - and magic of numbers - we think he stands absolutely alone among all the poets of the most poetical age.

(11)

But much more perceptively, he touches upon one of the essential characteristics of Coleridge's work:

If there be such a thing as poetry of the senses strung to imagination - such is his. It lies in the senses, but they are senses breathed upon by imagination - having reference to the imagination though they do not reach to it - having a sympathy, not an union, with the imagination - like the beauty of flowers. In Milton there is between sense and imagination a strict union - their actions are blended into one. In Coleridge what is borrowed from imagination or affection is brought to sense - sense is his sphere.

(11)

Wilson must have been the first critic to appreciate the extent to which the texture and fabric of Coleridge's verse depended upon the perception of the senses.

It is a remarkable review. Wilson's general praise of Coleridge's poetry is supported by a perceptive and sophisticated reading of The Ancient Mariner, and he displays a sympathetic understanding of Christabel and of Coleridge's poetic aims as a whole. It is a fine piece of literary criticism, but it was written by the man who savaged the Biographia Literaria.

Blackwood's attitude to Coleridge was extraordinarily ambivalent, as shown by Wilson's two articles and by the attacks which continued even after the reconciliation with the poet. It was also extremely complex, particularly since the Magazine

popularized several of Coleridge's theories despite the attack on the Biographia. We have seen how Townshend in 1829 used the second part of Coleridge's book to underpin his arguments about Wordsworth, but even more startling was Wilson's consistent use of Coleridge's distinction between Fancy and Imagination.¹ That the periodical which so blatantly attacked Coleridge at the outset should act as a leading exponent of some of his major ideas, serves as a concluding comment upon the relations between Coleridge and his reviewers.

Southey

Robert Southey occupies an equivocal position in any discussion of the periodicals of his day. Both John Hayden² and Lionel Madden³ in their sensible and sympathetic accounts of the critical reception accorded him recognize his importance as a leading literary figure but, however reluctantly, admit his failings as a creative writer. In this there can be little disagreement with the judgement passed upon him by his contemporaries, and Lionel Madden's comment sums up both contemporary and modern attitudes:

Southey could never absolve himself from his duty to others for the sake of his art. For this reason he undertook much arduous and soul-destroying work which inevitably dulled his imagination and restricted his freedom. In 1807 he

1. See my "John Wilson and the Distinction between Fancy and Imagination", Studies in Romanticism xiii (Fall, 1974), 300-13.

2. Hayden, 111-23.

3. Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage, ed. L. Madden (1972).

wrote of himself, perhaps drawing a contrast with Coleridge: 'No person can be more thoroughly convinced that goodness is a better thing than genius, and that genius is no excuse for those follies and offences which are called its eccentricities'. The sentiment is worthy and Southey's principles were undoubtedly noble. No reader of his letters, indeed, can fail to esteem him very highly as a man. Nevertheless, it is clear that, by deliberately choosing a life of systematic application and by shunning the exhausting excitement of imaginative involvement in favour of calm and dispassionate detachment, Southey effectively crushed his own ambitions of major poetic achievement.¹

Therefore, unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge, Southey does not present us with an example of a major writer severely misunderstood and mistreated by his reviewers. There is no clash of aesthetic theory, either between one periodical and another or between his age and our own, and there are to be found no extremes of either journalistic vituperation or critical insight in the reviews of his work. Despite their occasional severity of tone, the periodicals seem remarkably, even suspiciously, fair-minded and accurate in their assessments of his strengths and weaknesses. Southey would therefore seem to be of limited interest in a study such as this, but in fact he is of some considerable significance for two reasons: the reviews of his work, particularly those which see him as a representative Laker, very clearly illuminate some of the central prejudices motivating the periodicals, and so help us to understand the background against which the reviews of Wordsworth and Coleridge must be placed; and Southey is also a central figure in the history of the periodicals. To begin with this latter point.

In the case of the Edinburgh Southey's role was that of an obdurate, fanatical, and at times formidable opponent. The

1. Madden, 3.

reason for this was the obvious one: Jeffrey's attack on Thalaba and the unfavourable reception he gave to Southey's other long poems. Southey was a proud and sensitive man who was acutely aware of his own limitations as a poet, and as a reviewer he had means of retaliation eventually at hand. Before the founding of the Quarterly, he refrained from open hostility with the Edinburgh, thanks mainly to the mediating influence of Walter Scott, although he refused an offer to join its ranks and instead encouraged Coleridge to found an opposition journal which eventually became transformed into the ill-fated Friend.¹ Once he had become a Quarterly reviewer he launched what Geoffrey Carnall has called 'his private campaign against the Edinburgh'.² Although Southey's animosity can be

1. J. Simmons, Southey (1945), 125-6.

2. G. Carnall, Robert Southey and his Age: The Development of a Conservative Mind (1960), 130. Certain battles and skirmishes were fought in the campaign: Southey's article on the Baptist mission in India was as much a reply to Sydney Smith's attacks on such missionaries in the Edinburgh as a means of testing the Quarterly's freedom from Church domination (*ibid.*, 98-9); similarly, Southey's severe review of James Sedgewick's Hints to the Public and the Legislature on the Nature and Effect of Evangelical Preaching was prompted in part by Sedgewick's approving comments on Smith's articles in the Edinburgh (*ibid.*, 130-1); Southey's advocacy of Bell's system of education and his attack on Lancaster's also owed much to his determination to oppose the Edinburgh on every front, and the pamphlet which he published entitled The Origin, Nature, and Object of the New System of Education (an enlargement of his original article in the Quarterly supporting Bell) was supposedly dedicated to the editor of the Edinburgh, and opened by insisting that its purpose was to attack the Review (*ibid.*, 134-5); a final example is Southey's abortive article on Brougham which was to be a vehicle for 'sundry charge of small shot ready made up for Jeffrey's posteriors', but Southey's friends persuaded him not to publish it (*ibid.*, 165-6).

accounted for to some extent on political grounds (he bitterly opposed the Edinburgh's anti-war policy and its later support of parliamentary reform), the major impulse for it seems to have been a personal hatred of Jeffrey. After meeting Jeffrey for the first time, he made much of his opponent's small stature,¹ and this recurs in a letter he wrote to James Hogg in 1814:

↪ For myself popularity is not the mark I shoot at; if it were I should not write such poems as Roderick; and Jeffrey can no more stand in my way to fame, than Tom Thumb could stand in my way in the street.²

There are other examples of Southey's almost childish malice: he was incensed with Gifford for excising a reference to Balaam's ass in an attack on the Edinburgh in his article on Parliamentary Reform in 1816, and he made sure the reference was included when he reprinted the article in 1832.³

This kind of animosity is neither surprising nor particularly noteworthy. What is important about Southey's reaction is that here we have a leading contributor to one periodical engaged in a personal vendetta against its rival. On a general level this underlines the importance of such rivalry, and, more specifically, it warns us that any article or review by Southey is liable to distortion because of his animus towards the Edinburgh. Perhaps most interestingly of all, however, is how this illustrates the way in which a particularly potent bias or prejudice can overrule all other considerations. Geoffrey Carnall in his fine biographical

1. Carnall, 100.

2. New Letters, Curry, ii, 112.

3. Carnall, 221-3. Carnall lists the alterations made by Gifford by comparing the original review with the published article. It is an interesting example of the way in which editors tailored their contributors' reviews.

study of Southey points out how the development of what he calls Southey's 'conservative mind' was a slow and gradual process, and how often there was a great deal of affinity between Southey's political views and those of the Edinburgh. It is impossible to detect any such affinity from Southey's articles and reviews in the Quarterly, and therefore the distortion that results from his campaign against the Edinburgh is particularly complex. It not only means that his work for the Quarterly is not always a particularly reliable guide to his own thinking, it means that the extent and nature of the rivalry between the two periodicals is open to exaggeration if one relies on Southey's contributions for evidence. The extent of Southey's contributions and Gifford's editing of them further confuse the issue, and again warn us of the danger of making general statements about the periodicals.

Of more importance than Southey the reviewer for our immediate purpose is Southey the reviewed. The Edinburgh insisted on classing him as a Lake poet. On the one hand this was obviously a disadvantage, and Southey complained bitterly of 'the absurdity of those critics who have classed together three writers so utterly unlike as [Coleridge] and Wordsworth and myself, for the convenience of abuse'.¹ But, on the other hand, this also gave him a popularity (notoriety, perhaps) which he might not otherwise have enjoyed. Also there is the question of just how much discomfort resulted from riding to fame on Wordsworth's and Coleridge's coat-tails. John Hayden argues that 'Jeffrey in the Edinburgh Review, for example, was much more tolerant when dealing with Southey than with Wordsworth,

1. New Letters, Curry, ii, 52.

and consequently delivered much more intelligent and acceptable judgements'.¹ Jeffrey would have been hard put to it to find anything less intelligent and acceptable than his comments on Wordsworth, but in any case Hayden has missed the point. Southey was a useful ploy in Jeffrey's attack on Wordsworth and Coleridge. Although initially similar to Wordsworth, Southey, particularly in his longer poems, was a very different kind of poet. What better way of proving the reasonableness of your case than by judiciously praising a poet of similar ilk to the one you are condemning, particularly when that poet is far less challenging and subversive than the real target of your attack? It is a device used rather more obviously by Blackwood's when it leavened its attack on Keats with praise of Shelley.

The inferior quality of Southey's poetry invoked, however, a similar inferiority of critical response. Whereas Wordsworth's poetry was often capable of discomforting a reviewer to the point where his critical preconceptions and convictions were seriously challenged, Southey's allowed those preconceptions to be glibly articulated. Therein lies his value to us, since the reviews of his poetry in the Edinburgh in particular often reveal in a more simplistic manner the biases and prejudices underlying the response to Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry.

They do so in two ways. Firstly there are the general criticisms aimed at all the Lake poets: Southey is taken to task for using the ballad form; the sins of singularity, affectation, and lack of proportion are also laid at his door; he is accused of childishness, particularly in the descriptive scenes from The Curse

1. Hayden, 122.

of Kehama; and, the greatest sin of all, he is guilty of arrogance and ingratitude in not heeding the advice and remonstrations of his reviewers given, of course, more in sorrow than in anger. Some of the more abusive terminology employed against Wordsworth is also present: the tenth section of The Curse of Kehama is described as 'namby-pamby'; and there is a reference in the review of The Vision of Judgement to 'those who sing or scan in their reading (as they are said to do at the Lakes)'. Used with a certain amount of malicious cunning against Wordsworth, such accusations took on a spurious validity; with Southey it seems very much more a case of breaking a butterfly upon a wheel.

Secondly, apart from demonstrating the worthlessness of the general criticisms of the Lake poets, Jeffrey's reviews of Southey also illuminate the principles which provided the basis (or the excuse) for such an attack. As we have already seen, these primarily consisted of an appeal to supposedly established and generally agreed literary principles which the poet had offended against. Much of the terminology employed has a neo-classical ring to it: Southey's poetry is accused of lacking both elegance and dignity; like Wordsworth, he has sacrificed the true simplicity which is the end of all art for that simplicity which is mere affectation since it denies the existence of art; no attempt is made to produce 'just imitations of nature and human character', and such poetry can only appeal to the 'young, the enthusiastic, and the uninstructed' since 'nice critics and fastidious judges' can only condemn Southey and the other Lake poets; and Southey and his colleagues are taken to task for advocating a system 'that would teach us to undervalue

that vigilance and labour which sustained the loftiness of Milton, and gave energy and direction to the pointed and fine propriety of Pope'. All this is summed up by a paragraph in the review of The Curse of Kehama:¹

[Southey] has come with his whistle, and his gilded book of fairy tales, into the assemblies of bearded men, and audibly undervalued all other instruments and studies. The kind of conceit, indeed, and arrogance, that is visible in this author and his associates, is still more provoking than their childishness, - or rather, is that which makes their childishness so offensive. While gravely preferring the tame vulgarity of our old ballads, to the nervous and refined verses of Pope and Johnson, they lay claim, not to indulgence, but to admiration; and treat almost the whole of our classical poets with the most supercilious neglect; while they speak in an authoritative tone of the beauties of George Wither and Henry More. With such ludicrous auxiliaries, they wage a desperate war on the established system of public taste and judgment, - and waste their great talents in an attempt, the success of which is as hopeless as it would be lamentable, and which all their genius cannot save from being ridiculous.

(434)

Here we have the usual complaints against the Lakers clothed in the kind of critical terminology that I have just drawn attention to, complete with the laudatory reference to two leading Augustan poets. once again, however, it must be stressed that the appeal to an established critical code is more apparent than real. Jeffrey

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1. ER, xvii (Feb., 1811), 429-65. The reviews of Southey's work in the Edinburgh are as follows:
- ER, i (Oct., 1802), 63-83. Thalaba the Destroyer (F. Jeffrey)
- ER, iii (Oct., 1803), 109-36. Amadis de Gaul transl. (W. Scott)
- ER, iv (April, 1804), 214-30. Works of Chatterton ed. (W. Scott)
- ER, vii (Oct., 1805), 1-28. Madoc (F. Jeffrey)
- ER, xi (Oct., 1807), 31-40. Specimens of Later English Poets (?Henry Brugham)
- ER, xi (Jan., 1808), 370-90. Letters from England (F. Jeffrey)
- ER, xvii (Feb., 1811), 429-65. Curse of Kehama (F. Jeffrey)
- ER, xxii (Jan., 1814), 447-54. Carmen Triumphale (?F. Jeffrey)
- ER, xxv (June, 1815), 1-31. Roderick: Last of the Goths (F. Jeffrey)
- ER, xxvi (June, 1816), 441-49. Carmen Nuptiale (F. Jeffrey)
- ER, xxviii (Mar., 1817), 151-74. Wat Tyler and Letter to Wm. Smith
(F. Jeffrey)
- ER, xxxv (July, 1821), 422-36. A Vision of Judgment (F. Jeffrey)
- ER, 1 (Jan., 1830), 528-65. Colloquies (T. Macaulay)

creates the impression that he is appealing to such a code and the terms he employs possess a spurious consistency, but nowhere in the Edinburgh does he define those terms or offer a definition of the principles which would seem to underlie them. In his criticism of Wordsworth this is disguised by the conflict that takes place between his genuine response to the poetry and his instinctive conservatism that forces him to reject it. Since in Southey's case the interest and confusion that resulted from such a conflict is missing, the hollowness of Jeffrey's attack on the Lake poets is all too apparent.

Such an attack was not, of course, based simply on the phraseology normally associated with the Augustan critics. The paragraph quoted above also demonstrates two more concrete and important motives for Jeffrey's attitude: his belief in popularity (by which he seems to mean acceptance by received critical opinion) as a touchstone of genius; and his dislike of the supernatural. The reviewer of Southey's anthology Specimens of the Later English Poets (probably Henry Brougham) shows himself fully aware of the difficulties involved in using popularity either as a test of merit or as a means of evaluating public taste,¹ but Jeffrey elevates popularity into a philosophic principle. This is seen very clearly in his review of Madoc,² where he writes:

In matters of taste, however, we conceive that there are no discoveries to be made, any more than in matters of morality. The end of poetry is to please; and men cannot be mistaken as to what has actually given them pleasure. Accidental associations, indeed, may impose upon them for

1. ER, xi (Oct., 1807), 32n. Brougham is hostile to Southey and echoes many of Jeffrey's ideas, but he is somewhat more aware of the problems posed by the concept of popularity.

2. ER, vii (Oct., 1805), 1-28.

a season, and lead them to ascribe to the genius of the poet an emotion which was really excited by the circumstances in which they perused him: but this illusion can never be of long duration; and the emotions which he continues to excite under every variation of circumstances, the feelings which he commands among every class of his readers, and continues to impress upon every successive generation, can only be referred to that intrinsic merit, of which they afford indeed the sole and ultimate criterion.

(2)

The antonym of popularity in this sense is singularity, and Jeffrey sees this as the Lake poets' greatest sin. He continues:

The ancient and uninterrupted possession of the great inheritors of poetical reputation, must be admitted therefore as the clearest evidence of their right, and renders it the duty of every new claimant to contend with them as lawful competitors, instead of seeking to supplant them as usurpers. It may still be asserted...that new sources of poetical beauty may be discovered, which may lower the value of the old; and that untrodden regions may still be explored in that vast domain, sufficiently splendid and fertile to become the seat of a legitimate and independent empire. We have already said, however, that we have no faith in such discoveries....Poetry, as we have formerly hinted, is in this respect indeed very nearly upon a footing with morality. In substance, it is the same everywhere....We should certainly look with compassion or contempt on any man who should pretend to have discovered a new way to be virtuous; and who, in pursuit of supreme moral excellence, should affect to put no value upon the vulgar elements of justice, generosity, or benevolence; but to rest his pretensions upon some peculiar moralities of his own invention, such as ordering his servants never to deny him, educating boys without the use of birch, or keeping an hospital for decayed post-horses.

(2-3)

In employing the image of 'the untrodden regions' of the mind Jeffrey is using a central Romantic image to deny the existence of that movement which eventually established 'a legitimate and independent empire', and in his final comment he unwittingly demonstrates that morality is no more absolute than literary taste. And yet it is in these comments that we find the key to his attitude towards literature. Possessed of a genuine literary sensibility, he lacked both the imagination and the self-assurance to do anything but, in Lamb's phrase, to 'coast the shores of prescribed sentiment'. It

was this, rather than any belief in an Augustan aesthetic, which formed the basis of his thinking. When popular acclaim determined a writer's success, as in Byron's case, Jeffrey could show himself to be alive to the new literary impulses of his age, but if in doubt he resorted to the position so baldly stated in the extracts from his review of Madoc. There can be little doubt that he believed in such concepts; equally, there can be little doubt that both theoretically and practically in terms of his response to contemporary poetry they were untenable.

Jeffrey's dislike of the supernatural is important not only in his attack on the Lake school, but also in his response to Scott's poetry and fiction. Southey is taken to task on several occasions for employing the supernatural, and Jeffrey's comment on Thalaba are representative of his attitude:

The pleasure afforded by performances of this sort, is very much akin to that which may be derived from the exhibition of a harlequin farce; where, instead of just imitations of nature and human character, we are entertained with the transformation of cauliflowers and beer-barrels, the apparition of ghosts and devils, and all the other magic of the wooden sword. Those who can prefer this eternal sorcery, to the just and modest representation of human actions and passions, will probably take more delight in walking among the holly griffins, and yew sphinxes of the city-gardener, than in ranging among the groves and lawns which have been laid out by a hand that feared to violate nature, as much as it aspired to embellish her; and disdained the easy art of startling by novelties, and surprising by impropriety.

(i, 75-6)

Rather than being the measured response of a man of reason to such chimeras of the fancy, Jeffrey's comments here and elsewhere have a note of alarm about them which suggest that he gave much greater credence to such things than he was prepared to allow publicly. If so, it is only further confirmation of that dichotomy which existed within him.

The Edinburgh's treatment of Southey as a representative Laker ended with the review of The Curse of Kehama, and in the reviews that followed politics became the central issue. Praise is given to Roderick as the best and most powerful of Southey's poems, and the severe qualifications that are made are no longer expressed in the terminology employed against the Lakers. When reviewing Carmen Nuptiale Jeffrey made it clear that the issue was no longer a poetical one:

Now, considering that Mr Southey was at all events incapable of sacrificing truth to Court favour, it cannot but be regarded as a rare felicity in his subject, that he could thus select a pattern of private purity and public honour in the person of the actual Sovereign, without incurring the least suspicion either of base adulation or lax morality.

(xxvi, 447)

The appearance of Wat Tyler and Southey's reply in his Letter to William Smith provided the kind of ammunition that Jeffrey must have dreamed of but never dared hope for, and good use was made of it. After that, the review of A Vision of Judgement is a little tame, and the hit at the Lakers which it contains seems hopelessly dated and out of place. When the Edinburgh came to review Southey again, after a lapse of nine years, the task was given to Thomas Macaulay. His review of Colloquies is perhaps the most important review of Southey's work to appear in the Edinburgh, but the reasons for its importance lie outside the scope of this study.

The Quarterly Review was, naturally, a supporter of Southey.¹

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1. The following reviews of Southey's work appeared in the Quarterly:
- QR, i (Feb., 1809), 134-153. Chronicle of the Cid transl. (W.Scott)
- QR, iv (Nov., 1810), 454-74. History of Brazil vol.i. (R.Heber)
- QR, v (Feb., 1811), 40-61. Curse of Kehama (W.Scott and G.Bedford)
- QR, xiii (April, 1815), 83-113. Roderick: Last of the Goths (G.Bedford)
- QR, xviii (Oct., 1817), 99-128. History of Brazil vol.ii. (R.Heber)
- QR, xxiv (Oct., 1820), 1-55. Life of Wesley (R.Heber)
- QR, xxix (April, 1823), 53-85. History of the Peninsular War (W.Croker and G.Procter)
- QR, xxxii (Oct., 1825), 457-67. A Tale of Paraguay
- QR, xli (July, 1829), 1-27. Colloquies
- QR, xliii (Oct., 1830), 469-94. Life of Bunyan

On one level this manifested itself as somewhat mindless praise of a political supporter and leading contributor. Thus in the review of The History of Brazil we are told that

It is by no means easy to mention a style of composition which Mr. Southey has not attempted, and it would be still harder to point out one in which his talents might not be expected to raise him to distinguished eminence; few authors, of the present age, have written so much as he has done, and still fewer, of any age, have written so well.

(iv, 454)

Such praise can only be lavished on Southey, however, because he has had a change of heart and abandoned his previous 'querulous discontent under the existing state of society'. Now no one is better placed than Southey to act as a moral example to the youth of England:

At present, if we wish to educate in the minds of youth a lofty sense of national dignity, a temperate zeal in the cause of freedom, and a manly hatred for every species of oppression or cruelty, if we desire to raise in them that admiration of individual merit, which speaks to the feelings, and stimulates the emulation of the soldier or the citizen, as well as the statesman or general, and makes the study of history a school, not only of national politics, but of private virtues: if, in short, we wish to breed up such men in England, as England now most needs to preserve her, few better manuals can be found than the works of Robert Southey.

(473)

However, there are two reviews of Southey's work in the Quarterly which are of more interest than this might suggest. Both are designed to rebut Jeffrey's attacks on Southey as a Lake poet, and the first,¹ written by Walter Scott, is a genuine attempt to come to terms with the issues raised by Jeffrey. But Scott is in some difficulty. Although he responded more strongly than

1. QR, v (Feb., 1811), 40-61. It is the review of The Curse of Kehama.

Jeffrey to the new developments in literature, he was not entirely in sympathy with them and he was writing for a periodical which was conservative in its taste as well as its politics. He attempts to overcome this problem by putting the poets and the critics into two opposing camps and setting himself up as peacemaker. On the one hand the poets argue that their art by its very nature must remain unconfined and constantly renew itself whilst, on the other hand, the critics argue that 'poetry, like all the other fine arts, has its general rules, which, though strictly observed, will still leave endless scope for variety' and that 'it does not become the poet to assume the licence of framing his effusions according to the fantastic dictates of his own imagination'. Scott suggests the compromise that 'the critic rests too much upon usage and authority, and that the poet allows too little to the general principles of taste'.

Scott, having established this centralist position, is able to expound a theory which, although a refutation of Jeffrey's ideas, is neither extreme nor dogmatic. It is extremely interesting that what he offers is an organic view of the development of literature. He begins by stressing that 'eternal operation of change, to which literature, like the globe itself, is necessarily subjected', and continues:

There are however, as [Spenser] proceeds to inform us, laws by which mutability herself is regulated in her various and capricious movements, and which therefore may supply the critic with a code independent of her influence. Such laws indeed are to be drawn, not from the mechanical jargon of French criticism, but from an accurate consideration of the springs and movements of the human heart. These doubtless are changed and modified in the different stages of society, as the outward figure is disguised or altered by the progressive change of dress: but the nature of the human

mind in the one case, as the conformation of the limbs in the other, remains in fact unaltered; and (making allowance always for the particular stage of society) it is that to which we must finally appeal in censuring or approving poetical composition. The writings of the ancients may be then properly consulted, not as containing the authority by which their successors must be regulated, but as affording the happiest illustration of those general principles upon which poetry ought to be written.

(v, 43)

Apart from offering a view of literature which eschews what the Quarterly's readers might consider to be anarchy but which still counters Jeffrey's rigid almost mechanistic and overstated attitude, Scott is concerned with two other interrelated issues. As a poet, and later as a novelist, he employed the supernatural and was therefore anxious to defend its use by other writers. Jeffrey's attack was obviously in his mind when he wrote:

The passages which we have quoted will bear us out in asserting that no bard of modern days possesses a more abundant share of imagination, the highest of poetic qualities. There is a glow, an exuberancy even in his descriptions, indicating a richness of fancy adequate to supply the waste not of use only, but of extravagance: and perhaps it is a natural consequence of such attributes, that, like Collins, 'he loves fairies, genii, giants and monsters; delights to rove through the meanders of enchantment, to gaze on the magnificence of golden palaces, and to repose by the water-falls of Elysian gardens'. To this taste we owe the 'wild and wondrous tale' of Thalaba, and the still more wild and wondrous Curse of Kehama.

(55)

But praise of the poet's imaginative power was not sufficient in itself, and so Scott suggests that the poem is extremely useful since by making use of Hindoo mythology (with all its attendant supernatural happenings) Southey acquaints his readers with a major world religion. Scott realized that this sounded somewhat lame, and hastily refutes any idea of Southey writing a poem simply 'to introduce to the world, The Hindoo mythology made plain and easy to the meanest capacity', and goes on to make a much larger claim

for the poem on moral grounds:

A work which combines with circumstances of this [moral] nature a powerful imaginative character, has certainly advanced far towards perfection in one of the chief objects of poetry - the elevation of the human mind; which is thus for a time lifted above the sphere of common life, its low pursuits and passions, and carried into an empyreum of fancy, where it may rove at will through blissful regions of its own creation. It is impossible for a reader of feeling to rise from such a poem without being sensible of this abstraction; without a consciousness that he has at least enjoyed a glimpse of virtue....Poetry, indeed, cannot create a soil for virtue to take root in; but whenever it appears in its loftier character, it seldom fails to invigorate and enrich that in which it is already implanted.

(56)

The relationship between imagination and morality that Scott is postulating here seems an uneasy one, particularly since he claims that all depends on 'the moral character of Kailyal, which is perpetually opposed to the inordinate attempts, and almost omnipotent wickedness of the Rajah'. A modern reader of the poem may find it very difficult to find the moral centre of the poem in the figure of this poorly drawn and hopelessly idealized young girl. In any case, Scott has shifted his ground: from defending the use of the supernatural in terms of imaginative power he has uneasily moved on to praise it on conventional moral grounds. This illustrates Scott's dilemma very clearly: his innate conservatism reinforced by that of the Review for which he is writing does not allow him to treat with the poem on its own terms. A far better comment, and the most persuasive refutation of Jeffrey's attitude to appear in the review, comes with Scott's assertion that there is little point in suggesting that Southey should have written a different kind of poem or adhered more strictly to some ideal

epic form:

This is the false gallop of criticism - it is not pointing out to an author any reasonable object to be attained; but insidiously hinting at some unknown point of excellence, with whose bearings we doubtless are acquainted, though we kindly leave the poet to find them out as he can. In this we see neither wit nor wisdom: and shame on our craft if this finesse be its excellence! In judging of every human production, we can only estimate how far it exceeds or falls short of the common exertions of humanity; and it shews equal ignorance and injustice to attempt reducing it to the imaginary standard of some beau ideal, of which neither the author nor the critic has any distinct or accurate perception.

(60)

The other review of importance in the Quarterly,¹ of Roderick, was by Grosvenor Bedford who probably had a hand in Scott's review as well.² In many ways it is a continuation of the earlier review, but this time the issues are more firmly stated and confidently handled, partly because the poem itself provides a much better basis for what the critic is trying to say. The review begins by praising Southey and putting Jeffrey firmly in his place:

If poetry has any fundamental rules but those which best exhibit the feelings of the human heart, we confess that we are strangers to them. It is in proportion to his knowledge of these, and to his power of developing and delineating their action and effects, that the world in general will bestow their tribute of approbation upon the poet. Whether he lays his scene in heaven or earth, his business is with human sympathies, exalted perhaps by the grandeur of the objects which excite them, or called into existence by the circumstances which he creates, but still in their nature, progress, and ends, in every sense of the word, human.

(83)

Bedford then goes on to defend the mythological and supernatural elements of Southey's poetry in an impressive and intelligent manner:

Nature offers a boundless range to observation in all her productions animate or inanimate, and it would be bold to assert that any of them are below the attention of genius. Before vulgar optics they pass without notice; but the poet sees them decked in the forms and colours with which

1. QR, xiii (April, 1815), 83-113.

2. Grosvenor Bedford was a close friend of Southey (Simmonds, 23), and this must be borne in mind when assessing his reviews.

his 'mind's eye' invests them, gives them a body which they possessed not before, and presenting them in their new characters seems to create and to people a world from his own imagination.

Critics who exercise their trade according to precedents only, and who would exclude all models but those sanctioned by antiquity and use, may deny the existence of this power, or censure the employment of it; but experience tells us that it exists, and taste and judgment are gratified by the exercise of it. They have for ages drawn their canons from these examples, and with a notable zeal for the confirmation of their dominion, have established a school and promulgated its laws in the spirit of intolerance. The unenterprising and the dull have not been galled by the restraint; but real genius must have felt with indignation the pressure of the fetters which art had forged and prescription rivetted.

Mr. Southey has shewn the validity of his system in the poems of which we have thought it due to him to take a cursory view; and whether he has drawn from the inexhaustible sources of his own imagination and created both his personages and the world which he has given them to inhabit, or set before us pictures of elevated humanity, his principle has been true to nature, and his application of it consistent through even the wildest of his fables.

(86-7)

The foundation of this argument is to be found in the earlier review, but there Scott allowed it to become a limited and conventional moral statement. Bedford develops a much more sophisticated view of the relationship between art and morality, as he shows after he has given a résumé of the poem:

Original in its plan, true in its fundamental elements, and consistent in its parts, it rouses the feelings, and stimulates those powers of the imagination, which rejoice in the consciousness of exertion. When we rise from the contemplation of a work, which has so involuntarily called forth the vigilance of attention by its development of character, its display of the capabilities of human nature, and by the interest which it creates, we are made to feel that our intellectual and moral existence is enlarged.

(110)

Again, both the stress on the imaginative power of the poem and the moral concept that is suggested here were prefigured in the earlier review, but flaws in The Curse of Kehama and a certain lack of confidence or enterprise on Scott's part prevented them from being fully articulated.

But whilst Kailyal in Kehama had been unable to give the poem the moral weight that Scott suggested (either in conventional terms by acting as an example of right conduct, 'or, on a different level, by enlarging 'our intellectual and moral existence'), Roderick more than fills the bill:

When, by an effort consistent with his character, he rises above the despair in which he feels it disgraceful to be involved, we recognize the salutary workings of repentance in the self-devotedness with which he seeks to retrieve the consequences of his faults. From this point he springs into a new state of moral existence, and his progress, though rapid, is regular and consistent. In solitude and in contemplation he has obtained a knowledge of his own heart, and acquired self-controul; the powers with which nature has originally endowed him, enable him to controul others, and strengthen the influence of his enthusiasm over all within the sphere of his example....Every incident in the poem is brought about by his direction, the energies of all the actors are kindled by his influence, and the victory, which effects the consummation of his wishes, is ensured by his example.

(110)

All in all, Bedford's is the most interesting review of Southey's poetry to appear in the major periodicals, and for reasons that cannot simply be attributed to his friendship for Southey. It builds on the earlier review, and together they offer the most sustained and perceptive attack on Jeffrey's aesthetic theory to appear at this time.

Finally, it is interesting to note how Bedford's review benefits from the success of Byron's poetry. Roderick has something of the Byronic hero about him, and since the appearance of Childe Harold, The Giaour, The Bride of Abydos, and The Corsair, such heroes were acceptable. They posed greater moral problems than Roderick, but at this time were being dealt with leniently by the critics, and in similar terms to those employed by Bedford. But there is none of the sense of unease and discomfort that Ellis and Jeffrey obviously felt in discussing Byron's heroes - once again

the inferiority of Southey's poetry makes it easier for the critic to take up a position which is not seriously compromised by the ambivalence of his response to the work he is discussing.¹

.....

The periodicals' response to the Lake poets is the best known and, perhaps, most important part of their history.² It does not, however, at first sight seem a particularly praiseworthy

1. Blackwood's contributions on Southey are not sufficiently interesting or numerous to deserve serious consideration. By 1817 most of Southey's long poems had appeared, his political apostasy was an established fact, and his activities as a Quarterly reviewer well-known. The most accurate summary of the Magazine's view of him comes in a review, probably by Lockhart, of The Life of Wesley: 'Had Southey flourished forty or fifty years ago, and written half as well as he has written in our time, he might have ranked nem. con. with the first of modern critics, of modern historians, perhaps even of modern poets....How different is his actual case! As a poet, an author of imaginative works in general, how small is the space he covers, how little is he talked or thought of! The Established Church of Poetry will hear of nobody but Scott, Byron, Campbell; and the Lake Methodists themselves will scarcely permit him to be called a burning and a shining light in the same day with their Wordsworth - even their Coleridge' [BM, xv (Feb., 1824), 208-19]. The other contributions in Blackwood's consist of a reprinting of Southey's letter to the Courier replying to attacks made upon him by William Smith and Lord Byron [BM, xvi, (Dec., 1824), 711-15]; an unfavourable review of A Tale of Paraguay [BM, xviii (Sept., 1825), 370-77]; a review by Hartley Coleridge of All for Love; And the Pilgrim to Compostella [BM, xxvi (July, 1829), 62-71], which suggests that Southey should use the Catholic religion as the basis for a long poem (in the same way as he had used the Hindoo religion in The Curse of Kehama, and thus by implication equating Catholicism with Hindooism as a superstitious and inferior religion); and two reviews, one of Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society [BM, xxvi (Oct., 1829), 611-30], and one of Vindiciae Ecclesiae Anglicanae [BM, xxvii (March, 1830), 465-71], both of which laud Southey as part of the Magazine's general attack on the Catholic religion and any suggestion of Catholic emancipation.

2. The reviews of the poetry of Samuel Rogers, Thomas Campbell, Thomas Moore, and John Wilson, are also part of the debate that took place in the periodicals about critical values past and present. I have not dealt with them in this thesis because the reviews of their work tend to confirm rather than develop the beliefs and concepts at work in the reviews of the Lake poets. Also time and space are finite, and even a thesis which deals with the periodicals has its limits.

one. Faced with challenging and innovatory literature, the reviewers all too often display an alarmed hostility and seek refuge in abuse. Jeffrey's infamous attack on Wordsworth, and Coleridge's treatment at the hands of Moore, Hazlitt, and Wilson, provide plenty of evidence for those who would dismiss contemporary criticism of these poets as largely worthless.

But it is not quite as simple as that. There are, after all, those reviews which offer something of value even to a modern reader. In particular, there are Townshend's articles in Blackwood's; admittedly they appeared over thirty years after the publication of Lyrical Ballads, and they benefited from being written to some degree in retrospect, and at a time when Wordsworth's reputation was much more secure. None the less, Townshend displays a literary sensitivity, a knowledge of the range and complexity of the poetry, and a wit and tact, which enable him to take his place as one of the first critics to treat Wordsworth with the discrimination as well as the sympathy that his work demands. We also have Wilson's articles on Wordsworth, and, more importantly, his review of The Ancient Mariner and Christabel which still deserves to be read today. There is also Hazlitt's review of A Lay Sermon which has a passion and clarity that must appeal to many readers who have just emerged from reading Coleridge's somewhat turgid work, and there is Grosvenor Bedford's review of Southey's Roderick. One can also add to these the less convincing but sporadically interesting reviews, such as Lamb's of The Excursion and J.T. Coleridge's of Remorse.

However, the periodicals cannot really be defended in this manner. If the fair-minded, informed, and intelligent reviews were to be put in the scales with those that to a lesser or greater

extent trade in abuse and prejudice, there can be little doubt as to which side the balance would fall. There are some good reviews as I have tried to show, but the real value of examining in detail the reasons why the periodicals responded in the way that they did lies in a rather different direction. To perceive this, we must employ that double focus that I referred to in my introduction to this section of the thesis. Viewed from the standpoint of the poets concerned, the periodicals' response to their work was, with the exceptions I have noted, disappointing and often damaging. When we view the matter from the periodicals' point of view something much more interesting emerges. I do not see Jeffrey as a Coleridgean Iago guilty of 'motiveless malignity', nor do I believe that very many of the reviews of the Lake poets were the result solely of hostility and malice (some are, but they are outnumbered by those which I believe to be valuable). What I think we have is a genuine dilemma - the dilemma which arises when any critic is faced with literature which challenges his preconceptions and fails to fit into the framework of his critical opinions. The reaction of the early nineteenth-century reviewers was conservative (something not unprecedented in literary history), and they retreated to an apparently traditional but, in fact, largely imaginary critical position. In doing so, however, they have left us with a series of reviews which provide a fascinating picture of the way in which the ideas and impulses behind the new literary movement gradually came to the forefront of the public consciousness. Of course this resulted in conflict and confusion. Jeffrey was not alone in the duality of his response to the new emphases in literature - Scott also experienced this. What is important is

that in examining the reviews in depth we are able to recapture some of the complexity of the contemporary response to the new literature. That response is not as reactionary as might sometimes appear, and even when at its most defensive, it often hides an ambivalence of attitude which shows that the reviewers were far from immune to the new spirit of the age.

Chapter Eight

Gentility versus Immorality: Byron and Shelley

Whilst Wordsworth and Coleridge presented the greatest challenge to the accepted literary standards of contemporary reviewers, Byron and Shelley provided an equally complex but rather different problem. It is a problem of particular interest to us because it demonstrates very clearly the interaction of those biases and prejudices identified at the end of Chapter Six, and shows in particular the conflict between what I have called gentility and morality. Both the Quarterly and the Edinburgh, which despite the furore it created in its early days was a Whig not a Radical periodical, were fundamentally concerned with maintaining the status quo. Byron and Shelley threatened this, but not simply in political terms. Byron, in particular, inextricably bound together the private and the public, and no other poet used his art (and his rank) so provocatively to challenge conventional morality. As we shall see, it is this challenge to conventional morality, and sometimes religion, from men of birth and social standing which proved most problematical for the reviewers. Obviously political considerations cannot be separated from this, particularly in Shelley's case, but the emphasis in the periodicals is not predominantly ideological. We shall also see how the literary standards and tastes which are invoked are often grounded in political and class attitudes.

Byron added another dimension to the problem by the enormous popularity which he commanded. To some degree this

usurped what the reviewers considered to be their rightful function (although Jeffrey was quick to point out that they were there to guide rather than direct public taste), but it also allowed a certain freedom of response since the final decision on whether or not Byron would command public favour had been taken out of their hands. The reservations that nearly all the reviewers shared about his politics and morals only further complicated the situation.

Byron was reviewed more extensively than any other writer of the time, and the long section on him which follows is divided into four. The first part deals with the Edinburgh's review of Hours of Idleness and the two quarterlies' reviews of the first two cantos of Childe Harold and their reviews of The Giaour and other Eastern tales - all these reviews, with the exception of the one of Hours of Idleness, appeared between 1812-14; the second part details reviews by Jeffrey and Wilson in the Edinburgh and by Scott in the Quarterly which appeared between 1816-18 - all are favourable and mark the height of Byron's popularity with the quarterlies, and they deal with his most important work before he wrote Don Juan; the third phase of the quarterlies' reception of Byron occurs between 1821-23, and is overshadowed by Don Juan (although the poem is not directly reviewed) and the disapproval that it occasioned; the final section is concerned with Blackwood's treatment of Byron which was at once both infuriating and extremely perceptive.

Byron

The first review of Byron in the Edinburgh was of Hours of Idleness,¹ and the choice of Henry Brougham as the reviewer, particularly since he rarely reviewed poetry, shows that Jeffrey saw the matter as a political one. Brougham certainly did: he launches a swingeing attack upon Byron, including a ponderous joke about the law of minority which in its legal basis is so very typical of the Edinburgh's early reviewers, but he soon gets to the point:

His other plea of privilege, our author rather brings forward in order to waive it. He certainly, however, does allude frequently to his family and ancestors - sometimes in poetry, sometimes in notes; and while giving up his claim on the score of rank, he takes care to remember us of Dr. Johnson's saying, that when a nobleman appears as an author, his merit should be handsomely acknowledged.

(285-6)

Brougham is making a political point, but the way in which Byron appeared to deny his rank and yet use it to gain a hold over his readers is an issue which other reviewers returned to. At this point in time a young lord writing rather bad poetry was a great temptation, particularly when the Review was at its most brash and assertive, and Byron's coy remarks about his parentage and the affectation of the title help explain the ferocity of Brougham's remarks. Possibly a similarity in temperament between reviewer and poet added bite to the review: despite Brougham's remark in his review, it is not the privilege only of poets to be egotists.

The review is unnecessarily severe: although many of the poems are egotistical, imitative, and callow, there

1. ER, xi (Jan., 1808), 285-9.

are enough good ones to suggest to a perceptive critic that Byron deserved encouragement as well as criticism. Indeed, of the sixteen periodicals which also reviewed the volume, eleven were favourable and prophesied a noteworthy future for the poet.¹ The review in the Edinburgh was politically motivated, but Brougham had got the wrong man. Byron considered himself a Whig, and was not a little surprised at the attack upon him:

As an author, I am cut to atoms by the E[dinburgh] Review, it is just out, and has completely demolished my little fabric of fame, this is rather scurvy treatment from a Whig Review, but politics and poetry are different things, & I am no adept in either, I therefore submit in Silence.²

English Bards and Scotch Reviewers broke that silence, but further confusion resulted from Byron's mistaken belief that Jeffrey not Brougham was the reviewer responsible.

The first two cantos of Childe Harold mark the beginning of serious reviewing of Byron's poetry, and the contributions made by both the Edinburgh and the Quarterly have received high praise from Andrew Rutherford:

The traditional accusations of political and literary prejudice cannot be brought against their treatment of Byron, which is characterized over the years by its blend of sympathy and astringency, fairness and

1. W.S.Ward, "Byron's Hours of Idleness and Other than Scotch Reviewers", MLN, 11x (1944), 547-50.

2. Byron's Letters and Journals, ed. L.Marchand, i (1973), 158-9. Byron's attitude to the Reviews was a rather typical mixture of assumed indifference (Marchand, i, 136 and iii, 220), exasperation [The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals, ed. R.E.Prothero (1901), iv, 341 and v, 374] and grudging recognition, by the very intensity of his antipathy, of the importance of the Reviews' good opinion [Byron: A Self-Portrait, ed. P.Quennell (1950), ii, 675].

rigour, Jeffrey's own contributions being particularly impressive. His judicious assessments, still more his continual endeavour to place particular judgments in an appropriate historical and philosophical framework, make his articles rewarding reading even today - and they document most usefully one exceptionally competent and influential reader's developing response to Byron's poetry.¹

Unfortunately, this is an over-simplification: the attitude of the two Reviews was far more subtle and a great deal more mixed than Rutherford allows. It is true, however, that Jeffrey's response is of particular interest. Despite his defensive reaction to Wordsworth and Coleridge, he displays a surprising receptivity to Byron's poetry, although this might be as much due to Byron's simplification of the ideas and themes which informed his poetry as to Jeffrey's willingness to respond to them.

Jeffrey's review of the first two cantos of Childe Harold is more than somewhat equivocal.² Byron's poem had been instantaneously successful; the first edition was sold out

1. Byron: The Critical Heritage, ed. A. Rutherford (1970), 3.

2. ER, xix (Feb., 1812), 466-77. Byron's attitude to Jeffrey is of interest. Throughout most of his career, he regarded Jeffrey with a condescending affection which stemmed from a mistaken belief that Jeffrey's later reviews displayed a magnanimous change of heart from the opinions he expressed in the review of Hours of Idleness (written, of course, by Brougham). Byron felt great satisfaction at having forced a major critic to change his mind (Quennell, i, 253), and he found Jeffrey's reviews a great boost to his morale (ibid., i, 296). By 1817 he realized that Jeffrey's attitude was changing, but he still gave him credit for not capitalizing on his 'domestic destruction' which had provided such an opportunity for many of his detractors (ibid., ii, 396). Even in 1822 he was still prepared to forgive Jeffrey's comments because of his 'kindness by-gone' (Letters and Journals, Prothero, vi, 81), although he soon became a great deal less equable towards his critic (ibid., vi, 89). See J.T. Dwyer, "A Check-list of the primary sources of the Byron-Jeffrey relationship", N&Q, ccv (July, 1960), 256-59 for a fuller account.

within three days of its official publication date, March 10.¹

By the time the Edinburgh appeared in May,² it could say little else but that

Lord Byron has improved marvellously since his last appearance at our tribunal; - and this, though it bear a very affected title, is really a volume of very considerable power, spirit and originality - which not only atones for the evil works of his nonage, but gives promise of a further excellence hereafter; to which it is quite comfortable to look forward.

(466)

As was to happen with Scott, Byron's success demanded some kind of homage from the Edinburgh. But there were also more pressing and less apparent reasons for the praise it gave him. By now the Edinburgh knew of Byron's Whig sympathies, and Childe Harold provided substantial evidence of them. It did so by its unfavourable comments on Wellington's campaign in Spain and its attempt to debunk the glorification of warfare. In MS the poem was a great deal more inflammatory, but Byron acceded to the wishes of Dallas and Murray by removing or altering those stanzas which gave most offence.³ None the less, the poem had important political implications for the Edinburgh, which had never been an enthusiastic supporter of the wars against Napoleon. The Don Cevallos article, which hastened the founding of the Quarterly and frightened Jeffrey into more moderate policies,

1. L. Marchand, Byron: A Biography (1957), i, 325.

2. Theodore Redpath, The Young Romantics and Critical Opinion (1973), 180n.

3. The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry, ed. E.H. Coleridge (1922), ii, xi.

had been concerned with the rising in Spain in 1808 which led to the Peninsular War. Byron's poem presented an opportunity to return to this theme, which was obviously welcome since from its inception

the Review [had] continued to advocate the necessity for attempts at accommodation with Napoleon, and lived up to its self-appointed role as the Cassandra of the Whig party by issuing an unending series of gloomy predictions about the outcome of the Spanish Revolt and the Peninsular War, and dwelling on the ever-increasing invincibility of the French.¹

Even the Edinburgh's supporters were not always happy with this policy, and its opponents accused the Review of supporting France and Napoleon. In 1810 and 1811 Brougham wrote reviews in which he rebutted such accusations² but, in Clive's words, 'The Review continued to predict doom and to advocate pacific policies at every critical juncture....'³ It was certainly doing so in 1812.

One would expect, therefore, the Edinburgh to make political capital out of Byron's poem. At one point Jeffrey refers to the situation in Spain and quotes parts of stanzas lxxxv and lxxxvi from Canto I:

The canto ends with a view of the atrocities of the French; the determined valour of the Spanish peasantry; and some reflections on the extraordinary condition of that people,

'Where all are noble, save Nobility;
None hug a conqueror's chain, save fallen Chivalry!'
'They fight for freedom who were never free;
A kingless people for a nerveless state,
The vassals combat when their chieftains flee,
True to the veriest slaves of Treachery.'

(471-2)

1. Clive, Scotch Reviewers, 100.

2. ER, xvi (Aug., 1810), 354; and ER, xviii (May, 1811), 235-6. As quoted by Clive, 101n.

3. Clive, 101.

But that is a somewhat neutral attitude despite the quotations, and it is preceded by the following passage:

Lord Byron takes the trouble to caution his readers against supposing that he meant to shadow out his own character under the dark and repulsive traits of that which we have just exhibited; a caution which was surely unnecessary - though it is impossible not to observe, that the mind of the noble author has been so far tinged by his strong conception of this Satanic personage, that the sentiments and reflections which he delivers in his own name, have all received a shade of the same gloomy and misanthropic colouring which invests those of his imaginary hero. The general strain of those sentiments, too, is such as we should have thought very little likely to attract popularity, in the present temper of this country. They are not only complexionally dark and disdainful, but run directly counter to very many of our national passions, and most favoured propensities. Lord Byron speaks with the most unbounded contempt of the Portuguese - with despondence of Spain - and in a very slighting and sarcastic manner of wars, and victories, and military heroes in general. Neither are his religious opinions more orthodox, we apprehend, than his politics; for he not only speaks without any respect of priests, and creeds, and dogmas of all descriptions, but doubts very freely of the immortality of the soul, and other points as fundamental.

(466-7)

Although this is merely meant to be part of an account of 'the disadvantages under which this poem lays claim to the public favour', Jeffrey must have been aware of its implications. He states quite clearly that any remark made by Byron in propria persona is not to be trusted, his tone seems to suggest disapproval of the poet's attitude to the war in Spain, and he further undermines Byron's credibility by casting doubt upon the soundness of his religious beliefs. This would seem to herald a major change in the Edinburgh's political stance,

if it were not for a review by Brougham in the following number¹ which is in perfect accord with 'the strong strain of appeasement which runs through the Review until the Napoleonic wars entered their final stage'.²

There are two possible explanations for Jeffrey's apparent inconsistency. To some extent he was obviously trying to bring the Review more into line with public opinion; he had been frightened by the furore created by the Don Cevallos article four years previously, and presumably did not wish to run such a risk again. The second possibility is more interesting. The main purpose of the passage quoted above is to disassociate Byron from his hero; Byron had been warned that many of his readers would identify him with 'Childe Buron', and the alteration to 'Childe Harold' and a disclaimer in the preface did little to counteract this danger. Jeffrey's tone suggests that he is fully aware of the moral implications of too close an identification of poet and hero, and that he is trying to deflect attention away from the more sensational aspects of the poem. In doing so, intentionally or otherwise, he manoeuvres himself into a position which precludes the possibility of using the poem for political comment. Indeed, he is in some danger of denying those political principles with which he must be largely in agreement. It is a fascinating example of the way in which the various impulses motivating

1. ER, xx (July, 1812), 214-34. Quoted by Clive, 101n.

2. Clive, 99.

a Review or reviewer could come into conflict with each other.

There is a similar conflict of interests in Jeffrey's assessment of the literary merits of the poem. It is a conflict between his need to recognize and account for the popularity of the poem; his hostility, as demonstrated by his response to Wordsworth and Coleridge, towards certain aspects of Romanticism; and his desire to adhere to certain moral conventions. His embarrassment is shown in several ways.

A central issue, and one with which the reviewers became increasingly preoccupied, was that of the Byronic hero. At the beginning of his review Jeffrey describes the Childe in no uncertain terms:

Childe Harold is a sated epicure - sickened with the very fulness of prosperity - oppressed with ennui, and stung with occasional remorse; - his heart hardened by a long course of sensual indulgence, and his opinion of mankind degraded by his acquaintance with the baser part of them.

(466)

None the less, Jeffrey cannot help but recognize the Childe's centrality to the poem, and from describing him as a hero 'as oddly chosen as he is imperfectly employed' he goes so far as to ask

whether there is not something piquant in the very novelty and singularity of that cast of misanthropy and universal scorn, which we have already noticed as among the repulsive features of the composition. It excites a kind of curiosity, at least, to see how objects, which have been usually presented under so different an aspect, appear through so dark a medium; and undoubtedly gives great effect to the flashes of emotion and suppressed sensibility that occasionally burst through the gloom. The best parts of the poem, accordingly, are those which embody those stern and disdainful reflexions, to which the author seems to recur with unfeigned cordiality and eagerness - and through which we think we can sometimes discern the strugglings of a gentler feeling, to which he is afraid to abandon himself.

(467-8)

The 'cast of misanthropy and universal scorn' encompasses not only the Childe but Byron himself with all the moral implications which that entails. The hopeful reference to that 'gentler feeling' which the poet disguises so well is obviously an attempt to retreat to safer ground, and hence a recognition that Jeffrey had committed himself further than he had intended. His attraction to the Byronic hero and the 'dark medium' of Byron's verse can be seen in two ways: as a grudging recognition of the cause of the poet's popularity, or as a genuine and instinctive response to a type of poetry which he might well have forcibly rejected if it had not already become popular.

Certainly in praising Childe Harold Jeffrey resorts to critical terminology which seems somewhat inconsistent with his criticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge:

Its chief excellence is a singular freedom and boldness, both of thought and expression, and a great occasional force and felicity of diction, which is the more pleasing that it does not appear to be the result either of long labour or humble imitation. There is, indeed, a tone of self-willed independence and originality about the whole composition - a certain plain manliness and strength of manner, which is infinitely refreshing after the sickly affectations of so many modern writers....

(467)

Freedom, boldness, force, spontaneity and self-willed independence and originality had been a matter for censure only ten years previously, and this makes the attack on 'the sickly affectations of so many modern writers' seem particularly dishonest.

Comparisons of Byron's poetry with that of Scott,

Dr^yden, and Crabbe seem to be made largely for the sake of reassurance, and the summary at the end of the review strikes that note of equivocation which has been sounded throughout:

The work, in short, bears considerable marks of haste and carelessness; and is rather a proof of the author's powers, than an example of their successful exertion. It shows the compass of his instrument, and the power of his hand; though we cannot say that we are very much delighted either with the air he has chosen, or the style in which it is executed.

(475)

Superficially, Jeffrey's review is favourable; it could be little else given the poem's instant popularity, and the political opinions of its author. But there are tensions and contradictions within it which make it of particular interest to us. It is also important because it confronts all the problems which were to concern Jeffrey and George Ellis, the reviewer in the Quarterly, for the next two years: Byron's popularity; the moral problem of the Byronic hero; the poet's political and religious views; the form and import of his poetry; and, in Jeffrey's case, an increasing fascination with a poet of whom he is not sure he should approve.

Byron was as much an embarrassment to the Quarterly as he was to the Edinburgh: a Whig lord writing poetry which was making a fortune for the Quarterly's publisher on the advice of its editor¹ presented obvious problems. Perhaps Gifford felt that a trusted and experienced reviewer was

1. Byron's attitude towards Gifford is interesting. He had a great personal regard for him which is shown in his concern about Gifford's reaction to his poems (Letters and Journals, Prothero, ii, 27, and v, 371-2.), although he felt that his allegiance was to Jeffrey and the Edinburgh (ibid., iv, 32, 54, and 93). By 1822, however, the increasing severity of Jeffrey's criticism meant that Byron lost patience with the Edinburgh (ibid., vi, 89), and turned increasingly towards its rival.

needed to review the first two cantos of Childe Harold,¹ but the choice of the sixty-year-old George Ellis² was unfortunate. One can forgive the ponderous joke about aged reviewers and 'the fascinations of young females' and the pedantic aside about the true nature of 'the Romaunt' which, with a long résumé of the poem, go to make up the first half of the review, but it is difficult to see any justification for Ellis's belief that the poem is really a travelogue with great epic potential.

What begin to emerge, however, as the review continues are the kind of biases which we saw at work within Jeffrey's review. Not surprisingly they are stated somewhat more forcibly, but still without the virulence that might have resulted if Byron had not been so fortunately placed, both in his social position and in Gifford's choice of reviewer. The figure of Childe Harold allows Ellis the usual moral strictures, although, unlike Jeffrey, he fails to admit how essential the hero is to the poem's success. The tone of Ellis's censures is caught by the following passage:

The victim of violent and unrequited passion, whether crushed into the sullenness of apathy, or irritated into habitual moroseness, may become, in the hands of an able poet, very generally and deeply interesting; the human heart is certainly disposed to beat in unison with the struggles of strong and concentrated feeling; but the boyish libertine whose imagination is chilled by his sated appetites, whose frightful gloom is only the result of disappointed selfishness; and 'whose kiss, had been pollution', cannot surely be expected to excite any tender sympathy, and can only be viewed with unmixed disgust.

(195-6)

1. QR, vii (March, 1812), 180-200. Not published until after May 9 (Hayden, 271).

2. See Smiles, i, 126 for account of Ellis's importance in the early days of the Quarterly.

It is typical of the review as a whole, and it is interesting that Ellis makes moral concern the basis both for his political comment -

It is something to be honoured by those whom we love. It is something to the soldier when he returns to the arms of a mother, a wife, or a sister, to see in their eyes the tears of exultation mixing with those of affection, and of pious gratitude to heaven for his safety. These joys of a triumph, it may be said, are mere illusions; but for the sake of such illusions is life chiefly worth having. When we read the preceding sarcasms on the 'bravo's trade', we are induced to ask, not without some anxiety and alarm, whether such are indeed the opinions which a British peer entertains of a British army -

(195)

and for his strictures on Byron's religious opinions:

The common courtesy of society has, we think, very justly proscribed the intrusive introduction of such topics as these into conversation [he has just quoted stanzas iii-vii from Canto II which describe man as 'Poor child of doubt and death, whose hope is built on reeds']; and as no reader probably will open Childe Harold with the view of inquiring into the religious tenets of the author, or of endeavouring to settle his own, we cannot but disapprove, in point of taste, these protracted meditations, as well as the disgusting objects by which some of them are suggested.

(198)

Hayden sees these comments on Byron's unorthodox religious opinions as 'perhaps the wisest objection to such views on the grounds of taste',¹ and certainly Ellis cannot be faulted for defending the moral and religious values of his day. None the less, the rhetoric in defence of the soldier's calling and the appeal to the taboos of polite conversation are an attempt to avoid a direct confrontation with 'the more disturbing aspects of Byron's poem.

The overall impression created by the review is one of amiable but muddled generosity. Ellis goes through the motions of

1. Hayden, 136.

censuring Byron for his moral, political, and religious indiscretions, but the poem has made little impact upon him. It is an extremely ineffective review, not only because Ellis condemns those elements of the poem which give it its greatest strength and lavishes praise on its minor features, but because of his failure to accept the challenge offered by the poem. Byron's popularity, his peculiar position in relation to Murray and Gifford, and the choice of Ellis as reviewer, ensured that the Quarterly's first review of Byron was strangely muted.

During 1813-14 four reviews of Byron's poetry appeared in the two major periodicals. Jeffrey reviewed The Giaour in 1813, and The Corsair and The Bride of Abydos jointly in 1814; Ellis wrote two joint reviews in 1814, one of which dealt with The Giaour and The Bride of Abydos and the other with The Corsair and Lara.

Jeffrey's review of The Giaour¹ was extremely enthusiastic and complimentary.² Political considerations were not relevant on this occasion, and, since the Giaour cannot be identified so easily with Byron as Childe Harold, the moral dilemma was not so great. None the less, Jeffrey twice pulls back from committing himself to Byron's poetic aims. The first occasion occurs when he tempers his enthusiasm for the portrait of the Giaour with a reminder that he is a very different character from Childe Harold:

1. ER, xxi (July, 1813), 299-309.

2. Byron found it favourable enough, and wrote to Thomas Moore: 'The said article is so very mild and sentimental, that it must be written by Jeffrey in love; - you know he is gone to America to marry some fair one, of whom he has been, for several quarters, éperdument amoureux'. (Letters and Journals, Marchand, iii, 94).

What the noble author has most strongly conceived and most happily expressed, is the character of the Giaour; - of which, though some of the elements are sufficiently familiar in poetry, the sketch which is here given appears to us in the highest degree striking and original. The fiery soul of the Marmion and Bertram of Scott, with their love of lofty daring, their scorn of soft contemplation or petty comforts, and their proud defiance of law, religion, and conscience itself, - are combined with something of the constitutional gloom, and the mingled disdain and regret for human nature, which were invented for Childe Harold; while the sterner features of that lofty portraiture are softened down by the prevalence of an ardent passion for the gentlest of human beings, and shaded over by the overwhelming grief which the loss of her had occasioned.

(300-1)

As this passage unwittingly reveals, the Giaour is just as seductive an example of the Byronic hero as Childe Harold. The second example of Jeffrey's retreating to a safer position occurs when, after having initially defined Byron's success in the following terms -

The whole poem, indeed, may be considered as an exposition of the doctrine, that the enjoyment of high minds is only to be found in the unbounded vehemence and strong tumult of the feelings; and that all gentler emotions are tame and feeble, and unworthy to move the soul that can bear the agency of the greater passions. It is the force and feeling with which this sentiment is expressed and illustrated, which gives the piece before us its chief excellence and effect; and has enabled Lord Byron to turn the elements of an ordinary tale of murder into a strain of noble and impassioned poetry -

(301)

he writes at the end of the review:

Energy of character and intensity of emotion are sublime in themselves, and attractive in the highest degree as objects of admiration; but the admiration which they excite, when presented in combination with worthlessness and guilt, is one of the most powerful corrupters and perverters of our moral nature; and is the more to be lamented, as it is most apt to exert its influence on the noblest characters. The poetry of Lord Byron is full of this perversion; and it is because we conceive it capable of producing other and still more delightful sensations than those of admiration, that we wish to see it employed upon subjects less gloomy and revolting than those to which it has hitherto been almost exclusively devoted.

(309)

Even allowing for the somewhat spurious argument about admiration rather than emulation, it is still difficult to see how Jeffrey can equate these latter sentiments with his assertion that Byron had turned 'the elements of an ordinary tale of murder into a strain of noble and impassioned poetry'. We can see quite clearly how Jeffrey's literary judgements clash with the moral stance that he wishes to adopt in the Review. His search for that 'gentler feeling' which he claimed existed somewhere in Childe Harold and his desire for 'subjects less gloomy and revolting' in this review are merely pious hopes. They have nothing to do with the functioning or impact of Byron's poetry and, as we shall see, Jeffrey found that they became increasingly untenable.

None the less, Jeffrey responded more readily to the poem than perhaps even he realized. This is shown by a comparison with Ellis's review in the Quarterly which dealt with The Bride of Abydos as well as The Giaour.¹ Ellis begins by replying to Jeffrey's remark that 'the greater part of polite readers would now no more think of sitting down to a whole Epic, than to a whole ox' (itself a hit at Ellis's earlier assessment of Childe Harold as a possible epic):

it has lately been discovered, that poetical fragments may, without inconvenience, be substituted for epic or other poems. It is obvious, that to embellish striking incidents by splendid description, is the boast of the poet, and that from these exertions of his fancy must be derived the principal enjoyment of the reader. Hence it seems to follow, that the interests of both parties may be promoted, by agreeing to reduce every species of composition to its quintessence, and to omit, by common consent, the many insipid ingredients which swelled the redundant narratives of our ancestors.

(332)

1. QR, x (Jan., 1814), 331-54. Published between March 25 and April 7, 1814 (Hayden, 271).

Ellis's heavy irony results from something more than a mere squabble between rival reviewers; it points to the very basic difference between his approach and Jeffrey's. Jeffrey defended the episodic structure of The Giaour, and in doing so praised the force and originality of the poem; Ellis, on the other hand, is not prepared to accept anything which strays too far from the traditional norms.

The same is true of his attitude towards the Giaour. There is some truth in his charge that

It is surely not quite consistent with [the Giaour's] feelings of remorse, that he should boast of his inability to 'whine or sigh', of his determination to 'obtain or die', and consequently to risk the life of Leila for his own gratification; and that he should justify her murder, by the avowal that he, himself, would have acted like Hassan under a similar provocation.

(342)

The essence of the Byronic hero lies, of course, in that inconsistency, but few reviewers were prepared to explore this, and contented themselves instead with conventional moral disclaimers. We have seen how Jeffrey withdrew from too close an identification with Byron's aims, but that at least was better than Ellis's reaction which was to give preference to The Bride of Abydos over The Giaour on the grounds that the former 'does not contain a single offensive passage' and that its heroine is a far better woman than the heroine of the other poem.

Ellis's dilemma is all too obvious: it is the problem of equating Byron's popularity with his dubious morality, coupled with a lack of sympathy for the kind of poetry he was writing. He takes refuge in the tepid but inoffensive The Bride of Abydos and hopes for better things to come.

Jeffrey's review of The Corsair and The Bride of Abydos,¹

1. ER, xxiii (April, 1814), 198-229.

and Ellis's of The Corsair and Lara¹ mark the culmination of what can be seen as the first phase of their periodicals' reviewing of Byron's poetry. Byron's popularity was by now phenomenal, and this helped confirm certain traits which, as we have seen, were becoming apparent in these early reviews.

Jeffrey, in particular, now made a determined effort to define the nature of Byron's popularity:

He has delineated, with unequalled force and fidelity, the workings of those deep and powerful emotions which alternately enchant and agonize the minds that are exposed to their inroads; and represented, with a terrible energy, those struggles and sufferings and exaltations, by which the spirit is at once torn and transported, and traits of divine inspiration, or demoniacal possession, thrown across the tamer features of humanity. It is by this spell, chiefly, we think, that he has fixed the admiration of the public; and while other poets delight by their vivacity, or enchant by their sweetness, he alone has been able to command the sympathy, even of reluctant readers, by the natural magic of his moral sublimity, and the terrors and attractions of those overpowering feelings, the depths and the heights of which he seems to have so successfully explored.

(198-9)

It is a bold statement and one which goes so far as to credit Byron's poetry with 'moral sublimity'. In order to explain it Jeffrey has to develop his own theory of the development of literature and society: in the earliest days 'men's passions are violent, and their sensibility dull', but as society advances all 'manifestation of strong feeling is soon proscribed as coarse and vulgar; and first a cold and ceremonious politeness, and afterwards a more gay and heartless dissipation, represses, and in part eradicates the warmer affections and generous passions of our nature, along with its more dangerous and turbulent emotions'. However, another

1. QR, xi (July, 1814), 428-57. Published after October 20, 1814 (Hayden, 272).

stage follows, and

when generations have passed away, during which all persons of education have employed themselves in doing the same frivolous things, with the same despair either of interest or glory, it can scarcely fail to happen, that the more powerful spirits will awaken to a sense of their own degradation and unhappiness; - a disdain and impatience of the petty pretensions and joyless elegancies of fashion will gradually arise: and strong and natural sensations will again be sought, without dread of their coarseness, in every scene which promises to supply them. This is the stage of society in which fanaticism has its second birth, and political enthusiasm its first true development - when plans of visionary reform, and schemes of boundless ambition are conceived, and almost realized by the energy with which they are pursued - the era of revolutions and projects - of vast performances, and infinite expectations.

Poetry, of course, reflects and partakes in this great transformation. It becomes more enthusiastic, authoritative and impassioned; and feeling the necessity of dealing in more powerful emotions than suited the tranquil and frivolous age which preceded, naturally goes back to those themes and characters which animated the energetic lays of its first rude inventors. The feats of chivalry, and the loves of romance, are revived with more than their primitive wildness and ardour. For the sake of the natural feeling they contain, the incidents and diction of the old vulgar ballads are once more imitated and surpassed; and poetry does not disdain, in pursuit of her new idol of strong emotion, to descend to the very lowest conditions of society, and to stir up the most revolting dregs of utter wretchedness and depravity.

(200-1)

As a description of his own age and contemporary poetry, Jeffrey's account is of interest. But what is really important is his attempt to explore the reasons for Byron's success by placing him within the context of his age. Nor is he unaware of the implications that his theory has for other poets, including Wordsworth, although the tone of his remarks remains equivocal:

Instead of ingenious essays, elegant pieces of gallantry, and witty satires all stuck over with classical allusions, we have, in our popular poetry, the dreams of convicts, and the agonies of Gypsy women, - and the exploits of buccaneers, freebooters, and savages - and pictures to shudder at, of remorse, revenge, and insanity - and the triumph of generous feelings in scenes of anguish and terror - and the heroism of low-born affection and the tragedies of vulgar atrocity. All these various subjects have been found interesting, and

have succeeded, in different degrees, in spite of accompaniments which would have disgusted an age more recently escaped from barbarity: And as they agree in nothing but in being the vehicles of strong and natural emotions, and have generally pleased, nearly in proportion to the quantity of that emotion they conveyed, it is difficult not to conclude, that they have pleased only for the sake of that quality - a growing appetite for which may be regarded as the true characteristic of this age of the world.

(201)

It is a pity that Jeffrey had not been a little more perceptive in his earlier dealings with poets writing about 'the dreams of convicts, and the agonies of Gypsey women'; nor must it be forgotten that in the same year as this review he was to publish his attack on The Excursion. As we saw in his reviews of Childe Harold and The Giaour, the need to explain Byron's popularity and the attraction he felt for the poetry led him into a position at odds with beliefs and attitudes stated elsewhere.

The review goes on to become almost adulatory. Having explained that it is by the 'portraits of the interior of human nature that the poetry of the present day is distinguished from all that preceded it' and perceptively pointing out how Byron, Scott, and Southey borrow only the 'situations and unrestrained passions of the state of society from which they have taken their characters - and have added all the sensibility and delicacy from the stores of their own experience', Jeffrey enthusiastically praises Byron's descriptions of Greece, his depiction of 'the gentleness and submission of the females of these regions', and

a style always vigorous and original, though sometimes quaint and affected, and more frequently strained, harsh, and abrupt - a diction and versification invariably spirited, and almost always harmonious and emphatic: Nothing diluted in short, or diffused into weakness, but full of life, and nerve, and activity - expanding only in the eloquent expression of strong and favourite affections, and everywhere

else concise, energetic, and impetuous - hurrying on with a disdain of little ornaments and accuracies, and not always very solicitous about being comprehended by readers of inferior capacity.

(205-6)

The Corsair is preferred to The Bride of Abydos, which seems a reasonable judgement. Much is made of Byron's use of the heroic couplet in The Corsair, but any suspicion that Jeffrey liked the poem for its eighteenth-century verse-form is partly allayed by his statement that its charm lies as much in its subject-matter as in its versification.

Although this is Jeffrey's most favourable review of Byron's poetry to date, it is not entirely free from that concern with moral issues displayed in earlier reviews. The predominant consideration is again the Byronic hero, and, although Jeffrey shrugs off the problem when discussing Conrad, the hero of The Corsair, he writes at the end of the review:

We still wish he would present us with personages with whom we could more entirely sympathize. At present, he will let us admire nothing but adventurous courage in men, and devoted gentleness in women. There is no intellectual dignity or accomplishment about any of his characters; and no very enlightened or equitable principles of morality. We have made the best apology we could for this tribe of heroes, in the remarks we have ventured upon at the beginning; and are aware of the difficulty of exhibiting strong passions in respectable persons. But it belongs to a genius like his, to overcome such difficulties; and he will never be thoroughly nor universally pleasing, till he learns to bespeak our interest for beings a little more like those whom we have been accustomed to love and admire.

(228)

But Jeffrey has gone too far to turn back, and following his earlier remarks this seems a mere taking-out of insurance.

Ellis's review - his last one of Byron since he was to die in the following year - also demonstrates in a rather different way the hardening of attitudes present in previous reviews.

As we saw in his reaction to Childe Harold and his preference for The Bride of Abydos over The Giaour, Ellis had never been at ease with Byron's poetry. His review of The Corsair and Lara, although outwardly favourable, has an irascibility about it which confirms this.

Most of the review is taken up by extract and a long résumé of the plots of the two poems. It opens, however, with a sarcastic reference to Byron's supposed intention of giving up writing poetry:

When a young man, of a lively and vigorous mind, is once fairly possessed by the demon of poetry, he can no longer be considered as a free agent; but must in equity be absolved from the performance of any resolutions, which he may have formed without duly weighing the uncertain duration of his sane intervals, and the probable recurrence of his paroxysms of inspiration.

(428)

As we know from comments later in the review, Jeffrey's enthusiastic account of the impulses motivating modern poetry was very much in Ellis's mind, and the references to the 'demon of poetry', the 'uncertain duration of his sane intervals' and the 'paroxysms of inspiration', were probably aimed as much at the Edinburgh as at Byron.

Ellis is unimpressed by Lara, but admits that The Corsair is 'the most finished and the most beautiful of Lord Byron's productions'. This echoes Jeffrey's judgement, and, again like Jeffrey, Ellis is aware of the similarity that exists between Byron's heroes. He, however, goes much further than Jeffrey:

The objection is, that Conrad is a personage so eccentric, so oddly compounded of discordant qualities, and so remote from common nature, that it is difficult to sympathize in his feelings, at the same time that the affinity of his character to those of the Giaour and Childe Harold, is so marked, as to do away the merit, whatever it may be, of singularity, and to give him the appearance of a mere copy from a capricious original.

(453)

Ellis then suggests that all Byron's eastern tales in fact 'were originally collected for the purpose of being wrought into a series of adventures, tending to illustrate and develop the whimsical character of that Childe'. Obviously the moral issues raised by the Childe come to the fore again, and Ellis points out that the reader should not but does sympathize with that 'selfish, haughty, merciless villain', Conrad, and forgives if not loves 'the criminal' Gulnare:

Now, whether this, or any other incongruities of the same kind, which may be formed in Lord Byron's series of tales, arise, as we have supposed, from the original plan of Childe Harold, or from any peculiarity in the writer's fundamental notions of morality, it is equally certain that his poetical powers are very great and various. With his subjects we have been often displeased; his language, we think, is not unfrequently obscure, and his versification careless: but he seems to us to possess, to a degree which must always command admiration, that originality which is the sure attribute of genius.

(455)

That is the equivocal judgement which best sums up Ellis's attitude to Byron: he cannot deny his popularity, his talent, or his originality, but his doubts about the poet's morality, choice of subject, and technical accomplishment, remain to the end.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Ellis attacks Jeffrey's cyclic account of literary and social history. In doing so he emphasises the political implications which Jeffrey has refrained from making too apparent:

The last twenty years have, doubtless, been wonderfully fertile of crimes and miseries, and there have been some persons in this country who have hailed, with joy and praise, every step of that desolating tyranny, which threatened to spread over the world, and awakened in its progress all those strong emotions which are pronounced to be so delectable. But these persons were not very numerous, and certainly not legitimate arbiters of taste, or of poetical talent.

(456)

Once again the Edinburgh has been reminded of its antagonism towards the war against Napoleon; not surprisingly, given the views expressed by Byron, and what appeared to be the defeat of Napoleon with his incarceration on Elba. Ellis then goes on to take issue with another of Jeffrey's comments; that it is by the 'portraits of the interior of human nature that the poetry of the present day is distinguished from all that preceded it':

the writer, who seeks to excite any emotion, will never effect this by attempting to analyse its nature and origin, but must content himself with describing its effects, because it is only with these that his readers can be supposed to be conversant....The secret sensibility which lurks within our bosoms, which pervades the whole animated frame, and transmits through it the indications of joy or grief, of pleasure or pain, but of which the excess is suffocating and unutterable, cannot itself become the subject of description. To attempt such description is, we think, to exceed the legitimate pretensions of poetry, and to invade the province of metaphysics.

(457)

A legitimate point of view, perhaps, but it illustrates Ellis's lack of sympathy with Byron's aims, and it also shows how far Jeffrey had gone in responding to some of the changes that had taken place in contemporary thinking about literature.

The second phase of the two leading Reviews' reception of Byron's poetry consists of three reviews by Jeffrey and one by John Wilson in the Edinburgh, and two by Walter Scott in the Quarterly. These constitute a new phase, not simply because all the reviews are favourable and some particularly perceptive and intelligent, but because they deal with Byron's most important poems before 'the sad truth which hovers o'er my desk Turns what was once romantic to burlesque'. Canto Three of Childe Harold and Manfred are his most considerable achievements before he comes

to write Don Juan, and Beppo is important as a transitional poem. These, and the final canto of Childe Harold, are dealt with in this period, which marks the height of Byron's popularity with the two Reviews.

The first of Jeffrey's reviews was of Canto Three of Childe Harold and The Prisoner of Chillon.¹ Theodore Redpath has given it great praise:

This review of Jeffrey's is admirably sensitive and understanding. He picks out unerringly the best passages, describes them vividly and accurately, and goes a long way with the spirit of the poetry. His review has the virtues, but also possibly some of the weaknesses, of balance and poise. He is neither as enthusiastic nor as fanatically condemnatory as some of the other reviewers. On the other hand, he does rightly retain his own scale of moral values, and makes it felt when it seems relevant. How much we value Jeffrey's liberal-minded sanity and balance will depend on our whole attitude to criticism, literature, and, indeed, life.²

The tone of the review certainly creates the impression of fair-mindedness, and Jeffrey's refusal to sensationalize Byron's private life is commendable. None the less, the review is not as good as Redpath suggests, and it needs to be put into the context of Jeffrey's reviewing of Byron as a whole.

To begin with, Jeffrey goes out of his way to make sure that his support for Byron and his appreciation of changing literary perspectives cannot be misconstrued as in any way lessening his strictures on the Lake poets. After placing Byron above all his contemporaries 'if 'the finest poetry be that which leaves the deepest impression on the minds of its readers' and reiterating

1. ER, xxvii (Dec., 1816), 277-310.

2. T. Redpath, The Young Romantics and Critical Opinion 1807-1824 (1973), 29.

his by now accustomed remark that 'To produce great effects, [Byron] felt that it was necessary to deal only with the greater passions', Jeffrey launches an attack on the Lake poets:

But we must say, that it would afford us still greater pleasure to find these tuneful gentlemen [i.e. Wordsworth and Southey whom, Jeffrey acknowledges, have been imitated by Byron] returning the compliment which Lord Byron has here paid to their talents, and forming themselves on the model rather of his imitations, than of their own originals. In these imitations they will find that, though he is sometimes abundantly mystical, he never, or at least very rarely, indulges in absolute nonsense - never takes his lofty flights upon mean or ridiculous occasions - and, above all, never dilutes his strong conceptions and magnificent imaginations with a flood of oppressive verbosity. (278)

Jeffrey then moves on to consider Byron's faults; the greatest being 'far too great a monotony in the moral colouring of his pictures, and too much repetition of the same sentiments and maxims'. Ellis too had complained about the similarity of Byron's heroes, but Jeffrey is a little more sympathetic in attributing to such figures 'a sort of demoniacal sublimity, not without some traits of the ruined Archangel'. But enough is enough, and Jeffrey recognizes that Byron is certainly guilty of depicting the same hero in a variety of poses.

Jeffrey recognizes that a substantial part of his objection to this is a result of moral objections, and, in a passage worthy of Hazlitt at his most inspired, he makes a determined attempt to define the nature of those objections:

A great living poet is not like a distant volcano, or an occasional tempest. He is a volcano in the heart of our land, and a cloud that hangs over our dwellings; and we have some cause to complain, if, instead of genial warmth and grateful shade, he darkens and inflames our atmosphere with perpetual explosions of fiery torrents and pitchy vapours. Lord Byron's poetry, in short, is too attractive and too famous to lie dormant or inoperative; and therefore, if it produce any painful or pernicious effects, there will be murmurs, and ought to be suggestions of alteration. (280)

A few lines later he makes his point again, but somewhat more soberly:

These [Byron's claims that courage, affection, and imagination, are 'not only akin to Guilt, but the parents of Misery'], it appears to us, are not merely errors in taste, but perversions of morality; and, as a great poet is necessarily a Moral Teacher, and gives forth his ethical lessons, in general, with far more effect and authority than any of his graver brethren, he is peculiarly liable to the censures reserved for those who turn the means of improvement to purposes of corruption.

(280-1)

Presumably this is an example of what Dr. Redpath sees as 'Jeffrey's liberal-minded sanity and balance' where he so rightly retains 'his own scale of moral values, and makes it felt when it seems relevant'. There is much justification for such a point of view, although, remembering Wordsworth's conception of the role of the poet, one wonders how Jeffrey can equate this with his attack on The Excursion. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of Jeffrey's comments is his attempt to define his position rather than merely relying on the conventional, vague, and unsubstantiated innuendos about the undesirability of Byron's attitudes. The whole question of the relationship between art and morality was central to the Romantic period, and was a problem that remained unresolved by many others at the time. Jeffrey's view is too much rooted in the eighteenth century (although not exclusively so) for him to be seen as a precursor to Arnold and Leavis in arguing for the high moral seriousness of literature, and perhaps the best point he makes is the one about the artist's public responsibility:

it is nevertheless true, that a public benefactor becomes a debtor to the public; and is, in some degree, responsible for the employment of those gifts which seem to be conferred upon him, not merely for his own delight, but for the delight and improvement of his fellows through all generations.

(280)

That does not mean, of course, that the artist has necessarily to conform to conventional morality, and Jeffrey seems to have recognized this in his review of The Corsair when he talked of 'the natural magic of [Byron's] moral sublimity'. He returns to this again in his comments on Canto three of Childe Harold when he claims that the poem is 'substantially a contemplative and ethical work' and that its finest parts are those which 'embody the weight of [Byron's] moral sentiments, or disclose the lofty sympathy which binds the despiser of Man to the glorious aspects of Nature'. Unfortunately he does not explain what he means or explore the problem further, and his overall judgement on Byron is disappointing but not surprising:

We do not consider it as unfair, therefore, to say that Lord Byron appears to us to be the zealous apostle of a certain fierce and magnificent misanthropy, which has already saddened his poetry with too deep a shade, and not only led to a great misapplication of great talents, but contributed to render popular some very false estimates of the constituents of human happiness and merit.

(281)

Fair comment, perhaps; but the suspicion remains, thanks to those comments about Byron's poetry having an underlying moral import, that this is based on convention rather than conviction.

This impression is strengthened, and much of the impact of the review lost, when Jeffrey discusses Byron's assessment of Napoleon in Canto three, and argues against the view, central to the concept of the Byronic hero, that 'He who ascends to mountain-tops, shall find The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow'. This leads him into the extraordinary statement that

It will be found, we believe, accordingly, that the master spirits of their age have always escaped the unhappiness which is here supposed to be the inevitable lot of extraordinary talents; and that this strange tax upon genius

has only been levied upon those who held the secondary shares of it. Men of truly great powers of mind have generally been cheerful, social, and indulgent; - while a tendency to sentimental whining, or fierce intolerance, may be ranked among the surest symptoms of little souls and inferior intellects.

(299)

It is a pleasant thought, but hardly one susceptible of proof.

A great deal of the perceptiveness and intelligence of Jeffrey's earlier comments is dissipated by this silly assertion, and the even sillier list of men whom he believes combined greatness with happiness.

Before dealing with the Third Canto of Childe Harold Jeffrey praises Lara, The Siege of Corinth, and Parasina, but refuses to discuss the shorter lyrics which obviously refer to Byron's marriage. The praise is not indiscriminate, and shows an appreciation of the darker aspects of Byron's poetry which is not altogether in accord with his view of the poet as moral teacher. His comments on the Third Canto of Childe Harold are generous but predictable: he wonders, as he did with the first two cantos, that the poem works without plot or characterization, but decides, as we have seen, that it is 'substantially a contemplative and ethical work'; he continues to believe that some kind of reformation is possible in the Childe, and that 'his misanthropy, thus softened over by habits of calmer contemplation, appears less active and impatient, even although more deep-rooted than before'; and he has to acknowledge that it is no longer possible to distinguish between the views of Byron and his hero. The extracts from Canto Three are well-chosen and highly praised; the remarks on The Prisoner of Chillon short but again favourable; and Jeffrey concludes by commenting on the shorter more personal poems:

We cannot maintain our accustomed tone of levity, or even speak like calm literary judges, in the midst of these agonizing traces of a wounded and distempered spirit. Even our admiration is at last swallowed up in a most painful feeling of pity and of wonder. It is impossible to mistake these for fictitious sorrows, conjured up for the purpose of poetical effect. There is a dreadful tone of sincerity, and an energy that cannot be counterfeited in the expression of wretchedness and alienation from human kind, which occurs in every page of this publication; and as the author has at last spoken out in his own person, and unbosomed his griefs a great deal too freely to his readers, the offence now would be to entertain a doubt of their reality.

(309)

Byron was, of course, something of a poseur, and Jeffrey's reaction is a little over-emotive. As we shall see, Walter Scott dealt with the problem far more realistically.

During the course of the review Jeffrey also deals with the question of Byron's apparent debt to Wordsworth, and quotes stanzas lxxii, lxxxviii, and xcvi from Canto Three as examples of this. Perhaps it is unfair to expect anything else, but it is a little sad that Jeffrey cannot see how the similarity is never more than superficial, and that Byron is distorting and exaggerating impulses and ideas used with much greater sensitivity and awareness by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

It is difficult to summarize Jeffrey's review, although obviously it is an important part of his thinking on Byron. Its greatest strength is the instinctive sympathy with Byron's poetry which is shown by the generosity of the praise and, more importantly, the judicious choice of quotations: set against that is the attack on the Lake poets, the facile comments about great men and happiness, and the lingering hopes for the Childe's conversion to a more cheerful disposition. At the centre of the review lies Jeffrey's

unresolved dilemma about the moral responsibility of the poet: his definition of the poet as moral teacher could have been used to explore that 'moral sublimity' that he perceives at times in Byron's work, but he decides instead to revert to a much more conventional position by stressing the more obvious and commonplace objections to Byron's attitudes. But the review has served an important purpose, although, paradoxically, Byron's popularity appears to have made it unnecessary:

Wherever a work, therefore, is very popular, and where the general opinion of its merits appears to be substantially right, we think ourselves at liberty to leave it out of our chronicle, without incurring the censure of neglect or inattention. - A very rigorous application of this maxim might have saved our readers the trouble of reading what we now write, - and, to confess the truth, we write it rather to gratify ourselves, than with the hope of giving them much information.

(282)

The last comment points to the true function of the review: it has enabled Jeffrey to exorcise, although not to resolve, the doubts that had been troubling him as he found himself becoming increasingly attracted to Byron's poetry.

Certainly in his reviews of Manfred and Beppo, Jeffrey appears relatively unconcerned by the problems about Byron's poetry which had been worrying him up to this point. When reviewing Manfred¹ he makes it quite clear that it is the power of the poem and the character of Manfred which he finds most impressive.² He makes the obvious point that in Manfred 'we recognize at once the gloom and potency of that soul which burned and blasted and fed upon

1. ER, xxviii (Aug., 1817), 418-31.

2. See Hayden, 145, for a rather different reading of this review. He recognizes Jeffrey's desire to play down objections to Byron's poem, but I cannot agree with him that 'Jeffrey's review itself was far from enthusiastic'.

itself in Harold, and Conrad, and Lara...', but now the fiercest part of such misanthropy is 'quenched in the gloom of a deeper despondency'. No overt comment is made about the moral temper of such a character, and Jeffrey emphasises instead how the poem 'is a grand and terrific vision of a being invested with superhuman attributes, in order that he may be capable of more than human sufferings....' It is Manfred, 'actor and sufferer', who is the centre of the action, and the other characters and the supernatural machinery are only a means of centering attention upon him.

Jeffrey writes:

If we can once conceive of him as a real existence, and enter into the depth and the height of his pride and his sorrows, we may deal as we please with the means that have been used to furnish us with this impression, or to enable us to attain to this conception. We may regard them but as types, or metaphors, or allegories: But he is the thing to be expressed, and the feeling and the intellect of which all these are but shadows.

(420)

This is a remarkable passage, and one which indicates a genuine response to the poem. Manfred contains certain gothic elements which might have offended Jeffrey, but he ignores them in his effort to stress the central importance of the hero.

Jeffrey also readily accepts another controversial aspect of the poem. He recognizes that the poem has faults: it 'fatigues and overawes us by the uniformity of its terror and solemnity'; the subject of incest is 'painful and offensive' and 'not a thing to be at all brought before the imagination'; the lyrical songs of the Spirits are too long; and there is too much pedantry in the whole poem, particularly in Manfred's numerous classical allusions. However, these things would only be relevant if Manfred was to be

considered 'as a proper drama, or even as a finished poem', but this is not the case since Byron

contemplated but a dim and magnificent sketch of a subject which did not admit of more accurate drawing, or more brilliant colouring. Its obscurity is a part of its grandeur; - and the darkness that rests upon it, and the smoky distance in which it is lost, are all devices to increase its majesty, to stimulate our curiosity, and to impress us with deeper awe.

(430)

So Jeffrey not only praises the unconventional structure of the poem; he also uses it to minimise the poem's other faults.

His review of Beppo,¹ his last on Byron for three years, marks the height of his enthusiasm for the poet's work. The poem was generally well-received,² although some reviewers, like the one in the Eclectic Review, found it 'licentious in its moral, occasionally vulgar and profane in its expressions, and rather tedious in its narrative'.³ Jeffrey, obviously aware that the anonymously published poem was by Byron, finds little fault with it. He concedes that it is 'in itself, absolutely a thing of nothing', but he responds to its gaiety, frivolity, and enthusiasm. He praises its versification, and has obviously been amused and entertained. It is the last time that we see him respond so spontaneously to Byron's poetry.

Before either of Jeffrey's reviews on Manfred or Beppo appeared, Walter Scott had published his review of Canto Three of Childe Harold in the Quarterly.⁴ Scott's review is of great value, not because

1. ER, xxix (Feb., 1818), 302-10.

2. Hayden, 146-7.

3. Rutherford, 121.

4. QR, xvi (Oct., 1816), 172-208. Published 11-2-1817 (Hayden, 273).

it sheds new light on Byron, but because his equanimity and kindness bring a sense of perspective to the discussion - something always necessary given Byron's popularity, and the sensational aspects of his poetry. Scott's review is also something of a self-justification: Hayden has pointed out how Scott's defence of Byron's careless style is really a defence of his own;¹ and his remarks about the use of historical and geographical background in imaginative literature also reflect his concerns as poet and novelist.

Balance is the dominating characteristic of the review.

He opens the review by admitting that Byron is an example of

the Muse having descended upon a bard of a wounded spirit, and lent her lyre to tell, and we trust to soothe, afflictions of no ordinary description, afflictions originating probably in that singular combination of feeling which has been called the poetical temperament, and which has so often saddened the days of those on whom it has been conferred.

(173)

But he has no intention of emulating Jeffrey in redefining the nature and progress of English poetry to account for this, and instead points to the dangers involved in the poetical temperament, particularly in its exercise of the imagination:

The 'imagination all compact', which the greatest poet who ever lived has assigned as the distinguishing badge of his brethren, is in every case a dangerous gift. It exaggerates, indeed, our expectations, and can often bid its possessor hope, where hope is lost to reason: but the delusive pleasure arising from these visions of imagination, resembles that of a child whose notice is attracted by a fragment of glass to which a sun-beam has given momentary splendour. He hastens to the spot with breathless impatience, and finds the object of his curiosity and expectation is equally vulgar and worthless. Such is the man of quick and exalted powers of imagination. His fancy over-estimates the object of his wishes, and pleasure, fame, distinction, are alternately pursued, attained, and despised when in his power.

(173-4)

It is a sane Augustan view of the matter, and it is particularly important in enabling Scott to set the tone for the résumé of

1. Hayden, 144.

Byron's career which follows.

In that résumé Scott quite deliberately discusses the relationship between Byron's poetry and his public and private life. Not only was this now inevitable in view of the opening stanzas of Canto Three of Childe Harold, but Byron's compulsive self-dramatization and the succès de scandale of his poetry were by this time obvious and legitimate concerns for any contemporary reviewer - Scott's realization of this is far preferable to Jeffrey's rather prim refusal to discuss Byron's private life. 1816 was the year of Byron's separation from his wife and his departure from England with all the attendant publicity, and Scott's review came at a time when, although the more sensational aspects of the affair had faded a little, it was still fresh in his readers' minds.

Having gently chidden the Edinburgh for the reception it gave to Hours of Idleness, Scott goes on to describe the appearance of the first two Cantos of Childe Harold. He is particularly perceptive in illustrating how this involved Byron in adopting a deliberately aggressive and provocative pose towards his readers:

The assuming of such a character as the medium of communicating his poetry and his sentiments indicated a feeling towards the public, which, if it fell short of contemning their favour, disdained, at least, all attempt to propitiate them. Yet the very audacity of this repulsive personification, joined to the energy with which it was supported, and to the indications of a bold, powerful, and original mind which glanced through every line of the poem, electrified the mass of readers, and placed at once upon Lord Byron's head the garland for which other men of genius have toiled long, and which they have gained late.

(175)

To counteract this, Scott then describes Byron's personality with sympathy and generosity; and the poet's youth, beauty, and personal

virtues are stressed with a tactful acknowledgement of the existence of a real rather than an affected melancholy. Again one has to remember the public controversy surrounding Byron at this time to appreciate the value of Scott's comments.

Scott acknowledges the similarity between Byron's heroes and the way in which they constantly mirror certain aspects of their author's character, but, in what may be a reference to the rumours about the incestuous relationship between Byron and his half-sister, he claims that 'falsehood and malice alone can impute to him any real cause for hopeless remorse or gloomy misanthropy'. The possible reasons he gives for Byron's self-identification with his heroes are interesting: perhaps, Hamlet-like, Byron wishes to place himself in 'supposed situations of guilt and danger, as some men love instinctively to tread the giddy edge of a precipice'; possibly 'these disguises were assumed capriciously as a man might chuse the cloak, poniard, and dark-lantern of a bravo, for his disguise at a masquerade'; perhaps he had been carried away by his success in portraying such figures; or perhaps it was simply in defiance of those critics who had objected to the *Childe* in the first place. Scott is too kind to point it out directly, but all the possibilities involve, to a greater or lesser extent, an element of posturing and self-dramatization on the part of the poet. It is an astute assessment on Scott's part.

Despite his obvious sympathy with Byron, Scott has no choice but to disagree with his political opinions, although he does so with as little acrimony as possible. He takes issue with Byron's description of Waterloo, and he pays obsequious compliments to Wellington (so ostentatiously ignored by Byron). His main

attack, however, is not on Byron, but on those

whose general opinions concerning the policy of Europe are so closely and habitually linked with their party prejudices at home, that they see in the victory of Waterloo only the triumph of Lord Castlereagh; and could the event have been reversed, would have thought rather of the possible change of seats in St. Stephen's, than of the probable subjugation of Europe. Such were those who, hiding perhaps secret hopes with affected despondence, lamented the madness which endeavoured to make a stand against the Irresistible whose military calculations were formed on plans far beyond the comprehension of all other minds; and such are they who, confuted by stubborn facts, now affect to mourn over the consequences of a victory which they had pronounced impossible.

(193-4)

That is directed at the Edinburgh although, as we have seen, its comments on the political implications of Byron's poetry were more than a little muted. Possibly Jeffrey's refusal to comment upon Byron's attitude to Waterloo and the praise he gave to the account of Rousseau when reviewing Canto Three of Childe Harold prompted Scott's remarks. Certainly Scott attacks Rousseau whom he dismisses as 'a frenzied sophist', and he has little patience with Byron's hopes that after the failure of the French Revolution 'mankind must and will begin the same work anew, in order to do it better and more effectually'. But very astutely he realizes that Byron's political views were more than a little inconsistent:

we cannot trace in Lord Byron's writings any systematic attachment to a particular creed of politics, and he appears to us to seize the subjects of public interest upon the side in which they happen to present themselves for the moment, with this qualification, that he usually paints them on the shaded aspect, perhaps that their tints may harmonize with the sombre colours of his landscape.

(194)

It is an important point, and one which helps explain to some extent the low-key response by both Reviews to the political ideas in Byron's poetry.

Scott's judgement on the literary merits of Byron's poems

are reasonably sound. He acknowledges the popularity of the Eastern tales without praising them excessively, and he finds The Prisoner of Chillon an interesting poem, but inferior to Childe Harold. His comments on Canto Three, although not comparable to Jeffrey's instinctive sympathy with the poem and astute choice of extracts, show that he realizes its superiority to the preceding cantos.

Although Scott confronts and thereby lessens the unhealthy excitement which surrounded Byron and his poetry at this time, and although he makes his political point whilst acknowledging that Byron is fundamentally apolitical, his review is finally limited. It had to be by its very nature - it depends upon common-sense, sanity, and traditional opinions about the nature of literature and society. Scott, unlike Jeffrey, was not prepared to recognize that a change had taken place in the political or literary consciousness of his time which was exemplified, however crudely and vulgarly, by Byron's poetry. Consequently Scott was in an impossible position; whatever sympathy he felt for Byron as a man, and however much he wished to place a discussion of his poetry on a more responsible level, he had to acknowledge that Byron was writing poetry which he was forced to recognize as immoral and destructive. It is not surprising, therefore, that the review ends with a very long and sentimental appeal to Byron to mend his ways and behave himself in future. It is a tame ending to what in other ways is a valuable contribution to the continuing discussion of Byron's poetry.

The second stage of that debate concludes with reviews by Walter Scott in the Quarterly and John Wilson in the Edinburgh of

the fourth canto of Childe Harold. Scott's review¹ does not differ greatly in tone and approach from his commentary on Canto Three, but it does contain points of interest. His basic concerns are the same: to censure Byron's moral stance whilst exonerating the poet himself from any suspicion of deliberately undermining the moral fabric of his own society; and to disagree with his political principles, but on the grounds that they are misguided rather than malicious.

He is helped by the somewhat muted tone of Canto Four. He argues that there is 'less of passion, more of deep thought and sentiment at once collected and general' in this canto, although what he really means is perhaps shown by his use of the last stanza as an epigraph to his review:

'Farewell! with him alone may rest the pain,
If such there were - with you, the moral of his strain!'

However, he is too honest to pretend that these lines can redeem the whole poem. He points out how Byron's weltschmerz, particularly when aped by his imitators, leads to a pernicious and depraved kind of Epicureanism, and that it is originally founded on the kind of self-analysis which can only lead to despondency and madness. And, indeed, his antidote to such an attitude can be given a Wordsworthian gloss:

Nature, when she created man a social being, gave him the capacity of drawing that happiness from his relations with the rest of his race, which he is doomed to seek in vain in his own bosom. These relations cannot be the source of happiness to us if we despise or hate the kind with whom it is their office to unite us more closely. If the earth be a den of fools and knaves, from whom the man of genius differs by the more mercurial and exalted character of his

1. QR, xix (April, 1818), 215-32. Published September, 1818 (Hayden, 274).

intellect, it is natural that he should look down with pitiless scorn on creatures so inferior. But if, as we believe, each man, in his own degree, possesses a portion of the ethereal flame, however smothered by unfavourable circumstances, it is or should be enough to secure the most mean from the scorn of genius as well as from the oppression of power, and such being the case, the relations which we hold with society through all their gradations are channels through which the better affections of the loftiest may, without degradation, extend themselves to the lowest.

(229)

Often in his reviews Scott's apparently conventional sentiments at least touch upon much more sensitive and often Wordsworthian modes of feeling. He goes on here, however, to retreat to the more conventional moral that 'our present life is a state of trial not of enjoyment, and that we now suffer sorrow that we may hereafter be partakers of happiness'.

He obviously felt that this was a necessary reminder given the nature of Byron's popularity, and it is his comments on the nature of that popularity which prove to be of most interest. He accounts for it in three ways: Byron satisfies the public's demand for originality; he is the first poet since Cowper 'who, either in his own person, or covered by no very thick disguise, has directly appeared before the public, an actual living man expressing his own sentiments, thoughts, hopes and fears'; and his character takes on special potency because it is apparent that he 'who despised the world intimated that he had the talents and genius necessary to win it if he had thought it worth while'. Underlying all this is Byron's attitude towards his readers:

The reader felt as it were in the presence of a superior being, when, instead of his judgment being consulted, his imagination excited or soothed, his taste flattered or conciliated in order to bespeak his applause, he was told, in strains of the most sublime poetry, that neither he, the courteous reader, nor aught the earth had to shew, was worthy the attention of the noble traveller.

(218)

This is the crux of the problem - it is not simply what Byron says, but the power and authority with which he says it. Much of that authority comes from his character and personality, but by addressing him as 'the noble traveller' Scott recognizes that it is also due in part to his rank in society. Many other reviewers also realized that Byron's popularity and the threat he posed to conventional morality stemmed from his social position. But Scott also perceived, although much less clearly, that Byron uses his rank to manipulate his readers' response to his poetry: in his review of Canto Three he pointed out how the portrait of Childe Harold 'indicated a feeling towards the public, which, if it fell short of contemning their favour, disdained, at least, all attempts to propitiate them', and in the above extract he makes a similar point. He does not take it further, but obviously much of Byron's popular appeal resulted from the spectacle not simply of a lord disgracing himself, but a lord who had made much of the superiority given him by his social position.

As in his first review, Scott manages to disagree with Byron's political views without attacking him directly. He does so in two ways: he lavishes praise on stanzas clxvii-clxx which mourn the death of Charlotte Augusta, the only daughter of the Prince Regent, and so show that Byron is not as disaffected as he pretends; and he launches a swingeing attack not on the poem itself but John Cam Hobhouse's notes to it. The review ends with this political diatribe which seems so curiously unconnected with the rest of the review that it might have been added by another hand, although there is no evidence, except perhaps stylistically, to substantiate

this.

Although little different from his earlier review, Scott's defence of Byron on this occasion is less forceful and decisive. He warns that novelty and singularity sometimes pass for originality in the public's mind, and he is obviously uneasy about the nature of Byron's popularity. He also recognizes that Byron subordinates style to meaning in his poetry, although an equivocal note is again struck, and his own concerns as a poet are brought into play, when he defends Byron against the charge that his stanzas are often 'involved, harsh, and overflowing into each other beyond the usual license of the Spenserian stanza':

A highly finished strain of versification resembles a dressed pleasure ground, elegant - even beautiful - but tame and insipid compared to the majesty and interest of a woodland chase, where scenes of natural loveliness are rendered sweeter and more¹ interesting by the contrast of irregularity and wildness.

(231)

In the end it was the irregularity and the wildness which proved too much for Scott.

The same cannot be said of John Wilson in his review in the Edinburgh,² which has been described by Theodore Redpath as 'one of the finest contemporary appreciations of Childe Harold'.³

It is an extraordinary mixture of brilliance and carelessness, but it is of particular interest for the way in which Wilson defends Byron by ignoring accepted literary theory and appealing to the more avant garde ideas of his time.

1. An interesting comparison can be made between this passage and the concluding paragraph of chapter five of Waverley. In the novel the 'irregularity and wildness' of Waverley Chase only confirm Edward - who like Jane Austen's Emma is an 'imaginist' - in what are seen to be the weakest elements of his character.

2. ER, xxx (June, 1818), 87-120.

3. Redpath, 33.

This can be demonstrated most clearly by comparing his comments with those of Scott. Scott, although fully aware that Byron's poetry depended on the poet's portrayal of himself, warned that 'he who shall mine long and deeply for materials in his own bosom will encounter abysses at the depth of which he must necessarily tremble' and that 'Nature, when she created man a social being, gave him the capacity of drawing that happiness from his relations with the rest of the race, which he is doomed to seek in vain in his own bosom'. This, of course, is the basis for Scott's approach to the poetry, and it is fundamentally a moral one. Wilson, however, takes a very different view:

The personal character of which we have spoken, it should be understood, is not, altogether, that on which the seal of life has been set, - and to which, therefore, moral approval or condemnation is necessarily annexed, as to the language or conduct of actual existence. It is the character, so to speak, which is prior to conduct, and yet open to good and to ill, - the constitution of the being, in body and in soul....[Byron and Rousseau] have gone down into those depths which every man may sound for himself, though not for another; and they have made disclosures to the world of what they beheld and knew there - disclosures that have commanded and enforced a profound and universal sympathy, by proving that all mankind, the troubled and the untroubled, the lofty and the low, the strongest and the frailest, are linked together by the bonds of a common but inscrutable nature.

(88-9)

The moral issue is brushed aside, somewhat unconvincingly, and the emphasis is on the importance of the examination of self.

The same sense of intellectual speculation is shown in Wilson's awareness of the European scope of such a sensibility. He opens the review by comparing Byron with Rousseau, and later with Goethe and Schiller. The comparison with Rousseau is interesting because it offers another example of a clash of biases within a periodical. Rousseau was the epitome of republican thought, and Scott dismissed him as 'a frenzied sophist' in his

review of Canto Three of Childe Harold. Wilson's use of him here might appear deliberately provocative if it were not for the fact that, as a Tory, Wilson did not approve of Byron's political view. He uses Rousseau to make his point, and forgets or disregards the political implications attached to him.

Wilson also shows himself to be particularly in tune with the more advanced thought of his time when he argues, obviously with the moral objections to Byron's poetry in mind, that

when we seem to see the poet shadowed out in all those states of disordered being which such heroes exhibit, we are far from believing that his own mind has gone through those states of disorder, in its own experience of life. We merely conceive of it as having felt within itself the capacity of such disorders, and therefore exhibiting itself before us in possibility. This is not general - it is rare with great poets. Neither Homer, nor Shakespeare, nor Milton, ever so show themselves in the characters which they portray. Their poetical personages have no reference to themselves; but are distinct, independent creatures of their minds, produced in the full freedom of intellectual power. In Byron, there does not seem this freedom of power....[His poems] are merely bold, confused, and turbulent exemplifications of certain sweeping energies and irresistible passions. They are fragments of a poet's dark dream of life.

(94)

This statement is remarkably similar to Keats's famous definition of his own 'poetical Character', and it is possible that Wilson's words were fresh in Keats's mind when he contrasted his belief in negative capability with the 'wordsworthian or egotistical sublime'.¹

1. Keats wrote his letter to Richard Woodhouse on 27 October, 1818 [The Letters of John Keats, ed. H.E. Rollins (1958), i, 386-88]. He had been interested in the concept of the 'characterless poet' certainly since he had heard Hazlitt lecture at the Surrey Institute the preceding winter [W.J. Bate, John Keats (Cambridge Mass., 1963), 259-60], and one would expect him to have read the quarterlies' reviews of Byron's latest poem. Although he does not mention Byron himself, it is interesting that Woodhouse, when writing to John Taylor about Keats's letter, comments that 'Ld. Byron does not come up to this Character. He can certainly conceive & describe a dark accomplished villain in love - & a female tender & kind who loves him. Or a sated & palled Sensualist Misanthrope & Deist - But here his power ends. - The true poet can not only conceive this - but can assume any Character Essence idea or Substance at pleasure. & He has this imaginative faculty not in a limited manner, but in full universality' (Letters, Rollins, i, 390).

Wilson does not defend Byron; he asserts his greatness by showing how he exemplifies a particular zeitgeist. It is very different from Jeffrey's struggle to come to terms with Byron's popularity and his own somewhat reluctant response to the poetry, and from Scott's magnanimous approach which vacillates between the acceptance of the conventional and an awareness of new currents of thought and response. Wilson's approach means that he veers wildly from the perceptive to the foolish in his assessment of Byron's poetry, and he never resolves the moral dilemma posed by it.

His praise of Manfred; his realization that the function of the Childe gradually changes, and that the heroes of the Eastern tales take over the role of 'ideal human beings, made up of certain troubled powers and passions' whilst the Childe increasingly becomes a means for Byron to explore his own personality; and his impressive if somewhat rhetorical description of Byron's poetry in terms of sculpture are perceptive and important. But the review is marred by an extravagance and exaggeration of both style and statement, and Wilson over-estimates the value of Canto Four:

It is a nobler creature who is before us. The ill-sustained misanthropy, and disdain of the two first Cantos, more faintly glimmer throughout the third, and may be said to disappear wholly from the fourth, which reflects the high and disturbed visions of earthly glory, as a dark swollen tide images the splendours of the sky in portentous colouring, and broken magnificence.

(94)

Although Wilson's greatest strength is his refusal to allow the moral problem posed by Byron's poetry to dominate his response, it affects his judgement of Canto Four and results in his criticizing Byron in the last part of the review for being more enamoured of intellectual power than of 'the luxuries of quiet virtue...[and] the serenity of

home'. He redeems himself by concluding with an extremely perceptive account of contemporary literature and its reliance on the operation of the imagination.

It is, however, the opening of the review which has most impact. Despite the rhetoric, which found an echo much later in Matthew Arnold's description of Byron in Memorial Verses, Wilson shows very clearly how Byron's power and appeal comes, like Rousseau's, from depicting himself. But he adds a warning:

Posterity may make fewer allowances for much in himself and his writings, than his contemporaries are willing to do; nor will they, with the same passionate and impetuous zeal, follow the wild voice that too often leads into a haunted wilderness of doubt and darkness. To them, as to us, there will always be something majestic in his misery - something sublime in his despair. But they will not, like us, be withheld from sterner and severer feelings, and from the more frequent visitings of moral condemnation, by that awful commiseration and sympathy which a great poet breathes at will into all hearts, from his living agonies....

(93)

Again moral considerations come into play, and an earlier attempt by Wilson to excuse Byron's soul-baring on the grounds that poetry is a private not a public art is far from convincing. None the less, it cannot be doubted that Wilson, like Arnold, has 'felt' that 'fount of fiery life', and it is the expression of this rather than the intellectual stringency of his argument which informs the whole review.

And it is this which allows Wilson to make his most perceptive point. It comes in two statements: the first deals with the relationship between Byron and his readers:

But though he speaks to the public, at all times, he does not consider them as his judges. He looks upon them as sentient existences that are important to his poetical existence, - but, so that he command their feelings and passions, he cares not for their censure or their praise, - for his fame is more than mere literary fame; and he

aims in poetry, like the fallen chief whose image is so often before him, at universal dominion, we had almost said, universal tyranny, over the minds of men.

(99-100)

And later he writes:

Byron has chosen too often to be the undoubting adorer of Power. The idea of tyrannic and unquestioned sway seems to be the secret delight of his spirit. He would pretend, indeed, to be a republican, - but his heroes are all stamped with the leaden signet of despotism; and we sometimes see the most cold, secluded, immitigable tyrant of the whole, lurking beneath the 'scallop-shell and sandal-shoon' of the Pilgrim himself.

(117-18)

These comments state with much greater force something that Scott had been reaching towards when he wrote of Byron's attitude towards his public, and the apolitical nature of many of his apparently political comments. Wilson, a Tory writing in a Whig periodical which had already shown itself to be uneasy with the radical opinions of a supposedly Whig lord, obviously found this a convenient way of dealing with those 'confused and turbid stanzas [filled] with political retrospects and prophecies'. But he has made an important point: much of Byron's success comes from the superiority he claims for himself over ordinary humanity. Largely it is a superiority of sensitivity and sensibility, but it is inextricably bound up with his social position. The Reviews recognized this, and Scott and particularly Wilson perceived the reactionary basis for many of his apparently radical statements.¹

Wilson's review ends the Edinburgh's and Quarterly's most

1. Four years later Hazlitt made the same point but for different political ends: 'If the poet lends a grace to the nobleman, the nobleman pays it back to the poet with interest. What a fine addition is ten thousand a year and a title to the flaunting pretensions of a modern rhapsodist....In fact, his Lordship's blaze of reputation culminates from his rank and place in society. He sustains two lofty and imposing characters;...we equalise his pretensions, and take it for granted that he must be superior to other men in genius as he is in birth'. [The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P.P.Howe (1930-4), viii, 209-10].

fruitful and favourable criticism of Byron's poetry. We have seen how Jeffrey came to reassess both the nature of contemporary poetry and the relationship between poetry and morality in his attempts to come to terms with Byron's work, and how Scott lessened the sensationalism surrounding the poet in coming to a considered assessment based on his own beliefs and attitudes. Moral and political considerations obviously play a major part, but of most interest perhaps is the awareness by Scott and Wilson of Byron's manipulation of his readers by the way in which he stresses his special position as man, poet, and lord.

If it is Childe Harold who stands over the first two stages of the relationship between the quarterlies and Byron, it is Don Juan who dominates the last. The first two cantos were published in 1819, and John Hayden has documented the response from the minor periodicals, which was a mixture of praise and moral condemnation.¹ No review of the poem itself appeared in the two quarterlies, and Jeffrey was the first to review Byron after its publication. The review was of Marino Faliero and The Prophecy of Dante,² and Jeffrey's change of tone and approach is marked.

It is immediately apparent that Byron is no longer to receive the consideration which he had previously enjoyed. Jeffrey informs his readers that whilst Marino Faliero possesses considerable beauties and would certainly have established the reputation of a

1. Hayden, 148-9.

2. ER, xxxv (July, 1821), 271-85.

young poet, it is unworthy of Byron and fails both as poem and play.

One reason for its failure is its choice of subject-matter. Instead of exercising his gifts of 'exquisite tenderness and demoniacal sublimity', Byron has written a work which depends for its success on 'the elaborate representations of conjugal dignity and domestic honour, - the sober and austere triumphs of cold and untempted chastity, and the noble propriety of a pure and disciplined understanding'. Jeffrey seems to have forgotten that it was just such 'sober and austere' virtues that he had asked for in the earlier poems. This suggests that he is intent on attacking Byron whatever the merits of the work under review, and this is confirmed by his use of techniques normally used to deflate minor or pretentious authors. Some lines are rendered in prose, and an unfavourable comparison is made with Otway's Venice Preserved. The only point of interest is his assertion that

Altogether, [the work] gives us the impression of a thing worked out against the grain, and not poured forth from the fulness of the heart or the fancy - the ambitious and elaborate work of a powerful mind engaged with an unsuitable task - not the spontaneous effusion of an exuberant imagination, sporting in the fulness of its strength.

(284-5)

Any Wordsworthian echo is accidental, and Jeffrey goes on to attack The Prophecy of Dante. He sees it as a 'very grand, fervid, turbulent, and somewhat mystical composition - full of the highest sentiments, and the highest poetry; - but disfigured by many faults of precipitation, and overclouded with many obscurities'. The objection to 'obscurities' is a reviewing commonplace, as is the censure of 'the general crudity and imperfect concoction of the bulk of the composition'. The review as a whole quite obviously lacks the responsiveness and constructive critical interest which

so distinguished Jeffrey's earlier reviews of the poet's work, particularly of Beppo.

Its effect is to destroy the sense of connection found in those reviews. Jeffrey is distancing himself from Byron's work, as the tone of the review shows, and it is a tone which is found again in his penultimate review of Byron.¹ Ostensibly it is a review of Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari, and Cain, but its purpose is to provide a carefully constructed, almost clinical statement of Jeffrey's refutation of Byron's poetry and what he felt to be its implications.

It opens with a lengthy discussion of the history and nature of drama, in which Shakespeare and the early seventeenth-century dramatists are given high praise. This is interspersed with some sardonic and cutting remarks by Jeffrey: he points out that Byron 'has not certainly been very tractable to advice, nor very patient of blame'; that he has 'too little sympathy with the ordinary feelings and frailties of humanity, to succeed well in their representation'; that the world is growing weary of pictures of 'misanthropes and madmen - outlaws and their mistresses'; that 'Lord Byron, in Shakespeare's place, would have peopled the world with black Othellos!'; and that of all men he is the last who should defend the dramatic unities, since he "if ever man was, is a law to himself - 'a chartered libertine;' - and now, when he is tired of this unbridled license, he wants to do penance within the Unities!'. The impact of such remarks should not be underestimated; juxtaposed with the apparently measured and balanced discussion of English

1. ER, xxxvi (Feb., 1822), 413-52. The review is sometimes attributed to Hazlitt [P.P. Howe, Life of William Hazlitt (1947), 310, and H. Baker, William Hazlitt (1962), 216n. and 413n.], but the review as it stands could not have been by him. Jeffrey claimed it as his, and stylistically it belongs to him.

drama they take on added force and point.

Although this bite remains in the review, the emphasis changes to a reasoned and logical statement of Jeffrey's objections to Byron's poetry. These are twofold: the first returns to the problem of the relationship between art and morality, and this time Jeffrey's views are very explicit:

We therefore think that poets ought fairly to be confined to the established creed and morality of their country, or to the actual passions and sentiments of mankind; and that poetical dreamers and sophists who pretend to theorise according to their feverish fancies, without a warrant from authority or reason, ought to be banished the commonwealth of letters. In the courts of morality, poets are unexceptionable witnesses; they may give in the evidence, and depose to facts whether good or ill; but we demur to their arbitrary and self-pleasing summing up; they are suspected judges, and not very often safe advocates, where great questions are concerned, and universal principles brought to issue.

(438)

His second objection is more specific: the effect of Byron's poetry, whatever its intention, is pernicious and immoral:

The charge we bring against Lord. B. in short is, that his writings have a tendency to destroy all belief in the reality of virtue - and to make all enthusiasm and constancy of affection ridiculous; and that this is effected, not merely by direct maxims and examples, of an imposing or seducing kind, but by the constant exhibition of the most profligate heartlessness in the persons of those who had been transiently represented as actuated by the purest and most exalted emotions - and in the lessons of that very teacher who had been, but a moment before, so beautifully pathetic in the expression of the loftiest conceptions.

(448)

Here Jeffrey is not talking of Childe Harold, the heroes of the Eastern tales, or characters in the plays under review. He has already claimed that Byron has ignored the advice given him about the moral tenor of his work and 'only took leave of Childe Harold to ally himself to Don Juan', and it is Don Juan that is conditioning his response here. The last few pages of the review refer directly

to the poem and, after quoting the episodes of Donna Julia secreting Juan in her bed, 'the low humour and buffoonery' so ill-suited to the shipwreck, and the scenes in the seraglio after the touching death of Haidée, Jeffrey writes:

Thus all good feelings are excited only to accustom us to their speedy and complete extinction; and we are brought back, from their transient and theatrical exhibition, to the staple and substantial doctrine of the work - the non-existence of constancy in women or honour in men, and the folly of expecting to meet with any such virtues, or of cultivating them, for an undeserving world; - and all this mixed up with so much wit and cleverness, and knowledge of human nature, as to make it irresistibly pleasant and plausible - while there is not only no antidote supplied, but every thing that might have operated in that way has been anticipated, and presented already in as strong and engaging a form as possible - but under such associations as to rob it of all efficacy, or even turn it into an auxiliary of the poison.

(450-1)

It had simply come to this: Don Juan in Jeffrey's eyes (and in the view of other contemporary reviewers) put Byron outside the pale. Moral considerations, always close to dominating the reviewers' response, now took precedence. Possibly Jeffrey cannot be blamed for this, and much of his review consists of clear and logical exposition far removed from the vehemence of his younger days. But if one remembers the earlier reviews in which Jeffrey accepted the poetry on its own terms, then his final judgement, however understandable and even predictable, is disappointing.

There are two other aspects of his review which deserve comment. The first is Byron's accusation, as quoted by Jeffrey, that it is 'chiefly because he is a Gentleman and a Nobleman that plebian censors have conspired to bear him down'. Jeffrey points out, quite correctly, that it is because of Byron's social rank that the Quarterly has refrained from dealing with him far more severely; he does not, however, acknowledge the part played by

such considerations in his own response to the poet's work.

Bound up with this question of social bias are political considerations. Byron, despite Scott's recognition that his political views were far from consistent, was always a source of embarrassment to the Edinburgh, and he proves so to the end. In his preface to The Two Foscari he gives Southey a severe mauling in the course of which he makes some political statements with which the Edinburgh is forced to concur. These are quoted and some capital made out of them, but Southey is spoken of more with sorrow than with anger, and Byron is reminded that 'his antagonist, whatever may be his failings, was a person of respectable talents, and, in private life, of irreproachable character'. The changed political situation from 1822 onwards meant that the Edinburgh wished to disassociate itself even more clearly from Byron's political views, and moral considerations are one means of doing so. Certainly the Edinburgh no longer wished to be seen as the champion of Byron.¹

1. One further review of Byron appeared in the Edinburgh [ER, xxxviii (Feb., 1823), 27-48]. It was a review of Byron's Heaven and Earth and Thomas Moore's Loves of the Angels, and was written by either Hazlitt or Jeffrey. Stylistically it could belong to either, but the opening paragraph congratulates both poets on the impeccable moral and religious tone of their works and thanks them for 'saving us a world of moralizing - a tone in criticism we do not much affect, unless when it is forced upon us, and which we would gladly leave to the Pulpit, or to the Chairs of Moral Philosophy'. This suggests Hazlitt as the reviewer: the reference to 'a world of moralizing' could have been directed at Jeffrey, and the remark about 'Chairs of Moral Philosophy' is a hit at John Wilson which was more likely to come from Hazlitt given the attacks upon him in Blackwood's although Jeffrey also suffered at its hands. Whoever was responsible, the review adds nothing to the discussion of Byron's work, and throws little light on the issues we have been discussing.

The Quarterly's final review was of Marino Faliero, Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari, and Cain,¹ and there is a strangely antiquated and stagnant air about it. One always suspected that virgins, Christians, and Englishmen were regarded with particular favour by the Quarterly, but it is somewhat alarming to find them established as arbiters of literary merit. The first half of the review, in particular, is interesting as an example of the kind of ossified attitudes that Blackwood's, the exponent of a new and very different kind of Toryism, took great delight in parodying.

The review opens by regretting that Byron has not seen the error of his ways, and deploring the 'increasing prostitution of those splendid talents to the expression of feelings, and the promulgation of opinions, which, as Christians, as Englishmen, and even as men, we were constrained to regard with abhorrence'. The Quarterly had kept silent, fearing that nothing would 'reach the faults or purify the taste of Don Juan', and had hoped that Byron would eventually turn to better things. Surprisingly, the reviewer feels that he has done so in these plays, and displays a remarkable ability to distinguish between kinds of evil when he suggests that even Cain, 'wicked as it may be, is the work of a nobler and more daring wickedness than that which delights in insulting the miseries, and stimulating the evil passions, and casting a cold-blooded

1. QR, xxvii (July, 1822), 476-524. The reviewer was either Reginald Heber or John Ireland with revisions by Gifford. Six years later a review of Leigh Hunt's Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries appeared in the Quarterly [QR, xxxvii (March, 1828), 402-26]. It largely consists of an attack on Hunt whose book is described as 'the miserable book of a miserable man'; the basis of the attack is again political and class prejudice. The Quarterly is loathe to speak ill of the dead, and little is added to its discussion of Byron.

ridicule over all the lofty and generous feelings of our nature....'

The uneasiness created by the opening paragraph is confirmed as the reviewer displays in full his political prejudice and his chauvinism. The first becomes apparent with his statement that

those speculations which [Byron] designed for the educated ranks alone, are thrown open to the gaze of the persons most likely to be influenced by them, and disseminated, with remorseless activity, among the young, the ignorant, and the poor, - by the efforts of the basest and most wicked faction that ever infested a Christian country....

(478)

And he returns to this theme later in the review, when he discusses the political effects of Cain:

And though the intention is evident which has led the Atheists and Jacobins (the terms are convertible) of our metropolis, to circulate the work in a cheap form, among the populace, we are not ourselves of opinion that it possesses much power of active mischief, or that many persons will be very deeply or lastingly impressed by insinuations which lead to no practical result, and difficulties which so obviously transcend the range of human experience.

(514)

By 1822 the term 'Jacobin' was more than a little dated (as witnessed by the rarity of its appearance in the pages of Blackwood's); this, coupled with the ponderous prose style, helps give a moribund air to the review.

This is accentuated by the reviewer's chauvinism, already made apparent by his appeals to those standards held dear by all Englishmen. In a very lengthy discussion of the dramatic unities, which has neither the sensitivity nor the breadth of reading displayed by Jeffrey's comments, the reviewer declares that

if we are to be pelted with the epithets of 'incorrect', 'uncivilized', and we know not what, for saying that we prefer a play of Shakespeare's to a drama of Racine's or Alfieri's; if all merit or beauty is to be appreciated by a French critic in a Grecian mask, and if the noblest models of writing are to be abandoned and despised, because

they do not tally with rules arbitrarily imposed, and customs which no more concern us than the droit d'aubaine; when, lastly, these usurpations find an advocate in one who is himself among the most illustrious living ornaments of English poetry, it is time to make up our minds, either to defend the national laws, or to submit to the 'Code Napoléon'....

(479)

Again one has to remember that it was nearly eight years since there was any danger of succumbing to the 'Code Napoléon'.

The discussion of the literary merits of the four plays is not very perceptive: Marino Faliero is found to be 'neither sustained nor impressive'; Sardanapalus is praised, excessively, as the most splendid example of English neoclassical tragedy, and a great deal of time is spent in an almost Bradleian analysis of Sardanapalus; The Two Foscari is peremptorily dismissed; and Cain is recognized to contain some passages of great beauty. The only criticism of real interest is the warning to Byron that if he really wants to write dramas in accordance with classical rules, then he must write dramas of incident not character; otherwise his practice will contradict his theory, as it does in the case of Sardanapalus.

The review concludes with a lengthy discussion of Byron's attitude towards the Christian religion, obviously written by some one well-versed in the subject (probably Reginald Heber). It is a great deal more sensible than the rest of the review, which strengthens the impression that the review may have been the work of several hands. But the reviewer is more interested in the issues raised than in relating them directly to Byron, and the review fades away into a rather poor sermon.

The Quarterly's contributions to the public discussion

of Byron's poetry, apart from the two reviews by Scott, was not distinguished. Perhaps this was due in part to Byron's relationship with Murray and Gifford, but this final review points to a more important reason. The Quarterly was founded by men whose political education took place before the turn of the century, and by 1822 Gifford's reign was coming to an end. The Review was no longer able to respond to changing events in politics and literature, and Byron posed a particularly severe problem in the way in which moral, social, and political considerations were bound up with his poetry. The Edinburgh was only saved by Jeffrey's critical intelligence, but he too eventually allowed these considerations to shape his response. We must now examine the way in which the younger generation of reviewers handled these problems.

Blackwood's treatment of Byron can be divided into three phases: reviews of his poems up to his death in 1824; articles and reviews of books occasioned by his death; and, most significantly of all, the Magazine's reaction to Don Juan. There is the usual measure of inane and sometimes malicious humour, manifest insincerities, and journalistic rhetoric, but this should not be allowed to detract from what is essentially a valuable and perceptive response to Byron's work.

The reviews of Byron's poetry up to 1824 were written by John Wilson, with the exception of two by Lockhart dealing with Beppo and the three tragedies, and two anonymous notices of Werner. To begin with Wilson's contributions: by 1821 he had

reviewed Manfred, The Lament of Tasso, Canto Four of Childe Harold, Mazeppa, and Marino Faliero;¹ and from these reviews certain fundamental ideas and concepts become apparent, some of which we have already seen in operation in the pages of the Edinburgh and Quarterly.

The predominant issue is again the moral one. Wilson appreciates the implications of Byron's enormous popularity, and at various times acknowledges the threat that he poses to conventional morality. However, he is also concerned with the status and nature of the poet:

To no poet was there ever given so awful a revelation of the passions of the human soul. He surveys, with a stern delight, that tumult and conflict of terrible thoughts from which other highly-gifted and powerful minds have involuntarily recoiled; he calmly and fearlessly stands upon the brink of that abyss from which the soul would seem to shrink with horror, and he looks down upon, and listens to, the everlasting agitation of the howling waters....And even those whose lives have had little experience of the wilder passions, for a moment feel that an unknown region of their own souls has been revealed to them, and that there are indeed fearful mysteries in our human nature.

(i, 289)

He goes on to argue in his review of Canto Four of Childe Harold that the power of the poet is divine, and whilst admitting that it is impossible to speak of 'Byron's poetry 'without also speaking of himself, morally, as a man', he comes to the important realization that

In his poetry, more than any other man's, there is felt a continual presence of himself - there is everlasting self-representation or self-reference; and perhaps that, which to cold and unimpassioned judgment might seem the essential fault of his poetry, constitutes its real

1. BM, i (June, 1817), 289-95; ii (Nov., 1817), 142-4; iii (May, 1818), 216-26; v (July, 1819), 429-32; ix (April, 1821), 93-103.

excellence, and gives it power, sovereign and despotical.

(iii, 216)

Other reviewers had recognized the importance of self-depiction, some had even seen it as 'the real excellence of his poetry', but few were prepared to concede that the success of his poetry could be quite so independent of its moral import. (And once again, Wilson, as he does in his review in the Edinburgh, points to the 'sovereign and despotical' power of Byron's poetry.)

Wilson goes on to make the point that 'Byron's creations are not so much poems, as they are glorious manifestations of a poet's mind', and this means that whilst his heroes are indeed portraits of himself they are so in the sense that they are 'either what he is, or has been, or what he would wish or fear to be' (my italics). It is a sensitive correction to the simplistic identification of Byron with his heroes which other reviewers indulged in. In an earlier review he had also argued that the heroes

though all the same, yet are they all strangely different. We hail each successive Existence with a profounder sympathy; and we are lost in wonder, in fear, and in sorrow, at the infinitely varied struggles, the endless and agonizing modifications of the human Passions, as they drive along through every gate and avenue of the soul, darkening or brightening, elevating or laying prostrate.

(ii, 142)

Even with the rhetoric, the point is an important one: Byron's poems are an exploration of a manifold and sensitive personality.

But Wilson is not unaware of the dangers involved in giving too much credence to self-dramatization. In his review of Childe Harold he writes:

We must all feel that Byron, with all his mighty faculties, is at times only shielded from contempt, by the conviction that many of his miseries are self-inflicted. They are

often imaginary; and therefore is it that our imagination redeems him who awakens it. He exasperates his soul into agony. He sinks it down into despair. But genius breathes forth the profoundest sighs that disturb us, and often converts them, in an instant, into an exulting hymn.

(iii, 217)

Once again, despite his reservations, Wilson stresses the imaginative power of what he calls Byron's 'life of passion'.

But he is also aware of another aspect of his character.

Jeffrey argued in his final review of Byron that it was the mixture of fine feeling with calculated cynicism which made his work so pernicious and morally corrupt. Wilson, without coming to the same conclusion, is also aware that

many passages are to be found in his poetry, of the most irresistible and overpowering pathos, in which the depth of his sympathy, with common sorrows and common sufferers, seems as profound as if his nature knew nothing more mournful than sighs and tears.

(i, 289)

In his review of The Lament of Tasso Wilson becomes almost maudlin in his account of Byron's reluctance to give in to these softer emotions. One wonders, however, what moral importance Wilson finally gave to this element of Byron's work, since his most perceptive comments relate to the more passionate expression of Byron's personality.

One other thing is worthy of comment in these reviews by Wilson, and that is the comparison he makes between Byron and Wordsworth. In his review of Manfred he goes so far as to give precedence to Byron:

In the third canto of Childe Harold, accordingly, he has delivered up his soul to the impulses of Nature, and we have seen how that high communion has elevated and sublimed it....He leapt at once into the first rank of descriptive poets. He came into competition with Wordsworth upon his own ground, and with his own weapons; and in the first encounter, he vanquished and overthrew him.

(i, 289)

However, Wilson realized that he had gone too far, and in his review of Childe Harold acknowledges that it was 'cold and unmeaning to say, that in the third canto of Childe Harold, he imitated or competed with the author of the Excursion'. However, he persisted in making a comparison which, whilst at least referring to Wordsworth with admiration and respect, in the end disregarded his much more subtle and complex response to Nature. It is possible that again the desire to make Byron morally acceptable lies at the heart of Wilson's argument:

we fear not that we shall soon see the day, when Byron, escaping from the too severe dominion of his own passions, shall look abroad over nature with a wider sweep of speculation, - become a happier, a better, a greater man, as the benign influences of nature are suffered to enter, unopposed, into the recesses of his heart.... (iii, 218)

This is no better than Ellis's, Scott's, and Jeffrey's hopes that Byron would mend his ways and become a reformed character.

None the less, despite the rhetoric and the exaggeration (the disadvantages of his somewhat impressionistic approach which otherwise allows him a commendable freedom and creativity of response) of many of his statements, his remarks on Byron show many of the virtues to be found in his review in the Edinburgh. Although moral considerations are always apparent (in his review of the third Canto of Childe Harold he spends a great deal of time pointing out the danger resulting from such poetry to 'souls of fine aspirations, but unsteadfast wills'), they do not dominate or restrict his response to the poetry.

These five reviews represent Wilson's most serious attempt to discuss Byron's poetry. He went on to review Heaven and Earth¹.

1. BM, xiii (Jan., 1823), 72-7.

and The Age of Bronze;¹ in both he attacks Byron, and John Hayden has described the latter review as 'a masterpiece of abuse'.² Neither they, nor the two anonymous notices of Werner,³ offer anything of value, and they show Blackwood's at its most irresponsible.

Apart from Wilson's contributions, Blackwood's published in June 1818 'A Letter to the Author of Beppo', probably written by Lockhart.⁴ Theodore Redpath dismisses it as one of Blackwood's stunts, particularly since later Lockhart was to prove himself favourably disposed towards Don Juan. But like many of Blackwood's stunts, it had a point to it. The letter addressed directly to Byron is superbly declamatory, and accuses him of having 'done little more than exhibit to the world, the melancholy spectacle of a great spirit, self-embittered, self-wasted, and self-degraded'. It contrasts him with other great poets and finds him 'a pigmy among giants'; it claims (inaccurately given the reputation of Byron's ancestors) that the poet's private life has placed a stain upon 'the pure, the generous, the patriotic, the English name of Byron'; and it laments that Byron has never taught us 'to despise earthly sufferings, in the hope of eternal happiness'.

This is a letter addressed to Byron and as such is dramatic in form, and Lockhart enjoys indulging in outraged moral feelings. By doing so he achieves two effects: he reminds his readers of the moral objections to Byron's poetry somewhat played down by Wilson (in a letter to the editor which prefaces his remarks to Byron,

1. BM, xiii (April, 1823), 457-60.
2. Hayden, 159.
3. BM, xii (Dec., 1822), 710-19, and 782-85.
4. BM, iii (June, 1818), 323-29.

Lockhart censures Blackwood's for not taking a stronger moral line); and he allows the bombast and rhetoric of the letter to undermine what he is saying. It is a good example of the way in which Wilson and Lockhart fed off each other to provide differing views of the same problem, and of how the 'letter' form could be used to put forward conflicting views simultaneously. That the 'letter' is not merely an attempt at confusion is shown by two arguments which deserve serious consideration. The first of these is the assertion that great poets other than Byron,

Instead of raving with demoniacal satisfaction about the worthlessness of our motives and the nothingness of our attainments, ...strove, by shewing us what we might be and what we had been, to make us what we should be.

(325)

And the second, that with Byron

heroism is lunacy, philosophy folly, virtue a cheat, and religion a bubble. Your Man is a stern, cruel, jealous, revengeful, contemptuous, hopeless, solitary savage. Your Woman is a blind, devoted, heedless, beautiful minister and victim of lust.

(326)

Essentially these are the points that Jeffrey makes in his final review about the constructive nature of poetry and the destructive effect of Byron's cynicism. Jeffrey, in fact, is taken to task for not having appreciated the threat posed by Beppo to 'that pure domestic morality, on which the public prosperity of his country is founded', and one wonders whether the remark went home.

Lockhart also reviewed Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari, and Cain,¹ and again the tone is hostile. Little is said about the plays themselves except the usual comments that Sardanapalus

1. BM, xi (Jan., 1822), 90-4.

possessed some virtues but no dramatic power, and that Cain was 'a wicked and blasphemous performance'. The rest of the very short notice is taken up with the notes to the plays, and, in particular, Byron's praise of Lady Morgan's Italy (an authoress also disapproved of on moral and political grounds) and his attack on Southey. Both are refuted by Lockhart, and Southey's reply (which first appeared in the Courier) is reprinted in full.

Blackwood's treatment of Byron's poetry up to his death, excluding Don Juan, is therefore mixed. John Wilson's first five reviews, despite their rhetoric and exaggeration, offered a sensible and perceptive approach, but this is offset by Lockhart's contributions and Wilson's silly but characteristic comments on Byron's later, more minor work. After his death, Blackwood's, like most of the periodicals, treated Byron more handsomely. Mostly this meant defending Byron from the plethora of books written by those who, however tenuously, could claim to have had some personal knowledge of the dead poet.¹ The one exception is a long article by Lockhart which appeared in 1825.²

From the outset Lockhart makes it clear that his purpose is to defend Byron. He dismisses attacks upon the poet in the Universal Review and the London Magazine, and takes issue with Hazlitt's portrait of Byron in The Spirit of the Age. The usual political invective is levelled at the Cockneys en passant, and the jibe about their 'despairing imbecility and plebian spite' underlines the social prejudice inherent in this. Lockhart also makes the

1. BM, xvi (Nov., 1824), 530-40; xviii (Aug., 1825), 137-55; and xxvii (Feb., 1830), 389-420.

2. BM, xvii (Feb., 1825), 131-51.

point that Byron really belonged to no political party: his

literary success had all along been regarded with infinite gall by the minor Tories, and...the elevation of his personal manners and feelings had always prevented him from being an object of anything like real attachment among the miserable adherents of that degraded faction to which he sometimes too much lent himself.

(131-2)

He also suggests that the 'minor Tories' only kept quiet because Murray was Byron's publisher.

Blackwood's own record is, of course, seen as unblemished.

This is patently untrue, but, as we shall see, one has to concede Lockhart's claim that although the Magazine criticised the morality of Don Juan it was always alive to 'the extraordinary merits of that poem, as it grew up and expanded itself into one of the most remarkable works of English genius'. In the discussion of Byron's work that follows, two points of real interest emerge. First, Lockhart criticises the tendency of the public to take the word for the deed, and assume that everything recorded in Byron's poems refers to actual experience. It is the old problem of the identification of Byron with his heroes which the quarterlies struggled with, but Lockhart argues that this has now gone too far and that on every occasion the 'poet damns the man, and the man the poet'. Expanding this idea, he makes his second point of importance:

We tell [Byron] in every possible form and shape, that the great and distinguishing merit of his poetry is the intense truth with which that poetry expresses his own personal feelings. - We encourage him in every possible way to dissect his own heart for our entertainment - we tempt him, by every bribe most likely to act powerfully on a young and imaginative man, to plunge into the darkest depths of self-knowledge, to madden his brain with eternal self-scrutinies, to find his pride and his pleasure in what others shrunk from as torture - we tempt him to indulge in these dangerous exercises, until they obviously acquire the power of leading him to the very brink of phrenzy - we tempt him to find, and to see in this perilous vocation, the staple of his existence, the

food of his ambition, the very essence of his glory - and the moment that, by habits of our own creating, at least of our own encouraging and confirming, he is carried one single step beyond what we happen to approve of, we turn round with all the bitterness of spleen, and reproach him with the unmanliness of entertaining the public with his feelings in regard to his separation from his wife. This was truly the conduct of a fair and liberal public!

(136)

Though it was Lockhart himself who had most bitterly attacked Byron for the satiric portrait of Lady Byron as Donna Inez, his point is an important one. It is the second time that Blackwood's has had the perception and humanity to realize that Byron was as much sinned against as sinning, and that in some ways he was the victim of his own public.

The same kind of sensitivity is evident in Lockhart's comments on the poems. He recognizes the superiority of the last two cantos of Childe Harold to the first two, although, following Wilson, his praise of Canto Four is a little excessive. He praises the 'colossal, mysterious, heart-felt gloom of Manfred', and follows Jeffrey and ignores his own earlier comments by describing Beppo as 'a very clever jeu d'esprit'. He also recognizes the superiority of The Giaour to the other Eastern tales. But it is his praise of Don Juan which is most impressive:

the keen and searching observation - the perfect knowledge of human nature in very many of its weakest, and in very many of its strongest points - the wit - the humour - the really Shakespearean touches of character scattered over every page - these are excellencies which lie sufficiently on the surface of this extraordinary poem. The profound philosophical truth displayed in the conduct of the work - the gradations of the incidents, and the fine development of the principal character - these are matters demanding more study, and sure, if that study be given, to reward it abundantly.

(149)

These comments help make this perhaps the finest critique of Byron's

poetry to appear in Blackwood's, although more praise is normally given to his review of September 1823 which we must examine as we now move on to consider Blackwood's response to Don Juan.

In fact Blackwood's, and particularly Lockhart's, reaction to Don Juan deserves special praise. Lockhart was the first to review the poem,¹ and he made his position quite clear:

there is unquestionably a more thorough and intense infusion of genius and vice - power and profligacy - than in any poem which had ever before been written in the English, or indeed in any other modern language.

(512)

He sternly denounces the immorality of the poem; particularly Byron's portrayal of his wife as Donna Inez. He also deplures Byron's apparent rejection of all human feeling, and claims that he has now become 'a cool unconcerned fiend, laughing with a detestable glee over the whole of the better and worse elements of which human life is composed'. None the less, he recognizes some of the poem's merits:

What the immediate effect of the poem may be on contemporary literature, we cannot pretend to guess - too happy could we hope that its lessons of boldness and vigour in language, and versification, and conception, might be attended to, as they deserve to be - without any stain being suffered to fall on the purity of those who minister to the general shape and culture of the public mind....

(513)

He also gives lengthy, if censored, extracts from the poem, and there is justification for his claim that 'our indignation, in regard to the morality of the poem, has not blinded us to its manifold beauties'. This was particularly commendable since this was Blackwood's first major pronouncement on the poem.

1. BM, v (Aug., 1819), 512-22.

The next two articles in Blackwood's on Don Juan are less interesting. The first¹ was Wilson's reply to the Letter to the Right Hon. Lord Byron, by John Bull which was, although published anonymously, written by Lockhart. The Letter is remarkable for its support of Don Juan, but Wilson uses it to launch an extremely funny attack on Jeremy Bentham, and he concludes by reiterating the usual moral strictures against Byron's poem. However, this was followed the next month by an article on the third, fourth, and fifth cantos of the poem.² The article is signed by one, Harry Franklin, and is in the form of a letter to the editor; the author is not known, but the import of the article is that, like everything else in this world, Byron's poetry is 'partly good, and partly bad', and that

Only infants can be shown naked in company, but his Lordship pulls the very robe de chambre from both men and women, and goes on with his exposure as smirkingly as a barrister cross-questioning a chamber maid in a case of crim. con.

(115)

But the author of the article does not appear to mind very much, and by use of long extracts he allows the poem to speak for itself.

The note of moral censure returns in two other articles;³ the first of which makes an interesting point by comparing Byron to Chaucer, and so traces the tragi-comic manner of Don Juan much further back into English literature. But the author's attitude to the poem follows the line established by Lockhart. On the one

1. BM, ix (July, 1821), 421-26.

2. BM, x (Aug., 1821), 107-15.

3. BM, x (Oct., 1821), 295-8; and xi (Feb., 1822), 212-17.

hand he declaims that

Disgusted by the charlatan exhibition of Byron in Don Juan - his tossing up his feelings to public view, and catching them as they fell, writhing on the prongs of ridicule - we treated the production in a tone which enhanced its merits a great deal too much.

(295)

But, on the other hand, he admits that it is a poem which 'sets one half of the world laughing at the other'. Colonel John Mathews, in the article which followed, even goes so far as to suggest that the faults of the poem had been 'much exaggerated by the prudery of this age' with its 'affectation of superior sanctity' and its attempts 'to preserve the appearance of greater delicacy and decorum'. He spends most of his time, however, discussing Sardanapalus and the other drama, and one only hopes that he proved to be a better soldier than he did a reviewer.

The most impressive comments on Don Juan, apart from those in the article we looked at when considering the contributions that appeared in Blackwood's after Byron's death, come in Lockhart's contribution to the number for September 1823.¹ The article is a reply to an attack on the poem which had appeared two months earlier written by Lockhart with the help of Maginn.² Such goings-on do not encourage us in our search for responsible literary criticism, but it would be a mistake to be too severe in this instance. Admittedly the earlier article is only of interest because it uses as its basis Byron's connections with the so-called Cockneys, and the political and social prejudices at work in it have more to do with the Magazine's discussion of Hunt than of Byron. But it is interesting that

1. BM, xiv (Sept., 1823), 282-93.

2. BM, xiv (July, 1823), 88-92.

not more is made of the friendship between Hunt and Byron, and perhaps it is another example of Byron being protected by his rank.

Lockhart's reply to the attack is somewhat tongue-in-cheek. He boasts that the Magazine's chief claim to merit has always been its 'justice to INTELLECT', and, since the article is in the form of a letter to 'Christopher North', he writes:

Do not let it be said, that even in one instance you have suffered any prejudices whatever, no matter on what proper feelings they may have been bottomed, to interfere with your candour as a judge of intellectual exertion. - Distinguish as you please: brand with the mark of your indignation whatever offends your feelings, moral, political, or religious - but "nothing extenuate". If you mention a book at all, say what it really is. Blame Don Juan; blame Faublas; blame Candide; but blame them for what really is deserving of blame. Stick to your own good old rule - abuse Wickedness, but acknowledge Wit.

(282)

That is a fine definition of what we have been looking for in the Reviews, and Lockhart triumphantly fulfils his own dictum. He insists that Don Juan is Byron's finest work; that it is his most original in conception and tone; that it contains specimens of both his finest tragic as well as comic poetry; and that it will always 'hold a permanent rank in the literature of our country'. He also argues that Byron is no more obscene than Voltaire, Fielding, or even Richardson, and that, although this is no excuse, he is really guilty of nothing more than 'playing mad tricks' on his readers. He gives very long extracts from Cantos IX, X, and XI, and despite strictures about Byron's moral and political statements, he concludes by arguing that almost 'any one canto of Juan - certainly any one of these three - contains more poetry and more genius than any three of Byron's recent tragic attempts have done'. The

tone and approach of the article go a long way towards justifying Theodore Redpath's claim that it 'is the best of all the accounts of the spirit and status of Don Juan printed in any periodical of the time',¹ although to my mind the later article of 1825 is as good. John Hayden shares Redpath's view, and suggests that this review 'by itself almost compensates for the stupid and mean criticism in which Blackwood's so often dealt'.²

Whilst not denying that Blackwood's could be both stupid and mean, it is unfair to suggest this in relation to their treatment of Byron. There are examples of typical Blackwood's jokes which are both silly and damaging, but Wilson's reviews of Byron up to 1819, the assessments of him after his death, and the willingness to respond to the wit if not the wickedness of Don Juan, more than compensate for such lapses. The major bias at work remains the moral one, although political considerations come into play with Byron's collaboration with Leigh Hunt. The problem of Byron's social position (and the use he made of it) is discussed by Wilson, who points to the 'sovereign and despotical' power of his poetry, and by Lockhart. But unencumbered by such problems as the need for consistency or logic of argument, Blackwood's, unlike the quarterlies, could every so often step aside from such considerations and respond simply and directly to the poems as they stood. As was so often the case, the Magazine's greatest weakness was also its greatest strength.

1. Redpath, 48.

2. Hayden, 158.

Shelley

Shelley needs to be considered along with Byron for several reasons. Although he did not command Byron's popularity, his reviewers felt that his advanced and revolutionary beliefs posed as great a threat to the stability of their society. Consequently the biases and prejudices motivating their responses are similar to those found in their commentaries on Byron: moral, religious, and political considerations all come into play, and are overlaid by an ambivalent reaction to Shelley's social position. As with Byron, this is particularly pronounced in the case of Blackwood's Magazine. And as well as tracing the interaction of these prejudices, our search for literary criticism of lasting value is rewarded by Hazlitt's review in the Edinburgh, which deserves praise for its balanced assessment of the poet. John Hayden has a very fine chapter on Shelley,¹ and I find myself in agreement with many of his comments. However, our difference in emphasis leads me to account for Blackwood's treatment of Shelley in a rather different way, and, whilst agreeing with his praise of Walker's review in the Quarterly and Hazlitt's in the Edinburgh, my concern is with those forces that shaped those judgements.

It is fitting to begin with Blackwood's. Newman Ivy White in his biography of Shelley gives great praise to the Magazine's reviews of the poet's work, and claims that the

persistent and extraordinary wooing of Shelley by the most powerful monthly of the day was a more significant thing than either Shelley or his biographers have realized. It was clear evidence that a genius like Shelley's could not

1. Hayden, 161-75.

be wasted, no matter how dull or biased the majority of the reviewers might be. It showed also that in 1819, before his best works were published, it was possible for Shelley to achieve a fairly general recognition as a great poet.¹

White is far too sanguine, and we shall see that Blackwood's support for Shelley was far more apparent than real.

Lockhart wrote the first four reviews of Shelley's work to appear in the Magazine; after reading the first Shelley wrote to Charles Ollier, his publisher:

Do you know, I think the article in Blackwood could not have been written by a favourer of Government, and a religionist. I don't believe any such one could sincerely like my writings. After all is it not some friend in disguise, and don't you know who wrote it?²

Shelley's surprise is understandable; no Tory Review could have been expected to condone his political and religious views, and, of all things, this first review by Lockhart was of The Revolt of Islam!³

Lockhart attempted to overcome the considerable difficulty facing him by distinguishing between the ideas of the poem and 'the vehicle in which these opinions are conveyed'. It was a well-worn reviewing technique, but it had little chance of succeeding with a poem so firmly committed to political allegory. Lockhart attempts to dismiss this allegory by claiming, with some justification, that it is often unskilful and obscure, but his refusal to discuss the poem's powerful opening suggests that at least some of it was all too clear.

None the less, he perseveres in the distinction he has made

1. N.I.White, Shelley (1947), ii, 161.

2. Letters of P.B.Shelley, ed. F.Jones (Oxford, 1964), ii, 163.

3. BM, iv (Jan., 1819), 475-82.

between content and form. Although as a philosopher Shelley is held to be 'weak and worthless', Lockhart claims that as a poet 'he is strong, nervous, original; well entitled to take his place near to the great creative masters, whose works have shed its truest glory around the age wherein we live'. That is all very well, but having dismissed the philosophy Lockhart has some difficulty in substantiating this claim. He attempts to do so by praising Shelley's description of the love of Laon and Cynthia, and claims that 'it is in the portraying of this intense, overmastering, unfearing, unfading love, that Mr Shelley has proved himself to be a genuine poet'. In fact the relationship between the two can only be understood within the allegorical structure of the poem, and it becomes somewhat ludicrous if read on a realistic level. Nor is it any more helpful to claim that the poem's interest lies not in plot or narrative but in 'a very rare strength and abundance of poetic imagery and feeling....'

As Lockhart himself makes abundantly clear in reviews of minor writers such as Barry Cornwall, this alone does not make a great poet. Lockhart's increasing embarrassment becomes more apparent when he follows an admission that the poem contains no outstanding passages with the lame afterthought that 'neither does it contain any such intermixture of prosaic materials as disfigure even the greatest of [poems]'. He finally overcomes his difficulties by stating in a manner more than a little reminiscent of the Quarterly's that 'Mr Shelley, whatever his errors may have been, is a scholar, a gentleman, and a poet....' As we shall see, it was the second of these which was to prove of particular importance.

The problems created by censoring the meaning whilst praising

the structure of the poetry continued to bedevil Blackwood's criticism of Shelley. In Lockhart's second review, this time of Rosalind and Helen,¹ the inconsistencies of this approach become even more apparent. Lockhart begins by attacking Shelley's philosophy: in words similar to those used about Byron, we are told that the poet possesses a 'fierce and contemptuous scorn of those sacred institutions which nature protects and guards for the sake of her own worth and dignity'; Lockhart refuses to accept that such an attitude has any foundation in systematic thought, and suggests (with some truth, perhaps) that Shelley 'often writes like a man angry and dissatisfied with the world, because he is angry and dissatisfied with himself'; finally, Shelley's attack on religion is dismissed as the outpourings of 'an inconsiderate and thoughtless scoffer', and it is said that in attempting to offer an alternative to religion he makes himself appear to be 'an obscure and cheerless moralist'. Most perceptively of all, Lockhart points out that the

finer essence of his poetry never penetrates [his philosophical ideas] - the hues of his imagination never clothes them with attractive beauty.

(274)

Unfortunately Lockhart takes no further what is one of the central problems in evaluating Shelley's work.

Whatever the validity of such comments, Lockhart has placed himself in a position where he is forced into excessive praise of the poem in an attempt to justify his earlier favourable statements. Rosalind and Helen is not a good poem, and although the debt to Byron and Wordsworth is obvious, it is ridiculous for Lockhart to claim that it rivals their best work. Rosalind's story is forced,

1. BM, v (June, 1819), 268-74.

conventional, and insipid, and one looks in vain for Lockhart's 'great animation and force of passion'. It is easier to agree with his dislike of Helen's long and laboured account of Lionel, although political considerations may have played a part in this judgement. Lockhart's assertion that Helen's tale is a little too fantastic but is obviously written by a poet has an unintentional ambiguity which sums up the whole poem. That he should exaggerate the qualities of such a mediocre work suggests that his concerns were other than simply literary. After all, The Revolt of Islam had shown the real promise, and as such had needed the Magazine's full support.

Extra-literary considerations also dominate Lockhart's review of Alastor which was reviewed by Blackwood's in 1819 although published three years earlier.¹ It is perhaps Shelley's first important poem and showed signs of a remarkable but undisciplined talent - a point taken by Lockhart who describes its author as a 'gifted but wayward young man'.

Part of the review is spent in denouncing the Quarterly, and a comparison is made of "the vis inertiae of [the Quarterly reviewer's] motionless prose with the 'eagle-winged raptures' of Mr Shelley's poetry". We should be wary, however, of taking this review altogether at face value - as the championing of a promising young poet despite his uncongenial politics. Some such calculation as the following may well have been in Lockhart's mind. The Quarterly had not increased its reputation by its attack on Keats, and it would be an advantage to Blackwood's to seem more receptive,

1. BM, vi (Nov., 1819), 148-54.

less biased, than its staid and elderly rival. Moreover, Shelley was a young man of good family, who might well discard his extreme political opinions as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey had done. To praise his poetry, therefore, while denouncing his views must have seemed (whatever its merits as criticism) a sound journalistic strategy. If Shelley later acquired a great reputation with the reading public, as Byron had done, Blackwood's would congratulate itself on its critical acumen; if not, it only had to increase the severity of its condemnation of Shelley's poetry.

As one would expect, therefore, the review's specific criticism is a mixture of praise and censure. Some of it is quite perceptive, as for example in the suggestion that

Mr Shelley is too fond of allegories; and a great genius like his should scorn, now that it has reached the maturity of manhood, to adopt a species of poetry in which the difficulties of the art may be so conveniently blinked, and weakness find so easy a refuge in obscurity.

(148)

Other warnings are leavened with vague assurances about Shelley's disbelief in his own theories, and the existence of 'the light of poetry even in the darkness of Mr Shelley's imagination'. There is a warning about the usual Cockney sin of extravagance, although, as we shall see, Shelley was exempt from the more extreme attacks on the Cockneys, and Lockhart also warns that 'Mr Shelley's imagination is enamoured of dreams of death; and he loves to strike his harp among the tombs'. But there is also further praise of The Revolt of Islam, and Lockhart's assertion that it 'is not in the power of all the critics alive to blind one true lover of poetry to the splendour of Mr Shelley's genius....' Unfortunately it remains

an assertion, and Lockhart never explains the nature of that 'splendour'.

Given Lockhart's dislike of Shelley's philosophy and use of allegory, it is not surprising that he found himself in difficulties when he came to review Prometheus Unbound.¹ He somewhat modifies his position on the use of allegory: he begins by insisting that the only thing that Aeschylus in Prometheus Bound symbolized was 'the native strength of human intellect itself - its strength of endurance above all others - its sublime power of patience'; but he then refers to the tragedy as 'this simple and sublime allegory', and admits that Christianity also utilizes symbols of suffering and redemption. The trouble with Shelley's poem, however, is that he has given his own meaning to the Prometheus myth, and it is this which makes the poem a 'pestiferous mixture of blasphemy, sedition, and sensuality....' Obviously moral and political considerations are now becoming more important, although there is a great deal of truth in Lockhart's comment that all Shelley has to offer in place of religious and moral codes is 'a certain mysterious indefinable kindliness'. It is far more sensible a comment than his denunciation of horrors occasioned by Shelley's 'evil ambitions'.

Despite quoting examples of the poet's 'detestable principles', Lockhart continues to apply his distinction between form and meaning by praising Shelley's 'very extraordinary powers of language and imagination'. He also recognizes the importance of Prometheus Unbound in the Shelley canon, and he believes that it

1. BM, vii (Sept., 1820), 679-87.

will be considered by all that read it attentively, as abounding in poetical beauties of the highest order - as presenting many specimens not easily to be surpassed, of the moral sublime of eloquence - as overflowing with pathos, and most magnificent in description.

(680)

Further praise is given to other poems in the volume, in particular 'The Sensitive Plant'. Lockhart prefers this to the better-known 'To a Skylark' and 'Ode to the West Wind' although both are spoken of favourably. But as so often happened with Byron, this generous praise is obscured throughout the review by moral posturing.

The remainder of the review is taken up with further abuse of the Cockneys, a slightly less severe judgement on Keats, and a reaffirmation of Shelley's superiority to both Keats and Hunt. These last two points strengthen the suggestion that the favourable reception given to Shelley had much to do with the attack on Keats. Another reason is also touched upon when the London Magazine is taken to task for its allegation that Blackwood's only preferred Shelley to his fellow poets because of his superior social standing.

Prometheus Unbound was extremely provocative, and naturally political and moral considerations loom large in Lockhart's review. None the less, Blackwood's was giving substantial support to Shelley's poetry. By 1821 this had changed, and it is perhaps of significance that it was also at this time that the three periodicals were treating Byron with much greater severity. This change is seen in a review of Adonais written by George Croly, which is spiteful and unprincipled even by Blackwood's standards.¹ He begins by

1. BM, x (Dec., 1821), 696-700.

comparing the Cockneys to the Della Cruscans, and mocks 'milliners' maids and city apprentices [who] pined over the mutual melancholies of Arley and Matilda'. He then adds that at least the Della Cruscans 'kept their private irregularities to themselves, and sought for no reprobate popularity by raising the banner to all the vicious of the community'.

The comments on Adonais are not worth repeating. An unpleasant and sneering résumé of Keats's career is followed by a parody of the elegy which is in thoroughly bad taste. Some lines are then quoted from The Cenci to show that

This raving is such as perhaps no excess of madness ever raved, except in the imagination of a Cockney, determined to be as mad as possible, and opulent in his recollections of the shambles.

(698)

Finally Shelley is denounced as 'the only verseman of the day, who has dared, in a Christian country, to work out for himself the character of direct ATHEISM'. Obviously political considerations are now uppermost, and this becomes even more apparent with the accusation that Shelley's 'language against the death-dealing Quarterly Review, which has made such havoc in the Empire of Cockaigne, is merely malignant, mean, and peevishly personal'. Blackwood's now thought the time had come to side with its more respectable rival.

Shelley's fall from grace is confirmed in a brief note on Epipsychidion which appears in Charles Ollier's article 'Letter from London'.¹ Not surprisingly (since Ollier was Shelley's publisher) his own comments are fairly innocuous, but a footnote is added by

1. BM, xi (Feb., 1822), 236-39.

'Christopher North':

Percy Bysshe Shelley has now published a long series of poems, the only object of which seems to be the promotion of ATHEISM and INCEST; and we can no longer hesitate to avow our belief, that he is as worthy of co-operating with the King of Cockaigne, as he is unworthy of co-operating with Lord Byron. Shelley is a man of genius, but he has no sort of sense or judgement. He is merely "an inspired idiot"!

(237)

Seven years later Blackwood's wrote of Shelley more kindly,¹ and their attacks on him should not obscure the early support they gave him.

But it was support which was, at best, equivocal. It was rarely backed up by sustained intelligent criticism, and too often consisted of vague and perfunctory praise. That Blackwood's should support Shelley at all was surprising, but I have suggested two reasons for this. One is the need to balance the attack on Keats, and the other Shelley's social standing. Both stem from Blackwood's obsession with the so-called Cockneys, and in 1826 the Magazine tried to justify its treatment of them:²

That we did smash that pestilent sect, we acknowledge with pleasure. A baser crew never was spewed over literature. Conceited, ignorant, insolent, disaffected, irreligious, and obscene, they had, by force of impudence, obtained a certain sway over the public mind....That we did our work roughly, we acknowledge; they were not vermin to be crushed by a delicate finger. That we did our work personally, we deny; unless their own consciences applied to their persons what we said of their books....We positively assert, that our hatred and disgust to these scribblers, was political and literary. How, in fact, could it be personal, against men whom we never saw, and who moved in such a sphere of life as to render it impossible for us to meet them?

(xv-xvi)

Blackwood's hatred was undoubtedly political and literary, but the

1. BM, xxiii (March, 1828), 402.

2. BM, xix (1826), i-xxix.

most insidious bias can be seen in the sneer of the last sentence. This could not apply to Shelley, who was at least the social equal of his reviewers, and since the abuse of the Cockneys was based on class prejudice he escaped rather more lightly. However, with the hardening of attitudes against Byron in 1821, Blackwood's decided that even token support for Shelley was no longer possible. It is something they overlooked when they summed up their treatment of him:

Percy Bysshe Shelley was a man of far superior powers to Keats. He had many of the faculties of a great poet. He was, however, we verily believe it now, scarcely in his right mind. His errors in private life had been great, but not prodigious, as the Quarterly Review represented them....He had many noble qualities; and thus gifted, thus erring, and thus an outcast, we spoke of him with kindness and with praise.

(xxvii)

But Blackwood's was always good at embroidering the truth.

The first review of Shelley in the Quarterly¹ is remarkable not for any unexpected support of the poet, but for the virtuosity and subtlety of its denigration of him. It is normally ascribed to J.T. Coleridge; but it is a great deal more shrewd and Machiavellian than his usual contributions, and one wonders if Gifford had a hand in it. It was a review of The Revolt of Islam.

The Quarterly's objections to Shelley are quite simply political and moral:

The existence of evil, physical and moral, is the grand problem of all philosophy; the humble find it a trial, the proud make it a stumbling-block; Mr Shelley refers it to the faults of those civil institutions and religious creeds which are designed to regulate the conduct of man here, and his hopes in a hereafter. In these he seems to make no distinction, but considers them all as bottomed

1. QR, xxi (April, 1819), 460-71. There is an earlier but somewhat confused reference to Shelley in the review of Hunt's Foliage [QR, xviii (May, 1818), 324-35.]

upon principles pernicious to man and unworthy of God, carried into details the most cruel, and upheld only by the stupidity of the many on the one hand, and the selfish conspiracy of the few on the other.

(463)

The Quarterly naturally cannot accept any of these conclusions, and the review sets out to destroy their credibility and that of their perpetrator.

For once, however, invective and satire are eschewed; Coleridge appears to write more in sorrow than in anger, and the cool, level tone of the review makes it extremely effective. Particularly so since this is in marked contrast to the treatment normally given to the Cockneys, the tone of which we are reminded of at the very beginning of the review:

[Shelley] is one of that industrious knot of authors, the tendency of whose works we have in our late Numbers exposed to the caution of our readers - novel, poem, romance, letters, tours, critique, lecture and essay follow one another, framed to the same measure, and in subjection to the same key-note, while the sweet under-song of the weekly journal [i.e. the Examiner], filling up all pauses, strengthening all weaknesses, smoothing all abruptnesses, harmonizes the whole strain.

(460)

But Coleridge goes on to argue that Shelley, paradoxically, is the least dangerous of them:

there is a naiveté and openness in his manner of laying down the most extravagant positions, which in some measure deprives them of their venom; and when he enlarges on what certainly are but necessary results of opinions more guardedly delivered by others, he might almost be mistaken for some artful advocate of civil order and religious institutions.

(460)

It is also a point made, surprisingly, by Hazlitt, who mistrusted Shelley for constantly adopting a 'pernicious extreme on the liberal side, and so hurting it'.¹ But Hazlitt meant what he said;

1. The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt, edited by his Eldest Son (1862), i, 166.

Coleridge's aim is to belittle Shelley, and he does so by pretending that his extremism renders him impotent.

That Coleridge did not believe this is shown by his use of another technique sometimes employed by reviewers when dealing with a potentially dangerous work. We are told that The Revolt of Islam

has not much ribaldry or voluptuousness for prurient imaginations, and no personal scandal for the malicious; and even those on whom it might be expected to act most dangerously by its semblance of enthusiasm, will have stout hearts to proceed beyond the first canto. As a whole, it is insupportably dull, and laboriously obscure; its absurdities are not of the kind which provoke laughter, the story is almost devoid of interest, and very meagre....

(462-3)

That is the classic way, still commonly used,¹ of persuading a reader not to read a book that the reviewer in reality disapproves of.

A variety of other techniques are used. Class prejudice is latent in the sorrowful claim that Shelley was one 'whom nature had intended for better things'. The Quarterly's customary chauvinism is also in evidence:

The laws and government on which Mr. Shelley's reasoning proceeds, are the Turkish, administered by a lawless despot; his religion is the Mohammedan, maintained by servile hypocrites; and his scene for their joint operation Greece, the land full beyond all others of recollections of former glory and independence, now covered with shame and sunk in slavery. We are Englishmen, Christians, free, and independent; we ask Mr. Shelley how his case applies to us? or what we learn from it to the prejudice of our own institutions?

(466)

And, in the same vein, a reference is made later to 'that store-house

1. George Orwell, in an unpublished foreword to Animal Farm, wrote: 'Naturally, those reviewers who understand the art of denigration will not attack it on political grounds but on literary ones. They will say that it is a dull, silly book and a disgraceful waste of paper'. (TLS, 15-9-1972).

of cast-off mummeries and abominations, the French revolution'.

On a different tack, a comparison is made with Wordsworth:

Mr. Shelley indeed is an unsparing imitator; and he draws largely on the rich stores of another mountain poet [his debt to Southey having already been noted], to whose religious mind it must be matter, we think, of perpetual sorrow to see the philosophy which comes pure and holy from his pen, degraded and perverted, as it continually is, by this miserable crew of atheists or pantheists, who have just sense enough to abuse its terms, but neither heart nor principle to comprehend its import, or follow its application.

(461-2)

This is not an unusual tactic (it occurs in the reviews of Byron), and Wordsworth must have been extremely irritated to find himself becoming a weapon in the reviewers' armoury.

Although the review deliberately avoids the emotionalism normally generated when the Quarterly or Blackwood's dealt with a 'Cockney', Shelley's personal character still comes in for some rough-handling. Reference is made to his expulsion from Oxford, and later, after comparing him to Hunt and conceding that he is at least a gentleman, Coleridge states:

he is really too young, too ignorant, too inexperienced, and too vicious to undertake the task of reforming any world, but the little world within his own breast; that the task will be a good preparation for the difficulties which he is more anxious at once to encounter. There is a book which will help him to this preparation, which has more poetry in it than Lucretius, more interest than Godwin, and far more philosophy than both.

(470)

It is the condescending and patronizing tone of this passage which must have been most irritating for Shelley. But Coleridge is not content merely to belittle him, and he concludes by revealing the steel just beneath the surface of the Quarterly's ineffable superiority:

if we might withdraw the veil of private life, and tell what we now know about him, it would be indeed a disgusting picture that we should exhibit, but it would be an unanswerable comment on our text; it is not easy for those who read only,

to conceive how much low pride, how much cold selfishness, how much unmanly cruelty are consistent with the laws of this 'universal' and 'lawless love'. But we must only use our knowledge to check the groundless hopes which we were once prone to entertain of him.

(471)

Innuendo is, of course, much more effective than a bald statement, and again the considerable cunning of the reviewer is in evidence. It is not surprising that Shelley was extremely annoyed by the review.¹

Ostensibly it is a review of The Revolt of Islam (first published as Laon and Cythna), but the extent and quality of literary criticism is negligible. Like Lockhart, Coleridge makes a distinction between form and content, and he concedes that the poem 'is not without beautiful passages, that the language is in general free from errors of taste, and the versification smooth and harmonious'. But that is damning with faint praise, and at least the dismissal of Rosalind and Helen has the virtue of honesty. Despite the hopes that the Quarterly pretended it had for Shelley's reformation, it is obvious that the purpose of this review is to dispose of him as efficiently as possible, and a considerable number of reviewing tricks are employed for just that purpose.

1. Shelley wrote to Charles Ollier in October 1819: 'The only remark worth notice in this piece is the assertion that I imitate Wordsworth. It may as well be said that Lord Byron imitates Wordsworth [it was, by all three periodicals]....A certain similarity all the best writers of any particular age inevitably are marked with, from the spirit of that age acting on all. This I had explained in my preface, which the writer was too disingenuous to advert to. As to the other trash, and particularly that lame attack on my personal character, which was meant so ill, and which I am not the man to feel, 'tis all nothing.... I was amused, too, with the finale; it is like the end of the first act of an opera, when that tremendous concordant discord sets up from the orchestra, and everybody talks and sings at once'. (Letters, Jones, ii, 127-28).

Three years later W.S.Walker reviewed Prometheus Unbound,¹

and the tone is even brisker:

So Mr. Shelley may plume himself upon writing in three different styles: one which can be generally understood; another which can be understood only by the author; and a third which is absolutely and intrinsically unintelligible. Whatever his command may be of the first and second of these styles, this volume is a most satisfactory testimonial of his proficiency in the last.

(168-9)

This looks like the opening of a slashing review of Shelley; less subtle, perhaps, but no less virulent than Coleridge's. The ending of the review confirms this impression, and the reasons for it made apparent:

Mr. Shelley says, that his intentions are pure. Pure! They may be so in his vocabulary; for, (to say nothing of his having unfortunately mistaken nonsense for poetry, and blasphemy for an imperious duty,) vice and irreligion, and the subversion of society are, according to his system, pure and holy things; Christianity, and moral virtue, and social order, are alone impure....He professes to write in order to reform the world. The essence of the proposed reformation is the destruction of religion and government.

(179-80)

Given these sentiments, it is somewhat surprising to discover that Walker reviewed Shelley's Posthumous Poems extremely favourably in Knight's Quarterly Magazine.² His authorship of the review in the Quarterly is beyond doubt, and Theodore Redpath when discussing the issue concludes that 'If Walker wrote the later review [in Knight's Quarterly Magazine] also, he may have changed his mind about Shelley, or Gifford may have influenced or tinkered with the review in the Quarterly'.³ Both are possible, and the joke

1. QR, xxvi (Oct., 1821), 168-80.

2. Knight's Quarterly Magazine, iii (Aug., 1824).

3. Redpath, 41.

which opens the review and the diatribe which concludes it could well have been added by Gifford. However, if one looks more closely at the review, Walker's later support for Shelley does not quite appear so inconsistent.

This does not mean that he softens his attitude towards Shelley, and indeed unlike Lockhart and J.T.Coleridge he refuses to make a spurious distinction between the poetry's pernicious meaning and its form. In fact it is the form that he takes issue with:

The predominating characteristic of Mr. Shelley's poetry, however, is its frequent and total want of meaning. Far be it from us to call for strict reasoning, or the precision of logical deductions, in poetry; but we have a right to demand clear, distinct conceptions. The colouring of the pictures may be brighter or more variegated than that of reality; elements may be combined which do not in fact exist in a state of union; but there must be no confusion in the forms presented to us. Upon a question of mere beauty, there may be a difference of taste....But the question of meaning, or no meaning, is a matter of fact on which common sense, with common attention, is adequate to decide....

(169)

That is a perfectly legitimate critical position clearly and honestly stated. Walker might be accused of a lack of sympathy with Romantic poetry as displayed by his appeal to what were so often the Quarterly's domestic deities of plain common-sense and immediate intelligibility, if it were not for the sensible and telling examples from Shelley's poetry, particularly 'The Sensitive Plant', with which he supports his argument. And in comparing Shelley's supporters with converts to Methodism, he arrives at the most pressing critical problem raised by Shelley's poetry:

In the same way [as the words of the Methodist preacher], poetry like that of Mr. Shelley presents every where glittering constellations of words, which taken separately have a meaning, and either communicate some activity to the

imagination, or dazzle it by their brilliance. Many of them relate to beautiful or interesting objects, and are therefore capable of imparting pleasure to us by the associations attached to them. The reader is conscious that his mind is raised from a state of stagnation, and he is willing to believe, that he is astounded and bewildered, not by the absurdity, but by the originality and sublimity of the author.

(176)

And later he makes the same point, but even more strongly:

If the poet is one who whirls round his reader's brain, till it becomes dizzy and confused; if it is his office to envelop he knows not what in huge folds of a clumsy drapery of splendid words and showy metaphors, then, without doubt, may Mr. Shelley place the Delphic laurel on his head. But take away from him the unintelligible, the confused, the incoherent, the bombastic, the affected, the extravagant, the hideously gorgeous, and 'Prometheus', and the poems which accompany it, will sink at once into nothing.

(177)

It is a severe judgement, and one which might on a superficial reading reinforce the impression of the review as an onslaught on Shelley's poetry. But in essence it is a judgement that has been arrived at by most critics who have written on Shelley although perhaps not to the same degree of severity, and certainly in Walker's case it is founded on consistent critical principles and a very real connection with the poetry. Obviously the Quarterly's policy was to attack Shelley, and there is no way of telling whether Walker designed his review with this aim in mind, or whether it was reworked by Gifford. The perception and intelligence displayed in the review suggests that Walker was quite capable of playing the devil's disciple and concentrating only on the weaker aspects of Shelley's work. Later, after Shelley's death and in a periodical less conscious of its public responsibilities, he could take a more balanced approach. But even within the confines of the Quarterly, his comments deserve more consideration

than might at first appear.

The Quarterly's final comment on Shelley appeared in a review of Gower's Translation of Faust:¹

Mr. Shelley had a fine ear for harmony, and a great command of poetical language, although he was often seduced by bad example into licenses both of expression and versification at once mean and extravagant. He had, moreover, a fine liveliness both of feeling and of imagination, and in short, wanted little to be a distinguished original poet, but distinctness of conception, and regulation of taste.

(148)

But this was in 1826, and the Quarterly rarely spoke ill of the dead. Obviously its response to Shelley was conditioned by the threat he posed to religion and society, but, as Walker's review shows, it was not simply a case of condemning him because he 'flew straight in the face of [these] two almost hysterical fears'.²

In October 1824 Mary Shelley had written to Marianne Hunt:

[Hazlitt] wrote an article in the E.R. on the vol. of Poems which I published - I do not know whether he meant it to be favourable or not - I did not like it at all - but when I saw him I could not be angry.³

1. QR, xxxiv (June, 1826), 148-53.

2. N.I.White, The Unextinguished Hearth (Durham, N.C., 1938)¹⁰. In fact Shelley's views were not quite so extreme as the periodicals, though understandably, imagined. In a letter to Hunt he wrote: 'I fear that in England things will be carried violently by the rulers, and that they will not have learned to yield in time to the spirit of the age. The great thing to do is to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy; to inculcate with fervour both the right of resistance and the duty of forbearance. You know my principles incite me to take all the good I can get in politics, for ever aspiring to something more. I am one of those whom nothing will fully satisfy, but who am ready to be partially satisfied by all that is practicable'. (Letters, Jones, ii, 153). A.S.Walker, "Peterloo, Shelley, and Reform", PMLA, xl (1925), 128-64, also argues that Shelley's political aims were not so extreme as so often thought, and draws attention to The Philosophical View of Reform which was written in 1819-20 but not published until 1920.

3. The Letters of Mary Shelley, ed. F.L.Jones (Oklahoma, 1946), i, 90.

Mary's anger was checked by Hazlitt's wretched state of health; but her anger does not do justice to a review¹ which balanced Shelley's faults and merits as a poet whilst evoking the essential spirit of his work - it is, perhaps, this attempt to arrive at a balanced assessment which provoked Mary Shelley to remark naively that she was not sure whether the review was meant to be favourable or not. John Hayden has praised the review and quoted from it at length,² but certain points need amplification.

The first is the very favourable light it throws on Walker's review. Although sharing many of Shelley's political views and also appearing to be more in tune with the essential spirit of Shelley's poetry, Hazlitt's strictures on the poet's work are very similar to those expressed by Walker:

Mr Shelley's style is to poetry what astrology is to natural science - a passionate dream, a straining after impossibilities, a record of fond conjectures, a confused embodying of vague abstractions, - a fever of the soul, thirsting and craving after what it cannot have, indulging its love of power and novelty at the expense of truth and nature, associating ideas by contraries, and wasting great powers by their application to unattainable objects.

(494)

He goes on to develop this line of reasoning, and at times his comments more than equal Walker's in their severity. But a hint of admiration usually underlies his disapproval, and he acknowledges more fully the positive aspects of Shelley's work:

He has single thoughts of great depth and force, single images of rare beauty, detached passages of extreme tenderness; and, in his smaller pieces, where he has attempted little, he has done most.

(495)

By the poet's own standards this would have been a limiting judgement,

1. ER, xl (July, 1824), 494-514.

2. Hayden, 171-3.

but it is one echoed by succeeding generations of critics.

But Hazlitt's review is not only valuable because many others have agreed with his literary judgements. It offers an account both of the poet and the man which appears to be stringent and honest, and so relatively free from the prejudices and biases which motivated other reviewers. At times it is perhaps too impressionistic, but the general picture that emerges is one that has found a resemblance in the work of such modern biographers as Richard Holmes.

The review does not consist solely of general statements about the nature of Shelley's poetic abilities, and there are commentaries on individual poems. Hazlitt finds Julien and Maddalo 'full of that thoughtful and romantic humanity, but rendered perplexing and unattractive by that veil of shadowy or of glittering obscurity, which distinguished Mr Shelley's writings', although he still thinks it is a good example of Shelley at his 'least-mannered'. He is more severe with The Witch of Atlas, The Triumph of Life, and Marianne's Dream, all of which in his view show how '[Shelley's] Muse chiefly runs riot, and baffles all pursuit of common comprehension or critical acumen'. All this is hardly lavish praise, but in preferring The Witch of Atlas to Alastor he defines both as 'being a sort of mental voyage through the unexplored regions of space and time'. Few other contemporary reviewers were capable of such a comment, and it demonstrates Hazlitt's awareness of the nature and spirit of Shelley's work even though by temperament he disliked what was vague and abstract. His understanding of Shelley's actual achievement is shown by his praise of the shorter poems and translations. Not surprisingly he dislikes the oppressive and heavy-handed Ginevra, but he

finds the Ode to Naples 'a fair specimen of Mr Shelley's highest powers' - as he made clear earlier in the review, he feels that these are best exemplified by the shorter poems. It still seems a valid judgement.

There is one other issue which ought to be considered, and that is the political implications of the review. At one point Hazlitt writes:

We wish to speak of the errors of a man of genius with tenderness. His nature was kind, and his sentiments noble; but in him the rage of free inquiry and private judgment amounted to a species of madness. Whatever was new, untried, unheard of, unauthorized, exerted a kind of fascination over his mind. The examples of the world, the opinion of others, instead of acting as a check upon him, served but to impel him forward with double velocity in his wild and hazardous career. Spurning the world of realities, he rushed into the world of nonentities and contingencies, like air into a vacuum. If a thing was old and established, this was with him a certain proof of its having no solid foundation to rest upon: if it was new, it was good and right. Every paradox was to him a self-evident truth; every prejudice an undoubted absurdity. The weight of authority, the sanction of ages, the common consent of mankind, were vouchers only for ignorance, error, and imposture. Whatever shocked the feelings of others, conciliated his regard; whatever was light, extravagant, and vain, was to him a proportionable relief from the dulness and stupidity of established opinions.

(497)

John Hayden quotes the same passage, and then comments: 'Thus wrote a contemporary who was both a personal acquaintance of Shelley and a radical'.¹ But it was not quite as simple as that. The Edinburgh was not a radical periodical, and, even though Hazlitt managed to get away with a great deal, a full-scale defence of Shelley was probably impossible. In any case, as we have seen, Hazlitt felt that Shelley's extremism damaged the radical cause, and it is a point he makes in the review when he states that 'The martello-towers with which we are to repress, if we cannot destroy,

1. Hayden, 164.

the systems of fraud and oppression should not be castles in the air, or clouds in the verge of the horizon, but the enormous and accumulated pile of abuses which have arisen out of their own continuance'. His reluctance to support Shelley is a matter of expediency rather than ideological disagreement.

But his review remains an important contribution to the discussion of Shelley, although Walker provides us with stringent and soundly based criticism of Shelley's poetry. The praise in Blackwood's amounts to very little in substance, and eventually the Magazine emulates the Quarterly in giving predominance to political, religious, and moral considerations. None the less, Shelley fared far better at the hands of his reviewers than either Keats or Coleridge.

In the case of Byron and Shelley the major biases and prejudices at work are immediately apparent. What I have tried to show in this chapter is not only their development but their interaction, and how this could prove to be a great deal more complex and even contradictory than at first appears. I have also tried to show the importance of class prejudice, and how this motivated the periodicals' response to two poets of gentle birth but egalitarian ideals - this proves particularly revealing in Byron's case, but it also helps explain in part Blackwood's reception of Shelley.

My pursuit of significant literary criticism is rewarded by Hazlitt's and possibly Walker's reviews of Shelley, and by the criticism of Byron by Jeffrey, Scott, and Wilson. In Jeffrey we see a critic attempting to come to terms with poetry with which he feels some affinity, but in doing so he is forced to confront some

of his literary and extra-literary preconceptions. Scott and Wilson attempt to disentangle Byron from the problems created by his enormous popularity, and both offer a perceptive, and in Wilson's case a challenging, assessment of his achievement. These things, in particular, show the value of the periodicals as a record of the complex and intricate pressures which must always lie behind the reception given to new literature, not only of the early nineteenth century but of any period.

Chapter Nine

Politics and Class: Hunt, Keats, and Hazlitt

Leigh Hunt

With Leigh Hunt we come to one of the most extraordinary episodes in the history of periodical reviewing, and one which provides an embarrassment of riches for anyone attempting to unravel the skein of cause and effect in these Reviews and magazines. Hunt's importance is of course secondary to that of Keats and Shelley, but their treatment can only be understood in relation to his. The villain of the piece is Blackwood's Magazine, and it was Lockhart who christened Hunt "King of Cockaigne", and cast Keats and Shelley as his misguided subjects. "Cockaigne" not only carried the social stigma of "Cockney" (which at this time possessed implications of false refinement), but also referred to 'an imaginary country, the abode of luxury and idleness'.¹

Before Blackwood's began its campaign, reviews of The Story of Rimini (1816) had appeared in both the Edinburgh and the Quarterly. John Wilson Croker wrote the Quarterly's review, but there has been some confusion over the authorship of the one in the Edinburgh. Hazlitt wrote to Leigh Hunt claiming that he had praised him in the Edinburgh,² and Blackwood's thought

1. O.E.D.

2. H.Baker, William Hazlitt (1962), 208n.

Hazlitt was the reviewer. But Jeffrey listed the review¹ as his own, and stylistically it is his and must remain so in the absence of any conclusive evidence to the contrary.

The Story of Rimini, that 'compound of grace and vulgarity' as Herschel Baker calls it, is as mixed as its author. Jeffrey adopts a tolerant attitude towards the poem, and is kinder than it deserves. Political considerations probably played a part in this. Whilst not in any sense supporting Hunt's more extreme views, Jeffrey may well have wished to signal the Edinburgh's political position by pointedly refraining from attacking such a notorious figure (he had been out of prison for only just over a year). The years after Waterloo were particularly turbulent, and at this time Jeffrey was still advocating some kind of alliance between Whigs and Radicals in an effort to achieve a modicum of reform and so avert revolution. If this was the case, it was only the most cautious of gestures since the Edinburgh did not review Hunt again. Hunt commented on this silence, and politics were uppermost in his mind:

far, therefore, am I from supposing, that the silence of the Whig critics respecting me was owing to any hostile influence which Lord Holland would have condescended to exercise. Not being among the visitors at Holland House, I dare say I was not thought of, I was regarded as a person who, in shunning Whig connection, and perhaps, in persisting to advocate a reform towards which they were cooling, might be supposed indifferent to Whig advocacy. And, indeed, such was the case, till I felt the want of it.... I think the Edinburgh Review might have noticed my books a little oftener. I am sure it would have done me a great deal of worldly good by it, and itself no harm in these progressing days of criticism. But I said nothing on the subject, and may have been thought indifferent.²

1. ER, xxvi (June, 1816), 476-91.

2. The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt, ed. J.E.Morpurgo (1949), 227-28.

The review gathers in enthusiasm as it continues: Hunt is commended for capturing the spirit of his original since, although it would have been impossible for him to have imitated Dante's manner, 'the lovers, whose memory the muse of the Italian poet had consecrated in the other world, are here restored to earth, with the graces and the sentiments that became them in their lifetime'; complimentary comparisons are made with Boccaccio, Ariosto, and Watteau; and in his résumé of the poem Jeffrey stresses Hunt's uniqueness:

Mr Hunt, as we have already intimated, does not belong to any of the modern schools of poetry....His poetry is not like Mr Wordsworth's, which is metaphysical; nor like Mr Coleridge's, which is fantastical; nor like Mr Southey's, which is monastical.

(482)

However, the praise is tempered with some adverse criticism, and Jeffrey suggests that the poem's style is its weakness as well as its strength:

we think there is a good deal of affectation in his homeliness, directness, and rambling descriptions. He visibly gives himself airs of familiarity, and mixes up flippant, and even cant phrases, with passages that bear, upon the whole, the marks of considerable labour and study. In general, however, he is very successful in his attempts at facility, and has unquestionably produced a little poem of great grace and spirit, and, in many passages and many particulars, of infinite beauty and delicacy.

(477)

The critical terminology employed here is significant: the censure of affectation and the praise of 'labour and study' and 'facility' are reminiscent of those references to the canons of literature which Jeffrey appealed to but never defined in his comments on Wordsworth. Jeffrey's praise of the poem is very nebulous, and the ambivalence in the review is not restricted to terminology.

Although ostensibly favourable, it remains an unsatisfactory review.

If Jeffrey's review is unsatisfactory because of its lack of conviction in praising the poem, Croker's review in the Quarterly¹ is unsatisfactory because his condemnation of Hunt also lacks any sense of connection with the poem itself. He begins by combining the two weapons consistently used against Hunt by the two major periodicals - politics and class:

A considerable part of this poem was written in Newgate, where the author was some time confined, we believe for a libel [against the Prince Regent] which appeared in a newspaper, of which he is said to be the conductor. Such an introduction is not calculated to make a very favourable impression. Fortunately, however, we are as little prejudiced as possible on this subject: we have never seen Mr. Hunt's newspaper; we have never heard any particulars of his offence; nor should we have known that he had been imprisoned but for his own confession. We have not, indeed, ever read one line that he has written, and are alike remote from the knowledge of his errors or the influence of his private character.

(473)

Thus the Quarterly's readers are reminded of Hunt's undesirable politics, and the reviewer's tone of effortless superiority not only allows him to claim a spurious impartiality (it was impossible for Croker not to have known of the Hunts' trial), but allows him to stress Hunt's social inferiority.

The tone of Croker's review is very much that of a headmaster reporting on an unsatisfactory pupil from an undesirable home background, and this analogy is reinforced by the comments that follow the opening paragraph. Hunt is ridiculed for lapses in grammar and style, and is accused of writing in 'the most strange,

1. QR, xiv (Jan., 1816), 473-81.

laboured, uncouth, and unintelligible species of prose that we ever read, only indeed to be exceeded in these qualities by some of the subsequent verses....' Vulgarity not only of style but also of sentiment is seen as perhaps Hunt's greatest sin, and Croker underlines this by quoting those famous lines:

The two divinest things this world HAS GOT,
A lovely woman in a rural spot!

However sound in theory, Hunt's lines seem to deserve Croker's censure, although Coventry Patmore offered a rather more telling criticism with his parody:

The two divinest things the world can grab,
A handsome woman in a hansom cab.

Croker's objection is not simply to Hunt's practice, but also to his theory, and the arrogance with which, he claims, Hunt attempts to put this forward as a pattern for imitation:

Mr. Hunt's first canon is that there should be a great freedom of versification - this is a proposition to which we should have readily assented; but when Mr. Hunt goes on to say that by freedom of versification he means something which neither Pope nor Johnson possessed, and of which even 'they knew less than any poets perhaps who ever wrote', we check our confidence; and, after a little consideration, find that by freedom Mr. Hunt means only an inaccurate, negligent, and harsh style of versification, which our early poets fell into from want of polish, and such poets as Mr. Hunt still practise from want of ease, of expression, and of taste.

'License he means, when he cries liberty'.

(474)

Once again political prejudice is being activated since license rather than liberty was the charge levelled against the Radicals (as it had been, earlier, against any supporter of the French Revolution). Also the defence of Pope and Johnson suggests an appeal to tradition which emphasises the determination of the Quarterly to defend the status quo be it literary or political, although one has to recognize the silliness of Hunt's comment.

At the end of the review, Croker returns to the most important aspect of his attack on Hunt:

Mr. Hunt prefixes to his work a dedication to Lord Byron, in which he assumes a high tone, and talks big of his 'fellow-dignity' and independence: what fellow-dignity may mean, we know not; perhaps the dignity of a fellow; but this we will say, that Mr. Hunt is not more unlucky in his pompous pretension to versification and good language, than he is in that which he makes, in this dedication, to proper spirit, as he calls it, and fellow-dignity; for we never, in so few lines, saw so many clear marks of the vulgar impatience of a low man, conscious and ashamed of his wretched vanity, and labouring, with coarse flippancy, to scramble over the bounds of birth and education, and fidget himself into the stout-heartedness of being familiar with a LORD.

(481)

Hunt's sycophancy is a recurring theme in the periodicals, and one which is difficult to repudiate. In the case of Byron, however, we must take into account Edmund Blunden's words:

If, ... Hunt's "dear Byron" manner is to be condemned as tactless and artificial, Byron himself is partly to blame for it; clearly he did not choose to be irritated by it until other persons had educated him into that feeling.¹

The Quarterly certainly helped in his education.

The Quarterly's other major contribution on Hunt was a review of Foliage by either Croker, J.T. Coleridge or Southey.² Croker had reviewed The Story of Rimini, but stylistically it belongs to Coleridge. It opens facetiously: Hunt is twitted for the dedication to the volume of poems since 'a certain beautiful and indefinite vagueness in the expression has made it difficult for us to understand parts'; and other errors in expression and grammar are ridiculed. But the tone of the review soon changes, and becomes more sombre as the net is spread to

1. E. Blunden, Leigh Hunt (1930), 80.

2. QR, xviii (May, 1818), 324-35. The Quarterly also reviewed Hunt's Life of Byron [QR, xxxvii (March, 1828), 402-26], but the review is of little interest to us.

include not only Hunt but, by implication, Byron and Shelley (who is referred to specifically in a footnote):

It may seem a wild apprehension to talk of the systematic revival of Epicureism amongst us in this age of the world; yet something very like it both speculatively and practically, and that too in its most dangerous because least offensive form, seems to be inculcated in all the writings we have alluded to.

(327)

The reviewer warns that whilst Hunt 'may flatter himself with possessing a finer eye, and a warmer feeling for the loveliness of nature, or congratulate himself on the philosophic freedom with which he follows her impulses', the 'plain and beaten' path of conduct is far better, since

We should not, for instance, commend as singularly amiable the receiving great and unmerited favours to be returned with venomous and almost frantic hatred; we are at a loss for the decency which rails at marriage, or the honour which pollutes it; and we have still a reluctance to condemn as a low prejudice the mysterious feeling of separation, which consecrates, and draws to closer intimacy the communion of brothers and sisters. We may be very narrow-minded, but we look upon it still as somewhat dishonourable to have been expelled from a University for the monstrous absurdity of a 'mathematical demonstration of the non-existence of a God': [and] according to our understandings, it is not proof of a very affectionate heart to break that of a wife by cruelty and infidelity....

(328-9)

The tone of this is more measured and authoritative than Lockhart's invective in Blackwood's (although this review may help explain the reasons for that invective, particularly since the last point made in the above extract obviously refers to Byron), and the reasons for the reviewer's objections to Hunt are made very clear. There is little of the class superiority displayed by Croker in the earlier review, and the analogy this time is not with the headmaster but with the domine anxious to keep one of his flock from bad company. But by the end of the review rhetoric replaces

sense, and Hunt is warned that if he continues to follow his present course,

Henceforth all will be wormwood and bitterness to him: he may write a few more stinging and a few more brilliant periods, he may slander a few more eminent characters, he may go on to deride venerable and holy institutions, he may stir up more discontent and sedition, but he will have no peace of mind within, he will do none of the good he once hoped to do, nor yet have the bitter satisfaction of doing all the evil he now desires; he will live and die unhonoured in his own generation, and, for his own sake it is to be hoped, moulder unknown in those which are to follow.

(335)

This was to find a verbal echo in J.T.Coleridge's review of Shelley's The Revolt of Islam, and much of this review is aimed not specifically at Hunt but the moral and religious doctrines of his more prominent friends.

Hunt's poetry, however, is not ignored altogether, and an attempt is made to assess both his faults and virtues as a poet:

Mr. Hunt's faults are a total want of taste, and of ear for metrical harmony; an indulgence of cant terms to a ridiculous excess, an ignorance of common language, a barbarous and uncouth combination of epithets, an affectation of language and sentiment, and what is a far more serious charge, though it occurs but seldom, an impurity of both....

Mr. Hunt's merits are a general richness of language, and a picturesque imagination; this last indeed, the faculty of placing before us, with considerable warmth of colouring, and truth of drawing, the groups which his fancy assembles, he possesses in an eminent degree....

(329-30)

It may be harsh, but it is the only attempt to arrive at a balanced judgement which appeared in any of the three major periodicals. This in itself demonstrates the extent to which extra-literary criteria determined the response to Hunt's works, and suggests that his true importance derived not from his poetry but from his editorship of the Examiner.

However, one must not overrate the nature of Hunt's literary achievement, and so needlessly denigrate his reviewers. John Hayden's point is an important one:

Vulgarity, familiarity, bad taste: as terms of critical disapproval these are, I believe, valid and meaningful, although it is not often necessary to call them into use; for the occasion seldom arises when dealing with works of any literary value. When dealing with Hunt's works, some of which are well worth reading, the need for applying such terms is constant. They may at first seem to be mere abuse when encountered in contemporary reviews; but it is difficult to tell a writer he is being vulgar without sounding abusive, just as it is difficult to point out familiarity without resorting to humorous comment. Blackwood's, as usual, went too far and indulged in personal abuse, thereby creating a one-sided image of Hunt's contemporary critics.¹

Blackwood's is quite rightly singled out as the exception to the point that Hayden is making, but the reasons for the Magazine's excessive personal abuse of Hunt are far more complex and a great deal more interesting than either Hayden or his fellow commentators on the periodicals have allowed.

Blackwood's treatment of Hunt consists of a series of eight articles 'On the Cockney School of Poetry' which sometimes took the form of a review of a specific work, two spoof letters, two occasional articles, and three reviews. It falls into three periods: the first four articles on the Cockney School (one of which is an article on Keats and does not concern us here) and the two 'Letters' by 'Z' appeared between October 1817 and August 1818 - all were written by Lockhart, and all display a remarkable venom and irresponsibility; a further three articles in the series on the Cockney School and an article entitled 'Cockney Poetry and Cockney Politics' all by Lockhart, and a review of The Literary

1. Hayden, 188.

Pocket-Book by Wilson, appeared between April 1819 and December 1822 - on the whole these are still unreasonably severe, but they lack the unbalanced intensity of their forerunners; and, finally, between January 1824 and March 1828 three contributions by Wilson and a collection of parodies by William Hay Forbes appeared in the pages of the Magazine, and their severity of tone is even further diluted.

Lockhart is obviously the major figure in the attack launched by Blackwood's (although presumably he carried it out with the full connivance of Wilson and Blackwood), and the most notable aspect of his onslaught is the sustained virulence which it displays, as exemplified by this extract from the second

Letter of Z. to Mr. Leigh Hunt:

You may unblushingly expose yourself and your name to the scorn and disgust of the wise and the good - you may endeavour to sap the foundations of civil society and of social life - you may, as you have often done in prose, eulogize prostitutes and kept-mistresses, and sneer at that dull thing a wife - you may, as you have done in something that is not prose, hold up to the love, and pity, and admiration, and worship of virgins, the incestuous and adulterous wretch, who took to her polluted embraces her husband's brother, for no other cause than because he was a handsome man...- you may, as you have done, abet murder and assassination, by blaming the general principle, and yet applauding or extenuating each particular instance of it - and to all these enormities you may affix, with an imperial flourish, the sign manual of LEIGH HUNT. But is that any reason why Z., or any other man, should voluntarily offer himself to the filthy abuse of a crew of Jacobins and incendiaries?

(iii, 198)

In some ways this violent nonsense is not much worse than the abuse employed by such eighteenth-century satirists as Junius, but there is a vehemence and pruriency about this which is exceptional even by Blackwood's standards.

Lockhart opens his first article 'On the Cockney School of Poetry'¹ with a general attack, but his main target is more specific:

Its chief Doctor and Professor is Mr Leigh Hunt, a man certainly of some talents, of extravagant pretensions both in wit, poetry, and politics, and withal of exquisitely bad taste, and extremely vulgar modes of thinking and manners in all respects.

(38)

Hunt's lack of breeding is only matched by his lack of education, but it is his lack of social standing which is constantly harped upon by Lockhart. Thus, although at one point we are told that 'The story of Rimini is not wholly undeserving of praise', we are informed at another that in the poem 'Every thing is pretence, affectation, finery, and gaudiness' typical of the drawing-room of 'a little mincing boarding-school mistress'. There is also the somewhat inaccurate claim that

All the great poets of our country have been men of some rank in society, and there is no vulgarity in any of their writings; but Mr Hunt cannot utter a dedication, or even a note, without betraying the Shibboleth of low birth and low habits.

(39)

But class prejudice is not the only weapon employed by Lockhart, and, not content with having defined poetic achievement in terms of class, he claims that 'The two great elements of all dignified poetry, religious feeling, and patriotic feeling, have no place in [Hunt's] mind'. He believes that the poet's religion is instead a dilution of the Encyclopédie, and his patriotism nothing but a form of Jacobinism. But Lockhart is writing in 1818, not 1793, and the resurrection of these particular bogeymen

1. BM, ii (Oct., 1817), 38-41.

only seems to show the paucity of his invective, as do his derisive comments on Hunt's hair-style and yellow stockings. His only sensible criticism is of Hunt's aspirations to become a pastoral poet, although Hunt's incapacity to see nature as anything more than picturesque is even more fundamental than he allows.

Moral depravity becomes the central issue, and in a passage for which he had to apologise Lockhart claims that

[Hunt's] poetry is that of a man who has kept company with kept-mistresses. He talks indelicately like a tea-sipping milliner girl.

(40)

He makes much of the adultery and incest in The Story of Rimini, and uses the yardstick of Philistine common-sense in referring to Hunt's 'want of respect for all that numerous class of plain upright men, and unpretending women, in which the real worth and excellence of human society consists'. Hunt belongs to the type of man exemplified by Voltaire, Lord Holland, and Haydon, and Lockhart does not believe that he can claim kinship with Wordsworth, Moore, or Byron.

The reference to both Wordsworth and Byron is important. Blackwood's, as we have seen, was an early admirer and supporter of Wordsworth, and in this review of Hunt he is given praise by contrast:

How such a profligate creature as Mr Hunt can pretend to be an admirer of Mr Wordsworth, is to us a thing altogether inexplicable. One great charm of Wordsworth's noble compositions consists in the dignified purity of thought, and the patriarchal simplicity of feeling, with which they are throughout penetrated and imbued.

(40)

And as for Lord Byron:

How must the haughty spirit of Lara and Harold contemn the subaltern sneaking of our modern tuft-hunter....We

dare say Mr Hunt has some fine dreams about the true nobility being the nobility of talent, and flatters himself, that with those who acknowledge only that sort of rank, he himself passes for being the peer of Byron. He is sadly mistaken. He is as completely a Plebian in his mind as he is in his rank and station in society.

(40-1)

In those two comments we have a clue to at least part of the reason for Blackwood's treatment of Hunt. By over-emphasising its political and class convictions the Magazine is, in the case of Wordsworth, quelling any doubts in its readers' minds that it might be abandoning its basic tenets by supporting the Lakers; and, in Byron's case, it is overcoming the problem of the possible immorality of his poetry by directing the attack not at Byron but at Hunt - how can the Magazine be accused of countenancing immoral poetry when it is doing so much to counter it in its attacks on Hunt and his ilk (Byron, by reason of his social rank, stands aloof from such low-bred men). If such reasoning seems a little too ingenious on my part, one must remember the way in which Lockhart overstates his social and political preconceptions almost to the point of parody, and how he utilizes so many of his readers' fears and prejudices (however dated) in his attack. Hunt's politics account for some of this, but the intensity of Lockhart's attack and the curious use of sexual innuendo make far more sense if Hunt is being used for another purpose - the furtherance of the Magazine's support of two controversial poets, one of whom poses a specific problem of sexual morality.

The second article on the Cockney School ostensibly concentrates the attack on The Story of Rimini.¹ It begins by discussing

1. BM, ii (Nov., 1817), 194-201.

the use of incest as a literary theme:

The awful interest excited by the contemplation of passions abandoned to the extreme of infamy, has tempted many illustrious poets to indulge themselves in such unhallowed themes. But they themselves were at all times aware, that in so doing they have done wrong; and we know of no great poem, turning on such a subject, which does not contain within it some marks of the contrition of the author.

(194)

Having made this moral position quite clear, Lockhart then considers Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, Euripides' Hippolytus, Alfieri's Mirra, and Schiller's Die Braut von Messina, all of which, he claims, eschew any attempt to make incest attractive, and concentrate instead on the horror and pity of the situations which they describe. Lockhart also believes that the same is true of the work of 'the first of all living poets':

The daring spirit of Byron has twice ventured to tread upon the same awful ground. He has represented, both in Manfred and Parasina, the mutual love of conscious incest.

(196)

Lockhart then writes:

To none of these poems, however, does the subject of Rimini bear so great a resemblance as to Parasina, and it is this very circumstance of likeness which brings before us in the strongest colours the difference between the incest of Leigh Hunt and the incest of Byron. In Parasina, we are scarcely permitted to have a single glance at the guilt before our attention is rivetted upon the punishment.

(196)

This is the point of the review - Byron's plays are morally suspect and Lockhart is defending them here by showing how, in comparison with Hunt's poem which is disturbingly akin to one of them, they are in fact morally potent:

In all these productions of immortal poets [Byron included], we see the same desire to represent incest as a thing too awful to spring up of itself, without the interference of some revengeful power - the same careful avoidance of luxurious images - the same resolution to treat unhallowed

love with the seriousness of a judge, who narrates only that he may condemn the guilty and warn the heedless.

(197)

Hunt, of course, must be seen to be the opposite to this, and Lockhart makes quite sure that this is so. He also brings into play the class prejudice we saw in the first article by claiming that he 'never yet saw a lady lift [the poem] up, who did not immediately throw it down again in disgust', but that it might spread its pernicious influence amongst 'milliners and apprentice-boys' - if Blackwood's was going to defend Byron, it was going to do so from a position of utmost respectability.

Lockhart's third article is extremely virulent in tone.¹

Part of the impetus underlying it is political:

'Our hatred and contempt of Leigh Hunt as a writer, is not so much owing to his shameless irreverence to his aged and afflicted king - to his profligate attacks on the character of the king's sons -as to the odious and unnatural harlotry of his polluted muse.

(453)

In fact Hunt's attacks on the Regent and the royal family were a very important reason for Blackwood's opposition to him. But there is another factor involved, and again I would suggest that it concerns Byron. The following extract is significant:

The world is not fond of ingenious distinctions between the theory and the practice of morals. The public are justified in refusing to hear a man plead in favour of his character, when they hold in their hands a work of his in which all respect to character is forgotten. We must reap the fruit of what we sow; and if evil and unjust reports have arisen against Leigh Hunt as a man, and unluckily for him it is so, he ought not to attribute the rise of such reports to the political animosities which his virulence has excited, but to the real and obvious cause - his voluptuous defence of crimes revolting to Nature.

(454)

1. BM, iii (July, 1818), 453-6.

Taken in isolation such a passage might have been taken from a review of Byron's work, probably after the appearance of the first cantos of Don Juan. And yet the virulence of Lockhart's tone in the review as a whole, his denunciation of Hunt's political views (the periodicals were very concerned to show the apolitical nature of Byron's poetry), and the continual emphasis on Hunt's lack of breeding, would have prevented the majority of Blackwood's readers from making the connection between Hunt's case and Byron's. Again the stance taken by the Magazine is irreproachable, both politically and morally, but it still does not involve jettisoning Byron who is seen as belonging to a different world to that inhabited by the miserable Hunt. It is also of importance that this article of Lockhart's appeared shortly after the review of Foliage in the Quarterly in which Hunt's behaviour is seen as less culpable than that of Shelley and Byron - it is a view that Blackwood's seems to be trying very hard to implicitly refute.

The two letters from 'Z.' also belong to this time,¹ but they are of very little interest to us. They are even more virulent than the articles, and their purpose seems to be to rehearse the moral, political, class, and sexual prejudices which Lockhart makes such use of in his other pieces on Hunt.

Eight months elapsed between the third and fifth article 'On the Cockney School of Poetry'² (the fourth was an attack on Keats). This fifth article initiates the second phase of

1. BM, ii (Jan., 1818), 414-17, and iii (May, 1818), 196-201.
2. BM, v (April, 1819), 97-100.

Blackwood's treatment of Hunt, but it is strangely truncated and disparate. Lockhart begins by claiming that the 'two greatest egotists of the present day are absque omni dubio, Mr Wordsworth, and Mr Leigh Hunt'. Again we seem to have an example of the technique used in the earlier articles when he was defending Byron:

[Wordsworth's] genius came down to us like a beautiful unknown bird of heaven, wheeling around us, and courting us in its innocence, with colours we had never seen before, and wild sweet melodies to which our ears were strangers. But we repelled the visitor....It is no wonder that he should have learned almost to forget the existence of those who rejected him; and that egotism is pardonable in him, which would infallibly expose any other man of his genius to the just derision even of his inferiors.

(97)

Lockhart even goes on to defend the egotism of what he considers to be the more minor members of the Lake school, and a comparison is made between their forgivable and understandable egotism and that of the Cockneys.

The Cockneys are attacked on some of the lines that we have come to expect: 'they are lecturers of the Surrey Institution, and editors of Sunday papers, and so forth'; and Hunt is accused of self-adulation and complacency. But the sexual emphasis has now disappeared (Wordsworth after all did not have to be defended from charges of immorality), and the use of class prejudice has to be turned on its head:

What can fine ladies understand about Ruth? or fine gentlemen about Michael? Who, that wears black silk breeches or a crimson sattin petticoat, cares a farthing about the gray headed pedlar with his substantial coat of Galashiels cloth, or for Lucy Fell with her "little gray cloak"?

(97)

Whilst it was relatively easy to defend Byron by turning Hunt

into a bogeyman and playing upon the political and class prejudices of his readers, Lockhart found it much more difficult with Wordsworth, and the article fades away with a very long extract from Hunt's dramatic criticism.

Lockhart's penultimate article on Hunt is the sixth in the series on the Cockney school, and is a review of Foliage.¹ The change that we saw taking place in the previous article in the series is now more apparent; the article is maliciously funny in places ("My dear Byron", was quite a bright thought"), but the intensity of the earlier articles has been replaced by somewhat routine twitting of an author opposed largely on political grounds. The review is rather macabre in that Lockhart pretends that he is reviewing a posthumous volume of poems, and Hazlitt and Haydon come in for some abuse. The emphasis on class prejudice is still there, but only as another stick with which to beat Hunt who was well inured to such blows by this time.

Before Lockhart's final article, Wilson reviewed The Literary Pocket-Book:²

we propose now doing a truly wonderful thing - namely, in good earnest to laud a production of Mr Leigh Hunt's.

(235)

But Hunt has not really been forgiven, and we are told that his 'other sins of immorality, sedition, and impiety, we leave for the present to those dread twins, REMORSE and REPENTANCE'. Hunt's poems are given some praise: 'The Calendar of Nature' is 'often lively and

1. BM, vi (Oct., 1819), 70-6. An article by Lockhart entitled 'Cockney Poetry and Cockney Politics' appeared before this [BM, v (Sept., 1819), 639-42], but it is an extremely boring practical joke which links Leigh Hunt with Henry Hunt (the Hampstead Hunt and the Bristol Hunt).

2. BM, vi (Dec., 1819), 235-47.

descriptive', and 'Summer in 1818' 'really amiable and pretty'.

However two sonnets by Keats come in for rather rougher handling, and Wilson writes of him:

He is at present a very amiable, silly, lisping, and pragmatical young gentleman - but we hope to cure him of all that - and should have much pleasure in introducing him to our readers in a year or two speaking the language of this country, counting his fingers correctly, and condescending to a neckcloth.

(240)

A comparison is made between Keats and Shelley with the intention of disparaging the former, since 'A bird of paradise and a friezeland fowl would not look more absurdly, on the same perch' - Blackwood's was obviously determined to pursue its attack on Keats and its defence of Shelley. On the whole, however, Wilson provides a facetious and whimsical review of a collection of ephemera, which gains some importance thanks to a handful of poems by authors of note.

Lockhart's final article on Hunt, a review of the somewhat inept prose tale The Florentine Lovers, is a return to his earlier manner.¹ The energy and passion of the earlier articles is again apparent, as is the emphasis on sexual innuendo and lack of breeding:

Joking apart, we now consider Leigh Hunt the most contemptible little capon of the bantam breed, that ever vainly dropped a wing, or sidled up to a partlet. He can no more crow than a hen; and his gallantry betrays him into the most awkward predicament.

(775)

The tale itself affords Lockhart plenty of opportunity to indulge in this kind of invective, again with a largely sexual emphasis.

This return to the earlier manner of attacking Hunt is also

1. BM, xii (Dec., 1822), 775-81.

accompanied by a return to Lockhart's concern with Byron:

What, in the name of Katerfelto, can Byron mean by patronizing a Cockney? A Bear at College was all very well; - but, my lord, think on it, - a Cockney at Pisa! - Fie, my lord! This is by far the greatest outrage you have ever yet committed on manners, and morals, and intellectuals. As to Don Juan and Cain, we pardon you them; but this sin is beyond the reach of our forgiveness....

(781)

As I have tried to show, Hunt was the means by which Lockhart attempted to pardon such poems as Cain and Don Juan, but possibly he now felt that the stories of Byron's life-style in Italy and the hostility of so many of the other periodicals no longer made this possible. And yet the technique is still effective - although the reference to Byron quoted above is the severest that we have met in these articles on Hunt, it still places him in a far better light than Hunt, as an individual, as a poet, and, above all, as a gentleman.

The remaining items on Hunt are of no great interest.

They consist of reviews by Wilson of Ultra-Crepidarius; A Satire on William Gifford,¹ Bacchus in Tuscany (the eighth and final article in the series 'On the Cockney School of Poetry'),² and Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries.³ There is also a collection of parodies entitled Cockney Contributions to the First of April by William Hay Forbes.⁴ They continue the attack on Hunt, but in a half-hearted and emasculated fashion.

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1. BM, xv (Jan., 1824), 86-90.
 2. BM, xviii (Aug., 1825), 155-60.
 3. BM, xxiii (March, 1828), 362-408.
 4. BM, xvi (July, 1824), 67-73.

Hunt is of particular interest because all the prejudices and biases we find in the periodicals are at work in their treatment of him, and because of the light he throws on the reception given to other writers. Politics are obviously the central issue: most simply this meant that the Edinburgh was prepared to countenance him at a time when it was supporting a possible coalition between the Whigs and the Radicals, but then very studiously ignored him; whereas the Quarterly and Blackwood's attacked him with varying degrees of severity. The use of class prejudice and the charges of immorality were also politically motivated to a large extent. As regards other writers, Hunt was the means of preparing the ground for the abuse of Keats and Hazlitt; but he also has to be seen in relation to Byron and Shelley, particularly with regard to the problems of class prejudice and the relationship between literature and morality. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the periodicals' treatment of him is the way in which Lockhart used him as part of Blackwood's general defence of Byron and, to a lesser extent, Wordsworth - it is a further example of the devious way in which the periodicals operated, and of the need to see their treatment of an individual author within the broader context.

Keats

The reception given to Keats's poetry by his contemporary reviewers has been closely documented, one of the most perceptive studies being G.M.Mathews's volume in the Critical Heritage series. Little would be gained from reworking such well-known material if it were not that a study of the Reviews in general illuminates

several issues raised by Keatsian scholars.

At times Keats's relationship with his reviewers takes on the air of a macabre comedy: the gift of £25 by an anonymous benefactor angered at the Quarterly's attack on the poet; Gifford's use of Croker as reviewer who was as notorious as Brougham for his love of unprincipled abuse, and who (for his boorishness) had been nicknamed 'the talking potato'; and the myth, gleefully retold by Byron, that the Quarterly had been responsible for Keats's death, all help create this impression. Fortunately the Reviews are no longer held responsible for hastening Keats's death,¹ but G.M.Mathews is obviously correct in suggesting that the poet's early resilience to their attacks gave way to despondency as his health deteriorated - certainly his letters suggest that this was the case.²

Only a review apiece appeared in the three major periodicals,³ and despite their official publication dates Lockhart's article in Blackwood's appeared before that of Croker's in the Quarterly. Both were extremely hostile, but they were followed two years later by Jeffrey's favourable commentary in the Edinburgh. One has to remember that of over eighty items which appeared in other periodicals only fifteen were entirely hostile,⁴ but this does not compensate for the damage done to Keats's reputation by the two

1. See H.E.Briggs, "Keats's Conscious and Unconscious Reactions to Criticisms of Endymion", PMLA, lx (1945), 1106-29, for an interesting account of Keats's reaction to contemporary criticism.

2. The Letters of John Keats 1814-21, ed. H.L.Rollins (1958), i, 180, 294, 374, 394; and ii, 9, 15, 220.

3. BM, iii (Aug., 1818), 519-24 ; QR, xix (April, 1818), 204-8 (published September 1818); ER xxxiv (Aug., 1820), 203-13.

4. G.I.Marsh and N.I.White, "Keats and the Periodicals of his Time", MP, xxxii (1934-5), 37-53.

major Tory Reviews. Despite Keats's own optimistic belief that the 'Reviews have had their day - that the public have been surfeited',¹ it was the three major periodicals which continued to fashion public opinion, and no other major poet with the exception of Coleridge suffered such violent and unsubstantiated abuse.

Lockhart, towards the end of his attack on Keats, remarks with affected carelessness that 'We had almost forgot to mention, that Keats belongs to the Cockney School of Politics, as well as the Cockney School of Poetry'. It is normally thought, with justification, that the two Tory periodicals attacked Keats's politics because of his association with Leigh Hunt, and the article in Blackwood's is one of a series on the Cockney School which, as we have seen, was a concerted attack on Hunt. Lockhart makes specific mention of Keats's sonnet 'Written on the day that Mr. Leigh Hunt left Prison', and makes it quite clear that he believes both poets to be tarred with the same brush. Jeffrey carefully avoids the political implications of Keats's poetry: he was no fonder of Leigh Hunt than the Quarterly, and his refusal to make capital out of the obvious bias of his rivals demonstrates how very far from that of the Radicals the conventional Whig position was (apart from the short-lived idea of a coalition which exercised Jeffrey's mind).

As well as the political bias, we have the social prejudice of the Tory periodicals. We have seen how Lockhart deliberately exaggerated this in Hunt's case, both in an effort to paint his victim in the blackest colours, and also to reassure his readers

1. Letters, Griggs, ii, 15.

that the Magazine was defending the right values. Keats does not offer the same provocation as Hunt (although some of the poems in the 1817 volume contain vaguely republican sentiments),¹ but class prejudice is still apparent. We find Lockhart complaining that

our very footmen compose tragedies, and there is scarcely a superannuated governess in the island that does not leave a roll of lyrics behind her in her band-box.

(519)

But Croker in the Quarterly also writes of 'Cockney poetry; which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language', and which is inimicable to 'harmonious and sublime poetry'. Although class prejudice is often used as a form of propaganda (both political and literary), it is something which is very firmly embedded in the collective consciousness of the major periodicals. We saw it work in Lyall's review of Wordsworth and Heber's review of Byron, but this was an expression of the conscious superiority of the governing classes. In the years following the Napoleonic Wars any danger to such classes was more apparent than real thanks to harsh political repression, but there was felt to be a more insidious danger from what Byron called the 'shabby-genteel'. Blackwood's attack on the Cockneys feeds off this, and there is a great deal of justification for Hazlitt's claim that Shelley was let off more lightly than Hunt or Keats because he was a gentleman by birth and they were not.²

1. H.G.Wright, "Keats and Politics", E&S, xviii (1932), 7-23 gives an account of Keats's political thinking.

2. The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P.P.Howe (1930-4), xii, 208.

Certainly class prejudice influences literary theory in Keats's case. One of the major objections made by Croker and Lockhart to the theory underlying Keats's poetry was that it deliberately and maliciously denigrated the poetry of Pope and his followers - poetry which helped to defend a civilized and sophisticated social code. In Croker's case this was probably a genuine response, in so far as a man of his political persuasion was obviously going to find it easier to defend poetry of the past that supported the status quo than to praise poetry of the present which apparently did not. Lockhart, however, is up to his old tricks, and he pretends horror at seeing

The purest, the loftiest, and, we do not fear to say it, the most classical of living English poets, joined together in the same compliment with the meanest, the filthiest, and the most vulgar of Cockney poetasters. . .

(520)

This 'most classical of living English poets' is in fact Wordsworth, and we have another example of Lockhart using the Cockneys as a means of defending one of the two controversial poets that Blackwood's had decided to champion. Reference is made to Pope but only as a means of heaping more abuse on Keats's unfortunate head, as is demonstrated by Lockhart's qualified assessment of Pope's importance:

although Pope was not a poet of the same high order with some who are now living, yet, to deny his genius, is just about as absurd as to dispute that of Wordsworth, or to believe in that of Hunt.

(520)

In fact it was the two Tory periodicals' attitude towards Hunt and, in Blackwood's case, Wordsworth which fashioned their response to Keats.

Jeffrey's review in the Edinburgh is very different from that of his rivals. In many ways it is badly flawed, but it is still

an important corrective to the earlier attacks on Keats.

G.M.Mathews has suggested that the review was written two years prior to its publication, and then withheld until Jeffrey was sure of sufficient public support for his views.¹ Without denying that Jeffrey was quite capable of such circumspection, Mathew's theory seems unlikely. It is true that the treatment of the Lamia volume is very cursory and somewhat haphazardly added to the discussion of Endymion, but the same fault is evident in a great many other reviews. Pressures of time and space often resulted in a work or part of a work being treated perfunctorily or even ignored altogether, and as editor Jeffrey was particularly aware of the need to tailor reviews to the demands of individual numbers. Although these factors may help to explain the unsatisfactory nature of Jeffrey's review, they do not of course excuse his failure to realize that it was the Lamia volume which contained Keats's most important poetry.

As a review of Endymion Jeffrey's article is good. His assessment of Keats is guarded but free of any suggestion of bias:

Mr Keats, we understand, is still a very young man; and his whole works, indeed, bear evidence enough of the fact. They are full of extravagance and irregularity, rash attempts at originality, interminable wanderings, and excessive obscurity. They manifestly require, therefore, all the indulgence that can be claimed for a first attempt: - but we think it no less plain that they deserve it; for they are flushed all over with the rich lights of fancy, and so coloured and bestrewn with the flowers of poetry, that even while perplexed and bewildered in their labyrinths, it is impossible to resist the intoxication of their sweetness, or to shut our hearts to the enchantments they so lavishly present.

(xxxiv, 203-4)

This recognizes the appeal as well as the faults of Keats's early poetry.

1. Keats: The Critical Heritage, ed. G.M.Mathews (1971), 26-7.

Jeffrey's comments on Keats's debt to the poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are particularly important. Reviewers in the minor periodicals had already appreciated the significance of Keats's use of these poets, but Lockhart and Croker had looked no further than his rejection of Dryden and Pope. Jeffrey believes that Keats has modelled himself on Fletcher and Jonson, and

like his great originals, [he] has also contrived to impart to the whole piece that true rural and poetical air which breathes only in them and in Theocritus - which is at once homely and majestic, luxurious and rude, and sets before us the genuine sights and sounds and smells of the country, with all the magic and grace of Elysium.

(204)

It is this comparison between the country and Elysium which raises the whole problem of art and nature in Keats's poetry. Jeffrey, continuing the comparison between Keats and his predecessors, believes that

The great distinction, however, between him and these divine authors, is, that imagination in them is subordinate to reason and judgment, while, with him, it is paramount and supreme....

(204)

Jeffrey sees this supremacy of the imagination as a mixed blessing. He has no doubt that Keats is fully in touch with 'the true genius of English poetry', which is to be found

where, without much incident or many characters, and with little wit, wisdom, or arrangement, a number of bright pictures are presented to the imagination, and a fine feeling expressed of those mysterious relations by which visible external things are assimilated with inward thoughts and emotions, and become the images and exponents of all passions and affections.

(205-6)

But Keats is not always able to live up to this ideal. His style is often extravagant, with the result that he produces 'an interminable arabesque of connected and incongruous figures'.

Also,

the scope and substance of Mr K.'s poetry is rather too dreary and abstracted to excite the strongest interest, or to sustain the attention through a work of any great compass or extent.

(206)

These are not unreasonable criticisms of Endymion, particularly as Jeffrey makes it quite clear that anyone who 'would represent the whole poem as despicable, must either have no notion of poetry, or no regard to truth'.

The rest of the review is unsatisfactory. The comments and extracts from the Lamia volume are perfunctory, and the concluding summary is conventional and meaningless. This is all the more disappointing because the criticism of Endymion shows a basic sympathy with Keats's poetry.

In 1823 William Hazlitt's article on 'The Periodical Press' appeared in the Edinburgh.¹ It contained a defence of Keats which deserves quoting because it is not generally known, and because of certain implications underlying it:

A young poet comes forward: an early and favourable notice appears of some boyish verses of his in the Examiner, independently of all political opinion. That alone decides his fate; and from that moment he is set upon, pulled in pieces, and hunted into his grave by the whole venal crew in full cry after him. It was crime enough that he dared to accept praise from so disreputable a quarter. He should have thrown back his bounty in the face of the donor, and come with his manuscript in his hand, to have poetical justice dealt out to him by the unbiassed author of the Barviad and Maeviad! His tenderness and beauties would then have been exalted with faint praise, instead of being mangled and torn to pieces with ruthless, unfeeling rage; his faults would have been gently hinted at, and attributed to youth and inexperience; and his profession, instead of being made the subject of loud ribald jests by vile buffoons, would have been introduced to enhance the merit of his poetry.

(376)

1. ER, xxxviii (May, 1823), 349-78.

It was, of course, Jeffrey not Gifford who damned with faint praise; bearing in mind the uneasy and hesitant friendship between Jeffrey and Hazlitt (and the Edinburgh's equivocal attitude towards the Radicals), it is possible that the reviewer is intending an innuendo at his editor's expense.

However, it was the Edinburgh which provided the only reasonable criticism of Keats's poetry in the three major periodicals. Politics, reinforced with class prejudice, dominated the response of the two Tory periodicals - Keats's association with Leigh Hunt made that inevitable from the outset.

Hazlitt

The response to Hazlitt's work tells us far more about the periodicals than it does about Hazlitt. John Hayden points out how Hazlitt's writings 'were much more provocative than were Hunt's, perhaps more than any other writer in the period';¹ the reasons for that provocation lay not simply, as Hayden claims, in Hazlitt's 'assertive personality which took advantage of such an outlet for his highly individualized beliefs and prejudices', but also in the abrasive way in which he attempted to define the ideas and impulses underlying the period as a whole. Although moral indignation, political bias, and class prejudice play a part, the reaction of the periodicals was fundamentally a conservative one; a defensive response to a man who so perturbingly attempted to capture the spirit of the age.

1. . Hayden, 204.

In the case of the Edinburgh matters were further confused by Hazlitt's connection with the Review, and by his political partizanship. He became a contributor in the autumn of 1814, lost contact with Jeffrey after the unfavourable review of The Spirit of the Age in 1824, but again contributed to the Review after Macvey Napier took over the editorship in 1829. He did not meet Jeffrey until 1822 and, although the two men were never on terms of easy intimacy, a mutual respect seems to have existed between them. Hazlitt certainly felt sufficiently at ease to ask Jeffrey to review favourably Characters of Shakespeare's Plays:

I take the liberty of troubling you with a copy of a work I have just finished relating to Shakespear. I thought perhaps if you approved of it you might take a brief notice of it in the Edinburgh Review. I should not make this abrupt proposition, but from the necessity of circumstances. My friends may praise what I write, but I do not find that the public read it, & without that, I cannot live.¹

Jeffrey eventually reviewed the book, and Crabb Robinson described it as 'a very puffing review'.² It was the first review of Hazlitt's work to appear in the Edinburgh,³ and was not as puffing as Crabb Robinson claimed.

It hovers between excessive praise and severe qualification: Hazlitt's book is no dry disquisition upon Shakespeare, but rather 'an encomium'; this, however, results from excessive love rather than from excessive knowledge of Shakespeare's plays; but the book is very pleasing and shows 'considerable originality and genius'; none the less, the tendency is towards idolatry although the

1. H.Baker, William Hazlitt (1962), 214.

2. Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers, ed. E.J.Morley (1938), i, 210.

3. ER, 28 (Aug., 1817), 472-88. Hazlitt's Reply to Malthus is listed in an Edinburgh article on Population, but the work itself is not discussed [ER, xvi (Aug., 1810), 464-76].

reviewer is prepared to forgive this since he shares the author's enthusiasm. A paragraph praising Hazlitt's perception and sympathy is followed by the warning that

When we have said that his observations are generally right, we have said, in substance, that they are not generally original; for the beauties of Shakespeare are not of so dim or equivocal a nature as to be visible only to learned eyes - and undoubtedly his finest passages are those which please all classes of readers, and are admired for the same qualities by judges from every school of criticism.

(472-73)

Not only does this kind of equivocation nullify the effect of the praise, but in his earlier use of 'enthusiasm' in a pejorative sense and by his appeal to common but ill-defined common standards (as in his reviews of Wordsworth) we see Jeffrey's uncertainty in his approach to Hazlitt's work.

The review improves when Jeffrey points to what he sees as the two strengths of Hazlitt's book: his discussion of Shakespeare's heroes and heroines, and his illustration of the rich texture of Shakespeare's poetry. Jeffrey spends several pages expounding his own views on the effectiveness of the verse; then, remembering that his business is supposed to be with Hazlitt, contents himself by quoting at great length but without comment from Hazlitt's book. It is by no means unusual for a reviewer to quote at great length, or to use the work under review as a starting point for his own thinking, but in this case these things, taken in conjunction with the equivocal opening paragraph, result in an unsatisfactory and unconvincing review.

Given that he had already reviewed Hazlitt once, and also the controversial nature of Hazlitt's work and personality, it is significant that it was not Jeffrey but T.N.Talfourd who reviewed

Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Shakespeare.¹

Jeffrey was reviewing as normal in 1820, but Hazlitt contributed two reviews to the Edinburgh in that year² and it was perhaps this which prompted Jeffrey to allocate the review to someone else.

Once again an equivocal note is struck despite a great deal of flattering praise. The opening of the review illustrates this quite clearly: the first paragraph claims that it is Hazlitt himself with his carelessness towards public opinion, his love of paradox, and his political invective, who is most responsible for his own unpopularity; this is followed, however, by an eloquent almost lyrical passage which out-Hazlitts Hazlitt in describing how the 'knowledge communicated in his Lectures, breaks no sweet enchantment, nor chills one feeling of youthful joy. His Criticisms, while they extend our insight into the causes of poetical excellence, teach us, at the same time, more keenly to enjoy, and more fondly to revere it'; and, then, in the most interesting part of the review, Talfourd returns to the reasons for Hazlitt's unpopularity.

The reasons he gives, apart from the issues of party politics and personal animosity which he has already touched upon, bear a striking similarity to those advanced against Coleridge. Hazlitt's abilities are seen to lack proportion, arrangement, and harmony; he possesses the 'deepest feelings', 'the profoundest sentiments of humanity', and 'the loftiest aspirations after ideal good'; but 'there are no great leading principles of taste to give singleness to his aims', and there is 'no sufficient distinction between his intellectual and his imaginative faculties'. The lack of general

1. ER, xxxiv (Nov., 1820), 438-49.

2. These were reviews of Spence's Anecdotes [ER, xxxiii (May, 1820), 302-30], and of Joseph Farrington's The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds [ER, xxxiv (Aug., 1820), 79-108].

principles and the sacrifice of the intellect to the imagination lead to inconsistency of doctrine and style, the result of which is that

Instead of conducting us onward to a given object, he opens so many delicious prospects by the way-side, and suffers us to gaze at them so long, that we forget the end of our journey. He is perpetually dazzled among the sunbeams of his fancy, and plays with them in elegant fantasy, when he should point them to the spots where they might fall on truth and beauty, and render them visible by a clearer and lovelier radiance than had yet revealed them.

(440-1)

Such comments could well have come from a review of Coleridge's work, and the Edinburgh was only prepared to go a little way down the road pointed out to it by such authors.

This caution is manifest throughout the review. There is one amusing example where Hazlitt is upbraided by Talfourd for imagining himself actually communing with Jonson, Chapman, Webster and Heywood, whilst Milton is only represented by Paradise Lost which 'lies on the table as on an altar, never taken up or laid down without reverence':

we wonder that Mr Hazlitt should commit so great an incongruity, as to represent the other poets around him in person, while Milton, introduced among the rest, is used only as the title of a book.

(444-5)

Milton, along with Shakespeare, always offered a safe anchorage to reviewers in distress; Hazlitt, by relegating him to the status of ghost at the feast, underlines his own basic unsoundness.

As well as this fundamental disagreement with Hazlitt's literary beliefs and aims, Talfourd displays other grounds for mistrust. Hazlitt attributes the rise of Elizabethan drama partly to the Reformation, one of the effects of which was to give the figure of Christ a much greater imaginative validity for the

common people once the Bible had been translated into their own tongue: Talfourd, perhaps bearing in mind Hazlitt's Unitarianism and the stigma of atheism attached to the 'Cockney school' by Blackwood's, hastily repudiates the suggestion that Christ was ever denied to the ordinary people. He is equally as concerned with the future as with the past, and he warns against Hazlitt's excessive reverence for antiquity since 'There remains yet abundant space for genius to possess; and science is rather the pioneer than the impeder of its progress'. This seems to be part of the Edinburgh's general optimism and belief in progress which was becoming marked at this time, but it stands in opposition to a major impulse in Romantic literature and to the much more questioning and complex attitudes to past and present which were being explored by the major writers of the time.

Although overtly favourable, the underlying tone of Talfourd's review, like Jeffrey's earlier one, remains equivocal and mistrustful. However, there is no mistaking the open hostility of Jeffrey's review of The Spirit of the Age which appeared five years later.¹ There is the usual acknowledgement of Hazlitt's great but misused talents (an extremely hackneyed convention dating back to the early attacks on the Lake poets), but the opening of the review makes Jeffrey's position quite clear:

His besetting sin is self-sufficiency, and this in all its branches, whereof dogmatism is among the most prevailing. Whatever he writes is likely to be read, and either praised or censured beyond its deserts. But it is his own fault that he does not write much better than he ever has done. Let him only be somewhat more humble and diffident. Let him reflect, that fine writing really cannot exist without good sense, and an earnest pursuit of 'whatsoever things are just, and whatsoever

1. ER, xlii (April, 1825), 254-60.

things are true'; let him be assured, that the first object with every rational writer is to be in the right, rather than to strike by novelty; and that no degree of brilliancy will ever make up for want of sense and nature; and with his talents, nay, with far less than his talents, far more valuable books will be produced.

(254-5)

Jeffrey's comments on the individual portraits are neither perceptive nor interesting, although a certain amount of grudging praise is given to the account of Wordsworth. But he concludes the review with a remark about Hazlitt which is significant:

To his infinite honour, he is, on all occasions, the advocate of liberty and human improvement, and the fearless antagonist of those poor, but pernicious creatures, who, loving darkness rather than light, are ever found at work in the regions of their choice, and at vile and congenial occupations.

(259)

It is a reminder of the political significance of Hazlitt's work and reputation, and of the fact that the Edinburgh was in a position in which it not only had to recognize this, but also to make some kind of acknowledgement of their acceptance of the ideals behind it. This, along with the Review's inability to respond to the impulses of the age so brilliantly sketched by Hazlitt, account for its embarrassment and unease with the majority of his works.

The Quarterly, on the other hand, suffered from no such inhibitions. It reviewed Hazlitt five times in all compared with the Edinburgh's three, which in itself suggests both the reluctance of one and the eagerness of the other to come to grips with him. As Herschel Baker points out:

For two years Hazlitt, with the Examiner as weapon, had been smiting patriot bards, the party they supported, and the principles they espoused, and generally he had kept

them off their balance in a posture of defense. But then he wrote a book, and the hour of retribution was at hand.¹

The book was The Round Table, and it was reviewed by James Russell with extensive revisions by Gifford.²

The animus displayed towards Hazlitt is politically motivated, but this is not openly acknowledged until half way through the review when he is described as a 'sour Jacobin', and at the end when disparaging comments are made about Hunt's contributions to the book. As so often with the Tory periodicals, the political point is made through an appeal to class prejudice: much fun is made of the essay on washerwomen (written, in fact, by Hunt):

He professes more than once, with a laudable though unnecessary caution, that he is not used to 'fashionable manners'; and in perfect conformity with these protestations, he is sparing, even to abstemiousness, of all remarks upon gentlemen or gentlewomen: but, to make amends, when he gets amongst 'the tub-tumbling viragoes', as he playfully calls them, he is quite at home....

(155-6)

Fun is also poked at the diction employed by Hazlitt in his essays:

There is one merit which this author possesses besides that of successful imitation - he is a very eminent creator of words and phrases. Amongst a vast variety which have newly started into life we notice 'firesider', - 'kitcheny', - 'to smooth up', - 'to do off' - and 'to tiptoe down'.

(157)

Blackwood's was to make exactly the same point about Hunt and Keats in an effort to prove their 'Cockney' ancestry.

There is one further point worth making about the review.

It opens by quoting Hazlitt's own comment that his essays were

1. Baker, 364-5. Baker's comments on Hazlitt and the Quarterly are helpful, but he does not appear to have consulted the Shines' bibliography when attributing reviews.

2. QR, xvii (April, 1817), 154-9. James Russell (1790-1861) was a barrister, and, with his brother John, edited the Annual Register for a period.

intended to be written 'in the manner of the Spectator and Tatler'; not surprisingly, the reviewer makes capital out of the comparison:

we were about to rise from 'the Round Table' heavily oppressed with a recollection of vulgar descriptions, silly paradoxes, flat truisms, misty sophistry, broken English, ill humour and rancorous abuse, when we were first informed of the modest pretensions of our host. Our thoughts then reverted with an eager impulse to the urbanity of Addison, his unassuming tone, and clear simplicity; to the ease and softness of his style, to the cheerful benevolence of his heart. The playful gaiety too, and the tender feelings of his coadjutor, poor Steele, came forcibly to our memory. The effect of the ludicrous contrast thus presented to us, it would be somewhat difficult to describe.

(154-5)

It is interesting that even at this stage, in a work which makes no direct attack on eighteenth-century literature, Hazlitt should provoke this kind of response.

It is a response which is much more sharply defined in the review of Characters of Shakespeare's Plays which was again written by Russell and revised by Gifford.¹ The review opens with a defence of Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare - 'one of the most perfect pieces of criticism which has appeared since the days of Quintilian' - which Hazlitt had attacked in his book. Bearing this in mind and the fact that the reviewer's first specific attack is directed at Hazlitt's comments on Cymbeline, it is worth quoting the remarks of a recent editor of that play:

Hazlitt's comments, many of which are excellent, are thus directed by recognition of the romantic nature of Cymbeline and of the technical brilliance of the last act, and may be said to reflect a temperate Romantic attitude just as Johnson's reflect a moribund Augustanism. They represent the best that professional criticism had to offer until Harley Granville-Barker published his preface to the play.²

1. QR, xviii (May, 1818), 458-66.

2. The Arden Shakespeare: Cymbeline, ed. J.M.Nosworthy (1955), xlii.

There is no need to labour the point (whatever one may think of Johnson's criticism): moribund Augustanism was very much the order of the day as far as the Quarterly was concerned.

But the major objection to Hazlitt remained political. There are again references to washerwomen as well as other minor criticisms, some valid others not. The main attack comes in reply to Hazlitt's disinclination to feed his countrymen's 'pampered egotism' by quoting John o'Gaunt's speech from Richard II, and his suspicion that Shakespeare 'seems to have had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question, perhaps from some feeling of contempt for his own origin; and to have spared no occasion of baiting the rabble'. The reviewer's rebuttal of this leaves no room for doubt:

Shall we not be dishonouring the gentle Shakespeare by answering such calumny, when every page of his works supplies its refutation?....It is true he was not actuated by an envious hatred of greatness; he was not at all likely, had he lived in our time, to be an orator in Spa-fields, or the editor of a seditious Sunday newspaper; he knew what discord would follow if degree were taken away; and therefore, with the wise and good of every age, he pointed out the injuries that must arise to society from a turbulent rabble instigated to mischief by men not much more enlightened, and infinitely more worthless than themselves.

(464-5)

This is related directly to Hazlitt at the end of the review, and the final sentence, in directing attention to Hazlitt's morals, echoes one of the devices used by Blackwood's.

Presumably the Quarterly felt that it had made its point because the review which followed, of Lectures on English Poets,¹ avoided the more obvious political implications of Hazlitt's

1. QR, xix (Dec., 1818), 424-34. This was written by E.S. Barrett (1786-1820), a minor poet, with revisions by Gifford.

work. None the less, it is one of the most unpleasant reviews that we have encountered so far. Its insidious and equable tone only masks its venomous attack on Hazlitt, and it is quite obviously looking for the most expedient way of destroying his credibility as writer and thinker. Its terms of reference are familiar: it concentrates on Hazlitt's discussion of poetry, and insists on the 'principles' and 'chief rules of art', but this time Pope not Johnson is defended:

The truth is that Pope's unpardonable fault, in the estimation of those who decry him at the present day, consists in his being very perspicuous; he is always intelligible; every line has its meaning; every idea which he communicates has its boundaries distinctly marked; and he is supposed to want feeling, because he abounds in sense. Were some of his finest passages to be translated into the mystical language of the modern school, the eyes of many would be opened, who are now blind to his superlative merits.

(432-3)

The emphasis on intelligibility, clarity, and sense as opposed to 'the mystical language of the modern school' provides a clear example of one of the issues which determined the Quarterly's reaction to Hazlitt's work which so uncompromisingly defended the spirit of that modern school.

But the issue is a complex one; it is not simply a question of retreating into the past and invoking earlier critical theories. Classical philosophy stressed the essential unity and universality of knowledge, and this may have been in Talfourd's mind when, in his review in the Edinburgh, he claimed that 'There remains yet abundant space for genius to possess; and science is rather the pioneer than the impeder of its progress'. In answering Hazlitt's claim that science has injured poetry, Barrett says something very similar:

We do not conceive that poetry has suffered any loss by the change [in scientific thought], nor would she be a gainer by the total extirpation of science. Among every people, who are in a state approaching to civilization, systems of doctrines upon certain subjects must exist: they who devote their lives to the study of these systems will not be poets; but they will not be the less likely to be so, because the systems which they study have been erected cautiously on a firm foundation. The progress of true science is favourable to poetical genius in two ways: it supplies an abundant store of new materials for the poet to work upon; and there is a sublimity in its views, far superior to any thing that the framers of fanciful hypotheses can invent, which exalts the genius and trains it to lofty contemplations.

(431)

This is more than a hurried attempt to bridge the gap between the two cultures - it is an honourable attempt to deny that any such division existed. The prestige that science enjoyed throughout the eighteenth century provided the authority for Barrett's comment, but it was Hazlitt who was to prove more sensitive to the changes in attitude that were now beginning to take place.

Barrett's review ends spitefully by dismissing Hazlitt's book as 'an incoherent jumble of gaudy words'. Our indignation aroused by this review must be weighed against the provocation that Hazlitt had given the Quarterly, and by his ability to hold his own in any battle of words. He had been sniping at the Quarterly from the pages of the Examiner throughout the Review's campaign against him, and he replied to the review of Lectures on English Poets with his Letter to William Gifford Esq. Baker describes it as 'both an apologia pro vita sua and a triumph of invective'.¹ It is certainly the latter, and destroys any belief that the art of public abuse died with the eighteenth century.

It seems to have been effective. Baker tries to argue

1. Baker, 368.

that the review of Political Essays which next appeared in the Quarterly¹ was Gifford's reply to the Letter, but he has to admit that if so it was both 'muted and delayed'.² There is some doubt about Gifford's authorship of the review,³ but in any case it never rivals Hazlitt's attack. By comparison it is predictable and pallid: Hazlitt is likened to 'the sphinx atropos, or death's head hawk-moth'; the appropriate disgust and horror is registered at the passage in which he states that 'To be a true Jacobin a man must be a good hater'; the Letter is referred to, but merely as an example of 'the ludicrous egotism which has driven this forlorn drudge of the Examiner into a belief that it is his prerogative to abuse whom he will, and the privilege of all the world to submit in silence'; a few rather damp squibs are thrown at Hunt, and his possession of 'the Throne of Cockney'; Hazlitt's attacks on such people as Paley and Wellington are naturally deprecated, and his enthusiasm for Napoleon ridiculed; and, finally, the reviewer returns to his entomological conceit, and concludes that Hazlitt as insect 'does not belong to our climate, nor can multiply here; but that its presence is owing to the late extraordinary seasons, which have brought us so many new plagues'.

The insect turns out to be 'a slangwhanger' (according to the reviewer an American term meaning 'one who makes use of political or other gabble, vulgarly called slang, that serves

1. QR, xxii (Nov., 1819), 158-63.

2. Baker, 369.

3. It was probably written or rewritten by Gifford, but it is sometimes ascribed to Edward Jacob.

to amuse the rabble') in the final review of Hazlitt's work to appear in the Quarterly.¹ Written by John Mathews, who like Barrett was a minor poet who wrote in imitation of Pope, it was of Table Talk, and adds little to the Quarterly's discussion of Hazlitt's work. Jacobins, Spenceans, Radicals, and Americans are all condemned as 'pestilent vermin'; Hazlitt is likened to Satan; and we are treated to the following account of the social structure of Great Britain:

The rich in Great Britain have been ever found to have hearts and hands 'open as day to melting charity'; and the lower orders, the continual objects of their bounty, have always, except when enlightened by the care of some active demagogue of the Hazlitt school, received their liberality, and their indefatigable efforts to ameliorate their condition, with a laudable degree of gratitude.

(106)

The political issues have become so ossified as to be meaningless, and Hazlitt emerges as a somewhat muddied victor from the battle of abuse which had raged for nearly six years.

Blackwood's, however, presented Hazlitt with a foe much more accomplished in the art of public abuse, and one supposedly intent on destroying anybody connected with Leigh Hunt. In fact the Magazine's treatment of Hazlitt is rather curious, and its initial response to him was favourable. This consisted of three articles which formed a detailed abstract of his lectures at the Surrey Institute (eventually published as Lectures on the English Poets).² The reporter was P.G. Patmore who refrained from commenting directly on the lectures until the third article, by which time

1. QR, xxvi (Oct., 1821), 103-8.

2. BM, ii (Feb., 1818), 556-62; (March, 1818), 679-84; and iii (April, 1818), 71-5.

the sympathetic tone he adopted had led to a situation in which 'our own opinions have been strangely supposed to be identified with those who we have done nothing more than detail'. A certain amount of back-pedalling is then engaged upon (in which Hazlitt is described as the very best but also the very worst of living critics), but the predominant tone is favourable:

His sincere and healthful perceptions of truth and beauty, of falsehood and deformity, have a clearness, a depth, and a comprehensiveness, that have rarely been equalled.

(75)

This is followed by a short article by John Wilson,¹ who compares Hazlitt with Jeffrey, they 'being at present the two most eminent speculators on literary topics', and offers a very balanced and interesting account of the two men's critical abilities.

The tone changes, however, two months later with an article by an unknown contributor entitled 'Hazlitt Cross-Questioned'.² It bears all the signs of being a forerunner to a sustained attack, and lists a series of 'charges' against Hazlitt which include ingratitude to Wordsworth (the infamous incident in which Hazlitt had to flee the Lake District is referred to), plagiarism, and downright dishonesty. The epithet 'Cockney' is used for the first time in relation to Hazlitt, and the abuse which follows is extremely predictable.

But the attack that this would seem to herald does not really materialize. Various derogatory references are made about Hazlitt in Lockhart's series 'On the Cockney School of Poetry' and

1. BM, iii (June, 1818), 303-6.

2. BM, iii (Aug., 1818), 550-2.

in other articles in the Magazine,¹ but it was four years before Blackwood's devoted a full article to him. It was a review of Table Talk,² and employs the weapons normally used by Blackwood's against the Cockneys. It has some of the nastiness of Lockhart's attack on Hunt:

Now, it is one thing to feel sore, and a bad thing it is there is no denying; but to tell all the world the story of one's soreness, to be continually poking at the bandages, and displaying all the ugly things they ought to cover, is quite another, and a far worse affair. The one is a misfortune, the other is a fault.

(157)

On the whole, however, the review lacks real venom and spite, and simply rehearses the arguments against the Cockneys employed elsewhere (it does refute Hazlitt's charge that Byron received preferential treatment from his reviewers because he was a lord, but on the somewhat inadequate grounds that more important and noble lords who took up their pens did not fare so favourably).

Not many men can have handed themselves over to their enemies in quite the way that Hazlitt did when he published Liber Amoris. The two major quarterlies ignored it, wisely letting it speak for itself, but Blackwood's reviewed it in June 1823.³

The reviewer, possibly J.G.Lockhart, seems somewhat overcome by the extent of Hazlitt's self-revelation (Hazlitt after all christened his protagonist in the story H.), but he makes the obvious points:

we have long wished that some of this precious brotherhood would embody in a plain English narrative, concerning plain English transactions, the ideas of their school concerning morality, and the plain household relations of society.

(641)

1. One example is John Wilson's review of Hogg's Three Perils of Women [BM, xiv (Oct., 1823), 427-37.

2. BM, xii (Aug., 1822), 157-66.

3. BM, xiii (June, 1823), 640-4.

And:

This book is printed for the same JOHN HUNT who is the publisher of *The Liberal* and *The Examiner*, and the brother of Leigh Hunt, the author of *Rimini*, and the "Letters from Abroad". The elegant, polite, chivalrous, pure, high-spirited Five-guinea-per-sheet gentleman of the press, who writes this book, and tells this story, is a fair specimen of the tribe of authors to which he belongs....

...we call down upon his head, and upon the heads of those accomplished reformers in ethics, religion, and politics, who are now enjoying his chef-d'oeuvre, the scorn and loathing of every thing that bears the name of MAN.

(646)

But this is commonplace rhetoric: possibly the reviewer spoke more truly than he realized when, in a spoof beginning to the article, he pretended that 'He who writes under such an unexampled accumulation of woes, may well disarm criticism'; perhaps the kind of attack launched by Blackwood's against the Cockneys worked better with innuendo and suggestion than with such obvious and ready-made material; or perhaps it was a case of Lockhart gradually disentangling himself from his more unsavoury Blackwood's escapades in preparation for his taking up the editorship of the Quarterly. Whatever the reasons, it is surprising that the attack on Hazlitt is not more specific and damaging than these empty and predictable commonplaces.

Something of the energy and violence of the attacks on Hunt and Keats returns with Blackwood's final piece on Hazlitt, a review of The Spirit of the Age.¹ Probably written by Lockhart (stylistically it is far more his than the previous review), it vilifies Hazlitt for his politics, his vulgarity, and his immorality.

1. BM, xvii (March, 1825), 361-65.

Its concluding paragraphs contain the following strongly pictorial illustration of the final flight of Hazlitt from Nemesis (a role often favoured by Blackwood's):

The old Germans used to enclose certain criminals in wicker creels, and sink them in mud and slime....Who, if that punishment were carried into effect by the hands of a mud-lark, would not laugh at the incurable culprit as he wriggled himself, in laborious extrication, from the penal ordure, and, dropping at every faltering step filth from his body almost as loathsome as that which he had discharged from his soul, rushed for refuge into some obscene receptacle of the infamous and excommunicated, in the pestilent regions of Cockaigne?

(365)

The proper antecedents to that are the caricatures of Hogarth, Gillray, and Rowlandson, and in some ways this is the tradition to which Blackwood's attack on the Cockneys belongs. Certainly the central technique employed by the caricaturists - the identification and distortion of certain characteristics - is used by Blackwood's in its attacks on the Cockneys. The very name 'Cockney' implies this, and vulgarity and low-breeding are the supposed traits seized upon. The invention of a 'Kingdom of Cockaigne' with Hunt as reigning monarch also adds the touch of fantasy nearly always to be found in caricature. There are even pictorial elements employed in the attack (Hunt's yellow stockings, for example), and the emphasis on sexual licentiousness and, in particular, physical brutishness is something found very obviously in the work of Gillray with its scatological emphasis.

This analogy with caricature helps explain to a large extent Blackwood's treatment of Hazlitt. Hunt was very much the focal point of the attack upon the Cockneys, and so comes in for more virulent treatment (partly because, as I have argued, he is being used as a means of implicitly defending Byron and Wordsworth).

Hazlitt, whilst in fact posing a far more serious and effective threat than Hunt to the social and political beliefs of the Magazine, is used mainly as a subsidiary weapon in the battle against the Cockneys.

.....

It was a battle which was little to the credit of the Quarterly and Blackwood's. Hunt and Hazlitt came in for some rough handling from the reviewers, but both were able to defend themselves in this kind of journalistic warfare. The motives underlying the reviews of their work are more than usually devious, and literary considerations are often secondary. The victim of all this was, of course, Keats. The treatment he received from the reviewers was unforgivable, and of all the major poets of the period his was the poetry which received the least recognition.

Chapter Ten

The Problems of Popularity: Scott and the Novel

The periodicals' response to the literary form which was to become so dominant in the nineteenth century is one of the most fascinating and also least-well documented aspects of their history.¹ One recent commentator has suggested, more boldly than wisely, that the response to the novel at the end of the eighteenth and in the first three decades of the nineteenth centuries lacked both vitality and imagination:

In the monthly reviews there was surprisingly little of interest. The situation continued until after 1800, and even the novels of Scott failed to stimulate new thinking.²

This is simply not true: Derek Roper in his study of the earlier periodicals has disproved the first part of this assertion; and an examination of the later Reviews reveals not only a serious but, in certain cases, an extremely stimulating attempt to discuss what the periodicals themselves came to realize was a major literary genre.

Scott, as the most popular and influential novelist of his day, demands a prominent position in an account of the periodicals'

1. Surprisingly little has been written about the periodicals' reaction to the novel, but the following books and articles have been consulted and found of some importance:

M. Butler, Maria Edgeworth (1972), esp. 338-51.

W.F. Gallaway, "The Conservative Attitude Toward Fiction, 1770-1830", PMLA, lv (1940), 1041-59. Gallaway pays little attention to the periodicals.

J.T. Hillhouse, The Waverley Novels and Their Critics (Minneapolis, 1936).

J.T. Taylor, Early Opposition to the English Novel: The Popular Reaction from 1760-1830 (New York, 1943).

2. I. Williams, Novel and Romance (1970), 3.

response to the novel.¹ But the reaction to his work can only be fully understood within the context of the critical attitude towards the genre as a whole - an attitude which, of course, he helped to fashion both as critic and novelist. The only way of recreating this attitude is to examine the reviews of fiction that appeared in the three major periodicals, and to deduce from them the principles or (since periodical criticism is a great deal more pragmatic than such a word suggests) underlying habits of thought which informed their comments on the genre as a whole. In doing this we might appear to be moving away from the raison d'etre of this thesis, in that much has been made of the need to see every review in the light of the many and very complex forces which helped to fashion it. On this occasion, however, the benefits of a more general approach outweigh the disadvantages, and the creation of a context in which to place the reviews of Scott's novels makes any divergence from the purpose of this thesis more apparent than real.

Three issues must dominate any discussion of the periodicals' reaction to the novel as a genre: the status of the novel; the relationship between fiction and morality; and the relationship between fiction and reality. I wish to begin by considering these, and then to move on to important but more minor issues such as the place of the supernatural in fiction, and the role of women both as writers of and characters in fiction. My evidence for the first part of this chapter will be drawn from the hundred or so reviews of fiction which appeared in the pages of the three major periodicals.

1. Scott's poetry is not dealt with in this thesis. The subject is more than adequately dealt with by J.H. Alexander, Two Studies in Romantic Reviewing: The Reviewing of Walter Scott's Poetry 1805-1817 (Salzburg, 1976).

In extracting comments and statements from a large number of reviews there is always the danger of falsifying or misrepresenting the arguments put forward by individual reviewers; needless to say, I have done my best to minimise this danger. There is also the attendant risk of ignoring the peculiarities and characteristics of each individual periodical; I have tried to overcome this by devoting some time to examining the general character of the response of each of the three periodicals to the novel as a genre. This movement from the general to the specific is continued with the second part of this chapter which consists of an account of the reception given to Scott's novels which will, I hope, refocus the discussion of the general aspects of the periodicals' response to the novel with which this chapter opens.

The issues of morality and realism tended to dominate the minds of the early nineteenth-century reviewers, as had been the case with their immediate predecessors. It is discernible, however, that the discussion of these issues became more subtle and sophisticated as the century progressed, and by the 1820s significantly better ways of talking about the novel had been evolved. But this would not have been possible if there had not been a significant improvement in the status of the novel, and it is with this issue that we must begin.

The poles between which a reviewer could oscillate when discussing fiction in the early years of the nineteenth century were represented on the one hand by the acknowledged achievement of such writers as Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne, and on the other by the outpourings of the circulating libraries, particularly in the shape of 'fashionable' tales or Gothic novels. All three periodicals

paid tribute to the major eighteenth-century novelists, although occasionally they voiced some misgivings in true Johnsonian style about the moral effects of, in particular, Tom Jones. But whilst accepting such novels as serious literature, they quite rightly and properly objected to treat as such much of the popular fiction which appeared at this time. Unlike the earlier monthlies, the Edinburgh and the Quarterly felt no obligation to review everything that appeared, and they severely limited the amount of space they allocated to reviews of novels.

Some of the novels dealt with by the reviewers were dismissed out of hand, and in terms that did little to enhance the prestige of the genre as a whole. John Wilson Croker in the Quarterly was particularly hostile. On one occasion he dismissed Fanny Burney's The Wanderer by stating that the novel

cannot, in our judgment, claim any very decided superiority over the thousand-and-one volumes with which the Minerva Press inundates the shelves of circulating libraries, and increases, instead of diverting, the ennui of the loungers at watering places.

(QR, xi, 124)

On another occasion he hit out at the gothic novel, the bête noire of both the Edinburgh and the Quarterly, and dismissed Maturin's Women; or Pour et Contre with the words:

The great object of the author is to turn this species of writing into ridicule - to show with how little talent or ingenuity three volumes may be concocted - to exhibit the monstrous, the impossible absurdities which can be passed off as a plot - and to expose the raving nonsense which novel readers are content to receive as sublimity and pathos.

(QR, xix, 322)

It was a point he came back to when he reviewed Maturin's much better novel, Melmoth the Wanderer:

Indeed, Mr. Maturin has contrived, by a curiosa infelicitas, to unite in this work all the worst particularities of the worst modern novels. Compared with it, Lady Morgan is almost intelligible - The Monk, decent - The Vampire, amiable - and Frankenstein, natural.

(QR, xxiv, 303)

Other critics were less venomous, but still made use of the obvious prejudice that Croker is playing upon. Thus Scott, much more cheerfully, announced that

After some consideration, we sent to our Publisher for an assortment of the newest and most fashionable novels, hoping to find among the frivolous articles of domestic manufacture something to supply the want of foreign importation. It is from a laborious inspection into the contents of this packet, or rather hamper, that we are now risen with the painful conviction that spirits and patience may be as completely exhausted in perusing trifles as in following algebraical calculations.

(QR, iii, 340)

Scott, in fact, goes on to list various kinds of novel in descending order of merit, allocating the imitators of Mrs. Radcliffe and M.G.Lewis to the Limbus Patrum. But Scott's objections are not to the novel as such, but the novels that were appearing in 1810. In that, unlike Croker, he was much more in line with what was becoming the periodicals' general attitude towards fiction.

Reviewers in the Edinburgh and the Quarterly tended to be cautious on matters of literary taste (although not so timid in denouncing authors once they had grounds which they felt commanded some kind of consensus), and given the low standing of the novel their response is commendably adventurous. Obviously some caution was inevitable. Thus in the second number of the Quarterly we have what looks very much like a statement of policy:

If the importance of a literary work is to be estimated by the number of readers which it attracts, and the effect which it produces upon character and moral taste, a novel or a tale cannot justly be deemed a trifling production. For it is not only that a novel even of the lowest order always finds more readers than a serious work, but that it finds readers of a more ductile cast whose feelings are more easily interested, and with whom every impression

is deeper, because more new. Productions of this kind, therefore, are by no means beneath the notice of the reviewer, but fall very peculiarly within his province. The customers of the circulating library are so numerous, and so easily imposed upon, that it is of the utmost importance to the public, that its weights and measures should be subject to the inspection of a strict literary police, and the standard of its morality and sentiment kept as pure as the nature of things will admit.

(QR, ii, 146)

The reference to morality and the need to establish a 'literary police' reflect the customary unease with the novel as a form, and underlying the whole statement is an uneasy recognition of the problem that is posed when popular acclaim either forestalls or contradicts the pronouncements of the public critic. It is, however, significant that at the outset of its career the Quarterly acknowledged the necessity of reviewing novels.

The note of caution struck in this early review is often sounded in other reviews both in the Quarterly and the Edinburgh (which, as we shall see, was even more conservative in its attitude towards the novel). Thus Lord Dudley, when reviewing Maria Edgeworth's Patronage in the Quarterly, pays tribute to the novel as the most remarkable addition that the moderns have made to literature, but then goes on to add a proviso:

We doubt, however, whether the dignity of this species of composition has quite kept pace with its popularity....If there is a strong taste in favour of novels, there are also some prejudices against them. There is something undignified in their name and origin. The germ of them is to be found in those entertaining, but extravagant and unprofitable histories of giants, enchanters, knights and damsels....It happened too that the earliest of those compositions to which we have now agreed to confine the name of novels, that is to say, the earliest fictitious accounts of probable events in private life, were of such a tendency that all grave persons were obliged, and all moral persons were disposed to discountenance them....[And also] whilst the ancients were considered (and, for some time, justly considered) as the great and only models of excellence, and whilst the successful imitation of their works was regarded as the highest point of literary ambition, a species of composition wholly unknown to them was not likely to be fairly appreciated, whatever its intrinsic merit might be.

(QR, x, 302-3)

Similarly, another reviewer in the Quarterly as late as 1827 felt obliged to apologise for reviewing a novel since 'we have of late devoted more space to novels and romances than most of our readers may be disposed to approve of....'(QR, xxxvi,269). . But this kind of caution was often offset by an awareness of the novel's possibilities. Lord Dudley in the review quoted above puts the final emphasis on the new respectability of the novel, and Francis Jeffrey, admittedly referring to the one rather than the many, when reviewing Maria Edgeworth's Tales of Fashionable Life insisted on the need to 'separate her from the ordinary manufacturers of novels, and speak of her Tales as works of more serious importance than much of the true history and solemn philosophy that comes daily under our inspection'(ER, xx,100-0). Four years later Walter Scott in his famous review of Emma¹ began by suggesting that there are some vices which however harmless are concealed from public knowledge, and that

One would almost think that novel-reading fell under this class of frailties, since among the crowds who read little else, it is not common to find an individual of hardihood sufficient to avow his taste for these frivolous studies.

(QR, xiv, 188)

But he then goes on to state that a novel like Emma proclaims 'a knowledge of the human heart, with the power and resolution to bring that knowledge to the service of honour and virtue'. In such comments and the general tenor of his review he recognizes the importance and significance of the genre.

1. W.Reitzel in his "Sir Walter Scott's Review of Jane Austen's Emma", PMLA,xliii (1928), 487-93, argues that the review of Emma was written by Richard Whately, the author of the other review of Jane Austen's novels to appear in the Quarterly. This, however, is disproved by C.B.Hogan in his "Sir Walter Scott and Emma", PMLA,xlv (1930), 1264-66.

And it was this recognition of the serious literary achievement of the novel which was to become the dominant note in the periodicals' reviews of fiction. Thus in 1815 Hazlitt could write in the Edinburgh that there were 'few works to which we oftener turn for profit or delight, than to the standard productions in this species of composition' (ER, xxiv, 320), and three years later an unknown reviewer in Blackwood's claimed that the novel was one of the most remarkable 'literary improvements of the present time':

Latterly this department of literature has assumed a very superior stile; and under the guidance both of male and female genius, has risen to a rank in the world of letters, little, if at all inferior to the most dignified productions of scholars and poets. Nor does there seem, in the nature of that sort of composition, any reason why this place should not be assigned it.

(BM, ii, 402-3)

Richard Whately in 1821 also pointed to the increased respectability of the novel, although the note of caution returns with his comment that this improvement was due to the fact that novels now contained 'more solid sense; they may not afford higher gratification, but it is of a nature which men are less disposed to be ashamed of avowing' (QR, xxiv, 352). Two years later, however, Lockhart in Blackwood's was far more fulsome:

We consider it one of the advantageous changes in the public opinion in letters, that the Novel has now attained a rank in literature much above what it was some time ago allowed to assume. It was formerly looked upon as a kind of reading only fit for the idle among the young, who might skim over the pages of a novel in the moments of hair-dressing, (when hair-dressing was the fashion); and, if not positively hurtful and demoralizing, was set down as a waste of time, as a relaxation enfeebling the mind, destructive of those common-sense views of life which its romantic or sentimental fictions wished to discredit, as opposed to practical wisdom or useful benevolence.

(BM, xiii, 548)

In 1826 Thomas Moore looked back upon the progress made by the novel, and attempted to assess the improvement:

The quality, however, of these productions is still more remarkable than their quantity. If we were to 'call for the returns' of the Circulating Libraries for thirty or forty years back, we should find that, for every one good novel then in the market there are now a dozen. Even the lowest class of such works has risen considerably in the scale; - the Minerva Press itself has been obliged to 'marcher avec son siecle'....

(ER, xliii, 356)

Apart from the occasional grumble or note of caution it is possible to see in the pages of the periodicals from 1815-16 onwards (the years of Hazlitt's review of Fanny Burney's Wanderer in the Edinburgh, and of Scott's of Emma in the Quarterly¹) an increasing awareness of the novel's importance and increasing respectability.

One reason for this is touched upon by Moore in the review quoted above:

The impulse towards Novel-writing, which is, at present, all over Europe, driving the current of imaginative talent into this channel, - leaving the fair springs of Poesy dry and deserted, - may be traced, no doubt, to the example and success of our own inimitable Romancer of the North.

(ER, lxiii, 356-57)

Certainly Scott's success provoked a host of imitators which was seen as an advantage by some reviewers: -

it is not a little creditable to the genius of our beloved country, that, even in those gay and airy walks of literature from which she had been so long estranged, an opening was no sooner made, by the splendid success of one gifted Scotsman, than many others were found ready to enter upon them....-

(ER, xxxix, 160)

and as a distinct disadvantage by others:

The extraordinary success of what (for want of an author's name) we are obliged to designate as the Scotch novels, has produced a crowd of imitators, without a single rival;

1. The number in which the review of Emma appeared is dated October 1815, but it was not published until March 1816.

and we have not thought it respectful to our readers to notice a shoal of copies and parodies which have but one merit, that of proving the popularity, and, we may add, the inimitability of their prototype.

(QR, xxv, 147)

But Scott's influence was not simply a creative one: His extraordinary success presented the public critics of literature with a fait accompli, and they were forced to accept the public's verdict (albeit somewhat huffily in the Edinburgh's case). But as we have seen, novels had been taken seriously before Scott published Waverley, and eventually the two quarterlies found little difficulty in accepting the novel as a serious literary genre. None the less, the impact of Scott's novels made this easier for the reviewers. Certainly by the time Blackwood's appeared there was a general feeling that novel writing had moved on to a new plane. Bad novels still appeared in abundance and those that were reviewed were treated accordingly, but there was a greater sense of ease and security when a novel was praised.

Blackwood's, much less concerned with intellectual respectability than the quarterlies, took advantage of this not new but more settled climate, and some interesting comments on the novel appeared in its pages. Two examples will serve: the first is a comment by Lockhart, ostensibly on the nature of genius in the novel, which describes the most fundamental aspect of the experience of reading a novel. He claims that the greatness of a novel can be recognized

because it, and it alone, takes possession of those that contemplate its energies, and fills and inspires them for the time, whatever of themselves they may be, with the actual presence and enjoyment of a state of mind that is felt always while it lasts, and often after it is gone, to belong, as it were, to the beings of another sphere.

(BM, xvii, 518)

The second example is more specific. Caleb Williams was a novel praised in retrospect by most nineteenth-century periodicals, and Blackwood's was no exception:

The impression which his story makes upon us is like that of a dismal dream, which we feel to be a fiction, and from which we are anxious to escape, but which sits, with a gloomy pertinacity, inflexible upon our breast, and compels us, in spite of reason and volition, to keep our eyes fixed and steadfast on its gliding phantoms and unearthly horrors.

(BM, ii, 270)

The rhetoric sounds oddly to modern ears, and Lockhart's judgement is impressionistic rather than analytical, but there can be little doubt that the novel has played a part in Lockhart's imaginative life, and that he is willing to acknowledge the fact. This must be the starting point for all literary criticism, and it shows how far the attitude towards the novel had changed from the days when Croker could dismiss the whole genre by a reference to the Minerva Press.

To a modern reader, the most obtrusive feature of the periodicals' reviewing of works of fiction is the concern with the moral nature of the novel under review. This was a much more complex matter than might at first appear. All three periodicals condemned novels that offended against conventional standards of sexual and social morality, although external factors might influence the severity of such censure. There was also a consensus that the novelist had a responsibility to make sure that the moral tenor of his or her novel was unexceptional, although what this meant in practice was heavily dependent on the individual periodical. Thus the Edinburgh found little wrong with Charles Maturin's early novels, whilst the Quarterly fulminated against such profane nonsense emanating from the pen of a clergyman.

In the same way, the Edinburgh enthusiastically praised Maria Edgeworth's novels for their moral utility, whilst the Quarterly objected to the rationalist, non-Christian basis of her teaching. Most (but not all) reviewers agreed that novels should have a moral purpose, but a great deal of space was devoted to a discussion of how overt this should be, and whether or not it was necessary for the moral meaning of the book to be fully integrated into its artistic whole. And, just occasionally, a reviewer would let drop a remark which, in its implications about the function of the novel, moved the discussion on to a different plane, and suggested a very much more complex relationship between morality and fiction.

Rejection of a novel on the most superficial of these moral grounds is evident in both the Edinburgh and the Quarterly. An early example occurs with Sydney Smith's review of Madame de Staël's Delphine:

Our general opinion of this book is, that it is calculated to shed a mild lustre over adultery; by gentle and convenient gradation, to destroy the modesty and caution of women; to facilitate the acquisition of easy vices, and encumber the difficulty of virtue. What a wretched qualification of this censure to add, that the badness of the principles is only corrected by the badness of the style, and that this celebrated lady would have been very guilty, if she had not been very dull!

(ER, ii, 177)

This is matched by Croker's comments on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (disapproved of on other than moral grounds, of course):

Our taste and our judgment alike revolt at this kind of writing, and the greater the ability with which it may be executed the worse it is - it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated - it fatigues the feelings without interesting the understanding; it gratuitously harasses the heart, and wantonly adds to the store, already too great, of painful sensations.

(QR, xviii, 385)

The reviewers' attitude here is quite simple: a novel which attempted to subvert conventional moral standards (whether sexual or more generally social) had to be condemned out of hand. What came into that category depended upon the response of the individual reviewer and the general attitude of the Review for which he was writing, since an attack on the moral content of a novel was one way of condemning a work that was disapproved of on political grounds. This seems to be the case, for example, in the Quarterly's review of the notorious Lady Morgan's novel Woman:

Such is the story; which may be dismissed as merely foolish: but the sentiments and language must not escape quite so easily. The latter is an inflated jargon, composed of terms picked up in all countries, and wholly irreducible to any ordinary rules of grammar or sense. The former are mischievous in tendency, and profligate in principle; licentious and irreverent in the highest degree.

(QR, i, 52)

The reviewers' reaction to any suggestion of sexual or social impropriety in a work of fiction often seems excessive and exaggerated, and one is reminded of Byron's comment that 'the reading or non-reading of a book never kept down a single petticoat'. However, underlying this concern with the specific and apparently trivial is the more general belief that the function of a novel is to inculcate certain moral lessons. Thus Croker in the Quarterly states that 'A novel, which is not in some degree a lesson either of morals or conduct, is, we think, a production which the world might be quite as well without....' (QR, vii, 331), and Francis Jeffrey in a review of one of Maria Edgeworth's novels claims that all 'writers of fictitious history' (a significant turn of phrase) since Homer have aimed at moral

improvement (ER, iv, 329). The same attitude is implicit in John Wilson's strictures on Thomas Hamilton's novel Cyril Thornton, since in delineating the hero's father as a man devoid of all paternal feeling, Hamilton arouses in the reader 'such feelings of repugnance and disgust as should never be excited in any bosom. Their excitation is in direct hostility to the end of all fictitious narrative' (BM, xxii, 86). Those who held that the end of fiction was indeed the inculcation of moral values were particularly incensed by what they considered to be the deliberate perversion of that end, and thus we find Croker writing in the Quarterly:

we are convinced that the gay immoralities, the criminal levities, and the rewarded dissipation of Tom Jones and Peregrine Pickle have contributed to inflame, and we will venture to add, to debauch many a youthful imagination.

(QR, vii, 332)

And even those who felt less strongly about the moral character of fiction acknowledged its power to impair the moral fabric both of society and the individual:

We are not believers in the efficacy of inculcating the greater morals, in works of fiction; though we think great mischief may be done by making such works the medium either of depravity, or of a false or sickly morality.

(QR, xxxiii, 482)

One way in which a novel could corrupt the minds, particularly of young readers was by confusing the actual with the imagined, the real with the ideal. It is a point made by Richard Whately in his review of Jane Austen's novels in the Quarterly, and he argues that in this respect the novel is far more pernicious than the romance:

But it is otherwise with those fictions which differ from common life in little or nothing but the improbability

of the occurrences: the reader is insensibly led to calculate upon some of those lucky incidents and opportune coincidences of which he has been so much accustomed to read, and which, it is undeniable, may take place in real life; and to feel a sort of confidence, that however romantic his conduct may be, and in whatever difficulties it may involve him, all will be sure to come right at last, as is invariably the case with the hero of a novel.

(QR, xxiv, 354)

It is a point that had been made twelve years before in the first number of the Quarterly:

But real life is the very thing which novels affect to imitate; and the young and inexperienced will sometimes be too ready to conceive that the picture is true, in those respects at least in which they wish it to be so. Hence both their temper, conduct, and happiness may be materially injured. For novels are often romantic, not indeed by the relation of what is obviously miraculous or impossible, but by deviating, though perhaps insensibly, beyond the bounds of probability or consistency.

(QR, i, 305)

However, in the hands of someone determined to use fiction as a means of moral instruction, the novel was seen as a powerful instrument; and Maria Edgeworth as the main exponent of this came in for high praise, although most of her reviewers were a little uncomfortable with the didactic tone of some of her work.

This simplistic view of the moral function of the novel was reflected in the view of the relationship between novel and novelist. In the case of such authors as Maria Edgeworth, where moral didacticism is obviously the raison d'être of their work, the novelist can be expected to exercise a very strict control over his or her novel; in fact this makes it easier for the Quarterly to attack Maria Edgeworth for her failure to promote Christianity, since she 'leads her readers to suppose that they are receiving a complete lesson of morality, by

neglecting to remind them that there are duties more sacred than those which she prescribes, and motives more commendable than those which she inculcates' (QR, ii, 448). But even in works of more pure imagination, the author's control over his fictional characters is seen as absolute: thus Croker in his review of Melmoth the Wanderer pointed out very forcibly that Maturin's hero 'is the child of his own imagination, and that he is responsible for the scandal which every pious mind must feel at such idle and gratuitous profanation' (QR, xxiv, 311). Even reading Frankenstein did not alert Croker to the possibility of a more complex relationship between creator and created.

It will be seen that the reviewers were much exercised by the relationship between fiction and morality, and often saw it in unsophisticated terms. Some reviewers were prepared explicitly to give precedence to moral over artistic worth, as in the case of H.J. Stephen's review of Florian's William Tell:

Though he never reaches that full power of pathos which characterizes some of the sentimental writers of the French school, he is raised above the great majority of them by a much prouder distinction. The feelings with him are never exalted at the expence of Virtue.... In his exhibitions of correct moral feeling, he displays the same beauties which many of his rivals exhibit in the effusions of a vicious sensibility.... (QR, ii, 349)

More often, though, a balance is struck between conflicting claims, as in Scott's reaction to Caleb Williams:

But although the story of Caleb Williams be unpleasing, and the moral sufficiently mischievous, we acknowledge we have met with few novels which excited a more powerful interest. (ER, vi, 182)

And a reviewer in the Quarterly, when reviewing one of Maria Edgeworth's novels, ruefully admitted his failings:

To our shame, however, we must acknowledge that we always think her most agreeable when she deviates a little from her rigid realities, and concedes to the corrupted taste of her readers some petty sprinkling of romantic feeling and extraordinary incident.

(QR, ii, 147)

In fact a reasonably intelligent discussion of the extent to which the moral purport of a novel should be integrated into the work as a whole took place in the pages of the periodicals. Those who placed a great deal of emphasis on the moral teaching of the novel lamented that 'readers of novels insist upon being entertained in the first place, and merely submit to as much instruction as can be insinuated into their minds, without putting them to any trouble' (ER, viii, 210); and dismissed those novels that simply grafted a moral ending on to a tale which otherwise showed little concern for such issues. But even the Edinburgh, which in its early years in its support of Maria Edgeworth extolled novels in terms of moral utility, drew the line at unvarnished tales of moral instruction. When he dismisses Hannah More's Celebs in Search of a Wife (the Edinburgh's campaign against Methodism played a part in this), the reviewer draws an interesting threefold distinction:

There are books however of all kinds; and those may not be unwisely planned which set before us very pure models. They are less probable, and therefore less amusing than ordinary stories; but they are more amusing than plain, unfabled precept.

(ER, xiv, 146)

Few if any reviewers praised 'plain, unfabled precept', but there was more divergence of opinion with regard to the relative merits of 'pure models' and 'ordinary stories'. The reviewer quoted above, writing in the Edinburgh in 1809, hesitated to make an evaluative assessment, but ten years later William Howison

writing in Blackwood's was prepared to go a little further:

The manners and concerns of the middle classes have also been handled in works, which are not written like the highest novels, for the sake of recording the developements exhibited by the human mind, but which may be called moral novels; because they have generally a didactic purpose, relating to existing circumstances, and are meant to shew the causes of success or failure in life, or the ways in which happiness or misery is produced by the different management of the passions and affections.

(BM, iv, 394)

Maria Edgeworth was, of course, the greatest exponent of this secondary or 'moral' kind of novel that Howison describes, and not surprisingly the debate about the balance that needed to be struck between artistic integrity and moral teaching centred upon her work. And, despite the reviewers' general agreement that a 'certain portion of moral instruction must accompany every well-invented narrative' (QR, xxiv, 358), most of them found that Maria Edgeworth 'comes forward sometimes too ostentatiously in propria persona as a moral teacher...' (BM, i, 635).

Therefore, while all agreed that a novel should have a strong moral element, most echoed Howison in Blackwood's who, as we have seen, refused to give novels of moral instruction the highest praise, and reserved it instead for those novels whose function was the recording of 'the developements exhibited by the human mind....'

Such a comment moves us away from the more limited discussion of the moral function of the novel, and suggests an approach of greater sophistication. The idea that the novel's purpose is not only the inculcation of standard moral values but the exploration of human character is suggested by Richard Whately in his review of Jane Austen's novels:

Those, again, who delight in the study of human nature, may improve in the knowledge of it, and in the profitable application of that knowledge, by the perusal of such fictions as those before us.

(QR, xxiv, 376)

Six years later a fellow reviewer in the Quarterly quoted

Goethe:

Goethe, himself one of the true masters of romance, says somewhere, that that is a bad romance the moral drift and scope of which may be extracted in the form of one distinct proposition: and he is no doubt justified in so far by the practice of the most eminent writers in this line, whose works are very seldom found to be capable of any such analysis.

(QR, xxxvi, 271)

There is still an element of caution in both remarks: Whately still sees the novel in terms of moral usefulness although in a less simplistic fashion than some of his colleagues; and the later Quarterly reviewer insists that he is talking only of 'the most eminent writers in this line'. No such caution, however, is present in Wilson's comments in Blackwood's in 1827:

The great moral of all works of fiction should permeate the whole living mass, not merely evolve itself in an unexpected, perhaps unaccountable corruscation at the close....One continuous master emotion must have been with us from the uplifting to the letting down of the curtain, making us, if we have looked and listened aright, better because wiser men, with more power over the passions of our individual selves, because with more knowledge of the passions that belong to human nature at large. There can be no distinction between poetical justice, as it is dealt out by genius, to the creatures moving along Fancy's enchanted floor, and that justice, that from highest heaven, is, day and night, seen smiting the children of men. Have not all the events of real life, great or small, each its own moral - that speaks either with a still small voice, or trumpet-tongued, the whisper and the blast equally intelligible, and easy to be understood? How is this to end? is a question that, in reading any wise fiction, is seldom, if ever, distinctly put by the awakened mind to itself, but the passion with which it peruses continually involves the forward-looking hopes and fears, from which such a question would spring.

(BM, xxii, 401-02)

The rhetoric, maddening in its mixture of nonsense and enthusiasm, should not blind us to the significance of Wilson's comments. Instead of primly praising a novel for its moral utility or damning it for its pernicious effects on the minds of the young, Wilson talks of fiction and morality in much wider and far-reaching terms - not only must the entire novel be imbued with a moral sense (as opposed to lesson), that sense involves not simply right doing but right thinking since it requires a widening of our moral perceptions instead of a bolstering of our social habits. That is in itself a considerable step forward from the earlier discussions of the moral workings of the novel, and it echoes an earlier but even more positive statement made by Hazlitt in 1815:

The most moral writers, after all, are those who do not pretend to inculcate any moral: The professed moralist almost unavoidably degenerates into the partisan of a system; and the philosopher warps the evidence to his own purpose. But the painter of manners gives the facts of human nature, and leaves us to draw the inference: If we are not able to do this, or do it ill, at least it is our own fault.

(ER, xxiv, 321)

Such comments are the exception rather than the rule, and many reviewers confined themselves to very simple considerations of moral propriety. Other reviewers thought more deeply and as the confidence in the novel as a respectable literary form increased so they began to ask the kind of questions that were to become so pertinent later in the century. Just occasionally, as with Hazlitt and Wilson, they began to supply some interesting answers.

In the same way that the discussion about the

relationship between morality and fiction was becoming more sophisticated and forward-looking (although still largely based on the premises employed by earlier reviewers), so the debate about realism and the novel took on a new life and significance. Realism, of course, is one of those terms which is easier to use than define, but Ioan Williams in his book The Realist Novel in England (1974) offers a rather simplified but useful working definition:

The origin of the term Realism, however, and the origin of the Realist fiction we are concerned with, both take us back to the eighteenth century, to the moment when artists and intellectuals in Europe abandoned the idea that art should show truth to nature and started to think in terms of using it to establish the nature of truth - finding truth within experience rather than making experience conform to some authoritative and arbitrary pattern derived from philosophy or theology. At this point art took on a new status and a new function, and although it has developed through successive generations as the idea of Reality itself has changed, it has rested on this fundamental assumption and developed along lines laid down at this time.

(xi)

It seems to me that this concern with fiction establishing the nature of truth through an examination of experience is very clearly illustrated in the pages of the periodicals.

Admittedly some reviewers still employed the older concept. Thus we have a reviewer in the Edinburgh praising Mrs. Opie's Simple Tales because the characters in them 'are strictly due to general nature', and he goes on to insist that

For more serious sympathy, we must be made to feel that the sentiments and actions of the characters are such, as must inevitably belong to all persons in their situation; and it is on the delicate adaptation of their language and conduct to their circumstances, and not to any supposed peculiarity in their character, that the success of the writer will generally depend.

(ER, viii, 466)

He considers, therefore, that the best pieces of literature 'derive their whole beauty from this perfect and beautiful conformity to general and universal nature'; that 'there is no need for the presentation of ideal individuality [since] the general conception of a delicate and affectionate girl - of a gallant and warm-hearted young man...- are quite sufficient to call forth our sympathies....'; and that if we look at Shakespeare we shall find that 'what have often been quoted as examples of originality in the conception of character, are nothing more than the exquisite adaptation of common and familiar feelings to peculiar situations'. This is, perhaps, the most extreme example in the periodicals of the use of neo-classical attitudes when discussing the novel, but even in the 1820s some of the terminology used by reviewers seems reminiscent of an earlier age, as, for example, when Washington Irving's Sketchbook is praised because 'natural feelings expressed in the language of nature and good sense must always be contemplated with interest and pleasure' (QR, xxv, 52); or when Hope's novel Anastasius is criticized for containing too many surprizes, since 'these attempts are too often made at the expense of nature and probability' (QR, xxiv, 528). Such comments came to look extremely dated: much more representative is Hazlitt's criticism of Richardson, in whose novels 'All actual objects and feelings are blunted and deadened by being presented through a medium which may be true to reason, but is false in nature' (ER, xxiv, 332; my italics).

Hazlitt's comment appeared in his review of 1815. In March of the following year Scott's review of Emma appeared in the Quarterly,¹ and he too recognized the change that had taken place

1. QR, xiv (Oct., 1815), 188-201.

in the development of the novel. In the eighteenth century the novelist was 'expected to tread pretty much in the limits between the concentric circles of probability and possibility; and as he was not permitted to transgress the latter, his narrative, to make amends, almost always went beyond the bounds of the former' - also, the 'novelist professed to give an imitation of nature, but it was, as the French say, la belle nature. Human beings, indeed, were presented, but in the most sentimental mood, and with minds purified by a sensibility which often verged on extravagance'. However, Jane Austen's novels 'belong to a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel', and this new kind of fiction which had appeared within the previous fifteen or twenty years involves

the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him.

(QR, xiv, 193)

From this point on we find novels increasingly being praised for their adherence to reality. John Wilson claims of one novel that 'we do not know that we ever read any piece of fictitious biography with a stronger feeling of all its chief transactions being founded in truth. Its power lies in its reality' (BM, xxii, 83). Another is praised because its characters 'look, and speak, and act, as is natural to their situation, and are not forced into attitudes either of the

picturesque that may attract admiration, or the ludicrous that may excite ridicule' (BM, ix, 204). Also within this novel 'the pathetic is that of . . . ordinary, not high-wrought feeling, and its language the natural expression of affliction without the swell of tragedy, or the whine of sentiment', whilst the description is 'simply of what he sees, and what we believe he could not but see'. It is this adherence to and depiction of reality that allows one commentator to write in Blackwood's in 1818:

The novel is the epic of comedy, or perhaps I should rather say, the epic of ordinary life. Its range is among the passions as well as the manners of men; and a skilful delineation of these, in a walk which can be understood as well as judged by every one of a tolerably liberal education, is certainly entitled to no mean place in the ranks of literature.

(BM, ii, 403)

And three years later Richard Whately wrote in the Quarterly that

a novel, which makes good its pretensions of giving a perfectly correct picture of common life, becomes a far more instructive work than one of equal or superior merit of the other class; it guides the judgment, and supplies a kind of artificial experience.

(QR, xxiv, 353)

Not all reviewers agreed with Whately. As we have seen, those most concerned with the effect of the novel on the morals of society sometimes argued that novels were more pernicious than romances because, by blurring the boundaries between life and fiction, they misled the young and inexperienced and made them dissatisfied with their lot. Others, however, thought those novels far less damaging which were intent on 'describing the emotions of the human heart, rather than that of astonishing the reader by the accumulation of imaginary

horrors, or the singular combinations of marvellous and perilous adventures' (ER, xxx, 235), and Maria Edgeworth, in particular, was praised for offering an antidote not only to the gothic but also to the sentimental novel:

To support, however, in any degree, the interest of a tale of fiction, and yet to divest it of the romantic tone to which fiction seems always to have owed its chief allurements, implies powers of no ordinary kind....

(QR, ii, 147)

However, this was written in 1809, and the increasing emphasis on realism in the novels themselves as our period progressed was reflected in the comments of the reviewers.

The discussion about the relationship between fiction and reality, as with that about the relationship between the novel and morality, did at times move on to a more sophisticated level than has perhaps been suggested so far. This can be approached most fruitfully by noting an analogy which became increasingly popular in the pages of the periodicals when novels were being discussed. In Blackwood's a reviewer drew a comparison between two of Maria Edgeworth's novels, Harrington and Ormond:

The one is a fancy-piece, in which the powers of the artist are evidently exerted to impart to her figures a magnitude and colouring beyond the reality of life: - the other is a study from nature, in which the portraiture is in general correct, but in which the pencilling is perhaps too minute, and some things are brought forward to view, which might have been more discreetly thrown into shade.

(BM, i, 520)

The analogy is, of course, with sketching: it is one we find used again by Thomas Moore in the Edinburgh, who writes of Ireland that 'it would be difficult to name any country in

which the sketcher of human nature could expect to find more original subjects for his pencil, more mixture of lights and shadows....' (ER, lxiii, 359); and Scott, who likens the new kind of realistic novel he describes in his review of Emma to the work of the Flemish school of painting, and who refers to Tobias Smollett as 'the literary Hogarth' (QR, iii, 341). The importance of the analogy can be seen by the way in which it operates in the extract from Blackwood's quoted above:

Ormond is described as 'a study from nature' and so by implication closer to 'the reality of life' than Harrington; but Ormond is then criticized because some of the pencilling is too minute and things are given prominence which should have been more muted. In other words, the novelist, like the painter, whilst drawing from nature also shapes, modifies, and selects according to the workings of his imagination.

It is the proper working of this faculty of imagination that concerns John Wilson when he writes:

Where every thing is to be bent and moulded to meet our idea of ideas of proportion, fitness, beauty, and so forth, in a composition, our mind is apt to feel that art and nature are two different things, and that the latter is sacrificed to the former - the stronger to the weaker - that of which we care little, for that of which we care everything.

(BM, xiii, 78)

And he returns to the problem when reviewing a novel by Lockhart:

The current of deeper emotion is too often checked or diverted; and although the book may not, on that account, be a less true picture of human life, nevertheless we expect human life, in all its varieties, to be something different, in a work of imagination, from what it is in reality.

(BM, xv, 103)

At first sight these two comments seem contradictory: in the first Wilson is complaining of the sacrifice of life to art; in the second of art to life. What he is concerned with in both cases,

however, is the proper relationship between the two. It is something which exercised the mind of the reviewer of Godwin's Cloudesley (possibly Mary Shelley) who comments upon the kind of fiction represented by Bulwer Lytton's novel, Pelham:

Mr Bulwer does not take the materials of the world around, first separating, and then, by aid of the inventive faculty, moulding them into a new form, whose exact appearance depends on a preconceived notion of what must be, to fulfil his idea; but he gives us rather himself, his experience, his opinions, his emotions.

(BM, xxvii, 711)

But the reviewer does not believe that the 'merely copying from our own hearts will form a first-rate work of art....', and that 'a certain degree of obedience to rule and law is necessary for the completion and elevation of our nature and its productions'. This is particularly evident in Godwin's case, since when he begins to write a novel

He sketches in his own mind, with a comprehensiveness and bold imagination, the plan of his work; he digs at the foundations, and learns all the due bearings of his position; he examines his materials, and sees exactly to what purpose each is best fitted; he makes an incident; he unerringly divines the results, both of the event and passion, which this incident will bring forth.

(BM, xxvii, 712)

But this in itself is not sufficient, since the transforming power of the imagination must finally take over, and, as in the case of Cloudesley,

we begin to feel the just proportions and promising beauty of the plan, till the tantalizing work of preparation finally yields to the full manifestation of the conception of the artist.

(BM, xxvii, 713)

It is a point made rather more succinctly by a reviewer in the Quarterly:

All the classics of this branch of literature have drawn largely upon their own personal observation and experience in life; but these would have availed them little had they not possessed high faculties of imagination, and been, through them, enabled to fuse their materials of all kinds into an artist-like unity of form and purpose; investing actual events and real persons with the colours of poetry, and blending old things with new so thoroughly as to merit the praise of creation.

(QR, xxxvi, 269)

It is this recognition of the way in which the creative imagination must fashion its materials from the surface of reality if the novel is to fulfil its potential that seems to me to be one of the major achievements of the periodical critics at this time.

In fact the whole discussion of the role of the imagination in both the writing and reading of fiction is of considerable interest. On the whole, the reviewers recognized that the appeal of fiction lay in its imaginative power, however much issues of morality and realism might exercise them in their theoretical discussions. It is this which prompts Scott to write of Maturin's Fatal Revenge:

In truth we rose from his strange chaotic novel romance as from a confused and feverish dream, unrefreshed, and unamused, yet strangely impressed by many of the ideas which had been so vaguely and wildly presented to our imagination.

(QR, iii, 347)

And it similarly inspires Lockhart to comment upon Godwin's Caleb Williams in an extract quoted earlier in this chapter:

The impression which his story makes upon us is like that of a dismal dream, which we feel to be a fiction, and from which we are anxious to escape, but which sits, with a gloomy pertinacity, inflexible upon our breast, and compels us, in spite of reason and volition, to keep our eyes fixed and stedfast on its gliding phantoms and unearthly horrors.

(BM, ii, 270)

In more general terms, the imaginative power of fiction is

celebrated again, probably by Lockhart but this time in a review of Tremaine, when he writes of the way in which one recognizes genius at work in the novel:

it, and it alone, takes possession of those that contemplate its energies, and fills and inspires them for the time, whatever of themselves they may be, with the actual presence and enjoyment of a state of mind that is felt always while it lasts, and often after it is gone, to belong, as it were, to the beings of another sphere.

(BM, xvii, 518)

It is a point picked up and given even greater force two years later by John Wilson (and it is significant that Coleridge is mentioned later in the review):

The mind, when moved by the imagination, will hold each strange tale devoutly true, that genius consecrates to falsehood. That only this one every-day apparent and palpable world of ours exists, is to the mind stupified by pure intellect a melancholy truth. But, to the mind sublimed by the ether of imagination, that creed is a self-evident contradiction; the sole entities are then felt to be thoughts; systems on systems, not the less real because transitory, are created as at a breath, sub-natural, super-natural, preter-natural - yet all formed on the model of what we call nature, and intelligible to all who know anything, however dimly, of what nature is, and received among our persuasions, and beliefs, and convictions, which are in themselves immortal, though at times asleep, and although often disappearing, never extinguished or destroyed.

(BM, xxii, 386)

However, although contemporary reviewers were prepared to recognize the functioning of the imagination in the creation of fiction and to acknowledge the novel's imaginative power even at times at the expense of considerations of morality, they were generally agreed that it had to operate within the circumscribed bounds of realism. This can be seen very clearly in their treatment of the heroes of the novels they reviewed. Whereas reviewers of poetry were prepared to tolerate and even, as Byron's reputation

grew, to greet with some enthusiasm the appearance of the Byronic hero, such a figure found less encouragement when appearing in the pages of a novel. We find Henry Mathews in the Quarterly remarking rather sardonically that the hero of Hope's Anastasius

seems to belong entirely to that modern school of worthies, who, by the aid of a white forehead, a curling lip, raven hair and eyes, and the Turkish costume, have contrived to excite so powerful a sympathy in their favour.

(QR, xxiv, 511)

Others also objected to the appearance of Byronic heroes, and Lockhart notes that with Godwin as with Byron 'gloominess and desolation, and Satanic sarcasm, are the ground-work of their fictions....' (BM, ii, 270). But this does not mean that reviewers failed to recognize that the novel as it was by now beginning to emerge was primarily concerned with the exploration of the individual, and Lockhart in 1817 pointed out how

The hero of a modern romance is not the victim either of implacable destiny, or of outward injury; the revolutions of his fate are all engendered within himself, and he has to contend with no assaults but those of his own wishes, prejudices, principles, and passions.

(BM, ii, 269)

However, this has to be kept within bounds, as Wilson points out when he makes an astute comment about Scott's novels:

In the works of the Author of Waverley, accordingly, we find no one leading spirit influencing and stamping the destinies of all, towards one great consummation. Each does his own work, and sometimes the work of each is the most important and dignified. The want of a hero, therefore, is, we think, a great excellence, in all works of this kind; for, thereby, they are liker reality, and keep us among our own experiences.

(BM, xiii, 78)

It is a statement which demonstrates how fully the reviewers had come to realize that the novel's business was, in Ioan Williams's

words, not to show truth to nature, but 'to establish the nature of truth'.

All three of the central issues that we have considered so far - the status of the novel, its relationship to morality, and to reality - there is a gradual but perceptible improvement in the attitude of the reviewers. In trying to demonstrate this, I may have been guilty of simplifying the chronology or overstating the extent of the changes, and I fully acknowledge the fragmentary nature of my evidence. However, I think it is undeniable that by the 1820s the status of the novel had improved considerably; partly thanks to Scott, but also to a general improvement in the quality of fiction and the reviews of it. Moral considerations of the most superficial kind recur throughout our period in the periodicals' discussion of fiction, but I have tried to draw attention to those examples which seem to point to a much more interesting and far-reaching notion of the moral function of the novel. I also think that the most impressive achievement of the periodical critics of the novel lies in their discussion of the way in which the realist novel was beginning to emerge at this time, and how some of them realized that however much the novelist took his materials from the surface of reality the success of the novel still depended on the workings of the creative imagination. In terms of chronology, none of these things can be plotted with certainty; but 1815 and early 1816 are important dates, with the publication of Hazlitt's review of Fanny Burney's The Wanderer in the Edinburgh and Scott's of Emma in the Quarterly. The appearance of Blackwood's Magazine

two years later was also significant since it made full use of the improved atmosphere with regard to the novel, and played an important part in the changes in the ways of talking about the novel that I have tried to outline here.

There are two other general issues which deserve discussion: the first is the response of the periodicals to the use of the supernatural in fiction; and the second their attitude towards women, both as characters in and writers of fiction. As far as the supernatural is concerned, one would expect a more or less general condemnation of its use in respectable fiction. The damage done to the status of the novel by the gothic romance, the increasing importance that the reviewers gave to realism, and the hostility towards the use of the supernatural in poetry displayed by such critics as Jeffrey, are all factors which would suggest this, and there were plenty of critics who did indeed condemn anything that smacked of the supernatural or the improbable. But support for its use in fiction came from two sources. The first of these, not surprisingly, consisted of the reviews written by Walter Scott, and his remarks display his normal acumen and good sense. He dismisses, in one review, those imitators of Mrs. Radcliffe and M.G. Lewis 'who to all the faults and extravagancies of their originals, added that of dulness....' since all too often 'the terrors of this class of novel writers are too accumulated and unremitting' and the 'vivacity of emotion also depends upon surprize, and surprize cannot be repeatedly excited during the perusal of the same work' (QR, iii, 346). He clarifies his position in an early review in the Quarterly:

We are no defenders of ghost-seeing and diablerie.
 - That mode of exciting interest ought to be despised
 as too obvious and too much in vulgar use: but,
 when the appeal is made to nature, we must recollect
 that there are incredibilities in the moral, as
 well as physical, world.

(QR, 1, 347)

His longest and most interesting discussion of the role of the
 supernatural in fiction comes in his review of Mary Shelley's
Frankenstein which appeared in Blackwood's Magazine in 1818.

He divides novels and romances which make use of the supernatural
 into three classes: earlier works in which both the author and
 his audience believed in the supernatural; those in which the
 'marvellous is itself the principal and most important object',
 and so allows the reader to luxuriate in a make-believe world;
 and, thirdly, a 'more philosophical and refined use of the
 supernatural' whereby natural laws are altered 'to shew the
 probable effect which the supposed miracles would produce on
 those who witnessed them', with the purpose of such stories being

to open new trains and channels of thought, by
 placing men in supposed situations of an extraordinary
 and preternatural character, and then describing the
 mode of feeling and conduct which they are most
 likely to adopt.

(BM, ii, 614)

In this kind of novel, Scott argues, the author asks for a belief
 in the supernatural, but in return he makes sure that his
 characters conduct themselves 'according to the rules of probability,
 and the nature of the human heart'.

Blackwood's, mainly in the person of J.G.Lockhart, provided
 the other major source of support for the supernatural. Lockhart's
 most sustained defence comes in his review of E.T.A.Hoffmann's
The Devil's Elixir, and in a trenchant attack on the prevailing
 critical attitude he remarks that

whatever small men, accustomed to move in one very small sphere of intellect, may say, the horrible is quite as legitimate a field of poetry and romance, as either the pathetic or the ludicrous.

(BM, xvi, 55)

In ascending order of importance he praises Mrs. Radcliffe,

Maturin, Godwin, and Schiller, and claims that

Nothing that is a part, a real essential part, of human nature, ever can be exhausted - and the regions of fear and terror never will be so. - Human flesh will creep to the end of time....

(BM, xvi, 56)

But it is not simply a question of making the flesh creep, and

he goes on to point out that

From infancy, in whatever quarter of the globe we are born, we are sure to be nourished with the same unvarying provender of tales, dreams, and visions, all connected with this belief; and it acquires over us a power too deep ever entirely to be shaken....We are equally of opinion, that so long as this feeling, this painful feeling, as to the reality of such things continues, the human mind will continue to receive a tragic pleasure from the skilful use made of them in works of imagination.

(BM, xvi, 56)

It is a point he had made in his review of Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer, where he had pitied those who through 'extreme delicacy of taste' or 'extreme indulgence in the habits of strict criticism' could not enjoy such novels, particularly since there was no 'lover of imaginative excitement, that ever laid down one of [Maturin's] books unfinished' or who could fail to recognize the 'truth of true poetry diffused over the thickest chaos of his absurdities' (BM, viii, 161). Similarly, although W. Mudford's The Five Nights of St. Alban's is full of magic, those who decry it for that reason are in a position whereby 'a very great portion of what the world considers best in the imaginative literature of every tongue, dead or living, can afford them no pleasure (BM, xxvi, 563).

It is something that John Wilson had already commented upon in his article Some Remarks on the Preternatural in Fiction in 1818, where he stated that

surely poets should be permitted to feign all wonders which cannot be proved to be impossible, and which are not contradictory to the spirit of our religion.

(BM, iii, 649)

His article is particularly important because, having stated this and concluded that in Britain there existed 'a strength of imagination which delights in the feeling of superstitious horror' as proven by the ancient dramatists and the success of the Gothic novel, Wilson draws attention to the use of the supernatural in the works of Scott, Wordsworth, Byron, and Coleridge. He cites Christabel as the best model for the proper use of the supernatural in contemporary literature.

Scott, Lockhart, and Wilson are, on the whole, unusual in their defence of the use of the supernatural in fiction; Scott, of course, had a vested interest in the matter, and Lockhart and Wilson were writing at a time when the increased respectability of the novel allowed greater freedom of comment. But, although the exception rather than the rule, it is of importance that some defence of the supernatural is to be found in the periodicals' reviews of novels, particularly since it is lacking in the far more numerous reviews of poetry with the resultant refusal to recognize or examine a major impulse of the Romantic period.

The second general issue I wish to discuss concerns the role of women in fiction, and is of importance because of their increasing significance both as heroines in and writers of novels. But however much the likes of Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and

Jane Austen might come to dominate the writing of novels, the writing of reviews was very much a male preserve: of the known reviewers of the hundred or so reviews of fiction that we have been concerned with in this chapter only one, Mary Shelley, was a woman, and the evidence for attributing the review of Godwin's Cloudesley to her is far from conclusive.¹ Given this, the rampant male chauvinism displayed by the reviewers is not surprising.

Francis Jeffrey wrote of Mrs. Opie's Simple Tales:

There is something delightfully feminine in all Mrs. Opie's writings....She does not reason well; but she has, like most accomplished women, the talent of perceiving truth, without the process of reasoning, and of bringing it out with the facility and the effect of an obvious and natural sentiment.

(ER, viii, 467)

This is more than matched by Hazlitt's comment in his review of Fanny Burney's novel The Wanderer (appropriately sub-titled Female Difficulties):

Women, in general, have a quicker perception of any oddity or singularity of character than men, and are more alive to every absurdity which arises from a violation of the rules of society, or a deviation from established custom. This partly arises from the restraints on their own behaviour, which turn their attention constantly on the subject, and partly from other causes. The surface of their minds, like that of their bodies, seems of a finer texture than ours; more soft, and susceptible of immediate impression. They have less muscular power, - less power of continued voluntary attention, - of reason - passion and imagination: But they are more easily impressed with whatever appeals to their senses or habitual prejudices. The intuitive perception of their minds is less disturbed by any general reasonings on causes or consequences. They learn the idiom of character and manner, as they acquire that of language, by rote merely, without troubling themselves about the principles. Their observation is not the less accurate on that account, as far as it goes; for it has been well said, that 'there is nothing so true as habit'.

(ER, xxiv, 336-37)

However, Blackwood's was probably the worst offender.

1. BM, xxvii (May, 1830), 711-16.

The reviewer of Susan Ferrier's The Inheritance states quite simply that

The books of women are as unlike the books of men, as women themselves are unlike the lords of the creation.

(BM, xv, 660)

And the reviewer continues:

if [women] do feel as deeply as we do, there is some ineradicable principle of reserve about their nature, which prevents them from confessing that they do feel so....

(Ibid., xv, 660)

Such comments were not confined to women novelists, and William Maginn in a review of Miss Landon's poetry (BM, xvi, 189-93) asserts that women are only capable of writing about love, and that the attempts to break away from this restricted field of interest made by Mrs. Hemans, Madame de Stael, and the Misses Holford, Mitford, and Porden, have all failed miserably. John Neale, in an article simply entitled Men and Women which appeared in 1824 (BM, xvi, 387-94) admits that contemporary reviewers had made fun of the intellectual abilities of women, but the ingenious and thoroughly spurious distinction that he makes between the intellect and sensibility of the sexes only helps confirm the inferiority of women.

A feminine mind was not always seen as a major handicap to a novelist. Lord Dudley, in a review in the Quarterly, even went so far as to attribute social as well as literary progress to the influence of women, since in ancient times

that steady settled influence of women upon society was utterly unknown, which in modern times has given grace, variety, and interest to private life, and rendered the delineation of it one of the most entertaining and one of the most instructive forms of composition.

(QR, x, 301)

The Blackwood's reviewer of Susan Ferrier's Marriage somewhat atoned for his colleagues' attitude by admitting that women novelists' 'real importance lies in the way in which they have made men acquainted with the minds of women', and that

"Marriage" is at once discovered to be the work of a female hand, both by the minute accuracy of its ordinary details, and by the exquisite originality and instinctive fidelity of its female portraits.

(BM, iii, 286)

But such comments in no way balance the very obvious prejudice against women outlined earlier, and which is again at work in the following summary of the relative merits of contemporary women novelists which appeared in Blackwood's in 1824:

She has all that Miss Austin had - but she is not merely a Scotch Miss Austin. Her mind is naturally one of a more firm, vigorous, and so to speak, masculine tone; and besides, while nothing can be better than Miss Austin's sketches of that sober, orderly, small-town, parsonage, sort of society in which she herself had spent her life, and nothing more feeble than Miss Austin's pen, whenever she steps beyond that walk, either up the hill or downwards - this lady, on the contrary, can paint the inmates of the cottage, the farm-house, the manse, the mansion-house, and the castle....In this particular respect she is far above not only Miss Austin, but Miss Burney, and confesses equality with no female author our country has as yet produced, except only the great novelist of Ireland.

(BM, xv, 659)

However, it is as a female author that Miss Ferrier has been judged, and it is an important and limiting distinction. The attitude of the periodicals towards women novelists is something that has to be kept in mind when discussing such issues as the status of the genre as a whole, and when reading reviews of individual female authors.

It would be wrong to close the discussion of the periodicals' response to the novel on a negative note. They were not oblivious to the genre's importance, or to the way in which it was developing. The odd review taken at random might well appear extraordinarily dismissive or obsessed with facile moral issues, and even the overall picture is at times misty and inconclusive. But it is my belief that one can see the beginnings of an awareness of the importance of realism and a wider concept of morality emerge at this time in the pages of the periodicals. It could be nothing more than this - the reviewers, after all, stood at the beginning not at the end of a great tradition.

So far we have considered the response to the novel as a piece without paying much attention to the policies, attitudes, and idiosyncracies of the individual periodicals. As a preface to such a discussion, it is worth considering to what extent the three major kinds of prejudice or bias (moral, political, and social) identified earlier in the thesis played a part in the reviewing of the novel.

The moral issue, as we have seen, was a dominant one.

In this respect the reviewing of the novel is in complete accord with the reviewing of poetry. Contemporary reviewers believed very strongly in the need for literature to conform strictly to the moral standards of the day. We only have to remember the trials this century involving The Rainbow, Lady Chatterley's Lover, and, most recently, Gay News, to find that unexceptional.

However, unlike Byron and Shelley, the major novelists of the day did not pose a major threat to conventional moral standards, and we find none of the complexity (not to say confusion) that resulted when reviewers had to face up to the problem of poetry that insidiously or overtly challenged such standards, and yet at the same time commanded, in Byron's case, enormous popularity, and possessed an appeal and force to which the reviewer himself was not wholly immune.

Political bias also operates in the reviews of the novels, but again in a simplified form and is normally overt and predictable. Thus we find Croker in the Quarterly attacking Godwin's Mandeville and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein with political issues obviously uppermost in his mind.¹ Similarly, he responds to Fanny Burney's tribute to Napoleon in the preface to The Wanderer and Parnell's attack on Adam Smith and the English administration of Ireland in Maurice and Bershetta with all the virulence we would expect from him.² Ireland also features in Lord Dudley's review of Maria Edgeworth's Patronage, and in rebuking her for her unflattering

1. QR, xviii (Oct., 1817), 176-7; xviii (May, 1818), 379-85.

2. QR, xi (April, 1814), 123-30; xxi (April, 1819), 471-86.

portraits of the King and his Chief Justice, he remarks severely:

The cabinet of the reigning sovereign is no fit place for the scenery of a novel. We say nothing of any other considerations that might forbid their introduction, it is sufficient that it is contrary to some of the most obvious rules of propriety and good taste which govern the species of composition....

(QR, x, 313)

The belief that literary interests should be subordinated to concerns of morality or politics (here the latter is disguised as the former as was often the case) should be commonplace to us by now. The Quarterly was, of course, not alone in the political implications of some of its reviews of fiction. Hazlitt in the Edinburgh uses his review of Fanny Burney's The Wanderer to attack the King,¹ and Blackwood's made various attacks on the Whigs, including the mischievous comment that the Tories could take heart, since 'though the Whigs of our day can write reviews enough none of them (at least there is scarcely an exception) can write books'.

Class prejudice is also present in the reviews of fiction in a rather simplistic form, but at times it provides points of more interest. At its most crass it results in such comments as Wilson's that Hogg is guilty of 'vulgarity' in some of his stories (BM, vii, 154), and Jeffrey's extremely unpleasant comment (in a manner used later by Blackwood's in its attacks on the Cockneys) that 'we dare say that there is still a good deal of raving about tideless blooded souls, overwhelming emotions, and narrow prejudices, among the abigails and dealers in small millinery, who read novels, and sip ratafia upon the borders of prostitution' (ER, viii, 207).

1. ER, xxiv (Feb., 1815), 335.

More interesting is the discussion, admittedly a fragmentary and limited one, centred on the development of the middling classes and the importance of this for the rise of the novel. It is a point made most clearly by Hazlitt, who, looking back to the eighteenth century, writes:

It is remarkable that our four best novel writers belong nearly to the same age. We also owe to the same period, (the reign of George II), the inimitable Hogarth, and some of our best writers of the middle style of comedy. If we were called upon to account for this coincidence, we should wave the consideration of more general causes, (as, that imagination naturally descends with the progress of civilization), and ascribe it at once to the establishment of the Protestant ascendancy, and the succession of the House of Hanover. These great events appear to have given a more popular turn to our literature and genius, as well as to our Government. It was found high time that the people should be represented in books as well as in parliament. They wished to see some account of themselves in what they read, and not to be confined always to the vices, the miseries and frivolities of the great.

(ER, xxiv, 334)

The other critics were not prepared to go as far as Hazlitt does in this review, and normally contented themselves with praising novels for their moral utility in instructing the various classes of society. Unfortunately the patronising complacency that this suggests was all too evident, as witnessed by comments from such contrasting figures as Jeffrey and Lockhart:

It is for this great and most important class of society [that great multitude who are neither high-born nor high-bred] that the volumes before us have been written; and their object is, to interest, amuse and instruct them by stories founded on the incidents of common life, and developed by the agency of ordinary characters; to withdraw their attention from those dazzling displays of fashionable manners, with which they have no natural connexion, and to fix it upon those scenes and occurrences which have an immediate application to their own way of life; and in this way to impress upon their minds the inestimable value and substantial dignity of industry, perseverance, prudence, good humour, and all that train of vulgar and homely virtues that have hitherto made the happiness of the world, without obtaining any great share of its admiration.

(ER, iv, 329-30)

This [John Wilson's The Trials of Margaret Lyndsay] is certainly a useful species of composition: if it can extend the empire of virtue and religion, and bring their excellencies into contact with the humble ranks of society, traced through scenes with which the higher classes of mankind are often but little, too little, familiar, it may profit both.

(BM, xiii, 549)

Other examples of novelists being praised for the benefit they confer upon society by their portraits of the lower and middle classes can be found in reviews of novels by Mrs. Hamilton, Jane Austen, John Wilson, and, of course, Maria Edgeworth.¹

Although the three major kinds of bias or prejudice are at work in the reviewing of fiction, they are of a less complex nature than in the cases that we have looked at in earlier chapters. This is partly due to the nature of the novel itself and of its practitioners, and partly due to the status of the genre. I have already suggested that the major novelists of the time reinforced rather than challenged conventional moral beliefs. Also the emphasis on realism, reinforced by approval of moral utility, made it easier for the reviewers to accept, for example, depictions of low and rustic life. John Galt's peasants may have existed in a fictional world but it was one which had a clear and obvious relationship to reality, unlike Wordsworth's rustics, who had a much more tangential connection with reality since they belonged as much to the world of Wordsworth's imagination as to that of the Lake District. Similarly, it was much easier for the reviewers to discuss, say, Emma Woodhouse than the Giaour or Childe Harold. The relative lack and general predictability of the political bias is due to some extent to the status of the

1: ER, xii (July, 1808), 401-10; QR, xiv (Oct., 1815), 188-201; BM, xiii (May, 1823), 548-57; ER, xiv (July, 1809), 375-88.

novel: many of the fiercest political battles had been fought before the novel achieved a level of genuine respectability, and in those earlier days reviewers tended to keep their powder dry until more prestigious targets hove into view. Finally, there is a consideration which affects all three kinds of bias, and also brings a sense of perspective to our discussion as a whole - although over a hundred reviews of fiction appeared in the periodicals, that is still a far smaller number than those that appeared on poetry and prose. Quality may make up for quantity in matters of literary interest, but in terms of detecting the forces motivating the reviewers there is simply less evidence to go on.

However, this must not be exaggerated, and the relative sparseness of reviews does not prevent identifiable and important distinctions existing between the three periodicals. The Edinburgh, although it started publication well before the Quarterly and Blackwood's, contains the fewest reviews of novels, but two points of major importance emerge from a consideration of the thirty or so reviews that did appear. The first of these is the way in which the Edinburgh fiercely championed the work of Maria Edgeworth. Marilyn Butler has quite recently drawn attention to this,¹ and prefaces her remarks with some general comments about the periodicals' reviewing of fiction:

The Edinburgh reviewers who superseded the publishers' hacks of journals like the British Critic were, or soon became, men of some literary standing, but in the novel (if not in poetry) their scope was at first limited by

1. M. Butler, Maria Edgeworth (1972).

the scarcity of novels worth writing about. Maria Edgeworth was lucky therefore that from about 1804 until 1812 or 1814 she received a respectful attention that in a richer period no single minor artist would have been able to command. For intelligent reviewers, looking for something of significance to write about, the unusual interest of the subject-matter and the manner of treatment in Maria Edgeworth's Irish tales in particular was a godsend. Being rather more concerned with the novel as a form than Maria was, they saw aesthetic implications in what she was doing. While she merely worried about how far her stories reported reality, her early reviewers began to draw certain conclusions about realism. They took up the challenge with enthusiasm. Indeed, for the Edinburgh and more particularly for the Quarterly, 1809 and 1812, the years in which Ennui and The Absentee were published, were landmarks in the history of the novel.

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Whilst in full agreement with Mrs. Butler's comment about the reviewers and realism, I do not think that a scarcity of good novels is a sufficient reason for the Edinburgh's very fulsome praise of Maria Edgeworth's work, and nor do I think that 1809 and 1812 were landmarks in the history of the novel (or rather, in this context, the history of the novel's critical reception). In fact, Mrs. Butler goes on to point very perceptively to the true cause of the Edinburgh's admiration; Jeffrey wrote five out of the six reviews of Maria Edgeworth's work that appeared in the Edinburgh, and Marilyn Butler writes:

Jeffrey's views are worth dwelling on because of their representativeness. He writes as a humane, forward-looking, but essentially philistine bourgeois, and so mirrors the tastes of the average cultivated middle-class reader of the early nineteenth century. His Scottish background places him within the liberal, rational, practical tradition which is broadly characterized as utilitarianism. And in England, despite unrepresentative opposition from many of the best poets, the Anglo-Scottish empirical tradition is beyond question the dominant intellectual movement of the period. Jeffrey is a liberal but not a radical. In aesthetic matters he is a conservative because like the Edgeworths and their friends among French intellectuals he is frightened of the social and moral evils which he associates with the introspection of the great poets. No doubt he particularly admires Maria Edgeworth's novels because

they direct the reader's attention to the recognizable 'real' world, and, by implication, urge him to make the best of it. This is to be 'progressive' as Jeffrey understands it.

(340-1)

Much of that is in accord with what I have written of Jeffrey earlier in this thesis, but the important point here is that the Edinburgh was spending much of the time it devoted to fiction in praising novels that were morally useful and unexceptional. This resulted from conviction (Jeffrey's belief in Scottish Realist philosophy) and caution (the insecurity of the novel's reputation). Caution was to continue to dominate the Edinburgh's response to the novel, but by 1817 the debate about the nature of the novel had reached a state which allowed Jeffrey to dispense with Maria Edgeworth, scold her for 'her excessive care for the moral utility of her works', and suggest that fiction could indeed stimulate the moral feelings without the assistance of such didacticism.¹ It is a useful mark for gauging the progress of the debate about the status and moral function of the novel.

Marilyn Butler argues that the reason for such progress was an improvement in the quality of the novels under review, and I have already drawn attention to Scott's importance in this respect. However, and this takes me to the second point I wish to make with regard to the Edinburgh, in the same volume in which Jeffrey's review of Waverley appeared Hazlitt wrote his review of Fanny Burney's The Wanderer. Although it deals with an inferior novel, Hazlitt's is the most important review to appear in the Edinburgh. It is so

1. ER, xxviii (Aug., 1817), 390-418.

for three reasons: Hazlitt gives a sensitive and perceptive account of the eighteenth-century novel (he refers to Uncle Toby as 'one of the finest compliments ever paid to human nature'), and shows a fundamental awareness of the development of the genre; he relates this development to changes in the nature of society, although he is admittedly making a political point at the same time; and he is in advance of his time in stressing the importance of realism and, even more importantly, in offering a view of the moral function of the novel which transcends the immediate concerns of sexual and social morality. The review appeared before Scott's success could radically alter attitudes to the novel, and so suggests that the improved climate surrounding fiction owed at least something to the critical acumen of some reviewers. (Scott's review of Emma, which rivals Hazlitt's in perception and foresight, appeared a few months later).

In commenting upon the Quarterly's reception of fiction,

Marilyn Butler writes:

The great rival to the Edinburgh Review, the Quarterly, begins only in 1809. Since it sets out to repair the deficiencies of the Edinburgh Review, the Quarterly tries to improve on Jeffrey's treatment of new writing, and it is disposed to be more sympathetic to experiment. If the interests of Church and State seem threatened, the Quarterly's Tory critics can on occasion be vituperative, and the notorious excesses of John Wilson Croker are too well known to need recalling. But on most literary subjects the Quarterly's reviewers are more sensitive and open-minded than the Edinburgh's. During the first decade of the Quarterly's existence, until Blackwood's Magazine and the London Magazine appear in often successful rivalry, an able group of critics use its pages as a forum for determining what the novel is and can be.

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I would certainly take issue with Mrs. Butler over the suggestion that the Quarterly was more sensitive and open-minded 'on most literary subjects', but as regards the novel there can be little disagreement.

The reviews of Maria Edgeworth's novels by Croker, H.J. Stephen, and Lord Dudley; the review of Maturin's Fatal Revenge by Scott; and Scott's and Whately's reviews of Jane Austen's works, are all remarkable for their perception and acknowledgement of the novel's capabilities and potential.¹ However, taken as a whole, the Quarterly's reviews of fiction show a very strong concern with moral issues, and any novel which seriously deviated from the Quarterly's moral and political norms was censured. (The degree of censure depended on the individual reviewer - Croker was particularly severe, but Scott usually let literary concerns take precedence although a rider concerning the novel's immorality or sedition would be added). Consequently, we find Maria Edgeworth taken to task for the rationalist, non-religious basis of her teaching; Maturin dismissed out of hand (except by Scott), with his sins compounded by the very fact of his being a clergyman; and any quasi-Byronic hero, such as Moore's Anastasius, given very short shrift indeed. Against this excessive concern with moral issues we have, in the person of Scott, a major practising novelist who takes the opportunity to explore and discuss the theoretical aspects of his art. This, and the reviews already listed, helped the Quarterly make an important, if at times limited, contribution to the contemporary discussion about the development of the novel.

Arguably the greatest contribution, however, came not from the quarterlies but from Blackwood's Magazine. To some extent this was to be expected: the status of the novel had

1. QR, vii (June, 1812), 329-42; ii (Aug., 1809), 146-54; x (Jan., 1814), 301-22; iii (May, 1810), 339-47; xiv (Oct., 1815), 188-201; xxiv (Jan., 1821), 352-76.

improved considerably by 1817; Austen and Scott had produced major novels by this time, and Scott's had commanded enormous popularity; and the better reviews in the Quarterly and the Edinburgh, with their recognition of the importance of realism and discussion of other central issues, provided a fertile climate for a continuing discussion of the novel's potentialities. The excesses that Blackwood's was always prone to still occur in its reviews of fiction: at one extreme we find irritating and juvenile practical jokes; at the other, high-flown, sometimes incomprehensible, rhetoric. And yet despite this (or, as so often with Blackwood's, because of the imaginative freedom that this refusal to conform to the sober consistency of its rivals sometimes allowed it), there are reviews and articles which make a major contribution to the new understanding of the novel that was beginning to emerge.¹ In particular, Lockhart and Wilson (both practising if not particularly successful novelists) recognized the function of the imagination in the creation of even the most realistic novels. This enabled them to move the discussion of the moral function of the novel from the level of the keeping or not keeping down of petticoats to something approaching the statement by a much later critic that great novelists are great because 'of that human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life' and that in so doing they bring 'to an intense focus, an unusually developed interest

1. Reviews of Godwin's Mandeville [BM, ii (Dec., 1817), 268-79], Mary Shelley's Frankenstein [BM, ii (March, 1818), 613-20], John Galt's The Entail [BM, xiii (Jan., 1823), 77-86], John Wilson's The Trials of Margaret Lindsay [BM, xiii (May, 1823), 548-57], and Thomas Moore's The Epicurean [BM, xxii (Sept., 1827), 374-402], are of particular interest.

in life....they are all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity'.¹ Lockhart and Leavis may be poles apart in many ways, but in their differing uses of rhetoric they both try to advance our understanding and comprehension of the great nineteenth-century tradition of realistic fiction.

Obviously, exaggerated claims must be avoided. The Edinburgh, obsessed in its early years with the moral utilitarianism that was promoted by its belief in the Scottish Realist philosophical tradition, can only really boast Hazlitt's review as a unified rather than fragmented statement about the future of the novel. The Quarterly's record is more impressive, but its High Church principles and concern with sexual morality limit even the half-dozen or so important reviews that appeared in its pages. And Blackwood's can all too easily be discredited. But even bearing this in mind, and admitting the relatively few reviews of fiction that appeared in the periodicals, I think it is possible to detect a perceptible and major shift in critical attitudes which began to take definite shape between 1814 and 1816. The most important and consistently expressed feature of this was the discussion of the new realism. Less clearly expressed but also present was an awareness that the moral function of the novel did not have to be confined to the support of existing social mores, and the realization that the power and truth of fiction stems from the operation of the imagination of both the reader and the novelist.

1. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1967), 11-17.

Scott

The central problem confronting the contemporary reviewers of Scott's novels was created by his enormous popularity. It is summed up, perhaps a little too sympathetically, by John Hayden:

The contemporary reviewers of Scott's works had much to contend with. They confronted a careless, indifferent, and anonymous writer who ground out novels at an unprecedented flow for a voracious public which would not likely pay much attention to adverse critics anyway. In one sense, the reviewers were facing for the first time a modern phenomenon - the best-seller.¹

In fact this is not strictly true since Byron had commanded a similar popularity several years before the appearance of Waverley, and Scott's own poetry had also enjoyed a very large and favourable public response.² But Byron and Scott were writing in a genre which the reviewers felt instinctively at home with, and, after acknowledging the favourable judgement passed by the public upon both poets, they went on to review them as they thought fit. Scott as a novelist was employing a genre which, as I have tried to show earlier in this chapter, not only initially puzzled the reviewers, but on the whole provoked their displeasure - a situation which was only just beginning to change immediately prior to the publication of Waverley. The dilemma which therefore faced the periodicals casts an interesting light on their relationship with their readers. The air of omniscience which so often surrounded, in

1. Scott: The Critical Heritage, ed. J. Hayden (1970), 5-6.

2. Jeffrey discusses the significance of Scott's popularity as a poet in his review of The Lady of the Lake, and defends the privileged position of the critic: 'It would not be quite correct, we fear, to say that those are invariably the best judges who are most easily pleased. The great multitude, even of the reading world, must necessarily be uninstructed and injudicious; and will frequently be found, not only to derive pleasure from what is worthless in finer eyes, but to be quite insensible to those beauties which afford the most exquisite delight to more cultivated understandings. True pathos and sublimity will indeed charm every one: but, out of this lofty sphere, we are pretty well convinced, that the poetry which appears most perfect to a very refined taste, will not turn out to be very popular poetry'. [ER, xvi (Aug., 1810), 264].

particular, the pronouncements of the Edinburgh and Quarterly was in fact extremely insecurely founded. It is something noticed by John Clive, not in a literary but a political context, when he writes of the Edinburgh's attitude towards Catholic emancipation:

And on this question the Review never wavered - though in 1807, after the fall of the Talents, it was forced to concede that opponents of the Catholic claims unfortunately comprehended too large a portion of the public to be reviled or turned into ridicule - a wonderfully revealing comment on the self-imposed limits of the Review's function and method. For its implication appears to be an admission that those weapons were to be employed only when minority views were clearly involved, with reader opinion automatically assumed to be in harmony with editorial views; and that sweet reasonableness must be resorted to when this was not the case. When the absurdity he ridicules is taken seriously by the majority, it is only too easy for the critic himself to appear absurd - and to lose his readers. The favourite Edinburgh device of setting timeless common sense against temporary absurdity had its limitations.¹

The Edinburgh's 'timeless common sense' was certainly matched by the Quarterly's air of ponderous authority, and so it is not surprising to find both periodicals exhibiting signs of uncertainty and strain when confronted with the phenomenon of 'The Great Unknown'.

Jeffrey, nicknamed the 'Little Known' by Blackwood's, was the sole reviewer of Scott's novels in the Edinburgh, and his reviews display signs of the general unease occasioned by Scott's novels, the attitudes normally adopted by the Edinburgh towards the novel, and his own critical attitudes and habits of mind. In fact the Edinburgh's reception of Scott's novels can only be fully understood within the context of all three, as is immediately

1. J.Clive, Scotch Reviewers, 91.

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apparent in Jeffrey's review of Waverley:

It is wonderful what genius and adherence to nature will do, in spite of all disadvantages. Here is a thing obviously very hastily, and, in many places, very unskilfully written - composed, one half of it, in a dialect unintelligible to four-fifths of the reading population of the country - relating to a period too recent to be romantic, and too far gone by to be familiar - and published, moreover, in a quarter of the island where materials and talents for novel-writing have been supposed to be equally wanting; and yet, by the mere force and truth and vivacity of its colouring, already casting the whole tribe of ordinary novels into the shade, and taking its place rather with the most popular of our modern poems, than with the rubbish of provincial romances.

(208)

The uneasy coupling of 'genius' with 'adherence to nature', the promotion of the novel to the ranks of 'the most popular of our modern poems', and the reference to 'the rubbish of provincial romances', illustrate both Jeffrey's perplexity and the unease of the Review with the novel as a genre. This continues throughout the review, but Jeffrey finds a life-line in the historical basis of Scott's fiction:

It requires no ordinary talent, indeed, to choose such realities as may outshine the bright imaginations of the inventive, and so to combine them as to produce the most advantageous effect; but when this is once accomplished, the result is sure to be something more firm, impressive, and engaging, than can ever be produced by mere fiction. There is a consistency in nature and truth, the want of which may always be detected in the happiest combinations of fancy; and the consciousness of their support gives a confidence and assurance to the artist, which encourages him occasionally to risk a strength of colouring, and a boldness of drawing, upon which he would scarcely have ventured in a sketch that was purely ideal. The reader, too, who by these or still finer indications, speedily comes to perceive that he is engaged with scenes and characters that are copied from existing originals, naturally lends a more eager attention to the story in which they are unfolded, and regards with a keener interest what he no longer considers as a bewildering series of dreams and

1. ER, xxiv (Nov., 1814), 208-43.

exaggerations - but an instructive exposition of human actions and energies, and of all the singular modifications which our plastic nature receives from the circumstances with which it is surrounded.

(208-09)

Far be it for Jeffrey to be seduced by even the 'happiest combinations of fancy', and one only has to remember his support for the moral utilitarianism of Maria Edgeworth's work to see why 'an instructive exposition of human actions and energies' should be preferable to 'a bewildering series of dreams and exaggerations'. (It is perhaps indicative of Jeffrey's unease with Scott that he had already turned away from Maria Edgeworth by this time, and accused her of an obsessive concern with moral utilitarianism; and had himself developed a somewhat more sophisticated argument about the moral nature of the novel).

The criticisms of Scott's 'considerable carelessness and haste', and of his excessive nationalism as demonstrated by his use of dialect and setting, were to be repeated on many occasions by other critics. Rather more interesting, although equally prevalent in other commentaries on the Waverley novels, is Jeffrey's praise of 'those dramatic or picturesque representations to which [Scott's] genius so decidedly inclines'. This recognition of the dramatic element in Scott's novels eventually turned to a plea that he should turn his talents to drama. The reasons for the reviewers' preoccupation with this are several: dramatic adaptations of the Waverley novels abounded; the periodicals had a genuine interest in the revival of English drama as witnessed by their interest in Shakespeare and the drama of the seventeenth century;¹ and they had perceived that the dramatic was an important

1. See N. Bawcutt, "The Revival of Elizabethan Drama and the Crisis of Romantic Drama" in Literature of the Romantic Period 1750 - 1850, ed. R. T. Davies and B. G. Beatty (Liverpool, 1976), 96 - 113.

mode within the novels themselves. One cannot help feeling, however, that one of their reasons was also an attempt to divert Scott's energies into a form where the relationship between author and audience, fact and fiction, and reviewer and reviewed, was more clearly established. The frequent comparison with Shakespeare may also result from this, and not simply from admiration for Scott's facility and inventiveness.

Two and a half years elapsed before the Edinburgh reviewed Scott again (a considerable and significant gap, given that both Guy Mannering and The Antiquary had appeared during this time).

1
However, the opening of the second review shows that little had changed:

We have often been astonished at the quantity of talent - of invention, observation, and knowledge of character, as well as of spirited and graceful composition, that may be found in those works of fiction in our language, which are generally regarded as among the lower productions of our literature, - upon which no great pains is understood to be bestowed, and which are seldom regarded as the titles of a permanent reputation. If Novels, however, are not fated to last as long as Epic poems, they are at least a great deal more popular in their season; and, slight as their structure, and imperfect as their finishing may often be thought in comparison, we have no hesitation in saying, that the better specimens of the art are incomparably more entertaining, and considerably more instructive. The great objection to them, indeed, is, that they are too entertaining - and are so pleasant in their reading, as to be apt to produce a disrelish for other kinds of reading which may be more necessary, and can in no way be made so agreeable.

(193)

The equivocation about the status of the novel is very evident here, and is again apparent when, in praising Scott, Jeffrey claims that his novels 'not only show great talent, but infinite good sense

1. ER, xxviii (March, 1817), 193-259. The review is ostensibly of The Black Dwarf and Old Mortality, but it also refers to the preceding novels.

and good nature, - a more vigorous and wide-reaching intellect than is often displayed in novels, and a more powerful fancy, and a deeper sympathy with various passion, than is often combined with strength of understanding'.

In the assessment of Scott's strengths and weaknesses as a novelist which follow, it is this quality of 'infinite good sense and good nature' which is given predominance. Having praised Scott's powers of characterization and description, Jeffrey writes that the true interest of Scott's novels is

for the most part a moral interest - that the concern we take in his characters is less an account of their adventures than of their amiableness - and that the great charm of his works is derived from the kindness of heart, the capacity of generous emotions, and the lights of native taste which he ascribes...even to the humblest of his favourites.

(194-95)

Whilst one cannot deny that Jeffrey has instinctively touched upon a major quality of Scott's work (and one which is echoed later, although with much greater intellectual depth and emotional clarity, in the novels of George Eliot), one wonders how much this response is conditioned by Jeffrey's knowledge of Scott's character and his personal friendship for him. That Scott's compassion might also be soft-centred is unwittingly suggested by Jeffrey's comparison of him with the Lake poets:

The temper of [Scott's] writings, in short, is precisely the reverse of those of our Laureates and Lakers, who, being themselves the most whimsical of mortals, make it a conscience to loathe and detest all with whom they happen to disagree, and labour to promote mutual animosity, and all manner of uncharitableness among mankind, by referring every supposed error of taste, or peculiarity of opinion, to some hateful corruption of the heart and understanding.

(195)

It is not surprising that Jeffrey should find Scott more congenial

company than the Lake poets, but his approval is not unqualified and he rebukes Scott (and demonstrates the Calvinist streak in his own character) for being 'something of a latitudinarian both in morals and religion' and reserving his admiration 'for those graceful and gentleman-like principles which can generally be acted upon with a gay countenance - and do not imply any great effort of self-denial, or any deep sense of the rights of others, or the helplessness and humility of our common nature'. However, unlike the Lake poets with their jacobinical views (it is implied), Scott's aristocratical principles do not prevent him from drawing convincing pictures of 'rustic and homely characters':

The great merit of all these delineations, is their admirable truth and fidelity - the whole manner and cast of the characters being accurately moulded on their condition...they are made interesting and even noble beings, without the least particle of foppery or exaggeration, and delight and amuse us without trespassing at all on the province of pastoral or romance.

(196)

Jeffrey, having buried the Lakers by praising Scott, continues by listing the faults of the novelist. On the whole, his criticisms are unexceptional: generally he finds Scott's description of women and love 'lame and mawkish'; he believes that the novelist's love of the ludicrous 'betrays him into forced and vulgar exaggerations, and into the repetition of common and paltry stories'; he argues that Scott is guilty of taking the descriptions of some of his more 'striking and highly-coloured' characters to excessive length; and that the strong 'national and Scottish' cast of his novels makes it impossible for him to be fully understood other than in his native land.

Jeffrey's review of Waverley was exceptional for its lack

of specific comment on the novel itself, and in this second review he tries to rectify the balance. He is not particularly successful, however: he admits to looking upon Waverley with 'all the fascination of a first love', and suggests that Guy Mannering and The Antiquary show 'quite as much power and genius in the author'. But he finds The Antiquary less interesting than the others, although he pays tribute to the descriptive power of the storm scene and the 'striking and pathetic' nature of Steenie's funeral. He was also perhaps the first, although by no means the last, critic to fail to realize that the fact that Oldbuck himself 'is the great blemish of the work, - at least in so far as he is an Antiquary' (my italics) is the point on which the novel's entire discussion of the proper relationship between past and present depends.

The review is specifically intended as a review of the first series of Tales of My Landlord which consisted of The Black Dwarf and Old Mortality. Jeffrey dismisses the introduction to the Tales as 'foolish and clumsy' which however defensible on grounds of taste shows little awareness of the problems of narrative technique, and like other contemporary reviewers he has little good to say about The Black Dwarf. Old Mortality, however, posed a more interesting problem.

Usually, the discussion of Scott's use of history got little further than a debate about the propriety of using fact in fiction with the honours normally going to fact. The dismissive implications of that for fiction are evident in Jeffrey's reviews. Old Mortality deals with events in Scotland just prior to 1688, and Jeffrey comments that 'the piece would have been too full of

distress and humiliation, if it had been chiefly engaged with the course of public events, or the record of public feelings. So sad a subject would not have suited many readers - and the author, we suspect, less than any of them'. And later, when touching upon the debate occasioned by Scott's accurate or otherwise portrayal of the Covenanters, Jeffrey remarks that it 'is a singular honour, no doubt, to a work of fiction and amusement, to be thus made the theme of serious attack and defence upon points of historical and theological discussion.... It is difficult for us, we confess, to view the matter in so serious a light....' However, despite this, Jeffrey still manages to make one of the most sensible comments to appear in the periodicals about the relationship of Scott's characters to their historical setting:

and though nothing lends such an air, both of reality and importance, to a fictitious narrative, as to connect its persons with events in real history, still it is the imaginary individual himself that excites our chief interest throughout, and we care for the national affairs only in so far as they affect him. In one sense, indeed, this is the true end and the best use of history; for as all public events are important only as they ultimately concern individuals, if the individual selected belong to a large and comprehensive class, and the events, and their natural operation on him, be justly represented, we shall be enabled, in following out his adventures, to form no bad estimate of their true character and value.

(217-18)

Jeffrey's view of the nature and function of history might be debatable, but at least he has understood Scott's concern with the action of historical forces on the individual and the need to depict the interaction between the two.

The review of Rob Roy that followed in 1818¹ is neither

1. ER, xxix (Feb., 1818), 403-32.

very interesting nor very enthusiastic. Again the unease occasioned by the usurpation of the reviewers' role by public acclaim is all too evident:

This is not so good, perhaps, as some others of the family; - but it is better than any thing else; and has a charm and a spirit about it that draws us irresistibly away from our graver works of politics and science, to expatiate upon that which every body understands and agrees in; and after setting us diligently to read over again what we had scarce finished reading, leaves us no choice but to tell our readers what they all know already, and to persuade them of that of which they are most intimately convinced.

(403)

The remarks about the novel itself are equally ill-at-case, and this nullifies the conventional and unsubstantiated praise of Scott which occurs in the review.

The next review, ostensibly of Ivanhoe but with reference to The Heart of Midlothian, The Bride of Lammermoor, and The Legend of Montrose, is of more interest to us.¹ Jeffrey feels it incumbent upon him to apologize for his failure to review Scott's novels more regularly, again on the grounds 'that in reality all the world thought just what we were inclined to say of them'.

His judgement on the individual novels is sound but conventional. The Heart of Midlothian is criticized for the 'extravagant and unpleasing' portrait of George Staunton, the 'needlessly improbable and startling' final catastrophe, and the way in which the extension of the story beyond its apparently natural conclusion makes Saddletree^s and Davie Deans seem in the end 'tedious and unreasonable'. A little more surprisingly

1. ER, xxxiii (Jan., 1820), 1-54.

he finds the opening description of the Porteous riots 'heavily described', and one can only regret that instead of praising the scenes as 'full of spirit' in which the Duke of Argyle appears, he failed to make some political capital out of Scott's sycophancy. He does, however, accept that Jeanie Deans provides the true centre of the book, and finds nothing incongruous in the choice of such an unconventional heroine:

But the great boast of the piece, and the great exploit of the author - perhaps the greatest of all his exploits - is the character and history of Jeanie Deans....The singular talent with which he has engrafted on the humble and somewhat coarse stock of a quiet unassuming peasant girl, the heroic affection, the strong sense, and lofty purposes, which distinguish this heroine - or rather the art with which he has so tempered and modified those great qualities, as to make them appear noways unsuitable to the station or ordinary bearing of such a person, and so ordered and disposed the incidents by which they are called out, that they seem throughout adapted and native as it were to her condition, - is superior to any thing we can recollect in the history of invention; and must appear, to any one who attentively considers it, as a remarkable triumph over the greatest of all difficulties in the conduct of a fictitious narrative.

(4)

Jeffrey also praises The Bride of Lammermoor; a judgement echoed by other contemporary reviewers.

In discussing Ivanhoe, Jeffrey is aware of a change in kind, since in comparison with the earlier novels it is obvious that

we are passing in a good degree from the reign of nature and reality, to that of fancy and romance....A far greater proportion of the work is accordingly made up of splendid descriptions...- while the interest of the story is maintained far more by surprising adventures and extraordinary situations, the startling effect of exaggerated sentiments, and the strong contrast of exaggerated characters, than by the sober charms of truth and reality, - the exquisite representation of scenes with which we are familiar, or the skilful development of affections which we have often experienced.

These bright lights and deep shadows - this succession of brilliant pictures, addressed as often to the eye as to the imagination, and oftener to the imagination than the heart - this preference of striking generalities to homely details, all belong more properly to the province of poetry than of

prose; and *Ivanhoe* accordingly seems to us much more akin to the most splendid of modern poems, than the most interesting of modern novels....For our part we prefer, and we care not who knows it, the prose to the poetry....

(8)

The preference for the prose to the poetry signals a major change of heart, since Jeffrey in an earlier review had praised Scott's novels by elevating them to the level of 'the most splendid of modern poems'. He praises the portrait of Rebecca and admits that *Ivanhoe* displays as much genius and interest as the previous novels, but he does not believe that it delights 'so deeply' or that it will endure so long. It is, in fact, a 'splendid pageant' rather than 'a reality', and, in a passage which demonstrates a heightened awareness of the importance of realism as it was beginning to emerge in the novel as a genre, Jeffrey turns back to *Waverley*, *The Antiquary*, and *Old Mortality*, and so renews acquaintance 'with our neighbours and ourselves, and our duties and dangers and true felicities, in the exquisite pictures which our author there exhibits of the follies we daily witness or display, and of the prejudices, habits and affections, by which we are hourly obstructed, governed, or cheered'. This view of *Ivanhoe*, shared by the *Quarterly* but opposed by *Blackwood's*, shows some signs of an awareness of the changes that were taking place in the development of contemporary fiction.

Jeffrey's final review of Scott does not develop that awareness in any way.¹ *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* are not only seen (quite properly) as Scott's weakest novels to date, but for once as not even superior to the general run of contemporary fiction.

1. ER, xxxvii (June, 1822), 204-25.

It is a measure of Jeffrey's surprising tolerance of the supernatural in the Waverley novels that he asserts that "we do not think the White Lady, or the other supernatural agency, the worst blemish of 'the Monastery'", and even argues that the White Lady's first appearance (borrowed, he believes, from Byron's Witch of the Alps in Manfred) is 'very beautifully imagined'. He does, however, draw the line at the descent into the alabaster cave and the seizure of the stolen Bible from an altar blazing with a cold flame, which he believes 'looks very like an unlucky combination of a French fairy tale and a dull German romance'.

His comments on Kenilworth and The Fortunes of Nigel demonstrate again the equivocal nature of his response to Scott's work. He finds Kenilworth almost as good as Ivanhoe, but complains that

almost all the lower agents in the performance have a sort of demoniacal character; and the deep and disgusting guilt by which most of the main incidents are developed, make a splendid passage of English history read like the Newgate Calendar, and give a certain horror to the story, which is neither agreeable to historical truth, nor attractive in a work of imagination.

(207)

So again we find Jeffrey limiting the scope of the novel by implying that topics which do not conform to moral or social stereotypes are unfit 'in a work of imagination'. However, when he comments on The Fortunes of Nigel he is forced to admit that 'while it certainly presents us with a very brilliant, and, we believe, a very faithful sketch of the manners and habits of the time, we cannot say that it either embodies them in a very interesting story, or supplies us with any rich variety of particular characters'. Rather like some of the characters in Kenilworth which seemed to be 'copied rather from the quaintness

of old plays, than the reality of past and present nature', Jeffrey finds that the characters in The Fortunes of Nigel seem borrowed from 'written memorials of the age to which they refer'. However, if Jeffrey is advocating a greater realism in the portrayal of such characters, it is still one based on 'eternal and universal nature' and that 'nature [which] alone must be the source of all natural interest'.

Overall, Jeffrey's response to Scott's novels is embarrassed and equivocal. Superficially his reviews are very favourable, but much of the praise seems to be simply posturing in the face of the fait accompli represented by the immediate success of the novels. Doubts about the status of the novel and the nature and source of realism in fiction added to his problems. To his credit, his praise of what he called Scott's 'kindness of heart' points to an important aspect of the author's work, although he seems to fail to realize that this could easily become a disadvantage. Perhaps, most significantly, his praise of Jeanie Deans, and his realization that Scott's concern was not simply with the popularization of history but with the impact upon and the interaction between historical forces and the individual, show a degree of sympathy and understanding that should not be entirely overlooked.

The reviewing of Scott's novels by the Quarterly falls into four sections: three reviews by John Wilson Croker; the famous and important review by Scott himself which he wrote in collaboration with William Erskine; three favourable but, I would argue, limited reviews by William Nassau Senior; and, finally, two reviews which are of interest to us for their general comments

about the novel as a genre.¹ These have all been accurately summarized by James T. Hillhouse,² but since he has not studied either the periodicals themselves or the development of the novel's reputation in any detail, there are points of interest which he has overlooked.

Croker's name appeared on several occasions in the earlier part of this chapter, and always in connection with the hostile reaction to the novel which is to be found at times in the pages of the periodicals. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the tone of his comments on Scott less than adulatory. J.T.

Hillhouse writes:

The Quarterly, like the Edinburgh, noticed all the Waverley novels for many years. The first three, Waverley, Guy Mannering, and The Antiquary, were reviewed as they came out by Croker in papers that add little glory to him or the periodical. Lukewarm and cautious, they show little understanding or appreciation of the newly revealed genius which Jeffrey had rushed to meet with open arms, but take refuge only too often in pointing out the faults and weaknesses which it required no great critical acumen to recognize. Of these reviews, Lockhart said, having just praised Jeffrey's Edinburgh essays, they "will bear the test of ultimate opinion as badly as any critical pieces which our time has produced. They are written in a captious, cavilling strain of quibble which shows as complete blindness to the essential interest of the narrative as the critic betrays on the subject of the Scottish dialogue which forms its liveliest ornament." And when some of the later novels were entrusted to Nassau Senior (according to Lockhart, "a critic second to few") Lockhart fancied that Gifford was convinced that he had made a grievous mistake in the matter of the first three reviews.

(47)

1. The reviews in the Quarterly were as follows:

QR, xi (July, 1814), 354-77 - Waverley.

QR, xii (Jan., 1815), 501-09 - Guy Mannering.

QR, xv (April, 1816), 125-39 - The Antiquary.

QR, xvi (Jan., 1817), 430-80 - The Black Dwarf and Old Mortality.

QR, xxvi (Oct., 1821), 109-48 - Rob Roy, The Heart of Midlothian, The Bride of Lammermoor, The Legend of Montrose, Ivanhoe, The Monastery, The Abbot, and Kenilworth.

QR, xxvi (Jan., 1822), 454-74 - The Pirate.

QR, xxvii (July, 1822), 337-64 - The Fortunes of Nigel.

QR, xxxiv (Sept., 1826), 349-78 - Lives of the Novelists.

QR, xxxv (March, 1827), 518-66 - Historical Romances.

2. J.T. Hillhouse, The Waverley Novels and their Critics (Minneapolis, 1936).

I do not agree with Hillhouse's assessment of Jeffrey's reviews nor with Lockhart's of Senior's, but there can be little disagreement over the united stand they take against Croker.

Once again, however, the immediate popularity of Scott's novels presented a problem. Most of Croker's earlier attacks on the novel as a form had appeared in reviews of works of obvious literary inferiority or of dubious moral or political inference, and he had used this as an excuse for engaging in abuse rather than argument. In the case of the Waverley novels greater care was needed, and any objection to the novel as a genre would have to be substantiated in some way or other.

In his review of Waverley, Croker does this by referring back to the achievement of the eighteenth-century novelists (as we have seen, all three periodicals praised the founding-fathers even when attacking the more recent products of the genre):

The characters in Gil Blas and Tom Jones are not individuals so much as specimens of the human race; and these delightful works have been, are, and ever will be popular, because they present lively and accurate delineations of the workings of the human soul, and that every man who reads them is obliged to confess to himself, that in similar circumstances with the personages of Le Sage and Fielding, he would probably have acted in the way they are described to have done.

(xi, 354-5)

Croker then argues that the novel has gone to move from the general to the specific, from an examination of the human soul to the depiction of the individual:

The general operations of nature are circumscribed to her effects on an individual character, and the modern novels of this class, compared with the broad and noble style of the earlier writers, may be considered as Dutch pictures, delightful in their vivid and minute details of common life, wonderfully entertaining to the close observer of peculiarities, and highly creditable to the accuracy, observation and humour of

the painter, but exciting none of those more exalted feelings, giving none of those higher views of the human soul which delight and exalt the mind of the spectator of Raphael, Correggio, or Murillo.

(xi, 355)

This is an extremely limiting judgement on the novels of Croker's own time which deliberately sets its face against the emphasis on realism which was becoming apparent by this time, and he attempts to qualify it somewhat:

We mean only to say, that the lines of writing which they have adopted is less comprehensive and less sublime, but not that it is less entertaining or less useful than that of their predecessors. On the contrary, so far as utility constitutes merit in a novel, we have no hesitation in preferring the moderns to their predecessors. We do not believe that any man or woman was ever improved in morals or manners by the reading of Tom Jones or Peregrine Pickle, though we are confident that many have profited by the Tales of Fashionable Life, and [Mrs. Hamilton's] the Cottagers of Glenburnie.

(xi, 355)

This only makes matters worse from Scott's point of view since Waverley does not, fortunately, possess the moral didacticism of either Maria Edgeworth's or Mrs. Hamilton's novels.

Croker's lack of sympathy with the moving force behind Scott's work becomes very apparent at the end of the review where he makes no attempt to conceal his preference for fact over fiction:

We confess that we have, speaking generally, a great objection to what may be called historical romance, in which real and fictitious personages, and actual and fabulous events are mixed together to the utter confusion of the reader, and the unsettling of all accurate recollections of past transactions; and we cannot but wish that the ingenious and intelligent author of Waverley had rather employed himself in recording historically the character and transactions of his countrymen Sixty years since, than in writing a work, which, though it may be, in its facts, almost true, and in its delineations perfectly accurate, will yet, in sixty years hence, be regarded, or rather, probably, disregarded, as a mere romance; and the gratuitous invention of a facetious fancy.

(xi, 377)

The ostensibly favourable tone of much of the review cannot hide Croker's hostility to contemporary fiction, nor his misgivings about the genre as a whole. His preference for Fielding and Smollett, the general rather than the specific, and history rather than romance, all imply a retreat to an early literary aesthetic, and form the background to his other two reviews of Scott's novels.

Neither of these reviews need detain us long. Croker has little good to say of Guy Mannering. He objects to the use of the supernatural, the triteness and improbability of many of the events in the novel, the fact that 'the greater part of characters, their manners and dialects, are at once barbarous and vulgar, extravagant and mean', and, most fundamentally of all, to the national cast of the novel.

The review of The Antiquary is apparently more favourable, and is perhaps an attempt by Croker to conform to the popular view of the Waverley novels. If so, he does it only grudgingly, and without surrendering much ground from his earlier position. He begins by claiming that The Antiquary is better than Guy Mannering although not so good as Waverley. He then takes issue with Scott's claim to have deliberately attempted to illustrate three distinct periods of Scottish history in the three novels, but he tempers this with some ostensibly generous praise:

That, however, in which he has not failed is the higher duty of the novelist - character, interest, eloquence; something that hurries rather than leads you on; traits of feeling that melt, and strokes of humour that enliven the heart; all these he, in an eminent degree possesses; with them he combines so curious and accurate a delineation of human nature, that, through the Scottish garb, and the Scottish dialect, we distinguish the characteristic follies, foibles, and virtues, which belong to our own acquaintance, and to all mankind.

(xv, 126)

But the praise is extremely imprecise, and Scott's success is in spite of rather than because of 'the Scottish garb, and the Scottish dialect'. Also, the 'characteristic follies, foibles, and virtues' which Scott presents in his characters are successful because they refer not only to the individual, but, more importantly, 'to all mankind'. Croker cannot be faulted on the grounds of consistency, and if Scott is going to be praised it will only be on the uncompromising terms already set down.

Scott is again taken to task for his use of the supernatural, although Croker admits that it is not as marked as it was in Guy Mannering, and the plot is criticized for lack of originality and probability. There is praise, however, of the two best scenes in the novel (the storm which endangers the lives of Sir Arthur and his daughter, and the burial of Steenie), but nearly all the reviewers of the novel praised one or both of these. The review concludes with some favourable but general comments about Scott's abilities as a novelist, but the review makes an unsatisfactory whole. The praise is too imprecise, and there is a too obvious determination to make Scott fit the theories expounded in the review of Waverley. Scott's novels, from the periodical from which he could reasonably have expected most, received only a very guarded and hesitant welcome.

However, the Quarterly more than atoned for this when it allowed Scott himself to review the first series of Tales of My Landlord, which consisted in fact of The Black Dwarf and Old Mortality. That Scott should review his own novels has been a matter of some embarrassment to his supporters, and J.C. Lockhart dismissed the whole matter by claiming that William Erskine, not

Scott, wrote the review.¹ The most convincing account of the construction of the review is to be found in an article by Martin Lightfoot published in 1968.² He begins by dividing the review into five sections: introductory remarks which deal with some of the leading issues raised by the novels that had appeared; the relation of characters and incidents to real historical events and persons, supported by detailed evidence; the account of The Black Dwarf and Old Mortality; general remarks on the Waverley novels as a whole, which really turn into a panegyric on Scott, and are stylistically different from the earlier general remarks; the historical foundations of Old Mortality with detailed reference to specific sources; and a final paragraph which alludes to the rumour that Scott's brother was the author of the novels. Mr. Lightfoot argues, convincingly and with reference to the original MS. of the review, that Scott wrote the first three sections up to but not including the brief summary of the final chapters of Old Mortality (this occurs on p. 465 of the review). He believes that Gifford wrote the

1. Murray, who was by now publishing the Waverley novels, was convinced that Scott was the author of them, although he had not been informed of the fact. He wrote to Scott congratulating him on Tales of My Landlord, and received the reply: 'I give you heartily joy of the success of the Tales, although I do not claim that paternal interest in them which my friends do me the credit to assign me....I do not expect implicit reliance to be placed on my disavowal, because I know very well that he who is disposed not to own a work must necessarily deny it, and that otherwise his secret would be at the mercy of all who choose to ask the question, since silence in such a case must always pass for consent, or rather assent. But I have a mode of convincing you that I am perfectly serious in my denial - pretty similar to that by which Solomon distinguished the fictitious from the real mother - and that is, by reviewing the work, which I take to be an operation equal to that of quartering the child. But this is only on condition I can have Mr Erskine's assistance....' (Lockhart, Life of Scott, iv, 32).

2. M.Lightfoot, "Scott's Self-Reviewal: Manuscript and Other Evidence", Nineteenth Century Fiction, xxiii (1968-9), 150-60.

panegyric on the Waverley novels which immediately follows, and that Erskine, with material supplied by Scott, was responsible for the section providing the historical basis for the depiction of the Covenanters in Old Mortality. It seems a reasonable assumption, and certainly the first half of the review is by far the most interesting. The panegyric on Scott, which occurs immediately after the discussion of Old Mortality and which Mr. Lightfoot ascribes to Gifford, certainly acts as a corrective to Croker's grudging attitude, but it adds little to the serious discussion of Scott's strengths and weaknesses as a novelist. The opposite is true of the review's opening remarks, most probably written by Scott, and it is on these that I wish to concentrate.

Scott begins by placing his novels strictly within a realistic framework:

we are certain that it ought to increase the value of his portraits, that human beings have actually sate for them. These coincidences between fiction and reality are perhaps the very circumstances to which the success of these novels is in a great measure to be attributed: for, without depreciating the merit of the artist, every spectator at once recognizes in those scenes and faces which are copied from nature an air of distinct reality, which is not attached to fancy-pieces however happily conceived and elaborately executed. By what sort of freemasonry, if we may use the term, the mind arrives at this conviction, we do not pretend to guess, but every one must have felt that he instinctively and almost insensibly recognizes in painting, poetry, or other works of imagination, that which is copied from existing nature, and that he forthwith clings to it with that kindred interest which thinks nothing which is human indifferent to humanity.

(xvi, 430)

It is a point that is returned to later in the review in the general comments which follow the account of Old Mortality, but without the vigour and incisiveness of these earlier remarks.

Scott then moves on to deal with the criticism that the plots

to his novels are poorly constructed, and that 'Probability and perspicuity of narrative are sacrificed with the utmost indifference to the desire of producing effect....' He apparently has much sympathy with such criticisms, but he goes on:

There may be something of a system in it however: for we have remarked, that with an attention which amounts even to affectation, he has avoided the common language of narrative, and thrown his story, as much as possible, into a dramatic shape. In many cases this has added greatly to the effect, by keeping both the actors and action continually before the reader, and placing him, in some measure, in the situation of the audience at a theatre, who are compelled to gather the meaning of the scene from what the dramatis personae say to each other, and not from any explanation addressed immediately to themselves.

(xvi, 431)

He gravely goes on to suggest that such a practice 'is a principal cause of the flimsiness and incoherent texture of which his greatest admirers are compelled to complain'. Scott must have derived a great deal of enjoyment from sending up both himself and his critics in this fashion, and the first part of the review abounds in examples of his doing this (at one point he severely criticizes the author of Old Mortality for suggesting that General Dalzell ever wore boots, since reliable historical authority denies the fact - an incident reminiscent of the Baron of Bradwardine's long debate about whether caligae could refer to boots as well as sandals, and whether or not brogues could also be covered by the term).

But there is a more serious side to Scott's comments. As well as pointing out the realistic and dramatic basis of his work, he also defends his use of the apparently unheroic hero:

His chief characters are never actors, but always acted upon by the spur of circumstances, and have their fates uniformly determined by the agency of the subordinate persons. This arises from the author having usually represented them as foreigners to whom every thing in Scotland is strange, - a circumstance which serves as his apology for entering into

many minute details which are reflectively, as it were, addressed to the reader through the medium of the hero....The insipidity of this author's heroes may be also in part referred to the readiness with which he twists and turns his story to produce some immediate and perhaps temporary effect. This could hardly be done without representing the principal character either as inconsistent or flexible in his principles. The ease with which Waverley adopts and afterwards forsakes the Jacobite party in 1745 is a good example of what we mean. Had he been painted as a steady character, his conduct would have been improbable. The author was aware of this; and yet, unwilling to relinquish an opportunity of introducing the interior of the Chevalier's military court, the circumstances of the battle of Preston-pans, and so forth, he hesitates not to sacrifice poor Waverley, and to represent him as a reed blown about at the pleasure of every breeze....

(xvi, 432)

This ignores some of the thematic implications of Waverley's character, but makes the point very strongly that Scott's heroes are as they are through design rather than accident.

The final point of substance that Scott makes in the review concerns his use of the supernatural:

The traditions and manners of the Scotch were so blended with superstitious practices and fears, that the author of these novels seems to have deemed it incumbent on him, to transfer many more such incidents to his novels, than seem either probable or natural to an English reader. It may be some apology that his story would have lost the national cast, which it was chiefly his object to preserve, had this been otherwise.

(xvi, 435)

It is not a very full or satisfactory statement, but it makes the obvious reply to those critics who took exception to the supernatural in Scott's work. It is also another example of the duality of Scott's own response. In the review, as so often in the novels, the supernatural is explained away in rational terms which do not, however, entirely obscure the emotional impact of, and Scott's own fascination with, such matters.

There is little else of major value in the review, except for the comment that the true strength of The Black Dwarf lies in

those 'passages both of natural pathos and fantastic terror, not unworthy of the author of the scene of Stanie's burial, in the Antiquary, or the wild tone assumed in the character of Meg Merrilies'. The review is remarkable, however, for the opportunity it gives Scott to defend himself against his critics, and to stress those aspects of his work which he believed to be of greatest importance. It is a unique review in the history of the periodicals.

The three reviews that followed were all by William Nassau Senior:¹ the first was a long review of the novels from Rob Roy to Kenilworth; the second, of The Pirate; and the third, of The Fortunes of Nigel. James Hillhouse has summed up the major features of these reviews:

Though a professed admirer of the author, of whom he speaks in terms of high reverence always, he emphasizes the weakness of the plots, the slow and tiresome openings, the insipid heroes and the tiresome bores. In analyzing the characters his judgement seems to be excellent, and his exaltation of The Heart of Midlothian and The Bride of Lammermoor above the others of the group would be acceptable to the later critic. It is notable, on the other hand, that he does not seem to realize clearly that Scott was working in a different genre when he wrote Ivanhoe and the other romances. Senior admits that a second reading of Ivanhoe shook his original faith in the book, and his remarks on Kenilworth show that he felt the melodramatic and stagy qualities of this type; but he nowhere strikes the nail on the head as Jeffrey had when he pointed out with damaging clarity what Scott had done in deserting his own Scotland for the meretricious appeals of a false antiquity. It is perhaps worth noting that Senior is fairly liberal in the matter of Scott's juggling with history. He speaks for instance of the "pleasing anachronism" of Shakespeare in Kenilworth and is in general tolerant of such rearrangements, though he does, with some propriety indeed, object to wide deviations from fact when such well-known characters as Leicester are involved.

1. William Nassau Senior (1790-1864) is best remembered as a political economist. In 1825 he became the first holder of the Chair of Political Economy at Oxford, and he was the author of the report on which the 1834 Poor Law was based. A series of articles on political economy were published in the Edinburgh after 1840.

Senior's reviews of The Pirate and Nigel are distinctly less favourable in tone, especially the latter; in both he again attacks the weakness of plot construction, the disappointing heroes and the insufferable bores. Though he finds many details in description and character to praise in The Pirate, he calls it inferior to most of the other novels, and is especially severe on the character of Cleveland, which changes with what seems to him a shifting of the writer's whole plan of the novel. Of Nigel he says at the end, "In dramatic power and in delineation of character it is equal to anything our author has written" - surely praise that is little justified - but goes on to declare that the "obscurity and improbability of the fable, the uninterestingness of all the actors, excepting the King, and the harassing, or degrading or painful nature of the scenes through which we follow the hero" place it beneath the other novels.¹

Three things of a more general nature also emerge from these reviews, and are worthy of note. The first of these concerns the relationship between fiction and morality:

a writer of fiction has no right to dress, what is fundamentally wrong, in a covering that can attract sympathy or admiration. He is not exposed to the same difficulties as his heroes, and has no right to make their reward depend on that part of their conduct which does not deserve unmixed approbation. Still less has he a right to sanction a parley between duty and passion, and to countenance the sophistry that attacks the understanding through the heart.

(xxvi, 141)

This was written in 1821 and, although perfectly in accord with the common view (and there is no reason to expect reviewers to be other than men of their own time), it lacks the insight into the possibilities of the moral nature of fiction that one or two other reviewers had displayed by this time.

The second point concerns the nature of women, and strikes a note that we have already detected in the periodicals:

Courage restrained by caution, and liberality, by prudence, loyalty, with a view only to the ultimate utility of power, and love, never forgetting itself in its object, are the

1. Hillhouse, 51-2.

attributes of men. Their purposes are formed on a general balance of compensating motives, and pursued only while their means appear not totally inadequate. The greater susceptibility, which is always the charm, and sometimes the misfortune, of women, deprives them of the same accurate view of the proportion of different objects. The one upon which they are intent, whether it be a lover, a parent, a husband, a child, a king, a preacher, a ball, or a bonnet, swallows up the rest.

(xxvi, 136)

The very fact that so many reviewers felt the need to philosophize in such terms about the nature of men and women suggests that perhaps they were not quite so confident of their ground as they sometimes appeared.

The third point is a more minor one, and provides us with another example of the analogous use of painting and drawing:

A writer of fiction may deserve the name of a mannerist, either by a continual selection of peculiar persons or situations for imitation, or by constantly attributing to his characters, whether taken at hazard or from a limited class, in given situations, peculiar feelings and modes of conduct. Thus a painter may be a mannerist, either if he choose to paint nothing but rocks or ships, or again if, taking his subjects from the common store-house of nature, he dress them all in one or two uniform tints.

(xxvii, 337)

The analogy is a useful one, but the frequency of its use in the periodicals suggests that the reviewers were in search of an adequate critical terminology.

These examples not only provide further evidence for some of the points made in the first part of the chapter, they also demonstrate the conventional nature of Senior's criticism.¹ On the whole, his comments on Scott are favourable, and he singles

1. Senior's first review was originally prefaced by a long disquisition upon the nature of the novel, but this was omitted from the printed review. It was probably a wise decision, since Senior's comments are conventional and uninteresting [see W.N.Senior, Essays on Fiction (1864), 1-8.

out the right novels for praise, whilst pointing to those faults that all too obviously occur to a lesser or greater extent in all of them. However, he adds little of particular significance or value - it is unexceptional criticism in every sense of the word.

The two articles which conclude the Quarterly's treatment of Scott deal more with general rather than specific issues. Lockhart, reviewing The Lives of the Novelists in 1826, spends a great deal of time discussing why the novel did not develop until relatively modern times, and comes up with the idea that this was due to the recent emergence of a reading public. He suggests that the novel had now become the vehicle of moral satire, and provides examples from European literature to illustrate the scope of this. In a manner befitting the editor of the Quarterly Review, Lockhart then takes issue with both Scott and Dr. Johnson with regard to the moral impact of fiction:

With all deference we must take the liberty to believe that both Dr. Johnson and Sir Walter Scott have judged as to these matters more from the vigour of their own masculine minds than from actual observation of the world at large as it was, and is. The Beggar's Opera did, we may admit, no harm in the boxes, but we suspect the galleries, if they could speak, might tell a very different tale. Schiller's Robbers did, all the world knows, seduce certain enthusiastic Burschen from the German universities to the highway; and the records of our police courts and of graver tribunals are ready to prove that while Tom and Jerry were crowding the streets with brawlers, the Memoirs of Messrs. Moffatt and Haggart were leading or hurrying their victims to the gallows. In truth, to deny the influence of artificial representations of human life upon the manners of those who contemplate them, appears to us to be not very different from denying absolutely the effect of example.

(xxxiv, 366)

However, Lockhart redeems himself when he takes issue with Scott's comment that 'the worst evil to be apprehended from the perusal of novels is, that the habit is apt to generate an indisposition to useful literature and real history'. Lockhart, not so much in the

manner of the editor of the Quarterly but more in the style of a Blackwood's reviewer that we saw examples of earlier in this chapter, writes:

But what after all does our author mean by 'useful literature'? Is that a literature without use, which makes men and women better acquainted with human nature? Are the characters and the passions of our species less useful objects of study than the external events of any time, or the phenomena of material nature in any of her departments?...we have a considerable suspicion that the great novelist of our own age has taught more truths about the workings of the human mind, than any professional metaphysician of his nation...; and is it really so, that knowledge loses value merely because it has been attained through a pleasant medium.

(xxxiv, 372)

There is, in fact, a basic and important difference in approach between the two extracts just quoted. In the first (in which I think Lockhart, newly appointed as editor, is deliberately evoking the traditional attitudes of the Quarterly) there is a very simple relationship between fiction and morality postulated: literature can promote evil as well as good because it teaches by example. In the second extract, much more typical of Lockhart the reviewer, literature is useful, not because it teaches by example, but because it reveals 'the workings of the human mind', presumably for both good and ill. This is the difference between those reviewers who saw the moral effects of fiction simply as the bolstering of contemporary morality, and those, like Hazlitt, who believed it worked in a more profound and sophisticated way.

Lockhart concludes his article with some very favourable but general comments upon Scott's achievement and influence as a novelist:

He has widened the whole field to an extent of which none that went before him ever dreamed; embellished it by many original graces, as exquisite at least as any that their

hands had introduced; and ennobled it by the splendours of a poetical imagination, more powerful and more exalted by far than had ever in former days exerted its energies elsewhere than in the highest of the strictly poetical forms - epic and tragic.

(xxxiv, 376-7)

The Quarterly's final review of Scott is of more interest for its defence of Wordsworth and, especially, Coleridge, than for its comments on Scott's novels. It was written by J.A.Heraud¹ and is a wild and whirling piece of criticism, as is perhaps suggested by the fact that as well as avowedly reviewing Peveril of the Peak, Quentin Durward, St. Ronan's Well, Redgauntlet, Tales of the Crusaders, and Woodstock, it also attempts to deal with Horace Smith's historical novels Brambletye House and The Tor Hill, as well as Coleridge's translation of Schiller's Wallenstein. Stylistically, the review is a curious amalgam of the Biographia Literaria, Lockhart's Blackwood's reviews, and the Preface to Lyrical Ballads:

[Milton] speaks from the fulness of his experience; and poetry, like a passion, draws into the same vortex, and forces, to one common centre, every remembrance; in the hurry and the frenzy of the occasion, re-collects, from each chamber of the understanding and fancy, every image and idea from whatever source derived; and fuses them all together into one glowing mass of illustration and eloquence: - like a dream, 'it curdles a long life into an hour.' But the mind not furnished with the same associations has much to learn before it can understand, much less feel, the diction composed from such resources.

(xxxv, 519)

The theoretical foundation for such statements owes much to

Coleridge:

A complete critical examination, therefore, of the conduct proper to the construction and execution of the novel, would tend to develop the laws by which

1. J.A.Heraud (1799-1887) was a minor poet and dramatist. He was a popularizer of Schelling, and a friend of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Lockhart. He helped to edit Fraser's Magazine from 1830-33.

even the loftier efforts of genius should be regulated; and even such a hasty survey as we can promise will prove two important truths: first, - that the rules of classical poetry originated not merely in caprice and custom, but are founded in truth and general nature; secondly, - that every good writer originates them again in his own mind, and by the laws of his own intellect necessarily prescribes their observance to himself, while engaged in the labour of production. And we may, perhaps, be enabled to illustrate this position, that, unless he does so originate them by the necessity of his own mind, the mere knowledge of them is insufficient to constitute a good writer, and their mechanical observance will fail to produce a lively and vigorous work of imagination: in other words, that his performance, however correct in point of form, will in spirit be discovered to want that foundation in truth and nature which is essentially necessary to support and animate the external resemblance, - to produce that harmony between the substance and the visible sign, in which the real charm of Art consists, and without which the imitation must be imperfect, wanting life and voluntary motion.

(xxxv, 519-20)

The platonic implications of the latter part of that statement might help explain the existence of that 'truth and general nature' upon which the rules of classical poetry are supposedly founded, but there does seem to be some muddle and confusion here. Matters are not helped in the early part of the review by the rhetoric that Heraud employs, and his defence of Scott's diction (by which he seems to mean style as a whole) and his general comments about the novel in general and Scott's in particular seem merely ingenious. The comparison he makes between Wallenstein and Quentin Durward is rather pedestrian, although it provides another example of the reviewers' attempting to turn Scott into a dramatist (something also debated by Lockhart in the previous review of The Lives of the Novelists who quotes Scott's own comments which clearly demonstrate his dislike of the idea). The review concludes with a very unfavourable account of Horace Smith's attempts at writing historical novels which, of course, underlines Scott's supremacy

My assessment of the review is a little severe. Apart from being of interest because it provides us with another example of the way in which the periodicals popularized Coleridge's ideas despite their attack upon him, the review does contain a sensible account of Scott's achievement as an historical novelist. Early in the review, Heraud points out that it 'is in the novel suggested by historical occurrences, and partly founded thereon, that he is altogether unrivalled; and has established a reputation that will endure as long as the literature of the country', and a little later he argues that Scott's 'strength lay in the choice of his subject; yet the subject is excogitated from his own mind, not given by history, though suggested by it, and (which is the result of much art) apparently growing out of it....' The imagination of the novelist allows him to create rather than simply record, and it is a point that Heraud returns to:

We know that there is a prejudice against the historical novel; but whatever objection obtains against it must equally obtain against the corresponding species of the drama, and with yet greater force against the epopée, of which, as we have seen, the novel is but a popular modification. We are no advocates for the falsification of historical fact, the distortion of character, or the reversion or inversion of events; but we are altogether blind to the evils of embellishing an historical outline with graceful and not improbable fiction; - taking advantage of the doubtful points of history - and giving them the colouring most expedient for the fable, or conducive to the cause of truth and morals.

(xxxv, 530)

He goes on to claim that 'it is possible, without affecting higher interests even than mere historical accuracy, to construct a fable from the relation of facts, in which the boldest imagination and the brightest fancy may be freely exercised', and the predominance that this gives to the creative imagination shows that he learnt

something from reading Schelling and Coleridge.

Blackwood's treatment of Scott is disappointing. By the time the Magazine appeared, Scott had already published his first six novels. The first review to appear was of The Heart of Midlothian,¹ and, in contrast to the Quarterly's enthusiastic support, Blackwood's found the novel less than satisfactory. The most obvious factor motivating this review takes us back to one of the major prejudices we have already seen at work in the pages of the Magazine. In commenting upon Jeanie Deans, the reviewer notes that hers is

somewhat of a new character in novel writing, and certainly a very interesting one. Perhaps there is a little too much of it, as even with persons not very aristocratical, the attention may appear to be too long, and too diffusely called to the concerns of a cow-feeder and his daughter....A modern school has...carried the muse through all the back lanes and blind alleys, not only of low but of vulgar life. We humbly think, however, that in this process she has soiled her petticoats, if not dimmed her beauty.

(570)

This sets the tone for the rest of the review. Jeanie is praised, but only because there 'is an undeviating rectitude, a conscientious discharge of duty, a sentiment of the purest piety, which runs through every incident of Jeanie Deans' life and conduct, which every rank will feel their heart assent to and applaud....' Not surprisingly, praise is given to the sycophantic portrait of the Duke of Argyle (we are told that the 'eulogium of the Duke of Argyle is no more than just'), and to the account of the conversation between Jeanie and Queen

1. BM, iii (Aug., 1818), 567-74.

Caroline (something to which the Quarterly objected). Scott is taken to task, however, for his apparent inability to portray the speech of the upper-classes in the scene where the Duke of Argyle speaks to Queen Caroline, since for people of that class,

Their deportment and language is the ordinary costume of their lives, put on as naturally, and with as little effort, as the star and ribbon with which their sovereign has graced them, and which they never forget, except amidst the violence of passion, or the discomposure of some untoward and distressing incident.

(iii, 573)

In fact the reviewer suggests that there is too much in the dialogue of the novel which is 'coarse and offensive', and likens the speech of the ordinary characters in the novel to 'certain simple coarse kinds of fare which delight the most refined palates at times, but they would be disgusted by a daily meal of them'.

Other criticisms are also levelled at Scott: his novels are too much alike and, at times, he 'borrows from himself'; the final volume of The Heart of Midlothian 'is rather de trop as the French say, and we believe most readers wish that the greatest part of it had been spared' (Senior in the Quarterly also recognized the problems posed by the ending, but thought that on balance it worked); and, finally, the recognized faults of plot construction and haste and carelessness are given an airing. It is an arid and class-^{ridden} ~~written~~ review which offers very little of value.

The next review, which was of The Bride of Lammermoor and The Legend of Montrose,¹ was better, if only because it pays handsome tribute to The Bride of Lammermoor. However, the snobbery of the first review is still evident:

1. BM, v (June, 1819), 340-53.

The interest of the *Bride of Lammermoor* is not founded like that of *Old Mortality*, on any broad representation of popular manners, and habits of thinking, but chiefly on the evil destinies of a noble family, and on the tragical situations in which particular individuals are involved.

(341)

To make sure that we have taken the point, the reviewer implicitly destroys the base on which much of Scott's significance rests by claiming that it is all very well to present a 'broad representation of manners' and concentrate on an individual in creating a sense of history, but

no narrative is so well calculated to produce a solemn and terrible effect as that which makes to pass before our view the fates and fortunes of some conspicuous family, through successive generations, so as to shew the entailed consequences of the events and passions in which they have been involved.

(341)

One of the reasons for the appeal of The Bride of Lammermoor is that 'it is not so replete with representations of popular manners as some former novels', and in fact the reviewer suggests that Scott has failed in previous ^{novels} to show as fully as he might have done the manners of the old Scottish aristocracy.

However, praise is given to The Bride of Lammermoor:

But of all the novels of our author there is no one which has a catastrophe so complete, and which shakes the mind so strongly as that of the *Bride of Lammermoor*. It is the only true romance of the whole set; - in purpose, tenor, and conclusion - it is a pure and magnificent tragical romance.

(342)

It is, however, praised as a 'tragical romance' not as a novel, and even the favourable comments on Lucy Ashton, the use of the 'Scottish superstitions', and the 'poetry' of the concluding paragraphs, cannot dispel the air of fundamental hostility which pervades the review.

Hostility was to be replaced by fulsome praise in the review of Ivanhoe which followed.¹ Senior in the Quarterly had, with some perception and insight, suggested that the novel appeared far less successful on a second reading. But the reviewer in Blackwood's insists that a second reading is essential since 'this exquisite romance' differs so much from earlier novels that it 'requires to be read with a quite new, and much greater effort of imagination'. However, 'the more critical, philosophical, or imaginative student' will have no doubts as to its success:

Such has been the mastery of the poet - such the perfect working of the spell by which he has carried us with him back into his troubled but majestic sphere of vision, that we feel as if we had just awakened from an actual dream of beauty and wonder....Never were the long-gathered stores of most extensive erudition applied to the purposes of imaginative genius with so much easy, lavish, and luxurious power - never was the illusion of fancy so complete - made up of so many minute elements, - and yet producing such entireness of effect.

(263)

Specific praise is given to the description of the tournament at Ashby, the rescue of Rebecca from de Bois' castle, and, inevitably, the figure of Rebecca herself:

[she is] by far the most fine, and at the same time the most romantic creation of female character the author has ever formed - and second, we suspect, to no creature of female character whatever that is to be found in the whole annals of either poetry or of romance.

This kind of praise illustrates all too clearly the reviewer's limitations, and his view of the novel is not one shared by his contemporaries or by posterity.

The review of The Monastery which followed² opens with the

1. BM, vi (Dec., 1819), 262-72.

2. BM, vi (March, 1820), 692-704.

pleasing thought that the 'two most remarkable men of the present day are unquestionably the Duke of Wellington and the Author of Waverley'. This apparent non sequitur (unless the reviewer is claiming inside knowledge as to the identity of the author of the Waverley novels) does not bode well for the rest of the review. A great deal of meaningless praise is lavished on Scott, but at least the class-ridden atmosphere of the first two reviews has given way to a somewhat breezier and more relaxed view of society:

[The Monastery's] chief beauty consists in the fine fresh picture it reveals of the ordinary life and manners of various classes of Scottish society, not much, at all events, not very immediately or very consciously concerned in the great decisions of thought which agitated the busy upper intellect of the age of Elizabeth and Mary.

(693)

The novel is also praised for its ease of reading: scenes follow in easy succession; there are few things in the plot which 'require either much stretch of attention or much exercise of recollection'; and no 'character entirely of a new species' is introduced to disturb the torpor which the reviewer seems to find so desirable. But the reviewer goes on to claim that The Monastery 'goes through the mind like a salutary storm', and then continues:

It in some measure expends the activity of the passions without doing any mischief, supposing the incidents are so contrived as to bring the feelings which have been excited to a just and proper conclusion. Whatever violent emotions may have been awakened in the course of the narrative, its catastrophe should, if possible, beseech us to restore the mind to a state of equilibrium, and dismiss the reader satisfied with having seen out the moral tendency and natural results of the different impulses to which his feelings have been subjected - and in that point of view the saddest morals are very frequently the best.

(693)

This completes the emasculation of the novel as a form, and it is no surprise to find the review concluding with a defence of the

particularly silly supernatural goings-on which The Monastery contains.

A very brief and favourable comment upon The Abbot appeared next in Blackwood's,¹ and this was followed by a review of Kenilworth.² The review is a predominantly favourable but strangely stilted piece of criticism. The reviewer admits that the novel contains plenty of interest, pomp, and pageantry, and that the portrait of Elizabeth I is both daring and successful, but the most interesting comment is somewhat equivocal:

In the art and beauty of the composition, [Kenilworth] is evidently superior to most of those novels which have come before it from the same pen. But its merits are liker those of a dramatic piece, and it contains none of the poetry of the heart communing with nature. Thus the same mind, which at first listens to the voice of poetry in the indefinite sound of the elements, and, by sympathy, almost feels what is their internal being, may afterwards turn to consider the intellectual relations of external appearances, and actuated by the spirit of art, may produce compositions having the merit of fine arrangement, beautiful progression, and the display of opposed causes and powers, and though colder in relation to sympathy, more gratifying to intellect and to contemplative taste.

(435)

If that is meant to be an account of Scott's development as a novelist, it is echoed in the warning with which the review ends:

There is reason to believe, that too close a sympathy with public feelings often operates as a drag on the ascending power of genius, and prevents the search after intellectual beauty and poetical feeling from being carried as far as it might be.

(442)

The two reviews which next appeared in Blackwood's, the first possibly written by Lockhart and the second by William Howison, were

1. BM, vii (Sept., 1820), 665-67.

2. BM, viii (Jan., 1821), 435-42.

of The Pirate¹ and The Fortunes of Nigel.² Both are more favourable than the novels seem to allow, or than fellow reviewers believed them to be. The review of The Pirate is somewhat conservative about Scott's use of history, and argues that he does better to create imaginary characters within an historical setting, rather than bending historical fact to fit the needs of fiction:

he has in fact made himself one of the greatest of national historians, as well as of national novelists. For who, after all, can doubt, that, when the manners of Britain, (which express the soul of Britain much more forcibly than even the events of British history,) shall have passed away, it will be from his pages, and such as his, that the students of after generations will collect their best and truest lights?

(713)

This, many of the reviewers argued, was why Scott should take care never to falsify history for his own ends as a novelist.

Finally, Blackwood's printed two further pieces on Scott. One was entitled On the Dramatic Powers of the Author of Waverley,³ and returned again to what, at times, seems to be an idée fixe of the reviewers with its appeal for Scott to turn his hand to drama. The final review is a surprisingly unsatisfactory one by John Wilson of The Chronicles of Canongate,⁴ and it offers nothing of real interest to us.

The overall reaction of the periodicals to Scott's novels

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1. BM, x (Dec., 1821), 712-28.
 2. BM, xi (June, 1822), 734-5.
 3. BM, xix (Feb., 1826), 152-60.
 4. BM, xxii (Nov., 1827), 531-70.

is unquestionably disappointing. One could argue that the reason for this lies within the novels themselves, and that the reviewers realized that Scott's achievement was not as great as his popularity suggested. To my mind, the true reason resides not so much in the novels as in that popularity. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, the reviewers were beginning to recognize the importance and possibilities of the genre as a whole. But this was a gradual and far from general process, and when faced with the phenomenon of the Waverley novels the reviewers retreated to a position of safety. Admittedly many of their comments were sane and sensible, and have been echoed by later critics, but in nearly all the reviews there is a sense of unease and uncertainty which prevents proper contact between the critic and the novels. This is very different from, say, Jeffrey's response to Byron where he used the poet's popularity as an excuse for exploring the appeal that the poetry had for him.

But our disappointment, which is somewhat alleviated by Scott's own review but deepened by Blackwood's failure to live up to the general standard of its comments on the novel, should not blind us to the very real advances that took place in the criticism of the genre as a whole. Nor must we forget that Scott's efforts, both as critic and novelist, played a major part in this.

Conclusion

My purpose in this thesis has been to create a series of perspectives. I have tried to achieve the simplest and most fundamental of these by concentrating my attention on the three major periodicals - as disseminators of critical ideas and opinions they commanded the attention of the reading public to an extent which has rarely been equalled since. Secondly, I have attempted to reveal some of the impulses and motives which lay behind the critical judgement made by contemporary reviewers, and so warn of the dangers of taking in isolation any of their statements as representative of their time. Thirdly, and I believe most importantly, I have tried to show how the periodicals acted as very sensitive if often unwitting indicators of the changes that were taking place in contemporary literature. Isobel Armstrong, writing of the periodicals of the decades following those with which I have been concerned, notes the closeness of periodical criticism to 'cultural pressures' and how one becomes 'powerfully aware of the literary situation in which it was written, aware of the anxieties, stresses and distresses from which [such] criticism emerged'.¹ This was as much the case, if not more so, with the Romantic as with the Victorian reviewers. Often their reaction to such pressures was a negative one, but even in their hostility and equivocation, we find important evidence for the way in which new concepts and modes of feeling were being incorporated into the literary culture. Finally, in my search for good criticism

1. I. Armstrong, Victorian Scrutinies (1972), 3-4.

I have tried to indicate those reviews which are still of interest to the modern reader, although the overall effect of such a task is perhaps primarily a salutary one. The role and status of the critic have always been problematical matters, and reading the periodicals of the early nineteenth century reminds us that openness^{of response} and awareness of one's own beliefs and preconceptions are not simply the requirements, but the responsibility of the critic of literature.

I hope at least some of these aims have been achieved. Nineteenth century periodicals provide much rich and complex material, and a great deal of work remains to be done on them. As with Rasselas, this has to be a conclusion in which nothing is concluded, but perhaps that is as it should be.

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