

Living as an Author in the Romantic Period:
Remuneration, Recognition and Self-Fashioning

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Matthew James Robert Sangster, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

The early nineteenth century was a transitional period for conceptions of authorship, which was not yet established as a solid profession or seen as the special province of the inspired genius. Authors therefore focused their ambitions on various different objectives, some seeking primarily to achieve the difficult goal of earning a living by publishing, some pursuing critical acclaim, others looking to access influential networks and a few attempting to redefine and reify conceptions of authorship. Achieving any of these ends was usually contingent on social connections, which dominated and validated the tightly-networked literary milieu.

After an introduction giving an overview of the ways in which authors and authorship were apprehended in the period, the thesis examines the financial and social aspects of building a career as an author, considering in three chapters the publishing industry contexts in which writers worked, the struggles faced by those who sought to prosper by the pen, and the methods employed by those exceptional figures who managed to achieve significant successes through literary labours. The fourth chapter focuses on the politicised reviewing culture of the period, looking at the ways in which ambitious quarterly critics sought to propagate political, professional and institutional authority through defining and censoring literary authors. The fifth chapter examines the networks in which authors were embedded and valued, paying particular attention to issues of publicity and privacy and to reciprocal processes of self-definition. The thesis concludes by briefly examining the ways in which the canonical Romantic poets' responses to the environment depicted in the rest of the thesis paved the way for kinds of enduring success which eluded many of the authors with whom they competed for popularity and plaudits during the 1800s and the 1810s.

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Note on Abbreviations and Attributions

As this investigation ranges widely rather than focusing intensively on a single author or group, I have given the references for books, periodicals and online resources fully in the footnotes rather than abbreviating. I have, however, made extensive use of certain manuscript repositories, which I have abbreviated thus:

BL – London, British Library

NLS – Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland

NYPL Berg – New York Public Library, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg
Collection of English and American Literature

NYPL Pforzheimer – New York Public Library, Carl H. Pforzheimer
Collection of Shelley and His Circle

RUL – Reading University Library

I have made particularly extensive use of the Archive of the Royal Literary Fund, held at the British Library (Loan 96 RLF). When referring to parts of this archive, I have generally omitted ‘BL’ and provided the title and the full number for the relevant series, file or item as given on the online catalogue (<<http://searcharchives.bl.uk>>).

Following standard conventions, I have abbreviated the *Oxford English Dictionary* as *OED* and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* as *ODNB*. In both cases, I have worked from the online versions (<www.oed.com> and <www.oxforddnb.com>). In discussing poorly-documented figures I have often drawn heavily on the *ODNB*; to provide appropriate credit, I have cited article references and access dates in the footnotes.

I have deviated from the MHRA style slightly when referring to periodicals, as the Volume (Year) system is less well-adapted to online repositories than it is to bound volumes. To aid looking-up, therefore, I have given enough relevant information to clearly identify the specific issue to which I am referring, generally adding, for example, the month of publication for monthlies or quarterlies. When referring to period Reviews, I have given the running title for longer articles where the journal

itself provides one; for all reviews I have given the page range to indicate their scope.

Unless otherwise indicated, attributions are taken from the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900* (originally edited by Walter Houghton; now maintained online at <http://wellesley.chadwyck.com>) for the *Edinburgh Review* and from Jonathan Cutmore (ed.), *The Quarterly Review Archive, Romantic Circles*, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/qr/> for the *Quarterly*.

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Introduction

What was an Author in the Romantic Period?

Calamities of Authors

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of men and women were seeking to pursue authorship as if it were a professional career. They were drawn by the wealth, influence and social cachet of high-profile successes and by the glorification of writing engendered through education and the periodical press, both of which were becoming increasingly accessible. However, while a few writers, mostly socially-advantaged gentlemen, were able to make their fortunes and reputations through literature, for most aspirants the realities of the writing life proved disappointing. Rather than receiving plaudits, their works were passed over by a censorious and hierarchal print culture. Rather than being showered with wealth, they received at best modest payments, seldom sufficient to serve as a sole means of support. As David Williams, the founder of the Literary Fund, lamented, those who believed that their talents would enable them to live comfortably as authors were generally ‘soon and miserably undeceived.’¹

It was partly to warn away some of these potential scribblers that Isaac D’Israeli published his 1812 miscellany *Calamities of Authors*, in which he scrutinised the many pitfalls of the literary life by drawing on examples ranging from Elizabethan writers through to his early nineteenth-century contemporaries. From the outset he took pains to contradict explicitly the impression that authors are generally successful and respected:

The title of AUTHOR still retains its seduction among our youth, and is consecrated by ages. Yet what affectionate parent would consent to see his son devote himself to his pen as a profession? The studies of a true Author insulate him in society, exacting daily labours; yet he will receive but little

¹ David Williams, *Claims of Literature: The Origin, Motives, Objects, and Transactions, of the Society for the Establishment of a Literary Fund* (London: William Miller, 1802), p. 62.

encouragement, and less remuneration. It will be found that the most successful Author can obtain no equivalent for the labours of his life [...] Authors themselves never discover this melancholy truth till they have yielded to an impulse, and adopted a profession, too late in life to resist the one, or abandon the other. Whoever labours without hope, a painful state to which Authors are at length reduced, may surely be placed among the most injured class in the community. Most Authors close their lives in apathy or despair, and too many live by means which few of them would not blush to describe.²

Throughout *Calamities* D'Israeli stressed that living by the pen is a risky and precarious form of existence. He did not dispute that literary history contained a number of examples of writers such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson who were able to earn respect, influence and significant payments by writing.³ He was an enthusiastic proponent of the proliferation of books and of the achievements of the marginalised writers he examined, using the term 'genius' liberally to describe many of them. Brilliance and innovation, though, in D'Israeli's formulation, had never guaranteed either fortune or respect. Indeed, he argued that novel works are likely to be met at first with critical distrust and popular incomprehension, a claim that chimes with William Wordsworth's 1815 assertion that 'every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so has it been, so will it continue to be.'⁴ Wordsworth, of course, could afford to wait (albeit impatiently) for recognition due to his non-literary incomes. Had the pen been his sole source of support, he would have been a very poor man, as in 1835 he estimated that over forty years of publishing had

² Isaac D'Israeli, *Calamities of Authors; including some Inquiries Respecting their Moral and Literary Characters*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1812), I, viii-ix.

³ Although these authors often asserted their claims in vexed dialogue with patrons and with others who sought control over written discourses; see Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 123-154, 220-245.

⁴ William Wordsworth, 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' (1815), in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), III, 80.

earned him ‘not above £1000.’⁵ Poor remuneration for all but sensations meant that destitution and being forced to produce hack work to make ends meet were common authorial fates. D’Israeli reserved considerable scorn for authors who compromised their principles to promote factions, describing them as ‘polluters of the press, who have turned a vestal into a prostitute; a grotesque race of famished buffoons or laughing assassins.’⁶ Of all the writers he depicts, though, only these clients, together with a few great names mentioned fleetingly, are described as being able to realise a significant income. D’Israeli had the leisure to discourse on literary misfortune only because he himself was financially independent, having inherited at the age of twenty-five the considerable fortune of his maternal grandmother, Esther Shiprut.⁷ Those without such means of support were likely to find that attempting to become a professional writer also meant becoming poor, maligned and embittered.

In this study I will demonstrate that D’Israeli’s gloom regarding the prospects of his contemporaries was to a large extent justified. The early nineteenth century is now read principally through the eyes of authors whose social statuses, financial positions and views of art were distinctly unusual at the time. While both professionalised writing and the idea of the Romantic genius developed earlier, it was not until the 1820s and 1830s that changes in periodical methodologies, printing technologies and the makeup of the reading nation brought these notions to wide acceptance. This study will demonstrate that living as an author in the early nineteenth century was by no means a Romantic prospect by reconstructing the commercial, critical and social paradigms that predominated from the late 1790s to the early 1820s. Drawing on evidence from publishers’ archives, authors’ personal papers and the Archive of the Royal Literary Fund, it will consider the consequences of the period’s common publication models for authors, examining the struggles of working writers and the means by which a small number of authors achieved outstanding successes. It will consider the ways that print criticism functioned, paying particular attention to the dominating influences of the party quarterlies, the

⁵ Quoted in J.W. Saunders, *The Profession of English Letters* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 171.

⁶ D’Israeli, I, 3.

⁷ James Ogden, *Isaac D’Israeli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 8.

Edinburgh Review and the *Quarterly Review*. Throughout, it will stress the crucial role played by sociability in achieving financial and critical success and in validating and valuing authors, texts and groupings.

I will introduce this investigation by setting out four important contexts for the more detailed studies that follow. Firstly, I will examine the ways that authorship was characterised and denigrated in the early nineteenth century before moving on to discuss the importance of personality-driven modes of reading, reviewing and social assertion. In the third section, I will address the ways that Romanticism and other modern critical ideologies have retrospectively reshaped notions of how authors in the period operated. Finally, I will examine the chronology of the major shifts in publishing, criticism and culture which determined the environments in which writers operated.

To begin, I want to consider the place of authorship in emergent discourses of professionalism. As Betty Schellenberg has it, ‘The term “professional” is often used in literary histories without explicit definition, but by implication simply to denote writing for financial remuneration, in opposition to the sorts of cultural and material rewards offered by coterie writing for manuscript circulation and publishing as part of a patronage system.’⁸ Schellenberg is right to resist both a purely financial view of professional activity and the binary she evokes. Even in modern literary culture patronage and coteries are entangled in complex ways with professionalism and with the securing of financial rewards, and this was certainly the case in the Romantic period. However, for an activity to comfortably establish itself as professional a certain critical mass of its participants must be able to support themselves financially and establish themselves socially by virtue of their participating in it. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, authorship did not comfortably answer to this description. Unlike ‘the three great Professions of Divinity, Law and Physick’, whose burgeoning adherents Joseph Addison worried over in 1711, authors lacked a defined area of expertise and a strong group identity.⁹

⁸ Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 13.

⁹ *The Spectator*, No. 21 (24 March 1711), [p. 41].

Each of these established professions ‘was built around access to a specialist corpus of professional knowledge’.¹⁰ Authors, by contrast, were valued for their particularity rather than for their having mastered a generic skill set. Publishing books did not require ‘prolonged training and a formal qualification’ or affiliating with contemporaries.¹¹ Authors were diverse, fractious and individualistic, and thus poorly positioned to lobby communally. Penelope Corfield argues of the professions that

the position[s] of different groups varied according to their sense of collective identity or otherwise and also according to their bargaining power. And that in turn depended upon the interaction of supply with the state of effective demand for professional services, whether that was generated by the state, by other institutions, by individual consumers, or by all these.¹²

The collective identity of authors was weak, their bargaining power as a group was consequently rarely asserted and the demand for their productions was tightly constrained as literary works were generally marketed and priced as luxury items. Consequently, the idea of professional authorship was often viewed with suspicion. To attempt to be a professional author was to risk being seen as a venal drudge. It was better, if one had the means, to be a gentleman who wrote, as Coleridge asserted when he advised in *Biographia Literaria* that aspirant authors should ‘Let literature be an honourable augmentation to your arms; but not constitute the coat, or fill the escutcheon!’¹³

This did not prevent authors from agitating for a respectable professional status. Schellenberg contends that during the latter half of the eighteenth century they asserted ‘the professional’s claim to offer a certain specialised set of skills to

¹⁰ Penelope J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 20.

¹¹ *OED*.

¹² Corfield, p. 179.

¹³ *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen ed. Kathleen Coburn, 14 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-93), VII.i, 229.

meet a defined need of society at large and to be deserving of a certain status and economic rewards as a result.¹⁴ She argues that ‘This movement is evidenced in the development of institutions such as the critical reviews and the Royal Literary Fund, and in the increasing typology and hierarchization of forms of authorship, and in the self-consciousness of growing prestige most famously expressed by Samuel Johnson and eagerly responded to [...] by the young Frances Burney.’ As I will demonstrate, however, by the early nineteenth century such developments had failed to establish an environment where aspiring writers could achieve prosperity or command respect by writing books and identifying themselves as authors. Reviews in the 1800s and the 1810s were less conducive to the construction of authorly professionalism than those Schellenberg examines, being controlled by politicised cabals and operating a kind of selective, personalised criticism often primarily motivated by extra-literary factors. The Literary Fund (tellingly, the ‘Royal’ sobriquet was granted only in 1842) was striking in that its committee and subscribers did not include many full-time writers. As I will discuss in detail in my second chapter, David Williams persevered with the Fund because he was convinced that valuable authorial achievements went unrecognised by society, but the Fund’s success at compensating for this failure was qualified. Writerly hierarchies were instituted, but many of those at the top were distinguished precisely because they were not professional authors. Lord Byron paraded his aristocracy and Francis Jeffrey and Walter Scott established themselves as lawyers before turning to literature. As Schellenberg and other critics such as Brian Goldberg have shown, writers certainly ‘measured themselves against their audiences, and against other professionals’, but in doing so they frequently expressed intense and justified anxieties about the value and status of their labour.¹⁵

For large parts of the Romantic period, then, authorship occupied a precarious position. As Dustin Griffin writes:

One of the ironies of literary history is that it was probably the combination of the hard-pressed humble eighteenth-century ‘authors by profession’ with

¹⁴ Schellenberg, p. 13.

¹⁵ Brian Goldberg, *The Lake Poets and Professional Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 4.

the successful gentleman-authors – who made up a relatively small proportion of the authors of the day but kept alive the idea that the true author was animated by genius and the goal of literary fame – that set the stage for the appearance, by the mid-nineteenth century, of the talented ‘man [or woman] of letters’ who might lead a well-rewarded life, and might aspire to be regarded as the equivalent of the members of the honourable learned professions.¹⁶

I concur with Griffin in dating the emergence of a widely recognised professional body of writers to the mid-nineteenth century. As Clifford Siskin notes, in 1831 only four hundred census respondents classed themselves as authors, compared to thirteen thousand in 1901. However, Siskin traces in prior decades the formation of the consensus which allowed this expansion, contending that ‘Victorian professionalism had to be written up, word by word, before it became “real” and widespread.’¹⁷ I would argue that the professionalisation Schellenberg and others have traced in eighteenth-century sources is often principally rhetorical, the result of this writing-up. It is also the case that authors writing prior to the French Revolution operated in a paradigm in many ways more conducive to the construction of writerly professionalism than those who operated in the fraught post-revolutionary environment. Paul Keen has identified in the 1790s ‘two critical transitions: a shift in focus from literature to authors, and a redefinition of politics as a struggle for professional distinction (the status of author) rather than for national agency (revolution, government reform, the rights of man).’¹⁸ The 1790s thus saw a move from a criticism focused on works to one centred on writers. The republic of letters became increasingly vexed as the establishment reacted to the threat radical authors were presumed to present. Authors struggling for distinction often did so by

¹⁶ Dustin Griffin, ‘The Rise of the Professional Author’, in Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume V: 1695-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 132-45 (p. 145).

¹⁷ Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain 1700-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 108.

¹⁸ Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 8.

condemning other writers and modes of writing, and this struggle placed the value of authorship itself under continuing sceptical scrutiny.

In the early nineteenth century, then, the nascent profession of letters, as Richard Cronin writes, ‘occupied an uncertain position: it neither guaranteed, like the church, the higher ranks of the armed services, and the higher branches of law and medicine, the gentlemanly status of its followers, nor did it preclude that status.’¹⁹ The fact that authorship did not in itself carry social cachet is a key indicator of its weak identity as a profession. Another indicator is the ease with which professionalism was mocked by authors who operated primarily as gentlemen. In *Beppo* Byron derides the idea of constituting oneself principally as a writer:

One hates an author that’s *all author*, fellows
In foolscap uniforms turned up with ink,
So very anxious, clever, fine, and jealous,
One don’t know what to say to them, or think,
Unless to puff them with a pair of bellows;
Of coxcombry’s worst coxcombs e’en the pink
Are preferable to these shreds of paper,
These unquenched snuffings of the midnight taper.

Of these same we see several, and of others,
Men of the world, who know the world like men,
S[co]tt, R[oger]s, M[oo]re, and all the better brothers,
Who think of something else besides the pen;
But for the children of the ‘mighty mother’s,’
The would-be wits and can’t-be gentlemen,
I leave them to their daily ‘tea is ready,’
Smug coterie, and literary lady.²⁰

¹⁹ Richard Cronin, *Paper Pellets: British Literary Culture after Waterloo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 144.

²⁰ *Beppo: a Venetian Story*, stanzas 75 and 76 (lines 593-608), from *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980-93), IV, 152-53.

Byron here suggests a different continuity to that which D'Israeli considers. While D'Israeli sees authorship as enduringly unprofitable, Byron, in figuring the persistence of the Grub Street hack and the bluestocking's sycophant, represents all-author authorship as enduringly déclassé. The continuity is stressed by his recalling the 'Mighty Mother' – the goddess Dulness – from Pope's four-book *Dunciad*, a text that also served as a model for William Gifford's attacks on the Della Cruscans in the *Baviad* and *Maeviad* and for Byron's ripostes in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.²¹ In all these works, the authors attacked are portrayed as ridiculous failures, their overriding focus on inky matters the antithesis of the diverse accomplishments required of a gentleman. For Byron the best writing comes from well-connected masculine circles, not from bookish obsession, inky-fingered diligence or feminised salon culture.

It is easy to take umbrage at Byron's dismissal of hard-working would-be professionals, particularly considering his own privileged social standing and the ways that his assertions chime with his own self-marketing.²² However, the prejudices he expresses were not untypical and reflected the reality that most of the highest-profile writers of the early nineteenth century did not depend on their literary earnings. The writers Byron lists as 'know[ing] the world like men' were three of the biggest-selling, best-connected and most-acclaimed writers of the period. Of the three, only Thomas Moore relied principally on his pen for his income, and his success depended to a large extent on his having access to the elite circles in which he promoted his poetry, performed his hugely profitable *Irish Melodies* and made the contacts which allowed him to publish lucrative biographical writings in the

²¹ 'The Mighty Mother, and her Son, who brings/The Smithfield Muses to the ear of Kings/I sing.' From *The Dunciad*, in *Four Books*, I, lines 1-3, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope Volume V: The Dunciad*, ed. James Sutherland, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1953), pp. 267-68.

²² See Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) for accounts of Byron's canny manipulation of his aristocratic credentials and collusions with the expectations of his publishers and audiences. See also the final section of Chapter Three.

1820s. Walter Scott was established comfortably before he ever published, having acquired a very substantial income through his family, his legal practice, his marriage and the patronage of the Duke of Buccleuch.²³ Samuel Rogers, author of *The Pleasures of Memory* and a pivotal figure in literary society, had a significant interest in his family's profitable bank and after his father's death in 1793 'found himself possessed of £5000 a year.'²⁴ This granted him the financial muscle to publish and control his own works, a rare privilege. Many other popular and respected authors lived off smaller private incomes, and patronage remained invaluable for writers without independent means. A few writers were supported directly by the state – Robert Southey and Thomas Campbell were both awarded government pensions of £200 a year, Campbell in his late twenties and Southey in his early thirties.²⁵ Direct and indirect support from wealthy individuals also remained a factor, examples including William Hayley's support for William Blake and Charlotte Smith, Tom and Josiah Wedgewood's providing Samuel Taylor Coleridge with an annuity of £150, and Sir William Lowther's securing for Wordsworth the position of distributor of stamps after perceiving the poet's discomfort at the idea of more direct support.²⁶

Such incomes, and the connections that having them entailed, granted their possessors freedom to pursue literature in ways denied to aspirant commercial writers. While at the end of the eighteenth century a far larger potential readership for literary work existed than a hundred years before, books by contemporary writers, as William St Clair's groundbreaking work has shown, were still beyond the

²³ I discuss the careers of Moore and Scott in detail in Chapter Three.

²⁴ Richard Garnett, 'Rogers, Samuel (1763–1855)', rev. Paul Baines, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23997>> [accessed 21 Sept 2010].

²⁵ Geoffrey Carnall, 'Campbell, Thomas (1777–1844)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4534>> [accessed 1 Oct 2010]; Geoffrey Carnall, 'Southey, Robert (1774–1843)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26056>> [accessed 1 Oct 2010].

²⁶ Vivienne W. Painting, 'Hayley, William (1745–1820)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12769>> [accessed 1 Oct 2010]; Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 176–78; Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Viking, 2000), pp. 438, 440–41, 448–49.

means of most working men and women.²⁷ The small editions of five hundred or a thousand copies in which most books were printed required a high capital outlay from the publisher and offered a relatively limited return, usually only turning a profit after about 60% of the edition had sold through.²⁸ Savings from printing more copies were minor and this, combined with the cost of storing unsold stock, meant that publishers were unwilling to gamble on longer runs until technological innovations brought costs down in the 1820s. This kept prices high, editions small, audiences limited and authors who depended on their works for their income generally poor. Writers who needed money were therefore often forced to produce work at a very high rate; generally this impeded their quality of life, often necessitating borrowing, extreme thrift and writing for long periods in poor light. Byron's 'midnight taper' was burnt at the cost of the eyesight of more than a few.²⁹ The usual recourses of those who required a steady income were writing novels in established genres such as the gothic, producing large volumes of periodical and newspaper journalism or authoring textbooks or other non-fiction for mass consumption. Such low-status works seldom brought fame, social plaudits or vast payments.

Rather than being the occupation of a professional literary class, respectable authorship, particularly of poetry, was largely the preserve of privileged gentlemen. The high prices of books meant that gentlemen were also the primary purchasers of many types of literature, so their opinions and values had an enormous influence in mediating the content and reception of texts. Like Byron, gentlemanly mediators were often suspicious of those who achieved popularity outside their networks. This suspicion bred an aggressive rhetoric which figured authorial labour as a mindless, proliferating contagion, exemplified by Gifford's attack on Robert Merry (Della Crusca) in the *Baviad*:

Lo, DELLA CRUSCA ! In his closet pent,

²⁷ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); see especially pp. 193-96.

²⁸ I examine the practices of the publishing industry in detail in Chapter One.

²⁹ See my discussion of Robert Heron in Chapter Two.

He toils to give the crude conception vent.
Abortive thoughts that right and wrong confound,
Truth sacrific'd to letters, sense to sound ;
False glare, incongruous images, combine
And noise and nonsense clatter through the line.³⁰

In Gifford's satire Merry's toil creates only sickness and disorder. His work is portrayed as overabundant to the point of incoherence, lacking the clarifying structure of an established form or a guiding intelligence. In levelling such criticisms of literary labour Gifford was on shaky ground. The son of poor parents orphaned at an early age, he had been sent to sea as a child for a time, removed from schooling and apprenticed to a shoemaker before his early poetry attracted the attention of the surgeon William Cookesley.³¹ Cookesley's interest propelled him to Oxford where he acquired the literary skills that led to his embarking on a translation of Juvenal and receiving sustained patronage from Lord Richard Grosvenor. In the *Baviad*, however, he shields himself from counteraccusations by following the largely unimpeachable examples of Pope and Juvenal and by lacing his poem with scholarly notes which emphasise his classical erudition and his university education. Rather than positioning himself as an author, Gifford assumed the mantles of the scholar and the gentleman in order to censure the popular success of the Della Cruscans in a largely successful attempt to destroy their reputations.

Gifford's *Baviad* is a particularly interesting example as it was the launching pad for a successful critical career that would see Gifford become the editor of the influential *Anti-Jacobin* between 1797 and 1798 and of the more enduring *Quarterly Review* from 1809. In both publications Gifford penned and endorsed similarly virulent attacks on radicals and Whigs. The excitement provoked by the accusatory, *ad hominem* mode he employed made that mode a key tool for all factions in the increasingly politicised reviewing culture. Gifford's Whiggish opposite number,

³⁰ William Gifford, *The Baviad*, Book II, lines 39-44, from *The Baviad, and Maeviad*, new ed. (London: J. Wright, 1797), pp. 12-14.

³¹ See John Strachen (ed.), *British Satire 1785-1840: Volume 4: Gifford and the Della Cruscans* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), p. xiv-xvi.

Francis Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh Review*, used very similar language to damn Thomas Moore's 1806 volume, portraying his efforts as compulsive and impure:

he labours with a perseverance at once ludicrous and detestable. He may be seen in every page running round the paltry circle of his seductions with incredible zeal and anxiety, and stimulating his jaded fancy for new images of impurity, with as much melancholy industry as ever outcast of the muses hunted for epithets or metre.³²

Like Byron's 'would-be wits and can't-be gentlemen' Moore in this passage is rhetorically made all-author, a ridiculous and unworthy obsessive exposed by the gaze of his stern and civic-minded judge. By diagnosing corruption in others, literary auditors like Jeffrey bolstered their individual and institutional claims for discernment and moral probity. This tactic remained common in later decades. In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) Hazlitt calls Gifford 'a critic of the last age', but belies this characterisation by describing him as being

possessed of that sort of learning which is likely to result from an over-anxious desire to supply the want of the first rudiments of education: that sort of wit which is the offspring of ill-humour or bodily pain: that sort of sense which arises from a spirit of contradiction and a disposition to cavil at and dispute the opinions of others: and that sort of reputation which is the consequence of bowing to established authority and ministerial influence.³³

Hazlitt's tit-for-tat essay enacts a rhetorical victory over Gifford just as the *Baviad* enacts one over the Della Crusicans, but in both works the idea of the working author loses out, authorial labour being shown to create not products of genius but tainted, inadequate fruits. In its review of Hazlitt's book *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* attacked him in very similar terms: 'He seems to live in the very lowest society, for

³² [Francis Jeffrey], 'Moore's *Poems*', *Edinburgh Review*, 8 (July 1806), pp. 456-65 (p. 457).

³³ William Hazlitt, 'Mr. Gifford', in *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930-34), XI, 117.

he has for years absolutely *been on the Press*.³⁴ As Richard Cronin remarks, this ‘leaves one wondering where the writers for *Blackwood’s* imagined they had been.’³⁵ One might answer that the key position in this discourse was to be on the attack, focusing on the failings of others while assuming a posture of superiority oneself, precluding others questioning one’s own position by asserting a presence in ‘better circles’.³⁶

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, then, being condemned as all-author rather than recognised as someone of consequence who wrote was often socially calamitous. The difficulties of making a living from the market and the importance of connections for getting the best jobs and securing good reviews meant that the literary playing field remained far from level. Retractions and regressions from the freedoms of the eighteenth century had particular consequences for women, whose position in literary society worsened significantly. As Elizabeth Eger has argued, the largely positive reception enjoyed by the Bluestocking circle was a fleeting phenomenon; subsequently, ‘the cultural anxiety caused by women’s very success in the public sphere of letters caused a new generation [...] to displace women from their positions of power.’³⁷ The high profiles of female radicals after the French Revolution strengthened this conservative reaction. A major tool in the displacement of women was the aggressive, politicised and widely-read criticism propagated by the quarterlies. The masculine circles that controlled these Reviews generally either neglected or patronised women and often lambasted female writers who ventured into political discourse, as happened when Anna Laetitia Barbauld published *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, her bold vision of England’s eventual ruin. The notorious anonymous review in the *Quarterly* now attributed to John Wilson Croker charged her with having ‘wandered from the course in which she was respectable and useful’ and facetiously belittled her efforts: ‘we had hoped, indeed,

³⁴ ‘Works of the First Importance’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 17 (March 1825), pp. 362-65 (p. 362.)

³⁵ Cronin, p. 137.

³⁶ *Blackwood’s*, Ibid.

³⁷ Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 209.

that the empire might have been saved without the intervention of a lady author.³⁸ The sting here is in ‘author’ as well as ‘lady’; both denote classes unfit to influence affairs of state. Croker deplores what he depicts as political interventions from Barbauld and denies that she has any facility for operating in masculine modes: ‘we must take the liberty of warning her to desist from satire, which indeed is satire on herself alone.’³⁹ In taking such liberties, Croker both indicated and exercised the strength arrogated by the anonymous periodical reviewer, placing Barbauld, as William Keach puts it, ‘outside both the “conjugal family” and the “public sphere”’.⁴⁰ The limited circulation Barbauld’s poem achieved attests to such reviews’ tangible influence. Barbauld published no further volumes of poetry.

The reviewers’ power was by no means absolute. Some very popular writers were able to make light of periodical attacks. Lady Morgan (née Sydney Owenson) baited reviewers partly as a promotional strategy. Croker reviewed her novel *The Wild Irish Girl* and her study *France* extremely negatively, but the virulent nature of his attacks, instead of warning readers off the books, ended up boosting their sales.⁴¹ Morgan issued spirited responses to Croker in pamphlets and caricatured him as the odious Conway Townsend Crawley ‘with his brogue and effrontery’ in her novel *Florence Macarthy*.⁴² By the time he came to review Morgan’s *Italy* in 1821, Croker refused to print any excerpts from her work, writing that ‘Buried in the lead of her ponderous quartos, the corruption is inoffensive – any examination would only serve to let the effluvia escape, and in some degree endanger the public

³⁸ [John Wilson Croker], ‘Mrs. Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*’, *Quarterly Review*, 7 (June 1812), pp. 309-13 (p. 309).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁴⁰ William Keach, ‘A Regency Prophecy and the End of Anna Barbauld’s Career’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (Winter 1994), pp. 569-77 (p. 571).

⁴¹ Ina Ferris gives an excellent account of Croker’s reviews and the ways in which ‘the critical terms in which [Morgan] was cast locate her within the negative paradigm of female reading’ in *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 45-52 (p. 46).

⁴² Sydney, Lady Morgan, *Florence Macarthy: An Irish Tale*, 4 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1819), III, 133.

health.⁴³ Instead he reviewed her book's advertisements, arguing that she was attempting to draw interest to her languishing works based on their ability to '*put all the race of intolerant critics into a STATE of FURY.*'⁴⁴ Morgan herself was confident in asserting her worth, writing that 'the *price* given for my last *venture* from Italy is the best answer to those who endeavoured to undervalue the cargo.'⁴⁵ The innovative populist publisher Henry Colburn had made her 'a dashing offer of two thousand pounds' for the book, and was himself more than happy with the transaction, writing to *The Times* that

I am ready to prove, that five hundred copies of this work were sold on the first day of publication; that more copies have been disposed of during the last month, and since the appearance of the 'Quarterly Review,' than in any preceding one since the day of publication; that a new edition is in preparation; that two editions, amounting to 4000 copies, have been printed at Paris, and another in Belgium [...] I shall be most happy to receive from the author another work of equal interest, on the same terms.⁴⁶

Popularity could thus serve a shield against critical malignity. Devoted readers could affirm that writer's value in ways that critics found difficult to counteract without employing the risky strategy of belittling the abilities of those readers. However, while acquiring large readerships became easier as the century progressed, these were the exception rather than the rule. Lady Morgans were few and far between. Most authors could only aspire to such popularity.

Instead, grim failures were common, as attested to by the extensive records of the Literary Fund, which received applications from over 650 distressed authors between 1790 and 1830. Writers often protested their embarrassment at having to apply, but apply they did in any case, and in large numbers, testament to the fleeting

⁴³ [John Wilson Croker], 'Lady Morgan's *Italy*', *Quarterly Review*, 25 (July 1821), pp. 529-34 (p. 529).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁴⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 534.

⁴⁶ Quoted in William John Fitzpatrick, *Lady Morgan: Her Career, Literary and Personal* (London; Charles J. Skeet, 1860), pp. 206, 224.

nature of literary rewards. Common in these letters are fates of writers like William Henry Hall ‘an unfortunate, and it may be added, undone gentleman, who was once, by his literary productions an ornament to society, but whose bodily afflictions and whose poverty have driven him to the last state of human sorrow and wretchedness, in an obscure garret, on a dying bed.’⁴⁷ Lady Frances Chambers wrote in 1802 on behalf of Charlotte Lennox, author of the *Female Quixote*, ‘who is in great distress for the common necessaries of life & is too ill & now too old to assist herself in any way.’⁴⁸ The young Thomas Love Peacock was profoundly depressed by the failure of his early works, causing his friend Edward Hookham to write to the Fund that

I have been most intimately acquainted with M^r Peacock for six years & not unfrequently during that period I have had but too just reason to dread that the fate of Chatterton might be that of Peacock. This inference I have drawn not only from the distressed state of mind in which I have seen him, but likewise from the tone of despondency which breathes throughout many of his letters to me.⁴⁹

The autobiography of William Jerdan, the editor and part-owner of the *Literary Gazette* and a Literary Fund committee member from 1817, spends a good part of its four volumes bemoaning the inconsistencies of his own relatively successful career, stressing the uncertainties that plagued even well-connected authors. In one of a number of tragic examples from his work for the Fund he describes how on responding to a letter requesting urgent aid he

found, in a single apartment, a broker’s man in possession of an execution for rent, a dead child of two or three years of age on a rug in a corner, a living mother and a living baby on the semblance of a bed, covered with a horse-cloth, on the floor, and the “Literary Man,” who had really written

⁴⁷ William Hall to the Committee of the Literary Fund, 11 January 1808, Loan 96 RLF 1/74/3.

⁴⁸ Lady Frances Chambers to David Williams, 20 January 1802, Loan 96 RLF 1/12/8.

⁴⁹ Edward Thomas Hookham to the Committee of the Literary Fund, 20 May 1812, Loan 96 RLF 1/274/4; see also Nicholas A. Joukovsky, ‘Peacock Before *Headlong Hall*: A New Look at his Early Years’, *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin*, 36 (1985), pp. 1-40.

some creditable productions, sitting stupefied, like an impersonation of Apathy, on a broken chair.⁵⁰

Jerdan also quotes Charles Lamb's exclamation to the Quaker poet Bernard Barton on hearing that Barton was thinking of leaving his bank position and throwing himself into the realm of letters: 'Throw yourself rather, my dear sir, from the Tarpeian Rock, slap down headlong upon iron spikes.'⁵¹ To weigh against the Morgans, Scotts and Byrons who successfully asserted authorial selves are hundreds for whom the dream of making a respectable living as an author had curdled into nightmares of poverty, neglect, opprobrium and despair.

Social Readers, Social Writers

While the prosperous author and the mass audience were ideas to conjure with at the end of the eighteenth century, then, they were fully realised in the marketplace considerably later. The reality of respectable professional authorship and the ideal of the inspired, asocial poet were still in the early stages of their development. Without clearly-defined social or aesthetic lineaments to assume, authors were obliged to construct writing selves that were individual, contingent and personalised. These selves operated based on assumptions which were fundamentally different to those which generally underpin the twentieth-century critical tradition.

Roland Barthes, in a famous polemical formulation, argues that 'The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.'⁵² For readers to be able fully to engage with a text as 'a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash', he argues that the 'final signified'

⁵⁰ William Jerdan, *The Autobiography of William Jerdan*, 4 vols (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1852-53), IV, 38.

⁵¹ Jerdan, IV, 42.

⁵² Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', trans. Stephen Heath, in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (Harlow: Longman, 1988), pp. 167-72 (p. 172).

which the Author represents must be removed.⁵³ Barthes' essay could be seen as the culmination of a movement with its roots in Romanticism's reification of literature, which went hand-in-hand with a conceptual retreat from the marketplace and from seeing texts as aspects of sociability. Equally, though, it rejects the Romantic notion of the author as 'autonomous, original and expressive', a view which, as Andrew Bennett has pointed out, casts a long shadow despite its being both intrinsically paradoxical and 'a fiction of subsequent critical reception'.⁵⁴ Barthes' essay is thus intrinsically post-Romantic, the paradigms of authorship it suggests and responds to very different from those current in the early nineteenth century. One of the tasks of this investigation, focused as it is on the business of living as an author, will be to recover these older, less theoretical paradigms.

Authors and critics in the tightly-networked literary society of the early nineteenth century were intensely aware of each other as living people who exerted social influence. As Jeffrey Cox writes, 'a literary work is both a product and producer of a web of human relations.'⁵⁵ Books exist in complex metonymic relationships with their authors and those by living writers can be seen as aspects of beings who can be personally encountered, befriended or opposed. The early nineteenth-century Reviews predominantly read works in this fashion, censoring books as if they uncomplicatedly represented their authors' beliefs and seeking to recruit writers and readers to their causes by lavishing or withholding praise. This mode of apprehension was by no means limited to the Reviews; it reflects the status of writing in a literate society that was relatively small in size and in which complex professionalising theories of the division between text and author had not yet taken hold. In this literary culture, intentionality was an assumption rather than a fallacy.⁵⁶ It certainly would not have generally occurred to readers to ask, as Michel Foucault

⁵³ Barthes, p 170, 171.

⁵⁴ Andrew Bennett, *The Author* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 56, 71.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 14.

⁵⁶ See William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', *Sewanee Review*, 54 (Summer 1946), pp. 468-88.

does, following Samuel Beckett, ‘What difference does it make who is speaking?’⁵⁷ As Gregory Dart has written, the early nineteenth century ‘thought of itself as “an age of personality”’: no period either before or since seems to have been so entirely predisposed to correlate the fate of nations and the dynamics of personal character.⁵⁸ Writers were often read precisely because of who they were and readers’ responses to books were highly mediated by their previous knowledge of their authors. One of the main reasons why anonymous production was so prevalent was that acknowledged works could easily be employed to damage author’ reputations, impugn their morality or compromise their social standings.

Excellent evidence of the readerly propensity for treating books as extensions of their authors can be found in H.J. Jackson’s work on marginalia. In their annotations readers commonly addressed books as beings, particularly when they were at their most impassioned and engaged:

In unguarded moments, or under the strong impression that the book was talking to them, readers talked back to their books. All the little gestures of approval, like Coleridge’s “Right!” and “Excellent!” could be understood in this way, as could their opposites. Companionship does not mean automatic agreement. An even plainer sign is the direct address “you.”⁵⁹

Jackson gives numerous examples of this habit, one of the most compelling being her account of Blake arguing with Sir Joshua Reynolds. In the front of his copy of Reynolds’ *Works* Blake added an inscription stating that ““This Man was Hired to Depress Art This is the Opinion of Will Blake my Proofs of this Opinion are given in the following Notes.””⁶⁰ Blake read his *bête noire*’s book as evidencing Reynolds’ hated self, to the point where he wilfully misread the parts with which he

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’, trans. Joseph V. Harari, in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (Harlow: Longman, 1988), pp. 197-210 (p. 198).

⁵⁸ Gregory Dart, ‘Hazlitt and Biography’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 29:4 (2000), pp. 338-48 (p. 338).

⁵⁹ H.J. Jackson, *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 124.

⁶⁰ Blake’s annotation to the frontispiece of the first volume of *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 3 vols (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), BL C.45.e.18-20. Reproduced in Jackson, p. 155.

agreed: as Jackson writes, ‘Even when Blake grudgingly expresses admiration for an idea or expression in the text, he tends to turn it into a complaint that Reynolds is contradicting himself, thereby proving that he is weak and wanting in self-knowledge’.⁶¹ The good things about the book are made, by Blake’s annotations, evidence of Reynolds’ personal duplicity. By writing himself into the book, Blake encounters and resists Reynolds, opposing Reynolds’ subjectivity with his own. Jackson argues that such annotations allowed Blake to ‘*publish* his quarrel with the author as the book circulated’, noting that the lending of annotated works was a common part of literary friendship.⁶² Annotators such as Blake thus established their styles and identities through dialogue with the printed identities of others. The dissemination of such self-definitions was a crucial part of establishing both one’s reputation and one’s valuable particularity.

Robert Southey indulged in some similar self-fashioning while editing the *Remains of Henry Kirke White* (itself a title that indicates the consonance between the book’s contents and their author). Despite his purpose ostensibly being to give an account of Kirke White’s life, Southey regularly takes opportunities to slip himself into the narrative. Discussing his subject’s reaction to a ferocious critique, he opines that ‘An author is proof against reviewing, when, like myself, he has been reviewed above seventy times’, boasting both of the attention he has drawn and of the success of his own self-definitions, which have outweighed any single review.⁶³ Nevertheless, he continues obsessively to write himself. His account of Kirke White represented an opportunity to inscribe both his own character and that of his subject, to define both as reading contexts in order to constrain later interpretations. Inscribing selves in paratextual apparatus was a common practice – consider the profusion of prefaces and notes which regularly girded poetry, contextualising the

⁶¹ Jackson, p. 167.

⁶² Jackson, p. 169.

⁶³ *The Remains of Henry Kirke White; with an Account of his Life*, ed. Robert Southey, 2 vols (London: Vernor, Hood, and Sharpe; Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme; J. Dighton, T. Barret, and J. Nicholson, Cambridge; and W. Dunn and S. Tupman, Nottingham, 1807), I, 23.

verse with assertions of character, intention or factual truth.⁶⁴ In addressing Kirke White, Southey writes that it is his ‘fortune to lay before the world some account of one [...] whose virtues were as admirable as his genius.’⁶⁵ Kirke White’s personal qualities are thus placed on a level with his effusions and serve to guarantee his value, a value in which Southey implicates himself through describing Kirke White’s appreciation of his friendship and through recounting incidents such as his finding ‘a sonnet addressed to myself’ among Kirke White’s unpublished papers.⁶⁶ However, throughout his account, Southey is careful to distinguish his own opinions from his subject’s:

Of his fervent piety, his letters, his prayers, and his hymns, will afford ample and interesting proofs. I must be permitted to say, that my own views of the religion of Jesus Christ differ essentially from the system of belief which he had adopted; but, having said this, it is indeed my anxious wish to do full justice to piety so fervent.⁶⁷

While Southey is keen to claim that Kirke White’s faith allowed him to ‘keep watch over his heart’ and ‘correct the few symptoms, which it ever displayed, of human imperfection’, he nonetheless feels obligated to differentiate his own religious position, fully aware that he is implicated in the text he edits and must control as far as possible the ways it can be read back onto him.

Even those writers closely involved with theorising genius as a method of legitimating literary works were conscious that their contemporaries often judged them based on perceptions of their personalities and morals. Coleridge was deeply aware of the extent to which selves were read into and out of books, as is evidenced in a series of letters he wrote to Francis Jeffrey in 1808. After complaining in the

⁶⁴ To cite a few canonical examples, think of the various advertisements and prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads*, of Byron’s extensive footnoting in *English Bards* and *Childe Harold* and of Shelley’s obsessive prefatory self-fashioning.

⁶⁵ *Remains*, I, 1.

⁶⁶ *Remains*, I, 53.

⁶⁷ *Remains*, I, 58.

first of these that Jeffrey had been ‘perhaps rather unwarrant[ab]ly, severe’ on his ‘morals and understanding’, Coleridge goes on to ‘intreat – for the sake of man-kind – an honorable review of Mr Clarkson’s History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. – I know the man – and if you knew him you, I am sure, would revere him – and your reverence of him, as an agent, would almost supersede all Judgment of him as a mere literary man.’⁶⁸ Coleridge here contends that Thomas Clarkson should not be read cruelly or crudely as an author, as this represents only a subordinate part of his social existence. He worries that by publishing Clarkson has opened himself up to being read uncharitably, to having his self reconstructed through the lens of his prose. Earlier in the letter, Coleridge expresses this anxiety with regard to his own work, assuring Jeffrey that ‘If you knew me, you would yourself smile at some of the charges, which, I am told, you have burthened on me’. These two interlinked statements both assert the inadequate nature of readings that view texts as definitive summations of their authors. While Coleridge can be read solely off the page, such a reading, in his eyes, is necessarily limited and misleading. Reading someone less self-consciously authorly, like Clarkson, in this way is presented as outright irresponsible.

In a second letter written a couple of months later Coleridge clarified the ways that he saw himself positioned with respect to public opinion:

severe & long continued bodily disease exacerbated by disappointment in the great Hope of my Life had rendered me insensible to blame and praise even to a faulty degree, unless they proceeded from the one or two who love me. The entrance-passage to my Heart is choked up with heavy lumber – & I am thus barricaded ~~myself~~ against attacks, which, doubtless, I should otherwise have felt as keenly as most men. Instead of censuring a certain quantum of irritability respecting the reception of published composition, I rather envy it – it becomes ludicrous then only, when it is disavowed, and

⁶⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Francis Jeffrey, 23 May 1808 (NYPL Berg 211218B A331). Printed as letter 710 in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-1971), III, 116-17. The texts given here and for the following two letters are my transcriptions, which differ from Griggs’ in their representation of Coleridge’s punctuation and by including deletions which Griggs silently omits.

the opposite Temper pretended to/. The ass's Skin is almost scourge-proof – while the Elephant's thrills under the movements of every fly, that runs over it.⁶⁹

Reviews, then, cannot hurt Coleridge, or so he says. Misreading is what he expects, except from a few close to him. In his denial, though, he seeks to fascinate and impress through the aptness of his language, the mystery of his great disappointment and the unspecified nature of his unfortunate illness. Coleridge performs himself for Jeffrey, making himself an individual with uncommon powers, uncommon problems and an uncommon ability to resist the blandishments of general society. Here nascent Romantic subjectivity blends with a recognition that its time has not yet come, a recognition that Coleridge represents both a deviation from the common view of authors and a stronger articulation of writerly independence than society is prepared to accept.

The social connection Coleridge established with Jeffrey through these exchanges had two beneficial results as far as his literary career was concerned. A later letter thanked Jeffrey for his 'kindness on the arrival of the Prospectuses'.⁷⁰ These prospectuses were for Coleridge's new journal, *The Friend*, and Jeffrey's distributing them to friends in Edinburgh and adding his own name to the subscription list were significant contributions to Coleridge's nascent project. The letter also thanks Jeffrey for his 'act of personal kindness' in printing Coleridge's own review of Clarkson in the *Edinburgh* and paying him the considerable sum of twenty guineas for the contribution. Coleridge's private defence of Clarkson thus became the *Edinburgh's* public position, albeit in a form mediated by Jeffrey's editorial interventions and agenda.⁷¹ Written selves were thus constantly asserted and contested both by their initiators and their interpreters. Those who could gain

⁶⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Francis Jeffrey, 20 July 1808 (NYPL Berg 211210 B A332). Letter 712 in Griggs (III, 118-19).

⁷⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Francis Jeffrey, 14 December 1808 (NYPL Berg 212877B A334). Letter 732 in Griggs (III, 148-50).

⁷¹ [Samuel Taylor Coleridge], 'Clarkson's *History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade*', *Edinburgh Review*, 12 (July 1808), pp. 355-79.

access to influential readerships enjoyed enormous advantages in defining their selves and the selves of others.

Reading writers onto and out of their works could have very serious consequences. Richard Cronin sees the late 1810s and early 1820s as ‘a period constituted not, as some have suggested, by the doctrine of sympathy that its leading writers held in common but by the antagonisms that divided them’ and gives vivid depictions of several fatal duels fought over printed slights.⁷² The authors of attacks would sometimes deny that their assaults reflected badly on the personal characters of their victims. John Gibson Lockhart, justifying his attacks on Leigh Hunt, stated disingenuously that ‘When I charged you with depraved morality, obscenity, and indecency, I spoke not of Leigh Hunt as a man. I deny the fact, – I have no reason to doubt that your private character is respectable; but I judged you from your works’.⁷³ However, Lockhart’s whole article is predicated on the intrinsic sociability of writing, his metaphors constantly turning to social acts. He attributes his reply to ‘common civility’ and censures Hunt’s rudeness. He asserts that his article was but ‘the first paragraph of [Hunt’s] indictment’, the opening statement in a trial before ‘the impartial jury of your country.’ He repeatedly personifies Hunt – as an expeller of ‘foaming exclamations’, as a ‘testy person’, as being possessed of excessive ‘personal vanity’, as a man with ‘a partiality for indecent subjects’, as a ‘poet vastly inferior to Wordsworth, Byron and Moore.’⁷⁴ Hunt’s private character is constantly implied. His writing is read as a social process, mapped into networks and hierarchies and rhetorically brought under the authority of institutions. Literature here is in no way seen as something apart but is instead shown to be intrinsically linked with its author, the two powerfully and suggestively interchangeable. In the most extreme cases, such as the article which Byron called the ‘homicide review of J. Keats’, attacks were imagined to be capable of literally killing authors.⁷⁵ Writing

⁷² Cronin, p. 13.

⁷³ [John Gibson Lockhart], ‘Letter from Z. To Mr. Leigh Hunt’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 10 (January 1818), p. 416.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 414-15.

⁷⁵ *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-94), VIII, 173.

was thus potentially both a powerful mode of social assertion and a source of immense personal vulnerability, a vulnerability which could lead to shattered reputations, compromised financial affairs and, in certain vexed cases, to the loss of life itself.

Romanticism and Retrospection

The texts and examples cited above suggest a somewhat different picture of the author in what is generally termed the Romantic period than the image propagated by the poets from whom the period takes its title. The Big Six (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Byron, Shelley and Keats) have come down to us as authors who are magnificently all-author, synonymous with poetry, achievement and timeless virtue. Wordsworth in particular made himself through his relentless self-presentations the paragon of a kind of writing that claims a transcendent value detached from the operations of the market and from the appraisals of contemporaries. While Wordsworth is perhaps the most extreme case, all the canonical Romantics took care in their works to distinguish themselves from the common ruck. Their self-fashioning rhetoric tends to elevate them above financial matters and talks down the importance of popularity and profession. Literary culture has largely colluded with them by hailing them as geniuses, avatars of their age, *sui generis*.

However, prior to the 1820s, Romantic success was a nascent, conflicted and little-recognised formulation. Most of the writers living through what we now term the Romantic period would not have thought of themselves as living through anything of the kind. As Michael Gamer writes, the term is ‘misleading because it posits as representative writers who literally do not represent the range of writing of these decades.’⁷⁶ In the words of Peter T. Murphy, the conventional model of Romanticism ‘quite simply excludes all of the most popular poets of the period, with

⁷⁶ Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 5.

the exception of Byron.⁷⁷ In a table of poetry sales in the early nineteenth century Wordsworth and Coleridge would be placed low, Keats and Shelley lower and Blake would hardly figure. Of the six only Byron was the recipient of widespread critical acclaim, although revelations about his personal life and the controversial nature of his works made him more divisive later in his career. Blake was scarcely commented on as an author in print, Wordsworth and Coleridge both received a large number of conflicted and negative reviews and Keats and Shelley, if not killed by critics' pens, were certainly severely compromised in the eyes of readers by vitriolic responses to their works and lives.

Rather than being garlanded when they wrote, then, five of the six major Romantics achieved their prominence due to processes of canonisation which they themselves set in motion through incorporating self-justificatory theories into their works. The belated acceptance of these arguments has inevitably coloured critical depictions. Jerome McGann's influential thesis in *The Romantic Ideology* is that criticism of Romantic-period authors is often marred by 'an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations.'⁷⁸ Clifford Siskin writes similarly that 'almost all our literary histories of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are themselves Romantic. Like the texts they propose to interpret, they tell tales of lyrical development.'⁷⁹ Since the values of Romanticism are those that ground modern definitions of literary value and from which professional academic discourse developed, the poets benefit from being rooted at the heart of the canon. However, the sense of transhistorical literary worth which they inculcated and benefit from belies the insecure positions they occupied in the society and literary culture in which they lived and worked. The Romantics' careers harked back to older conservative models of authorship and blazed a trail towards more exalted places for

⁷⁷ Peter T. Murphy, 'Climbing Parnassus, & Falling Off' in Mary A. Favret and Nicola J. Watson (eds.), *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist and Materialist Criticism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994), p. 40.

⁷⁸ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 1.

⁷⁹ Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 170.

poets because of their anxieties about the nature of their contemporary milieu and their places within it. As Mary Poovey has argued, the modern genre of the literary work emerged during the Romantic period as authors including Coleridge and Wordsworth worked to ‘devise a model of value that could challenge the market evaluation registered by *popularity* or *demand*.’⁸⁰ Poovey is far from alone in figuring the Romantics as creating a concept of lasting literary value in opposition to their contemporaries’ commercial, social and critical valuations. Andrew Bennett has subtly and exactly drawn out the ways that the canonical poets inflected their poetry towards a posthumous audience, reconfiguring contemporary neglect as a condition for future appreciation.⁸¹ Lucy Newlyn has ranged over an astonishing variety of material in considering how the Romantics anxiously constructed both ideal and fearsome readers in reaction to the contemporary audiences they perceived.⁸² In my coda I will follow Poovey, Newlyn and Bennett in considering how the Romantics reacted against prevailing commercial, critical and social assumptions, creating distinctive aesthetic arguments for the value of their works. However, for the most part this study will decentre the canonical Romantics in favour of more fully defining the modes of valuation which they reacted against and examining the ways that their contemporaries engaged with these. It will also highlight the extent to which the Romantics’ ability to resist and reconfigure such modes was predicated on their connections and on their non-literary incomes. Romanticism developed from discourses of the privileged. I say this not to denigrate it or mark it as somehow phony, but to deny the claims for universality which Romantic poems often seem to make. In fact, they represent particular experiences, and we teach and read them as the final word only at the expense of hundreds of other writers.

⁸⁰ Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 286.

⁸¹ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁸² Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Many authors of the period have, of course, already been reclaimed by critics in recent decades. In particular, a huge amount of valuable work has been done to recover the works and perspectives of female writers including Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, Lady Morgan, Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, most of whom enjoyed levels of contemporary popularity and acclaim far greater than those accorded to the Big Six, Byron excepted. The reversal of this situation in posterity puts critics wishing to speak for the merits of these women in a difficult position. The main way into the period for modern readers is through Romanticism, but opposing women writers and the canonical Romantics can make it seem as if the Big Six, rather than more popular writers or institutions, were the major forces oppressing women. Anne Mellor writes that canonical Romantic poetry

subtly denies the value of female difference. Positive feminine characteristics – sensibility, compassion, maternal love – are metaphorically appropriated by the male poet, while attributes of difference – independence, intelligence, willpower, aggressive action – are denigrated.⁸³

While this offers a cogent analysis of the ways in which Romantic appropriations have retrospectively silenced women's voices, it is not as helpful for looking at women's contemporary prospects. Mellor's argument that 'feminine Romanticism, like masculine Romanticism, was a reformist bourgeois movement' dedicated to bringing about, in Mary Wollstonecraft's words 'a revolution in female manners' ascribes an uneasy common motive to a very diverse group, creating a parallel female Romantic canon which, like the male one, excludes many of the texts her posited revolution was reacting against.⁸⁴ As Marlon Ross has it, 'romanticist critics have made women writers of the period an extension of male romanticism [...] allowing us to keep intact the idea that romanticism can describe the whole period by equating the male romantic poets with all the literature of the time.'⁸⁵ Defining

⁸³ Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 29.

⁸⁴ Mellor, p. 212; see also the wider context, pp. 209-212.

⁸⁵ Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 5.

women writers as secondary Romantics blurs them into a tradition many of them strongly opposed, occluding the contemporary circumstances and expectations which shaped their works and placed a number of them among the most valued writers of their day.

Mellor's conclusions on 'feminine Romanticism' for me sell short the works she adroitly explicates by simplifying her previously-stated position on the diversity of authorial selves:

I am not suggesting that male Romantic writers constructed one kind of self and female Romantic writers another. Rather, I am arguing against Foucault that there is no such thing as "*the* Romantic self" or "*the* Modern self," but only differing modes of subjectivity which can be shared by male and female writers alike, and even by the same person in the course of a long and variegated life.⁸⁶

This seems to me to be a very productive way of looking at the period, seeing it as one in which new types of self-expression became possible while recognising that these were adopted by different writers to lesser or greater extents and in different degrees at different times. This is a model with which dissimilar works can be fruitfully examined while avoiding the deadening effect which a totalising imposition of the category of Romanticism can have. While this study does not pretend exhaustively to analyse the ways that any class of authors wrote in the early nineteenth century, it will attempt to represent the diversity of authorial methods and motives in the period, to stress the social nature of authorship and to make clear the means by which writers were judged before the propagation of Romantic ideologies and the institutionalisation of criticism. It will recover neglected writers who struggled to make a living by writing commercially, but will also examine several now-neglected authors whose works were hugely popular in the period due to their talents for meeting their contemporaries' expectations. By returning to the early nineteenth century's own systems of valuation, then, I will seek to bring to light aspects of authorship which Romantic and counter-Romantic ideologies have

⁸⁶ Mellor, p. 168.

occluded and consider what these have to tell us both about literary work in the early nineteenth century and about its later receptions and transformations.

Continuities and Discontinuities

Considering the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first three of the nineteenth as a discrete Romantic period can cause readers and critics to exaggerate the discontinuities between those decades and those that preceded and succeeded them and to dislocate the temporality of the changes within them. It is a canard that the Romantic period was one in which everything was in revolutionary upheaval; in fact reactionary forces were by and large successful in preventing the kinds of decisive break that radicals sought and ensuring continuity in many aspects of public life. Nevertheless, the outlook for authors in the late 1820s differed considerably from that of the late 1790s. James Chandler, following Claude Levi-Strauss, has described the Romantic period as a ‘hot chronology’, in which ‘in the eyes of the historian numerous events appear as differential elements.’⁸⁷ As Chandler has argued, authors registered a strong awareness of their specific historical circumstances and often responded to very narrow windows of opportunity. Rendering the period as a homogenous whole impedes appreciations of such circumstances and their effects on the content and aesthetics of literary works.

Attempting to produce a picture of literary life in the early nineteenth century which is faithful to historical specificities will be an ongoing process in this study, but I would like at the outset to outline what seem to me to be some of the most consequential changes. I would not wish to put too much emphasis on these; as Stephen Behrendt has warned, the desire for ‘neatness and cleanliness’ can lead to scholarship that ‘ignores the discontinuities, the dissonances, the failure to “fit” that characterizes real life no less than the real literary landscapes of Romantic-era

⁸⁷ James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case for Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 67.

Britain'.⁸⁸ However, by sketching out what seem to me to be crucial large-scale shifts which reconfigured the environment in which all writers worked, I will provide a superstructure which I will refine and complicate in the detailed case studies which follow.

While the relatively open society of the 1780s reached its apogee in the couple of years immediately after the French Revolution, even before the declaration of war with France literary society was moving towards becoming a culture largely dominated by conservative fears and institutions. While retrospectively it is clear that a rich and transformative revolutionary literature was produced in the 1790s, many texts now considered formative and canonical were either successfully traduced by mainstream publications or ignored altogether. Literature, criticism and politics from the late 1790s to the early 1820s were characterised by a pervasive conservatism. After the furious circulations of the early 1790s the establishment was successful in effectively suppressing a number of more progressive traditions from earlier in the eighteenth century. The Treason Trials in 1794, the passing of the Gagging Acts (the Treason Act and the Seditious Meetings Act) in 1795, the imprisonment of Leigh Hunt in 1813, the prosecution of William Hone in 1817 and the two suspensions of *habeas corpus* in 1793 and 1817 are all examples of the ways that the establishment attempted to censure authors it considered dangerous.⁸⁹ The state was a useful source of both direct and indirect patronage for writers and controlled a ferocious propaganda engine. To hazard a confrontation was to risk imprisonment, transportation or obloquy severe enough to scupper any chance of making a living by the pen. In addition, as the largely Tory-led governments elected in the period prove, state conservatism was often supported by public opinion, or at least that of the gentlemanly voters who comprised a disproportionately influential part of the reading public.

⁸⁸ Stephen C. Behrendt, *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), p. 5.

⁸⁹ John Barrell explores many of these events and their implications for the ways that imagination was conceived in *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1794-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

In some ways literary writers were protected from the full force of the state's concerned scrutiny. While pamphlets and cheap productions could circulate widely among the populace, the high price that most new literary and philosophical works commanded kept them out of the hands of the masses. In William Godwin's account, William Pitt dismissed concerns about the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) by arguing that 'a three guinea book could never do harm among those who had not three shillings to spare.'⁹⁰ However, while such books were not seen as dangers on the scale of *The Rights of Man* (1791-92), they were still subject to damaging censure. George Canning established the *Anti-Jacobin* in 1797, with Gifford as editor, with the express purpose of 'detecting falsehood,—and rectifying error,—by correcting misrepresentation, and exposing malignity.'⁹¹ This was done partly through Gifford's trademark vitriolic satire, in parodies which reached their zenith in the poem 'New Morality' in the final issue. In the poem and in James Gillray's accompanying cartoon, literary innovators including Coleridge, Southey, Charles Lamb, William Godwin and Thomas Holcroft were savagely pilloried. In assaults like this literary progressivism became associated with dangerous radicalism. Producing novel literature could thus result in character assassination. While radical magazines and newspapers fought back, these publications lacked the ability to unsay the curses that could destroy reputations and lives. Although the 1794 treason charges against Holcroft were dropped, his formerly successful literary career foundered. As he wrote in 1799: 'My income has always been the produce of my labour; and that produce has been so reduced, by the animosity of party spirit, that I find myself obliged to sell my effects for the payment of my debts, that I may leave the kingdom till party spirit shall subside.'⁹² To be a radical and a writer was thus to take a considerable risk, and the incentives to toe the line were real and significant. This contributed to the 'narratives of withdrawal' which critics have identified in the late 1790s. As Jon Mee writes, 'Literary ideas of conversation were

⁹⁰ Quoted in William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 85. St Clair notes that Pitt misrepresented the price of *Political Justice*, which was actually £1.16s.

⁹¹ 'Prospectus', *Anti-Jacobin; or, Weekly Examiner*, 1 (20 November 1797), p. 2.

⁹² Thomas Holcroft, *The Life of Thomas Holcroft*, continued by William Hazlitt, ed. Elbridge Colby, 2 vols (London: Constable & Co., 1925), II, 248.

increasingly either domesticated or displaced into ideas of higher forms of communion’, although these shifts ‘must also be weighed against the continuation of the wider context of ongoing talk about literature, politics and other issues that continued in an array of places, including bookshops, clubs, and in the home.’⁹³ As these contexts indicate, though, literary culture circulated in increasingly private and mediated spaces. This is not to say that this was solely limiting – as Harriet Guest has explored, their exclusions led a number of female writers to successfully ‘represent domesticity as the site from which an oppositional political discourse [could] be articulated.’⁹⁴

The success of the *Edinburgh Review* (launched in 1802) was both a symptom and a supreme expression of the attraction exerted by regulating and defining authors. On first consideration it would be logical to assume that the Whiggish *Edinburgh* would have served to counteract to some extent the conservative strain in literary culture, but in fact the *Edinburgh* was generally doctrinaire when it came to literary works, inveighing against new styles and lax morals. That its editors had noted the success of the vicious *Anti-Jacobin* style was evident in their keenness to censure, as in Jeffrey’s 1807 attack on James Montgomery:

We took compassion on Mr Montgomery on his first appearance ;
conceiving him to be some slender youth of seventeen, intoxicated with
weak tea, and the praises of sentimental Ensigns and other provincial literati,
and tempted in that situation, to commit a feeble outrage on the public, of
which the recollection would be a sufficient punishment. A third edition,
however, is too alarming to be passed over in silence...⁹⁵

⁹³ Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 27, 133.

⁹⁴ Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 18.

⁹⁵ [Francis Jeffrey], ‘Montgomery’s *Poems*’, *Edinburgh Review*, 9 (January 1807), pp. 347-54 (p. 347).

Here Jeffrey asserts the *Edinburgh's* centrality to the country's literary life, identifies it as a judge of those who would 'outrage' the public and places it as a corrective to the follies of popular taste. The huge readerships the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* obtained validated such claims. Their controlling cliques enjoyed enormous influence, exercised through censure and omission. The selectivity of the quarterlies was partly a symptom of textual proliferation. However, it was also ideologically motivated. Selectivity, and the priorities of those doing the selecting, led to a turn towards more structured hierarchies of genres and practitioners in which gentlemanly male authorship was generally privileged over female or lower-class writing and the dominance of poetry over the novel was reinforced. The writers praised in the Reviews were not necessarily bestsellers and did not necessarily sell well after they were reviewed. Indeed, the quarterlies often defined their values in opposition to a spectral mass market, as in the *Quarterly's* assertion that 'the temperament which disposes the soul to take fire at the beauties of poetry, must, in every state, be limited to a very small number'.⁹⁶ What the positive attention of the quarterlies and their discriminating readers did confer, though, was a far-reaching recognition of a writer's respectability. As I will argue, such social currency was crucial for establishing one's importance through writing. The canons lauded in the quarterlies did not correspond to the modern canon – for example, the review of Montgomery in the *Edinburgh* concludes 'when every day is bringing forth some new work from the pen of Scott, Campbell, Rogers, Baillie, Sotheby, Wordsworth, or Southey, it is natural to feel some disgust at the undistinguished voracity which can swallow down three editions of songs to convivial societies, and verses to a pillow.'⁹⁷ It is possible, though, to locate in such comparisons presentiments of the

⁹⁶ [Horace Twiss?], 'Moore's *Irish Melodies*', *Quarterly Review*, 7 (June 1812), pp. 374-82 (p. 376).

⁹⁷ [Jeffrey], 'Montgomery's *Poems*', p. 354. It is interesting that Wordsworth and Southey, who Francis Jeffrey is often depicted as being vehemently opposed to, are nevertheless included in this list of exciting writers. As John Clive pointed out, there are a number of accounts of Jeffrey's admitting privately to enjoying Wordsworth and reasons to believe that his campaign was driven by a complex set of motivations including suspicion of the Lakers' principles and the proven efficacy of attacking them for boosting the *Edinburgh's* authority (*Scotch Reviewers: The 'Edinburgh Review' 1802-1815* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), pp. 156-159). For the increasingly professionalised reviewer, private enjoyment did not preclude public attacks on poets' principles as part of the mutual and antagonistic

processes of hierarchy-creation that eventually resulted in modern conceptions of literary value.

In the 1810s a combination of factors including increasing book prices, the emergence of several strong new voices and the increasing volume and complexity of periodical discourse created a literary environment uniquely conducive to the popular success of narrative poems.⁹⁸ The 1810s were the heyday of the quarterlies, with both the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* reaching their peak circulations.⁹⁹ It was also the decade in which resistance to the quarterlies brought to prominence a new generation of monthly and weekly magazines, including Hunt's *Examiner* (commenced in 1808) at the radical end of the political spectrum and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817) at the conservative end. Many of these periodicals paid considerable attention to poetry, especially after Byron became a phenomenon, a symbol of the transformation of celebrity, which became 'no longer something you had, but something you were.'¹⁰⁰ Byron's sensational poetics focused attention on the poet as an exotic social novelty, and many other writers capitalised on his success through imitating his strategies. Walter Scott, though, cannily ceded the mantle of most popular poet and succeeded in establishing the novel as a form that would eventually eclipse poetry, first in terms of sales and eventually in terms of artistic relevance and prestige. While Scott and Byron were big sellers by the standards of refined literary works, it is important to note that other texts enjoyed far larger circulations. Publications such as William Cobbett's *Political Register* and William Hone's satires sold in the hundreds of thousands, addressing audiences that would not be tapped by literary authors for a couple of decades more.¹⁰¹

business of building, defining and dominating a high literary culture. I discuss this process further in Chapter Four.

⁹⁸ The increase in the costs of books and book production was part of a larger pattern of price inflation between 1800 and 1820 (see John Burnett, *A History of the Cost of Living* (London: Penguin, 1969), pp. 198-202), but also resulted from circumstances specific to the book trade, as I discuss in the following chapter.

⁹⁹ St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p. 573.

¹⁰⁰ Mole, p. xii.

¹⁰¹ See Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957). Estimated circulation figures for

In the 1820s and early 1830s the widespread adoption of technologies including the Fourdrinier papermaking machine, the steam-driven printing press and the stereotyping process drastically brought down the costs of book production and made economies of scale first viable and then desirable.¹⁰² This led to the development of pioneering low-cost editions, initially often produced by pirate publishers, as for Byron's *Don Juan*, or offshore, as in Galignani's Paris editions of poets' complete works. These practices were eventually taken up by the publishing mainstream, resulting in the cheap editions of Scott produced by Cadell and popular uniform series such as Bentley's Standard Novels (commenced in 1831). Such editions, along with the development of formats such as gift annuals and genuinely cheap periodicals, made contemporary literature an affordable prospect for the majority for the first time, paving the way both for true mass literature and for genuinely profitable and professionalised authorship. Even so, literary writing remained uncertain and tenuous as a profession. The interests mediating print culture continued to multiply, greatly reducing the ability of any one individual or institution to lead public opinion. This profusion of print also brought to a head concerns about valuing works in an increasingly profligate culture and this, combined with their works' increased accessibility, gradually brought to the fore those poets who had most effectively fashioned unique authorial selves, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats among them. Crucially, as David Higgins has put it, 'the idealised image of the Romantic genius was largely produced and popularised by the culture that it supposedly transcended.'¹⁰³

* * *

Cobbett (200,000 for his 'Address to the Journeymen and Labourers') and Hone (a total of 250,000 for the five squibs he prepared with George Cruikshank) are given pp. 381-82.

¹⁰² James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 325-26.

¹⁰³ David Higgins, 'Celebrity, Politics and the Rhetoric of Genius' in Tom Mole (ed.), *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 43.

The first three chapters that follow examine writing as a financial and social activity, considering the difficulties and advantages of living by the pen. They look in turn at the mechanics of the publishing industry, the precarious lives of working writers and the techniques used by some of the period's most popular authors to achieve their successes. The fourth and fifth chapters analyse the ways in which authors sought validation through print institutions and connections, looking at the power, prejudices and assumptions of the quarterlies and bringing into focus the alternative modes of authentication offered by sociability and networking. Finally, my brief coda reconsiders the canonical Romantic writers, examining ways in which they resisted their contemporary circumstances and outlining the early stages of their emergence into canonicity.

Chapter One uses the pioneering work of William St Clair, alongside evidence from the Longman and Murray archives, to examine the contracts authors signed, processes of production and payment and the ways that publishers interacted with each other. As James Raven's research has proved, publishing in the early nineteenth century was a costly, uncertain and conservative business. Printing an edition represented a significant capital demand and publishing too many slow sellers, printed at significant cost and then stored at further expense, could easily ruin a bookseller.¹⁰⁴ Using a range of examples both famous and obscure this chapter breaks down the structure of the publishing industry from the author's perspective, providing a series of significant contexts for the more in-depth examinations of writing lives in the following two chapters.

In literary histories, the successes of a few renowned authors often overwrite the conflicted and complex working lives of multitudes of less fortunate writers. Chapter Two follows Isaac D'Israeli in looking at disappointed literary ambitions by employing the extensive archive of the Literary Fund. It first considers the difficulties faced by its founder David Williams in generating support to assist writers of literary merit suffering financial hardship, and examines his attempts to instil in society a greater appreciation for the value of writers. It then examines three

¹⁰⁴ Raven, pp. 294-319.

exemplary case studies: the miscellaneous writer Robert Heron, the gothic novelist Eliza Parsons and the rural poet Robert Bloomfield. By setting these writers in the wider contexts of the Literary Fund's applicants, it assesses the neglected majority who found publishing and its attendant fashions parlous, destructive and fickle.

Chapter Three considers the social contexts that allowed for authorial success by examining the lives of three exceptional authors who achieved substantial incomes through literary writing. Robert Southey established himself with the aid of monies from friends and family, and after securing recognition moved from conceiving of his labours as principally poetic to producing profitable political and historical work. Thomas Moore unsuccessfully sought patronage and tried several modes before his sociable talents and his facility with lyrical verse and satire brought him prosperity and renown. Walter Scott, unquestionably the most popular contemporary writer of the period, made and lost huge sums of money, the first through his unerring sense for readers' tastes, the second by investing in publishing, printing and reviewery. The chapter concludes with some remarks on the unique case of Byron, considering the new kind of fame that marked his reception.

Chapter Four looks at the authority of *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, assessing their impact and examining the writers they praised, censured and excluded. It considers their editors' reasons for criticising, arguing that the quarterlies manufactured a highly-mediated discourse on literature by bringing a carefully-selected range of writers and works before the public to be endorsed or denigrated. The quarterlies' principal concerns were political, but literary reviews provided an excellent forum for advancing social agendas, denigrating rivals and building influence. Their professionalised criticism played a key role in defining authors and authorship, their authority both exerting huge influence over literary culture and stimulating resistant practices which later outmoded their methods.

Chapter Five focuses on the crucial roles of social interactions and personal knowledge in validating authors' accomplishments, focusing on the extent to which authorship in the period could be as much a social practice as a commercial, professional or aesthetic one. The chapter opens by examining the importance of

groups and networks in legitimising authorial achievements, thinking about the different ways in which such communities could be created, constituted and inflected. It then moves on to examine the porous boundaries between public and private, using an exchange between Elizabeth Hamilton and Mary Hays as a key example, before looking at the ways that writers constructed distinct and personal discourses in their letters to privilege themselves and their correspondents, focusing particularly on Leigh Hunt. It concludes by looking at the sometimes problematic but often fruitful positions of women in the collaborative formation of social systems of association and legitimation.

* * *

What, then, was an author in the Romantic period? As I discuss further in the coda, one of the most problematic legacies of conceiving of the early nineteenth century as the period of Romanticism is that it ahistorically imposes a particular model of authorship on a period when the question of exactly what constituted an author was vexed. The seeds for both the Romantic model of the poet-genius and the Victorian model of the respectable professional writer were germinating in the period, but did not sprout or bloom until decades later. What exactly constituted an author was the subject of many competing discourses, with older models of authorship persisting and coexisting alongside radical new modes. Authors could be hacks, gentlemen, celebrities, philosophers, commentators, politicians, judges and storytellers, could seek popular success, serve patrons, accrue social cachet, court critical acclaim, foment revolution or yearn for aesthetic fulfilment. Being accepted as a writer has always been a complicated social negotiation, and never more so than in the contentious literary environments that prevailed between the opening shots of the French Revolution and the passing of the Reform Bill. In scrutinising this history, I hope to emphasise the contingent nature of success by looking at the ways in which writers struggled, tried and failed and stressing that the authors perceived as paramount by their contemporaries were a very different set to those who dominate the period in the eyes of posterity.

Chapter One

Publishers, Book Production and Profits

The Costs of Literature

Opening the introduction, I discussed the disjunction between the sense among the educated young in the early nineteenth century that authorship was a career which could be pursued in similar ways to medicine or the law and the fact that for the vast majority of authors, literary profits provided at best a useful secondary income. As I will demonstrate, the mass reading public often conjured fearfully by writers in the period was for most authors chimerical. Until the late 1820s the prices of contemporary literary works were prohibitively high; indeed, as Richard Altick has it, ‘During the first quarter of the nineteenth century [...] new books were more expensive than ever before.’¹ Consequently the numbers of copies sold were generally small and the profits insufficient to sustain more than a handful of the most popular authors. In this chapter I will consider the publishing industry practices which defined and limited the prospects for direct writerly incomes. In the next two chapters I will build on this by examining the many difficulties faced by authors seeking to construct careers and by delimiting the specific personal and social circumstances that permitted a few writers to obtain significant profits.

The prevailing publishing model at the beginning of the nineteenth century was largely conservative. As James Raven writes

the basic organisation of the mid-eighteenth-century book trade, with its technological basis in the hand-operated printing press, was still in place by the 1810s. For those publishing, the technical printing process had changed little, the same limited editions were produced, and the same constraints of

¹ Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 260.

large initial overheads, warehousing, and printing costs acted upon the small and large operator alike.²

Although the number of printers and booksellers rose, until the third decade of the nineteenth century publishers was largely unable or unwilling to employ new technologies to reduce costs and make literary writing more accessible. In fact, production costs rose considerably during the long war with France, as the hostilities prevented the importing of consignments of rags essential to the paper-making process, leading to a peak in manufacturing costs in the early 1810s.³ It was only in the 1820s and 1830s that costs and prices were brought down as mass production technologies developed in previous decades were taken up. Friedrich Koenig's steam-driven printing presses, which by 1818 had developed to the point where they could produce five times as many impressions-per-hour as the best Stanhope hand-driven presses, began to be widely employed.⁴ Stereotyping, a process for creating plates from which new editions could be printed swiftly and cheaply without the need to assemble the type, finally became more common, allowing publishers to respond more flexibly to customer demand for popular works.⁵ The proliferation of the Fourdriner papermaking machine brought down the cost of paper, previously generally the highest single cost in the book production process.⁶ Alongside these technological innovations, developments in literary formats such as the packaging of works in gift annuals like *The Keepsake* (1828-1857), the printing of mass-market editions of novels and experiments with cheap periodicals paved the way for literature to reach previously disenfranchised publics. As David McKitterick writes, after stressing the 'confused and often tardy process of change', 'by about 1830 some of the major

² James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 227.

³ Paper costs increased by over fifty per cent between 1797 and 1810; see Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialisation of Publishing, 1800-1850* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), p. 20.

⁴ Hans Bolza, 'Friedrich Koenig und die Erfindung der Druckmaschine', *Technikgeschichte*, 34 (1967), pp. 79-89.

⁵ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 100-01.

⁶ Raven, p. 310.

changes in manufacture, materials, market demands and economic possibilities had become sufficiently widespread for it to be possible to claim that a revolution of some kind had been effected.⁷ As Lee Erickson has discussed, these changes caused a boom first in periodicals and then in the novel, propelling both forms to new mass audiences, creating a range of new and lucrative opportunities for writers.⁸ Poetry, which had sold comparatively well when competing with more expensive novels and periodicals, especially in the peculiar conditions of the 1810s, became an increasingly unprofitable form in the 1830s and one which most publishers refused to deal in.⁹ The cumulative effect of such advances was to make authorship in the 1830s far more stable a career than it had been in previous decades.

However, these technological and cultural developments existed only as encouraging or worrying future prospects for most of the authors I discuss in this study. Writers publishing at the turn of the nineteenth century faced many similar difficulties to those writing fifty or a hundred years earlier. While Brean Hammond has established that the theatre offered ‘a precarious living for a small number of people and a potentially good living for a few’ by the early years of the eighteenth century, he writes that ‘With respect to the publication of other literary genres [...] it was far more difficult for authors to reap direct rewards from their labours.’¹⁰ Cheryl Turner describes the most common career for eighteenth-century women writing for money as ‘a continual struggle against the prospect of poverty’.¹¹ Authorial incomes were sharply limited by small readerships and the costs of books. Publishers, like academic publishers today, generally aimed to sell small editions of high-priced copies to wealthy buyers and to libraries. With new books, they looked to minimise potential losses and to make a small profit on editions that sold through while securing occasional windfalls from successful books that could be repeatedly reprinted. High

⁷ David McKitterick, ‘Introduction’ to McKitterick (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume VI: 1830-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-74 (p. 3).

⁸ Erickson, pp. 71-104, 142-70.

⁹ Erickson, pp. 47-48.

¹⁰ Brean S. Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740: ‘Hackney for Bread’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 61, 69.

¹¹ Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 60, 116.

capital overheads meant that it was critical for publishers to estimate edition sizes accurately to avoid large losses. The relatively small size of the book market also meant that the vast majority of publishers were required to be generalists, with literary works comprising potentially prestigious but risky parts of broader lists that also included non-fiction, religious and instructional works, all of which commonly outsold productions of the imagination.¹² While some new literary works sold very well, most sold numbers of copies in the hundreds. Literature was thus not a commodity for which publishers could afford to pay too much on spec.

Calculating equivalent values across two centuries is a nigh-on impossible task given the drastic changes in technologies and lifestyles in the intervening period, but it is important to give some indications as to just how expensive books were in the early nineteenth century. To demonstrate this, it is first necessary to provide figures for the sorts of yearly incomes common at the time. Richard Holmes draws on a talk by William St Clair on Treasury tax figures to suggest that ‘a skilled worker such as a printer earned approximately £90 a year, while a gentleman with a small house and a servant in London could live comfortably on £200 a year.’¹³ Edward Copeland, examining the yearly incomes discussed in female-authored novels in the period, writes that ‘With £200 the tone of contemporary witnesses shifts from martyrdom and heroic self-denial to one of grudging admission among some authors that such a competence might just achieve gentility’, although he notes that £400 or £500 a year was portrayed as being the level needed to comfortably maintain a house and servants.¹⁴ St Clair himself, drawing on Naval List figures issued after the end of the war with France, suggests a standard of £5 a week as ‘a reasonable but not extravagant income for members of the upper- or upper-middle classes.’¹⁵ In 1797 Coleridge calculated his expenses to be around £100 a year (probably quite an optimistic figure)

¹² For an overview, see Michael F. Suarez, ‘Towards a Bibliometric Analysis of the Surviving Record’, in Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 5: 1695-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 39-65, esp. pp. 45-50. See also my analysis of collaborative publication in the last section of this chapter.

¹³ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 176.

¹⁴ Edward Copeland, *Women Writing about Money: Women’s Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 28; wider context pp. 22-33.

¹⁵ St Clair, p. 194.

and in January 1798 Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood provided him with an annuity of £150, which was supposed to be sufficient to allow him to live independently.¹⁶

Labouring wages were much lower; additionally, as Margot Finn notes, servants and labourers often ‘received much of their wage payments in kind – in the form of lodging, board, clothing and credit with their master’s tradesmen’, thus severely constraining their ability to purchase expensive consumer goods like books.¹⁷

The expense of literature can be extrapolated from these figures through comparing them with the price of Walter Scott’s *Waverley*, which cost 21 shillings for three volumes in paper wrappers.¹⁸ This represents a little over 1/200th of the gentlemanly income Holmes and Copeland cite above, or a little over 1/250th of St Clair’s suggested standard for the reasonably wealthy. If we take a figure of £25,000 as being a reasonable figure for the net yearly income of a young modern professional and £20 as a (supposedly) reasonable price for a modern hardback novel, the novel would represent 1/1200th of that yearly income, making the novel by Scott somewhere between five and six times as expensive expressed as a proportion of income. This rough and unscientific comparison would suggest that the equivalent of the cost of a novel by Scott today might be somewhere in the region of £100 to £120. Susan Matoff quotes correspondence from the Office of National Statistics that suggests a similar conclusion, indicating that ‘as a rule of thumb, prices today are about eighty times those of the nineteenth century.’¹⁹ The relative expense of books can also be indicated by comparing their cost to that of renting property. In 1817 the Irish poet and songwriter Thomas Moore rented Sloperton Cottage, near Bromham in Wiltshire, furnished, for £40 a year, giving up an expensive house in Hornsey, which had cost him £90 a year. A previous residence at Mayfield Cottage near Ashbourne in

¹⁶ Holmes, pp. 176-78.

¹⁷ Margot C. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 76.

¹⁸ St Clair, p. 636. Scott’s success allowed the prices of respectable novels, including his own, to creep up further; he set a standard of 31s.6d with *Kenilworth* in 1821 (cf. Altick, p. 263).

¹⁹ Susan Matoff, *Conflicted Life: William Jerdan, 1782-1869: London Editor, Author and Critic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), p. xii.

Derbyshire had set him back merely £20 per annum.²⁰ You would be hard-pressed today to find a house in Britain with an annual rent less than ninety times the cost of a new hardback novel, let alone less than twenty times the cost.

The effects of the publishers' high-cost, low-sales model were particularly pronounced for multi-volume novels, where the mode of consumption for all but the wealthy was through the circulating libraries. For a novel to run to a second edition was a relatively rare occurrence. However, even for single-volume poems or verse collections, where later octavo editions often sold for between a quarter and a third of the price of a three-volume novel, large circulations and significant sales were the exceptions. As I shall establish using the examples in the rest of this chapter, direct profits from books were rarely enough in themselves to allow their authors to attain respectable incomes.

Common Publishing Arrangements

In 1815 the Reverend William Herbert, Rector of Spofforth in the West Riding of Yorkshire, approached John Murray about publishing his narrative poem *Helga*. The third son of Henry Herbert, first Earl of Carnarvon, Herbert was educated at Eton and Oxford and prior to his ordination in 1814 he had served twice as an MP and worked as a barrister.²¹ During the 1800s he had become a noted translator of Latin and (more unusually) Icelandic works, and in this role he merits a brief mention in Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*:

HERBERT shall wield THOR'S hammer, and sometimes
In gratitude thou'lt praise his rugged rhymes.²²

²⁰ Prices cited in Linda Kelly, *Ireland's Minstrel: A Life of Tom Moore: Poet, Patriot and Byron's Friend* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 138-139, 106.

²¹ B.D. Jackson, 'Herbert, William (1778-1847)', rev. Richard Smail, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13063>> [accessed 22 March 2010].

²² Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, lines 510-11, in *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980-93), I, 245.

The 'thou' in this couplet is Francis Jeffrey, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, who at the point in the poem is being addressed by 'Caledonia's Goddess', who is laying out his future as a critical potentate. As the couplet indicates, in addition to his translating and his sequence of professional careers, Herbert reviewed for the *Edinburgh* and was connected to its influential gentlemanly circle. He was thus a man whom Murray was obliged to take seriously.

In his first original book-length poem, Herbert hoped to make his Scandinavian interests more accessible by presenting them in a form 'pleasing to the reader'. He claimed that *Helga* contained 'a faithful picture of the manners and superstitions of the period which it represents' but that he had 'attempted to give it the coloring of poetry, and to temper with chaster ornaments the rude wildness of Scaldic fiction.'²³ The poem itself is written in tetrameter couplets, at times clumsy but generally fairly fluent, spiced with some artful archaisms but also strongly reminiscent of Byron and – especially – Scott, whose arrogated styles at times clash with Herbert's Scandinavian material. The poem tells the story of the conflict for the hand of the titular Helga between the Danish warrior Angantyr and her father's retainer Hialmar, whom she loves and assists. Helga travels to 'Hell' to discover how Hialmar should defeat Angantyr and elicits the following prophecy from its denizens:

“Deep-bosom'd in the northern fells
“A pigmy race immortal dwells,
“Whose skilful hands can forge the steel
“With many a wonderous muttered spell.
“If bold Hialmar's might can gain
“A falchion from their lone domain,
“Nor stone, nor iron shall withstand
“The dint of such a gifted brand ;
“Its edge shall drink Angantyr's blood,
“And life's tide issue with the flood.
“Victorious, at night's silent hour,
“The chief shall reach fair Helga's bower.”²⁴

²³ William Herbert, *Helga: a Poem in Seven Cantos* (London: John Murray, 1815), pp. iv, v-vi.

²⁴ Herbert, *Helga*, Canto II, lines 714-25, pp. 47-48.

As is often the case with such prophecies in Scandinavian folklore, its fulfilment is even more doom-laden than a cursory reading would indicate. Helga is haunted by her hellish descent and remains in seclusion while Hjalmar uses the intelligence she has gathered to acquire the enchanted sword. Unfortunately, while the sword allows him to slay Angantyr as promised, he is fatally wounded in the duel and he reaches Helga's bower only as corpse, Helga perishing in turn when she sees his body. Herbert's volume also contains copious antiquarian notes and two shorter poems, 'The Song of the Vala' and 'Brynhilda,' 'freely imitated' from their source material.²⁵ In *Helga* and his translations Herbert was catering to established critical and popular interests in ancient and foreign literatures, promoting his own career by using English poetry to reframe and make accessible Scandinavian material, just as Scott had done with Scottish history and Byron had done with Europe and the East.

Murray evidently thought Herbert's work worth publishing, the transaction of enough moment for him to record it in his selective letter book and Herbert important enough to offer a range of financial options. It is this offer of various arrangements, illuminating the most common publishing practices in the period, which makes Herbert's book particularly interesting in the context of this study. On January 28th 1815 Murray wrote the following to Herbert:

I submit to you three proposals as to the mode of publishing your poem entitled *Helga*

1. I will publish it at your own cost & sell it entirely upon your own account
2. I will publish it at my own cost & Risque & give you one Half of the profits
3. I will give you Two Hundred Guineas for the Copyright.²⁶

The first arrangement Murray suggests, that of publishing at Herbert's cost, does not at first glance appear profitable for Murray except in terms of associating himself with Herbert, particularly as he would have had to bear the costs of printing

²⁵ Herbert, p. 273.

²⁶ John Murray to William Herbert, 28 January 1815, from John Murray Letter Book, 2 Apr 1808-13 Mar 1843, NLS Ms.41909, fol. 25^r (outgoing side).

and paper and then reclaim the monies. However, publishers charged a commission for such services, generally 10% on sales, so they would still profit, provided of course that the writer concerned paid any debts that accumulated on their account if the book sold slowly or poorly.²⁷ This was not always the case. Shelley's second novel, *St. Irvyne*, was published under this arrangement by John Joseph Stockdale in 1811, Shelley having blithely asserted that such a novel was 'a thing which almost *mechanically* sells to circulating libraries.'²⁸ Shelley was disappointed in this, and evidently so was Stockdale, as he complained in 1827 that he had never received the £300 Shelley owed him for producing the novel.²⁹

Publishing on commission could often be the equivalent of modern vanity publishing, although without much of the stigma that attached itself to that mode prior to the recent rise of practical and affordable print-on-demand technologies. It was usually employed either by wealthy writers who wanted to control their texts or by those who could not publish their works in any other way and were either confident in their potential or desperate to see print. It was the form which carried the greatest risk for writers, as they were liable for the production costs should their works not sell, and such costs could be very substantial, as indicated by the £300 Stockdale claimed Shelley owed him. For writers against whom debts could be more easily enforced, such a bill might easily end up causing bankruptcy or lead to incarceration in debtor's prison.

In some circumstances, though, this form of publishing could be very effective. The wealthy banker-poet Samuel Rogers chose to fund the publication of almost all of his literary works and achieved several notable successes.³⁰ *The Pleasures of Memory* (1792), an elegant and polished moral poem on eighteenth-century lines, went through four quarto editions in its first year and was reprinted

²⁷ St Clair, p. 165.

²⁸ Shelley to Stockdale, 14 November 1810, from *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I, 20. This and the next as referenced in Erickson, pp. 144-145n.

²⁹ *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, 130n.

³⁰ Richard Garnett, 'Rogers, Samuel (1763–1855)', rev. Paul Baines, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23997>> [accessed 24 March 2010].

frequently, selling 22,350 copies between 1801 and 1816.³¹ Rogers' later long poem, *Italy*, published in two parts in 1822 and 1828, was initially considered a failure, selling poorly and attracting little positive critical notice. However, Rogers was able to employ his personal assets to make the poem a triumph. He destroyed the unsold copies, extensively revised the text and reprinted the poem in a lavish edition with plates from illustrations by artists including Thomas Stothard, Samuel Prout and J.M.W. Turner. This new edition and a similarly luxurious edition of Roger's *Poems* published in 1834 were both critically and commercially successful, making back the £7,000 which Rogers spent on their production.³² As that enormous figure indicates, though, Rogers could only pursue such a course due to his vast personal wealth. His cause was also aided by the plethora of literary, artistic and social connections he could draw on to enhance his works and their reputations. Rogers never needed to write for money and could spend as much as necessary to meet his social and aesthetic ends, a rare and enviable position which secured him a place near the apex of hierarchies of perceived poetical talent in the period. Byron placed him above all but Scott in the 'triangular 'Gradus ad Parnassum'' in his 1813 journal.³³

For authors less well-connected or more controversial, though, publishing at one's own expense could be ineffectual. In addition to *St Irvyne*, a number of Shelley's mature works were published under such arrangements, including *Alastor* (1816) and *The Revolt of Islam* (1818). In analysing the detailed costs for the latter St Clair concludes that Shelley was almost certainly overcharged and quotes an employee of the printer as saying that 'the Paper and Printing are equally bad but it was done as cheaply as possible.'³⁴ The expense was only an inconvenience to one as wealthy as Shelley, but because the poem lacked the advocacy both of an attractive presentation and of an interested commercial agent it was left to Shelley's friends to attempt to drum up sales and positive reviews. For authors, then, publishing a book on account was a financial risk compounded by the work's being disadvantaged in the

³¹ St Clair, p. 632.

³² ODNB.

³³ *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie Marchand, 13 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973-1994), III, 220.

³⁴ St Clair, p. 508.

marketplace and the Reviews through its lacking a publisher's backing. While the arrangement offered authors the highest potential earnings, few writers were in a position to exploit that potential.

The second arrangement Murray proposes, that he will bear the cost of publication and then split any profits evenly with Herbert, was a more common one, widely used both for new authors whose sales potential was not established and by established authors who wished to secure an ongoing income from their works. The large capital investment required to manufacture and print the book was provided by the publisher and the author did not stand to lose money if their work sold poorly. As with publishing at one's own expense, writers were reliant on their publishers for fair costings. These were not always provided – St Clair notes that ‘the accounts which Murray prepared for Austen, in calculating her share of the profits of *Emma*, are as fictional as the novel.’³⁵ If a publication failed to make its declared costs back, the writer would end up with nothing in return for their work. For example, in 1821 Longman & Co. wrote to William Godwin, stating that ‘As we have little or no demand for the “Lives of the Phillips’s” it is our intention to include the remainder in a sale which we shall make to the trade in a few days. When all are sold we shall unfortunately be minus of the expences.’³⁶ Godwin's *Lives of Edward and John Phillips, Nephews and Pupils of Milton* had been printed in 250 lavish quarto copies in May 1815, of which 146 were eventually sold at full price, 130 of those prior to June 1816.³⁷ Twenty-one further copies were ‘delivered’, or provided gratuitously, variously going to Godwin and to Reviews including the *Quarterly*, the *Eclectic* and the *Monthly*. The book was sold at the very high price of 30 shillings, producing a gross profit of £219, but since the total costs for the work's production and promotion were £252.5s.9d, the account ended in deficit. Longmans offered Godwin the remaining copies at remainder prices, but nevertheless all that Godwin received for his

³⁵ St Clair, p. 164.

³⁶ Longman & Co. to William Godwin, 9 April 1821, Longman Outletter Book 24 July 1820 – 31 December 1825, transcribed Michael Bott, RUL MS 1393 Part I.101, letter 117A.

³⁷ Figures from Longman Divide Ledger D1 1807-1828, RUL MS 1393 Part I.2, fol. 222 and Divide Ledger D2 1818-1866, RUL MS 1393 Part I.3, fol. 200.

work were his initial presentation copies and the sixty-eight copies he bought for £17 six years after the book's publication.

The other problem with half-profits arrangements was that even for profitable books there could be a long delay between publication and the author receiving any money. Longmans, for example, disbursed half-profits payments for most works each June. Robert Southey's hugely popular *Roderick, the Last of the Goths* was published in quarto in September 1814. This first edition sold out quickly and the follow-up octavo second edition also sold extremely well, so Southey received a substantial payment of £272.14s.2d in June 1815, nine months after publication.³⁸ Nine months is itself a relatively significant amount of time, but delays could be considerably longer. Wordsworth's *Excursion*, published in a five-hundred-copy quarto run in August 1814, had sold 291 copies by June 1815 at the substantial price of 30 shillings a copy.³⁹ However, the expense of the raw materials at the height of the shortages caused by the Napoleonic Wars and the high printing costs for these luxurious volumes meant that even with just under 60% of the edition sold, Longman did not consider the profits significant enough to make a payment to Wordsworth. It was only in June 1816, twenty-two months after publication and after a further 40 copies had been sold, that Wordsworth received his first payment, £68.15s.10d. This was fine if, like Wordsworth, the author had an income and could afford to take the long view. For authors who needed money to supply immediate needs, though, the deferred and uncertain payments offered by half-profits arrangements were unappealing.

An attractive alternative arrangement for such authors was the third on Murray's list: the sale of the author's copyright to the publisher. A publisher who purchased the copyright of a work purchased with it the ability to print that work any number of times and retain all the profits from doing so. In return the author received guaranteed money up front, or at worst as a series of post-dated bills, as was the case for Byron's designated beneficiary for *The Corsair*, Robert Charles Dallas, Murray writing to him in January 1814 that he had 'the pleasure of inclosing 3 bills at 2, 4 & 6 mo^{ths}. payable at my Bankers, amounting to five Hundred Guineas for the Copy-

³⁸ Longman Divide Ledger D1, r. 60.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, r. 102.

right'.⁴⁰ For authors who needed immediate payments, who wanted little to do with the industry or who sought large speculative advances, selling the copyright was a tempting option. If a work was successful, though, the author would have no legal recourse to claim further remuneration, although on occasion publishers would make additional payments for further editions. The arrangements for Southey's *Life of Nelson* included provision for such a payment, Southey writing to Murray in 1813 that, 'This evening I have received your draft for one hundred guineas, – for the copyright of the Life of Nelson. I thank you for it, & I thank you also for your promise of a similar sum, in case a second edition of the work should be printed.'⁴¹ Southey was fortunate, however, in that as a *Quarterly* reviewer he was a privileged part of Murray's publishing business, and thus Murray, who had suggested that he compose the biography, was disposed to be generous.⁴² The payment to Dallas, whom Murray did not much like, did not represent good value for *The Corsair*, but knowing Byron had no desire to engage in financial wrangling, Murray offered the same as he had paid for the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Murray went on to make enormous sums on both poems, recording in his ledger net profits of £2513.0s.10d for six editions of *Childe Harold* and an even more impressive £3660.8s.9d for 29,500 copies of *The Corsair*.⁴³ Under half-profits arrangements the two works would have returned over £3000 to Dallas, rather than a thousand guineas.

For most authors, though, selling their copyrights was a relatively good option. Copyright payments from a reputable publisher could often be somewhat higher than the expected half-profits return on the first edition. Murray's large payment for *Childe Harold*, for example, would have left him facing a considerable loss if the quarto edition had failed. Publishers did on occasion take advantage of poor writers by offering them very low sums knowing that they had little choice but to accept, but even so this was guaranteed money which could be used to feed children and keep debtors from the door rather than a hazy prospect of future profits. The problem with

⁴⁰ John Murray to R.C. Dallas, 6 January 1814, from Murray Letter Book, NLS Ms.41909, fol. 21^v (outgoing side).

⁴¹ Robert Southey to John Murray, 7 April 1813, in Letters from Southey 1813-1818, NLS Ms.42551.

⁴² I discuss Southey's relationship with Murray further in Chapter Three.

⁴³ Copies Ledger A of the publisher John Murray, 1803-1819, NLS Ms.42724, pp. 97, 57.

this was that while authors who published successful works under half-profits arrangements would receive continuing payments to underpin their finances, writers who sold their copyrights had to keep writing, and write faster when the money ran out. Conversely, buying copyrights could be very good for publishers if they proved valuable. The ability to continue to exploit enduringly valuable copyrights underpinned the finances of most of the major houses, with shares in such copyrights acting as a currency and a way of spreading risk among publishers, as I shall discuss shortly.

With any of these methods of publication, although most commonly for half-profits arrangements, a subscription list could be compiled. For uncertain prospects, publishers would seek or require a certain number of subscribers before committing to print, thus mitigating their risk. J.B. Henson and Edward Drury both proposed using this method for John Clare's first volume.⁴⁴ Subscription lists were also used as promotional tools for fashionable or charitable publications, with a prominent peer or dignitary heading a list which others joined in the spirit of 'emulative snobbery', as Raven slightly unkindly puts it.⁴⁵ While subscription editions played 'a relatively small part in the book trade as a whole', they could serve as an important tool for launching new authors.⁴⁶ The risk-spreading element of subscription was an attractive prospect for publishers, who often operated lists within the trade through which booksellers would agree in advance to buy a certain number of copies on a book's publication in return for a discount.⁴⁷

For his *Helga* Herbert eventually chose a slightly different arrangement, also relatively common in the period. In March 1815 Murray wrote, 'I will give you 150 Gns. for permission to print 2,000 Copies of your poem *Helga* with Notes, in 8vo to

⁴⁴ John Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador, 2004), pp. 111-13, 118-26.

⁴⁵ Raven, p. 275.

⁴⁶ Raven, p. 316. See my discussions of patronage in Chapter Two and Thomas Moore in Chapter Three.

⁴⁷ For examples, see John Murray's Subscription Lists (NLS Ms.42808-50) and my discussion of *Calamities of Authors* below.

form a Volume similar to *Childe Harold*.⁴⁸ Herbert thus accepted a slightly smaller payment in order to retain his copyright in case the poem was successful. The comparison of *Helga* to *Childe Harold* was a flattering piece of association on Murray's part, but one which was not subsequently borne out. Murray initially printed 1,000 copies rather than the 2,000 he had made an offer for, at a total cost of £345.7s.6d for expenses including printing, paper, the payment to Herbert and advertising.⁴⁹ The critical response to the poem was tepid. The *Edinburgh* was ambivalent, complaining that 'Instead of relying on his own powers, which were not likely to fail him, he has sworn, that no creature shall be admitted within his runic circle, unless he can give it a family likeness to some prototype in Walter Scott and Lord Byron. Under this management, the gigantic forms of Scandinavia have been made to combine in a pretty, modern, melting, love-story.'⁵⁰ Such criticism evidently did not encourage the poem's sales, as Murray made a total of £197.4s from the copies he printed. He initially sold copies for eight shillings, but by December 1817 he was disposing of copies for a shilling each and in January 1818 he sold off the final forty-two copies for a total of £2.2s, or 6d a copy. The account for the edition of *Helga* closes with Murray £148.3s.6d out-of-pocket. Herbert's accepting a lump sum was thus proved prudent – a half-profits arrangement would have made him nothing and publishing the edition at his own risk would likely have left him in debt.

The Costs of Production

As the losses Murray incurred from *Helga* imply, the high costs of printing and paper meant that publishers had to take great care in selecting what to publish and calculating print runs. A clear example of such a calculation can be drawn from Murray's estimate book, in which he costed the touchstone of my introduction, Isaac D'Israeli's *Calamities of Authors*. Murray printed an edition of 1,000 copies and

⁴⁸ John Murray to William Herbert, 13 March 1815, from Letter Book, NLS Ms.41909, fol. 25^r (outgoing side).

⁴⁹ Copies Ledger B of the publisher John Murray, NLS Ms.42725, p. 114.

⁵⁰ [Francis Palgrave], 'Herbert's *Helga*', *Edinburgh Review*, 25 (June 1815), pp. 146-68 (p. 166).

made two estimates as to the cost, the second of which evidences a somewhat vexed printing process:

Printing 43 sheets at 51 shillings = £110.18s.6d

Extra for Index, contents & very long notes = £3.13s.6d

Overrunning, correcting & adding to first 5 sheets = £2.12s.6d

Corrections in other parts of work = £5.15s.6d⁵¹

The total cost for printing that Murray gives, with a further fifteen-shilling tweak included, is £123.15s. The paper for such a long book was an even greater expense. Murray estimated that the book would require eighty-eight reams at thirty-seven shillings a ream, a total cost of £162.16s. Murray added to these costs £23.9s for advertising, which included printed advertisements but also sundry related costs such as that of providing copies to periodical reviewers and key influencers. The exact figure Murray gives here, though, was chosen to make the overall estimate a neat £310. This is considerably higher than Murray's earlier estimate due to the cost of the corrections and additional paper, but Murray also tweaked the sale price up from 9s.6d in the first estimate to 10s.6d in the second, so the total expected profit in the first was in fact £2 less. The estimated profit for the book in Murray's revised working is £215, based on the sale of the full thousand copies. There is no copyright payment to D'Israeli listed, so the most likely form of recompense would have been a half-profits arrangement; these were commonly employed for D'Israeli's productions.⁵² If the edition sold out completely, as Murray's estimate assumes, it would have yielded to each party a little over £100.

For *Calamities*, then, Murray's estimate was based on his making a profit of about 35% on his initial investment after splitting the profits with D'Israeli, providing that the edition sold through at full price. It is interesting to note, though, the costs that Murray fails to include. This estimate does not, for example, list a cost for Murray's time or for the time of his employees, for maintaining his premises or for

⁵¹ Details from Estimate Book of the publisher John Murray, NLS Ms.42720, pp. 84-85.

⁵² For example, see the entry for *Quarrels of Authors* (1814) in Murray Copies Ledger A, NLS Ms.42724, p. 65, and the entry for *Curiosities of Literature* (6th edition; 1817) in Murray Copies Ledger B, NLS Ms.42725, p. 50.

communicating with his printers or his agents. It also gives no indication of the cost of warehousing, which, in Raven's words, 'together with stock insurance could swallow up to a quarter of the gross returns on a publication.'⁵³ In fact, Raven goes on to describe how John Murray suffered enormous losses in the 1820s due to overprinting. He had to pay huge amounts for storage and was eventually forced to remainder large parts of his inventory.

For a fairly typical book like *Calamities*, then, a publisher had to put down a great deal of money up front, would make no profit at all until 60% or so of the edition was sold and stood to lose in the worst case scenario far more money than he stood to make if all went as predicted. In the event, *Calamities* was fairly successful. Murray's subscription book lists 377 advance sales to fifty-six other booksellers ordering between two and fifty copies.⁵⁴ His 1812 Stock Book indicates that he disposed of copies briskly after publication through sales in his shop and further sales to other booksellers (Blackwood, his Edinburgh partner, took fifty copies in May and a further twenty-four in August).⁵⁵ D'Israeli himself bought thirty-three copies on top of his fourteen gratis copies to give as presents, and copies were sent to periodicals (the *Monthly Magazine* is specified, and seven other copies are listed as having gone to Reviews). Other copies went to influential writers and trade figures including John Nichols, Thomas Campbell, George Dyer, Alexander Chalmers and James Perry.⁵⁶ Such promotions evidently paid off; in his 1813 Stock Book Murray notes that only seventy-one copies remained on hand.⁵⁷ Unlike D'Israeli's most successful productions, *Curiosities of Literature* and *The Literary Character*, however, *Calamities* did not merit further editions – evidently Murray thought it a modest rather than a runaway success and did not think he would profit by a second edition.

⁵³ Raven, p. 304.

⁵⁴ Subscriptions Lists of the publisher John Murray (Sales Book), 1812-1817, NLS Ms.42809, fols. 12^v-13^v.

⁵⁵ John Murray Stock Book 02 (1812), NLS Ms.42778. Murray's Stock Books are not foliated, but their indexes mean that figures are easy to locate.

⁵⁶ John Murray Copies Day Book 02 (September 1811-February 1817), NLS Ms.42887, p. 16.

⁵⁷ John Murray Stock Book 04 (1813), NLS Ms.42780.

While *Calamities* was a qualified success, the expense of printing it helps to demonstrate why the book trade's high capital costs and unreliable returns made publishers 'peculiarly vulnerable to failure.'⁵⁸ Lee Erickson states that 'typically 70 percent of all publications lost money', which does not seem an unreasonable estimate, although Erickson cites no specific evidence to back up this claim.⁵⁹ Payments to authors must therefore be considered in this context. While copyright payments for successful works may seem ridiculously low, they often represented reasonable remuneration based on expected sales. While half-profits publications could return relatively little to the author, and that with a considerable delay, the prospect of 50% of the profits going to the author compares very favourably with modern royalty arrangements. Authors' poor remuneration in the period can thus not principally be attributed to publisher's sharp practice, but rather to the status of their works as luxury goods, which meant that the restricted readerships they addressed were often insufficient for their support.

The Life of a Successful Book: *The World before the Flood*

To give a better sense of the potential for literary profits, I will now examine the sales history of one of the period's most successful poems, James Montgomery's *The World before the Flood*. Born in 1771 to Moravian parents in Ayrshire, Montgomery was a prolific writer from an early age.⁶⁰ After working as a baker's apprentice and in a general store and failing to get his early verses published in London, in 1792 he was appointed clerk and bookkeeper in the office of the *Sheffield Register*, to which he became a regular contributor. When the *Register* closed after Joseph Gales, its editor, fled to America to escape prosecution, Montgomery became the editor of a successor paper, the *Sheffield Iris*. While Montgomery pursued a less radical line than Gales, he was prosecuted for sedition in 1795 and again for malicious libel in 1796 for reporting the militia firing on a riotous crowd. He served terms of

⁵⁸ Raven, p. 294.

⁵⁹ Erickson, p. 89.

⁶⁰ G. Tolley, 'Montgomery, James (1771–1854)', *ODNB*
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19070>> [accessed 25 March 2010].

three and six months respectively in prison in York, but the publication of the *Iris* continued, Montgomery remaining editor until he sold the paper in 1825. He also set up as a publisher and printer, which made him a comfortable income. He became a man of substance in Sheffield, serving on numerous boards and societies and acting as a mainspring of support for missionary initiatives in the city. His wider reputation, though, rested on the hymns that he published, many of which are still standard in modern hymnals, and also on his poetry, which, although acclaimed at the time, has persisted rather less well.

Montgomery's first long poem, *The Ocean* (1805), attracted little attention, but his follow-up, *The Wanderer of Switzerland, and Other Poems* (1806) ran to three editions in six months. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the *Edinburgh Review* was unimpressed, claiming that 'in less than three years, nobody will know the name of the Wanderer of Switzerland' and calling Montgomery 'very weakly, very finical, and very affected.'⁶¹ However, the collection was praised by Byron as being 'worth more than a thousand Lyrical Ballads.'⁶² Southey was also an advocate, authoring later reviews in the *Quarterly* which opposed the *Edinburgh's* harsh judgements.⁶³ Montgomery's subsequent poem on the slave trade was well received, and his success gave him the confidence to undertake a biblical epic expressly inspired by *Paradise Lost*.

The World before the Flood is an accomplished but peculiar work, telling the story of a last pocket of 'patriarchs,' led by Enoch, facing the all-conquering armies of the 'Giant-monarch.' Beginning with the return of the self-exiled musician Javan to the patriarchs' camp, the poem combines its Miltonic model with extravagant pastoral and an initially intriguing love story, which is overwhelmed in the middle cantos by retellings of earlier biblical events. The poem concludes with a confrontation between the captive patriarchs and their oppressors, culminating in an impressive divine intervention which scatters the conquering army and allows the faithful to escape.

⁶¹ [Francis Jeffrey], 'Montgomery's *Poems*', *Edinburgh Review*, 9 (January 1807), pp. 347-54 (p. 347).

⁶² Byron: *The Complete Poetical Works*, I, 407.

⁶³ [Robert Southey], 'Montgomery's *Poems*', *Quarterly Review*, 6 (December 1811), pp. 405-19, and 'Montgomery's *World before the Flood*', *Quarterly Review*, 11 (April 1814), pp. 78-87.

In his preface Montgomery defends his building a complex fiction on a small amount of scriptural material, writing that ‘Fiction though it be, it is the fiction that represents Truth; and that *is* Truth, – Truth in the essence, though not in the name; Truth in the spirit, though not in the letter.’⁶⁴ This might seem to indicate a dryly pious poem, but in fact the poem is lushly descriptive, blending Miltonic and biblical language with skilful landscape writing and contemporary narrative vogues. The paucity of sources gives Montgomery room to incorporate a character recalling Byron’s feeling heroes:

As years enlarged his form, in moody hours,
His mind betray’d its weakness with its powers ;
Alike his fairest hopes and strangest fears
Were nursed in silence, or divulged with tears ;
The fulness of his heart repress’d his tongue,
Though none might rival Javan when he sung.⁶⁵

Like Herbert, Montgomery has obviously been paying attention to the tormented protagonists in his successful contemporaries’ Eastern tales, but in his poem he inverts the common model, redeeming his hero and subsuming him into the pastoral world of the patriarchs. This redemptive religious message is expressed using revelatory rather than didactic rhetoric, relying mainly on affect for its impact, the treatment of the biblical figures being more akin to novels of sentiment than to parables. For example, in the following passage, Enoch describes Eve’s reaction to the death of Adam:

“ Eve's faithful arm still clasp’d her lifeless Spouse ;
Gently I shook it from her trance to rouse;
She gave no answer ; motionless and cold,
It fell like clay from my relaxing hold ;
Alarm’d, I lifted up the locks of grey
That hid her cheek ; her soul had pass’d away :

⁶⁴ James Montgomery, *The World before the Flood, with Other Occasional Pieces* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1813), pp. x-xi.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Canto I, p. 13

A beauteous corse she graced her partner's side,
Love bound their lives, and Death could not divide.

“ Trembling astonishment of grief we felt,
Till Nature's sympathies began to melt ;
We wept in stillness through the long dark night :
—And O how welcome was the morning light !”⁶⁶

While the diction here is Miltonic, its elevation is counterpointed by restricting the depicted reactions to human ones and through the deliberate simplicity of key couplets. God, with the exception of his intervention at the end of the poem, is kept in the background. Instead, the characters are comforted by an almost Wordsworthian healing Nature, albeit one certainly not contextualised by the language of ‘a man speaking to men.’⁶⁷ While less formally innovative and more overtly religious than the canonical Romantic poets, Montgomery shares with them the key influence of Milton and an ability to hybridise Miltonic verse with contemporary forms and preoccupations.

As the poem's sales figures attest, in combining a religious subject with sentiment and romantic heroism Montgomery evidently judged the tastes of contemporary readers accurately. From the first, *The World before the Flood* sold extremely well. Longmans initially printed an octavo edition of 1000 copies, priced at eight shillings. This edition was released in April 1813 and all but 159 copies had been sold or distributed by the time Longman took stock that June. The book was reprinted in a larger edition of 1500 in September 1813, and this edition, priced at six shillings, also sold very fast, necessitating a further reprint the following June. The poem remained in print at the same price until 1837, its sales dropping off relatively slowly. Montgomery, already a recognised writer and reasonably comfortable

⁶⁶ *World before the Flood*, Canto IV, pp. 77-78.

⁶⁷ William Wordsworth [and Samuel Taylor Coleridge], *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems*, 3rd edition, 2 vols (London: Longman & Rees 1802), I, xxviii.

financially, had sensibly published the work under a half-profits arrangement. The profits were considerable, as the following table demonstrates.⁶⁸

Date	Copies sold ⁶⁹	Monies to Montgomery	Editions
June 1813	813	£109.1s.5d	1 st – April 1813 (1000 8vo)
June 1814	1657	£143.8s.8d	2 nd – September 1813 (1500 8vo)
June 1815	1181	£91.8s.1d	3 rd – June 1814 (1500 8vo)
June 1816	687	£44.2s.0d	4 th – November 1815 (1500 8vo)
June 1817	483	£54.16s.1d	
June 1818	392	£55.3s.0d	
June 1819	418	£31.0s.9d	5 th – January 1819 (1500 8vo)
June 1820	415	£22.5s.6d	
June 1821	354	£52.13s.11d	
June 1822	305	£44.3s.11d	6 th – November 1822 (1000 8vo)
June 1823	341	£15.6s.4d	
June 1824	320	£14.1s.4d	
June 1825	350	£51.16s.9d	
June 1826 ⁷⁰	181	£26.11s.7d	7 th – January 1826 (1000 8vo)
June 1827	409	£18.10s.10d	
June 1828	362	£53.10s.6d	
June 1829	217	£32.5s.11d	8 th – February 1829 (1000 8vo)
June 1830	225	£0.0s.0d	
June 1831	198	£23.0s.0d	
June 1832	99	£14.15s.2d	
June 1833	130	£19.5s.3d	
June 1834	106	£15.8s.2d	
June 1835	100	£14.16s.7d	
June 1836	92	£13.12s.6d	
June 1837	37	£5.11s.0d	

⁶⁸ Figures taken from Longman Divide Ledger D1 1807-1828, RUL MS 1393 Part I.2, fol. 222, Divide Ledger D2 1818-1866, RUL MS 1393, Part I.3, fols. 113, 309, and Divide Ledger D3 1828-1867, RUL MS 1393, Part I.4, fol. 227.

⁶⁹ These figures exclude copies marked as ‘delivered’. These included complementary copies of each edition for Montgomery himself, for personal use and to present to friends, as well as copies delivered to the Reviews and to influential figures – Southey is named as a recipient of a first edition copy. Deliveries were highest for the first edition (twenty-eight copies); they dropped to twelve copies for most of the later editions. In total, 128 copies were delivered over the course of the eight editions.

⁷⁰ The figures for this year only account for the sales of the remaining copies of the 6th edition; in fact, copies of the 7th were probably sold prior to this payment, but these are accounted for by Longmans in 1827.

As these figures show, a successful poem such as *The World before the Flood* could have a very long shelf life. While nearly a quarter of its total sales were in the first fourteen months, it took another four years for another quarter of the total copies to be sold and after that point the sales declined only relatively slowly. By contrast with the fairly smooth curve for the sales, the yearly profits paid to Montgomery could be quite volatile. He got nothing from an edition until it broke even, but after this point he received a string of relatively large payments as the remaining copies produced profits. This is why the 409 copies credited in 1827 returned only £18.10s.10d, while the 362 sold in 1828 returned £53.10s.6d. Such fluctuations were relatively unproblematic when editions sold out within a year, but once sales of *The World before the Flood* slowed, there were a number of years where the profits were meagre and one year (1830) when a new edition failing to break even in its first year meant that Montgomery received nothing at all.

Over the poem's twenty-three year lifespan in single-volume octavo, Montgomery made a total of £971.15s.3d. He also reaped additional profits later when the book was incorporated into his *Poetical Works*. While these profits are significant, the lengthy period over which they were returned must be considered. No single payment Montgomery received reached the gentlemanly level of annual income suggested by St Clair. The volatility of the payments must also be taken into account. An author who depended solely on the income from successful half-profits books would have to be very assiduous or fortunate to avoid years where reprintings coincided with a lack of payments from new books, leading to a drastically reduced income. A final major consideration is the level of popularity required to produce such returns. In a table prepared by Benjamin Colbert of the top-selling poems published by Longmans in the early nineteenth century, only four poets – Walter Scott, Robert Bloomfield, Thomas Moore and Robert Southey – produced works that outsold *The World before the Flood*.⁷¹ Expanding across the trade would add a few

⁷¹ Benjamin Colbert, 'Popular Romanticism?: Publishing, Readership and the Making of Literary History' in E.J. Clery, Caroline Franklin and Peter Garside (eds.), *Authorship, Commerce and the Public* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 155. Bloomfield's appearance on this list is a little misleading, as during the period of his greatest success, from which the figures in the table are compiled, he was not published by Longman, but by Vernor & Hood (see next chapter).

more names to this list (Byron, Samuel Rogers and Thomas Campbell, and a little later Felicia Hemans and L.E.L.) but it seems safe to name Montgomery as one of the best-selling contemporary poets of the Romantic Age. The fact that an author as successful as Montgomery publishing using the most prudent arrangement commonly available could sustain from his most profitable work a return of less than £1000 – and that over a twenty-three year period – indicates the considerable challenges that authors faced in attempting to conjure stable incomes.

Co-operation in the Book Trade

Having covered examples of publishing processes from the contract through the printing process to the sales, it remains only to comment briefly on the close co-operation between publishers in the period and the consequences of this co-operation for authors. Much can be elucidated using one revealing communication, a letter from John Murray to William Blackwood written on New Year's Day 1817. Blackwood had set up as a bookseller in 1804 and had been Murray's agent in Edinburgh since 1811, but at the time the letter was written was increasingly focusing on publishing and distributing works under his own imprint.⁷² In 1816 he had achieved a coup by securing the rights to co-publish Walter Scott's *Tales of my Landlord* with Murray and in April 1817 he would launch the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*, which was rebranded in the autumn of that year and became the influential and controversial *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. The relationship between Blackwood and Murray was thus undergoing significant changes, which put their relationship under considerable strain.

Murray's letter opens by describing how Blackwood's previous communication had 'overflowed [his] Cup of bearance' and he vacillates throughout between attempting to heal the rift he identifies, reasserting his sense that he has been

⁷² Peter Garside, 'Publishing 1800-1830' in Bill Bell (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland Volume 3: Ambition and Industry 1800-1880* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 79-90 (pp. 83-84).

wronged and offering Blackwood advice about how to run his business.⁷³ The most substantive sections are those in which Murray discusses how his firm and Blackwood's should co-operate to maximise their profits and minimise risks:

I will venture to tell you what you must not do – you must not as in a recent instance calculate upon gaining £10 more or less by keeping the whole of one little Volume to yourself – but estimate to what an extent of publication you may proceed by dividing your risque & the very increased profits which may arise thereby by commanding the whole range of the English Market.

Constable is so fully aware of the importance of creating a powerful interest in a Bookseller here that he has not in any instance engaged in a Book which he has not offered a share to a London publisher [...] It is not the profit of this little Volume if it sell that should be thought of but what must be gained in a large scale by the additional Capital divided risque & moral certainty of extensive success.⁷⁴

Murray thus argues that Blackwood's desire to reap all of the profits from what he published risked isolating him, both in terms of his accessing capital from the trade and in terms of the markets his works could penetrate. While Murray is more than a little hypocritical in this letter, since he jealously protected some of his biggest-selling books, such as Byron's works, his advice on co-operation is reasonable. Even Longmans, the biggest publisher in the period in terms of titles produced, employed agents to distribute their books and regularly co-operated with other houses.⁷⁵ Smaller firms were even more reliant on contacts and agents, which were of particular importance for accessing distant markets – as mentioned, Blackwood had previously been the agent for Murray titles in Edinburgh and both Longmans and Murray had partnered with Constable in the 1800s to distribute the *Edinburgh Review* in London. This policy of dividing and assigning publications kept trade relations clear and

⁷³ John Murray to William Blackwood, 1 January 1817 [misdated 1816], from Murray Letter Book, NLS Ms.41909, fols. 28^r-29^v (outgoing side) (fol. 28^r).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fols. 28^v-29^r.

⁷⁵ Longmans' market share and participation in consortia detailed in Asa Briggs, *A History of Longmans and their Books 1724-1990: Longevity in Publishing* (London and Delaware: British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2008), pp. 143-45.

amicable – as Murray writes regarding Constable’s policy of co-publishing the Waverley novels with a London firm, ‘I may mention to you that he never does interfere with the sale in England or partners would be cutting each others Throats at once and we would easily sell our share in Scotland.’⁷⁶ Forbearance like Constable’s kept the business equitable and individual fiefdoms intact, removing any need for competitive price-cutting or similar measures. Constable’s policy also allowed him to share the burden of Scott’s considerable copyright payments and the costs of printing the massive editions the Waverley novels ran to.

By operating as a cartel, publishers could keep prices high, pool capital and spread their risk. Murray writes to Blackwood that

these are things which may be deemed evils at first sight, but they will be found to produce commensurate advantages in the liberal & extensive dealing for which you ought now to be preparing yourself and at any rate I beg leave to both refer & to defer – to the plan of those who have the most extensive as well as respectable dealings in our trade.⁷⁷

As Murray’s statement indicates, these practices were long-established and while a new bookseller might feel that financially co-operating with the establishment was disadvantageous, to go against them was a risky strategy. Those operating outside such arrangements found themselves cut out of trade sales of books and copyright shares and had to compete with the pooled influence of the more established houses. The larger publishers formed a heavily-interconnected community which made efforts where possible to look after its own and to keep out competitors of whose practices it disapproved. The level of this entanglement is indicated by the fact that during the crash of 1826 the collapse of Hurst & Robinson also brought down both the profitable and solvent firm of Archibald Constable, for whom Hurst & Robinson served as a London agent, and the printer James Ballantyne, whose finances were intimately intertwined with Constable’s. John Sutherland, while arguing that ‘the British book trade as a whole seems to have weathered the 1826 storm quite serenely’, quotes

⁷⁶ Murray to Blackwood, fol. 29^f.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

figures which indicate that Longmans' entanglements with Hurst & Robinson forced them to write off £40,000 of debt.⁷⁸ Such levels of entwinement bespeak the strength of the culture of co-operation (or connivance) in publishing.

Another strong indication of the extent to which publishers interlaced their finances can be found in firms' copyright books, in which they recorded complex transactions involving fractions of the copyrights owned by the trade. These copyrights run the gamut of genres and make clear the relative diminutiveness of literary production runs compared to the real big sellers – religious and educational works. Such works could be split into very small shares. Longmans' copyright ledgers record that in 1802 the firm owned shares of 1/24th and 1/16th in Graglia's '*Italien Dictionary*.'⁷⁹ Longmans later acquired further shares in Graglia's book, a 1/32nd share from John Harris for £15 in 1819 and a 1/64th share from George Whittaker for £13 in 1826. As these prices show, the dictionary remained a valuable property for decades after its initial publication in 1795. The Longman copyright ledgers record editions of 3000 in February 1802, of 5000 in November 1807, of 4000 in January 1815, 5000 in December 1818, 5000 in April 1822, 6000 in February 1826, 6000 in September 1829, 4000 in January 1834, 4000 in February 1837 and 4000 in October 1840. If a complete list, this would indicate that the book actually became increasingly popular twenty years after its publication. The 46,000 copies printed over forty years realised a substantial, albeit long-term, profit for the publishers who held shares. Even more impressive sales figures were racked up by major educational works such as Lindlay Murray's *English Grammar*. First published in 1795, Longmans' books record it being reprinted at least yearly between 1809 and 1829 in editions of 10,000 copies or more, and it continued to be reprinted until the 1870s.⁸⁰ The *English Grammar* was only one of Murray's astonishingly successful books, which also included his *English Exercises* (1797), his *English Reader* (1799) and a

⁷⁸ John Sutherland, 'The British Book Trade and the Crash of 1826', *The Library*, 6th Series, 9 (June 1987), pp. 148-161 (pp. 159, 161).

⁷⁹ Longman Copyright Ledger no. 3 1794-1827, RUL MS 1393 Part I.279 and Longman Copyright Ledger no. 4 1797-1842, RUL MS 1393 Part I.280. The ledgers are unfoliated, but are arranged alphabetically, so these figures are easy to locate.

⁸⁰ See the Longman Copyright Ledgers and Ingrid Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, 'Murray, Lindley (1745–1826)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19640>> [accessed 24 March 2010].

number of new editions and sequels to all three books, as well as popular religious works. Together these books sold in the millions, both in Britain and in the United States, although the latter's buccaneering copyright practices prevented British publishers from competing effectively in that market. Murray's having chosen to sell his copyrights thus provided the publishers who subsequently bought shares in them with a secure underlying source of income from which the high initial costs of publishing new works could be met.

Even with books that were out of copyright according to the 1774 Lord's ruling in the case of *Donaldson v. Beckett*, which denied that publishers could hold copyright perpetually, mainstream publishers often regulated their production through adhering to old divisions. Longmans' ledgers show that shares in Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* existed in denominations as small as 1/200th and record that the work was printed regularly and co-operatively – an 1820 edition lists no fewer than eighteen publishers.⁸¹ Longmans also held fractions of most of Johnson's other works, as well as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, James Thomson's *The Seasons*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and a huge host of other books. The entries for such books in Longmans' copyright ledgers extend well into the nineteenth century, indicating that the benefits of co-operation to the trade were significant enough to make holding to old arrangements and paying sometimes considerable sums for notional copyrights a sensible practice.

While publishers had regular spats, communications between the houses ensured that grievances were not left to fester. For example, Longman & Co. addressed the following letter to Murray in April 1831:

Dear Sir

We were not a little surprised yesterday to learn that some of your recently published works were on sale by M^r Tegg at a ~~price~~ considerably

⁸¹ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets*, 2 vols (London: Printed for F. C and J. Rivington; J. Nunn; Cadell and Davies; Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown; G. & W.B. Whittaker; J. Richardson; J. Walker; Newman and Co.; Lackington and Co.; Black, Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen; J. Black and Son; Sherwood, Neely and Jones; Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy; J. Robinson; E. Edwards; Simpkin and Marshall; R. Scholey; and G. Cowie, 1820).

depreciated price : for instance Moore's Byron 2 Vols (of which we purchased 8 sets at your late sale & have 5 of them now remaining) for £2.2.0; Irving's Columbus & Granada of both of which we have considerable stocks; one at 9/= & the other at 16/=; which latter cost us 15/= & 26/= P Copy.

Had we the least idea that these books (& perhaps others) would have been thus early thrown into the market, we certainly should not have purchased to the extent of ~~having the chance of having the books we now have left by subject to a loss :-~~ & we did which had by ~~you~~ this depreciation subjected us to a considerable loss. Under these circumstances we suppose that you will not allow us to be losers upon books so lately purchased at your sale terms of you.⁸²

While Longman's irritation at being undercut by Tegg with Murray's connivance is understandable, it is telling that the firm bothered to address this letter to Murray to try and resolve the situation. Presumably they would not have done so without expecting some sort of resolution. A draft of a similar sort of letter in the Murray Archive records Murray's fury at what he believed to be a deliberate accounting error by a clerk at Longmans designed to swindle him out of his small profit for distributing copies of the *Edinburgh Review*. A subsequent note, however, describes how Thomas Norton Longman called personally to resolve the issue and after 'warm discussions' the matter was smoothed over.⁸³ Both these communications highlight the importance of personal connections in the trade, of a sense of fair play that tamed to a considerable extent commercial competition. Such connections also allowed for easy collaboration. For example, Murray worked with Longman & Co. on *The Secret History of the Court and Cabinet of St. Cloud* in 1805:

I propose with your concurrence to omit the improprieties complained of in the Life of Talleyrand, & if you'll do me the favour to send the corrected Copy – I will read it with all the Care and Expedition which circumstances require or will Permit & will return it to Gillett. I enclose a curious Passage which when know will materially increase the Public attention to our Book, and as

⁸² Longman & Co. to John Murray, 22 April 1831, from Longman Outletter Book January 1826 – May 1837, transcribed Michael Bott, RUL MS 1393 Part I.102, letter 167D.

⁸³ John Murray to Thomas Norton Longman, 21 August 1807, from John Murray Letter Book, March 1803-11 September 1823, NLS Ms.41908, fols. 75^v-77^r. (fol. 76^v).

you have some influence in the Morning Post perhaps you will take the trouble to cause its immediate inclusion & it may be paid for or not as they determine.⁸⁴

Murray's willingness to cut the work shows how the labour of producing a book could be spread among the firms according to the priorities of those involved, and his display of moral probity shows how having multiple firms involved could lead to a consensus on how to best present the material to the public (although in this case it is possible that Longmans might have been prepared to risk a more scandalous text than the sober Murray was prepared to countenance). The letter also demonstrates the way that firms would pool and leverage contacts to promote books. I shall discuss this further, but suffice for now to say that as the larger publishers cultivated collections of influential media outlets, amicable relations could assist both with placing effective advertisements and with securing good reviews (or 'puffs').

It is easy to see from these examples that individual authors approaching the fairly collegiate body of publishers were at a considerable disadvantage. The highest advances in modern publishing are generally produced by auctions in which an author's agent gets multiple competing publishers to bid against each other. Romantic period authors did not have literary agents and the only major auctions in publishing were within the trade.⁸⁵ Lacking the ability to set publishers against each other, authors would generally get similar sorts of offers wherever they chose to take their books. One of David Williams' ambitions for the Literary Fund, as I discuss in the following chapter, was to address this imbalance so that authors might exert pressure as a class. Had this come to pass, authors might have been supported by an organisation which could have put them collectively on a par with the publishing establishment. As it was, though, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the

⁸⁴ John Murray to Messrs Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 15 November 1805, from Murray Letter Book, NLS Ms.41908, fols. 31^v-32^r.

⁸⁵ Walter Scott, who had the Ballantyne brothers as proto-agents and who successfully played opposing publishing houses off against each other for profit, was a major exception, as I discuss in Chapter Three. As Dustin Griffin notes, Alexander Pope triggered a bidding war for his Homer, but this was a one-off occurrence ('The Rise of the Professional Author', in Suarez and Turner (eds.), pp. 132-45 (p. 141.)).

Society of Authors and the first literary agencies were established. Romantic-period authors thus generally faced the cartelised publishing industry as lone individuals, or at best with the support of friends. While publishers regularly enjoyed friendly relationships with individual writers, the conviviality of the trade often left authors with little room for negotiation.

Chapter Two

The Working Writer

The Foundation and Philosophies of the Literary Fund

Isaac D’Israeli was not the only writer rightly concerned about the parlous circumstances of those seeking to live by the pen. David Williams, philosopher, Dissenting minister, educationalist and man of letters, was a passionate believer in the value of authors. The first volume of the minute books of the Literary Fund, the organisation he founded in 1790 to address his concerns about the rewards they received for their labours, opens with a summary of his argument:

Men of genius [...] are the greatest benefactors of every community; and their cases known, they should never be suffered to experience distress. It is distress, or the apprehension of distress, that perverts talents and produces their crimes.

To reclaim them, punishment is generally applied, but punishment is a precarious and odious instrument; justice and recompence are the true and certain means to obtain their services.

Neglect and menace produce repugnance and hostility; rewards and the prospects of consolation in misery and old age, would produce prodigies of Zeal and exertion.¹

Williams was painfully aware that many writers who produced work of recognised value were, in D’Israeli’s words, ‘good enough to be praised, but not to sell’.² Both Williams and D’Israeli bemoaned the fact that innovative work always risks being

¹ London, British Library, Archive of the Royal Literary Fund, Royal Literary Fund Minute Book – Volume 1, Loan 96 RLF 2/1/1. The account is on unnumbered pages at the opening of the volume. Following references to the RLF Archive give manuscript name and reference only.

² Isaac D’Israeli, *Calamities of Authors; including some Inquiries Respecting their Moral and Literary Characters*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1812), I, 205.

met with incomprehension, causing talented writers to shy away and produce less valuable but more profitable writings for a perceived market or for the highest bidder. However, Williams pushed the argument further than D'Israeli, seeing impoverished writers not as individual melancholy cases but victims of a social injustice which damaged and made impotent individuals whose ideas might otherwise have had wide-ranging benefits. Also unlike D'Israeli, who portrays the miseries of authors as being regrettable but somehow inevitable, Williams believed that the calamities of authors could be legislated against. Removing the threat of pecuniary distress from authors would, he asserted, allow the populace as a whole to profit from an outpouring of superior intellectual work. This is in keeping with his larger philosophical project – as James Dybikowski asserts, ‘The theme of the primacy of intellectual liberty runs as a seamless web through [Williams’] thought.’³ For Williams, a desirable liberal society was founded on free presses through whose productions thriving communities of writers could freely discourse untroubled by pecuniary or political pressures. He is thus in line with what Paul Keen describes as ‘[t]he Enlightenment ideal of literature as a means of generating and diffusing new ideas’, an ideal which, as Keen notes, ‘collapsed partly under the weight of the overtly political stresses’ following the French Revolution, a collapse discernible in the Literary Fund’s early institutional history.⁴ This, however, does not negate the essential accuracy of William’s argument that writers forced by circumstances to pander to limited markets will be socially and financially compromised, as the examples from the Literary Fund’s archive examined later in this chapter demonstrate. The lives of these writers and Williams’ arguments for the Literary Fund also bear witness to the awkward failure of authors in the period to constitute themselves in the public imagination as a body of respected professionals.

In 1773 Williams presented his first proposal for an institution to support authors to the Club of Thirteen, a debating society he had formed with his friend Benjamin Franklin. Franklin and Williams had become acquainted after Franklin

³ J. Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground: An Examination of the Ideas, Projects and Life of David Williams* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1993), p. 229.

⁴ Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 75.

expressed admiration for Williams' deist *Essays on Public Worship, Patriotism and Projects of Reformation*, and they maintained a lively dialogue throughout Franklin's residency in England. Other members of the Club included Colonel Dawson, the Lieutenant Governor of the Isle of Man, the pottery and porcelain manufacturers Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Bentley, the scientific instrument maker John Whitehurst, the architect and painter James Stuart, the botanist Daniel Solander, the educationalist Thomas Day, and the songwriter and soldier Captain Thomas Morris.⁵ In pitching his scheme to this eclectic company Williams was keen to stress that his proposal was not simply to establish an aid-dispensing charity, but to create an institution with a wider social and moral remit. Tellingly, the other members of the club generally agreed that William's scheme was virtuous, but doubted whether subscribers could be found to aid such an ill-defined group as distressed 'men of genius.' Franklin, responding for the group, warned Williams that such an institution would 'require so much time, perseverance and patience, that the Anvil may wear out the hammer.'⁶

Franklin's caution was justified, as the first meeting of the Literary Fund did not take place for a further seventeen years. Williams' life in the 1770s was taken up with religious, historical and political writings and with running a school.⁷ He also worked on another of the Club's projects, his *Liturgy on the Universal Principles of Religion and Morality*, which drew favourable notices from Rousseau, Voltaire and Frederick the Great and was credited as an influence on religious practice in post-Revolutionary France.⁸ However, he never wholly gave up on his plan. After the conclusion of the American War of Independence he arranged audiences with Adam Smith, William Pitt, Charles James Fox, Edmund Burke and

⁵ Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 8.

⁶ Royal Literary Fund Minute Book – Volume One, Loan 96 RLF 2/1/1.

⁷ Cross, *Common Writer*, pp. 9-10. For more on Williams' wider contexts, see Dybikowski and Whitney R.D. Jones, *David Williams: The Anvil & the Hammer* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1986).

⁸ David Williams, 'The Missions of David Williams and James Tilly Matthews to England', *English Historical Review*, 53 (October 1938), pp. 651-68 (p. 652).

Joseph Banks to discuss the idea. Unfortunately for Williams, none of these luminaries would consent to patronise a fund to aid authors. Pitt, Banks and Smith expressed some interest but would not commit their time or resources. Fox received Williams in a state of disarray and referred him swiftly on to Burke. The meeting with Burke was particularly unsuccessful – in Williams’ words his intimidating interlocutor ‘looked fiercely in my face and said: “Authors, writers, scribblers are the pests of the country, and I will not be troubled with them.”’⁹ Williams, ‘infected’ with Burke’s fury, responded, ‘Who and what are you to use such language? If you had not been a man of letters, you would have been a bogtrotter.’¹⁰ The meeting did not recover.

In this exchange Burke argues that authors as a class were beneath his notice; Williams contends that on the contrary it is the existence of the category of author that has allowed Burke to reach his current position. Both these assertions are telling. Williams is correct in that Burke brought himself to notice by writing. However, Burke’s political career and influence were predicated on his having formed a specific public identity rather than his being identified generically or professionally as an author. To succeed as an author in a society where literature was predominantly the preserve of a small and tightly-interconnected elite meant becoming known as a specific self rather than as a representative of a somewhat suspicious trade. Since it was individuals rather than authors as a class that were valued, Williams faced, as Franklin predicted, an uphill struggle to establish the value of authorship in itself, as his own first impulse to approach famous and eminent exemplars indicates.

Williams subsequently dropped his idea until 1787, when Floyer Sydenham, an acquaintance of his, died as a result of his inability to pay a minor bill for provisions. Sydenham was a noted scholar of Greek whose writings had achieved positive critical notices but whose subscriber numbers failed to match his expectations, forcing him to contract debts which placed him in the circumstances

⁹ David Williams, *Incidents in My Own Life Which Have Been Thought of Some Importance*, ed. Peter France (Brighton: University of Sussex Library Press, 1980), p. 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

that led to his demise.¹¹ Sources are unclear on whether he died in debtor's prison or whether he committed suicide before he was incarcerated; regardless, his untimely death reawakened Williams' resolve.¹² Having failed to secure the interest of an influential patron, he decided to press ahead with the Fund himself and together with a small group of clubbable friends he began gathering funds to promote his idea.¹³

The eight original subscribers to the Fund included three doctors, Hugh Downman, Thomas Dale and Alexander Johnson, the architect Robert Mitchell, the portraitist John Francis Rigaud, the patent medicine entrepreneur Isaac Swainson, the businessman Alexander Blair, and James Martin, MP for Tewkesbury.¹⁴ Downman was a poet, having produced among other works a long didactic poem entitled *Infancy, or, The Management of Children* and Dale was 'a good linguist and classical scholar,' but none of these men lived principally by writing.¹⁵ It is striking that Williams' project to help authors began to be realised through representatives of other professions and that these men evidently accepted that writing was something with a value which went unrecognised by markets or existing institutions. As this initial group expanded, men whose livelihoods were more closely involved with literature joined, including the fashionable farceur and journalist Edward Topham and the booksellers Lockyer Davis and Edward Brooke.¹⁶ Of particular importance was the tireless support of John Nichols, inheritor of William Bowyer's prosperous

¹¹ E. I. Carlyle, 'Sydenham, Floyer (1710–1787)', rev. Anna Chahoud, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26861>> [accessed 28 May 2009].

¹² In the papers of the Literary Fund and writings by Williams, Sydenham is always referred to as having died 'in consequence of an arrest for a small debt' or something similar (Williams, *Incidents*, p. 47).

¹³ See Dybikowski, p. 238.

¹⁴ Cross, *Common Writer*, p. 13.

¹⁵ Alick Cameron, 'Downman, Hugh (1740–1809)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7983>> [accessed 28 May 2009]; G.S. Boulger, 'Dale, Thomas (1748/9–1816)', rev. Kaye Bagshaw, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7018>> [accessed 28 May 2009].

¹⁶ Cross, *Common Writer*, pp. 16-17. See also the RLF Annual Reports, which contain full subscriber lists, the earliest dating from 1792 (Loan 96 RLF 3) and the Minute Books, which contain lists of members present at each meeting (Loan 96 RLF 2).

printing house, editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine* and a respected antiquarian who was also the Deputy of Farringdon Ward and a close friend of the radical politician John Wilkes.¹⁷ However, while the book trade began to associate itself with the Fund fairly early in its existence, in its first decade the organisation was funded neither by established aristocratic patrons of literature nor by successful writers seeking to aid their compatriots. The Fund's foundation was instead a testament to the growing resources of a professional middle class consisting of men with excess capital to invest in charitable causes and enough of an investment in the value of writing to wish to better the lots of its producers. The Literary Fund, like the book club and the circulating library, allowed a group to pool their resources and collectively access and influence literary culture in a manner previously reserved for the wealthy. In line with Williams' vision, the Fund sought to operate by fair and democratic principles, with confidential applications and a decision-making process modelled on Parliament seeking to mitigate the compromising sense of obligation created by more traditional patronage arrangements.

The nascent Committee advertised in various London newspapers in order to raise awareness and attract subscribers. The early notices were fairly unassuming, stating that 'a small number of Gentlemen [...] have formed the outlines of an Institution to relieve and support Genius and Learning in sickness, in age, and at the termination of life; and to preserve from distress the widows and orphans of those who have any claims on the Public, from their Literary industry or merit.'¹⁸ This advertisement omits any mention of the social objectives that Williams espoused to his club, instead restricting its purview to the practical alleviation of suffering. Such modest messages met with a limited response and the Committee subsequently shifted to a more assertive line, stating that the Fund's goal was

¹⁷ Julian Pooley and Robin Myers, 'Nichols family (*per. c.* 1760–1939)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63494>> [accessed 14 June 2009].

¹⁸ 'Literary Fund', *The World*, 24 May 1788, p. [1]. Reprinted on several later occasions; see *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers*, <<http://find.galegroup.com/bncn/>> [accessed 31 March 2009].

to withdraw those apprehensions of extreme poverty, and those desponding views of futurity, which lead Genius and Talent from the path of Virtue, prostitute them to pernicious factions, and convert the Liberty of the Press into a detestable and unsufferable license.¹⁹

The subscribers in this formulation are not merely aiding writers suffering from pecuniary distress, but also protecting the population at large from the insidious effects of unscrupulous writings. This advertisement appeals to anyone with pretensions to being a cultured citizen, selling writers as philosophers and shapers, as key influencers who should be protected and valued in order to encourage them to work towards the creation of a better society.

Despite this change in advertising strategy from restrained sentiment to bullishness, for two years the Fund's advertisements produced only enough income to defray the expenses they themselves incurred and to print a proposed constitution. The problem Williams faced was, as he recognised, that 'in the Literary Fund, he could produce no symbols of misery; no actual specimens and scenes to engage that compassion and humanity on which he was obliged to place its first reliance.'²⁰ The fundraising solution eventually devised by John Nichols avoided having explicitly to make the case for authors. In 1793 the Fund held its first Anniversary Dinner, to which eminent political, social and literary figures were invited, drawing in other, paying, interested parties in their wake.²¹ These dignitaries and gentlemen were wined, dined and toasted while being told of the good work the Fund was doing and encouraged to donate, subscribe or increase their existing commitments. The Fund's dinners became major events in the social calendar and attracted many notable speakers. Early gatherings were addressed by men closely involved with the Society, such as Sir Joseph Andrews, Thomas Williams and Sir James Bland

¹⁹ 'Literary Fund', *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 25-27 May 1790, p. [1]. Reprinted later in various papers, often with the subscription list appended – see for example 'Literary Fund', *The World*, 26 August 1790, p. [4].

²⁰ Royal Literary Fund Minute Book – Volume 1, Loan 96 RLF 2/1/1.

²¹ For details see the Anniversary Dinner Records, Loan 96 RLF 4/1.

Burges.²² As the Fund became increasingly connected with the establishment in its second decade, more senior noblemen, including the Duke of Somerset, the Earl of Chichester and the Duke of Kent, addressed the company. Later in the nineteenth century, dinners were chaired by renowned speakers including William Gladstone, Benjamin Disraeli, Prince Albert and King Leopold II of Belgium.²³

With these exalted guests far in the future, though, in the 1790s the Literary Fund began to confidentially assist its first applicants while gradually increasing its visibility and assets with the dinners, further appeals and, on one occasion, theatricals, building its resources through its members' contacts and sociability.²⁴ This provided the Fund with the resources to discreetly aid less prominent figures; by the turn of the century the Committee had heard almost one hundred cases and had provided money to writers including Charlotte Lennox, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the exiled Chateaubriand.²⁵

In 1801 the Fund resolved to celebrate its first ten years of existence by publishing a book of prose and verse. This book, *Claims of Literature*, was completed and printed in 1802, and its two sections epitomised the struggle within the Fund regarding its purview.²⁶ The verse section of *Claims* included a number of celebratory odes authored by writers including D'Israeli, the lawyer William Boscawen, the songwriter Captain Thomas Morris, the former politician and current Poet Laureate Henry James Pye and the staunch Hanoverian and patriot William

²² See any late volume of the RLF Annual Reports, Loan 96 RLF 3, for a full list of the Chairmen of the Anniversaries up to that report's date.

²³ Transcripts of Victorian dinner speeches can be found in the Annual Reports, Loan 96 RLF 3.

²⁴ Preparations for the theatricals are detailed in Royal Literary Fund Minute Book – Volume 1, Loan 96 RLF 2/1/1, pp. 15, 20, 27, 35. The play finally performed on 16 April 1792 was *Richard III*, with Committee member Thomas Morris in the title role. The *Morning Chronicle* wrote that the production was 'infinitely more correct than we had a right to respect from Gentlemen unpractised in the art' ('Benefit of the Literary Fund', 17 April 1792, p. [3]).

²⁵ RLF Case Files: Mrs Charlotte Lennox, Loan 96 RLF 1/12; Mr Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Loan 96 RLF 1/41; Monsieur le Vicomte François Auguste de Chateaubriand, Loan 96 RLF 1/75.

²⁶ David Williams, *Claims of Literature: The Origin, Motives, Objects, and Transactions, of the Society for the Establishment of a Literary Fund* (London: William Miller, 1802).

Thomas Fitzgerald. None of these writers were particularly distinguished. Pye's Laureateship was a political reward and his verse was routinely mocked. Fitzgerald is now remembered mainly as a victim of satires, including James and Horace Smith's 'Loyal Effusions' (in their *Rejected Addresses*) and Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, which opens, 'Still must I hear? – shall hoarse Fitzgerald bawl/His creaking couplets in a tavern hall,/And I not sing?'.²⁷ As Byron indicates, the poems printed in *Claims* were written to be recited publically to appreciative and soused audiences in order to provoke donations. They generally contained a plethora of muses and graces, allusions to the fates of writers like Thomas Chatterton and Thomas Otway and a great deal of bombast on how the work of the Literary Fund brought further glory to ever-glorious Britain. For example, Fitzgerald's contribution for 1799 begins

Is there a sight the heart can hold more dear
Than what Humanity contemplates here?
Pure's the delight that animates the breast,
To see you throng to succour the distress'd.
Manes of Butler, Otway, Dryden, rise!
Behold an object grateful to your eyes:
England, at last atoning for her crime—
England, that starved the witty and sublime!
With contrite feeling opes her ample store,
And bids the Sons of Genius starve no more.²⁸

Fitzgerald continues by arguing that the Literary Fund is a manifestation of a decent English concern with liberty, which he contrasts with the tyranny and destruction unleashed by the 'Gallic Daemon, hated by the wise', before concluding with an encomium to Williams (somewhat peculiarly, considering Williams' publicised

²⁷ James and Horace Smith, *Rejected Addresses: Or, The New Theatrum Poetarum* (London: John Miller, 1812), pp. 1-4; George Gordon, Lord Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, lines 1-2, in *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980-93), I, 229.

²⁸ William Thomas Fitzgerald, 'An Address to the Company Assembled at Freemasons' Hall, on the Anniversary of the Literary Fund, May 2, 1799' in *Claims*, p. 216.

sympathies).²⁹ While lacking much interest as verse, Fitzgerald's lines serve to show how the Fund's officers had found ways to tie in its mission with an emerging interest in the lives of distressed geniuses, an interest to which D'Israeli would later pander in *Calamities*. Fitzgerald gestures towards Whiggish progressivism through describing the Fund's righting a historic wrong, but also ties the Fund's mission to his virulent patriotism. His rhetoric highlights how Williams' expansive vision for the Fund was tempered by the involvement of more conservative figures, who became financially crucial when the Anniversary Dinners became the Fund's primary source of new revenue. This is not to say that such men were useless to the Fund except as purses. Fitzgerald in particular was a kindly and considerate advocate for numerous authors. Byron's begrudging him his annual chance to posture is thus a little cruel, but nevertheless accurately skewers the Fund's increasing identification with the establishment, a problematic situation for Williams' larger aims.

It was these aims which Williams laid out in the prose section of *Claims*. As the founder of the Fund, he was asked to write a report on its achievements. However, Williams asserted that because the Fund's work had to remain confidential to protect its applicants, he could not produce a conventional account. Instead he proposed to explain why the Fund existed, writing that 'the history of the society, to be useful, should consist more of argument than narrative'.³⁰ As Dybikowski argues, in *Claims* Williams 'situate[s] the Fund in a larger picture which it by itself was powerless to change'.³¹ By contrast with the self-congratulatory poetry, which figured the Fund as an achieved success, Williams believed the Fund would necessarily fail to achieve his aims unless changes were made in the social conditions and intellectual presumptions which created the contexts for authors' successes and failures.

Williams opens the main part of his argument with a consideration of genius, 'the actuating principle of all these arts; the origin of all the distinctions of man from

²⁹ *Claims*, p. 218.

³⁰ *Claims*, p. 7.

³¹ Dybikowski, p. 242.

other animals, and the source of all his peculiar happiness.’³² Genius, in Williams’ formulation, is inherently creative, inherently self-justifying and its products are inherently useful. He is clear that there are different kinds of genius – a philosopher is not required to put novel ideas in novel prose, and a poet is not expected to create new thoughts as well as new expressions. For Williams, though, a genius is someone who enriches society as a whole with new knowledge or new techniques with ongoing benefits:

MEN OF GENIUS, instead of being unproductive, as intimated by a popular writer, are the most productive of all the classes of mankind. Their inventions not only fix and realise themselves in some subject, and for some time, but they direct the mode of storing and setting in motion future industry; and instead of perishing in the performance, they are renovated in every renewed action of a similar nature, and endure for ever in some permanent habit, regulating the conduct, shortening the labour, and multiplying the comforts, of mankind.³³

In taking a jab at Adam Smith, Williams seeks to debunk his characterisation of men of letters in the chapter on productive and unproductive labour in the second book of *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith asserts that the work of such men ‘produces nothing which could afterwards purchase or procure an equal quantity of labour’; rather, it ‘perishes in the very instant of its production.’³⁴ Williams agrees that the constitution of society makes the first of these assertions accurate, but contends that rather than perishing as they are produced, in fact literary works continue to live after their initial creation, being reborn whenever they are reconsidered and exerting an extended web of influence through reiteration, imitation and development. This argument strikingly prefigures parts of Martin Heidegger’s in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, which contends that works of art are reborn or reoccur whenever new

³² *Claims*, p. 11.

³³ *Claims*, pp. 22-23.

³⁴ Adam Smith, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, gen. eds. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner, textual ed. W.B. Todd, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), I, 331.

eyes consider them.³⁵ Williams, though, does not make his argument through the medium of aesthetics. Instead his argument hybridises Smith's political economy with eighteenth-century theories of genius, which, as Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolander contend, 'argued that the productive forces of society were, or ought to be, organized according to the distribution of natural or acquired intellectual powers'.³⁶ In such formulations genius was not associated with 'creative imagination and emotional spontaneity' so much as with 'judgement, learning and artful restraints'.³⁷ By contrast with later discourses, for Williams the genius was inevitably a social agent whose productions arose from and pragmatically contributed to society and its institutions.

Williams' claim is that authors deserve remuneration equivalent to the social benefits produced by their works. He contends that developments in knowledge are incremental, that each increment is indispensable and that incremental progress results from the writers' productions. This being so, he sees men of genius as being grossly undercompensated:

Is it wonderful men of genius become exasperated and turbulent, when they find an equitable distribution allowed in every province but that of literature? The state derives immense advantages from what may be called the incorporation of the common stock of the knowledge of the country, on which every capitalist and every adventurer may draw at his pleasure. Great portions of this stock are furnished by persons who linger out their lives in obscurity and want.³⁸

³⁵ See Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 143-209 (particularly the third section, 'Truth and Art').

³⁶ Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolander, 'Genius versus Capital: Eighteenth-Century Theories of Genius and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*', *MLQ*, 55 (June 1994), pp. 169-89 (p. 170). Quoted in David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 2.

³⁷ M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 21.

³⁸ *Claims*, pp. 46-47.

Williams, then, sees the gross misevaluation of intellectual property as presenting a major disincentive for its production. His view of why literary production is misvalued is grounded partly in its lacking institutions: ‘In the modern establishments of relative value, between mental and bodily labour, the difficulty of ascertaining a standard, induced genius and learning to call in auxiliaries, to prevent the necessity of perpetual evaluations, by the privileges of PROFESSIONS, and the institution of ORDERS and CORPORATIONS.’³⁹ Without institutions to represent their interests, authors’ works are valued by and placed in the service of more organised groupings. When authorship is seen as a strictly individual good rather than a serious social contribution, its value is occluded and its powers can be misdirected.

Williams develops this argument by looking into the reasons why individuals see authorship as a viable career despite the fact that so many end up financially disappointed. He places a good deal of the blame at the doors of institutions of education, arguing that they teach their pupils to place values on certain kinds of knowledge far higher than those attributed to them in the marketplace. For this reason, he believes that organisations which seek to do good by educating the less well-off frequently damage rather than aid the objects of their attentions:

“Give them an education,” says ignorant and charitable Opulence, pointing at the squalid offspring of the famishing poor. WISDOM would say of the greater number, “Give them nutritious food, and certain elementary instructions, and inure their bodies to labour.” They are all immured in hospitals and schools, deprived of bodily exercise, and fed sparingly, but disciplined into a wretched species of LITERATURE, which they are instructed to believe is a PATENT for riches and honours. With bodies rendered unfit for labour, with sedentary habits, a passion for reading, and an expectation of being provided for and distinguished, they enter the world.

In these circumstances, the best disposed may have the fewest chances. They who are early susceptible of servility and intrigue, succeed in various directions; but when the professions are supplied, the surplus produce of

³⁹ *Claims*, p. 43.

many charitable institutions in Great Britain, is an endless succession of petty scholars, whose misery is the opprobrium of modern literature.⁴⁰

This argument somewhat complicates Williams' earlier assertions by arguing that a surfeit of scholars is possible. The two arguments can be reconciled by considering the excess scholars to be an excess only under a system where provision for men of learning is not sufficient. It is also possible to consider these scholars as falling outside the group of geniuses Williams would wish to make independent, although this contradicts his assertions about the value of talents; as Jennie Batchelor puts it, 'learning', 'labour' and 'utility' have key secondary positions in Williams' 'intellectual division of labour'.⁴¹ Regardless, the idea that many men are being overeducated creates an interesting tension in Williams' argument, as the same schools that produce unnecessary educated men are presumably also the places where the skills necessary for the ideas of 'men of genius' to be received and understood are taught. For Williams, however, as for other contemporary commentators, a little learning is dangerous, producing 'SICKLY SPAWN' in 'the male and female pupils of the CIRCULATING LIBRARIES'.⁴² Williams did not advocate a democratisation of reading so much as a professionalisation of knowledge work. He hoped that 'the truths exemplified by [the Literary Fund], might induce an enlightened legislature, to form a LITERARY JURISPRUDENCE, to allot to GENIUS, in all its exertions, an equitable portion, present and eventual, of the effects of those exertions'.⁴³ This is emphatically not a market-based model, but one which requires elites to legislate the value of writing, measuring its impacts and employing its insights for the good of a wider public which is not necessarily required to comprehend the reasons why writings are to be valued. Authors specifically, rather than the populace in general, were to be elevated.

⁴⁰ *Claims*, pp. 73-74.

⁴¹ Jennie Batchelor, *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750-1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 154-55.

⁴² *Claims*, pp. 98-99.

⁴³ *Claims*, p. 126.

Claims of Literature caused a clash between Williams and a fellow committee member, the former politician and minor poet Sir James Bland Burges. Burges, as Dybikowski notes, was part of an increasingly large conservative grouping on the Committee. He collaborated with William Boscawen in appointing friends, proceeding carefully ‘for fear of alarming the Democrats & creating a schism before the Institution is quite in a settled state.’⁴⁴ Believing that Williams’ part of *Claims* was an unacceptable attempt to politicise the work of the Fund, Burges resigned when the publication went ahead. For his part, Williams wrote that Burges had ‘endeavoured to pervert [the Fund] by mingling religious and political enquiries with the cases of the unfortunate claimants’, judging them as men rather than as authors in a manner similar to politicised periodicals like the *Anti-Jacobin*.⁴⁵ However, both men’s fears about politicisation proved to be unfounded. *Claims* represents the last major expression of Williams’ wider aspirations. In many ways its ideals date from an earlier decade, describing a vision of the Republic of Letters which had been largely discredited by the conservative crackdown on radical activities in the public sphere. The Literary Fund as it continued to develop was a product of a new phase in literary culture. While it remained a bourgeois organisation, by the 1800s there were number of prominent aristocrats on its subscriber list, with pride of place given to the Prince of Wales, who in 1806 funded a house to serve as the Fund’s headquarters.⁴⁶ While Williams had envisioned the Fund as being more than simply an instrument for distributing monies, he was forced by circumstances to scale back his ambitions. The established Fund was a broad church, relatively scrupulous in distributing its bounty without fear or favour, but rather than transforming the idea of the author, its impact was limited to the often-temporary mitigation of individual writers’ circumstances, as the following cases make clear.

⁴⁴ William Boscawen to James Bland Burges, 12 April 1798, quoted in Dybikowski, p. 240. Original: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bland Burges Deposit 22/14.

⁴⁵ Williams, *Incidents*, pp. 51-52. I discuss the *Anti-Jacobin* in the second section of Chapter Four.

⁴⁶ Royal Literary Fund Annual Reports Vol. I, Loan 96 RLF 3/1. See also the Administrative Documents: Loan 96 RLF 5/1/6 – Message from the Prince of Wales respecting a House; Loan 96 RLF 5/7 – House, 1805-1872.

The Unfortunate Robert Heron

In *Calamities of Authors* D’Israeli quotes the greater part of a letter to the Literary Fund in order to furnish his readers ‘with a picture of the fate of one, who’ [...] with a pertinacity of industry, not common, having undergone regular studies, and not without talents, not very injudiciously deemed that the life of a man of letters could provide for the simple wants of a philosopher.’⁴⁷ Two hundred years later, Robert Heron’s account of his literary life still serves as a telling example of the quantity an author could produce without being able to secure a livelihood:

“Ever since I was eleven years of age I have mingled with my studies the labour of teaching or of writing, to support and educate myself.

“During about twenty years, while I was in constant or occasional attendance at the University of Edinburgh, I taught and assisted young persons, at all periods, in the course of education; from the Alphabet to the highest branches of Science and Literature.

“I read a course of Lectures on the Law of Nature, the Law of Nations; the Jewish, the Grecian, the Roman, and the Canon Law; and then on the Feudal Law; and on the several forms of Municipal Jurisprudence established in Modern Europe. I printed a Syllabus of these Lectures, which was approved. They were intended as introductory to the professional study of Law, and to assist gentlemen who did not study it professionally, in the understanding of History.

“I translated Fourcroy’s Chemistry twice, from both the second and the third editions of the original; Fourcroy’s Philosophy of Chemistry; Savary’s Travels in Greece; Dumourier’s Letters; Gessner’s Idylls in part; an abstract of Zimmerman on Solitude, and a great diversity of smaller pieces.

⁴⁷ D’Israeli, I, 218.

“I wrote a Journey through the Western Parts of Scotland, which has passed through two editions; a History of Scotland, in six volumes 8vo.; a Topographical Account of Scotland, which has been several times reprinted; a number of communications in the Edinburgh Magazine; many Prefaces and Critiques; a Memoir of the Life of Burns the Poet which suggested and promoted the subscription for his family; has been many times reprinted, and formed the basis of Dr. Currie's Life of him, as I learned by a letter from the doctor to one of his friends; a variety of *Jeux d'Esprit* in verse and prose; and many abridgments of large works.

“In the beginning of 1799 I was encouraged to come to London. Here I have written a great multiplicity of articles in almost every branch of science and literature; my education at Edinburgh having comprehended them all. The London Review, the Agricultural Magazine, the Anti-jacobin Review, the Monthly Magazine, the Universal Magazine, the Public Characters, the Annual Necrology, with several other periodical works, contain many of my communications. In such of those publications as have been reviewed, I can show that my anonymous pieces have been distinguished with very high praise. I have written also a short system of Chemistry, in one volume 8vo. – and I published a few weeks since a small work called “Comforts of Life,” of which the first edition was sold in one week, and the second edition is now in rapid sale.

“In the Newspapers – the Oracle, the Porcupine when it existed, the General Evening Post, the Morning Post, the British Press, the Courier, &c., I have published many Reports of Debates in Parliament, and, I believe, a greater variety of light fugitive pieces than I know to have been written by any one other person.

“I have written also a variety of compositions in the Latin and the French languages, in favour of which I have been honoured with the testimonies of liberal approbation.

“I have invariably written to serve the cause of religion, morality, pious Christian education, and good order, in the most direct manner. I have considered what I have written as mere trifles; and have incessantly studied

to qualify myself for something better. I can prove that I have, for many years, read and written, one day with another, from twelve to sixteen hours a day. As a human being, I have not been free from follies and errors. But the tenor of my life has been temperate, laborious, humble, quiet, and, to the utmost of my power, beneficent. I can prove the general tenor of my writings to have been candid, and ever adapted to exhibit the most favourable views of the abilities, dispositions, and exertions of others.

“For these last ten months I have been brought to the very extremity of bodily and pecuniary distress.

“I shudder at the thought of perishing in a gaol.

92, Chancery-lane,

Feb. 2, 1807.

(In confinement).”⁴⁸

I quote this extensive catalogue in full to make it clear how heterogeneous a literary career at the close of the eighteenth century necessarily was for many of those seeking to make a living from their literary talents. Heron was not simply a journalist, a legal writer, a biographer, a travel writer, an educator or a historian – in the twenty or so years in which he pursued an active literary career he had to be all these things and more. His litany does not even present a comprehensive view of his endeavours, omitting, among other things, his *New and Complete System of Universal Geography*, his work on Sir John Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland*, his contributions to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, his edition of the letters of Junius and his disastrous attempt to launch himself as a dramatist with the comedy *St Kilda in Edinburgh; or, News from Camperdown*, which Robert Chambers’ *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* describes as being perceived as being ‘devoid of every thing like interest, and violating in many parts the common rules of decency’.⁴⁹ The play was consequently heckled off the stage; a

⁴⁸ D’Israeli, I, 219-24. Original: Robert Heron to the Committee of the Literary Fund, 2 February 1807, Loan 96 RLF 1/196/1.

⁴⁹ Robert Chambers, *A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*, 4 vols (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1835), III, 46; T.F. Henderson, ‘Heron, Robert (1764–1807)’, rev. H.C.G. Matthew, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13090>> [accessed 28 May 2009].

note in John Russell's copy claims that after a sarcastic jibe from the young Henry Brougham 'no more of the play was heard without roars of laughter – and the Curtain was dropt'.⁵⁰

It is striking to compare Heron's diverse writing career with those of canonical Romantics like Byron and Wordsworth or gentlemanly poets like Samuel Rogers, who were able to publish verse almost exclusively. His case highlights the divisions between those who wrote for money and those whose writing was directed towards cultivating social status or pursuing aesthetic agendas. Since he lacked an independent income, Heron had to cater to the demands of booksellers, employers and the market. As he admits when he writes that he 'studied to qualify [him]self for something better', he did not see the vast output that resulted as being particularly valued or valuable. Throughout his writing life he supplemented his earnings from these 'mere trifles' through preaching, teaching, lecturing, editing and writing for periodicals. He was in many ways suited to this sort of work. He was well-educated, he could compose swiftly and he had connections good enough to get himself contracts and assignments. To remain financially liquid, though, he had to use all of these advantages. He could not simply work in critically privileged forms, nor could he just translate, or write on Scotland, or produce journalism. Indeed, by the time he wrote to the Literary Fund, doing all of these things together could not keep him from the mercies of his creditors. In appealing to the Committee Heron aligns himself convincingly with assiduous talent rather than mercurial genius, presenting himself as an earnest, moral and hardworking scholar undone by circumstances beyond his control. His shudder at the prospect of death in debtor's prison stresses the gravity of his situation.

So, how did Heron come to write this desperate letter? Born in 1764, Heron was brought up in humble circumstances.⁵¹ Educationally precocious, he was made

⁵⁰ [Robert Heron], *St Kilda in Edinburgh; or News from Camperdown. A Comic Drama, in Two Acts; with a Critical Preface: to which is added An Account of a Famous Ass-Race* (Edinburgh: [no publisher given], 1798). Russell's copy: NLS Ry.IV.f.28 (note opposite title page).

⁵¹ Biographical sources on Heron are sparse; this summary principally draws on the *ODNB* and Catherine Carswell, 'Robert Heron: a Study in Failure', *Scots Magazine*, 18 (1932–33), pp. 37–48.

master of the parochial school at Kelton at the age on fourteen. With the income from this appointment and some assistance from his relatives he was able to enter the University of Edinburgh two years later as a student of divinity. To make ends meet he taught and produced magazine articles and other miscellaneous work for various booksellers. In 1789 he published his first full book, a substantially-prefaced edition of James Thomson's *The Seasons*. At this time he enjoyed several advantageous connections in Edinburgh, becoming a friend of the poet and author Thomas Blacklock and being for a time being employed as an assistant to Hugh Blair, rhetorician, critic and author of one of the biggest-selling books of the late eighteenth century, his *Sermons*.⁵² Through Blacklock, Heron also came to know Robert Burns in the 1780s. He was thus well-placed to take advantage of posthumous interest by publishing Burns' first biography as articles in the *Monthly Magazine*; these were collected in an octavo volume in 1797.

As his contacts with these respected writers indicate, Heron certainly had ambitions beyond hackwork, and he was deeply anxious that his talents be recognised. After the failure of *St Kilda in Edinburgh* in 1798, Heron swiftly published the play with a long justificatory preface, which he hubristically opened by quoting from *Tristram Shandy*:

The learned Bishop HALL, tells us, in one of his Decades, at the end of his Divine Art of Meditation, "That it is an abominable thing for a man to commend himself;" – and I really think, it is so.

And yet, on the other hand, when a thing is executed in a masterly kind of fashion, which thing is not likely to be found out; – I think, it is fully as abominable, that a man should lose the honour of it.

This is precisely my situation.⁵³

By ripping this passage from the convivial contexts of its parent work, where it justifies Tristram's 'master-stroke[s] of digressive skill', Heron converts its playful

⁵² Richard B. Sher, 'Blair, Hugh (1718–1800)', *ODNB*,

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2563>> [accessed 15 June 2009].

⁵³ [Heron], *St Kilda*, p. [i].

ironies into uncomfortable arrogance.⁵⁴ This effect is further compounded when Heron quotes a famous line from Jonathan Swift's *Thoughts on Various Subjects, Moral and Diverting*: 'WHEN a TRUE GENIUS appears in the world, you may know him by this sign,—that the DUNCES are all in confederacy against him.'⁵⁵ Heron thus employed the emergent idea of the misvalued writer, so important to D'Israeli's argument in *Calamities* and Williams' in *Claims*, to summarily (and erroneously) dismiss the 'malignity, intoxication and pert blockheadism' of his critics, who he believed sought 'not the mere damnation of the piece; but the UTTER RUIN of its author'.⁵⁶ The problem, of course, remained that however much Heron spurned his detractors, he was reliant on others' approbation to be able to work as he wished. In his preface he vacillates from asking 'who among all my contemporaries can, within the same quantity of writing, produce a greater number of original thoughts?' to worrying that he had 'hitherto done nothing to entitle me to that rank in literature, to which every man who cultivates the arts ought to aspire'.⁵⁷ He dismisses *St Kilda* as a trifle at the outset, but it becomes uncomfortably clear during the course of a defence longer than the play itself that Heron had pinned on it his hopes of achieving recognition. Without recognition to secure him sales, patronage or a profession, he could not be a Sterne or a Swift, and was instead forced to continue working on projects for which the booksellers would guarantee him payments.

Chambers' account of Heron in the *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* turns on the trope of his vanity, portraying him as 'another striking instance of the impossibility of shielding genius from poverty and disgrace when blinded by passion, or perverted by eccentricity'.⁵⁸ Contemporary evidence beyond the *St Kilda* preface could be mustered to buttress this view. In Burns' 1789 epistle to Dr Blacklock, Heron is by no means portrayed as a sober-minded careerist:

⁵⁴ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*, ed. Howard Anderson (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), p. 51 (Volume I, Chapter XXII).

⁵⁵ [Heron], p. [ii].

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Chambers, III, 50.

The *Ill-thief* blaw the *Heron* south!
And never drink be near his drouth!
He tald mysel, by word o' mouth,
 He'd tak my letter;
I lippen'd to the chiel in trouth,
 And bade nae better.—

But aiblins honest Master Heron
Had at the time some dainty *Fair One*,
To ware his theologic care on,
 And holy study:
And, tired o' *Sauls* to waste his lear on,
 E'en tried the body.—⁵⁹

In these stanzas Heron is painted as engaging, able to convince Burns of his trustworthiness and charm the 'dainty fair one' with his religious erudition. However, he is also shown as unreliable and immoral, being blown south by the 'Ill-thief' (Devil) and using his spiritual learning to effect a temporal seduction, leading to his failure to deliver Burns' letter. Heron himself would not have found this portrait entirely unfair. A 1930s article by Catherine Carswell, pointedly entitled 'Robert Heron: a Study in Failure', reveals that the journal he kept between 1789 and 1798 contains numerous passages of self-censure; in 1789, for example, he described himself as 'indolent, passionate, foolish, vain and regardless of truth.'⁶⁰

Heron, then, was by no means perfect, even by his own measure. Nevertheless, there are telling disparities between the accounts of his achievements published by D'Israeli in 1812 and by Chambers in the 1830s. D'Israeli sentimentalised Heron's fate to argue that talented authors often ended their days unrewarded, unrecognised and prematurely: 'O, ye populace of scribblers! before ye are driven to a garret, and your eyes are filled with constant tears, pause – recollect that few of you possess the learning or the abilities of HERON; shudder at all this

⁵⁹ Robert Burns, '[To Dr Blacklock]', lines 7-18, in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), I, 490.

⁶⁰ Manuscript 'Journal of my conduct', quoted in Carswell, p. 43.

secret agony and silent perdition!’⁶¹ By contrast, Chambers was censorious. In his first version of Heron’s story he states that Heron’s life is not an example of ‘positive virtue and good conduct’ but nevertheless forms ‘an entertaining article, and cannot fail to have a good effect *negatively*, as showing the uselessness of talent when it is not guided by prudence’.⁶² D’Israeli blames Heron’s fate on systemic and social failings of the kind Williams identifies, while Chambers reads it as amusing evidence of Heron’s moral turpitude. While Chambers’ portrayal is not wholly unjustified, I am inclined to see his account as evidencing the very different Edinburghs which Chambers and Heron inhabited.

Chambers established his reputation in the 1820s through writing works such as *Illustrations of the Author of Waverley* (1822) and *Traditions of Edinburgh* (1824).⁶³ As their titles suggest, these drew on the large readerships galvanised by Scott’s productions. His landmark publication, though, was *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, a pioneering cheap weekly paper, which within three months of its first appearance in February 1832 was selling 30,000 copies an issue. Chambers thus catered to a mass market, and it was to this new audience that he damned Heron. Heron, however, operated in a paradigm prior to the establishment of the publishing structures that allowed the sort of professional productions which Chambers produced. ‘Author-by-profession’ in Heron’s age was a synonym for a hack, and the desirable model for the author was the gentleman. Evidencing Heron’s improvidence, Chambers writes that he manifested an ‘extravagant desire of supporting a style of living which nothing but a liberal and certain income would admit of’.⁶⁴ From Chambers’ perspective this looks like a foolish inability to identify one’s proper class; from Heron’s perspective, though, such a way of living would have comprised a social performance that, like his preface, strained towards a more respectable form of authorship. Chambers records that ‘Wishing to be thought

⁶¹ D’Israeli, I, 225.

⁶² ‘Biographical Sketches: Robert Heron’, *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, 2 (20 July 1833), p. 198-99 (p. 198).

⁶³ Sondra Miley Cooney, ‘Chambers, Robert (1802–1871)’, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5079>> [accessed 17 April 2012].

⁶⁴ Chambers, III, 46.

an independent man of fortune, [Heron] would carry his folly so far as at times to keep a pair of horses, with a groom in livery.’⁶⁵ While this is not a sensible extravagance, maintaining a respectable façade was socially and financially crucial for those wishing to establish themselves as gentlemen and forge valued authorial personae. As Margot Finn has discussed, novels in the eighteenth century accurately depicted the fact that ‘trade credit was not determined by known quantities of capital but by perceived qualities of character.’⁶⁶ Finn also argues that those who recorded their thoughts at the time ‘agreed that a fundamental nexus obtained between personal character and personal credit, but the inherent fluidity of these systems of identity, meaning and exchange thwarted the construction of stable interpretations of consumer characters.’⁶⁷ Credit, both financial and social, was thus contingent to a large extent on performance. By acting as a gentleman, Heron could access the finances to live temporarily as a gentleman and mix among gentlemanly circles in order to seek the kind of authorial reification he attempted to solicit in the preface to his failed play. This approach was by no means unusual or entirely ill-advised; as I explore in the next chapter, recognition by influential circles could lead to direct financial rewards or to lucrative appointments via patronage.

Unfortunately for Heron, credit-supported performances of gentlemanly authorship could not be maintained indefinitely. He was imprisoned for debt quite early in his career, in 1793. To regain his freedom he contracted to produce a six-volume *History of Scotland* between 1794 and 1799, from which his creditors received most of the proceeds. Having completed this enormous task – and following the disappointment of *St Kilda* – he moved to London in 1799, seeking a new start. In London he improved his prospects through writing for and editing periodicals. In a letter to his parents he wrote that

My whole income, earned by full sixteen hours a-day of close application to reading, writing, observation, and study, is but very little more than three

⁶⁵ Chambers, III, 47.

⁶⁶ Margot C. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 47.

⁶⁷ Finn, pp. 102-03.

hundred pounds a year. But this is sufficient to my wants, and is earned in a manner which I know to be the most useful and honourable—that is, by teaching beneficial truths, and discountenancing vice and folly more effectually and more extensively than I could in any other way.⁶⁸

It might be suspect to read too much into Heron's pieties considering their context, but it is interesting that he justifies his work not by the income he derives but by the moral and intellectual influence he claims to wield. He is careful to frame himself not as writing solely for profit, but as writing for more gentlemanly, 'honourable' ends. If accurate, Heron's £300-a-year would have matched his professed morals, comprising a more-than-comfortable gentlemanly income – as discussed in the previous chapter, £250-a-year was enough to maintain a residence in London, employ servants and live with some degree of luxury. However, Heron does not exaggerate the effort that he expended to realise these returns. He writes wishfully that 'were I able to execute more literary labour I might readily obtain more money'. Since he already claims to be working sixteen-hour days, though, it is hard to see how he might have achieved this. As we can infer from the types of works he produced that he generally sold his productions for a single fee, he had to write on, and keep writing. Chambers writes that Heron 'would betake himself to his work, as an enthusiast in every thing, confining himself for weeks to his chamber, dressed only in his shirt and morning gown, and commonly with a green veil over his eyes, which were weak, and inflamed by such fits of ill regulated study.'⁶⁹ When writers complained of their health being broken by literary work, they were not necessarily exaggerating. The damage Heron did to his eyes can be compared with other cases in the Literary Fund's archive where writers such as the compiler of language textbooks Louis Du Mitand, the poet Edmund Henry White and the legal writer Robert Matthew Annesley became blind partly as a result of their literary exertions.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Quoted in Chambers, III, 47.

⁶⁹ Chambers, III, 48.

⁷⁰ RLF Case Files: Monsieur Louis Huguenin Du Mitand, and Mademoiselle Jane Du Mitand, his daughter, Loan 96 RLF 1/63; Mr Robert Matthew Annesley, and Mrs Martha Annesley, his widow, Loan 96 RLF 1/964; Mr Edmund Henry White, and Mrs Elizabeth Martha White, his widow, Loan 96 RLF 1/1299.

Living as an author, then, was to chance physical, as well as social and financial, collapse.

The circumstances which led to Heron's incarceration in 1807 are given in the first part of his letter to the Literary Fund, which D'Israeli omits but which remains preserved in the archive. In 1806 *The Fame*, a newspaper founded by Heron, failed. At the same time, as a result of the government's straitened finances, he lost his position as the editor of a government-backed French newspaper and did not receive back payments of his salary. By this time he was also suffering from 'rheumatism, asthma and spasms in [his] stomach'.⁷¹ Combined, these misfortunes left him unable to meet his obligations. His resulting confinement as a debtor worsened his health, which in turn reduced his ability to exercise his talents and write his way out of debt as he had done previously. In these circumstances, he appealed to the Literary Fund as a last resort. Several sources erroneously claim that Heron received no response to his application.⁷² In fact, the committee voted Heron a grant of £20 – not extravagant, by any means, but fairly standard for the Fund at the time, its means being still relatively limited. Heron wrote back expressing his gratitude, but the money was insufficient to clear his debts. In D'Israeli's words, 'About three months after, HERON sunk under a fever, and perished amid the walls of Newgate.'⁷³

Heron's experiences, then, were far from being those of a comfortable professional. After failing in his attempts to present himself as a gentlemanly writer, his authorial income was strung together from numerous sources, many of which were one-off payments. His work required him to constantly seek assignments and produce copy, and when he could not, no secure fallback was available to him. The Fund, D'Israeli and Chambers all agreed that his works had value, but this value was insufficiently remunerated to prevent his early and impecunious death. In his *St Kilda* preface he asked 'is it then a *crime* in the eyes of the Public [...] to have, in the want of other means, honestly striven to derive from the humble productions of

⁷¹ Robert Heron to the Committee of the Literary Fund, 2 February 1807, Loan 96 RLF 1/196/1.

⁷² Carswell and, at the time of initial writing, the *ODNB*, although the latter has now been corrected.

⁷³ D'Israeli, I, 225.

my literary labour, the scanty means which I require to enable me to indulge in that literary life which alone I love?’⁷⁴ It might be answered, that while it was not precisely a crime, literary labour often mitigated against the kind of respect Heron sought. When constituted as work, rather than acclaimed by the influential, literature, even for the zealous, was a poor prospect.

Eliza Parsons: ‘Compelled by dire necessity to become an Author’

Catherine Morland, the somewhat credulous heroine of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, bonds with the flighty Isabella Thorpe over a shared enjoyment of Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho*. Consequently, Isabella proposes that they read ‘ten or twelve more of the same kind’ providing a list: ‘*Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, Necromancer of the Black Forest, Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine, and Horrid Mysteries.*’ Catherine wishes to be assured that they are ‘all horrid’; Isabella assures her that she is ‘quite sure; for a particular friend [...] one of the sweetest creatures in the world, has read every one of them.’⁷⁵

This exchange lampoons both uncritical consumption and the reading of a certain kind of work, the gothic novel. Gothic was the most prevalent form of genre fiction in the 1790s, when many canny publishers and writers worked assiduously to sate the demand produced by an upsurge of interest in novels like Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1778) and the works Wordsworth impugned as ‘sickly and stupid German Tragedies.’⁷⁶ William

⁷⁴ [Heron], *St Kilda*, p. 21.

⁷⁵ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 33.

⁷⁶ William Wordsworth [and Samuel Taylor Coleridge], *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems*, 2nd edition, 2 vols (London: Longman & Rees, 1800 [actually published January 1801]), p. xix. Academic interest in the gothic has exploded since the publication of initial modern studies such as David Punter’s *The Literature of Terror* (London: Longman, 1980; revised in two volumes 1996). Of particular interest are E.J. Clery’s tracing *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Robert Miles’ exploration of gothic as a heterogeneous literary complex in *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Michael

Lane's Minerva Press was particularly associated with this movement, in the 1790s operating as the premier purveyor of mass-market gothic fictions. It was Lane who published six of the seven novels in Isabella Thorpe's list, or 'those scanty intellectual viands of the whole female reading public', as Charles Lamb later described them, retrospectively denying their popularity among both genders.⁷⁷

Two of the 'horrid' novels in the *Northanger* list, *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) and *The Mysterious Warning* (1796), were written by Eliza Parsons, who was driven by her circumstances to become an adept deployer of gothic and sentimental tropes. The following paragraph, taken from a letter she wrote to Thomas Dale, one of the Literary Fund's Registrars, in 1803, details the conditions that caused her to take up novel-writing:

I was born to affluence & married a respectable Turpentine Merchant with every prospect of happiness. A Sudden & Unexpected reverse of fortune Originating from the American War & its Subsequent Effects robbed us of a Considerable fortune, & while Struggling with these Misfortunes, a dreadful fire broke out in our Manufactory at Bowbridge and Completed our ruin. My Husband's Spirits Sank under his troubles, he languished 3 years under a paralytic affliction, when a second stroke terminated his existence.–I was left with eight children Wholly Unprovided for – their existence depended Upon me, but the resources for a well educated female Without Money are very few & after Several fruitless Efforts, I was compelled by dire necessity to become an Author ⁷⁸

In this account Parsons indicates authorship's relatively unattractive status, but also its position as one of the few economic resorts available to a respectable widow with

Gamer's analysis of gothic's reception history and its troubled entanglements with its ostensible opponents in *Romanticism and the Gothic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁷⁷ Elia [Charles Lamb], 'Popular Fallacies', *New Monthly Magazine*, 16 (January 1826), pp. 519-20 (p. 520). Gamer convincingly challenges the accuracy of depictions of the gothic as the domain of female readers with reference to evidence marshalled by Paul Kaufman and Jan Fergus using library records (*Romanticism and the Gothic*, pp. 38-40).

⁷⁸ Eliza Parsons to Thomas Dale, 30 May 1803, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/13.

children to provide for. Parsons was fifty-one in 1790 when Thomas Hookham published by subscription her first novel, the epistolary, Richardsonian *History of Miss Meredith*. Over the next decade-and-a-half she turned her hand to further sentimental works and to social comedies, but her most successful novels were her Minerva Press gothics. Parsons' work rate for Lane was prodigious – she completed nine novels totalling thirty-one volumes between 1791 and 1797, when she switched publishers to Thomas Norton Longman, and she continued to write until the mid-1800s, switching publishers again in 1799.

This work rate was necessary to achieve even a scanty living. William Lane was reputed to be fairly generous with his payments to authors. Dorothy Blakey writes that 'Prices somewhat above the average level [£5-£20] were at least offered by the Minerva' and the somewhat suspicious evidence of advertisements suggests 'an average of approximately thirty pounds'.⁷⁹ Nigel Cross's figures suggest that Lane paid Parsons around £40 for each of her copyrights.⁸⁰ Lane's supposed generosity was, however, relative. While his risks were not insignificant, when a book sold well, as it seems Parsons' did, Lane, as copyright owner, profited greatly. Lane also garnered additional profits from his role as a pioneering supplier of circulating libraries, which he stocked with volumes from his own press. The imbalance between authors' and publisher's gains is demonstrated by the fact that while a considerable number of Parsons' fellow Minerva Press novelists – including Maria Hunter, Eliza Norman, Elizabeth Helme, Regina Maria Roche and Selina Davenport – ended up applying to the Literary Fund, Lane's estate was valued at 'something under £17,500' after his death.⁸¹ Lacking better alternatives, Parsons accepted Lane's terms, but she was painfully aware that 'as Necessity always obliges me to sell the Copy Rights, my Advantages are trifling to what the Publisher

⁷⁹ Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press, 1790-1820* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1939), pp. 73, 74.

⁸⁰ Cross, *Common Writer*, p. 170.

⁸¹ RLF Case Files: Mrs Maria Hunter, Loan 96 RLF 1/25; Mrs Eliza Norman, Loan 96 RLF 1/36; Mrs Elizabeth Helme, Loan 96 RLF 1/97; Mrs Regina Maria Roche, Loan 96 RLF 1/590; Mrs Selina Davenport, Loan 96 RLF 1/1247. William Lane's wealth at death given in Blakey, p. 23.

gains.⁸² Parsons' income stream from her literary earnings was accordingly both episodic and slight. Even supplemented by a £40-per-annum second income from a position as a seamstress in the Royal Household, it was only by writing a three- or four-volume novel every eight months that Parsons could expect to earn around £100 a year, and this sum was scarcely sufficient to her needs. Accidents or any interruption to either income stream could be disastrous.

Parsons first applied to the Literary Fund in December 1792, after 'a dreadful fall' left her suffering from 'a Compound Fracture of the worst kind':

[I was] obliged unavoidably to Contract Debts which now threaten me Impending Evil within a few Days. Still confined to my Room, my leg on a pillow, Splinters of Bones continually working thro' which keeps me in extreme Tortures, I have been nevertheless obliged to Struggle with Pain and try to write.⁸³

Here, as in many of her other letters, Parsons appropriates, not without some knowing irony, the tropes of the sentimental heroines who occupy her gothic narratives. She depicts herself as one suffering as a result of unprovoked afflictions who has nevertheless made the best of her lot while struggling to maintain her modesty and her moral authority. However, she was also, as Jennie Batchelor has demonstrated, 'an adept ventriloquist of the emergent discourse of literary professionalism'.⁸⁴ She located herself both in Lane's industry and in the discourses Williams wished to promote, arguing in a 1796 letter that difficulties 'blunt the edge of Genius,' thus obliquely aligning herself with the 'unrecognised victims' of society's undervaluation of literature.⁸⁵ The 'feeling and Benevolent hearts' of the Committee was evidently swayed by Parsons' carefully-asserted claims, as they

⁸² Eliza Parsons to Thomas Dale, 7 July 1796, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/8.

⁸³ Eliza Parsons to Thomas Dale, 17 December 1792, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/1.

⁸⁴ Batchelor, *Women's Work*, p. 166.

⁸⁵ Parsons to Dale, 7 July 1796, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/8.

came to her rescue with a grant that was relatively substantial by their early standards.⁸⁶

Unfortunately, Parsons' recovery from injury did not signal an end to her problems. Having applied for aid to William Windham in the meantime, in 1796, Parsons applied to the Fund again.⁸⁷ The Civil List, on which she relied for the other part of her income, was 'now in the Seventh Quarter of Arrears' due to the war with France and consequently she had been driven to the 'Mortifying necessity' of fleeing her home to avoid her creditors.⁸⁸ After this application, and after two other in 1798 and 1799, the Literary Fund was able to provide her with enough support to address her immediate problems.⁸⁹ However, the grants could not solve the underlying instability of her finances. With aid, Parsons was able to stay solvent until 1801, when she finally slipped in balancing of her obligations. In May 1803 she wrote to Dale bemoaning the fact that in the last year she had 'experienced the loss of liberty and every attendant Mortification':

All the Money I had or could raise which would have paid more that 5*S.* in the Pound I offered to my Creditor which was refused and the Consequence was that being arrested, every Guinea of that little all I would have gladly given to him, was expended in law charges & in procuring the rules of the King's Bench Prison as a less dreadful & less expensive confinement than within the Walls. In these Melancholy Circumstances I have to write works of fancy for my daily Subsistence⁹⁰

Parsons' debts, as these examples demonstrate, were potentially socially as well as financially ruinous. As authorship did not in itself confer respectability, Parsons had to take great care in managing her reputation. She wrote in an earlier letter that she had 'struggled thro' innumerable difficulties to persevere in my Employment & preserve a decent appearance knowing the Illiberality of the world ridicules and

⁸⁶ Eliza Parsons to Thomas Dale, 18 December 1792, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/2.

⁸⁷ Eliza Parsons to William Windham, 14 May 1794, BL Additional Manuscript 37914.

⁸⁸ Parsons to Dale, 7 July 1796, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/8.

⁸⁹ See Loan 96 RLF 1/21/10a-12.

⁹⁰ Parsons to Dale, 30 May 1803, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/13.

Contemns an Unfortunate poor Author.’⁹¹ As a woman, her access to the social arenas in which respectability could be performed was more restricted than Heron’s. This was one reason why she took such care in advertising her affiliations through prefacing and dedicating her works, as Karen Morton has shown.⁹² Access to credit was dependent firstly on connections – by far the easiest sources were friendly acquaintances – and secondly on being able to present an impression of affluence and good character. Maintaining a front was critical. A good example of the importance of reputation is the lengths to which William Godwin went in order to service the debts on his book business and keep his creditors from taking him to court, having him imprisoned and seizing his shop and home. Forced to borrow lavishly to service his debts, he created a complex web of liabilities from which gifts from Shelley and other friends of sums amounting to thousands of pounds could not extricate him.⁹³ Parsons, although not a businesswoman, was in a similar situation in terms of providing for her family. Her express wish with her writing was to provide her children with respectable situations, which she accomplished, her work permitting all her sons to follow (sadly fatal) military or naval careers and her surviving daughters to pursue careers in teaching or needlecraft before marriage.⁹⁴ She could not have secured them such situations without a respectable reputation to allow her to make the necessary connections. Even her eventual arrest did not lift the burden of social performance, as she had to pay back her creditors in order to obtain her release, as well as making additional payments for permission to house herself within the Rules of the King’s Bench – a demarcated district close to the prison – rather than within the walls of the jail itself. Failing to make these payments would have amplified her problems. As she wrote of her jailers ‘poverty is the worst crime in their opinion who keeps these rules, & if not regular in my

⁹¹ Parsons to Dale, 7 July 1796, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/8.

⁹² Karen Morton, *A Life Marketed as Fiction: An Analysis of the Works of Eliza Parsons* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2011), pp. 60-92.

⁹³ William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989). Godwin’s persistent financial problems are detailed over a series of chapters; the index entry gives page references to pp. 255-60, 271, 287-89, 291, 306, 308-12, 328-35, 348-49, 355, 466 and 475. The material relating to Shelley’s major payments to Godwin is pp. 353-55 and 380-88.

⁹⁴ ‘Introduction’ to Eliza Parsons, *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2006), p. viii

payments I shall soon be turned out to make room for those who can pay & be thrown among a set of low profligate beings I shudder to think of.’⁹⁵

In pitching to the Literary Fund, Parsons did not claim that her works were great art, although she moved a little from the position in the preface to her first work, in which she hoped that her having written to support her children would ‘shield MISS MEREDITH from every shaft of criticism.’⁹⁶ Sensible of the Literary Fund’s desire to support writers of literary merit, she modifies this position in her letter to Dale by writing that she was ‘compelled to Avail myself of the fashion of the times and write Novels, which I trust tho’ perhaps deficient in Wit and Spirit, are at least Moral and tend to Amend the Heart.’⁹⁷ This is an argument also sustained in her books; as Batchelor has noted, ‘the novels [...] present their author as her readers’ moral benefactor’.⁹⁸ *The Castle of Wolfenbach*’s central character, Matilda, is a quintessential gothic heroine – kind, a little credulous, oft-fainting – who for reasons of moral principle refuses to disclaim the paternal authority vested in her lecherous uncle or to consider marrying above her station (both of these refusals also conveniently serves to drive forward the plot). Parsons contrasts a number of doubles with Matilda, one of the most interesting being the saintly Mother Magdalene, who explains to Matilda that she took orders after her father (like Parson’s husband) lost his money through misfortunate business ventures, dying shortly afterwards and leaving his grieving family penniless. A second protector also suffered an untimely death and a prospective husband, disappointed in his hopes of marrying money, proved faithless. Mother Magdalene’s story is one of a number in *Wolfenbach* in which Parsons expresses a sense of the contingency of financial success and notes the error of equating wealth and moral value. She is not sanguine on the general tendency of society to right wrongs, as is made clear in a speech made by the Count de Bouville, Matilda’s love interest:

⁹⁵ Parsons to Dale, 30 May 1803, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/13.

⁹⁶ Eliza Parsons, *The History of Miss Meredith*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Hookham, 1790), I, vi.

⁹⁷ Parsons to Dale, 17 Dec 1792, Loan 96 RLF 1/21/1.

⁹⁸ Jennie Batchelor, “‘The Claims of Literature’: Women Applicants to the Royal Literary Fund”, *Women's Writing*, 12:3 (2005), pp. 505-21 (p. 513).

there ought not to be any poor, that is, I mean beggars, in England, such immense sums are raised for their support, such resources for industry, and so many hospitals for the sick and aged, that, if proper management was observed, none need complain of cold or hunger; yet in my life I never saw so many painful and disgusting objects as there are in the streets and environs of London.⁹⁹

Despite her compliance with Protestant notions regarding suitable rewards for virtue and punishments for vice, Parsons works in cutting comments on society's failure to correctly value talents, comments not dissimilar to Williams'. Her characters are generally rewarded only through the intervention of merciful and exceptional benefactors. Her novels stress the difficulties of dealing with calamities and the atypical and personal nature of acts of kindness, convictions she also expressed to William Windham in 1794, when she wrote that 'in this world of prejudice the garb and supplications of Poverty generally excite Contempt or Cold useless pity.'¹⁰⁰

Contemporary reviewers appreciated many aspects of Parsons' work. William Enfield, in the *Monthly Review*, praised *Miss Meredith* as a work in which 'A natural and interesting tale is related in neat and unaffected language; and the moral which it inculcates, is the reverse of those romantic notions, which most novels have a tendency to inspire.'¹⁰¹ However, such praise was often tempered by her novels being read as part of a proliferating mass literature. The *Critical*, despite appreciating aspects of *Wolfenbach*, wrote that 'We do not pretend to give this novel as one of the first order, or even of the second'.¹⁰² The *Literary Journal* observed of *Murray House* (1804), that 'This novel, compared to others of the same sort, may be

⁹⁹ Parsons, *Wolfenbach*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁰ Parsons to Windham, 14 May 1794, BL Additional Manuscript 37914.

¹⁰¹ [William Enfield], *Monthly Review*, 2nd series, 3 (September 1790), p. 90. Attribution from Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling (eds.), *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) I, 513. This review and those following are helpfully collected in Morton (pp. 254-81).

¹⁰² 'Castle of Wolfenbach', *Critical Review*, new series, 10 (Jan 1794), pp. 49-52 (p. 50).

considered a *tolerable* publication.¹⁰³ Reviewers also often complained about what they identified as signs of hasty composition. The *Critical Review*, considering *The Mysterious Warning*, opined that

the novels of Mrs Parsons would be more interesting, if her plans had more unity: when the principal narrative is frequently broken in upon by different stories, however entertaining in themselves, attention flags, the mind experiences a kind of disappointment, loses the connection, proceeds languidly and is not easily reanimated.¹⁰⁴

Often her first volumes were preferred to the later ones. In the *Monthly Review* of *Ellen and Julia* (1793) the critic wrote that ‘In the first volume the story is diversified with many striking incidents, but, through a greater part of the second, the writer’s invention appears to flag.’¹⁰⁵ The *English Review* found *Lucy* (1794) ‘sufficiently interesting throughout the first volume’ but complained that ‘it dwindles into a mere farrago of wonderful and improbable adventures.’¹⁰⁶ The *Voluntary Exile* (1795) was almost universally identified as ‘faulty from its want of unity’.¹⁰⁷ The *British Critic*, writing on *An Old Friend with a New Face* (1797), observes ‘as the critic did to Sir Fretful Plagiary, there is a *falling off* in the last volume.’¹⁰⁸ Parsons’ grammar was also frequently attacked.¹⁰⁹

Surveying Parsons’ career, Dorothy Blakey writes that ‘there seems reason to suspect that Mrs Parsons wrote ‘horrid’ books for profit, and expressed her real self in topical satire.’¹¹⁰ This claims, as well as those of her contemporaries and of critics like Devendra Varma and Diane Long Hoeveler, imply that that Parsons might have

¹⁰³ *Literary Journal*, 3 (June 1804), pp. 609-10 (p. 609).

¹⁰⁴ *Critical Review*, new series, 16 (April 1796), p. 474.

¹⁰⁵ *Monthly Review*, 2nd series, 14 (August 1794), p. 465.

¹⁰⁶ ‘*Lucy; a Novel*’, *English Review*, 24 (July 1794), pp. 62-63 (p. 63).

¹⁰⁷ ‘Mrs. Parson’s *Voluntary Exile*’, *Analytical Review*, 21 (March 1795), pp. 296-99 (p. 296).

¹⁰⁸ *British Critic*, 11 (May 1798), p. 562.

¹⁰⁹ For examples see the *Analytical* review referred to above and the *British Critic*’s review of *The Voluntary Exile*, which lists oversights ‘which admit no excuse’ (6 (Aug 1795), p. 190).

¹¹⁰ Blakey, p. 60.

been able to write more successful novels had she not had to rush to procure the next copyright payment.¹¹¹ Her career in this respect provides a revealing contrast with Ann Radcliffe's. Like Parsons, Radcliffe published her first novel with Thomas Hookham. However, Radcliffe had a prudent husband, did not need to provide for children and did not have to deal with pressing debts. She was therefore able to write her later novels at a fairly leisurely pace. Three years passed between the publications of *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and three more between *Udolpho* and *The Italian*. Radcliffe was paid significant amounts for these later works. After three novels with Hookham, she changed publishers for *Udolpho*; an extant copy of the contract records that she received £500 for the copyright, more than twelve times what Parsons could expect to receive.¹¹² She changed publishers again for *The Italian*, her final novel, again receiving a significant payment. Radcliffe's earliest biographer, Thomas Noon Talfourd, speculated that, as with Parsons, money was a reason why Radcliffe wrote and a sufficiency one of the reasons why she stopped: 'At first the sums she received, though not necessary, were welcome; but, as her pecuniary resources became more ample, she was without sufficient excitement to begin on an extended romance.'¹¹³ For Radcliffe, money from writing was a useful luxury, not a necessity. She did not need to write at speed in order to survive as Parsons did, and, perhaps as a result, she was able to garner profits and plaudits in a way that Parsons could not.

With regard to her avowed goal of supporting her family, Parsons' literary career was a success. Although four of her eight children predeceased her, four married daughters, whose school fees she had paid and whose careers as teachers and Mantua-makers she had launched, survived after her death at the age of seventy-

¹¹¹ See Devendra P. Varma 'Introduction' to Eliza Parsons, *The Mysterious Warning: A German Tale* (London: Folio Press, 1968), p. xi and Hoeveler, 'Introduction' to Parsons, *Wolfenbach*, p. viii.

¹¹² Deborah D. Rogers, *Ann Radcliffe: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 106.

¹¹³ Thomas Noon Talfourd, 'Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe', prefixed to Ann Radcliffe, *Gaston de Blondville, or the Court of Henry III Keeping Festival in Ardenne: a Romance & St Albans Abbey: a Metrical Tale*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey and I. Lea, 1826), I, 57.

one.¹¹⁴ This was an ending not perhaps as just and happy as one she might have composed, but bespeaks her dedication in the face of publishing conventions which were not conducive to producing the kind of steady and significant income she required. However, the pressures exerted on her by the market took a toll on her health, reputation and works. It is perhaps no coincidence that, as Nigel Cross has remarked, ‘Of the five women novelists active between 1780 and 1815 whose work is at all well-known today – Fanny Burney, Mrs Inchbald, Ann Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen – only Mrs Inchbald lacked private means, but she was a beauty, which was nearly as good since it led to a stage career rather than governing or needlework.’¹¹⁵ Like Parsons, ‘Most women simply did not have the leisure to cultivate their talents; they had to dash off fiction at piece rates just to keep a roof over their heads.’ While her books remain pleasurable if inconsistent reads, it seems likely that Eliza Parsons was prevented from reaching her full potential by the unfortunate conditions which necessitated her turning to the pen. Authorship for Parsons was not only financially a last resort, but its manifesting as such textually and paratextually in her works militated against her achieving the kind of success that might have solved her enduring financial problems.

Robert Bloomfield, Patronage and Fashion

David Williams had a low opinion of the patrons of literature, their individual vagaries being one of his principal justifications for establishing institutions like the Literary Fund. As he writes in *Claims*

I have hardly ever conversed with an English MECÆNAS, who did not imagine men of genius and learning should be poor, because poverty impels exertion. The fruits of dire necessity, and of literary leisure, are, however, extremely different. But those patrons have been generally collectors of

¹¹⁴ Parsons gives some details of her children’s careers in her letter to William Windham. Details of her surviving daughters from Elizabeth Lee, ‘Parsons, Eliza (1739–1811)’, rev. Rebecca Mills, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21455>> [accessed 15 Oct 2009].

¹¹⁵ Cross, *Common Writer*, p. 172.

books from vanity, half-learned, demi-connoisseurs, open to gross flattery on account either of birth, fortune, or other circumstances, which neither bestow, nor exclude, talents, virtue, or merit.¹¹⁶

Williams' making such an attack belies the common view that patronage was no longer relevant for authors in the Romantic period. As Dustin Griffin has argued, the Whiggish view that the patronage system declined after 1755, with Samuel Johnson's letter chiding Lord Chesterfield being the symbolic turning point, is inaccurate.¹¹⁷ In fact patronage persisted well into the nineteenth century as a major contributor to authors' incomes, as can be seen from the cases of Parsons and Heron, both of whom held posts acquired through connections. Patrons also played a substantial role in the promotion of authors, using their contacts and prestige to promote works published by subscription. Eliza Parsons' first novel was dedicated to the Marchioness of Salisbury and boasted a substantial list of subscribers that included the Prince of Wales, the Dukes of York and Gloucester, Elizabeth Montagu and Horace Walpole.¹¹⁸ As such favours indicate, by the end of the eighteenth century patronage networks had diversified. Figures in government, influential editors, newly prosperous professionals, a few wealthy authors and the Literary Fund itself joined aristocrats and members of the landed gentry in supporting authors through means other than direct purchase of their works.

While patronage relationships could be subject to the problems Williams describes, they could also be beneficial to both sides. Several of the canonical Romantics were sustained at various times by incomes facilitated by patrons. In 1813, when Wordsworth was in financial difficulties, he was assisted by Samuel Rogers in making an appeal to Sir William Lowther, Lord Lonsdale, which elicited an offer of £100 a year. Wordsworth's qualms about accepting this money caused Lonsdale to offer instead an official position, Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland and the Penrith area of Cumberland. Wordsworth held this job for nearly thirty

¹¹⁶ Williams, *Claims*, pp. 79-80.

¹¹⁷ Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 246-48

¹¹⁸ Parsons, *Miss Meredith*, I, i-25. List also printed in full in Morton, pp. 243-53.

years, eventually passing it on to his son.¹¹⁹ William Blake secured financial support from the generous didactic poet William Hayley and for much of his adult life Coleridge was partly supported by an annuity provided by Tom and Josiah Wedgwood. Such patronage relationships were also personal. Tom Wedgwood and Coleridge travelled together, discussed ideas and corresponded on personal matters.¹²⁰ Blake and Hayley collaborated directly, with Blake producing engravings for Hayley's works, including his *Life of Cowper* (1803-4), and Hayley writing a series of ballads for Blake to illustrate. These were eventually published in 1805, with payments being made only to Blake and to the publisher.¹²¹ Although the relationship became strained due to differences in temperament between the radical artisan and his gentlemanly supporter, Hayley later provided money and a barrister to assist Blake in successfully opposing sedition charges and continued to help him to gain commissions. Wordsworth gratefully dedicated *The Excursion* (1814) to Lord Lonsdale and was on friendly terms with Lonsdale and with his other major patron, Sir George Beaumont, both of whom he visited regularly.

Before acquiring patrons, though, these three writers were already to some extent established – Wordsworth and Coleridge as poets and gentlemen, Blake as an engraver and artist. Robert Bloomfield, by contrast, was reliant on patronage for his initial publication, which entailed a more fraught set of dynamics. In *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), Byron gives the following satirical description of Bloomfield's career trajectory:

When some brisk youth, the tenant of a stall,
Employs a pen less pointed than his awl,
Leaves his snug shop, forsakes his store of shoes,
St. Crispin quits, and cobbles for the muse,
Heavens! how the vulgar stare! how crowds applaud!
How ladies read! and Literati laud!

¹¹⁹ Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Viking, 2000), pp. 438, 440-41, 448-49.

¹²⁰ See Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 174-80, 336-37, 359.

¹²¹ Vivienne W. Painting, 'Hayley, William (1745-1820)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12769>> [accessed 11 Nov 2009].

If chance some wicked wag should pass his jest,
'Tis sheer ill-nature — don't the world know best?
Genius must guide when wits admire the rhyme,
And CAPEL LOFFT declares 'tis quite sublime.
Hear, then, ye happy sons of needless trade!
Swains! quit the plough, resign the useless spade¹²²

Byron is keen to mock the idea that poetry can be produced by artisan labourers in the same way as trade goods, but his satire here is somewhat defensive, advancing the claim that poetry was a privileged activity for gentleman such as himself, rather than a trade. Coleridge was similarly worried about lower-class intrusions into the literary realm, opining cynically in an 1811 lecture that 'in these times, if a man fail as a tailor, or a shoemaker, and can read and write correctly (for spelling is still of some consequence) he becomes an author.'¹²³ However, as Byron's own later works proved, it was entirely possible to write poems that would operate as consumer goods, running to many editions and selling tens of thousands of copies. This was the case with Bloomfield, who in *The Farmer's Boy* (1800) produced one of the most popular poems of the Romantic period.

Bloomfield was launched when his brother George sent the manuscript of *The Farmer's Boy* to Capel Lofft, a Suffolk gentleman described facetiously by Byron as 'a kind of gratis Accoucheur to those who wish to be delivered of rhyme, but do not know how to bring it forth.'¹²⁴ In Bloomfield's case, Lofft's help was invaluable – finding the poem to be 'very pleasing and characteristic', he secured Bloomfield a publishing contract and drew his work to the attention of influential figures.¹²⁵ Particularly important was Augustus Henry Fitzroy, the third Duke of

¹²² Lord Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, lines 765-76, in *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, I, 253.

¹²³ *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen ed. Kathleen Coburn, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-1993), V.ii, 463.

¹²⁴ Byron, footnote to *English Bards*, in *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, I, 414.

¹²⁵ Capel Lofft, 'Preface' to Robert Bloomfield, *The Farmer's Boy: a Rural Poem* (London: Vernor and Hood, 1800), p. i. For a biographical account of Lofft, see Simon J. White, *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) pp. 84-85.

Grafton, a well-connected Whig and former prime minister, who committed to pay Bloomfield an annuity of fifteen pounds, supported his work and provided him with books.¹²⁶

Once brought to attention, Bloomfield achieved success swiftly and sweepingly. His publisher, Vernor and Hood, published *The Farmer's Boy* under an initially slightly confused half-profits arrangement; they also took a half-share in the copyright.¹²⁷ *The Farmer's Boy* proceeded to sell over 26,100 copies in the first two-and-three-quarter years after its publication and continued to sell in large quantities in subsequent years.¹²⁸ Its sequels, *Rural Tales, Ballads and Songs* (1802) and *Wild Flowers; or, Pastoral and Local Poetry* (1806), although not as sensationally successful as Bloomfield's first book, also did relatively well – St Clair estimates that Bloomfield's other works sold 'at least 46,500' copies between 1803 and 1826.¹²⁹ His works also received gratifying critical plaudits. Robert Southey wrote in the *Critical Review* that in *The Farmer's Boy* 'we were delighted to meet with excellence that we had not expected' and he went on to garnish significant extracts from *Rural Tales* with praise.¹³⁰ However, he also made a prescient point about the potential dangers Bloomfield faced, writing that 'to acquire reputation has ever been easier than to preserve it. Mr. Bloomfield's poems

¹²⁶ Robert Bloomfield to Capel Lofft, 5 March 1800, letter 23 in *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and his Circle*, ed. Tim Fulford and Linda Pratt, *Romantic Circles Electronic Editions*, 2009, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/letterlist.html> [accessed 11 Nov 2009]. Further references to this edition, henceforward referred to as *LRBC*, will give the correspondents, dates and letter number.

¹²⁷ For a full account of the poem's publication history, see B.C. Bloomfield, 'The Publication of *The Farmer's Boy* by Robert Bloomfield', in *The Library*, 6th Series, 15 (June 1993), pp. 75-94. Details of the copyright arrangements in a letter from Thomas Hood quoted p. 81.

¹²⁸ B.C. Bloomfield, p. 83.

¹²⁹ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 582.

¹³⁰ [Robert Southey], 'Bloomfield's *Rural Tales*', *Critical Review*, new series, 35 (May 1802), pp. 67-75 (p. 67).

will now be compared with what he formerly produced; and the Farmer's Boy is his most dangerous rival.'¹³¹

Lofft's assistance in achieving this success came with strings attached. He added a contextualising preface to the first edition of *The Farmer's Boy*, so its readers encountered Lofft's detailed narrative of Bloomfield's upbringing before they read a line of Bloomfield's verse. Following a strategy similar to those employed to launch previous working-class prodigies such as James Woodhouse and Mary Leapor, Lofft stressed Bloomfield's struggle to acquire literacy and his aptitude for literary pursuits, but also his modesty and amiability, making readers aware that Bloomfield was a moral and non-threatening writer, not a potentially dangerous demagogue.¹³² Lofft did not overplay his own role, although he did signal his gentlemanly accomplishments by asserting that his contribution had been 'to revise the MS. making occasionally corrections with respect to Orthography, and sometimes in grammatical construction'.¹³³

Bloomfield's success, though, gave Lofft occasion for further interference. In Simon White's view, Lofft 'believed his position as patron or editor to be threatened', and this anxiety manifested in profuse textual additions.¹³⁴ To the second edition of *The Farmer's Boy* he added a seven-page supplement to the preface and to the third a sonnet and a twenty-five page critical appendix, which in the fourth edition he expanded further. This later material was also more proprietorial, attempting to impose Lofft's views on Bloomfield's verse and at points depicting Bloomfield as comic.¹³⁵ Lofft also succumbed to the temptation of writing about himself, at times hugely inappropriately, such as when he used parts of the appendix to protest against his dismissal as a magistrate.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 68.

¹³² See White, pp. 86-87.

¹³³ Lofft, 'Preface' to *The Farmer's Boy*, p. xv.

¹³⁴ White, p. 86.

¹³⁵ Fully detailed in White, pp. 89-100.

Such domineering interventions damaged and discomforted Bloomfield. His publisher, Hood, made it clear prior to the publication of *Rural Tales* in 1802 that he wanted Lofft's notes and preface dropped. Lofft considered this 'the height of absurdity' and accused Bloomfield of being Hood's unwitting pawn.¹³⁶ Ultimately, Bloomfield felt he had little choice but to side with Lofft due to the potential damage his rancour could do. He wrote to Hood that should Lofft's additions be omitted

To the Duke of Grafton and many other friends it will be utterly impossible for me to escape the charge of the blackest baseness and ingratitude: for who of them will have patience, to hear my defence? Or take the pains to acquire information? My character will sink rapidly¹³⁷

The notes remained, but both Hood and Bloomfield were right to have been concerned. While the volume was otherwise well-reviewed, the *Poetical Register* remarked that Lofft's 'impertinence of commentary cannot be too severely reprobated' and the *Anti-Jacobin Review's* critic could not 'help smiling at the self-importance of the man, who, throughout the volume, has tacked his criticism to the end of each piece.'¹³⁸

Bloomfield's control over his works was thus successfully contested by others in whose debt he was known to be. His class and his mode of initially accessing attention made his career partially contingent on the opinions of gentlemanly and aristocratic parties who could shape his public persona for their own ends. This left Bloomfield feeling, in the words of Tim Fulford and Debbie Lee, that 'his muse (that is to say, his expression of his unique self in verse) was tainted by his patrons' appropriation of his words in their own causes.'¹³⁹ Fulford and Lee partly attribute to this feeling Bloomfield's declining publication rate in

¹³⁶ Capel Lofft to Robert Bloomfield, 24 October 1801, letter 59 in *LRBC*.

¹³⁷ Robert Bloomfield to Thomas Hood, undated [? late October 1801], letter 64 in *LRBC*.

¹³⁸ *Poetical Register*, 2 (January 1803), pp. 426-427 (p. 427); *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 11 (Apr 1802), p. 394-96 (p. 394)

¹³⁹ Tim Fulford and Debbie Lee, 'The Vaccine Rose: Patronage, Pastoralism and Public Health' in Simon White, John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan (eds.), *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class and the Romantic Canon* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), pp. 142-58 (p. 146).

later life, although, as Simon White has argued, Bloomfield took principled stands which allowed him to produce poetry of which he was proud despite his slow progress and his later volumes' comparative lack of success.¹⁴⁰

In terms of literary profits, Bloomfield was astonishingly successful. B.C. Bloomfield has estimated that Bloomfield made around £4000 from *The Farmer's Boy* over the course of his lifetime.¹⁴¹ Adding in the Duke of Grafton's annuity and payments for other volumes, it initially seems hard to credit Bloomfield's later poverty, as his average income post-1800 could be estimated to be at least £250 a year. However, this income was not uniform and numerous circumstances placed extraordinary demands on Bloomfield's faculties and finances. The interest aroused by the poem necessitated the exhibition of his talents and person at the houses of his patrons. He could not gracefully refuse such engagements, which he often found trying and which left him with less time for the cobbling that had supported him in various forms since the early 1780s or for his sideline in constructing Aeolian harps. Illness and an increasing confidence in his literary work also contributed to his largely abandoning his old trades. His confidence was not unjustified, but while the profits from *The Farmer's Boy* were significant, they were not consistent. In 1801 he had to ask for a publishers' advance to tide him over. In 1802, seeking to provide him with a more secure income, the Duke of Grafton secured for him a place as undersealer to the King's Bench court. Bloomfield did not find the responsibilities congenial, writing to his brother on the day before he left the position that 'another 4 months such as I have past might perhaps indeed drive me mad'.¹⁴² Once the profits from his books made their way to him, he prospered financially during the rest of the 1800s, although his income was at times taxed by his generosity. He supported his mother through her final illness and after her death in December 1803 he bought the title to her cottage for his stepfather and gave considerable sums to his brothers. Thus, while he lived fairly comfortably, he was not able to save or invest to secure a permanent income beyond the small Grafton annuity.

¹⁴⁰ This argument is made particularly strongly with respect to Bloomfield's final collection, *May Day with the Muses* (1822) – see White, pp. 122-36.

¹⁴¹ B.C. Bloomfield, p. 93.

¹⁴² Robert Bloomfield to George Bloomfield, 27 May 1803, letter 109 in *LRBC*.

In the 1810s Bloomfield's financial situation grievously worsened. The death of Thomas Hood in 1811 left Bloomfield's publishers in the hands of a partner named Sharpe, and by April 1812 losses had brought the firm close to bankruptcy. To raise funds Sharpe sold his share of Bloomfield's copyrights to another bookseller for £509 and disposed of his remaining copies of Bloomfield's works for credit, neglecting to pass any of the profits from these transactions on to Bloomfield.¹⁴³ Sharpe's selling-up ended the regular payments made to Bloomfield and placed the collection of profits from the copyrights of his previous work in abeyance. Bloomfield was not fond of Benjamin Crosby, who acquired the largest share in Vernor, Hood and Sharpe's copyrights, and when he negotiated terms with him in 1814 he believed he 'obtained about half the sum [...] their chance is worth', although it is possible he overvalued his declining stock.¹⁴⁴ His prospects deteriorated further when Crosby went bankrupt, leaving Bloomfield's copyright divided among a number of booksellers. Reprints of his earlier works realised increasingly small returns and half of these diminishing profits went to a portfolio of publishers who often had no interest in his current state or in his new productions.¹⁴⁵ Attempting to sort out these tangled affairs cost Bloomfield further time and money, and the journeys to London did his fragile health little good.

Patronage income also became harder to for Bloomfield acquire. He was valued initially, as the Duke of Grafton put it to Capel Lofft, as a 'real untaught genius.'¹⁴⁶ He was framed in the context of a pre-existing tradition; as Peter Denney writes, 'the laboring-class poet was expected by the polite to conform to a model of exemplary private virtue, diligent, dutiful, and suitably distanced from what were perceived to be the vulgar elements of collective plebeian life.'¹⁴⁷ Bloomfield's

¹⁴³ Jonathan Lawson, *Robert Bloomfield* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1980), p. 39.

¹⁴⁴ B.C. Bloomfield, p. 86.

¹⁴⁵ For an idea of the diminishing returns in Bloomfield's late career, see the table detailing costs and profits given in Robert Baldwin to Robert Bloomfield, 5 April 1821, letter 350 in *LRBC*.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in a letter from Capel Lofft to George Bloomfield, 1 March 1800, letter 21 in *LRBC*.

¹⁴⁷ Peter Denney, 'The Talk of the Tap-Room: Bloomfield, Politics, and Popular Culture', in John Goodridge and Bridget Keenan (eds.), *Robert Bloomfield: The Inestimable Blessing of Letters*,

poems were partly sold on a projected personality – he was, as his patrons and his own self-presentations had made him, the Farmer’s Boy himself. Ian Haywood has argued that even in modern readings of *The Farmer’s Boy* ‘the prevailing pastoralization (indeed, pasteurization) of the poem reveals a curious critical tendency to evade or minimize the poem’s striking evocations of violence, terror, and guilt.’¹⁴⁸ Haywood emphasises the extent to which Bloomfield’s class predetermined and thus occluded the content of his poems. His patrons recognised and responded to his novel evocations within a tradition of patronised rural writing, but their readings were highly mediated by this tradition and the limitations it placed on those working within it, exhausting Bloomfield’s interest. This was especially awkward for Bloomfield because, as Tim Fulford has written, ‘Despite his self-characterization in his poems as “Giles” the “farmer’s boy,” Bloomfield was, when he wrote, a Londoner working in one of the capital’s hundreds of cramped workshops.’¹⁴⁹ He was thus expected to act a role in which he did not comfortably fit, and his ability to represent himself to the public was constrained both by the power of his first appearance and by his lack of access to the powerful periodical and social media in which he was discussed and defined.

As Southey had predicted, Bloomfield found it increasingly difficult to interest patrons and the public in his later productions. The demand for his presence at literary gatherings dried up, and in any case his attending such events became impractical after his worsening finances necessitated his leaving London for a cheaper abode in Shefford. When the third Duke of Grafton died in March 1811,

Romantic Circles Praxis, January 2012,

<<http://romantic.arhu.umd.edu/praxis/bloomfield/HTML/praxis.2011.denney.html>> [accessed 20 April 2012], paragraph 1.

¹⁴⁸ Ian Haywood, ‘The Infection of Robert Bloomfield: Terrorizing *The Farmer’s Boy*’, in Goodridge and Keegan (eds.),

<<http://romantic.arhu.umd.edu/praxis/bloomfield/HTML/praxis.2011.haywood.html>> [accessed 20 April 2012], paragraph 1.

¹⁴⁹ Tim Fulford, ‘Bloomfield in His Letters: The Social World of a London Shoemaker Turned Suffolk Poet’, in Goodridge and Keenan (eds.),

<<http://romantic.arhu.umd.edu/praxis/bloomfield/HTML/praxis.2011.fulford.html>> [accessed 20 April 2012], paragraph 3.

Bloomfield heard nothing from his successor for several months and it was only after two letters and more than a year that the fourth Duke eventually responded to Bloomfield's entreaties by paying the arrears of the annuity and arranging for its continuation.¹⁵⁰ In 1817, when Bloomfield's friends were attempting to raise desperately-needed money to assist him, Wordsworth wrote ruefully to Benjamin Haydon from the Duke's seat: 'This Spot, and its neighbourhood are the scene of the Farmer's Boy; from this bond of connection something was expected from the noble Duke, nor was that expectation wholly fruitless—for he has given five Pounds!!!'¹⁵¹

This grudging pittance played a small part in a major operation in the late 1810s to set Bloomfield's finances on an even footing. Bloomfield was fortunate in that unlike Heron or Parsons he had a significant set of supporters and contacts, the most essential resource for succeeding in the literary marketplace. Southey advised Bloomfield how he could best order his finances and raise money from the book trade. Rogers also provided Bloomfield with advice and assistance. In 1816 Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges organised a subscription effort, writing in the testimonial that Bloomfield's supporters hoped to raise enough to provide an annuity 'which may secure independence and comfort to himself and his family during the remainder of his own sickly existence.'¹⁵² This plan did not raise enough to purchase the proposed annuity, but did allow Bloomfield to clear his immediate debts. However, this relief was only temporary. In 1818 Anne Pye wrote to the Literary Fund that 'Robert Bloomfield, the Author of the Farmer's Boy &c. – is now in circumstances of the greatest embarrassment, having lost the sight of one eye, & the other is at times so much affected that he can neither see to read nor write, from which most unfortunate event he is rendered totally unable to support himself & family'.¹⁵³ The Literary Fund granted Bloomfield £40. Bloomfield was grateful, but also careful to stress that he was not directly involved in the application, asking

¹⁵⁰ Robert Bloomfield to the 4th Duke of Grafton, 7 September 1811 and 7 April 1812, letters 271 and 274 in *LRBC*.

¹⁵¹ William Wordsworth to Benjamin Haydon, 20 January 1817, letter 307 in *LRBC*.

¹⁵² Appeal of Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges on behalf of Robert Bloomfield, 15 September 1816, letter 303 in *LRBC*.

¹⁵³ Anne Pye to the Committee of the Literary Fund, Nov 1818, Loan 96 RLF 1/382/2.

Walter Pye to communicate his ‘sincere thanks in any form you please to Mr Fitzgerald and all who may have thus nobly distinguished an absent man without his personal solicitation or written statement of circumstances.’¹⁵⁴ A further application was made in 1822, and another on behalf of Hannah Bloomfield after her father’s death in 1823, when to settle his outstanding debts his family had to auction his books and household effects. The Fund responded to both applications with further monies. With such support, Bloomfield avoided the debtor’s prisons that had claimed Heron and, temporarily, Parsons, but only by inviting, against his inclinations, further patronage and patronisation from others.

Like Parsons and Heron, Bloomfield was socially compromised by his illiquidity. His greater public profile and additional reliance on patronage, though, meant that the consequences were even more disabling. Because he was poor, potential patrons assumed that others must have judged him immoral and therefore were reluctant to aid him or to support his works. This was explicitly brought to his attention by Thomas Lloyd Baker, his companion on his Wye tour in happier times, who wrote to him that

it has been remarked that for some time past *neither yourself nor any of your family* have been in the habit of attending *any place of worship whatsoever*. It has also been observed that you are in the habit of reading some periodical works which are very hostile to the government of this country. Perhaps from these two circumstances coupled together has originated the idea that you have imbibed both Deistical & Republican principles [...] These considerations have induced many of your friends & patrons *upon principle* to withhold from you their accustomed protection & assistance, thinking that by doing as they had done, & as they still wish to do, they should be giving countenance to a dangerous man.¹⁵⁵

In his response to Lloyd Baker, Bloomfield made it clear that he resented the intrusion into his private affairs. He stressed that his patronage income was not

¹⁵⁴ Robert Bloomfield to Walter Pye, 17 Nov 1818, Loan 96 RLF 1/382/3.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas John Lloyd Baker to Robert Bloomfield, 23 May 1821, letter 351 in *LRBC*.

precisely accustomed, regular payments being limited to the Grafton annuity and another smaller and short-term one from Mrs Sharp Andrews, and that when the subscription had been raised for him ‘many worthy hands assisted; the Earl of Lonsdale, Mr Rogers, Lord Holland, and people of the most opposite opinions.’¹⁵⁶ More bullishly, he wrote that in any case when in 1800 he had found he must ‘unavoidably be brought before the public’, he had determined that he ‘*never would in public writing or intimate correspondence enter into disputation or disquisition on the two grand subjects which keep the world in agitation, Religion and politics.*’ ‘I have kept my word or vow,’ he accurately asserted, ‘and you will find that I can keep it.’ This silence, though, was not solely by choice. As Denney writes, ‘Throughout his career, [Bloomfield’s] work and public image were appropriated to serve a political cause by people of a radical as well as a conservative persuasion, and this must have reinforced the poet’s sense that politics was utterly incompatible with the independence he so much wanted to preserve.’¹⁵⁷ Bloomfield’s talent as a poet was allowed, but he was still looked down on as a political entity, seen as being less than gentlemanly and therefore ripe for appropriation by his social superiors. While politicians like William Windham and writers like William Cobbett employed Bloomfield for political ends, he could not express his own politics without risking censure from his patrons and from the institutions which praised him only so long as he wrote from a position that posed them no threat.¹⁵⁸

In a notice marking Bloomfield’s death, the *Monthly Magazine* published a damning assault on his character and on the propriety of poor writers seeking to publish:

His ambition [...] was disappointed; and, for some years, he was in a state of mental depression, which, it is stated, rendered his death consolatory to his connections. Under these circumstances, and they are such as constantly attend genius without pecuniary independence, the editor of this Magazine is not ashamed of the advice which he gave Bloomfield at his outset. The

¹⁵⁶ Robert Bloomfield to Thomas John Lloyd Baker, 25 May 1821, letter 352 in *LRBC*.

¹⁵⁷ Denney, paragraph 27.

¹⁵⁸ Denney, paragraphs 22-26.

world would have lost nothing by the non-appearance of the Farmer's Boy, as it then existed in Bloomfield's original manuscript, and the poet would have enjoyed the comforts of an industrious life, enhanced by his love of the Muses.¹⁵⁹

Bloomfield's brother George was infuriated by this article, and in a letter to Joseph Weston, the editor of Bloomfield's *Remains*, took great pains to rebut its charges. He described the extent to which 'All the comforts myself and brothers enjoyed, evidently sprung from the success of Robert', pointing out that at times Bloomfield was supporting relatives numbering in the high twenties.¹⁶⁰ George was also angered by the article's paternalism and its '*inference*, that the *poor* man of talents should not dare to enter the fields of literature, but leave them to the men of '*pecuniary independence*.'¹⁶¹ Bearing in mind Bloomfield's considerable achievements, George is well-justified in his rejection of the article's insulting insinuations. However, the *Monthly* was largely correct in asserting that financial independence and a certain level of social status were necessary for an author to exert a reasonable level of control over his or her social and financial destinies. Bloomfield's literary exertions were enduringly successful. By B.C. Bloomfield's 'considerable under-estimate' around 283,000 copies of *The Farmer's Boy*, alone and in volumes of collected works, were sold during the nineteenth century.¹⁶² In Bloomfield's lifetime, though, he was patronised in both senses, and even the immense popularity of his works did not allow him to take full control of his reputation and construct a career that could independently sustain him.

Southey's Critique and the Profession of Authorship

On the publication of *Calamities of Authors*, Robert Southey, not yet Poet Laureate but still a well-established, solvent and respected writer, wrote to John

¹⁵⁹ 'Died', *Monthly Magazine*, 56 (Sep 1823), p. 181-83 (p. 183).

¹⁶⁰ George Bloomfield to Joseph Weston, 9 June 1824, letter 389 in *LRBC*.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² B.C. Bloomfield, p. 92.

Murray to propose that he ‘give wings to [D’Israeli’s] work’ by reviewing it for the *Quarterly*. As well as addressing D’Israeli’s book, though, he was keen to ‘say something upon the absurd purposes of the Literary Fund, with its despicable ostentation of patronage’.¹⁶³

Southey’s account of D’Israeli’s book in the resulting review is largely positive. He agreed that D’Israeli was right to attempt to ‘enforce a truth which may save many a one from a life of dependence, disappointment, and wretchedness’.¹⁶⁴ However, he objected to many of D’Israeli’s examples of authorly distress. He asserts, for example, that while an author might suffer damage to his health while writing, it is hardly comparable with the damage suffered by people in more active professions; as he put it with sly irony, ‘Sailors and night-coachmen are short lived for want of due sleep: he who lives, night as well as day, in his study among the dead, converses usually longer with the living also, than those men of hard lives and iron temperament.’¹⁶⁵ He extends this observation to argue that many of the problems D’Israeli attributes to authorship either result from mental characteristics unrelated to the profession or affect a wider range of people than simply authors.

Southey had his own agenda in attempting to dissociate authorship from dysfunction. His own position as a trusted and influential commentator rested partly on his having successfully promoted himself as a sensible professional gentleman. Therefore, when he describes Heron as ‘a poor miserable laborious man, who has the strongest claim upon our compassion for the wretchedness of his fate, but who has no claim for anything further,’ Southey is carefully distancing the ranks of ‘proper’ authors like himself from those who write and fail.¹⁶⁶ While he admits that authorship is ‘a very unprofitable profession’, he remains self-interestedly

¹⁶³ Robert Southey to John Murray, 14 August 1812, in *Letters from Southey, 1808-1812*, NLS Ms.42550.

¹⁶⁴ [Robert Southey], ‘D’Israeli’s *Calamities of Authors*’, *Quarterly Review*, 7 (September 1812), pp. 93-114 (p. 109).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

determined that it nevertheless be recognised as a respectable career for select adherents.¹⁶⁷

I will discuss the legitimacy of Southey's claims as they relate to his own career in the next chapter, but first I want briefly to consider his negative response to Williams' attempt to alleviate the problems of distressed writers:

We have, it is true, a Literary Fund for the relief of distressed authors, the members of which dole out their alms in sums of five, ten and twenty pounds (never, we believe, exceeding the latter sum), dine in public once a year, write verses in praise of their own benevolence and recite them themselves. Nothing can be more evident, then, than that such liberality is as useless to literature as it is pitiful in itself.¹⁶⁸

Like Williams, Southey deplores the excesses of patrons, but unlike Williams, he sees the worst excesses of patronage exemplified in the Fund itself, rendered particularly offensive as he believes that the grants that it offers authors are woefully insufficient. While a writer taken up by a traditional wealthy patron could at least expect access to the resources they needed to address their liabilities, the Fund with its limited income and many applicants could often only offer its applicants a stay of execution. As Southey put it

the Literary Fund provides no present employment for the hungry and willing labourer, and holds out no hope for the future; a first donation operates against a second; a second or a third becomes a bar to any further bounty, and the learned mendicant who leans upon the broken reed is abandoned by it in prison, or turned over to the parish or the hospital at last.¹⁶⁹

Southey treats the Literary Fund harshly, but he has a point. The Fund helped far more people than any single patron could have hoped to, receiving

¹⁶⁷ [Southey], p. 101.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 113.

applications from over 650 authors between 1790 and 1830 and providing around 85% of these applicants with much-needed relief, many of them on several occasions.¹⁷⁰ Without the interest drawn by the self-congratulatory dinners Southey deplored, the Fund would have had even less money to aid its applicants. Even with the dinners, though, the aid that the ‘joint-stock-patronage-company’ could disburse was spread among so many writers that the value of individual grants, was often insufficient, as with Heron, or only enough to address immediate problems, as with Parsons.¹⁷¹ The work the Fund did was well-intentioned and valuable, but it did not stimulate a revolution in the status of literary production and, as Williams had feared, it could not single-handedly engender the institutions and respectability that stabilised professions. As Penelope Corfield writes, ‘it proved insuperably difficult to translate literary freedom into the trappings of formal professionalism.’¹⁷² Thus, while many authors blithely assumed they could build steady and respectable careers by writing, most were sadly mistaken.

¹⁷⁰ Statistics from catalogue data for the Case Files (Loan 96 RLF 1).

¹⁷¹ [Southey], p. 113.

¹⁷² Penelope J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 185.

Chapter Three

Succeeding in ‘the Worst Trade’

Status and Connections

In the early nineteenth century, authors were rarities on the Literary Fund’s subscription list.¹ In 1812 the only eminent writers who subscribed were Isaac D’Israeli, the poet George Crabbe and Matthew ‘*Monk*’ Lewis.² This was not because successful writers were necessarily ungenerous, but because they did not feel that they belonged to a defined professional class whose members they should aid out of solidarity. However, affluent authors frequently assisted individuals they felt personally invested in. In 1816, for example, Byron made Samuel Taylor Coleridge a gift of £100, more than three times the £30 the Fund gave him in response to an application in the same year.³ Percy Shelley gave hundreds of pounds to his father-in-law, William Godwin, to Thomas Peacock and to Leigh Hunt.⁴ Samuel Rogers was something of a guardian angel to literary friends including Thomas Campbell, William Wordsworth, Ugo Foscolo and Thomas Moore, assisting them by using both his connections and his banking fortune.⁵ In all these cases aid resulted from an established personal connection and through the operation of a certain kind of mutual respect between the aid-giver and the subject of relief. The giving of such gifts was often an essentially gentlemanly act and represented one of several potent advantages available to those able to access influential circles.

¹ By contrast with later in the century, when the Fund counted a considerable number of authors among its subscribers, and writers including Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope served on the Committee. See the Annual Reports (Loan 96 RLF 3).

² Nigel Cross, *The Royal Literary Fund 1790-1918: an Introduction to the Fund’s History and Archives with an Index of Applicants* (London: World Microfilm Publications, 1984), p. 13. See also Royal Literary Fund Annual Reports Vol. II, Loan 96 RLF 3/2.

³ Cross, p. 14; see also Mr Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Loan 96 RLF 1/41.

⁴ See Richard Holmes, *Shelley: the Pursuit* (London: Penguin 1987), pp. 232-33, 238n, 350-52.

⁵ Richard Garnett, ‘Rogers, Samuel (1763–1855)’, rev. Paul Baines, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23997>> [accessed 25 April 2012].

The literary world in the first two decades of the nineteenth century was one largely mediated by codes of gentlemanly behaviour, and, as the examples in the previous chapter stress, those who were not gentlemen were often disadvantaged in negotiating it. Tim Fulford has argued that in the period ‘Chivalric manhood [...] was relocated in the middle class. They made duty, honour and paternalism the basis of their claim to govern just as they had formerly been the foundation of the aristocracy’s defence of its power.’⁶ The professionalisation of British society was thus conducted through the reconciliation of new commercial and knowledge-based modes of valuation with older moral and social mores vested in the performance of a certain kind of masculinity. Such performances were particularly critical for authors, whose aspirations toward professionalism were, as I have argued, often compromised by their poor incomes and the lack of institutional supports. In seeking to avoid the negative associations of the author-by-profession, successful writers often characterised themselves as well-connected gentlemen first and authors second.

This chapter will examine the exceptional careers of three individuals who succeeded in making significant literary profits – Robert Southey, Thomas Moore and Walter Scott – before concluding with a brief coda on Lord Byron. While the conditions for each of their successes were unique, these writers had in common access to networks of influence that provided them with financial and social capital which in turn provided them with opportunities to profit by writing. I will detail the networks each writer was entangled with more fully in what follows, but to summarise briefly: in Southey’s case, they included his extended family, the friends he made through his schooling at Westminster, Bristol circles, the Lakers and later John Murray’s associates and the Tory establishment. Through his education at Trinity College Dublin Moore made connections which brought him into contact with the Whiggish aristocratic groupings and literati whose influence did a great deal to launch and shape him. Scott’s family and his legal occupation gave him access to key figures in the Dundas ascendancy, which in turn allowed him to secure patronage appointments and begin his literary career in a comfortable professional

⁶ Tim Fulford, *Romanticism and Masculinity: Gender, Politics and Poetics in the Writings of Burke, Coleridge, Cobbett, Wordsworth, De Quincey and Hazlitt* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 9.

position from which he could access tastemakers, promote his works and shape his social emanations. As can be seen, access to most of these networks was constrained by class and gender – while obviously not strictly so in the case of families, familial assistance was nevertheless dependent on the family's social position and was more likely to be given to sons to establish them in careers than to daughters who might have wished to do the same.

One of the major advantages well-connected authors enjoyed was access to alternative income streams, meaning that they were not wholly reliant on their literary earnings. As the previous two chapters have shown, the potential for authors to live comfortably solely on publishing profits was limited. In the early nineteenth century the profits a well-connected writer could accrue from direct and indirect patronage were often greater and more reliable than those that could be reaped directly from the marketplace. Such income streams insulated authors both from the vagaries of publisher's payments and from accusations of hackery.

Another benefit well-connected gentlemen enjoyed was the ability to inspire attention and respect from the periodical Reviews. Reviewers and those authors they supported could form symbiotic systems of appreciation and promotion. As Ina Ferris has argued, Scott's success with the *Waverley* novels was partly due to their being seen by reviewers as 'establishing novel writing as a literary activity and legitimating novel reading as a manly practice.'⁷ Scott and his reviewers colluded in propagating gentlemanly authority by exalting 'manly interventions' at the expense of feminised models for fiction. While commonly-used printing technologies had not changed greatly between the publication of *The Castle of Wolfenbach* in 1792 and *Waverley* in 1814, the considerable changes in the periodical environment had made it far easier for well-connected authors to solicit acclaim, exercise authority and make money by reviewing. It is no coincidence that Southey, Moore and Scott all wrote for the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, or both.

⁷ Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 80.

While successful authors and publishers often enjoyed close and mutually beneficial relationships, gentlemen could if necessary use their recognised status to pull rank on their literary paymasters. Thomas Moore attempted this with John Murray when the two found themselves on opposite sides of the debate about the fate of Byron's memoirs. In the heated discussion Moore, believing that Murray had insulted him, responded, 'Hard words, Mr Murray, but if you chuse to take the privileges of a gentleman, I am ready to accord them to you.'⁸ The privilege Moore offered was the right to duel, and his offer deliberately invoked his gentlemanly status to belittle Murray, who either had to accept the challenge and risk being shot or concede Moore's superior status, with the accompanying assumptions on probity and critical judgement.⁹

As well as privileges, however, gentleman had hazily-defined but constraining responsibilities. Jon Cam Hobhouse, recording the memoir confrontation, depicts Murray accomplishing a fairly elegant inversion of Moore's line of attack:

"I do not care whose the MSS are – here am I as a tradesman – I do not care a farthing about having your money, or whether I ever get it or not – but such regard have I for Lord Byron's honour and fame that I am willing and determined to destroy these MSS which have been read by Mr Gifford, who says they would render Lord Byron's name eternally infamous. It is very hard that I as a tradesman should be willing to make a sacrifice that you as a gentleman will *not* consent to!"¹⁰

⁸ *The Journal of Thomas Moore*, ed. Wilfred S. Dowden, 6 vols (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983-1991), VI, 2442 (entry for 17 May 1824).

⁹ Duels and their implications form the unifying thread in Richard Cronin's *Paper Pellets: British Literary Culture after Waterloo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); I discuss Cronin's book elsewhere in this chapter and study.

¹⁰ John Cam Hobhouse, *Hobhouse's Diary*, ed. Peter Cochran (from British Library Additional Manuscript 56548), <<http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/33-1824.pdf>> [accessed 06 Jan 2010], p. 52.

Murray here rhetorically makes himself more gentlemanly than a gentleman, calling on Gifford's authority to reassert the propriety of destroying the memoirs and implicitly pegging Moore as an acquisitive false friend. The loose definitions of gentlemanly conduct left rhetors considerable room for exhorting gentleman not to violate an invoked code of behaviour and for denying their enemies gentlemanly status by asserting their poor conduct. Money matters were certainly not supposed to be on a gentleman's list of priorities, and since the ownership of the memoirs was a money matter, Murray adroitly disarmed Moore by asserting that he, a tradesman, was able to rise above it.

While gentlemanliness was not without its disadvantages, then, gentlemanly writers were possessed of a plethora of advantages which were denied to female writers and those of lower social status. In no way do I wish to undersell the numerous successes that women and working-class writers achieved in the period. However, it is important to recognise that they were constrained by the importance of access to masculine networks and by what Ian Duncan has called 'the patronizing and professionalizing ethos' that demarcated the territory of literature in the 1800s and 1810s.¹¹ It is striking that of the four most prominent female poets of the Romantic period, two produced the greatest part of their work before 1800 (Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Charlotte Smith) and two launched their careers later in the 1810s (Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon). Barbauld and Smith both operated most successfully in the period before the retreats in the later 1790s, the eclipse of the liberal Dissenting periodicals and the shift to a masculinised and censorious reviewing culture. Hemans and (particularly) Landon flourished along with the proliferation of new magazines in the later 1810s and 1820s, when increasing readerships multiplied opportunities for pioneering new models for female literary professionalism and celebrity. Here, too, though, networks and contacts were crucial, especially in the case of Landon, whose association with William Jerdan and the *Literary Gazette* was crucial in launching, propagating and

¹¹ Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 43.

promoting her celebrity, poetry and views of literature.¹² Networks were also crucial to the career of Hannah More, probably the most influential and prosperous lady author of the period, who aligned herself at various times with the Bluestockings, the London theatre scene, salon culture, the Evangelical movement and tens of other societies and institutions for education. On her death she left a fortune of £27,500 to around 200 charities, this number of selected beneficiaries in itself indicative of the huge range of groupings with whom she worked and in whom she felt invested.¹³

An ability to trade on connections, then, was crucial to authorial prosperity in the early nineteenth century, and gentlemen were commonly those best placed to do so. There were, however, numerous gentlemanly writers in the period, and only a few outstanding successes. Talent and connections alone were nowhere near enough to guarantee a living from writing. As I shall now contend, exceptional authors were able to profit by writing only due to very specific combinations of circumstances, abilities and good fortune.

Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters?

Southey is a poet who has only recently received renewed attention after a long critical eclipse.¹⁴ His recent advocates have been keen to assert his importance by invoking Byron's description of him as 'the only existing entire man of letters.'¹⁵

¹² Explored at length in Susan Matoff's *Conflicted Life: William Jerdan, 1782-1869: London Editor, Author and Critic* (Brighton, Portland & Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2011).

¹³ Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 331.

¹⁴ Recent scholarly contributions include the meticulous new edition of his earlier poetry, Robert Southey, *Poetical Works 1793-1810*, gen ed. Lynda Pratt, 5 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), W.A. Speck's excellent biography, *Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), and a significant essay collection, Lynda Pratt (ed.), *Robert Southey and the Contexts of English Romanticism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). Works in progress include editions of his later poetry, his collected letters and his *Letters from England*.

¹⁵ At the time of writing this quotation featured prominently on the website for the *Collected Letters* project (<<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/crc/robert-southey/index.php>> [accessed 12 Feb 2010]) and it provides the subtitle for Speck's biography. Both cite from Lionel Madden (ed.) *Robert Southey: The*

Michael Gamer writes that ‘[t]he manner in which he conducted his career [...] signals a new era of professional writing—one characterized neither by patronage, nor by venture capitalism, but rather by careful planning and a determination to eliminate unwanted contingencies and turns of fortune.’¹⁶ Having established that ‘new forms of professionalism are partially based on the management of risk’, Brian Goldberg argues that, in Southey’s preferred professional paradigm, ‘A poet’s encounter with the marketplace would, ideally, be profitable, but an ideology of vocational solidarity would also serve as a new source of status and affiliation transcending birth.’¹⁷ These are fair descriptions, but in recounting Southey’s professional aspirations both critics occlude to some extent the particular circumstances which allowed him partially to realise them. By the 1810s, the period on which Gamer’s discussion focuses, Southey was able to earn significant sums by carefully husbanding the revenue streams his works provided. However, the considerable input that he received from friends, family and the government earlier in his career was instrumental in allowing him to build his reputation to the point where his writing could command large audiences and return a substantial income. His ability to create a professional identity for himself, in other words, rested on his sociable connections.

Southey’s father was a linen draper whose financial circumstances were often shaky and who finally went bankrupt in 1792.¹⁸ When Southey was a boy, his better-off relatives helped to support and educate him. Until he reached the age of seven he lived for the majority of the time with his mother’s half-sister, Elizabeth Tyler, in Bath. After an early education at a series of small schools, his uncle Herbert Hill, hoping to shape him for a clerical career, paid his fees for Westminster, which Southey entered at fourteen and from whence he was expelled in his final year for writing an article attacking corporal punishment. Nevertheless, he was able to

Critical Heritage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 157; Madden himself cites from Byron’s journal entry for 22 November 1813 (using R.E. Prothero’s edition (1898-1901)).

¹⁶ Michael Gamer, ‘Laureate Policy’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 42 (Winter 2011), pp. 42-47 (p. 42).

¹⁷ Brian Goldberg, *The Lake Poets and Professional Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 21, 194.

¹⁸ My source for the biographical material is Speck unless otherwise indicated.

matriculate at Balliol College in November 1792, supported financially by his uncle, his aunt and friends he had made at Westminster. He remained in Oxford until late 1794, often discontent, making a brief resolution to study medicine, aware that his republican sympathies meant that securing a politically-dependent appointment was unlikely. In 1794 change came to Southey in the form of Coleridge and their combined scheme to found an egalitarian settlement in America. Inspired, Southey spent most of 1795 in the West Country promoting this scheme and collaborating with Coleridge, supported partly by his relatives, partly by small profits from early literary works, such as *Joan of Arc* (1796), and partly by earnings from schemes such as the public lectures he and Coleridge arranged in Bristol. Money was tight, however, particularly after Elizabeth Tyler cut off her nephew on hearing about his pantisocratic plans and his engagement to Edith Fricker, a seamstress. When Herbert Hill suggested that Southey visit him in Portugal, hoping to persuade him to follow him into the church, Southey was happy to oblige. However, he secretly married Edith before leaving Bristol in November 1795, making his commitment to her clear. A year earlier Southey had written to his brother that ‘money is a huge evil with which we shall not have long to encounter’, but the little he earned at this time, even with familial aid, was not enough to sustain even modest schemes, let alone Pantisocracy.¹⁹

Southey, though, was fortunate enough to acquire a major fixed annual income on his reaching his majority early in 1797. His Westminster contemporary and lifelong friend Charles Watkin Williams Wynn, hoping to allow him to fulfil his potential, agreed to grant him ‘£160 for life, payable quarterly on the 20 of Jan, April, July and October’.²⁰ This annuity provided the greater part of Southey’s income while he established his reputation. Despite the annuity being a fairly significant sum, not far short of a gentlemanly income in itself, it was not sufficient for Southey’s family’s needs. W.A. Speck writes that in late 1797

¹⁹ Robert Southey to Thomas Southey, 12 October [1794]. Letter 106 in Part 1 of *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Lynda Pratt, March 2009-, *Romantic Circles*, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/Part_One/HTML/letterEEd.26.106.html> [accessed 7 May 2012].

²⁰ Speck, p. 68.

he was reduced to asking [Joseph] Cottle to lend him ten pounds, explaining that ‘my expenses this quarter have exceeded my income’. He was so hard up that he took on a prodigious amount of literary work, reviewing for the *Critical Review* and publishing poems in the *Morning Post*. The *Critical Review* paid him ‘at the low rate of three guineas a sheet’, though he admitted that ‘my work was not worth more. It brought me from £50 to £100 yearly, a very acceptable addition to my straightened income.’ ‘In 1798 [Daniel] Stuart offered me a guinea a week to supply verses for the *Morning Post*’, he was to recall many years later: ‘that offer was very acceptable to me & all the pieces which bear date from that time to 1800, when I went for the second time to Portugal, were written under that engagement. About 60 lines a week I thought a fair discharge.’²¹

Even this early in his career, then, Southey was not (and could not be) purely a poet but worked as a pen-for-hire. He relied on his connections with periodicals and composed in a range of forms, including journalism, translation (sometimes unattributed) and travel writing, the latter in the form of his *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal* (1797). He continued to work on both lyric and epic poems, the former going to the *Morning Post*, the latter representing his main hope for literary glory. At this point Southey faced problems similar to those of Parsons and Heron – only by writing extensively could he make a sum barely sufficient for his support. Southey, though, was underwritten both by the Wynn annuity and by the possibility of drawing on his other connections for financial assistance. For example, when he left for Portugal in 1800, he received £100 from Peter Elmsley, another Westminster friend who had also helped to fund him at Oxford.²² The ability to solicit gifts of sum greater than the yearly income of many tradesmen gave Southey a cushion that less fortunate writers lacked.

Such support kept Southey from falling into debt and let him establish himself. After moving to Greta Hall in Keswick in 1803, he began to develop the

²¹ Speck, p. 71.

²² Speck, p. 83; Christopher Collard, ‘Elmsley, Peter (1774–1825)’, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8737>> [accessed 22 April 2010].

comfortable routine that sustained him for the best part of forty years. The yearly rent, negotiated initially by Coleridge, was £42, a sum that could be met easily out of the Wynn annuity.²³ The relative isolation of the Lakes and the support of his growing family meant that he could pour his attention into a range of chosen literary works. As Gamer argues, his main goal in this was strategically to secure himself against financial failure: ‘Rather than writing exclusively in a few given genres [...] Southey diversified, working on multiple projects in a given day on the assumption that each piece of writing might produce a small but consistent stream of income.’²⁴ He continued to produce a great deal of journalism and completed *Madoc* (1805), *The Curse of Kehama* (1810) and numerous shorter poems. He undertook paid translation work, including a version of Vasco Lobiera’s *Amadis of Gaul*, which was published in 1803 and for which he received £100 for the copyright. He also produced a corrected version of *Palmerin of England* (1807) and his *Chronicle of the Cid* (1808), a complex fusion of several source texts.²⁵ Also influenced by his Iberian experiences was his enduringly successful *Letters from England* (1807), for which he took the guise of a Spaniard, Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella. Although his long-cherished desire to write a history of Portugal was never realised, the research he conducted informed a number of other works, notably his *History of Brazil*, the first volume of which was published in 1810. In addition to all these projects, he had enough leisure to work on behalf of the family of Henry Kirke White, editing his *Remains* (1807) and sustaining an interest with roots in his work with Joseph Cottle on a posthumous edition of Thomas Chatterton for the benefit the poet’s sister (published in 1803).²⁶ The Kirke White volume was enormously popular – it sold through its first 750-copy edition within a year, was reprinted in larger 1500-copy editions yearly in the subsequent three years, and continued to be frequently reprinted after that.²⁷ The fact that Southey took the time to produce such a work

²³ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 278.

²⁴ Gamer, p. 45.

²⁵ St Clair, p. 654.

²⁶ For more on Southey’s engagement with Chatterton’s family and with Chatterton’s implications for literary men, see Nick Groom, ‘Love and Madness: Southey Editing Chatterton’ in Pratt (ed.), pp. 19-35, and Goldberg, pp. 193-214.

²⁷ St Clair, p. 654.

indicates both his relative affluence and his gentlemanly commitment to patronising and promoting good writing by those in less fortunate positions than his own.

At this point, Southey was able to sustain himself and his family, but he was unable to produce a work that broke out to a large audience. His epic poems produced initially disappointing returns – as he wrote to his friend William Taylor in 1806, “‘*Madoc*’ is doing well in all but sale. If you do not know the current value of epic poetry at the present time, I can help you to a pretty just estimate. My profits on this poem in the course of twelve months amount precisely to three pounds, seventeen shillings and one penny.”²⁸ He went on jealously to compare his earnings with Scott’s. Southey’s letter, though, protests a little too much – the fact that *Madoc* returned any profits at all after the first year meant that it was not a true failure in terms of sales and the profits Southey reaped in subsequent years after Longmans’ costs on the two-guinea quarto had been met were significant. In the 1810s and 1820s continuing sales justified several further editions.²⁹ While the returns Southey received from his epics were slower than he might have wished, then, they also endured. No one work of Southey’s was overwhelmingly successful, but cumulatively they boosted his profile and established him as an author whose works were worthy of continuing interest, comprising a back catalogue which laid the financial and social foundations for his future prosperity and clout.

During the 1800s Southey’s finances continued to be underpinned by monies from Charles Wynn. In 1807 the original annuity was replaced by a government pension of £200 a year which Wynn procured.³⁰ This continuing income allowed Southey to use money from his increasing portfolio of literary revenues to guard against unexpected disasters. In 1809 he took out a £1000 life insurance policy to provide for his family in the event of his early death. Tellingly, Speck writes that ‘when doing so he had to declare his profession, and found that poet, historian and reviewer were not acceptable legal terms, so had to describe himself as

²⁸ Cited in Speck, p. 115.

²⁹ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 653.

³⁰ Speck, p. 119.

Gentleman'.³¹ Southey paid the premium on another £3000 policy with his yearly salary from the Laureateship when he received the post in 1813, hedging against his death in a move that Gamer reads as characteristic:

whatever the difficulties in reconciling premiums and policies to higher notions of poetic service and fame, Southey never ceases to convert both sets of terms into a single currency, if only to assist him in arriving at the best long-term business decision [...] Robert Southey the writer might die at any time, but Southey Incorporated—consisting not just of his wife and children but also his two sisters-in-law and their progeny—might continue, as planned, with confident assurance.³²

Gamer here clarifies one of the reasons why Southey sits uncomfortably within Romantic theories of poetry. Unlike Wordsworth or Coleridge, Southey did not argue for the separation of the poet from market society, but instead conceived of his career as an endeavour that must produce both economic and reputational currency and which provided situations in which one might be leveraged to secure the other. He spread his risk and wrote in numerous forms to accumulate both the monies to supply his immediate needs and the reputation to increase his earning power – as Gamer writes, by this point in his career he was ‘a poet who wrote poetry *before* breakfast in order not to impinge on the scheduled hours after breakfast devoted to writing books and articles that paid.’³³ Southey’s success in this project speaks a good deal about the lack of currency of Romantic ideologies within the period – while Wordsworth and Coleridge won out in the eyes of posterity, during the 1800s and 1810s Southey’s works were far more lucrative and enjoyed considerably larger readerships.

Southey’s readers and remuneration were both hugely increased by his connection with John Murray’s *Quarterly Review*. Southey had refused an offer to write for the *Edinburgh* in 1807, antagonised by its politics and by Jeffrey’s having

³¹ Speck, p. 136.

³² Gamer, pp. 46-47.

³³ Gamer, p. 45.

included him in his demarcation and denigration of the school of Lake Poets.³⁴ The *Edinburgh*'s minimum remuneration of ten guineas a sheet would have been welcome – it was more than three times what the *Critical* paid him. However, by sticking to his principles he placed himself as an ideal candidate to write for Murray's opposing Review. Scott, a key mover in Murray's new enterprise, recruited Southey for the first issue and his spirited, popular and often aggressive reviews played a major role in defining the *Quarterly*. The *Quarterly Review Archive* attributes fifty-six articles wholly or partially to Southey between 1809 and 1824, indicating that he wrote almost as many articles in that period as there were issues.³⁵ At times Southey clashed both with Murray and with the *Quarterly*'s editor, William Gifford, who regularly finessed the content of his articles. In his first article, on the Baptists, Gifford 'excised any indication of indifference to theological orthodoxy, and Southey was furious when he saw how cruelly his article had been mutilated.'³⁶ However, the sting was lessened by his receiving £21.13s for the article, 'better pay than I have ever yet received for any former occupation', as he noted in a letter to his uncle.³⁷ As his importance to the *Quarterly* became apparent, Murray began to offer him '100£ per piece', pay which Southey rightly considered 'very liberal'.³⁸ As his views became more closely aligned with those of his Tory associates and the popularity of his contributions became apparent he was entrusted with key articles, allowed considerable latitude in what he chose to review and permitted to call on Murray for the books he needed to prepare his critiques – a considerable bonus for a man as bibliophilic as Southey.

Southey also accrued a number of other benefits from his association with Murray's journal, augured by the first issue's containing a glowing review by Scott

³⁴ Speck, pp. 123-24. I discuss Jeffrey's reviews of *Thalaba* in the following chapter.

³⁵ See John Cutmore (ed.), *Quarterly Review Archive, Romantic Circles*, <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/qr/index/01.html>> [accessed 06 April 2010].

³⁶ Geoffrey Carnall, 'Southey, Robert (1774–1843)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26056>> [accessed 12 April 2010].

³⁷ Quoted in Speck, p. 132.

³⁸ Rates discussed in Robert Southey to John Murray, 7 October 1818, in Letters from Southey 1813-1818, NLS Ms.42551, but instituted earlier – see Southey to Murray, 17 Nov 1816.

of his *Chronicle of the Cid*.³⁹ In other cases, Southey had direct input in choosing his reviewers. *Roderick, the last of the Goths* (1814) was reviewed by his school friend Grosvenor Charles Bedford. When Murray expressed doubts about this, Gifford wrote to him that ‘Bedford was not selected by me [...] He was fixed upon by Southey’. Having received Bedford’s copy, Gifford felt it impolitic greatly to change it, despite his own qualms about its quality, writing that ‘the difficulty with me is Southey. He entertains a very high opinion of his friend's talents, as he shewed by employing him & he has seen & approved the critique [...] he is after all the sheet anchor of the Revw & should not be lightly hurt.’⁴⁰ Southey’s connection with the *Quarterly* thus gave him considerable power to shape the way he was perceived by others and to dispense literary patronage to his friends. While the quarterlies affected to be above puffing, which they associated with earlier periodicals, for their key associates they offered unprecedented opportunities for shaping receptions.⁴¹

The opportunities the *Quarterly* presented came at an apposite time, as Southey had grown tired of producing poetry. Writing to Gifford on the publication of *Roderick* he described himself as ‘poor enough to need its success, – but far too proud to feel either disappointment or mortification at its failure.’ He no longer felt fully engaged with the processes of poetic creation: ‘My bolt is shot, at my age the faculties of the mind are mature, & tho’ not yet tending upon decay, I suspect in

³⁹ [Walter Scott], ‘Chronicle of the Cid’, *Quarterly Review*, 1 (February 1809), pp. 134-53.

⁴⁰ William Gifford to John Murray, letters dated [1814] and 28 January 1815, *Quarterly Review Archive, Romantic Circles*, <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/qr/index/25.html>> [accessed 14 May 2012].

⁴¹ Consider Coleridge’s approaches to Jeffrey regarding reviewing Thomas Clarkson in the *Edinburgh*, discussed in the introduction. Publishers also solicited reviewers for favoured authors. Longmans, ‘deeply interested in the success of Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*’, wrote to the Reverend William Shepherd suggesting that he write for the *Quarterly* ‘a pretty full review of the work’, assuring him that ‘we shall be most happy to remunerate you liberally’. See Longmans to William Shepherd, 17 November 1817, Longman Outletter Book 8 July 1816-26 May 1818, transcribed Michael Bott, RUL 1393 Part I.100, letter 173.

myself a lack of enterprize which would not have been felt a few years ago.⁴²

David Craig has described how later in his career Southey enjoyed poetry ‘more as a private hobby than a public vocation’, preferring to take up cudgels as a periodical moralist to earn his income.⁴³ In a complementary essay Mark Storey has traced numerous iterations of Southey’s complaints against poetry, his concern throughout his career that ‘Composition [...] excites me more than it is desirable to be excited.’⁴⁴ For Southey there was something uncomfortably revealing about the emotional aspects of versifying, leading him to spend more time on less subjective and more profitable endeavours. Storey traces his movement, against the grain of later criticism, from writing verse that at its best manifests a ‘quiet, public intimacy’ to producing grander histories, based on Southey’s feeling ‘a conviction in my own mind that I shall ultimately hold a higher place among historians [...] than among poets.’⁴⁵ Southey’s view of poetry was from an early stage deeply historical. David Fairer has examined numerous works in which Southey traced this lineage and argues that he ‘remained acutely conscious of the many tracings and retracing of literary history, and he continued to associate the formation of his own character with the character of the nation’s poetry.’⁴⁶ It is not a huge leap from the fanciful but carefully-constructed poetic histories in Southey’s epics to his later historical writing and it is one which Southey’s increasing expertise regarding his own political and historical contexts made attractive.

As Southey shifted from contributing poems to newspapers to politicised reviewing for the *Quarterly*, then, he also shifted from producing epics to writing histories. This transition worked out very well for Murray, who published most of Southey’s later prose works, effectively poaching his productivity from Longmans,

⁴² Robert Southey to William Gifford, 25 November 1814, extracted in John Murray Letter Book, 2 April 1808-13 March 1843, NLS Ms. 41909, fol. 3^v (incoming side).

⁴³ David M. Craig, ‘Subservient Talents? Robert Southey as Public Moralist’, in Pratt (ed.), pp. 101-14 (p. 103).

⁴⁴ Mark Storey, ‘“Bob Southey! – Poet Laureate”: Public and Private in Southey’s Poems of 1816’ in Pratt (ed.), pp. 87-100 (p. 90).

⁴⁵ Storey, pp. 100, 91.

⁴⁶ David Fairer, ‘Southey’s Literary History’ in Pratt (ed.), p. 17.

who published his poetry. Southey's later books regularly began in *Quarterly* articles, and were often developed at Murray's instigation. One of his most enduring productions had its kernel in a review he wrote attacking an old rival, James Stanier Clarke. Southey had described Clarke's *The Progress of Maritime Discovery* (1803) as a 'national disgrace' in the *Annual Review* and Clarke had responded by savaging *Madoc* in the *Monthly*.⁴⁷ Southey struck again by rubbishing Clarke's *Nelson* (1809) in the *Quarterly* and Murray, sensing an opportunity, was keen to see the review expanded, writing to Southey that he felt that Nelson's life was

so noble a subject for you, in every respect, that I wish it to receive all your care, and a good portion of what Turner calls the "prime" of your mind [...] I wish it to be such a book as will become the heroic text of every midshipman in the navy. – & the association of Nelson and Southey will not I think be ungrateful to you – if it be worth your attention in this way, I am disposed to think that it will enable me to treble the sum I first offered as a slight remuneration [...] you will of course omit totally all criticism on Clarke &c. &c. – I wish to make the price of the volume – one Dollar!⁴⁸

Murray here demonstrates a number of strategies for persuading Southey – flattering him, appealing to his patriotism in time of war, speaking of his own large ambitions for the work, offering financial inducements and hinting at his willingness to adopt a novel pricing scheme that might produce further profits. He slips in his instruction about Clarke carefully in the middle of a sentence, deemphasising it and placing it as a given to forestall Southey's potential objections. Murray thus played to Southey's desire to accumulate connections, prestige and income, selling Southey his own sense of the benefits the book would endue. His canny calculations were correct – the book sold in huge quantities and has remained in print almost continuously since its publication. The *Life of Nelson* was the first of several historical works Southey produced for Murray. In 1813, having consulted with Gifford, Murray offered Southey a thousand guineas for a work on the Peninsular War 'a subject in every

⁴⁷ Speck, p. 106, 137.

⁴⁸ John Murray to Robert Southey, 28 October 1811, in Murray Letter Book, NLS Ms. 41909, fol. 17^r (outgoing side).

way worthy of you, & one upon which we both feel that you should raise up as one of the pillars of your Fame.’ He agreed to provide the best ‘portraits, plans & views’ if the work ‘be finished before we begin to print.’⁴⁹ Murray’s hint at rewards for speed went unheeded. Southey’s painstaking research for this long, bookish project meant that it eventually emerged in three volumes between 1823 and 1832, to mixed reviews.

Murray, the *Quarterly*, and the financial profits they brought thus had a considerable influence on Southey’s writing practices, an influence which at times made him uncomfortable. He expressed this discontent to Murray in October 1818, writing that

the price which I receive for my writings is by no means a matter of indifference to me, but it can make no difference in the manner of my writing. The same diligence, the same desire, – & the same power (whatever that may be) were brought to the task when you paid me ten guineas per sheet, as when you raised it to 100£ per piece. This last is a great price, & it is very convenient for me to receive it. But I will tell you with that frankness which you have always found in my correspondence & conversation that I suspect my time might be more profitably employed (as I am sure it might be more worthily) than writing for your journal even at that price.⁵⁰

Southey anxiously sought to assert his independence by claiming that the lavish payments Murray offered him had no effect on what he chose to write while also, contrarily, arguing that he should cut back his *Quarterly* work partly as he as didn’t see it as the most profitable use of his time, again balancing and equating commercial and reputational value. As the contradiction implies, his assessment of the *Quarterly* work as poor value is probably principally rhetorical, as Southey manifestly failed to keep to this resolution. When Murray wrote to John Gibson Lockhart in April 1829, worried about declining circulation, his main hope for

⁴⁹ John Murray to Robert Southey, 16 July 1813, in Letters from Southey 1813-1818, NLS Ms.42551.

⁵⁰ Robert Southey to John Murray, 7 October 1818, in Letters from Southey 1813-1818, NLS Ms.42551.

boosting the sales of the next issue was that ‘chance might cast upon an interesting article, or two from Sir Walter, & Southey’ and he listed two Southey articles in his prospective contents list.⁵¹ Southey continued reviewing for the *Quarterly* well into the 1830s, his concerns about his time lulled by the *Quarterly*’s convenience, Murray’s generosity and the influence reviewing allowed him to wield.

Although Southey failed to finish his long-planned history of Portugal, in his later career he kept up a constant stream of productions. These included his *Life of Wesley* (1820), his long-planned and profitable *Book of the Church* (1824) and his biographical writings for editions of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1830) and William Cowper’s *Works* (1835-36). In such works he positioned himself as a key commentator on religious and political issues and indulged his ongoing interest in curating and writing himself into Britain’s literary heritage. Perhaps his strangest late production was *Sir Thomas More, or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (1829), a series of fifteen dialogues in which the shade of More debates with Montesinos, a version of the young Southey. In these dialogues the Laureate reprimanded his own youthful utopianism while decrying the exploitative manufacturing system, arguing that workers’ financial and cultural poverty must be alleviated within the current system to prevent damaging class warfare.⁵² Thomas Babington Macaulay, reviewing the book in the *Edinburgh Review* ‘observed with great regret the strange infatuation which leads the Poet-laureate to abandon those departments of literature in which he might excel, and to lecture the public on sciences of which he has still the very alphabet to learn.’⁵³ By contrast, the leading article in the *Quarterly* puffed the work as ‘a beautiful book, full of poetry and feeling’ and argued that it was excellent of Southey to ‘point out [...] the gangrene which is creeping through the land, and the quickening spirit which alone can stay

⁵¹ John Murray to John Gibson Lockhart, 3 April 1829, in Murray Letter Book, NLS Ms. 41909, fols. 42^r-43^r (outgoing side).

⁵² For a fuller exploration, see Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of ‘Culture’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 258-65.

⁵³ [Thomas Babington Macaulay], ‘Southey’s *Colloquies on Society*’, *Edinburgh Review*, 50 (January 1830), pp. 528-65 (p. 528).

its progress.⁵⁴ This division is indicative of the view of Southey which his reviews and histories had promoted, that of his being ‘the most powerful literary supporter of the Tories in the present day.’⁵⁵ Macaulay’s comment, though, is also symptomatic of the shift in the 1820s away from the social literary world in which Southey had shaped his career. As Philip Connell has argued, Macaulay judged Southey ‘ignorant of the true principles of economic science’ and thus insufficiently qualified to comment on matters properly the preserve of specialists in the increasingly professionalised discipline of political economy.⁵⁶ Somewhat ironically, the poetry Southey had left behind to pursue profits and influence in prose still served to define him, while his having moved away from it left him a transitional figure, caught between the new professionalisms manifested by the younger generation of periodical writers and the emergent Romantic paradigm in which he failed to fit.

This is not to say that Southey’s work had no enduring influence; as Raymond Williams noted, he played a crucial role in the formations of nineteenth-century conservatism, the Young England movement and the idea of culture opposing industrial alienation.⁵⁷ His exertions received their crowning temporal recognition in 1835 when Robert Peel offered him a baronetcy, which, when Southey cannily refused it ‘on the grounds that he could not sustain the dignity of the title’, was replaced with a £300-a-year pension.⁵⁸ Southey took advantage of this income by ceasing to review and working on the long histories on which he had expended so much time and effort, before he was halted by the failure of his mind in 1839.

When Southey wrote to John Murray in 1812 about D’Israeli’s *Calamities of Authors*, he included a sunny examination of his own literary life to contrast with D’Israeli’s grim vignettes. Despite the fact that he considered literature to be

⁵⁴ ‘Southey’s *Colloquies*’, *Quarterly Review*, 41 (July 1829), pp. 1-27 (pp. 1, 25).

⁵⁵ William Lowther, Viscount Lowther, quoted in Speck, p. 284.

⁵⁶ Connell, p. 9.

⁵⁷ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Penguin, 1961), p. 40.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Speck, p. 229.

generally ‘the worst trade to which a man can possibly betake himself’, he asserts that he had ‘never regretted [his] choice’:

The usual censure, ridicule & even calumnies which it has drawn upon me never gave me a moments pain, – but on the other hand literature has given me friends among the best & wisest & most celebrated of my contemporaries it has given me distinction, – if I live twenty years longer I do not doubt that it will give me fortunes, & if it please God to take me before my family are provided for I doubt a little that in my name and in my works they will find a provision.⁵⁹

Southey puffs himself a little in this letter, as he was accustomed to do, but his prognosis was largely accurate. Although he glosses over the considerable advantages he gained from his connections in early years of his literary career, by the 1810s he was making very substantial sums, sufficient to support his own family as well as Coleridge’s. For those like Southey who managed to secure a prominent role in society through outspoken and prolific publication, then, literature could serve to maintain them in performing that role. However, such careers were rare. Southey worked hard to achieve his profile, but even relatively late in his career there were times when his finances were stretched. When his son Herbert died in 1816, he had to ask Grosvenor Bedford to pay the funeral expenses, and as late as 1827 disruptions to his periodical incomes left him ‘desperately short of money’.⁶⁰ It took a combination of literary connections, patronage incomes, understanding friends and his accrued value to his publishers to create Southey’s particular brand of professionalism, and it was just that: a particular, inimitable and somewhat unstable brand, not a formula which Southey could easily pass on to all those who wrote to him asking how to pursue literary careers.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Robert Southey to John Murray, 14 August 1812, Letters from Southey, 1808-1812, NLS Ms.42550.

⁶⁰ Speck, pp. 167, 203.

⁶¹ Famously Charlotte Brontë, but see also Dennis Low’s accounts of Southey’s mentoring Caroline Bowles, Maria Gowen Brooks and others in *The Literary Protégées of the Lake Poets* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

Lynda Pratt has argued that after his death '[Southey's] reputation was entangled [...] in both the complex web of family feuds and the politics of romantic literary criticism', causing his works to fall 'into textual disrepair and critical ignominy.'⁶² As the contextual foci of much recent criticism indicates, while it was as a poet he began and as a poet he received the Laureateship, in truth Southey was a diverse writer, subsidising his poetry through piecework, periodical journalism, fixed-rate translation and long historical works. This breadth of experience, though, counted for less once time stripped away the immediate relevance of his political works and caused much of his non-fiction to be superseded. The care he took in planning his working life worked against him when the paradigms his fellow Lakers promoted were taken up, privileging a kind of poetry which reconfigured the views of literary history on which Southey had focused and which largely outmoded his mode of authorship. Neither uncomplicatedly professional nor securely Romantic, he became and remains an uncomfortable prospect for later systems of being writerly.

Thomas Moore and Sociable Authorship

Of the writers in this chapter, Thomas Moore has the best claim to having lived purely by the pen, although this was by no means his intention. He achieved his success by operating in a manner that differed considerably from Southey's, relying to an even greater extent on cultivating personal connections. While Southey structured his working life carefully from his library in Keswick, Moore was sociable, affable and somewhat chaotic, his career more a result of displays of ebullience than of performances of pragmatic competence.

Moore's modern critical stock is low. In *England in 1819*, one of a small number of recent works to pay him any sustained attention, James Chandler states that 'there may well be no British writer of the period who has fallen so dramatically in reputation'; he himself uses Moore as a unifying presence, 'a kind of "mediocre

⁶² Lynda Pratt, 'Family Misfortunes?: The Posthumous Editing of Robert Southey' in Pratt (ed.), pp. 219-38 (p. 238).

hero” of the sort we find in the new historical novels of the post-Waterloo period’.⁶³ Moore has, however, been the subject of two biographies in recent years, and several other modern studies have located him at the centre of the period’s political and literary world, seeing him as a key mediator and disseminator of national and cultural identities.⁶⁴ These kinds of attention respond to Moore’s manner of existing as an author both in his life and in his texts, highlighting the desire to please and the love of company which were major contributors to his prosperity.

A couple of characterisations will help to demonstrate Moore’s particular manner of being authorly. His biographer Ronan Kelly quotes an anecdote of Edmund Gosse’s of a story Gosse himself had been told by Richard Hengist Horne:

Horne met Moore one evening at the Leigh Hunts’, Wordsworth being also present. Moore sang some of his own songs at Mrs Hunt’s piano, and was much complimented. Wordsworth was asked if he also did not admire these songs, and he replied: ‘Oh! Yes, my friend Mr. Moore has written a great deal of agreeable verse, although we should hardly call it *poetry*, should we, Mr Moore?’ to which the Bard of Erin, sparkling with good nature, answered, ‘No! Indeed, Mr. Wordsworth, of course not!’ without exhibiting the slightest resentment.⁶⁵

This meeting, supposed to have taken place in 1835, was a gathering of an older literary generation at a time when Wordsworth’s critical star was (in his opinion, finally) in the ascendant. Moore here is depicted performing gracefully, both

⁶³ James Chandler, *England in 1819* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 267, xvii.

⁶⁴ Linda Kelly’s *Ireland’s Minstrel: A Life of Thomas Moore: Poet, Patriot and Byron’s Friend* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006) and Ronan Kelly’s *Bard of Erin: The Life of Thomas Moore* (London: Penguin, 2009); these books are my points of reference for biographical details in the following pages unless others are cited. Mohammed Sharafuddin’s *Islam and Romantic Orientalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994) discusses representations of the Orient in Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*. Leith Davis’s *Music, Postcolonialism, and Gender: The Construction of Irish National Identity, 1724–1874* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) considers Moore’s patriotic works and his formative role in the creation of the modern Irish identity.

⁶⁵ Ronan Kelly, p. 513.

literally on Marianne Hunt's piano and socially in terms of his easily accepting Wordsworth's dismissal. Moore is a man eager to please, a man who brightens up a party in a way that contrasts markedly with Wordsworth's grand social awkwardness. He asserts himself through finding an appropriate place within society from which to present his works, not by promoting himself as an outsider-genius.

In *The Spirit of the Age* Hazlitt opines that Moore writes 'the poetry of the bath, of the toilette, of the saloon, of the fashionable world; not the poetry of nature, of the heart, or of human life.'⁶⁶ Here also Moore is depicted as Wordsworth's opposite. In Hazlitt's view, the eagerness of the verse to please reflects the poet:

Mr. Moore is in private life an amiable and estimable man. The embellished and voluptuous style of his poetry, his unpretending origin and his *mignon* figure, soon introduced him to the notice of the great, and his gaiety, his wit, his good-humour, and many agreeable accomplishments fixed him there, the darling of his friends and the idol of fashion.⁶⁷

Lest this be thought wholly positive, Hazlitt adds that Moore is perhaps too 'accustomed to the society of Whig Lords', too 'enchanted with the smile of beauty and fashion'. In questioning Moore's conduct he asks, 'Because he is genteel and sarcastic, may not others be paradoxical and argumentative?'⁶⁸ For the prickly Hazlitt, as for later readers searching for radical spirits, Moore's willingness to accommodate is at times off-putting. The care he took in making himself pleasing to contemporary reading audiences and to high society meant that as literary preferences changed and that society slipped away, he began to seem dangerously outmoded. Dismissing him, though, neglects his centrality to literary culture in the 1810s and 1820s and also the very real zest and interest of many of his works.

⁶⁶ William Hazlitt, 'Mr. T. Moore – Mr. Leigh Hunt', in *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930-34), XI, 170.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, XI, 175.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, XI, 175, 176.

Like Southey the son of a tradesman, Moore was educated in Dublin's leading grammar school by Samuel Whyte, who encouraged his theatrical and literary interests. Moore's family were Catholics, and consequently he was only able to enter Trinity College Dublin in 1795 due to the war with France, which had occasioned the lifting of various discriminatory penal laws to ease tensions in the British Isles. At Trinity Moore acquired sound groundings in classical languages and patriotic politics before taking his degree in the spring of 1799. Unlike Southey he did not make friends prepared to support him, although with much scrimping his family saved enough to pay for his entry into the Middle Temple. Moore was not without contacts, however, and an early London acquaintance, Joseph Atkinson, a politician and amateur dramatist, engineered his introduction to Francis Rawdon, the Earl of Moira, an influential Whig magnate. Moira's closeness with the Prince of Wales was expected to bear fruit, but it was a costly association, exacerbated by the fact that he was 'habitually extravagant, generous, and hospitable, and spent beyond his large income.'⁶⁹ Moore's long-term financial hopes of Moira came to little, but he was able to exploit his connection to get permission to dedicate his first book, the *Odes of Anacreon* (1800), to the Prince, who headed an impressive sixteen-page subscriber list that also included 'two dukes, sixteen earls, nine viscounts and a descending array of lesser nobility.'⁷⁰ Moore's publisher, John Stockdale of Piccadilly, was unwilling to make an advance payment to an unknown author and left much of the work of selling the book to Moore, who proved to be an extremely able self-promoter. The *Anacreon* volume, initially published as a handsome quarto with generously spaced text and copious learned notes, was an immediate success.

In the *Odes*, Moore contains sensuous poetry within a dense farrago of narratorial masks and scholarly notes, a form of metatextual play he employed frequently during his career. In his introductory remarks he argues that Anacreon's soul 'speaks so unequivocally through his odes' that 'we find him there the elegant voluptuary, diffusing the seductive charm of sentiment over passions and

⁶⁹ Roland Thorne, 'Hastings, Francis Rawdon (1754–1826)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12568>> [accessed 7 April 2010].

⁷⁰ Linda Kelly, p. 37.

propensities at which rigid morality might frown.⁷¹ Moore here speaks as much of himself as he does of Anacreon, folding his own poetic persona into the ancient poet's, as he also does in his elegant and lyrical translation of Anacreon's 'Ode XXII':

THE Phrygian Rock, that braves the storm,
Was once a weeping matron's form –
And Progne, hapless, frantic maid,
Is now a swallow in the shade.
Oh ! that a mirror's form was mine,
To sparkle with that smile divine ;
And like my heart then I should be,
Reflecting thee, and only thee !
Or were I love, the robe which flows
O'er every charm that secret glows,
In many a lucid fold to swim,
And cling and grow to every limb !
Oh ! could I, as the streamlet's wave,
Thy warmly-mellowing beauties lave,
Or float as perfume on thine hair,
And breathe my soul in fragrance there !
I wish I were the zone, that lies
Warm to thy breast, and feels its sighs ;
Or like the envious pearls that show,
So faintly round that neck of snow,
Yes – I would be a happy gem,
Like them to hang, to fade like them ;
What more would thy Anacreon be ?
Oh ! Any thing that touches thee.
Nay, sandals for those airy feet –
Thus to be press'd by thee were sweet !⁷²

⁷¹ Thomas Moore, *Odes of Anacreon, translated into English verse, with Notes* (London: John Stockdale, 1800), pp. 10-11.

⁷² *Anacreon*, pp. 92-96.

This ode exemplifies Moore's early strengths as a poet – an easy and fluent way with line and rhythm, a richness of language combined with clarity of expression, and a suggestiveness quite outré for his time. By contrast, many of his notes are ostensibly starchy – in the introduction he quotes an extensive list of other editions and translations he has consulted and in the main part of the book more than half of each page is regularly taken up with quoted poetry influenced by Anacreon. Other notes, though, define a more lyrical agenda. Moore part-rebuts John Ogilvie's accusation that 'Ode XXII' 'is meer sport and wantonness' by asserting 'it is the wantonness however of a very graceful Muse', playing off Ogilvie to position the poems as valuable in being beautiful and daring.⁷³ The Provost of Trinity, John Kearney, on reading the paraphrases when they were submitted for an award, had remarked 'The young people will like it', and Moore in his notes often seems to be appealing to a high-spirited audience, winking through his academic mask.⁷⁴ He glosses 'zone' in 'Ode XXII' as 'a ribband, or band, called by the Romans fascia and strophium, which the women wore for the purpose of restraining the exuberance of the bosom,' running the technical explanation into a half-lush, half-prudish definition which seems far more in sympathy with the lush side.⁷⁵ Invoking the motif of the zone again in a defence that applies just as well to his own methods as to his source's, Moore writes that 'our poet was amiable ; his morality was relaxed, but not abandoned ; and virtue, with her zone loosened, may be an emblem of the character of Anacreon.'⁷⁶ He attempts a delicate balancing act, positioning himself as morally relaxed enough to be novel and interesting, but not so indecent as to deserve censure. For the *Odes* and for his subsequent *Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Little Esq.* (1801), in which he published similarly-themed original material masked by a Chatterton-like deceased persona, this positioning was successful. Both collections sold well and brought him acclaim.

⁷³ *Anacreon*, p. 92. Ogilvie's opinion was expressed in his 'Essay on the Lyric Poetry of the Ancients' printed with his *Poems on Several Subjects* (London: G. Keith, 1762).

⁷⁴ Linda Kelly, p. 37.

⁷⁵ *Anacreon*, p. 95.

⁷⁶ *Anacreon*, p. 11.

The most significant benefit Moore reaped from his early publications was his entry into Whiggish high society, a set with whom he associated for the rest of his life. Establishing himself in this milieu, however, was expensive. In a letter to his mother he wrote that before his introduction to the Prince of Wales he had needed to acquire a new coat, which he got ‘in a very economical plan, by giving two guineas and an *old coat*, whereas the usual price of a coat here is near four pounds’.⁷⁷ He noted in the same letter that he was still in debt to another tailor. The costs of living and being seen in London meant that the financial benefits Moore reaped from his early works were largely cancelled out, a situation not helped by his lack of fiscal acumen. Contrary to Chandler’s assertion that he was ‘a shrewd entrepreneur’, Linda Kelly gives the following bald précis of Moore’s early dealings with the book trade:⁷⁸

From the first he seems to have been a hopeless businessman. He had sold the copyright of *Anacreon* in order to repay a debt of £70 to his friend [Thomas] Hume for the expenses involved in launching it; since the poems [...] ran into nine editions, he was certainly the loser by the bargain. He had transferred to a new publisher, Carpenter, for the poems of Thomas Little, and having been encouraged to draw on him for expenses was dismayed to find himself in debt for £60. The publisher obligingly suggested that he should clear it by selling him the copyright of Little’s poems, which Moore, in his innocence, was happy to do. Carpenter admitted some years later that he was still making £200 a year on the poems.⁷⁹

Moore, then, did not accrue a series of ongoing half-profits arrangements, but instead sold his copyrights for short-term gains in order to promote himself to those who might provide him with a sinecure or other patronage, pinning his hopes on these older practices rather than on appealing to the market. His hopes were raised in 1803 when Moira acquired for him a post as registrar to the Naval Prize Court in Bermuda. Moore uprooted himself, took loans and sold many of his possessions to

⁷⁷ Linda Kelly, p. 39.

⁷⁸ Chandler, p. 268.

⁷⁹ Linda Kelly, p. 46.

fund the journey. Unfortunately, by the time that Moore assumed the post, French maritime commerce had been largely extinguished and Moore's profits, which were only from commissions on prizes, were almost nonexistent, as were his duties. He duly appointed a deputy and returned to England in April 1804. Disappointed in his hopes for a profitable post, he continued to scrape and save to make ends meet through the 1800s, relying on further small payments for the copyrights of works and for poems contributed, often anonymously, to the newspapers.

In the middle of the decade Moore's prospects were thrown into doubt by attacks on the morality of his works. In December 1802 Coleridge had refused to contribute to an anthology which included a poem by Moore, grouping his work with Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and arguing that Moore's and Lewis's names were 'those of men, who have sold provocatives to vulgar Debauchees, & vicious School boys'.⁸⁰ Coleridge's private communications were indicative of a censorious reaction against Moore which found public expression in Francis Jeffrey's review of his *Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems* (1806). While allowing that Moore's works possessed 'a singular sweetness and melody of versification', Jeffrey pronounced him 'the most licentious of modern versifiers'.⁸¹ He painted Moore as a foul-minded voluptuary: 'he takes care to intimate to us, in every page, that the raptures which he celebrates do not spring from the excesses of an innocent love, or the extravagances of a romantic attachment ; but are the unhallowed fruits of cheap and vulgar prostitution'.⁸² He contended that not only was Moore a sybaritic sensualist, he was not even a particularly good one: 'to us, indeed, the perpetual kissing, and twining, and panting of these amorous persons, is rather ludicrous than seductive'.⁸³ Despite this, Jeffrey worried publicly that Moore's popular productions might lead less-educated readers – particularly women – astray.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), II, 905.

⁸¹ [Francis Jeffrey], 'Moore's *Poems*', *Edinburgh Review*, 8 (July 1806), pp. 456-65 (p. 456).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ I return to this review in my examination of the *Edinburgh's* propagation of its institutional authority in the next chapter.

This review, somewhat understandably considering the ways that it traduced his character, led Moore to challenge Jeffrey. Unfortunately, the subsequent meeting did Moore few favours. As Byron put it, ‘In 1806, Messrs. JEFFREY and MOORE, met at Chalk Farm. The duel was prevented by the interference of the Magistracy; and, on examination, the balls of the pistols, like the courage of the combatants, were found to have evaporated.’⁸⁵ Accusations about ‘LITTLE’S leadless pistol’ were not to Moore’s liking, and the farcical nature of the duel continued to dog him. His reputation as ‘Anacreon Moore’ was tainted by accusations of immorality and buffoonery.

Moore sought to remedy this situation by beginning to work in new forms and media, developing his talents for topical and national poetry. While he was not financially canny, Chandler’s characterising him as a shrewd entrepreneur is correct in that he was a man with a good eye for opportunities and ‘an extraordinary capacity to win friends and influence people’.⁸⁶ Even though they had duelled, Jeffrey later became a close friend, as did Byron, who Moore also challenged. Richard Cronin argues that challenges often expressed a queasy mixture of antagonism and approbation of interest and social status; once honour was satisfied or anger had faded, therefore, they could function as introductions.⁸⁷ Moore was an expert at negotiating such potentially fraught connections. His ability to configure his public and private reputations favourably is amply demonstrated in a letter he wrote to his friend Lady Barbara Donegall in 1808. He begins by asserting that he ‘allow[ed] the good people of Dublin to think (as indeed I have told them) that it was the toss-up of a ten-penny token which decided me against going to London, yet to you I must give some better signs and tokens of rationality and account for my

⁸⁵ Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, footnote to line 467, in *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980-93), I, 407.

⁸⁶ Chandler, p. 272.

⁸⁷ Cronin, p. 230.

change of mind in somewhat a more serious manner'.⁸⁸ He claims that he does not care how 'light and inconsiderate' he may seem to the world before admitting that he does in fact care inasmuch that he goes out of the way to promote that image, letting Dubliners believe that he is blithe, flighty and – by implication – successful. In the closed circles in which he expects the letter to circulate, however, he recognises that his marketable image as an airy wit is not conducive to conducting business or forging friendships. He conjures it and casts it aside to demonstrate to Lady Donegall that she has been taken into his confidence. He also enjoins her to circulate this confidence among their mutual friends, 'not forgetting our trusty and well-beloved [Samuel] Rogers.' Moore moves among a connected elite, aware that his words will circulate and therefore careful to spin a performance for his supporters as well as for the public.

Moore states that his motivations for going to London would have been 'pleasure and ambition.' The first he uses to flatter his patron: 'the strongest attraction that my Epicureanism would have in London at present is the pleasure of being near you, with you & about you'. He takes care to connect his second motive with Lady Donegall's interest in the welfare of their shared homeland. At the time he was preparing *Corruption* and *Intolerance*, two anonymously-published attacks on England's treatment of the Irish:

We hear you talk of Britain's glorious rights,
As weeping slaves, that under hatches lie,
Hear those on deck extol the sun and sky!⁸⁹

Moore thus responded to Jeffrey's attack by addressing serious and patriotic issues. This repositioning was carefully deliberated; in the letter he writes that 'by republishing those last poems with my name, together with one or two more of the same nature which I might catch the eye of some of our patriotic

⁸⁸ Thomas Moore to Lady Donegall, 29 April [1808], transcribed Michael Bott, RUL MS 1393 Part II.26B, 1/Part 1/138. All further quotations in the next two paragraphs are from the same letter unless otherwise indicated.

⁸⁹ Thomas Moore, *Corruption and Intolerance* (London: J. Carpenter, 1808), pp. 2-3.

politicians and thus be enabled to serve both myself and the principles which I cherish'. While Moore plays at bravery by asserting that acknowledging such opinions might damage his reputation, in fact, as he implies, there were plenty of Whiggish grantees to whom such sentiments would have been highly congenial. His desire to reframe himself for such figures demonstrates his quandary: his previous collections had made him popular, but they brought him no continuing income and their ascribed notoriety marred his reputation and with it his hopes of patronage and restored respectability. He was additionally disadvantaged as he lacked the money necessary to move comfortably in society in order to remedy this characterisation:

many of the reasons why Austria should not go to war were the very reasons why I should not go to London – an exhausted treasury, dilapidated resources, the necessity of seeking subsidies from those who would fleece me well for it in turn, ~~when they could get an opportunity~~, the unprepared state of my Capital &c.&c. – “I have here a home, where I can live at but little expence, and I have a summer’s leisure before me to prepare something for the next campaign, which may enable me to look down upon my enemies without entirely looking up to my friends – for, let one say what one will, looking up too long is tiresome, let the object be ever so grand or lovely, (whether) the Statue of Venus or the Cupola of St. Paul’s” – Such were my reflections, while I waited for the answer to a letter which I had written to Carpenter, sounding him upon the kind of assistance which he would be willing to give me & suggesting that as it was entirely for his interest that I should go over, (to get the work through the Press which I left in his hands) I thought he ought at least to defray my expences – His answer was so niggardly and so chilling, that it instantly awaked me to the folly of trusting myself again in London without some means of commanding a supply; and I resolved to employ this Summer in making wings for myself ~~to~~ against winter to carry me completely out of the mud

There is an element of demonstrative gentlemanly snobbery in Moore’s reference to his publisher – while Carpenter indisputably underpaid Moore, it still seems a little unreasonable of Moore to expect subsidies for the considerable expense of the London season. However, without money, Moore could not appear in London as a

gentleman and he did not wish to attenuate his friendships or prospects by appearing shabby or explicitly asking for money. Of course, Moore's request that his letter be circulated to the wealthy Rogers could well imply that he had not entirely given up on the idea of going to London if sufficient support could be found. The display of Moore's faculties and charm in his Austria analogy and the attack on the 'niggardly' tradesman certainly invite the reader to value Moore and to consider the injustice of his exclusion from the capital's expensive delights.

In the event, Moore finally secured his income neither through his satires nor through high-society patronage, nor even strictly through poetry, although all these things contributed to his receiving what turned out to be an extremely profitable opportunity from the music publishers William and James Power. The first volume of the *Irish Melodies*, a collaboration in which Moore provided lyrics for arrangements of Irish tunes collected by Sir John Stevenson, was published in 1808. Although he short-sightedly sold his copyright for £50, the volume's extraordinary success, driven in part by Moore's playing the songs at high society gatherings, enabled him to enter into a more profitable arrangement that secured his prosperity. In March 1811 Moore and James Power signed an agreement which provided 'the said Thomas Moore an Annuity of Five Hundred pounds per annum' in return for producing each year a further number of the *Melodies* or a similar production and 'at the least four Ballads songs or pieces or compositions equivalent or tantamount thereto'.⁹⁰ Moore thus got in Power what he had wanted from Carpenter – a publisher who would supply him with enough income to allow him to move in society and to provide for his new wife, Bessy, and the family he was expecting. For his part, Power was pleased to have secured a profitable series as well as the implicit understanding that Moore would use his glamour and his influence in Whig circles to promote the *Melodies*.

After 1811, then, Moore was comfortably established. In the 1810s he produced a series of sprightly satires including *Intercepted Letters; or, The Twopenny Post-Bag* (1813), *The Fudge Family in Paris* (1818) and a string of

⁹⁰ Deed of Covenant between Thomas Moore and James Power, 6 Mar 1811, RUL MS 1393 Part II.26B, 2/1.

shorter pieces published in papers including the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Examiner*.⁹¹ In these he shifted away from the Juvenalian disgust of *Corruption* and *Intolerance*, writing in a later introduction that he ‘found that lighter form of weapon, to which I afterwards betook myself, not only more easy to wield, but, from its very lightness, perhaps more sure to reach its mark.’⁹² He acknowledged explicitly that his ‘unembittered spirit’ was advantageous since his amused targets would not take offence but would rather ‘refer to and quote’ his barbs ‘with a degree of good-humour’.⁹³ His books turned up in the houses of the ministers they satirised, who took care to make it known that that they did not mind ‘the humorous and laughing things’, as Lord Castlereagh, the main target of the *Fudge Family*, described them.⁹⁴ Such circulations served to increase Moore’s fame and firmly enmesh him in the networks of literary and political culture.

Moore also continued to expand the range of his publications, contributing two articles to the *Edinburgh* at Jeffrey’s urging and working on a long carefully-researched oriental poem in the genre established by Walter Savage Landor in *Gebir* (1798), developed by Southey in his epics and popularised by Byron in his Eastern tales. For this poem Moore disentangled himself from Carpenter, who had offered him £2000 for the copyright (as had John Murray informally, at Byron’s urging). His friend James Perry, the editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, suggested that Moore publish with Longman and helped him negotiate a famously lucrative contract. Having found out that the greatest sum paid for a poem previously had been 3000 guineas (paid to Scott for *Rokeby*), Perry determined that his friend deserved the same, and Longmans were induced to agree, although the sum was later reduced to a still-princely £3000. Longman also offered Moore the prospect of better treatment, a prospect that was borne out as both the head of the firm, Thomas Norton Longman,

⁹¹ Moore’s satiric output is collected and contextualised in *British Satire 1785-1840: Volume 5: The Satires of Thomas Moore*, ed. Jane Moore (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003).

⁹² *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, 10 vols (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1840-41), III, vi.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, III, vii.

⁹⁴ Ronan Kelly, pp. 238, 311.

and a senior partner, Owen Rees, were faithful friends to Moore during his later financial difficulties.

Unusually, both the first and second editions of Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817) were luxurious two-guinea quartos, indicating Longmans' high expectations. The poem was an immediate sensation. Jeffrey's fulsome thirty-five page *Edinburgh* review found Moore's sensuousness far more acceptable when displaced:

The beauteous forms, the dazzling splendours, the breathing odours of the East, seem at last to have found a kindred poet in that Green Isle of the West; whose Genius has long been suspected to be derived from a warmer clime, and now wantons and luxuriates in those voluptuous regions, as if it felt that it had at length regained its native element.⁹⁵

Other reviews were even more rapturous. *Blackwood's* gushed that after *Lalla Rookh* 'it was universally acknowledged throughout Britain, that the star of Moore's genius, which had long been seen shining on the horizon, had now reached its altitude in heaven, and burnt with uneclipsed glory among its surrounding luminaries.'⁹⁶ In the first part of its two-part review *Blackwood's* had explicitly laid to rest Jeffrey's 1806 accusations, writing that 'it is long since Mr Moore has redeemed himself—nobly redeemed himself, and become the eloquent and inspired champion of virtue, liberty, and truth.'⁹⁷ *Lalla Rookh*, then, was a triumph, completing Moore's critical rehabilitation. It was also an enormous commercial success. After the two quarto editions it ran through twelve octavo editions between 1817 and 1827, totalling 18,000 copies, before being tranced down to duodecimo and it continued to sell throughout the nineteenth century.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ [Francis Jeffrey], 'Moore's *Lalla Rookh*', *Edinburgh Review*, 29 (November 1817), pp. 1-35 (p. 1).

⁹⁶ 'Review.—*Lalla Rookh*' (second part), *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 1 (August 1817), pp. 503-10 (p. 503).

⁹⁷ 'Review.—*Lalla Rookh*' (first part), *Blackwood's*, 1 (June 1817), pp. 279-85 (p. 279).

⁹⁸ St Clair, pp. 619-20.

In 1818 Moira's patronage finally began to affect Moore's finances. Unfortunately for Moore this was in a hugely detrimental manner, as it was discovered that the deputy he had appointed to oversee his Bermuda post had absconded, leaving Moore responsible for debts of over £6000. Since he had no hope of paying such a huge sum, he was forced to flee to the continent to avoid imprisonment. His publishers at Longman were granted power of attorney, and they assiduously pleaded his cause with his creditors.⁹⁹ Longman's mediation was greatly assisted by a very considerable donation from Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, the Marquess of Lansdowne, whose seat at Bowood was near Moore's Sloperton Cottage and who had previously given Moore the run of his library along with other assistance. After Moore had spent three discontented years on the continent, the majority of these with his family in tow, these interests eventually secured an agreement that the creditors would accept, but Moore's finances remained precarious.

Seeking to address this, Moore, like Southey, was able to secure lucrative contracts for historical works, in his case biographies. His huge network of contacts and his talent for writing works which tantalised the public without offending those implicated made him well-suited to profit from such works. His life of the playwright and Whig politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan (published in 1825) earned him £1000 from Longmans, but this large sum was dwarfed by the 4000 guineas which Murray paid for his *Life of Byron* (1832).¹⁰⁰ Moore, though, was by this point in debt to both Longman and Murray and interest payments on this borrowing and the costs of researching ate away at his profits. However, he still had the annuity and his high reputation allowed him to command very high fees for his newspaper contributions – *The Times* paid him '£400 in 1826 and 1827, and £200 thereafter'.¹⁰¹ During this period Moore was in his pomp, in tune with the market,

⁹⁹ The document, dated 13 September 1819, survives (RUL MS 1393 Part II.26B, 2/5).

¹⁰⁰ See Copies Ledger B of the publisher John Murray, NLS.42725, p. 228. It is telling that over £3000 of the *Life of Byron* advance went directly to Longmans, presumably covering monies they had advanced to Moore.

¹⁰¹ Geoffrey Carnall, 'Moore, Thomas (1779–1852)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19150>> [accessed 9 April 2010].

widely respected for his talents, able comfortably to support his family and to write as he chose. *The Loves of the Angels* (1822), in which three fallen angels describe their love for mortal women, and the strident Irish nationalism of his *Memoirs of Captain Rock* (1824) could have given ample fuel for the Tory press to destroy the reputation of a less-established writer. As it was, Moore was safely ensconced in the pantheon and acclaimed as a national treasure in Ireland, a fact that stood him in good stead in the more liberal 1830s.

As it turned out, Moore required the attentions of his liberal friends, as the shaky foundations of his prosperity were made sharply apparent when the publication of the *Irish Melodies* ceased in 1834. Moore had initiated a split with James Power, the *Melodies*' publisher, on discovering in 1832 that Power had been taking unauthorised payments out of Moore's annuity since Sir John Stevenson had left the project in 1818 in order to pay a new composer, Henry Bishop. These deductions meant that rather than running a surplus with Power as he had expected, Moore owed him £500. Having not noticed the deductions for quite some time and having entangled his financial affairs with Power's by frequently borrowing from him, Moore was in a poor situation to protest Power's seemingly blatant abuse. The resulting legal battle left Moore having to write a further number of the *Melodies* and release his copyrights for his songs to Power in return for a final £350.¹⁰² After the termination of the Power annuity, which had underpinned his finances for twenty-three years, Moore was left facing little but years of hackwork. However, after the Whigs regained power in 1835, Lord Lansdowne and Lord John Russell pulled some strings on behalf of their friend. Moore, like Southey, was awarded a pension of £300 a year. Unlike Southey, though, for Moore this pension was desperately needed and was his main source of income through many of his remaining seventeen years.

While Southey managed his incomes more professionally, Moore was the more accomplished self-promoter and self-fashioner. His careful self-presentations and eye for literary opportunities, combined with his genuine enthusiasm for

¹⁰² Linda Kelly, p. 221.

company, brought him considerable rewards. Like Southey, his career encompassed changing paradigms, and Moore took expert advantage of these by positioning himself as a bridge between privileged networks and expanding middle-class readerships. By cultivating his celebrity using both high society and the resources provided by newspapers and periodicals, Moore brought literary innovations, society satires and patriotic effusions to large and appreciative audiences. His exertions, though, were still insufficient to guarantee a permanent living from literary profits. When he accrued debts due to the unforeseen consequences of his sociality, literature alone could not save him. Just as it was his connections that brought him to fame, so it was ultimately his friendships that secured him in his later years.

Walter Scott: The Wizard of the North

Walter Scott was undoubtedly one of the most brilliant commercial writers in literary history. With the possible exception of Byron, he was the best-selling living poet of the Romantic period, selling 17,800 copies of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and an even more impressive 29,300 copies of *The Lady of the Lake* in the five years after their respective publications in 1805 and 1810, sales figures that dwarfed those of his contemporaries.¹⁰³ When he switched to writing novels he became the nineteenth century's biggest-selling novelist. As William St Clair has it, 'During the romantic period the 'Author of *Waverley*' sold more novels than all the other novelists of the time put together.'¹⁰⁴ This is a mind-boggling statistic which emphasises the relatively small size of the market for novels but also the scale of Scott's achievement. While most novels sold in the hundreds, his inevitably sold tens of thousands of copies. As well as saturating the market, they enjoyed other forms of success. In Ian Duncan's words, 'their claim on the cultural authority of the Enlightenment human sciences, as well as their artistic prowess, helped win them an overwhelming critical prestige; and their author stood at the center of the regional

¹⁰³ See Benjamin Colbert, 'Popular Romanticism? Publishing, Readership and the Making of Literary History' in *Authorship, Commerce and the Public*, ed. E.J. Clery, Caroline Franklin and Peter Garside (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 153-68 (p. 155) and St Clair, pp. 216-18.

¹⁰⁴ St Clair, p. 221.

network of Tory patronage'.¹⁰⁵ Scott dominated the way that Scotland was imagined and the novel approached in the 1810s and 1820s. Despite this, he claimed to have seen authorship as an unstable source of possible wealth rather than a way to acquire a solid income. In 1830 he wrote that he had determined early that 'literature should be my staff but not my crutch'.¹⁰⁶ He managed to keep to this dictum in a personal capacity for much of his career, but also entangled himself directly with the publishing industry through investing and then leveraging his assets. While this allowed him fleetingly to monopolise his works' means of production, it rendered his household dangerously vulnerable to circumstances beyond his direct control.

Scott established a healthy income relatively early in his life through a legal career, patronage and marriage.¹⁰⁷ He was fortunate in being born into a more highly-placed family than Moore or Southey – his father, also called Walter Scott, held the title of Writer to the Signet, a senior position in Scotland's legal hierarchy. Scott the Elder funded a piecemeal gentlemanly education for his sickly third son, and it was expected that he would work in his father's office. Scott, though, was ambitious, refusing his father's offer of a partnership in 1790 and instead qualifying as an advocate in 1792. Unfortunately, he was an indifferent performer in the courtroom, making 23 guineas, 55 guineas and £84 in his first three years of practice. He quickly realised that he was not best suited to advocacy, and, as John Sutherland has it, he 'sensibly invested his hopes in what patronage might do for him' by cultivating the acquaintances of powerful men including Henry Scott, Duke of Buccleuch, Robert Dundas, the lord advocate, and Robert Macqueen, Lord Braxfield, the lord justice clerk.¹⁰⁸ This course proved prudent – Scott was appointed Sherriff of Selkirkshire in 1799, a position in the gift of Buccleuch whose

¹⁰⁵ Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, p. xi.

¹⁰⁶ In the 'Introduction to *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*' from Cadell's 1830 edition of the *Poetical Works*, as quoted in John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, 7 vols (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1837-38), I, 249. Lockhart quotes the demurral to downplay the importance of his father-in-law's investments in the book trade, having previously highlighted the respectable incomes I detail below.

¹⁰⁷ Factual information taken from John Sutherland, *The Life of Walter Scott* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) unless otherwise attributed.

¹⁰⁸ John Sutherland, p. 49.

responsibilities were mainly handled by a deputy. He held the position until his death in 1832, at an initial salary of £250, later raised to £300. In 1797 he secured £500 a year through his marriage to Charlotte Carpenter (the surname being an Anglicised version of her original French surname, Charpentier). After his father's death in 1799 he inherited family monies and by 1800 his household income was between £1000 and £1500 a year.¹⁰⁹ He later improved his legal income by politicking with the aid of his patrons for one of the principal clerkships of the Court of Session, agreeing in 1806 to fulfil the duties of an elderly incumbent gratis in return for guaranteed succession to the post. The incumbent, William Home, lived longer than Scott expected, but was induced to retire in January 1812, at which point Scott began to receive the salary, £1300 a year at that time, less a sum contributed to his predecessor's pension. By 1812, therefore, his non-literary incomes totalled around £2000 a year, a sum ten times the size of Southey's first government pension and four times that of Moore's *Irish Melodies* annuity.

In another man, such incomes might have engendered contempt for publishing profits. Scott, though, was fascinated both by money and by the book trade, and he indulged these fascinations through experimentation and speculation. As a gentleman it would have been unseemly for him to be seen to involve himself in business, but he circumvented disapprobation by working clandestinely with James and John Ballantyne, brothers who he knew from his schooldays in Kelso and who were also his Masonic brethren. James Ballantyne's Kelso press published Scott's earliest works, *An Apology for Tales of Terror* (1799) and the ballad 'The Eve of St John.' Ballantyne was also involved with the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3), which was published by a London firm, Cadell & Davies, but printed by Ballantyne, at Scott's insistence. After the success of Scott's ballad collections, he persuaded James Ballantyne to move to Edinburgh and loaned him £500 to establish a press there. He also secured for him the lucrative printing contract for the Court of Session. When the success of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) stretched the fledgling firm's resources, Scott seized on the opportunity to buy in as a partner, injecting £1500 in return for a third-share in the company.

¹⁰⁹ Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown*, 2 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1970), I, 176.

Scott's connection to the firm was kept secret from all but a few, partly due to his gentlemanly scruples but also because at times he used his secret involvement to his benefit, sometimes not entirely ethically. For example, when considering preparing an edition of Dryden, Scott contacted the editor of a competing edition, Edward Forster, made an agreement to collaborate and then insisted that the printing be done by Ballantyne. Ballantyne quoted a very high price which, combined with doubts expressed by the edition's London publisher, got Forster ejected from the project and Scott installed in his place.¹¹⁰

Another major contributor to Scott's success was Edinburgh's premier publisher, Archibald Constable, who bought shares in Scott's early productions and finally poached him from Longman in January 1807 by offering a thousand guineas for *Marmion* (1808), more than double the £500 Longmans had paid for the *Minstrelsy* and the *Lay*.¹¹¹ Constable's careful wooing led to a long and fruitful collaboration, although one interrupted by a number of fallings-out. During the poetic phase of his career, Scott generally sold his copyrights, and Constable was happy to profit from this and to let Scott draw on the monies from these payments before the works were complete. Constable also secured Scott for an edition of Jonathan Swift, for which he paid £1500, £500 in advance. This edition, begun in 1808 and finally completed in 1814, was the source of much frustration for Scott. He resented Constable's profits, disliked his partner, Alexander Hunter, and was annoyed by a negative review of *Marmion* in the *Edinburgh*, which Constable published. Therefore, seeking to bring his works' profits into his own hands, he approached John Ballantyne with the idea of setting up a publishing company in which Scott himself would secretly hold a half-share and the Ballantyne brothers a quarter-share each. The first production of John Ballantyne and Co. was Scott's *Lady of the Lake* (1810), which sold through a first edition of two thousand two-guinea quartos within weeks and ran through a succession of cheaper octavo editions at an unprecedented rate. As John Sutherland writes, 'in return for the copyright

¹¹⁰ John Sutherland, p. 129.

¹¹¹ David Hewitt, 'Constable, Archibald (1774–1827)', *ODNB*,
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6101>> [accessed 26 April 2010].

Scott ‘nominally’ received 2,000 guineas; but his profit-share income was probably around £10,000 in 1810 [...] He had, as he said, ‘put a nail in Fortune’s wheel.’¹¹²

Another project in which Scott had a hand at this time was the nascent *Quarterly Review*. He wrote at great length to Murray and Gifford discussing strategy, secured contributors, wrote four articles for the first issue and made sure that the Ballantynes had a share in it. Consequently, after 1809 Scott found himself a key mover in one of the major Reviews, able like Southey to influence the presentation of his own works and the works of others. During this period he also became the dominant partner in James Ballantyne’s printing house, so for a time he had almost total control over all the stages of his works’ production: ‘he could write his books, publish his books, print his books, sell his books and – if he was daring enough – review (or have friends review) his books in *his* journal.’¹¹³ At this point, Scott seemed to have mastered the literary marketplace. Each stage of the publication process brought money to him, and since the sales of his works were so considerable, the amount of money brought in by his labour was enormous. It is no coincidence that it was around this time that Scott began to realise his dream of lairdhood by buying the property that would become Abbotsford.

However, mastery was not to remain Scott’s for long. John Ballantyne’s firm was dangerously undercapitalised, largely due to Scott’s substantial demands on its reserves and his insistence on initiating costly projects which realised slow or poor returns, such as a posthumous edition of his friend Anna Seward in three volumes (1810) and a fourteen-volume edition of Beaumont and Fletcher (1812). Such weighty projects left Scott’s own works as the only productions on the Ballantyne list that brought in significant profits swiftly. The worst drain on the firm’s funds was the *Edinburgh Annual Register*, which inevitably appeared late and contained a great deal of undistinguished material rushed off by Scott himself with the sole aim of filling its two overambitious volumes. By 1812 Constable, who took responsibly for winding up the firm as a favour to Scott, estimated that the *Register*

¹¹² John Sutherland, p. 144.

¹¹³ John Sutherland, p. 139.

was losing the firm at least £1000 a year.¹¹⁴ Since John Ballantyne's firm's principal creditor was James Ballantyne's press, it seemed possible that debts could bring down both businesses. Keen to have Scott back in the fold, Constable took on £1300 of John Ballantyne's unsold stock and bought a quarter-share in the copyright of Scott's next poem, *Rokeby*, for £700 to tide the firm over while he investigated its liabilities. To the shock of the partners, he found that the firm would require £4000 to avoid a bankruptcy that would unmask Scott as a profit-hungry investor and force him to resign his clerkship. Scott appealed in desperation to the Duke of Buccleuch, who agreed to stand as guarantor for the sum, allowing the partners to extricate themselves from the ruins of the firm while leaving James Ballantyne's press and Scott's reputation intact. A great number of unsold volumes were left over and only disposed of slowly, Scott cannily requiring that those who wished to publish his novels also took on a bundle of dubious Ballantyne inventory.

By 1813 Scott also realised that he had been eclipsed as a poet by Byron. He faced this prospect with relative equanimity – John Gibson Lockhart, his son-in-law and biographer, quotes him as saying, 'Byron hits the mark where I don't even pretend to fledge my arrow'.¹¹⁵ This dismissal was doubtless partly performative, as Scott continued to write verse for some time after Byron's success, but also reflects the fact that he had begun building upon earlier dalliances with novel-writing. The romantic narrative of Scott's taking up *Waverley* again after chancing across the manuscript in an old writing desk has been questioned by Peter Garside among others, but it seems likely that Scott did begin the novel in the 1800s, returning to it after the relative failure of *Rokeby* and the actual failure of John Ballantyne's firm.¹¹⁶ On its completion *Waverley* was sold to Constable as an anonymous work (although Constable doubtless knew that Scott was the author). An initial demand of £1000 was met with a cautious counteroffer of £700 before the parties eventually settled on a half-profits arrangement, a shift away from the large copyright payments Scott had

¹¹⁴ Johnson, I, 415.

¹¹⁵ Lockhart, III, 239.

¹¹⁶ Peter Garside, 'Popular Fiction and National Tale: the Hidden Origins of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*', *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 46 (June 1991), pp. 30-51.

become accustomed to, but one which paved the way for him to reach whole new levels of financial success.

For Scott's contemporaries its historical specificity and its masculine evocations made *Waverley* a superior sort of novel. Jeffrey wrote that it displayed 'a consistency in nature and truth, the want of which may always be detected in the happiest combinations of fancy'.¹¹⁷ For Jeffrey and other nineteenth-century critics, as Ina Ferris has argued, *Waverley* offered relief from 'the feminised space of modernity' from which they figured earlier novels springing.¹¹⁸ While Scott gently derided generic subtitles in *Waverley's* first chapter, the *Waverley* novels were read and marketed as a genre in themselves, and were appropriated as such by critics, who used them to make claims for their own authority over the sphere of novel-writing which legitimated the Author of *Waverley* as the creator of 'the most remarkable productions of the present age.'¹¹⁹

Jeffrey's describing Scott's works as 'productions' highlights the fact that, as Kathryn Sutherland has written, 'Scott engages with fiction in accordance with the mixed codes of the economist and the romancer'.¹²⁰ Scott accurately saw his massively popular works as part of the systems of political economy. In the 'Author of *Waverley*' he created a literary brand with an unprecedentedly wide reach and unparalleled profit-making potential. The fact that Scott enjoyed doing business from behind this mask is evident from the teasing preface he added to the third edition of *Waverley*, in which he 'leaves it to the candour of the public' to decide whether he is 'a writer new to publication' or 'a hackneyed author, who is ashamed of too frequent appearance' or 'a man of a grave profession, to whom the reputation of being a novel-writer might be prejudicial; or [...] a man of fashion, to whom

¹¹⁷ [Francis Jeffrey], 'Waverley—a Novel', *Edinburgh Review*, 24 (Nov 1814), pp. 208-43 (p. 208).

¹¹⁸ Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 94.

¹¹⁹ [Francis Jeffrey], 'Ivanhoe', *Edinburgh Review*, 33 (January 1820), pp. 1-54 (p. 2).

¹²⁰ Kathryn Sutherland, 'Fictional Economies: Adam Smith, Walter Scott and the Nineteenth-Century Novel', *ELH*, 54 (Spring 1987), pp. 97-127 (p. 99).

writing of any kind might appear pedantic.’¹²¹ The mask also allowed him to discuss trade without shame, as Sutherland recognises when she describes the ‘Author of *Waverley*’ as Scott’s ‘ungentlemanly counterpart and man of business’.¹²² Scott’s financial views of authorship is incorporated into his novels, as in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, in which he argues that, contra Adam Smith, ‘a successful author is a productive labourer, and that his works constitute as effectual a part of the public wealth as that which is created by any other manufacture.’¹²³ As well as being, in Fiona Robertson’s words, ‘histories of legitimacy in terms both of plot and of declared political orientation’, Scott’s novels textually and contextually legitimate his own critical and commercial stock.¹²⁴

From the first, Scott’s authorship was less secret than his investments. Jane Austen wrote on *Waverley*’s publication that ‘Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones. – It is not fair. – He has Fame and Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people’s mouths.’¹²⁵ Austen’s complaint makes clear the perceived division between poetry as the medium of fame and fiction as that of profit, although, as I have described, before Scott this was a dubious distinction, as the very largest payments previously had been for poetic works. Austen also trenchantly highlights the limitations of the reading audience for novels and presciently predicts the scale of Scott’s impact. However, while it is difficult with the information available to parse the effects of Scott’s work on the sales of other novelists, it can certainly be argued that his influence was in part ‘generative’, spawning a vast train of imitators and kick-starting a vogue for

¹²¹ Walter Scott, *Waverley; or ‘tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 344.

¹²² Kathryn Sutherland, p. 113.

¹²³ Walter Scott, ‘Introductory Epistle’ to *The Fortunes of Nigel*, ed. Frank Jordan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 14. See also my discussion of David Williams’ response to Smith in the previous chapter.

¹²⁴ Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 12.

¹²⁵ Jane Austen to Anna Austen, 28 September 1814, in *Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 277.

historical fiction.¹²⁶ His legacy could also be said to have aided other novelists in that the pioneering cheap editions of his works cultivated a hunger for novels among those newly able to afford them. It would not be too much of a stretch to implicate him as a major factor in the eventual eclipse of poetry by the novel.¹²⁷

From 1814 until 1826, then, Scott published phenomenally successful novel after phenomenally successful novel and made unprecedented sums while doing so. He generally sold the rights to print editions of 10,000 or 12,000 copies for £3000 or (later) £2500 and drew a second income stream from these editions being printed by James Ballantyne. In 1816 he took advantage of his easy productivity to begin a second novel franchise, *Tales of My Landlord*, offering these new works to William Blackwood in partnership with John Murray in return both for generous remuneration and for Blackwood's taking on £600 of old Ballantyne stock. When this sale seemed temporarily uncertain, Scott took advantage of his contacts to make sure he benefited significantly from his new inspiration. As Edgar Johnson writes, 'Employing first James, then John, as his agents, Scott [...] managed to get Constable, Longman, Blackwood, and Murray all hotly bidding for the unknown novelist.'¹²⁸ Scott thus instigated an early rights auction, a rare occurrence until the emergence of well-connected agents at the end of the century.¹²⁹ He spread his works among a network of leading publishers, securing himself access to their resources, connections and coffers and asserting his own essential centrality to literary life. This dominance was also enacted in his works. As Kathryn Sutherland argues, 'In the rival output of two prolific novelists, and subsequently in the whole team of narrators and editor-historians spawned by the "Author of *Waverley*," and in the *Tales*' sustained Cervantean redactions, Scott discovered the unimpeded exercise of his talents and the consequent increase in their fertility.'¹³⁰ Despite his masks,

¹²⁶ Duncan, p. xi; for scale of impact see also pp. 32-34.

¹²⁷ See Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialisation of Printing 1800-1850* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), pp. 146-49, 36-39.

¹²⁸ Johnson, I, 550.

¹²⁹ For the early history of literary agents, see Mary Ann Gillies, *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

¹³⁰ Kathryn Sutherland, p. 105.

accolades flooded in to the man at the centre, the most notable being the baronetcy awarded to him in 1820, the first of George IV's reign. The great product of the vast wealth Scott accumulated was Abbotsford, into which he poured tens of thousands of pounds. His works continued to sell, the capital kept flowing and all seemed well.

Unfortunately, though, during the summer of speculation in 1825 J.O. Robinson of Hurst, Robinson & Co., one of Constable's major London connections, unsuccessfully attempted to corner the hops market. He lost his firm a vast amount of money in the process, leaving it dangerously indebted.¹³¹ When Hurst, Robinson & Co. finally collapsed in January 1826 its fall dragged down Constable and Ballantyne as well. Scott's demands had drained Constable's coffers – 'by 1825, Scott had outstanding contracts for nine works with Constable, for which he had received advance payment of £10,000.'¹³² The firms' capital was also dangerously leveraged. All three points of the production triangle – Scott, Ballantyne and Constable – regularly exchanged 'accommodation bills' with each other. Accommodation bills were essentially paired sets of I.O.U.s repayable on a certain date which could then be sold on for the requisite sum. Since often both parties sold their bills, this meant that when they were called in the sum owing would be twice what either party had borrowed, and both parties was liable for both halves of the bill. Scott was the worst offender in this potentially risky form of borrowing, as he required a vast amount of capital for Abbotsford. As a consequence of this, when creditors alarmed by Hurst & Robinson's problems started to call in bills that Constable and Ballantyne had backed, the firms were unable to produce the requisite monies.

This calamity left Scott with four options. The first was to accept the offers of aid which poured in from friends, but this he refused to countenance. He could have declared personal bankruptcy, but that would have endangered his life-rent of

¹³¹ Simon Eliot, '1825-6: Years of Crisis?' in Bill Bell (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland Volume 3: Ambition and Industry 1800-1880* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 91-95 (p. 92).

¹³² *Walter Scott Digital Archive*, Edinburgh University Library, <<http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/biography/finance.html>> [accessed 26 April 2010].

Abbotsford, as well as his movables and books, and would have probably resulted in his having to live out the rest of his days in exile. He could have applied for trade bankruptcy, which would have protected his personal assets and allowed him to negotiate very favourable terms, but his gentlemanly scruples precluded this. He was already mortified that his speculations were now known, and could not accept failure as a tradesman. Instead, he sought to secure the agreement of his creditors for the establishment of a trust into which he would pay all his literary earnings and through which he proposed to pay back the full amount he owed – as he put it in the journal he kept for the last six years of his life, ‘my own right hand will do it.’¹³³ Since his liabilities were calculated as £121,000, it might have been expected that his creditors balk at Scott’s chivalrous intention, but in fact the general sympathy felt regarding his predicament and the proven profitability of his works meant that only one creditor failed to agree to the arrangement, and after this dissenter was paid off by one of Scott’s friends, the plan proceeded. James Ballantyne’s debt was included in the purview of the trust, preserving his firm, but Scott cut himself off from Constable, leaving his former publisher to die the next year with little to show for his former greatness. Constable’s partner, Robert Cadell, escaped relatively unscathed, set up in business again in a matter of months and brought out many further Scott works, including the annotated Magnum Opus edition of the novels and the pioneering cheap editions which had been one of Constable’s most prescient ideas.

The most incredible thing about Scott’s enormous debts is that he succeeded in paying them off in full. Admittedly, the last payments were made through the sale of the remaining Waverley copyrights to Cadell in 1847, fifteen years after Scott’s death, but nevertheless, it remains an impressive achievement. During his lifetime he reduced his debt from £121,000 to only £53,000, making around £10,000 each year for his creditors in the last years of his life.¹³⁴ During this period he drew his legal incomes for his own support and lived in comfort at Abbotsford. His creditors also allowed him to do some literary work in his own time for his own

¹³³ *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. W.E.K. Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 65.

¹³⁴ *Walter Scott Digital Archive*, <<http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/biography/finance.html>>.

benefit, so his total literary profits were even higher. While later critics have thought little of the later Scott novels and they indisputably show the signs of quick composition, the momentum of his brand was unstoppable and his works continued to sell in enormous quantities. Scott added to his fiction several enormous historical projects – his *Life of Napoleon* (1827-28), a *History of Scotland* (1829) and his historical works for children, the *Tales of a Grandfather* (published in four series; 1828-31). These projects drained his energies – after his wife’s death he wrote for full days, complained of headaches and was often depressed. He suffered a number of increasingly serious strokes after 1830, finally agreeing to a Mediterranean trip for the sake of his health in October 1831. On the return journey in May 1832 he suffered a further stroke. He was back in Abbotsford by July, but was suffering, confused and often incoherent, finally dying on September 21st.

In one sense, it is difficult to draw wider inferences about writing lives from Scott’s extraordinary career. His poetic career is easier to contextualise, as while he was fantastically successful as a poet, he was challenged later by Byron, with several other poets, including Rogers, Campbell and Moore, not massively far behind. It is his career as a novelist that was unprecedented. It is salutatory to contrast the sales of his novels with Jane Austen’s print runs. The probable size of the first edition of *Emma* (1815) was 2000 copies, and it was not reprinted until 1833.¹³⁵ *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were published together in a single 1818 edition of 1750 copies. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) did better, running through three editions, but the third did not sell through and was remaindered. By contrast, any given *Waverley* novel was printed in an initial edition five times the size of *Emma*’s, they were kept almost constantly in print and continued selling in staggering quantities. The bestsellers like *Guy Mannering* (1815), *Rob Roy* (1817) and *Waverley* itself racked up sales of between 40,000 to 50,000 copies in various editions between their publication dates and the mid 1830s.¹³⁶ In the minds of his contemporaries Scott was *the* novelist. As Kathryn Sutherland writes, he can be seen as being largely responsible for ‘the Victorian transformation [...] of Smith’s “unproductive

¹³⁵ St Clair, pp. 578-80.

¹³⁶ St Clair, pp. 636-37.

entertainers” into profitable producers of social good, and, indirectly, of advancing economic prosperity’, the model both for later professional men-of-letters and for writers-as-industries such as Charles Dickens and William Morris.¹³⁷ Scott, then, proves that the best way to make money from books in the early nineteenth century was to act as a venture capitalist as well as an author, although his career demonstrates that this was a risky proposition. He was also a key figure, though, in the process of moving authorship towards professional respectability. While his success was not something that could be duplicated, he provided an inspirational model both in terms of establishing genres of works that would garner profits and for modelling a manner of being indisputably bookish while also remaining a pillar of polite and commercial society.

Byron: Transcending Commerce

In this chapter I have focused on authors who were able to parlay their connections to obtain situations in which they could profit by writing, situations which were largely denied to those less well-connected, less well-born and less male. It is fitting, then, to end by briefly commenting on Byron, whose aristocracy is very much a live issue with respect to the way he conducted his career. This is both because his novelty as a handsome literary aristocrat was a major part of the image that sold him and because his status and the wealth associated with it made him approach the marketplace very differently to less privileged authors. As Tom Mole has eloquently demonstrated, Byron operated as a celebrity, a site of fascination:

For many of Byron’s first readers, buying, reading, reading aloud, lending, borrowing, copying into commonplace books, annotating and discussing Byron’s poetry were the central activities among a group of practices aimed at investigating Byron the man in order to know more about him or relate more intimately to him [...] Reading Byron’s poems was supplemented by such activities as buying and looking at portraits of Byron, or illustrations in

¹³⁷ Kathryn Sutherland, p. 123.

which the Byronic hero was represented as the poet, soliciting introductions to Byron, writing to him, dressing in Byronic fashion, reading newspapers, cartoons or reviews, and falling in love, either with the noble lord or violently, passionately and hopelessly, as his characters were wont to do.¹³⁸

This ‘hermeneutic of intimacy’ was crucial both to Byron’s appeal and to his manner of operating as an author. Mole argues that Byron’s verse tales acted as ‘relays of desire, lenses through which his readers’ gazes and desires could pass, centring, finally, on the poet’s body as a locus of signification for interior subjective realities.’¹³⁹ Jerome Christensen contends similarly that his romances ‘simultaneously convey to their consumer that he or she is an intentional subject and instil anxiety about the singularity of that position.’¹⁴⁰ By revealing, concealing and performing his self, Byron tempted readers into engaging with him through imitation, projection and purchase. As Corin Throsby puts it, ‘By making the Byronic hero such an uncertain, open – flirtatious – text, Byron invites a response from his readers’.¹⁴¹ Byron’s invitations were highly successful, as the many anonymous fan letters that he kept prove. While the other authors in this chapter carefully mediated their identities in their works, Byron made his commodified identity central to his interest. He largely bypassed pre-existing literary networks by means of his carefully-managed sudden rise, and while he valued hobnobbing with the literati, his fame was in no way reliant on their approbation. He represents a supreme example of the importance of wealth and status in literary culture, but in collaboration with John Murray he also pioneered approaching mass readerships through the powerful projection of poetic personality and through newly-realised powers of commerce.

¹³⁸ Tom Mole, *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 24-25.

¹³⁹ Mole, p. 77.

¹⁴⁰ Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron’s Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 16.

¹⁴¹ Corin Throsby, ‘Flirting with Fame: Byron’s Anonymous Female Fans’, *The Byron Journal*, 32:2 (2004), pp. 115-23 (p. 117).

Considered financially, Byron's career falls into two sections. In the first he took the long-established aristocratic position and affected to care very little about his literary profits. This attitude meant that Murray did very well out of the poetry he wrote during his years of London fame.¹⁴² Peter Cochran has disproved the myth that Byron accepted no money from his poems prior to leaving England in 1816, putting his total earnings at £3,850. However, he has also stressed that the process of financial settlement was 'a complex and convoluted one, involving much posturing and prevarication on Byron's part, and much patience and generosity on Murray's'.¹⁴³ The sums involved, while large, were dwarfed by Byron's other assets and his expenditures. When he sold Newstead Abbey to pay his debts, he raised £94,500, but even this was not sufficient. After the sale he urged his friend Douglas Kinnaird to make renewed efforts to get rid of his Rochdale property to allow him to clear the rest of his liabilities.¹⁴⁴ While the period's other super-successful author, Scott, speculated on his talents to secure vast sums of money, for Byron, already hugely wealthy, the financial value of his works was initially of far less interest than the fact of their popularity. At first he drew satisfaction from his fame, but subsequently, he found it challenging to break free from Murray's attempt to 'create a recognisable brand Byron who would answer the demands of a wide readership with minimum commercial risk.'¹⁴⁵

After 1816, disenchanted by the reaction that forced him into exile, Byron changed direction and began to define a modified authorial self. From this point in his career, as Christensen puts it, 'it becomes important to distinguish between Byronism, the [...] speculative machine owned and operated by John Murray, and Lord Byron.'¹⁴⁶ While he remained an assiduous reader of his own reviews, he no longer wrote for acclaim, precisely, but played off his awareness of his large audience in taking his self-presentations in darker and more ironic directions. As

¹⁴² See the section on publishing arrangements in Chapter One for further details.

¹⁴³ Peter Cochran, 'Did Byron Take Money for his Early Work?', *The Byron Journal*, 31 (2003), pp. 72-76 (p. 76).

¹⁴⁴ Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend* (London: John Murray, 2002), p. 335.

¹⁴⁵ Mole, pp. 113-14.

¹⁴⁶ Christensen, p. 172.

Shelley astutely and enviously opined, ‘he touched a chord to which a million hearts responded, and the coarse music which he produced to please them disciplined him to the perfection which he now approaches’.¹⁴⁷ Byronism, in Shelley’s view, provided Byron with an audience which allowed him to develop his poetry confident in the knowledge that it would be read, rather than feeling, as Shelley did, that he was required to constantly reframe himself in an attempt to induce others to notice him. For his later, more invested works Byron began to negotiate more fiercely. For the third canto of *Childe Harold* and *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), for example, Murray had planned to offer fifteen hundred guineas (£1575), although, as he wrote, ‘The Poem is however so much beyond any thing in Modern days that I may be out in my Calculation – it requires an ethereal mind like its Authors to cope with it.’¹⁴⁸ Despite the concern implied in this statement about the ethereality of the standard reader’s mind, Kinnaird and Shelley, negotiating on Byron’s behalf, were able to talk Murray up to two thousand guineas for the two poems. Murray’s combined profits for the first two editions of both poems were a relatively modest £775.11s.6d.¹⁴⁹ Byron negotiated similarly carefully for his other later productions. He still did not precisely need the money – after the death of his mother-in-law in 1822 he had an income of £6000 a year; he gained around £2500 of that from her estate, so even before receiving the inheritance he was well-off.¹⁵⁰ However, the money from Murray was a good way of keeping abreast of the value of his works once he was cut off from direct access to English literary society and also a way of asserting both his value to and independence from his publisher’s agendas for commoditising him.

The literary marketplace for Byron, then, was a very different proposition than for the other authors I have discussed. The luxury of seeing the financial success of works as a way of keeping score was one reserved for a few privileged writers. This luxury allowed Byron considerable freedom to develop in his later

¹⁴⁷ Shelley to John Gisbourne, 18 June 1822, in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, 436.

¹⁴⁸ Murray to Byron, 20 September 1816, in *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, ed. Andrew Nicholson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 176-77.

¹⁴⁹ Murray Copies Ledger B, NLS Ms.42725, p. 132.

¹⁵⁰ MacCarthy, p. 411.

works in directions which would have had grave consequences for a market-reliant and less famous author. For him, success was a stage on which he could perform himself, and his works were received more as performances from a fascinating celebrity than as the products of a respectable gentlemanly pen. By casting his works as his self, first by playing the irresistible aristocratic poet and then by subverting that role, Byron made himself an unavoidable context for his productions, bypassing legitimating networks and bringing compulsive evocations of poetic brilliance directly to large commercial readerships. His titanic fame dragged and glamorised other poets in his wake, contributing to the wave of biographical interest in the 1820s and 1830s which consolidated the idea of the poetic genius and the respectable professional author in opposition to each other as the two models for Victorians being writerly. Somewhat ironically, then, Byron's sparking a new interest in the character of the poet ended up contributing to the belated acceptance of the older generation of Romantics, whose contrasts with him in a paradigm where he was ubiquitous drew new attention from reacting readerships and tastemakers.

Chapter Four

The Oligarchs of Literature: Authority and the Quarterly Reviews

Paradigm Shift

Henry Cockburn, in his 1852 *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, wrote that his friend's most notable achievement, the *Edinburgh Review*, represented 'an entire and instant change of every thing that the public had been accustomed to in that sort of composition', adding that on its emergence, 'The old periodical opiates were extinguished at once.'¹ Cockburn is somewhat hyperbolic here, but his account tallies with those of other contemporaries in envisaging the emergence of the *Edinburgh* as an event which transformed criticism and authorship. Where previous journals had catalogued, nurtured and responded to literary culture, the *Edinburgh* sought to shape and dominate it, leveraging critical authority for political gain. Its voice was, for a time, uniquely commanding; as William Hazlitt put it

The persons who wrote in this Review seemed 'to have their hands full of truths,' and now and then, in a fit of spleen or gaiety, let some of them fly ; and while this practice continued, it was impossible to say that the Monarchy or the Hierarchy was safe. Some of the arrows glanced, others might stick, and in the end prove fatal. It was not the principles of the *Edinburgh Review*, but the spirit, that was looked at with jealousy and alarm. The principles were by no means decidedly hostile to existing institutions : but the spirit was that of fair and free discussion ; a field was open to argument and wit ; every question was tried upon its own ostensible merits, and there was no foul play. The tone was that of a studied impartiality (which many called *trimming*) or of a skeptical indifference.²

¹ Henry Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey: with a Selection from his Correspondence*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1852), I, 131.

² William Hazlitt, 'Mr. Jeffrey', in *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930-34), XI, 126-27.

Hazlitt enthusiastically figures the early *Edinburgh* reviewers as a potent new pantheon whose emergence served to put the established order on the back foot. Like Cockburn's account, Hazlitt's is hyperbolic and at points downright disingenuous. In particular, his assertion that the *Edinburgh's* spirit was one of 'free and fair discussion', eschewing 'foul play', would have come as a surprise to the authors it subjected to debilitating attacks. Furious responses from aggrieved writers were numerous enough only five years after the *Edinburgh* commenced to fill John Ring's *Beauties of the 'Edinburgh Review', alias the Stinkpot of Literature*. Ring gives his target's chief beauties as 'calumny and detraction', writing that it 'makes war on the whole host of authors; and mangles them without mercy, for the sake of amusing the public.'³ Just as Ring claimed, the professional authority the *Edinburgh's* critics wielded was achieved at least partly at the expense of those it reviewed. Its success thus had considerable consequences for the careers and social identities of individual writers and for authors as a class. The *Edinburgh* self-consciously asserted its pre-eminence through felicity of style, through frequent censure and through the aspects of its subjects that it revealed and concealed. As Jeffrey put it in a letter to Charles Koenig:

To be learned and right is no doubt the first requisite – but to be ingenious and original and discursive is perhaps something more than the second in a publication which can only do good by remaining popular – and cannot be popular without other attractions than those of mere truth and correctness.⁴

Hazlitt was accurate in depicting establishment nervousness regarding the *Edinburgh*. In 1807 John Murray, only recently made undisputed head of his father's publishing house and keen to make both profits and his mark, wrote a worried letter to George Canning, who had become Foreign Secretary earlier that

³ John Ring, *The Beauties of the 'Edinburgh Review', alias the Stinkpot of Literature* (London: H.D. Symonds and John Hatchard, 1807), p. 2.

⁴ Francis Jeffrey to Charles Koenig, 20 January 1806, BL Additional Manuscript 32439, fol. 235, as reprinted in John Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: The 'Edinburgh Review' 1802-1815* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 54.

year and who had previously successfully barracked Whiggish and radical opponents in the *Anti-Jacobin*. Murray described the *Edinburgh* as being ‘written with such unquestionable talent, that it has already attained an extent of circulation not equalled by any similar publication.’⁵ Worried by the authority wielded by a publication whose Whiggish principles he described as ‘radically bad’, he suggested that ‘some means, equally popular, ought to be adopted to counteract their dangerous tendency.’ The publication Murray founded, the *Quarterly Review*, followed the trail the *Edinburgh*’s clique had blazed by creating an entertaining and authoritative voice to produce and perpetuate its popularity and clout. Its success in doing so is demonstrated by the responses it provoked from its opponents, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley’s admission that it was ‘a dreadful preponderance against the cause of improvement’ or Hazlitt’s furiously describing it as ‘one foul blotch of servility, intolerance, falsehood, spite, and ill-manners’.⁶

The two quarterlies thus occupied a crucial position in the transition from eighteenth-century notions of authorship to those that predominated in the nineteenth, creating during the 1800s and 1810s a new class of professional, widely-read and well-remunerated critics. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which their burgeoning oligarchies dominated the dissemination of public personalities and shaped the practices and discourses of authorship. In the following chapter and the coda I will go on to examine the ways that their authority was challenged through sociability, literary proliferation the creation of notions of Romantic genius which resisted their judgmental discourses.

It is important to stress that while the quarterlies were inherently political publications, they were not simply mouthpieces for opposing factions. Walter Scott drew out the subtleties in an 1808 letter to the editor of the nascent *Quarterly*, William Gifford:

⁵ John Murray to the R^t Hon. G.C. (George Canning), 25 September 1807, from John Murray Letter Book, 2 April 1808-13 March 1843, NLS Ms.41909, fols. 17^v-18^f (outgoing side) (fol. 17^v).

⁶ *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), II, 81; Hazlitt, ‘Mr. Jeffrey’, XI, 127.

It would certainly not be advisable that the work should at its outset assume exclusively a political character. On the contrary the articles upon science and miscellaneous literature ought to be such as may challenge comparison with the best of contemporary reviews. But as the real reason for instituting the publication is the disgusting and deleterious doctrine with which the most popular of these periodical works disgraces its pages it is essential to consider how opposite & sounder principles can be most advantageously brought forward.⁷

Scott here makes explicit one of the key ways that the quarterlies operated – having established their authority through their superior reviewing, they exercised that authority to win the ‘war of representation’ and induce readers to accept their political pronouncements and world views.⁸ Their editors thus had a strong incentive to make sure that those reviews which did not directly address political matters nevertheless played a part in propagating a sense of their journals’ rigour and brilliance. To achieve this, both Jeffrey and Gifford exercised tight editorial controls, freely ‘finessing’ contributors’ copy to make it ‘palatable’, converting ‘an unmarketable commodity into one which from its general effect and spirit is not likely to disgrace those among which it is placed.’⁹ Such editorial convoking allowed the periodicals to forge powerful anonymised voices which through enacting dominance over the spheres of culture, science and letters purchased the respect that made their political articles potent interventions. As Jon Klancher has it, ‘No discourse was so immediately identified with power in the nineteenth century as

⁷ Walter Scott to William Gifford, 25 October 1808, in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Sir Herbert Grierson, transcribed Takero Sato, 12 vols, located at *The Walter Scott Digital Archive*, Edinburgh University Library, <<http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/etexts/etexts/letters.html>> [accessed 15 February 2011], II, 105.

⁸ Mark Schoenfield, *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity: The “Literary Lower Empire”* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 85. See also the wider context (pp. 84-99) and the earlier section on Lord Eldon’s concern about the power the press had in representing and thus shaping political discourse (pp. 38-47).

⁹ *Letters of Scott*, II, 104.

that of the great party quarterlies' which 'carved between them what seemed to be the universe of political thought.'¹⁰

The commencement of the *Edinburgh Review* initiated a period in literary history during which for around twenty years the quarterlies vastly outsold their competition. The *Edinburgh*, launched in October 1802, achieved ubiquity first, but from 1809 the *Quarterly* swiftly made up for lost time, becoming the *Edinburgh's* equal opponent, somewhat different in intellectual focus but employing similar rhetoric and printed in similar numbers. The *Quarterly's* sales peaked at around 14,000 copies in the late 1810s, a figure slightly higher than the *Edinburgh's* peak of around 13,000 copies earlier in the decade.¹¹ By comparison, William St Clair quotes sources giving 4,000 copies as a circulation figure for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in the late 1810s – although he notes that its most successful numbers could sell a great many more – and cites an account from 1813 listing a circulation of 4,500 copies for the *Monthly Magazine* and 2,000 each for the *Critical Review*, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and the *British Critic*.¹² It is important to consider, though, that these figures only tell part of the story. As Jeffrey wrote to Thomas Moore in 1814, 'We print now nearly 13,000 copies and may reckon I suppose modestly on three or four readers of the popular articles in each copy – no prose preachers I believe have so large an audience.'¹³ Jeffrey here highlights habits of sharing and circulation which allowed texts to reach readerships far in excess of their print runs and which brought the quarterlies before considerable percentages of the total reading public, compounding their advantages over the competition.

It is difficult to estimate the size of the reading nation in the Romantic period. A figure commonly given is a purported estimate by Edmund Burke that

¹⁰ Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 69.

¹¹ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 573. Issue-by-issue figures can be found in the Murray and Longman archives.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 573-74.

¹³ Francis Jeffrey to Thomas Moore, 14 September 1814, transcribed Michael Bott, RUL MS 1393 Part II.26B, 1/Part 1/299.

towards the end of the eighteenth century there were around 80,000 book readers. This figure is usually cited from A.S. Collins's 1928 *Profession of Letters*, although it also appears in the preface to the first volume of Charles Knight's *Penny Magazine*, printed in 1832.¹⁴ Knight's preface goes on to show the massive expansion that had taken place by the time he commenced his work: 'In the present year', he wrote, 'it has been shown by the sale of the 'Penny Magazine,' that there are two hundred thousand *purchasers* of one periodical work. It may be fairly calculated that the number of readers of that single work amounts to a million.' The *Penny Magazine*'s vast circulation demonstrates the great strides in printing technology made by the 1830s. Charles Henry Timperley's *Dictionary of Printers and Printing* (1839) gives a telling comparison: 'from two sets of plates, by machines made by Applegath and Cowper, the same quantity of press work may be performed in ten days, as would take two men, by the old mode [...] more than five calendar months.'¹⁵ Timperley makes it clear that steam-driven presses and stereotyping vastly reduced printing costs, making cheap competitors to the older exclusive periodicals viable. This goes some way to explain why the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* waned during the 1820s in the face of cheaper and more diverse competition which enfranchised new classes of readers. It also, however, implies that while the reading public grew during the early nineteenth century, until the 1830s the numbers able to access new works and the periodicals that reviewed them was nowhere near Knight's million *Penny Magazine* readers. In an 1812 review of George Crabbe, Jeffrey estimates that 'there probably are not less than two hundred thousand persons who read for amusement or instruction among the middling classes of society. In the higher classes, there are not as many as twenty thousand.'¹⁶ Based

¹⁴ A.S. Collins, *The Profession of Letters: A Study of the Relation of Author to Patron, Publisher, and Public, 1780-1832* (London: Routledge, 1928), p. 29; 'Preface' to Charles Knight (ed.), *The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Volumes 1-2* (London: Charles Knight, 1832), p. iii. Richard Altick notes the *Penny Magazine* reference and states that his efforts to find the figure in Burke were 'fruitless' (*The English Common Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 49).

¹⁵ Charles Henry Timperley, *A Dictionary of Printers and Printing: with the Progress of Literature, Ancient and Modern* (London: H. Johnson, 1839), p. 920.

¹⁶ [Francis Jeffrey], 'Crabbe's *Tales*', *Edinburgh Review*, 20 (November 1812), pp. 277-305 (p. 280).

on these figures, it seems fair to say that the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* reached a seldom-equalled fraction of those able to afford new literary works.

As the evidence I have cited indicates, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* dominated criticism in the 1800s and 1810s, reconfiguring literary culture to a degree which has not always been fully recognised in modern studies. Jon Klancher's incisive account of the fragmentation of periodical audiences, the touchstone for much valuable recent work, considers the quarterlies as part of a chapter on the formulation of self-consciously middle-class readerships. However, in doing so he to some extent occludes their formative role. He lists the 'most significant journals' in the field of cultivating middle-class identities as 'the *Edinburgh Review* (1802), the *Examiner* (1808), the *Quarterly Review* (1809), the *New Monthly Magazine* (1814), *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817), the *London Magazine* (1821), the *Westminster Review* (1824), the *Athenaeum* (1828), *Fraser's Magazine* (1830), the *Metropolitan* (1831).'¹⁷ The range of dates in this list and the figures cited previously demonstrate that considering these periodicals as peers glosses over massive differences in the sizes of their readerships and in the circumstances in which they were published. With the exception of the weekly *Examiner*, it was not until the 1820s that the quarterlies faced major challengers to their hegemony. Competition from publications seeking to address mass readerships also developed later – of the four periodicals Klancher names opening his chapter on mass audiences, *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* was established in 1822, *The Hive* ran from 1822 until 1824 and the *Penny Magazine* and *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal* did not begin production until 1832.¹⁸ While radical publications such as William Cobbett's *Political Register* (priced 2d from November 1816) and Thomas Wooler's *Black Dwarf* (established 1817) achieved high circulations earlier, their audiences largely consisted of those priced out of the refined literary discourses the quarterlies sought to regulate.¹⁹

¹⁷ Klancher, p. 50.

¹⁸ Klancher, p. 77.

¹⁹ Altick, pp. 325-26.

What I wish to do, then, is posit an additional stage in Klancher's model, between the eclipse of the old periodicals in the late 1790s and the emergence of distinct mass and middle-class audiences in the third decade of the nineteenth century. David Stewart argues, and I would agree, that as late as 1825 'Magazines [...] created much of their perplexing effect by acknowledging the mixed nature of an audience they could not securely divide into separate groups.'²⁰ A number of recent studies have brought out the richness and diversity of magazine culture in the late 1810s and the 1820s, the period in which the writers we now most associate with Romantic periodical writing – Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Thomas De Quincey and Thomas Carlyle – as well as many less famous names, produced the discourse in which 'genius first became widely discussed and represented.'²¹ I shall return to these important developments in the coda, but I would like to emphasise that the 'spectacle of multiplicity' these publications presented emerged in opposition to the contexts which the quarterly colossi had determined.²²

Enlightenment vs. *The Anti-Jacobin*

To explain the transformations that the quarterlies wrought is best accomplished by first discussing the periodicals which they eclipsed. The earliest English periodicals were the proceedings of learned societies, but at the beginning of the eighteenth century writers began using the form to address a wider public. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele explicitly intended that the *Spectator* would open up the literary world; in a famous and much-discussed declaration, their persona asserted that 'I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought

²⁰ David Stewart, *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 206

²¹ David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 150. Other works focusing principally on this later period include Mark Parker's *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), which focuses on the period 1820-1834, and Stewart's book, whose introduction gives its date range as 1815-1825.

²² Stewart, p. 10.

Philosophy out of the Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses.’²³ Many other early periodicals were similarly explicit in seeking to make intellectual culture accessible to a wider readership, and when the first general magazines and Reviews were ‘initiated by bookseller-publisher-distributors’ their reviews were, in Marilyn Butler’s words, ‘plainly aimed not at selling the individual book (for on the whole there was little direct “puffing”), but at creating and developing an audience for “literary intelligence.”’²⁴ The principal duties of the early reviewer were to set out the contents of the book under consideration and place these in contexts which inexperienced readers could understand. The synoptic method employed to accomplish this allowed the readers of periodicals like the *Monthly Review* (established in 1749) and the *Critical Review* (1756) to keep abreast of developments across a wide range of disciplines without having to acquire either specialist knowledge or a large number of expensive new books.

Such Reviews affected and largely practiced enlightened egalitarianism. While women and lower-class writers were at times condescended to, the Reviews’ pretensions to inclusiveness ensured that their works were at least noticed. As I have discussed, Eliza Parsons, despite writing in a popular style and being published by a less-than-reputable press, was reviewed even-handedly. The *Critical’s* four-page review of *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) quoted extensively, and while the critic claimed that ‘there is no fine writing in these volumes’ and was happy to point out ‘vulgarisms’, he also stressed that the novel was moral and that it had ‘sufficient interest to be read with pleasure’.²⁵ The *British Critic* was more impressed; its brief review concluded that Wolfenbach was ‘more interesting than the general run of modern novels’ and ‘abound[ed] with interesting, though improbable situations.’²⁶ Parsons’ works were treated relatively respectfully by her reviewers, who allowed

²³ *The Spectator*, No. 10 (12 March 1711), [p. 19].

²⁴ Marilyn Butler, ‘Culture’s Medium: The Role of the Review’ in Stuart Curran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 131.

²⁵ ‘*Castle of Wolfenbach*’, *Critical Review*, new series, 10 (January 1794), pp. 49-52 (p. 50).

²⁶ *British Critic*, 3 (February 1794), pp. 199-200.

her merits and often gave her works ample opportunity to speak directly to readers through summary and direct quotation.

Even works which might have been seen to be morally suspect, such as William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), were generally reviewed appreciatively and sensitively. The *Critical's* review cannily noted that 'the disguise of a translator of an invisible original, is now suspected,' pointing out that the work displays 'the acute turns of modern composition, so easily learned in the school of Voltaire.'²⁷ Regardless, its praise was relatively unreserved, although it skipped over some of *Vathek's* more gruesome scenes, instead making much of the scholarship displayed in the notes. The *Gentleman's Magazine* 'earnestly recommend[ed] "Vathek" to every class of readers ; for the morality of the design, and the excellence of the execution entitle it to universal attention'.²⁸ The *English Review* (a publication revealingly subtitled '*an abstract of English and foreign literature*') did comment suspiciously on *Vathek's* principles, but in a way that interestingly restated its own commitment to the active pursuit of knowledge:

The moral which is here conveyed, that ignorance, childishness, and the want of ambition, are the sources of human happiness, though agreeable to the strain of eastern fiction, is inconsistent with true philosophy, and with the nature of man. The punishments of vice, and the pains of gratified curiosity, ought never to have been confounded. Although the *tree of knowledge* was once forbidden, in the present condition of humanity it is the *tree of life*.²⁹

This extract explicitly supports Butler's argument that Reviews were invested in propagating a reading public which valued bookish knowledge. In service to this ideal, the eighteenth-century reviewer was more a cataloguer than a judge – the qualities of the work took centre stage, and reviewers generally clarified, commented and categorised rather than presenting partisan opinions or their own ideas. Klancher has stressed the collaborative appearance of eighteenth-century

²⁷ 'The History of the Caliph Vathek', *Critical Review*, 62 (July 1786), pp 37-42 (pp. 39, 38).

²⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 56 (July 1786), pp. 593-94 (p. 594).

²⁹ 'The History of the Caliph Vathek', *English Review*, 8 (September 1786), pp. 180-84 (p. 184).

periodicals, particularly the printing of correspondence and the letter-like aspects of reviews, arguing that such practices let them manifest ‘an *enjoined* rather than a self-confirming discourse, a community of reading and writing and not a projection on the public.’³⁰ The fact that readers of journals could easily become their writers created a sense of equality and equivalency in the interested pursuit of knowledge. Such shifting of roles played a key part in the process of making print seem safe to new readers; as Clifford Siskin has it ‘writing induced a fundamental change in readers – leading them to behave as writers – which, in turn, induced more writing.’³¹ Eighteenth-century periodicals were thus a key avenue for the proliferation both of authorship and of the idea that producing books could potentially be a respectable and valuable occupation.

In the pressured environment of the 1790s, though, Reviews’ priorities shifted. As Paul Keen writes,

Beyond the continuing goal of encouraging the diffusion of learning [...] reviews were now required to perform the more conservative task of preserving the coherence of the republic of letters as a unique cultural domain (and therefore upholding the claims for the social distinction of authors) by taming those political and cultural pressures which threatened to erode literature’s unique social function.³²

Keen argues that Reviews accomplished this by systematising literary production, by selecting and castigating their subjects and by trying to ensure their own permanence. These new tendencies were often most apparent in periodicals founded in opposition to the older Reviews. The reasons for this were partly political. As Butler has noted, ‘all four owner-editors of the journals dealing seriously with literary matters in 1790 – the *Monthly Review*, the *Critical Review*, the *English*

³⁰ Klancher, p. 22.

³¹ Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain 1700-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 4.

³² Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 117.

Review and the *Analytical Review* – were Dissenters.’³³ Indeed, the eighteenth-century periodical itself had a Dissenting cast – rational, independently-minded and with a wide purview that more closely resembled the broad curricula of the Dissenting academies than the staid offerings of Oxford and Cambridge. The conductors of the Dissenting journals, eager to secure full political rights for their brethren, ensured that their periodicals keenly supported reform. After reformist hopes were dashed by the outbreak of war in 1793, ‘the journals’ continued support for liberal causes, including peace with France, became all the more counter-cultural and elicited a powerful backlash against literary culture from about 1796.’³⁴ This backlash took the form both of active repression – for example, the jailing of Joseph Johnson, the doyen of radical publishers, for publishing seditious works in 1798 – and of a satirical reconfiguring and politicisation of the literary world through *ad hominem* attacks in publications typified by the *Anti-Jacobin*.

A weekly journal, the *Anti-Jacobin* was founded by George Canning, later both Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, and edited by William Gifford, who later edited the *Quarterly*. It had a fairly short run between November 1797 and July 1798, but was kept in the public mind by its successor journal, *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* (published from 1798), and by the reprinting of key materials in book form, both as a relatively expensive two-volume work in quarto and octavo and in a smaller, cheaper volume entitled *The Beauties of the Anti-Jacobin*. The title displays a certain level of irony, as the poems that make up over half the volume are generally ferocious parodies, written in supposed Jacobin voices and expressing radical sentiments in ways that comprehensively undermine them. A good, if blunt, example is ‘The Jacobin’, first published in the journal in April 1798, which adapts its stanza from radical poems by Southey:

I Am a hearty Jacobin,
Who own no God, and dread no Sin,
Ready to dash thro’ thick and thin
For freedom :

³³ Butler, p. 130.

³⁴ Ibid.

And when the teachers of Chalk Farm
Gave Ministers so much alarm,
And preach'd that Kings do only harm,
I fee'd 'em.

By Bedford's cut I've trim'd my locks,
And coal-black is my Knowledge-box,
Callous to all, except hard knocks
Of thumpers ;

My eye a noble fierceness boasts,
My voice is hollow as a ghost's,
My throat oft wash'd by factious toasts
In bumpers.

Whatever is in France, is right ;
Terror and blood are my delight ;
Parties with us do not excite
Enough rage.

Our boasted Laws I hate and curse,
Bad from the first, by age grown worse,
I pant and sigh for univers-
al suffrage.

Wakefield I love – adore Horne Tooke,
With pride on Jones and Thelwall look,
And hope that they, by hook or crook,
Will prosper.

But they deserve the worst of ills,
And all th' abuse of all our quills,
Who form'd of strong and *gagging bills*
A cross pair.

Extinct since then each Speaker's fire,
And silent ev'ry daring lyre
Dum-founded they whom I would hire
To lecture.

Tied up, alas! is every tongue
On which conviction nightly hung,
And Thelwall looks, though yet but young,
A Spectre.

Huzza! the French will soon invade,
And we shall drive a roaring trade ;
To us will ev'ry Gallic blade
Be welcome ;

And surely no more joyful sound
To Corresponders can be found ;
Unless Marat should through the ground
From Hell come.³⁵

Here, as in much of the *Anti-Jacobin's* verse, the fictive Jacobin is made to damn himself and others, explicitly naming and implicitly shaming key radical figures and encoding evidence of his faction's defeat in his ostensible celebration of its values. The *Anti-Jacobin's* writers openly crowed over the cleverness of this strategy; a note to this poem comments archly that in the third-to-last stanza 'These words, of *conviction* and *hanging*, have so ominous a sound, it is rather odd that they were chosen.' This not-so-subtly threatening stanza was the final one in the first published version; the two even blunter final stanzas were added in the *Beauties* volume to drive home the point to its readers.³⁶ The *Beauties* volume also extended the poem's introductory note to add a claim that this example of radical Sapphics was taken 'from a roll of miscellaneous papers dropped in the park by some

³⁵ 'The Jacobin', from William Gifford (ed.), *The Beauties of the Anti-Jacobin* (London: C. Chapple, 1799), pp. 205-206.

³⁶ 'The Jacobin', *Anti-Jacobin*, 2 (9 April 1798), pp. 133-135.

Jacobin.’ The readers of a cheap edition could obviously not be trusted to appreciate the poem’s irony from the less obvious setup used in earlier versions. The *Anti-Jacobin’s* parodies achieved a wide circulation; reviewing Southey in the first issue of the *Edinburgh*, Jeffrey noted that ‘the melancholy fate of his English Sapphics, we believe, is but too generally known.’³⁷

Such rabble-rousing reconfigurations were characteristic of the *Anti-Jacobin’s* professed interest in acting as a corrective to the nation’s periodical culture, which it figured as foolish, subversive and dangerous. As Gifford put it in the introduction to the *Beauties* volume,

There is nothing in which the enemies of the constitution have so much the advantage of its friends as in their strict adherence to each other and their *judicious* management of *the Press* [...] that fatal engine which has done more than the sword, the musquet, or the cannon, for the extension of anarchy, and the destruction of the social world.³⁸

The *Anti-Jacobin* set itself up as a resistance movement, fighting for truth in a high-stakes battle against seditious and mendacious print-cultural adversaries. In its formulations the idea that all additions to knowledge are valuable became suspect and outmoded. Gifford’s prospectus makes it very clear that in a time of partisan and international conflict disinterested appreciation was not a mode that he and his associates could countenance:

We avow ourselves to be *partial* to the COUNTRY *in which we live*, notwithstanding the daily panegyrics which we read and hear on the superior virtues and endowments of its rival and hostile neighbours. We are *prejudiced* in favour of *her* Establishments, civil and religious ; though without claiming for either that ideal perfection, which modern philosophy professes to discover in the more luminous systems which are arising on all sides of us.³⁹

³⁷ [Francis Jeffrey], ‘Southey’s *Thalaba*’, *Edinburgh Review*, 1 (October 1802), pp. 63-83 (p. 72).

³⁸ ‘Advertisement’, *The Beauties of the Anti-Jacobin*, pp. iv-v.

³⁹ ‘Prospectus’, *Anti-Jacobin*, 1 (20 November 1797), pp. 1-10 (pp. 3-4).

Such rhetoric positions those who affect unprejudiced discourse as irresponsible and potentially dangerous malcontents. The *Anti-Jacobin* accepts that writers influence political processes, but turns this against liberal authors by arguing that their writings reveal them to be ‘ignorant, and designing, and false, and wicked, and turbulent, and anarchical—various in their language, but united in their plans, and steadily pursuing through hatred and contempt, the destruction of their Country.’⁴⁰ Its concluding shot, the poem ‘New Morality,’ named many of its targets, binding together Thomas Paine, William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft and the Literary Fund’s founder David Williams as ‘creeping creatures, venomous and low,’ and also including among those enjoined to ‘praise Lepaux’ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Southey, Lamb, the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Morning Post*, Joseph Priestly, John Thelwall and Gilbert Wakefield.⁴¹ Leading poets, dissenters and papers are thus explicitly leagued with France against England, cast as threats to be contained and condemned. Such attacks on individual authors and on writers as a group undermined the inclusive, knowledge-promoting methodology of the old Reviews. The *Anti-Jacobin* articulated a new sense of the periodical writer as a stern judge bringing feckless authors into line – as Gifford put it, ‘We reverence LAW, –We acknowledge USAGE, –We look even upon PRESCRIPTION without hatred or horror.’⁴² While Derek Roper has rightly stressed that reviewers for early periodicals were often eminent and eminently qualified, the low rates of pay and the quantities of work that key reviewers undertook provided ammunition for rousing the Grub Street-inspired spectre of careless hackery and accusing writers of puffing with the ‘mere cant of Authorship.’⁴³ The *Anti-Jacobin* and similar works made writers and writing objects of necessary suspicion, closing down inclusive Enlightenment discourse in response to the perceived threat of unbounded and politicised literature. It was not for nothing that the *Anti-Jacobin*’s successor, the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, subtitled itself the ‘*Monthly, Political, and Literary Censor.*’

⁴⁰ ‘[Untitled]’, *Anti-Jacobin*, 2 (9 July 1798), pp. 615-23 (p. 622).

⁴¹ ‘New Morality’, *Anti-Jacobin*, 2 (9 July 1798), pp. 623-640 (pp. 635-636).

⁴² ‘Prospectus’, *Anti-Jacobin*, p. 6.

⁴³ See Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the ‘Edinburgh’: 1788-1802* (London: Methuen & Co, 1978), p. 30; *Anti-Jacobin*, 2 (9 July 1798), p. 615.

The *Edinburgh's* New Methodology

The *Edinburgh Review*, then, emerged in a climate in which periodical writing was figured as politically and socially suspect. As Ina Ferris puts it, the practice of reviewing ‘had lost caste. The [R]eviews generally had been moved out of the literary into the commercial sphere, which stood in antithetical relation to it in the culture.’⁴⁴ The bright, ambitious young men who formed the *Edinburgh's* initial circle of contributors were keen to avoid being seen as either tradesmen or subversives. Francis Jeffrey, Francis Horner and Henry Brougham had trained as lawyers and Sydney Smith, the editor of the first number, was a clergyman. They all knew the social advantages granted by respectable professional identities, and a key element in the *Edinburgh's* success was its working to establish the critic as a professional role – the skilled arbiter of the literary realm, a writer at the very least the equal of the poet or the historian, and decidedly superior to the novelist. This is made explicit in the first issue, in which economic articles by Jeffrey and Horner stress the regulatory professional character of the periodical, its ability to ‘influence the flow of other commodities within the marketplace of ideas’ and its central role in ‘constitut[ing] a culture of knowledge.’⁴⁵

Both quarterlies made widely-accepted claims for privileged regulatory positions based on the connections, respectability and integrity of their contributors. Hazlitt wrote of the *Edinburgh Review* that ‘the pre-eminence it claims is from an acknowledged superiority of talent and information, and literary attainment’.⁴⁶ Explaining the value of the *Quarterly* to the American writer John Bristed, Murray also drew on the discourse of acknowledged talent, although his formulation was more socially inflected: ‘the writers are all gentlemen of the first rank & talents & indeed nothing but the greatest ~~talent~~ ability will enable a man to write a review

⁴⁴ Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 20.

⁴⁵ Schoenfield, p. 73.

⁴⁶ Hazlitt, ‘Mr Jeffrey’, XI, 128.

which is to compress the information of a folio in the compass of a few pages & to render them interesting.⁴⁷ Both these formulations posit quarterly reviewers as acknowledged betters in terms of abilities and moral probity. Quarterly critics were in this respect pioneers in the literary field in asserting as a group the ‘control of intangible expertise’ that Penelope Corfield has pegged as being crucial to the formation of a powerful professional identity.⁴⁸

In part, as I will discuss, the quarterly cliques established their superiority through enacting rhetorical triumphs over the works they examined. However, they also employed other strategies, as Scott highlighted when advising Gifford on the *Quarterly*:

The extensive reputation and circulation of the *Edinburgh Review* is chiefly owing to two circumstances. First that it is entirely uninfluenced by the Booksellers who have contrived to make most of the other reviews mere vehicles for advertising & puffing off their own publications or running down those of their rivals. Secondly the very handsome recompence which the Editor not only holds forth to his regular assistants but actually forces on those whose rank & fortune make it a matter of indifference to them.⁴⁹

The circumstances Scott describes here allowed the *Edinburgh* to place its opinions as superior in terms both of financial value and of being disinterested, although as I stressed earlier this appearance of disinterest was in many ways an elaborate textual illusion. The *Edinburgh* began by paying its contributors ten guineas per sheet, more than triple the three-guinea rate which had previously been considered respectable.⁵⁰ Its conductors raised this rate to fifteen guineas in 1808 and then twenty-five in 1812. Key contributors were even better remunerated. As editor Jeffrey earned £300 in the early years of the Review, but in 1809 he negotiated a

⁴⁷ John Murray to John Bristed, 8 June 1810, from John Murray Letter Book, March 1803-11 September 1823, NLS Ms.41908, fols. 148^v-149^v (fol. 149^v).

⁴⁸ Penelope J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 18.

⁴⁹ Scott to Gifford, 25 October 1808, in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, II, 102-103.

⁵⁰ See my discussion of Southey’s early career in the second section of the previous chapter.

share of the profits for the original contributors which saw him earning over £3000 a year by the 1820s.⁵¹ The *Quarterly* endeavoured to offer similar rates-per-sheet from the outset and paid key contributors, like Southey, considerably more. The *Edinburgh's* other major innovation, as Scott notes, was the provision of a fee to everyone who wrote, regardless of their wealth, status or objections. This neatly sidestepped the stigma of paid employment for contributors who felt that they should be above such things while also raising the status of the Review and reviewers by attracting exalted contributors. Its high rates of pay also meant that when it employed the discourse of professionals censuring amateurs, this was often grounded in the economic realities. Conducting a periodical on the *Edinburgh's* model was expensive and only sustainable with a large circulation – until it was matched by the *Quarterly* the *Edinburgh* was by far the highest-paying periodical venue, able to cherry-pick contributors. The later normalisation of such high rates of pay had enormous consequences for writers; while it took a couple of decades before there was enough demand to sustain a reasonable number of high-paying magazines, the widespread adoption of *Edinburgh*-like remuneration models by the publications founded in the late 1810s and the 1820s ushered in a period where a substantial number of writers could finally earn a living wage from the pen.

The *Edinburgh's* recruiting, promotion and payroll strategies, then, all helped to recast the critic as a well-paid and respectable professional rather than a poor hireling or diffident amateur. This marked a decisive break from earlier journals. Clifford Siskin describes it as ‘the first fully *professional* review’, ‘doubly exclusive’ in its contributors and content.⁵² Klancher writes that ‘public knowledge of ample payments to contributors signalled the distancing of the audience. No longer a society of readers and writers, the journal represented itself as an institution blending writer, editor and publisher in what could only appear to be an essentially authorless text.’⁵³ I would modify this by noting that while the quarterlies affected authorlessness, the social cachet of their known contributors was an advantageous

⁵¹ Figures given in William Christie, *The Edinburgh Review in the Literary Culture of Romantic Britain: Mammoth and Megalonyx* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), pp. 35-36.

⁵² Siskin, p. 224.

⁵³ Klancher, p. 51.

selling point. Group voices allowed individual contributors deniability and let the quarterlies' editors channel multiple intelligences into a united front, but the fact that it was known that many of those who contributed were influential gentleman bolstered their rhetorical authority. While Byron suspected (wrongly) that Jeffrey was his Scotch reviewer, his counterblast took in a large group. 'Athenian Aberdeen', 'HERBERT', 'Smug SYDNEY', 'classic HALLAM', 'SCOTT', 'paltry PILLANS', 'blundering BROUGHAM' and 'gay Thalia's luckless votary, LAMBE' – even satirically configured, the size of this company bespeaks a considerable public knowledge of the figures behind the *Edinburgh*, their own reputations reinforced by and reinforcing its critiques.⁵⁴

The *Edinburgh* also made major changes to what comprised the content of the printed Review. Its convenors declared in the advertisement to the first issue that they would 'confine their notice, in a very great degree, to works that have either attained, or deserve, a certain portion of celebrity.'⁵⁵ This argument justified the *Edinburgh's* omissions and performed the clever rhetorical trick of implicitly dismissing the works they chose not to review as uninteresting and unworthy. By moving away from the encyclopaedic model, the *Edinburgh* gave itself room to define a range of disciplines it considered important, chief among them 'the specialisms for which Scottish universities were famous, especially the natural sciences, moral philosophy and political economy.'⁵⁶ Political works were also prominently reviewed – the *Edinburgh* would review quite flimsy pamphlets if doing so afforded an opportunity to influence public opinion. Interestingly, the *Edinburgh's* coverage of poetry and novels was comparatively sparse – in the order it inculcated, imaginative writings occupied a slightly dubious position, as its often critical reviews attest. The *Quarterly*, perhaps in opposition to the *Edinburgh's* scholarly foci, was keener to engage with literature, although its coverage could be equally scathing.

⁵⁴ Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, lines 509, 510, 512, 513, 514, 515, 524 and 516, in *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980-93), I, 245.

⁵⁵ 'Advertisement', *Edinburgh Review*, 1 (October 1802), pp. [2-3] (p. [2]).

⁵⁶ Butler, p. 131.

As Ina Ferris has pointed out, a key point in the *Edinburgh's* declared policy is 'the *social* ground ("celebrity" – either attained or deserved) of the selection. The interest of the early *Edinburgh* reviewers [...] explicitly lay less in what was being written than in what was—or should be—read.'⁵⁷ The *Edinburgh* established itself as a publication noticing all important writers but also one that would adjudicate the tastes of the reading public and the performances of authors. For the *Edinburgh* books were inevitably social and politicised objects, and it was through interrogating the ways that they represented their authors' views and the ways that educated and uneducated readers approached them that its critics sought to shape proper literature and – by extension – contemporary society and politics.

Within individual reviews, the *Edinburgh's* critics enacted a major shift in the balance between description and criticism. As Derek Roper puts it, 'the important feature of most articles was opinion, usually aggressively and often voluminously stated, and sometimes only slenderly connected with the work in hand.'⁵⁸ The *Edinburgh's* critics allowed works less space to speak for themselves and spent a lot more time interpreting and judging their authors. This can be clearly seen by comparing Jeffrey's two reviews of Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801). In the first issue of the *Edinburgh* Jeffrey used Southey as an excuse to take on the whole field of modern poetry, positioning the *Edinburgh* with respect to radicalism, aesthetics and the Lake Poets, a school he wrote into being to oppose. As William Christie has it, 'The *Edinburgh* article has all the hallmarks of an opening assault in a self-conscious campaign.'⁵⁹ Jeffrey's concurrent review in the *Monthly*, by contrast, followed the old style, moving swiftly into plot summary, extract and commentary. He concluded the *Monthly* review with the following relatively humble opinions:

On the whole, we conceive that this work contains more and ample proofs of the author's genius and capacity for poetical impressions, than any of his

⁵⁷ Ferris, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Roper, p. 45.

⁵⁹ Christie, p. 61.

former publications : but at the same time, we are sorry to observe that it affords no indications of his advancement towards a more correct taste or more manly style of composition. Together with much that must please readers of every description, it contains not a little that will offend those whose suffrages Mr. Southey should be most ambitious of securing.⁶⁰

The measured style Jeffrey assumes here affects to offer an impartial, balanced assessment, praising Southey's improvements while lightly rebuking his poetry for displaying faulty taste and a dubious style. Jeffrey ascribes the failures he detects principally to Southey's composition – Southey himself is advised to write more carefully in future, but the review clearly holds out the prospect of his progressing to produce better work.

By contrast, the final paragraph of the *Edinburgh* review focuses squarely on Southey himself. His errors are explicitly depicted as errors of character, not style, and are attributed to his entanglement with the suspicious new school Jeffrey castigates:

All the productions of this author, it appears to us, bear very distinctly the impression of an amiable mind, a cultivated fancy, and a perverted taste [...] He is often puerile, diffuse, and artificial, and seems to have but little acquaintance with those chaster and severer graces, by whom the epic muse would be most suitably attired. His faults are always aggravated, and often created, by his partiality for the peculiar manner of that new school of poetry, of which he is a faithful disciple, and to the glory of which he has sacrificed greater talents and acquisitions, than can be boasted by any of his associates.⁶¹

The first sentence here is a classic Jeffrey sting, two compliments undercut by a concluding condemnation. Southey's abilities are made to seem childish and poorly developed, his poetry denied the chasteness and severity which characterise Jeffrey's

⁶⁰ [Francis Jeffrey], 'Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer*', *Monthly Review*, 2nd series, 39 (November 1802), pp. 240-51 (p. 251).

⁶¹ [Jeffrey], 'Southey's *Thalaba*', *Edinburgh Review*, p. 83.

own prose, placing Southey as distinctly inferior to the judge who can detect his errors and do what he cannot. Where the *Monthly* describes the work, the *Edinburgh* censures the man, making sweeping statements of truth in a self-consciously worked and controversial style which performed the authority the reviewers hoped to assert. While the *Edinburgh's* reviewers were accepted by their contemporaries as experts, in fact their expertise was often more rhetorical than technical; as Christie has argued, 'The Review attests to their argumentative competence in an important range of areas, but it is precisely this, and not an expertise in a specific area, that represents their critical strength.'⁶² It was the excellent, controversy-courting writing rather than specialist wisdom which bought readers flocking to the *Edinburgh*.

The reading nation was more than willing to accept the *Edinburgh's* exciting new reviewing model and validate its claims to superiority. The longstanding Reviews 'continued to attract good contributors and print good articles [...] But in the early nineteenth century literature was a growth market, and the older reviews did not take their share of the growth.'⁶³ Scott wrote in 1808 that prior to the *Edinburgh* Reviews 'gave a dawdling, maudlin sort of applause to everything that reached even mediocrity. The Edinburgh folks squeezed into their sauce plenty of acid, and were popular from novelty as well as from merit.'⁶⁴ The *Edinburgh* thus succeeded in overwriting older reviewing models and inaugurating a new era of powerful, respected critics well aware of the advantages they could accrue through judicious censure.

Disciplining Authors and Readers

As previous chapters have intimated, both quarterlies were generally morally and aesthetically conservative when it came to literature, and they were not slow to dominate, reframe and censure those authors of whose works they did not approve.

⁶² Christie, pp. 36-37.

⁶³ Roper, p. 27.

⁶⁴ Walter Scott to George Ellis, 18 Nov 1808, in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, II, 128.

Reviewing Thomas Campbell's *Gertrude of Wyoming* in the *Quarterly's* second issue, Scott helpfully lays out the some of the modes by which such gleeful reframings were accomplished:

According to the modern canons of criticism, the Reviewer is expected to shew his immense superiority to the Author reviewed, and at the same time to relieve the tediousness of narration by turning the epic, dramatic, moral story before him into quaint and lively burlesque. We had accordingly prepared materials for caricaturing Gertrude of Wyoming, in which the irresistible Spanish pantaloons of her lover were not forgotten, Albert was regularly distinguished as old Jonathan, the provincial troops were called Yankie-doodles, and the sombre character of the Oneyda chief was relieved by various sly allusions to 'blankets, strouds, stinkubus, and wampum.' And having thus clearly demonstrated to Mr. Campbell and to the reader that the whole effect of his poem was as completely at our mercy as the house which a child has painfully built with a pack of cards, we proposed to pat him on the head with a few slight compliments on the ingenuity of his puny architecture, and dismiss him with a sugar-plum as a very promising child indeed.⁶⁵

Scott conjures this practice mainly in order to make a case for the new *Quarterly* against the arrogant *Edinburgh*, stating that the beauty of Campbell's work prevented him from following through on this standard spoofing strategy. Despite Scott's disavowal, however, the *Quarterly* was generally just as quick as the *Edinburgh* to assert its authority over the works it reviewed and employ them for its own purposes, especially when, as in this review, they provided an opportunity to snub its rival. In the 1810s particularly, reviewers were combatants, their prize cultural capital that could be parlayed into social and political influence. Appreciations in such an environment were always qualified.

Scott was correct in asserting that even the much-admired Campbell could not wholly escape correction at the *Edinburgh's* hands. While Jeffrey's review is mainly appreciative, he takes time to note that 'the narrative is extremely obscure

⁶⁵ [Walter Scott], 'Gertrude of Wyoming', *Quarterly Review* 1 (May 1809), pp. 241-58 (p. 254).

and imperfect’ and asserts that the poem’s greatest fault ‘is the occasional constraint and obscurity of the diction, proceeding apparently from too laborious an effort at emphasis or condensation.’⁶⁶ By pointing out how far Campbell falls short of a notional perfect poem, Jeffrey plays up his own ability to conceive of better works, building his own authority by limiting Campbell’s. Jeffrey’s final page pushes this further by positing Campbell as a man bedevilled by doubt: ‘It seems to us, as if the natural force and boldness of his ideas were habitually checked by a certain fastidious timidity, and an anxiety about the minor graces of correct and chastened composition.’⁶⁷ Campbell is thus depicted as a man in need of the *Edinburgh’s* praise – as well as correcting the work, Jeffrey suggests that he might also correct Campbell’s character:

We wish any praises or exhortations of ours had the power to give him confidence in his own great talents; and hope earnestly, that he will now meet with such encouragement, as may set him above all restraints that proceed from apprehension, and induce him to give free scope to that genius, of which we are persuaded that the world has hitherto seen rather the grace than the richness.⁶⁸

The *Edinburgh* here is a necessary catalyst for perfect poetry, its applause a prerequisite for greatness. Even when reviewing those it acclaimed, then, the *Edinburgh* reserved the highest position for itself.

The *Edinburgh’s* elitist credentials were asserted from its first issue. As Andrea Bradley writes, ‘because it require[d] a sure footing for the establishment of its position as a critical center, the periodical reveals a near obsession with authority of all kinds – aesthetic, financial, social, legal, but above all cultural authority.’⁶⁹

⁶⁶ [Francis Jeffrey], ‘Campbell’s *Gertrude of Wyoming*’, *Edinburgh Review*, 14 (April 1809), pp. 1-19 (p. 16).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Andrea Bradley, ‘Correcting Mrs Opie’s Powers: The *Edinburgh Review* of Amelia Opie’s Poems (1802)’ in Kim Wheatley (ed.), *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 41-61 (p. 55).

This can be demonstrated by returning to Jeffrey's review of Southey's *Thalaba*, in which he uses Wordsworth's attempts to claim for poetry the language of common men to position his Review with respect to valuing class discourses. The *Edinburgh* may have been published liveried in the buff and blue of Charles James Fox, but it was not and could not afford to be perceived as being on the side of revolution. As Robert Miles has it, 'Though a liberal, Jeffrey, as a Whig, detested the levelling impulse of the Jacobins; and he detected Jacobinism in poems such as "The Thorn" because they implicitly endorsed a "democratic subject".'⁷⁰ Jeffrey refuted Wordsworth's troubling claims for ordinary language by arguing that social classes fundamentally differ in the ways that they feel: 'The love, or grief, or indignation of an enlightened and refined character, is not only expressed in a different language, but is itself a different emotion from the love, or grief, or anger of a clown, a tradesman, or a market-wench. The things themselves are radically and obviously distinct'.⁷¹ Wordsworth's practice is thus in Jeffrey's formulation both an imposition on the lower classes and a pointless constraint. For Jeffrey, poetry is essentially the preserve of the cultured men to whom he principally addresses himself. If others wish to write it, they must acquire for themselves the kind of discerning language Jeffrey himself sells: 'In serious poetry, a man of the middling or lower orders *must necessarily* lay aside a great deal of his ordinary language ; he must avoid errors in grammar and orthography ; and steer clear of the cant of particular professions, and of every impropriety that is ludicrous or disgusting : nay, he must speak in good verse, and observe all the graces in prosody and collocation.'⁷² Jeffrey's man must do this so as not to threaten the existing class order, but also in order to be subject to the type of criticism that Jeffrey hopes to found his career on. The *Edinburgh* sought to build its hegemony by monopolising and limiting the language of cultural discourse. Wordsworth and Southey represented direct threats to this scheme and therefore had to be rhetorically shut out. To accomplish this Jeffrey rhetorically leagued the Lakers with radical demagogues while positioning the *Edinburgh* carefully on the middle ground, remarking that 'Wealth is just as valid an excuse for one class of vices, as indigence is for the

⁷⁰ Robert Miles, *Romantic Misfits* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 82.

⁷¹ [Jeffrey], 'Southey's *Thalaba*', *Edinburgh Review*, p. 66.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

other.⁷³ He thus courted well-to-do book buyers while assuring them of the *Edinburgh's* propensity to correct vice and asserting his own ability to make such judgements. By rejecting those unable to afford expensive quarterlies and those depicted as perversely championing their language and rights, the *Edinburgh* defined the boundaries of the cultural realm over which it staked its claim.

I touched on Jeffrey's slashing review of Thomas Moore's 1806 volume in the previous chapter, but wish now to examine in detail the ways that Jeffrey conjures Moore as a threat in order to emphasise the *Edinburgh's* importance. The review opens with a long sentence building Moore up in the manner of a gothic villain, ringingly concluding that he is 'the most poetical of those who, in our times, have devoted their talents to the propagation of immorality.'⁷⁴ After damning Moore's book, Jeffrey asserts that the *Edinburgh* could 'trample it down by one short movement of contempt and indignation' but writes that he will prolong his analysis as he is aware that Moore is 'abetted by patrons who are entitled to a more respectful remonstrance, and by admirers who may require a more extended exploitation of their dangers'.⁷⁵ By revealing that he knows of Moore's many connections, he hints at access he denies to his readers and at the *Edinburgh's* central but not unaccountable place in public discourse. He tempts his readers to read on by teasing the sensational nature of Moore's work and anticipating the enjoyment which will ensue from seeing it contained and neutralised.

After this initial lambasting, Jeffrey calms briefly to consider who exactly is threatened by the corruption he accuses Moore of wishing to unleash. He is quick to assert that 'our sex, we are afraid, is seldom so pure as to leave them much to learn from publications of this description.'⁷⁶ The 'our' here could be read as the collective masculine voice of the *Edinburgh*, but could also be an 'our' uniting the reviewer with male readers through a kind of experience rhetorically bemoaned but actually celebrated inasmuch as it places those who have it beyond the reach of

⁷³ [Jeffrey], 'Southey's *Thalaba*', p. 72.

⁷⁴ [Francis Jeffrey], 'Moore's *Poems*', *Edinburgh Review*, 8 (July 1806), pp. 456-65 (p. 456).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

Moore's corrupting schemes. This is by contrast with fragile women, who Jeffrey simultaneously sublimates and belittles:

If they should ever cease to be the pure, the delicate, and timid creatures that they are now – if they should cease to overawe profligacy, and to win and to shame men into decency, fidelity, and love of unfulfilled virtue – it is easy to see that this influence, which has hitherto been exerted to strengthen and refine our society, will operate entirely to its corruption and debasement ; that domestic happiness and private honour will be extinguished, and public spirit and national industry most probably annihilated along with them.⁷⁷

The revolution-evoking collapse Jeffrey envisages if women were to be so foolish as to read Thomas Moore indicates his lack of trust in feminine probity and critical power. In Jeffrey the idea of writing as a dangerous technology lives on, but the dangers are restricted to genders and classes depicted as weak and credulous. For cultured male *Edinburgh* readers, reading Moore is unproblematic as they will be equipped to recognise his perversity, or at worst will be restrained by their virtuous womenfolk.

Jeffrey's envisioning women as intellectually vacuous, easily moved to excess and in perpetual need of male guardianship has obvious consequences for his appreciations of female writers. By denying women self-control, Jeffrey and others of his opinion rhetorically stripped them of true agency, denying that they could produce works on the rational, engaged and moral lines that the *Edinburgh* advocated. A key part of the *Edinburgh*'s constructing a safe reading nation was restricting that nation's reading to books written by those of whom it approved. Women were rarely among these writers, and when it deigned to review their works, it was, in Stuart Curran's words, 'uniformly supercilious and virtually dismissive.'⁷⁸ Reviewers generally granted positive assessments to women's writing only when it

⁷⁷ [Jeffrey], 'Moore's *Poems*', p. 460.

⁷⁸ Stuart Curran, 'Woman and the *Edinburgh Review*' in Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu (eds.), *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 195.

was located in clearly defined and denigrated genres. For example, Thomas Brown's review of Amelia Opie in the *Edinburgh's* first issue exhorts her to 'constrain her poetry to appropriate registers'; it 'praises Opie's poems of sentiment but faults her pieces aiming at higher modes of dignity.'⁷⁹ The attitudes of the exclusively male cliques who controlled the quarterlies were thus a major bar to women achieving literary recognition, placing them low in the hierarchies developed in their increasingly professionalised and stratified criticism.

Jeffrey's Moore review also makes large claims for the importance of writing. He argues that in contemporary Britain 'all parts of the mass, act and react upon each other with a powerful and unintermitted agency ; and if the head be once infected, the corruption will spread irresistibly through the whole body.'⁸⁰ Ideas expressed in costly literary works will by this logic nevertheless circulate when they are repeated in periodical publications and newspapers and when those lower down in society imitate the higher classes. Aware that the *Edinburgh* could potentially be implicated in transmitting infections from the head of the body politic to the rest, Jeffrey reassures readers of his Moore review by employing the rhetoric of his other profession and asserting that he will 'put the law in force against this delinquent, since he has not only indicated a disposition to do mischief, but seems unfortunately to have found an opportunity.'⁸¹ Kim Wheatley has described such formulations as a form of period-specific paranoid politics in which 'both Tory and Whig reviewers translate their intense partisanship into a vocabulary of moral absolutism' and 'pin the blame for actual or potential social unrest on one person or a small band of conspirators'.⁸² The idea of the Review protecting society against plotters was hugely useful in establishing reviewers' importance. If publications such as Moore's are powerful enough to do vast harm, then such writings are obviously worthy of the depth of scrutiny the quarterlies brought to them. If the power of writing was regularly abused, the quarterlies were doubly valuable as guardians against

⁷⁹ Bradley, pp. 57, 45.

⁸⁰ [Jeffrey], 'Moore's *Poems*', p. 460.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Kim Wheatley, *Shelley and his Readers: Beyond Paranoid Politics* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 2.

immorality and social disorder. Such formulations are also naturally dramatic and engaging; as Wheatley puts it, ‘persecution is fun!’⁸³ By censuring fervidly, Jeffrey entertains his readers into acknowledging his importance as a doughty analyst of culture and a moral guide to literature. The fact that a wide base of readers accepted such claims made the quarterlies’ critiques exceptionally potent, as Moore and others found to their cost.

While Jeffrey’s review of Moore at least allows him a little talent, all that James Montgomery is permitted is ‘the merit of smooth versification, blameless morality, and a sort of sickly affectation of delicacy and fine feelings, which is apt to impose on the amiable part of the young and illiterate.’⁸⁴ He is reviewed explicitly to counteract his popularity, Jeffrey seeking to pass off his latest work as a fad by asserting that ‘in less than three years nobody will know the name of the Wanderer of Switzerland’.⁸⁵ The certainty of Montgomery’s eclipse is attributed to his bad readers – ‘young, half-educated women, sickly tradesmen, and enamoured apprentices’.⁸⁶ Jeffrey’s auditors are invited to sneer at lower-class book-lovers, an underprivileged and sickly mass unable to view critically as the *Edinburgh* does. Derogatory references to lower publics continue in the disapproving comments that adorn the article’s quotations, which repeatedly associate Montgomery’s verse with the excesses of popular theatre. Part of *The Wanderer of Switzerland* ‘appears to us like the singing of a bad pantomime.’ Of Montgomery’s style, Jeffrey writes that ‘Its chief ornaments are ejaculations and points of admiration ; and, indeed, we must do Mr Montgomery the justice to say, that he is on no occasion sparing of his ohs and ahs.’ One of his verses is described as being ‘as tawdry and vile as the tarnished finery of a strolling actress.’⁸⁷ Just as the classes he writes for are figured as stupid and sickly, so is Montgomery himself, the corruptions in his verse being ascribed to

⁸³ Wheatley, p. 4.

⁸⁴ [Francis Jeffrey], ‘Montgomery’s *Poems*’, *Edinburgh Review*, 9 (January 1807), pp. 347-54 (p. 347).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 349, 351, 352.

corruptions in his consciousness. Jeffrey employs a particularly insulting analogy to drive this home:

Medical writers inform us, that spasms and convulsions are usually produced by debility ; and we have generally observed, that the more feeble a writer's genius is, the more violent and terrific are the distortions into which he throws himself. There is a certain cold extravagance, which is symptomatic of extreme dullness ; and wild metaphors and startling personifications indicate the natural sterility of the mind which has been forced to bear them. This volume abounds with these sallies of desperate impotence.⁸⁸

Unmanned, unwell, undone and soon to be unread, Montgomery is systematically destroyed for the enjoyment of the *Edinburgh's* audience. This review is very facile and very funny but also deeply cruel. It shows the unpleasant side of the *Edinburgh's* aggregated authority – its willingness to mercilessly bully innocuous authors to entertain its readers, boost its circulation and confirm its dominion. Unsurprisingly, this horrible review was not accepted with equanimity by its unfortunate subject. Montgomery wrote to a friend shortly after its publication that

All that I had suffered from political persecution and personal animosity in the former part of my life seemed manly and generous opposition in comparison with the cowardly yet audacious malignity of this critic, who took advantage of the eminence on which he was placed beyond the reach of retaliation, to curse me like Shimei ; to cast stones and dirt at me, because he knew I must from necessity be as passive as David : an injured and insulted author replying to the sarcasms of his unjust judge being as impotent as the trodden worm that turns to the foot that crushes it, but can do no more.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ [Jeffrey], 'Montgomery's *Poems*', p. 349.

⁸⁹ James Montgomery to Daniel Parken, 16 April 1807, as quoted in John Holland and James Everett, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of James Montgomery*, 7 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854-1856), II, 142-43.

Montgomery's helplessness comes through strongly here – in the face of the *Edinburgh's* metropolitan authority, his own provincial networks are powerless to salve his reputation. The knowledge that he had no venue in which to respond did not preclude him from dwelling on it, however. His biographers recorded that the margins of his copy of the review were packed with shorthand notes; when they questioned him, Montgomery admitted that these constituted his 'unpublished defence.'⁹⁰ For months after the review's publication, Montgomery's letters show that his 'escape with barely my life in my hand from the tomahawks of the northern banditti' remained a burden on his mind. 'All the kindness of my friends has been exerted to soothe me for the malice of one cowardly enemy who spat in my face in the dark,' he wrote, 'and yet I feel the venom of his spittle still on my cheek, that burns at the recollection of the indignity.'⁹¹ The metaphor here actualises the livid mark made on Montgomery's reputation, his constantly recalling it a sign of its psychological impact.

The review was considered extreme even by the *Edinburgh's* standards, and consequently Montgomery received sympathy, both covertly and in print. Walter Scott privately communicated his disapprobation and Lucy Aikin published supportive lines in her father's *Athenaeum*, beginning 'DROOP not sweet bard !'⁹² While this poem was doubtless well-intentioned, one wonders whether Montgomery drew much comfort from it, as for all its encouraging rhetoric Aikin's verse makes it clear that the expected reaction to a ferocious *Edinburgh* review was to 'droop', asserts that Montgomery's bays had been 'violated' and implies that the review had rendered him pitiable. By this point, five years into its run, the *Edinburgh's* overbearing authority was a cultural truism.

Perhaps the most notable defences of Montgomery were Southey's reviews in the *Quarterly*. Southey was a partisan of Montgomery's, writing to John Murray that he had refused to write for the *Edinburgh* 'upon the ground, among others, of the cruel manner of criticism which Jeffery had adopted' and stating that

⁹⁰ Holland and Everett, II, 137.

⁹¹ James Montgomery to Daniel Parken, 28 May 1807, from Holland and Everett, II, 149.

⁹² Lucy Aikin, 'To Mr. Montgomery', *Athenaeum*, 1 (April 1807), pp. 399-400 (p. 339).

Montgomery's case was 'peculiarly cruel and unjust.' Reviewing Montgomery in the *Quarterly* represented 'the opportunity of doing justice to one I consider as undoubtedly a man of genius'.⁹³ His review, though, is overshadowed throughout by Jeffrey's. Even its positive assertions implicitly or explicitly echo Jeffrey's accusations. Southey depicts Montgomery as an independent man with 'no friends among the oligarchs of literature' who was welcomed 'with the applause he deserved' only to be capriciously cast down when 'the master of the new school of criticism thought [it] proper to crush the rising poet.'⁹⁴ To demonstrate this crushing he quotes Jeffrey at considerable length, propagating the *Edinburgh's* opinion even as he attempts to revoke it. This effect is exacerbated as Southey is unable or unwilling to offer stringent arguments on Montgomery's behalf. He spends a considerable time admitting that Montgomery's poetry is often flawed, at one point decrying as Jeffrey had done previously 'the tinsel and tawdry with which our modern poetry has so long abounded'.⁹⁵ He attempts to refute the *Edinburgh* by claiming originality and strength for Montgomery – 'a mind overflowing with feelings, but in the highest degree pure and pious' – and through quoting extensively and respectfully, letting Montgomery's verse speak for itself.⁹⁶ His final pages evoke one very specific example of Montgomery's beneficial effects, describing of 'a female whom sickness had reconciled to the notes of sorrow' finding 'consolation and delight' in Montgomery's poems, which 'beguiled the weary hours of sickness and pain, and strewed her path to the grave with flowers.'⁹⁷ This pathetic example smacks of special pleading in a way Jeffrey's judicial style rarely does. By portraying readers engaging with Montgomery, Southey attempted to counteract the *Edinburgh*, but his constant references to its mockery reveal that its effects remained pervasive among tastemakers. In his subsequent review of *The World Before the Flood*, Southey notes that Montgomery's preface has him coming before the public

⁹³ Robert Southey to John Murray, 12 August 1810, in Letters from Southey 1808-1812, NLS Ms.42550.

⁹⁴ [Robert Southey], 'Montgomery's *Poems*', *Quarterly Review*, 6 (December 1811), pp. 405-19 (p. 412).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

with ‘many apprehensions, and with small hopes.’⁹⁸ Southey is keen to reassure Montgomery and the *Quarterly*’s readers that ‘there is no reason for this distrust’, but it is evident that despite his ongoing popular success, Montgomery’s rejection by the *Edinburgh* continued to sting.

The Quarterlies and Canonical Romanticism

Montgomery, however, was luckier than some of the canonical Romantics. His poetry was formally approachable and, as Jeffrey disapprovingly implied, safely in tune with the public taste. Despite being unfashionable in the *Edinburgh*’s cultural circles, Montgomery succeeded in taking his works to a wide and appreciative readership. By comparison, the innovations for which the canonical Romantics are now treasured rendered them strange to contemporary readers. Had the quarterlies been sensitive to their particular merits, they might have served as bridges between these poets and the public. However, the merits of writers’ works were not the sole, or even the primary, cause for quarterly appreciation. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey were all victims of the *Edinburgh*’s ire, as was Byron initially. Shelley was wholly excluded from its pages while he lived, although Jeffrey made some perceptive if tardy remarks on John Keats in the August 1820 issue. The *Quarterly*, founded after the Lake Poets swung towards conservatism, was kinder to the older generation, especially the heavily-involved Southey, although it continued to be somewhat frustrated by their ways of writing. Discussing Wordsworth’s defence of his methods in 1815, it huffed that ‘if he is not now or should not be hereafter, a favourite with the public, he can have no one to blame but himself.’⁹⁹ Shelley and Keats, though, were both subject to damaging reviews, the *Quarterly* turning the qualities of their works against them to ensure that its political opponents would acquire few converts from among its readers.

⁹⁸ [Robert Southey], ‘Montgomery’s *World before the Flood*’, *Quarterly Review*, 11 (April 1814), pp. 78-87 (p. 87).

⁹⁹ [William Rowe Lyall?], ‘Wordsworth’s *White Doe* [and *Poems*]’, *Quarterly Review*, 14 (October 1815), pp. 201-25 (p. 225).

In the *Quarterly's* April 1819 issue John Taylor Coleridge (nephew of the (now) more famous Samuel) ostensibly reviewed *Laon and Cythna* and its later, partly expurgated, version, *The Revolt of Islam*. In fact, though, he focused for the most part on Shelley himself, condemning and dismissing the poetry at the outset: 'it has not much ribaldry or voluptuousness for prurient imaginations, and no personal scandal for the malicious ; and even those on whom it might be expected to act most dangerously by its semblance of enthusiasm, will have stout hearts to proceed beyond the first canto.'¹⁰⁰ He thus stigmatised the poem as something that the *Quarterly's* readers would find unrewarding, allowing him to disregard its overall structure and instead quote and reconfigure select parts to tell a gripping story of Shelley's corruption. The poem is in effect rewritten as a work of subversive yet incoherent political philosophy from which Coleridge creates a damning portrait of Shelley as an inept but odious gothic seducer – 'a young and inexperienced man, imperfectly educated, irregular in his application, and shamefully dissolute in his conduct.'¹⁰¹ Coleridge also makes glowering references to Shelley's expulsion from Oxford and his association with William Godwin.¹⁰² Towards the end of the review he affects to hold out a hand to Shelley, hoping that he might perhaps improve himself by turning to the Bible. However, this illusion of forgiveness is shattered in a tailpiece which asserts that after completing the original review Coleridge received *Rosalind and Helen*, a work 'less interesting, less vigorous and chaste in language, less harmonious in versification, and less pure in thought; more rambling and diffuse, more palpably and consciously sophistical, more offensive and vulgar, more unintelligible.'¹⁰³ In light of this new outrage Coleridge forswears his earlier comments about the possibility of Shelley's redemption. As if *Rosalind and Helen's* badness presents an pretext for an less circuitous attack, Coleridge makes it explicit that he has privileged information about Shelley's personal depravity: 'if we might withdraw the veil of private life, and tell what we *now* know about him, it would be

¹⁰⁰ [John Taylor Coleridge], 'Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*', *Quarterly Review*, 21 (April 1819), pp. 460-71 (pp. 462-63).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 468.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

indeed a disgusting picture that we should exhibit.’¹⁰⁴ The review enacts a process of consideration, censure, attempted leniency and finally total condemnation. By its end Shelley is rhetorically concluded and silenced; likened to the pursuers of Moses ‘he sinks ‘like lead’ to the bottom.’

Although Coleridge rejects and abhors Shelley, there is at least in his review some effort to engage with his subject’s point of view. Shelley’s aristocratic background meant that he had to be dismissed carefully, shown to be a reprobate ‘in spite of the manifest advantages of education and society which his work displays’, as the *Monthly Review* put it.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, ‘Cockney’ Keats could be unhesitatingly trashed, as he was in John Wilson Croker’s infamous review of *Endymion*. Croker begins by explicitly stating that he had not read three cantos of the poem because the single canto he had ‘painfully toiled’ through made absolutely no sense to him.¹⁰⁶ Within the first paragraph, reading Keats becomes a thankless task, his work a Sisyphean burden on its reviewer. For Croker, where his ‘prototype’ Hunt is presumptuous, Keats is downright irrational, pouring out verse with no regard for sense. He asserts that Keats composes by sound alone, creating poetry made of signs that fail to signify, writing without any regard for meaning:

He seems to us to write a line at random, and then he follows not the thought excited by this line, but that suggested by the *rhyme* with which it concludes. There is hardly a complete couplet inclosing a complete idea in the whole book. He wanders from one subject to another, from the association, not of ideas but of sounds, and the work is composed of hemistichs which, it is quite evident, have forced themselves upon the author by the mere force of the catchwords on which they turn.¹⁰⁷

Having asserted that Keats focuses only on the mechanisms of poetry, Croker then denies that he has any talent even for this, spending the remaining paragraphs of his

¹⁰⁴ [Coleridge], ‘Shelley’s *Revolt of Islam*’, p. 471.

¹⁰⁵ *Monthly Review*, 2nd series, 88 (March 1819), pp. 323-24 (p. 323).

¹⁰⁶ [John Wilson Croker], ‘Keats’s *Endymion*’, *Quarterly Review*, 19 (April 1818), pp. 204-08 (p. 204).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

review taking apart snippets of *Endymion* by attacking their grammar, metre and coinages. This attack on Keats is not the result of baffled frustration at his obscurity, but rather a conscious attempt to silence him and mock his mentor. By denying Keats meaning, the *Quarterly* buttressed its own.

It is debateable whether Keats' confidence was deeply dented by Croker's attack. He wrote to his brother and sister-in-law that 'Even as a Matter of present interest the attempt to crush me in the Quarterly has only brought me more notice.'¹⁰⁸ In the culture, though, the trope of his being a poet who was 'snuffed out by an Article' has considerable currency.¹⁰⁹ The responsibility for propagating this view lies in large part with Shelley and Byron. Shelley was particularly invested in Keats' fate, asserting in the preface to *Adonais* that the *Quarterly's* review 'produced the most violent effect on his susceptible mind; the agitation thus originated ended in the rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs; a rapid consumption ensued, and the succeeding acknowledgements from more candid critics of the true greatness of his powers were ineffectual to heal the wound thus wantonly inflicted.'¹¹⁰ It is interesting that Shelley targets the *Quarterly*, which had attacked his own work most ferociously, rather than *Blackwood's*, whose 'Cockney School' articles had seemingly troubled Keats more. As Duncan Wu records, 'Benjamin Bailey wrote that 'Keats attributed his approaching end to the poisonous pen of Lockhart', and Keats apparently told his friend Charles Brown 'If I die you must ruin Lockhart.'¹¹¹ It is perhaps not surprising, though, that Shelley blends his own agendas and travails with Keats'. In a letter to Marianne Hunt Shelley wrote that in encouraging Keats 'I am aware indeed in part [tha]t I am nourishing a rival who will

¹⁰⁸ *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), I, 394.

¹⁰⁹ Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto XI, line 480, in *Complete Poetical Works*, V, 483. See also the poetic responses to Keats' death analysed by Jeffrey C. Robinson in *Reception and Poetics in Keats: "My Ended Poet"* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

¹¹⁰ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Preface' to *Adonais*, from *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), p. 410.

¹¹¹ Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 256.

far surpass [me] and this is an additional motive & will be an added pleasure.’¹¹² For Shelley, Keats was an aspirational figure, a younger, purer version of himself. By celebrating Keats’ transcendent potential, Shelley sought to put them both beyond the purview of their reviewers – Keats explicitly, himself implicitly by association and through his ability to make visible a genius denied by the critics.

Refuting the *Quarterly*’s critical hierarchies is clearly part of Shelley’s intention in the *Adonais* preface:

As to *Endymion*, was it a poem, whatever might be its defects, to be treated contemptuously by those who had celebrated, with various degrees of complacency and panegyric, *Paris*, and *Woman*, and a *Syrian Tale*, and Mrs. Lefanu, and Mr. Barrett, and Mr. Howard Payne, and a long list of the illustrious obscure? Are these the men who in their venal good nature presumed to draw a parallel between the Reverend Mr. Milman and Lord Byron? What gnat did they strain at here, after having swallowed all those camels? Against what woman taken in adultery dares the foremost of these literary prostitutes to cast his opprobrious stone?¹¹³

In this passage Shelley opposes the *Quarterly* in its own style, depicting its reviewers as ignorant philistines who praise where no merit is to be found and slander without any care for their subjects. Just as reviews of Shelley placed him outside the realm of acceptable and accomplished literature, so Shelley casts down the popular works praised by his accusers, asserting that they could only be appreciated by the venal and complacent. However, Shelley’s attempt to position the *Quarterly* as petty is destabilised by his appropriating its own methods – even down to its religiously-inflected rhetoric – and his asserting its disastrous impact on Keats.

In attempting to topple the quarterly critic from his judge’s chair, Shelley railed alone against a powerful set of mutually reinforcing opponents, as the careers

¹¹² *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, 240.

¹¹³ Shelley, ‘Preface’ to *Adonais*, p. 410.

of the authors he derides prove. *Adonais* was privately printed at Pisa in an edition of 250 copies, although, unlike most of Shelley's works, it did sell well enough to justify a second edition. By contrast, Eaton Stannard Barrett's *Woman* was, according to Donald Reiman 'more popular during his lifetime than any single work by a major or secondary poet then living, including Scott and Byron' and 'reached a seventeenth London edition.'¹¹⁴ *Woman* is particularly interesting in that Barrett first published it in 1810, but, as he wrote in the preface to the heavily revised 1818 version, after 'the critics abused it' he came to find his original 'obscure, affected, and replete with all those errors which arise from an unformed and ambitious style.'¹¹⁵ The moral he drew from this was that 'we should listen with deference to those critics, whose judgement differs from our own.'¹¹⁶ He explicitly aligns his aesthetics with the *Quarterly's* expressed preferences; his reference to his old 'ambitious style' echoes a review of Henry Hart Milman by John Taylor Coleridge in which 'an ambitious style' is 'loosely defined to be an unnatural and artificial sustainment of the language and imagery, when neither the warmth of the author's mind prompts it, nor the elevation of his thoughts demands it.'¹¹⁷ The *Quarterly* scorned such lexical flourishes in favour of a clearer, more traditional poetics – 'simplicity in our sense is little other than synonymous with fitness.'¹¹⁸ Barrett thus assumed the style the Reviews advocated and took measures to make sure he was recognised for doing so. The *Quarterly's* positive notice found that his revised version of *Woman* 'evinced both talent and genius'; this effusive response was in part due to Barrett's having solicited the review from his friend J.T. Coleridge and submitted it himself.¹¹⁹ The poem's enormous sales indicate that the *Quarterly's*

¹¹⁴ Donald H. Reiman, 'Introduction' to Eaton Stannard Barrett, *Woman; Henry Schultze*, facsimile edition (London: Garland, 1979), p. xii.

¹¹⁵ Eaton Stannard Barrett, *Woman: a Poem* (London: Henry Colburn, 1818), p. 5, 6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ [John Taylor Coleridge], 'Milman's *Fazio* [and *Judicium Regale*], *Quarterly Review*, 15 (April 1816), pp. 69-85 (p. 70).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹¹⁹ [John Taylor Coleridge], 'Woman: a Poem', *Quarterly Review*, 19 (April 1818), pp. 246-50 (p. 250). For attribution, see Murray Archive letters quoted in Reiman and in John Cutmore (ed.), *Quarterly Review Archive, Romantic Circles*, <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/qr/index/37.html>> [accessed 13 April 2011].

taste was shared by a large enough fraction of the reading public to make Barrett's careful conforming and self-promotion eminently pragmatic.

Another poem on Shelley's list, George Croly's *Paris in 1815*, was praised by John Wilson Croker as 'the work of a powerful and poetic imagination'.¹²⁰ By contrast with the 'unmanly brutality of Mr Hobhouse, and the unwomanly brutality of Lady Morgan', Croker finds Croly's treatment of the Bourbon restoration 'beautiful' and imbued with 'deep and real feeling.'¹²¹ The defects he identifies are stylistic – Croly's inversions, 'the wretched expedient which Darwin employed to cover the weakness of his style, and the poverty of his imagination', are attributed to his copying from bad models.¹²² Croly's strengths, on the other hand, are granted to be his own, and it is implied that if he takes the *Quarterly's* judicious advice and purges these perfidious influences he can expect continuing support as a poet 'who seems to exhibit a union, unhappily too rare, of piety and poetry, of what is right in politics, respectable in morals, correct in taste, and splendid in imagination.'¹²³ Croly was only too happy to be recognised by the establishment and to play his part in buttressing it, as in his cruelly parodic attack in *Blackwood's* on Shelley's 'unintelligible' *Adonais* and the 'Grub Street Empire' of the Cockneys, in which he did down their 'Della Cruscan' style to assert the primacy of his own conservative circle.¹²⁴

Particularly galling for Shelley would have been the *Quarterly's* praise for Henry Hart Milman, his contemporary at Eton and Oxford. Unlike Shelley's own, Milman's early career was orthodox and materially successful. He was ordained in 1816, his early poems were published by Murray, his drama *Fazio* was a rousing success, he regularly reviewed for the *Quarterly* during the 1820s and in 1821 he

¹²⁰ [John Wilson Croker], 'Paris: a Poem', *Quarterly Review*, 17 (April 1817), pp. 218-29 (p. 218).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223, 224.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ [George Croly], 'Remarks on Shelley's *Adonais*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 10 (December 1821), pp. 696-700 (p. 697).

was made Professor of Poetry at Oxford.¹²⁵ He was reviewed first in April 1816; John Taylor Coleridge praised his work, albeit with the caveats about his ‘ambitious style’ discussed above. In 1818, though, his epic *Samor, the Lord of the Bright City*, about the Saxon invasion of England (the titular bright city is Gloucester), attracted Coleridge’s censure as well as his praise:

Samor exhibits all that is affected in language, strange even to solecism in usage, involved in construction and meretricious in ornament [...] Mr. Milman may be, we are sure that he is, gifted with unusual powers, but this fault is a weight, that might over-burthen and keep down the pinions of an eagle : while the clothing of his thought is such as it is now, he can never aspire to the fame of a true poet.¹²⁶

The *Quarterly* here seeks to rebuke and shape Milman, admiring his beauties while offering suggestions as to how he could counteract his ‘numerous and important’ faults.¹²⁷ Coleridge follows the *Quarterly*’s general line in taking Milman to task for his failure to adhere to the ‘grand simplicity’ of Homer, Virgil and Milton, writing that ‘The true poet never sacrifices accuracy of reasoning or description for the sake of increasing a particular effect.’¹²⁸ Contemporary letters indicate Milman took this review hard.¹²⁹

In May 1820, however, Milman’s *Fall of Jerusalem* received a glowing 28-page *Quarterly* review from Reginald Heber, a clergyman who was later to become ‘one of his dearest friends’.¹³⁰ While not wholly uncritical, Heber was keen to assure his readers that Milman had overcome his previous errors, writing that ‘the peculiar

¹²⁵ H.C.G. Matthew, ‘Milman, Henry Hart (1791–1868)’, *ODNB*,

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18778>> [accessed 19 April 2011].

¹²⁶ [John Taylor Coleridge], ‘Milman’s *Samor*’, *Quarterly Review*, 19 (July 1818), pp. 328-47 (p. 346).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

¹²⁹ See *Quarterly Review Archive*, <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/qr/index/38.html>> [accessed 20 April 2011].

¹³⁰ W.E.H. Lecky, *Historical and Political Essays* (London: Longmans, 1908), p. 255.

merits of his earlier efforts are heightened, and their besetting faults, even beyond expectation, corrected'.¹³¹ He thus vindicates the *Quarterly* both for asserting Milman's promise and for seeking to tame his excesses. Milman is compared to Milton and set up to oppose Byron, Heber opining that while 'one of the mightiest spirits of the age has, apparently, devoted himself and his genius to the adornment and extension of evil, we may well be exhilarated by the accession of a new and potent ally to the cause of human virtue and happiness'.¹³² This is the comparison to which Shelley explicitly objects in the *Adonais* preface; the review would have nagged at him as he himself is also snubbed, Heber writing that 'Mr Shelley alone, since the days of Titus Andronicus and the tragic schoolmaster in Gil Blas, has expected to afford mankind delight by a fac-simile of unmingled wickedness and horror.'¹³³ Heber's review explicitly leagues Milman with the *Quarterly* against the poets Southey designated the 'Satanic School.'¹³⁴ Though this process of correction and sanctification the *Quarterly* both established its own ability to improve promising poets and recruited Milman as part of a moral company opposing the corruption displayed by its rivals.

Like the *Anti-Jacobin*, the *Quarterly* sought to bolster the government and Anglicanism against perceived threats. However, it did so from an explicit position of strength, promising writers the acclaim of its large audience should they accept its strictures. The *Quarterly* and those that it praised enjoyed a symbiotic relationship, together propagating a hugely influential view of poetry which was largely hostile to what we now consider to be the Romantic canon. Its exemplars were classical authors and the regular, lucid poetry of the eighteenth century. Among the living poets Byron and Crabbe were cited as models for Croly, and Milman's best work was compared 'with the pictures drawn by the magic pencil of Southey in Thalaba

¹³¹ [Reginald Heber], 'Milman's *Fall of Jerusalem*', *Quarterly Review*, 23 (May 1820), pp. 198-225 (p. 225).

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 201-202.

¹³⁴ Robert Southey, 'Preface' to *A Vision of Judgement* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821), p. xxi.

and Kehama.¹³⁵ It is possible to detect a little market-based self-interest here, as the authors in this modern constellation were all heavily involved with Murray, the *Quarterly's* publisher. However, they were all also established as popular and thus easy to set against obscure and obtuse radicals like Shelley. The quarterlies could only stray so far from mainstream opinion in their attempts to shape taste; as John Clive puts it, 'When the absurdity he ridicules is taken seriously by the majority, it is only too easy for the critic himself to appear absurd—and to lose his readers.'¹³⁶ Conversely, that which is strange to the majority is easy prey. The quarterlies were controlled by cliques heavily invested in the current political establishments, and their corporate opinions both represented the views of these establishments and were a key means by which their ranks were swelled.

Writing the introduction to his contributions the *Edinburgh*, Jeffrey recalled remonstrating with Scott, who wanted the journal to be less partisan and forthright on national matters. Jeffrey argued in response that 'The Review, in short, has but two legs to stand on. Literature no doubt is one of them: But its *Right leg* is Politics.'¹³⁷ Without literature and politics, then, the *Edinburgh* would fall, but it is also an institution set over these fields, bearing down upon them. However, Jeffrey's metaphor is disingenuous in figuring literature and politics as separate matters; in fact, as I have argued, in the quarterlies they were inextricably entwined. The quarterlies in their pomp held out the potent prospect of preferment to those who accepted their aesthetics or who were politically useful to their controllers. Conversely, they could put those authors who opposed them in socially – and sometimes financially – compromising positions. In an expanding but still limited literary culture, their massive popularity and authority gave them considerable power to ruin writers' reputations and bar them from accessing the reading public. As my next chapter will make clear, though, their officious hegemony was by no means unopposed.

¹³⁵ [J.T. Coleridge], 'Milman's *Samor*', *Quarterly Review*, p. 339.

¹³⁶ Clive, p. 91.

¹³⁷ Francis Jeffrey, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 2nd edition, 3 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1846), I, xix.

Chapter Five

Sociability, Resistance and Self-Definition

Friends, Groups and Networks

In recent years scholars have become increasingly interested in examining authors in the contexts of the groups and networks in which they were embedded.¹ A key text in this trend is Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite's collection *Romantic Sociability*, which opens by discussing the 'Immortal Dinner' held the artist Benjamin Robert Haydon to celebrate his progress on his epic painting *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*.² This intensely self-conscious meal was attended by William Wordsworth, John Keats, Charles Lamb and Wordsworth's cousin Thomas Monkhouse; the party was later joined by the doctor and explorer John Ritchie and, awkwardly for Wordsworth, by John Kingston, deputy comptroller of the Stamp Office and thus his immediate superior. Russell and Tuite assert that literary studies should pay greater attention to the revealing implications of such social occasions in order to counterpoint the discipline's 'considerable ideological investment in canonical genres and forms such as the lyric, as well as in a narrow text-based definition of the public sphere'. They contend that critics 'need to recover the significance of sociability, not simply for biographical studies of Romantic writers or in order to contextualise their work, but as a kind of text in its own right, a form

¹ Exemplary books include Paul Keen's *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Stephen C. Behrendt's *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), Susan J. Wolfson's *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) and Jon Mee's *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Particular attention has been paid to Leigh Hunt and his circle in works including Jeffrey N. Cox's *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Nicholas Roe's *Fiery Heart: The First Life of Leigh Hunt* (London: Pimlico, 2005); Daisy Hay's *Young Romantics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) covers the circle for a more general readership.

² A wide-ranging account of the dinner and its contexts is given in Penelope Hughes-Hallett's *The Immortal Dinner* (London: Viking, 2000).

of cultural work – sometimes playfully convivial as at 22 Lisson Grove – which was a fundamental part of the self-definition of Romantic writers and artists.’³

As is probably evident from this study so far, I wholeheartedly agree with Russell and Tuite’s position. I would, however, modify the clause of their argument, which identifies self-definition as a Romantic project. Meaningful social interactions were by no means the sole preserve of those writers and artists we now class as Romantic, but were crucial for all writers in the period, not only for defining selves and corpuses but also for promoting, justifying, constructing and profiting from them. In previous chapters I have taken pains to stress that the authors I have discussed operated as members of networks comprised of writers, publishers, gentlemen, the politically active, periodical conductors, professionals, friends, institutional colleagues and many other types of associate. Success within this multivalent society rested to a great extent on gaining access to influential circles, and one of the key reasons to become a writer was to express one’s self and opinions to these circles for personal gain and in order to influence wider society. Adroit writers accrued not only financial and cultural capital, but also social capital. By making themselves and shaping others through written and personal interactions, they played a critical role in setting the cultural agendas which defined social hierarchies and set the criteria for literary success.

One of the first things that budding writers did in the period was to seek the company of other writers. This is true of the most canonical figures. Think of Coleridge and Southey planning *Pantisocracy* and producing poetry together in the mid-1790s, of the queasily collaborative *Lyrical Ballads* and of the lifelong written relationships that tied the Lakers together (whether they liked it or not). In the 1810s the Hunt circle linked writers in formations close and distinctive enough to draw sustained and highly critical attacks on their purported philosophies, which were seen as threats both by the political establishment and by literary oligarchs. This hostility was by no means entirely unprovoked; as Jeffrey Cox puts it

³ Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite, ‘Introducing Romantic Sociability’, in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 4.

the Hunt circle pursued a coterie mode of literary production that resisted at the concrete point of the literary work the subordination of culture to [the] private and privatizing enterprise that they also attacked in the context of that work; faced with an increased sense of the author's isolation in relation to a distant public of purchasers, they sought to forge a collective literary practice and to communicate that communal sensibility through even their printed works.⁴

Cox depicts the Cockney School working to oppose the professional aggression of the journals by constructing a web of public and private texts which validated each other, seeking to create 'a reconfigured social space built upon a new – Cockney – cultural literacy.'⁵ He takes considerable pains to stress that Hunt and his associates established their own worth through positioning themselves as opponents of a system they implicitly and explicitly denigrated through creating alternative critical criteria. Such groups thus became their own judges – as Lucy Newlyn puts it, 'Not only did the existence of coteries allow writers to circulate their work before it appeared in print (thus delaying and pre-empting its public reception), it also helped them discover common aims, intentions, and prejudices; a shared and inevitably exclusive language; and strongly cohesive loyalties.'⁶ By making themselves into a canon through cross-referencing, anthologising, reviewing and publishing, the Hunt circle and other similar groupings constituted threatening alternatives to the hierarchy-crafting authorities behind the establishment periodicals.

The intrinsic interest of famous and oppositional groupings like the Lakers and the Hunt circle, however, should not be allowed to occlude the fact that grouping was a common practice. Additionally, groups were not necessarily constituted in opposition. For example, as I discussed at the close of the last chapter, Tory writers used the dominant *Quarterly* to enact complex processes of recruitment

⁴ Cox, p. 62.

⁵ Cox, p. 12.

⁶ Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 24.

and affiliation. Neither should it be implied that writers can be defined uncomplicatedly as holding to single allegiances. Cox asserts that ‘By studying a group rather than individual writers, we see literary and other intellectual work not as unique isolated objects but as the products of forces of both affiliation and cultural warfare.’⁷ The obvious follow-on would be to say that while studying a group brings out the social purposes of its members’ works, there is a risk that without wider contexts groups’ unique practices will be mistaken for common ones, and visa versa. Cox is by no mean unaware of this – to give just one example, he draws illuminatingly on Margaret Ezell’s work on seventeenth-century manuscript culture to stress the antecedents of the Hunt circle’s modes of circulating writings.⁸ Nevertheless, the relatively tight foci of works such as Cox’s book and the individual essays in Russell and Tuite’s volume leave open a number of questions about to what extent groupings in the period adhered to common practices. This is a question best answered through plenitude – by reading Cox alongside Russell and Tuite and accounts of the Lakers, the Bluestockings, clubs, corresponding societies, and the groupings around the Reviews. Such readings reveal a great deal of crossover between groupings, creating a picture of sociability in the period more like an interconnected web than a swarm of closed bubbles. I have attempted to demonstrate this throughout this study by highlighting the connections between the figures I have examined and emphasising the crucial importance of networking for securing plaudits and payments for writing. In this chapter, I want to develop this by looking at ways in which connections constructed and validated writers socially, paying particular attention to the frangible natures of such relationships and to the dynamics of inequality often present in writerly affiliations. For most literary writers the ‘distant public of purchasers’ Cox alludes to was neither that large nor in many cases that distant. Many of those that could afford to buy books also wrote them, or moved in the same circles as their writers. Association could be both a means and an end for authors seeking to justify their works and selves.

⁷ Cox, p. 12.

⁸ Cox, p. 64.

Groups in literary society were unstable imagined communities which were open to scrutiny and often configured in conflicting ways. For example, in attempting to take down the Cockney School, *Blackwood's*' circle of young Tories sought to propagate their own group reputation by attacking men they figured as upstart demagogues attempting to assume dignities to which they were not entitled. *Blackwood's* reviewers often picked up on laudatory statements by weaker group members and used these to attack those praised. Cox stresses this when he highlights the fact that John Gibson Lockhart, writing as Z., opened his initial attack on Hunt's circle with some poor lines by the relatively peripheral Cornelius Webb.⁹ These lines claimed cultural authority for the Cockneys by linking together 'Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, Milton' with 'HUNT, and KEATS,/the Muses' son of promise'. Lockhart employed Webb's evoked connections to link and undermine the group's lynchpins, using Webb's hyperbole to exemplify Hunt's 'extravagant pretensions' and 'exquisitely bad taste'.¹⁰

In a similar fashion, strong group members could be rhetorically excluded to weaken the group as a whole and to advance alternative agendas. At first blush Shelley would seem an obvious target for *Blackwood's*' writers, but in fact he received kinder treatment from them than from any of the other major Reviews; Newman Ivey White goes as far as to identify a systematic campaign to encourage him to triumph by 'abandoning his vices.'¹¹ This campaign reached its height in 1819 when *Blackwood's* sought out a copy of *Alastor* in order to appreciate his progress and denounce the way that he had been 'infamously and stupidly treated in the Quarterly Review.'¹² *Blackwood's* argues that the *Quarterly's* cavils showed it to be out of touch with the ways that right-thinking Englishmen saw poetic brilliance in the post-Byronic literary climate:

⁹ Cox, p. 19.

¹⁰ [John Gibson Lockhart], 'On the Cockney School of Poetry. No. I', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 2 (October 1817), pp. 38-41 (p. 38).

¹¹ Newman Ivey White, *Shelley*, 2 vols (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1940), II, 160.

¹² 'Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude', *Blackwood's*, 6 (November 1819), pp. 148-54 (p. 153).

There is, we firmly believe, a strong love of genius in the people of this country, and they are willing to pardon its possessor much extravagance and error—nay, even more serious transgressions. Let both Mr Shelley and his critic think on that—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 meanness, 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.¹³

Blackwood's' setting the poetic genius above the critical reverses the dynamic the quarterlies sought to propagate. By creating, theorising and praising a group of modern geniuses, *Blackwood's* separated its mode of operation from those of its precursors, successfully portraying their methods as outmoded. Such exalting formulations were crucial in paving the way for the wider acceptance of Romantic genius in the 1820s and 1830s, as I will argue in the coda.

Blackwood's praise of Shelley was also consistent with the class concerns of the Cockney School attacks. In the articles Hunt is dubbed the 'King of the Cockneys' and his associates converted into the 'youthful nobility of Cockaigne'.¹⁴ By making Hunt the meritless king of a delusory kingdom, Lockhart ties the group together under Hunt and mocks their collective pretensions, origins and abilities. However, his satire also encodes his underlying concern about the claims of plebeian writers. As Gregory Dart puts it, the Blackwoodsmen were concerned both about the 'blurring of social boundaries' evident in Cockney writing and with 'the coming into prominence of an identifiably metropolitan sensibility' which could undercut their traditionally-grounded and self-consciously provincial aesthetic.¹⁵ This anxiety is evident in Lockhart's directing Keats 'back to the shop [...] back to "plasters, pills, and ointment boxes,"', attempting to shame his socially-mobile competition back

¹³ 'Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude', p. 154.

¹⁴ [Lockhart], 'Letter from Z. to Leigh Hunt, King of the Cockneys', *Blackwood's*, 3 (May 1818), pp. 196-201 (p. 196).

¹⁵ Gregory Dart, 'The Cockney Moment', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 32:3 (2003), pp. 203-23 (p. 205).

into suburban anonymity.¹⁶ As the son of a wealthy baronet, Shelley was not in *Blackwood's* eyes a true Cockney, so he could be cut off from the group to avoid troubling Z.'s narrative of low-born, unrefined upstarts and could be recruited instead to the collection of genius-poets with which *Blackwood's* challenged the tastes of its quarterly opponents. The ease with which *Blackwood's* broke the connections which Hunt and Shelley publically acknowledged in their prefaces and dedications demonstrates both groups' susceptibility to rhetorical reconfiguration and their potential power for legitimating arguments.

Grouping was an important means by which authors could shift discourses regarding their vocations. When authors interacted with others in society they represented the tenuous profession of authorship, creating themselves as writers while simultaneously employing their talents and selves to shift the social consensus on what an author was. Russell and Tuite's entry point, the Immortal Dinner, provides an excellent example of such collaborative artistic mythmaking. Writing in his diary after the event, Haydon expressed his pride in having created 'an evening worthy of the Elizabethan age':

There was something interesting in seeing Wordsworth sitting, & Keats & Lamb, & my Picture of Christ's entry towering up behind them, occasionally brightened by the gleams of flame that sparkled from the fire, & hearing the voice of Wordsworth repeating Milton with an intonation like the funeral bell of St Paul's & the music of Handel mingling, & then Lamb's wit came sparking in between, & Keats's rich fancy of Satyrs & Fauns & doves & white clouds, wound up the stream of conversation.¹⁷

As this passage makes clear, Haydon was gratified in his expectation that his writerly friends act like authors. Wordsworth makes himself Miltonic through his recitation; Lamb, free of the East India Company office, teases and provokes,

¹⁶ [Lockhart], 'The Cockney School of Poetry. No. IV', *Blackwood's*, 3 (August 1818), pp. 519-24 (p. 524).

¹⁷ *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. Willard Bissell Pope, 5 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960-63), II, 176.

validated by laughter; the young Keats is free to evoke poetic images, to feel his way into authorship by seeking reactions from more established practitioners. Indeed, in some ways they become more powerfully authorial in performance than on the page, provoked into stronger expressions of selfhood by the acceptance and admiration of their peers. Crucially, this transformation is effected in the eyes and testimony of Haydon, whose account of a private event makes it a lasting and available memory. As his proud tone indicates, Haydon too takes something from this process, his pleasure in his guest's talents coming partly from his recognising the ways that those talents reflect on him.

The Immortal Dinner was part of a series of socio-artistic transactions in which Wordsworth, Keats and Haydon reinforced each other's senses of themselves as artists. Some of these transactions were considerably more public than the dinner and diary. The unfinished canvas of *Christ's Entry* that loomed over Haydon's guests was, as Russell and Tuite argue, designed to act as 'a heroic vindication and, indeed, sanctification of the capacity of men of genius to transcend the age.'¹⁸ By juxtaposing Keats, Wordsworth, Lamb and Hazlitt with Isaac Newton and Voltaire as spectators watching Jesus's triumph, the painting makes an unmistakable claim for the greatness of Haydon's friends. Haydon's assertion on his friends' behalf also served to reinforce his own self-aggrandising through advertising his affiliation with men he hailed as geniuses.

Similar reciprocal processes can be observed in three slightly earlier sonnets by Keats and Wordsworth. These poems all make grand claims for Haydon – and by extension for their authors – but also display uneasiness about public responses to artistic works and selves. Keats' sonnet 'Addressed to Haydon' concludes 'Unnumbered souls breathe out a still applause,/Proud to behold him in his country's eye.'¹⁹ Still applause, of course, is a rather cold comfort until Keats translates its absent sound into present words. The line reads like an excuse for a lack of critical response, a hollow assertion that public silence should be taken for assent rather than

¹⁸ Russell and Tuite, p. 2.

¹⁹ *Keats' Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), p. 56.

indifference. When Keats writes that Haydon's great purpose 'ought to frighten into hooded shame/A money mong'ring, pitiable brood', his 'ought' hedges significantly. In a perfect world, Haydon's 'steadfast genius' would be recognised, but in a world where Hunt's hated money-getters will not be shamed when they are supposed to be, Haydon's recognition must come in the form of halting poetry. In the end the poem makes a claim which only carries the unquestioned support of the poet making it. It cannot fully stretch beyond friendly circles to take in others less familiar.

Keats' second, more famous, sonnet to Haydon, takes a different tack, affecting to bring before the 'nations' a company of men whose greatnesses are validated by their connections to the past, to the sublime and to a nature vaster in scope than the human communities it succours:

GREAT spirits now on earth are sojourning;
He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
Who on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,
Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing:
He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake:
And lo!—whose steadfastness would never take
A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering.
And other spirits there are standing apart
Upon the forehead of the age to come;
These, these will give the world another heart,
And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum
Of mighty workings? —
Listen awhile, ye nations, and be dumb.²⁰

This poem avoids the problem of public reception by placing its subjects among unquestionable verities rather than society. It makes a more secure claim by putting the onus on the reader to recognise the artists being referred to and by asserting that the transformations they will bring are irresistible and under way. The withholding of proper names flatters the informed reader who can recognise the artists evoked

²⁰ *Keats' Poetry and Prose*, p. 56.

while challenging others to listen harder. The implication that Hunt is sufficiently clued from flowers, sociability and imprisonment and Haydon from the connection to Raphael shows how public the preoccupations of writers were assumed to be among those attuned to literary matters. The history of Keats' poem vindicates this assumption, as in addition to acting as an appeal to wider society, it represented an act of affiliation which achieved its desired effect by paving the way for Keats to connect with Wordsworth. Haydon acted as editor and go-between, transmitting the sonnet to the older poet and arranging several meetings.²¹ As well as setting out Keats' beliefs and associations in high words, then, the poem was successful as a literary calling card.

Wordsworth's sonnet to Haydon takes a slightly different tack to Keats' poems. Where the younger poet admires greatness, Wordsworth, characteristically, implicates himself in it. By beginning 'High is our calling, Friend!' Wordsworth explicitly leagues himself and Haydon as equivalents.²² He is keen to valorise their artistic occupations, stating that creative art 'Demands the service of a mind and heart,/Though sensitive, yet, in their weakest part,/Heroically fashioned'. As the poem progresses, though, a more interesting strain emerges, stressing the difficulty of callings that require the pair 'to infuse/Faith in the whispers of the lonely Muse,/While the whole world seems adverse to desert'. Wordsworth makes public indifference a trial which guarantees real artistry, encouraging Haydon to persevere regardless of critical or public reactions, secure in the knowledge that a qualified fellow respects and understands what he is doing. As an accomplished work itself the poem enacts the triumph over adversity that it describes and thus proves the struggle worthwhile. This was not so critical when the poem remained a private communication, but its publication in *The Champion* on April 1st 1816 made this private leaguering into a public statement, serving to promote Haydon, Wordsworth and a view of the importance of art which was congenial to both men. Private

²¹ Andrew Motion, *Keats* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 129, 142. Haydon cut 'in a distant Mart' from the end of the penultimate line in Keats' draft to leave the effective pause in the final version.

²² William Wordsworth, 'To R.B. [B.R.] Haydon, Esq.', in *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*, ed. Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 174.

communications could thus easily slip into more public forums. The self-definitions of artists were refined in collaboration and then sent out into society to inspire and shape others into opposing present orthodoxies.

In their own ages, then, authors' writings serve a number of additional social functions which are often occluded by the tendency to see literary writings primarily as art practices. By the early nineteenth century the cohesive egalitarianism and sense of separation from society which Anne Goldgar identifies in eighteenth-century notions of the Republic of Letters had to a large extent fallen away, replaced by smaller, more fissile and heterogeneous groupings.²³ Nevertheless, authors in the Romantic period wrote in arrays of interlocking social networks, not quite a republic, but certainly a distributed community of letters. In the rest of this chapter I will explore further aspects of the relationships that constituted this community by examining letters from the collections of New York Public Library as 'inscribed, contested, altered outline[s]' of writers' social characters and interactions.²⁴ Towards the end of the chapter I will examine collaborative self-fashioning, looking at the ways in which writers opposed opprobrium or neglect through network-based reconfigurations and reinforcements. First, though, I will return to the vexed question of slippage between public and private animuses and amities in order to demonstrate how social interactions and personal knowledge constrained and empowered public characterisations.

Character in Pen and in Print: Elizabeth Hamilton vs. Mary Hays

On March 13th 1797, Eliza Hamilton wrote an indignant letter to her erstwhile friend Mary Hays regarding a review Hays had written of Hamilton's first novel, *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*. In her letter Hamilton vents her

²³ Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1995), p. 3.

²⁴ Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 27.

anger at what she sees as Hays' cruelty and duplicity in negatively noticing her work, expressing incredulity at Hays' claims for the fairness of her actions:

You assert the "purity of your intentions." I am afraid I am not sufficiently versed in the new nomenclature of virtues thoroughly to understand your meaning. In my old fashioned way of thinking purity of intentions comprehends candour and sincerity, and is altogether incompatible with every shade or degree of Treachery or Malevolence. In the case which you have forced upon my recollection there is no need of any appeal to the recording Angel in search of the inspiring Motive. – The Action Speaks for itself.²⁵

Hamilton argues that Hays' review is completely incompatible with their former friendship. It is clear that she expects Hays to keep faith with private amities rather than attempt objective candour in her public print discourse (although Hamilton's noting a 'new nomenclature' bespeaks, despite her sarcasm, an anxiety about the currency of this opinion). For Hamilton, Hays' betrayal makes her almost a criminal, 'motive' having begun to slip into its modern legally-inflected definition by this time.²⁶ Her reference to the recording angel hints strongly towards hellish consequences for Hays' self-evidently malicious action.

Having rhetorically damned Hays, Hamilton goes on to assert her book's innocence, describing it as 'containing no Accusations against any sect or party; throwing out no Aspersion upon any character' and stressing that its plot 'merely raised a laugh at some self-evident absurdities.' This assertion is interesting in that it implies that a political or overtly satirical work might justify a dissenting friend's public censure, but Hamilton denies that her book's 'innocent raillery' offers Hays any cause for making a public objection. She thus positions Hays' attack as emotionally irresponsible and irrevocably personal, recalling that Hays had 'in

²⁵ Eliza Hamilton to Mary Hays, 13 March 1797, NYPL Pforzheimer Misc Ms. 2210. Also printed in *The Correspondence of Mary Hays (1779-1843)*, *British Novelist*, ed. Marilyn L. Brooks (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), pp. 313-15.

²⁶ *OED*.

confidence confessed how severely you had felt the slight animadversions that had been made upon your first performance in one of the reviews' but despite this had not scrupled in her own reviewing: 'with the smile of friendship upon your face, did you Voluntarily offer yourself as the instrument of inflicting similar pains upon the Mind of your unsuspecting friend'. Hamilton's letter makes it painfully clear that she saw Hays' literary actions as a culpable and hypocritical breach of trust.

For Hamilton, Hays' review was also potentially a form of character assassination: 'You, in the dark, and with a muffled dagger aimed the blow which was to fix, as far as it is in the power of a review to fix, the fame, and character of the person you saluted as a friend!' By not 'fairly' presenting her arguments, Hamilton argues that Hays aimed to fix her own unflattering interpretation as definitive in public discourse. Hamilton's concern was a reasonable one; as Gary Kelly writes, commenting on Hays' own traducement by Charles Lloyd, 'the danger of being misread and misrepresented, textually and personally, had [...] increased greatly by the late 1790s'.²⁷ For female authors, writing represented one of a fairly limited range of socially-acceptable modes for engaging with public matters. Kelly asserts that *Hindoo Rajah* 'gave [Hamilton] a public and even political identity without sacrificing her feminine and domestic one'.²⁸ Hamilton's letter confirms that she saw her books as constituting acts of speech which were irrevocably hers. Hays' misinterpretations thus threatened to destabilise her textual self, potentially compromising any social influence or improved possibilities from which she might have benefitted. While Hamilton's letter is certainly not without gothic flourishes, her feelings of anger and betrayal should be taken seriously, along with her sense of the damage a false friend's social reconfigurations could cause.

By the later standards of the quarterlies or *Blackwood's*, Hays' review for the *Analytical* is fairly brief and fairly tame, if somewhat condescending. At the outset she grants that 'we have received entertainment from the perusal of this lively and amusing little work' and writes that the novel's sixty-page preliminary dissertation

²⁷ Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 125.

²⁸ Kelly, p. 143.

displays ‘considerable knowledge of Indian affairs’.²⁹ However, contrary to Hamilton’s assertion that British rule is seen universally as a ‘happy change,’ she contends that many readers will be ‘inclined to believe’ that ‘these injured people have merely *changed masters*.’³⁰ She also evokes suspicions regarding the novel’s dedication to Warren Hastings, the recently-acquitted former governor-general of Bengal, writing that Hamilton’s dedication ‘will be adjudged by the reader, either as just, or the grateful language of private obligation and friendship, according to his own preconceived opinions on the subject.’³¹ Hays here ostensibly offers protection to Hamilton by extending to the reader a choice of only two ways to read the dedication, but this blatant railroading hints at less generous interpretations that might be advanced. In fact Hamilton’s sense of private obligation is made very clear in the full text of the dedication, which thanks Hastings for his patronage of ‘Shanscrit and Persian literature’ and for being ‘the honoured patron and friend’ of Hamilton’s ‘beloved, and much lamented brother’ Charles.³² Hays’s discussing Hamilton’s ‘private’ connection with Hastings highlights the extent to which literary figures and literature were – and were assumed to be – tied up in politics and political circles. Readers were aware that behind printed discourses lay vast webs of connections and discussions, carried out with varying degrees of privacy, but in no way simply divisible into the personal and the professional. In this respect, Hays’ review accords with Hamilton’s letter in portraying a society in which print necessarily acted on the social relationships between author and their subjects.

Hays’ criticisms come through most strongly in her final summary paragraph, in which her comments on the novel tend to slip into personal condemnations. She takes strident issue with what she sees as the novel’s dogmatism, writing that Hamilton ‘sometimes betrays a spirit not perfectly

²⁹ [Mary Hays], ‘Hamilton’s *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*’, *Analytical Review*, 24 (October 1796), pp. 429-31 (p. 429).

³⁰ [Hays], ‘*Hindoo Rajah*’, p. 429.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Eliza Hamilton, *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796), [unnumbered leaf at beginning of volume]. See also Pam Perkins, ‘Hamilton, Elizabeth (1756?–1816)’, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12062>> [accessed 4 July 2011].

consistent with the mildness and simplicity of the religion of Jesus: railing is substituted for reasoning, and a frightful picture is held up of the adversaries of revelation, in which truth and soberness are sacrificed [...] to *undue alarm*.³³ She admonishes Hamilton that ‘Candid and calm discussion, not *abuse*, is the proper method of making rational converts’. Hays’ progressive politics and Jacobin sympathies are evident in her opposing Hamilton’s muscular Christian expressions. She makes Hamilton sound shrill and fanatical, but in doing so betrays her own affiliations through her Godwinian advocacy for rational argument. There is an irony here, of course, in Hays’ massive misstatement of the public taste – calumny, as I argued in the last chapter, proved to be a far more effective means than Godwinian logic for entertaining readers into sympathy with just or unjust causes.

Hays also argues that Hamilton is ‘still less successful, and equally illiberal, in her attack upon moral philosophy and metaphysical enquiry, in which little knowledge and great assumption are manifested.’³⁴ That these attributed flaws are read as failings in Hamilton rather than in her book demonstrates again how easily written texts could become synonymous with their authors. Her suggestion that Hamilton would have done better to have focused on ‘fashionable follies’ is one which the scholarly Hamilton understandably found particularly infuriating, especially as she detected in the claim evidence of Hays’ personal attachments:

it is a strange sort of complement you pay your friend M^r Godwin, in taking it for granted that he has made a Monopoly of all the absurdity, and extravagance, in the world [...] Ignorant as I am, and ignorant as to the world you have declared me to be, I could point out to your perusal volumes upon volumes where you might see, in the regions of Metaphysicks fancy has taken as bold a flight – and that in the rage for systematising Authors of at least as distinguished an eminence have laid themselves open to ridicule.³⁵

³³ [Hays], ‘*Hindoo Rajah*’, p. 431.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Hamilton to Hays, 13 March 1797.

As Marilyn Brooks notes, Hamilton is on somewhat shaky ground here, as Mr Vapour in her novel displays many unmistakably Godwinian characteristics and at points quite specifically echoes Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*.³⁶ Hamilton attempts to keep the moral high ground in attacking Hays' condescension, but Godwin's notoriety makes her defence sketchy. Her letter applies a double standard in claiming that she meant no insult to 'particular persons' despite Hays' concerns, while taking Hays' review as an unjustified betrayal by ascribing Hays certain intentions. Her counterattack takes liberties just as Hays' attack does, rhetoric making distinctions appear clearer-cut than they were.

Both Hamilton's letter and Hays' review reveal how writing could position and negotiate the permeable barriers between politics, authorship and private life. Despite their friendship, Hamilton represented a threat to the agenda that Hays wished to advance, and publicly curbing her served to protect that agenda. For Hamilton, Hays' action represented a public betrayal of their private amities, a politicised manoeuvre that threatened to damage her ability to express herself as an author by denying her intellectual agency. By privately communicating her disapprobation and claiming that 'it was not I who sought this contest', Hamilton attempted to pre-emptively justify responding to Hays in a manner that took full advantage of the blurred divisions between the personal and the literary.

In this response, her 1800 novel *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, Hamilton satirically portrayed Hays as Bridgetina Botherim (one might think the name alone revenge enough). Bridgetina is gloatingly described by the *Anti-Jacobin Review* as 'one of those young ladies, who, disregarding all the old-fashioned female excellencies by which the women of this country have been so eminently distinguished, has devoted herself to the study of Godwinian and Wolstonecraftian philosophy.'³⁷ In constructing her, Hamilton quotes extensively from Godwin's writings and from Hays' semi-autobiographical novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), helpfully providing footnotes that refer the reader to the relevant passages in

³⁶ *Correspondence of Mary Hays*, p. 314.

³⁷ 'Memoirs of Modern Philosophers' (first part), *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 7 (September 1800), pp. 39-46 (p. 39).

the original works.³⁸ *Emma Courtney* was a fruitful source for *ad feminam* satire. Hays' novel is defiantly autobiographical, contains near-verbatim reproductions of some highly personal correspondence, is often stylistically overwrought and was socially controversial. On its release it was well-reviewed by sympathetic Dissenting journals. The *Analytical Review*, despite some cavils about its plausibility, called it 'the vehicle of much good sense and liberal principle'.³⁹ The *Monthly Review* gave it a largely positive notice, but cautioned that the book contained 'sentiments that are open to attack.'⁴⁰ Hamilton took full advantage of Hays' openness in a depiction Claire Grogan describes as 'bitingly cruel' and which the *Critical Review* characterised at the time as 'grossly and farcically overcharged'.⁴¹ As Gary Kelly notes, 'even [Hays'] short stature and slight squint are ridiculed'.⁴² As well as being short, Bridgetina is extremely ugly and prone to wearing outlandish and ridiculous attire. She is unable to converse effectively, speaking largely in quotations from novels and metaphysical texts. Many of these Hamilton explicitly appropriates, marooning them in a discourse over which she holds authority, reframing Hays' and Godwin's texts just as Hays' review had reframed hers. By placing Hays' and Godwin's words in the mouths of the credulous Bridgetina and the scruple-free seducer Vallaton, Hamilton makes those words ridiculous and pernicious. Godwin, though, comes off better than Hays; while his philosophies are shown to be impracticable and dangerous when

³⁸ The first of many Godwin reference is to his necessitarianism, Mr Myope 'judiciously' observing that a tart 'could never have been so nicely sweetened, if *Alexander the Great had not set fire to the palace of Persepolis.*' For this, Hamilton footnotes *Political Justice* 'vol. i. p. 161.' (Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, ed. Claire Grogan (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), p. 40). Later references direct the reader to Godwin's *Enquirer* and to *Caleb Williams*. Specific notes for Hays are less common and begin later. The earliest directs the reader to 'See *Emma Courtney*, a philosophical novel; to which Miss Botherim seems indebted for some of her finest thoughts' (p. 175). Several further direct references and numerous allusions follow.

³⁹ 'Miss Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*', *Analytical Review*, 25 (February 1797), pp. 174-78 (p. 174).

⁴⁰ 'Miss Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*', *Monthly Review*, 2nd series, 22 (April 1797), pp. 443-49 (p. 449).

⁴¹ *Modern Philosophers*, p. 19; 'Memoirs of Modern Philosophers', *Critical Review*, new series, 29 (July 1800), pp. 311-13 (p. 311).

⁴² Kelly, p. 149.

misinterpreted, many of the more considered characters admire his ambitions and the character most analogous to him, Mr Myope, is an enthusiast rather than an imbecile. By contrast, Bridgetina is hypocritical, dangerously self-obsessed, incapable of thinking independently and romantically undesirable. Not content with social and mental humiliations, Hamilton also has Bridgetina fall into open sewers (twice) and sees her physically accosted by pickpockets, streetwalkers, watchmen and an ‘obstreperous and unmanageable’ herd of pigs.⁴³

The multi-part appreciation in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, which ran to sixteen pages over two issues, gloated that Hamilton had constructed

an excellent imitation of that vicious and detestable stuff which has issued from the pen of M—y H—s. Indeed the whole character of Bridgetina so strongly resembles that of this impassioned Godwinian, that it is impossible to be mistaken.⁴⁴

The fact that the review explicitly names the subject of the satire is worth noting, as is the fact that the *Anti-Jacobin Review* also took the opportunity to discuss the real-life events which underlay both *Emma Courtney* and Hamilton’s parody. Before an extensive quotation, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* writes of the subject of Bridgetina’s admiration, Henry Sydney, that ‘Like Mr F—d he declines all her advances; and she, in imitation of M—y H—s, writes to him the following philosophical love letter.’⁴⁵ ‘Mr F—d’ is William Fend, the Unitarian author and academic whose rejection of Hays was a major factor in occasioning *Emma Courtney*.⁴⁶ In her introduction to the novel Eleanor Ty goes as far as to assert that ‘Since many of the letters to Godwin are replicated *verbatim* in *Emma Courtney*, we can assume that many of the letters

⁴³ *Modern Philosophers*, p. 157.

⁴⁴ ‘*Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*’ (second part), *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 7 (December 1800), pp. 369-76 (p. 371).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁴⁶ Marilyn L. Brooks, ‘Hays, Mary (1759–1843)’, *ODNB*,

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37525>> [accessed 10 July 2012].

Emma writes to Augustus were originally Hays's love letters to Frennd.⁴⁷ In satirising the letters printed in *Emma Courtney*, then, Hamilton thus also implicitly mocks the close relatives that Hays addressed privately. The *Anti-Jacobin Review* brought this private connection explicitly before the public in order to mock Hays and rejoice further in Hamilton's travesty of her style, beliefs and person. In Hamilton's versioning, Hays's reflections and emotions are made into ridiculous self-regard through their association with Bridgetina. Asked whether it is 'possible that Henry Sidney can really have engaged your affections' Bridgetina replies

it is not only possible, but literally and demonstrably true. The history of my sensations are equally interesting and instructive. You will there see, how sensation generates interest, interest generates passions, passions generate powers ; and sensations, passions, powers, all working together, produce associations and habits, and ideas, and sensibilities. O Julia! Julia! what a heart-moving history is mine.⁴⁸

Hamilton follows this passage by noting that on hearing this it was 'almost impossible even for Julia to refrain from laughing.' In her preface to *Emma Courtney* Hays wrote that her book was 'calculated to operate as a *warning*, rather than as an example.'⁴⁹ In Hamilton's version, all such restraints and caveats are removed so Bridgetina's obsession, rather than flowing from properly-contextualised notions of sensibility and utility, is made to farcically express selfishness and pigheaded stupidity. The *Anti-Jacobin Review* brings this full circle by refracting Bridgetina and Henry Sydney onto Hays and Frennd, Hamilton's recasting displaying in its opinion 'an admirable exposition of Godwinian principles' which dispenses with the characters with 'all due poetical justice.'⁵⁰ By meting out poetical – or novelistic – justice, as opposed to political justice, Hamilton overwrites Hays's systems in a manner that encompasses her creative works, her person and her

⁴⁷ 'Introduction' to Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, ed. Eleanor Ty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. xiv.

⁴⁸ *Modern Philosophers*, p. 174.

⁴⁹ *Emma Courtney*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 7 (December 1800), p. 375.

associates. ‘Calm and candid discussion’ proves to be no match for novelistic richness or for the combination of curiosity and censoriousness that characterised early nineteenth-century literary life. As Hamilton’s biographer Elizabeth Benger wrote: ‘The popularity of *The Modern Philosophers* was a passport to fame and distinction ; and Miss Hamilton consequently found herself admired by the celebrated and the fashionable, and an object of curiosity and interest to the public.’⁵¹ Hays’ career, by contrast, went into a decline, her social authority compromised by her earlier honesty and by the increasing conservatism of literary culture.

I have dwelt on this exchange at length because it demonstrates the extraordinary extent to which public reactions could draw on private contexts and to which authors were beholden to their contemporaries’ constructions of their characters. It might be protested that Hays is a poor example, as *Emma Courtney* does rather invite this sort of reading. However, it is simple to cite other instances of the ease with which private matters became public currency. In the tightly-interconnected literary milieu the private affairs of others were a form of social currency, subjects for the gossip that helped constitute writers as communities and material for authors keen to sell a work based on a scandalous connection to one already popular. John William Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), published under Byron’s name and featuring a Byronic nobleman as the titular villain is an obvious example, as is Caroline Lamb’s *Glenarvon* (1816), from whose thinly-veiled Byron substitute Polidori took his central character’s name.⁵² Other prominent examples of personal satire are easy to cite: William Gifford’s *Baviad* (1791) and *Maviad* (1795), the parodies in the *Anti-Jacobin* (1797-98), Richard Polwhele’s *The Unsex’d Females* (1798), Byron’s *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) and *Vision of Judgment* (1822), James and Horace Smith’s *Rejected Addresses* (1812), the various iterations of Hunt’s *The Feast of the Poets* (printed in *The Reflector* in 1811; revised

⁵¹ Elizabeth Benger, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818), I, 132.

⁵² Such personalities continue to fascinate – Benjamin Markovits has recently explored Polidori’s haunting of and haunting by Byron’s identity in *Imposture* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007) and examined further aspects of Byron’s character and influence in its two sequels.

and published as a book in 1814), *Blackwood's* 'Chaldee Manuscript' (1817) and 'Noctes Ambrosianae' (1822-35), Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), John Gibson Lockhart's *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk* (1819), Percy Shelley's 'Julian and Maddalo' (completed in 1819; first published in 1824), John Hamilton Reynolds' 'The Pilgrimage of Living Poets to the Stream of Castaly' (1816) and *The Press* (1822), Robert Montgomery's *The Age Reviewed* (1827). In publishing and achieving social prominence, then, writers surrendered control over aspects of their characters, which could be taken up and refashioned by others, further testimony to the fact that in the period works were seen as being authored by social beings both constituting and constitutive of their essences. Sociability could be crucial for avoiding having one's public self rewritten, but entrusting other writers with private knowledge could also be a costly reputational proposition.

Relational Self-Fashioning: Leigh Hunt's Correspondence

Towards the end of her letter to Hays, Hamilton writes of the importance of her personal network: 'In the little circle of friends by whom I should wish to see myself surrounded I hope the light will always shine of sound judgement and unsophisticating truth.'⁵³ Hamilton here makes it clear that the opinions of trusted associates played a critical role in defining the nature of her works and authorship. Private friends' opinions could of course influence works' wider receptions, as Southey hoped when he wrote in an 1808 letter, 'Puff me, Coleridge! if you love me, puff me! Puff a couple of hundred into my pocket!'⁵⁴ However, while a close circle of well-connected partisans could propel an author to success, less-connected circles could also provide encouragement, advice and validation. Jane Austen solicited critical responses from friends after *Mansfield Park* failed to attract reviewers' attention, and these responses served to reassure her that she was read and provided her with a spectrum of views. The novel's heroine, Fanny Price, evidently inspired both fondness and frustration; she was variously described as

⁵³ Hamilton to Hays, 13 Mar 1797.

⁵⁴ *Life and Correspondence of the Late Robert Southey*, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey, 6 vols (London: Longman, Brown Green, and Longmans, 1849-50), III, 134.

‘delightful’, ‘liked’, ‘disliked’, unbearable, ‘insipid’ and ‘natural’.⁵⁵ Mary Cooke noted that she ‘Admired Fanny in general; but thought she ought to have been more determined on overcoming her own feelings’; John Plumptre felt ‘the want of some character more striking & interesting to the generality of Readers, than Fanny was likely to be.’⁵⁶ Austen evidently found such opinions useful – presumably, she would not have repeated the procedure for *Emma* had she not found it productive, and it seems reasonable to see Emma herself as an attempt to write a more active and striking heroine than Fanny, addressing some of the concerns raised by her correspondents.⁵⁷

Correspondences thus let authors see their writings – and by extension, their public selves – through the eyes of others. Their responses, both direct and indirect, allowed them to redefine and modify the impressions they gave, either broadly or specifically for a single addressee. Authors made themselves and were made in dialogue with individuals with whom they were acquainted, and it is this process of negotiated self-creation which I now wish to examine, using Leigh Hunt as my primary example.

Reviewing *The Revolt of Islam*, John Taylor Coleridge writes that while Shelley lacks Hunt’s ‘bustling vulgarity’, ‘ludicrous affectations’ and ‘factious flippancy’, for either man it is true that ‘like a speculator in trade, he would be rich without capital and without delay’.⁵⁸ While this is obviously an interested view, in some senses Coleridge is quite insightful about the ways in which Hunt operated. Becoming ‘rich without capital’ was in a very real sense the fiscal and social challenge that faced him. While not from a wholly deprived background, Hunt was educated for free at Christ’s Hospital, was not university educated, was not trained to a profession and derived the vast majority of his income from his pen. He could

⁵⁵ ‘Opinions of *Mansfield Park*’ in Jane Austen, *Later Manuscripts*, ed. Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 230-32.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 232, 233.

⁵⁷ ‘Opinions of *Emma*’ in *ibid.*, pp. 235-39.

⁵⁸ [John Taylor Coleridge], ‘Shelley’s *Revolt of Islam*’, *Quarterly Review*, 21 (April 1819), pp. 460-71 (p. 469).

not easily succeed in the patrician paradigm which Coleridge implicitly defends in his review; instead, he was forced to create new ways of being an author, both through his outspoken liberalism in the *Examiner* and through the cultivation of his circle and its distinctive modes. Jon Mee argues that what was consistent across Hunt's different 'loose and often shifting groups' 'was the ability to reproduce the idea of culture as a form of amiable exchange in which readers could easily join.'⁵⁹ In the following section I will examine how Hunt rhetorically employed this amiability to exert his status and to mutually create new forms of authorial identity which sought to transcend establishment paradigms.

In March 1817 Hunt addressed a brief note to Lord Holland, the doyen of Whig high society. Its expressed purpose was to thank Holland for a revised edition of his *Account of the Life and Writings of Lope Felix de Vega Carpio*, which contained a newly-added account of another Spanish dramatist, Guillen de Castro:

My Lord,

I have been most unwarrantably negligent in delaying to acknowledge the receipt of a new edition of Lope de Vega, which, I presume, by what appears on a blank leaf, the bookseller sent me by your Lordship's direction. I have been waiting from day to day, in the expectation of begging your acceptance, of a new edition of a little work of my own; but the printing has been so slow, that I am really ashamed of putting off my acknowledgements any longer, & must beg your Lordship not to think them the less sincere, or indeed eager, for making their appearance so late. The Lope de Vega is an old acquaintance; but of Guillen de Castro I knew nothing but by name, though often tempted to try & look into Spanish poetry, – poetry indeed, in any language, being something I can almost as little help getting into, as a clump of green trees. Guillen however did not begin with treating me very luxuriously; your Lordship's account of him having fairly kept me two hours awake the other night, in bed, unable to cease thinking of the filial gallantry of the Cid. It appears to me, I confess, infinitely finer than in Corneille.

⁵⁹ Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 248.

Will your Lordship allow me to take this opportunity of repeating, in private, what I have sometimes indulged myself with expressing elsewhere? The name of Lord Holland has always presented to my mind that mixture of the genial & intellectual, which render respect affectionate; & it is with this feeling that I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your most obliged & obed^t. humble serv^t.

Leigh Hunt.⁶⁰

Hunt is considerably more formal in this letter than when writing to those he considered close friends (where he sometimes tripped himself up by being too familiar, offending the prickly Byron by omitting his title).⁶¹ Nevertheless, this letter presents a personal narrative of passionate response, producing a sense of the gift of literature being gratefully received and expressing a wish that this gift-giving might be made mutual. Hunt hints that he and Holland can become somehow equal through an equivalent exchange of works, just as those in Hunt's circles bound themselves together by exchanging books, dedications and sonnets. However, he also makes his own distinctive claims to importance by portraying himself as a reader and an aesthete – unable to resist literature and nature, familiar with de Vega and Corneille, enraptured into sleeplessness by the story of the Cid. These responses claim a kind of superiority of sensitivity, a claim reinforced by his description of the complex of resonances created in him by Holland's name. Even the acknowledged lateness of his response could be read as an assertion of artistic status, his preoccupation with literature causing the claims of the quotidian present to lose their urgency. The literary life in this letter to a lord is figured as a genteel and leisurely one – almost, in fact, aristocratic. In this letter Hunt is not a frantic producer of copy, 'bruised & overwhelmed by the quantity I write' or harried by financial concerns as he is in less guarded letters to close friends like Shelley.⁶² Instead he is a passionate admirer of writing and an influential connector. The frustrations

⁶⁰ Leigh Hunt to Lord Holland, 3 March 1817, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0256. Printed in Eleanor M. Gates, *Leigh Hunt: A Life in Letters; Together With Some Correspondence of William Hazlitt* (Essex, CT: Falls River Publications, 1988), pp. 80-81.

⁶¹ See Hunt's awkward letter Lord Byron dated 13 Feb 1822, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0258.

⁶² Hunt to Percy Bysshe Shelley, 3 November 1820, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0030.

occasioned by slow printers add a touch of professional reality to the ideas that Hunt sells to Holland: the idea of himself as a sensitive, worthwhile and respectable friend and the idea of authorship as a skilled and valuable occupation.

Hunt is similarly preoccupied with conjuring himself and his friends in his letters to Percy and Mary Shelley, but with these closer associates Hunt is more intimate and creative. In these letters the power of writing is constantly celebrated, as when Hunt describes its ability to bring his self to the Shelleys:

Whenever I write to you, I seem to be transported to your presence. I dart out of the window like a bird, dash into a southwestern current of air, skim over the cool waters, hurry over the basking lands, rise like a lark over the mountains, fling like a swallow into the vallies, skin again, pant for breath – there's Leghorn – eccomi! – how d'ye do?⁶³

This opening echoes tropes from Shelley's own poetry; later in the letter Hunt praises Shelley's 'Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills', and his language here echoes the winds, birds and vistas of that poem, although Hunt's more grounded style ties the flight down at either end through the references to his Hampstead window and to his bursting in on the Shelleys' own 'windless bower' with a cheeky greeting.⁶⁴ The lark Hunt makes himself interestingly prefigures Shelley's 'To a Skylark' in which the bird becomes a poet who 'Pourest thy full heart/ In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.'⁶⁵ I do not mean to suggest that Hunt's effusion directly inspired Shelley's poem, but rather that playing with the established lyric trope connecting birds and poets formed a small part of the friends' shared aesthetic vocabulary. In writing to the Shelleys Hunt travels to them imaginatively both in the narrative of his journey and in employing a lexicon of mutually beloved images.

⁶³ Hunt to Percy and Mary Shelley, August 1819, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0025; also in Gates, p. 99, in which the date is tentatively given as the 23rd.

⁶⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills', line 344, from *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), p. 118.

⁶⁵ Shelley, 'To A Skylark', lines 4-5, *ibid.*, p. 304.

While the imagined journey is fanciful, the closeness created through this echoing is more tangible, a written affirmation of their shared ambitions.

This shared intellectual culture pervades even the most personal matters, as in the letter Hunt wrote soon after the death of the Shelleys' young son:

He was a fine little fellow, – was William; & for my part, I cannot conceive, that young intellectual spirit which set thinking out of his eye, & seemed to comprehend so much in his smile, can perish like the house it inhabited. I do not know that a soul is born with us; but we seem, to me, to attain to a soul, some later, some earlier; & when we have got that, there is a look in our eye, a sympathy in our cheerfulness, & a yearning & grave beauty in our thoughtfulness, that seems to say – Our mortal dress may fall off when it will: – our trunk & our leaves may go: – we have shot up our blossom into an immortal air. This is poetry, you will see, & not argument; but then there comes upon me another fancy, which would fain persuade me, that poetry is the argument of a higher sphere. Do you smile at me? Do you too, Marina, smile at me? Well, then, – I have done something at any rate.⁶⁶

This letter's move from the sorrow of loss to metaphysical speculations is ostensibly jarring, but its allusions carried particular resonances for the group. William is described in two of his father's favoured words as an 'intellectual spirit'; in a previous letter Hunt had admired the respect paid to 'Spirit of Intellectual Beauty' by the Greek tragedians through their 'lurking impatience & irreligion against their own plot[s]' and their 'yearning after every sphere of beauty, moral & physical'.⁶⁷ This earlier letter responded to Shelley's own 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', which sceptically reworks aspects of Wordsworth's Immortality ode. Hunt's response to William's death is indebted to the language and mood of Wordsworth's poem, but contends that rather than being immanent the soul descends like Shelley's spirit of beauty. In his hymn Shelley writes of his unsuccessful childhood search for gothic inspiration before describing the true revelation of the spirit: 'Sudden, thy shadow

⁶⁶ Hunt to Percy Shelley, [8?] July 1819, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0023. Printed in Gates, p. 96.

⁶⁷ Hunt to Mary Shelley, 9 March 1819, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0022.

fell on me; I shrieked, and clasped my hand in extacy!’⁶⁸ In arguing that William precociously exhibited an intellectual spirit and the sympathy which Shelley ascribed to its operation, Hunt equates the son with his father and becoming a real person with thinking like a poet. Hunt thus seeks to comfort Shelley by affirming a shared belief in the value of their vocations and by asserting that William, young as he was, had also manifested this belief. In this shared discourse poetry is seen not a process or a genre but a superior way of being, a way that promises a kind of beautifully evoked, if ill-defined, immortality. By arguing that poetry is ‘the argument of a higher sphere’, Hunt makes it a replacement for religion as a medium for explaining calamities, glorifying and validating literary perception. He is of course a little uncertain about pushing the value of life so far into literature, aware that he might come across as unfeeling through bringing up aesthetics in response to a very real bereavement. Hedging against this, he tempers his statements by gently burlesquing his declared fanciful nature in the final lines, portraying himself as deliberately overreaching in his claims for poetry while still holding out the prospect of their being true. Faced with death, Hunt thus turns towards a shared textual pantheon to produce comfort, while remaining astute enough to realise that he can only gesture towards consolation – he wrote to Mary again shortly afterwards, ‘I wish in truth I knew how to amuze you just now.’⁶⁹

Not all Hunt’s writerly evocations were so heightened; indeed, he was often more comfortable discussing the quotidian aspects of pen-pushing. Attempting to amuse Mary in a later letter, Hunt plays imaginatively with the medium’s physicality:

I will tell you, Marina, what I meant by “gigantic paragraphs”: – short letters written in large characters. Count the number of words in one of my letters, & in one of yours, & see which has the greater. Thus you write a long letter, it is true, but not a full one. The characters I write in are like the devils in Pandemonium, who shrunk themselves to pigmies that they might all get in;

⁶⁸ Shelley, ‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty’, lines 59-60, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, p. 95.

⁶⁹ Hunt to Mary Shelley, 25-27 July 1819, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0024.

– yours are the leaders of them in secret conclave, – mightier, but not so numerous.⁷⁰

Hunt here takes Mary lightly to task for short-changing him as a correspondent. His diabolic comparisons display a shared delight in figurative language and also playfully echo the opinions of their shared conservative opponents, who, as Kim Wheatley has noted, tended to configure radicals as ‘Satanic rebels against orthodoxy’.⁷¹ Writing here becomes its writer, and while Hunt is happy to rank Mary’s might above his own, he nevertheless chides her for closing herself off behind large, secretive characters while his own letters cram words – and therefore self – into whatever space is available.⁷² For Hunt such generous individual expression was of immense importance. Later in the same letter he wrote that he had been reading the *Meditations* of Marcus Antonius and found in him a powerful argument for entangling art and friendship:

He advises people who wish to rejoice themselves, to call to mind the several virtues or gifts of those they are acquainted with, – as the industry of this person, the good nature of that, &c. So you see, you are to beatify yourself any time at a moment’s notice by reflecting on Shelley’s ardour of benevolence, Marianne’s paper-cutting, or my performance of a Venetian ballad, – on any thing, in short, great or small, which is pleasurable and belongs to your friends. But the notion is beautiful, is it not?

In Marcus Antonius Hunt thus finds a precedent for his faith in networks, in the ability of associative groupings to sustain their members. Artistic creation becomes

⁷⁰ Hunt to Mary Shelley, 12 September 1819, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0027.

⁷¹ Kim Wheatley, *Shelley and his Readers: Beyond Paranoid Politics* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 2.

⁷² Hunt’s last lines often shrink considerably to keep the letter on a single sheet of paper, probably partially as postal costs for letters were calculated based on the number of sheets as well as the distance they had to travel. Such costs, generally paid by the recipient, were fairly significant, so many letter-writers got into the habit of restricting themselves to single sheets. A useful spreadsheet of historical postal costs can be found on the website of the British Postal Museum and Archive: <<http://postalheritage.org.uk/page/internalrates>> [accessed 15 Aug 2011].

not only a means of expression for the artist but also for their friends, a source of strength both aesthetic and personal. By encouraging Mary to see herself as part of a circle of talented individuals, Hunt offers to her the consolations both of art and of friendship, or rather of the one expressed through the other, both being in his formulation inextricably intertwined.

Hunt also encouraged both Shelleys in more pragmatic ways by updating them on the progress of their publications, often painting sunny pictures of their British reception. On the publication of *The Cenci* he wrote that ‘Shelley’s tragedy is out & flourishing. I receive, both as his friend & representative, congratulations on all sides, upon the dedication, the preface & the drama.’ He described the poem rapturously as ‘a true, stately, & yet affectionate mixture of poetry, & philosophy, & human nature, & horror, & all-redeeming sweetness of intention’ and noted his promotion of this view in the *Examiner*: ‘I gave a brief notice of it two or three weeks ago, announcing this longer one, which will just precede, I hope, the second edition.’⁷³ For Shelley, physically removed from the literary scene in Britain, Hunt acted as a crucial promoter: of sales, in print and of Shelley’s own confidence in his work. This supportive relationship was reciprocal; Hunt often expressed pleasure on receiving complements and continued to convey his appreciation for Shelley’s ‘overwhelmingly generous gift of £1,400’, made in 1818 to help Hunt settle his debts.⁷⁴ Hunt’s letters regularly stress his gratitude by laying out plans to fully satisfy his creditors through literary work:

How you delight me with what you say of the Indicator! I hope you will like the succeeding papers as well. I have now already completed a volume, & I speculate upon writing three at least, if my health will hold out, –three years in all, being the time for which I have given up what I told you to my creditors.⁷⁵

⁷³ Hunt to Percy and Mary Shelley, 6 April 1820, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0031.

⁷⁴ Roe, *Fiery Heart*, p. 311.

⁷⁵ Hunt to Percy Shelley, 23 August 1820, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0032.

Contrariwise, Hunt shared his frustrations with Shelley when his aspirations were thwarted. While Hunt was far more successful at getting his work to readers than Shelley was, his prominence meant that he was more commonly the target of attacks on their shared aspirations. In his letters he leagues himself and the Shelleys as part of an aggrieved opposition to a perfidious establishment. Writing in 1821 he complains that illness and worry have made him ‘thin & gaunt’, that the *Examiner* ‘has been lamentably falling off’, that his family are unwell and that his brother is imprisoned. He attributes these calamities to his paper’s honesty: ‘we could not have been treated with more spite & revenge, in some respects, if we had been Jesus himself come upon earth again, unknown to his would-be Christians.’⁷⁶ Hunt makes this potentially blasphemous comparison secure in the knowledge that his atheistical friends will allow him the liberty. As long as Hunt and the Shelleys have each other they are in some respects market- and critic-proof, their works assured of at least a few appreciators to justify their continuing to write.

The role of Shelley’s best appreciator was one that Hunt actively sought and defended long after his friend’s untimely death. In a later querulous letter to Mary Shelley he objected to her characterisation of her husband as having “‘possessed a quality of mind which experience has shewn you no other human being as possessing, in more than a very slight degree,” – “unworldliness”⁷⁷. He argued that he too was unworldly and that his continuing difficulties (exemplified by his applying to the Literary Fund twice in the 1830s) revealed that he, like Shelley, had written for goals other than contemporary wealth and fame.⁷⁸ The fact that unworldliness could be considered an attractive trait stands testament to the transformation that the thinking of Hunt and his circle wrought. Discourses refined through private sociability could thus break out to wider audiences. While Hunt himself was not a major beneficiary of this transformation, the types of oppositional authorship he championed became and remain his potent legacy in the mainstream.

⁷⁶ Hunt to Percy and Mary Shelley, 10 July 1821, NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0035.

⁷⁷ Leigh Hunt to Mary Shelley, 25 June [?], NYPL Pforzheimer LH 0016.

⁷⁸ See Mr Leigh Hunt (full name: James Henry Leigh Hunt), BL Loan 96 RLF 1/734.

Women, Networking and Audiences

Arguing against viewing women's literary activities separately from those of men, Stephen Behrendt writes that 'while gender undeniably played a considerable part in the literary and cultural politics of the period, it is an error to assume [...] that the activities of men and women were therefore wholly delineated and separated on the basis of notions about the "separate spheres" that have become commonplace in twentieth-century criticism and theory.' Rather, he contends, 'there were in fact both overlapping and competing (or alternative) spheres'.⁷⁹ In what follows I will examine two letters in which female writers negotiate these spheres in order to argue that sociability was a particularly crucial tool for women seeking recognition and validation from wider literary communities. Letters were particularly important for women, who were often barred by custom and resources from many of the physical and conceptual spaces in which men socialised. Over the textual spaces of letters, though, they could hold equal or greater sway.

The first letter I wish to consider was written in 1810 by Matilda Betham to George Dyer, who would later support her applications to the Literary Fund.⁸⁰ Betham's first collection *Elegies, and Other Smaller Poems*, published in 1797, received an encouraging notice in the *Monthly*, which rated her talents 'beyond the common sphere of merit.'⁸¹ This relative success led Betham to travel to London and attempt to earn a living as an author. 'Many people have thought me naturally a singular and perhaps imprudent person because I rhymed and ventured into the world as an artist,' she wrote, 'but I belonged to a large family, and dreaded dependence.'⁸² She was successful in building a network of literary supporters; as Paula Feldman writes, 'she was the close friend of Robert Southey and Charles and Mary Lamb and knew John Opie, Francis Holcroft, Hannah More, Anna Letitia

⁷⁹ Behrendt, p. 8.

⁸⁰ Miss Matilda Betham (or Mary Matilda Betham), BL Loan 96 RLF 1/361.

⁸¹ *Monthly Review*, 2nd series, 26 (May 1798), pp. 92-94 (p. 92).

⁸² Quoted in her niece Matilda Betham-Edwards' *Six Life Studies of Famous Women* (London: Griffith & Farran, 1880), p. 235. Originally from her privately printed autobiographical book *Crow-Quill Flights*, pages of which survive in the Literary Fund Archive (Loan 96 RLF 1/361/15).

Barbauld, Germaine de Staël and Samuel Taylor Coleridge'.⁸³ In 1802 the last of these compared her to Sappho and assured her that 'the fair, wild Offspring of thy Genius [...] Have found a little Home within *my* Heart.'⁸⁴ While she worked at writing she supplemented her literary income by giving readings from Shakespeare and painting miniatures. In 1804 she published a *Biographical Dictionary of the Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country*. It was reviewed sparsely, but the *British Critic* praised its 'authenticity' and pronounced it satisfying and interesting.⁸⁵ In the opinion of the *Critical Review*, her 1808 volume of *Poems* showed 'the clearest marks of being written by a person of elegant genius, and of a warm and generous heart.'⁸⁶

By 1810, then, Betham was an accomplished and well-connected author, if not a commercially successful one. Her letter to Dyer shows her comfortably at home in literary society: 'I have seen the Holcrofts, Mrs Montagu & Mr Lamb. Miss Lamb did not return to town with him.'⁸⁷ Dyer would have known that the tactful reference to Mary signified her having been confined in an asylum due to a recurrence of her debilitating mental illness. The inclusion of such personal information indicates the great extent to which networks of authors were constituted as friendship groups rather than professional circles, although of course such friendships were often capitalised on for the purposes of writerly advancement. Betham confirms the importance of personal sociability in an added postscript:

Since I wrote the above a large party of us have been down to Purfleet to a ball on board my brother's ship – and Mr Lamb, though he did not dance was one, and very much contributed to the passage there & back (in the latter we were becalmed & were from 9 in the morning till 8 at night returning)

⁸³ Paula R. Feldman, *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 91.

⁸⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger', lines 8, 11, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen ed. Kathleen Coburn, 14 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-1993), I.ii, p. 727.

⁸⁵ *British Critic*, 24 (August 1804), p. 212.

⁸⁶ 'Betham's *Poems*', *Critical Review*, 14 (July 1808), pp. 273-77 (p. 274).

⁸⁷ Matilda Betham to George Dyer, 20 August 1810, NYPL Pforzheimer Misc. Ms. 3616h.

pleasant to us all. We wished you to have been with us – for it was the prettiest night I ever saw.

Betham goes on to describe the party – the glowing ‘Chinese lanterns’, the ‘handsome orchestra’, the flags festooning the deck, the baffled Chinese sailors ‘who in their best attire, and with countenances full of surprise and pleasure beheld us all dancing and seemed mightily amused.’ Through this description she draws Dyer into the party he was unable to attend, giving him something of the occasion and of herself by sharing her perspective. In describing Lamb’s presence and good humour she reassures Dyer that Lamb is being cared for and is bearing up despite his trying circumstances. In Betham’s friendships writing is an aspect of a broader conviviality, serving to communicate affection as well as profundities. It is a mistake to read writerly friendships as solely bookish endeavours; when writers assisted and bonded with each other the reasons were not necessarily related to their literary similarities or priorities. One valuable reason for examining convivial letters like Betham’s is to flesh out our sense of writers as individuals motivated by numerous connections and anxieties, rather than seeing them as dissocialised minds concerned only with creating art.

While the body of Betham’s letter to Dyer is concerned with personal matters, poetry is also in play. At the end of the initial letter Betham writes that ‘My friend has been copying out the rhymes you scolded me about & I have revised them for your service.’ These rhymes comprise a draft entitled ‘Fancy fettered’ on the letter’s second leaf. Since this draft version has to my knowledge never been printed, I give it here in full:

O! blame me not that I do restrain
Thy wandering footsteps! Thus thy wings confine!
'Tis the decree of Fate, it is not mine,
For I would let thee Fancy widely stray
Would follow gladly, tend thee on thy way
And never of thy vagaries complain;
Never thy wild and sportive flights disdain
Though reasonless those graceful moods may be,

They still, alas! Are passing sweet to me!

Then pity me who am compelled to bind
This murmuring captive; her who ever strove,
By little playful arts to win my love;
And ever inoffending, ever bright,
Danc'd in my view and pleased me to delight.
She scattered showers of lilacs on my mind,
For O! so fair, so fresh and so refined,
Her childlike offerings, without thorns to pain,
Without one canker'd wound, or earthly stain.

O! darling! as, at duty's call I twine
Those fetters round thee, they are wet with tears,
For the sweet playmate of my early years
I cannot thus afflict, nor thus resign,
My equal liberty and not repine
For I would make thee, infant as thou art,
Queen of my hopes, my leisure and my heart
But that affection, venerable cause,
I linked with Duty's unrelenting laws.

She blames me that I let thy sports offend
Old Time, and lay thy snare within his path
To make him falter, as it often hath;
But O! I love him not, he holds his breath
And hurries on, and is in league with Death,
To make the path through which my footsteps bend,
Late rich in all that rural scenes attend,
A gloomy desert; and I droop and die,
Beneath the gaze of his dull, threatening eye.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Matilda Betham to George Dyer, 20 August 1810.

This poem examines the tension between self-indulgent but truthful self-expression and conforming to societal norms, a tension inherent in the creation of socialised, communicative poetry. Being a respectable author in this poem is a process of self-restraint, not of gushing forth. The poem, however, remains ambivalent about the value of enslaving (feminine) Fancy at the behest of supposedly more mature impulses (a feminine Duty, but one operating at the behest of a masculine Time). By complaining of the need for restraint, Betham creates a space to enumerate Fancy's charms, making surrendering to her seem far more attractive than life under the aegis of Duty. This places the poem itself in a peculiar position – it implies that writing dutifully requires the resignation of childhood impulses and liberty, but through portraying this the poem has it both ways, gaining credit for both the beauty of fancy and resignation to social norms. By placing the poem initially in the context of a private letter Betham tests out these sentiments, obliquely addressing Dyer on the sacrifices she must face in order to produce socially or financially profitable works. By asking his opinion, she ensures that he will read her verses and thus come to better understand his friend – or at least the poetic persona she projects – and perhaps come to help her negotiate the problems the poem depicts.

Betham obviously valued these lines, as they appeared in print in two different forms. *The Edinburgh Annual Register*, a publication with which her friend Southey was heavily involved, published them with minor alterations and many additional exclamation marks.⁸⁹ A revised version were also published in *The Lay of Marie* (1816), Betham's long poem on Marie de France, in which the lines comprise one of the first songs that the eponymous heroine plays for the court, crying out against her limiting constraints.⁹⁰ The *Lay* itself is interesting in that a number of Betham's friends were involved in its composition and production. In May 1814 Southey, at Betham's instigation, had suggested that her most lucrative literary prospects would be 'to adapt some of our old plays to the stage' or 'to versify some popular tale; better still, to manufacture one with a melodrama or grand

⁸⁹ 'The Fettering of Fancy', *The Edinburgh Annual Register* (1812), pp. 24-25. The punctuation changes move the poem closer towards the stereotype of the breathless feminine effusion – an interesting mediation on the part of the editors.

⁹⁰ Matilda Betham, *The Lay of Marie* (London: Rowland Hunter, 1816), pp. 14-15.

spectacle for the stage.’⁹¹ Southey’s advice drew on precedents from within his circle of friends. Coleridge’s most financially successful production was his play *Remorse* and Southey himself specialised in spectacular poetry both original and adapted, although his works were long-term prospects as far as money was concerned, as I have proved.⁹² Interestingly, Southey’s letter concludes by slipping from advice to invitation: ‘These are things which may be talked over at leisure when you come to us; we shall all rejoice to see you, and it is very likely that among my books you may find something which will suit your purpose.’ Even for Southey, a man whose love of quietness among his books was notorious, Betham’s company was desirable and her literary needs best met by incorporating them into a broader sociability.

Once Betham set about writing her *Lay*, Southey wrote again advising her to look at Marie de France’s originals: ‘the writing is not likely to be difficult [...] but I dare say George Dyer would lend you his eyes if your own should be puzzled.’⁹³ He shrewdly suggested that including the originals would ensure that the book had ‘an antiquarian value’. Betham took up this suggestion and included a great deal of ancillary material in the volume. Her book was thus to some extent co-authored by her circle. She consulted Dyer on the fragment, discussed plans and drafts with Southey and asked Lamb to help see the poem through the press. Feldman describes Lamb as having ‘made some substantive, though not always helpful changes’ to the poem, basing her assertion on the following passage from an 1816 letter:⁹⁴

I will go thro’ the Poem, unless you should feel more safe by doing it yourself. In fact a second person looking over a proof is liable to let pass any thing that sounds plausible. The act of looking it over seeming to require only an attention to the words that they have the proper component

⁹¹ Robert Southey to Matilda Betham, 15 May 1814, in Ernest Betham (ed.), *A House of Letters* (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1905), p. 146.

⁹² On *Remorse* see Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (London: Flamingo, 1999), pp. 335-38. On Southey see Chapter Three.

⁹³ Southey to Betham, 30 May 1814, in Betham (ed.), p. 147.

⁹⁴ Feldman, p. 92.

letters, one scarce thinks then (or but half) of the sense. – You will find one line I have ventured to alter in 3^d sheet. You have made hope & yoke rhyme, which I find intolerable. Every body can see & carp at a bad rhyme or no rhyme. It strikes as slovenly, like bad spelling.⁹⁵

Feldman implies from Lamb's line alteration that he ran roughshod over Betham's original, but read in the context of the full passage, Lamb's alterations come across rather differently. He takes up the poem at Betham's request, limits his attention principally to proofing and makes the one alteration he explicitly mentions based on a conviction that the line as it stands will reflect badly on his friend. Lamb was a man whose taste and talents were respected, and asking friends for editorial assistance was not uncommon – for example, Byron commented on Hunt's *Story of Rimini* (1816), Gifford made suggestions on Byron's works at his request and John Clare's published works were constructed in consultation with numerous acquaintances, most prominently his publisher, John Taylor.⁹⁶ In giving her poem into Lamb's hands, perhaps Betham invited him to refine and improve the text and thus help her achieve the financial success she required.

There is, however, something in Feldman's claim. Lamb described himself as taking his task very seriously, but his other commitments interfered. He later felt compelled to drop the project as he felt that his 'distrest state of mind' was impeding his performance: 'The blunders I have already overlooked have weighed upon me almost insufferably.'⁹⁷ Of course, while the blunders weigh upon Lamb, they also presumably weigh upon Betham's poem. He apologised for this in a later letter:

I have drawn you into a scrape and am ashamed, but I know no remedy. My unwellness must be my apology. God bless you (tho' He curse the India House, and fire it *to the ground*), and may no unkind error creep into

⁹⁵ Charles Lamb to Matilda Betham, [1816], in Betham (ed.), p. 162.

⁹⁶ Roe, *Fiery Heart*, pp. 243-44; Fiona McCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend* (London: John Murray, 2002), p. 149; Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador, 2004), discussed at numerous points, but particularly pp. 203-07.

⁹⁷ Lamb to Betham, 1 June 1816, in Betham (ed.), p. 164.

‘Marie.’ May all its readers like it as well as I do, and everybody about you like its kind author no worse!⁹⁸

A lack of full professionalisation within the publishing industry meant that having a network of friends to assist in preparing works was invaluable, but the status of these friends as friends rather than professionals meant that they could not be held to account in the same way that someone doing a job could be. Betham’s friends were in some senses her competitors and had their own careers to consider, as Lamb’s letter makes clear. Betham was a person that other writers were glad to know and whose presence they valued; in her old age a young admirer stated that he ‘would rather talk to Matilda Betham than to the most beautiful young woman in the world.’⁹⁹ Her friends were happy to assist her, but there were practical limits to their level of investment in the work as opposed to its writer. Southey’s slip from advice to invitation in the letter I cited earlier perhaps indicates that friends keen for her company might have valued Betham’s conversation above her verse and might have been kind in their professed assessments of her works while declining to promote them among their other friends. Read in this light, Lamb’s ‘may all its readers like it as well as I do’ acquires a kind of dangerous ambiguity. This is, of course, an unprovable and possibly unjustified speculation. Nevertheless, it serves to make the point that while sociability was a powerful mode of literary validation, it could also be a slippery and potentially delusive one. It is easy to lie to maintain the good opinions of those we care about or whose approbation we seek; doubtless, as in any period, many insincere complements smoothed the functioning of literary society.

Betham’s literary correspondents were largely male (although she maintained a lifelong friendship with Charlotte Jerneingham, Lady Bedingfield, and exchanged letters with Sara Coleridge, Edith Southey and Mary Lamb). To provide a contrast I want to conclude by examining a letter connecting two female writers, Jane Porter and Mary Cockle. Porter was a popular and well-established writer of historical romances, most famously *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803) and *The Scottish Chiefs*

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 165-166.

⁹⁹ Betham-Edwards, p. 300.

(1810).¹⁰⁰ Cockle is more obscure and information on her life somewhat sparse. J.R. de J. Jackson states that she ‘was governess to the Misses Fitzclarence’ and ‘contributed to *The Iris* and *The Keepsake* annuals’.¹⁰¹ She published a number of educational books in the 1800s, including *The Juvenile Journal* and *Important Studies for the Female Sex, in reference to Modern Manners*. In 1810 she published *Lines on the Lamented Death of Sir John Moore*, which she followed up in 1812 with *Simple Minstrelsy*, a collection consisting principally of familiar poems addressed to friends. In 1814 she published *National Triumphs*, a long patriotic poem celebrating British victories in the Napoleonic Wars; reviewing this, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* described her as ‘a Lady whose talents and genius have ever been directed to the promotion of virtue’.¹⁰² She also published a number of shorter poetic pamphlets: pious elegies on the deaths of Princess Charlotte and George III, and, in 1817, two poems on Byron. These unsurprisingly damned his morals while admiring his talents, bemoaning his ability to ‘charm the fancy—but corrupt the heart’.¹⁰³ By September 1820 Cockle was a governess to the child of ‘Mr. & Mrs. Pearson’ at ‘Unthank Hall’ and it was to this address that Porter sent a newsy letter.

Porter’s letter is particularly interesting in its depicting a distinctively female network of literary sociability:

I was staying with Mrs. Hort, where I had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Opie very often. – She spoke to me of you, with high encomium of your talents, and told me Miss. More was a friend of hers. – Just before I went to Brighton Mrs. Opie and I went to a Literary Dinner at Mr Longmans Hampstead villa, and found it very pleasant. The Hospitality of our modern Maecenas, was as splendid as anything that ever groaned on Roman tables; and the guests who encircled it, were worthy of the host. His amiable wife was at the head of the board; and, besides some few ladies, of no earthly

¹⁰⁰ See St Clair, pp. 630-31.

¹⁰¹ J.R. de J. Jackson, *Romantic Poetry by Women: A Bibliography, 1770-1835* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 64. The Misses Fitzclarence were the illegitimate children of the Duke of Clarence (later William IV) and the actress Dorothea Jordan.

¹⁰² ‘*National Triumphs*’, *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 46 (June 1814), pp. 553-61 (p. 553).

¹⁰³ Mary E. Cockle, *Reply to Lord Byron’s “Fare Thee Well”* (Newcastle: S. Hodgson, 1817), p. 7.

names of note, (so if you please we may suppose them the nine heavenly sisters, in mortal disguise!) we had Mrs. Marcet, Miss. Aikin, & &. Gentlemen of the Muse, without number! And, on the whole, everything went off as gaily as wisely; – for, I own, I anticipated some Dullness, in a circle of so much profundity. However I was most agreeably disappointed.¹⁰⁴

This letter extends to Cockle the presences of other sympathetic female writers – in this passage Porter names Amelia Opie, Jane Marcet and Lucy Aikin; later in the letter she mentions her sister Anna Maria. In Porter's descriptions these women constitute authoritative sources of legitimation, by contrast with the male writers at Longman's dinner, who are lightly dismissed as a numberless mass. Even Longman himself is abstracted as a 'modern Maecenas', made grand but less immediately interesting than the ladies present. The encouraging praise placed at the head of the letter is Opie's, with the prospect of the formidable More's held out by means of this association. Porter's humorous dismissal of the ladies of no earthly name makes it clear that it is specifically a network of female writers into which she wishes to introduce Cockle. This sense of a shared privileging of the achievements of other female authors is amplified when Porter later writes that 'Neither Miss Pamela FitzGerald, nor myself, have forgotten your wish for a scrap of Mde. De Genlis hand-writing'. Pamela FitzGerald was the wife of the Irish patriot Lord Edward FitzGerald and the adopted daughter of Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de St-Aubin, comtesse de Genlis, a famed harpist and wit who produced a body of influential educational writings which were popular in Britain; these were probably the source of Cockle's interest. The fact that Cockle wished to collect this particular keepsake and that Porter was happy to collude indicates the particular totemic value successful female writers had for their female contemporaries.

Jacqueline Pearson has contended that 'novel-reading [...] gave women readers a series of potent images to deal with their anxieties about, or even fight for

¹⁰⁴ Jane Porter to Mrs Cockle, 24 September 1819, NYPL Pforzheimer Misc. Ms. 3930.

their rights to, literary authority.¹⁰⁵ Porter's letter demonstrates that women writers, as well as their works, could serve directly as exemplars and inspirations. It also suggests that this could be taken further, sketching a circle of women writers who sought each other out, read and socialised with each other and who collaborated in admiring interlocking canons of female writers. While women's access to public forums and gentlemanly networks was limited and their works often maligned or neglected by these formations, letters like Porter's show that masculine formulations in no way precluded networks of female authors and readers from forming and from articulating potent discourses of their own in search of social and literary validation. The liberating power of the letter allowed female authors to disseminate their writings and selves to other women who shared similar concerns and who worked together to mentor new talents and promote and value each other.

While the quarterlies and those who employed similar rhetorics affected total control over the sphere of literary opinion, then, in fact recognition as a worthwhile author could be sought through a wide range of different types of social interactions. Those asserting the primacy of professional criticism and aesthetic modes of validating literature were gaining ground, but authors could still engage socially with significant fractions of their readers and contemporaries, assuring themselves of the value of their works and selves through dialogue. The tight-knit nature of literary society meant that connections were relatively easy to establish and had profound implications for the way that writers were valued, both in intimate and influential circles and by increasingly expansive publics.

¹⁰⁵ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.218.

Coda: Where the Romantics Fit (or fail to)

In his 'Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg', composed in 1834, William Wordsworth mourns Hogg alongside a gallery of other recently-deceased acquaintances by recalling personal experiences. In evoking brief memories of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Walter Scott, George Crabbe, Felicia Hemans and Charles Lamb, Wordsworth remembers friendships – of varying closeness, certainly, but connections stronger and more complex than those of professional association or literary admiration. Indeed, as Janette Currie has observed, Hogg himself, who Wordsworth knew less well and with whom he was less comfortable, is sidelined in a poem in which he is the ostensible subject.¹ In the poem Wordsworth paints an intimately-connected literary world, one in which a company of major authors kept company with one another. However, its melancholy catalogue gives the sense that this familiar world is slipping away. Wordsworth is one of a decreasing band left 'to hear/A timid voice, that asks in whispers/"Who next will drop and disappear?"'²

This little poem explicitly positions itself at the junction between two literary cultures. Wordsworth places himself among an older, depleted generation whose achievements are established but who as individuals are past or passing. What comes next seems at first to be terrifyingly absent. However, the poem itself also provides the model for what will replace Coleridge's 'mortal power [...] frozen at its marvellous source' and the body of Lamb, 'vanished from his lonely hearth'.³ Their own self-determinations are replaced by textual representations and their original networks and contexts replaced with Wordsworth's canonising arrangement. This grouping also serves to sanctify Wordsworth himself through his being acquainted with this pantheon and through his figuring it in such a way as to promote his own

¹ Janette Currie, 'Re-Visioning James Hogg: The Return of the Subject to Wordsworth's "Extempore Effusion"', *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780-1840* (Winter 2005), <http://www.romtext.cf.ac.uk/articles/rt15_n01.pdf> [accessed 17 June 2012], pp. 7-28 (pp. 7-8).

² William Wordsworth, 'Extempore Effusions on the death of James Hogg,' lines 26-28, in *Last Poems, 1821-1850*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 305-307 (p. 306)

³ 'Extempore Effusions', lines 15-16, 20, pp. 305, 306.

convictions – it is notable, for example, that Scott is described as ‘the Border-minstrel’, rather than the Author of Waverley.⁴ This is a company endowed with the sublime inherent qualities of Romantic poets rather than the bibliographic, social or professional trappings of authors.

I begin with this poem, then, because it represents in microcosm a number of crucial shifts that occurred between the late 1810s and the 1830s. For the greater part of this study I have principally focused on the first two decades of the nineteenth century, an environment in which, as Paul Keen has argued, Romanticism ‘constituted an emergent rather than a dominant discourse’ and, as I have asserted, drawing on William St Clair and others, new works of literature, with a few notable exceptions, circulated in expensive editions among relatively elite audiences.⁵ To conclude, then, I want briefly to explore the positions from which the Romantics operated and to outline some of the shifts in the 1820s which indicate that when Wordsworth constructed his canon in the ‘Extempore Effusion’ he was both in tune with a wider reading public than those he had been able to reach in previous decades and operating in a culture which had begun to accept his arguments about poetry and genius, which the quarterlies and the literary establishment had previously resisted.

In the 1800s and the 1810s the canonical Romantic poets were acutely conscious of the successes of their contemporaries and, with the exception of Byron, were painfully aware that their own works did not match up in terms of sales, profitability or critical acclaim in print. This was not unexpected for Blake, who for the most part operated outside the literary culture of the period, but was more problematic for Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley. As Lucy Newlyn puts it, ‘Far from being oppressed by the burden of the past [...] the Romantic writers were intensely preoccupied with the combined threats of modernity and futurity.’⁶

⁴ ‘Extempore Effusions’, line 8, p. 305.

⁵ Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 237. As Keen notes, ‘In 1817, Coleridge was still able to write of Wordsworth that ‘His fame belongs to another age’.

⁶ Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. x.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats were manifestly not as good at appealing to large audiences as writers like Robert Bloomfield, James Montgomery, Thomas Moore and Matthew Lewis. None of them possessed the kind of critical kudos enjoyed by Thomas Campbell, Maria Edgeworth or the conveniently deceased Robert Burns. They were not as well-connected as figures like Francis Jeffrey, Samuel Rogers or Robert Southey, whose literary credentials were backed up by their having access to wealth, power and media through which to voice themselves. Certainly, none of them combined financial success, popular appeal, critical acclaim and social influence in the way that Walter Scott did. The Wizard of the North represented the greatest possible level of success a literary writer could achieve – by comparison, Harold Bloom's visionary company occupied relatively humble and marginal positions.

One of the reasons that proliferating markets, networks and readerships troubled the poets was that they were principally invested in older models of literary conduct. In the early nineteenth century the environment in which authors worked was changing rapidly, but many elements of the sociable literary culture of eighteenth century persisted:

traces of a system of patronage were observable in the dependence of writers such as the young Coleridge on private annuities; in the persistence of subscription methods of publication; in various methods of advocacy, whether they took place in public or behind the scene; in the active promotional role played by influential booksellers; and in the relation between established literary figures and their young protégées.⁷

In many senses, the Romantics operated as authors most successfully within the contexts of this longer-established literary culture. Coleridge and Wordsworth were both university-educated beneficiaries of older systems of recognition, receiving income from patrons, legacies and, in Wordsworth's case, the government. Shelley and Byron were heirs both to aristocratic titles and to a long tradition of literary endeavour among the advantaged, although Shelley especially sought to craft a new

⁷ Newlyn, p. 24.

kind of authorial identity which did not rely on his privileged background (though his having the leisure to do so was largely contingent on his vast familial wealth). Keats was not from a particularly exalted background, but in his short life he lived principally on inherited income. Keats and the Hunt circle, as I have discussed, also operated as a coterie in a manner reminiscent of much earlier writers, employing manuscript circulation and promoting each others' work through private praise and public advocacy. The Romantics thus often operated from or appropriated privileged gentlemanly positions. While they were relatively successful at establishing themselves in the contexts of literary networks, they were faced with the challenge of validating their works in the contexts of emergent readerships which treated them relatively indifferently and powerful bands of increasingly professionalised critics who arrogated to themselves the right to determine the values and meanings of literary texts.

That the Romantics were successful in claiming paramount positions in the longer term is futile to deny. They are clearly 'greater' or 'stronger' writers by conventional modern standards than most of their contemporaries. Saying this, though, requires us to consider what criteria determine excellence, and here I would agree with Jerome McGann, Clifford Siskin and many others that the criteria which we use to judge poetry today are both intrinsically Romantic and historically contingent.⁸ It does not seem implausible that the majority of readers in the early nineteenth century were acculturated and educated in such a manner as to genuinely enjoy and venerate poems such as Rogers' *Pleasures of Memory*, Bloomfield's *Farmer's Boy* and Scott's *Lady of the Lake* rather than Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Wordsworth's *Excursion* or Blake's *Jerusalem*. It also seems to me condescending to think that they were foolish to do so, that audiences were just waiting for the brilliance of canonical Romanticism to sweep away their trivial distractions. The acceptance of Romanticism in the middle decades of the nineteenth century was contingent on a major shift in the ways that poets and poetry were appraised and conceived. Acknowledging this aesthetic turn and the ways it

⁸ See Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983) and Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

responds to market discourses lets us see both the Romantic period and Romanticism in a more clear-eyed manner.

So, then – what changed, and how did it do so? What constituted the strong identities that allowed the Romantics to build and maintain readerships when so many of their contemporaries slipped out of the limelight and out of print? In what follows I will necessarily present a brief and partial view, but in doing so I will attempt to integrate my findings about the broader literary culture of the early nineteenth century with studies that have focused intensively on the construction and reception of the canonical poets. Firstly, I will examine some of the ways that the Romantics advanced alternative claims to poetic authority vested in the enduring value of their achievements. Secondly, I will consider the ways that periodical and biographical discourses in the late 1810s and the 1820s paved the way both for the individual Romantics and for the notion of the Romantic poet to reach wider readerships, albeit in forms mediated in ways with which the poets still living were not entirely comfortable.

Romantic ideologies were formed in opposition to commercial and critical professionalisation, but also took from both these processes. Newlyn considers Romanticism ‘a species of reaction-formation against the new power of reading’ by which authors ‘[sought] to consolidate their diminishing sense of authority through strategies of mystification.’⁹ It thus mirrored in certain respects the ‘maintenance of ‘mystery’ which Penelope Corfield has identified as crucial in the emergence of professional identities.¹⁰ As Andrew Bennett has argued, one of the sophisticated self-fashioning strategies employed by the poets was to present their works as pioneering, deferring their validation until the arrival of a more hospitable future:

In order to discriminate the poet from the scribbler or hack, the poem from common, everyday verse, Romantic theories of poetry produce an absolute and non-negotiable opposition between writing which is original, new,

⁹ Newlyn, p. 48.

¹⁰ Penelope J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 28.

revolutionary, writing which breaks from the past and appeals to the future, and writing which is conventional, derivative, a copy or simulation of earlier work, writing which has immediate appeal and an in-built redundancy.¹¹

While originality had been valued previously, in Romantic arguments it is made paramount. By fetishising the originality of their verse, the Romantics attempted to escape both the hierarchies of taste propagated by the periodical oligopolies and the expectations aroused by the sales figures of their more commercially-successful contemporaries. If the Romantics convinced as originals, as innovators, they were not unsuccessful, but rather keepers of specialist knowledge, their success merely deferred until the reading public had caught up with their innovations.

Explicit examples of such framing can be found in the paratexts of *Lyrical Ballads*, particularly its preface, usually solely credited to Wordsworth, but written with considerable input from Coleridge, who claimed that it ‘[arose from] the heads of our mutual Conversations’.¹² The preface opens with an assertion that the poetry that follows will inevitably ruffle feathers. Indeed, it becomes apparent that in some senses this is the effect Wordsworth desires, as he argues that he has quite deliberately transgressed the terms of an implicit agreement between authors and readers. In refusing to write verse that will ‘gratify certain known habits of association’, Wordsworth claims for himself the authority of originality.¹³ This chimes with the advertisement to the London copies of the 1798 first edition, in

¹¹ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 3.

¹² Coleridge to William Sotheby, 13 July 1802, in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E.L. Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71), II, 811. The collaboration is explored by Adam Sisman in *The Friendship: Wordsworth and Coleridge* (New York: Viking, 2007); see especially pp. 306-13.

¹³ William Wordsworth [and Samuel Taylor Coleridge], *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems*, 2nd edition, 2 vols (London: Longman & Rees, 1800 [actually published January 1801]), I, ix. This and the following early editions consulted using *Lyrical Ballads: An Electronic Scholarly Edition*, ed. Bruce Graver and Ron Tetreault, *Romantic Circles*, <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/LB/>> [accessed 20 June 2012].

which the poems were framed as ‘experiments.’¹⁴ The advertisement also made a bolder claim, asserting that ‘It is the honourable characteristic of Poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind. The evidence of this fact is to be sought, not in the writings of Critics, but in those of Poets themselves.’¹⁵ This statement radically extends the purview of poetry and in doing so makes claims for the poet beyond the explicit assertion that it makes. If poetry may be found in every subject, then the poet moves from being a craftsman assembling conventional elements to being an interpreter of reality, the philosopher of nature that Coleridge hoped Wordsworth would become through writing *The Recluse*. For this to be recognised, though, the relationship between poets, readers and critics must be substantially redefined. Wordsworth puts the case relatively discreetly, but his argument here seeks to allow the poet to bypass contemporary critics, who he implies have failed to comprehend his work, and places him above his readers, who have proved incapable of divining his purpose without further explication. The pragmatic need to contextualise his poems is thus converted into a means by which to advance an agenda which privileges the type of particularised poet Wordsworth wants to be and the kind of work that he produces.

Other poets employed similar, although subtly reinflected, arguments. Shelley’s *Revolt of Islam*, for example, is characterised in its preface as ‘an experiment on the temper of the public mind as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live.’¹⁶ Shelley’s poet here is a presumptuous activist, his poem explicitly written both to shape and to provoke a response from his readers. While his limited success in reaching wide readerships caused him to vary his strategies, Shelley continued to attempt to advance the importance of the poet. In the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, when he writes that

¹⁴ Although these claims were somewhat disingenuous, as Mary Jacobus explores in *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

¹⁵ [William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge], *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* (London: J. & A. Arch, 1798), p. i.

¹⁶ Preface to *Laon and Cyntha/The Revolt of Islam*, in *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1989-), II, 32.

‘Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are in one sense the creators and in another the creations of their age’, Shelley places artists as shapers dynamically engaged with politics and history rather than as gentlemen possessed of polite accomplishments.¹⁷ Even when disavowing his own authorship, as in the advertisement to *Epipsychidion*, whose supposed author ‘died at Florence’, Shelley seeks to reify poetic genius by claiming that the poem’s narrator’s life holds interest ‘less on account of the romantic vicissitudes which diversified it, than the ideal tinge which it received from his own character and feelings.’¹⁸

The formulations we now group as Romantic, then, sought to promote their authors both through making clear their specific virtues and through attempting to legitimate the idea of poets transcending other professional discourses and existing above the markets in which they were implicated. One of the most famous examples of this process is the answer Wordsworth gives when he asks (with a significant capital) ‘What is a Poet?’:

He is a man speaking to men : a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind ; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him ; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.¹⁹

While he begins the sentence as an equal, Wordsworth’s Poet is quickly refined into a sort of empathic saint, who sees more, comprehends more fully and feels better than other men (as many critics have remarked, the discourse of Romanticism is consciously masculine). As Bennett asserts, ‘Romanticism develops a theory of

¹⁷ Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), p. 208.

¹⁸ Advertisement to *Epipsychidion*, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, p. 392.

¹⁹ William Wordsworth [and Samuel Taylor Coleridge], *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems*, 3rd edition, 2 vols (London: Longman & Rees 1802), I, xxviii.

writing and reception which stresses the importance of the poet's originating subjectivity, and of the work of art as an expression of self uncontaminated by market forces, undiluted by appeals to the corrupt prejudices and desires of (bourgeois, contaminating, fallible, feminine, temporal, mortal) readers.²⁰

However, while the poets publicly scorned the conspicuous successes of contemporaries and comforted themselves in the face of failure with intimations of future vindication once the tastes of readers had been 'corrected and purified', this did not mean that they were able successfully to turn their backs on their age.²¹ The Romantics did not give themselves wholly over to Romantic theory – indeed, they could not, as it was not yet fully formulated. As Bennett notes, writing for posterity is an anxious, conflicted proposition. After all, 'one cannot experience one's own posterity [...] becoming 'eternal' or 'immortal' in one's work means dying.'²² It would have taken a supremely confident and cerebral writer to be able to devote themselves fully to such a prospect and it is thus unsurprising that the Romantics even as they oriented themselves towards better futures sought to engage with the present in order to bring these futures more swiftly into being. Think of Shelley's pamphleteering, Keats' networking, Coleridge's lecturing, Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra* (1808) and *Guide to the Lakes* (1810; revised editions in 1820, 1822, 1823 and 1835). Consider the dramas that all the poets sought to produce (a successful play being in the period far more widely accessible and profitable than any published work). While the Romantics evoked the prospect of future vindication, they also sought both to bring this to pass through self-promotion, looking to achieve contemporary profiles by taking advantage of their connections in forms made possible by advances in technologies, shifts in taste and the increasing public audience for literary matters.

In achieving recognition on the terms which they had threaded into their works, the Romantics benefitted from two major print-cultural shifts which were driven in large part by the expanding readerships about which they expressed such

²⁰ Bennett, p. 3.

²¹ Preface to 1802 *Lyrical Ballads*, p. xxvii.

²² Bennett, p. 201.

anxiety. The first was the propagation of poetic genius in the monthly magazines founded from the late 1810s, which drew upon the poets' conceptions in establishing new discourses with which to oppose the hegemony of the quarterlies. The second was the vogue in the 1820s and 1830s for authorial biography, a consequence of the interest sparked by periodical responses to Romantic theories stressing the importance of the poet and a result of expanding readerships interposing new social distances between authors and their readers. The common factor that connects these shifts is the importance they placed in writers' selves. It is no coincidence that the Romantics created strongly personalised selves to oppose the theoretically anonymous critic and the increasingly-unknown reader. Not least among their achievements are the intensely figured consciousnesses in their works. As Bennett puts it, 'Romantic poets [...] want to know what we think about them and what we think about them is largely a function of what they think of our thinking.'²³ The shifts I have described can be understood in one sense as stages in a process engendered by this reciprocal scrutiny. The concept of the elevated genius was employed to oppose market-based and professional valuations; subsequently, those who had sought the epithet became the subjects of biographical attention in an attempt to better understand and justify their privileged status; and finally the accepted exemplars of genius were read back out to redefine genius itself, creating the somewhat awkward umbrella of Romanticism.

In his excellent book on the formulation and popularisation of notions of genius in the literary magazines, David Higgins quotes a telling extract by the Tory journalist William Maginn, who argued in 1826 – with, as Higgins puts it, 'a degree of ironic hyperbole' – that under the influence of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*

the whole periodical criticism of Britain underwent a revolution. Principles were laid down and applied to passages from our great 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

²³ Bennett, p. 200.

imaginations, and here, too, in Criticism as in Politics, they began to feel, think, and speak, like free men.²⁴

Maginn identifies the popularisation of Romantic notions of genius as part of a periodical revolution which had successfully shaken off the stifling authority of the quarterlies and made room for new magazines. The *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* sold themselves to a large extent on the brilliance and probity of their reviewers. Other magazines found it difficult to compete with them on their own terms and were forced to find new ways of asserting their interest. *Blackwood's* responded by producing unprecedentedly venomous, personalised and provocative critiques, but also by praising certain writers to the skies, a rare occurrence in the authoritarian quarterlies. *Blackwood's* critics opposed the *Quarterly* by praising Shelley as a man of genius despite his unfortunate politics, furthering a model of ideal poetic response being essentially asocial.²⁵ In opposing the *Edinburgh* they exalted Jeffrey's *bête noire*, Wordsworth; as Higgins puts it, 'His genius was constantly celebrated and he was treated as a profound thinker, worthy of veneration' in passages that often displayed 'religious overtones'.²⁶ By casting themselves as harbingers for strongly personalised poets, *Blackwood's* and other periodicals including the *London Magazine* (launched in 1820), the *New Monthly Magazine* (relaunched as a literary periodical in 1821) and the *Westminster Review* (launched in 1824) took up arms against the quarterlies' hegemony by figuring literary authors as objects of intense inherent interest rather than subjects for politicised regulation and dismissal. The 'young men of strong sensibility and meditative minds' who Coleridge depicts in *Biographia Literaria* as responding to Wordsworth with almost '*religious fervour*'

²⁴ David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 18; [William Maginn [and John Wilson?]], 'Preface', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 19 (January 1826), pp. [i]-xxx (p. xii).

²⁵ I discussed *Blackwood's* review of *Alastor* in more detail in the first section of Chapter Five.

²⁶ Higgins, p. 93. *Blackwood's* relationship with Wordsworth was complicated by their occasionally publishing attacks and printing biographical material which Wordsworth saw as intrusive (see Higgins' chapter on the subject, pp. 90-101).

thus took control of professional channels the poets themselves had been unable or unwilling to access.²⁷

The promotion of individual figures as geniuses by periodicals was not solely due to their accepting certain aesthetic ideologies and arguments, but was also a means to build up and knock down interesting figures who would hold the attention of their readers. In Eric Eisner's words, the Reviews 'evolved a highly reflexive and self-aware commentary on the personalities of authors, maintained both through discussions of individual works and through surveys of the literary scene, and through a particular delight in gossip about writers (including, of course, fellow periodical writers).'²⁸ Periodicals thus filled their pages by opening up to their readers a gallery of literary figures who were suitable objects for discussion due to their having obtained or sought falsely to obtain positions that set them apart from the common run. As Higgins puts it

Authors such as Burns, Coleridge, Scott, Shelley and Wordsworth were often portrayed as fundamentally different from normal people, but also functioned as sites of desire for readers and critics who felt that they too were somehow different from the norm. The fact that, in the case of writers associated with social transgression, this desire existed alongside a degree of fear or repulsion probably only added to its power.²⁹

The propagation of Romantic genius thus operated as a kind of queasy symbiosis between the poets and their interpreters. Periodicals brought poets' work before a wider public, but did so by depicting the poets as objects of fascination in themselves, as figures in literary dramas designed to attract and retain readers. Romantic genius was thus from the first entangled in complex ways with the specific biographies and depicted personalities of poets. Readers and critics responded to

²⁷ *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen ed. Kathleen Coburn, 14 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-93), VII.ii, 9.

²⁸ Eric Eisner, *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 11.

²⁹ Higgins, p. 4.

poets' assertions of their exceptional natures with a curiosity that was as much biographical as literary. Along with the conveniently-timed deaths of the younger Romantic generation, this paved the way for a wave of articles on their lives and habits which cemented the poets as subjects of interest but subjected their personalities as well as their poetry to intense scrutiny. As Julian North writes, 'Biography was [...] the most influential transmitter of the myth of the Romantic poet in the nineteenth century and beyond, yet *Lives* of the poets flourished in a competitive and critical relationship with their subjects.'³⁰ Poetic lives thus became increasingly valued and valuable commodities. Writers like William Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey bolstered their own reputations and made considerable sums of money by giving accounts of their acquaintances with poets, accounts which were not always flattering. Geniuses, though, were not expected to keep to conventional standards; as Higgins puts it, 'it was frequently argued that the aesthetic rule-breaking associated with genius was reflected in the transgressive conduct of its possessors in private life.'³¹ It was as flawed brilliances that the Romantics particularly fascinated.

To give an example: Coleridge holds a prime position at the close of Hazlitt's 1818 lecture 'On the Living Poets'. Hazlitt first talks briefly about Coleridge's work, about which he is mostly critical – he describes his tragedies as 'drawling sentiment, and metaphysical jargon' and dismisses much of his prose as 'dreary trash.'³² Having given the measure of the work, though, his tone changes markedly when he moves on to discuss the man:

But I may say of him here, that he is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt any thing. There is only one thing he could learn from me in return, but *that* he has not. He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at

³⁰ Julian North, *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 3.

³¹ Higgins, p. 12.

³² William Hazlitt, 'On the Living Poets', in *Lectures on the English Poets* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1818), pp. 327-28, p. 329.

that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! ... That spell is broke; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more: but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound.³³

What is striking about this passage is the extent to which Coleridge lives for Hazlitt in memory not for his poetry but for his thoughts, conversation and way of being. Coleridge's brilliance vests in his recollected self, which Hazlitt fashions in such a way as to promote his own talents through skill, contrast and association. Hazlitt's portrayal teases both Coleridge and his audiences, both deliberately withholding details – the 'one thing' he could have taught Coleridge – and evoking this marvellous Coleridge only to declare him irrevocably lost. He grants Coleridge a kind of authority based securely in the past, making him a poet through his having existed so strongly as a poet should. This model of genius cannot easily be challenged by textual analysis; denying it mandates an alternative biographical argument that intensifies the focus on the poet. Privileging such biographical approaches made poems only one aspect of a poet's extended self, which also comprised social encounters, the memories of friends, letters, pictures, places, scandals, rhetoric and apocrypha.

Not coincidentally, these other elements were, to a far greater extent than the poets' verse corpuses, subject to profitable manipulations and mediations by other writers. Think of Moore's enormously profitable *Life of Lord Byron* (1832), of

³³ Hazlitt, pp. 329-30.

Edward John Trelawney's *Adventures of a Younger Son* (1831), of Hunt's *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (1828), of the popularity of 'Table Talk' volumes, of De Quincey's controversial articles on Coleridge and Wordsworth for *Blackwood's*, of Thomas Love Peacock's satirical versions of the poets, of Benjamin Disraeli's *Venetia* (1837). For the increasing influence of rhetorics of genius on poets beginning their careers in the 1820s, think of Letitia Elizabeth Landon's carefully manipulated pseudonymity, her plays with her femininity and the difficulties she suffered when the press began to read her love poetry onto her life. L.E.L.'s reception was in many ways more like those accorded to actresses than the receptions previously accorded to authors, a testament to the increasing currency of literary celebrity. Both amused and chagrined, she wrote of the rumours surrounding her person:

One young lady heard at Scarborough last summer, that I had had two hundred offers; and a gentleman at Leeds brought an account of three hundred and fifty straight from London. It is really very unfortunate that my conquests should so much resemble the passage to the North Pole and Wordsworth's Cuckoo, 'talked of but never seen.'³⁴

Authors like Landon were public personalities to large audiences in a way that their earlier counterparts rarely were and – crucially – could thereby support themselves reasonably comfortably by writing. In the 1820s the closed circuits of the older literary scene with its patrons, its privileged buyers of expensive books, its sociable publishers and powerful periodical oligarchies were passing away, making way for a more open literary culture in which the gulf between writers and readers widened and in which writers could trade far more usefully and successfully on the mystical aspects of their craft.

The canonical Romantics, then, both benefitted from and suffered by living in a transitional period in the history of art, artifice and production. They were among the last generation to live as part of an intensively social literary culture that

³⁴ Laman Blanchard, *The Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), I, 50-51.

was small, exclusive and tight-knit. While they were not undisputed masters in this culture, they were able to cultivate social connections through which their ideologies and reputations could spread. However, they also lived at a time at which new types of literary fame was being formulated – and were in part the formulators. They were thus well-placed to take advantage when technologies and expanding audiences tipped these into the mainstream. As Southey's spectral Sir Thomas More remarked, in 1829 'All classes are now brought within the reach of your current literature [...] on the quality of which, according as it may be salubrious or noxious, the health of the public mind depends.'³⁵ Pioneering cheap editions, like Robert Cadell's Collected Edition of the Waverley Novels (printed between 1829-33) and the Standard Novels series launched by Richard Bentley and Henry Colburn in 1831, slashed the prices necessary to access prose fiction. In 1834 *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* remarked that 'The expensive quartos and octavos, which used to issue in such swarms for Albemarle Street, and The Row, and from the Edinburgh press in *Constable's* days, have given place to the *Waverley Novels*, *Lardner's Cyclopaedia*, *The Edinburgh Cabinet Library*, and some scores more of similar works, published in monthly parts, at cheap prices.'³⁶ The article also notes the falls of the quarterlies: 'The *Quarterly Review*, the organ of the wealthy classes of wealthy England, was once as high in circulation as 14,000 and is now understood to have fallen to 9,000 or 8,000. The *Edinburgh Review* has steadily been sinking from 12,000, to somewhere around 7,000 or 6,000.'³⁷ The purpose of *Tait's* article is to lay out its reasons for dramatically dropping its price, from half-a-crown to a shilling. Its success when it did so indicated the flourishing of a genuinely mass print culture in which the authority of single arbiters was limited.

The Romantics thus achieved prominence during a wave of expansion and were becoming established greats at the point when huge reductions in the cost of literature took it to a hitherto unprecedentedly huge audience. As Richard Cronin

³⁵ Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1829), II, 362-63.

³⁶ 'Johnstone's *Edinburgh Magazine: The Cheap and Dear Periodicals*', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 4 (January 1834), pp. 490-500 (p. 492).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

asserts, ‘it was in this period that writers first began to flaunt the status of their productions as commodities’ and the Romantics, pre-established as opposing this, began to seem like exemplars of a purer and greater age.³⁸ They also benefitted from a collapse in the sales of new poetry – as Lee Erickson has remarked, the buoyant poetry market of the 1810s peaked in 1820 and then subsided in the face of competition from cheap novels and periodicals. Publishers began to refuse to take on new poets, and by the middle of the century ‘there was almost no one but Edward Moxon’ publishing them, and he generally did so on the condition that ‘the author would have an equal share of the profits and the losses’.³⁹ The difficulty of profiting from poetry and its consequent limited attraction meant that the Romantics were left as the most modern poets with established reputations, and benefitted greatly from the resulting references in schoolbooks, periodicals and popular culture. Their having defied earlier publics placed them as ideal cultural commodities to value and disseminate in an age that both feared and embraced the consequences of mass production.

The poets were also ambiguously fortunate in coming to be considered part of a grouping bigger than any one of them. This grouping was formulated partly from the ideologies in their works, but was also grounded in many other contexts – in histories and chronologies, in a wider European movement, in developments in the other arts, in popular perceptions, in print culture, in the testimony of friends and enemies, in philosophy, and, crucially, in retrospect. It is perhaps appropriate that, unlike many previous literary epochs, the Romantic period is not named for its rulers or dates, but rather for its eventually triumphant opposition. Nevertheless, it is important to remain aware that this naming arose later and that it represents a summing-up, a historical conclusion that was for the poets – and even more so for their contemporaries – by no means one that seemed inevitable. The widely-propagated version of Romanticism occludes the particularities of the poets, the vibrant, social, intricately-networked print culture of their period, and the hundreds

³⁸ Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824-1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 11.

³⁹ Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), pp. 38, 37.

of other writers who wrote for money, reputation, public praise or private friends. Romanticism can be a useful, if distorting, lens through which to view the Big Six and to examine the things that unite them. It is in itself a fascinating movement in world culture, if one for which precise parameters are extremely difficult to delimit. As the definitive summation of forty years of literary society and production, though, Romanticism is, as I hope I have shown, a deeply inadequate label.

In my introduction I cited a number of scholars, Barthes and Foucault chief among them, who were concerned with delineating theories that allowed the authority of the author to be rhetorically contained or discounted. Such strategies ease the way for criticism by clearing texts of the awkward significations and specificities of authors' lives. These professionalised reading strategies can produce brilliant and incisive results, but they do so by adopting a model of reading seldom practiced outside the confines of the academy and one which is ultimately intensely personalised. In this study I have pursued an alternative method, focusing on the specific practices of authorship and their reception, and examining the ways in which individuals and groups have struggled with their historical circumstances to make livings, acquire respect and operate socially through writing. Authorship, like literature, can be read in macro in search of general principles, and such readings are invaluable for providing ways to discuss and to begin to comprehend. However, the ways that men and women are and have been authors are more complex, social and contingent than any summation can encompass. As for literature, many of the pleasures of reading in the history of authorship lie in the particular, in the peculiar, poignant and irreducible specifics. Just as we respect the complexity and interpretability of literature, so too should we recognise and value the distinct ways that writers have fashioned their selves, their contemporaries and a complex of conflicting, sublime, social and quotidian manners of being authorly.

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