

**THE CULT OF GENIUS: MAGAZINES, READERS, AND THE
CREATIVE ARTIST, 1802-37**

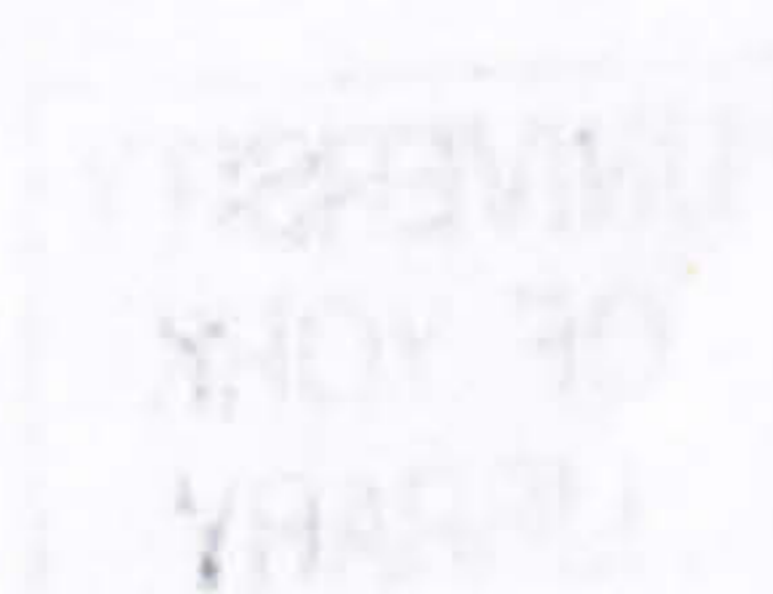
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines representations of the creative artist as genius in British literary magazines during the early nineteenth century. I discuss debates about the nature of genius, and the role that magazines played in constructing particular individuals as geniuses, especially through biographical articles. My approach is to emphasise the complex cultural origins and functions of genius, particularly the way in which it acted as a site for the construction of middle-class identity. In the first chapter, I look at debates about the relationship between genius and social transgression during the first half of the nineteenth century. Although genius was sometimes put forward as a powerful, redemptive force, this argument was put under pressure by its possible associations with improvidence, immorality, and even insanity. In chapter two, I give an overview of literary biography in the 1820s and 30s, concentrating on magazine biography such as Thomas Jefferson Hogg's 'Percy Bysshe Shelley at Oxford' and Thomas De Quincey's reminiscences of the Lake Poets. I also examine contemporary arguments about the scope and limitations of literary biography. The third chapter is on *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and its construction of Wordsworth as both poetic genius and Tory gentleman. In the fourth chapter, I examine William Hazlitt's complex account of the 'degrading' relationship between genius and political power in the Romantic period. Finally, I discuss the historical painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, whose attempt to represent himself as a disinterested, heroic genius in an increasingly commercialised cultural field encapsulates many of the tensions that I explore throughout this thesis.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AFA</i>	<i>Annals of the Fine Arts</i>
<i>BEM</i>	<i>Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine</i>
<i>CWH</i>	<i>The Complete Works of William Hazlitt</i> , ed. by P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1930-33)
<i>ER</i>	<i>Edinburgh Review</i>
<i>FM</i>	<i>Fraser's Magazine</i>
<i>JBM</i>	<i>John Bull Magazine</i>
<i>LM</i>	<i>London Magazine</i>
<i>MR</i>	<i>Monthly Repository</i>
<i>NMM</i>	<i>New Monthly Magazine</i>
<i>QR</i>	<i>Quarterly Review</i>
<i>SMA</i>	<i>The Spirit and Manners of the Age</i>
<i>TEM</i>	<i>Tait's Edinburgh Magazine</i>
<i>VPR</i>	<i>Victorian Periodicals Review</i>

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In the early nineteenth century, almost all periodical writing was either anonymous or pseudonymous, and although I have not highlighted this fact in every reference to such writing, it is important that it is borne in mind. Many of my attributions are from *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, ed. by Walter E. Houghton, 5 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966-89). The following sources have also been useful: for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* from 1817 to 1824, Alan Lang Strout, *A Bibliography of Articles in 'Blackwood's Magazine'* (Lubbock: The Texas Tech Press, 1959); for *Fraser's Magazine* in the 1830s, Miriam J. Thrall, *Rebellious Fraser's* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934); for the *Quarterly Review* up to and including 1824, Hill Shine and Helen Shine, *The 'Quarterly Review' under Gifford* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949).

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to examine representations of the creative artist as genius in British literary magazines during the early nineteenth century, and to consider the cultural functions of such representations. I discuss debates about the nature of genius and the role that magazines played in constructing particular individuals as geniuses through critical and biographical articles. It has long been recognised that an emphasis on originality and individuality in artistic creation was an important aspect of Romanticism, but in recent years accounts of writing on genius in the period from 1750 to 1850 have moved beyond the history of aesthetics to consider, for example, the relationship between genius and gender politics, or the development of the idea of genius as a response to changes in the literary marketplace. However, little attention has been paid to writing in the periodical press, which often had far more influence on how genius was understood by the early nineteenth-century reading public than the types of works - philosophical treatises, or passages in poets' letters - to which literary critics have usually turned in their attempts to comprehend the contemporary meaning of the term. My approach is to emphasise the complex cultural origins and functions of genius, particularly the way in which it acted as a site for the construction of middle-class identity. Through the consumption of images of genius, both magazines and their readers sought to distinguish themselves from their peers, and yet at the same time, genius was often put forward as the only force that could unify a rapidly fragmenting reading public - a form of pure subjectivity which transcended the realms of politics and economics. The strategies by which magazine writers sought to defuse, contain, or explore the tension

between the claims made about genius, and its use in commercial and ideological conflicts, are an important part of my analysis.

The principal modern usage of the word 'genius' - 'native intellectual power of an exalted type [...] instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery' (*OED*) - emerged at the beginning of the eighteenth century and had become widespread a hundred years later. Previously, the term had been used mainly in its Latin sense, meaning an attendant spirit attached to a person or place, or to refer to a person's characteristic disposition or inclination. The new meaning of 'genius' arose as the result of developments in European thought which saw an increasing emphasis on the creative powers of the human mind and, in particular, made individual expression and originality the *sine qua non* of 'good' art and literature.¹ During the second half of the eighteenth century, a number of treatises on the subject were published in Britain, including William Duff's *Essay on Original Genius* (1767), Alexander Gerard's *Essay on Genius* (1774), William Sharpe's *Dissertation on Genius* (1755), and Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759).² These works, especially the latter, were highly influential in Germany, and it was there - during the *Sturm und Drang* period (1760s and 1770s) - that writing on genius appeared in its most extreme form.³ Authors like Hamann and Lavater exalted the creative genius as an unstoppable, godlike force: 'Genius is not learned, not acquired [...] It is our unique

¹ The two most important sources for the idea of genius in the context of the history of aesthetics are M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) and James Engell, *The Creative Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985). See also Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan, 1997), chapter 6; Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius* (London: The Women's Press, 1989); Herbert Dieckmann, 'Diderot's Conception of Genius', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2 (1941), 151-82; Bernhard Fabian, introduction to Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Genius* (London: W. Strahan, 1774; repr. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1966); *Genius: The History of an Idea*, ed. by Penelope Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Giorgio Tonelli, 'Genius from the Renaissance to 1770' and Rudolf Wittkower, 'Genius: Individualism in Art and Artists', both in *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. by Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), pp. 293-97 and 297-312.

² Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolander have argued that eighteenth-century theories of genius were not primarily aesthetic, but constituted a discourse which 'argued that the productive forces of society were, or ought to be, organized according to the distribution of natural or acquired intellectual powers'. This discourse existed in competition with the emerging discourse of political economy, but the latter's success led to the 'marginalisation' of the former; in the Romantic period, it became mainly limited to discussions of art and literature. I would add that although it is rarely helpful to talk about a fully-fledged 'discourse of genius' after about 1780, it sometimes appears in vestigial form during the Romantic period in discussions about the relationship between genius and society. See 'Genius versus Capital: Eighteenth-Century Theories of Genius and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*', *MLQ*, 55 (1994), 169-89 (p. 170).

³ See Roy Pascal, *The German Sturm und Drang* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), pp. 233-99.

property, inimitable, divine, it is inspired [...] Gods in human form! Creators!
Destroyers!’⁴

British attitudes towards genius were usually less hyperbolic, but it became a key term in Romantic-period aesthetics, literary criticism, and accounts of subjectivity. In particular, its valorisation of originality and self-expression - and concomitant downgrading of the virtues of emulation and education - gave writers the courage to experiment with literary form and content. Genius was one of the concepts fuelling the literary revolution which we now term Romanticism. As Andrew Elfenbein has pointed out, it was not always ‘a precisely defined philosophical category’, but was often used simply as ‘a loose term of praise in poems, reviews, biographies, broadsides, collections, portraits, novels, and educational tracts’.⁵ It was particularly important to some of the literary magazines that came into being after the end of the Napoleonic wars. In these journals, we find an emphasis on genius in reviews, discussions about the nature of genius, accounts of the relationship between the genius and society, and the emergence of the creative artist as a celebrity whose appearance and private life are of as much interest as his works.

We shall discover in the course of this thesis that there were a number of reasons why genius became such an important concept to writers in the late Romantic period - one of them was the influence of German Idealism, which began to filter into Britain through the work of a number of authors, most notably Samuel Taylor Coleridge.⁶ His famous distinction between the primary and secondary imagination in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817) was inspired mainly by the writings of Schelling and Tetens.⁷ For

⁴ From Lavater’s *Physiognomical Fragments*; quoted in Pascal, p. 138.

⁵ Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 28.

⁶ Other Germanists included Thomas De Quincey, John Gibson Lockhart, Thomas Carlyle, and John Abraham Heraud; all, except Heraud, are discussed in Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought 1800-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁷ Engell, pp. 308-09.

Coleridge, consciousness was fundamentally and automatically (re)creative: ‘the primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM’.

But the secondary imagination, the equivalent of Schelling’s *Dichtungsvermögen* and the distinguishing characteristic of creative genius, is

an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree* and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.⁸

That is to say, the possessor of the secondary imagination *wilfully* dissolves, alters and remoulds the images of nature formed by the primary imagination, and thus consciously participates in the creative power of God. As James Engell has noted, Coleridge’s metaphysics of the imagination ‘renovated’ the ‘age-old saying that the poet [...] is divinely inspired’.⁹ However, although magazine writers were sometimes influenced by philosophical aesthetics, discussions and representations of the creative artist in literary magazines were generally conducted at a less rarefied level because they were meant to appeal to a relatively large middle-class readership. And it is important to note that the story of Romantic genius is not only one of the development and movement of ideas, but also describes a complex set of cultural pressures and shifts.

Although I spend some time examining theoretical writing about the creative artist in this thesis, I concentrate on the way in which particular ‘geniuses’ - or, to use the more common contemporary plural, ‘men of genius’ - were described. In the late eighteenth century, accounts of genius generally took the form of theories of how the

⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, 2 vols, I, 304, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 7, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

⁹ Engell, p. 342.

mind worked, or arguments about the importance of artistic originality. But in the early nineteenth century, these considerations were often secondary to debates about how the possession of genius affected a person's character and life history - whether men of genius were generally virtuous or vicious, sane or mad, celebrated or neglected - or accounts of different types of genius. Such discussions depended on concrete examples: figures like Walter Scott, Byron, or Coleridge would be put forward as paradigms for human creativity and endeavour, or as examples of the dangers of misapplied ability. More significantly, the 1820s and 30s also saw an explosion in biographical writing focused on eminent individuals, particularly writers and poets. The Romantic cult of genius went far beyond considering it as an abstract quality to look at its embodiment in the appearance, personalities, and biographies of intellectually gifted individuals. It was the idea of genius that led to certain creative artists, Byron especially, becoming celebrities whose private lives were available for public consumption. In fact, it could be argued that in the pages of the British literary magazines of the 1820s and 30s occurs one of the very first eruptions of 'celebrity' in an identifiably modern sense. The celebrity can be distinguished from the merely famous 'as a figure whose personality is created, bought, sold, and advertised through capitalist relations of production'.¹⁰

Particular representations of genius fulfilled the needs of individual writers and magazines, but it is also important to consider the broader issue of why they should have become so prevalent in the middle-class periodical press during the late Romantic period. A number of scholars have linked the rise of the idea of genius with changes in the ways in which literature was produced and consumed in the long eighteenth century. In the 1950s, Raymond Williams argued that Romanticism's 'emphasis on the special nature of art-activity as a means to 'imaginative truth', and [...] on the artist as a special kind of

¹⁰ Andrew Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 47.

person' was in part a compensatory response to the decline of patronage and the growth of the commercial market for literature. However, he also stressed that it represented a broader reaction to the threat to 'certain human values, capacities, [and] energies' which the development of 'industrial civilisation' seemed to hold.¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu criticised this account for failing to acknowledge that it was only the growth of a reading public which enabled the formation of a literary field which was relatively autonomous from political and religious authority, itself 'the condition of the appearance of the independent intellectual, who does not recognise nor wish to recognise any obligations other than the intrinsic demands of his creative project'.¹² The development of the literary marketplace was a double-edged sword which alienated writers from readers, but which gave them, for the first time, status as 'independent intellectual[s]', or, less anachronistically, men of genius. This account is perhaps more suggestive than Bourdieu's later claim that the idea of genius was purely a response to 'the pressures of an anonymous market' for literature, reducing it to a species of false consciousness.¹³

Recently, our knowledge of the relationship between the development of aesthetics and changes in literary production has been enriched by detailed work which has looked at the emergence of the idea of original genius in the eighteenth century in relation to the needs of writers to establish legal ownership of their works in order to protect their livelihoods.¹⁴ This emphasis on the economic function of genius does not necessarily contradict Williams's or Bourdieu's notions of it as, in part, an attempt to escape from economic realities. It was only in the early nineteenth century - after the idea of genius had helped to constitute modern notions of authorship and intellectual property

¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1993), p. 36.

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, 'Intellectual Field and Creative Project', trans. by Sian France, in *Knowledge and Control*, ed. by M. F. D. Young (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), pp. 161-88 (p. 163). This article first appeared as 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', *Les temps modernes*, November 1966, pp. 865-906.

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. by Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 114.

¹⁴ Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), chapter 7, and Martha Woodmansee, 'The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the Author', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 17 (1984), 425-48.

- that it became widely used in a more restricted, 'elitist' sense to refer to a small group of special individuals whose creativity was not bound by material considerations.

The Romantic separation of art and life - the claim that 'only a poet and his works can transcend a corrupting appropriation by "the world" of politics and money' - has been identified by Jerome McGann as one of the 'basic illusions of Romantic Ideology'.¹⁵ He is describing a powerful form of writing on genius and art in the early nineteenth century which emphasises the way in which it soars beyond the quotidian. That this is often a politically reactionary account is apparent in its utilisation by the High Tory journal *Fraser's Magazine*. And recently Robert Keith Lapp has described the similar implications of Coleridge's articulation of

a Romanticism of withdrawal into visionary idealism that locates cultural authority in the attractive figure of the poet-prophet. This figure is in turn a product of the more generalised ideology of individual sensibility, drawing in this instance on the emergent tradition of bardolatry and its celebration of autonomous "Poetic Genius".¹⁶

However, we must not forget Williams's insight that, as well as 'simplification', there was also 'high courage and actual utility' in Romantic claims about art and genius.¹⁷ Romantic idealism was often articulated in response to the equally extreme claims of other discourses, particularly utilitarianism. Furthermore, genius was certainly not a monolithic concept in the early nineteenth century. If one account constructed its possessors as superior beings who cut themselves off from the world in order to meditate on higher things, than another represented them as rebellious transgressors who questioned the very foundations of contemporary society. And although the meritocratic

¹⁵ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 13. In 1974, Robert Currie described genius as a pernicious 'ideology' which was 'used most often in reaction to the mass power mobilised through spread of education, growth of cities, capitalism, liberalism, constitutionalism and democracy'; *Genius: An Ideology in Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), p. 10.

¹⁶ Robert Keith Lapp, *Contest for Cultural Authority: Hazlitt, Coleridge, and the Distresses of the Regency* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1999), p. 12.

¹⁷ Williams, p. 47.

implications of genius were often lost in the way in which the term was used, at times it could still carry a radical political charge by offering a theory of human value based on mental aptitude rather than rank or wealth.¹⁸ This thesis is not put forward primarily as an account of the 'politics of genius' in the Romantic period, but I do show that genius was a counter which could be used in all sorts of different language games, and for all sorts of different purposes.

II

Magazines were the predominant literary form of the late Romantic period. Lee Erickson has shown that improvements in printing technology, and a decrease in the price of paper, made large-scale periodical publishing much more attractive to publishers than poetry after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, with the result that authors were driven towards journalism in order to survive.¹⁹ Throughout the Romantic period, there was such a disparity between the sales of most poetry, and sales of periodicals, that it would not be an exaggeration to state that most middle-class readers would have been exposed to a great deal of the literature which later became canonical *solely* through the medium of the periodical press. Through reviews, critical surveys, and biographical articles, periodicals had a tremendous influence on how individual authors were perceived by the public, and on the sales of their works. Critics could also actively disseminate portions of particular texts, in the form of lengthy quotations, to their relatively large readerships.

In his recent *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism*, Mark Parker has made a persuasive argument for the study of magazine literature in its own right, rather

¹⁸For a brief account of the conservative reaction to the political implications of genius, see Elfenbein, pp. 35-38.

¹⁹Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1850* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), chapter 3.

than as an adjunct to more 'creative' forms of writing.²⁰ It is not just that much of the best and most interesting literature of the 1820s and 30s was in the form of the periodical essay, but that individual magazines constituted themselves as coherent, powerful entities with particular ideologies and rhetorical styles. As Parker puts it, 'the periodical does not simply stand in secondary relation to the literary work it contains; a dynamic relation among contributions informs and creates meaning'.²¹ Thus throughout this thesis, I have considered the position of each article I discuss within its host magazine, and the place of that magazine within literary culture. I have concentrated on the best-known early nineteenth-century literary magazines - the *New Monthly Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* - because they contained the most writing on genius, had the most influence on the middle-class reading public, and because they both produced and reflected that public's interest in genius. However, I have not limited my discussion to these journals. It would also have been desirable to have examined in detail the two most influential literary weeklies - the *Literary Gazette* and the *Athenaeum* - but this has not been possible within the confines of this study. Of course, I do not deal only with periodical literature, as it was often the case that representations of genius in the press were reactions to representations in other forms of writing.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the way in which the nineteenth-century periodical press helped the middle classes to, as David Hogsette puts it, 'culturally legitimate their growing economic and political power and aided them in creating a unified national identity'.²² He claims that in the 1830s, critics represented Coleridge as 'the English consummation of poetic genius, a secular messiah whose

²⁰ Mark Parker, *Literary Magazine and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²¹ Parker, p. 3.

²² David S. Hogsette, 'Coleridge as Victorian Heirloom: Nostalgic Rhetoric in the Early Victorian Reviews of *Poetical Works*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 37 (1998), 63-75 (p. 63).

creative power redeems the middle classes and provides a cohesive structure to the universal middle-class Mind'.²³ This draws on Jon Klancher's influential argument that through the 'great public journals' of the early nineteenth century, a nascent middle-class audience learnt to define itself:

What will finally distinguish the new middle-class audience of the nineteenth century from its radical antagonists and the mass public's fascination with commodities is the activated interpretative mind in its power to reincarnate everyday life: to form a "philosophy" of one's encounter with the street and the city, with fashion, with social class, with intellectual systems and the mind's own unpredictable acts.²⁴

This project of 'generalizing the philosophic, interpreting mind' is, Klancher claims, particularly apparent in the 'tireless promotion of "intellect"' by *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* - not only in the content of its articles, but through an elaborate style which invited its readers to exercise their own mental powers in the act of reading.²⁵ There is no doubt that in its early years, *Blackwood's* does evince a strong interest in exploring and defining 'genius', or 'the power of mind itself', as Klancher puts it. However, he has a tendency to exaggerate the coherence of the periodicals he discusses. I am not convinced that *Blackwood's* most typical project is to transmit 'an ideology of mind', or for that matter that the *New Monthly's* aim is to educate its readership in cultural semiotics, or that Carlyle's *Edinburgh Review* essay 'Signs of the Times' typifies the Reviews' searches for 'master keys' to the 1820s.²⁶ If, in the past, readings of Romantic prose have been impoverished by wrenching texts from their original locations, Klancher, I think, goes too far the other way by overemphasising the unity of particular periodicals and,

²³ Hogsette, p. 67.

²⁴ Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 51.

²⁵ Klancher, pp. 51-60.

²⁶ Klancher, pp. 52-73.

indeed, the function of middle-class periodicals as a whole through presenting a handful of articles as exemplary.

Klancher and Hogsette are correct in so far as magazine discourse frequently sought to support the creation of a stable middle-class identity. But it is interesting that writing on creative genius - in both its abstract and specific forms - often sought to *create* distinctions within the middle-class public. In the case of *Blackwood's*, the interest in mental process that is apparent in a small number of its articles does cohere, to some extent, with the emphasis on genius and originality to be found in some of the periodical's reviews. For both the discursive articles and the reviews purport to give the readers of the magazine a special insight into the operations of the human intellect. By celebrating genius, *Blackwood's* also celebrates its audience as consisting of particularly able individuals who are capable of appreciating great writers. The reason that genius is so important to *Blackwood's* was that it was the main source of *distinction* available to the magazine and its readers. The essence of genius is, supposedly, that it is distinctive; it can be distinguished from mere talent by its originality - it stands out from the crowd. In the years surrounding 1820, the literary marketplace was saturated with products: the poetry market was at its peak and about to decline, while the periodical market was burgeoning rapidly. In such a contested cultural arena, readers were bound to seek for markers as to the best and most prestigious works to purchase. Genius is what distinguishes a writer from his competitors in an increasingly crowded field of competition.

What *Blackwood's* did - and some other periodicals followed suit - was to promise its readers a version of the distinction enjoyed by the man of genius. Simply by reading *Blackwood's*, they were already better readers than others, by following its stylistic intricacies they would improve further, by listening to its critical judgements they

would acquire a respect for genius and a knowledge of its qualities which elevated them as much as it elevated the periodical they bought. If this process begins with reviewing practices and claims made about those practices, during the 1820s, and particularly the 1830s, it is evident in a variety of biographical writing about literary figures in the magazines. Each sought to further define and expand its own readership by recourse to a particular pantheon of genius to be found within its pages, in reviews and biographical articles. The promise of all such texts is that they give their readers a knowledge of and sympathy with 'men of genius' which distinguishes them from other readers of the same or similar social background. Thus it was the need to carve out *different* identities within a large middle-class readership that became an engine of the periodical press's interest in genius in the late Romantic period.

But this interest was often anxious and problematic. Authors like John Wilson, Thomas De Quincey, and Thomas Carlyle began writing for magazines because they could not subsist by producing more prestigious forms of literature; this sometimes lent a certain bitterness to their accounts of more fortunate and famous creative artists. And for many writers in the 1820s and 1830s, the rise of newspapers and magazines was the reason for the apparent dearth of poets, dramatists, and novelists of the first rank. Original genius, it was claimed, was being swallowed up or stifled by the anonymous, teeming mass of periodical writing. David Latané has suggested that anonymous celebrations of genius in the periodical press were undercut and ironised by their position within a realm of apparently authorless discourse which placed the idea of the 'transcendent author' firmly in the past.²⁷ However, this argument is surely overstated. Although accounts of genius were sometimes retrospective (because they were posthumous), in the 1830s it was still frequently put forward as an immensely powerful

²⁷David E. Latané, 'The Birth of the Author in the Victorian Archive', *VPR*, 22 (1989), 109-17.

force which would overcome the temporary impediments of political or cultural change. In my first chapter, I argue that the word 'genius' may have become less important in literary discussions during the early Victorian period, because its association with social transgression or alienation jarred with attempts to constitute writing as a respectable profession. However, this new model of authorship was still ultimately dependent on notions of autonomy and originality, even if not taken to the extreme that we find in Romantic writing on genius. Once the idea of the 'transcendent author' had taken hold, it proved impossible to get rid of.²⁸

III

As this thesis explores Romantic assumptions about genius, it is important to be explicit about the ways in which my own methodology relates to some of those assumptions. I take the view that genius, rather than being an innate gift that can be discovered in certain individuals, is always socially constructed, that is to say, it is a contingent, symbolic production. There is nothing inevitable about the process which leads a person to be described as a genius: this depends on a large number of factors which are extrinsic to his or her mental abilities, and what appear as the 'signs' of genius at a certain time and place may not be considered as such in other contexts.²⁹ This approach to genius falls in with modern critical attempts to open up the literary canon, or even to deconstruct the very notion of canonicity. The Romantic 'discourse of posterity' claims,

²⁸I should add that, despite my caveats, Latané's discussion of writing on genius in the periodical press in relation to modern attempts to deconstruct the idea of authorship is extremely acute and suggestive.

²⁹For a good account of this view, see Tia DeNora and Hugh Mehan, 'Genius: A Social Construction, the Case of Beethoven's Initial Recognition', in *Constructing the Social*, ed. by Theodore R. Sarbin and John I. Kitsuse (London: Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 157-73. See also DeNora's excellent study *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), and Michael Howe's *Genius Explained* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), although Howe takes a much less rigorous constructivist perspective than DeNora and Mehan.

as it were, that the cream always rises to the top (albeit posthumously),³⁰ but studying the social construction of genius makes us aware of the complex set of mechanisms - particularly the valorising activities of critics, academics, publishers, and so on - by which long-term literary reputation is secured, and can help shed light on the ways in which it has been denied to certain groups of authors (for example, female or working-class poets).

Although my approach to genius could certainly not be described as 'Romantic', I do allow a degree of space for subjective agency in literary production - I am interested in the reasons why authors make certain choices at certain times, and I sometimes use biographical information to support my arguments. Here I am influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's work on the sociology of literature, which seeks to avoid the polarities of (idealist/ Romantic) 'subjectivism' and (Marxist/ structuralist) 'objectivism'.³¹ Bourdieu argues that the literary world, at any given time and place, is a field of forces, 'a network of objective relations' between agents. Any literary work places the writer in a certain position within this field - areas of which correspond to genres, sub-genres and particular audiences - and these 'position-takings' tend to result from the writer's 'disposition' (which Bourdieu relates to class background), and ownership of different forms of capital (economic, cultural, and symbolic). The literary field is a constantly shifting site of struggle between agents for economic and symbolic capital. Like all fields of 'cultural production', it is dominated by the field of power, that is, the site of struggle for political power and economic capital among the ruling elite.

The degree of autonomy that the literary field has from the field of power can be assessed by looking at the extent to which it has its own rules governing the distribution of symbolic capital (prestige). Bourdieu argues that the idea of 'the pure aesthetic'

³⁰ See Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially chapter 2.

³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, and *The Rules of Art*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

becomes more prevalent as the literary field becomes more autonomous. This is why the interest in genius, and the celebrity accorded to artists is different in different periods: 'the interest in the personage of the writer or artist grows in parallel with the autonomization of the field of production and with the correlative elevation of the status of producers'.³² Part of Bourdieu's project is to critique notions that aesthetic creation or perception is ontological and unmediated, and a matter of the emanations or responses of individual consciousness, independent of socio-cultural context. He shows that a number of different consecrative agents (publishers, reviewers and so on) work together to create the symbolic value of the work of art, and so argues that in order to understand a work historically, one must analyse the way in which the entire field of production acts in order to give the work its contemporary meaning.

There are two main problems with Bourdieu's theory. First, it is based on an analysis of the peculiarly polarised literary culture of late nineteenth-century France, and it seems likely that more fluid cultural fields will be much harder to map out. Secondly, his method requires an enormous amount of research - if the historical 'meaning' of a work is the function of the operation of the entire cultural field at a given time, then ideally, one would want to have a sophisticated schematic model of this field before embarking on any substantial analysis of that work.³³ I do not have such a model of British literary culture in the Romantic period, and thus this thesis is not a fully-fledged 'Bourdieuian' study. However, it is certainly informed by his approach to cultural production, which emphasises the importance of personal, institutional and generic relationships, but still gives some weight to subjective agency.

³²Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, p. 190.

³³Toril Moi also makes this point, and notes that Bourdieu 'mobilized a huge team of researchers' for his analysis of Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale*; see 'The Challenge of the Particular Case: Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture and Literary Criticism', *MLQ*, 58 (1997), 497-508 (p. 505).

I look mainly at representations of poets in the following pages, although I also deal with other sorts of writers, and my final chapter is on the artist Benjamin Robert Haydon. Most accounts of the creative artist in the literary magazines of the Romantic period were principally about poets, and such figures tended to be much more celebrated than other types of artists and intellectuals. But it was also the case that scientists or politicians, for example, could be described as geniuses, and there is certainly the need for further study on the way in which they were represented in the period.³⁴ Another important area of which I have not given a detailed account is the relationship between genius and gender. This has previously been explored by Christine Battersby, who has looked at the masculine emphasis built in to the discourse of genius, discussing a number of late eighteenth-century and Romantic authors, such as Duff, Blake and Wollstonecraft. More recently, Andrew Elfenbein has examined the correspondence between representations of genius and homosexuality in the Romantic period.³⁵ In part of my second chapter, I discuss the neglect of women writers by the authors of literary galleries, but a full examination of gendered accounts of genius in the literary magazines - in particular, the representation of women poets, and discussions of genius and domesticity - will be an important area for future research.

My first chapter is a general account of debates about the relationship between genius, transgression, and neglect in the periodical press during the early nineteenth century. I relate them to the expansion of the market for periodical literature in the 1820s and 30s, which led to a gap between an emergent model of the professional man of letters - who was meant to be a productive member of civil society - and a Romantic model of genius which emphasised the inevitable alienation between the (male) author

³⁴ For scientific genius in the Romantic period, see Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chapter 7; Trevor H. Levere, 'Humphry Davy, 'The Sons of Genius', and the Idea of Glory', in *Science and the Sons of Genius: Studies on Humphry Davy*, ed. by Sophie Forgan (London: Science Reviews, 1980), pp. 33-58; Simon Schaffer, 'Genius in Romantic natural philosophy', in *Romanticism and the Sciences*, ed. by Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 82-98.

³⁵ See Battersby, *Gender and Genius* and Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*.

and his fellows. In chapter 2, I give an overview of literary biography in the 1820s and 30s, concentrating mainly on magazine biography. I discuss texts such as William Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* (1825), Leigh Hunt's *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* (1828), Thomas Jefferson Hogg's 'Percy Bysshe Shelley at Oxford' (*New Monthly Magazine*, 1832) and Thomas De Quincey's 'Lake Reminiscences' (*Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 1833-41).

The other three chapters are case studies. The third is on representations of Wordsworth in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. I argue that *Blackwood's* played an important role in transforming public perceptions of the poet in the late 1810s and early 1820s, and led the way for the construction of the 'Victorian' Wordsworth as a poet-priest of natural religion. I also look at ways in which the celebration of the poet was used for economic and ideological ends by the magazine, and may have fulfilled the psychological needs of its main critic, John Wilson, a friend of Wordsworth and fellow 'Lake Poet'. My fourth chapter focuses on William Hazlitt, who argued throughout his literary career that contemporary genius was 'degraded' by the influence that political power had over the literary world. At times, he viewed this state of affairs as inevitable, but I show that some of his writings for the *Liberal* - in particular 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' and 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' - reveal a sense that genius could be a locus of resistance to 'Legitimacy'. Finally, I discuss the historical painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, who, during the height of his career, was widely fêted as the heir to the great Italian artists of the Renaissance. Haydon's attempt to represent himself as a disinterested, heroic genius in an increasingly commercialised cultural field encapsulates many of the tensions that I explore throughout this thesis.

CHAPTER 1

GENIUS, NEGLECT, AND TRANSGRESSION IN THE EARLY
NINETEENTH CENTURY

The increasing popularity and cultural power of the periodical press was the cause of much anxiety among writers during the Romantic period. Was the growth of criticism, it was frequently asked, damaging to other forms of contemporary literature? Were the critical judgements of periodical writers inevitably warped by political or commercial interests? And was the reading public's obsession with Reviews, magazines, and newspapers responsible for the neglect suffered by poets and dramatists? This anxiety contributed to the growth of literature based on the theme of 'neglected genius', centring on figures such as Chatterton and Burns.¹ However, the argument that the sufferings that so often seemed to afflict men of genius were caused by the failure of their contemporaries to recognise and reward their achievements was frequently countered by the claim that such men reaped the harvest of their own improvidence and eccentric behaviour. This gave rise to a further important question, which was whether or not such behaviour was the natural concomitant of the possession of genius. Although the notion of the 'artistic temperament' had classical antecedents, it was given new force by the rise of the idea of original genius during the eighteenth century. It was sometimes claimed that the aesthetic rule-breaking associated with genius was reflected in the transgressive conduct of its possessors in private life.

¹ Examples of this genre include the anonymous 'On the Neglect of Genius', *Imperial Magazine*, October 1821, pp. 938-46; W. H. Ireland, *Neglected Genius* (London: George Cowie, 1812); Isaac D'Israeli, *Calamities of Authors*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1812); 'Sylvaticus' [J. F. Pennie], *The Tale of a Modern Genius; or, The Miseries of Parnassus*, 3 vols (London: J. Andrews, 1827).

In this chapter, I examine how the debate on genius developed in magazines and Reviews during the early nineteenth century, and relate this debate to changes in the literary marketplace. I show that attempts to represent the (male) author as a figure who, ideally, stood apart from the literary and political maelstrom were put under pressure by a developing model of literary professionalism which tried to show that authors should be fully engaged with contemporary society. But the attempt to constitute writing as a respectable profession in the late Romantic and early Victorian periods was itself vitiated by contemporary representations of the 'man of genius' as an eccentric Bohemian, or even a transgressive hero, who did not respect middle-class mores. The results of this clash of different ideals of authorship can be seen in the extreme positions taken up by writers in the 1830s, ranging from the elevation of the creative artist - particularly the poet - into a morally perfect, Christ-like figure, to a suspicion that 'genius' was little more than a code word for vice and madness.

I begin with a brief discussion of the two major Reviews - the *Edinburgh* (founded in 1802) and the *Quarterly* (founded in 1809) - which dominated British literary culture during much of the early nineteenth century.² Although my focus in this thesis is on the post-Napoleonic period, which saw the rapid expansion of the periodical press, it is vital to have a sense of the sort of reviewing practices to which later journals were reacting. The writers of the two Reviews attempted to 'police' contemporary literature by attacking those authors whose works did not fit in with what they believed to be social and cultural norms. Then I move on to examine *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, founded in 1817, alongside other monthly miscellanies such as the *London Magazine* and the *New Monthly Magazine*, all of which sought to emancipate criticism

² General surveys of the periodical press with accounts of the Reviews include Marilyn Butler, 'Culture's medium: the role of the review', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. by Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 120-47; John O. Hayden, *The Romantic Reviewers 1802-1824* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), chapter 1; Joanne Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers: The 'Edinburgh' and the 'Quarterly' in the Early Victorian Age* (London: Leicester University Press, 1989). Derek Roper assesses the *Edinburgh's* forebears in *Reviewing before the 'Edinburgh': 1788-1802* (London: Methuen, 1978).

from the influence of the Reviews, and placed much greater value on the 'genius' of the writers they reviewed. In the third part of the chapter, I discuss contemporary suspicions about genius, focusing on *The Spirit and Manners of the Age* (1826-29), an Evangelical magazine which took a notably tough line on the transgressions of literary characters. Finally, I look at *Fraser's Magazine*, a journal that is obsessed by genius, in the context of changes in literary culture during the 1820s and 1830s.

I

The *Edinburgh Review*, the most influential critical organ of the Romantic period, was founded in October 1802 by a small group of Scottish lawyers, including Francis Jeffrey (its editor until 1829), Francis Horner, and Henry Brougham, and a clergyman, Sydney Smith.³ At that time, the Tories dominated Edinburgh's political life, and it was impossible for young Whigs like Jeffrey and his friends to advance in the legal profession; thus they were forced to seek other avenues of employment such as periodical writing. The *Edinburgh's* founders were children of the Scottish Enlightenment, sceptical, highly trained professionals, with a great interest in new learning. This was reflected in the subjects covered by the new journal, which also quickly differentiated itself from the Reviews of the late eighteenth century by its selective approach to the works it dealt with and the long length of its review articles. As the *Edinburgh* developed these often became essays in their own right.⁴ Although at first contributors were not paid for their work, after the initial numbers all writers for the Review were 'forced' to accept

³ Accounts of the *Edinburgh* include John Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: The 'Edinburgh Review', 1802-1815* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957); Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), especially pp. 19-32; Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The 'Edinburgh Review' 1802-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Dickie A. Spurgeon, 'The Edinburgh Review', in *British Literary Magazines: The Romantic Age, 1789-1836*, ed. by Alvin Sullivan (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 139-44.

⁴ For a good account of the *Edinburgh's* editorial policy and particular interests, see Butler, pp. 130-37.

payment of an unprecedented ten guineas a sheet (sixteen printed pages), 'thereby ensuring that the gentlemanly distinction between amateur and professional was collapsed in such a way that all contributors could be at once gentlemen and professionals but emphatically not tradesmen or commercial hacks'.⁵ The *Edinburgh* was immediately successful; by October 1803, over two thousand copies of the first number had been sold, and by 1807, its initial print run of seven thousand was certainly much larger than any of its rivals.⁶

The *Edinburgh* is best known to students of Romantic literature for Jeffrey's attacks on the 'Lake School' poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, in particular the former.⁷ As has been widely noted, Jeffrey based his literary criticism on what he believed to be long-established standards of taste.⁸ He attacked Wordsworth's choice of subjects, the 'puerility' of his verse and, importantly, what he saw the arrogant isolationism of the poet, arguing that a poet should live in urban society so that his talent could be modified by interaction with his intellectual peers. Jeffrey also claimed that present popularity was an important sign of a poet's future glory. Thus he pitted himself against the Romantic account of genius which emphasised the separation of the artist from society and valorised contemporary neglect as a harbinger of long-term success, a view famously expressed by Wordsworth in the *Essay, Supplementary to the Preface* of 1815.⁹ Jeffrey's attitude to the authors he reviewed was often one of stern admonishment; he presented himself as the arbiter of civilised taste who sought to control the excesses of genius. Unsurprisingly given the background of its founders, legal

⁵ Ferris, p. 21.

⁶ For the *Edinburgh*'s circulation figures, see Clive, pp. 133-34. In 1797, the most successful of the *Edinburgh*'s forebears, the *Monthly Review*, was printing about five thousand copies of each issue; see Roper, p. 24.

⁷ For example, 'Southey's *Thalaba*', October 1802, pp. 63-83; 'Southey's *Madoc: a Poem*', October 1805, pp. 1-28; 'Wordsworth's *Poems*', October 1807, pp. 214-31; 'Wordsworth's *Excursion*', November 1814, pp. 1-30.

⁸ For a detailed account of Jeffrey's critical principles, see Peter F. Morgan, *Literary Critics and Reviewers in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), chapter 1. Also Morgan's introduction to *Jeffrey's Criticism: A Selection* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983).

⁹ William Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), III, 56-107.

rhetoric pervaded the *Edinburgh* - its motto was *judex damnatur, cum nocens absolvitur* - and, as Peter Morgan has pointed out, 'Jeffrey saw the poet as standing at the bar of public opinion, both as artist and as moral being, with the critic, however temperate and sensitive, as his judge'.¹⁰

Jeffrey's most notable utterance on genius occurs in his controversial review of R. H. Cromek's *Reliques of Burns* in January 1809. Although the critic describes Burns as 'a great and original genius',¹¹ he spends some time discussing the unfortunate 'peculiarities' of his works, by which Jeffrey means anything that reminds the reader of 'the lowness of [Burns's] origin'.¹² In particular, he states that

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; nor can any thing be more lamentable, than that it should have found a patron in such a man as Burns, and communicated to a great part of his productions a character of immorality, at once contemptible and hateful.¹³

Burns's belief in '*the dispensing power* of genius and social feeling' is, Jeffrey goes on to argue, a form of cant which seeks to disguise selfishness and criminal behaviour, but which has fortunately 'never found much favour in the eyes of English sense and morality'. He then refers to a group of German students who were inspired by the noble character of the bandit leader Charles Moor in Schiller's play *Die Räuber* (1782) to 'rob on the highway', but states that in England 'a predilection for that honourable profession must have preceded this admiration of the character', and thus that 'the style we have

¹⁰ Morgan, *Jeffrey's Criticism*, p. 2. Mark Schoenfield discusses the legal rhetoric in the 'Lake School' reviews in *The Professional Wordsworth* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. 207.

¹¹ 'Reliques of Burns', *ER*, January 1809, p. 255.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 252.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 253.

The *Quarterly Review* was founded in order to oppose the *Edinburgh's* politics.¹⁸

The latter had been fairly moderate in its early volumes, but after 1807 it became increasingly strident and began calling for large-scale reforms.¹⁹ In late 1808, a group of worried Tories, including Walter Scott, George Canning, and the publisher John Murray formed the *Quarterly* under the editorship of William Gifford, a mostly self-taught shoemaker who had gone on to become a satirical poet and editor of the *Anti-Jacobin*. The *Quarterly* had very close links to the government; Canning, who became Prime Minister in 1827, was an MP, and held the post of foreign minister until autumn 1809, and two of its main writers, John Wilson Croker and Sir John Barrow, were, respectively, first and second secretaries of the Admiralty.²⁰ The template for the Review was based on that of the *Edinburgh*; it contained long review essays on similar subjects, although it evinced a greater interest in *belles-lettres*. As Marilyn Butler states, 'the journal conducted a comprehensive campaign on behalf of conservative, Christian and family values [...] [it] hunted down "infidel", irreligious, or sexually explicit subject-matter in texts of all kinds'.²¹ By 1817, the *Quarterly's* sales of twelve to fourteen thousand had matched, maybe even slightly bettered, those of its rival.²²

Just as the *Edinburgh* had attacked the 'Lake School', the *Quarterly* is well known for attacks on the 'second generation' Romantics.²³ John Taylor Coleridge's

¹⁸ Useful sources of information about the *Quarterly* include Jonathan Cutmore's website, the *Quarterly Review Project*, June 2000, Toronto, 7 January 2002, <<http://www.dreamwater.com/edu/earlyqr/>>; Hill Shine and Helen Shine, *The Quarterly Review Under Gifford* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949) and Roger P. Wallins, 'The Quarterly Review', in *British Literary Magazines*, pp. 359-67.

¹⁹ The article which particularly shocked the Tories was 'Don Pedro Cevallos on the French Usurpation of Spain' by Brougham and Jeffrey, *ER*, October 1808, pp. 215-34. John Clive gives a good account of the *Edinburgh's* politics in *Scotch Reviewers*, chapter 4.

²⁰ For more detailed accounts of the origin of the *Quarterly* see Wallins; Hayden, pp. 24-33; 'John Murray's Gentlemen: The Founding of the Quarterly Review' in Cutmore, 'The Quarterly Review Project' and Samuel Smiles, *A Publisher and his Friends: Memoirs and Correspondence of the Late John Murray*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1891), I, chapter 5.

²¹ Butler, p. 141.

²² Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 303.

²³ The *Quarterly* generally praised Byron, partly because - almost until the very end of the poet's career - they shared publishers. It avoided reviewing his later, satirical poems, such as *Don Juan*, *Beppo* and *The Vision of Judgement* as this would have necessitated attacking the poet for questioning cultural values which were important to the Review and its readers. However, in his positive review of Byron's 'Dramas', the churchman Reginald Heber strongly criticises *Don Juan* in passing, lamenting that in the past Byron's readers had witnessed 'the systematic and 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'. See *QR*, July 1822, p. 476.

review of Shelley's *Revolt of Islam* lambasted the poet's radical politics and made vague but serious accusations about Shelley's personal life; Croker's review of *Endymion* was widely represented in the 1820s as having caused Keats's death, and Hazlitt was continually depicted as both a seditious and an incompetent writer.²⁴ Although the *Quarterly's* literary criticism had always been motivated by 'political and social considerations',²⁵ the virulence of these attacks can perhaps be explained by the political climate after 1815. This was a time of great popular unrest, culminating of course in Peterloo and the Six Acts. The intense political situation was reflected in the literary culture of the period from 1815 to 1820; reviewing became increasingly acrimonious and politically partisan, and a number of literary feuds developed.²⁶

However, this increased politicisation of literary culture also saw the emergence of a counter-discourse which sought, at least ostensibly, to emphasise the autonomy of the aesthetic from the political. As I will show, one way in which new magazines could emphasise their difference from the Reviews was by claiming that they took a very different, non-partisan attitude to criticism, one that sought to celebrate and support 'genius' rather than to damn it. In the process of making these claims, the reviewing practices of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* were often caricatured, but there is certainly a major shift in the approach that the 'new wave' of periodicals that appeared around 1820 took to literary criticism. As I have argued, reviewers in the *Quarterly* tended to judge works depending on their consonance with the periodical's Tory, Anglican ethos, whereas Jeffrey tended to judge them by what he saw as fixed standards of polite taste and social decorum. In both Reviews, critics represented themselves as mediators between authors and the public, mediators whose main task was to control the

²⁴ See, respectively, *QR*, April 1819, pp. 460-71; April 1818, pp. 204-08, and, for reviews of Hazlitt, April 1817, pp. 154-59; May 1818, pp. 458-65; December 1818, pp. 424-33; July 1819, pp. 158-62.

²⁵ Wallins, p. 359.

²⁶ I discuss John Scott's feud with *Blackwood's Magazine* later in this chapter, and Hazlitt's conflict with the Lake Poets in chapter 4.

excesses of genius in order to make it fit in with prevailing social norms. A number of later magazines give genius much more emphasis and importance than the Reviews, and in some cases, the genius of an author is represented as an alibi or even a reason for his personal and/or textual flouting of the ethics and politics of the dominant classes.

Jeffrey's judgement that the belief in '*the dispensing power* of genius' had not found favour in England proved to be premature.

II

In *The Economy of Literary Form*, Lee Erickson argues that the 'poetry boom' of the first two decades of the nineteenth century ended due to developments in printing technology. As a result, economies of scale allowed the expansion of the market for periodicals:

once the materials and the means of printing became cheaper, diffuse prose was no longer at a comparative economic disadvantage with compressed poetry. The periodical format, in particular, gave rise to a variety of shorter prose forms that competed for and largely won over the audience for poetry.²⁷

This seems to me to be a good explanation for the large increase in the numbers of periodicals published after the end of the Napoleonic wars, although the poetry market itself did not peak until 1820. During this period, a number of monthly miscellanies appeared, offering themselves as in direct competition with the older quarterlies. The relatively high rates of pay offered by these magazines offered new possibilities for writers who were unable to subsist by writing in other genres. For example, towards the end of his life, John Keats, in severe financial difficulties which could not be alleviated by

²⁷ Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 47-48.

the very poor sales of his poetry, was seriously considering becoming a magazine writer and planned to consult William Hazlitt for advice: 'I will write, on the liberal side of the question, for whoever will pay me'. Although some writers may have felt that they had little choice other than to turn to periodical writing, they did of course have a measure of autonomy in which journals they wrote for; Keats was determined to do 'any thing but Mortgage my Brain to Blackwood'.²⁸

This was a reference to William Blackwood, proprietor of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, which had recently contained a series of articles entitled 'The Cockney School of Poetry' attacking radical London writers such as Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, and Keats himself. Blackwood had founded the periodical early in 1817 in order to counteract the commercial success of his local rival, Archibald Constable, proprietor of the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Scots Magazine*, who had recently taken on Walter Scott after Blackwood had fallen out with the author during the publication of *Tales of my Landlord*.²⁹ Blackwood was also politically motivated, a staunch Tory who was concerned by what he saw as the Whig dominance of Edinburgh's cultural life. Unfortunately, under the editorship of Thomas Pringle and James Cleghorn, his magazine was not only dull - it even praised the *Edinburgh Review*. So Blackwood got rid of his editors, enlisted John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart - both young, briefless barristers - to help him, and relaunched the periodical in October 1817.³⁰ This edition contained the 'Chaldee Manuscript', a parody of the Edinburgh literary scene couched in mock-Biblical language, the first of the 'Cockney School of Poetry' articles by Lockhart, and a vicious review of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* by Wilson. As a result of these attacks,

²⁸ See Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 608-09. It is interesting to note that around this time both Coleridge and De Quincey were driven by financial need to become writers for *Blackwood's*; see Robert Morrison, 'Opium-Eaters and Magazine Wars: De Quincey and Coleridge in 1821', *VPR*, 30 (1997), 27-40 (p. 29).

²⁹ For the founding of *Blackwood's*, see Margaret Oliphant, *Annals of a Publishing House: William Blackwood and his Sons*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1899), I, chapters 1 to 3.

³⁰ During the late 1810s young Tory lawyers in Scotland were suffering from the same politically induced unemployment that had affected Jeffrey and his colleagues at the beginning of the century.

Blackwood's quickly became infamous; that it was able to maintain its early success and rapidly increase its sale was due to the high abilities of its writers, which were reflected in a delight in formal experimentation and parody.³¹ It also became seen, and to an extent still is seen by modern critics, as an extreme example of the political partisanship of the periodical press during the early nineteenth century.

However, one of the extraordinary things about *Blackwood's* is that its writers, during the same period as they were attacking Keats and Leigh Hunt as lower-class interlopers and 'Cockney' radicals, often claimed to be trying to break free of the political bias of the quarterly Reviews and aid literary genius regardless of its source. For example, Lockhart's article 'On the Periodical Criticism of England', purportedly by the 'Baron von Lauerwinkel', appeared in March 1818, three months after the second 'Cockney School' article and four months before the third. The article presents the Reviews as despots ruling the republic of letters and preventing literary freedom. Lauerwinkel argues that periodical criticism is becoming hijacked by political discussion; a critic will often use a review

as an excuse for writing, what he thinks the author might have been better employed in doing, a dissertation, *in favour* of the minister if the Review be the property of a Pittite; *against* him and all his measures if it be the property of a Foxite, bookseller. It is no matter although the poor author be a man who cares nothing at all about politics, and has never once thought either of Pitt or Fox, Castlereagh or Napoleon, during the whole time of composing his book. The English Reviewers are of the opinion of Pericles, that politics are, or should be, in some way or other, the subject of every man's writings.³²

Lauerwinkel goes on to attack the editors the *Quarterly* and the *Edinburgh*. Despite his talents, Gifford's political bigotry makes him a bad critic and insensible to genius. His

Review is right to oppose Napoleon, but wrong to denigrate his abilities: 'it is an insult

³¹Wilson claimed that the October 1817 issue sold ten thousand copies, and that in 1820 the magazine was selling at 'SOMEWHERE BELOW 17000!' Clearly these figures need to be treated with some circumspection; see 'An Hour's Tête-à-Tête with the Public', *BEM*, October 1820, pp. 80-81.

³²'Baron von Lauerwinkel' [John Gibson Lockhart], 'Remarks on the Periodical Criticism of England', *BEM*, March 1818, p. 671. All further references to this article are given in the text.

upon common understanding to tell London in the nineteenth century, that Buonoparte is an ordinary man'. The *Quarterly's* 'rancour' against the defeated Emperor reveals an endemic lack of sympathy with greatness, for

there is something dignified and sacred in human genius, even although it be misapplied. The reverence which we feel for it is an instinct of nature, and cannot be laid aside without a sin. He who is insensible to its influence, has committed sacrilege against his own spirit, and degraded himself from the height of his original elevation. (pp. 673-74)

This extraordinary 'sanctification' of genius, in which it becomes a sacred duty to reverence 'great men' regardless of their crimes, is surprising in a magazine that professes Tory values. It is, however, an attitude that one repeatedly finds in the pages of *Blackwood's*, although it is rarely expressed as explicitly as it is here.

Lauerwinkel now turns his attention to Jeffrey. The editor of the *Edinburgh*, he argues, is 'a man of genius' who could have been a great thinker or rhetorician but has wasted his talents in order to please the multitude of 'superficial readers' (p. 675). His treatment of Byron, Wordsworth and Goethe shows that he is incapable of appreciating the genius of others. The attack becomes more serious when Lauerwinkel accuses the *Edinburgh Review* of 'treason' for acting as 'the apologist of Napoleon' (p. 677). He adds that the periodical is the covert 'champion of infidelity' (p. 677); even its support for Catholic emancipation is seen by Lauerwinkel, a German Catholic, as undermined by its enmity to Christianity, which is in fact a very unfair representation of the Review's attitude to religion, although it was continually accused of crypto-atheism by Tory writers.

After this attack on the two Reviews, Lauerwinkel considers the question as to whether the growth of criticism means the decline of literature. He fears that talented writers who are not in the first rank, 'gentle and elegant minds, which might contribute

both to the delight and instruction of their species', cannot endure the taunts of the reviewers. However, he states that the greatest writers will always be immune to the effects of contemporary criticism, for 'these go on in their destined way, rejoicing in the consciousness of their own strength, and having their eyes fixed upon the sure prospect of immortality - far above the reign, either of calumniating wit or ignorant approbation' (p. 679). This gesture to what has been described as 'the discourse of posterity' is of course a familiar move made by Romantic writers.³³ Lockhart's article is quite typical of this discourse in that it laments the state of contemporary literature, whilst simultaneously asserting that genius will ultimately always succeed in overcoming any obstacles to its eventual fame. This is a powerful and common argument during the early nineteenth century: that genius is always conscious of its powers and thus immune to unfair criticism. But it is noteworthy that this argument appears in a magazine. Such organs, of course, were supposed to constitute the contemporary literary maelstrom which the true genius will eventually transcend. However, the whole thrust of Lockhart's article is that *Blackwood's* is not part of this maelstrom, and that unlike its competitors in the periodical marketplace, it is capable of recognising genius as it appears.

One of the foundations of *Blackwood's* success was its relentless self-promotion. Its writers were constantly extolling the journal's merits and its triumphs over other publications, and Lockhart's article is the first of a number of attempts by *Blackwood's* to distinguish itself from its competitors by claiming that it is a new type of periodical, intent on helping and encouraging genius rather than attacking it. Thus it was important for the magazine to differentiate itself from the *Quarterly* as well as the *Edinburgh*, even though *Blackwood's* was on the same side as the former in terms of politics.³⁴ In 1820,

³³ See Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁴ I agree with J. H. Alexander that *Blackwood's* often used to Jeffrey to 'epitomise all that they were reacting against', but they also pitched themselves against the *Quarterly*, and, indeed, contemporary literary culture as a whole. Alexander's excellent article, 'Blackwood's: Magazine as Romantic Form' has been very helpful in stimulating my ideas about the journal; *Wordsworth Circle*, 15 (1984), 57-68.

Wilson would state, with a degree of ironic hyperbole, that the magazine had had a revolutionary effect on periodical criticism:

we have done more than all the periodical works that have ever existed since the beginning of time (moderately speaking) to spread the empire of genius and imagination upon earth. There is no single man of genius whom we have not delighted to honour [...] We have gathered up the flowers that dropped from the garlands of poetry - wiped from them the dust scattered on them by the hoof of vulgar criticism - restored them to their bright companionship - and hung the whole dazzling glory upon the temple of Fame.³⁵

This claim was repeated, in different terms, by William Maginn in 1826:

before we appeared, the art of criticism was indeed a miserable concern. The critic looked upon the poet as his prey. The two were always at daggers-drawing [...] Men of genius were insulted by tenth-rate scribblers, without head or heart [...] We put an end to this in six months [...] In another year the whole periodical criticism of Britain underwent a revolution. Principles were laid down and applied to passages from our living poets. People were encouraged to indulge their emotions, that they might be brought to know their nature. That long icy chill was shook off their fancies and imaginations, and here, too, in Criticism as in Politics, they began to feel, think, and speak, like free men [...] A long, prosing leading article in the Edinburgh, abusing Wordsworth, looked ineffably silly beside one splendid panegyric paragraph in *Maga* on the Great Laker [...] A deposed Critic-king is a most deplorable subject [...] His temples are most absurd without their crown, and having lost his sceptre, he is forced to hide his hands in his breeches pocket. So fared it with many an anointed head [...] This universal dethronement is accomplished and there is once more a Republic of Letters.³⁶

The political language of this extract is fascinating. Maginn, an extreme Tory, celebrates a 'revolution' in sensibility prompted by *Blackwood's* which has resulted in the dethronement and humiliation of Jeffrey, the 'Critic-king', and other literary despots. But although Maginn claims that there is a similarity here with the journal's encouragement of, as he puts it a few lines above this passage, 'that latitude of opinion which is the Englishman's birth-right', it would certainly not have wanted a 'universal dethronement' outside the literary sphere. There was a tension between *Blackwood's*

³⁵ John Wilson, 'An Hour's Tête-à-Tête with the Public', *BEM*, October 1820, p. 93.

³⁶ William Maginn and possibly John Wilson, 'Preface', *BEM*, 1826, pp. xxii-xxiii.

staunch political monarchism, and its desire to be seen, in literary terms, as a republican force which supported a meritocracy of genius. For remarks such as Maginn's must have seemed laughable to the victims of its attacks. How could a journal that told Keats 'back to the shop Mr John, back to "plasters, pills, and ointment boxes,"' and vilified Hazlitt as a 'quack', 'scribbler' and 'charlatan' be ending the 'daggers-drawing' between author and critic?³⁷ Whilst claiming to support creative genius, by the simple expedient of denying that quality to authors whose social class and political affiliations they found offensive, writers in *Blackwood's* seemed to feel that they had a God-given right to produce the most vicious, *ad hominem* attacks in the thin guise of criticism.

But despite its partisanship and hypocrisy, *Blackwood's* was revolutionary as a literary magazine, and its treatment of authors was very different from that of the *Reviews*. Those whom the magazine supported, particularly Wordsworth, were generally praised in a concerted and eulogistic fashion which had not been seen in periodical criticism before. As I will show chapter 3, *Blackwood's* not only extolled the merits of Wordsworth's poetry in a sustained critical campaign, but constructed an image of the poet as a virtuous poet-priest which was highly influential on his reception later in the nineteenth century. It was predictable that the magazine's writers would support a fellow Tory, but during 1819 and 1820 it also contained several generous reviews of Shelley, whose atheism and radicalism were anathema to its ethos. These reviews, I think, constitute strong evidence that its claims to be revolutionary were not merely empty propaganda; they reveal that, as Robert Morrison puts it, 'throughout its early years, *Blackwood's* literary criticism repeatedly flew in the face of its own political and literary dogma'.³⁸

³⁷'Z.' [John Gibson Lockhart], 'On Cockney School of Poetry No. IV' and 'An Old Friend with a New Face' [Lockhart], 'Hazlitt Cross-Questioned', both in *BEM*, August 1818, pp. 524 and 550-52.

³⁸Robert Morrison, "'Abuse Wickedness, but Acknowledge Wit": *Blackwood's* and the Shelley Circle', *VPR*, 34 (2001), 147-64 (p. 149).

III

The first of the Shelley reviews was of *The Revolt of Islam* and appeared in January 1819. Alan Lang Strout, the twentieth-century bibliographer of *Blackwood's*, has attributed this piece to Lockhart, but there is good evidence that De Quincey and possibly Wilson also contributed to it.³⁹ The article begins ominously, attacking 'the sophistical and phantastical enemies of religion and good order among mankind' who have always eventually secured the 'contempt and disgust' of their fellow men: 'they had no part in the just spirit of respectfulness which makes men to contemplate, with an unwilling and unsteady eye, the aberrations of genius'. It seems to be limbering up for a savage assault, but then describes Shelley as different from other radical writers:

Mr Shelly [*sic*] is devoting his mind to the same pernicious purposes which have recoiled in vengeance upon so many of his contemporaries; but he possesses the qualities of a powerful and vigorous intellect, and therefore his fate cannot be sealed so speedily as theirs. He also is of the "COCKNEY SCHOOL," so far as his opinions are concerned; but the base opinions of the sect have not as yet been able entirely to obscure in him the character, or take away from him the privileges of the genius born within him.⁴⁰

Throughout, the review distinguishes Shelley's political opinions and associations from his intellectual abilities. The 'privileges' of genius are that its possessor can be forgiven sins which would damn his less brilliant fellows. Shelley's powers become the key to his possible redemption from what is represented as an inchoate and vicious philosophy:

³⁹ Strout originally attributed the Shelley reviews to John Wilson in an article which first drew my attention to *Blackwood's*' support of Shelley; see 'Maga, Champion of Shelley', *Studies in Philology*, 29 (1932), 95-119. After further research, he found good evidence for Lockhart's authorship; see 'Lockhart, Champion of Shelley', *TLS*, 12 August 1955, p. 468 and *A Bibliography of Articles in 'Blackwood's Magazine'* (Lubbock: The Texas Tech Press, 1959). However, recently Robert Morrison has argued that, in the case of the article on *The Revolt of Islam*, 'credit for the review belongs primarily to De Quincey'; 'De Quincey, Champion of Shelley', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 41 (1992), 36-41 (p. 41). It seems likely that, as is the case with a number of *Blackwood's* articles, the *Revolt of Islam* review is a joint production in which it is difficult to work out who wrote what.

⁴⁰ Lockhart, De Quincey and possibly Wilson, 'Observations on *The Revolt of Islam*', *BEM*, January 1819, pp. 475-76.

As a philosopher, our author is weak and worthless; - our business is with him as a poet, and, as such, 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 [...] The native splendour of Mr Shelly's [*sic*] faculties has been his safeguard from universal degradation, and a part, at least, of his genius, has been consecrated to themes worthy of it and of him.⁴¹

This argument is reiterated in the next three reviews of Shelley, which were probably all written mainly by Lockhart. The beauties of his poetry are contrasted with the errors of his morality, and it is hoped that his genius will lead him to embrace religion and respect for authority. Shelley's poetic genius acts as an alibi for his transgressions; it is represented as the true, essential Shelley which prevents him from being irrevocably damned for his erroneous principles. Although it was a typical reviewer's rhetorical trick to launch an attack under the pretext of attempting to educate misguided ability - Jeffrey was the archetypal practitioner of this ploy - this is not the case with these reviews. Lockhart is exhorting Shelley to change his opinions, but this is subsidiary to a generous appreciation of the merits of his poetry. However, I cannot agree with Morrison that '*Blackwood's* did not de-politicise or aestheticise Shelley' and that it 'fully understood the radical nature of [his] vision'.⁴² For while the magazine admitted the radical sentiments in his verse, it also made this philosophy extrinsic to his poetic genius. By positing an *absolute* separation between the political content of his poetry and its merits, the magazine not only attempts to make Shelley palatable for its readers, but seeks to aid its construction of a version of genius that is fundamentally socially conservative. It is Shelley's privilege, like the wayward son of a nobleman, to be allowed certain youthful transgressions, with the understanding that he will eventually return to the fold.

We can get a better sense of the relationship between *Blackwood's* Toryism and its account of genius by examining two articles by John Wilson. In 'On Literary

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 476.

⁴² Morrison, '*Blackwood's* and the Shelley Circle', p. 154.

Censorship' (November 1818), despite the occasional viciousness of his own reviewing, he attacks literary critics as gratuitously cruel to youthful writers, and probably unnecessary to 'the literature of a country', the 'excellence' of which 'does not depend on tribunals of criticism: it depends on the spirit of the people. It is the state of the mind of the whole nation that must determine the character of its literature'.⁴³ He goes on to state that

we must desire to see writers of genius and power perfectly bold and free,- submissive, indeed, where all minds should submit,- but within that circumscription, uncontrolled, impetuous, trusting to their own spirit, and by that light fearlessly exploring and fearlessly creating. A literature generous and aspiring,- yet guarded alike by wisdom and reverence from all transgression,- is alone worthy of England.⁴⁴

This is, in a nutshell, the dilemma of the *Blackwood's* approach to writers of genius. They must be allowed to be 'perfectly bold and free', but also 'submissive' to Church and State; 'uncontrolled', yet 'guarded'; literary republicans, but political monarchists. This balancing act makes necessary the construction of a sharp division between the aesthetic and the political, manifested in the Shelley reviews as a distinction between form and content.

Just over a year later, Wilson developed his argument about the relationship between the creative artist and the nation in his thoughtful article 'On the Analogy Between the Growth of Individual and National Genius', published in January 1820. This can be situated usefully within the Burkean-Coleridgean tradition of conservative writing about national culture. Wilson argues that its development must be a balance between the forces of what Coleridge would later call, in *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1830), 'Permanence' and 'Progression':

⁴³ John Wilson, 'On Literary Censorship', *BEM*, November 1818, p. 176.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 177.

It is to be desired that the living generation should derive as much as possible of good from those which have preceded, without being so far subjected to them as to lose the good which is open to it to acquire. But it ought not, in eagerness for acquisition of its own, to forego the good which may be inherited [...] Among ourselves, the tendency of deviation seems to be towards too great relaxation of the subjection of our minds to the great generations from which we spring.⁴⁵

The word 'analogy' in the title of the article is misleading, because Wilson claims that the development of individual and national genius is not only similar, but *linked*. Although individual genius is a progressive force, it has to recognise that, as an emanation of the national spirit - which of course *Blackwood's* figured as essentially Tory - it must be restrained by an adherence to custom and history. 'The human intellect', Wilson argues,

is not an unfettered intelligence, ranging through absolute existence, and creating ideal form. It is the power of a being who in all parts of his nature is subjected to conditions of life, who, in his sensibilities, his knowledge, his productions, is under restraint and limitation of his individual nature, and of his place among mankind [...] He who, in the pride of his own age, believes himself independent of the ages to which he succeeds, shuts out from himself the highest influences under which it was given to his mind to live.⁴⁶

Shelley's errors, for his *Blackwood's* critics, are because he does not recognise the responsibilities that individual genius has to 'the ages to which he succeeds', he is not 'submissive [...] where all minds should submit'. But because these errors are, as Lockhart emphasises in the review of *Rosalind and Helen*, 'devoid of any essential or fundamental alliance with his masterly genius', they may be overcome in the future.⁴⁷

All the Shelley reviews contain lengthy quotations from the poetry. In the article on *Rosalind and Helen*, Lockhart makes it clear that one of his goals is to give Shelley access to a large reading audience, for hitherto his writings have had 'but a very limited circulation, and few of our periodical brethren have condescended to occupy their pages

⁴⁵ John Wilson, 'On the Analogy Between the Growth of Individual and National Genius', *BEM*, January 1820, p. 379.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 380.

⁴⁷ John Gibson Lockhart, 'Rosalind and Helen, a Modern Eclogue', *BEM*, June 1819, p. 274.

with his poetry'. By giving *Blackwood's* readers 'full and abundant specimens of fine poetry which we have selected from Percy Bysshe Shelley', Lockhart seeks to fulfil one of the journal's 'great objects' - 'to support the cause of genius and of imagination'.⁴⁸ This is comparable with *Blackwood's*' treatment of Coleridge and Wordsworth, both of whom the periodical attempted to mediate to its readers, through critical discussions of their poetry, and, in the case of Wordsworth, biographical accounts of the poet. As I have shown, *Blackwood's* writers made this mediation of genius into the periodical's major selling point, and its support of Shelley could be, and indeed was, later adduced as proof to its readers that its critical judgements were based solely on literary merit.

It is instructive to compare *Blackwood's* reviews of Shelley with John Taylor Coleridge's review of the *Revolt of Islam* in the *Quarterly Review*. Although Coleridge grudgingly admits Shelley's gifts, and says of his poem, 'it is not without beautiful passages', he spends the bulk of his review attacking Shelley's 'system' and ends by claiming that he has personal knowledge of the poet which reveals the hollowness of his philosophical professions:

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'.⁴⁹

At no point in the review does Coleridge use the word 'genius', which is scattered like confetti throughout the *Blackwood's* articles on Shelley. He evinces little interest in Shelley's poetry and certainly no desire to give it wide circulation, spending much of the article arguing with Shelley's politics. In the course of a twelve-page article, one passage of four stanzas is quoted, one individual stanza and eight fragments. In Lockhart's seven

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 273.

⁴⁹ John Taylor Coleridge, 'Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*', *QR*, April 1819, p. 471. Coleridge knew Shelley at Eton.

pages on the *Revolt of Islam*, a number of passages are quoted, making a total of well over thirty stanzas, and later reviews contain an even greater proportion of quotation than this.

Lockhart responded to the *Quarterly's* article in his review of *Alastor* in November 1819. He launched a scathing attack on Shelley's reviewer, describing him as 'a dunce rating a man of genius', and stating that

nor will any man who loves and honours genius, even though that genius may have occasionally suffered itself to be both stained and led astray, think but with contempt and indignation and scorn of a critic who, while he pretends to wield the weapons of honour, virtue, and truth, yet clothes himself in the armour of deceit, hypocrisy, and falsehood. He *exults* to calumniate Mr Shelley's moral character, but he *fears* to acknowledge his genius.⁵⁰

As in the other reviews, Lockhart emphasises here that Shelley's genius is the key to the poet's possible redemption. He also argues that Coleridge's inability to recognise this truth disqualifies him from being Shelley's critic. This is akin to the criticisms of the *Quarterly* that Lockhart made in 1818 for failing to sympathise with Napoleon's 'misapplied' genius. Coleridge is criticised for his underhanded and hypocritical reference to Shelley's personal character, although such 'personality' and 'deceit' was of course the stock-in-trade of Lockhart himself. Finally, he argues that there is a generosity and love among the British people towards genius which will aid Shelley's redemption, for 'they are willing to pardon to its possessor much extravagance and error - nay, even more serious transgressions'. He exhorts Shelley and his critic to consider this:

⁵⁰ John Gibson Lockhart, 'Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude', *BEM*, November 1819, p. 153.

let it encourage the one to walk onwards to his bright destiny, without turning into dark or doubtful or wicked ways - let it teach the other to feel a proper sense of his own insignificance, and to be ashamed, in the midst of his own weaknesses and deficiencies and meannesses, to aggravate the faults of the highly-gifted, and to gloat with a sinful satisfaction on the real or imaginary debasement of genius and intellect.⁵¹

Thus here we have the strange spectacle of a Tory reviewer, in a virulently Tory periodical, defending a radical atheist from the attacks of another Tory reviewer during a period of intense political unrest and partisanship, when one would expect political allegiances to be at their strongest. These reviews do not seem to square with modern critical representations of the 'fractured' public sphere of the early nineteenth century, in which criticism was 'unabashedly political'.⁵² However, they are totally consistent with the various complaints about contemporary periodical criticism to be found in *Blackwood's*. Again one should note the *sanctified* quality of genius, which allows 'its possessor' to be forgiven even 'serious transgressions' - and those who fail to forgive the man of genius reveal their own deficiencies. The forgiveness of Shelley is carried out by Lockhart on an epistemological level, through the construction of the category of the pure aesthetic, separate from the poet's 'moral character' or political beliefs. By placing Shelley's poetic gifts in this category, he redeems him for a Tory readership by divesting his work of the radical political themes which, for modern critics, are so integral to it. But this begs the question of why *Blackwood's* treats Shelley in this way, and yet also contains *ad hominem* attacks on 'Cockney' writers, which are clearly motivated by political and class prejudice. If the Shelley reviews bear out the magazine's claims to be carrying out, at least at times, a new sort of criticism that respects and celebrates creative endeavour, regardless of its source - even if this is at the cost of 'cleansing' it of unfortunate associations - then why are Keats and Hunt not subject to a similar process?

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 154.

⁵² Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From 'The Spectator' to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 38.

Blackwood's treatment of Shelley was noticed by contemporaries, in some cases with a degree of cynicism. In June 1820, William Hazlitt, who by this time had been warring with the magazine for nearly two years, claimed that its support of the poet was due entirely to his social background:

It is name, it is wealth, it is title and influence that mollifies the tender-hearted Cerberus of criticism [...] This is the reason why a certain Magazine praises Percy Bysshe Shelley, and villifies [*sic*] 'Johnny Keats:' they know very well that they cannot ruin the one in fortune as well as in fame, but they may ruin the other in both.⁵³

In his review of *Prometheus Unbound*, Lockhart angrily denied Hazlitt's accusation and defended *Blackwood's*' conduct towards Hunt, Keats, and Shelley.⁵⁴ But there is no doubt that *Blackwood's* writers tended to have an elevated respect for rank and, as recent critics have shown, the 'Cockney School' articles are riven with class prejudice.⁵⁵ Such prejudice may well have influenced the Shelley reviews; for unlike the Cockneys, he is 'a scholar, a gentleman, and a poet'.⁵⁶

Another reason was mooted by the poet himself in a letter to Charles Ollier; pleasantly surprised by the review of *The Revolt of Islam*, Shelley states that 'the article in *Blackwood* could not have been written by a favourer of the Government and a religionist', and asks his publisher, 'is it not some friend in disguise and don't you know who wrote it?'⁵⁷ Writing nine months later, in August 1820, an anonymous reviewer in the *Honeycomb* gave a similar explanation for this strange anomaly, arguing that there must be 'some secret machinery' in operation, 'some friend behind the scenes, or some working of personal interest, which thus induces that magazine for once to throw aside

⁵³ William Hazlitt, 'On the Qualifications Necessary for Success in Life', *CWH*, XII, 208. First published in the *London Magazine*.

⁵⁴ *BEM*, September 1820, pp. 686-87.

⁵⁵ See especially Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chapter 1.

⁵⁶ Lockhart, De Quincey, and possibly Wilson, 'Observations on the Revolt of Islam', p. 482.

⁵⁷ Letter to Charles Ollier, December 15 [or 25], 1819 in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (London: Ernest Benn, 1965), X, 134.

the trammels of party prejudice, and to do justice to a man who even advocates the French Revolution'.⁵⁸ When *this* passage was written, there was indeed a 'secret machinery'. Charles E. Robinson has shown that towards the end of 1819 William Blackwood made contact with Charles Ollier, Shelley's publisher. They began corresponding and Blackwood became Ollier's Scottish agent. Thus in 1820, Blackwood 'was not only advertising, selling, and reviewing Shelley's works (and those of Ollier's other authors) but also announcing in the Edinburgh advertisements that he was co-publishing Shelley with the Olliers'.⁵⁹ It is possible that the reviewer quoted above may have known something about this arrangement.

Clearly, the treatment of Shelley by *Blackwood's* was overdetermined, a function of a number of different factors including his social class, the relationship with Ollier, his distance from the cut and thrust of British literary culture, and, I certainly believe, a genuine pleasure on the part of Lockhart, De Quincey, and Wilson in Shelley's poetic gifts. But the motivation behind the reviews is not as important as the language in which they are written and thus the discursive possibilities that are present. What matters is that *Blackwood's* was consistently willing to distinguish Shelley's artistic abilities from his political philosophy, and his personal morality. These distinctions were impossible for Coleridge in the *Quarterly Review*.

In *Blackwood's*, the creative artist, particularly the poet, is generally granted a much higher status than in the pages of the Reviews. This approach is very clear in some of the theoretical articles to be found in the magazine, but is actually put into practice in its dealings with Shelley. In these reviews, we see *Blackwood's* actively trying to break free from the dominance of contemporary literary culture by party politics, a project

⁵⁸ 'Portraits of the Metropolitan Poets, No. III, Mr Percy Bysshe Shelley', *The Honeycomb*, 12 August 1820, pp. 65-72; quoted in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poems and Prose*, ed. by Timothy Webb (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), p. 496.

⁵⁹ 'Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Ollier, and William Blackwood: the contexts of early nineteenth-century publishing' in *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, ed. by Kelvin Everest (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), pp. 183-226 (p. 198).

which it made one of its major selling points. However, as we have seen, whilst on the one hand, the Shelley reviews sought to support this aim, this was only feasible by depoliticising the poet's genius. The only way in which 'a favourer of the Government and a religionist' *could* criticise him favourably was by arguing that Shelley's politics and poetry should be viewed entirely separately. Thus in the hands of *Blackwood's*, the apparent emancipation of literary criticism from politics was ultimately a conservative strategy. Literary genius was only allowed freedom in so far as it did not transgress against the respect for Church and State that the journal argued was fundamental to British culture.

Another important magazine in the movement away from the politicisation of literary culture was Baldwin's *London Magazine*, founded in 1820 in order that, according to its prospectus, the metropolis should no longer 'remain *unrepresented* in the now strenuous competition of Periodical Literature'.⁶⁰ Although its sales were much lower than *Blackwood's* (around two thousand), it contained much of the best prose writing of the period, including Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, Hazlitt's *Table-Talk*, and De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Like its Scottish rival, the *London* positioned itself against its periodical competitors by emphasising its lack of partisanship, and support for true genius. Its talented editor, John Scott, expressed his desire 'to give a free, independent and honest tone to literary discussion', and after a year of publication, claimed proudly that 'we have not made a single dead set at an author since we started'.⁶¹ In his rather belated review of Keats's *Endymion*, P. G. Patmore complained that the periodical press frequently sought to make criticism 'a means of depressing true genius' and this theme was continued by Scott a few months later.⁶² The

⁶⁰ John Scott, 'Preface', *LM*, I, p. iv.

⁶¹ 'Our Arrears', *LM*, December 1820, p. 626.

⁶² 'Endymion, A Poetic Romance', *LM*, April 1820, p. 380.

London's editor attacked partisan reviewing, and included *Blackwood's Magazine* in his admonitions:

We consider it one of the worst signs of these, the worst times which England, we are afraid, has ever seen, that the miserable selfishness of political party has erected itself into a literary authority, and established, by means of popular channels, the most direct and easy access to the public ear on literary questions. The provocation, we allow, is reciprocal: the vanity of the Examiner manifests just as great a deficiency in real candour as is apparent in the bitter spite of the Quarterly, or the merry ruffianism of Blackwood. But the distinct consciousness of depravity in the two latter, which must accompany them in many of their lucubrations, gives a blacker feature to their conduct.⁶³

Two months later, Scott launched a powerful and sustained attack on *Blackwood's*, accusing its writers of fraud, misuse of anonymity, 'the most licentious personal abuse' and so on. He particularly took issue with the 'Cockney School' articles, claiming that they were entirely *ad hominem* attacks which contained no 'genuine criticism'. He repeated and elaborated on these accusations in the following two numbers.⁶⁴ At this point literary warfare spilled into real violence; a painfully confused series of discussions between Lockhart, Scott and their representatives resulted in a grotesquely mismanaged duel between Scott and Lockhart's friend, Christie, at Chalk Farm in February 1821. Scott was fatally wounded. His death is a well-known example of the wanton excesses of literary warfare in the early nineteenth century.⁶⁵ What has not been noted is the sad irony that both Lockhart and Scott, as critics, claimed to be motivated by the same desire; promoting genius through literary journalism that was free of the influence of political allegiances. Their conflict should not be seen as proving this stance to be a sham, but rather as showing that, although the relative autonomy of the

⁶³ John Scott, 'Keats's Poems', *LM*, September 1820, p. 315. Scott could also be critical of the *Edinburgh Review*; see his article 'Living Authors No. II: Wordsworth', *LM*, March 1820, pp. 275-85.

⁶⁴ See John Scott, 'Blackwood's Magazine', *LM*, November 1820, pp. 509-21; 'The Mohock Magazine', *LM*, December 1820, pp. 666-85 and 'The Mohocks', *LM*, January 1821, pp. 76-77.

⁶⁵ A detailed account of the duel and the events leading up to it can be found in Patrick O'Leary, *Regency Editor: The Life of John Scott* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983), chapters 8 and 9.

literary field did increase during the Romantic period, this shift was slow, limited, and always partially compromised.

At the same time as Scott was announcing that the *London* sought to give a new tone to literary discussion, a similar change was occurring in the case of one of its principal rivals, the *New Monthly Magazine*. This was founded in 1814 by the publisher Henry Colburn as a strongly Tory opponent to Sir Richard Phillips's liberal *Monthly Magazine*. But in 1821, the Whiggish poet Thomas Campbell became editor and the journal was re-titled the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. Under Campbell's editorship, it became much less politically engaged and quickly attracted a number of the best writers, including Hazlitt, Lamb and Stendhal. In the 'Preface' to the relaunched *New Monthly*, Campbell was keen to emphasise that this was no longer a partisan journal, and stated that

it does not follow, from the general utility of political discussion, that it should invariably pervade every species of literary composition, or that there should be no calm spot in the world of periodical literature where all minds of common charity and candour may meet without the asperities of party feeling.⁶⁶

The transformation of the *New Monthly* from a fiercely political organ into a fashionable miscellany that sought to avoid political controversy can, I think, be taken as an extreme example of the changes that were happening across literary culture at the beginning of the 1820s, as the political ferment of the post-war years began to subside. Colburn was extremely sensitive to market conditions and was clearly aware that readers were becoming less interested in political discussion. However, this hiatus was short-lived; the founding of the *Westminster Review* in 1824 not only marked the entry of a powerful progressive voice into the field of periodical literature, but also the slow stirrings of a

⁶⁶Thomas Campbell, 'Preface', *NMM*, 1821, p. v.

new agitation in the public sphere which was eventually to lead to the Reform Bill of 1832.⁶⁷

IV

‘Genius’ was a key term in the literary criticism of the late Romantic period, but, as we saw in the case of Francis Jeffrey, some writers viewed it with suspicion. In 1812, Barbara Hofland published the first of many editions of her popular conduct novel, *The Son of a Genius*.⁶⁸ This attempted to teach young people that intellectual gifts were useless without self-control, humility, and religious feeling. The genius of the title, a gifted painter called Mr Lewis, eventually drags his family into penury because of his belief that the ‘super-excellence of possessing Genius’ means that he does not need to work hard, or conduct his affairs with prudence.⁶⁹ His wife, however, is determined to prevent her son from following in his father’s footsteps:

[she] had some portion of that finer perception of beauty and excellence, which, in whatever path it walks, may be designated *genius*: but she had an aversion to the *word*, amounting almost to horror, from having observed its application tend to injure either nearly, or remotely, every one to whom it had been her lot to see it applied; and as it was ever in *her* mind associated with imprudence, imbecility, folly, or vice, was made the excuse for one man’s eccentricities, another man’s errors, and not unfrequently the crimes of a third; it was no wonder that she shrunk from its application to a son [...] We flatter ourselves every young person who like him has been praised for this rare, indefinite, and often blameably extolled quality so much the subject of attention in the present day, will see the folly of depending upon it either for happiness, or respectability, in *this* world, and the sin of making it an excuse for neglecting *that* “which is to come”.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For the *Westminster*, see George L. Nesbitt, *Benthamite Reviewing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934). Andrew Hemingway has discussed its attitude towards genius in ‘Genius, Gender and Progress: Benthamism and the Arts in the 1820s’, *Art History*, 16 (1992), 619-46.

⁶⁸ Hofland’s follow-up novel, *The Daughter of a Genius*, which also went through many editions, was first published in 1823.

⁶⁹ Barbara Hofland, *The Son of a Genius: A Tale for the Use of Youth* (London: J. Harris, 1812), p. 88.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

Hofland's main target is similar to Jeffrey's: contemporary belief in '*the dispensing power of genius*'. The interest of the novel lies, I think, in its ambivalence about the nature of genius. In the passage above, Hofland reduces it to simply a form of taste, and at one point in the story, Mrs Lewis tells her son that the attainments of great men are the result of 'a decided preference for a particular art or science', combined with hard work: 'this preference is called *taste*, and united with perseverance, it produced that superiority which became *genius*'.⁷¹ But at other times, Hofland clearly accepts that people do have high mental abilities without having worked for them:

in proportion as the mind is endued with higher powers, and acuter sensibilities, it is annoyed with stronger passions, and more dangerous propensities, and calls in a more peculiar manner for the controul of reason, and the aids and restrictions of religion.⁷²

The danger she identifies, then, is actually twofold. First, that the word 'genius' is too often used as an excuse for immoral or imprudent behaviour, and secondly, that genius, or something very like it, has 'dangerous propensities' which need to be controlled.

The continued prevalence of the term during the 1820s led to a negative reaction, prompted mainly, I think, by two forces: the professionalisation of authorship, and the growth of Evangelical morality. This reaction is apparent even in the pages of *Blackwood's*, for which the idea of genius was so important. Shortly before becoming editor of the *Quarterly Review* in 1825, Lockhart reviewed Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges's *Recollections*, which he claimed was 'extremely dangerous to young minds'. First, because Brydges argues that genius 'incapacitates a man for mixing in the ordinary society and business of the world', and secondly, because he encourages the view that the only thing of value in literature is self-expression regardless of 'art, arrangement,

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

condensation' and so on. As a result, young people who lack real ability are encouraged to attempt to make literature their trade:

That one word *genius* has done more harm than anything in the vocabulary. It has been prostituted until it has lost all meaning. Not a beardless driveller in the land who does not expect, if he produces a sonnet on a rose-leaf, that we shall see *genius* in his bauble. Genius, so help us, inspires the leading articles of our newspapers - the small print of our Magazines is redolent of *genius*!⁷³

Lockhart's problem is that genius has been debased, not only through overuse, and through its association with weakness, eccentricity, and unpopularity. His dislike of what he terms 'THE MOPING SCHOOL' is not, I think, primarily political; in fact, he admires Brydges as a thoroughbred Tory. But the *Blackwood's* notion of genius as a conduit of national *power* is vitiated by the term being associated with antisociality and 'beardless driveller[s]'.

A more moralistic reaction can be found in the magazine four years later. In one of John Wilson's *Noctes Ambrosianae*, a series of conversations between *Blackwood's* imaginary contributors, Christopher North (the fictional editor of the magazine) states that, 'we idolize Genius, to the neglect of the worship of Virtue'.⁷⁴ He lambasts the idea that genius is an excuse for transgression: 'it makes my very soul sick within me to hear the puny whinings poured by philosophical sentimentalists over the failings - the errors - the vices of genius.' And he particularly focuses on Burns; speaking of the poet's 'aberrations', he attacks those critics who 'dared to declare that we were bound to forgive and forget them on the score of the poet's genius - as if genius, the guardian of virtue, could ever be regarded as the pandar to vice, and the slave of sin.'⁷⁵ There are two important differences between Wilson's argument and Jeffrey's. First, his primary

⁷³ John Gibson Lockhart, 'Sir Egerton Brydges's Recollections', *BEM*, May 1825, p. 506.

⁷⁴ John Wilson, 'Noctes Ambrosianae No. XLII', *BEM*, April 1829, p. 536.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 537.

complaint about the idolatry of genius is that it is irreligious, rather than socially dangerous, although this may also be implied. And secondly, Wilson wants to give an alternative account of genius to the one that he associates with Burns. For, as we saw in the reviews for Shelley, genius is not generally represented as a transgressive force in *Blackwood's*, but as 'the guardian of virtue'.

The best example of the 1820s reaction against genius is *The Spirit and Manners of the Age*, which represented it not as virtue's guardian, but as its enemy. This moderately priced Evangelical journal, published in London, appeared weekly from 1826 to 1829, before becoming the short-lived *British Magazine* (1830). In the Preface to the first volume, its purpose is described as being 'to impart just views of men and manners; to form a correct taste for literary pursuits; to advocate the cause of humanity, virtue, and, above all, to give prominence to the sublime proofs and principles of genuine Christianity'.⁷⁶ There is very little information available about the *Spirit and Manners of the Age*; all that I have been able to discover is that in 1829 it was edited by Samuel Carter Hall, who continued in this role when it changed into the *British Magazine*, and later became editor of the *New Monthly*.⁷⁷ It was a miscellany which contained a variety of mostly anonymous articles: didactic moral tales, reviews, poems, disquisitions on the evils of slavery, attacks on irreligion, and so on. One of its constant themes was the personal and literary transgressions of men of genius. An early series of five 'Sketches of Biography and Character' discussed Sheridan, Byron, Burns, Cowper, and Bloomfield, and drew moral lessons from the unfortunate histories of these individuals. For example,

⁷⁶'Preface', *SMA*, I, p. vi.

⁷⁷Samuel Carter Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life: From 1815 to 1883*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1883), I, 314. Hall probably edited *SMA* from 1826 to 1828, although this is not clear from his account. There is a short account of the *British Magazine*, whose contributors included Letitia Landon and John Clare, by Lance Schacterle in *British Literary Magazines*, pp. 66-68. Schacterle mentions *SMA* in passing - this is the only reference to the periodical that I have found in modern criticism.

that Sheridan's life 'should teach us, that genius without virtue is but a fire which consumes its possessor'.⁷⁸ The article on Burns prompted a lament on his sufferings:

Genius, alas! alas! what are the varieties of thy history? - melancholy, disease, poverty, insanity, and premature dissolution! Warm-hearted Burns! thou wert too genuine a son of the Muse to run thy brief career unscathed by the ills which are allotted to her children [...] Thine errors we can neither excuse or palliate [...] But thou hadst virtues as well as vices, and these thy verses have embalmed - would that they were not also the record of thy follies.⁷⁹

This is a fairly typical account of Burns in the 'calamities of authors' tradition, but with an added emphasis that his sufferings and passions - even though they may have been 'allotted' to him by his Muse - do not excuse Burns's behaviour. However, the tone here is sympathetic in comparison with later articles in the magazine which took a more punitive approach to the errors of genius. Byron was a particularly useful hook on which the magazine's writers could hang moral disquisitions. The issue for 17 June 1826 contained an article entitled 'The Cant of Lord Byron' which attacked the poet for ridiculing everything 'esteemed fundamental, sacred, and indisputable by Englishmen' and predicted that his fame would prove transitory.⁸⁰ This assertion was answered the following week by a writer who claimed that Byron 'will descend to posterity as a poetical genius of a very high order' - however, this was anything but a defence of the poet, for the writer added that this 'only increases his moral delinquency'.⁸¹ Byron is represented as a terrible corrupting influence on the age whose genius has prevented critics from chastising him, and the article concludes that 'the meanest follower of Christ, with an intellect but a few removes from idiotcy' is 'a far more distinguished and glorious being than this infidel and licentious man of genius'.⁸²

⁷⁸ 'Sketches of Biography and Character No. I: Sheridan', *SMA*, 21 January 1826, p. 39.

⁷⁹ 'N.', 'Sketches of Biography and Character No. V: Robert Burns', *SMA*, 20 May 1826, pp. 317-18.

⁸⁰ *SMA*, 17 June 1826, p. 372.

⁸¹ 'Lord Byron and his Writings', *SMA*, 24 June 1826, p. 384.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 390.

It is hardly surprising that a writer in an Evangelical magazine would value Christian feeling over mental ability, but it is interesting that the writers of the *Spirit and Manners of the Age* felt obliged to keep up an unremitting assault against misapplied genius. The most notable example of this is an article which appeared in the issue for 21 October 1826, the title of which encapsulated the magazine's continual claim that 'Literary Men [were] often the Patrons and Apologists of Vice'. The premise of this bizarre piece of writing is that 'the master spirits in the republic of genius are generally among the most sceptical and depraved of their species' who are 'endeavouring to hasten on a universal corruption of social manners' by attacking Christianity.⁸³ This is because they are 'generally men of strong and ardent passions, impatient of restraint', and 'too lofty in the imaginative conceptions to yield to the government of those common-place maxims, on which the virtue and happiness of society depend'.⁸⁴ Such a representation of the man of genius as a radical force is similar, in some ways, to the extreme outbursts of the German *Stürmer und Dränger*; the difference is that the writers of the conservative *Spirit and Manners of the Age* greatly fear the power of these 'master spirits' to disrupt society.

The article goes on to describe these geniuses as 'alternately the apologists and the defenders of each other's conduct', which leads the writer to quote the stanza from 'The Vision' which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. He is even more appalled by Burns's special pleading than Jeffrey or Wilson:

If this were a sentiment held exclusively by the late bard of Scotland, I should not have been at the trouble of transcribing the lines in which it is expressed; but as it is becoming a popular opinion, and so dangerous in its moral influence and consequences, I cannot let it pass without offering some remarks on it. If that great Being who created the intellectual powers of man created his vicious propensities, than man becomes *an object of pity, but not of blame*. To what a

⁸³ 'Literary Men often the Patrons and Apologists of Vice', *SMA*, 21 October 1826, pp. 241-42.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 241.

frightful extent will this doctrine carry us. We see the fell murderer embruing his hand in the blood of his brother's life! We see the spoiler of domestic happiness coming up, and laying waste every safeguard which has been thrown around our virtue and our honour! We see the midnight plunderer bearing off our property, after he had abused and insulted our persons. But when arraigned and accused of these crimes, would an honest jury acquit them, if they were to offer as an apology, the apology which a depraved genius, and his impassioned admirers, think admissable.⁸⁵

We recall that Jeffrey initially identified the idea of eccentric genius as a threat to society, but proceeded to make it safe by arguing that it had not taken hold in England, and reducing it to having only affected the actions of a handful of foolish German students. In contrast, this writer describes, somewhat hysterically, its possible effects as a total breakdown in law and order. This is because the claim that 'the *light* that led astray/ Was *light* from heaven' threatens the idea that we have full responsibility for our actions. However, although it is 'becoming a popular opinion' that genius is allowed moral transgressions, the writer asserts that an 'honest jury' would not acquit a genius guilty of the crimes he has described, and his statement that such erring individuals must 'stand amenable [...] to the tribunal of public opinion' serves to imply that ultimately this tribunal will share the opinion of the *Spirit and Manners of the Age*, which is that

such men, by being entrusted with superior abilities, ought to have employed them for the *moral* benefit of mankind, in a degree and to an extent equal to their capacities and opportunities, and the responsibility which they were under to *Him* who requires much where much has been given; but having, like the author of all evil, failed to maintain the high elevation of their dignity, and prostituted their talents to offend God and corrupt man, our admiration for their genius is lost amidst those more righteous emotions which a recollection of their sad history excites within us; and while we cannot forbear to pity, we cannot forbear to condemn.⁸⁶

The problem with the argument of this article is that the writer states initially that the mental constitutions of men of genius cause them to transgress socially beneficial

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 242. Burns's argument is also criticised as 'a gross impiety' in the Preface to the third volume of *SMA*.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 243.

'common-place maxims', but later tries to separate the 'intellectual powers of man' from his 'vicious propensities' in order to show that a divine gift could never have immoral or antisocial effects. His opening remarks thus comes perilously close to the argument that he is seeking to attack, for if men of genius are bound by their 'lofty imaginative conceptions' to offend against society, then it hard to see how this cannot be, in all justice, at least a partial palliation of their crimes. This contradiction occurs throughout the *Spirit and Manners of the Age*; its writers, unlike Lockhart and Wilson in *Blackwood's*, or, as we shall see, Heraud and Brydges in *Fraser's Magazine*, do not tend to argue that genius is *essentially* virtuous and socially conservative and that, for example, Shelley's political opinions or moral transgressions have nothing to do with his poetic abilities. Rather, they seem to believe that they have found 'something rotten' and rebellious in genius itself which it is their duty to reveal to their readers. This extreme stance may have been a result of the magazine's anomalous position as a self-styled 'Christian and Literary Miscellany'; perhaps it was only possible for an Evangelical magazine to evince literary interests by constantly reminding its readers that it had no time for the moral errors of men of genius. We should also recall that the magazine's readership - due to its relatively low price and denominational stance - would have been mostly different from the cultured, upper middle-class audience who were the main consumers of the literary periodicals that I deal with in this thesis. This latter audience had a great investment in 'literature' and genius - in fact, it could be argued that it was the means by which they constituted themselves as a public - and they might have been unreceptive to articles which sought to denigrate its importance as a source of value. On the other hand, those who may have felt themselves excluded from literary culture by

education or social class, may have been more receptive to articles which constantly emphasised that religious faith was far more important than literary ability.⁸⁷

V

After the death of Byron in 1824, and the publishing crash of 1825-26, disquisitions on the decline of literature became common among periodical writers. If there were fewer accusations that reviewers were politically motivated, there was more lamentation about the damaging effects that the literary marketplace had on genius.⁸⁸ Concern was frequently expressed about the public taste for newspapers, 'meretricious' poetry, or 'fashionable' novels and the bias displayed by periodicals towards other works published by their proprietors, particularly the practice of 'puffing' - advertising a work in the guise of a review. Accusations of 'puffing' became a new vehicle of conflict between periodicals, as well as a way for new journals to assert their independence. For example, William Maginn, writing in the second number of the scurrilous and short-lived *John Bull Magazine*, complained in verse that all reviewers were 'great humbugs', with the exception of himself:

What clown from St. Bees, or Dumbarton, or Dunstable,
Does not know that Frank Jeff is but scrub to A. Constable.
That no volume would suffer that critic's damnation,
Which came from the mountain of Old Proclamation.

Who thinks that cross Gifford would venture to worry
A quarto, red-hot, from the counter of Murray;
That Campbell would treat a smart novel from Colburn
As if it were printed by Benbow, in Holborn.

⁸⁷There is a certain similarity here with the *Westminster Review's* suspicion of literature and the fine arts as aristocratic tools for the perpetuation of class divisions; see Nesbitt, pp. 102-03, and Hemingway, *passim*.

⁸⁸A good example is 'On Modern Literature, and Periodical Criticism', by Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1823, pp. 218-20. Brydges lists thirteen different ways in which periodical criticism is 'pernicious to the public mind'.

Would a volume of Taylor and Hessey's be undone,
 We ask you, my friend, by a cut from the London?
 Or would not Old Monthly keep silent and still lips
 'Gainst the slips of a pamphlet from Sir Richard Phillips.⁸⁹

Six years later, as editor of *Fraser's Magazine*, Maginn would frequently attack contemporary literary culture and its subservience to the laws of the market. *Fraser's*, founded in 1830, has been caricatured by Terry Eagleton as 'an insulting rag', but in fact it was by far the best magazine of the 1830s, with similar sales to the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*.⁹⁰ It continued the spirit of *Blackwood's*, which was by now relatively respectable, into a new decade, packed full of squibs, doggerel, invective, personal attacks, and some fine writing which generally adhered to a strongly Tory ethos. Maginn's character, a strange mixture of childish vindictiveness, deep erudition, emotional volatility and brilliant creativity, pervades the pages of the magazine. In its early years, *Fraser's* positioned itself against its competitors by accusing them (with some justification) of being dominated by commercial interests, especially in their reviewing. Thus in 'L'Envoy' to the second volume, the writer, probably Maginn, justified the harshness of the magazine's criticism as a response to 'puffing' practices:

we know that some have considered us rather too severe every now and then, and recommended more lenient applications [...] We say, in our justification, we have a constant and daily provocation to our spleen, in the flourishing vigour of the puff system. There is not a book published of the slightest importance - (*i. e.* which costs the publisher any sum of money worth caring about) - which in one quarter or another of the critical or pseudocritical world, is not sure of being lauded in terms of the most outrageous eulogy, were it the stupidest and the basest of all human compositions.⁹¹

⁸⁹ William Maginn, 'The Rhyming Review', *JBM*, August 1824, p. 76.

⁹⁰ Eagleton, p. 37. For more helpful assessments of the periodical, see Miriam J. Thrall's indispensable *Rebellious Fraser's* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934) and J. Van Dann, 'Fraser's Magazine', in *British Literary Magazines*, pp. 171-75.

⁹¹ William Maginn, 'L'Envoy', *FM*, January 1831, p. 745. Although *Fraser's* tended to represent itself as conducting a lonely campaign against puffing, one should note that the *Athenaeum's* campaign started earlier, and was conducted with more fairness and rigour; see Leslie A. Marchand, *The Athenaeum: A Mirror of Victorian Culture* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), chapter 2.

If 'puffing' was one example of the degraded nature of contemporary literature, *Fraser's* other major literary target was the fashionable novel and in particular the work of Edward Lytton Bulwer, writer of 'silver fork' and 'Newgate' fiction, editor of the *New Monthly Magazine* during the early 1830s, dandified man about town, and Radical politician. The novels of such an author, it was argued, were necessarily showy and superficial: 'Man cannot serve God and Mammon. It is denied him to be a labourer in the field of fashion and the field of intellect.'⁹² In June 1830, Maginn attacked Bulwer in particular for producing fiction that lacked any sort of improving qualities: 'What noble faculties are addressed in such works? Are they calculated to make readers in general better or worse? - to brace up manly energy and promote heroic virtue?'⁹³ Maginn's recourse to the language of virtue here, which is not particularly typical of his writings, serves his purpose of constructing Bulwer as an effeminate purveyor of fashionable luxuries. He goes on to state that the novelist is 'an intellectual libertine' who defies the rules of art. Bulwer is a mechanical producer of novels for a debased reading public, and his works lack the organic sensibility to be found in works of lasting value, which itself reveals his lack of genius.⁹⁴

What is particularly interesting about *Fraser's Magazine* is that at the same time as it was attacking contemporary literary culture as awash with shallow luxuries, in its early years its writers seem almost obsessed with the subject of (literary) genius. They are constantly defining it, analysing it, generalising about it, and discussing the relationship between the genius and society. One can understand why identifying genius might have become a particular issue when there was a perceived dearth of it in modern Britain. For most contemporary critics, the collapse of the market for poetry proved that

⁹² William Maginn and possibly John Abraham Heraud, 'Fashionable Novels', *FM*, April 1830, p. 321.

⁹³ William Maginn and possibly John Abraham Heraud, 'Mr Edward Lytton Bulwer's Novels; and Remarks on Novel-Writing', *FM*, June 1830, p. 512.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 514.

they were living in a literary 'age of Bronze', and the chorus of lamentation grew louder during the early 1830s, when, it was often claimed, the Reform Bill agitation resulted in 'Literature' being ignored by the public.⁹⁵ At the same time, the continuing expansion of the periodical press saw the emergence of a new class of professional journalists, the existence of which, as Nigel Cross has pointed out, problematised earlier models of authorship because they were perceived neither as 'men of genius' nor as booksellers' hacks.⁹⁶ Considering these pressures, it is not surprising that in the late Romantic period, discussions of genius, particularly poetic genius, exhibited an urgency and tendency to polemicise which was not the case earlier in the nineteenth century. Patrick Leary has written that in its early years, *Fraser's* 'stands astride a fault line of conceptions of what constitutes the literary life' between 'the Romantic ideal of the literary man as heroic genius' and 'the mid-Victorian author-businessman as a respectable literary professional'.⁹⁷ This is true up to a point, although I would add that another possible conception of 'the literary life' which was sometimes important to the magazine was the author as hard-living Bohemian. And Leary's claim that *Fraser's* position entailed a 'distaste for the pretensions of the Romantic ideal' is entirely inaccurate, for in fact one can find articles in *Fraser's* during the 1830s which are the *ne plus ultra* of Romantic notions of genius.⁹⁸

However, it is impossible to describe a unified Fraserian attitude to 'genius'; rather, the magazine can be viewed as containing a cross-section of contemporary discourse on the subject. For example, in July 1833, in the first part of his historical biography 'Count Cagliostro', Thomas Carlyle says of his subject's youth, 'we hear that

⁹⁵ There is still very little work on the literary culture of the 1830s; one good modern account is Kathryn Chittick's *Dickens and the 1830s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially chapter 2. For an examination of some of the ways in which writers of this period assimilated the work of their Romantic forebears, see Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824-1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

⁹⁶ Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 90-91.

⁹⁷ 'Fraser's Magazine and the Literary Life, 1830-1847', *VPR*, 27 (1994), 105-26 (p. 106).

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

Beppo was “often punished:” painful experiences of the fate of genius;- for all genius, by its nature, comes to disturb *somebody* in his ease, and your thief-genius more so than most!”⁹⁹ Yet for other ‘Fraserians’, such as John Abraham Heraud and Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, who gave genius a semi-divine status and emphasised its consonance with virtue, the very yoking of the words ‘thief’ and ‘genius’ would have been little short of blasphemous.

The transgressive nature of genius had become a particular issue in the early 1830s due to the spate of biographies of Byron that had appeared after the poet’s death in 1824, in particular Leigh Hunt’s *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (1828), and Thomas Moore’s ‘authorised’ *Life of Byron* (1830-31). Moore’s biography, despite a much more generous approach to its subject than Hunt’s hatchet-job, contained some lengthy and controversial remarks on the relationship between the artist and society, particularly on the ‘unmarriageability’ of genius. In the first volume Moore states baldly that ‘the truth is, I fear, that rarely, if ever, have men of the highest order of genius shown themselves fitted for the calm affections and comforts that form the cement of domestic life.’ He goes on to argue that if a man of genius wishes to achieve greatness, he must avoid being ‘tamed and domesticated in society’, as social affections disturb the ‘power of self-concentration’ which is essential to genius.¹⁰⁰

Moore’s comments were defended by the physician R. R. Madden in his book *The Infirmities of Genius* (1833), itself an interesting adumbration of scientific accounts of the pathology of genius later in the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ Madden argues that the studious habits of literary men are injurious to their physical health, and therefore cause

⁹⁹ Thomas Carlyle, ‘Count Cagliostro: in Two Flights. Flight First’, *FM*, July 1833, p. 25. Reprinted in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by H. D. Traill, 30 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896-99), XXVIII, 264.

¹⁰⁰ Lord George Gordon Byron and Thomas Moore, *The Works of Lord Byron: With his Letters and Journals and his Life*, 17 vols (London: John Murray, 1833), III, 125-36.

¹⁰¹ *The Infirmities of Genius*, 2 vols (London: Saunders & Otley, 1833), I, 157-59. For later scientific debates about genius, see George Becker, *The Mad Genius Controversy* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978).

mental 'irritability'. He seems to place some weight on the idea of the 'poetic temperament', but concentrates mainly on the physical causes that he believes lie behind the errors and improvidence of men like Byron. Such arguments, as well as the explicit association of the poet with various forms of transgression in more lurid, if less prestigious, publications, made Byron a locus for debates about the relationship between the artist and society.¹⁰²

Dealing with Byron was a severe problem for conservative writers such as Heraud, poet, disciple of Coleridge and follower of German transcendentalism. Heraud was Maginn's editorial assistant and wrote many articles on literature and aesthetics for *Fraser's*. In an article for the opening number of the magazine, entitled 'On Poetical Genius, Considered as a Creative Power', Heraud attacks theories of genius as a form of association of ideas, and argues that genius has the 'power of creation in the most extended sense; not only in the combination of ideas, but ideas themselves, primarily and underived, as its own absolute and independent production.'¹⁰³ He emphasises that this power is a divine gift - a 'vital spark of heavenly flame' - and cannot be acquired by education; the creations of the genius, and those of God, are different only in degree.¹⁰⁴ This elevation of the creative artist - for Heraud is most interested in poetic genius - to an individual with literally divine abilities has some basis in the Classical tradition of poetic frenzy, however, its main source is the philosophical idealism that Heraud had imbued from Coleridge.

In order to maintain his argument that genius was a divine gift, and that men of genius had God-like power, Heraud had to divest it of its newly resurgent associations

¹⁰²There is a detailed discussion of Moore's account of Byron as genius in Joseph Reed, *English Biography in the Early Nineteenth Century: 1801-1838* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), chapter 6. For a good account of Byronism in the 1830s, see Andrew Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter 2.

¹⁰³John Abraham Heraud, 'On Poetic Genius, Considered as a Creative Power', *FM*, February 1830, p. 57.

¹⁰⁴Miriam J. Thrall reminds us that Heraud's view that genius had innate qualities that led it to a certain vocation is the opposite of Carlyle's theory of genius, in which the path that a great man takes depends on the demands of his age rather than his particular bent. She also shows that by December 1834, Heraud was voicing Carlyle's opinion, rather than the one he had expressed in 1830. See *Rebellious Fraser's*, pp. 88-91, 264.

with insanity and other forms of transgression. Thus in the following issue of *Fraser's*, in an article on William Blake, he argues that it is *a priori* impossible that such a gift, which gives its possessor 'a participation in the rights, privileges, and attributes of beatified saints' can have anything to do with sickness.

By abstraction from the world, and self-reflection, and self-improvement, and self-regeneration, genius will ultimately make man a partaker of the joys of heaven [...] But that this blessed consummation should be induced through the means of imbecility and disease, we doubt altogether [...] By the thorough cultivation of genius, man partakes of a portion of the essence of the Divinity. How can this state be akin to madness,- the most lamentable infirmity to which humanity has been made subject?¹⁰⁵

Heraud is an heir to the Romantic elevation of the poetic genius to a man of great moral virtue which we find in Wordsworth, Shelley, and Coleridge, pushed to an extreme which links genius inextricably with Christian spirituality.¹⁰⁶ This argument is expressed even more strongly in a short pamphlet he published in 1837 entitled *Substance of a Lecture on Poetic Genius as a Moral Power*, a transcendentalist farrago in which he argues that genius is a manifestation of 'the divine WORD',¹⁰⁷ and that only the 'moral poet' is capable of original creation, because his possession by 'the universal Spirit' allows him to escape from the influence of his forebears.¹⁰⁸

Heraud deals with Byron in a review of John Galt's biography of the poet.¹⁰⁹ His praise for the book is tempered by his assertion that Galt is incapable of discussing 'metaphysical abstractions', and as evidence he quotes a rather confused passage in

¹⁰⁵ John Abraham Heraud, 'The Last of the Supernaturalists', *FM*, March 1830, p. 217. In this attribution I am following Thrall. Her argument for Heraud's authorship of the article is fairly compelling; see *Rebellious Fraser's*, p. 267.

¹⁰⁶ The claim that great poets are necessarily virtuous is made most powerfully by Shelley in the *Defence of Poetry*. But it is also strongly implied in Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, and Coleridge's chapter on the 'Supposed Irritability of Men of Genius' in the *Biographia Literaria*; see, respectively, Ingpen and Peck, VII, 118; Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, I, 138; *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, 2 vols, I, 30-47, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 7, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

¹⁰⁷ John Abraham Heraud, *Substance of a Lecture on Poetic Genius as a Moral Power* (London: James Fraser, 1837), p. 36.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁹ John Abraham Heraud and William Maginn, 'Galt's Life of Byron', *FM*, October 1830, pp. 347-70. All further references to this article are within the text. Assuming that Thrall is right about the authors of this article (p. 285), I suspect that Maginn wrote the first three pages of the review, but am fairly certain that the passages on Byron's genius are by Heraud.

which Galt discusses genius; Heraud rightly points out that this is ‘too full of discursive imagery to lead to any intelligible definition’ (p. 366), and goes on to give an alternative account: ‘it may be simply described as the communicative intellect between God and man, the power of self-intuition [...] It is the primary imagination, which is set forth in the following passage from Mr. Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*’ (p. 367). He then quotes Coleridge’s passage on the primary and secondary imagination from chapter 13 of the *Biographia*. I will take Heraud’s definition of genius as ‘the primary imagination’ to be either a typographical error or a surprising misreading of Coleridge, for if that was what he meant to say he would effectively be claiming that all individuals had genius, which is certainly not his argument. Assuming him to mean the *secondary* imagination, then, as in the previous article, genius is represented not only as a rare gift, but one that elevates its possessor to partake of the divine. And as one might expect, this sanctified representation of genius does not really fit Byron: ‘The question is, had Byron that inappreciable gift which we denominate genius? We think, undoubtedly not. Was he the truly great and lofty poet which his admirers would make him? By the same rule, we think not’ (pp. 367-68). Although Byron’s merits were the subject of vigorous debate at this time, it was rare for a writer to actually deny that he had genius. Heraud is able to do this by defining this faculty as the highest form of Christian spirituality, rather than relying on more usual definitions such as high mental abilities or artistic originality. For the problem with Byron is not his abilities as a versifier, but the fact that his pride and misanthropy lead him to write about the ‘baser passions of the soul’ (p. 370). The themes of his poetry degrade rather than elevate mankind.

Heraud’s criticisms of Byron were not particularly original, but his use of them to deny that the poet had genius was strikingly novel - as we have seen, even the morally outraged writers of the *Spirit and Manners of the Age* did not normally go so far.

Perhaps his argument is best seen as part of the early stirrings of the moralistic reaction against Byronism that was to lead to a decline in the poet's reputation in the late 1830s and the 1840s.¹¹⁰ Predictably enough, the contemporary poet who most seemed to cohere with that period's - and Heraud's - governing representation of poetic genius was Wordsworth.¹¹¹ In the pages of *Fraser's*, we see a continuation of the idealisation of the poet which began in the early volumes of *Blackwood's Magazine* and was to become much more prevalent in the Victorian period. In his review of the Wordsworth's *Poetical Works* in November 1832, Heraud is keen to emphasise the 'moral purity' of his writings.¹¹² Three years later, in a review of *Yarrow Revisited*, the writer, probably Heraud, narrates the transformation of the poet into a priestly figure: 'Wordsworth is no longer the poet of nature altogether or mainly - no longer the natural theologian in chief, but the druid of a purer faith - the minstrel of a holier shrine. His religion is now of heaven'.¹¹³ Wordsworth is the perfect exemplar of Heraud's theory of genius because he seems to exhibit the reconciliation of the poetic imagination with moral and religious duty, both as natural theologian in his youth and a 'heavenly' poet in his maturity. Of course this narrative sidesteps the difficulties of reconciling Wordsworth's *oeuvre* with Anglicanism.

Wordsworth was also useful to Heraud because his growing reputation could be adduced as proof that true genius would rise above neglect and calumny, thus revealing that it had divine sanction. The theme of neglected genius was given popular form earlier in the century by Isaac D'Israeli in numerous editions of *The Calamities of Authors* and

¹¹⁰See Samuel Chew, *Byron in England* (London: John Murray, 1924), chapter 12.

¹¹¹David S. Hogsette has argued that early Victorian critics represented Coleridge 'as a poetic and intellectual saint around whom a stable cultural history could be established'; 'Coleridge as Victorian Heirloom: Nostalgic Rhetoric in the Early Victorian Reviews of *Poetical Works*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 37 (1998), 63-75 (p. 63). However, as Robert Lapp has shown, Coleridge was a much more equivocal figure than Hogsette suggests, for in *Fraser's* he was also depicted as an anarchic *bon-vivant*; 'Romanticism Repackaged: The New Faces of "Old Man" Coleridge in *Fraser's Magazine*, 1830-35', *European Romantic Review*, 11 (2000), 235-47. I would suggest that Hogsette's description is much more applicable to representations of the notoriously clean-living Wordsworth than to those of his fellow Lake Poet.

¹¹²John Abraham Heraud, 'Wordsworth's *Poetical Works*', *FM*, November 1832, p. 619.

¹¹³Probably John Abraham Heraud, 'Wordsworth's New Volume of Poetry', *FM*, June 1835, p. 702.

The Literary Character. It was an issue that received fresh impetus from the deaths of Keats and Byron as exiles far from their native country, and remained current into the 1830s; this was partly due to the decline in the market for individual books of poetry, which contributed to a sense that modern literature was dominated by mediocre novelists who produced 'trashy' writings and the periodical critics who applauded them. Authors such as Richard Henry Horne, Allan Cunningham, Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, and, in the field of the fine arts, Benjamin Robert Haydon, all wrote bitterly about the way in which contemporary society maltreated the truly original and creative artist.

VI

Brydges was *Fraser's Magazine's* very own 'neglected genius'. Born in 1762, he was a prolific poet, genealogist, editor of Elizabethan literature, *soi-disant* aristocrat and had been Member of Parliament for Maidstone during the 1810s. As an occasional contributor to *Fraser's* during the 1830s (he died in September 1837), he complained vociferously in its pages about the attitude that society took to men of genius, and in particular, the way it had treated him.¹¹⁴ He felt that his literary merits, especially as a poet, had not been acknowledged either by critics or by the reading public. Brydges published eight articles and a few sonnets in *Fraser's* during the period from 1833 to 1837. All of the articles are on literary themes, and all contain disquisitions on the subject of genius. Four are mainly on this topic: 'On Intellectual Endowments' (September 1833); 'Sir Egerton Brydges' Reply to the "Edinburgh Review"' (December 1834); 'On the Charge that Men of Genius and High Talents Want Judgment and Practical Sense'

¹¹⁴Brydges seems to have been forced into periodical writing in old age due to the legal expenses incurred by his failed attempts to prove that he had a legitimate claim to the baronetcy of Chandos; see Leary, p. 117.

(June 1836) and 'An Essay on Originality of Mind' (May 1837). These essays are fairly lengthy and tend to be both repetitive and digressive, lacking any strong or coherent argument. However, taken as a whole they do construct a very interesting representation of the genius as a figure neglected and victimised by his fellow men. I want now to give a general account of three of the articles, before focusing in particular on Brydges's argument with the *Edinburgh Review*.

In 'On Intellectual Endowments', Brydges constructs a familiar, if extreme, formulation of the relationship between the artist and society. He begins by asserting that 'every one is really great in proportion to the greatness of his intellectual powers, provided they are accompanied by virtue', and he describes genius as 'an intuitive power, in which sagacity and sensibility operate on imagination'.¹¹⁵ Like Heraud, he emphasises its divine nature, though without recourse to the former's idealism:

it does not deal in tricky subtleties and plausible falsehoods [...] but in that moral wisdom which comes from the mingled fountain of head and heart [...] It must be something that approaches to the axiomatic wisdom of the moral part of the sacred writings. God has sent us into the world with spiritual powers to operate upon matter; it is the act of associating those spiritual powers with matter, and bringing them thus into view, that constitutes the great duty of genius. (p. 292)

Because genius is so morally pure, its possessor needs to seclude himself from the rest of mankind who are engaged 'in an unprincipled struggle for selfish advantages' (p. 292). And the intellectual faculties are weakened by social intercourse: 'when the ardour of genius endeavours to keep down its impetuosities, it loses its strength and its zest. The collision of society forces us to smooth down our roughnesses, and, with our roughnesses, all our characteristics' (p. 293).

We should note here the absolute contrast between this description of the relationship between genius and society, and that found in the *Edinburgh and Quarterly*

¹¹⁵Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, 'On Intellectual Endowments', *FM*, September 1833, p. 291. All further references to this article are in the text.

earlier in the century, which, we recall, emphasised that the excesses of genius needed to be curbed by reference to the standards of polite culture. We have also seen that Brydges's claim in his *Recollections* of 1825 that genius was alienated from ordinary life was offensive to Lockhart, because it weakened the *Blackwood's* account of genius as emerging from national history and custom. For Brydges, however, modern society is made up of individuals pursuing their own private interests and is thus essentially immoral. On the other hand, genius seeks to benefit the public interest at whatever cost to itself and is thus essentially moral. This configuration clearly owes much to eighteenth-century representations of the *gentleman* as a disinterested figure who stands above the division of labour.¹¹⁶ But in Brydges's writings, these representations are combined with a Romantic valorisation of authorship, and emphasis on its neglect, to produce his despairing vision of the disinterested *genius* who is continually preyed upon by the mass of people whom he is trying to help. At the same time, Brydges seeks to avoid representing the genius as a marginal figure. First, by asserting a 'providential' view of literary fame; ultimately it is the best authors who will be known to posterity. Thus he exclaims, with an obvious hint of personal interest, 'let no one, therefore, who is conscious of his own deserts despair!' (p. 291). Secondly, he argues that despite this seclusion, the 'fruits of the workings of lonely inspiration' will gradually affect the community 'like a subterraneous spring' (p. 292); there is an echo here of Shelley's 'unacknowledged legislators', although *A Defence of Poetry* was not published until 1840.

Throughout 'On Intellectual Endowments', the tone is defensive, as if Brydges is arguing with unseen and barely-acknowledged interlocutors who are constantly denying the value of the imagination. Halfway through the essay, Brydges mentions the discourse

¹¹⁶See John Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), introduction.

which is his implicit target throughout: ‘the devil is always at the cauldron that brews evil, and spreads its smoke over the world [...] At this crisis, radical falsehoods in political economy are in full operation; are they to be left to detect themselves?’ (p. 294). Only the original truths produced by the imagination can save England from the political crisis brought on by an adherence to political economy. Again, the similarity with Shelley’s *Defence* is striking. However, unlike Shelley, Brydges’s distrust of political economy was in part due to its association with Reform and anti-aristocratic principles, for his views on social organisation were conservative:

We have a strong opinion of the variety of our destinies, and of the uses of it; and therefore we are advocates for the distinction of ranks and the demarcations of society. It contributes to the energies of our social state, and the nutriment of hope [...] There is nothing more stupid nor more odious than to try all men’s duties by one test of excellence. He who executes the necessary business of life, is not more useful than he who executes the ornamental [...] There is a strange theory of dull men, which applies measure and value to everything; and there are two classes of politicians who do this - fools and Radicals. (p. 299)

In Brydges’s hands, genius becomes an anti-democratic principle because, as we have seen, it is conflated with the eighteenth-century argument that society could only be properly run by gentlemen whose lack of a specific occupation allowed them to see society as a whole. Brydges’s argument about the necessity for an intellectual division of labour - an argument which he represents as alien to Radicals - thus requires that the ‘distinction of ranks’ is maintained. Brydges uses this construction of genius as aloof from the selfish interests of ordinary men in order to assert the value of an aristocratic model of government; genius and rank are pitched against political economy, Reform and the ‘mob’.¹¹⁷ Genius is divested of any transgressive or pathological qualities and becomes a prop for the old social order.

¹¹⁷ A clearer understanding of Brydges’s politics can be gleaned from his *Autobiography* (1834). Whilst supporting an ‘inheritable’ aristocracy, he detests modern, ‘parvenu’ nobility, reserving his respect for those families ‘whose dates in the male line are prior to the abdication of James II’. He believes that only this ancient aristocracy, alongside ‘genius’, can stand against the rule of the ‘mob’ which so disfigures modern life; see *The Autobiography, Times, Opinions, and Contemporaries of Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges*, 2 vols (London: Cochrane and M’Crone, 1834), I, 283-85 and II, 44-45.

Brydges continues his attack on 'self-interested' society in 'On the Charge that Men of Genius and High Talents want Judgment and Practical Sense'.¹¹⁸ Men of genius, he claims, need to be protected from 'the false stigmas which the sordid wretches engaged in carrying on the haphazard game of common life are so anxious and expert to cast upon them'.¹¹⁹ His argument in this essay is essentially that although 'men of genius and high talents' are represented by 'coarse' men as impractical and foolish, in fact they simply lack the selfishness and cunning of their less gifted fellows. As in his earlier article, whereas 'the majority of mankind are condemned to pass through life either as ciphers or in the sole pursuit of their own individual interests or amusements', men of genius 'can never be content with so narrow and selfish a sphere of action (p. 681). One of Brydges's purposes in writing these articles is to prove to *Fraser's* readership that he is one of those who, as he puts it, 'are born for higher things'. Through describing the relationship between genius and society, Brydges is himself engaged in the sort of generalising activity that is the province of genius and is making a claim about his own intellectual superiority:

I am fully aware of the surprise with which many persons view these sort of discussions, which they call not merely idle but vexatious. It is not to be denied that many are not at leisure to pursue them, and many are not formed with a capacity to pursue them; but there are others, who have both the leisure and the capacity, and in whom it seems a desertion of duty not to pursue them. A part of mankind are as much destined for speculation as others are for mere action: to them, it is not sufficient to go round in the same mechanical steps, like a blind horse in a mill. (p. 675)

The claim that philosophical speculation is the duty of those who have both 'capacity' and 'leisure' clearly reveals the aristocratic origins of his theory of genius. However, as the essay continues, Brydges begins to seem uncertain as to whether such intellectual

¹¹⁸ A shorter version of this essay first appeared in Brydges's privately-printed book *Gnomica* (Geneva: W. Fick, 1824), pp. 105-20.

¹¹⁹ Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, 'On the Charge that Men of Genius and High Talents want Judgment and Practical Sense', *FM*, June 1836, p. 674. All further references to this article are in the text.

activities are truly disinterested, stating that he is 'puzzle[d]' and 'harrass[ed]' by the question of 'to what extent we may be allowed to drink oblivion to our own private concerns, by draught of the seductive cup of literature' (p. 677).

Here, Brydges's valorisation of the role of the genius or philosophical speculator breaks down into a representation of the life of the mind as potentially no more than a private 'indulgence', for which he says he has 'been unjustly and cruelly blamed'. This is enacted in terms of genre, as his supposedly disinterested discussion of genius in a public journal is undermined by his use of the autobiographical language of private sensibility.¹²⁰ He spends the next few paragraphs - which are rather confused - justifying his escape from his 'private concerns' into literature. Brydges seems to believe that this is some sort of failure, but argues that he has been criticised for it, whereas others, such as Milton, have not. However, he anxiously points out that

I do not mean to be the apologist of vice, or to argue that genius is above the rules of moral obligation. I think the reverse; I think that it is difficult, though not impossible, for true genius to exist without a high degree of virtue. I am inclined, therefore, notwithstanding many contradictory appearances, to believe the heart of Rousseau was virtuous. (p. 678)

This reassertion of the connection between genius and virtue, although it is made with some reservations, is necessary because Brydges has effectively weakened his own argument about the transcendence of genius by admitting that literary pursuits can be private interests, rather than disinterested contemplation for the public good. As the essay continues, he again seeks to recover his position by emphasising the distinction between the literary and the 'common mind', which is 'exercised principally in plotting for its own interest or its own vanity, or in the contemplation of gross amusements or gross indulgences'. Literature, on the other hand, 'detaches, enlarges, raises, softens [...]

¹²⁰ A number of very similar passages, mixing theoretical discussion with personal effusions, appear in Brydges's *Autobiography*.

It tends to expel personalities and localities, and to draw off the poison of evil passions, by letting in the air of heaven upon them' (p. 679).

Brydges's inability to escape from autobiography when discussing genius nicely dramatises the difficulties he had in representing the literary man as a disinterested figure, and is also apparent in his 'An Essay on Originality of Mind' (1837). He begins by stating that 'it is probable that no man can altogether estimate himself rightly', but soon contradicts himself by asserting that 'there are faculties of the mind of which the marks cannot be doubted, and of which, when they exist, the superiority can still less be questioned. Among these is the imagination.'¹²¹ This seems to sit uneasily with the very existence of Brydges's theoretical writings, particularly, as we will see, his reply to the *Edinburgh Review*. For surely the basis of all these is that the essential problem of genius is epistemological, how can it be *known*? If its 'marks' could truly not be doubted, there would be no need for endless articles on the subject and Brydges, being a genius, would be recognised by his peers.

Brydges suggests a reason for the neglect of genius by arguing that 'in this iron age there is an attempt to decry and extinguish all real genius, and to substitute in its place a bastard kind of gaudy assumption' by those 'who lead the public mind' (p. 583). The perils of original thought are such that 'happiness consists in the absence of genius and talents', for men of genius are incapable of contending with the 'self-interest' and 'dissimulation' that prevail in society:¹²²

I contend that this is the triumph of Satan, which Providence can permit only as a punishment. I take it, that hard-heartedness, false-hood, deceit, and cunning, will always triumph over delicate and sensitive virtue. Lord Byron was a great genius; but he had a good deal of the devil in him; and it must be admitted that it was *this* which carried him forward triumphant through the world. (p. 584)

¹²¹Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, 'An Essay on Originality of Mind, Illustrated by a Few Notices of Those Eminent Men who have been Distinguished by it, Especially Poets', *FM*, May 1837, p. 581. All further references are in the text.

¹²²This is similar to Hazlitt's argument in 'The Qualifications Necessary for Success in Life', *CWH*, XII, 195-209.

This account of Byron, unlike Heraud's, seeks to assert the poet's genius while disassociating it from the poet's moral errors. Brydges argues that Byron's success was due to the evil, selfish elements in his nature; his contemporary fame was based on his transgressive personality rather than his poetic abilities. This separation of the poet's genius from any criminal or radical aspects of his persona is, of course, exactly what happens in Lockhart's reviews of Shelley.¹²³

There are three important aspects of Brydges's account of genius. First, his emphasis on the link between genius and morality; the man of genius has much greater sensibility than the mass of mankind and is disinterested and virtuous rather than cunning and selfish. This is why there is a tension between the genius and society and *not* because genius is in any way a pathological or transgressive principle. Secondly, in all the articles, Brydges's assertions about the importance of genius exist alongside a profound uncertainty about the utility of literature and abstract speculation, which leads to the defensive tone of his writings. And thirdly, there is strong autobiographical element in all of Brydges's writings on genius. Readers of *Fraser's* would have been well aware, particularly after his appearance in the magazine's 'Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters' in February 1834, that when he complained about the dissonance between the genius and society, Brydges spoke from bitter experience.¹²⁴ His use of 'we' is not a journalistic convention, for his name is appended to all his articles, but is meant to place himself in a select band of neglected genius.¹²⁵ And at other times he uses the 'I' form and complains explicitly about the remarks of his detractors.

Brydges published his two-volume *Autobiography* in 1834. This fascinating, but shockingly disordered and repetitive text, mixes various fragments of his life history with

¹²³In 1825 Brydges published a defence of Byron in which he argued that the poet's genius acted as 'a magical antidote' to his 'strange propensities to evil'; see *An Impartial Portrait of Lord Byron, as a Poet and a Man* (Paris: Galignani, 1825), p. 17.

¹²⁴William Maginn, 'Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters XLV: Sir Egerton Brydges', *FM*, February 1834, p. 146. This is a notably generous account of Brydges in a series that is sometimes waspish about its subjects.

¹²⁵For example, 'On Intellectual Endowments', *FM*, September 1833, p. 297.

lengthy disquisitions on poetic genius. With relentless self-pity, Brydges refers to the sufferings that he has endured at the hands of his malevolent fellow men, and reveals a persecution complex of almost Rousseauvian dimensions. The main point of the book is self-vindication; he argues explicitly that his failure to produce the creative work befitting his innate poetic genius is due to the lack of encouragement he had as a young man, and that the merits of the work he has produced have not been recognised by the public. He bitterly laments the time he feels he has 'lost' on bibliographical and genealogical research. The tone of the book is very similar to that of *Fraser's* articles, for his assertions of his own merit are clearly prompted by the serious and only partially concealed doubts that he has as to whether he truly is a poetic genius.

Brydges's book was reviewed by Edward Lytton Bulwer in the July 1834 number of the *Edinburgh Review*. He is unconvinced by Brydges's argument, describing him as an example of a particular 'species of literary character [...] that has all the acute sensibilities of poetical genius, without its energy and power'.¹²⁶ Bulwer treats the article as a pedagogic exercise, as a warning to others not to take Brydges's path. In particular, he concentrates on the poet's misanthropy and love of solitude:

It cannot be denied, that no inconsiderable proportion of our literary men, immediately preceding the present day, have been more or less characterised by those feelings, too acute and sensitive, which incline us to the Unsocial. Sometimes the disease is mild and gentle in its symptoms - sometimes dark and gloomy - sometimes it is but reserve; at others, misanthropy. (p. 440)

Brydges's dislike of society, and complaints about various individuals in the book are, Bulwer argues, a result of a dangerous and selfish egotism, which can be distinguished from the more benevolent egotism of Rousseau, Byron, or Milton. In such cases, periods of solitude can be healthy and restorative, 'but a solitude that is the aliment of

¹²⁶Edward Lytton Bulwer, 'Sir Egerton Brydges's *Autobiography*', *ER*, July 1834, p. 439.

misanthropy - the den of hatred - the mephitic and noisome cave from which evil oracles are emitted - is the retreat, not of genius, but of envy, which is at war with genius' (p. 444).

Bulwer's emphasis on sociality is interestingly similar to Jeffrey's criticisms of the Lake Poets, especially in the review of the *Excursion*, as well as his remarks on the 'Burnsian' account of genius. Like Jeffrey, Bulwer seeks to keep the creative artist operating well within the public sphere, although his idea of the scope of this sphere is quite different from Jeffrey's. Whereas the latter looked back to an eighteenth-century model of gentlemanly taste, Bulwer looks forward to an early Victorian ideal of the professional man of letters who is engaged in a wholesome, mutually-improving relationship with a reformed society - both models are clearly opposed to an account of Romantic genius which relies on an alienation, or at least a distance, between the writer and society. As editor of the *New Monthly Magazine* in the early 1830s, Bulwer played an important role in the development of a campaign for the 'Dignity of Literature', which sought to improve both the social and financial status of authors.¹²⁷ Although the campaign drew upon complaints about the neglect of men of genius - Bulwer was particularly inspired by the work of Isaac D'Israeli - extreme Romantic formulations of this complaint such as Brydges's were an embarrassment, because they seemed based on a model of eccentric genius (although Brydges would have denied this) from which the new breed of men of letters were anxious to escape. Bulwer hoped that in the future, writers would take a 'healthier' attitude to the world around them:

¹²⁷ In particular, see his articles 'Literature Considered as a Profession', *NMM*, 1831, pp. 227-32, 'Aristocracy', *NMM*, August 1832, p. 167 and 'Proposals for a Literary Union', *NMM*, November 1832, pp. 418-21. For the nineteenth-century controversy about the gentlemanly status of authors, see K. J. Fielding, 'Thackeray and the "Dignity of Literature"', *TLS*, 19 September 1958, p. 536, and 26 September 1958, p. 552; T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), chapter 2; Michael Lund, *Reading Thackeray* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1988), chapter 3.

we think we recognise in the rising generation of literary men a more wholesome and masculine frame of mind than that which characterised a large number of their immediate predecessors. And in proportion as the political constitution becomes more popular, genius of every description is, perhaps, insensibly compelled to become more social [...] The main advantages of an enlarged political circle, in connexion with the pursuits of a scholar, are less in alluring him from his closet to public life, - (for in that the public may lose as often as it may gain,) - than in familiarizing his ear and his heart with the affairs of the actual world. The agitation, the stir, the ferment, - the lively, the unceasing, the general interest in political concerns, which it is in the nature of popular governments to create, - meet him in every circle. (p. 445)

Political reform, and the agitation surrounding it, is beneficial to genius by preventing it from an 'effeminate' withdrawal into the private realm. 'Masculine', modern literary characters are forced to become more comfortable with contemporary society due to its increased democracy. This argument leads Bulwer to a Utopian representation of the relationship between the modern writer and more public figures which perfectly encapsulates his reformist ideal of authorship:

This it was which so singularly characterised the literature of Athens; bringing in close contact the statesman and the student, - giving vitality to the dream of the poet, and philosophy to the harangues of the orator. And by a necessary reaction, the same causes which render the man of letters more interested in the affairs of men of action, interest the men of action in the aims and character of men of letters. The connexion is as serviceable to the world as to the scholar; it corrects the dreaminess of the last, - it refines the earthlier calculations of the first; and thus popular institutions insensibly become the medium of exchange, which barter and transfer from the most distinct quarters, the most various commodities in the intellectual commerce of mankind. (p. 445)

This sympathetic mutual exchange between the genius and the politician is provocatively couched in the language of trade, thus totally dismissing Brydges's construction of an antagonism between genius and political economy. Similarly, the claim that this exchange will take place through 'popular institutions' - by which I presume Bulwer means the apparatus of a reformed government - undercuts Brydges's attacks on 'the mob'.

Bulwer's review gave Brydges yet another opportunity to indulge in his favourite activity of self-justification. The reader of his article in response is presented with the extraordinary and rather embarrassing spectacle of a writer trying to argue, in prose, that he is a poetic genius.¹²⁸ The tone of the essay is a mixture of querulous self-pity and egotism, prompted by Brydges's obvious insecurity about his gifts. Unlike Bulwer, he sees 'the irregularities and morbidnesses which commonly accompany genius', that is, its antisociality, as being an integral part of its essence, thus defending and valorising his personal dislike of society.¹²⁹ He is also touchingly honest about the importance that 'genius' has for him on an emotional level, stating that 'it produces a strong self-complacency to believe that nature has been bountiful in her endowments to one. Riches may fly away, adversity may overtake us, but what is inherent in the person cannot be taken from us'. And even though 'it may be said that genius is yet frail and ill calculated to stem the troubles of the world, and therefore affords little to pride ourselves upon', Brydges asserts that 'still it is comparative superiority. As man excels the brute creation, so one man excels another' (p. 731). The fact that he so obviously and explicitly wants to be known as a genius means that he cannot really argue coherently against Bulwer. For the only response that he can make to the latter's depiction of him in the *Edinburgh* is to state that 'I cannot see on what principles critics can call my poetical power into question' (p. 726), yet at the same time he makes it clear to the reader that his opinion of himself is hardly disinterested. Despite the consistent claim in Brydges's writings that genius is easily recognisable to others and always conscious of its own powers, the fact that this exchange with Bulwer is taking place shows that the recognition of genius was an epistemological problem which haunted the 1820s and 1830s, and strongly affected the lives of certain individuals. The belief that

¹²⁸Comparable attempts by artists to argue for their own genius can be found in Wordsworth's *Essay Supplementary to the Preface* and throughout Haydon's writings, although I think Brydges goes further than any of his contemporaries.

¹²⁹Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, 'Sir Egerton Brydges' Reply to the "Edinburgh Review"', *FM*, December 1834, pp. 729-30.

suffering, neglect, and alienation were often the concomitants of genius gave unsuccessful authors such as Keats, Brydges, and Richard Henry Horne (see below) the mental strength to persist in their careers, but the deferral of their rewards to posterity put them under severe psychological as well as financial pressure. As Brydges put it,

great genius finds this fire [the desire for fame] born within it, it never rests till it indulges the pursuit, and persuades itself that it attains, or is likely to attain, the end. It is thus that we are unhappy when we are damped, disclaimed, or refused the credit of those faculties, on belief of which we had fed. (p. 735)

VII

Fraser's gave Brydges a platform to expound his views on the neglect of genius to a much greater audience than he had ever had before.¹³⁰ However, when other authors made similar claims, they were attacked by the magazine's writers. In 1834, the poet and biographer Allan Cunningham published his *Biographical and Critical History of the British Literature of the Last Fifty Years*, which had first appeared as a series of articles in the *Athenaeum* late in 1833. In a fairly bland survey without obvious political bias, Cunningham is complimentary about almost all his subjects, happy to praise Lockhart as well as Keats, although critical of the reviewing practices of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*. After such inoffensiveness, it is a shock when one reaches the final sentences of the book:

¹³⁰The majority of Brydges's many works were privately printed and had a very limited circulation, although he did produce two novels in the 1790s which had some success. He was also an occasional writer for the *Gentleman's Magazine* - most of his contributions were short letters on genealogical topics. He published one article in the *Quarterly Review*: 'French and English Peerage', March 1830, pp. 281-333.

some one has desired me to describe the influence which men of genius have in this land: this can be done in a word - they have none. The editors of two or three leading newspapers have more to say with the country and the government, than all the bards which have breathed for these last fifty years. The influence of genius is recorded in its fortunes. Chatterton drank poison, because he could not find bread; Johnson was refused the means of improving his health abroad; Burns, at his death, had neither bread in his house, nor a penny in his pocket; Crabbe died a poor parson - preferment did not find him out; Scott crushed himself attempting independence, and his country refuses to save his books from the auctioneer; Byron was exiled and died all but cursing the land his genius adorns; Coleridge has been deprived of his small pension; Wordsworth lives by distributing stamps; Southey has a pint of thin wine a-day from the king; Moore has found verse, like virtue, its own reward; Hogg picks a mutton bone on Yarrow, and Wilson lives by moral philosophy. I bid the subject farewell.¹³¹

If Cunningham was just describing the sufferings of literary characters then this passage would be fairly unexceptional, although his list is a rather depressing role-call of neglect. But he emphasises that this is because they have no 'influence' with the country and the government; here, I think, he is relying on both the archaic and modern uses of the word. Men of genius have no access to those in positions of power (the archaic usage) - this is reflected in their lack of patronage and consequent poverty - and they also have little effect on public and governmental opinion (the modern usage), unlike the 'editors of two or three leading newspapers'.

In his fairly dismissive review of the *Biographical and Critical History*, Maginn drew attention to these conclusions. 'Mr Cunningham', he declares,

adds some remarks on the treatment of men of genius in this country, which, we think, it would be by no means difficult to refute [...] [We] hope to be able to convince Mr Cunningham that the number of those who have cause to quarrel with their genius is marvellously small. Genius is by no means such a slayer as people would sometimes make it appear, though certain causes must produce their natural effects in men of genius, as in men of meaner mould.¹³²

¹³¹ Allan Cunningham, *Biographical and Critical History of the British Literature of the Last Fifty Years* (Paris: Baudry's Foreign Library, 1834), p. 325.

¹³² William Maginn (?), 'Allan Cunningham's *Fifty Years*', *FM*, February 1834, p. 240.

In a similar way to Heraud in the article on Blake, Maginn refuses to accept that the sufferings of authors are the result of their genius, although this is not exactly Cunningham's argument. It was important for *Fraser's* to keep genius 'pure' in this way in order to maintain its association with Christian virtue, and Tory social ideology. The idea that it could lead to poverty, disease, or insanity weakened this association; first, because it implied that genius was not a divine blessing, and secondly, that the genius, rather than being a figure who might help unify national consciousness, was naturally an outcast from society. However, the extended refutation of Cunningham that Maginn promised did not appear until 1838, in a leading article entitled 'Genius and the Public'. Unfortunately, neither Thrall nor the *Wellesley Index* give an author for this important essay. Maginn's editorship had ended in 1836 under the pressures of debt, estrangement from his wife, and the savage beating of James Fraser by the aggrieved novelist Grantly Berkeley (which led to a duel between him and Maginn), although he still occasionally contributed to the magazine. According to Thrall's bibliography, Heraud did not contribute anything after volume sixteen, the volume before this article appeared. Francis Mahony ('Father Prout') had taken over the editorship for a short time after Maginn's departure, but there is no information as to who edited the periodical from 1838 to 1842. The article's continual sniping at Bulwer leads me to believe that it was probably by one of these three *Fraser's* 'old boys', and the use of 'Cockney School' rhetoric, particularly the claim that Keats died of 'weakness, probably consequent on thin potations', seems to make Maginn's authorship the more likely, although it could well have been a joint effort.¹³³

The article is in part a very belated review of an anonymous book published in 1833, entitled *Exposition of the False Medium and Barriers Excluding Men of Genius*

¹³³Thackeray was contributing to the magazine at this time, and it is quite possible that he may have had something to do with the article. Its sentiments on genius are certainly similar to those he expresses in *Pendennis* (see below).

from the Public, written by the young poet, Richard Henry (later Hengist) Horne, who was to return to the subject of genius ten years later in *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844). As Ann Blainey has shown, in the early 1820s, Horne had become an obsessive 'subscriber to Romantic poetic beliefs', and believed that his 'dissimilarity to other men' proved that he had a poetic vocation. He saw his heroes - Keats, Shelley, and Hazlitt - as men of genius who had been victimised by a corrupt society.¹³⁴ His book is a rather histrionic depiction of the sufferings of writers, artists, and scientists, which are, he argues, due in part to the ignorance and greed of the reading public and the government. In particular, he makes a scapegoat of publishers' readers, who make up the 'false medium' of his title. He is keen to emphasise that writers cannot generally be blamed for their sufferings, saying that there is only 'a very limited degree of truth' in the idea that 'the personal misconduct or imprudence of men of genius, is the chief cause of their misfortunes'.¹³⁵ Instead, Horne argues that generally the transgressions of 'superior men' are due to 'strong passions that can find no proper vent [and which] must either destroy the individual with their smouldering and wasting fire, or else break forth in wrong directions'.¹³⁶

Horne's claim that the crimes and sufferings of genius were caused by the conjunction of its powerful energies with the pressures of worldly want and neglect seemed to his reviewer to be a tendentious attempt to excuse the serious errors of immoral individuals:

¹³⁴ Ann Blainey, *The Farthing Poet* (London: Longman, 1968), chapter 2.

¹³⁵ Richard Henry Horne, *Exposition of the False Medium and Barriers Excluding Men of Genius from the Public* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833), p. 117.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 118-19.

there are the cases of Chatterton, Otway, Savage, Burns, Sheridan, &c. Now, it so happens that not one of this eternally quoted list owed his misery to any thing more or less than to the very sufficient cause of an utter want of conduct. Talk of their genius ruining them, indeed! Had these men been *true to themselves*, their genius would have commanded the homage, as it did the admiration, of their contemporaries. Instead of this, by an entire disregard of all social restraints, they contrived to make the judicious grieve, and to bring the very name of poet into contempt among the sober-minded portion of the community.¹³⁷

Here the alienation between the author and society is not inevitable, but the result of the misdemeanours of individuals who happen to be poets. And, although Horne's argument is much more about the neglect of genius by society than it is about the nature of genius, his reviewer uses this opportunity to attack the idea of eccentric genius:

Can any effect be more pernicious than that produced, or likely to be produced, by such men, on those who come after them, and who, in the glory of their youth, and under the exaggerating influence of what is called the poetic temperament, are but too ready to regard life under an illusive aspect, and to sneer at the suggestions of a sound judgement? Is not the plain English of all that is said on this subject by the sentimentalists, male and female, simply this, that the possession of genius is of itself a sufficient emancipation from ordinary moral and social restraints - that honesty, decorum, industry, and foresight, are for the humdrum drudges of everyday life; but that the ethereal essence of genius is far above all this, and that its extravagances, errors - nay, crimes - are to be palliated by the convenient creed, that "the light which leads astray is the light from heaven?"¹³⁸

Horne's reviewer, like Barbara Hofland and the writers of the *Spirit and Manners of the Age*, identifies the claim that genius is an alibi for transgression as a threat to society.

The fact that it is easier to find attacks on this claim in the early nineteenth century than examples of it, leads me to believe that such attacks were often based on little more than a (sometimes deliberate) misreading of complaints about the modern neglect of genius by those who disliked the reformist agenda inherent in those complaints. For the argument of 'Genius and the Public' - aided in this case, it must be admitted, by Horne's own

¹³⁷William Maginn and others (?), 'Genius and the Public', *FM*, October 1838, p. 383.

¹³⁸*ibid.*, pp. 383-84.

rhetoric - has the effect of representing arguments about the neglect of genius as covert attempts to allow the creative artist licence to break social and moral codes.

Assuming that 'Genius and the Public' was written by Maginn, or one of his disciples, then it gives rise to an interesting irony, because during the early Victorian period his scandalously Bohemian lifestyle was seen as a prime example of the eccentricities of the literary character. After his death from consumption in 1842, Maginn's family were forced to apply to the Royal Literary Fund for financial help. On the application form, Francis Mahony described the writer's wife and children 'as the casualties of a life wholly dependent on literature'.¹³⁹ This seems close to the argument that 'Genius and the Public' attacked, for here Maginn's profession is blamed for the sufferings of his family, rather than his own indigence and irresponsibility. For much of the 1830s, Maginn's income from journalism was probably about one thousand pounds a year, so he was hardly a neglected genius.¹⁴⁰ In 1850, Thackeray, once a writer for *Fraser's*, prompted a controversy surrounding the 'Dignity of Literature' with his representation of the literary life in *Pendennis*, in particular his portrayal of the periodical writer Captain Shandon, who was based on Maginn.¹⁴¹ In one passage, the young Pendennis tries to defend Shandon's improvidence by stating that "we must deal kindly with the eccentricities of genius, and remember that the very ardour and enthusiasm of temperament which makes the author delightful often leads the man astray". This is too much for his sensible friend George Warrington, who exclaims,

¹³⁹quoted in Leary, p. 118.

¹⁴⁰*ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁴¹The best account of the controversy caused by *Pendennis*, and Thackeray's response, is in Lund, chapter 3.

“A fiddlestick about men of genius! [...] I deny that there are so many geniuses as people who whimper about the fate of men of letters assert there are. There are thousands of clever fellows in the world who could, if they would, turn verses, write articles, read books, and deliver a judgement upon them [...]. If a lawyer, or a soldier, or a parson, outruns his income, and does not pay his bills, he must go to jail; and an author must go, too”.¹⁴²

Warrington’s complaint is that the term ‘genius’ is used as an alibi for the transgressions of authors because it represents writing as a special vocation with special privileges. As far as he is concerned, it is a profession like any other, and thus authors must submit to the same rules as other members of society. Later in the novel, Thackeray makes it clear that this is his own view of the subject:

I for one am quite ready to protest with my friend, George Warrington, against the doctrine which some poetical sympathizers are inclined to put forward, viz., that men of letters, and what is called genius, are to be exempt from the prose duties of this daily, bread-wanting, tax-paying life, are not to be made to work and pay like their neighbours.¹⁴³

For Thackeray, such arguments were unnecessary because, as he made clear to his critics in 1850, he believed that ‘literary men had earned for themselves a place in society quite as satisfactory as that enjoyed by other professional men.’¹⁴⁴ However, for writers like Dickens and Forster, who felt that writers were still socially and financially undervalued, Thackeray’s portrayal of literary Bohemia seemed likely to damage their prospects of turning authorship into a respectable and well-rewarded profession that exhibited middle-class values such as ‘self-discipline, hard work, methodical habits and temperate living’.¹⁴⁵ ‘Genius’ was at best an equivocal term for proponents of this new model of authorship for three reasons. First, because it was associated with a model of literary production that valorised the products of ‘inspiration’ and denigrated those who

¹⁴²William Makepeace Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*, ed. by John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 415.

¹⁴³*ibid.*, p. 450.

¹⁴⁴Gordon N. Ray, *Thackeray: The Age of Wisdom: 1847-1863* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 137.

¹⁴⁵Heyck, p. 30. One of Dickens’s aims in *David Copperfield* is to present a model of authorship that coheres with these values.

practised literature as a 'trade'. Secondly, because, as we have seen, it was linked with eccentric and excessive forms of behaviour. And thirdly because, as Lockhart argued as early as 1825, it had become devalued through overuse, and was associated with false forms of celebrity and literary 'lionism'. Thus in the early Victorian period, 'genius' tends to be used with more circumspection than was the case earlier in the century, and is more frequently ironised.¹⁴⁶ For example, in Dickens's early novels; malignant or insignificant characters such as Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, Simon Tappertit, Dennis the executioner, and Grip the raven in *Barnaby Rudge*, and Chevy Slyme in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, are all described as geniuses by the consciously ironic narrator, or their unconsciously ironic sycophants.

This trend is also apparent in the anonymous two-part moral tale, 'A Most Talented Family', published in *Fraser's* in July and August 1836. This title may be a subtle hit at Bulwer, who, according to the *OED*, was the first writer to use 'talented' in its modern sense in his novel *Falkland* (1827). This is described as an 'intolerable word' in 'Genius and the Public', which the writer associates with the complaints of second-rate authors who do not deserve to rise above neglect. However, in 'A Most Talented Family', it is actually the word 'genius' that is represented as a sort of 'cant' term concealing moral transgression, self-interest, and mediocrity. The narrative is a simple one. Mr Foster, a country gentleman, is in despair at the lack of genius displayed by his otherwise worthy children, whom he compares unfavourably with his much-lauded niece and nephews, a fashionable belle with singing talents, a successful Radical politician, and a novelist whose fictional heroes include a body-snatcher and a savage otter hunter. However, when he visits the Seymour family in London, he discovers that the true situation is very different: Arthur, the politician, virtually by his own admission,

¹⁴⁶ I suspect also that 'genius' is used less often in the literary criticism of the early Victorian period than during the 1820s and early 1830s; this, however, remains to be tested.

is an adventurer who has no loyalty to his party and seeks only his own preferment; his sister Julia is a dangerously irresponsible coquette who is used as a convenient 'stop-gap at musical parties' and Augustus, the novelist, writes meretricious, Bulwer-esque productions. The family life of the Seymours is desperately unhappy, for Foster's sister and her husband spend all their time worrying about the success of their offspring, who obviously have no respect for them. London society is represented as influenced solely by the pursuit of celebrity, the appearance of genius rather than its reality. This desire for present popularity, rather than true fame, is destructive not only to modern literature, but to family life: 'the love of notoriety [...] unknits the links of family tenderness, by rendering parents and children, brothers and sisters, even husbands and wives, careless and independent of the affections of each other, and only solicitous of the praise and admiration of a world of strangers'.¹⁴⁷ The story ends with a comeuppance for all three geniuses, and Foster is delighted to return to the bosom of his own 'dear, good, happy family'.

It would perhaps be quixotic to attempt an overly subtle analysis of such a relentlessly didactic narrative. It is important for my purposes because of its deliberate emphasis on the dangers of the term 'genius'. At the beginning of the story, Foster complains that his wife fails to value 'the gift of *genius*', and she replies that

"I am quite sensible that a certain something which is called *genius* is the idol set up by the good people of the nineteenth century, as the object of their preposterous adoration; but it's impossible for me to regret the absence of this quality in my family, - for I am not quite certain that I comprehend what it is."¹⁴⁸

Foster attempts to enlighten his wife through his nephew's discussion of the subject in his romance 'Scrapegrave, the Body-snatcher'. The passage quoted is similar to some of

¹⁴⁷'A Most Talented Family', *FM*, August 1836, p. 164.

¹⁴⁸'A Most Talented Family', *FM*, July 1836, p. 104.

writing we have looked at in this chapter, representing genius as a sort of spiritual energy and sensibility to beauty which leads to strong passions and an aspiration for fame. Mrs Foster is signally unimpressed by her nephew's effusions, and states that she is delighted that her virtuous, healthy, and handsome children do not possess "this highly popular quality [which] may be regarded as the result of a strong tendency to madness, acted upon by an inordinate degree of selfishness and vanity".¹⁴⁹ Although the course of the story shows Mrs. Foster's preference for her own children to be correct, it does not necessarily support her definition of genius. Rather, 'A Most Talented Family' seeks to critique the way in which the term is used in contemporary culture, and the way in which it is confused with transitory fame. For it soon becomes clear to the reader - and Foster - that his relatives certainly lack 'genius' in the spiritualised 'Heraudian' sense in which it tended to be used in *Fraser's*. All the children have the appearance of genius, in terms of newspaper panegyric, without the reality. By showing that 'genius' can conceal not only hollow pretensions, but a disdain for social morality which endangers the fabric of middle-class domestic life, the tale encourages its readers to treat the word with a great deal of suspicion.

VIII

The Romantic celebration of the creative artist is a truism of literary history, but in this chapter, I have shown that accounts of genius in the early nineteenth century magazines were also highly contested. Reviewers in the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* tended to argue that writers should restrain themselves in line with 'widely-held' maxims and

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

beliefs. In the late 1810s, the influential *Blackwood's Magazine* positioned itself against the Reviews through a form of appreciative criticism which gave those individuals identified as having genius a considerable degree of artistic and ideological latitude: as we have seen, there was a tension between the journal's political monarchism and its literary republicanism. But at the same time as some writers were putting genius forward as a redemptive force in a world of political and economic conflict, others contended that it should be treated with suspicion and that too much emphasis on genius could weaken respect for hard work, religion, and possibly even damage the social fabric. In particular, there were two claims about genius that were identified as pernicious: first, that it was often alienated from, and neglected by society, and secondly, that it was naturally prone to imprudence or even immorality. Although these claims often appeared in close proximity, they are distinct. But critics tended to conflate them into the assertion that genius was an excuse for various forms of transgression. Thus writers like those of the *Spirit and Manners of the Age*, and Barbara Hofland, seemed to reject the very idea of genius as harmful. On the other hand, conservative literary critics such as Wilson in *Blackwood's*, and especially Heraud in *Fraser's*, attempted to represent it as an essentially moral and religious force which could be separated from vicious behaviour or political radicalism.

There is no doubt that genius remained a powerful concept throughout the nineteenth century, but it was put under pressure in the late 1820s and the 1830s by literary professionalisation and a growing climate of moral earnestness. The massive expansion of the periodical press, and the success of the serial novel, saw the emergence of a large number of relatively well-paid writers who sought social respectability. For them, 'genius', with its possible associations with transgression, antisociality, and disdain for the reading public, was not always a useful term. The result of this may have been

that it became increasingly confined to discussions of poetry and the poet's role, for many early Victorian critics certainly had a grandiose conception of the poet as seer which they had largely inherited from Coleridge and Shelley. But, particularly in the 1830s, it often seemed that there was no active contemporary poet who could live up to this ideal, although the vogue for writing religious epics shows that many people were willing to try. Thus it was the Romantics, Wordsworth in particular, who were put forward, often nostalgically, as transcendent, redemptive figures whose works might aid spiritual-social rebirth. The problem for literary biographers was that this was often the principal justification for writing about the Romantic poets, but at the same time such figures could only be made interesting and sympathetic to readers by emphasizing their human qualities and failings. It is this tension - between the ideal and the actual - which I examine in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

'THIS AGE OF PERSONALITY': LITERARY BIOGRAPHY IN THE MAGAZINES

This AGE OF PERSONALITY, this age of literary and political *Gossiping* [...] a Generation so transformed from the characteristic reserve of Britons, that from the ephemeral Sheet of a London Newspaper to the everlasting Scotch Professorial Quarto, almost every Publication exhibits or flatters the epidemic Distemper.¹

In this well-known passage, first published in the *Friend* in 1809, Samuel Taylor Coleridge complains that contemporary literature is infected by an obsession with the private lives of eminent individuals. There is something essentially 'un-British' about such an interest, and although he does not elaborate on this point, Coleridge is probably implying that it is the result of the pernicious influence of Rousseau's autobiographical writings.² A few months later, he returns to the theme of 'personality', arguing that it threatens to confuse the boundaries between public and private:

In the present age (emphatically the age of personality!) [...] there are men, who trading in the silliest anecdotes, in unprovoked abuse and senseless eulogy, think themselves nevertheless employed both worthily and honourably, if only all this be done "*in good set terms*," and from the Press, and of *public* Characters: a class which has encreased so rapidly of late, that it becomes difficult to consider what Characters are to be considered as private [...] A crime it is [...] thus to introduce the spirit of vulgar scandal, and personal inquietude into the Closet and the Library, environing with evil passions the very Sanctuaries, to which we should flee for refuge from them!³

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'On The Errors of Party Spirit: or Extremes Meet', *The Friend*, 19 October 1809, p. 150; reprinted in *The Friend*, ed. by Barbara E. Rooke, 2 vols, II, 138, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 4, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

² For the politics of confession in Rousseau, see chapter two of Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³ 'A Prefatory Observation on Modern Biography', *The Friend*, 25 January 1810, p. 339; reprinted in Rooke, II, 286-87.

Coleridge was not alone in the early nineteenth century in claiming that the 'sanctuary' of private life was threatened by press intrusion, and, as was often the case, his views were, in part, a conservative reaction to the expansion of the reading public. However, he was certainly correct that writers and readers during the Romantic period were generally more interested in the private lives of 'public characters' than their eighteenth-century forebears had been. This was especially true with regard to authors, who, perhaps for the first time in history, could become celebrities in the sense that their personalities and, in extreme cases, their private lives, sometimes became an integral part of the marketing and consumption of their works. For one result of the development of the idea of original genius during the preceding decades was that literary texts were seen increasingly as expressions of the inner selves of their creators. It was inevitable that there would be a strong upsurge in biographical writing on writers at the same time as their works began to be approached as self-revelation, and, in some cases, to invite such an approach. For the existence and characteristics of genius, it was widely believed, could be discovered in the appearance, personal habits, and private manners of authors - and thus it was often argued that 'reading' the life was a vital adjunct to reading the text. The popularity of the literary anecdotalist, Isaac D'Israeli, whose works - such as *The Literary Character* and *Calamities of Authors* - went through many editions, and the mass of biographical material surrounding the figure of Byron reveal the immense public appetite for information about the private lives and characters of 'men of genius'.⁴ The literary magazines of the early nineteenth century attempted to feed this demand with a host of memoirs, literary portraits, *ad hominem* reviews, conversations, reminiscences, and recollections. Scholars have generally regarded these articles as merely sources of biographical information, and there have been few attempts to assess their literary

⁴ See Samuel Chew, *Byron in England* (London: John Murray, 1924), *passim*. For an account of D'Israeli's life and works, see James Ogden, *Isaac D'Israeli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

qualities, or their functions within the culture of the period.⁵ In this chapter, I begin the task of rectifying this omission by giving a critical survey of literary biography in the middle-class magazines.

The only modern study of fragmentary or collective biography during the Romantic period - which of course was the type of biography that most suited the periodical press - is Annette Wheeler Cafarelli's acute and scholarly work *Prose in the Age of Poets*.⁶ However, her emphasis on the influence of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* on Romantic biographers tends to elide sharp differences between Johnson's approach - which was generally to discuss man and work as separate entities - and the more complex and troubled attempts of his early nineteenth-century descendants to describe the connections between author and text. This shift in emphasis, which reaches its apogee in the writings of Carlyle, has been well described by M. H. Abrams. He argues that before the Romantic period,

the writing of the lives of poets and artists was carried on as one branch of general biography, intended to memorialize men of note in all areas of endeavor. But once the theory emerged that poetry is primarily the expression of feeling and a state of mind - and even, in its extreme form, that poetry is the fictional gratification of desire - a natural corollary was to approach a poem as a revelation of what Carlyle called the 'individual specialties' of the author himself.⁷

This is a helpful generalisation, although we have already seen that there was some resistance to this tendency towards 'personality', at least in theory. The very different biographical writings of Carlyle, Hazlitt, and De Quincey evince a much greater interest in the particular psychological characteristics of the authors they describe than do *The*

⁵ Recently, however, Pickering and Chatto have published a series of well-edited volumes of *Lives of the Great Romantics*, often containing hitherto fugitive pieces of magazine biography. These have been useful in the preparation of this thesis.

⁶ Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, *Prose in the Age of Poets* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1990). Other useful accounts of early nineteenth-century biography include Richard D. Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965); Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824-1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), chapter 1; Francis R. Hart, *Lockhart as Romantic Biographer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971); Joseph Reed, *English Biography in the Early Nineteenth Century: 1801-1838* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth-Century Culture of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chapter 4.

⁷ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 226.

Lives of the Poets, and they also reveal a stronger fascination with the *relationship* between the details of the author's appearance and habits of life, his genius, and his works. And the emergence within literary magazines of a new sub-genre which straddles the genres of biography and criticism - the literary portrait - is symptomatic of the shift that Abrams describes.

The other main weakness in Cafarelli's account is that she rarely pays any attention to the 'institutional' context of particular writings. It is often important to examine the function that biographical texts fulfilled within particular magazines. Sometimes this was simple: publishers not only had an economic interest in promoting the concept of literary genius *per se* through the periodicals they owned - for in many ways 'genius' was the fuel that kept the literary marketplace going - but they also had an interest in increasing the public profile of particular authors in order to foster the sales of their writings, or biographies about them.⁸ At the same time, as I argued in my introduction, genius was an important source of 'distinction' for literary magazines, acting as a sort of totem that could be invoked to support the claims of a particular journal that it transcended the commercial interest and political partisanship which most commentators agreed disfigured periodical literature. And by supporting the claims to genius of particular authors, magazines could position themselves against other publications and writers who denied those claims, and, as it were, invest their own symbolic capital in these figures, in the hope of being able to partake of some of the glory resulting from their past or future successes.⁹ Finally, on an ideological level,

⁸ Henry Colburn, publisher of the *New Monthly Magazine* and the *Literary Gazette*, was notorious for this sort of 'puffing'. See, for example, the 'review' of Leigh Hunt's *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* in the *New Monthly Magazine*, January 1828, pp. 84-96. Cafarelli quotes from this article in order to show that Hunt had his supporters, and is seemingly ignorant of the fact that it was no more than an extended advertisement for one of Colburn's publications; Cafarelli, p. 145.

⁹ The best example of this is *Blackwood's Magazine's* lionisation of Wordsworth, an important part of its struggle against the *Edinburgh Review*, which I discuss in my third chapter.

magazines could use accounts of particular writers with strong political or cultural identities to support their own views, either by association, or by contrast.

Magazines would not have contained biographical writing on genius unless editors believed that readers would be attracted by such texts. On the one hand, genius was put forward as a source of unity and value in an increasingly contested cultural sphere. It seemed to offer an escape from the political and social questions that perplexed middle-class readers. On the other hand, through the consumption of images of particular geniuses, different middle-class readerships could distinguish themselves from their peers. First, by asserting their proximity to the great men of the day, and secondly, by associating themselves with the particular ideological formations represented by, for example, Coleridge, Shelley, or Byron. The paradox of this form of celebrity was that if genius, in the abstract, was often put forward as an ineffable force far above the quotidian, it could be only made accessible and sympathetic to readers by emphasising the ordinary human characteristics of men of genius. This was the tightrope - between the transcendent and the everyday - that literary biographers had to walk. Thus before I look at particular biographical texts, I want to discuss the debates surrounding literary biography.

I

In Thomas Love Peacock's novel *Crotchet Castle* (1831), there is a brief dinner-table discussion between the Reverend Dr Folliott, and his acquaintance Mr Eavesdrop.

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT

Sir, you have published a character of your facetious friend, the Reverend Doctor F., wherein you have sketched off me; me, sir, even to my nose and wig. What business have the public with my nose and wig?

MR EAVESDROP

Sir, it is all good humoured: all in *bonhommie*: all friendly and complimentary.

[...]

THE REV. DR FOLLIOTT

You have dished me up, like a savory omelette, to gratify the appetite of the reading rabble for gossip. The next time, sir, I will respond with the *argumentum baculinum*. Print that, sir: put it on record as a promise of the Reverend Doctor F., which shall be most faithfully kept, with an exemplary bamboo.¹⁰

Folliott's rhetorical question was one that haunted literary biographers and critics throughout the early nineteenth century. What business, in fact, *did* the public have with the 'nose and wig' of Burns or Byron, Coleridge or Wordsworth? Could legitimate biography be distinguished from pernicious gossip, and if so, how? Such questions were particularly relevant during the period in which Peacock's novel was published. After Byron's death in 1824, there had been a deluge of memoirs, literary portraits, conversations and satires of the poet published in order to exploit his notoriety. In creating the character of Mr. Eavesdrop, Peacock probably had Leigh Hunt and Thomas Medwin particularly in mind, for he had strongly criticised their reminiscences of Byron in a review of the first volume of Thomas Moore's biography of the poet, published only five months before *Crotchet Castle*.¹¹ Hunt's bad-tempered *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (1828) had also provoked furious and lengthy attacks by John Gibson Lockhart and John Wilson in, respectively, the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's*

¹⁰Thomas Love Peacock, *Crotchet Castle*, in *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols (London: Constable, 1924-34; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1967), IV, 79-80.

¹¹Peacock, 'Moore's Letters & Journals of Lord Byron, Vol. I', *Westminster Review*, October 1830; reprinted in the *Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, IX, 71-139. Peacock is much less harsh on Moore than he is on Hunt and Medwin, though he does strongly criticise Moore's literary style.

Edinburgh Magazine.¹² It was perhaps predictable that Hunt's old enemies would rush to savage him, but Hunt himself was deeply anxious about the propriety of his book.

Three years after *Crotchet Castle* there was another controversy surrounding literary biography; De Quincey's recollections of the recently-deceased Coleridge in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (1834-35) prompted a hysterical response among the Grasmere circle. Like Hunt's book, De Quincey's account was seen as an appalling act of betrayal motivated by greed and envy. In particular, Folliott's threat of the *argumentum baculinum* (which roughly translates as 'an appeal to the big stick') was repeated by Southey, who, according to Carlyle, was apoplectic with rage:

"I have told Hartley Coleridge," said he, "that he ought to take a strong cudgel, proceed to Edinburgh, and give De Quincey, publicly in the streets there, a sound beating - as a calumniator, cowardly spy, traitor, base betrayer of the hospitable social hearth, for one thing!"¹³

It is important to realise that it was not always biographical attacks that caused consternation - we recall that Coleridge had complained of 'senseless eulogy' as well as 'unprovoked abuse'. Rather, there was a feeling that there were certain details of the subject's private life that even the most friendly biographer should not reveal. There is no implication that Mr Eavesdrop has *attacked* Dr Folliott, but as far as the enraged Doctor is concerned, his biographer has erred merely by presenting details of his personal appearance to the 'reading rabble'. There was more cause for Southey's anger over De Quincey's articles, because although they emphasised Coleridge's genius, they also made some damaging claims; in particular, that the poet initially took opium due to his desire for luxurious sensations rather than for its analgesic properties, and that his marriage (to Southey's sister-in-law) was an unhappy one. These represented a far more serious

¹² See *BEM*, March 1828, pp. 362-405 and *QR*, March 1828, pp. 168-226.

¹³ Quoted in Grevel Lindop, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 315-16.

breach of trust than De Quincey's lengthy explication of Coleridge's plagiarisms, for they involved the use of information that was not in the public domain. In the Romantic period, anti-biographical discourse tended to construct an absolute boundary between a person's public life - their writings, speeches, and so on - and private life - their personal character, appearance, and relationships with family and friends. Even the most hagiographic writer had to be wary of crossing this line: at best, it might be seen as a breach of the rules of social propriety, and, at worst, it could be perceived as an act of terrible betrayal.

Ethical arguments against biography were opposed by an epistemology of authorship which sought to connect private life and public utterance. Much of the most controversial biographical writing tended to be about poets, although it was frequently argued that accounts of private lives of such writers - who supposedly appealed to the hearts rather than the minds of their readers - were justified as being of particular public interest. But whereas polite biographers of figures such as soldiers and politicians could pass over any unsavoury aspects of their private lives in order to concentrate on their role in events of national importance - Southey does this in *The Life of Nelson* - this was obviously far more difficult for biographers of literary characters who may never have had significant public roles.¹⁴ As the *public* characters of writers were considered to be constituted by their works, then it was inevitable that literary biographers would be led to examine the personal lives and characters of their subjects in some detail.

The scope of the Romantic debate about the value and limitations of literary biography can be understood by looking at two extreme accounts of the genre, both of which were prompted by biographies of Burns. Wordsworth's *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (1816) was written at the request of Gilbert Burns, the younger brother of

¹⁴For an account of *The Life of Nelson*, see Reed, chapter 5

the poet. Through their mutual friend, James Gray, Gilbert sought Wordsworth's advice as to the best way of restoring his elder brother's rather battered reputation through a defence of the poet to be attached to a new edition of his poetry that Gilbert was superintending. Wordsworth used this opportunity to discuss James Currie's biography of Burns (1800) as an example of the dangers of unsympathetic biography, and to argue that *literary* biography was an entirely worthless genre. Carlyle's essay on Burns was published twelve years later, in the *Edinburgh Review* for December 1828. It is ostensibly a review of Lockhart's *Life of Burns* (1827), but like Wordsworth, Carlyle goes on to engage in further speculation on literary biography. At the same time, he gives a rather impressionistic account of Burns's life. I have paired Wordsworth and Carlyle together because they mark the parameters of Romantic discourse on the biography of authors. By the end of the *Letter*, Wordsworth has totally denigrated literary biography; by the end of his review, Carlyle has turned it into a vital act of spiritual interpretation.

Although they discuss different biographies, the particular criticisms made by the two men are interestingly similar. For both authors, past biographers of Burns have not shown true insight into his mind and motivation. Wordsworth argues that Currie has damaged Burns's reputation due to his 'superficial knowledge' of the poet, which has led him to concentrate on the external events of Burns's biography, rather than his inner life:

here is a revolting account of a man of exquisite genius, and confessedly of many high moral qualities, sunk into the lowest depths of vice and misery! But the painful story, notwithstanding its minuteness, is incomplete, - in essentials it is deficient; so that the most attentive and sagacious reader cannot explain how a mind, so well established by knowledge, fell - and continued to fall, without power to prevent or retard its own ruin.¹⁵

¹⁵ 'A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns', in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), III, 119. All further references are within the text.

Because Currie's biography does not aid the reader to understand what lay behind Burns's behaviour, it has harmed his reputation by giving merely a catalogue of debauchery. The dangers of this sort of biography, the mere compilation of facts, are also identified by Carlyle in his review of Lockhart. He praises him for giving a better account of Burns's character than his predecessors, and makes a distinction between mere 'lives' and true biographies, stating that if an individual is deserving of biography, then 'we have always been of opinion that the public ought to be made acquainted with all the inward springs and relations of his character'.¹⁶ Carlyle develops this view in his article on 'Jean Paul Friedrich Richter', published in the *Foreign Review* in 1830. Here he argues that most biographies fail because they concentrate on the facts of the subject's life to the exclusion of his spiritual being; thus they are 'mere Indexes of a Biography'.¹⁷

So there appears to be a certain agreement between Wordsworth and Carlyle: biography fails if it deals merely with the material and the external. Instead, the biographer must engage in a sympathetic way with his subject in order to reveal his psychological complexities. However, Wordsworth goes on to argue that 'true' biography is an impossibility because (a) only a close friend of an author can know enough about his life and 'internal springs' so as to be a truthful biographer, but (b) that such a friend would have too much sympathy to reveal the author's foibles to the world. 'Would a bosom friend of the author,' he asks, 'have told such things, if true, as this book contains? and who, but one possessed of the intimate knowledge which none but a bosom friend can acquire, could have been justified in making these avowals?' (p. 120). The impossibility of reconciling sympathy and knowledge also affects the publication of an author's correspondence. Most readers, lacking sympathy with the subject, will not know how to read his letters properly, to distinguish sentiments expressed 'to gratify the

¹⁶ Thomas Carlyle, 'Burns', in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by H. D. Traill, 30 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896-99), XXVI, 291.

¹⁷ Carlyle, *Works*, XXVII, 101.

tastes of several correspondents', or 'for the momentary amusement of the writer's own fancy', from 'those which his judgement deliberately approves, and his heart faithfully cherishes' (pp. 120-21).

This argument is very similar to later criticisms of Medwin's and Hunt's books on Byron by reviewers such as Peacock and Lockhart. It was claimed that both biographers often took Byron's ironic, or insincere, conversation and letters too seriously, and, in fact, that he enjoyed saying outrageous things to them purely for effect. This may have been true, but the criticism was also a means for partisan reviewers to construct Byron according to their own ideological template; to dismiss as insincere any of his reported utterances - on religion, for example - that were inconsistent with the image of the poet that they were trying to create. And, just as in the passage quoted above, this argument served to emphasise the distinction between the genius, his biographer, and the reading public. Most readers and biographers were represented as incapable of properly interpreting the private conversations - or even the private lives - of geniuses, for they could not read critically, taking everything at face value. Wordsworth's aim in the *Letter* is to show that the private life of genius is not fit for public consumption because a mass readership cannot properly understand the eccentricities that men like Burns often exhibit: 'it is the privilege of poetic genius to catch, under certain restrictions of which perhaps at the time of its being exerted it is but dimly conscious, a spirit of pleasure wherever it can be found' (p. 124). But in the hands of a writer like Carlyle, this argument about the ignorance of readers could also be used to elevate literary biography, rather than denigrate it, by valorising the role of the biographer or critic, who was needed to interpret and mediate the works, conversation, appearance, and actions of exceptional individuals to the reading public.

In the middle part of the *Letter*, Wordsworth moves on to a general discussion of biography, describing it as an 'art' which always requires 'moral or intellectual' justification. He fears that the ability to judge between the conflicting demands of the subject's right to privacy, and legitimate public interest in biography,

runs a risk of becoming extinct upon us, if the coarse intrusions into the recesses, the gross breaches upon the sanctities, of domestic life, to which we have lately been more and more accustomed, are to be regarded as indications of a vigorous state of public feeling. (p. 122)

This passage strongly echoes Coleridge's lament on the 'age of personality'. Significantly, during the period in which Wordsworth composed the *Letter* (December 1815 to early February 1816), Byron's separation from his wife was prompting intense speculation and savage attacks in the press. As Thomas Moore later put it, 'such an outcry was raised against Lord Byron as, in no case of private life, perhaps, was ever before witnessed [...] In every various form of paragraph, pamphlet, and caricature, both his character and person were held up to odium.'¹⁸ It seems likely that the 'gross breaches upon the sanctities of domestic life' to which Wordsworth referred would have made contemporary readers immediately think of the controversy surrounding Byron's marriage (the *Letter* was published by Longman in May 1816), and this context, I think, partly explains the vehemence of Wordsworth's antipathy to biographical approaches to poets. Byron was an example and a warning to other literary figures of the strange, double-edged nature of celebrity, the way in which public adulation could quickly turn to public revulsion. He had encouraged and manipulated public interest in his private life, but was ultimately driven from England by the very culture of 'personality' which he had helped to foster.

¹⁸ *The Works of Lord Byron: with his Letters and Journals, and His Life*, 14 vols (London: John Murray, 1832), III, 216.

The crux of Wordsworth's argument in the *Letter* is that there is an essential difference between the biography of authors and that of men 'who have borne an active part in the world'. In the case of the latter, the knowledge of their character gained 'by the scrutiny of their private lives, conduces to explain not only their public conduct, but that of those with whom they have acted'. In the case of authors, however, he argues that 'our business is with their books, - to understand and enjoy them. And, of poets more especially, it is true - that, if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished' (p. 122). Poets like Burns are particularly unsuitable subjects for biography, for 'the principal charm' of their writings 'depends upon the familiar knowledge which they convey of the personal feelings of their authors'. For Wordsworth, the danger here is that the discrepancy between the poet's character, as revealed in their work, and the character represented by their biography, may diminish the enjoyment and instruction that the reader gains from their poetry. In the case of Burns,

on the basis of his human character he has reared a poetic one [...] This poetic fabric, dug out of the quarry of genuine humanity, is airy and spiritual [...] Plague, then, upon your remorseless hunters after matters of fact (who, after all, rank among the blindest of human beings) when they would convince you that the foundations of this admirable edifice are hollow; and that its frame is unsound! (p. 123)

Although Wordsworth was not particularly successful until the 1830s, at least in terms of sales, by the mid-1810s he was a well-known cultural figure, and clearly wrote the *Letter* as a potential subject for biography. And, of course, in his affair with Annette Vallon and the existence of his illegitimate daughter, he had much to hide from the inquisitive. It is also possible that he was aware of rumours about his relationship with Dorothy, and feared that they might be made public after his death.¹⁹ Like Coleridge,

¹⁹De Quincey consciously refrained from mentioning the incest rumour in his articles on the poet in *Tait's*; see Cafarelli, p. 81.

Wordsworth also used an attack on the contemporary popularity of biography as a covert justification for his own relative lack of readers; it became a sign of a debased and ignorant reading public who cared more about gossip than art. In that sense, the *Letter* should be considered in tandem with the *Essay, Supplementary to the Preface* (1815) in that genius is represented in both as essentially opposed to and isolated from the literary culture of its day, which consists of reviewers and biographers who pander to readers who are hungry for literary controversy and tittle-tattle. Both texts contain attacks on Francis Jeffrey, Wordsworth's *bête noire*, and the poet's chosen symbol of the evils besetting modern literature.

In the *Letter*, Wordsworth represents 'genius' as the ideal character that a poet reveals to the reader in his works. His contention that Burn's 'poetic' character, although based on his 'human' one, has nothing to do with the details of Burns's life, relegates any writing that examines this life, or that of other such poets, to the status of irrelevant gossip. Carlyle, on the other hand, whilst accepting the importance of the 'self in the text', argues in 'Jean Paul Friedrich Richter' that a close knowledge of authors as private men is extremely valuable:

If the acted life of a *pious Vates* is so high a matter, the written life, which, if properly written, would be a translation and interpretation thereof, must also have great value. It has been said that no Poet is equal to his Poem, which saying is partially true; but, in a deeper sense, it may be also be asserted, and with still greater truth, that no Poem is equal to its Poet. Now it is Biography that first gives us both Poet and Poem, by the significance of the one elucidating and completing that of the other. *That ideal outline of himself, which a man unconsciously shadows forth in his writings, and which, rightly deciphered, will be truer than any other representation of him, it is the task of the Biographer to fill-up into an actual coherent figure, and bring home to our experience, or at least our clear undoubting admiration, thereby to instruct and edify us in many ways.* Conducted on such principles, the Biography of great men, especially of great Poets, that is, of men in the highest degree noble-minded and wise, might become one of the most dignified and valuable species of composition. (second set of italics are mine)²⁰

²⁰ 'Jean Paul Friedrich Richter', in Carlyle, *Works*, XXVII, 100-01.

Whilst Wordsworth tries to show that the knowledge of the 'genius' of Burns that can be extrapolated from his works is all that the reader requires, in 'Burns' Carlyle claims that the story of the poet's life is much more important and powerful than his poetry: 'True and genial as his poetry must appear, it is not chiefly as a poet, but as a man, that he interests and affects us'.²¹ For Carlyle, Burns's poetry did not give true expression to his genius due to the peculiarly troubled circumstances of his life, and its brevity. Thus 'the Writings he has left', offer 'no more than a poor, mutilated fraction of what was in him; brief, broken glimpses of a genius that could never show itself complete'.²² As Carlyle then embarks on a lengthy and panegyric critique of Burns's poetry, he implicitly concedes that this account of it as 'a poor, mutilated fraction' is an exaggeration. However, about halfway through the essay, he again emphasises the greater importance of the poet's life history. The 'mere literary character of Burns,' he announces,

has already detained us too long. Far more interesting than any of his written works, as it appears to us, are his acted ones: the Life he willed and was fated to lead among his fellow-men. These Poems are but like little rhymed fragments scattered here and there in the grand unrhymed Romance of his earthly existence; and it is only when intercalated in this at their proper places, that they attain their full measure of significance.²³

This extraordinary statement represents a new extreme in the Romantic interest in the creative artist as a private individual. It is not only that Burns's poems can be properly appreciated only within the context of his biography, but that his most important production was his life, his 'acted' works. For Carlyle, the facts of this life are there to be sensitively and charitably interpreted; just like his poems, the narrative of Burns's existence is there to be *read*.

²¹ Carlyle, *Works*, XXVI, 264.

²² *ibid.*, 266.

²³ *ibid.*, 291.

It is only towards the end of the article that Carlyle attempts to show why he believes literary biography to be so important. He invokes the example of Byron in order to argue that wealth or social status would not have made Burns happy, for suffering, it seems, is the inevitable consequence of genius:

Byron and Burns were sent forth as missionaries to their generation, to teach it a higher Doctrine, a purer Truth; they had a message to deliver, which left them no rest till it was accomplished; in dim throes of pain, this divine behest lay smouldering within them; for they knew not what it meant, and felt it only in mysterious anticipation, and they had to die without articulately uttering it.²⁴

This notion of the poet, or man of letters, as missionary, prophet and seer - 'vates' - is of course central to Carlyle's thought and is further developed in his other biographical essays, such as those on Richter, as well as his lectures *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841). Men like Burns and Byron are important for Carlyle because they are messengers to mankind who reveal the essentially spiritual nature of reality, 'a perpetual Priesthood [...] teaching all men that a God is still present in their life; that all 'Appearance,' whatsoever we see in the world, is but as a vesture for the 'Divine Idea of the World'' (the quotations are from Fichte).²⁵

However, Carlyle argues in both 'Burns' and *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* that Burns is important not as a successful missionary, but as a failed one. Paradoxically, such failure may be more interesting and important than success, as Carlyle implicitly concedes by discussing 'failures' such as Rousseau, Johnson and Burns in 'The Hero as Man of Letters', rather than Goethe, who, he claims, was a successful prophet. In this lecture, suffering 'every species of worldly Distress and Degradation' is represented as an essential part of the life of a heroic author - yet, in the article on 'Burns', Carlyle asserts that worldly circumstances prevented the poet from carrying out his prophetic intentions

²⁴ *ibid.*, 316.

²⁵ Carlyle, *Works*, V, 157.

in his lifetime. This is the rich paradox at the heart of Carlyle's theory of heroic genius. The hero is a Christ-like figure whose suffering is his success; his story allows the world to be redeemed. The biographer, by drawing attention to the failure of the author's life, can help to transcend this failure and allow the expression of the spiritual truth to take place. He does this partly by bringing out the true qualities of the author which were misunderstood in his lifetime, but mainly by showing that the neglect of such a genius is an important sign of the failures and disorganisation of the society in which he lived. So Carlyle completes Burns's task through his narrative of the poet's life, and thus, by implication, is himself a heroic man of letters.

It is interesting that both Carlyle and Wordsworth have related views with regard to the messianic status of the poet; yet they disagree so strongly about the usefulness of literary biography.²⁶ Their differences must surely be partly a function of their different positions within literary culture. I have already argued that the *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* was prompted by Wordsworth's fears that he might become a victim of the culture of celebrity that he saw around him. Carlyle's championing of biography clearly had much to do with his philosophical and political interest in 'Great Men', but in 1828 his role as an up-and-coming literary critic and biographer was also likely to encourage him to celebrate a genre which effectively validated his profession.

The publication of 'Burns' in the *Edinburgh Review* is also important, for the poet was (and still is) a potent symbol of Scottish culture and national identity, and a locus of symbolic conflict between periodicals such as the *Edinburgh* and *Blackwood's*. Jeffrey's criticisms of the poet in his 1809 review of the *Reliques of Robert Burns* allowed Tories like Wordsworth and Lockhart to represent him as an enemy of poetic genius, and to claim Burns for their own. Furthermore, as F. R. Hart has shown, in both

²⁶For Wordsworth's representation of himself as a prophet, see M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1971).

Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk and the *Life of Burns*, Lockhart used the treatment of Burns during his lifetime as a way of attacking the Scottish Enlightenment, which he associated with Whig dominance in Edinburgh, and the rise of the *Edinburgh Review*.²⁷ Thus the position of Carlyle's article within the *Edinburgh* (regardless of Carlyle's own political views) can be seen as an attempt to construct the periodical as a supporter of Scottish literature, to supersede Lockhart's championing of the poet in his recent biography, and to wrest Burns back from the Tories.

II

In a review of a new edition of Joseph Spence's *Anecdotes, Observations, and Characters of Books and Men*, published in the *Edinburgh Review* for May 1820, William Hazlitt argued for the utility and interest of literary biography, clearly responding to Wordsworth's criticisms of the genre: 'It has been made an objection to the biography of literary men, that the principle events of their lives are their works; and that there is little else to be known of them, either interesting to others, or perhaps creditable to themselves.'²⁸ This sentence nicely summarises the poet's argument, which attempts to be all-encompassing: Wordsworth tries to show that the biography of literary characters is pointless, because everything one needs to know about them is in their works, but also argues that, even if personal detail were of interest or relevance, it is better that they are not known as they might hurt the dead man's family and reputation. Thus his objections are both epistemological and ethical. Hazlitt's response is to argue for literary biography from the position of the curious reader, rather than the self-protective writer:

²⁷ Hart, chapter 3.

²⁸ *CWH*, XVI, 153. All further reference to *CWH* are in the text.

It is the very absence of grave transactions or striking vicissitudes that turns our attentions more immediately upon themselves [literary men], and leaves us at leisure to explore their domestic habits, and descry their little peculiarities of temper [...] We draw down genius from its air-built citadel in books and libraries; and make it our play-mate, and our companion. We see how poets and philosophers 'live, converse, and behave,' like other men. We reduce theory to practice; we translate words into things, and books into men. It is, in short, the *ideal* and abstracted existence of authors that renders their personal character and private history a subject of so much interest. The difficulty of forming almost any inference at all from what men *write* to what they *are*, constitutes the chief value of the problem which the literary biographer undertakes to solve. (*CWH*, XVI, 153-54)

In this passage, Hazlitt argues that it is the fact that there is no *necessary* connection between the character of a writer and that of his works that makes literary biography so interesting: if the personality and private life of the author could be extrapolated from the lines of the literary text, there would be no demand for a biographical account of him.²⁹ Hazlitt goes on to give Johnson as an example of the difference between author and man; this reference is particularly apt, for Johnson had himself remarked on such a discrepancy, stating that 'there has often been observed a manifest and striking contrariety between the life of an author and his writings.'³⁰ This view was still fairly commonplace during the early nineteenth century; however, Hazlitt's argument is interestingly original in that he makes this 'contrariety' the sole justification for literary biography. Unlike Johnson, or, in a different sense, Carlyle, he does not claim that the life narrative of a genius can offer moral teaching to the reader; neither does he, like De Quincey and others, claim that literary biography is useful or interesting in that it sheds light on the works of the author, or on his 'intellectual characteristics'.

²⁹In the *Plain Speaker* essay 'On Jealousy and Spleen of Party', Hazlitt argues that authors are 'generally in earnest in what they write', and that an author 'is himself in his books' (*CWH*, XII, 369-71). This does not exactly contradict his earlier remarks about the possible dissonance between character and work, because Hazlitt is arguing that the work expresses the inner genius of the writer, which is not necessarily exhibited in his person and private life.

³⁰*The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of Samuel Johnson*, 16 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969-89), III, ed. by W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 74. I should add that Johnson also thought that sincerity was an important criterion of literary merit; see Cafarelli, pp. 47-52.

Hazlitt is able to take up a position in which the aim of literary biography is principally the satisfaction of 'a curiosity [...] that has its origin in enthusiasm' (*CWH*, XVI, 153) because he is neither trying to defend himself from potential biographers, nor, at this stage in his career, trying to justify his own biographical practice. We have already seen how Carlyle, as a biographer of the phenomenon of genius, came up with an elevated rationale for his own work. Literary biography was still a contested genre in the late 1830s, and Thomas De Quincey, in his first article on 'William Wordsworth', published in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* in January 1839, was careful to discriminate between his approach to his subject and mere literary gossip.³¹ De Quincey begins by claiming that not only is Wordsworth 'destined to be had in the everlasting remembrance by every generation of men', but that as a great poet who has made himself 'necessary to the human heart', he will be remembered with an intensity of feeling which is not accorded to the memories of great philosophers, reformers, and so on.³² This leads on to a fantasy of cultural imperialism in which, due to the spread of English throughout the world, Wordsworth's poetry will be loved by those who 'have any depth of feeling [...] in every clime and every land' (p. 10). This global popularity, De Quincey argues, will inevitably lead to a desire for information about the poet himself.

Commensurate with the interest in the poetry will be a secondary interest in the poet - in his personal appearance, and his habits of life, *so far as they can be supposed at all dependent on his intellectual characteristics*; for, with respect to differences that are purely casual, and which illustrate no principle of higher origin than accidents of education or chance position, it is a gossiping taste only that could seek for such information, and a gossiping taste that would choose to consult it. (p. 11)

³¹ Wordsworthian arguments against literary biography remained viable for at least twenty years after his remarks on Burns: for example, William Empson, in his 1838 review of Prior's *Life of Goldsmith*, argued that knowing the sordid reality of the author's life destroyed the pleasure one could find in the ideal world of his texts; 'Prior's *Life of Goldsmith*', *ER*, April 1837, p. 210.

³² 'Lake Reminiscences, from 1807 to 1830. No. I: William Wordsworth', *TEM*, January 1839, p. 10. All further references to this article are within the text.

Legitimate interest, and the biography that serves it, will only seek information that is relevant to an understanding of the subject's 'intellectual characteristics', and thus, presumably, their works. On the other hand, gossip deals in the 'casual' or chance attributes of its subject, those which are purely the result of the happenstance of his past 'education' - which means more than simply 'schooling' - and present situation in life.

Although the passage is a little unclear, I do not think that De Quincey is thus implying that such cultural factors have no *effect* on the subject's 'intellectual characteristics', but rather that they also produce other effects that are entirely unconnected with those characteristics, and which are not the legitimate province of biography.³³

In the second part of the justification, De Quincey attempts to defend himself further from potential accusations of gossip:

Meantime, it is under no such gossiping taste that volumes have been written upon the mere portraits and upon the possible portraits of Shakspeare; and how invaluable should we all feel any record to be, which should raise the curtain upon Shakspeare's daily life - his habits, personal and social, his intellectual tastes, and his opinions on contemporary men, books, events, or national prospects! I cannot, therefore, think it necessary to apologize for the most circumstantial notices past or to come of Wordsworth's person and habits of life. (p. 11)

At first, De Quincey seems to be on the verge of contradicting himself, for the desire for *any* record, that, as he rather prudently puts it, 'should raise the curtain on Shakspeare's daily life', is surely dangerously close to revealing, in his own terms, a 'gossiping taste'.

But his examples of what lies behind this curtain can clearly all be related to Shakespeare's 'intellectual characteristics' and thus the original distinction is maintained. In the final sentence, however, it is again threatened, for De Quincey's explicit refusal to apologise for the 'notices' only serves to make his discomfort with them all the more

³³ Compare his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* essay on Shakespeare from a year earlier, where he argues that the lack of knowledge of the dramatist's social condition as a youth does not matter, because it is enough to know that it helped produce such a genius: *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. by David Masson, 14 vols (London: A & C Black, 1897), IV, 45.

plain, as he clearly feels that his readers might be, perhaps even should be, expecting such an apology.

The passage that I have been discussing comes towards the end of the first instalment of the Wordsworth reminiscences, after De Quincey has spent some time describing the poet's personal appearance. Considering the prevalent physiognomical assumptions of the period, it is easy to see how the discussion of Wordsworth's face can be justified as legitimate, but it is much less clear that the account of the poet's bad legs, 'mean appearance', and the fact that he walks like an insect, is not, in De Quincey own terms, pandering to a 'gossiping taste'. For he makes no attempt to connect these attributes to the poet's genius - of course, the purpose of the justification we have discussed is to convince the reader that everything that De Quincey relates, or has related, about Wordsworth is bound to shed light on his 'intellectual characteristics', even if exactly how is unclear. Thus this passage is, in part, a piece of sophistry, for De Quincey gives the reader no way of distinguishing between biography and gossip, except on the biographer's say-so.

Naturally, Wordsworth and his family were horrified by the articles, especially as De Quincey had gone further than most biographers in writing about the living. But it is the remarks quoted above, rather than the relatively inoffensive content of the 'portraits', that can help us to understand why Wordsworth, throughout his career, was so opposed to literary biography. He clearly realised that if one believed that an author's genius was evident in his private life, then the biographical remit was potentially infinite. Many Romantic biographers presented the smallest details of their subject's appearance or manners as offering insights into their particular psychological makeup; for example, in the essay 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', Hazlitt makes Coleridge's walk a sign of his intellectual and political instability, and the size of his nose supposedly reveals his

lack of willpower (*CWH*, XVII, 109-13). Biographical readings of the subject's physiognomy were commonplace, and the currency that Spurzheim's theory of phrenology quickly gained in England shows, I think, a cultural obsession with reading the signs of character or genius in the most apparently insignificant details of personal appearance.

However, those who linked authorial and textual character were faced with the problem of dealing with cases where there was a clear discrepancy between an author's writings and his behaviour in private life.³⁴ One contemporary response to this problem, was by recourse, not always explicitly, to the concept of 'genius' as the author's 'best self'. This can be seen almost as a renewal of the Renaissance model of the inspired artist; genius, in this view, is something that possesses the author for a short time as he writes, departing as he returns to his everyday affairs. That there was an essential contradiction between this theory, and the biographical approach that constructed 'genius' as omnipresent in the quotidian, is evident in the work of Isaac D'Israeli. In a chapter in *The Literary Character* (1818), he asks 'are the personal dispositions of an author discoverable in his writings?'³⁵ He answers this question by giving examples of classical moralists who had deeply immoral personal lives and concludes, like Hazlitt and Johnson, that 'an author and an artist may yield no certain indication of their personal character in their works'.³⁶

For D'Israeli, however, this conclusion is abhorrent because if the literary text is not an expression of the character of its author, then writing becomes a mere exercise or performance. He is quick to shy away from such an idea, exclaiming, 'can he whose

³⁴The contrast between Sterne's literary sentimentalism and cold treatment of his family in real life was often cited as an example of this discrepancy.

³⁵Isaac D'Israeli, *The Literary Character, Illustrated by the History of Men of Genius, Drawn From Their Own Feelings And Confessions* (London: John Murray, 1818), p. 281. The original version of this book - *An Essay on the Manners and Genius of the Literary Character* - was published in 1795.

³⁶D'Israeli, p. 287.

secret power raises so many emotions in our breasts, be without any of his own? [...] An alien to all the wisdom and virtue he inspires? No!’³⁷ His solution to this problem seeks to reconcile both anecdotal evidence and his belief in authorial sincerity:

An author has, in truth, two distinct characters; the literary, formed by the habits of his study; the personal, by the habits of his situation. And, however the personal character may contrast with that of their genius, still are the works themselves genuine, and exist as realities for us - and were so doubtless to themselves, in the act of composition. In the calm of study, a beautiful imagination may convert him whose morals are corrupt, into an admirable moralist, awakening feelings, which yet may be cold in the business of life.³⁸

D’Israeli’s account goes further than Wordsworth’s, for although the latter had represented Burns’s ‘poetic’ character as a purified version of his human one, he also implied that the two were strongly linked. On the other hand, D’Israeli represents the author’s imagination as allowing him to transcend utterly the personal character produced by his circumstances and to put on, in seclusion, the mantle of genius. This mystification is repeated by John Wilson in an article entitled ‘On the Influence of the Love of Fame on Genius’, published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in September 1818. Wilson argues that great artists never create with a selfish desire for ‘fame’ in their minds, but only think of it in their everyday lives:

The poet and mighty sculptor return from their ideal world into their human life. They are men once more, and they resume the feelings and the frailties of men. In their human life, and not in their ideal world, they find again their love of fame, their wishes and their hopes of immortal praise.³⁹

These remarks may well have been inspired by D’Israeli, for Wilson reviewed *The Literary Character* in *Blackwood’s* a month later. ‘On the Influence of the Love of Fame on Genius’ shows how D’Israeli’s theory of the separation of personal and literary

³⁷ D’Israeli, p. 291.

³⁸ D’Israeli, p. 292.

³⁹ ‘On the Influence of the Love of Fame on Genius’, *BEM*, September 1818, p. 703.

character could be used to totally abstract artistic creation not just from the material realm of the author's 'situation', but from human desire itself.

The difficulty with D'Israeli's arguments is that while they offer a solution to the problem of the discrepancy between life and art, they undermine the very project they are meant to support. For if the literary work is produced in seclusion, 'under the influence' of genius, then the personal life and character of the writer should be of little relevance to understanding his work. Why then does D'Israeli spend a whole book attempting to describe, through biographical anecdotes, the 'literary character' - which he claims consistently reveals the same personality traits and personal habits - when he has shown that the private life and character of an author may have nothing to do with his writings. Of course, like most of his contemporaries, D'Israeli ultimately assumes that there *is* a link between the private life and public utterances of an author, and his theory of genius as a form of temporary inspiration is simply trying to account for those writers who do not fit easily into this model. However, there is a clear contradiction between positing a potential separation between a writer's personality *and* his genius, at the same time as attempting to give an account of the peculiar personality traits exhibited by men of genius. This contradiction reveals a tension in the development of the Romantic concept of the creative artist that results from its popularisation during the early nineteenth century, and which is apparent in many biographical articles.

'Genius' is meant to be the possession of the gifted few. It cannot be explained by system, or reduced to rules. The workings of genius are ineffable, incomprehensible to ordinary mortals, and perhaps even to men of genius themselves. In the 1820s and 30s, periodical writers and biographers sought to emphasise the transcendence of genius whilst at the same time making it available to their readers through biographical accounts of particular authors. They were thus faced with the impossible task of revealing the

spiritual through the quotidian, whilst at the same time showing the spiritual to be utterly separate from the quotidian. The only writer to deal effectively with this problem was Carlyle, who did so by breaking down the distinction between the spiritual world of art, and the material world of biography. In 1838, he wrote that 'there is no heroic poem in the world but is at bottom a biography, the life of a man: also, it may be said, there is no life of a man, faithfully recorded, but is a heroic poem of its sort, rhymed or unrhymed'.⁴⁰ However, for Carlyle, it would require an exceptional individual to bring out the poetry of his subject's life: the criticisms that were made with regard to Hunt's incomprehension of Byron could be applied to anyone, and the only way that biographers could circumvent this was to set themselves up, implicitly or explicitly, as the peers of their subjects. Ultimately, it would take a genius to interpret and mediate the life of another genius to Dr Follitt's 'reading rabble'.

III

Having examined the debate surrounding literary biography, I now want to consider some of the most important examples of the genre in the magazines of the early nineteenth century. The best way to understand its different forms is to position them on a continuum which leads from public to private. At one end lies the 'purest' textual criticism, at the other lies the most detailed recollections of the personal life of writers: most biography and criticism lies between these two extremes, and many texts combine both genres. Obviously, reviews rarely concentrated purely on the literary work, and often made remarks on the author's mind or personality. Further towards the 'private'

⁴⁰'Sir Walter Scott', in *Works*, XXVII, 26. The article was first published as a review of Lockhart's *Life of Scott* in the *London and Westminster Review*, January 1838.

end appear those reviews that contained a strong *ad hominem* component, such as the ‘Cockney School’ attacks. Then one reaches the mass of so-called ‘literary portraits’, which, to a lesser or greater degree, sought to engage with the character of their subject *as an author*, but sometimes commented at the same time on his or her personal character, appearance and life history. The most famous of the literary galleries, Hazlitt’s *Spirit of the Age*, had very little to say about its subjects as private people, but other such series made stronger links between the individual and his or her writings. Next, we reach biographical memoirs, in some cases modelled on Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets*, which were generally anodyne in the treatment of their subjects. More interesting results sometimes occurred when a writer used a review of a biography as a pretext for presenting his own alternative narrative of the subject’s life and art. This was quite common practice; a fascinating example which I have already discussed is Carlyle’s ‘review’ of Lockhart’s *Life of Burns*. Finally we arrive at the private pole of the continuum, with the fragmentary personal reminiscence or anecdote which might become part of a full-blown biography at a later date. Good examples are Thomas Jefferson Hogg’s articles on ‘Percy Bysshe Shelley at Oxford’ (*New Monthly Magazine*, 1832), which were later included in his *Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1858), and De Quincey’s articles on the Lake poets in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* during the 1830s.

This part of the chapter is a survey of these different types of literary biography, and the way in which they were utilised by different magazines and critics. I begin by looking at ‘personality’ in reviewing, concentrating on *Blackwood’s Magazine*, then discuss various literary galleries, and finally move on to more personal recollections. Clearly, biographical memoirs could have an important function in relating a particular periodical to a variety of well-known figures, but I do not discuss them here. This is partly due to lack of space, and partly because, as they were often written to

commemorate the death of a 'great man', they tend to be anodyne.⁴¹ I also omit any account of two of the best examples of the personal reminiscence - Wilson's 'Letters from the Lakes' and Hazlitt's 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' - because they are examined in detail in chapters three and four respectively.

In the previous chapter, I briefly discussed John Scott's assault on *Blackwood's Magazine*. One of his claims was that the articles on the 'Cockney School of Poetry' contained no genuine criticism and were simply personal attacks. These accusations were repeated by many other writers: *Blackwood's* was seen by its detractors as the worst example of the way in which reviewing was becoming infected by 'personality'. In an important article, Peter Murphy has examined the magazine's 'obsessive interest in the interaction, attachment and slippage between authors (published names) and persons (bodies indicated by names)'.⁴² He shows that *Blackwood's* writers constructed an abstract written world which effaced individual personality through the use of a variety of pseudonyms that could not easily be related to the real authors of the magazine. Paradoxically, this destabilisation of public identity by sundering it from the private realm was accompanied by a controversial form of criticism that, as in the case of Hunt, sought 'to punish written egotism by a fierce obtrusion of the bodily into the written', that is, through references to the appearance and private life of *Blackwood's* victims.⁴³

In the 'Cockney School' articles, 'Z.' (Lockhart) creates a highly detailed comic character which is ostensibly an extrapolation from Hunt's poetry, but which inevitably serves to represent Hunt as an actual individual. This strategy is most apparent in the following well-known passage:

⁴¹There are some important exceptions to this rule, for example, Carlyle's obituary of Goethe in the *NMM*, June 1832, pp. 507-12.

⁴²Peter T. Murphy, 'Impersonation and Authorship in Romantic Britain', *ELH*, 59 (1992), 625-49 (p. 626).

⁴³*ibid.*, p. 636.

The poetry of Mr Hunt is such as might be expected from the personal character and habits of its author. As a vulgar man is perpetually labouring to be genteel - in like manner, the poetry of this man is always on the stretch to be grand. He has been allowed to look for a moment from the antichamber into the saloon, and mistaken the waving of feathers and the painted floor for the *sine qua non's* of elegant society. He would fain be always tripping and waltzing, and is sorry that he cannot be allowed to walk about in the morning with yellow breeches and flesh-coloured silk-stockings. He sticks an artificial rose-bud into his button hole in the midst of winter. He wears no neckcloth, and cuts his hair in imitation of the Prints of Petrarch.⁴⁴

Is this detailed description of Hunt put forward purely as a metaphor for his poetical pretentiousness, or is Lockhart also describing Hunt's real physical appearance? The confusion is probably deliberate, but his comments on the morality of *The Story of Rimini* seem much more clearly to be a personal attack. Hunt's 'Muse' is described as a vulgar prostitute, and the reader is informed that 'his mind seems absolutely to gloat over all the details of adultery and incest'. The point is to insinuate that Hunt himself is as depraved as his poem, and Lockhart goes on to claim that

the very Concubine of so impure a wretch as Leigh Hunt would be to be pitied, but alas! for the Wife of such a Husband! For him there is no charm in simple Seduction; and he gloats over it only when accompanied with Adultery and Incest.⁴⁵

The 'immorality' of *The Story of Rimini* reveals Hunt to be a monster in private life, but Lockhart's reference to Hunt's wife was excessive even for *Blackwood's*, and William Blackwood cut this passage in later editions of the magazine.⁴⁶

Unsurprisingly, the removal of a couple of sentences from the first 'Cockney School' article did not mollify Hunt, who demanded that 'Z.' reveal his true identity, and threatened that, if it remained concealed, the publishers of the 'foul scandal' would have

⁴⁴'Z.' [John Gibson Lockhart], 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. I', *BEM*, October 1817, p. 39.

⁴⁵Quoted in Leigh Hunt, 'To Z.', *Examiner*, 16 November 1817, p. 729.

⁴⁶Kim Wheatley has pointed out that Lockhart's comments 'imply that Hunt's own sexual proclivities cannot be differentiated from those of the characters in his story. Rather than exposing Hunt's private life, they confuse reality with fiction in a way that actually makes Hunt far more compelling than he would have otherwise been'. This is certainly the case, but Wheatley's overall argument - that in the 'Cockney School' articles 'Z' becomes caught up in a paranoid Gothic fantasy centred on his fictionalisation of Hunt - is overstated. See 'The *Blackwood's* Attacks on Leigh Hunt', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 47 (1992), 1-37 (p. 2).

to face 'the consequences of their delinquency', that is, a libel action.⁴⁷ His attacker dismissed Hunt's complaints in *Blackwood's*, stating that 'when I charged you with depraved morality, obscenity, and indecency, I spoke not of Leigh Hunt the man [...] I have no reason to doubt that your private character is respectable'. This is disingenuous, and Lockhart goes on to imply that he has *every* reason to doubt Hunt's respectability: 'I judged of you from your works, and I maintain they are little calculated to support such a conclusion'.⁴⁸ Lockhart's claim that he had merely attacked Hunt as an author failed to convince his victim, who noted that 'Z.' had misrepresented 'my actions, my motives, my very reading, nay, my personal manners and very walk'.⁴⁹ Three months later, Lockhart, possibly emboldened by the lack of court proceedings, came up with a much stronger formulation of the relationship between author and text than previously:

There can be no radical distinction between the private and public character of a poet. If a poet sympathizes with and justifies wickedness in his poetry, he is a wicked man. It matters not that his private life may be free from wicked actions. Corrupt his moral principles must be, - and if his conduct has not been flagrantly immoral, the cause must be looked for in constitution, &c. but not in conscience. It is therefore of little or no importance, whether Leigh Hunt be or be not a bad private character. He maintains, that he is a most excellent private character, and that he would blush to tell the world how highly he is thought of by an host of respectable friends. [...] In such a case, the world will never be brought to believe even the truth.⁵⁰

Poetry, then, reveals the personal character of its author, and may actually give a more accurate impression of this than the author's private life, for, in the case of Hunt, it reveals the true perniciousness of his desires. Lockhart concedes that Hunt may be a respectable private man, but claims that this is simply because he is not strong enough for

⁴⁷ Hunt, 'To Z.'

⁴⁸ 'Z.' [John Gibson Lockhart], 'Letter from Z. to Mr Leigh Hunt', *BEM*, January 1818, p. 416.

⁴⁹ Leigh Hunt, 'Attack on the Editor in a Magazine', *Examiner*, 13 April 1818, p. 233.

⁵⁰ 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. III', *BEM*, July 1818, p. 454. Wheatley points out that this passage reveals Lockhart's 'double standard, in that his anonymity preserves the "radical distinction" between private and public where his own life is concerned'; 'The *Blackwood's* Attacks on Leigh Hunt', p. 19.

immoral conduct - perhaps a reference to Hunt's tendency to inform the readers of the *Examiner* about the state of his health.

It was not simply the need to avoid a libel action that initially made Lockhart slippery on the issue as to whether or not Hunt was a bad private man, for, as Murphy has shown, the writers of *Blackwood's Magazine* continually played on contemporary confusion about the relationship between author and text. Taken as a whole, what is particularly intriguing about the 'Cockney School' articles is that they inhabit both sides of the *Blackwood's* paradox of authorship. On the one hand, they bring Hunt, Keats, and Hazlitt into the world of semi-fictional characters that supposedly wrote the magazine, such as Christopher North, Morgan Odoherty, and Philip Kempferhausen, and although this is an act of coercion, it is also an elaborate joke that seemed to sunder *Blackwood's* victims from their real physical existence, and turn them into (sometimes affectionate) caricatures. Although I would not wish to underestimate the harshness of the 'Cockney School' attacks, by the early 1820s, Hunt was treated with a familiar raillery which was similar to the way in which the magazine dealt with 'friends' such as Hogg and De Quincey in the *Noctes Ambrosianae*. However, on the other hand, the use of *ad hominem* references, such as to Keats's training as an apothecary, Hunt's family life, or Hazlitt's alleged sexual misdemeanours in the Lake District, clearly entailed an obtrusion of the material into this supposedly abstract world of authorship, and one which intended to damage the real prospects of the magazine's victims.

It is no wonder then that enemies of *Blackwood's* found themselves caught up in its paradoxes, for when they sought to attack its use of 'personality', they were confronted by a confusing world of fictitious and semi-fictitious characters which protected the identities of the magazine's real authors. Murphy notes that John Scott's recourse to 'the rhetoric of clarity and exposure' with regard to personal identity is

weakened by the fact that he himself attempts to speak for others such as Coleridge, who, as it turned out, supported the magazine. I would add that this rhetoric also failed when Scott self-righteously attacked Lockhart as the true editor of the periodical, for in fact the editorship was a combined effort between Wilson, Lockhart, and Blackwood, with the last-named probably having the final editorial say-so.⁵¹

Difficulties similar to those of Scott were experienced by Macvey Napier, the probable author of the anonymous pamphlet *Hypocrisy Unveiled and Calumny Detected in a Review of Blackwood's Magazine* (1818).⁵² The tone throughout is grotesquely hyperbolic, with writers of the magazine painted as the lowest and most malevolent human beings imaginable. Napier complains that *Blackwood's* exploits the worst proclivities of the reading public: 'All the privacies of life are ransacked,- all the sanctuaries of our nature explored and violated, for the purposes of feeding an insatiate and depraved appetite for scandal and detraction'.⁵³ He goes on to accuse the magazine of 'exhibiting personal defects and innocent peculiarities to the broad gaze of the public', and then attacks John Wilson in very personal terms, partly through a brief parody of the infamous Chaldee Manuscript.⁵⁴ Napier fears that 'no man would be safe, nor could any one of us promise himself a moment's happiness, if all the errors of his life might be raked up at every moment, and thrown in his teeth at the discretion of a scoundrel',⁵⁵ but finishes by stating his familiarity with the 'names, characters and schemes' of the *Blackwood's* writers and threatens that if 'they shall persist in their work of calumny and defamation, we shall in no respect spare them'- clearly a case of 'an eye for an eye'.⁵⁶

⁵¹ See Robert Morrison, 'John Wilson and the Editorship of *Blackwood's Magazine*', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 46 (1999), 48-50.

⁵² Samuel Halkett and John Laing, *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature*, new edn by James Kennedy, W. A. Smith, and A. F. Johnson, 9 vols (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1928), III, 126.

⁵³ Probably Macvey Napier, *Hypocrisy Unveiled and Calumny Detected in a Review of Blackwood's Magazine* (Edinburgh: Francis Pillans, 1818), p. 8.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 54.

The pamphlet is meant to be an attack on ‘personality’, but ends up simply repeating the exaggerated rhetoric of personal vilification to be found in *Blackwood’s*.

Later in the nineteenth century, the high-spirited attacks of *Blackwood’s* early years were often put forward as the *ne plus ultra* of ‘personality’. As part of his campaign to reform literary culture in the early 1830s, Edward Lytton Bulwer argued strongly against anonymous criticism, claiming that it was frequently a cover for vicious personal remarks. *Blackwood’s* was his favourite example of this tendency:

in order to obtain a sale, those bad passions in human nature which adore malice and garbage on personalities, were to be addressed [...] It called names, blustered, and blackguarded: when it talked of an author, it informed you that he was “pimpled,” and never ridiculed his writings without abusing his face.⁵⁷

In the course of a similar discussion in *England and the English* (1833), he exclaimed, ‘what purpose salutary to literature is served by hearing that Hazlitt had pimples on his face?’⁵⁸ However, Bulwer was clearly unaware that, as Hazlitt himself had pointed out during his lifetime, he did not have a ‘pimpled’ complexion. The adjective was first used entirely gratuitously by Lockhart in the rhymed ‘Notices’ to the March 1818 number of the magazine - ‘pimpled Hazlitt’s coxcomb lectures’ - and then became a running joke, probably because the magazine’s writers knew that the term really annoyed its victim. But in the early 1820s, it was claimed that the epithet referred to Hazlitt’s *writings*: ‘none of us knows anything of his personal appearance - how could we? - But what designation could be more apt to mark the scurvy, verrucose, uneven, foully-heated, disordered, and repulsive style of the man?’⁵⁹ Just as in the case of Hunt, what was apparently an *ad hominem* attack was later justified as being a metaphorical comment on

⁵⁷ Edward Lytton Bulwer, ‘Upon the Spirit of True Criticism’, *NMM*, April 1832, p. 356. See also ‘To our Friends, on Preserving the Anonymity in Periodicals’, *NMM*, November 1832, pp. 385-89. Bulwer was editor of the *New Monthly* from November 1831 to August 1833.

⁵⁸ Edward Lytton Bulwer, *England and the English*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), II, 25.

⁵⁹ William Maginn, ‘Letters of Timothy Tickler, esq. to Eminent Literary Characters. No. IX’, *BEM*, September 1823, p. 311.

the author's work, rather than his person. Bulwer, by reviving the myth of Hazlitt's pimples, not only ended up viewing one of his idols through a lens supplied by *Blackwood's*, but repeated the personal references that he was trying to attack.⁶⁰ The magazine's rhetoric was highly infectious, I would suggest, because its equivocations about the relationship between private man and public author exposed the contradictory way in which early nineteenth-century culture represented literary genius. Writers like Bulwer demanded criticism directed at works rather than individuals, but at the same time were happy to feed an increasing public demand for anecdotes and gossip about authors. In the same editorial in which he attacked anonymous criticism, he celebrated the suitability of the *New Monthly* for biographical articles.⁶¹ But what *Blackwood's Magazine* had showed ten years earlier was that *ad hominem* criticism was an inevitable result of such an interest; the whole literary world was guilty of 'personality'.

IV

Most of the literary magazines of the early nineteenth century contained series of literary portraits. These often made little reference to the actual works of their subjects, concentrating instead on a general discussion of a writer's mind, or genius. They also sometimes provided information about his or her life history, personal character, and appearance (some included actual portraits). Modern critics have paid very little attention to these series, with the exception of William Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age*, despite the fact that they played an important role in canon construction during the late

⁶⁰For more on 'pimpled Hazlitt', see Alan Lang Strout, 'Hunt, Hazlitt, and *Maga*', *ELH*, 4 (1937), 151-59.

⁶¹It has always seemed to us that works of this description are peculiarly suited to those short sketches, which either give new or brief views of the characters of celebrated men, or embrace such anecdotes and descriptions, as a more elaborate work, obliged to condense its materials, would omit'; Bulwer, 'To Our Friends, on Preserving the Anonymous in Periodicals', p. 389.

Romantic period.⁶² Although literary galleries often promised a synoptic overview of the contemporary literary world, their inclusions and omissions were of course always conditioned by the ideologies of their authors, and of their host magazines. It may be that one reason why female and working-class writers who were popular during the early nineteenth century had, until fairly recently, tended to slip through the cracks of literary history is that they rarely appeared in the literary galleries of the time.

One early gallery was John Scott's 'Portraits of Authors', which appeared in the *Champion* in 1814. These were essentially critical articles that, as Scott was at pains to point out, sought to avoid 'the contamination of individual slander', and would 'direct the general attention to the leading features of our literary characters, *as displayed in their writings*, - for that is all which can be known with accuracy, or described with propriety' (my italics).⁶³ Scott's belief in fair and honourable criticism meant that these judicious articles carefully avoided any sort of 'personality'. Three years later, the idea was taken up by Richard Phillips' *Monthly Magazine*, which published an occasional series on 'Contemporary Authors' from 1817 to 1821. These articles were generally laudatory about their subjects as writers, and said little about them as private individuals. During this period, the *New Monthly* had no similar series, but instead published a succession of 'Memoirs of Eminent Persons', including many literary figures, which were accompanied with portraits. These memoirs combined critical assessments with short biographies in the style of Johnson's *Lives*. In 1820, the magazine printed a number of articles 'On the Living Novelists' which were mainly critical, and in the same year, John

⁶²There is the need for more research on 'canonising' during the Romantic period, and I have found nothing at all on the role of literary galleries in this process. However, there has been recent interest in literary anthologies of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: see Greg Kucich, 'Gendering the Canons of Romanticism: Past and Present', *Wordsworth Circle*, 27 (1996), 95-102 and *Romantic Canons: A Bibliography and an Argument*, ed. by Laura Mandell, 12 January 1998, Miami University, 8 January 2002, <<http://www.muohio.edu/~update/canon.htm>>.

⁶³John Scott, 'Portraits of Authors', *Champion*, 2 January 1814, pp. 414-15. The series ran intermittently until October 1814, and covered the following authors: Southey, Campbell, Walter Scott, Moore, Montgomery, Coleridge, Crabbe, Byron, Wordsworth, Rogers, Gifford, and Cowper.

Scott commenced his critical 'Sketches of Living Authors' in the *London Magazine*, a series that was cut short by his death.⁶⁴

All of these series mostly avoided 'personality', but, as one might expect from an exponent of the familiar essay, Leigh Hunt's 'Sketches of the Living Poets' in the *Examiner* in 1821 made more links between writings and the author as private man.⁶⁵ Although the emphasis was still on the minds of his subjects, Hunt included a short discussion of each poet's life history, appearance and personal character. Each article was accompanied by an engraving of the poet's portrait, encouraging the reader to make links between the two: 'the intention of this series of articles is, literally, to give sketches of the principle features of the living poets, as an artist might sketch those of their face'.⁶⁶ Despite this more personal touch, Hunt was also keen to emphasise that there was nothing scandalous about these articles, stating, in the account of Byron, that

as it is part of the spirit of our Sketches to be as characteristic every way as possible without violating any real delicacy, we shall touch upon some matters which must always interest, and some which shall agreeably surprise the public. This is said to be "an age of personalities;" and it is so; but if we can give the interest of personality without any thing of the scandal of it, we shall perhaps help even to counteract the latter, better than if we said nothing.⁶⁷

Hunt, then, is more willing than other literary portrait painters to admit that his work is about 'personality' and that this is interesting to readers, but he also emphasises that it does not transgress into the realms of scandal. This is born out by the Byron article, for Hunt goes on merely to describe the poet's appearance and lameness, saying that other

⁶⁴ Four novelists were profiled in the *New Monthly*: Mackenzie (March); 'The Author of *Waverley*' (May); Godwin (July); Maturin (August). There were five 'Sketches of Living Authors' in the *London*: Walter Scott (January 1820); Wordsworth (March 1820); Godwin (August 1820); Byron (January 1821); Crabbe (May 1821). The latter was by Hazlitt, and he later incorporated part of it into *The Spirit of the Age*.

⁶⁵ Only four articles appeared: on Bowles, Byron, Campbell, and Coleridge. Clearly the intention was to deal with contemporary poets in alphabetical order (the next one was supposed to be Barry Cornwall), but the series was cut short by Hunt's move to Italy.

⁶⁶ Leigh Hunt, 'Sketches of the Living Poets No. I: The Rev. William Lisle Bowles', *Examiner*, 15 July 1821, p. 444.

⁶⁷ Leigh Hunt, 'Sketches of the Living Poets No. II: Lord Byron', *Examiner*, 29 July 1821, p. 473.

subjects (by which he obviously means Byron's marriage) 'are not necessary to a discussion of his genius'.⁶⁸

Literary portraits had a tendency to abstract authorship from the material world by concentrating on a writer's 'spirit' or 'genius', whilst literary recollections, as we shall see, tended to try to reveal genius through the quotidian. At the same time, some portraits allowed the private self of the author to intrude, in the form of a visual and/or verbal account of his appearance, and a short biography. It seems to me, however, that these articles are usually best described as literary criticism, and this is also the case with Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* (1825), which directly emerges from this new genre, beginning life as a series of five 'Spirits of the Age' published in the *New Monthly* in 1824.⁶⁹ Most of the modern critical commentary on Hazlitt's book has revolved the question of its unity: the title suggests that he is attempting to make a statement about contemporary culture, but the lack of a preface or conclusion to the work, and the different ways in which he uses the title phrase, leaves it unclear as to what this 'spirit' is meant to be.⁷⁰ Here, I want to avoid this thorny problem and instead concentrate on two related questions: first, what does the work have to say about 'genius', and secondly, how does Hazlitt negotiate questions of private and public identity?

The Spirit of the Age is sometimes described as a work of 'collective biography', but in fact Hazlitt says nothing about the life history of the majority of his subjects and he rarely spends more than a sentence, if that, describing their physical appearance. There is more detail on the conversation of those 'spirits' with whom he has been acquainted, and Hazlitt makes the occasional reference to their private habits. He rarely relates public and

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Jeremy Bentham (January); Rev. Mr. Irving (February); The Late Mr. Horne Tooke (March); Sir Walter Scott (April); Lord Eldon (July).

⁷⁰ Useful discussions of *The Spirit of the Age* include Cafarelli, chapter 4; John Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), chapter 9, and James Mulvihill, 'Character and Culture in Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45 (1990), 281-99.

private personae, although when he does, the rhetorical effect can be very powerful: for instance, the reader is told that Bentham ‘turns wooden utensils in a lathe for exercise, and fancies he can turn men in the same manner’ (*CWH*, XI, 16). But the vast majority of the book is spent on its subjects as authors: their reputation, their books, their writing style, and the characteristics of their mind, as revealed by their works. The accounts that reveal the most ‘personality’ are those of Edward Irving and Leigh Hunt, but in both cases, this method is justified. Much of the former’s success as a preacher, Hazlitt claims, is due to his voice and physical stature, and so these need to be emphasised; and in the case of Hunt, the fact that he is more likeable as a man than as an author reveals the flaws in his writings.

Hazlitt’s book, then, is generally about genius considered as an abstract quality, embodied in writing, and which can be usefully considered apart from private personality, biography, and so on. Gregory Dart has argued that ‘Hazlitt shows remarkable little curiosity about how his subjects developed in the way that they did’ and thus that

each chapter represents its subject as a hothouse flower of subjectivity, an affirmation of individual identity, a unique species in his own right. In this formulation, genius comes to be seen as personality pushed to the point of principle, a transgressive greatness that is also, at one and the same time, a pathological condition.⁷¹

This is a highly suggestive account, but I think we need to be careful of using words such as ‘personality’ and particularly ‘pathological’ in this context. In the essay on Malthus, Hazlitt states that ‘when we speak of Mr Malthus, we mean the ‘Essay on Population’’ (*CWH*, XI, 104), and this is a reasonably accurate description of his method throughout the book. If this use of the writer’s name to stand for his work has a tendency to

⁷¹ ‘Hazlitt and Biography’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 29 (2000), 338-48 (p. 343).

personalise philosophical and literary debates, Hazlitt's general avoidance of the *ad hominem* in *The Spirit of the Age* prevents this process from going very far - his targets are sick, obsessive texts and philosophies, rather than the infirmities of individuals, and in fact *The Spirit of the Age* is almost entirely uninterested in the physical.

Aside from the felicities of Hazlitt's style, and his stature as a thinker, the reason that *The Spirit of the Age* is so much better than other literary galleries of the period is that the adversarial attitude the essayist takes towards many of his subjects creates a fascinating sense of intellectual tension and conflict. As John Kinnaird has pointed out, Hazlitt's approach did influence the efforts of later series to achieve 'thematic continuity', but they signally failed to match his 'critical relationship to his time'.⁷² The literary galleries of the late Romantic and early Victorian period, such as those by F. D. Maurice, Allan Cunningham, George Gilfillan, and Richard Henry Horne - although they are important in terms of the reception history of particular authors - generally stayed within the familiar generic conventions of careful, balanced criticism, and anodyne biography that studiously avoided 'personality'.⁷³ The glorious exception that broke these rules was William Maginn's 'Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters' (*Fraser's*, 1830-36), which, as well as manifesting the Irishman's typical satirical flair, also played an important role within its host magazine.⁷⁴

Maginn had already subverted the practice of literary portraiture in his short series of 'Humbugs of the Age' (1824), which began in the scurrilous *John Bull*

Magazine just as Hazlitt's series ended in the *New Monthly*.⁷⁵ These articles were direct

⁷²Kinnaird, p. 302.

⁷³F. D. Maurice, 'Sketches of Contemporary Authors', *Athenaeum*, 1828; Allan Cunningham, 'Biographical and Critical History of the Literature of the Last Fifty Years', *Athenaeum*, October to December 1833 (published in book form in 1834); George Gilfillan, *A Gallery of Literary Portraits* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1845), first published in the *Dumfries Herald*, 1844, and Richard Henry Horne, ed., *A New Spirit of the Age*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1844). For an account of the latter, see Ann Blainey, *The Farthing Poet* (London: Longman, 1968), chapter 13.

⁷⁴Maginn wrote all but five of the seventy-nine portraits. The others were by Lockhart, 'The Doctor [Maginn]', January 1831; Carlyle, 'Baron Von Goethe', March 1832, and Francis Mahony, who did three: 'Miss Landon', October 1833; 'Pierre-Jean de Béranger', March 1835; 'Henry O'Brien', August 1835.

⁷⁵Maginn's victims were: The Opium Eater (July 1824); Dr Kitchener (August 1824); Sir Humphry Davy (September 1824); Bishop the Composer (October 1824).

and unabashed personal attacks: in the first, he viciously mocked De Quincey's appearance, and hinted that his first child had been conceived before his marriage; in the third, he turned the public/private distinction on its head, stating that 'it is not of Davy, the chemist, we are going to speak, but of Sir Humphry, the gentleman'.⁷⁶ The seventy-nine literary portraits in *Fraser's* were less ferocious than the *John Bull* articles, relying for their effect on giving the reader a sense of personal familiarity with the authors described, but, as they were in a fairly prestigious magazine, mostly (although not always) avoiding gossip and scandal. The articles, always a page in length, were based on Daniel Maclise's accompanying drawings, which often depicted the subject in a state of private, domestic relaxation. Maginn's tone was generally irreverent, even when describing writers of whom *Fraser's* approved (although such writers were also greatly praised), and enemies of the magazine, that is to say, Whigs and Radicals, got a rough ride. Thus most of the article on Samuel Rogers consists of jokes about the fact that he resembles a corpse, and Thomas Moore is described (with some accuracy) as looking like 'something between a toad and a cupid'.⁷⁷

The main point of the series was to place the recently-launched *Fraser's* securely in the literary firmament by positioning it in conjunction with a number of friends and enemies. Both the sheer number of portraits, and their incisiveness, meant that this was achieved to a far greater extent than in any other magazine.⁷⁸ The January 1835 issue was particularly important as it contained Maclise's sketch of 'The Fraserians' (plate 1), which depicted twenty-six of the *Gallery's* subjects seated at a convivial dinner over which Maginn presided, and which was described in his accompanying article. Patrick

⁷⁶ William Maginn, 'The Humbugs of the Age No. III: Sir Humphry Davy', *JBM*, September 1824, p. 89.

⁷⁷ William Maginn, 'Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters IV: Samuel Rogers', *FM*, September 1830, p. 237, and 'Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters V: Thomas Moore', *FM*, October 1830, p. 266.

⁷⁸ It is interesting to compare Maginn's 'Gallery' with the series of 'Living Literary Characters' that ran in the *New Monthly*, one of *Fraser's Magazine's* main rivals, from January to November 1831. These were much longer articles, by different authors, which contained an account of the subject's biography, works, and appearance, and were accompanied by engravings of formal portraits and busts. But the judiciousness and sobriety of these articles makes them boring, and this may have been why they stopped when Bulwer became editor of the magazine at the end of 1831.

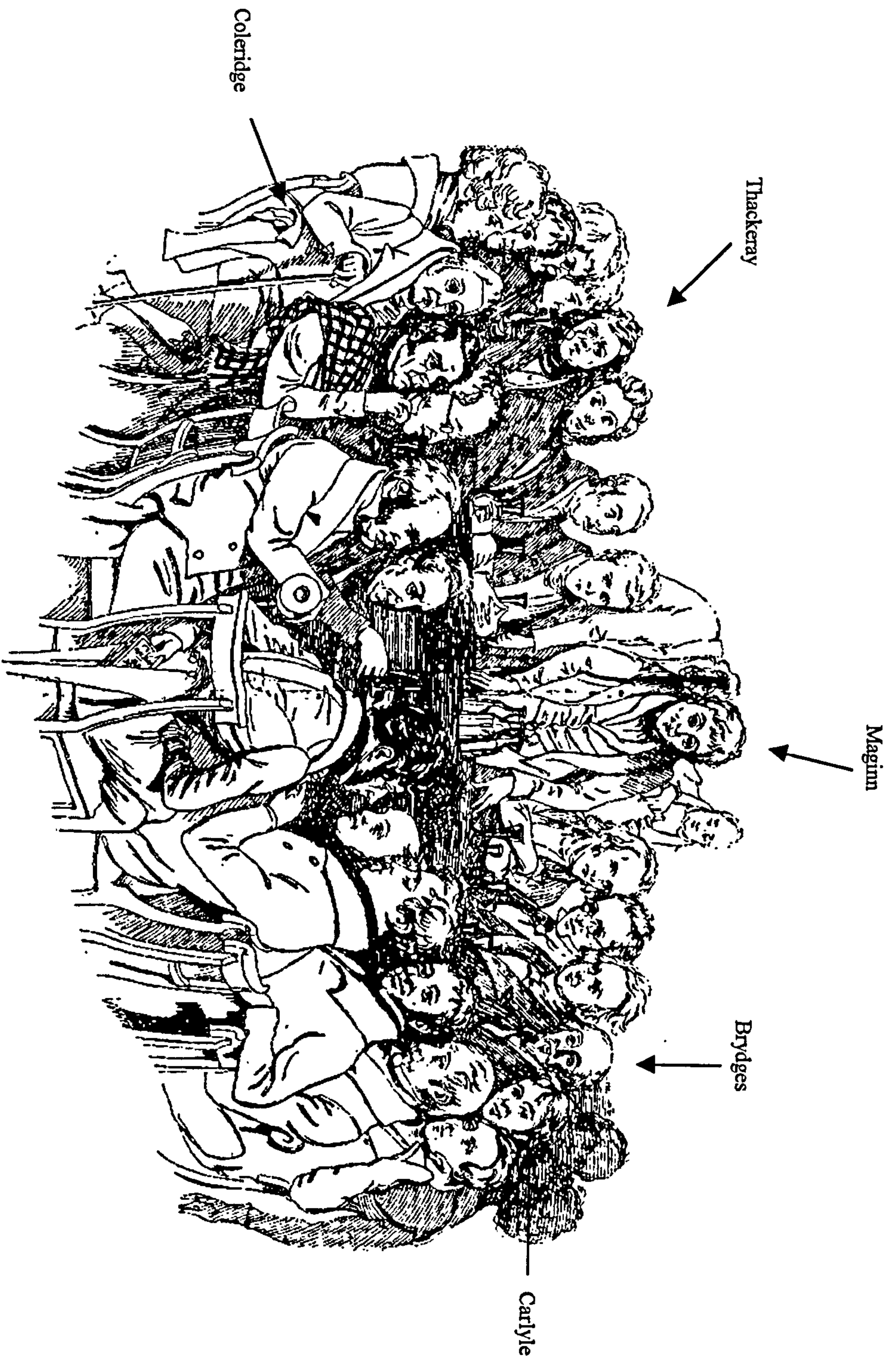


Plate 1. Daniel Maclise, 'The Fraserians', *Fraser's Magazine*, January 1835, p. 2.

Leary has pointed out that 'from the first issue, *Fraser's* self-consciously projected itself as the product of a distinct literary coterie', and that this projection was in part myth, for some of the figures in 'The Fraserians' had published very little in the magazine, and six of them - Southey, Murphy, D'Orsay, Hook, Jerdan, and Coleridge (who had died three months earlier) - had contributed nothing at all.⁷⁹ Of course, particularly in the case of Coleridge, Maginn was representing himself and *Fraser's* as being on familiar terms with literary genius in order to increase the journal's prestige. Thus in his early three-part article 'The Election of Editor for *Fraser's Magazine*', in which Maginn ventriloquises through a host of contemporary literary characters, Coleridge, 'the first genius of the age', is elected editor.⁸⁰

Part of *Fraser's* success, as Leary argues, 'lay in breaking through the traditional anonymity of the periodical press by ushering the reader into vicarious informal fellowship with some of the leading writers of the day', and this task was mainly carried out by Maginn's literary gallery.⁸¹ Much more than was the case with other such series, its subjects were interwoven into the fabric of the magazine's identity, and this gave *Fraser's* the aura of being closer to the pulse of genius than its competitors. But as we saw in chapter one, *Fraser's* also tended to produce an elevated conception of genius which removed it from the failings and limitations of mankind. Generally speaking, its readers are 'invited to imagine a subjectivity [which is] fundamentally *different* and inaccessible from their own'.⁸² Thus the 'informal fellowship' that they were offered with men like Coleridge, Carlyle, and Goethe could only go so far. Maginn's impudent literary

⁷⁹ Patrick Leary, 'Fraser's Magazine and the Literary Life, 1830-1847', *VPR*, 27 (1994), 105-26 (p. 111).

⁸⁰ William Maginn, 'The Election of Editor for *Fraser's Magazine*', *FM*, May 1830, pp. 496-508 (p. 497); July 1830, pp. 738-57; September 1830, pp. 238-50. For a good analysis of the magazine's use of Coleridge, see Robert Lapp, 'Romanticism Repackaged: The New Faces of "Old Man" Coleridge in *Fraser's Magazine*, 1830-35', *European Romantic Review*, 11 (2000), 235-47.

⁸¹ Leary, p. 112.

⁸² Lapp, p. 246.

portraits - which brought genius down to earth - were balanced with its mystification in other parts of the magazine.

Unlike most similar series, the 'Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters' included women, although this was probably a result of its large number of portraits, rather than for any ideological reasons. That there are no women in *The Spirit of the Age* should remind us that the individuals who are included constitute just one possible view of the cultural firmament in the mid-1820s. Of course, women were not prominent in public life at that time, but there were many successful female authors - if Hazlitt was willing to include 'Geoffrey Crayon' or 'Elia', he could also have put in Felicia Hemans, Joanna Baillie, or Maria Edgeworth. If one considers that after the death of Byron, Hemans was for many years probably the most popular poet in Britain, her absence from the literary galleries of the period is all the more remarkable. She does not appear in the *Athenaeum's* 'Sketches of Contemporary Authors', although this did include Edgeworth. One suspects that Hemans is absent because her poetry did not cohere with F. D. Maurice's elevated idea of literature and its purpose. She is not in the *New Monthly's* series of 'Living Literary Characters' and is not even one of the eight woman writers in *Fraser's* vast gallery; this is truly astounding when one considers some of the obscure male authors who do get in. Hemans died in 1835, but there were many other successful women writers in the 1830s and 40s, none of whom appeared in George Gilfillan's *Gallery of Literary Portraits*. The highest proportion of women in all the galleries that I have looked at is to be found in Richard Henry Horne's *New Spirit of the Age*. Here, eight out of thirty-nine portraits are of women - this may have had something to do with the fact that Elizabeth Barrett contributed to the book.

Writing in *Blackwood's* in 1824, in the guise of Ensign Morgan Odoherly, Maginn and Lockhart put forward a deliberately provocative view of women's writing:

What stuff in Mrs Hemans, Miss Porden, &c. &c. to be writing plays and epics! There is no such thing as female genius. The only good things that women have written, are Sappho's Ode upon Phaon, and Madame de Stael's *Corinne*; and of these two good things the inspiration is simply and entirely that one glorious feeling, in which, and in which alone, woman is the equal of man. They are undoubtedly mistress-pieces.⁸³

Although most critics of the period would not have denied the existence of 'female genius' quite so strongly, it was often argued that whatever genius women had was limited to works about love. These are what Maginn and Lockhart mean by the term 'mistress-pieces', although of course this is also a pun on 'masterpiece'. In the 1830s, the possibility of female genius became an important issue for those, like Bulwer, who associated the education of women with Reform. In the *New Monthly Magazine*, he argued that female intellectual cultivation should be encouraged, not so that women would be enabled to act in the public sphere, but so that they would better influence their husbands and sons, especially through an appreciation of 'Public Virtue'.⁸⁴ In a review of his friend Letitia Landon's novel *Romance and Reality*, he described her as 'a lady of remarkable genius',⁸⁵ and criticised those who argued against female education: 'does knowledge make men bad husbands? Why should it make women bad wives? [...] The soul of a woman is as fine an emanation from the Great Fountain of Spirit as that of a man'.⁸⁶

Similar views were expressed by the anonymous writer of an article on 'The Female Character' in *Fraser's* which argued strongly 'that in the arts and sciences, in the noblest efforts of mortal genius, and in the highest aspirings of human intellect, the female mind has and can rival that of the other sex'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, he or she claimed,

⁸³ Maginn and Lockhart, 'O'Doherty's Maxims. Part One', *BEM*, May 1824, p. 603.

⁸⁴ Edward Lytton Bulwer, 'On the Influence and Education of Women', *NMM*, March 1832, pp. 228-29.

⁸⁵ Edward Lytton Bulwer, 'Romance and Reality. By L. E. L.', *NMM*, December 1831, p. 546.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 545.

⁸⁷ 'The Female Character', *FM*, May 1833, p. 595.

No age has been so fruitful in female genius as the present. From all ranks of society women have come forth, and have distinguished themselves in almost every department of literature. Even politics, so long monopolised by mankind, finds partisans in the other sex; and Harriet Martineau is considered by her party their oracle on political economy. What females of any age possessed genius of a higher order than Joanna Baillie and Felicia Hemans? Who have given us moral sentiments more exalted than Hannah More and Caroline Bowles?⁸⁸

'Female genius', then, exists - although whether it is as powerful and extensive as male genius remains unclear - and women are capable of distinction in a variety of forms of writing. This article reveals *Fraser's* capacity to contain views which conflicted with its own main ideological stance, for the writer goes on to suggest that the fitness of women for political offices should be tested - a view which the liberal-minded Bulwer would certainly not have endorsed - and praises Mary Wollstonecraft.⁸⁹

The 'Gallery of Literary Portraits' generally carefully confined women's writing within the domestic sphere, and did not support anything other than the production of 'mistress-pieces'. For example, in the portrait of Letitia Landon, Francis Mahony 'defended' the writer from her critics:

There is too much about love in them, some cross-grained critic will say. How, Squaretoes, can there be too much of love in a young lady's writings? we reply in a question. Is she to write of politics, or political economy, or pugilism, or punch? Certainly not. We feel a determined dislike of women who wander into these unfeminine paths; they should immediately hoist a mustache - and, to do them justice, they in general do exhibit no inconsiderable specimen of the hair-lip. We think Miss L. E. L. has chosen much the better part. She shews every now and then that she is possessed of information, feeling, and genius, to enable her to shine in other departments of poetry; but she does right in thinking that Sappho knew what she was about when she chose the tender passion as the theme for women.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 599.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 600.

⁹⁰ Francis Mahony, 'Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters XLI. Miss Landon', FM, October 1833, p. 433. In 1824, Maginn contrasted Landon's 'brilliant' love poetry with the unpalatable works of Baillie, Hemans, and Porden: 'For what *can* a woman well write on but love?'; 'The Rhyming Review', *JBM*, August 1824, p. 77.

Neither Bulwer, nor the *Fraser's* writer of 'The Female Character' would have had a problem with women writing about 'politics' or 'political economy', but Mahony relies on the traditional argument that such pursuits were alien and damaging to femininity. It is not even that Landon lacks genius, or is ignorant about things other than love, but that she rightly chooses to limit her writing to that one subject - she knows her place. To a modern critic, such as Anne K. Mellor, Landon's acceptance of 'her culture's hegemonic definition of the female' led her into an artistic dead end, but for Mahony, it is to be celebrated.⁹¹

A year after the publication of 'The Fraserians' there appeared its female counterpart - 'Regina's Maids of Honour' (plate 2) - comprising all the women writers who had appeared Maginn's 'Gallery', as well as Anna Maria Hall, who was included a few months later. The participants, from left to right, are Hall, Landon, Mary Russell Mitford, Lady Morgan, Harriet Martineau, Jane Porter, Caroline Norton, and Countess Marguerite Blessington. Whereas *Fraser's* male contributors enjoy a raucous, alcohol-soaked dinner, the 'Maids of Honour' take part in a drawing-room tea party. The accompanying article is Maginn at his worst. For example:

What are they doing? what they should; with volant tongue and chatty cheer, welcoming in, by prattle good, or witty phrase, or comment shrewd, the opening of the gay new year. Mrs. Hall, so far and fine, bids her brilliant eyes to glow, - eyes the brightest of the nine would be but too proud to shew. Outlaw he, and Buccaneer, who'd refuse to worship here. And next, the mistress of the shell (not the lobster, but the lyre), see the lovely L. E. L. talks with tongue that will not tire. True, she turns away her face, out of pity to us men; but the swan-like neck we trace, and the figure full of grace, and the mignon hand whose pen wrote the *Golden Violet*, and the *Lit'rary Gazette*, and *Francesca's* mournful story. (Isn't she painted *con amore*?)⁹²

⁹¹ Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 114.

⁹² William Maginn, 'Regina's Maids of Honour', *FM*, January 1836, p. 80.



Plate 2. Daniel MacLise, 'Regina's Maids of Honour', *Fraser's Magazine*, January 1836, p. 81.

Most of the women in the article are described in a similar, faintly ironic manner, and Caroline Norton in particular is put forward as an object of masculine desire. Maginn's description of Landon, and Maclise's portrait bears out Mellor's observation that she was often represented in the period as 'an icon of female beauty'.⁹³ But the ostensibly innocent final sentence of the passage has a dark subtext. The previous year a scandal had broken out surrounding Landon's friendships with Bulwer, Maginn and Daniel Maclise, the illustrator of the 'Gallery of Literary Portraits', prompted by anonymous letters accusing her of being the mistress of a married man. This had forced her to break off her engagement with John Forster.⁹⁴ Thus the question 'Isn't she painted *con amore*?' is at best insensitive, and at worst seems meant to suggest that the rumours surrounding Landon and Maclise were based on fact. Maginn was a notorious scandalmonger, and it is possible that he may have even written the letters that destroyed Landon's reputation.⁹⁵ In that case, 'Regina's Maids of Honour' may have been the final twist of the knife.

In 1837, Landon met George Maclean, Governor of Cape Coast Castle in West Africa, and his marriage proposal seemed to offer an escape from her difficult life in England. They married in June 1838, and travelled to Africa. A few months later, Landon died of an overdose of prussic acid, which may or may not have been accidental. Mellor argues that

by writing her self as female beauty, Landon effectively wrote herself out of existence: she became a fluid sign in the discourse that constructed her, a discourse that denied her authenticity and overwrote whatever individual voice she might have possessed. For a modern reader, both her life and her poetry finally demonstrate the literally fatal consequences for a woman in the Romantic period who wholly inscribed herself within Burke's aesthetic category of the beautiful.⁹⁶

⁹³ Mellor, p. 122.

⁹⁴ Mellor, p. 121.

⁹⁵ Angelia Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 54.

⁹⁶ Mellor, p. 123.

This seems a little too glib in its conflation of life and literature. The scandal greatly damaged Landon's reputation and literary *cachet*, but there is no way of showing that the contrast between her public and private persona had 'literally fatal consequences'. However, Mellor is right to draw attention to this contrast. Landon was simply unable to conform to the stereotype of female authorship put forward in the 'Gallery of Literary Portraits'. Her association with scandalous aristocrats like Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady Blessington, her social spontaneity, and her close friendships with men would have made her more suitable for the boozy dinner depicted in 'The Fraserians', rather than the genteel tea party of 'Regina's Maids of Honour'. But of course the role of the eccentric, Bohemian writer was not open to women during the Romantic period. Even though Landon was generally represented as a female genius, she lacked the social privileges that were often allowed to similarly gifted men.

V

The most controversial form of literary biography in the early nineteenth century was the personal reminiscence. That this was a genre of dubious status is shown by the fact that it was often the last resort of periodical writers in desperate financial straits: when Hazlitt wrote 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', he was under house arrest for debt; Hunt claimed in his preface to the first edition of *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* that if he had not owed money to Henry Colburn, he would rather have consigned the book to the flames than have it published, and De Quincey composed most of his articles on the Lake Poets whilst on the run from his creditors. Authors knew that by making public the personal lives of their friends and acquaintances they were open to

accusations of betrayal, but they were also aware that their recollections would be eagerly snapped up by publishers who were happy to feed the popular demand for such information. Apart from what they tell us about the cultural climate of the early nineteenth century, contemporary literary reminiscences are also important because they have played a significant role in mediating the Romantic poets to later audiences. Here, I want to discuss three of the most interesting examples of the genre, by Hunt, De Quincey, and Thomas Jefferson Hogg.⁹⁷

Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries (1828) prompted a great deal of adverse press coverage, and did some harm to Leigh Hunt's reputation. Although it was published in book form, so much of it was quoted and discussed in advertisements, puffs (in Colburn's periodicals), and reviews that it can be examined usefully in the context of magazine biography. In the preface to the first edition, Hunt admitted that in writing the book, he 'had involuntarily felt a re-access of the spleen and indignation which I experienced, as a man who thought himself ill-treated'; however, he also emphasised that he had written nothing about Byron that he did not believe to be true.⁹⁸ Hunt's bitterness is apparent throughout his account of the poet, for he gives Byron's every action and comment the worst possible construction, and represents him as selfish, avaricious, incapable of love, absurdly proud, cowardly, capricious, jealous, superstitious, effeminate, and ignorant. At the end of this piece of literary iconoclasm, Hunt takes the

⁹⁷ Other magazine reminiscences of authors in the late Romantic period include: John Wilson, 'Letters from the Lakes', *BEM*, January and March 1819; John Mitford [?], 'Extract of a Letter from Geneva, with Anecdotes of Lord Byron, &c.', *NMM*, April 1819 (this preceded Polidori's story 'The Vampyre' which was published in the *New Monthly* as Byron's work); Charles Lamb, 'Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago', *LM*, November 1820; William Hazlitt, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', *Liberal*, April 1823; B. W. Proctor, 'My Recollections of the Late William Hazlitt', *NMM*, November 1830; Thomas Medwin, 'Memoir of Shelley', *Athenaeum*, July and August 1832; Marguerite Blessington, 'Journal of Conversations with Lord Byron', *NMM*, intermittently from August 1832 to December 1833; 'S.Y.', 'An Evening with Charles Lamb and Coleridge', *MR*, March 1834, pp. 162-68; Richard Henry Horne, 'Dies sub Coelo', *MR*, June 1834, pp. 365-92 (includes ten pages of reminiscences of W. H. Ireland); John Abraham Heraud, 'Reminiscences of Coleridge, Biographical, Philosophical, Poetical, and Political', *FM*, October 1834; Charles Le Grice, 'College Reminiscences of Mr. Coleridge', *Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1834; Barry Cornwall, 'Recollections of Charles Lamb', *Athenaeum*, 24 January and 7 February 1835; R. P. Gillies, 'Recollections of Sir Walter Scott', *FM*, September, November, December 1835, and January 1836. Of course, many other book-length reminiscences were made available to the readers of magazines through lengthy quotations in reviews and advertisements.

⁹⁸ Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), p. v. Hunt had originally intended to publish his autobiography, but Colburn, with his eye on the market, seems to have demanded that the book focus on Byron. It also contained literary portraits of Moore, Shelley, Keats, Theodore Hook, Lamb, and Coleridge, as well as an autobiographical essay.

moral high ground, claiming that he has written it in order to counteract the misconceptions about the poet that have been caused by earlier memoirs. Extraordinarily, he attacks 'the pensive public' for their prurient interest in such subjects: 'see with what avidity it entertains a prize-fight, a mad bull, or a scandalous magazine, which it affects to despise all the while. Anything to give it a sensation.'⁹⁹ However, Hunt's justification for *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* - that it is a disinterested attempt to set the record straight on Byron for the public good - is weakened by his admission that his financial circumstances have forced him into publishing his recollections of the poet. And Hunt's explanations and equivocations in the prefaces to both the first and second editions, as well as in letters to the *Morning Chronicle*, show that he was deeply troubled by the possible impropriety of his conduct - that in fact he was merely pandering to the public's appetite for 'sensation' - and of course this was one of the main criticisms aimed at him: for instance, Lockhart stated that the book contained 'the meanest details of private gossip, - dirty gabble about men's wives and men's mistresses, - and men's lackeys, and even the mistresses of lackeys'.¹⁰⁰

In an interesting discussion, Cafarelli has described the relationship of *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* to the development of the idea of 'the pathology of genius' during the Romantic period. She argues that

there is a critical dissonance between the poets' idealization of the poetic calling and what was increasingly becoming evident in Romantic biography and criticism, the dark side of the alienage and marginality of the artistic community, which poets were reluctant to see explored [...] The archetype of the sick artist that emerged in the critical dialogue of Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt illuminated the poet as a cultural outsider.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁰⁰ John Gibson Lockhart, 'Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries', *QR*, March 1828, p. 404.

¹⁰¹ Cafarelli, p. 139.

Her suggestion that Hazlitt's argument in his *Round Table* essay 'On the Causes of Methodism' that poetry is a symptom of the physical and mental sickness of its creators (*CWH*, IV, 58), greatly influenced Hunt's book, is an intriguing one. However, it does not stand up to close scrutiny. As I argued in chapter one, there were accounts of genius in the Romantic period that emphasised its transgressive, deviant nature, but Hunt actually has little recourse to these in his biography of Byron. As an explicit attempt to demythologise the poet, *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* obviously positioned itself against the public's tendency to idealise genius, but Hunt does not link Byron's infirmities to his poetical abilities, even though his *fame* has not done his character any good: 'Perverse from his birth, educated under personal disadvantages, debauched by ill companions, and perplexed between real and false pretensions, the injuries done to his nature were completed by a success, too great even for the genius he possessed'.¹⁰²

Byron's many flaws, for Hunt, are the result of an innate ill temper, bad parenting, bad company, and the pressures of celebrity. Hunt's attack is aimed at Byron as a man, not as an author, and the possibility that the light of Byron's poetry might be dimmed by our knowledge of his personal flaws becomes a source of regret for his biographer:

I subscribe so heartily to a doctrine eloquently set forth by Mr Hazlitt, - that whatever is good and true in works of a man of genius, eminently belongs to and is a part of him, let him partake as he will of common infirmity, - that I cannot without regret think of the picture I have drawn of the infirmities of Lord Byron, common or uncommon, nor omit to set down this confession [i.e. the preface] of an unwilling hand.¹⁰³

¹⁰²Hunt, *Lord Byron*, p. 92.

¹⁰³*ibid.*, p. vi. Hunt is referring to Hazlitt's essay 'On Jealousy and Spleen of Party'. See above, p. 19.

Cafarelli is right, of course, that Hunt's depiction of Byron is a long way from Shelley's, or Coleridge's, claims that genius is necessarily virtuous, but my point is that it is also a long way from an account of genius that sees it as inevitably debauched, dangerous, mad, or sick. Hunt's book is, in part, a study of Byron's pathology but it is certainly not a pathology of genius. For if Hunt had used such an argument, this would have had the effect of presenting an excuse or even an alibi for Byron's behaviour - and Hunt wanted to attack the poet, not to defend him.

If *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* is biography as revenge, then Thomas Jefferson Hogg's 'Percy Bysshe Shelley at Oxford' (*New Monthly Magazine*, 1832) is biography as vindication.¹⁰⁴ At the end of the 1820s, Shelley had slowly begun to emerge from the cloud of cultural obscurity which had enveloped him during his lifetime. Hunt had praised him far above Byron in 1828, and in the same year, he was the subject of a panegyric article in the *Athenaeum's* series of 'Sketches of Contemporary Authors'. Its author, F. D. Maurice, strongly denied that Shelley was really an atheist, and represented him as a true poet whose great achievement was to show that real improvement and reform must take place within the self, rather than in 'outward circumstances'; clearly a tendentious and ultimately reactionary interpretation of Shelley's work.¹⁰⁵ Maurice, one of the most brilliant young men of his generation, was the inspiration for the group of Cambridge Apostles - Thomas Sunderland, Arthur Hallam, and Richard Monckton Milnes - who argued in favour of Shelley at an Oxford Union debate in November 1829 on whether he or Byron was the greater poet (some of their opponents claimed not to know who Shelley was). As Richard Cronin has shown, the Apostles' version of Shelley was usually 'safely enclosed within a Wordsworthian

¹⁰⁴This appeared in six parts: January 1832, pp. 90-96; February 1832, pp. 136-44; April 1832, pp. 343-52; July 1832, pp. 65-73; October 1832, pp. 321-30; December 1832, pp. 505-13. Another article by Hogg, 'The History of Percy Bysshe Shelley's Expulsion from Oxford', was published in the *New Monthly* in May 1833, pp. 17-29.

¹⁰⁵F. D. Maurice, 'Sketches of Contemporary Authors No. VIII: Percy Bysshe Shelley', *Athenaeum*, 7 March 1828, p. 194.

wise passiveness', and their opposition to the Reform Bill also entailed some tempering of their enthusiasm for him.¹⁰⁶ But their championing of the poet - which included publishing *Adonais* in 1829 - helped bring him into public prominence.

Hogg's articles consummated this first phase in the rise of Shelley's reputation, and finally contradicted the view that was sometimes propagated by the Tory press in the 1820s, which was that he was an immoral and deranged writer of infidel poetry.¹⁰⁷ So much criticism of the poet was *ad hominem*, that Hogg's account of Shelley as a young man was as much a defence of his work as of his personal character. 'Percy Bysshe Shelley at Oxford' concentrates on the poet's many eccentricities: his untidy appearance; his enthusiasm for chemical experimentation; his awful voice; his strange sleeping habits, and his childish delight in making paper boats. However, Hogg also continually emphasises that Shelley was eminently sane, virtuous, and brilliant, and claims that on their first meeting these qualities were apparent in the poet's facial features, which

breathed an animation, a fire, an enthusiasm, a vivid and preternatural intelligence, that I never met with in any other countenance. Nor was the moral expression less beautiful than the intellectual; for there was a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness, and especially (though this will surprise many) that air of profound religious veneration, that characterizes the best works, and chiefly the frescoes [...] of the great masters of Florence and of Rome.¹⁰⁸

Despite his religious scepticism, which Hogg tries to downplay as a sin of youth, Shelley, as in Maurice's account, is represented as a highly spiritual being who is superior to ordinary people. Hogg goes on to describe Shelley's eccentricities in some detail, because, although they are minor, they reveal his childlike innocence and capacity for wonder.

¹⁰⁶Richard Cronin, 'Shelley, Tennyson, and the Apostles, 1828-1832', *Keats-Shelley Review*, 5 (1990), 14-40.

¹⁰⁷For Shelley's reputation in the nineteenth century, see Roland A. Duerksen, *Shelleyan Ideas in Victorian Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), pp. 22-28; Karsten Klejs Engelberg, *The Making of the Shelley Myth* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1988), especially chapter 3; *Lives of the Great Romantics by the Contemporaries*, ed. by John Mullan and others, 3 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996), I, ed. by John Mullan, introduction.

¹⁰⁸*NMM*, January 1832, p. 93.

One gets a sense of the careful way in which Hogg deals with Shelley's enthusiasms if his representation of the poet is compared with Hazlitt's pen-portrait in the *Table-talk* essay 'On Paradox and Common-Place' (1821). This is such a brilliant piece of writing that it requires lengthy quotation:

The author of the *Prometheus Unbound* [...] has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. He is sanguine-complexioned, and shrill-voiced. As is often observable in the case of religious enthusiasts, there is a slenderness of constitutional *stamina*, which renders the flesh no match for the spirit. His bending, flexible form appears to take no strong hold of things, does not grapple with the world about him, but slides from it like a river [...] He is clogged by no dull system of realities, no earth-bound feelings, no rooted prejudices, by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit, but is drawn up by irresistible levity to the regions of mere speculation and fancy, to the sphere of air and fire, where his delighted spirit floats in 'seas of pearl and clouds of amber'. (*CWH*, VIII, 148-49)

Hazlitt's Shelley is a deranged monomaniac whose restless desire for revolution is the product of a weak constitution. This is very much a continuation of the argument about the pathology of genius to be found in 'On the Causes of Methodism'; because of his physical infirmities, Shelley is drawn into a dream world which bears little resemblance to the realities of 'nature and habit'. As the passage continues, Hazlitt elaborates on this view of the poet through the use of a series of metaphors taken from the natural sciences, and, considering Shelley's enthusiasm for chemistry whilst at Oxford, these are clearly, in part, an *ad hominem* reference.

There is no *caput mortuum* of worn-out, thread-bare experience to serve as ballast to his mind; it is all volatile intellectual salt of tartar, that refuses to combine its evanescent, inflammable essence with any thing solid or any thing lasting. Bubbles are to him the only realities: - touch them, and they vanish. Curiosity is the only proper category of his mind, and though a man in knowledge, he is a child in feeling. Hence he puts every thing into a metaphysical crucible to judge of it himself and exhibit it to others as a subject of interesting experiment, without first making it over to the ordeal of his common sense or trying it on his heart. (*CWH*, VIII, 149)

Caput mortuum is a chemical term meaning the residue remaining after the distillation or sublimation of a substance, though it was also used figuratively in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to refer simply to a worthless residue. Of course here it is meant ironically, for Hazlitt does not believe experience to be 'worn-out' or 'thread-bare'. 'Salt of tartar' is now known as potassium carbonate; Hazlitt's knowledge of chemistry seems to be at fault here because although this inorganic salt is very soluble, and can be used to draw moisture out of the air, it is neither volatile, nor inflammable, and is in fact a component of 'solid', 'lasting' things like hard glass. However, if one recalls the action of potassium when put in water - an experiment which should be fairly familiar to most people from school chemistry lessons - then one gets a sense of the image of Shelley that is being constructed. His ideas appear bright, fiery, and exciting, but prove to be highly unstable and quickly dissolve away.

Regardless of their scientific inaccuracies, Hazlitt's metaphors have a powerful rhetorical effect, emphasising Shelley's empiricism gone mad, and his insensibility to the demands of 'common sense', or human sympathy ('his heart'). The essayist goes on to discuss the poet as a sort of scientific mountebank, who

tampers with all sorts of obnoxious subjects, but it is less because he is gratified with the rankness of the taint, than captivated with the intellectual phosphoric light they emit. It would seem that he wished not so much to convince or inform as to shock the public by the tenor of his productions, but I suspect he is more intent upon startling himself with his electrical experiments in morals and philosophy; and though they may scorch other people, they are to him harmless amusements, the coruscations of an Aurora Borealis, that 'play round the head, but do not reach the heart'. (*CWH*, VII, 149)

Hazlitt reduces Shelley's radicalism to the experiments of an eccentric scientist, which, while they delight the poet, may confuse or even damage his audience.

It is possible that Hogg may have been responding, consciously or unconsciously, to Hazlitt's criticisms of Shelley in parts of the *New Monthly* articles, for his account of the poet's relationship with chemistry tends to have the opposite effect to Hazlitt's scientific metaphors. When they first meet, Shelley is obsessed by the science, and takes great delight in making his own hair stand on end using a galvanic battery. He also discourses to Hogg with wild-eyed enthusiasm about future discoveries, and his biographer is careful to emphasise that despite Shelley's joy in seemingly pointless and possibly dangerous experiments, the poet firmly believes that scientific progress will end poverty and hunger, and that this is the reason for his obsession with the subject.¹⁰⁹ The poet's 'electrical experiments' are meant to help mankind, not shock them; his schemes and fantasies are always, for Hogg, benevolent ones, because Shelley's virtuous nature commands his enthusiasms. This is made very clear by an anecdote in the final part of 'Percy Bysshe Shelley at Oxford'. On a visit to London, Shelley drags his friend, to the latter's disgust, to a pawnbroker's shop 'in the neighbourhood of Newgate Street'. Hogg asks for an explanation, and learns that on a previous visit to London,

some old man had related to him a tale of distress, - of a calamity which could only be alleviated by the timely application of ten pounds; five of them he drew at once from his pocket, and to raise the other five he had pawned his beautiful solar microscope!¹¹⁰

This microscope, we are told, was 'a favourite plaything' of Shelley, and he had kept it long after 'he had parted with all the rest of his philosophical apparatus'. But in Hogg's story, the poet's desire to aid the unfortunate is shown to outweigh all other considerations, even his personal hobby-horses - thus Hogg attempts to give the reader an 'impression of the pure and genial beauty of Shelley's nature'.¹¹¹ Whereas Hazlitt uses

¹⁰⁹ *NMM*, January 1832, pp. 94-95.

¹¹⁰ *NMM*, December 1832, p. 513.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

science, in the form of a semi-personal, metaphorical critique, to argue that Shelley lives in a fantasy world of pointless radicalism, Hogg uses it, in the form of biographical anecdote, to represent the poet as a man deeply concerned with *practical*, paternalistic benevolence.

The publication of the Shelley articles occurred during a time of intense political agitation in the public sphere, and it is important to consider how Hogg's representation of a young and brilliant radical may have related to this. Late in 1831, Edward Lytton Bulwer took over the editorship of the *New Monthly* from Samuel Carter Hall (who was demoted to sub-editor), and transformed it from a relatively apolitical fashionable miscellany into a campaigning, reformist journal.¹¹² To some extent, then, it may have seemed a good vehicle for Hogg's articles, but there was also a tension between their account of an eccentric genius like Shelley, and the ideal of the new man of letters that Bulwer was propagating in the early 1830s. As I argued in chapter one, attempts to turn writing into a respectable profession seemed endangered by accounts of the literary genius as an isolated or transgressive figure. In Bulwer's case, he wanted a new breed of writers who could aid social progress by communicating with ordinary people. He was opposed to the artistic elitism represented by, for example, Maurice in the *Athenaeum*, a periodical which Bulwer attacked in *Paul Clifford* (1830) as "The Asinaeum," which was written to prove that whatever is popular is necessarily bad'.¹¹³ Although Hogg's Shelley is neither insane nor immoral, his very otherworldliness jars with Bulwer's notions of authorship in a newly reformed society.

In his *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1858), Hogg complained about Bulwer's interference with 'Percy Bysshe Shelley at Oxford': 'to write articles in a magazine or a

¹¹²Bulwer's editorship lasted for just under two years, after which Hall returned to the helm and the magazine lost its political edge.

¹¹³Quoted in Leslie A. Marchand, *The Athenaeum: A Mirror of Victorian Culture* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), p. 23. Bulwer's motivation for the attack was the paper's criticism of his *Pelham* in 1829.

review, is to walk in leading-strings [...] I contributed six or seven papers; being content to speak of my young fellow-collegian, not exactly as I would, but as I might'.¹¹⁴ He printed a letter from his editor, dated 12 January 1832, responding to Hogg's complaints about omissions from the first article. Bulwer tells him, that 'if an editor lays before him one great - paramount - consistent object in a periodical', that is, Reform, then 'alteration and omission become of frequent necessity [...] an oneness of opinion in all the papers is then requisite.'¹¹⁵ The changes he has made, Bulwer explains, were to passages on Oxford with which he disagreed, and to 'epithets and phrases, in which I thought a little exaggeration, natural to description and friendship, had crept in.' Hogg's editor warns him that the articles will not be published if he cannot make changes to them, and that this will probably be necessary in the future:

I have not yet done more than glance over a few lines in your second paper: and I see there, that your natural affection for Shelley carries you a little beyond that estimate of what he has left to the world, which as yet we are authorised to express. It is probable that this strain may be continued through the whole, and therefore require modification.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, in a postscript, Bulwer rejects Hogg's proposal of an article on Shelley's poetry, as they disagree about its merits. Bulwer asserts that 'he is great in parts; but, the "Cenci" excepted, does not in my opinion, effect a great whole.' However, 'the additional anecdotes on his life and opinions will be, I trust and believe, acceptable'.¹¹⁷

It is remarkable, I think, that the High Tory *Fraser's* published a general and very positive account of Shelley's poetry in 1831, as an introduction to its publication of 'The Wandering Jew', and yet there is no place in the reformist *New Monthly* for a similar

¹¹⁴Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), I, xiv.

¹¹⁵Hogg, xv-xvi.

¹¹⁶Hogg, xvi.

¹¹⁷Hogg, xvii.

article.¹¹⁸ Despite his loud opposition to ‘personality’, Bulwer was only interested in biographical anecdotes of Shelley. This is because although he believed him to be an important figure in understanding the intellectual spirit of the time, he was suspicious about the merits and influence of his poetry. In an article published a month before the first instalment of ‘Percy Bysshe Shelley at Oxford’, he argued that there was no necessary disjunction between imaginative writing and ‘a knowledge of the world’. Walter Scott, for example, ‘in his wildest flights, never loses sight of common sense - there is an affinity between him and his humblest reader; nay, the more discursive the flight, the closer that affinity becomes’. However,

Shelley disdains common sense. Of his “Prince Athanase,” we have no earthly comprehension - with his “Prometheus” we have no human sympathies; and the grander he becomes, the less popular we find him. Writers who do not in theory know their kind, may be admired, but they can never be popular. And when we hear men of unquestionable genius complain of not being appreciated by the herd, it is because they are not themselves skilled in the feelings of the herd.¹¹⁹

Echoing aspects of Hazlitt’s earlier criticisms of the poet, Bulwer finds Shelley to be too unworldly to be an effective communicator; for both writers, his lack of ‘common sense’ alienates from most other people. In an article on Tennyson, published the month after the final instalment of Hogg’s articles, Bulwer developed his charge that Shelley’s poetry was elitist:

When poetry cannot touch the common springs of emotion - cannot strike upon the Universal Heart, - there is a fault somewhere. Shelley would have been not a less, but a greater poet, if he had studied simplicity more [...] It is not philosophy to utter in grand words the rhapsodies of insanity.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ John Abraham Heraud, ‘New Poem.- By Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Wandering Jew: Introduction’, *FM*, June 1831, pp. 529-36.

¹¹⁹ Edward Lytton Bulwer, ‘The Knowledge of the World in Men and Books’, *NMM*, December 1831, p. 525.

¹²⁰ Edward Lytton Bulwer, ‘The Faults of Recent Poets: Poems by Alfred Tennyson’, *NMM*, January 1833, p. 69.

Considering that by the time this passage was printed, Leigh Hunt had published *The Masque of Anarchy*, Bulwer's view of Shelley's work is lamentably one-sided. But Hogg's articles, if anything, confirmed those suspicions because they emphasised so strongly that Shelley was a special and highly eccentric individual who was very different from the common run of humanity. We recall that when criticising Egerton Brydges in 1834, Bulwer argued that genius needed to become 'more social' and that modern men of letters exhibited 'a more wholesome and masculine frame of mind' than their predecessors.¹²¹ Neither Shelley's poetry, nor his character, seemed to fit the brave new world that the *New Monthly's* editor imagined would follow Parliamentary Reform.

Bulwer's sense that there was something fundamentally undemocratic about Shelley seemed to be born out by Hogg's account of the latter's politics in October 1832. Although the poet is described as having been 'entirely devoted to the lovely theory of freedom', Hogg represents him as a fundamentally speculative politician, 'eminently averse at that time from engaging in the far less beautiful practices wherein are found the actual and operative energies of liberty'.¹²² He reports a conversation with Shelley when the poet spoke with disdain about political articles in the press, and the House of Commons. However, according to Richard Holmes, Shelley became increasingly politically committed at Oxford, *largely due to Hogg's influence*, and read avidly Hunt's *Examiner* and Cobbett's *Political Register*.¹²³ In a move that would be repeated in the *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Hogg greatly understates his friend's youthful radicalism and totally conceals his own:

ordinary rules may guide ordinary men, but the orbit of the child of genius is essentially eccentric. Although the mind of Shelley had certainly a strong bias towards democracy, and he embraced with an ardent and youthful fondness the

¹²¹Edward Lytton Bulwer, 'Sir Egerton Brydges's *Autobiography*', *ER*, July 1834, p. 445.

¹²²*NMM*, October 1832, pp. 321-22.

¹²³Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 43.

theory of political equality, his feelings and behaviour were in many respects highly aristocratical [...] The unbleached web of transatlantic freedom, and the inconsiderate vehemence of such of our domestic patriots as would demonstrate their devotion to the good cause, by treating with irreverence whatever is most venerable, were equally repugnant to his sensitive and reverential spirit. As a politician, Shelley was in theory wholly a republican, but in practice, so far only as it is possible to be one with due regard for the sacred rights of a scholar and a gentleman; and these being in his eyes always more inviolable than any scheme of polity, or civil institution*, although he was upon paper and in discourse a sturdy commonwealth-man, the living, moving, acting individual, had much of the senatorial and conservative, and was, in the main, eminently patrician.¹²⁴

This Shelley is a sort of aristocratic dilettante, who, whatever his political theories, is in practice a conservative. Thus Hogg continues and strengthens the ‘deradicalising’ of the poet begun by *Blackwood’s Magazine*, and continued by Maurice. It is perhaps not surprising that Hogg would knowingly propagate such a false view of Shelley, but it is odd that Bulwer was willing to take this account as undeniable fact. His waspish footnote to ‘civil institution’ is ‘after all, we fear, from this passage, that our poet must have had very confused notions of the true scope and end of “Schemes of Polity” and “Civil Institutions.”’¹²⁵ The irony is that although Bulwer was fiercely egalitarian in the early 1830s, his views were nothing like as radical as those of the young Shelley or Hogg. But due to the efforts of Shelley’s supporters, Bulwer learnt to associate him with an artistic and political elitism which was fundamentally undemocratic.

VI

During the period from 1833 to 1841, De Quincey published over thirty personal reminiscences in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*. The most well known of these are his

¹²⁴Hogg, ‘Percy Bysshe Shelley at Oxford’, *NMM*, October 1832, pp. 324-25.

¹²⁵*ibid.*, p. 325.

four-part essay 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge' which began in September 1834, shortly after the poet's death, and his articles on Wordsworth, which appeared in 1839.¹²⁶ Like Hunt's account of Byron, these articles caused great controversy at the time, and were seen as breaches of personal trust. However, unlike Hunt, De Quincey justified them as a means of mediating genius to posterity, and furthermore, he tried very hard to distinguish them from mere gossip; although as we saw in the first part of this chapter, he had some difficulties in maintaining this distinction. Of course, the fact that his deeply personal and *interested* (as opposed to disinterested) accounts of the Grasmere circle obviously clash with the ideal of intellectual biography that he claims to support is one reason why they are so interesting, and stand out so strongly from more anodyne magazine recollections. And I think his achievement is greater than Hunt's, because although both men wanted to debunk the myths surrounding their subjects, De Quincey is normally generous about the literary talents of Wordsworth and Coleridge, whereas one gets the impression that Hunt often wants his readers to forget that Byron is a great poet.

Although there have been some good accounts of De Quincey's recollections of the Lake Poets, they have tended to focus on his psychological need to assert himself against Coleridge and Wordsworth. There has been no consideration of how their position within *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* should affect our reading of them. The journal, founded by William Tait early in 1832, was at first mainly a political organ which sought to advance the Radical cause, and its early contributors included Utilitarians like John Stuart Mill and Richard Cobden. But it also contained literary articles and reviews, which were generally non-partisan.¹²⁷ Because *Tait's* was inspired by utilitarianism rather

¹²⁶For discussions of these articles, see Cafarelli, chapter 5; Margaret Russet, *De Quincey's Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chapter 5, and John E. Jordan, *De Quincey to Wordsworth: A Biography of a Relationship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), chapter 5. My ideas on the 'Lake Reminiscences' have also been stimulated by two unpublished papers by Mirga Nekvedavicius and Julian North, both delivered at the Thomas De Quincey conference at the University of Bristol, May 2001.

¹²⁷For example, early in 1833 both Walter Scott and John Wilson were the subjects of panegyric articles: Harriet Martineau, 'The Achievements of the Genius of Scott', *TEM*, January 1833, pp. 445-60 and J. R. Chorley, 'The Poetical Works of Professor Wilson', *TEM*, March 1833, pp. 701-13.

than transcendentalism, genius was a far less important term to the journal than it was to *Fraser's Magazine*. However, in an article published in May 1833, Leigh Hunt showed how the word could be attached to a reformist agenda:

It is a sheer piece of egotism in the aristocratical and educated classes, to suppose that intellectual superiority has put them in their present state of privilege. Education would do just as much for others as it has done for them - a good deal, if it proceed properly. Genius has not made them lords and squires. It raises a man here and there; and in the first foundations of the present system of society, it may have laid a few of the stones; but accident, and subserviency, and brute force, laid by far the greater number. What may have been got by genius in the first instance, has certainly not been kept by it. Acquiescence and lying have been the great selfish conservatives.¹²⁸

Hunt's target is the sort of writing on genius that linked it with the maintenance of the social hierarchy - this went back as far as Duff and Gerard, but, as we have seen, was also given powerful expression in *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's*. His response is not to deny that humanity does exhibit 'inequalities of faculty', but to argue that these are not reflected in the way in which power and wealth are distributed in contemporary Britain, and thus do not justify this distribution. He also suggests that universal education would encourage a more meritocratic and mobile society. Hunt's account reveals that there is nothing inevitably reactionary about the concept of genius, even when genius is constructed as a form of subjectivity that transcends material considerations. To state explicitly that genius has little to do with politics or economics may weaken its power as a force for social change, but it can also weaken its power as a support for inequality:

Genius, considered merely in itself, and as a thing full of resources, wants nothing but itself for its honour and dignity. Praise it may need, because it is full of sympathy; and praise it gets or looks for. To common wants it is superior. Do we think that Sophocles, or Virgil, or Newton, or Locke, or Raphael, cared for any thing in the world, provided they could indulge their intellectual impulses, and obtain admiration? Did Schiller or Wieland care? Does Mr. Wordsworth? [...] We mean that, as a body, and as far as regards their salaries, they [men of genius] are

¹²⁸Leigh Hunt, 'The Wishing Cap No. III', *TEM*, May 1833, p. 142.

indifferent to every other superiority over their fellow-men, than such as the consciousness of genius can supply. If all the world had been in a condition of rational equality, *they* would not have been the men to want ten-thousand beef-steaks a day, or parks ten miles round in the neighbourhood of starving weavers.¹²⁹

Hunt's argument fitted in precisely with *Tait's* politics. De Quincey's instincts would probably have been to steer clear of such a Radical journal, but in 1833 he was in terrible financial difficulties and could not survive purely by writing for *Blackwood's*.¹³⁰ He began contributing to its rival in November with an anonymous essay on Kant, and the following month he published a harsh account of Hannah More, also under the cover of anonymity. This piece stands out very strongly from the other articles in the magazine, partly because of its personal, self-conscious tone, and partly because De Quincey's political beliefs were in evidence. At one point, Tait took issue with De Quincey's definition of 'Jacobinism' in a lengthy editorial footnote, and described him as a 'Tory of the purest strain'.¹³¹ The following year, he began a series of 'Sketches of Life and Manners; from the Autobiography of an English Opium Eater', which continued intermittently until 1841. As the majority of other articles in *Tait's* were anonymous, the 'Opium Eater' (who was widely known to be De Quincey) quickly became the most prominent character in the magazine, and the constant stream of autobiography must have given its readers a strong sense of personal acquaintance, perhaps even sympathy, with him. At the beginning of 1834, *Tait's* began a new series and the price was reduced from half a crown to one shilling. This made it more affordable for the lower middle-class and working-class readers who were its intended audience, and as a result, 'it became the largest selling magazine in Scotland and a surprisingly popular magazine

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Lindop, p. 304.

¹³¹ Thomas De Quincey, 'Hannah More', *TEM*, December 1833, p. 304.

in England'.¹³² Another important change occurred in June of that year, when *Johnstone's Edinburgh Magazine* - a cheap periodical - was incorporated into *Tait's*, and Christian Isobel Johnstone became the new 'hands-on' editor, although Tait maintained a strong role in the functioning of the magazine. Under Johnstone, the journal became much more of a literary magazine, but retained its reformist stance. The Opium Eater's contributions were an integral part of the new-look *Tait's* and must have aided its success. Robert Morrison has argued convincingly that the magazine offered a vehicle for the more 'liberal' side of De Quincey's character, and that he often expressed opinions in it which ran counter to the rabid Toryism of his contributions to *Blackwood's*.¹³³ Having said that, De Quincey was not a natural *Tait's* writer, and there was sometimes a certain *frisson* between some of the opinions expressed in his articles and the content of the rest of the magazine.

So when De Quincey began the essay on Coleridge in September 1834, the readers of *Tait's* were already familiar with the persona of the 'Opium Eater', and may have trusted his honesty even if they distrusted his politics. He started the first article by emphasising Coleridge's great genius, but quickly moved on to describe his plagiarisms, his procrastination, his unhappy marriage, his wife's jealousy of Dorothy Wordsworth (whom De Quincey did not mention by name), and the personal misery caused by his opium addiction. These revelations were mixed up with erudite disquisitions on Kant and Schelling, the purpose of which may have been to make De Quincey and his readers more comfortable with the gossipy nature of the essay. In the next two parts, De Quincey continued to emphasise his subject's 'majestic intellect', but, in the course of narrating Coleridge's life history, risked further annoying the poet's friends and relatives by arguing that he had first had recourse to opium due to his desire for 'luxurious

¹³²Mark A. Weinstein, 'Tait's Edinburgh Magazine', in *British Literary Magazines: The Romantic Age, 1789-1836*, ed. by Alvin Sullivan (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 401-05 (p. 402).

¹³³Robert Morrison, 'Red De Quincey', *Wordsworth Circle*, 29 (1998), 131-36.

sensations',¹³⁴ and discussing his falling out with Basil Montagu.¹³⁵ In the final part of 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge', he completed his biography of the poet and moved on to try to justify the essay. He emphasised that it had been composed '*almost extempore* and under circumstances of [...] extreme haste', and half-apologised for its impressionistic style.¹³⁶ This sort of special pleading was also used after the Wordsworth articles, and we should note that William Tait wrote to Christian Johnstone in 1840 that 'every piece of MS [...] which he put into my hands bore many, very many proofs of having been read over and corrected [...] he has always told me that he composes very slowly'.¹³⁷

De Quincey also stated that he intended to give 'a general glance [...] over the intellectual claims of Mr Coleridge', for 'those very claims constitute the entire and sole justification for the proceeding personal memoir'.¹³⁸ As we saw in the case of his justification of the Wordsworth articles, he felt that he had to tread very carefully as a biographer by emphasising that although he was fulfilling an understandable public interest in men of genius, this interest had to be related to the genius itself, rather just being irrelevant tittle-tattle. Thus, in promising a discussion of Coleridge's 'character' and 'manners', he explained why he felt that this was legitimate:

If Mr Coleridge had been merely a scholar - merely a philologist - or merely a man of science - there would be no reason apparent for travelling in our survey beyond the field of his intellect, rigorously and narrowly so called. But because he was a poet, and because he was a philosopher, in a comprehensive and most *human* sense, with whose functions the moral nature is so largely interwoven, I shall feel myself entitled to notice the most striking aspects of his *character*, [...] of his disposition, and his manners, as so many indications of his intellectual constitution.¹³⁹

¹³⁴Samuel Taylor Coleridge: by the English Opium Eater', *TEM*, October 1834, p. 593.

¹³⁵Samuel Taylor Coleridge: by the English Opium Eater', *TEM*, November 1834, p. 690.

¹³⁶Samuel Taylor Coleridge: by the English Opium Eater', *TEM*, January 1835, p. 5.

¹³⁷Quoted in Barry Symonds, "Do not suppose that I am underwriting myself": The Labyrinth of De Quincey's Manuscripts', *Wordsworth Circle*, 29 (1998), 137-40 (p. 137).

¹³⁸Samuel Taylor Coleridge: by the English Opium Eater', *TEM*, January 1835, p. 6.

¹³⁹*ibid.*

This is all very well, but De Quincey did not perform the survey that he promised. Over the next few pages, he discusses Coleridge's politics and that is where the essay ends. It is a remarkable spectacle to see De Quincey, normally described as an ultra-Tory, trying to make Coleridge's views palatable to the reformist readers of *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*. He begins by arguing that the designations 'Whig', 'Tory' and 'Radical' do not apply to the 'vast majority of good citizens'. Most people, including Coleridge, are '*Reformers*', with no party allegiance, who are 'favourably disposed to disposed to a spirit of ventilation and reform carried through all departments of public business'. Coleridge, we are told, was 'a friend to all enlightened reforms', including 'Reform in Parliament'. The poet's association with the Tory party is described as simply a result of his opposition to Bonaparte. Whatever the complexities of Coleridge's conservatism, De Quincey's account is somewhat tendentious, but the important point is that because he is writing in *Tait's*, he clearly feels impelled to put forward an argument which goes against the grain of many of his other political utterances. Such a passage could never have appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*.

Although the fourth part of 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge' ends with the editorial promise 'To be concluded in our next', this promise was not kept. I do not know for certain why De Quincey never completed his account of the poet, but one reason might be that he realised that *Tait's* readers did not particularly care about judging Coleridge's 'intellectual claims'. They simply did not have any sort of investment or interest in the conservative, transcendental philosophy which Coleridge represented in the 1830s, and which made him such an important figure for *Fraser's* audience of 'the metropolitan fashionable and educated elite'.¹⁴⁰ What De Quincey could never admit publicly was that the whole point of the Coleridge articles (and those on Wordsworth) was that they were

¹⁴⁰Lapp, p. 236.

gossip - they do not tell us much about either of the poet's works, but they do give a vibrant picture of the personal lives of two remarkable individuals. Despite De Quincey's obvious bitterness, the reader is mostly invited to sympathise with Coleridge's sufferings and human failings, which were not particularly heroic or special, but those experienced by 'ordinary' people all the time. It is highly fitting that the articles appeared in *Tait's*, because they deprived genius of the mystique with which it was associated by *Fraser's*, and which so often had reactionary ends.

As we saw earlier in the chapter, De Quincey's explicit justification for the Wordsworth notices is similar to that of the essay on Coleridge: they are valuable because they shed light on the genius of an author whose work will transcend time and place. But at the same time, De Quincey clearly seeks to counteract contemporary representations of Wordsworth as a paragon of wisdom and virtue by including details of him which are meant to show that in some ways the poet is not a particularly impressive man - this is, of course, part of the attraction of the articles. He also takes great pains to show that genius is not self-sufficient: Wordsworth is only able to devote his life to his art due to the sacrifices of his friends and family, and his enormous good fortune.¹⁴¹ Similarly, Coleridge is supported by a succession of friends and benefactors.¹⁴² The problem is that De Quincey is so good at making his subjects seem *human*, so good at *embodying* genius, that it becomes hard for the reader to connect the felicities of Coleridge's or Wordsworth's poetry - which De Quincey also emphasises - with their biographer's account of their appearance, habits and flaws. This has the effect of sundering man and work, and perhaps attacks implicitly the idea of the genius - which we find in Hogg's articles - as a person whose exceptional nature is revealed in all aspects of his life. However, I feel that this was less a conscious strategy on De Quincey's part, and

¹⁴¹'Lake Reminiscences, from 1807 to 1830. No. III: William Wordsworth', *TEM*, April 1839, pp. 247-51.

¹⁴²'Samuel Taylor Coleridge: by the English Opium Eater', *TEM*, January 1835, p. 4.

more the inevitable result of the personal bitterness behind these *ad hoc* productions, particularly with regard to Wordsworth. For when he was able to speak about genius in more abstract terms, he was content to link it with virtue in a way in which the Lake Poets would have approved:

A man of the highest talents is often obtuse and below the ordinary standard of men in his feelings; but no man of genius can unyoke himself from the society of moral perceptions that are brighter, and sensibilities that are more tremulous, than those of men in general.¹⁴³

Here De Quincey is discussing George Gilfillan's claims, in his literary portrait of Keats, that men of genius are *not* particularly prone to irritability, poverty, or nerves. De Quincey argues that this is difficult to prove or disprove: what can be shown is that geniuses have a greater capacity for happiness or unhappiness, and have 'moral perceptions that are brighter', than their fellows.

De Quincey is clearly a Romantic critic in so far as he believes that there is a clear distinction between genius and talent, and that men of genius are better than normal people morally as well as intellectually. But in the 'Lake Reminiscences', he also shows that they are living, breathing, *flawed* individuals who cannot succeed without financial and social support, thus undercutting the extreme representation of the creative artist as a transcendent, Godlike figure that we find in different forms in the writings of Heraud or Carlyle. Thus, whatever De Quincey's political views, the account of genius which is apparent in the articles on Coleridge and Wordsworth actually has an egalitarian edge, and fitted in well with the radicalism of *Tait's*. In the next chapter, I will show how a personal account of Wordsworth as a private man in *Blackwood's Magazine* could be used for a very different purpose.

¹⁴³Thomas De Quincey, 'Notes on Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits: John Keats*', Masson, XI, 382. First published in *TEM*, April 1846.

CHAPTER 3

BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORDSWORTH'S GENIUS

In an article describing his experiences as an Oxford undergraduate, published in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1835, Thomas De Quincey argued that his 'appreciation of Wordsworth' as a young man had put him thirty years in advance of his contemporaries. Although now, he claimed, 'no journal can be taken up which does not habitually speak of Mr Wordsworth as *a* great if not *the* great poet of the age', during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, 'language was exhausted, ingenuity was put on the rack, in the search after images and expressions vile enough - insolent enough - to convey the unutterable contempt avowed for all that he had written by the fashionable critics'.¹ According to De Quincey, for many years only one periodical supported the poet:

Blackwood's Magazine (1817) first accustomed the public ear to the language of admiration coupled with the name of Wordsworth. This began with Professor Wilson; and well I remember - nay, the proofs are still easy to hunt up - that, for eight or ten years, this singularity of opinion, having no countenance from other journals, was treated as a whim, a paradox, a bold extravagance of the *Blackwood* critics [...] In short, up to 1820, the name of Wordsworth was trampled under foot; from 1820 to 1830 it was militant; from 1830 to 1835 it has been triumphant.²

Peter Swaab has pointed out that the narrative of Wordsworth's reputation constructed by his former disciple was intended to emphasise what De Quincey described as 'the prophetic eye and general intrepidity' of himself and John Wilson.³ However, whilst De

¹ Thomas De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners; from the Autobiography of an English Opium Eater: Oxford', *TEM*, August 1835, p. 543.

² De Quincey, p. 543.

³ *Lives of the Great Romantics*, ed. by John Mullan and others, 3 vols (London: William Pickering, 1996), III, ed. by Peter Swaab, pp. xi-xii.

Quincey's portrayal of *Blackwood's* as a lone voice crying in the critical wilderness is inaccurate, the magazine was notable for its aggressive campaign to improve Wordsworth's reputation during the years from 1818 to 1822, which was a vital period in the establishment of the poet's place in the canon of English literature. This campaign contributed much to the later success of the poet, as well as to the construction of the 'Victorian' Wordsworth - 'a noble, morally pure priest of natural religion'⁴ - whose person was as much an object of veneration as his poetry.⁵

There have been a number of recent accounts of Wordsworth's 'self-fashioning' as a poet: his construction of his own literary career.⁶ Rather less has been written in the last few years on the construction of Wordsworth's literary career by his contemporaries.⁷ 'Constructed', of course, can mean either 'made' or 'interpreted'. The making of Wordsworth as a successful poet depended, in part, on interpretations of his writings and genius. Furthermore, narratives of Wordsworth's *success* were important preconditions for more tangible forms of reputation such as public honours or sales. Although I concentrate on representations of Wordsworth in this chapter, I should emphasise that these representations ultimately influenced real early nineteenth-century readers, affecting their views on poetry, genius, and Wordsworth himself; the ways in which they read his poetry, and indeed the likelihood of their reading it at all. To understand the process by which Wordsworth came to be widely viewed as a particular type of poetic genius who produced works of great value requires an act of historical

⁴ Carl Woodring, 'Wordsworth and the Victorians', in *The Age of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Kenneth R. Johnston and Gene W. Ruoff (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 261-75 (p. 262).

⁵ Margeret Oliphant, in her rather partisan account of *Blackwood's Magazine*, writes of 'the fine criticisms and noble defence by which, more than anything else except his own merits, the fame of Wordsworth was secured'; see *Annals of a Publishing House: William Blackwood and His Sons*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1897), I, 171. Her argument is overstated, but there is little doubt that representations of the poet in *Blackwood's* strongly influenced many other critics and readers.

⁶ These accounts have tended to concentrate on Wordsworth's views on posterity and the reading public, his dealings with publishers, and his campaign for copyright reform in the 1830s. See, for example, Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 44-50; Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), chapter 3; Thomas Pfau, *Wordsworth's Profession* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Mark Schoenfield, *The Professional Wordsworth* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

⁷ See, however, Swaab, pp. xi-xxvii. For the poet's reception in his last years, and after his death, see Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

imagination; to realise a time when a now canonical writer was still in competition with his peers, a time when his reputation still had to be made. Wordsworth's fame is a result of the way in which he was marketed and mediated both during his lifetime and since; his reputation *could* have been constructed differently.

The aim of this chapter is not merely to show how *Blackwood's* represented Wordsworth as a particular type of virtuous genius at a period when his position in literary culture was uncertain, but to examine what this image of the poet offered to the magazine and its readers. *Blackwood's* Wordsworth was used in its ideological and commercial battles with the *Edinburgh Review* and the so-called 'Cockney School', and helped the magazine create a position for itself within the increasingly competitive marketplace for periodical literature. The poet was also an ideal figure to support the journal's account of genius, because his artistic originality and boldness was counterbalanced, at least by the late 1810s, by his Toryism.

The most interesting *Blackwood's* writing on Wordsworth is aware of the contradiction between representing him as a disinterested figure who stood above the conflict of the urban literary marketplace, and the highly interested use of such representations by the magazine. This is particularly true of John Wilson's three 'Letters from the Lakes', published in *Blackwood's* in 1819. These articles are important because they mark an opening of generic possibilities in the way in which Wordsworth was represented. They do not review his poetry, or even discuss his 'thought', but give an account of his person and domestic life which adumbrates the lionisation of the poet in the 1830s and 40s. Despite the eulogistic tone of the 'Letters', I will suggest that Wilson deliberately intended to annoy Wordsworth by publishing details of his private life to the readers of *Blackwood's*. Furthermore, I will show that Wilson plays cleverly with the tensions inherent in mediating genius to a large, middle-class reading public. First,

however, I will discuss Wordsworth's reputation in the early nineteenth century, and the factors determining *Blackwood's* championing of the poet.

I

Despite De Quincey's remarks, Wordsworth's name was certainly not 'trampled under foot' until 1820; the story is much more complicated than that.⁸ The reviews of *Lyrical Ballads* were mostly good, and each volume sold about two thousand copies over a seven-year period.⁹ Wordsworth was not to achieve such commercial success again until the 1830s. In 1802, Jeffrey began his attacks on the 'Lake Poets' and other critics quickly followed suit.¹⁰ The *Edinburgh's* influence was apparent in the critical and commercial response to Wordsworth's *Poems* of 1807, which represented the nadir of the poet's reputation and sales.¹¹ In the period from 1807 to 1814, the critical consensus was to denigrate the Lake Poets, and Wordsworth in particular. However, reviews of *The Excursion* (1814), and the *White Doe of Rhyllstone* (1815) were generally good, although Jeffrey's attacks continued. Wordsworth's two publications of 1819, *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner*, were badly received by most critics, but this is hardly surprising considering their subject matter; it is almost as if the poet was being deliberately provocative. These bad reviews had relatively little influence on his reputation in so far

⁸ See William S. Ward, 'Wordsworth, the "Lake" Poets, and their Contemporary Magazine Critics, 1798-1820', *Studies in Philology*, 42 (1945), 87-113. Also Thomas M. Raysor, 'The Establishment of Wordsworth's Reputation', *Journal of English and German Philology*, 54 (1955), 61-71.

⁹ W. J. B. Owen, 'Costs, Sales, and Profits of Longman's Editions of Wordsworth', *The Library*, n.s. 12 (1956), 93-107 (pp. 93-95). The second, third and fourth editions (1800, 1802, and 1805) of the *Lyrical Ballads* were issued in two volumes, and an extra 250 copies of the second volume were printed in the second edition. Ward does not have sales figures for the first (single-volume) edition of 1798, but I have assumed an edition of five hundred, which was the norm for poetry.

¹⁰ Ward, p. 88.

¹¹ Ward, p. 89; Owen, pp. 95-96.

as he already had quite a weight of poetry published by then. The reviews of the *River Duddon* volume (1820) were mostly positive.

The good reviews enjoyed by Wordsworth in the 1810s did not have a strong effect on his sales, and this must have been because Jeffrey's attacks in the *Edinburgh*, which generally sold well over ten thousand copies (and was read by many more), had a far greater effect on contemporary readers than any number of appreciative reviews in minor periodicals like the *Philanthropist* or the *British Critic*.¹² Writing in 1819, John Gibson Lockhart (in the guise of Peter Morris) lamented the influence of Jeffrey's version of Wordsworth on Scottish readers:

The reading public of Edinburgh do not criticise Mr Wordsworth; they think him below their criticism; they know nothing about what he has done, or what he is likely to do. They think him a mere old sequestered hermit, eaten up with vanity and affectation, who publishes every now and then some absurd poem about a Washing-Tub, or a Leech-Gatherer, or a Little Grey Cloak. They do not know even the names of some of the finest poems our age has produced.¹³

Blackwood's writers tended to exaggerate the influence of *Edinburgh Review*, in order to emphasise the 'heroism' of their battle with it; Lockhart goes on to state that 'there is no work which has done so much to weaken the authority of the *Edinburgh Review* in such matters as *Blackwood's Magazine*'.¹⁴ But the *Edinburgh* was certainly highly influential during the 1810s, and the fact that Wordsworth, despite his professed aloofness from periodical criticism, was willing to invite ridicule by bitterly railing at Jeffrey in 1815 and 1816, shows his awareness of the damage that the critic had done to his reputation and sales.¹⁵

¹²Ward's article is weakened by his failure to take this into account. For the *Edinburgh's* circulation, see Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 392.

¹³Peter Morris [John Gibson Lockhart], *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1819), II, 143.

¹⁴*ibid.*, II, 144.

¹⁵Wordsworth attacked Jeffrey in the *Essay, Supplementary to the Preface* (1815), and *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (1816); see *Prose Works*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), III, 62 and 126-29. Clearly he attempted to make Jeffrey a scapegoat for his unpopularity, but that does not mean that the critic was not also influential.

De Quincey's narrative of Wordsworth's reputation *is* suggestive in so far as 1820 can be seen as a sort of turning point in his career, for during the next twenty years, his cultural status improved steadily. After Byron's death, he was arguably the most famous living English poet - although not the most successful - and he began to attract numerous visitors to the Lake District.¹⁶ His reviews were generally good after 1820 and attacks became less frequent. In 1831, Edward Moxon published an edition of his works for use in schools.¹⁷ *Yarrow Revisited* (1835) was exceptionally well-received by critics, and he was awarded public honours in the form of an honorary degree from Durham University (1838), an honorary doctorate from Oxford (1839), and, of course, the Laureateship (1843).¹⁸ His sales lagged somewhat behind his critical reputation, but started to improve markedly in the 1830s, and many editions of his poetry were published in the 1840s.¹⁹

The gradual change in the reception of Wordsworth must have been the result of a number of factors.²⁰ One of these was the growth of the market for periodical literature in the late 1810s and early 1820s, and in particular the founding of *Blackwood's Magazine*. The second generation of Romantic journalists - Lockhart, Hazlitt, John Scott and so on - who wrote for the new wave of monthly magazines that appeared after the end of the Napoleonic wars were much more receptive to 'Romanticism' than older critics like Jeffrey or Gifford. *Blackwood's* was both the most successful, and the most pro-Wordsworth of the new periodicals, but other journals were also receptive to his poetry. His growing prestige is apparent not just from reviews of his new volumes, but

¹⁶ Stephen Gill remarks that 'for the first time in English history, a writer's home had become a place of general pilgrimage while its stately incumbent was still alive'; *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, p. 11.

¹⁷ For a more detailed account of Wordsworth's reputation in the 1820s see Gill, *Wordsworth: A Life*, pp. 347-352. For the 1830s and 40s, see Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, chapter 1.

¹⁸ Gill, *Wordsworth: A Life*, pp. 396-99, 409-10.

¹⁹ For sales up to 1835, see Owen; Stephen Gill mentions Moxon's editions in the late 1830s and 1840s in *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, pp. 19, 30.

²⁰ Gill adduces the poet's longevity, and a change in 'the spirit of the age'; *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, p. 18.

by the appearance of a number of articles that offered general assessments of his work and ‘genius’.²¹ Although such writings were in part attempts to inform readers of Wordsworth’s particular excellencies and faults *as a poet*, they often crossed a thin line between discussing his literary abilities, and describing his personality and private life. This is hardly surprising; in chapter two, I showed that by the late Romantic period a cult of personality had developed within literary culture. The contemporary obsession surrounding the private lives of ‘men of genius’ deeply disturbed Wordsworth, but its exploitation by *Blackwood’s* can only have improved his cultural status.

II

Wordsworth’s first appearance in *Blackwood’s* did not bode well for his reputation. In the third number (June 1817), Wilson published an anonymous article entitled ‘Observations on Mr Wordsworth’s Letter Relative to a New Edition of Burns’s Works’, which was a response to the poet’s *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (1816) and, as Alan Lang Strout puts it, ‘a violent personal assault on Wordsworth, and a defence of Jeffrey’.²² At that time, William Blackwood’s journal was called the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*, edited by the incompetent duo, Pringle and Cleghorn. It was not until October of that year that the magazine was relaunched under control of the editorial triumvirate of Wilson, Lockhart, and Blackwood himself. In that controversial issue appeared an anonymous ‘Vindication of Mr Wordsworth’s Letter to Mr Gray’, which was also by Wilson and consisted largely of a rhapsodic paean to Wordsworth, setting

²¹ For example, ‘G. M.’, ‘On the Genius and Writings of Wordsworth’, *Imperial Magazine*, July 1820, pp. 598-602; John Scott, ‘Living Authors No. II: Wordsworth’, *LM*, March 1820, pp. 275-85; Thomas Noon Talfourd, ‘On the Genius and Writings of Wordsworth’, *NMM*, November and December 1820, pp. 483-508 and 648-55; John Wilson, ‘Essays on the Lake School of Poetry No. II: On the Habits of Thought, Inculcated by Wordsworth’, *BEM*, December 1818, pp. 257-63.

²² Alan Lang Strout, ‘John Wilson, “Champion” of Wordsworth’, *Modern Philology*, 31 (1934), 383-94 (p. 384).

the tone for much of *Blackwood's* later writing on the poet. Amusingly, Wilson violently criticised the writer of the 'Observations on Mr Wordsworth's Letter': '[I] beg leave to call the attention of your readers to the baseness of thus endeavouring, in an underhand way, to prejudice the public mind against a Man, no less admirable for the purity and sanctity of his life, than the originality and splendour of his genius.'²³ And yet in the next issue, in a reply to his own vindication of the poet, Wilson characterised Wordsworth very differently, as 'a melancholy, sighing, half-parson sort of gentleman, who lives in a small circle of old maids and sonnetteers, and drinks tea now and then with the solemn Laureate'.²⁴ Strout argues that these 'reviews' were as much a reflection of Wilson's 'extraordinary volatility' as a publicity stunt on behalf of a fledgling publication.²⁵ However, they must also be read in the context of the way in which the magazine's writers played with the idea of 'personality' in later issues of the magazine, particularly in the *Noctes Ambrosianae*. The writers of *Blackwood's* created a fictional, literary world populated by characters like Timothy Tickler, Christopher North and the Ettrick Shepherd. This adoption of different *personae* served as an interesting alternative to, or even a critique of, the Romantic valorisation of authorial sincerity. It is not surprising that when news of Wilson's 'stunt' leaked out, enemies of the magazine such as John Scott used it as evidence of the perverse malignity of *Blackwood's*, but we do not have to take that assessment seriously.²⁶ As we shall see, Wilson certainly had mixed feelings about his friend, but in the 1817 articles he was also, in a crude way, exploring different perspectives on Wordsworth and acting out the ongoing controversy surrounding the poet's merits.

²³'N.' [John Wilson], 'Vindication of Mr Wordsworth's Letter to Mr Gray, on a New Edition of Burns', *BEM*, October 1817, p. 67.

²⁴'D.' [John Wilson], 'Letter Occasioned by N.'s Vindication of Mr Wordsworth in Last Number', *BEM*, November 1817, p. 202.

²⁵Strout, pp. 392-93. According to Henry Crabb Robinson, Wordsworth believed his former friend to be capable of such capriciousness; see *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers*, ed. by Edith J. Morley, 3 vols (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1938), I, 256.

²⁶Strout, pp. 386-87.

After this initial flurry, the *Blackwood's* attitude to Wordsworth over the next few years was nearly always unqualified adulation. His genius was constantly celebrated and he was treated as a profound thinker, worthy of veneration. The following passage is typical:

With all the great and essential faculties of the Poet, he possesses the calm and self-commanding powers of the Philosopher [...] Hence he looks over the world of life, and man, with a sublime benignity [...] The pathos and the truth of his most felicitous Poetry are more profound than of any other, not unlike the most touching and beautiful passages in the Sacred Page.²⁷

Almost every *Blackwood's* article on the poet was by Wilson, who was himself seen as a member of the 'Lake School' after the publication of two volumes of poetry during the previous few years. Following a brilliant career at Oxford, Wilson had settled at the Elleray estate near Windermere in 1808. He had already written Wordsworth a fan letter in 1802, and he quickly became a close friend of the poet and his family.²⁸ Writing in August 1808, Dorothy Wordsworth told her friend Catherine Clarkson about Wilson's reverence for her brother, and the increasing intimacy between the two households.²⁹ *The Isle of Palms* (1812), Wilson's first volume of poetry, bears obvious marks of Wordsworth's influence: in one poem, 'The Angler's Tent', Wilson even self-deprecatingly compares his mentor's 'inspired song' with his own 'lowlier simple strain'.³⁰ Shortly after its publication, however, the friendship seems to have become

²⁷ John Wilson, 'Essays on the Lake School of Poetry No. I: Wordsworth's *White Doe of Rhylstone*', *BEM*, July 1818, p. 371. For other accounts of Wordsworth, see 'Essays on the Lake School of Poetry No. II: On the Habits of Thought, Inculcated by Wordsworth (December 1818); 'Letters from the Lakes' (January and March 1819); reviews of *Peter Bell* (May 1819), *The Waggoner* (June 1819), *Crabbe's Tales of the Hall* (July 1819), *River Duddon* (May 1820), and *Ecclesiastical Sketches and Memorials of a Tour* (August 1822) - all by John Wilson. Lockhart offered several passages praising Wordsworth in *Peter's Letters to His Kinfolk* (1819). Patmore's two 'Sonnets to Mr Wordsworth' appeared in February 1818 and Moir published a sonnet on the poet in February 1821.

²⁸ For a detailed account of the relationship between Wilson and Wordsworth up to 1817, see Alan Lang Strout, 'William Wordsworth and John Wilson: A Review of their Relations between 1802 and 1817', *PMLA*, 49 (1934), 143-83. See also Mary Gordon, *Christopher North: A Memoir of John Wilson*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Thomas C. Jack, 1879), chapter 5 and Elsie Swann, *Christopher North* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934), chapter 3.

²⁹ Quoted in Strout, 'William Wordsworth and John Wilson', p. 151.

³⁰ John Wilson, *The Isle of Palms and Other Poems* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1812), p. 186.

strained, and by 1815 a breach between the two poets had developed.³¹ In February of that year, Henry Crabb Robinson reports the following piece of gossip by De Quincey:

Wilson, the minor poet of the Lakes, is estranged from Wordsworth. Vanity among such men produces sad effects. Wordsworth was offended that Wilson should borrow so much without acknowledgment from him and his works, and has therefore given no praise to Wilson. This pains Wilson, who has, besides, peculiarities in his manners, etc., which Wordsworth does not spare.³²

It seems that Wilson's hero-worship of the older man became tinged with the resentment of a friend who found his merits were not acknowledged, and perhaps also with the anxiety of a poet trying to emancipate himself from the influence of a literary forebear. When Wilson began to write for *Blackwood's Magazine*, after being forced to give up his life of gentlemanly leisure due to a heavy financial loss, his mixed feelings about Wordsworth were given literary expression: under the cover of anonymity, he became a powerful 'champion' of the poet, but, as we have seen, was at times capable of savagely lashing out at him. Even after the flurry of panegyric accounts of the poet he published around 1820, Wilson clearly still felt ambivalent about Wordsworth. Although he still usually praised him, in the *Noctes Ambrosianae* of September 1825, Christopher North, the fictional editor of the magazine and Wilson's *Blackwood's* persona, stated that Wordsworth was 'a good man and a bad poet' and that *The Excursion* was 'the worst poem of any character in the English language'. When another victim of the same article threatened legal action, Wilson hid in the Lake District and sent letters to Blackwood begging him not to reveal his name for fear that he would be exposed as Wordsworth's calumniator.³³ Three years later, he published a lengthy attack on *The Excursion* for its lack of Christian doctrine.³⁴

³¹ Strout, 'William Wordsworth and John Wilson', pp. 172-83.

³² Henry Crabb Robinson, I, 160. Wordsworth's dismissal of Wilson's poetical merits was probably prompted by Jeffrey's praise of Wilson (who was his personal friend) at the expense of Wordsworth in his review of the *Isle of Palms*.

³³ Oliphant, I, 277-87.

³⁴ 'Sacred Poetry', *BEM*, December 1828. Stephen Gill argues that this article, which was republished in *The Recreations of*

Wilson's personal and artistic relationship with Wordsworth is clearly important for understanding his 'championing' of the poet, but this also served the interests of *Blackwood's Magazine* as well as his own psychological needs. Jeffrey N. Cox has recently argued that the impetus behind *Blackwood's* support for the poet was its enmity towards the 'Cockney School'. At the beginning of the first 'Cockney School' article, Z. [Lockhart] writes that 'the whole world is occupied with balancing the merits [...] of what is commonly called THE LAKE SCHOOL'.³⁵ Cox states that 'he must surely be alluding most immediately to the debate aroused by the publication of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*', and 'more generally, Z. must have had in mind what was at this point a more than yearlong attack on the Lake School by the group of writers gathered around Leigh Hunt.' He concludes that '*Blackwood's* editors seem to decide that if the gathering of liberal and radical intellectuals around Hunt criticized Wordsworth and the Lakers, then *Blackwood's* would defend them: if you are my enemy's enemy, then you must be my friend.'³⁶

Wordsworth is mentioned several times in the 'Cockney School' articles. In the first, Lockhart attacks Hunt for having the temerity to admire him:

How such an indelicate writer 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. We can conceive a vicious man admiring with distant awe the spectacle of virtue and purity; but if he does so sincerely, he must also do so with the profoundest feeling of the error of his own ways, and the resolution to amend them [...] Mr Hunt praises the purity of Wordsworth as if he himself were pure, his dignity as if he also were dignified [...] For the person who writes *Rimini*, to admire the *Excursion*, is just as impossible as it would be for a Chinese polisher

Christopher North (1842), may have influenced Wordsworth's revision of *The Excursion* in 1845; see *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, p. 66.

³⁵'Z.' [John Gibson Lockhart], 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. I', *BEM*, October 1817, p. 38.

³⁶Jeffrey N. Cox, 'Leigh Hunt's Cockney School: The Lakers' 'Other'', *Romanticism on the Net*, 14 (1999), paragraph 4, 8 January 2002, <<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/huntlakers.html>>.

of cherry-stones, or a gilder of tea-cups, to burst into tears at the sight of the Theseus or the Torso.³⁷

This passage shows the extent to which *Blackwood's*, even at this early stage, was intent on transforming the appreciation of Wordsworth into an index of moral virtue. There are also obvious religious overtones to the way in which Wordsworth is described; note the use of 'patriarchal' and especially 'purity' (three times). In order to deny Hunt the merit of admiring Wordsworth, Lockhart has to assert that the admiration is pretended, arguing that if Hunt felt seriously about the poet, he would change his ways. The simile in the final sentence seeks to denigrate Hunt by comparing him with Oriental artisans - Lockhart's rhetoric relies on both xenophobia and class prejudice. Wordsworth, on the other hand, is associated with the Greek artist who created the Elgin Marbles, emphasising that his works are classics which can only be properly appreciated by well-educated gentlemen.

A similar attempt to prevent Cockney approbation of Wordsworth occurs about a year later, in Lockhart's attack on Keats. He notes that in the sonnet 'Great spirits now on earth are sojourning', the young poet

classes together WORDSWORTH, HUNT, and HAYDON, as the three greatest spirits of the age, and that he alludes to himself, and some others of the rising brood of Cockneys, as likely to attain hereafter an equally honourable elevation. Wordsworth and Hunt! what a juxta-position! 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.³⁸

Strangely, in the next 'Cockney School' article, 'Z' spends some time 'juxta-posing' Hunt and Wordsworth. He explains the latter's 'egotism' in terms of his 'genius', but finds Cockney 'egotism' to be 'inexplicable' as 'none of them are men of genius - none

³⁷'Z.' [Lockhart], 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. I', p. 41.

³⁸'Z.' [Lockhart], 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. IV', *BEM*, August 1818, p. 520.

of them are men of solitary meditative habits'.³⁹ This is a defence of Wordsworth from Hazlitt's and Hunt's criticisms of his 'egotism' - here the charge is simply thrown back at the 'Cockneys' with added venom.⁴⁰

So it is certainly true that *Blackwood's* used their support of the 'Lake School', and of Wordsworth in particular, as a weapon in the war against the 'Cockney School'. However, Cox's account does not give the full story. Before the founding of his magazine, William Blackwood had been engaged for some years in a battle with Archibald Constable for control of the Scottish literary market.⁴¹ *Blackwood's* was started in order to challenge Constable's two journals - the *Scots Magazine* and the mighty *Edinburgh Review* - both commercially and ideologically. As Lockhart noted in 1819, 'the history of this Magazine [*Blackwood's*] may be considered [...] as the struggle, namely, of two rival booksellers, striving for their respective shares in the profits of periodical publications'.⁴² During the period from 1818 to 1820, Wilson and Lockhart attacked Francis Jeffrey a number of times; his failure to appreciate Wordsworth's genius became the main example of his own weakness as a critic, the inadequacies of the *Edinburgh Review*, and the lamentable ignorance and partisanship of Edinburgh Whigs. Writing in 1818, Wilson made it clear that *Blackwood's* was on a mission to counteract the *Edinburgh's* influence and mediate Wordsworth to the Scottish reading public:

³⁹'Z.' [Lockhart], 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. V', *BEM*, April 1819, p. 97.

⁴⁰See William Hazlitt, 'Illustrations of the Times Newspaper', *CWH*, VII, 144-45 and 'On the Living Poets', *CWH*, V, 163. Hunt criticised Wordsworth's sequestration in the notes to *The Feast of the Poets* (London: James Cawthorn, 1814; repr. Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989), pp. 90 and 107-08. He also praises 'health and sociality' over 'disappointed egotism' in the 'Preface' to *Foliage* (1818), in *Leigh Hunt's Literary Criticism*, ed. by Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 132.

⁴¹See Oliphant, I, chapters 2 and 3.

⁴²Lockhart, *Peter's Letters*, II, 226.

We are well aware, that what we have now written of Wordsworth is not the opinion entertained of his genius in Scotland, where, we believe, his Poetry is scarcely known, except by the extracts from it, and criticisms upon it, in the Edinburgh Review. But in England his reputation is high, - indeed, among many of the best judges, the highest of all our living Poets; and it is our intention, in this and some other articles, to give our readers an opportunity of judging for themselves, whether he is or is not a great poet. This they will best be enabled to do by fair and full critiques on all his principal Poems, and by full and copious quotations from them, selected in an admiring but impartial spirit.⁴³

And in *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk* (1819), a book-length account of Edinburgh society published by Blackwood, 'Peter Morris' (Lockhart) gave an account of a Burns dinner which emphasised the inability of the *Edinburgh's* writers to overcome their party allegiance and recognise genius:

not one of these Edinburgh Reviewers had the common candour or manliness, in a meeting, the object of which was so purely to do honour to poetic genius, to propose the health either of Wordsworth, or of Southey, or of Coleridge. I could not have believed that the influence of paltry prejudices could ever be allowed to controul in such a way the conduct of men so well entitled to be above their sphere [...] I had no conception previously of the real extent to which, in this country of political strife, the absurdities of party spleen are carried, even by men of eminence and virtue.⁴⁴

There are a number of other factors that encouraged *Blackwood's* support of Wordsworth. Early in 1819, William Blackwood was attempting to solicit Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a contributor.⁴⁵ The panegyric on Wordsworth and Coleridge in Wilson's 'Letters from the Lakes' (March 1819) may well have been partly designed to secure Coleridge's approbation, and William Blackwood sent Coleridge that particular issue. In June 1819, William Davis (of Cadell and Davis, Blackwood's London agents) wrote to the publisher, stating that '[Coleridge] *must* be much influenced, I think, by what he has discovered of the altered manner in which both he himself and his friend Wordsworth

⁴³Wilson, 'Essays on the Lake School of Poetry No. I', p. 371.

⁴⁴Lockhart, *Peter's Letters*, I, 118-19. This is not the only attack on Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh Review* in *Peter's Letters*; see also II, 125-46 and 204-16.

⁴⁵See Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 272-73 and Alan Lang Strout, 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Wilson of *Blackwood's Magazine*', *PMLA*, 48 (1933), 100-28 (pp. 108-10).

have lately been mentioned in your Magazine'.⁴⁶ Another reason is simply that Wordsworth's Toryism, which was becoming increasingly apparent (especially after his support for Lowther in the Westmoreland election of 1818), chimed in with *Blackwood's* own ideological stance. Wordsworth was also seen as a long-term 'cultural investment' by the magazine. The hope behind such an investment was that in the future the poet's reflected glory would shed light on the perspicacity of *Blackwood's* and its writers. This is why it was so important to deny that the 'Cockneys' could have the taste to appreciate him; only those who wrote for *Maga* could be seen as his true acolytes. In the 1820s, they used their championing of Wordsworth, who they now represented as successful, as evidence for their supremacy over other periodicals, particularly the *Edinburgh*. Thus Wilson wrote that

to us exclusively belongs the merit of obliging the people of Scotland to read Wordsworth. We have made him popular here, in spite of the *Edinburgh Review*, and all the Whigs that whine in chorus. Their low and unprincipled abuse of that great man we exposed and punished; and we have spread Wordsworth's fame o'er earth and seas.⁴⁷

And in 1826, Wilson and Maginn used Wordsworth as an example of the way in which, they claimed, *Blackwood's* had revolutionised contemporary criticism:

no Zany-Zoilus in the Blue and Yellow [the cover of the *Edinburgh Review*] could any longer outcrow the reading Public. A long, prosing leading article in the *Edinburgh*, abusing Wordsworth, looked ineffably silly beside one splendid panegyric paragraph in *Maga* on the Great Laker.⁴⁸

Neither of these extracts should be taken at face value. Rather, they should be seen as 'performative utterances'; types of statement intended to make what they describe actually occur. This is a typical *Blackwood's* tactic, apparent in accounts of their own

⁴⁶Quoted in Roe, p. 273.

⁴⁷Christopher North [John Wilson], 'An Hour's Tête-à-Tête with the Public', *BEM*, October 1820, p. 93.

⁴⁸John Wilson and William Maginn, 'Preface', *BEM*, 1826.

cultural power, the decline of the *Edinburgh Review*, and the existence of a 'Cockney School'. In the case of Wordsworth, the hyperbolic assertion of his fame is an attempt to produce *belief* in that fame among *Blackwood's* readership, thus actually effecting an improvement in his reputation.

Perhaps the most important use that *Blackwood's* made of Wordsworth was to valorise a particular model of poetic genius. It endeavoured to show that the poet's sequestration in the Lake District had nothing to do with egotism or misanthropy, but suited his philosophical distance from the corruptions of city life. Thus in December 1818, Wilson argued that whereas Rousseau's genius was 'perverted' when he moved from the mountains to the city, 'Mr Wordsworth has acted more wisely in keeping aloof, and continuing to cultivate his mind according to its pristine bias, and forbearing to grapple too closely with the differently educated men of cities'.⁴⁹ He also emphasised that Wordsworth's praiseworthy aloofness from the outside world was very different from the deliberate alienation of the transgressive Byronic hero:

It would seem that the kind of sublimity with which the English have always been delighted, consists merely in an exhibition of the strength of the human energies [...] witness Coriolanus, Richard the Third, Satan in Paradise Lost, the Giaours and the Corsairs, &c. of modern days [...] [But Wordsworth's] contemplative Platonism 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.⁵⁰

Although here Wordsworth's philosophy is described as not following the national spirit, he was often represented by *Blackwood's* as a figure who could greatly improve the minds of his countrymen - a powerful genius who fulfilled the journal's demand for 'a

⁴⁹ John Wilson, 'Essays on the Lake School of Poetry No. II. On the Habits of Thought, Inculcated by Wordsworth', *BEM*, December 1818, p. 263.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 254-55.

literature generous and aspiring,- yet guarded alike by wisdom and reverence from all transgression'.⁵¹

III

Early in 1819, Wilson published three 'Letters from the Lakes' in *Blackwood's*. They purported to be translations of letters written by a young German, Philip Kempferhausen, while holidaying in the Lake District in the summer of 1818. The first letter describes his wanderings among the Lakes, the second concentrates on a trip to Ambleside and a meeting with Robert Southey, and the third recounts a visit to Wordsworth at Rydal Mount. This letter treats the poet as a celebrity, and foreshadows interestingly his status as a Lakeland oracle in the latter period of his life. Like Wilson's other articles on the poet, it still seeks to defend Wordsworth's work from his critics, but does so through a representation of his personal character and private life. He appears as, in part, a country gentleman immersed in a network of healthy, paternalistic social relations and is linked with *Blackwood's* Tory ideology based on agrarian virtue, the maintenance of social distinctions, and religious orthodoxy. At the same time, despite its panegyric tone, by breaching the boundaries between public and private in such a way the article represents a deliberate insult to Wordsworth, and reveals Wilson's ambivalent feelings about his former friend.

I will begin by discussing briefly the first two letters, published together in January 1819. In the first, Kempferhausen writes of the beauties of the Lake District with

⁵¹ John Wilson, 'On Literary Censorship', *BEM*, November 1818, p. 177.

great enthusiasm; he describes his time there as 'a month in Paradise' and recounts the uplifting effect this environment has had on his 'soul'. He explains that

it is perhaps on persons such as I that nature most omnipotently works, persons who have known enough of her and her wonders to have conceived for her a deep and unconquerable passion, but whom destiny has debarred from frequent intercourse, and chained down among scenes most alien indeed to all her holiest influences.⁵²

Thus it is the urban tourist who is most sensitive to the natural world. In the course of a lengthy account of the joys of a solitary wander through the Lake District, it soon becomes apparent, to the initiated *Blackwood's* reader, that Kempferhausen is also an enthusiast for Wordsworth. He quotes the first two lines of 'My heart leaps up' (p. 396) and his prose echoes 'Tintern Abbey': 'the spirit of human life breathed a peculiar music' (p. 397).⁵³ After a rhapsodic, but almost entirely abstract account of 'the hills of Westmoreland', Kempferhausen describes the rustic inhabitants of the area, emphasising their beauty and primitive virtue: 'Never had I seen so fine-looking a race [...] I now beheld before me the free children of the soil, and I could not but admire the sons and daughters of liberty' (pp. 398-399). This account of the people of Lake District clearly has Wordsworthian resonances, and is meant to contradict those critics, like Hazlitt and Jeffrey, who had attacked the poet for writing about 'brutish' peasants.

The second letter describes a visit to the house of Robert Southey at Keswick. Kempferhausen's unnamed correspondent, it transpires, is also a fan of the Lake Poets, and thus the young German feels enabled to reveal information about their private lives:

I hope that I know too well what is due to the sanctity of the domestic life of men of genius and virtue, to utter one idle word about that bright scene of happiness which I was permitted, though a stranger and unknown, to behold and to enjoy -

⁵²'Letters from the Lakes', *BEM*, January 1819, p. 396. All further page references to this article are in the text.

⁵³Compare 'Tintern Abbey': 'The still, sad music of humanity' (line 91). There is another echo in the third letter; Kempferhausen writes that 'no wonder that these mountains, and glens, and groves, are becoming every day more dear to me [...] This beautiful country is dear to me for its own sake' - see 'Tintern Abbey', lines 157-59. See William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads' and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 118, 120.

but to you who, like myself, regard these men at once as the most original of poets, and the most patriotic of citizens, I may be allowed to communicate something of what I felt in their presence. (p. 401)

Here Wilson is playing with notions of public and private. Kempferhausen justifies his forthcoming account of the private lives of Wordsworth and Southey on the grounds of the respect that he and his friend have for them, and the private nature of their correspondence. As a document in a public journal, the article may of course be read by individuals who have no respect for the Lake Poets, so in its own terms, it seems to transgress the 'sanctity of the domestic life of men of genius and virtue', which Kempferhausen claims to value so highly. However, during 1818 *Blackwood's* had cajoled, instructed, and *constructed* its readers as individuals who were capable of appreciating the Lake Poets and simply needed to be introduced to their merits. Through Kempferhausen, Wilson is addressing the entire readership of *Blackwood's*, and telling them that now they have been educated in Wordsworth's genius and virtue, they have earned the right to consume images of his private life - an assertion with which Wordsworth himself would certainly not have concurred.

Southey is a 'genteel-looking man possessing much natural elegance, or even grace'. He has an idyllic family life and sits daily in his wonderful library, 'meditating future works for the benefit of mankind' (p. 402). He gives Kempferhausen an introductory note to Wordsworth, 'of whom he [Southey] spoke as the greatest poet since the days of Shakspeare, and of whose personal character he seemed impressed with the profoundest veneration'. Kempferhausen promises the reader that 'of that extraordinary person - certainly the most original genius of his day, at least of his country (for we must not yield our Goethe) - I shall endeavour to speak in my next Letter' (p. 404). As we have seen, Southey's extraordinarily high placing of Wordsworth in the

poetic canon, above even Milton, would have been a very isolated position in the 1810s; but it fits in very well with the hyperbolic tenor of most of Wilson's articles on the poet.

On his walk back to Ambleside, Kempferhausen muses on Southey's intellect, achievements, and self-discipline, and defends him from charges of apostasy, arguing that he 'has shewn himself to be, what every great Poet must be, unless dark or evil passions have unsettled and disturbed his spirit, a patriot - a devout lover of his country' (pp. 403-04). He goes on to oppose the Radical narrative of the Lakers' political shifts with the familiar defence that their youthful idealism has been modified by 'matured experience'. Southey has always had a love of 'mankind', but he has a good Tory enmity to 'sudden innovations' and a regard for time-hallowed 'National Institutions'. With some unconscious irony, for this is the year of Peterloo, the young German exclaims, 'what a glorious thing is public feeling [...] in this happy country, and with what a voice of thunder does it speak!' (p. 404). Despite 'all the prejudices of sectarian spleen - all the levity and indifference, real or affected, of mere worldly men to the character and pursuits of a recluse poet and philosopher', Southey has a 'splendid and noble' reputation among 'enlightened and good men, citizens, and Christians'. The claim that 'mere worldly men' have failed to appreciate virtuous genius is repeated in the later description of Wordsworth.

In the third of the 'Letters from the Lakes' (March 1819), as Peter Swaab has argued, Wilson situates Wordsworth in a pastoral context like that of *The Excursion*.⁵⁴ This is significant, for in part, the article attempts to mediate the persona that Wordsworth adopted in that poem - of the Miltonic philosopher-poet - to the readers of *Blackwood's*. It also seeks to defend this version of genius from the criticisms of Hazlitt

⁵⁴Swaab, 7.

and Jeffrey, who had represented Wordsworth as an alienated, antisocial figure in their reviews of Wordsworth's epic.⁵⁵ Jeffrey in particular had argued that the faults of *The Excursion* stemmed from the poet's isolated existence. 'Long habits of seclusion,' he declared,

and an excessive ambition of originality, can alone account for the disproportion which seems to exist between this author's taste and his genius; or for the devotion with which he has sacrificed so many precious gifts at the shrine of those paltry idols which he has set up for himself among his lakes and his mountains.⁵⁶

As Jeffrey saw it, Wordsworth lacked 'taste' because of his desire to distance himself from his contemporaries both geographically and artistically. Echoing the familiar criticism that Wordsworth's subjects were too puerile for poetry, Jeffrey also claimed that the poet has wasted his genius in glorifying 'paltry idols', presumably both natural objects and lowly individuals such as pedlars and children. He went on to elaborate further on Wordsworth's separation from polite, literary society:

Solitary musings, amidst such scenes, might no doubt be expected to nurse up the mind to the majesty of poetical conception, - (though it is remarkable that all the greater poets lived, or had lived, in the full current of society): - But the collision of equal minds, - the admonition of prevailing impressions - seems necessary to reduce its redundancies, and repress that tendency to extravagance or puerility, into which the self-indulgence and self-admiration of genius is so apt to be betrayed, when it is allowed to wanton, without awe or restraint, in the triumph and delight of its own intoxication. That its flights should be graceful and glorious in the eyes of men, it seems almost to be necessary that they should be made in the consciousness that mens' eyes are to behold them, - and that the inward transport and vigour by which they are inspired, should be tempered by an occasional reference to what will be thought of them by those ultimate dispensers of glory. (p. 3)

⁵⁵ William Hazlitt, 'Character of Mr Wordsworth's New Poem, The Excursion', *The Examiner*, 21 August, 28 August, and 2 October, pp. 541-42, 555-58 and 636-38. It is reprinted in *CWH*, XIX, 9-25. The review was also published, with changes which made it much more negative, in *The Round Table* (1817); see *CWH*, IV, 111-25.

⁵⁶ Francis Jeffrey, 'Wordsworth's *Excursion*', *ER*, November 1814, p. 3. All further references to this article are in the text.

Here Jeffrey opposed the Wordsworthian 'egotistical sublime' with a Whig account of cultural production; a very eighteenth-century model of polite letters, the public sphere, pitched against the model of the isolated genius. The critic grudgingly admits that poetry may result from the solitary experience of nature, emphasising at the same time that 'all the greater poets' were sociable urbanites. He asserts that 'genius' needs restraint, for on its own it is liable to 'extravagance', 'self-indulgence', 'intoxication', and the production of 'redundancies'. This is essentially a dialogic account of artistic creation; the dangerous fantasies of the imagination need to be curbed by social interaction with 'equal minds'. Jeffrey goes on to argue that genius can only succeed through 'an habitual and general knowledge of the few and settled permanent maxims, which form the canon of general taste in all large and polished societies'. An awareness of these 'maxims' prevents poetry from being an exercise in self-indulgence, for 'many things, which we still love and are moved by in secret, must necessarily be despised as childish, or derided as absurd, in all such societies' (p. 3). This statement provides an interesting gloss on the well-known gap between Jeffrey's private appreciation of the Lake Poets, and his public attacks on them - for Jeffrey, the reviewer, like the poet, has a responsibility to reflect 'general taste' which means that his personal literary pleasures cannot necessarily be expressed in his critical judgements.

As in his earlier reviews of Wordsworth, Jeffrey appeals to universal standards of taste which he claims that the poet has clearly breached. These standards are, the critic believes, well understood by the urban reading public that Wordsworth has ignored:

If Mr Wordsworth, instead of confining himself almost entirely to the society of dalesmen and cottagers, and little children, who form the subjects of his book, had condescended to mingle a little more with the people that were to read and judge of it, we cannot help thinking, that its texture would have been considerably improved: At least it appears to us to be absolutely impossible, that any one who had lived or mixed familiarly with men of literature and ordinary judgment in poetry, (of course we exclude the coadjutors and disciples of his own

school), could ever have fallen into such gross faults, or so long mistaken them for beauties. (pp. 3-4)

If, as Raymond Williams argued, the Romantic poets' emphasis on genius can be seen as partly a response to the alienation of the poet from his audience, then Jeffrey's critique of genius is based on a refusal to accept that this alienation necessarily exists.⁵⁷ As far as he is concerned, Wordsworth's failure is due to his self-induced separation from the reading public, and his disdain for its feelings. It was *Blackwood's* task to show that the poet's position actually resulted from the failure of this public to appreciate his profound philosophical poetry, and that *their* readers could be taught to admire him. In sharp contrast to Jeffrey's review, the third of the 'Letters from the Lakes' celebrates Wordsworth's sequestration in the Lake District, and presents it as a guarantee of the merits of his poetry.

The 'Letter' begins with Kempferhausen in Ambleside. He visits its churchyard at dawn, and tells the story of a consumptive girl who was buried there the day before. This sort of literary epitaph could almost have come out of Book VI of *The Excursion*. The young German leaves the churchyard, and traverses Kirkstone Pass, undergoing a Wordsworthian experience of seclusion and sublimity.⁵⁸ Arriving at Rydal, he visits the poet, whose stature as a philosopher is obvious even from his appearance:

They who have formed to themselves, as many have foolishly done, the idea of a simple pastoral poet, who writes sweet and touching verses, would be somewhat astounded to find themselves in the presence of William Wordsworth. There seemed to me, in his first appearance, something grave almost to austerity, and the deep tones of his voice added strength to that impression of him [...] His mind seemed to require an effort to awaken itself thoroughly from some brooding train of thought, and his manner, as I felt at least, at first reluctantly relaxed into blandness and urbanity. There was, however, nothing of vulgar pride in all this, although perhaps it might have seemed so, in an ordinary person. It was the dignity of a mind habitually conversant with high and abstracted thoughts - and unable to divest itself wholly, even in common hours, of the stateliness inspired

⁵⁷ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1993), chapter 2.

⁵⁸ 'Letters from the Lakes: Letter III', *BEM*, March 1819, pp. 737-38. All further references to this article are within the text.

by the loftiest studies of humanity [...] Never saw I a countenance in which CONTEMPLATION so reigns. His brow is very lofty - and his dark brown hair seems worn away, as it were, by thought, so thinly is it spread over his temples. (pp. 739-40)

This is an important moment in the cultural fashioning of Wordsworth, an early representation of him as a deep thinker which is echoed in accounts of him later in the nineteenth century as a poet-philosopher-priest. Wilson was fighting against two decades of representations of Wordsworth and his work as puerile and childish: however, *this* man is not the writer of the widely-mocked *Poems* of 1807, but the great genius who created *The Excursion*.

After describing the poet's idyllic home life and emphasising his familial affections, Kempferhausen gives an account of a walk to Grasmere church with Wordsworth and his family. This allows Wilson the opportunity to represent the poet as a philanthropic country gentleman who is venerated by the local peasantry: 'the old men, as they passed by, addressed him with an air of reverence, inspired no doubt by the power and wisdom of his conversation, and also by the benevolence and charities of his life' (p. 740). Wordsworth's virtue outshines even his poetic genius: 'I almost forgot the poet in the man - the great, if not lost, was absorbed, as it were, in the good; and I less envied William Wordsworth his glory as a prevailing poet, than his happiness as a philanthropist and a Christian' (pp. 740-41). Whereas Hazlitt and Jeffrey had disparaged rural society, implying that it was bound to degrade a man like Wordsworth by removing him from intercourse with his equals, Wilson shows the poet as protected from the corruptions of city life, and fully embedded in a network of healthy, hierarchical social relations in a devout rural community. His poetry may be revolutionary, but, as a country gentleman, his politics are entirely sedate. *Blackwood's* Wordsworth is meant to show

that rather than being a dangerous, transgressive force, great genius can be reconciled with Church and State.

In the third 'Letter', Wilson balances the representation of Wordsworth as a sociable, family-loving gentleman with a portrayal of him as a solitary genius. After the visit to Grasmere Church, the poet takes Kempferhausen to a 'tarn of deepest solitude' in Easdale, where, the young German states,

Wordsworth informed me, that he had meditated, and even composed, much of his poetry; and certainly there could not be a fitter study for a spirit like his, that loves to brood, with an intensity of passion, on those images of nature which his imagination brings from him afar and moulds into the forms of life. It was in this naked solitude that many of the richest and loftiest passages of the "Excursion" were composed. (p. 742)

This account of the poet creating his masterpiece in sublime isolation is meant to contradict utterly Jeffrey's argument that the poet should restrain his imagination through a dialogic relationship with his urban readership. Wordsworth has an exemplary private life, marked by both domestic affections and social duty, but here Kempferhausen emphasises that his poetry comes from solitude. The explicit mention of Wordsworth's epic poem serves to emphasise the extent to which the third letter is almost an advertisement for *The Excursion*. Throughout, Wilson represents Wordsworth's impressive appearance, personal happiness, sagacity and virtue as guarantees for the merit of his philosophical poem.

The final part of the third letter consists of Kempferhausen's account of Wordsworth's conversation, which is that of 'an inspired man'. The German declares that

it was evident, that poetry was the element in which he lived, and breathed, and had his being. Other poets, at least all I have ever known, are poets but on occasions - Wordsworth's profession is that of a poet; and therefore when he speaks of poetry, he speaks of the things most familiar, and, at the same time,

most holy to his heart. For twenty years has he lived in this grand country, and there devoted his whole soul to his divine art. (p. 741)

Poetry is not just something that Wordsworth produces; it is his *essence*. This is a vital aspect of the Romantic account of literary production; for a genius, writing is not an occasional hobby or a mere trade, but a way of life. Poetry was certainly not Wordsworth's main source of income; unable to make enough money from his publications to support his family, he had taken on the post of Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland and Penrith in 1813.⁵⁹ Wilson is using 'profession' mainly in its theological sense, meaning, in general, a declaration of faith and, more specifically, the vow made on entering a religious order. Whereas other poets write on 'occasion', presumably when they need money, Wordsworth offers up his whole life to his art.⁶⁰ Poetry, for him, is like the daily work undertaken by a monk or nun: 'most familiar' and 'most holy'. Thus although Kempferhausen emphasises that Wordsworth is generous in his praise for his contemporaries, he is marked out from them: 'it was clear that his soul was with them of elder times; and who shall say, but in this he obeyed the voice of truth - the only voice to which in his solitude Wordsworth cares to listen' (p. 742). Earlier in the letter, even the poet's prophet-like appearance signifies his distance from his peers:

I at once beheld, in his calm and confident voice - his stedfast and untroubled eyes - the serene expansion of his forehead - and the settled dignity of his demeanour - that original poet, who, in an age of poetry, has walked alone through a world almost exclusively his own, and who has cleared out for himself, by his own labour, a wide and magnificent path through the solitary forests of the human imagination. (p. 740)

⁵⁹ Gill, *Wordsworth: A Life*, pp. 296-97.

⁶⁰ Compare Lockhart on Wordsworth in *Peter's Letters*, II, 310: 'Poetry has been with him the pure sole business of life - he thinks of nothing else, and he speaks of nothing else - and where is the man who hears him, that would for a moment wish it to be otherwise?'

This account of Wordsworth's separation from the literary marketplace is further emphasised by the inclusion of the poet's remarks on the periodical press, which clearly have Kempferhausen's approbation:

Of the periodical criticism of Britain he spoke with almost unqualified contempt [...] The office of a periodical critic was one beneath the dignity of a great mind [...] Such a critic, in order to please, to startle, or astonish - without doing which he could acquire no character at all - must often sacrifice what he knew to be truth - that he must mingle truth with falsehood, or, at least, with error; and that he who wrote avowedly and professionally to the public, must respect, nay, take advantage, of its prejudices or its ignorance; and if so, surely, whatever might be the advantages or disadvantages of such writings to the public, they were not worthy [of] much notice from a poet who devoted his whole life to the study of his art, - who in his solitude sought truth, and truth alone; and who, unless he knew that it was amply deserved, and wisely bestowed, would be miserable under the world's applause. (p. 742)

This passage is based on a paradigmatic Romantic model of literary production.

Periodical writers, unlike poets, write 'avowedly and professionally for the public'; they pander to their readers and thus sacrifice truth to sales. They cannot be men of 'high intellect'. On the other hand, the poetic genius finds truth in his solitude, caring nothing for the 'world's applause', and, by implication, the concomitant financial rewards. Throughout his literary career, Wordsworth attempted to maintain a posture of utter disregard for the blandishments of the press, at the same time revealing the extent to which criticisms hurt him in his bitter attacks on writers like Jeffrey.

It may seem odd that Wilson would include an attack on periodical literature in the 'Letters from the Lakes'. However, disquiet about the influence of the press on both authors and the reading public was a fairly common theme among magazine writers of the period. As we saw in chapter one, in 1818 both Wilson and Lockhart had published articles which attacked the way in which literary critics sought to position themselves and their readers as judges of men of genius.⁶¹ *Blackwood's* was represented by its

⁶¹ See Lockhart's attack on Jeffrey and Gifford in the guise of the 'Baron von Lauerwinkel': 'Remarks on the Periodical Criticism of England', *BEM*, March 1818, pp. 670-79. Also Wilson, 'On Literary Censorship', pp. 176-78.

writers very differently; as a supporter of genius, and as a magazine that sought to educate its readers, rather than pander to their prejudices. Contemporary readers of the journal were encouraged to believe that *Blackwood's* should not be included as part of a magazine culture that could be so harmful to creativity. By including Wordsworth's comments on the press in his account of the poet, Wilson affirms the model of cultural production that pitches the disinterested genius against the debased critic, while suggesting at the same time that *Blackwood's* is the exception that proves this rule. In reality, Wordsworth would certainly not have exempted it from his remarks, and so Wilson is also having a joke at the poet's expense.

For the 'Letters from the Lakes' were seen as a breach of social decorum by Wordsworth and his family. The poet had disliked *Blackwood's* from its inception, having taken umbrage at Wilson's attacks on *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*, and the magazine was banned from his household.⁶² Around the time of the publication of the third of the letters, he wrote to Francis Wrangham expressing his disgust at the 'personal' nature of *Blackwood's* articles on him and his friends, though he may not have had the 'Letters' particularly in mind at this time.⁶³ When the articles were reprinted in the *Westmoreland Gazette*, probably with De Quincey's connivance, he was angered and tried to prevent the publication.⁶⁴ Wilson must have known that Wordsworth would be offended by *Blackwood's* account of his private life; as I showed in chapter two, in *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*, the poet had attacked the contemporary culture of 'personality', lamenting 'the coarse intrusions into the recesses, the gross breaches upon the sanctities, of domestic life, to which we have lately been more and more

⁶² See Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957-65), II, 409; Swaab, p. 6; Grevel Lindop, *The Opium Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 228.

⁶³ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn., rev. by Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill, 8 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967-93), III, 522-24.

⁶⁴ Moorman, *William Wordsworth*, II, 409.

accustomed'.⁶⁵ Having written three articles on this text, Wilson can hardly have been unaware of Wordsworth's assertion that biography was unnecessary in the case of authors, whom he did not consider to be public figures.⁶⁶

Throughout its early years, opponents of *Blackwood's Magazine* consistently drew attention to the personal nature of its criticism. *Ad hominem* attacks on Coleridge, Playfair, and the 'Cockneys' were adduced as evidence for the malevolence of the magazine's writers and their disdain for the personal privacy of their targets. Despite their eulogistic content, 'The Letters from the Lakes' were also criticised by a writer in the *New Monthly Magazine*, who complained of the magazine's practice

of dragging the peculiarities, the conversation, and domestic habits of distinguished individuals into public view, to gratify a diseased curiosity at the expense of men by whom its authors have been trusted. Such a course, if largely fulfilled, would destroy all that is private and social in life, and leave us nothing but our public existence. How must the joyous intercourses of society be chilled, and the free unbosoming of the soul be checked, by the feeling that some one is present who will put down every look and word and tone in a note-book, and exhibit them to the common gaze! If the enshading sanctities of life are to be cut away - as in Peter's Letters, or in the Letters from the Lakes - its joys will speedily perish. When they can no longer nestle in privacy, they will wither.⁶⁷

Wilson's effusive praise of Wordsworth in the 'Letters from the Lakes' is, paradoxically, a sort of revenge for Wordsworth's refusal to praise Wilson's poetry. The article is calculated both to improve Wordsworth's cultural status, and to offend the poet by revealing details of his private life to the readers of *Blackwood's*. Wordsworth's dislike of 'personality' was due not simply to his sense of personal dignity, but to a desire to control the ways in which he, or different versions of him, were mediated and consumed. Throughout his career, the poet wanted public success, but was horrified by the possible development of the culture of celebrity which is a hallmark of modern

⁶⁵ Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, III, 122.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ 'Modern Periodical Literature', *NMM*, September 1820, pp. 309-10.

capitalist society: the uncontrolled, commercialised proliferation of representations of particular individuals. By publicising the poet's private life, Wilson usurps Wordsworth's power to control representations of himself. He asserts the increasing dominance of the periodical press in the literary marketplace, as well as his own power over the poet as a critic for *Blackwood's Magazine*. And by including Wordsworth's disparaging remarks on the press in a journal that is conducting a public campaign in support of the poet, he draws attention to the symbiotic relationship which commodity culture creates between the artist and the critic. Wilson clearly does not agree with Jeffrey that the poetic genius should accommodate his work to the taste of the reading public. Rather, he implies that the task of the 'original' poet - as Wordsworth famously put it, of '*creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed'⁶⁸ - can be achieved only through the aid of sympathetic criticism and biography. Wordsworth needs *Blackwood's Magazine* to mediate his work to early nineteenth-century readers, whether he likes it or not.

IV

In 1830, Hartley Coleridge wrote ruefully that Wordsworth 'seems yearly less of a Poet, and more of the respectful, talented, hospitable Country gentleman'.⁶⁹ In the 'Letters from the Lakes', Wilson attempts to balance these two versions of the poet and construct him as both solitary genius, and virtuous gentleman. As a private person, Wordsworth is neither egotistic, nor solitary; he is notable both for his domestic affections, and his philanthropy. But as a poet, he thinks and writes in seclusion, far beyond the corruptions of the modern world; that is the essence of his genius, and that is why his work will last.

⁶⁸ *Prose Works*, III, 80.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Moorman, *William Wordsworth*, II, 427.

These two aspects of Wordsworth are inextricably linked in Wilson's article: the poet's exemplary private life is used as evidence for the merit and immortality of his works. Thus it was probably the most effective part of *Blackwood's* campaign to show that Wordsworth was a transcendent philosopher-poet, but certainly not an alienated or transgressive figure. This campaign, I would argue, contributed greatly to the gradual improvement in his reputation in the 1820s and 1830s, and helped create a cultural climate in which he seemed worthy of veneration. In *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, Stephen Gill describes the general view of the poet at the start of the Victorian period:

What were once derided as his follies are being identified as the true sources of his strength. Wordsworth's retirement to his native mountains had once been seen as an affected and culpable refusal to draw nourishment from the common stock of culture and civilised life [...] Now it was commonplace to invest with a spiritual aura a lifetime apparently spent secluded from the follies and temptations of the world in solitary pursuit of a personal vision of truth.⁷⁰

The shift that Gill identifies had already been articulated by *Blackwood's* almost twenty years earlier.

We have seen in this chapter that the magazine's representations of Wordsworth as a disinterested genius were used for a number of commercial and ideological purposes. The 'Letters from the Lakes' reveal this irony starkly because they are so clearly informed by Wilson's ambivalence about his former friend and deliberately play on the tension between the Romantic genius and the literary marketplace. Normally, however, *Blackwood's* writing on Wordsworth was less sophisticated, and I will end with a sonnet by 'Delta' (D. M. Moir) which gives a more typical account:

⁷⁰Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, p. 20.

Wordsworth, I envy thee, that from the strife
 Far distant, and the turmoil of mankind,
 Musing in solitude, thou keep'st thy mind
 Most spotless, leading an unblemish'd life [...]
 What marvel that the men of cities, they,
 Whose fate or choice compel them to endure
 The sight of things unholy and impure,
 Feel not the moonlight softness of thy lay?
 But thou hast fought and conquer'd, and decay
 Flies far from thee, whose great reward is sure!⁷¹

This is a classic description of the Romantic genius 'musing in solitude', whose works are not appreciated by corrupt metropolitan readers but which are bound to be valued by posterity. However, in reality there was nothing inevitable about Wordsworth's success, and I hope that I have shown that the attention that he was given by *Blackwood's Magazine* is an important example of the way in which the 'strife' of 'men of cities' ultimately contributed to the poet's 'great reward'; his place in the canon of English literature.

⁷¹D. M. Moir, 'Sonnet to Wordsworth', *BEM*, February 1821, p. 542.

CHAPTER 4

WILLIAM HAZLITT AND THE DEGRADATION OF GENIUS

Throughout his journalistic career, Hazlitt was obsessed with the corruption of contemporary literary culture by government influence and class prejudice. During the 1810s, his favourite example of this process was the ‘apostasy’ of the ‘Lake Poets’ - Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey - all of whom had become supporters of the Tory government and beneficiaries of its patronage, after having held strong Jacobin views during the 1790s. As he became an increasingly sought-after essayist and critic, Hazlitt suffered a number of savage attacks from Tory journalists, and this led him to complain continually that the reviewing of literary works was frequently used as a means of damaging the reputations and prospects of writers with radical opinions. He even argued that an author whose personal wealth or social status did not protect him from the depredations of the critics was a ‘helpless and despised animal’ whose only hope of escape from poverty and suffering lay in becoming a tool of those in positions of power.¹

In this chapter, I will explore some of the connections that Hazlitt made between literature and political power, and show how they relate to his ideas about genius. I focus on two periods of his career: the winter of 1816-17, when he wrote for the *Examiner* on political and literary subjects, and 1823, when he was a contributor to the *Liberal* and the *Edinburgh Review*. In the former period, Hazlitt published a series of damning articles on ‘modern apostates’, and even went so far as to argue, in his essay on *Coriolanus*, that ‘poetry is right royal’, and inevitably opposed to democracy (V, 347).

¹ *CWH*, VIII, 211. All further references to *CWH* are within the text in the form (vol number, page number).

One of these attacks - a letter to the *Examiner* contrasting Coleridge's eloquence as a radical preacher in 1798 with the reactionary gibberish (as Hazlitt saw of it) of the *Statesman's Manual* - became the germ of the famous essay 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', which appeared in the third number of the *Liberal*. Hazlitt's association with this magazine served, for a short time, to modify his jaundiced view of literary culture, and his essays of 1823 reveal an ambivalence about the relationship between literature and political reform which contrasts with his earlier more despairing view of their antipathy.

Before I begin, I want to make a brief point concerning methodology. Hazlitt criticism during the twentieth century can be divided into two strands which, for the sake of argument, I will label idealist and empiricist. Until fairly recently, the idealist approach has probably been dominant, and it has resulted in some remarkable and invaluable attempts to abstract the theoretical principles that supposedly lie within, or behind, Hazlitt's vast body of work. However, the historicisation of Romanticism over the last twenty years has led to a recognition that this approach has sometimes been at the cost of eliding the heterogeneity of his writings, which are often contradictory in very interesting ways.² Too much Hazlitt criticism has been insensitive to the contingencies of cultural production, and the effect of context upon meaning, treating him as a mind floating in a vat rather than as a journalist responding to the pressures of operating within complex literary and political spheres. Uttara Natarajan has recently defended this position by stating that 'the history of events may not take precedence over the history of ideas', and that 'the second is [not] simply conflatable with the first'.³ Her resistance to what has become the party line in (British) literary studies is admirable. However, it

² John Whale was the first critic to make this point: 'Hazlitt on Burke: The Ambivalent Position of a Radical Essayist', *Studies in Romanticism*, 25 (1986), 465-81 (p. 465). See also Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 210.

³ Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 2.

seems to me that, in the case of Hazlitt, to abstract his writings from their context is often to denude them of much of their force and richness. The idealist approach is to seek to get beyond the 'local ambiguities' in his *oeuvre* in search of an underlying philosophical integrity (which I believe to be chimerical),⁴ but one of Hazlitt's great strengths as a writer is his deep engagement with the world around him - at this moment, I think, we need more and better empirical accounts of the 'situatedness' of Hazlitt's writings, rather than further abstract studies.

Thus this chapter does not offer a reconstruction of Hazlitt's 'theory' of genius by taking isolated extracts from his work out of context, although I am extremely indebted to those who have taken this approach, and in the following section I do give an overview of his utterances on genius and the creative imagination. My method is, I hope, somewhat akin to Robert Lapp's in his recent account of the 'contest for cultural authority' between Hazlitt and Coleridge during the Regency period.⁵ Lapp gives close readings of Hazlitt's writings on his former mentor, but by carefully placing them within their 'discursive contexts', he does not lose sight of their wider cultural implications.⁶ In the bulk of this chapter, I examine a handful of texts which reveal Hazlitt's peculiar, but highly acute, interpretation of contemporary literary culture. It is important to understand the complexity of his vision because it informs 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', an essay which has probably had more influence on later views of Romantic genius than any other literary reminiscence of the nineteenth century. It is only by repositioning this essay within the context of its original publication that we can understand its peculiarly ambivalent, self-questioning nature.

⁴ Natarajan, p. 3.

⁵ Robert Keith Lapp, *Contest for Cultural Authority* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1999).

⁶ Lapp, p. 16.

I

Hazlitt's first publication, the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), has been identified by modern critics as containing a theory of the 'sympathetic imagination' which informs his later writings on aesthetics and the fine arts, and which influenced Keats's ideas about poetic creation.⁷ In the *Essay*, Hazlitt attempts to argue against philosophers like Hobbes and Mandeville who had represented 'Man' as naturally selfish. He claims that in fact that the human mind is naturally *disinterested*, and that both altruism and self-love result from the operation of the sympathetic imagination. What Hazlitt saw as his personal discovery was that self-love depended on an individual sympathising with his or her future self, who was, in effect, another person:

The imagination, by means of which alone I can anticipate future objects, or be interested in them, must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others by one and the same process by which I am thrown forward as it were into my future being, and interested in it. (I, 1)

Critics such as W. P. Albrecht have argued that sympathy is one of Hazlitt's 'principle criteria for poetic excellence',⁸ and there has been a tendency to confuse his theory of poetic genius with Keats's. As Uttara Natarajan has shown, the latter's ideal of the 'camelion Poet' who 'has no self' is based on Hazlitt's account of Shakespeare in the essay 'On Posthumous Fame' from the *Round Table* (1817):⁹ 'He seemed scarcely to have an individual existence of his own, but to borrow that of others at will, and to pass successively through "every variety of untried being"' (IV, 23). She goes on to argue

⁷ See Natarajan, p. 109 for a survey of the 'established view of the Keats-Hazlitt relationship'. There is also a useful chapter on Hazlitt and Keats in Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), chapter 8.

⁸ *Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination* (Laurence: The University of Kansas Press, 1965), p. 78.

⁹ Natarajan, pp. 107-10. She does not mention that Keats was certainly also influenced by Hazlitt's lecture 'On Shakespeare and Milton', delivered in January 1818, in which he further emphasises Shakespeare's sympathetic genius: 'He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be [...] He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at his pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own' (V, 47). According to Stanley Jones, Keats would have attended this lecture; see *Hazlitt: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 281.

that in general Hazlitt tended to represent genius as characterised by intellectual ‘bias’ and self-assertion, and that the ultra-sympathetic Shakespeare is an exception to this rule.¹⁰ This certainly seems to be born out by a number of passages from Hazlitt’s writings, and Natarajan gives particular weight to the essay ‘On Genius and Common Sense’, published in the first volume of *Table-Talk* (1821), where Hazlitt states that ‘Shakespeare (almost alone) seems to have been a man of genius, raised above the definition of genius [...] He was the Proteus of human intellect. Genius in ordinary is a more obstinate and less versatile thing’ (VIII, 42). The implied conflation of genius and power in another *Table-Talk* essay, ‘The Indian Jugglers’, is also important; at one point, Hazlitt states that ‘greatness is genius in undertakings of much pith and moment’, and three sentences on he remarks that ‘greatness is great power, producing great effects’ (VIII, 84).

It is clear from Natarajan’s account that the distinction between the two types of genius is not analogous with the distinction between egotism and sympathy, for, as she remarks, the self-assertion of the biased genius exhibits ‘Hazlitt’s peculiar associative version of ‘sympathy’ or ‘relation’ [...] a manifestation of the ‘power’ of the inspired self’.¹¹ She does not refer to the following passage on Rousseau, from the *Conversations of Northcote* (1830), but it supports her point:

he stamped his own character and the image of his self-love on the public mind [...] Had he possessed more comprehension of thought or feeling, it would only have diverted him from his object. But it was the excess of his egotism and his utter blindness to every thing else, that found a corresponding sympathy in the conscious feelings of every human breast, and shattered to pieces the pride of rank and circumstance by the pride of internal worth or upstart pretension. (XI, 278)

¹⁰ Natarajan, pp. 93-119.

¹¹ Natarajan, p. 96.

As Gregory Dart has argued, here Rousseau is represented as having been able to secure the sympathy of his readers through the excessive egotism of his writings - they represent 'a democratic universalisation of the self'.¹² His single-mindedness, the 'bias' of his genius, allows him to resist power and support freedom. In this passage, genius is a radical principle which, by asserting the power of 'internal worth', shatters the ideology of the *ancien regime*.

The weakness in Natarajan's exposition is that it is insensitive to contradictions in Hazlitt's approach to genius, particularly poetic genius, which are due to the important tension in his writings between a celebration of the creative imagination as a progressive force, and an anti-Romantic, even utilitarian, argument that links it with the support of pernicious forms of political power. In the optimistic mode, the 'bias' of genius is a strength that enables it to resist power, and 'universal', or Shakespearean, genius is figured as a form of disinterested subjectivity that sympathises with all human existence. However, in texts such as the *Examiner* attacks on the apostates, Wordsworth's 'bias' is represented as a dangerous arrogance that makes him hate the world around him, and Coleridge's 'universality' results in mental paralysis and an inability to hold on to important moral principles. Hazlitt's ambivalence about genius also affects 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', where he celebrates the youthful promise of Wordsworth and Coleridge whilst implicitly lamenting the degradation of their gifts, which he believes have been offered up to the idol of 'Legitimacy'.

Thus Natarajan's account glides over the complexity of Hazlitt's approach to his contemporaries. She notes in passing that, for Hazlitt, Coleridge lacked the single-mindedness that he saw 'as a general rule of human achievement.'¹³ However, she fails to recognise that even while he lamented Coleridge's weakness, Hazlitt continually

¹²Dart, p. 241. David Bromwich has also discussed this passage in *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 154-56.

¹³Natarajan, p. 93.

emphasised his genius. And she is so keen to make her case about Hazlitt's celebration of the 'power of the inspired self', that it leads her to downplay considerably his distrust of poetic egotism, as exhibited by, for example, Wordsworth and Byron. Although she admits that 'the strong manifestation of a particular poetic self may excite Hazlitt's antipathy', she argues that 'nonetheless, such self-centredness is also always regarded by him as a strength'.¹⁴ This is not only insensitive to the ambivalent tone of much of Hazlitt's writing on egotistical poets, but is also, quite simply, wrong; for instance, in the 'Reply to Z.', Hazlitt remarks that 'I have spoken of [Wordsworth's] intellectual egotism (and truly and warrantably) as the bane of his talents and of his public principles' (IX, 5). Hazlitt's account of Wordsworth's 'intellectual egotism' is certainly more complex than he makes it out to be here, but this particular statement is unequivocal.

Of all Hazlitt critics, John Kinnaird has given the most emphasis to his distrust of the poetic imagination.¹⁵ He argues that, after 1805, Hazlitt moved from a benevolent psychological theory to one based on the innate propensity of human beings to sympathise with 'power', a term not limited to, but certainly including, political power.¹⁶ Kinnaird rightly emphasises that Hazlitt's late-Regency tirades against the imagination as a supporter of social inequality are not rhetorical divergences from his 'true' theory of the disinterested imagination, but result from his ideas about the psychology of power, combined with his concern about the state of literary culture, and his desire to assert 'the independence of genius from all power but that of its own conscience.'¹⁷ However, he fails to recognise the extent of Hazlitt's ambivalence about the relationship between literature and political progress; in the 1810s, Hazlitt could not seem to decide whether

¹⁴ Natarajan, p. 99.

¹⁵ John Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), chapter 3. There is also an interesting chapter on 'Hazlitt and the limits of the sympathetic imagination' in John Whale, *Imagination under Pressure, 1789-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapter 4.

¹⁶ Kinnaird, p. 98.

¹⁷ Kinnaird, p. 101.

or not poetry is favourable to liberty. And in the early 1820s, as poetry became unfashionable and periodical writing became the most powerful genre in the literary marketplace, he was equally unsure about the political effects of the diffusion of periodical literature. Hazlitt never rescinded his argument about the natural disinterestedness of the human mind, and in fact, referred to the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* with great pride throughout his life.¹⁸ However, his adult experiences, particularly of the political apostasy of Wordsworth and Coleridge, led him to develop a darker view of the imagination which certainly complicated his earlier metaphysics. In the mid-1810s, his tortuous attempts to reconcile the dreams of the 1790s with the corruption of literary culture in the Regency period resulted in some remarkable newspaper articles in which he not only attacked his former friends, but even the idea of the sympathetic imagination itself.

II

During 1816, England was in a state of acute crisis. High taxation (a legacy of the war), the collapse of manufacturing industries, agricultural foreclosures, and a poor harvest left many of the lower classes without work and starving, prompting widespread debate about the 'Distresses of the Country'.¹⁹ Popular unrest culminated in the Spa Fields riot on 2 December, which itself led to the suspension of *Habeas Corpus* in March 1817. Hazlitt's increasingly savage writings during 1816 clearly bear the marks of this heightened political temperature, but were also informed by more personal provocations. Still reeling from the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, he had been dogged by ill health

¹⁸For example, in the *Letter to William Gifford* (1819), IX, 51-59.

¹⁹There is a good summary of the post-war situation in Jones, pp. 230-36.

throughout the year, and his youngest son had died in June.²⁰ Also, it is likely that he knew that Coleridge and Wordsworth had been spreading rumours about the 'Keswick incident' of 1803 when they helped him escape from a mob of angry villagers after he was accused of assaulting a local girl.²¹

The feud between Hazlitt and his former friends had been gathering momentum since 1813. It is possible that he wrote an anonymous squib attacking Wordsworth for surrendering his independence by accepting the post of Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland, which was published initially in the *Morning Chronicle* in April of that year (it later appeared in the *Examiner* and the *Champion*).²² He was certainly irritated by Wordsworth's *Poems* of 1815, which were dedicated to Sir George Beaumont, and contained a sonnet celebrating the triumph of George III over Napoleon at Leipzig. And in April 1816, Wordsworth published the *Thanksgiving Ode* - the climax of his 'coming out' as a Tory.²³ Hazlitt had also criticised Southey in 1813 for accepting the post of Poet Laureate, and had mocked his *New Year Ode* of 1814.²⁴ Meanwhile, Coleridge was writing for the *Courier*, a government newspaper, and it was only a matter of time before Hazlitt lashed out.²⁵

The *Examiner*, the radical Sunday newspaper conducted by the Hunt brothers, was the perfect vehicle for Hazlitt's attacks on the apostates, for it was resolutely committed to independence from party ties, and Leigh Hunt had himself attacked the

²⁰ Jones, p. 227.

²¹ Jones, pp. 158-60 and 176-77. Detailed accounts of Hazlitt's life and writings in 1816 can be found in Jones, chapters 10 and 11, and P. P. Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949), pp. 206-25.

²² Kinnaird has attributed the verses to Hazlitt (pp. 102-03, 392), but Jones has argued that they are more likely to have been written by Thomas Moore (p. 92).

²³ B. Bernard Cohen has given a more detailed account of the political disagreements between Hazlitt and Wordsworth, and its influence on the revisions Hazlitt made to his 1814 review of the *Excursion* when it was reprinted in the *Round Table*; see 'William Hazlitt: Bonapartist Critic of 'The Excursion'', *MLQ*, 10 (1949), 158-67.

²⁴ *CWH*, VII, 24-27 and XIX, 115-17.

²⁵ See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Essays on his Times in the 'Morning Post' and the 'Courier'*, ed. by David Erdman, 3 vols, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 3, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). E. P. Thompson has cited Coleridge's wartime journalism as evidence of 'the extreme provocation that Coleridge's former friends on the Left were under'; see 'A Compendium of Cliché: The Poet as Essayist', in *The Romantics* (Suffolk: The Merlin Press, 1997), pp. 143-55 (p. 154). Erdman gives a more sympathetic account of Coleridge's time with the *Courier* in his introduction to *Essays on his Times*, pp. cxxii-clxxix.

political shifts of Wordsworth and Southey.²⁶ Having written for the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Champion* at the start of his career, from early 1815, Hazlitt had contributed solely to the Hunts' newspaper and worked in close collaboration with them. His 1816 campaign began with an ambiguous article on Coleridge's *Christabel* volume on 2 June, in which he criticised Coleridge's lack of achievement, and, as Robert Lapp has shown, attempted to give 'a politically inflected reading of the title poem'.²⁷ He followed this with a review of Southey's *Lay of the Laureate* on 7 and 14 July. Southey was taunted for his Jacobin past, accused of intolerance and 'overweening self-opinion', and the poetry of the *Lay* was described as 'beneath criticism' (VII, 85-96). Two months later, Hazlitt returned to Coleridge with a proleptic review of the *Statesman's Manual*, before it had been published, or even written (VII, 114-18).²⁸ At the end of the year, just as the political temperature was reaching boiling point, he expressed his anger against the apostates in a series of articles: 'The Times Newspaper' (1 December); a letter signed Scrutator entitled 'The Editor of the Times' (8 December); 'Illustrations of the Times Newspaper' (15 and 22 December); a sardonic review of the *Statesman's Manual* (29 December); 'The Times Newspaper' (12 January 1817), and a letter on 'Mr Coleridge's Lay Sermon' (12 January 1817) which was another attack on Coleridge in the guise of a reader's response to Hazlitt's review.²⁹

Although it contained no personal remarks, the Lakers' apostasy clearly also influenced Hazlitt's well-known review of a Kemble production of *Coriolanus* at Covent Garden (15 December 1816), in which the poetic imagination is damned as an inevitable

²⁶ After Henry Pye's death in 1813, Hunt had suggested in the *Examiner* that the Laureateship should be abolished as a 'contemptible' office; see 'Office of Poet Laureate', 15 August, and 'The Laureateship', 29 August. He attacked Southey for accepting the post: 'The New Poet-Laureate', 26 September. In 1816, he strongly criticised Wordsworth in an article entitled 'Heaven Made a Party to Earthly Disputes - Mr. Wordsworth's Sonnets on Waterloo', *Examiner*, 18 February 1816.

²⁷ Lapp, p. 25.

²⁸ The imminent publication of the book, then entitled 'THE DAY OF ADVERSITY', was announced in the *Times* and the *Courier* in the middle of the August, but the *Statesman's Manual* did not appear until December; see Lapp, p. 51.

²⁹ The 'Scrutator' letter does not appear in *CWH*, but Stanley Jones has attributed it to Hazlitt; see 'Three Additions to the Canon of Hazlitt's Political Writings', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 38 (1987), 355-63.

supporter of 'power'.³⁰ Hazlitt begins by arguing that although the play handles different political debates 'very ably', 'Shakespeare himself seems to have had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question, perhaps from some feeling of contempt for his own origin'. At this time, Hazlitt is so politically sensitive that even the 'protean' Shakespeare is represented here as a sort of apostate who dislikes those of his own social background. However, Hazlitt goes on to argue that the play's apparent sympathy with the aristocracy also says much about the relationship between poetry and power:

The cause of the people is indeed but ill calculated as a subject for poetry: it admits of rhetoric, which goes into argument and explanation, but it presents no immediate or distinct images to the mind, 'no jutting frieze, buttress, or coigne of vantage' for poetry 'to make its pendant bed and procreant cradle in.' The language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power.

The quotations in this passage are from *Macbeth* (I.6.6-8); my modern edition has 'jutty, frieze' for 'jutting frieze'.³¹ Banquo is telling King Duncan that all the projections and corners of Macbeth's castle are used by nesting martins which are attracted by the sweetness of the air. Thus poetry builds itself on the symbols and images which power projects, perhaps without realising that power itself is a place of blood and terror.

This, one might think, is a strong enough claim, but as Hazlitt continues he shifts from a discussion of poetic language to a politicised account of the associative imagination which differs markedly from that of contemporary aestheticians:³²

³⁰ A number of critics have given detailed readings of this text; see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 164-73; Bromwich, pp. 314-26; Kinnaid, pp. 110-12; Charles Mahony, 'Upstaging the Fall: Coriolanus and the Spectacle of Romantic Apostasy', *Studies in Romanticism*, 38 (1999), 29-50.

³¹ *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans and others, 2nd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 1365.

³² The weakness in Mahony's ingenious account of *Coriolanus* and Romantic apostasy is that he fails to recognise the importance of this shift, and implies that Hazlitt's essay is mainly about poetic language. But Hazlitt is making much grander claims than that; he critiques 'the principle of poetry' as well as the language in which it is expressed.

The imagination is an exaggerating and exclusive faculty: it takes from one thing to add to another: it accumulates circumstances together to give the greatest possible effect to a favourite object. The understanding is a dividing and measuring faculty: it judges of things, not according to their immediate impression on the mind, but according to their relations to one another. The one is a monopolizing faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of present excitement by inequality and disproportion; the other is a distributive faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of ultimate good, by justice and proportion. The one is an aristocratical, the other a republican faculty. The principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle. It aims at effect, it exists by contrast. It admits of no medium. It is every thing by excess. It rises above the ordinary standard of sufferings and crimes. It presents an imposing appearance. It shews its head turreted, crowned and crested. Its front is gilt and blood-stained. Before it, 'it carries noise, and behind it, it leaves tears.' It has its altars and its victims, sacrifices, human sacrifices. Kings, priests, nobles, are its train-bearers; tyrants and slaves its executioners - 'Carnage is its daughter!' Poetry is right royal. It puts the individual for the species, the one above the infinite many, might before right. (V, 347-48)³³

This extraordinary passage is difficult to analyse because, as is often the case with Hazlitt, he makes his point through a series of appositional statements, rather than through a logical, sequential argument. The most important thing to bear in mind is that Hazlitt is not simply giving us a theory of the associative imagination which is meant to contrast with his earlier view of the sympathetic imagination, for, as Natarajan has argued, Hazlitt does not generally separate these functions of the imagination: 'the associative chain may be recognized as authentic only when it realizes a sympathy between the inspired object and the objective material reality'.³⁴ In fact, this passage represents his 'dark' version of both functions: the associative process is here the mechanism for the expression of the imagination's innate sympathy with power. The association of ideas is a form of theft; the imagination seeks to aggrandise a 'favourite object' by loading it with a disproportionate number of associations which are, in effect, taken from other objects. Whereas the *understanding* is disinterested, for it seeks to

³³The essay on *Coriolanus* was reprinted twice by Hazlitt, in *A View of the English Stage* (1818), and in the *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817), IV, 214-220. I have referred above to the former text, which, in the passage quoted, is almost identical to the *Examiner* version. In 1819, Hazlitt gave a strong defence of the *Coriolanus* account of the imagination in 'A Letter to William Gifford', IX, 36-39.

³⁴Natarajan, p. 111.

comprehend the relations between things - the world as it is - the *imagination* takes a selfish pleasure in fetishising its favourites. This is the foundation of poetry, and thus it is bound to celebrate individuals at the expense of the multitude. And by bolstering 'Legitimacy' through its love of glory and distinction, it becomes responsible for the 'human sacrifices' that power demands.

In the *Coriolanus* review, Hazlitt reminds one of an angrier, less ironic version of Thomas Love Peacock in the *Four Ages of Poetry* (1820). Both writers represent poetry as essentially a reactionary force which is inevitably implicated in the celebration of political power.³⁵ But the extent of Hazlitt's ambivalence on this issue becomes clear when we realise that at other times he was capable of occupying the position taken up by Shelley in his reply to Peacock, *A Defence of Poetry* (written in 1821, published in 1840). In the lecture 'On Poetry in General', delivered just over a year after the publication of the *Coriolanus* review, Hazlitt denies that poetry is merely 'a branch of authorship' and redefines it as any sort of emotional response to the world, 'the stuff of which our life is made'. The poetic imagination is what makes us human - 'man is a poetical animal' - and it is vital for our moral well-being: 'He who has a contempt for poetry cannot have much respect for himself, or for anyone else' (V, 2). I think that this lecture may well have influenced Shelley, who made very similar claims two years later.³⁶

The *Coriolanus* review was not a 'blip' in Hazlitt's aesthetics, but it was the most extreme position that he was to take up. His response to the apostasy of the Lake poets is to make a transhistorical generalisation about the faculty of the imagination; he transforms the relationship between literary culture and political power at a given moment into a *fait accompli*. And yet only a week later, in the second 'Illustrations of

³⁵'The Four Ages of Poetry', in *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by H. F. B. Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols (London: Constable, 1924-34; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1967), VIII, 4.

³⁶Shelley was in England when Hazlitt gave this lecture, but there is no evidence that he attended. However, he could easily have read accounts of it in the press, or later in the *Lectures on the English Poets* volume, although again there is no external evidence that he did so. Paul Dawson has shown that the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* influenced Shelley, but does not mention 'On Poetry in General'; see *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 230-37.

the Times Newspaper', he states that 'the spirit of poetry is in itself favourable to humanity and liberty; but, we suspect, not in times like these - not in the present reign' (VII, 142). This generalisation totally contradicts the *Coriolanus* review because here Hazlitt recognises that corrupt literary culture that he sees around him is a result of the particular political situation in Regency England. His *Examiner* articles of the winter of 1816-17 are interesting precisely because they are informed by this recognition, as well as by the very different argument of the *Coriolanus* review.

Hazlitt's attack on *The Times* was initially directed mainly at its editor, John Stoddart, an ultra-royalist who had once been an equally extreme Jacobin, and who also happened to be Hazlitt's brother-in-law. The articles developed into a series of savage, often excessive, accounts of Stoddart and the Lake Poets as examples of 'literary prostitution', and of the corrupting influence of political power. The very position of the essays in the *Examiner* served to emphasise the contemporary intertwining of politics and literature. The newspaper usually began with a section entitled 'The Political Examiner', invariably containing an attack on the government and/or the Tory press. This would be followed by 'Foreign Intelligence', 'Provincial Intelligence', 'The Examiner' - normally comment on political events in France - and finally miscellaneous items such as poems, letters, 'Literary Notices', and so on. This schema held for the entire of 1816, until 15 December when the paper began with the first of the 'Illustrations of the Times Newspaper', under the rubric of 'Literary Notices'. The 'Political Examiner' was nowhere to be seen. Hazlitt's articles on apostasy showed that the usual distinction that the layout of the *Examiner* made between politics and literature had become untenable.

Hazlitt's most detailed account of poetic apostasy is in the second of the 'Illustrations', published on 22 December. We have already seen that here he links 'the

spirit of poetry' with 'humanity and liberty', although 'not in the present reign'. This is because 'the spirit of poetry is not the spirit of mortification or of martyrdom' - it does not have the strength to stand up against the *status quo*. He goes on to argue that, in fact, poetry and reality are entirely incompatible, for

poetry dwells in a perpetual Utopia of its own, and is, for that reason, very ill calculated to make a Paradise upon earth, by encountering the shocks and disappointments of the world [...] It has the range of the universe; it traverses the empyreum, and looks down on nature from a higher sphere. When it lights upon the earth, it loses some of its dignity and its use. Its strength is in its wings; its element the air. Standing on its feet, jostling with the crowd, it is liable to be overthrown, trampled on, and defaced. (VII, 142)³⁷

Poetry may be favourable to 'liberty', but only in its transcendental, rather than political, form. If it tries to engage with the grubby realities of the material world, it loses its freedom and its power. This stark separation of art from life also applies to poets, who, Hazlitt claims,

live in an ideal world, where they make every thing out according to their wishes and fancies. They either find things delightful, or make them so. They feign the beautiful and grand out of their own minds, and imagine all things to be, not what they are, but what they ought to be. They are naturally inventors, *creators not of truth but beauty*: and while they speak to us from the sacred shrine of their own hearts, while they pour out the pure treasures of thought to the world, they cannot be too much admired or applauded: but when, forgetting their high calling, and becoming tools and puppets in the hands of others, they would pass off the gewgaws of corruption and love-tokens of self-interest, as the gifts of the Muse, they cannot be too much despised and shunned. (VII, 142-43; my italics)

The distinction that Hazlitt makes between 'truth' and 'beauty' here reveals the extent of his distrust of the Romantic imagination at this time. He did not always hold this opinion, and he revised this passage when it was reprinted in the essay 'On Poetical Versatility' in the *Round Table* (1817); poets are here described as '*creators of truth, of love, and beauty*' (IV, 152; my italics). In 1816, however, they are represented as fantasists whose

³⁷Part of this passage was reprinted in the *Letter to William Gifford*, IX, 50.

ability to 'feign the beautiful' makes them dangerous and useful tools for those in positions of power. This is not the same as the *Coriolanus* argument; although there is a similar emphasis on the ability of the poetic imagination to support power, here it does not appear to be an inevitable process, occurring only when poets forget their 'high calling'.

However, as he continues, although Hazlitt claims that the apostates are to be 'despised and shunned' for, as it were, bringing poetry into disrepute, he also offers explanations for their behaviour which do make their political shifts seem almost inevitable. If the *Coriolanus* review argues that this is a result of the aggrandising nature of the imagination, at this point in the 'Illustrations', it is due to the weakness of the poetic character, which is unable to resist 'Legitimacy' when it is triumphant:

Their souls are effeminate, half man and half woman: they want fortitude, and are without principle [...] Poets, therefore, cannot do well without sympathy and flattery. It is, accordingly, very much against the grain that they remain long on the unpopular side of the question. They do not like to be shut out when laurels are to be given away at court - or places under government to be disposed of, in romantic situations in the country. They are happy to be reconciled on the first opportunity to prince and people, and to exchange their principles for a pension. (VII, 144)

Poets are weak-souled individuals who need the admiration of others to support them.³⁸ Thus 'sympathy', rather than being the mechanism of poetic genius (at least in the case of Shakespeare), is the cause of its debasement. Writing in the *London Magazine* in 1821, Hazlitt made this point more explicitly, stating that what Coleridge 'calls *sympathising with others* is their admiring him, and it must be admitted that he varies his battery pretty often, in order to accommodate himself to this sort of mutual understanding' (XVII, 23). If Rousseau, for Hazlitt, could resist political power due to

³⁸ Compare Hazlitt's argument in the *Round Table* essay 'On the Causes of Methodism' that poets have 'an original poverty of spirit and weakness of constitution', first published in the *Examiner*, 22 October 1815. CWH, IV, 58.

the strength of his ego, here it seems that all poets are easy prey for 'Legitimacy' due to their lack of a strong sense of selfhood. This argument about the relationship between the weakness of poets, and their political shifts, is further developed towards the end of the article entitled 'The Times Newspaper' (12 January 1817), where Hazlitt explains that only a politics based on strong passion, rather than airy idealism, can resist the blandishments of power (VII, 151-52).

Hazlitt's account of poetic 'effeminacy' fits in perfectly with his representations of Coleridge in the *Examiner*, but it is hard to see how it works with regard to Wordsworth; for in his review of the *Excursion* in 1814, Hazlitt had emphasised the poet's strong 'intellectual egotism' (XIX, 11). Clearly aware of this discrepancy, in the final paragraph of the second of the 'Illustrations', Hazlitt describes the result of contact between 'the spirit of poetry' and 'the spirit of Jacobinism'. He argues that because Jacobinism seeks to level 'all distinctions of art and nature' it is fundamentally at odds with power-loving poetry, and when the two are combined, the effect is to convert 'the whole principle of admiration in the poet (which is the essence of poetry) into admiration of himself. The spirit of Jacobin poetry is rank egotism'. This is ingenious; the Jacobin poet, because he refuses to recognise power outside him, inevitably uses his arts to celebrate his own ego. However, when Hazlitt gives Wordsworth as an example of this process, his argument becomes strained:

We know an instance. It is of a person who founded a school of poetry on sheer humanity, on idiot boys and mad mothers, and on Simon Lee, the old huntsman. The secret of the Jacobin poetry and the anti-jacobin politics of this writer is the same. His lyrical poetry was a cant of humanity about the commonest people to level the great with the small; and his political poetry is a cant of loyalty to level Bonaparte with kings and hereditary imbecility.

At this point in the 'Illustrations', Hazlitt's masterly rhetoric slips into sophistry. For once, I think, his anger has got the better of his argument, for to represent all of Wordsworth's poetic output as an attempt to reduce the entire world to mediocrity in order to aggrandise the poet's sense of self is overstated to the point of ludicrousness. Hazlitt is forced into this specious assertion because he knows that his claims about the essential weakness of the poetic character fall down when faced with Wordsworth. In his next *Examiner* article, perhaps having had more time to think about this problem, he offers some more convincing explanations for the poet's apostasy.

Hazlitt's fourth article on the *Times*, subtitled 'On the Connexion between Toad-Eaters and Tyrants', is offered as the fulfilment of a pledge he made, in a review of Robert Owen's *New View of Society* (VII, 99-100), to explain 'some of the causes which impede the natural progress of liberty and human happiness', a pledge which he claims has been partially redeemed in the *Coriolanus* review (VII, 145). He argues that in 1792, 'Mr. Burke became a pensioner by writing his book against the French Revolution, and Mr. Thomas Paine was outlawed for his *Rights of Man*'. Since then, 'the press has been the great enemy of freedom, the whole weight of that immense engine (for the purposes of good or ill) having a fatal bias given to it by the two main springs of fear and favour' (VII, 145). By exploiting the 'weak sides of the human intellect', power is able to maintain itself through its control of literary culture. Having described, in the previous article, the influence of 'fear' on the Lakers' apostasy, now Hazlitt emphasises the lure of 'favour':

they could not live without the smiles of the great (not they), nor provide for an increasing establishment without a loss of character; instead of going into some profitable business and exchanging their lyres for ledgers, their pens for the plough (the honest road to riches), they chose rather to prostitute their pens to the mock-heroic defence of the most bare-faced of all mummeries, the pretended alliance of kings and people! (VII, 147)

This accusation is close to the bone, particularly in the case of Wordsworth. In order to provide for his wife and four children, maintain a middle-class existence, and remain a poet, he had been forced to apply to Lord Lonsdale for patronage, which had resulted in his Distributorship.³⁹ Southey's journalism, and his acceptance of the Laureateship, also resulted from his inability to earn enough from his poetry to support his family as he wished. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that, as Hazlitt argues, the Lakers' pro-Tory poetry was the product of mercenary motives. But the important point here is that he shows an awareness that their loss of independence may be partly caused by the realities of the literary marketplace - unless they are willing to give up poetry, or their bourgeois aspirations, they are almost doomed to accept patronage and thus to 'prostitute their pens'. Here Hazlitt recognises that apostasy may have structural, as well as psychological causes.

Hazlitt's writings on poetic apostasy have a complex relationship with his ideas about poetic genius. As we have seen, he argues that poets are attracted to tyranny for a host of reasons: the nature of poetic language; the associative process of the imagination; the weakness of the poetic character; greed (or, more charitably, financial necessity), and the desire for sympathy. He offers these different explanations as a sort of catch-all argument which will contain Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth. In such a mood, he represents both self-assertion and sympathy as leading inevitably to compliance with power, and it often seems from the *Examiner* articles that poets are eternally fated to work against the cause of democracy. However, even at this time, Hazlitt occasionally reveals a sense that apostasy might be a result of the particular, contingent relationship between literature and power in the Regency period, and, in the following sections, I will show how this insight developed later in his career.

³⁹ Jones, p. 91.

III

On 10 December 1816, Coleridge's much-delayed *Statesman's Manual*, 'a lay sermon addressed to the higher classes of society', was published by Gale and Fenner. This intervention in the 'Distresses of the Country' debate has been well discussed by Robert Lapp, who has also given a close analysis of Hazlitt's *Examiner* review of 29 December.⁴⁰ He shows that Hazlitt improvises 'a kind of Sunday counter-sermon from the lay pulpit of political dissent' in which he represents Coleridge's book as an attempt to justify repressive conservative ideology through a tendentious misreading of the Bible.⁴¹ Two weeks later, directly after his final article on the *Times*, Hazlitt published a letter under the pseudonym 'SEMPER EGO AUDITOR' entitled 'Mr Coleridge's Lay Sermon', in which he responded to his own review.⁴² In 1823, Hazlitt would take this text as the basis for 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', and thus it is an important link between his writings on apostasy in the late 1810s period, and his more complex account of the relationship between literature and political power in the mid-1820s.

The letter begins with a description of going to see Coleridge preach in January 1798. He is described as a prophet-like figure whose sermon then, it is implied, was very different from his recent publication: '*That* sermon, like *this* sermon, was upon peace and war; upon church and state - not their alliance, but their separation - on the spirit of the world, and the spirit of Christianity, not as the same, but as opposed to one another' (VII, 128). As a young man, according to Hazlitt, he was so delighted with Coleridge's performance that, on his return home, the world around him was imbued with his political dreams:

⁴⁰Lapp, chapters 3 and 4.

⁴¹Lapp, p. 88.

⁴²The pseudonym alludes 'to the opening line of Juvenal's *Satires*, "Semper ego auditor tantum?" - "Must I always be a listener only?"; Lapp, p. 20.

Poetry and Philosophy had met together, Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion. This was beyond even my hopes. I returned home well satisfied. The sun that was still labouring pale and wan through the sky, obscured by thick mists, seemed an emblem of the *good cause*: and the cold dank drops of dew that hung half melted on the beard of the thistle, had something genial and refreshing in them; for there was a spirit of hope and youth in all nature, that turned every thing into good. The face of nature had not then the brand of JUS DIVINUM on it. (VII, 129)

One would take the '*good cause*' to be political reform; it must surely be a testament to Coleridge's oratorical skills that he gave Hazlitt such optimism at a time when the radical movement in England was in total disarray after the government clamp-down of the mid-1790s.⁴³ Having said that, Hazlitt may well be referring to Napoleon's success in Italy in 1796 and 1797. In the *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (1828-30), he states that the Italian campaign

gave the first stunning blow to the Coalition [of Allied Powers] [...] Those who ever felt that dawn of a brighter day, that spring-time of hope and glow of exultation, animate their breasts, cannot easily be taught to forget it, either in the dazzling glare or cheerless gloom that was to succeed it. (XIII, 317-18)

Of course there is no way of knowing to what extent Hazlitt's nostalgic libertarian rhetoric describes his true feelings in 1798; his view of this period always seems rose-tinted, to say the least.

The pathetic fallacy in the passage quoted from the *Examiner* letter, that is, Hazlitt's apparent confusion of his own feelings and associations with the 'spirit' of the world around him, is important. In the letter - and in a more complex way in 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' - he constructs an ironic version of the 'Greater Romantic Lyric' practised by Wordsworth and Coleridge.⁴⁴ As in 'Frost at Midnight', or 'Tintern Abbey', the text describes a landscape associated with a youthful unity with nature,

⁴³ See Edward Royle and James Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers, 1760-1848* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), chapter 5.

⁴⁴ M. H. Abrams identifies and describes this poetic form in the well-known New Critical essay, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric', in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 201-29.

which has since been lost. However, unlike its poetic analogues, Hazlitt's lyrical meditation does not achieve any form of positive resolution and he remains in a state of alienation from the world. The reason for this alienation is the triumph of 'Legitimacy'; when he writes of 'the brand of JUS DIVINUM' which disfigures 'the face of nature', he is alluding to a passage in the *Statesman's Manual* in which Coleridge claimed that 'the *Jus divinum*, or direct Relation of the State and its Magistracy to the Supreme Being' was to be found in Scripture.⁴⁵ Hazlitt had singled out this argument for particular criticism in his review of Coleridge's tract (VII, 121). In 1798, according to the letter, Coleridge gave Hazlitt a vision of nature which made it consonant with the 'good cause', but now he and other apostates claim that in fact it is the divine right of kings that is natural, rather than the rights of mankind. As a result, Hazlitt feels that he has lost the synthesis that he once had with the world: that, like Coleridge's genius, is located firmly in the past:

I begin to suspect that my notions formerly must have been little better than a deception: that my faith in Mr. Coleridge's great powers must have been a vision of my youth, that, like other such visions, must pass away from me; and that all his genius and eloquence is *vox et preterea nihil*: for otherwise how is it so lost to all common sense upon paper? (VII, 129)

In the final paragraph of the letter, Hazlitt introduces a theme that is present, in a more implicit form, throughout 'My First Acquaintance with Poets'. It is not just that Hazlitt's faith in Coleridge's genius and the triumph of the 'good cause' has been disappointed. It is that Coleridge has invited this faith, awoken his imagination, enabled him to see nature as imbued with 'a spirit of hope and youth', irrevocably changed him and shaped his aspirations - and then left him a solitary Jacobin with broken dreams:

⁴⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. by R. J. White, p. 33 in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).

I am naturally, Sir, a man of plain, dull, dry understanding, without flights or fancies, and can just contrive to plod on, if left to myself: what right then has Mr. C., who is just going to ascend in a balloon, to offer me a seat in the parachute, only to throw me from the height of his career upon the ground, and dash me to pieces? Or again, what right has he to invite me to a feast of poets and philosophers, fruits and flowers intermixed,- immortal fruits and amaranthine flowers,- and then to tell me it is vapour, and, like *Timon*, to throw his empty dishes in my face? (VII, 129)

Lapp rightly points out the importance of Hazlitt's claim that he is 'a man of plain, dull, dry understanding', and its ironic contrast with 'his obviously exuberant experiment in style, at once eclectic and rhetorically pointed'.⁴⁶ But he fails to recognise that the key word here is 'naturally'; Hazlitt is saying that he was born as a certain type of person, but that due to Coleridge's influence he became capable of the 'flights' and 'fancies' of the imagination. Unfortunately, the publication of the *Statesman's Manual* has shown him that the imagination cannot be trusted, for whereas in 1798 Coleridge's 'flights' were those of 'an eagle dallying with the wind', now, with black humour, the poet is revealed to be a murderous balloonist. The central irony of the *Examiner* letter is that it utilises some of the tropes of Romantic writing, in particular the identification of the self with the natural world, in order to lament the failure of the Romantic imagination to resist political power. However, despite Hazlitt's claim that his vision of 1798 'must pass away', his poetic rhetoric shows that it is impossible for him to return to an innocent state of 'plain, dull, dry understanding' - even though what was once a glorious gift has now become a painful burden.

⁴⁶Lapp, p. 17.

IV

During the six years between the publication of the 'Semper Ego Auditor' letter in the *Examiner*, and that of 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' in the *Liberal*, Hazlitt's position within literary culture changed substantially. In 1817, he was still a writer of apparently ephemeral political and critical newspaper journalism; by 1823, he had published a number of books of lectures and essays, and contributed many articles to prestigious organs such as the *London Magazine*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, and the *Edinburgh Review*. This success had its price; he had become a target for Tory critics, and their attacks further justified his gloomy view of the corruption of literary culture. These are lamented in a number of his familiar essays, but are given extended treatment in 'On the Aristocracy of Letters', from the second volume of *Table-Talk* (1822).

As we saw in chapter one, in the essay 'On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life' of June 1820, Hazlitt remarked that only rank or wealth could protect an author from 'the tender-hearted Cerberus of criticism'. 'On the Aristocracy of Letters' is devoted entirely to this theme, dividing the literary world between professional authors who must subsist by writing, and aristocratic dilettantes who can write as they wish without having to worry about reviews or sales. Hazlitt is particularly envious of Byron, whose success, the essayist claims, is partly due to his rank, which awes the public and protects him from the critics:

He towers above his fellows by all the height of the peerage. 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! [...] The Noble Bard is for this reason scarcely vulnerable to the critics. The double barrier of his pretensions baffles their puny, timid efforts. Strip off some of his tarnished laurels, and the coronet appears glittering beneath: restore them, and it still shines through with keener lustre. In fact, his Lordship's blaze of reputation culminates from his rank and place in society. (VIII, 209-10)

Byron's charmed existence is bitterly contrasted with the life of the professional writer, who, without 'extrinsic advantages of birth, breeding, or fortune', is doomed to be 'a helpless and despised animal' (VIII, 210). Through this analysis, Hazlitt gives the basis for a sympathetic understanding of literary apostasy - a writer without a private income or social status is caught between the Scylla of poverty and the Charybdis of sycophancy. The fate of Keats is a grim warning of what awaits those who do not ally themselves with power, for 'when the mercenary servile crew approached him, he had no pedigree to show them, no rent-roll to hand out in reversion for their praise: he was not in any great man's train, nor the butt and puppet of a lord' (VIII, 211).

Hazlitt's complaint is that the rules which govern the way in which literary culture is structured are far too close to those which govern the worlds of politics and class, what Bourdieu would term 'the field of power'. The literary world lacks autonomy from power because writers, publishers, critics, and readers place too much value on wealth, social status, and political affiliation, rather than on literary ability. Thus although Hazlitt still clearly despises those writers who seek the patronage and protection of 'Legitimacy', he also realises that it is difficult for a man of letters to remain independent when his success or failure is largely dependent on its support. Here, apostasy is not represented as the result of the peculiar nature of poetic imagination, but rather of the structure of literary culture at a particular historical moment (although Hazlitt does not say whether or not he believes this situation can be changed). In the late Romantic period, the 'proper place' of 'a man of genius' - and Hazlitt is only speaking half-ironically here - is 'admidst silver services and shining chandeliers [...] picking his teeth his teeth and mincing an opinion, sheltered by rank, bowing to wealth [...] [he is] a powdered beau, a sycophant plant' (VIII, 211).

In the light of his jaundiced view of literary culture, and his dislike of aristocratic poets, it is interesting that in 1822, Hazlitt agreed to contribute to the *Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*, the quarterly periodical founded by Byron, Shelley and Leigh Hunt. This magazine was an attempt to counter the influence of the Tory press through the establishment of a small 'republic of letters' where class divisions and political affiliations were to be transcended by shared literary interests. Its title probably referred principally to Spanish democrats - *liberales* - who had rebelled successfully against King Ferdinand in 1820 (although the return to the liberal Constitution of 1812 only lasted until 1823). At the same time, the term 'liberal' had also begun to be used in England, mainly by Tories who sought to connect British radicals with European revolutionaries.⁴⁷ As Peter L. Thorslev has remarked, in the magazine's preface, Hunt 'makes great play with the 'old' and 'new' meanings of "liberal" and "liberalities"'.⁴⁸ He emphasises that the *Liberal* is to be a *literary* journal, which will be concerned with 'liberalities in the shape of poetry, Essays, Tales, and Translations', and remarks that 'the object of our work is not political, except inasmuch as all writing now-a-days must involve something to that effect.'⁴⁹ Later, Hunt explains that all that is meant by the title is that 'we are advocates of every species of liberal knowledge and that [...] we go the full length in matters of opinion with large bodies of men who are called LIBERALS'.⁵⁰ The *Liberal*, then, did not really have a detailed political agenda; its politics lay in its name, its distance from the British literary culture, its independence from government influence, and the class composition of the Pisan Circle. It was thus an interesting vehicle for Hazlitt's ambivalent accounts of the relationship between literature and power in 1823:

⁴⁷ More in-depth accounts of the term 'liberal' in the early nineteenth century can be found in Elie Halévy, *The Liberal Awakening: 1815-1830*, trans. by E. I. Watkin, 2nd edn (London: Ernest Benn, 1949), pp. 81-82; Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., 'Post-Waterloo Liberalism: The Second Generation', *Studies in Romanticism*, 28 (1989), 437-61 (pp. 444-46); Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, 2nd edn (London: Fontana Press, 1983), pp. 179-81.

⁴⁸ Thorslev, p. 444.

⁴⁹ Leigh Hunt, 'Preface', *Liberal*, October 1822, p. vii.

⁵⁰ Hunt, p. ix.

three of his five essays for the journal, as well as the *Edinburgh Review* essay 'The Periodical Press', are best read as engagements with the *Liberal* project.

The history of the *Liberal* is complicated, and I will only give a brief outline of it here.⁵¹ From 1818 until his death, Shelley wrote a number of letters imploring friends such as Hunt, Peacock, and Hogg to come and visit him in Italy. Writing to Peacock in February 1819, he lamented the power of the *Quarterly Review* to work against 'the cause of improvement', and called for 'a band of staunch reformers', to unite 'in so close and constant a league as that in which interest and fanaticism have bound the members of that literary coalition'.⁵² In December 1820, Byron wrote to Thomas Moore, suggesting that they start a newspaper, a proposal that was still floating around the following August, when Shelley visited Byron in Ravenna.⁵³ The idea of the *Liberal* was clearly formulated during this visit: at the end of the month, Shelley wrote to Hunt from Pisa, stating that Byron had proposed that 'you should come out and go shares with him and me in a periodical work'.⁵⁴ For various reasons, Hunt did not make it to Italy for over ten months, arriving on 3 July 1822, and five days later Shelley was dead. By this time the *Liberal* had already provoked a flurry of anticipatory attacks in the British press, and Byron's friends, such as Moore and Hobhouse, were trying to get him to extricate himself from this 'unholy alliance'. Even before the publication of the first number on 15 October 1822, Byron had written to his publisher John Murray claiming that he was only involved in the magazine as an act of charity to the Hunt brothers, and when a garbled version of the letter appeared in the *John Bull*, the personal tensions that already existed

⁵¹ A full account can be found in William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and 'The Liberal'* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960). See also W. Paul Elledge, 'The Liberal', in *British Literary Magazines: The Romantic Age, 1789-1836*, ed. by Alvin Sullivan (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 220-27.

⁵² *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (London: Ernest Benn., 1965), X, 34.

⁵³ Marshall, p. 24.

⁵⁴ Ingpen and Peck, X, 318.

between Hunt and Byron were exacerbated.⁵⁵ Their relationship deteriorated further over the winter, and the poor sales of the second number meant that the magazine was operating at a loss; by February 1823, after further pressure from his London friends, Byron had decided to withdraw. The third issue appeared at the end of the April to general indifference, and the fourth, published on 30 July 1823, was the last.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the magazine was doomed before its first number had even been published, but the violent reaction of the Tory press throughout 1822 suggests that at the time it seemed like a potentially dangerous rival. In particular, the alliance between Byron and Hunt represented a powerful symbol of the way in which political and literary interests could transcend class divisions. This union of middle-class radicalism and aristocratic Whiggism, Hunt's editorial flair and Byron's saleability, clearly worried government writers, and many of the attacks on the periodical focused on the difference between the two men in social class, in order to reassert the distinctions that their collaboration tended to occlude. Of course, the effacement of such divisive distinctions was important to the ideal behind the *Liberal*, Shelley's dream of 'a band of staunch reformers' of different backgrounds coming together to do battle with the *Quarterly Review*. This was to be a meritocracy, not an aristocracy, of letters, an attempt to assert the autonomy of genius from political power, and thus Hunt, writing in the preface to the first volume of the magazine, stated that 'the demigods of liberal worship' were not the 'legitimized' few, but could be found 'wherever [...] we see the mind of man exhibiting powers of its own, and at the same time helping to carry on the best interests of human nature.'⁵⁶

Although Tory sensibilities were offended by the first number of the magazine, particularly Byron's mockery of George III in *The Vision of Judgment* and his epigrams

⁵⁵ *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-82), X, 13.

⁵⁶ Hunt, p. xii.

on the recently-deceased Castlereagh, its content turned out to be mainly inoffensive *belles-lettres* produced by Hunt under great pressure, and, as its sales quickly declined, the press hysteria subsided. With the possible exception of Byron's poems, Hazlitt's five contributions were by far the most interesting and controversial things in the *Liberal*.⁵⁷ Years later, he claimed to have been asked, presumably by John Hunt, who edited the magazine from London, to contribute after Shelley's death, and Leigh Hunt and Byron seem to have first known of Hazlitt's involvement in September 1822. The first number of the magazine contained nothing by the essayist; he had done little or no writing over the summer, completely distracted by getting his divorce through the Scottish courts, and his obsession with Sarah Walker. His two contributions to the second number, published on 1 January 1823, were probably written in October at Winterslow, his rural retreat. Both 'On the Scotch Character' and 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' seemed calculated to further enrage the magazine's Tory critics. The former essay need not detain us long: it is an entertaining rant in which the writers of Hazlitt's arch-enemy, *Blackwood's Magazine*, are described as 'a troop of Yahoos'. One of them, John Wilson, responded with an article entitled 'On the Scotch Character - by a Flunky' in March 1823, which begins, 'Lord Byron being a somewhat whimsical nobleman, has lately hired two or three Cockneys as menial servants. They are to do his dirty work, for which they are to receive his cast-off clothes, and, we believe, twenty pounds per annum'.⁵⁸ This sort of comment, calculated to emphasise the class tensions between Hunt, Hazlitt, and Byron, is typical of Tory criticism of the *Liberal*. However, I must emphasise that these tensions were not purely in the imagination of its enemies, but were inscribed in the nature of the *Liberal* project - and 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' probably added to them.

⁵⁷ Other contributors included Mary Shelley, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Horace Smith, and Charles Armitage Brown; see Marshall, pp. 238-39.

⁵⁸ John Wilson, 'On the Scotch Character - By a Flunky', *BEM*, March 1823, p. 365.

This fine essay has been unduly neglected by most Hazlitt critics, the victim of a tendency to concentrate on his philosophical and critical writings at the expense of his other work. And as far as I am aware, it has not been recognised that it is best understood by placing it in its original context as a contribution to the *Liberal*. It represents a return to Hazlitt's argument in the *Coriolanus* review about the inevitable complicity of the imagination with political power: the epigraph, taken from the poet William Shenstone, includes the phrase 'poets are *Tories* by nature'. Hazlitt claims that human beings have a natural love of monarchy that results from a projection of their own self-love; we see in kings and lords what we would like to be. Our poetical faculties allows us to make idols of others, to believe in the symbolism of the state, and to imagine ourselves in positions of power. He goes on to launch a Rousseauvian attack on the vice and theatricality of court life, peppered with a few sarcasms directed at the late George III and his son. His conclusion, clearly referring to the journal in which the essay appears, would not have been out of place in Hunt's preface:

There is nothing truly liberal but that which postpones its own claims to those of propriety - or great, but that which looks out of itself to others. All power is but an unabated nuisance, a barbarous assumption, an aggravated injustice, that is not directed to the common good: all grandeur that has not something corresponding to it in personal merit and heroic acts, is a deliberate burlesque, and an insult on common sense and human nature. (XVII, 265)

'On the Spirit of Monarchy' is a good example of the ambivalence of Hazlitt's political views during the 1820s. In the above passage, he argues that power that is not altruistic, and based on merit, is an insult to 'common sense and human nature', but for most of the essay, the argument is that humans *naturally* sympathise with the show of 'power', the pomp and ceremony of state occasions, regardless of the worthlessness of those in charge. Thus liberalism, which entails disinterested sympathy with others, is undermined

by mankind's selfish sympathy with power.⁵⁹ As we have seen, Hazlitt had always viewed sympathy as a double-edged sword - the mechanism of both benevolence *and* self-love - but the presence of such ambivalence in 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' appears to weaken the ideal, which the *Liberal* was supposed to support, of a radical consensus that could stand up to political and social hegemony. Hazlitt, of course, was still haunted by what he saw as the break up of such a consensus during the 1790s.

Interestingly, Shelley's then-unpublished 'Defence of Poetry' was also supposed to appear in the second number of the *Liberal*, which would have created a fascinating juxtaposition.⁶⁰ Shelley argues that the imagination, because it enables us to sympathise with others, is 'the great instrument of moral good' and that this faculty is strengthened by poetry.⁶¹ Thus the imagination is a wholly progressive force and the poet is at the cutting edge of liberty. 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' would have been an excellent substitute for Peacock's 'The Four Ages of Poetry', which the 'Defence' was originally intended to answer, for, as I have argued, both Hazlitt and Peacock link poetry with support of an outmoded social system. Hazlitt's essay describes 'the dark side' of the imagination - its tendency to create false idols - and thus undercuts Shelley's rather facile link between poetry and political progress. It would also have been fitting for the two essays to have been published together, because, as we have seen, Shelley may have partly found his ideas of sympathy in Hazlitt.

The writer of 'The Candid No. II' in *Blackwood's Magazine* used 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' as evidence that the authors of the *Liberal* were republicans, a description which might well have annoyed Byron.⁶² He also suggested that it was a calculated dig at

⁵⁹ Peter L. Thorslev discusses Hazlitt's doctrine of 'disinterestedness' in his account of 'post-Waterloo liberalism', but, remarkably, does not mention any of Hazlitt's actual contributions to the *Liberal*; Thorslev, pp. 454-56.

⁶⁰ It is unclear why it did not appear; see Marshall, pp. 140-42.

⁶¹ Ingpen and Peck, VII, 118.

⁶² This is a tricky question, but Malcolm Kelsall has given a good account of Byron's position within a Whiggish tradition of resistance to the Crown, rather than republicanism; see *Byron's Politics* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987).

the poet: 'I think I perceive in it, a reproof to some friend or patron of the author, wrapped up in a mystical half-allegorical form [...] and that its title may be translated, 'The royal court at Pisa, a picture from life'''.⁶³ This seems far-fetched, but it is noteworthy that Hazlitt saw fit to attack hereditary privilege in a periodical founded, and partly funded, by a nobleman known to be proud of his status. The essayist later claimed that the article must 'have operated like a bomb-shell' among the Whig coteries of London; there is no evidence for this hyperbolic statement, but he may have been right to believe that it inspired Moore to write to Byron imploring him to escape from the magazine (XII, 379). According to Hunt, writing in 1828, Byron himself responded badly to Hazlitt's contributions:

Lord Byron was in truth afraid of Mr. Hazlitt; he admitted him like a courtier, for fear he should be treated by him as an enemy, but when he beheld such articles as the "Spirit of Monarchy," where the "taint" of public corruption was to be exposed, and the "First Acquaintance with Poets," where Mr. Wordsworth was to be exalted above deprecation [...] his Lordship could only wish him out again, and take pains to show his polite friends that he had nothing in common with so inconsiderate a plebeian.⁶⁴

If this is true, then Byron failed the test that Hazlitt set up for him by placing 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' in the second number of the *Liberal*. It seems to me that the essay is best seen as Hazlitt's challenge to the poet: it is asking him to prove, by *not* reacting badly to it, that he is fully committed to the *Liberal* project, and that it is possible to contest the Tory dominance of literary culture. He is asking Byron to forget about his rank and tolerate Hazlitt's tirade in order to show that a lordly poet can become a truly liberal member of the republic of letters. Thus although parts of the essay seem alien to the ideology behind the periodical, its very publication in the *Liberal*, as well as the Hunt-like peroration, reveal Hazlitt's interest in the project.

⁶³ 'R. S.' [J. Gillon or John Wilson], 'The Candid No. II', *BEM*, March 1823, p. 209.

⁶⁴ Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), p. 63.

The third number of the *Liberal* contains what is possibly Hazlitt's best-known essay, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', which at first glance reveals a similar ambivalence to 'On the Spirit of Monarchy'. It is a vision of the kind of sympathetic intercourse between men of genius that the *Liberal* was supposed to promote, but locates this republic of letters in a lost, golden past. This essay, and the way in which it relates to its forebears - the *Examiner* letter on 'Mr Coleridge's Lay Sermon', the lecture 'On the Living Poets', and the essay 'On Going a Journey' - has been the subject of some critical interest in recent years.⁶⁵ However, only Robert Lapp has pointed out that 'an accurate reading' of the essay must 'take into account the embattled circumstances of its publication in the *Liberal*' - here he is referring to the continuing attacks on the periodical, the discord between Byron and Leigh Hunt, and the indictment of John Hunt for the publication of 'The Vision of Judgment' at the end of 1822.⁶⁶ This is certainly the case, but Lapp's claim that the essay is unequivocally about the failure of 1820s liberalism is more doubtful. In 1823, Hazlitt dispenses with the *Examiner* letter's stark contrast between past and present, and although the essay contains powerful passages in which he laments the failure of his personal and political hopes, the overall result is more a celebration of the past than a jeremiad directed against the present.

'My First Acquaintance with Poets' repeats the account of Coleridge's sermon from the *Examiner* letter, but this is now a small section of a much larger piece. In the early part of the essay, Hazlitt describes his first meeting with Coleridge at the house of Hazlitt's father in Wem, and depicts the poet's appearance and conversation in some detail. In the latter half, he recounts his visit to Coleridge at Nether Stowey, and his impressions of Wordsworth, whom he also met there. Although the essay is pervaded by

⁶⁵ See Stanley Jones, 'First Flight: Image and Theme in a Hazlitt Essay', *Prose Studies*, 8 (1985), 35-47; James Mulvihill, 'Visions and Revisions: William Hazlitt and "My First Acquaintance with Poets"', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 109 (2000), 11-14; Jeffrey C. Robinson, 'Hazlitt's "My First Acquaintance with Poets": The Autobiography of a Cultural Critic', *Romanticism*, 6 (2000), 178-84; Bill Ruddick, 'Recollecting Coleridge: The Internalization of Radical Energies in Hazlitt's Political Prose', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 19 (1989), 243-55.

⁶⁶ Lapp, p. 167.

a wistfulness brought on by the loss of youthful hopes, there is an absence of recrimination, and Hazlitt cut the final two paragraphs from the *Examiner* letter where he had attacked Coleridge and suggested that his genius was '*vox et preterea nihil*'. The emphasis is now more on Hazlitt's youthful belief in the signs of genius exhibited by Wordsworth and Coleridge. However, the central irony of the letter remains; it is Coleridge who has given Hazlitt the imagination and inspiration to write such a masterly prose-poem - about the ultimate failure of those attributes. At the essay's beginning, Hazlitt describes the tremendous effect of the older man's conversation as they walked between Wem and Shrewsbury:

I had no notion then that I should ever be able to express my admiration to others in motley imagery or quaint allusion, till the light of his genius shone into my soul [...] I was at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the way-side, crushed, bleeding, lifeless; but now [...] my ideas float on winged words, and as they expand their plumes, catch the golden light of other years (XVII, 107).

Coleridge, by the power of his genius, transcends the boundaries of selfhood, enters into Hazlitt's 'soul', and awakens his imagination. Through the action of this new faculty, Hazlitt is able to see 'a spirit of hope and youth in all nature'. However, the essayist represents this new knowledge and imaginative outlook as double-edged; in 1798, it is a source of joy, but now, he implies, it has become a source of pain, as he has discovered that he cannot rely on the vision of the future that Coleridge has given him. If Coleridge is the God who creates the republican Eden of Hazlitt's youth, he is also, eventually, the Devil who takes it away.⁶⁷

Hazlitt, I think, associates the imaginative faculty which Coleridge has awoken with the failure of his own hopes, as well as the Lake Poets' tergiversation. In 1798, he was struggling with the composition of his 'metaphysical choke-pear', the *Essay on the*

⁶⁷ That the essay is about a Biblical 'Fall' is clearly signposted by Hazlitt in the opening sentence of the essay when he says of '1798', 'the figures that compose the date are to me like the "dreaded name of Demogorgon"', a reference to *Paradise Lost* (II, 964-65).

Principles of the Human Action, whereas now he is an in-demand journalist: 'I can write fast enough now'. However, Hazlitt sees his facility for periodical writing almost as a personal failure: 'Am I better than I then was? Oh no! One truth discovered, one pang of regret at not being able to express it, is better than all the fluency and flippancy in the world. Would that I could go back to what I then was!' In 1798, Hazlitt, Wordsworth and Coleridge exist in a rural republic of letters made up of sympathetic relationships and where individual genius is encouraged. One of the narratives underlying 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' is the story of how he and the Lake poets have moved from an ideal rural existence in which ideas flow freely and 'Legitimacy' is about to be defeated, to engage with an urban literary marketplace in which 'Legitimacy' triumphs by exploiting the self-interest of its members. This situation is compared implicitly to the 1790s, which 'was not a time when *nothing was given for nothing*. The mind opened, and a softness might be perceived coming over the hearts of individuals, beneath 'the scales that fence' our self-interest' (XVII, 116).⁶⁸ In the narrative of Hazlitt's own life, this was a time of leisured contemplation, long before he had become a journalist working in London. The contrast between the rural idyll of his youth and the harsh realities of the literary marketplace must have been very much in his mind during the composition of 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', for at that time (February 1823) he was confined under house arrest for debt.⁶⁹

We can get a better sense of Hazlitt's nostalgia for his rural life by glancing at the essay 'On Living to One's Self', from the first volume of *Table-Talk* (1821). Here, Hazlitt extols the merits of the life of 'a silent spectator' who does not feel obliged to meddle with the world, and looks wistfully back to his own youth:

⁶⁸ There is a similar passage in Hazlitt's *Life of Thomas Holcroft* (1816); see *CWH*, III, 156-57.

⁶⁹ A. C. Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2000), p. 296.

For many years of my life I did nothing but think. I had nothing else to do but solve some knotty point, or dip in some abstruse author, or look at the sky, or wander by the pebbled sea-side [...] I cared for nothing, I wanted nothing. I took my time to consider whatever occurred to me, and was in no hurry to give a sophistical answer to a question - there was no printer's devil waiting for me. (VIII, 92)

Hazlitt not only associates the late 1790s with dreams of republicanism, but with an ideal of liberated literary production, in which he was not prey to the demands of the reading public, that 'mean, stupid, dastardly, pitiful, selfish, spiteful, envious, ungrateful animal', which is led through the nose by malicious critics (VIII, 97-99). But if 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' describes a heaven inhabited by idealistic men of letters, the literary world of the 1820s is a hell where writers are tormented by devils, in the guise of errand boys, who constantly demand 'sophistical answer[s]' to feed a ravenous public.

There is no doubt then that Hazlitt's essay is, in part, meant to show that contemporary literary culture is corrupt. However, its appearance within such a progressive publication as the *Liberal* weakens the sense that one might get from 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' that the spirit of the 1790s cannot be recovered, for Hazlitt's depiction of the republic of letters is clearly a representation of the Utopian ideal of the magazine - literary genius is shown to be a locus of radical resistance to 'Legitimacy'. As one of Hazlitt's most self-consciously 'poetic' works, by its very nature the essay carries an argument about the power of the imagination to operate as a positive force, 'to catch the golden light of other years' and give a brief glimpse of what has been and, perhaps, what might be again, even though 'the face of nature' *now* has 'the brand of JUS DIVINUM on it' (XVII, 109). And, as we have seen, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' shows sympathy as progressive - essentially republican and disinterested - rather than as a mechanism which maintains our support for power. The essay also ends hopefully, as Hazlitt describes his first meeting with Charles Lamb at Godwin's house,

‘the beginning of a friendship between us, which I believe still continues’ (XVII, 122). Perhaps Lamb’s touching defence of his old friend a few months later, in the ‘Letter of Elia to Robert Southey Esquire’, showed Hazlitt that the sympathetic ideal of the 1790s was not entirely an empty dream.⁷⁰ What I am suggesting is that when ‘My First Acquaintance with Poets’ is read in the context of the *Liberal*, and Hazlitt’s writings on poetic apostasy, its account of the link between independent genius and political radicalism seems much less nostalgic than if it is read in an anthology or his collected works. It is still a deeply ambivalent essay, but offers at least the possibility that through the alliance of Byron, Hunt, and Hazlitt, its vision might be renewed.

V

‘Arguing in a Circle’, one of Hazlitt’s two contributions to the fourth and final number of the *Liberal* (the other was ‘Pulpit Oratory - Dr. Chalmers and Mr. Irving’), also sends out a somewhat mixed message. He begins by rejoicing in ‘the progress that has been made in public opinion and political liberty, and that may be still farther made’ (XVII, 268), but this optimistic beginning is vitiated by the bulk of the essay which is spent attacking Burke and the Lake poets as political apostates. Hazlitt’s ambivalence is even more strongly apparent in his essay ‘The Periodical Press’, written in the same period and published in the May 1823 number of the *Edinburgh Review*, which starts by accepting, even celebrating, the rise of periodical literature, but ends by bitterly lamenting the way in which it has been hijacked by power.

⁷⁰ *LM*, October 1823, p. 405.

This essay is a notable contribution to contemporary debates about the relationship between genius and literary culture, appearing in the pages of a periodical, that, if no longer the dominant force it had once been, was still powerful and widely read. In the first half of the essay, Hazlitt argues that the contemporary deluge of periodical criticism is a *symptom* of a lack of original genius, rather than its *cause*. As in the *Examiner* essay 'Why the Arts are not Progressive' of 1814 (IV, 160-64), he argues that, in all arts, the greatest geniuses appear at their beginning. The modern world suffers from an anxiety of influence which prevents writers and artists from reaching the heights of creativity achieved by their forebears. Hazlitt counsels that this situation should be accepted - 'there is a change in the world, and we must conform to it [...] Let us be contented to serve as priests at the shrine of ancient genius' (XVI, 218) - and even stridently embraces the rise of the periodicals: 'Therefore, let Reviews flourish - let Magazines increase and multiply - let the Daily and Weekly Newspapers live for ever! We are optimists in literature, and hold, with certain limitations, that, in this respect, whatever is, is right!' (XVI, 220). He also apparently dismisses the 'objection' that periodical criticism is an 'engine of party-spirit and personal invective', by noting that that this simply proves the Press's power and importance (XVI, 220).

Towards the end of the essay, as Hazlitt reaches the point in his survey where the reader expects him to move on to *Blackwood's Magazine*, there is a sudden shift in tone. 'The illiberality of the Periodical Press', he proclaims,

is 'the sin that most easily besets it.' We have already accounted for this from the rank and importance it has assumed, which have made it a necessary engine in the hands of party. The abuse, however, has grown to a height that renders it desirable that it should be crushed, if it cannot be corrected; for it threatens to overlay, not only criticism and letters, but to root out all common honesty and common sense from works of the greatest excellence, upon large classes of society. All character, all decency, the plainest matters of fact, or deductions of

reason, are made the sport of a nickname, an inuendo [*sic*], or a bold and direct falsehood. (XVI, 232-33)

Here the relaxed, *laissez-faire* attitude that characterises the early part of 'The Periodical Press' gives way to an interventionist zeal as Hazlitt demands that the partisanship of the press must be 'crushed' as a threat to society. Note the accusation of 'illiberality'; Hazlitt of course does not simply mean that the press is base, or bigoted, but that it is opposed to political liberalism, and the *Liberal*. In the following pages, he embarks on a lengthy rant about the sins of the Tory critics and argues that the government has hijacked the press, which should be an instrument of progress, and forced it to 'act in a retrograde direction to its natural one' (234). Ever since the *Anti-Jacobin*, Hazlitt argues, opponents of the government have been exposed to 'reckless slander and vulgar abuse', and in such a climate the apostasy of the Lake Poets seems almost inevitable:

Who, indeed, was likely to stand, for any length of time, 'the pelting of this pitiless storm' - the precipitation of nicknames from such a height, the thundering down of huge volumes of dirt and rubbish, the ugly blows at character, the flickering jests on personal defects - with the complacent smiles of the great, and the angry shouts of the mob, to say nothing of the Attorney-General's informations, filed *ex officio*, and the well-paid depositions of spies and informers? (XVI, 234-35)

Literary culture is so much under the control of the government, Hazlitt argues, that a poet such as Keats, is 'crushed as a warning to genius how it keeps company with honesty', that is, due to his association with the *Examiner*. This seems to be Hazlitt at his most depressed, but, ironically, it is actually a more optimistic view of the relationship between literature and power than he expresses in the *Coriolanus* review, or the articles on the *Times*. Here it is not the nature of the imagination that leads poetic genius into the arms of power, but the way in which the British government has learnt to manipulate the periodical press. Hazlitt was aware that the rise of the press ultimately represented a

weakening of aristocratic control over literary production, as authors became dependent on the approbation of large numbers of readers, rather than rich patrons. Thus at times he could view the political repression of literary culture in his lifetime as a contingent situation which might one day change. During the early 1820s, he desperately wanted to believe in the real possibility of political reform, despite the fact that his belief in humanity's innate love of power, and the evidence he saw around him of literary corruption, made this belief very difficult for him. For a short time, the *Liberal* seemed like a beacon lighting the way for the redirection of the great engine of the periodical press towards progress. However, the magazine's failure confirmed Hazlitt's fears that genius was inevitably degraded in the early nineteenth century.

Peter George Patmore noted in 1853 that Hazlitt had believed that the *Liberal* was 'an undertaking which, had it been cordially taken up by Byron and his friends, might [...] have produced great results'.⁷¹ There is no doubt that he blamed the demise of the journal on the intervention of Murray, Moore, and Hobhouse, and his lordship's cowardice. In the *Spirit of the Age* (1825), he remarks that Byron

patronizes men of letters out of vanity, and deserts them from caprice or from the advice of his friends. He embarks in an obnoxious publication to provoke censure, and leaves it to shift for itself for fear of scandal. We do not like Sir Walter's gratuitous servility: we like Lord Byron's preposterous *liberalism* little better. He may affect the principles of equality, but he resumes his privileges of peerage, upon occasion. (XI, 77)

Byron, then, had failed Hazlitt's test: he had been unable to disregard his rank and engage in the republic of letters. However, more disturbing for Hazlitt was the behaviour of the poet's supposedly 'liberal' friends, which he describes in 'On Jealousy and Spleen of Party', the superb final essay in the *Plain Speaker*:

⁷¹P. G. Patmore, *My Friends and Acquaintance*, 3 vols (London: Saunders and Otley, 1854), III, 136.

Who would have supposed that Mr. Thomas Moore and Mr. Hobhouse, those staunch friends and partisans of the people, should also be thrown into almost hysterical agonies of well-bred horror at the coalition between their noble and ignoble acquaintance, between the Patrician and 'the Newspaper-Man?' Mr. Moore darted backwards and forwards from Cold-Bath-Fields' Prison to the Examiner-Office, from Mr. Longman's to Mr. Murray's shop, in a state of ridiculous trepidation, to see what was to be done to prevent this degradation of the aristocracy of letters, this indecent encroachment of plebeian pretensions, this undue extension of patronage and compromise of privilege. (XII, 378)⁷²

Such actions, and of course the failure of the *Liberal*, simply served to confirm Hazlitt's fatalism: in the current political climate, he claims in this essay, the dreams of the 1790s are no longer viable (XII, 373). Now, all political parties seek to distance themselves from the idea of 'liberty' due to its associations with Jacobinism; neither Whigs nor Reformers will have anything to do with the popular radicalism propagated by '[Henry] Hunt, Carlisle, or Cobbett' (XII, 376).⁷³ He represents himself as a political pariah: disliked by the sycophantic Whigs because of his antagonism towards power, dismissed by the cold-hearted Utilitarians due to his literary inclinations. However, as we have seen, this tension between politics and *belles-lettres* was not simply a result of external pressures, but is very much an integral part of Hazlitt's writing. On the one hand, he damns the imagination as a supporter of power, on the other, he seeks to celebrate and explore poetic genius; he describes the periodical press as a progressive force, but complains that literary culture has been corrupted by government influence; he asks his readers to believe in a world of revolutionary hope, but laments its destruction. All these rich contradictions are revealed in Hazlitt's engagement with the *Liberal*.

⁷²Hazlitt and Hunt had clearly discussed the events surrounding the demise of the *Liberal* when they met in Florence early in 1825, and had arrived at virtually the same account. In *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries*, Hunt describes the reaction of Byron's friends in a similar semi-comic manner, and quotes liberally from 'On Jealousy and Spleen of Party'; see Hunt, p. 48.

⁷³Hazlitt not only strongly attacks the Whigs for their sycophancy and their cowardly failure to stand up to Tory attacks, but also damns the Utilitarians for their dogmatism, lack of sympathy with others, and dislike of literature.

VI

In his account of Walter Scott in the *Spirit of the Age*, Hazlitt's discussion of the novelist's ability to create lifelike characters leads him to exclaim, 'what a power is that of genius!' (XI, 63-64). But Hazlitt's delight in the Scotch novels was matched by his hatred of their author's politics, particularly Scott's association with *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*, and thus at the end of his account, he states that 'we believe there is no other age or country of the world (but ours), in which such genius could have been so degraded!' (XI, 68). In this chapter, we have looked at Hazlitt's complex account of this 'degradation', but perhaps I have not quite pinpointed why he thought, on occasion, that early nineteenth-century Britain was more corrupting to genius than any other time or place. Clearly, he was disturbed by the continued strength of 'Legitimacy' and the refusal of the British government to countenance reform, but he would have admitted that the world had seen far more tyrannous regimes than the Liverpool administration. Furthermore, he recognised that the Romantic period could be seen as a time when 'genius' was becoming less degraded, for it was increasingly possible for writers, although rarely poets, to subsist without recourse to aristocratic patronage. However, for Hazlitt, the tragedy of the early nineteenth century was that the great mechanism that should have emancipated writers and readers from the power of the State and the aristocracy - the periodical press - had become the most effective means for power to perpetuate itself. Through journals which the government either directly sponsored or indirectly influenced, the values that governed the field of power - respect for rank, wealth, tradition - were imposed on literary culture, and propagated to the burgeoning reading public. And as he saw it, it was very difficult for authors to retain

their principles in the face of 'this nefarious and organised system of party-proscription, carried on under the mask of literary criticism and fair discussion' (XI, 68).

Hazlitt's account of the political shifts of the Lake Poets is oversimplified, for he is too willing to read them as a function of personality, rather than principal. But we have seen that in the 1820s his ideas developed further, and he began to recognise that when literary culture was structured in a similar way to the field of power, it was very difficult for writers, especially poets, to maintain their independence. Although he could be fatalistic about this process, his own example shows that it could be resisted, and I think that, for a short time, he saw the *Liberal* as another locus of resistance. The values that the journal stood for were diametrically opposed to those governing the field of power, and thus it represented a brief, failed attempt to help free literary culture from the corrupting influence of 'Legitimacy'. Pierre Bourdieu has argued that, paradoxically, as literature becomes more autonomous from power, writers are more able to make decisive political interventions. 'The intellectual', a cultural figure which he believes was invented towards the end of the nineteenth century with Zola's intervention in the Dreyfus affair, is able to impose the values of an autonomous cultural field on to the field of power:

Enclosed within his own order, with his back against his own values of freedom, disinterestedness and justice, precluded by them from abdicating his specific authority and responsibility in exchange for necessarily devalued profits or temporal powers, the intellectual asserts himself against the specific laws of politics (those of *Realpolitik* and reasons of state) as defender of universal principles which are in fact the universalisation of the specific principles of his own universe.⁷⁴

We do not have to accept Bourdieu's wildly optimistic account of 'autonomisation', or his assumption that the values of an autonomous literary field are necessarily liberal ones,

⁷⁴Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 130.

to see how well his description of the late nineteenth-century 'intellectual' fits Hazlitt, with the proviso that, living in an earlier period, the essayist's cultural authority was severely limited by the weakness of the literary field *vis-à-vis* the field of power.

Throughout his career, Hazlitt attempted to use his role as a writer to assert the 'values of freedom, disinterestedness and justice' against 'Legitimacy', and as we have seen, this was the basis of his often savage and sometimes unfair remarks on his literary contemporaries. His recognition that it is the duty of literature to resist compromise with power had some influence on the development of literary culture in the nineteenth century, and is, of course, of continuing relevance.

CHAPTER 5

'THE QUACK ARTIST': BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON AND THE DANGERS OF PUBLICITY

When a great Genius appeared in Italy or Greece, it was instantly a question what shall we do to afford him peace & security that he may give vent to his conceptions undisturbed by necessity or harrassed by want. When a great Genius appears in England, it is what shall [we] do to bring him down (curse him) to our own level, that by his success in high efforts he may not cast reflections indirectly on the grovelling practice of the Trade.¹

Had a most glorious idea of Genius at 4 this morning. I awoke saying what is Genius? It is a spark from the Deity's Essence which shoots up into the Heavens fiery & blazing over an astonished World, & when it has reached its elevation, drops back into his Being like lava from a Volcanic Mountain. (V, 81-82)

Is it not a disgrace to this country that the leading historical painters should be obliged to exhibit their works like wild beasts, and advertise them like quack doctors.²

Haydon's artistic career was spent trying to bully the world, through his paintings and writings, into accepting that he was the great hero-genius who was to lead the 'British School' of art to victory over its Continental rivals. It should be said that, for a time, many people were convinced. The quotations with which I have begun this chapter, all by the painter, reveal three important aspects of Haydon's self-image (whenever he generalised about 'Genius' or 'historical painters', he was always referring primarily to himself). The first is typical of his many complaints about the lack of patronage afforded to history painters: in both his public and private writings, he often represented himself as

¹ *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. by Willard Bissell Pope, 5 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960-63), III, 376. All further references to the *Diary* are in the text in the form (vol number, page number).

² Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Correspondence and Table-Talk with a Memoir by his Son, Frederick Wordsworth Haydon*, 2 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876), II, 293.

a persecuted, suffering genius who was traduced by the press, plotted against by the Royal Academy ('the Trade'), and ignored by the aristocracy and the public. At the same time, as in the second quotation, he also liked to show himself to be a powerful masculine hero who was destined for great renown due to his God-given genius. This was how he appeared in the *Diary* as he began a new painting, or completed a successful exhibition. 'Genius,' he proclaimed in such a mood, 'will arise and make its way, if born at the bottom of the Indian Ocean' (I, 241). Many critics, particularly during the early years of his career, were as 'astonished' at Haydon's fiery trajectory as he felt they ought to be. Although the third quotation is meant, like the first, to emphasise the neglect of high art by the authorities, it also reveals Haydon's fear that his career was more that of a charlatan than of a genius, which was always a danger for an artist for whom showmanship was so important. His one-man exhibitions at William Bullock's Egyptian Hall, and relentless self-puffing in letters, articles, and exhibition catalogues earned him the unkindly sobriquet of 'The Quack Artist' (plate 3), and the mockery of those who doubted his claims to artistic greatness.³ One wonders how often, behind the arrogant bluster of his self-representations, lay the feeling that those doubts might be warranted - not only that he had become a charlatan, but perhaps that he always was one.

There are three main reasons why I have chosen to end this study by looking at Haydon's career. First, I doubt that anyone in the early nineteenth century wrote or cared more passionately about genius than he did. Secondly, many periodical writers were fascinated by Haydon, and their accounts of his artistic genius offer a useful comparison to the representations of literary genius which I have examined in earlier chapters. And thirdly, because Haydon's life was a constant and heroic struggle to

³ Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 413. Altick somewhat overstates the extent to which Haydon was perceived as a showman who degraded high art. The latter, of course, was not the only artist to be so accused, De Loutherbourg and Martin being the other obvious examples. However, charges of 'sensationalism' were aimed more at their paintings than at them as individuals, which was the reverse of the case with Haydon. For the tension between 'showmanship' and 'academic art' in the period, see Matthew Craske, *Art in Europe: 1700-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 210-17.

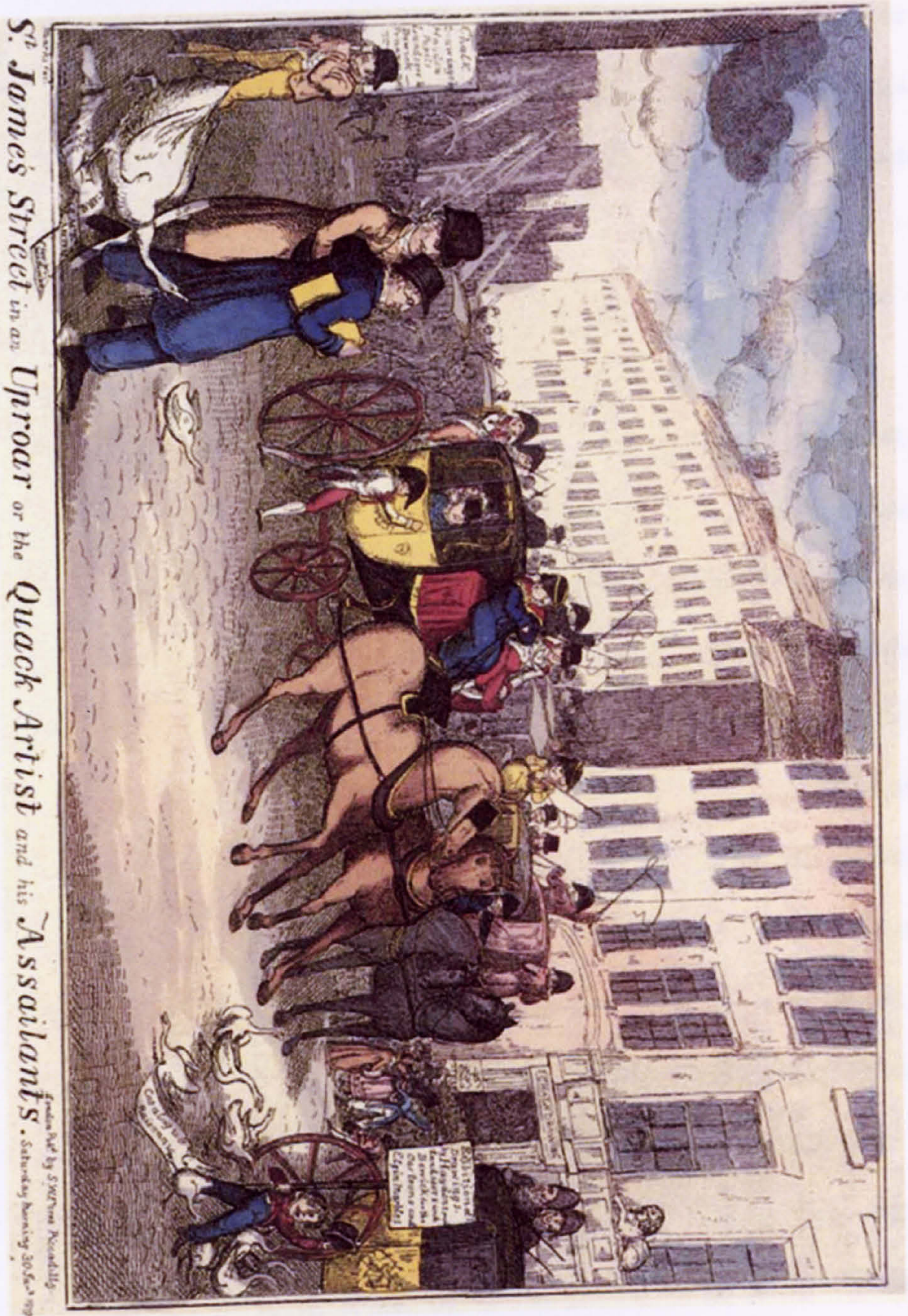


PLATE 3. J. Marks, 'St. James' Street in Uproar or the Quack Artist and his Assailants' (London: S. W. Fores, 1819). Reproduced from Brown, Woolf, and Hebron, p. 114. The angry goose in the foreground, which has a label round its neck inscribed with the initials W. C., is meant to represent the art critic William Carey. I discuss his angry denunciations of Haydon later in the chapter.

reconcile an ideal of original genius with the demands of artistic production in a commercial society. Throughout this thesis, we have seen that claims about the transcendent nature of genius - its ability to rise above political and economic strife - were undercut or problematised by the use of such claims for ideological, financial, or psychological ends. The case of Haydon brings this tension into stark relief; there was often a strong contrast between his vociferous self-promotion, and the particular model of genius that he was trying to promote.

For if Haydon had a true genius, it was for publicity. During the period from 1815 to 1825, he received more press attention than any other British artist, and he maintained a high public profile until his death in 1846. In part, this fame was a result of Haydon's artistic choices. Although landscape and genre paintings were becoming more valued during the early nineteenth century, most critics still paid at least lip service to the Academic hierarchy of genres which put history painting - and history painters - at the top.⁴ And Haydon's rise coincided with a period of post-Napoleonic triumphalism in which people were particularly receptive to signs of greatness in British artists. It was also the case that his battles with the Royal Academy and the British Institution meant that he tended to exhibit in one-man shows; thus his paintings were noticed in separate articles rather than being lumped together with those of most other artists in reviews of the summer exhibitions. But the main reason for Haydon's fame was his use of his own and other people's writings to assert his own genius and to propagate his plans for British art. Especially during the first half of his career, he had many friends and contacts in the press, and they, for the most part, supported him and his views. He was also an enormously prolific author, producing a number of pamphlets and exhibition catalogues,

⁴ The hierarchy of genres was highly contested during the period due to its incompatibility with the realities of the art market: see Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially chapter 6; also Kay Dian Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), *passim*.

and publishing numerous articles and letters in a wide variety of periodicals including the *Examiner*, the *Champion*, the *Annals of the Fine Arts*, the *London Magazine*, *The Times*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Spectator*, and the *Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*.⁵

As some of the last examples of a dying tradition of Classical history painting, Haydon's pictures have generally been little valued by art historians, and he has often been no more than a noisy bit player in modern accounts of nineteenth-century art.⁶ He has attracted more attention from literary critics and biographers due to his tragicomic life story, enshrined in the enormous *Diary*, and his acquaintance with Romantic luminaries such as Wordsworth, Keats, Hazlitt, and Hunt.⁷ Haydon often wrote so well that, in the early twentieth century, Aldous Huxley and Virginia Woolf both argued that he had mistaken his true vocation, and, since his death, his writings have had much more attention than his paintings.⁸ This is an absolute reversal of the judgement of his contemporaries: the problem with Haydon, as they saw it, was that he wasted time and energy in writing, when he should have been concentrating on the high art for which his genius so obviously suited him. Especially during the early years of his career, friends, critics, and patrons exhorted Haydon to lay down his pen, stop attacking his enemies, and, as Sir George Beaumont put it, '*paint them into the earth*'.⁹

⁵ Colbert Kearney gives an invaluable bibliography of Haydon's work in 'The Writings of Benjamin Robert Haydon' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1972), pp. 265-87.

⁶ As far as I am aware, there have been three sustained modern discussions of Haydon as an artist: David Blayney Brown, "'Fire and Clay" - Benjamin Robert Haydon, Historical Painter', in David Blayney Brown, Robert Woolf, and Stephen Hebron, *Benjamin Robert Haydon: 1786-1846* (Kendal: The Wordsworth Trust, 1996); Eric George, *The Life and Death of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 153-66; A. C. Sewter, 'A Revaluation of Haydon', *Art Quarterly*, 5 (1942), 323-37. For individual paintings, see John Barrell, 'Benjamin Robert Haydon: The Curtius of the Khyber Pass', in *Painting and the Politics of Culture*, ed. by John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 254-89; Frederick Cummings, 'Nature and the Antique in B. R. Haydon's *Assassination of Dentatus*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 23 (1962), 147-57 and, also by Cummings, 'Poussin, Haydon, and "The Judgement of Solomon"', *Burlington Magazine*, 104 (1962), 146-52. The *Mock Election* is discussed in Craske, pp. 269-71.

⁷ There are two modern biographies: George's *Life and Death*, and Clarke Olney's *Benjamin Robert Haydon: Historical Painter* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1952). Haydon is the central figure in Alethea Hayter's *A Sultry Month: Scenes of London Literary Life in 1846* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), and Penelope Hughes-Hallett's *The Immortal Dinner* (London: Viking, 2000).

⁸ Both writers based their opinion on an extremely limited knowledge of Haydon's paintings, and Huxley in particular totally caricatures Haydon's artistic legacy. See *The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. by Aldous Huxley, 3 vols (London: Peter Davies, 1926), I, pp. v-vii, and Virginia Woolf, 'Genius', in *Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1986-94), IV, 406-12.

⁹ *Correspondence and Table-Talk*, I, 340.

Haydon was vociferous about his artistic merits, but then so were many of his contemporaries, and if we are to resist viewing the painter with, in E. P. Thompson's phrase, 'the enormous condescension of posterity', we need to recognise that fact. Haydon only wrote so much, and so well, because he was inspired by his sense that he was a genius with a mission to reform British art, and thus that his experiences and theories deserved literary expression. However, writing, for Haydon, proved to be a 'dangerous supplement' which he found irresistible, but which also frequently threatened the cause that it was meant to support. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which Haydon represented himself, both *to* himself, and to his audience, and I look at responses to those representations in the periodical press. During the height of his career, his larger-than-life persona seemed to have an almost hypnotic power over critics and audiences, frequently blinding them to the flaws in his paintings. Thus he is a perfect example of the cult of genius during the Romantic period, when the figure of the creative artist was often given more importance than his actual works.

The first part of this chapter examines Haydon's theory of genius, the second his adherence to scientific racism, the third looks at the ways in which the painter was depicted in the press, and in the fourth, I discuss two Cruikshank caricatures from the 1840s. I show that although Haydon's extreme and egotistical account of genius fulfilled important psychological needs for him, and gathered much support in the press, it also led to private tensions and public accusations of charlatanism. Haydon's constant, and ultimately grating, self-promotion may have contributed to the growing suspicion about the claims of genius in the early Victorian period.

Part One: Haydon's Theory of Genius

Like most of his other theories of art, Haydon's views on genius did not change substantially after his formulation of them early in his career. However, they are described most fully in the *Lectures on Painting and Design*, delivered at the start of the last decade of his life, and published in the mid-1840s. Most of the ideas contained in these lectures were originally worked out in Haydon's journals, and those relating to genius are no exception. The key thing to understand, the artist argued, was that it was an *innate* characteristic, and he took issue with Reynolds's claim, in the second of his *Discourses*, that its effects could be produced by hard work.¹⁰ Instead, Haydon claimed that 'if you have great genius, industry only can prove it; but if you have not, industry [...] will certainly never supply the original deficiency of nature'.¹¹ He also disagreed with Johnson's argument that genius was 'accidentally' determined in a particular direction, although he followed that writer's basic description of it as 'a mind of large general powers'. Haydon thought that such a mind would have a particular susceptibility to certain sense impressions which would determine whether the genius became a poet, artist, warrior, or whatever.¹² This distinction was important to the painter, because it meant that the role that a man of genius took in society was not haphazard, but a matter of design. It allowed him to believe that his career as a history painter had been chosen for him by God.

As we saw at the start of the chapter, Haydon sometimes represented genius as an intensely powerful, almost unstoppable, force, but he generally argued that it needed the aid of circumstances to bring it to full fruition: 'genius must exist, patronage *can't*

¹⁰ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 99.

¹¹ B. R. Haydon, *Lectures on Painting and Design*, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1844-46), I, 3.

¹² *ibid.*, 4.

create it; but genius may exist, and die without full development for want of patronage'.¹³ The notion that genius might lie undiscovered was utterly unacceptable to him, as is apparent in his response to Shelley's claim, in *Queen Mab*, that poverty and tyranny could prevent genius from expressing itself: 'How many a rustic Milton has passed by,/ Stifling the speechless longings of his heart,/ In unremitting drudgery and care!'¹⁴ Haydon described this as 'the commonest of all common trash', for a genius would never be concealed, regardless of his lowly station (II, 154). Of course, while Shelley saw genius as a gift of Nature, Haydon saw it as a gift of God. A man of genius, then, was bound to seek to fulfil the vocation that the Lord had given him. However, at the same time, this fulfilment would be limited and imperfect without the aid of the right circumstances.

John Barrell has argued that the emphasis in Haydon's writings on the importance of innate genius undermines his adherence to a discourse of classical republicanism which emphasises the public function of art, for

his insistence on the primacy of genius makes it hard for him to insist, with any great conviction, on the reciprocity of the relations between art and society [...] The relations between the political republic and the republic of taste are reduced by Haydon almost entirely to relations of patronage, and, as far as form is concerned, the responsibility of the artist to paint public pictures seems reduced to the responsibility to paint in a public *style* - a responsibility which is argued for in a sternly moral language, but which seems to be in no particular moral relation with the society which welcomes or ignores it, beyond the fact that the production of works in that style reflects some kind of moral credit on the society which patronises and welcomes it.¹⁵

As Barrell points out, Haydon 'has no clear theory' of how public art contributes to the public sphere, and, as a result, genius becomes not only the primary cause of art, but its

¹³ *ibid.*, II, 111.

¹⁴ *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (London: Ernest Benn, 1965), I, 101. Shelley's lines, of course, refer to the 'mute inglorious Milton' in Thomas Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard'; see *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 331.

¹⁵ *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 309.

major justification. History painting is principally to be valued as a 'sign' of individual and national genius, rather than for its actual effects on the 'public': in 1812, Haydon claimed that it was the only sort of painting 'which can give rank to "this England in art," and which only wants rank in such matters to be the greatest nation the world has ever seen yet'.¹⁶ Throughout his life, the painter believed that his works proved that he had more genius than other artists and that England, or sometimes Britain, now had more genius than its rival nations - which effectively meant that both he and his country had been blessed by God. His frequent analogies between England's artistic and military glory reveal not only his extreme jingoism, but his construction of himself as the type of masculine hero so often depicted in his paintings. Andrew Hemingway has argued that the concept of genius embodied in such representations was threatened by 'anti-academical' critics who 'argued for a model of the artist genius whose power did not depend so much on the traditional criteria of the Grand Style, but rather on signs of originality and a capacity to capture the attention of the public such as Wilkie and John Martin displayed'.¹⁷ Haydon's contradiction was that he sought to promote himself as a civic hero - a public man - using all the advertising paraphernalia available in a commercial society, in order to 'capture the attention' of an audience which, Barrell reminds us, had 'come to regard art as an essentially private thing'.¹⁸

As Haydon became increasingly frustrated with the lack of interest in high art exhibited by the aristocracy, and the failure of the Royal Academy to reform itself, the idea that there might be an inevitable antipathy between genius and power became a recurring theme of the *Diary*. Congenitally a Tory, Haydon's actual politics were complex and his allegiances shifted during his life; as Barrell has suggested, they were 'to

¹⁶'An English Student' [Haydon], 'To the Critic of Barry's Works in the *Edinburgh Review*, Aug. 1810', *Examiner*, 2 February 1812, p. 76.

¹⁷Hemingway, p. 93. See also Andrew Hemingway, 'Genius, Gender and Progress: Benthamism and the Arts in the 1820s', *Art History*, 16 (1992), 619-46 (p. 630).

¹⁸Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, p. 313.

a large extent determined by an overriding concern for the future of High Art and the British School of painting'.¹⁹ Although he was certainly never a radical in the same way as his friends Hunt and Hazlitt, he had some sympathy with the reform movement of the late 1810s (II, 249) and was a strong supporter of the Reform Bill of 1832.²⁰ There is an interesting oscillation in Haydon's later writings between complaints that his desire to reform the Academy, and to paint in the 'Grand Style', have been misinterpreted as dangerous to Church and State - complaints for which there is little evidence - and angry denunciations which pitch the man of genius against an enervated aristocracy and a self-interested Royal Academy. He first utters such sentiments in November 1823:

Perhaps the reason that the Legitimate of the day don't like great works & heroic subjects & prefer small pictures & the actions of the peasantry is that the actions of the heroes makes them feel their own insignificance, whereas the Dutch boors & English paupers are a continual assurance of their own superiority. There is something radical in heroism & Genius they can't be taught, but are independent of birth & hereditary succession. (II, 435)

Haydon, then, was quite willing to play on the radical possibilities of classical republicanism when it suited him by using the aristocracy's preference for genre painting over history painting as evidence for their lack of heroic virtue and, perhaps, by implication, their unsuitability for government. Yet a few months later he complains that, due to his attack on the Academy, 'though naturally a lover of rank & one of the loyal admirers of my Country & my King, my character has been so blackened to His Majesty that I will venture to say if my name is mentioned he thinks of me only as a Radical & Revolutionist' (II, 459).²¹

¹⁹ Barrell, 'The Curtius of the Khyber Pass', p. 264.

²⁰ Matthew Craske is wrong to describe Haydon's 'political principles' as 'democratic'; see *Art in Europe: 1700-1830*, p. 58.

²¹ Haydon's claim that painting historical works was in itself perceived as 'radical' is expressed most strongly in his pamphlet *On Academies of Art, (More Particularly the Royal Academy), and their Pernicious Effect on the Genius of Europe* (London: Henry Hooper, 1839), pp. 31-32.

This tension between Haydon's political instincts, which were to support the *status quo*, and his desire to reform the art is strongly present in the *Diary* from the mid-1820s until the end of his life. There is a marvellously ambivalent passage written in 1825, where Haydon reluctantly concedes that 'Genius [should] bow to Title', but only out of self-interest (III, 40-41). In 1831, caught up in the excitement of the Reform agitation, he complained that 'things have been so long established in England, Property, rank, & authority have so long retained their superiority that no people are less prepared to respect the naked majesty of Genius than the English' (III, 507) - here the aristocracy have taken that share of the public's approbation that rightfully belongs to 'Genius'. However, in the late 1830s, Haydon became disillusioned with the Reform Bill, probably because it had had little effect on the Royal Academy, and described himself as a 'Conservative Reformer', who was 'more a Duke's man than any other' (he is referring to Wellington). He went on to state that

my position has always been a complicated one. My attacking the Academy was put to the score of Republicanism. I was suspected by my own party because I liked the Hunts. Believing in the Duke & hating the French, I was exasperated at being left to ruin, & joined the Whigs to punish my old associates. Seeing soon through the hollowness of *their* long Reform, I regretted my impetuosity, & now am ashamed to do my duty to my own honest Convictions, lest I get a repute like Southey. (IV, 556)

In the final years of his life, Haydon's personal bitterness led to more radical outbursts. In 1843, he entered two paintings in the Cartoon Competition to decorate the new Palace of Westminster (the old one had burnt down in 1834). Haydon believed that the holding of the Competition was a result of his vociferous campaign for state patronage of history painting, and the failure of his two entries - 'Adam and Eve' and 'Edward the Black Prince' - gave him a shock from which he never really recovered.²² A

²²For a detailed account of the Cartoon Competition of 1843, see T. S. R. Boase, 'The Decoration of the New Palace at Westminster, 1841-1863', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 17 (1954), 319-58 (pp. 320-30).

few weeks later, he wrote a passage in his *Diary* lamenting the dislike of 'High Art' evinced by the Royal Academy and the aristocracy, and then exclaimed, with revolutionary vigour, that 'the fact is, the energy of this great Country is struggling to split the superincumbent pressure of Aristocracy, which burks its vigor, and it will earthquake its weight bye [and] bye with an explosion which will mingle all in confusion, & clear the Sky' (V, 299). As usual, Haydon is principally talking about himself here, and, as when he referred to 'Genius' as 'a spark from the Deity's Essence' two years earlier (in the passage I quoted at the beginning of the chapter), there is a considerable sexual charge to his imagery. The effeminate aristocracy is like a succubus which straddles the heroic genius and saps his energy - but such is his masculine power that his ejaculation will vanquish the demon.

In February 1844, Haydon represented his career as a test case for the relationship between 'Genius' and 'Power': 'in my success is concealed the principle of successful resistance to oppression, or the right of power to oppress, or whether Genius have a right to resist Power when unjust, or Power a right to oppress Genius in spite of Justice' (V, 346). The painter had come round to an almost Shelleyan view of the way in which hegemony could dominate and crush talented individuals, although he would never have accepted that the latter could be completely oppressed by the former. Haydon was forced to blame the aristocracy, the Royal Academy, and Parliament for the failure of high art, because to blame 'the people' would have meant accepting that the art could not be reformed on his terms. Thus in his hands the theory of innate genius became, at times, a radical principle, mainly because he attached it to a classical republican theory of art which made history painting central to a healthy society. As Barrell has pointed out, Haydon's attempt to link genius with public art led to severe contradictions, but it also prevented, most of the time, the disdain for the public that one finds expressed by many

of the painter's literary contemporaries, for example, Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. The painter's belief that ordinary people - once purified of the corrupt principles inculcated by patrons, connoisseurs, and the Royal Academy - would be affected by history painting on a basic emotional level sustained him almost until the end of his life.

It was only in April 1846, when his exhibition at the Egyptian Hall was ignored by crowds who had come to see the midget Tom Thumb in the same building, that Haydon's faith in the public was shattered. 'They rush by thousands to see Thumb,' he lamented, 'It is an insanity, a Rabies, a madness, a Furor, a dream. I would not have believed it of the English people!' (V, 531). Two months later, he killed himself. Thus Matthew Craske is quite wrong to argue that Haydon was an artistic elitist who had no desire 'to bring the elevated art of painting to broader consumer markets'.²³ Of course he was opposed to the commercial realities of his day and continually asserted that the production of art should not simply be determined by market forces: but this does not seem to me to be necessarily an elitist argument. One of the main reasons why he campaigned for state patronage, and for the opening up of exhibitions to individuals of all ranks, was because he wanted history painting, especially his own, to be seen by as many people as possible. Haydon fought constantly, with brush and pen, for a public art that could be appreciated, potentially, by *every* member of society.

²³ Craske, pp. 58-59.

Part Two: The Lure of Racial Theory

The late eighteenth century saw the emergence of racial science in Europe, a discourse that used empirical data to assert the existence of a hierarchy of fixed racial types, and which invariably placed Europeans at the top. The physical and mental characteristics attributed to these types were considered to be permanent, and immune to the effects of climate or 'civilisation'.²⁴ Haydon, influenced by ethnographers and anatomists such as Charles White, J. F. Blumenbach, and Pieter Camper, was an exponent of this new approach to race, and published a series of pseudonymous letters on the subject in the *Examiner* in 1811. Thirty years later, in the catalogue to his painting of the Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840, he publicly recanted his views, although racial theory was in fact much more prevalent at this time than it had been during the early part of the century.²⁵ In this part of the chapter, I will show that Haydon's racism was closely allied to his faith in both his own artistic genius, and the future triumph of English art. I will also argue that he managed his retraction in such a way as to protect this faith, and that in any case he may not have let go of racial theory completely. Throughout this thesis, I have shown that genius was used for all kinds of purposes in the early nineteenth century; here, we will see that it could be used to support the racial science that served as a prop for the ideology of British Imperialism.

As a young man, Haydon attended the lectures of the anatomist Charles Bell, and campaigned for Bell's election to the post of Professor of Anatomy at the Royal Academy in 1808 (the election was won by Anthony Carlisle).²⁶ In his *Essays on the*

²⁴ For the history of racial theory, see *Race: The Origins of an Idea, 1760-1850*, ed. by H. E. Augstein (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996); Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), especially chapters 2, 9, and 15; *Romanticism and Colonialism*, ed. by Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chapter 2; Nicholas Hudson, 'From "Nation" to "Race": The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 (1996), 247-64; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

²⁵ Curtin, chapter 15.

²⁶ *Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, I, 32-33, 72. Lucy Hartley briefly discusses Bell's influence on Haydon

Anatomy of Expression in Painting (1806), which were based on his lectures, Bell proposed a theory that ‘in the ideal form of the antique head, the great principle of design was to magnify the proportions which mark the peculiarity of the human countenance, compared with that of the lower animals’, taking, of course, ‘the European head’ as the basis for those proportions.²⁷ Clearly influenced by the Dutch anatomist Camper, who had developed a theory of the ‘facial angle’ of different races, Bell argued that, viewing a head in profile, as the size of the jaw increased and the size of the forehead decreased, the image moved ‘from that of the European, to that of the negro, to that of the brute’.²⁸ Blacks, then, according to Bell, had more ‘brutal’ countenances than Europeans, and thus smaller brains: ‘in the brute, as the food is gathered by the mouth, the strength is in the jaws. The brain or sensorium is smaller, the forehead is therefore flatter, and the comparative size of the upper part of the face is diminished’.²⁹ Although he did not draw any further conclusions about black intelligence, the implication was clearly that the physiognomy of blacks revealed them to be mentally inferior to Europeans.

In his posthumously published *Autobiography* (1853), Haydon describes his discovery in 1810 of a theory of form which seems very similar to the one expressed by Bell four years earlier:

Charles Bell sent up to me to say that he had a lioness for dissection [...] I dissected her and made myself completely master of this magnificent quadruped. It was whilst meditating on her beautiful construction, and its relation in bony structure to that of man, that those principles of form since established by me arose in my mind [...] [I] concluded that in building a superior form the human

in her *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 64-66.

²⁷ *Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting* (London: Longman, 1806), p. 32.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 33. For the ‘facial angle’, see *The Works of the Late Professor Camper*, trans. by T. Cogan (London: C. Dilly, 1794), *passim*.

²⁹ Bell, p. 34.

peculiarities are to be dwelt on, while for an inferior form those which belong to the brute are to be approached.³⁰

This is not the personal insight that Haydon makes it out to be, for the essential idea here is Bell's, although Haydon is now applying it to the entire body, rather than just the head. A short time after dissecting the lioness, the painter was able to test his theories by studying the anatomy of a black American called Wilson. Again, the *Autobiography* presents this study as having led to a discovery:

The most extraordinary thing was, that I found in this negro all the positive marks characteristic of brutality. Beautiful as his form was, his calf was high and feeble, his feet flat, and heel projecting, his forearm as long as his arm-bone, his deltoid short, his jaw protrusive, and his forehead receding.³¹

In fact, Haydon found exactly what he expected to find in Wilson, for this passage, and Haydon's journal for the period (see below), reveal the influence not just of Bell, but of Charles White's *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man* (1799), which I am almost certain Haydon had read by this time (as we shall see, he had undoubtedly read it by the end of 1811). Haydon's application of Bell's theory of form to the entire body, rather than just the head, is also, I think, derived from his reading of White, who is an extremely important figure in the history of racial theory. White argued for the existence of 'an immense chain of beings', with the European at its highest point, and criticised monogenists like Camper and Stanhope Smith, who believed that racial difference could be explained by environmental factors. He was clear that 'various species of men were originally created and separated,' and claimed that Africans were the most brutal of these species.³² This was proved by, among other things, the shape of their skulls, and the structure of their skeletons: his book contains diagrams comparing European and

³⁰ *Autobiography and Memoirs*, I, 105-06.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 106.

³² *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man* (London: C. Dilly, 1799), *passim*. White based his arguments on a single African skeleton.

'Negro' calf bones, ankles, and feet, and charting the development of the facial angle from the lowly snipe to the Grecian Antique (plate 4).³³

Bell's racially inflected physiognomical theories, combined with White's assertion that anatomical differences between blacks and whites revealed the innate superiority of the latter, led Haydon to hold views in which a theory of how best to represent the heroic figure, a theory which he believed was proved by the Elgin Marbles, was intertwined with a belief in the existence of a fixed hierarchy of racial types.³⁴ This is apparent in the conclusions he drew from his study of Wilson:

Thus we find that Blacks in their form approach that of those who are deficient in intellect - their lobes of ear small, their teeth frequent, lower jaw retreats, the skull is diminished - they have longer bodies, longer fore arms, greater projection of elbows, deficient Deltoids. (I, 188)

In *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, Hugh Honour - clearly unaware of Haydon's *Examiner* letters - describes this passage as merely a 'ritual gesture [...] to current and omnipresent anthropological theories'. He argues that Haydon went on to 'qualify it so radically as almost to retract, denying in fact that intellectual abilities were always and necessarily reflected in physical features'.³⁵ In order to make his point, Honour quotes, in a footnote, the following extract from the painter's diary:

It cannot be said certainly that because a man has a small lobe to his ears, because his body is long, or his legs short, because his feet are flat and his ankles inverted, it cannot be proved that deficiency of intellect must follow, or that because he is finely formed - intellectual greatness must necessarily be the consequence...³⁶

³³ *ibid.*, plates 1 and 2.

³⁴ Colbert Kearney has given a good account of Bell's influence on Haydon notions of form, but does not recognise sufficiently their racist component, and makes no mention of White; see *The Writings of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, chapter 2.

³⁵ *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 4 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), IV, Part 2, 26.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 251. The passage is from the *Diary*, I, 189.

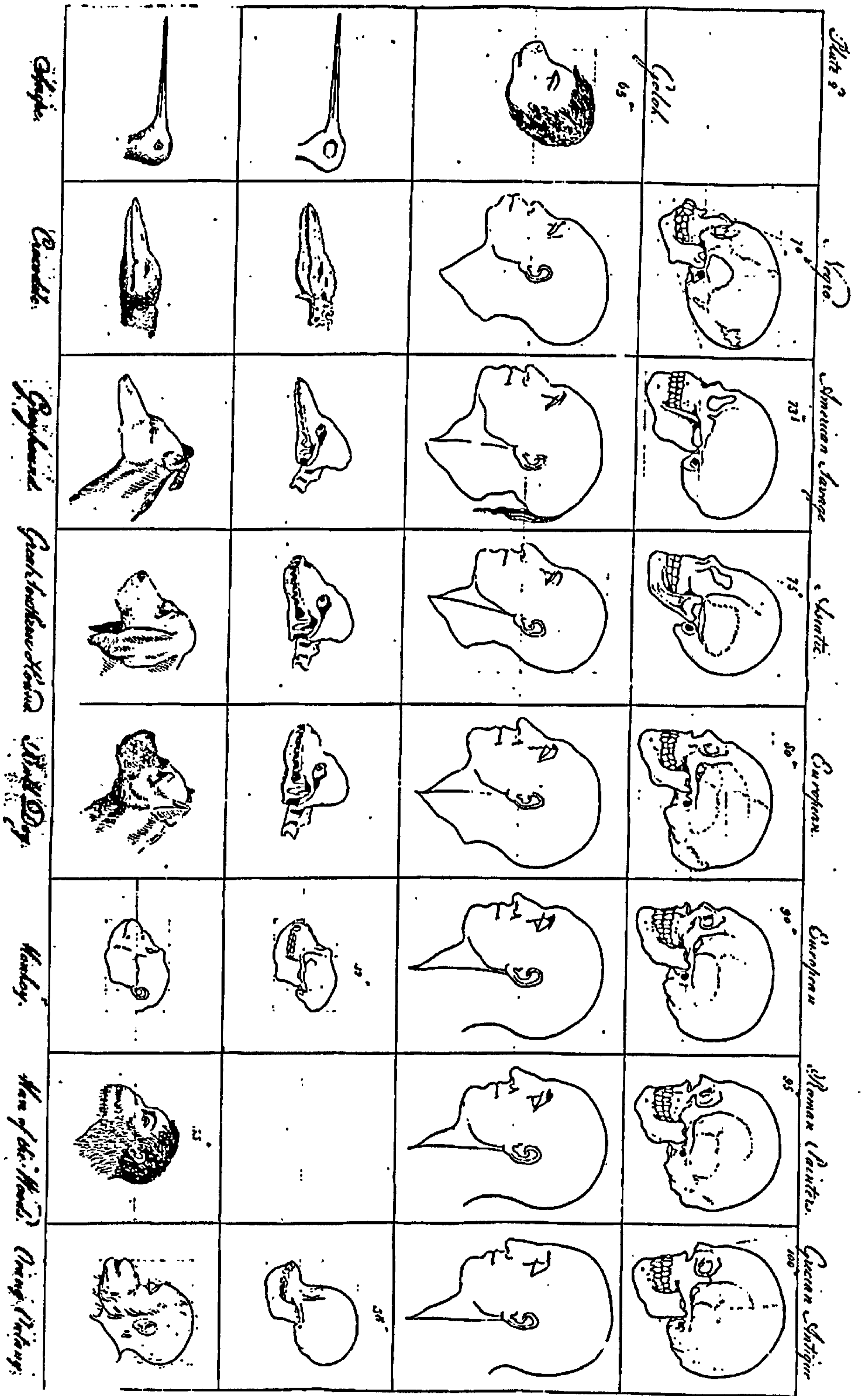


Plate 4. Charles White, *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man* (London: C. Dilly, 1799), plate 2.

Here Haydon does seem to be backtracking, but in fact Honour's quotation totally distorts the meaning of the passage, for the next few words, following 'consequence' and a hyphen, are 'from experience we find it occasionally otherwise, but *exceptio regulam probat*'. This hardly represents a qualification, let alone a retraction: Haydon is saying that the occasional exception *proves the rule* that 'brutal' characteristics - which he believes are more apparent in blacks than whites - generally reveal inferior intelligence. I do not understand why Honour is so keen to downplay the strength of Haydon's adherence to racial theory, for the evidence of the journals is quite clear and entirely consistent with the *Examiner* letters, though they are much more polemical in tone.

During 1811, Haydon expounded his artistic and racial theories to his friend Leigh Hunt, who eventually responded in a leading article in the *Examiner* in which he attacked scientific racism. Hunt accused contemporary ethnographers of exaggerating the animal characteristics of blacks, and asserted that 'there is a wide interval, never to be passed over, between the lowest of mankind and the first of brutes'. Although 'the negro, *at present*, and *as far as we know him*, exhibits an inferior animal character to the white man', Hunt claimed that 'races of men' could be 'changed by cultivation', and that the abolition of the slave trade would lead to the eventual mental and physical improvement of Africans.³⁷ Hunt's article prompted a debate which took place in the *Examiner* throughout September 1811. The principle participants, each occupying a distinct position, were Hunt himself, Haydon, writing under the pseudonym of 'An English Student', and 'Niger', who denied that blacks, in their current state, were mentally or physically inferior to other races. For Haydon, this was virtually his first taste of periodical writing, and, according to his *Autobiography*, his 'success' in the debate

³⁷'Negro Civilisation', *Examiner*, 4 August 1811, pp. 492-93. All further references to the *Examiner* for 1811 are given in the text.

was to encourage him to engage in the later public controversies that were to have such a dramatic effect on his artistic career.³⁸

In the first of his four letters, Haydon asserted that 'Negroes are decidedly deficient in those physical powers which peculiarly belong to the intellectual being' and that 'there is a stronger ground for suspecting them of total incapacity, than for asserting their capability, from comparing them with other nations' (p. 567). He depicted Hunt as an intellectual dilettante who had not properly studied the field, and whose intervention was little more than an insult to scientists and artists. In order to emphasise his own mastery of the subject, Haydon referred to Camper, White, Bell, and the German anthropologist Blumenbach. As we have seen, the painter was committed to the scientific study of the human anatomy and was convinced that a sound knowledge of the area was vital for the painter of heroic figures. He believed that the Elgin Marbles bore out his theories, and proved that the Ancient Greeks had studied the science in order to represent the ideal human form. The *Examiner* debate seemed like an ideal opportunity for him to publicise his views about the artistic representation of the heroic individual and he promised his audience that

I will in a future letter endeavour to shew, that form being the great medium of exciting associations, in Painting and Sculpture, of what absolute utility a thorough knowledge of the peculiar characteristics of an intellectual and a brutal being is to the Student, and will venture to sanction such characteristics and principles by reference to the divine works of the inspired ages of Greece.
(p. 568)

This attempt to turn the discussion into a platform for the dissemination of Haydon's artistic theories was greeted with surprise by Hunt, and derision by 'Niger', who stated that the painter's attempt to show that 'the Negroes are brutes' by reference to 'pictures

³⁸ *Autobiography and Journals*, I, 124. Haydon had published once before 1811 - a letter in defence of Lord Elgin which was also signed 'An English Student'; see *Examiner*, 8 October 1809, p. 652. His attacks on Payne Knight and the Royal Academy in 1812 were also written under this pseudonym, although Haydon's authorship was quickly discovered. For a complete list of Haydon's contributions to the *Examiner* see Colbert Kearney, 'B. R. Haydon and *The Examiner*', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 27 (1978), 108-32 (pp. 129-32).

and statues' was 'rather a novel mode of proof in the discussion of moral or political subjects' (p. 580). Both Hunt and 'Niger' were writing in an Enlightenment tradition in which discussions of slavery and race were the province of ethical theory, whereas Haydon's letters attempted to utilise the new discourse of scientific racism which made claims based solely on an appeal to the realm of supposed 'facts'. Haydon's references to the fine arts are understandable if we accept that he believed the greatest art to have the same claims to represent objective truth (in ideal form) as modern science. This stance of objectivity was emphasised by Haydon's portrayal of his opponents as sentimentalists whose opposition to the slave trade - which he claimed to share - had impaired their intellectual faculties.³⁹

Haydon had a supplementary argument to bolster his 'scientific' evidence. This was that the failure of blacks to produce individuals who could civilise them showed that they were innately inferior to whites:

Men of genius are always born with views beyond their time: - it is this that rescues nations from ignorance: one of their class, being born with greater capacity and more extended notions, influencing them by his ideas, collecting them, from scattered lawless ferocity, into regularity and order; framing laws for their benefit, and building towns for their comfort. But if negroes had never given birth to great lawgivers,- if negroes had never produced astronomers from contemplating the Heavens, or poets or painters from roving amid the beauties of Nature,- if while all the great nations of the world have in succession risen to refinement, and sunk in to voluptuousness, negroes had remained for thousands of years, as we know animals have always remained, in one continued state of unintellectual brutality, - surely, when so many *reasons from experience* press on one's mind as to their connection to brutes *in intellect*, and so many *palpable proofs* of their alliance *in body*, - and as the one is always adapted to the other - their mental capacity must be suspected, and that, too, on the strongest grounds. (p. 568)

Here Haydon figures blacks as constituting a 'nation' which is in a state of permanent barbarism, revealing not only a total confusion between ideas of race and nationality, but

³⁹ Haydon's rhetoric here is similar to White's; see *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man*, p. 137.

an ignorance of African culture and history. No member of this imaginary nation, he argues, has been a man of genius, and thus it does not participate in the narrative of progress, civilisation, luxury, and decline that is experienced by 'great nations'. Haydon believes that, like animals, blacks exist in an unchanging realm outside historical process. Hunt and 'Niger' both challenged the painter's assertion that there were no black geniuses by referring to Toussaint L'Ouverture, who, Hunt wrote, 'had in him all the elements of a truly great man' (p. 580). 'Niger' also pointed out that the lack of eminent black authors and artists proved nothing as it required just as much intellect to be successful statesmen, generals and so on (p. 581), and Hunt listed eight 'celebrated Negroes' as evidence that blacks could be educated to a high level (p. 593).⁴⁰ The question of education was, as Haydon saw it, the crux of the issue: 'Here is the great point of disagreement [...] I say the intellectual powers must exist, or education will have very little power to develop them. Can perseverance remedy original depravity of bodily formation, and why are the powers of the mind more pliable?' (pp. 612-13).

We have already seen that Haydon believed - in opposition to Reynolds - that individual genius was innate rather than acquired, and this theory was a vital psychological support for him throughout his life, in that allowed him to believe that his artistic career had divine sanction. As I have shown, his reading of contemporary works of anatomy and ethnography led Haydon to apply his theory of innate genius to crudely constructed 'races'. In 1819, the art critic William Carey argued, with his usual typographical exuberance, that Haydon's motivation in writing his 'absurd and arrogant' letters on race 'was to display the vast profundity of his acquirements to the World,' and that they were typical of the artist's periodical writings in exhibiting the 'disgusting quackery of SEEKING HIS OWN ELEVATION *by the* DEGRADATION OF

⁴⁰ Such lists were often drawn up by defenders of black equality such as Blumenbach (who by the end of the eighteenth century had moderated his earlier racist views), and Abbé Grégoire; see Curtin, pp. 47, 240-41.

OTHERS.’⁴¹ This is no doubt true as far as it goes; racial theory certainly served as a prop for Haydon’s ego, but in a much more complex way than Carey makes out. For Haydon, his triumph as a painter, and that of the ‘English School’, were one and the same thing - he considered himself to be one of those ‘men of genius’ with ‘views beyond their time’ who were responsible for national progress, and which Africa had failed to produce. He was the prophet who was to lead English art out of the wilderness, and saw the discovery of the Elgin Marbles as a sort of miracle which proved that both Haydon and England were blessed by God. Thus he was utterly opposed to the views of eighteenth-century Continental theorists such as Montesquieu and Winckelmann, who had claimed that the English climate prevented the development of native English genius in the fine arts.

By adhering to a racial theory of genius, rather than an environmental one, Haydon could believe that there was no reason why English art should not flourish if given the right encouragement - because as white Europeans, the English had essentially the same physical and intellectual characteristics as the Ancient Greeks, or the Renaissance Italians. Differences between European ‘nations’ - both in physical form and ‘civilisation’ - simply disappeared when placed against his representation of primitive, brutal Africans, and, in particular, the congruity between Ancient Greece and nineteenth-century England was enhanced further for Haydon by English ownership of the Elgin Marbles. Thus when ‘Niger’ denied that Greek models of beauty were better than any other, and stated that ‘John Bull is capable of expressing every feeling which becomes a man, with his short round face’ (p. 600), Haydon was quick to respond, asserting that ‘with respect to John Bull’s round face, I can assure Mr. Niger the English head is as oval and elevated as the Grecian’ (p. 613).

⁴¹ William Carey, *Desultory Exposition of an Anti-British System of Incendiary Publication, & c.* (London: the author, 1819), pp. 296, 307.

II

Haydon's belief that the Elgin Marbles would make England's art as mighty as its armed forces led him to embrace racial theories that were seen by his *Examiner* critics as evidence of a 'bias for ancient prejudices' (p. 581), but were actually to become increasingly acceptable during the course of the nineteenth century. The evidence of two passages written in the 1830s shows that his views did not change substantially over a period of twenty-five years. In the second of his *Lectures on Painting and Design*, entitled 'On the Skeleton', which was delivered in 1836, but published eight years later, he repeats the familiar argument that the size and shape of the head reveals the intellectual power of the brain: 'a large, broad, and powerful frontal bone is essentially an intellectual characteristic for a standard human head, and will be found in the most elevated and celebrated human beings'.⁴² The frontispiece to the *Lectures* reveals such a frontal bone to be strongly exhibited in the profile of B. R. Haydon himself (plate 5). A few pages on, he lists the three varieties of the human species 'described by Cuvier': the 'Caucasian', the 'Mongolian', and the 'Negro'. These varieties clearly form a hierarchy, although Haydon does not state this explicitly. The 'Caucasian', apparently, 'is known by the beauty of the oval-formed head [and] from this variety the most civilised nations have originated.' The 'Mongolian' has 'high cheek-bones' and a 'flat visage'; although this 'race' has founded 'great empires', 'they remained stationary in civilisation'. Unsurprisingly, the 'Negro' is at the bottom of the pile; with his 'compressed cranium', he 'has always remained in comparative barbarism'.⁴³ This passage is a shortened version of Cuvier's description of the three human varieties in his *magnum opus*, *The Animal*

⁴² *Lectures on Painting and Design*, 1, 64.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 72.



Plate 5. Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Lectures on Painting and Design*, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1844-46), frontispiece to first volume.

Kingdom (1827-35). In the description of the 'Caucasian', and the 'Mongolian', Haydon follows Cuvier very closely, but when he comes to the 'Negro' he ignores a whole sentence in the original. The missing sentence reads: 'in the prominence of the lower part of the face, and the thickness of the lips, it manifestly approaches to the monkey tribe'.⁴⁴ Although Cuvier's name carried great prestige, it was clearly one thing for Haydon to link blacks with brutality within the safe confines of a pseudonymous discussion in a periodical, and another to stand up in a crowded room and make such an assertion. However, despite this excision, and the relative moderation of his language, there is no evidence here that Haydon's views have changed substantially since 1811: if he draws back from asserting that blacks are the link between animal and man, he certainly represents 'the Negro' as the most inferior human variety and his continued emphasis on skull shape as an infallible sign of intelligence, and genius as an innate rather than an acquired power, allows him to imply that black 'inferiority' is permanent.

There is a very interesting passage in Haydon's diary for 17 August 1837, which reveals the continued importance he attached to the denigration of blacks:

Sir Joshua says if a negro painted Venus he would paint her [with] thick lips, short nose, wooly hair, & black skin. He would - but would [it *or* he] be right? God made man in his own image. Was God black skinned, wooly haired, thick lipped, & short nosed? Why not? He cannot be. Why? Because intellectual power is the great distinction of Man, because Negroes have never yet established their right to be intellectual, brain is the seat of intellectual power, because size of brain indicates extent of intellect, because size of brain infers size of skull to contain it, because White Men have given evidence of intellectual power, because they have large brains, large skulls, & the one denoting the other, & the other inferring the first, it is more than likely that when the Bible says, "God made man in his own image," the Bible meant the image in which God created the White Man, & Adam was this White Man, with all his characteristics & the image of his Creator. (IV, 426)

⁴⁴G. Cuvier, *The Animal Kingdom*, 16 vols (London: George B. Whittaker, 1827-35), I, 97. Haydon also substitutes 'comparative barbarism' for Cuvier's description of the 'Negro' as being in a state of 'complete barbarism'.

The point of this anxious and confused foray into Biblical exegesis is to deny blacks the divine power of intellect, or imagination, which God has passed on to the 'White Men' that he created 'in his own image'. All Haydon's old arguments for the supremacy of whites are deployed in order to assert that God is also a white man. The passage is evidence of the unsystematic nature of Haydon's racial theory; he offers no explanation as to how blacks were created, or whether they are to be considered to be men at all - if they are not made in God's image, then perhaps not. He also shows no awareness of the difficulties of reconciling orthodox Christian theology with scientific racism. Scripture supported the monogenist view that all human beings were originally descended from a single pair, and thus that racial difference was due to environmental factors such as climate or 'moral degeneration', rather than innate inequalities between types. As we have seen, such environmentalism was anathema to Haydon as it interfered with his plans for English art, yet at the same time in none of his writings does he concern himself with how different human, or semi-human, types might have otherwise originated. This shows, I think, that Haydon was little interested in racial theory *per se*, but merely took what he needed from it in order to bolster his belief in his own genius.

Considering Haydon's views, it is ironic that in 1840 he was employed to paint the international convention of the Anti-Slavery Society which took place at the Freemasons' Tavern in London.⁴⁵ Haydon's pamphlet describing the picture can best be described as a conversion narrative; he experiences a moment of enlightenment in the midst of the oration that the aged abolitionist Thomas Clarkson gives to the assembled delegates.

⁴⁵ For an account of this event, see Douglas H. Maynard, 'The World's Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 47 (1960), 452-71.

Never did I witness, in life or in the drama, so deep, so touching, so pathetic an effect produced on any great assembly as by the few, unaffected, unsophisticated, natural, and honest words of this aged and agitated person [...] I was so affected and so astonished, that it was many minutes before I recovered, sufficiently to perceive the moment of interest I had longed for had come to pass - and this was the moment I immediately chose for the picture.⁴⁶

The description of this overwhelming experience is shortly followed by a public recantation of his racial views:

There was a time when I believed that the negro, however deep his sympathies and affectionate his heart, was separated from the intellectual European irrevocably; when I believed his brain and bodily conformation were so inherently deficient, that no education and no ameliorated condition could ever improve them. I have lived, I thank God, to be convinced to the contrary. The head of this negro, Beckford, 27 years a slave, and the other, Barrett, 57, are as fine in physical construction of brain as any European in the picture.⁴⁷

Haydon still believes that an individual's physiognomy is a certain sign of his mental characteristics, but now thinks, like Hunt in 1811, that black physiognomies will 'improve' as they are educated.⁴⁸ Thus Beckford, who appears in the foreground of the painting, is revealed to be a civilised individual by the fact that his physiognomy is similar to that of the whites who surround him (plate 6).⁴⁹ This depiction should be compared with the 'brutal', prognathic physiognomy of the black servant in *The Judgment of Solomon* (1814), which, in Haydon's terms, is a sure sign of his primitive nature (plate 7).

If I am right that Haydon's assertion of the innate inferiority of blacks was an important component of his faith in his own genius and the divine sanction that lay

⁴⁶ *Description of Haydon's Picture of the Great Meeting of Delegates, Held at the Freemason's Tavern, June, 1840, for the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade Throughout the World* (London: C. Reynell, 1841), pp. 9-10.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁸ Considering the importance of physiognomy and phrenology to Victorian artists, it would have been surprising if his beliefs in this area had changed; see Mary Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴⁹ Hugh Honour points out that some of the abolitionists were unenthusiastic about Beckford's presence in the foreground of the painting, and argues that perhaps Haydon's artistic 'vision was unclouded by the well meaning but often condescending attitudes of the abolitionists'. This is true up to a point, but of course Honour's account of the painting is vitiated by his ignorance of the importance that racial theory had for Haydon; see *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, IV, Part 2, 167-68.



Plate 6. Benjamin Robert Haydon, *The Anti-Slavery Convention, 1840* (1841). National Portrait Gallery, London.



Plate 7. Benjamin Robert Haydon, *The Judgment of Solomon* (1814). Reproduced from Brown, Woolf, and Hebron, p. 11.

behind his mission to reform English art, then one would think that his repudiation of racial theory would lead to a consequent weakening of that faith. However, his conversion to a belief in the potential equality of blacks and whites was only able to take place because he manipulated his experience of painting the Anti-Slavery Convention in order to *bolster* his self-esteem, swapping one crutch for another. The contribution that scientific racism made to Haydon's psychic economy was superseded by the more powerful contribution made by a strong, personal identification with Clarkson as a fellow genius. This is most apparent in an extraordinary passage in Haydon's diary from April 1841, a few months before the completion of his picture. While Clarkson sat for his portrait, he told Haydon the story of 'His Vision', in which a voice awoke him while he was asleep and said "You have not done all your work. There is America" (V, 43). In a lengthy discussion of this story, Haydon first plays devil's advocate, asserting that the voice could simply have been a product of the abolitionist's imagination, before rejecting this explanation:

Many human beings have at different times been made the instruments of his divine will, on whom by dreams or influence he has acted for certain ends [...] For instance, Columbus believed he heard a Voice in the Storm, encouraging him to persevere. Socrates believed in his attendant spirit; & if it be allowed, Christ always talked as if in immediate communication. (V, 43-44)

Although he goes on to concede that such beliefs *could* be produced by the imagination, he asserts that it is not 'improbable' that Clarkson did truly hear such a voice, and refers to his own experience as one of those selected as a conduit for God's will:

I myself have believed in such impressions all my life [...] I believe that my sufferings were first, to correct me, & then, by rousing attention, to interest my nation [...] At 17, I could not write a word intelligibly; who gave me the power to thunder out in one night, as if by inspiration, my thoughts on the Academic question? Who guided me as to the only sound system of Education in an artist,

in opposition to all the existing practice of the day in England? Who cheered me when all the World seemed adverse to Desert? God! (V, 44-45)

After this assertion, Haydon's doubts briefly reappear - 'Perhaps this is insanity, as well as Clarkson's & Columbus's & Milton's & others. Perhaps We are all "drunk with *new Wine!*"' - before being again dismissed: 'No, no. We are all more live to the Supernatural and Spiritual! - than the rest of our fellow Creatures' (V, 45). The painter's obvious anxiety that his belief in his divine mission might be a false one, and his eventual strident rejection of this view, makes painful reading in the light of subsequent events. In 1844, Haydon heard a rather sinister (to my mind) 'audible whisper' that told him to paint and exhibit his designs for the new Houses of Parliament, despite his recent failure in the Cartoon Competition (V, 353). The fiasco of the exhibition of two of these paintings early in 1846 was probably the main cause of his suicide a few months later.

It is clear then that Clarkson unwittingly caused a change in Haydon's views by providing him with a more effective means of asserting his superiority over his fellow men than scientific racism. Haydon identified the abolitionist as a fellow traveller, an instrument of God's will on Earth, and Clarkson's charisma and success prompted a resurgence of the painter's own sense of the divine inspiration that he thought marked him out as a great man. Of course, Haydon had always had a strong sense of personal, as well as racial superiority, but what I am suggesting is that, under Clarkson's influence, the latter fantasy was greatly weakened, and the former was strengthened. The denigration of blacks is, to a large extent, replaced by the denigration of the mass of humanity who are less 'live to the Supernatural & Spiritual' than divinely inspired geniuses such as Clarkson, Columbus, Haydon, and Christ.

As his memories of painting Clarkson faded, it is possible that Haydon may have moved back towards his original views. This cannot be proved, but at the same time, it

cannot be stated with any certainty that the change of 1840-41 was a permanent one, as both Pope and Kearney seem to imply.⁵⁰ Haydon's failure to modify the discussion of race in his second lecture before its publication in 1844 could have been a simple oversight,⁵¹ but passages from his posthumously published autobiography, which were written *after* the publication of the pamphlet on the Anti-Slavery convention in 1841, give at best an ambiguous sense of the racial opinions that he held towards the end of his life.⁵² As we have seen, Haydon states that, when he came to study Wilson, 'the most extraordinary thing was, that I found in this negro all the positive marks characteristic of brutality'.⁵³ A few pages on, he describes the importance of his anatomical studies in leading to the *Examiner* debate:

It was about this time (1811) I accidentally got into my first public controversy, which branched out into the important one of the intellectuality or non-intellectuality of negroes. In consequence of dissecting a lion and comparing its form with that of a man I founded a theory of the standard figure which I found (and so did Eastlake) borne out in every principle by the standard works of the Greeks. As I went on meditating, I used to sketch and explain what I thought to Leigh Hunt, then in the height of his *Examiner* reputation, when one Sunday, in that jaunty style for which he had such talent, he assailed in public the theory I had explained in private.⁵⁴

There is no sense here that Haydon is embarrassed by his 1811 writings, or that he disowns them. (His claim that he 'accidentally' became embroiled in the debate is probably meant to suggest that he is not to be held responsible for the addiction to writing that he believed damaged his career.) He later describes himself as having emerged wholly victorious from this first 'public controversy':

⁵⁰ Kearney, 'The Writings of Benjamin Robert Haydon', p. 57; Pope, I, 210.

⁵¹ It is possible, of course, that the excision from Cuvier was made at that time.

⁵² Internal evidence suggests that the relevant chapter was written in 1843.

⁵³ Haydon, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, I, 106.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 121.

I plunged into the fight sword in hand; caught my adversaries on their weak points, and demolished them one after the other, till artists, anatomists and even abolitionists agreed I certainly had the best of the fight. Unfortunately I provoked all this clamour by asserting my belief, founded on physical construction, that the negro was the link between animal and man. In the position of the slavery question at that time nothing more was necessary.⁵⁵

Haydon's representation of his triumphant victory in the debate, a view which is certainly not born out by the pages of the *Examiner*, does not give the impression of someone who is anxious to apologise for the sins of their youth. His use of 'unfortunately' is a little unclear, but I would read the last two sentences as 'unfortunately my beliefs were controversial in 1811 shortly after the abolition of the slave-trade', rather than 'unfortunately I believed the negro to be the link between animal and man'. This is all Haydon has to say about his letters to the *Examiner*. He makes no apology for them and does not attempt to retract them. Although the *Autobiography* is hardly the most modest of texts, there are moments when Haydon admits to what he believes to be his past errors - but this is not one of them. And if he does not directly assert the truth of his racial theories, he presents his ideas of form as wholly correct - as we have seen, those ideas were strongly linked with his opinions about black mental and physical inferiority - and happily describes his triumph in the debate in which he first announced those theories to the world.

My purpose in this section has not been to damn Haydon by exposing him as a racist, but rather to follow him to one of the strange places where his monomaniacal obsession with his own genius would take him. I do not think that, even in 1811, Haydon bore any animosity towards Africans, and I see no reason to doubt that he was strongly opposed to the slave trade on humanitarian grounds.⁵⁶ I also feel that his 'conversion' in 1840-41 was a sincere one, although it may not have been permanent. What is clear,

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 123.

⁵⁶ That is not to say that Haydon was not capable of manifesting extreme hatred of other peoples, the French in particular.

however, is that throughout his life, Haydon's sense that he was a special individual chosen by God for the performance of a great task overrode all other considerations - financial, social, and ethical - and led him to hold beliefs and perform actions which seemed bizarre, even abhorrent, to many of his contemporaries, as indeed they may seem to us. He truly believed that his genius gave him a sort of general *carte blanche* which was not allowed to ordinary people. The idea of innate genius is not inevitably pernicious, but in the case of Haydon, it led him to embrace scientific racism with open arms.

Part Three: Haydon in the Press

So far in this chapter, we have explored Haydon's representations of himself; now I want to discuss the ways in which he was represented in the press during his career. In the late 1810s and early 1820s, he received so much positive coverage that he became a paradigmatic figure of powerful, artistic genius, and yet now he is virtually unknown outside academia. I have argued in this thesis that genius is *always* socially constructed, but because Haydon is no longer perceived as such, it is easier for us to see how this process occurred in his case than it is in the case of artists and writers whose works are still widely admired. I will not say that much about the critical response to his paintings as such information can be obtained from his biographers, concentrating instead on the figure of the painter himself. Of course, there was not always a clear distinction between discussing artist and art: as we shall see, the size and power of Haydon's pictures were sometimes described as reflections of his personality. My account is broadly chronological, but I focus mainly on the first half of his career when he was at his most famous, rather than his more obscure later years.

The golden period of Haydon's relationship with the press was from the exhibition of *The Judgment of Solomon* in 1814, to that of *The Raising of Lazarus* in 1823, which was shortly followed by his first imprisonment for debt. During this time he had a tremendous network of support among critics and editors: some were personal friends, but that is not to say that the approbation they gave his works was not due to what they saw as his artistic merits. *Solomon* was widely praised, often at great length: in an enormous review in the *Examiner*, Robert Hunt presented the painting as an answer to 'the impugners of British talent', stating that 'the unity and richness of the colour, light, and shade, resemble and indeed equal the lustre of the Venetian School', and that

'not even RAFAEL has surpassed him in the grand object of Art - the portraiture of the heart, or, as it is commonly termed, expression'.⁵⁷ The critic in the patriotic *New Monthly Magazine* saw it as 'a powerful auxiliary to the well-founded claims that Great Britain now possesses the first school of historical painting in the world'.⁵⁸ John Scott, editor of the liberal *Champion*, gave the picture almost an entire page of his newspaper and praised Haydon as a heroic genius who would revive the arts in Britain. A year later, Scott wrote that the picture was to be 'regarded as one of the earliest achievements of a genius that belongs to our country, and promises to exalt the characteristics of the period to a high pitch of estimation'.⁵⁹ The reviewers' emphasis on Haydon's contribution to national greatness was, of course, exactly what the painter himself continually asserted in his diary.

After *Solomon*, it was to be six years before Haydon would again exhibit a substantial work, and yet during this period he constantly appeared in the press. As Colbert Kearney has shown, he used the *Examiner* as a mouthpiece for asserting his own genius and his ideas on art, both through his own anonymous reviews and letters, and the continual puffing of Robert Hunt's 'Fine Arts' column, where 'readers are kept informed of his progress with *Christ's Entry*, and there are times when it is clear that Hunt is writing with Haydon, literally or metaphorically, beside him'.⁶⁰ It was in the *Examiner* that the painter printed the attacks on Richard Payne Knight and the Royal Academy in 1812 which were to have such an influence on his career.⁶¹ Haydon had even closer links with the *Annals of the Fine Arts* (1816-1820), edited by his friend, the architect James Elmes, the *raison d'être* of which was to promote Haydon as a great genius and

⁵⁷'Haydon's Judgment of Solomon', *Examiner*, 1 May 1814, pp. 286-87.

⁵⁸'Fine Arts', *NMM*, July 1814, p. 560.

⁵⁹John Scott, 'Exhibition of Painters in Oil and Water Colours', *Champion*, 1 May 1814, p. 141; 'Fine Arts', *Champion*, 18 June 1815, p. 197.

⁶⁰Kearney, 'B. R. Haydon and The Examiner', p. 121

⁶¹'To the Critic of Barry's Works in the *Edinburgh Review*, Aug. 1810', *Examiner*, 25 January, pp. 61-64; 2 February, pp. 76-78; 9 February, pp. 92-96.

propound his plans for British art.⁶² The *Annals* campaigned for the government purchase of the Elgin Marbles and for the reformation of the Royal Academy, claiming that it was run by portrait painters who cared nothing for the historical art which it was originally designed to support.

Although, as we shall see, the critic William Carey described the *Annals* as 'Anti-British', it is far too simplistic to argue, as Paul Magnuson does, that the quarterly was 'radical' due to its interest in 'Grecian subjects' and its attacks on the Royal Academy.⁶³ I very much doubt that the 'esthetics of classical art' which it promoted 'outraged the conservative social order', which had enough to be 'outraged' about in the years after Waterloo without worrying too much about relatively esoteric artistic debates. However, there was clearly a tension in the position of the magazine, the politics of which, as Andrew Hemingway has pointed out, 'were if anything conservative'.⁶⁴ During the late 1810s, any organ seeking the reform of public institutions could potentially be seen as radical and there is limited evidence that Haydon, at least, was tarred with this brush. But this tension between conservatism and reform was not really felt by Haydon himself until the 1820s.

The *Annals* did a massive amount of work to promote Haydon as a heroic genius who was destined to overcome the conspiracy against him. To take a few examples, in its first number, he is described as 'a young historical painter of the greatest promise';⁶⁵ in the second, Elmes notes 'his high feeling for his great calling' (*AFA*, I, 155); in the sixth, it is asked 'Did Raffaele at twenty put forth a more powerful picture than Dentatus?' (*AFA*, II, 407). The writer, possibly Elmes, goes on to state that 'Haydon is a spirit born

⁶² See George Allan Cate, 'Annals of the Fine Arts', in *British Literary Magazines: The Romantic Age, 1789-1836*, ed. by Alvin Sullivan (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 7-12; Ian Jack, *Keats and the Mirror of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), chapter 3; Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), chapter 6.

⁶³ Magnuson, p. 168.

⁶⁴ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, p. 139.

⁶⁵ James Elmes, *AFA*, I, 98. All other references to *AFA* are in the text.

for his times and I sincerely believe that nothing but the firmness with which he has so successfully kept his ground, in spite of all attempts to calumniate and crush him, could have produced the effects he has produced, and is producing' (*AFA*, II, 409). Later numbers contained similar comments. It also printed a number of letters and articles by the painter, some pseudonymous, the most self-adulatory of which were the 'Dreams of Somniator', two bizarre fantasies describing the defeat and humiliation of the Royal Academicians. In the first, 'The River of Time', most of them are drowned - only Fuseli, West, Flaxman, Wilkie, Turner and Callcott survive, led by the triumphant Haydon who is crowned with laurels (*AFA*, II, 461-74). In the second, the ghost of 'Michel Angelo' appears in the council chamber at the Royal Academy, and punishes the Academicians for their crimes against art by transmogrifying them into suitable objects: Lawrence becomes 'sweet oil', Shee 'a magpie', West 'a chameleon' and so on. Fuseli, despite his ignorance of 'nature', is rewarded for his 'fiery fancy' by being sent to Hell, which to him is heaven. Only Turner and Wilkie are unpunished: the latter is told to 'join your friend H-yd-n, with my best wishes to him; tell him he will succeed in all his noble views and plans' (*AFA*, III, 16). Although these articles are interesting as examples of Haydon's desire to present himself as a heroic figure who deserves adoration, ultimately they are little more than schoolboy squibs, and it is hard to believe, as Elmes claimed, that the Royal Academy lived in dread of Somniator (*AFA*, IV, i).⁶⁶

The fifth and final volume of the *Annals*, published in 1820, has a valedictory feel. It is dedicated to 'the Royal Academy of London, in respect of its recent Symptoms of Improvement' and in the 'Preface', Elmes states that the magazine's objectives have been achieved. Most importantly, its puffing of Haydon has been vindicated by the success of *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*: 'our readers will recollect how we were

⁶⁶Haydon also published a similar fantasy by 'Somnabulus' entitled 'Old St. Paul's: a Vision of Futurity'; *AFA*, V, 326.

taunted for mentioning his name in conjunction with the great men of other ages, whereas the public journals have joined his name with almost every one of them in succession' (*AFA*, V, 128-29). Its last number contained the most notable piece of myth-making to appear in the *Annals*: Elmes's 'Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon' (*AFA*, V, 335-78). This lengthy article, which might as well have been written by the artist himself, contains all the themes which later appear in Haydon's *Autobiography*: the conspiracy of the Royal Academy, who were jealous of his genius and hated history painting; his discovery of the Elgin Marbles *before* West; his heroic attacks on Richard Payne Knight which led to the purchase of the Marbles; his self-sacrifice for the public good; his triumph with *Christ's Entry*. Although Elmes is honest about his friendship with Haydon, the article represents as fact a dubious version of Haydon's life history which attempts, predictably, to show him in the best possible light. One example will suffice: Haydon's attack on Knight at the beginning of 1812 is presented as an act of 'less prudence than courage and firmness' (*AFA*, V, 356), for the connoisseur was a member of the British Institution, and Haydon's *Macbeth* was being exhibited there at the time with the possibility of being awarded a premium. However, as William Carey argued in 1819 - and the evidence of the *Diary* bears this out - Haydon did not know that Knight was the anonymous writer whom he was attacking.⁶⁷ In fact, the articles were, although sincere, also an attempt to ingratiate himself with the British Institution by attacking the Royal Academy - an attempt which totally backfired. Rather than being an example of Haydon's courage in speaking of the truth regardless of his self-interest, they tell us more about how Haydon's attempts to manage his career could go disastrously wrong.

⁶⁷Carey, p. 204. At the end of 1812, Haydon was still referring to the subject of his attacks as 'the Edingburgh [*sic*] reviewer'; *Diary*, I, 259.

In the 1820s, as we have seen, Haydon would claim that his attacks on Knight and the Royal Academy in the *Examiner* and the *Annals* had caused him to be labelled as a dangerous radical, thus leading to the alienation of his aristocratic patrons. This was of course a convenient excuse for his financial woes, and one which perhaps says more about the difficulties in Haydon's political position than it does about the way in which he was represented by others. But Haydon did experience some criticism in the late 1810s that clearly had political resonances, and it should be said that all of the major attacks he received during his career were in Tory periodicals.⁶⁸ As a friend of Hunt, it is not surprising that he makes four guest appearances in Lockhart's 'Cockney School' articles. In the first, he is merely mentioned in passing; in the fourth, he is 'that clever, but most affected artist, who as little resembles Raphael in genius as he does in person'; in the fifth he is used as an example of Cockney 'egotism':

Why is it that they seem to think the world has no right to hear one single word about any other person than Hunt, the Cockney Homer, Hazlitt, the Cockney Aristotle, and Haydon, the Cockney Raphael? They are all very eminent men in their own eyes, and in the eyes of the staring and listening groupes whom it is their ambition to astonish.

Lockhart went on to describe Haydon as having 'his own greasy hair combed loosly [*sic*] over his collar, after the manner of Raphael', and a few months later, mockingly exhorted the artist to paint a heroic picture of Hunt and Hazlitt having tea with Jupiter.⁶⁹

Haydon, like the other Cockneys, is depicted as a pretentious *parvenu* with delusions of grandeur, who is able to deceive his lower middle class audience of apprentices and clerks into accepting his grandiose claims. This was neither the first nor the last accusation of charlatanism to be aimed at the painter, and he got off extremely

⁶⁸ *Blackwood's*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, the *John Bull* newspaper, and *Fraser's Magazine*.

⁶⁹ 'Z.' [John Gibson Lockhart], 'The Cockney School of Poetry No. I', *BEM*, October 1817, p. 40; 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. IV', *BEM*, August 1818, p. 320; 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. V', *BEM*, April 1819, p. 97; 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. VI', *BEM*, October 1819, p. 72.

lightly compared with Hazlitt, Hunt and Keats, possibly because *Blackwood's* wasn't very interested in painting. In 1820, however, the magazine, which hardly ever contained art criticism, reviewed his *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*. In the meantime, Haydon had descended on Edinburgh, sweeping all before him, and met Lockhart and Wilson. The *Blackwood's* critic declared that 'Mr Haydon is already by far the greatest historical painter that England has yet produced. *In time*, those that have observed this masterpiece, can have no doubt he may take his place by the side of the very greatest painters of Italy.'⁷⁰ A year later, 'A Letter Concerning Haydon's Paintings' argued that as they clearly manifested 'the power of dramatic expression', the artist ought not 'to be seriously blamed for using copious means to draw the notice of the public [...] A manly self-confidence is not only becoming, but necessary'.⁷¹ Haydon's power, both as artist and man, to overawe his critics can be seen in the transformation he undergoes in *Blackwood's*: from an ignorant, self-aggrandising coxcomb with ideas far above his station, to a genius of 'manly self-confidence' who could truly be described as a 'Cockney Raphael'.

The periodical in which the most serious attacks on Haydon appeared was the *New Monthly Magazine*. As we have seen, its critic praised *Solomon* in 1814, and the magazine continued to support the artist until 1818, when it described him as 'decidedly one of the most promising of the present race' in a highly enthusiastic review of his pamphlet on the decoration of new churches.⁷² In 1819, however, William Carey became art critic for the magazine. Earlier in the 1810s, Carey had staunchly supported Haydon, praising him in the *Champion*, the *Examiner*, the *Literary Gazette*, and his *Critical Description of [Benjamin West's] "Death on a Pale Horse"*. The latter work prompted

⁷⁰'Mr Haydon's Picture', *BEM*, November 1820, p. 219.

⁷¹J. J. Halls (?), 'A Letter Concerning Haydon's Paintings', *BEM*, December 1821, p. 681.

⁷²'Fine Arts', *NMM*, August 1818, p. 70.

an extremely churlish review by Elmes in the *Annals* which trumpeted Haydon, denigrated West and accused Carey of writing under the latter's instruction (*AFA*, III, 79-90). In his hysterical response, a three hundred and fifty page book called *Desultory Exposition of an Anti-British System of Incendiary Publication* (1819 - the full title is over fifty words long), Carey attacked Haydon and Elmes, accusing them of seeking to elevate the painter by denigrating other artists, the Royal Academy, the British Institution, and the British School as a whole.

Despite its frenzied and repetitive prose, the *Exposition* makes some acute points. Through a close reading of the *Annals*, Carey shows how Haydon sought to manipulate public opinion in his favour by constructing an image of himself as a heroic, persecuted genius. While continuing to praise the artist's works, he also noted that the rival history painter William Hilton, barely mentioned by the *Annals*, had managed to produce fifteen paintings in the time it had taken Haydon to produce four.⁷³ The following passage is typical of the *Exposition*, and contains the two most interesting aspects of Carey's attack - the construction of Haydon and Elmes as charlatans, and the implication that such quackery is unpatriotic, perhaps even dangerous:

Mr. Haydon is to be praised and extolled and puffed; he is to be always honored with *laudations*, (p. 523 v. 2 *AFA*) and kept "WHOLLY and SOLELY" before the public as the MUNCHAUSEN of the *palette* and *pencil*, a sort of *pictorial Mountebank* on a stage; with his *anonymous Bill-sticker*, *Hornblower* and *Merry Andrew*, placarding the walls, sounding his blasts of astonishment, or playing a solo on the salt-box to attract the eyes and ears of the amazed Multitude. *All freedom of opinion is to be abolished*. Every public writer is to lay down his pen, or become a slave to the *Anti-academical* and *unitarian System*: a Creature, a Parasite, and a defamatory Instrument in the hands of this odious Anti-British Confederacy. The Press is to be converted into an engine for Disappointed Vanity and Envy, to work their unholy purposes, and all contemporary merit, every living British Artist, is to be thrown out of sight, or only brought forward as a mere background and inferior figure to Mr. Haydon; or this scribbling

⁷³Carey, pp. 74-75.

Jack-pudding, his Trumpeter, Showman, and Puff-master General is to be let loose upon us.⁷⁴

Carey's accurate if excessive use of the language of the fairground constructs Haydon as a purveyor of mendacious exaggerations who is aided by his vulgar flunky, Elmes, in seeking public notoriety. This accusation of charlatanism clearly recognises the weakness in Haydon's account of himself as a genius - if he is such a great artist then why does he have to go on about it? But the attack goes further than that: Carey does not just present the duo as quacks who trying to hoodwink the multitude for personal gain, but as demagogues engaged in an 'Anti-British confederacy' who seek to use the press to abolish 'freedom of opinion' and work 'their unholy purposes'; thus he also seeks to play on contemporary fears of popular radicalism, without, of course, directly accusing Haydon and Elmes of *political* sedition.⁷⁵

Although the *Desultory Exposition* is known to writers on Haydon, it does not seem to have been noticed that Carey made similar points in the *New Monthly Magazine* during 1819. These articles are bound to have had a much wider circulation than his privately printed book. In the first of his 'Fine Arts' columns, Carey stated that

our sincere and constant efforts shall, therefore, be diverted to create a national pride in BRITISH GENIUS, and a national love of BRITISH ART; to unite the whole body of our native artists and their PATRONS, the ROYAL ACADEMY and THE BRITISH INSTITUTION, more clearly; and to establish the glory of England in the Fine Arts as triumphantly as our victorious fleet and armies have established her fame in arms.⁷⁶

This type of patriotic rhetoric, with its comparison of English/ British artistic and military glory is exactly the language that Haydon uses throughout his life, but in further articles

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

⁷⁵ Carey's use of the word 'unitarianism' is interesting. He deploys it to mean that the *Annals* set Haydon up as the only contemporary artist who deserved praise, but of course it also had political connotations. Another passage in which he comes close to accusing Haydon and Elmes of radicalism occurs later in the *Exposition*, when he describes the *Annals* as manifesting an 'arrogant disrespect for rank and dignity of the highest order', including the King and the Prince Regent; Carey, p. 186.

⁷⁶ 'W. C.' [William Carey], 'Fine Arts', *NMM*, February 1819, p. 52.

Carey made it clear that he thinks that it is Haydon who has sought to destroy this glory by celebrating himself and denigrating all other British artists, as well as the Royal Academy and the British Institution.⁷⁷ Within the pages of the *New Monthly*, Carey's assertion that Haydon and Elmes were 'anti-British' had an extra edge, for the staunchly Tory periodical loudly and continually proclaimed itself to be a supporter of 'Loyalty and Religion' and enemy of 'Jacobinism'. Ironically, Haydon, a Francophobic jingoist, was thus implicitly linked with 'Buonaparte's adulators', to whom the magazine, of course, was firmly opposed.⁷⁸ It is clear then that Haydon's attacks on national institutions such as the Royal Academy and the British Institution *could* be interpreted as radical, particularly during a period of political instability.⁷⁹ However, the impression that one gets from Haydon's diary, and the comments of some of his defenders, that during the 1810s and 20s he was continually attacked as a radical, is a false one.

As in the case of *Blackwood's*, the *New Monthly* changed its tune in 1820. Carey seems to have stopped writing for the magazine early in that year; he is unlikely to have produced the unsigned review in July which praised *Christ's Entry*, and anticipated from Haydon's 'future labours [...] works which may equal the productions of the most auspicious times'.⁸⁰ The leading article in December 1820 was a 'Memoir of Benjamin Robert Haydon, esq.' which is similar in tone to its analogue in the *Annals*, although much shorter. Here Haydon is a heroic genius who has triumphed over all obstacles, motivated only by a 'disinterested ardour' for history painting which justifies his slightly excessive attacks on his opponents. The article ends with something like an apology for

Carey's articles:

⁷⁷'W. C.' [William Carey], 'Observations on the "Annals of the Fine Arts"', *NMM*, March 1819, pp. 135-39; 'Historical Observations on Anti-British and Anti-Contemporarian Prejudices', *NMM*, April 1819, pp. 258-63; 'Defence of the British Institution', *NMM*, November 1819, pp. 466-69; 'Defence of the British Institution (concluded)', *NMM*, December 1819, pp. 557-64.

⁷⁸'Preface', *NMM*, 1819.

⁷⁹Haydon's association with the *Examiner* obviously contributed to this, especially as the Hunts tended to link artistic and political reform to a far greater extent than did the painter, Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, p. 121.

⁸⁰'Fine Arts', *NMM*, July 1820, p. 77.

The private character of this artist has not been spared in the acrimonious contests which have been alluded to in the previous pages. Unable to resist the proof of his talent as a painter, some adversaries have called him a radical reformer, and others a deist [...] We have reason to know that he is sincerely attached to the British constitution, and considers the principal reform of which it is capable to be an extension of national encouragement to historical painting. So much for his politics. His religion may be discovered in his pictures.⁸¹

I have found no evidence of direct references to Haydon as either a ‘radical reformer’ or a ‘deist’ in the periodical press, although it may be that the *New Monthly’s* writer is referring to rumours circulating in the art world, or perhaps some of the anonymous letters that Haydon received throughout his life. On the other hand, it is quite possible that his information is from the painter himself and simply reveals Haydon’s paranoid fear that he had become branded as a radical.

Although some reviewers expressed reservations about the Christ figure in Haydon’s new painting, the glowing comments in the *New Monthly* are fairly typical.⁸² The critic in the *Repository of Arts* praised it ‘as being most flattering to the rising school of our country’ and the *Literary Gazette* described it as a ‘splendid and imposing’ painting which offered some consolation ‘to the admirers of British art’ for the recent death of Benjamin West.⁸³ We have already seen that the painting was highly praised in *Blackwood’s*, and of course the *Examiner* and the *Annals* weighed in with eulogies of Haydon’s genius. Again, the triumph was not solely Haydon’s, but also Britain’s. Robert Hunt claimed that he had given the country ‘additional celebrity’ and had proved ‘that high capability of Genius in Art is not confined to the more felicitous latitudes of Greece

⁸¹ ‘Memoir of Benjamin Robert Haydon, esq.’, *NMM*, December 1820, p. 605.

⁸² The *New Monthly* continued to support Haydon after 1820: for instance, a year later, the magazine, now a liberal production nominally edited by Thomas Campbell, stated that ‘he stands at the head of Historical Artists [...] Mr. HAYDON will be regarded by posterity, or we are very much mistaken, as the chief regenerator of elevated art in our times’; Robert Hunt or Samuel Beazley, ‘Fine Arts’, *NMM*, April 1821, p. 168.

⁸³ ‘Haydon’s Picture’, *Repository of Arts*, May 1820, p. 308; ‘Fine Arts’, *Literary Gazette*, 1 April 1820, p. 220. The picture was also praised strongly in the *Observer* and *The Times*.

and Italy'.⁸⁴ Elmes, unsurprisingly, felt enabled by the success of the painting to state that Haydon

is a man of undoubted genius, that he is the first painter in the country, that his works have raised the reputation of the English school; and that he has constantly devoted himself, disregarding all emolument, to the highest walk of art, through every species of want, ill-treatment and difficulty. (*AFA*, V, 373)

The most interesting review of *Christ's Entry* was by John Scott in the *London Magazine*. It begins with a familiar lament about the lack of government patronage for history painting, which means that a painter like West or Haydon is forced 'to advertise himself like a quack doctor, to squeeze that support from the shillings of the people, which he has vainly hoped to obtain from public patronage respectably manifested.'⁸⁵ Scott finds the idea of high art being exhibited for money unacceptable, as he sees the civic values it enshrines as bound to be degraded by commercialism. And although he describes *Christ's Entry* as 'the greatest effort of the English School of painting', he spends most of the article lamenting Haydon's own quack-like practices. One-man shows, Scott argues,

can have no salutary effect on an artist's character. Descriptive catalogues, advertisements, and posting bills, are dangerous stimulants: besides the temptation unduly to consider the popular taste in the selection of a subject, and to introduce accessories calculated to gratify popular prejudice in the mode of treating it.⁸⁶

An artist who pandered to such 'popular prejudices' could not, of course, be described as engaged 'in a gallant struggle for the triumph of his art', but rather as being 'resolved in *distinguishing* himself [...] by a dexterity of management, not exactly reconcilable to

⁸⁴ Robert Hunt, 'Mr. Haydon's Picture', *Examiner*, 7 May 1820, p. 300.

⁸⁵ John Scott, 'Notices of the Fine Arts No. V', *LM*, May 1820, p. 583.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 584.

that dignity with which the public display of genius should always be invested'.⁸⁷ So Scott makes a distinction between the heroic, disinterested genius, and the quack artist, who seeks to manipulate public opinion in order to increase his own fame (the term 'management', in this context, has overtones of deceit or trickery). This, one might think, is meant to be a description of Haydon, but Scott is careful to point out that the latter 'is animated by the most ardent devotion to the cause of fine art', and that his writings have greatly improved 'public opinion', and also led to a greater number of good exhibitions, as well as the purchase of the Elgin Marbles. However, the *London's* editor also criticises, at some length, two aspects of *Christ's Entry* as being particularly sensationalist: Haydon's claim, in the advertisements, that it had been 'six years at the easel', and his introduction of Voltaire's head into the painting. Taken as a whole, the review is strongly supportive of the artist, but the implication is that he is in danger of degrading himself and his pictures by attempting to 'manage' public opinion by the wrong methods.

In three letters published in the *Examiner*, John Landseer, one of Haydon's pupils, took strong exception to Scott's remarks.⁸⁸ Landseer denied that there was anything 'reprehensibly improper' about advertising a public exhibition and charging a shilling for entry. This was much better, he claimed, than putting artists at the mercy of the Hanging Committee at the Royal Academy. In 'The Lion's Head' for July 1820, Scott was keen to emphasise that he had not meant to attack Haydon, and the next month he printed an article which contained a short piece by the artist entitled 'On the Relative Encouragement of Sculpture and of Painting in England', and some additional remarks by Scott.⁸⁹ He repeated his claim that Haydon had a tendency to seek celebrity

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 584-85.

⁸⁸ J. Landseer, 'To the Author of a Critique of Mr. Haydon's Picture', *Examiner*, 14 May 1820, pp. 317-18; 28 May, pp. 346-47; 4 June, p. 365.

⁸⁹ John Scott, 'The Lion's Head', *LM*, July 1820, p. 3; John Scott and B. R. Haydon, 'Mr. Haydon's Address to the Public', *LM*, August 1820, pp. 206-09.

by unworthy means, but emphasised that this was entirely unnecessary due to his ‘great talents and noble resolution’. It seems strange that Scott, after attacking the artist’s puffing, was willing to introduce Haydon’s ‘address’ as ‘equally manly and called for’; for, apart from pleading for more patronage for history painting, the artist also exhorts patrons to purchase *Christ’s Entry* for three thousand guineas. Although he is careful not to make any direct assertions about his own genius, Haydon effectively does so through a series of rhetorical questions: ‘have I, or have I not, displayed talents to justify my pretensions? Is my pursuit worthy [of] encouragement, or is it not? Do I, or do I not, deserve to be encouraged? The public must decide.’⁹⁰ Of course, by then the exhibition of *Christ’s Entry* had been extremely successful, and nearly everybody agreed about Haydon’s artistic abilities: so what he is actually saying is that “the public *have* decided - and would you like to buy my painting for three thousand guineas?” Once again, a periodical that had criticised the painter’s publicity-seeking had become a vehicle for his self-promotion.

II

William Hazlitt, despite being Haydon’s friend, was more dubious than most about *Christ’s Entry*, describing it, in the *Edinburgh Review*, as ‘a masterly sketch’ rather than the finished product, in an article in which he also asserted that the fine arts were not natural to the English character.⁹¹ Years earlier, Haydon had believed that he could manipulate Hazlitt in order to disseminate his own views: in November 1816, the painter wrote ‘Hazlitt is a man who can do great good to the Art [...] All his sneers and attacks

⁹⁰ Scott and Haydon, pp. 208-09.

⁹¹ ‘Farington’s Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds’, *CWH*, XVI, 209. First published in August 1820.

on my views I take as nothing. My object is to manage such an intellect for the great purposes of art' (II, 65).⁹² In the long term, such management proved impossible: one of the few constants in Hazlitt's art criticism is his theory that any art will inevitably decline after its first glorious period, a view that was of course total anathema to Haydon. But the final straw came in 1824 when, in a review of Lady Morgan's *Life of Salvator Rosa*, Hazlitt discussed Salvator and James Barry as irritable geniuses who lacked true greatness: 'Those who are at war with others, are not at peace with themselves. It is the uneasiness, the turbulence, the acrimony within that recoils upon external objects. Barry abused the Academy, because he could not paint himself'.⁹³ Haydon, predictably, took these remarks to be aimed at him (which they probably were) and denounced Hazlitt in his diary as an apostate who had gone over to the 'courtier like side' (II, 493-96).

But despite Haydon's claims that Hazlitt had once been his 'furious defender', the essayist had always expressed doubts about the painter's ability, though none about his strength of character - 'I also know an artist who has at least the ambition and the boldness of genius,' he wrote in the *London Magazine* in 1820.⁹⁴ In his review of *Christ's Agony in the Garden*, also in the *London*, he described it as 'a comparative failure' and took issue with 'a liberal and friendly critic' (Robert Hunt in the *Examiner*) who had declared that 'the shades of Raphael, Michael Angelo, and Coreggio, can find no better than to descend again upon the earth [...] and stand with hands crossed, and eyes uplifted in mute wonder, before Mr. Haydon's picture of Christ's Agony in the Garden'.⁹⁵ The painter, argued Hazlitt, had reached the point when he 'should fling himself boldly and fairly into the huge stream of popularity [...] instead of buoying

⁹² Haydon did influence Hazlitt for a short time; this is apparent in the latter's review of 'The Catalogue Raisonné of the British Institution', *Examiner*, 3 November 1816 (*CWH*, XVIII, 104-11).

⁹³ 'Lady Morgan's *Life of Salvator*', *CWH*, XVI, 288. First published in the *Edinburgh Review* in July 1824.

⁹⁴ 'On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life', *CWH*, XII, 205.

⁹⁵ 'Haydon's "Christ's Agony in the Garden"', *CWH*, XVIII, 141-42. The review was first published in May 1821.

himself up with borrowed bloated bladders, and flimsy newspaper paragraphs'.⁹⁶ These comments, of course, continued Scott's remarks in the same magazine a year earlier. However, just like Scott, Hazlitt was unable to maintain the attack. For having tried to undercut the puffing of Haydon, he came up with some hyperbole of his own:

One great merit of Mr. Haydon's pictures is their size [...] His genius is gigantic. He is of the race of Brobdignag, and not of Lilliput [...] He bestrides his art like a Colossus. The more you give him to do, the better he does it. Ardour, energy, boundless ambition, are the categories of his mind, the springs of his enterprise [...] Vastness does not confound him, difficulty arouses him, impossibility is the element in which he glories.⁹⁷

Even Hazlitt, it seems, could not avoid being sucked into the vortex of publicity surrounding Haydon. This description makes the artist out to be one of his own heroic figures and seems calculated to feed his egotism. It is a literally a *puff*, inflating Haydon to gigantic size: no wonder that the final phrase of the quotation - 'impossibility is the element in which he glories' - became an occasional mantra to the painter later in life.

Having built Haydon up in 1821, at the end of the decade Hazlitt seemed to want to knock him down. In the twelfth of the *Conversations of Northcote*, first published in the *London Weekly Review* in 1829, he strongly criticised the painter's attempts to bully the public (though he only names him as 'X-'): 'he had no real love of his art, and therefore did not apply or give his whole mind sedulously to it; and was more spent on bespeaking notoriety beforehand by puffs and announcements of his works, than on giving them that degree of perfection which would ensure lasting reputation'.⁹⁸ A further attack which was meant to appear in the *New Monthly Magazine* was not published until 1853:

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 142.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 142-43.

⁹⁸ *CWH*, XI, 252.

I never heard him speak with enthusiasm of any painter or work of merit, nor show any love of art, except as a puffing-machine for him to get up into and blow a trumpet in his own praise. Instead of falling down and worshipping such names as Raphael and Michael Angelo, he is only considering how he may, by storm or stratagem, place himself beside them, on the loftiest seats of Parnassus, as ignorant country squires affect to sit with judges on the bench [...] Haydon should have been the boatswain of a man of war; he has no other ideas of glory than those which belong to a naval victory, or to vulgar noise and insolence; not at all as something in which the whole world may participate alike.⁹⁹

This superb caricature of Haydon is devastating in its awareness of the painter's weaknesses. Like Carey, but with infinitely more skill, Hazlitt represents the artist as a person whose sole motivation is to elevate himself above others. His love of the art is the opposite of disinterested, motivated only by a desire for fame, and his image of himself as a great painter is no more than hubris. The final sentence sums up perfectly Haydon's own confusion between art and war; the way in which he saw other painters, art institutions and the public as opponents who had to be loudly beaten into submission.

It was probably easier to emphasise Haydon's inferiority to the Old Masters in 1829 than it had been in 1820, because, although the artist continued to gain much attention and praise during the intervening years, critical panegyric was not maintained at as high a level as earlier in his career. The *Annals* was now defunct; Leigh Hunt was in Italy (although Robert Hunt continued to write for the *Examiner* until the end of 1828), John Scott was dead, and Hazlitt, as we have seen, was proving impossible to manipulate.¹⁰⁰ *The Raising of Lazarus* (1823) was well received, by both the public and the press, but Haydon's imprisonment for debt, and appearance in advertisements as a charity case, tarnished both his public and private image as an invincible hero. After 1823, a combination of poor eyesight and the pressures produced by the horrendous state of his finances meant that the quality of his paintings deteriorated, and although

⁹⁹ *CWH*, XX, 391-92.

¹⁰⁰ After the demise of the *Annals*, James Elmes moved back to his old employer, the *Monthly Magazine* at the end of 1820 and continued to praise Haydon, though fairly quietly. He seems to have left the *Monthly* late in 1821.

they still tended to gain good reviews, there were very few further comparisons with Raphael or Titian. A review of the 1827 Royal Academy exhibition in the *Literary Gazette* is typical of the more subdued responses to Haydon's pictures in the last twenty years of his life. The critic notices enthusiastically the number of historical works exhibited and lavishes much praise on Hilton, Etty and Eastlake. He describes Haydon's *Alexander Taming Bucephalus* as 'a work of the same class', and claims that it 'places him as far up the ladder of an artist's laudable ambition as if he had the big letter A, or the still more attractive letters R. A., appended to his name'.¹⁰¹ Haydon is represented as one of the major artists of the day, his picture is praised, and his campaign for election to the Royal Academy supported, but the eulogies of a few years earlier appeared no longer. His comic paintings of everyday life - the *Mock Election*, *Chairing the Member*, and *Punch* - were widely praised for their Hogarthian manner, but these productions, of course, meant relatively little either to Haydon (apart from financially), or to those critics who still subscribed to the old hierarchy of genres.

Accusations of charlatanism continued to bedevil the painter, and perhaps became more frequent as critics and the public became bored with his attempts to raise his profile, and his endless hectoring on the subject of public patronage. The *Magazine of the Fine Arts*, reviewing his Pall Mall exhibition in 1821, criticised the catalogue and noted 'the disgust with which mankind regard self-adulation and puffing' - months later it alluded to him as 'a conceited imposter'.¹⁰² In 1825, the *John Bull* mocked his portraits at the Society of British Artists as 'gigantic absurdities' that proved his 'lunacy'. The reviewer noted, with some irritation, that Haydon 'had left his impudence upon record by asking Parliament for money because he was a *great artist*', and proclaimed that 'such evidence of self-conceit when coupled with these abominable productions, is, perhaps,

¹⁰¹'Fine Arts', *Literary Gazette*, 12 May 1827, p. 298.

¹⁰²John Britton (?), 'Haydon's Gallery', *Magazine of the Fine Arts*, 1821, p. 53; 'Remarks on Cotemporary [sic] Criticism', p. 164.

hardly to be equalled'.¹⁰³ The *Literary Gazette* normally praised Haydon's paintings, but deplored his 'puff' of *The Mock Election* as 'the most ill-advised' of his 'absurd and offensive' writings.¹⁰⁴ In April 1832, the critic of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, after limited praise for *Eucles*, lambasted the 'quackery, conceit, and bombast' of his exhibition catalogue.¹⁰⁵

Probably the most serious attack on Haydon appeared in 1834. *Fraser's Magazine*, which rarely paid attention to the fine arts, printed an eight-page article ridiculing him and his picture of the Reform Banquet. The reviewer, possibly William Maginn, began by remarking on Haydon's notoriety:

MR. HAYDON's name is somewhat familiar to the public ear, inasmuch as, besides being a great painter, he is a very considerable writer on painting, a violent declaimer against the Royal Academy, a vituperator of the public taste, and an insufferable coxcomb.¹⁰⁶

The writer goes on to give a short biography of the artist which can be read as a parody of the eulogistic 'memoirs' of Haydon that appeared earlier in his career.¹⁰⁷ We are told of his arrogance in his youth, how he aped Raphael and 'at the same time he puffed himself and was patronised by others' - these remarks clearly echo the 'Cockney School' attacks of fifteen years earlier. The painting of *Christ's Entry* is described as 'spoil[ing] a very considerable piece of canvas, by smearing over it'. After mocking Haydon's portraits as 'colossal caricatures', in similar terms to the *John Bull* attacks, Maginn gives some praise for the *Mock Election*, but then states that

¹⁰³'Society of British Artists', *John Bull*, 15 May 1825, p. 158.

¹⁰⁴'Fine Arts', *Literary Gazette*, 15 December 1827, p. 811.

¹⁰⁵'Mr. Haydon's Pictures', *Gentlemen's Magazine*, April 1832, p. 440.

¹⁰⁶Probably William Maginn, 'Haydon's Reform Banquet', *FM*, June 1834, p. 702. This article is unassigned in the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*, but the style is Maginnian, and the echoes of *Blackwood's* and the *John Bull* make his authorship seem likely.

¹⁰⁷As well as the two which I have discussed above, see also 'Memoir of Mr. Haydon', *European Magazine*, November 1824, pp. 383-89.

after what we consider the "lucid interval," in which Mr. Haydon painted the excessively mad pictures, which in parts demand our praise, he relapsed into his old habits of inefficiency; and his time was spent in daubing hideous objects, and writing pamphlets and statements about himself and his art, and his debts and his duns; till at last he sunk into an oblivion dark and deep.¹⁰⁸

The rest of the article is spent attacking Reform, and laughing at Haydon's exhibition catalogue.

Clearly the main motivation for *Fraser's* attack was political - describing Haydon's painting allowed the magazine to mock Whig politicians like Brougham and Grey - but the way in which Haydon is represented is revealing. If he was not quite in 'oblivion dark and deep' during the 1830s, he was beginning to seem more and more like a faintly comic, marginal figure.¹⁰⁹ He had his victories in the last decade of his life - principally his popular lecture tours, the establishment of Schools of Design, and his commission to paint the Anti-Slavery Convention (although the resulting picture was a failure) - but his public profile declined steadily. In January 1842, he lamented that 'in the Press, now, I have hardly a Friend [...] I have only to shew a work to set the whole Press in an uproar of abuse' (V, 121). This is something of an exaggeration, but reveals Haydon's sense that he had become yesterday's man, whose artistic principles were increasingly remote from those of either the critics or the public.¹¹⁰ Even his martyrdom in 1846 could only temporarily slow down the slump in his reputation that continued into the twentieth century.

The case of Haydon shows that the conflation of artist and work by periodical writers did not only occur in the case of authors. Discussions of his paintings could rarely escape from the powerful character who produced them, just as Haydon often identified

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ For example, see his portrayal as the artist 'Daubson' in John Poole's 'Extract From a Journal Kept During a Residence in Little Pedlington', *NMM*, October 1835, pp. 177-81. Later published in *Little Pedlington and the Pedlingtonians*, 2 vols (London: Colburn, 1839), I, chapter 6.

¹¹⁰ George, chapter 20.

himself with the heroic figures he depicted. Some of the criticisms he received during his lifetime reveal an awareness that such self-aggrandisement threatened the account of artistic creation and reception which it was meant to support. The rapid rise and decline of the painter's reputation also emphasises the extent to which 'genius' is a historically-conditioned judgement. Haydon became, for a few years, the greatest artistic genius in Britain for reasons that often had little to do with his abilities as a painter. In the process, his public image became to some extent detached from his actual productions, an identifiably modern sort of fame which was only made possible by the rise of the periodical press.

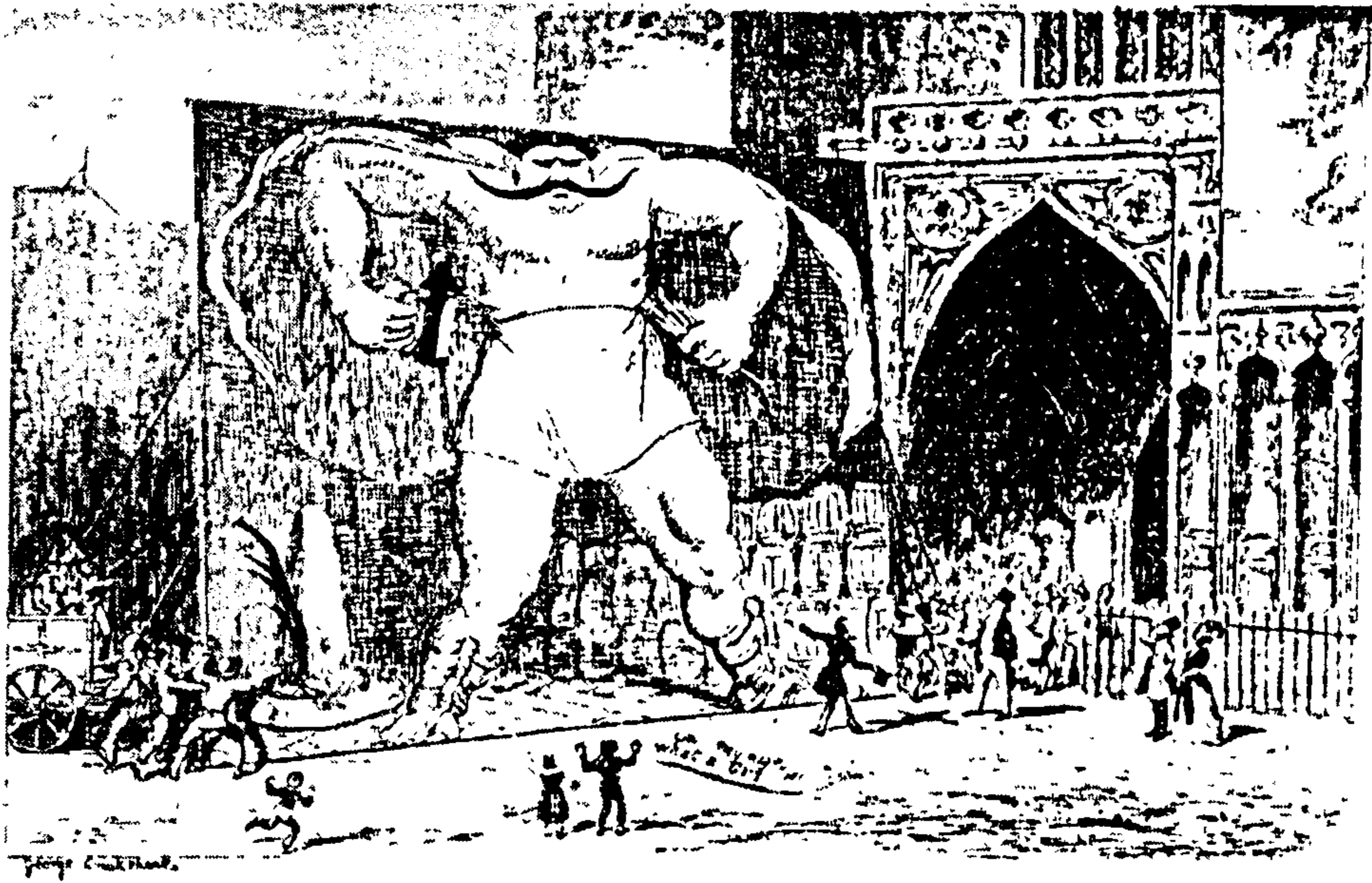
Part Four: Two Caricatures

During the 1840s, George Cruikshank published two caricatures in the *Comic Almanack*, which, if they did not depict Haydon directly, can certainly be read as making references to his career. The first, 'Guy Fawkes Treated Classically - An Unexhibited Cartoon' (plate 8, *fig. 1*), appeared in 1844, and the second, 'Born a Genius and Born a Dwarf' (plate 8, *fig. 2*), appeared in 1847, a few months after his suicide. What is interesting about both images is that they simultaneously celebrate the painter - his ambition, his showmanship, his suffering, perhaps even his artistic ability - and satirise him.

Cruikshank succeeds in encapsulating the dualistic response that Haydon so often provoked, representing him as neither genius, nor quack, but a strange mixture of both.

Putting the 1844 image to one side for a moment, let us consider the skit that Cruikshank wrote to accompany it. In a jaunty narrative, notable for some truly appalling puns, he describes how he had 'a good bold fling' at 'the grand style' with his entry for the Cartoon Competition at Westminster Hall, but states that 'I had carried the grand classical to such a height as to preclude all chances of my cartoon being got in through the doorway'.¹¹¹ He tells how, as a result, he sliced away the top and bottom of the canvas, which explains Guy Fawkes' rather compressed figure, and the fact that his hat is on the floor (although Cruikshank also claims that 'the imagination suggests that such a villain ought not to wear his hat'). Despite the exhibition of 'equally monstrous' cartoons in the Competition, 'Guy Fawkes' was still too big:

¹¹¹George Cruikshank, 'The Unexhibited Cartoon of Guy Fawkes', *Comic Almanack*, 1844, p. 31.



Guy Fawkes treated Classically - An Unexhibited Cartoon.

Figure 1. George Cruikshank, 'Guy Fawkes treated Classically – An Unexhibited Cartoon', *Comic Almanack*, 1844. Reproduced from Brown, Woof, and Hebron, p. 173.



BORN A GENIUS AND BORN A DWARF.

Figure 2. George Cruikshank, 'Born a Genius and Born a Dwarf', *Comic Almanack*, 1847. Reproduced from Brown, Woof, and Hebron, p. 173.

though I had cramped my genius already, to suit the views of the Commissioners, and the size of the door, I found I must have stooped much lower if I had resolved on finding admittance for my work. I wrote at once to the Woods and Forests, calling upon them to widen the door for genius, by taking down a portion of the wall; but [...] no answer was returned to my request.¹¹²

The germ of this fantasy is an actual event. In his diary for 8 June 1843, Haydon wrote, 'one man brought a Cartoon 16 feet - a villainous thing. Eastlake said it could not be admitted as it exceeded by a foot in length. He, the Artist, immediately ordered the Carpenter to saw off a Foot! which he did! - & perhaps improved it' (V, 283). Of course, no cartoons of Guy Fawkes were exhibited in the competition, and I have been unable to ascertain the identity of the unfortunate artist.

David Blayney Brown has assumed that the 'Guy Fawkes' caricature is directed at Haydon, but both Robert L. Patten and William Feaver have described it aimed at 'vasty' history painting in general.¹¹³ My own view is that although it is about the 'Grand Style', the most apt proponent of that style for Cruikshank's purposes was Haydon. However, to see the image as simply 'a satire on Haydon's pictorial gigantism and on his submissions to the Westminster Cartoon Competition' is to oversimplify its complexity.¹¹⁴ For when reading the caricature alongside the accompanying text, the huge, bristling, over-muscled, grotesque figure of Guy Fawkes becomes a symbol not just of Haydon's art, but of the painter's image of himself as a powerfully masculine heroic genius, and his attempt to force this image on to the public. The text plays with images of size and compression, making them refer both to the physical dimensions of the painting, and the artist's personality - 'I had cramped my genius already'. As we have seen, this trope, in which a description of Haydon's heroic style of painting is also

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.32.

¹¹³ Brown, Woof and Hebron, p. 172; William Feaver, "'At it Again": Aspects of Cruikshank's Later Work', in *George Cruikshank: A Revaluation*, ed. by Robert L. Patten (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 249-58 (p. 251); Robert L. Patten, *George Cruikshank's Life, Times, and Art*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: The Lutton Press, 1992-96), II, 196.

¹¹⁴ Brown, Woof, and Hebron, p. 172.

applied to his character or genius, was also used by other writers. The two most notable instances are Hazlitt's comment that 'his genius is gigantic [...] He bestrides his art like a Colossus', and Thackeray's review of the Royal Academy exhibition of 1845, where he describes the painter's *Uriel and Satan* as 'a broad-shouldered, swaggering, hulking archangel', and states that 'there is something burly and bold in this resolute genius which will attack only enormous subjects'.¹¹⁵ Both these writers share Cruikshank's ambivalence towards their subject; the grand magnitude of Haydon's art, ambition, and personality is a sight that is both sublime *and* ridiculous.

'Guy Fawkes Treated Classically' actually contains two images of Haydon, for if the figure of Guy Fawkes represents Haydon as heroic genius, then the tiny figure of the artist who is so dwarfed by his painting represents him as a quack touting his marvel to the watching public. This alludes to the painful irony of Haydon's career: that, as an artist who sought to inculcate public, heroic virtue, he was forced to use ever more desperate, showman-like measures to sell his paintings to a culture in which art was increasingly a matter of private consumption. In Cruikshank's caricature, the showman and the hero he purveys, are, like Haydon, ultimately excluded by the authorities of art, but they do get public recognition, if not exactly approbation: 'as it was carried through the streets, it seemed to be generally understood and appreciated, every one, even children, exclaiming as it passed, "Oh! there's a Guy!"'¹¹⁶ However, the painting in 'the grand style' that was supposed to adorn a public building is reduced to no more than a travelling freakshow in which the Barnum-like artist (Haydon as charlatan) touts his Belzoni-like strongman (Haydon as heroic genius) to the gaping multitude.

¹¹⁵ *CWH*, XVIII, 142-43; Michael Angelo Titmarsh [William Thackeray], 'Picture Gossip', *FM*, June 1845, p. 715.

¹¹⁶ Cruikshank, p. 32. The caricaturist is punning on two, or possibly three, meanings of 'guy': to refer to Guy Fawkes, to describe 'a person of grotesque appearance', and, perhaps, the verb meaning 'to make an object of ridicule', although the *OED* gives the earliest use for this as 1853.

The same year, the *Comic Almanack* also contained a 'Critical Essay on the Prize Cartoons' which mocked the Cartoon Competition.¹¹⁷ 'The Commissioners of the Fine Arts', the writer (probably Cruikshank) states, '[...] wished to ascertain the state of the art of historical painting, and got a glorious collection of designs for burlesquing British history, shewing at once the palmy state to which the art of caricature has risen in this country'.¹¹⁸ This is interestingly similar to Haydon's comment on the Competition, just after recounting the story of the artist with the over-large cartoon: 'there are so many rascally things I can't help thinking some have been put up on purpose to bring ridicule to the attempt' (V, 283). This acceptance that history painting, if done badly, could easily become caricature, is shared by both Haydon and the *Almanack's* writer; except, of course, that Haydon cannot see that such a view could apply to him. That Cruikshank's image of Guy Fawkes is also an image of Haydon becomes more apparent when reading the 'Critical Essay on the Prize Cartoons'; the writer repeats Cruikshank's play with magnitude, but is more explicit that the giganticism depicted is not simply pictorial:

Most of the artists seem to have laboured under an awful enlargement of the imagination, which set them off commencing their drawings upon an enormous scale, obliging them to moderate their conceptions before the completion of the picture. The fact that there was many a Cartoon which would have gone in, but that there was no getting it through the door, illustrates this malady among the artists. It may be considered as a species of Elephantiasis, inducing the idea that one's self and one's subject are much more vast than they are in reality.¹¹⁹

These remarks may not have been aimed at Haydon in particular, but I suspect that they would have seemed to many to be an apt description of the artist.

¹¹⁷The Cartoon Competition must have seemed a particularly good topic for satire, perhaps simply because of its title, for it was unusual for the almanac to contain two articles on the same theme.

¹¹⁸George Cruikshank, 'Critical Essay on the Prize Cartoons', *Comic Almanack*, 1844, p. 56.

¹¹⁹*ibid.*

'Born a Genius and Born a Dwarf' is described by Blayney Brown as 'no less vicious' than the Guy Fawkes caricature, again implying that the image is directed solely at Haydon.¹²⁰ Although it does seem (to me anyway) cruel of Cruikshank to use Haydon's sufferings as a vehicle for satire so soon after his suicide, the caricature itself is certainly much more than an attack on the artist. Robert L. Patten has described its different targets very well:

the satire cuts in all directions, at the public for preferring miniature to heroic, at life for promoting deformity over genius [...] It also cuts at Haydon for his romantic excesses and thundering prophets and at all the other entrants in the Westminster competition whose vacuous cartoons beat out Haydon's submission. And it alludes complexly to Cruikshank's own situation: he is both Haydon, humiliated by the public's rejection, and Tom Thumb, master of miniatures, though his own art can be distinguished from the blowsy rhetoric of romantic prophecy on one side and the diminutive trumpery of modern amusements on the other.¹²¹

What is remarkable about the image is that it both affirms and explodes the idea of Haydon as a neglected genius. If one reads 'genius' ironically, perhaps an unlikely reading considering the widespread sympathy for Haydon after his death, then the satire is on the artist's vanity, his fantasy of his own creative ability. Haydon is not really a genius and that is why he is in such a bad state. On the other hand, if genius is read as straightforwardly descriptive, like 'dwarf', then the picture becomes a satire on a society which rewards physical freakishness rather than creative ability. In that case, the picture supports Haydon's own arguments about the ill-treatment he has suffered throughout his career.

The text accompanying the image has the effect of fixing its meaning to the latter, more obvious interpretation. Entitled 'Jupiter and the Mother: An Idyll', it describes the complaints of a mother, who, having prayed to Jupiter that her unborn child will be 'the

¹²⁰Brown, Woolf and Hebron, p. 172.

¹²¹Patten, II, 196. The two caricatures are also discussed briefly in Feaver, pp. 251-52.

most admired of all thy Children - the richest - the happiest of Men', discovers, a few years later, that she has given birth to a dwarf. She lambasts Jupiter for having failed to bless the child 'with a form of Power, and a mind of Genius', but the deity tells her, 'had I conferred on him the Genius thou sighest after, he would have felt but Want and Neglect in the world [...] For know that Mind alone can sympathize with Mind; and mindless Man enriches those who minister rather to the luxury of his Senses, than to the refinement of his intellect.'¹²² This passage, with its indictment of an ignorant mass audience who care only for sensual pleasure, is not only a near-perfect example of the theme of the neglected genius, but is remarkably similar to sentiments recorded in Haydon's journal a few years earlier:

The greatest curse that can befall a Father in England is to have a Son gifted with a passion & a genius for High Art. Thank God with all my Soul & all my nature, my Children have witnessed the harrassing agonies under which I have ever painted, that the very name of Painting, the very name of High Art, the very thought of Pictures, gives them a hideous & disgusting taste in their mouths. Thank God, there is not one of my boys, or a Girl, who can draw a straight line, even with a ruler, much less without one, & I pray God on my knees, with my forehead bent to the Earth, my lips in the Dust, that they [*sic for he*] will, in his mercy, inflict them with every other passion, appetite, misery, wretchedness, disease, insanity, or gabbling Idiotism, rather than a longing for Painting - this scorned, miserable Art, this greater imposture than the human species it imitates - a greater delusion than a painted whore. (V, 179)

The almost comic hyperbole of this extract reveals the disgust that Haydon sometimes felt towards his own life, especially the incessant haggling with his creditors which was necessary in order to avoid imprisonment for debt. The close similarity between Haydon's sentiments, and the textually sanctioned reading of Cruikshank's caricature shows the extent to which it can be seen to support and uphold the self-image that Haydon projected in his dark moments.

¹²² 'Jupiter and the Mother: An Idyll', *Comic Almanack*, 1847, pp. 28-29.

However, 'Born a Genius and Born a Dwarf' goes far beyond its textual counterpart to provoke a variety of possible meanings. Like the earlier caricature, it is partly about freakishness: whereas in the Guy Fawkes image, Haydon was compared with a circus strongman, here he is contrasted with a circus midget. Again, Cruikshank recognises the link with showmanship which is so crucial to understanding Haydon's career. It is possible that the caricaturist may have been partly inspired by a passage in Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, in which the partiality of the London crowd for strange sights and monstrosities is attacked: 'a man, though in his person faultless as an aerial genius, might starve; but if stuck over with hideous warts like a porcupine, his fortune is made for ever'.¹²³ Using Haydon as such an example of the debased nature of the public taste causes ambiguities of meaning because, as we have seen, he was sometimes accused of engaging in the showman-like practices which Goldsmith so disliked. With that in mind, what is ostensibly a contrast between 'Genius' and 'Dwarf' can be interpreted as placing them on essentially the same level. Both are freaks of nature, born not made, who seek to profit by their difference from the norm. Tom Thumb lives in luxury because his particular variety of freakishness is more to the public taste than that exhibited (the pun is intended) by Haydon. So even if the caricature accepts Haydon's claims about his genius, it can take the gloss off those claims by denying him the right to special treatment due to his abilities. He has tried his best to promote himself, but has come up against a greater freak - Thumb - and a greater showman - Barnum - than he is.

The cleverness of 'Born a Genius' lies in the fact that, through its ambiguities, it lays bare some of the anxieties surrounding genius in the period. The word 'Genius' in the title can be read in different ways because it is impossible to give undeniable evidence

¹²³*The Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. by James Prior, 4 vols (London: John Murray, 1834), II, 181.

as to whether one is a genius or not - especially if, like Haydon, you claim that the prevalent cultural conditions militate against the expression of your inner power. Tom Thumb is clearly dwarfish (although technically he was a midget), but the Haydon image requires that the reader interpret it so as to ascertain whether 'genius' is meant as an accurate signifier. This of course is an impossible task: for some, Haydon's poverty reveals his lack of ability, for others it reveals the public's lack of taste. This problem of interpretation haunts the artist throughout his life: in his writings, paintings, and the conduct of his career, the theme of genius as martyr is expressed almost paradigmatically, but his continual assertion of this paradigm to a commercial society ultimately served to weaken its power - for genius is supposed to be disinterested and Haydon too often seemed like a showman seeking to puff his own merits for personal gain. This insoluble contradiction between an idealised notion of genius, and the realities of the commercial consumption of art is brilliantly explored by Cruikshank in the two caricatures.

However, it would be wrong to end this chapter without emphasising that Haydon withstood many years of indignity and extreme financial hardship not just because he wanted to be known as a great genius, but because he cared very deeply about the role that art had to play in contributing to the development of a healthy society. That he withstood these pressures until the age of sixty reveals a truly remarkable strength of character. Haydon liked to believe that his genius would be recognised by future generations, but of course posterity has met his claims to greatness with a resounding negative. This is perhaps due less to his flaws as a painter, but because, in the light of later developments in nineteenth-century art, his adherence to the 'Grand Style' can only seem utterly retrogressive. Whatever currency the term 'genius' has in the twenty-first century is largely based on its association with originality and

innovation, modern values that Haydon's art clearly failed to live up to. However, for the painter, genius had much more to do with a sense of personal power and vocation - it was about following a certain way of life and adhering to a particular set of 'truths' which it was necessary to communicate to the public. However wrong-headed his beliefs may seem to us, we should respect Haydon for his heroic attempt to live out his ideal.

CONCLUSION

My aim in writing this thesis has been to show throughout that representations of genius were integral to the self-fashioning of the literary magazines, and to that of their middle-class readers. Genius frequently became a cause of conflict between journals, writers, and audiences who sought it as a mark of distinction increasingly necessary in an overcrowded and contested literary marketplace. But it was also sometimes put forward as an idealised power which, by transcending economic and political strife, was a locus for social unity and rebirth, as in representations of Coleridge in *Fraser's Magazine*, or the *Blackwood's* account of Wordsworth. These Tory journals tried to turn genius into a locus of supposedly timeless, orthodox values. However, it also became an increasingly problematic concept in the 1820s and 30s because, try as they might, critics found it difficult to purify it of its links with alienation and transgression. At the same time, a new breed of professional writers wanted to close the gap between literature and normal society which Romanticism had seemed to open up, and some of them were suspicious of, for example, Shelley's eccentricities, or Coleridge's prophetic posturing. Thus the idea of genius was, it seems to me, attacked mainly on three fronts. First, from a conservative, idealist position which, by connecting it with moral responsibility and Christian spirituality, effectively weakened its vital associations with originality and revolutionary energy. Secondly, from an Evangelical perspective which represented it as little more than an excuse for unconventional or immoral behaviour. And thirdly, from radicals and literary professionals like Bulwer, and, to some extent, Hazlitt, who saw the vatic stance taken up by the Romantics and supported by some critics as unhelpful to the social and political progress of society.

What happened next? What happens to the idea of the creative artist as genius in the period from 1830 to 1860, in between, as it were, the last gasps of Romanticism, and the early stirrings of Aestheticism? There is no doubt that, despite the pressures that it was put under, particularly by the growing professionalisation of literature, it also lived on in various forms; for example, in the writings of Carlyle and Mill, and it would be useful to consider the extent to which the extreme valorisation of the creative artist by the Aesthetic Movement was influenced by this surviving Romantic tradition. It is fitting to end this thesis by referring to Carlyle and Mill, because in the figure of the Victorian 'sage' the ideal of Romantic genius was to some extent reaffirmed. I would have liked to have said a lot more about Carlyle than I have, spanning as he does periods which are too frequently considered in isolation from one another. It is certainly the case that in his early writings, he celebrates and elevates the role of the poet or man of letters as inspired genius. But it would be worth examining the extent to which, as his career develops, 'genius' becomes, in practice, subsumed under his concept of 'heroism', and whether or not he ends up replacing a valorisation of creativity and originality with one of personal strength and courage.

It would also be valuable to consider the ways in which the debates about genius and transgression which I discuss in chapter one feed into later nineteenth-century debates about the relationship between the individual and society. For Carlyle, the great man is to be applauded for imposing his vision on his fellows, regardless of their opinions or desires. In the figure of Raskolnikov, in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), Dostoevsky offers a murderous *reductio ad absurdum* of this view. Mill did not believe that the liberty of the many should be sacrificed to any individual, however brilliant or heroic, but in *On Liberty* (1859) he also expresses his fears that individual genius was threatened by the development of a conformist, democratic society. Hazlitt, writing in the 1820s, had

argued that genius should be on the side of the people against arbitrary power and in the following decade Bulwer had celebrated the role of the writer who was fully engaged with reformed society. But by the 1860s, despite the popularity of authors like Dickens and Tennyson, the perceived rift between the genius and the public which we find expressed by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats, was rapidly turning into a chasm. An increasing number of creative artists and critics began to see the real enemy of genius to be the rise of 'mass culture'. This, of course, had enormous consequences for the production of art and literature in the twentieth century. I hope that in this thesis I have shed some light on a period in which the battle lines were still being drawn up.

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