

## OXFORD COMPANION TO BRITISH CULTURE, 1776-1832

Entries by William Christie, University of Sydney

**Brougham** [*pron* 'Broom?], Henry, *cr* 1st Baron Brougham and Vaux, 1830 (*b* Edinburgh, 19 September 1778—*d* Cannes, 7 May 1868) Lawyer, Reviewer, Publicist, Politician

During and after a long, often brilliant career in the courts and in both Houses of Parliament — becoming unofficial spokesman in Commons for the 'Mountain' or radical wing of the Whig party before being elected to Earl Grey's ministry as Lord Chancellor in 1830 — Brougham was an indefatigable campaigner in speech and writing for numerous legal and social reforms.

A formidable speaker, Henry Brougham probably had more celebrated successes than any other politician of the period, from expediting the abolition of slave trading by having it reclassified as a crime punishable by transportation in 1810, and enforcing the revocation of the Orders in Council crippling British trade during the Napoleonic wars in 1812, to his tactically intimidating the Tory peers in 1832 to force the passage of the Reform Bill. So in the courtroom, he achieved such sensational defences as that of John and Leigh Hunt in February 1811 against the charge of seditious libel for an article published in *The Examiner* against flogging in the army. All this, 'not by eloquence, but by his readiness and force...and a powerful though never graceful fluency'<sup>1</sup>. Brougham's speeches raped, rather than seduced.

A parliamentary reputation for indiscretion and ambition was spectacularly confirmed by the one *cause célèbre* with which Brougham's name is still identified: the Queen Caroline affair. Yet his tireless campaigning for legal and social reforms — he had 'the same advantage in activity that a cat has in lives over other mortals' (Lord Holland)<sup>2</sup> — cannot be written off simply as ambition. Even without his abrasive handling, many reforms (like universal education) were offensive to powerful members of both parties.

Whom these reforms did not often offend were 'the people'. Brougham's objective — 'the re-establishment of the ancient intercourse between the Whigs and the people'<sup>3</sup> — may have combined myth with illusion, but the gratification that he derived from popularity was real enough. And he enforced ample recognition of his contribution.

For though effective in parliament, Brougham was more effective as a publicist, not least as a self-publicist. Little that he did was not heralded by a timely pamphlet, extensively distributed, or justified at length by an article in the *Edinburgh Review* and celebrated by another in the *Morning Chronicle* or the *Times* — all, with few exceptions, written by himself. None hitherto had used the press and periodical literature to such effect. While government exerted itself to contain press and public opinion, Brougham exploited them, urging reforms which included, not surprisingly, freedom of the press.

Though dissatisfied both with the Whig party (often contemplating a third or 'liberal' party before its time) and the party system (actively encouraging a coalition with Canning in 1825, for example), his remaining at best a 'restive' or 'indifferent party man'<sup>4</sup> was less a matter of policy than impatience with conformity, 'love of the lead'<sup>5</sup>, and contempt for a timorous and exclusive Whig aristocracy.

<sup>1</sup> British Library, Add. MS 47575, f. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Holland to Brougham, 4 January 1810; as quoted in Chester New, *The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830* (Oxford, 1961), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Brougham to Creevey, 1812; as quoted in Thomas Creevey, *The Creevey Papers: A Selection from the Correspondence of the late Thomas Creevey, M.P.*, ed. Sir Herbert Maxwell, in 2 vols (London, 1903), I, 174.

<sup>4</sup> Leveson Gower, II, 464; British Library, Add. MS 38108, f. 61.

<sup>5</sup> London School of Economics, Horner MSS 5, f. 246.

So, more generally, Brougham's failure to inspire admiration and trust in spite of his successes, while it had to do with his middle-class background, had more to do with personality. As 'perfectly amazed' as Thomas Creevey confessed himself 'at the marvellous talent of Brougham', still he could not 'like him': 'He has always some game or underplot out of sight'<sup>6</sup>. It was not always 'out of sight', in fact; Brougham's machinations were often as clumsily transparent as was his ambition. There was about his behaviour a pathological compulsion, combined with the radical naivety of the manic.

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### **Campbell**, Thomas (*b* Glasgow, 27 July 1777—*d* Boulogne, 15 June 1844) Poet and Journalist

Capitalizing on the recognition gained for his early poem *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799), Campbell left Edinburgh for London in 1803 to become an exemplary 'man of letters' of the early nineteenth century.

An entry in Walter Scott's journal for 1826 wonders why 'Tom Campbell, with so much real genius, has not maintained a greater figure in the public eye'<sup>1</sup>. Campbell had never fulfilled the promise of *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799), his first publication and an accomplished if hardly audacious exercise in a then popular mode (cp. Samuel Rogers's *The Pleasures of Memory* of 1792). The lengthy narratives *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809) and *Theodoric* (1824) at best master rather than explore their pathos and conventions. His aspiration for the *New Monthly Magazine* he edited from 1821 to 1830 — a 'calm spot in the world of periodical literature where all minds of common charity and candour may meet'<sup>2</sup> — may solve Scott's puzzle.

Like Robert Southey's, Campbell's career testifies to the new respectability available to a writer who, without patronage or private means, built a livelihood out of reputable literary activities: besides original poetry, contributions of 'learned' articles to encyclopaedias and reviews, poetry and criticism to magazines; the editorship (for a generous £500 p.a.); lectures on poetry at the Surrey Institution in 1820; historical *Annals of Great Britain from George II to the Peace of Amiens* (1807); a biography of Mrs Siddons (1834); *Specimens of the British Poets* in seven volumes (1819). This last, a judiciously edited anthology justly successful in a crowded market, along with his instigating a London university, represents his most important cultural contribution.

Despite Scott's sense of anti-climax, Campbell's literary reputation secured him a burial in Westminster Abbey. Only after his death was it disestablished.

### Further Reading

Beattie, William, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Campbell*, in 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1849).

<sup>6</sup> The Creevey Papers, I, 172.

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in W. L. Renwick, *English Literature 1789-1815*, Oxford History of English Literature, IX (New York and Oxford, 1963), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> In his Preface to *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, Vol. XV, No. 1 (1821).

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## Circulating (or ‘Subscription’) Libraries

Commercial libraries, commonly with a few hundred volumes on offer, whose proliferation from the middle of the eighteenth century encouraged the growth of reading generally and facilitated the explosion of female novels.

“A circulating library in a town is as an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge!” Already by 1775, when Sheridan’s *Sir Anthony Absolute* denounced the circulating libraries thus in *The Rivals*<sup>1</sup>, many voices had been raised against their agency in the spread of a corruption called ‘the novel’ amongst the lower orders of a burgeoning ‘reading public’ (most often, women ‘in service’), although only since the 1740s had they become a common feature of cultural life in Britain.

The principle was straightforward: established retailers in London and the provinces (especially, initially, in recreational centres like Bath) would purchase commercial libraries of between about one hundred and, by 1791, ten thousand volumes, from which subscribers could borrow for an annual fee of between 10s 6d and one guinea, non-subscribers for a set price per volume. The sudden access this gave to many who could not afford the high prices of books not only expanded readership but encouraged the production of reading material, especially of sensational or sentimental novels. Thus began a protracted campaign against fiction by the classically educated élite, reflecting on the continuing debate about the value of literacy *per se*.

How wide that audience was it is difficult to say; subscription fees still excluded the bulk of the population, though the post-Napoleonic period saw numerous cheaper counterparts. Two concomitants, if not consequences: first, the preponderance of women amongst those liberated into the reading public, hence of women writers by the demand they created; second, the progressively more strict class division of that public according to choice of reading material.

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**Cottle**, Joseph (*b* ?Gloucestershire, 1770—*d* Bristol, 7 June 1853) Bookseller, Publisher, Author

Bristol poet and publisher of poets, Cottle’s various enterprises reflect the increasing contribution to British culture made by an enlightened provincial booktrade during the period.

Remembered as the provincial publisher and patron of young radical poets Coleridge, Southey, and (later) Wordsworth in the mid to late 1790s and Coleridge’s first biographer, Cottle was a prolific poet in his own right with an assured if ambiguous contemporary reputation. Following the publication of

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<sup>1</sup> Act I, scene ii.

*Malvern Hills* and his retirement from bookselling, both in 1798 when he published Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, he produced a handful of 'epics': *Alfred* and *John the Baptist*(1801), *The Fall of Cambria*(1809), and *Messiah*(1815).

An 'habitual preparation for an enduring inheritance' (Southey)<sup>1</sup> prompted his controversial *Early Recollections, Chiefly Relating to Samuel Taylor Coleridge* of 1837 (revised and expanded to become *Reminiscences of STC and Robert Southey* in 1847). On the putative authority of Coleridge, it dealt clumsily, without accuracy or understanding, with his opium addiction. Rather foolish than malicious, Cottle's misdirected moralizing is often met with a comparable sanctimoniousness that obscures the book's virtues — its liveliness and evocativeness — as an essay in biography.

For most of Cottle's endeavours the epithet 'well-meaning' seems especially appropriate. While the *Recollections/Reminiscences* exaggerated his entrepreneurial role, his encouragement of talent was genuine and generous. Considered alongside such ventures as an edition of Chatterton in 1803, it confirms the social and geographical decentralization of literary culture in Britain in the later eighteenth century.

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## Debating Clubs or Societies

Convened to exercise the critical intellect and perfect the debating techniques of educated males still measured by their powers of public speech, some clubs saw the promotion of new ideas as paramount and all acknowledged a primary need for social intercourse.

'We take all occasions and pretences of forming ourselves into those little nocturnal assemblies which are commonly known as *clubs*' (Addison)<sup>1</sup>. Of these, the debating clubs or societies — in 'the pursuit of philosophical enquiry, and the improvement of the members in the art of speaking' to quote Adam Smith's objectives for the Select Society of Edinburgh in 1754<sup>2</sup> — increased later in the century, as 'intellectuals' developed self-consciousness.

From the 1750s, Scottish cities offered an ideal environment for debating clubs — according to Henry Cockburn, 'the natural results of the classes in Logic and Moral Philosophy' at the universities where, as in the Moderate Presbyterian Church, intellectuals found employment<sup>3</sup>. So the English Dissenting academies encouraged a critical and experimental method for the serious exchange of ideas in open-minded societies, of which each provincial centre had at least one. Formal discussion clubs also evolved from the London coffee-house gatherings of the early eighteenth century, but societies in Scotland and the provinces proved more progressive and productive.

In the 1790s, Scottish debating societies were given a special edge by laws inhibiting free speech and, in Scotland itself, the career blockade on young Whig intellectuals imposed by the Dundas Tory regime. Edinburgh's 'Speculative' and 'Academical' Societies were dominated by liberal lawyers perfecting argumentative techniques before going on to larger cultural dominations.

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in DNB, entry under Cottle (p. 1222).

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in George Pottinger, *Heirs of the Enlightenment: Edinburgh Reviewers and Writers 1800-1830* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> *Memorials of His Time*, abr. and ed. W. Forbes Gray (Edinburgh, 1946), p. 22.

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**De Quincey**, Thomas (*b* Manchester, 15 Aug 1785—*d* Edinburgh, 8 Dec 1859) Author

Drawing consistently and sensationally upon autobiographical material, De Quincey was one of the first to offer the middle-class reader a portrait of the artist as one whose superior gifts entailed deracination and debauchery.

Like so many of the professional writers of the early nineteenth century who took full advantage of the opportunities made available by the plethora of contemporary reviews, newspapers, and magazines, De Quincey's output was as various as it was prolific: editorial work (on *The Westmoreland Gazette*); translations of German texts; a novel (*Klosterheim*, 1832); tales; literary criticism (most famously, 'On the Knocking on the Gate in Macbeth'); occasional essays on topics ranging from 'On Murder as one of the Fine Arts' (1827) through history, the classics, philosophy, and linguistics to 'The Logic of Political Economy' (1844); literary and sociological anecdotes (1834-1840; collected as *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*) — all this, as well as the more characteristic and original work: the stylized meditation *Suspiria de Profundis*, brilliant sociological nightmare 'The English Mail-Coach', and *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, his famous autobiographical curiosity.

Begun as articles in the *London Magazine* in 1821, the *Confessions* in fact came early in a career born of the poverty of his mid thirties from which he never escaped. Readers were fascinated and De Quincey quick to revise and combine them (1822), revising them again substantially in 1856 and converting a creative commentary on his mental life into a textual commentary on his career (cp. Wordsworth's *The Prelude*).

Ostensibly a self-vindication, they remain in fact morally and imaginatively ambivalent about 'opium eating'. De Quincey was to make an art form of the haunting of unexplained or inexplicable guilt of the kind that impels the *Confessions* — though the stomach, ironically and comically figuring the unconscious, is often 'blamed'.

Self-irony never amounts to self-knowledge, however, leaving the reader puzzled about not just the motives or culpability of the confessor, but also his penetration and veracity. De Quincey claimed 'an intellect superb in its *analytic* functions' in combination with 'an inner eye and power of intuition for the vision and mysteries of our human nature'<sup>1</sup>, but the opium passages subtly disqualify the opium dreamer as a reliable commentator on his own life and his understanding remains spectacularly indeterminate.

Where 'nothing is but what is not', the prevailing metaphor is De Quincey's own highly artificial style. For *writing* takes over from the experience his visionary meditations purport to communicate and

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<sup>1</sup> In the *Confessions*; see Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Grevel Lindop (Oxford and New York, 1985), p. 5.

interpret. Stylized projections of a pathological imagination that evades rather than confronts psychological realities, they prove the artifice of autobiography everything but confessional.

Along with the ‘decentred’ narrative and fragmentation of the ego that De Quincey’s essays in autobiographical indirection have in common, their self-generating imagery, the ‘logic’ of their random associations, and the ebullient literariness of their stylistic heterogeneity would make them seem very ‘modern’ — were it not for the fact that, for all their formal cleverness, the reader is never allowed dispassionately to imagine that these are only ontological or literary games. De Quincey’s self-consciously literary ‘dreams’, moreover — part of ‘the magnificent apparatus which forces the infinite into the chambers of the human brain, and throws dark reflections from eternities below all life upon the mirrors of the sleeping mind’<sup>2</sup> as he says, alluding to Plato and St Paul — have more in common, both artistically and philosophically, with Dante’s than with Freud’s.

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## Dissenting Academies

Excluded from the grammar schools and from the two universities, the eighteenth-century Dissenters developed in their own ‘academies’ an educational system that exploited their want of charter and encouraged a vigorous, independent-minded religious and secular speculation.

Dissenting academies varied considerably, remaining an extension of their instituting Principals and independent of the church elders whose sons they educated. As it happens, those Principals included some of the most progressive intellects of their respective periods, from John Jennings at Kibworth, through Phillip Doddridge at Northampton and James Burgh at Stoke Newington, to Joseph Priestly (tutor) at Warrington.

Freethinking academies like these, especially Hackney and Hoxton, became at different times extreme in their ‘rational dissent’, entertaining the Arian, Socinian, even Unitarian ‘heresies’ — too freethinking for many Calvinist elders seeking training for their sons as Nonconformist ministers, forcing the closure of some of the more prestigious later in the century as dissent became synonymous with Jacobinism. (Burke wrote of the Hackney Academy as ‘the new arsenal in which subversive doctrines and arguments were forged’<sup>1</sup>.)

In less controversial areas, their syllabuses were at once extensive and comprehensive: French and Italian; history and political theory; geography and even shorthand; a version of English literature and, most notably, the new experimental sciences — all added to the Classics with which establishment institutions remained preoccupied. From here students would often proceed to the universities in Scotland or Holland, where they could develop the knowledge acquired at the best academies, but more importantly their critical method of enquiry.

### Further Reading

<sup>2</sup> In *Suspiria de Profundis*; see *Confessions*, ed. Lindop, p. 88.

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 164.

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## Epic

As an heroic narrative, adapting or constructing a public mythology in and for a specific culture, the epic reflected the rise of national self-consciousness throughout the period, as well as challenging the mythopoeic and revisionist impulse of the major poets.

John Thelwall wrote in 1801 of a 'press teeming, and, perhaps the public already satiated with NATIONAL HEROICS', that '*desideratum* in English Poesy'<sup>1</sup>. The national or nationalistic epic, on the Virgilian precedent, was in terms of sheer numbers the period's most striking contribution to the genre. The title of John Ogilvie's *Brittania: A National Epic in Twenty Books*, also of 1801, says it all. A nation embattled within and without, found a surfeit of more or less talented bards willing to create a more or less spurious history and mythology. King Alfred was a popular choice (the poet laureate Henry Pye's effort of 1801 followed hard on the heels of Joseph Cottle's *Alfred* of the year before), as was Richard Cœur de Lion.

Not all these quasi-historical narratives had epic pretensions. Richard Payne Knight's *Alfred* of 1823, for example, was subtitled *A Romance*, raising the issue of whether the epic and romance should be distinguished. The 'heroic' narratives that captivated the reading public — from Macpherson's Ossianic 'forgeries' (1761-5) through Robert Southey's *Madoc* (1805) and Scott's *Marmion* (1808) to Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1811; again, subtitled *A Romaunt*) — all arguably offer tendentious refractions of 'history' and certainly aspire to be 'doctrinal and exemplary to a nation' (Milton)<sup>2</sup>.

The epic's only existence is as a tradition, however. Many poets attempted faithfully to accommodate to their own period and purposes the manifold of conventions not just characteristic, but constitutive of the genre: a descent into the underworld; declamatory debates of gods or men in council; a self-consciously 'high' style; sonorous genealogies; contrived tests of heroic endurance and sense of purpose; and so on. This might involve the secular use of divine machinery or pacifist use of extensive battle scenes; sometimes a bizarre attempt — acknowledged by Virgil and become traditional — to incorporate, encyclopaedically, all available knowledge. (Coleridge envisaged taking ten years to research an epic, and another ten for composition!)

These awkward accommodations invoke the more ambitious engagements with — though not necessarily examples of — the epic during the period, in which the 'HEROICS' the epic poet celebrates is often the artist's own 'mental fight', to quote Blake<sup>3</sup>, endeavouring cultural and political renewal through generic revisioning as a form of creative prophecy. This the poets of the period had seen in Milton, and it was Milton, as the epic's latest acknowledged exemplum, they set out to adapt and/or subvert in turn. In the poem *Milton*, Blake would wrest the epic spirit from the dead letter of the epic tradition all together, rescuing Milton from his classical predecessors. Keats's Miltonic *Hyperion* had to be abandoned as *too* Miltonic, and its mythopoeic narrative reincorporated in *The Fall of*

<sup>1</sup> In the 'Prefatory Memoir' to his *Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement...* (Hereford, 1801), p. xliii.

<sup>2</sup> From 'The Reason of Church Government', in *Milton's Prose Writings*, ed. K. M. Burton (London and New York, 1958), p. 353.

<sup>3</sup> In the 'Preface' to Milton, *The Poems of William Blake*, ed. W. H. Stevenson, text by David V. Erdman (London, 1971), p. 489.

*Hyperion* as the ‘knowledge enormous’ of a lyric quest. And in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* — ‘or, The Growth of a Poet’s Mind’ — an ‘heroic’ quest to discover and vindicate the poetic voice paradoxically re-presenting the quest itself completes this internalization of the epic.

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## The Essay

Though the many forms of periodical publication available meant as many different forms of ‘essay’ — from technical contributions to the empirical sciences to grotesque comic and/or satirical flourishes — considered (roughly) as a contained piece of informal prose, meditating and illustrating a single idea or social phenomenon, the essay became more experimental and more intensely self-conscious during the period.

The venue for the ‘occasional’ or ‘familiar’ essay was most often the magazine, with which the market was amply supplied in the late eighteenth century (led by *The Gentleman’s*, 1731-1914), and glutted by the 1820s — from which some, like *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1817-1980) and *The London* (1820-1829), stand out, the last for having published Lamb’s *Essays of Elia*, De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, and much of Hazlitt’s *Table Talk*. The very persistence with which new magazines were launched, in spite of the short life of most of them, suggests how (potentially) lucrative they must have been for the publisher. The essayist had certainly never had such opportunities, though payments varied dramatically and were never as generous as the big reviews.

A number of things conspired to make it an especially attractive form in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, not the least of which was the sheer quantity of reading material. Where newspapers, annals, reviews, and encyclopaedias offered in condensed form information and polemic otherwise available only in protracted works, the essay offered summary, personal reflections on politics or culture, or illustrative anecdotes and licensed musing on aspects of social or individual behaviour. As its root meaning of an ‘attempt’ suggests, it required only a tentative authority; indeed, it implicitly suggested that authority could only ever be tentative — a characteristic encouraged by the phenomenological bias of recent idealist (Berkeley; Kant), associationist and sceptical (Hume) philosophy.

All of which encouraged the idea of the essay as an ‘attempt’ by an educated intellect to make contingent sense of new experiences in a specific environment or society by using the experiencing self as mediate and interpretative. Hence the frequently ‘impressionistic’ nature of the essay’s reading of ideas and events, its preoccupation with responsive consciousness linking it with poetry like Wordsworth’s —

the consciousness  
Of whom they are, habitually infused  
Through every image, and through every thought,  
And all impressions    (*The Prelude* (1805), XIII, 108-111)

— while anticipating the aestheticism of Pater later in the century.



And hence, also, the preponderance of overtly or covertly autobiographical essays in the period, especially after 1800. The essayists — and to Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey should be added Leigh Hunt, Cobbett, Hogg, and ‘Christopher North’ (John Wilson) — all, in their own quite idiosyncratic ways, exploit confessional techniques and take the ‘familiarity’ of the essay to new extremes: of subject matter, often focussing on apparently trivial details of everyday life; of the personal, indulging nostalgias, anxieties, or obsessions.

Despite the brevity of the genre and the limits of the magazine, the essay in the early nineteenth century is rather verbose than concise: rambling; arbitrarily or associatively digressive; periphrastic. Less surprisingly, it is self-consciously stylized or mannered — as exhibitionist in style, in fact, as it is of the essayist’s opinions and sensibility.

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**Fox**, Charles James (*b* London, 24 Jan. 1749—*d* Chiswick, 13 Sept. 1806) MP, Leader and Mentor of liberal Whigs

An endearing personality and reckless gambler, Fox held office briefly under the Tory Lord North before leading the Whig opposition, mainly to Pitt, through a long political life during which he championed America, Ireland, and India, as well as various domestic liberties and reforms.

In spite of thirty eight often controversial years in the Commons and, from 1782, effective leadership of an admittedly fragmented and shrunken Whig party, Fox’s major contribution to British politics was symbolic and ideological rather than legislative. His person, thence memory were treated with reverence by the ideological faction of the Whigs that bore his name and wore his colours (buff and blue). During the long years in opposition to 1830, annual Fox dinners were held; his opinions authoritatively quoted; his name and principles invoked to contain dissent. And yet no one reform originated with Fox or was carried by him through parliament (his Libel Act of 1792 securing the right of trial by jury for the accused is exceptional).

During the early years of the 1770s and his career, he in fact betrayed all the prejudices of the aristocratic Whigs. It was only later, when in the 1790s his name became antonymous with that of Pitt, that he championed ‘liberty’ and had his name struck from the privy council for toasting ‘Our sovereign, the people’, signalling hope to middle-class radicals like the young Wordsworth (who forwarded a copy of his *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and sought his support for the threatened ‘statesmen the Lake district).

Moreover, the illusory but jealously defended party identity of the Foxite Whigs took no account of Fox’s preference for broad-based administrations; important though it was to become to his political thinking, ‘party’ was only ever a ‘substitute...for public virtue and comprehensive understanding’<sup>1</sup>. Nor did it take account of his promiscuous entry into coalitions like that with the Tory Lord North in 1782. That it was the only way Fox could circumvent George III’s proscription on his entering the Ministry failed to absolve him in the eyes of politicians of all persuasions. Or of the nation itself: satirical

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<sup>1</sup> Fox to Lord Holland, 5 October 1794; British Library, Add. MS 47571, f. 165.

activity in the press exploded, as it would again in 1788 when Fox, champion of parliament against the Royal prerogative, affirmed the prerogative of his friend the Prince of Wales over parliamentary deliberations about the conditions of regency during the King's illness.

Yet his undertaking to the Westminster electorate in 1790 'to keep alive that spirit of liberty to which his country owes all her greatness' was neither meretricious nor empty. Admitting the 'cause of liberty' to be 'incapable of strict definition'<sup>2</sup>, Fox campaigned energetically for religious liberty, the abolition of the slave trade, and Irish and American independence. Freed by various defections from the obligation to appease both wings of the remaining Rockingham Whigs, he offered from 1794 less equivocal support for parliamentary reform and an honestly indignant resistance to the revocations of various personal and civil liberties introduced by Pitt. And his singular agitation for peace with France was as principled as it was unpopular and sometimes naive. What was not naive, on the other hand, were his prophetic support for 'that middle order of men'<sup>3</sup> and his understanding that certain reforms would be 'extorted...by convulsion' if ignored by parliament: 'You should therefore not contract the sentiments of the people, you should expand them'<sup>4</sup>.

Which explain Fox's influence on the liberal Whigs of the 'reform' generation, and why his contribution was largely posthumous.

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## Freedom of the Press

When, under interrogation from a burgeoning press, government acted jealously to preserve its prerogative over information and critical commentary, radicals and 'liberals' alike demanded the right of freedom of the press.

In one sense, the freedom of the press was secured as early as 1695, when government licensing officially lapsed. The freedom to print without requiring a licence meant a press subject, not to censorship, but the consequences of law. At issue, now, were *how* the law was applied (the legal process) and *what constituted* seditious, blasphemous, obscene, and defamatory libel (from the Latin *libellus*: 'a book or writing').

'Freedom of the press' meant freedom from harassment and prosecution, on the assumption of a right to know and criticize what passed in Parliament. In Scotland in the 1790s, for example, the notorious judge Lord Braxfield operated on the declared assumption that, the Constitution being perfect, any criticism of the government was, *prima facie*, an act of treason; in 1811, the judge Sir George Wood's insisted that 'parliament was the place for the discussion of the laws of the country, not

<sup>2</sup> First, as quoted in the *Public Advertiser*, 14 June 1790, and, second, in James Macintosh, *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Hon. Sir James Macintosh*, ed. R. J. Macintosh, in 2 vols (London, 1835), I, 91.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in the *Journal and Correspondence of William Eden, 1st Lord Auckland*, in 3 vols (London, 1861), II, 476.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in *The Times*, 29 May 1797.

newspapers<sup>1</sup>; between 1808 and 1811, forty two charges against publications were levelled by the Attorney-General, Sir Vicary Gibbs (as against seven in the preceding seven years).

It was not just to ministerial caprice that objections were raised, however. The Attorney-General could charge any publisher on the strength of his own ‘*ex officio* information’ (circumventing a grand jury), and arrest any publisher against whom ‘informations’ were filed — proceedings often involving specially selected juries.

The demand for ‘freedom of the press’ thus ranged from the abstract ‘right’ to criticize government policy in print to specific and extensive legal reforms, some of which were under way by the late 1820s.

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**Holland**, Lord [Henry Richard (Vassal) Fox, third Baron Holland] (*b* Wiltshire, 21 Nov. 1773—*d* Holland House, 22 Oct. 1840) Whig Statesman and Patron

Holland’s life at the centre of the Whig party and of a renowned circle of talented politicians and artists collected at Holland House was punctuated only by his and Lady Holland’s other passion — touring Europe.

Holland was a faithful protégé of Charles James Fox — the paternal uncle who, in an undisguised bid for personal immortality, undertook his cultural and political education — and the Foxite demand for civil and religious liberties under the constitution became the leitmotif of a political career in the Lords. Where he most distinguished himself, however, was at Holland House, where he and his wife Elizabeth (*née* Vassal, 1770-1845) maintained a lively and talented *salon*, whose many diplomats and *émigrés* gratified their interest in foreign affairs.

After Eton and Oxford, Holland embarked on a Grand Tour — like his life-style, ideas, and values, in the 18th-century mode. Here he confirmed a Foxite enthusiasm for constitutionalism and ‘a predilection for foreigners’ (Lord Richmond)<sup>1</sup>, though he was never trusted to use his considerable diplomatic abilities and connections — with Lafayette and Talleyrand in France, for example, and Jovellanos in Spain. As Cabinet Minister in the 1830s with the minor post of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, his unsolicited meddling through extensive connections at Holland House and abroad only embarrassed the government, as had his francophilia in the 1820s.

The epitaph he wrote just prior to his death betrays his allegiance, and humility:

Nephew of Fox and friend of Grey  
Enough my Need of fame  
If those who deigned t’observe me Say  
I’ve tarnished neither name<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in *The Times*, 18 March, 1811.

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in *The Holland House Diaries 1831-1840*, ed. Abraham D. Kriegel (London, Henley, and Boston, 1977), p. xli.

<sup>2</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Lett. c 234, f.113

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**Jeffrey, Francis**, *cr* Lord Jeffrey, 1834 (*b* Edinburgh, 23 Oct. 1773—*d* Edinburgh, 26 Jan. 1850)  
Scottish Advocate and Judge, Review Editor

Effectively the founding editor of the leading Whig periodical *The Edinburgh Review* and, with his friend Henry Brougham, the most prolific contributor to any review, Jeffrey encouraged in the Whig party a more popular politics and in the reading public that he collaborated to create a socially conscious mode of critical reading

As Lord Advocate of Scotland, Jeffrey was responsible for the Scottish Reform Bill which in 1832 increased the franchise to fourteen times its original size (from 4,500 to 65,000). Less apprehensive of a popular revolution, Jeffrey might have recalled a controversial protest made twenty four years earlier as editor of the *Edinburgh Review*: ‘Now, if any man thinks, that we should not extravagantly rejoice in any conceivable event which must reform the constitution of England...by exalting the mass of the community, and giving them, under the guidance of [a] virtual aristocracy, to direct the councils of England’, he ‘must have read but few pages of this Journal’<sup>1</sup>. Self-elected spokesman for that ‘virtual aristocracy’, Jeffrey had dedicated his Review to ‘guiding’ public opinion toward the reform he ultimately helped to engineer.

As a young man he had attended the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, with a year at Oxford in between serving only to inspire his defence of Scottish education against the encroachments of Oxonian priorities mooted by the Royal Commission into the Scottish Universities of 1826 and 1830. The *Edinburgh Review*, established in 1802 with undergraduate enthusiasm along with (amongst others) Sydney Smith, Francis Horner, and Henry Brougham was a child of that broad and critically enquiring Scottish system, as it was of Edinburgh’s agonistic debating societies. Though Jeffrey reviewed in most areas, the bulk of his substantial contribution (15% to 40% of each number) was in politics, philosophy, politics, original literature, and politics.

As editor, he was disorganized — often relying on contributors to tell him how much he owed them — but ideologically and stylistically scrupulous at high speed, often writing and editing into the early hours. Though Brougham, because he probably contributed more even than Jeffrey, seems to have been allowed to impose on him, the *Edinburgh* remained very much his own throughout the twenty six years of his editorship (1803-1829). During that time the *Edinburgh*’s popularity and influence remained impressively consistent. ‘From my careless and hasty way of reading’, Jeffrey once confessed, ‘I have generally found my own impressions those of the great reading multitude’<sup>2</sup>.

For Jeffrey, the ordinary associations of those he called (in an access of the sentimentality to which he was prone) ‘the ordinary run of sensible, kind people’<sup>3</sup> coincided to form a politico-legalistic *consensus gentium*: a mass coincidence of unconstrained particularities identified by philosophic Whiggism

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Review* XIII, no. 25 (October 1808), 233-4.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Archibald Alison, 29 July, 1808; National Library of Scotland, MS 5319, ff. 232-3.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Thomas Carlyle, 16 May 1831; as quoted in David Alec Wilson, *Carlyle to ‘the French Revolution’ 1826-1837* (New York and London, 1924), p. 204.

as ‘public opinion’ — the opinion, that is, of the ‘middling ranks’ or ‘classes’ of society. From this paradoxical consensuality of unique responses, Jeffrey derived his authority on critical, ethical, and political issues. The ‘affectation of singularity’ in an author offered a perverse challenge to this consensus, so to counteract a tendency he interpreted as socially divisive, Jeffrey adopted a position sometimes extreme in *its* affectation — of confusion or lack of sympathy; a position characterized by what he himself recognised as ‘needless asperities’<sup>4</sup>.

His infamous attacks upon Wordsworth and those he dubbed the Lake poets are illustrative, with some defensible only as good business. Equally indefensible, however, is Jeffrey’s still being recognised *only* as the author of those attacks. This will never do.

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**Lamb**, Charles (*b* London, 10 Feb. 1775—*d* Edmonton, 27 Dec. 1834) Poet, Essayist

Lamb brought an idiosyncratic voice and oblique rhetorical strategy to the essay of the period, cultivating an anachronistic eccentricity to explore questions of continuity and consciousness in the face of dehumanizing commercial and technological developments.

CHARLES LAMB, born in the Inner Temple, 10th February, 1775; educated in Christ’s Hospital; afterwards a clerk in the Accountant’s Office, East India House; pensioned off from that service, 1825, after thirty-three years’ service; . . . can remember few specialities in his life worth noting. . . . Has been guilty of obtruding upon the Public a Tale, in prose, called Rosamund Gray; a Dramatic sketch, named John Woodvil; a Farewell Ode to Tobacco, with sundry other Poems. . . . He is also the true Elia, whose Essays are extant

The same autobiographical fragment of 1827 betrays a rare pride in having edited unfashionable sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors (*Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare* [1808])<sup>1</sup>. Lamb’s taste for earlier English literature was more than a hobby-horse cultivated in retreat from what he called ‘the damn’d Day-hag *business*’ of clerical work<sup>2</sup> — though it was, vitally, this. (His committing his life to the care of his sister Mary subsequent to the bout of insanity in 1796 during which she killed their mother is as well known as the pathetic story of their subsequent walks together to the asylum, complete with straightjacket, following intimations of her progressively more frequent relapses. The protracted tedium of a clerical job was part of that commitment.)

No less than Mr Sleary’s defence of ‘amuthment’ in Dickens’s *Hard Times*, however, Lamb’s publicized literary preferences express an oblique but stubborn resistance to the utilitarian spirit threatening to convert society into the mindless drudgery of a self-auditing commercial enterprise. It was ‘the beauty of the world of words in that age’ that, as critic, Lamb sought to communicate and, as

<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Walter Scott; National Library of Scotland, MS 3879, f. 161.

<sup>1</sup> *Charles Lamb: Selected Prose*, ed. Adam Phillips (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Procter of 1824; as quoted in *Charles Lamb: Selected Prose*, ed. Phillips, p. 17.

essayist, to exploit: words ‘less definite than they are now, fixed and petrified’. The attraction was to a rich, heterogeneous literature, full of puns, allusions, and neologisms; a sceptical, anti-authoritarian challenge to the ‘definite’, the ‘fixed’, and the ‘petrified’<sup>3</sup>.

The comic, Spenserian allegorization of his job as ‘the damn’d Day-hag *business*’ itself reflects the strategy in the ‘familiar’ *Essays of Elia* (1823) and *Last Essays of Elia* (1833) of ironizing and *defamiliarizing* the ordinary with a characteristic if not mannered archaism, a self-conscious literariness comparable with the private games and eccentric rituals developed to obviate the threat of the everyday. As life is ritualized, so people are ‘characterized’ and Elia’s past is *rendered* old — remote and mythical; recollection becomes a kind of genteel archeology in which images and moments are conjured, savoured, and enfolded for preservation (‘Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the day-spring of thy fancies...the dark pillar not yet turned’; ‘Nor shall thou, their compeer, be quickly forgotten...’<sup>4</sup>). Though forty five when he began contributing essays to John Scott’s *London Magazine*, his most famous lyric, ‘The Old Familiar Faces’, is an exercise in nostalgia written at the age of only twenty.

Lamb’s resistance to the dehumanization of commerce, no less resolute for being less visionary and Miltonic than, say, Wordsworth’s; less ‘speculative’ and polemical than Coleridge’s; less sensational than Dickens’s — may indeed be more resolute precisely for being a habit of mind cultivated out of the necessity to preserve his personal sanity.

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### Lamb, Mary (b London, 3 Dec. 1764—d London, 20 May 1847) Children’s Writer

Trained to needlework and largely self-educated, Mary Lamb collaborated with her brother Charles on stories and poetry for children, some of which are still well received.

Only Charles’s name appeared on the (now famous) *Tales from Shakespear* in 1807, though Mary contributed stories from all but the tragedies — fourteen of the twenty to be exact. Of the ten stories in *Mrs. Leicester’s School* (1809), all but three were written by Mary, as were between one and two thirds of the *Poetry for Children* (1809), yet both were published anonymously.

That none of the three collaborative works was attributed to her may have been diffidence, perhaps a desire on the part of Charles or the publisher (Mary Jane Godwin, William Godwin’s second wife) to preserve her privacy after the slaying of her mother while temporarily insane in 1796 received extensive publicity.

Yet Mary’s ideal of femininity — to ‘be accounted the helpmates of *men*’ — also subscribed to a radical anonymity. In the article ‘On Needlework’ where this appears (in *The British Lady’s Magazine* in April 1825, written advocating needlework as a way out of the distress women were suffering ‘for want of employment’), she aspires only to an ‘equality with men as far as respects the mere enjoyment of life’<sup>1</sup> — admittedly with an irony as elusive as her brother’s.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in *Charles Lamb: Selected Prose*, ed. Phillips, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> From ‘Christ’s Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago’, *Elia. Essays Which Have Appeared under that Signature in the London Magazine* (London, 1823), pp. 47-8.

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in June and Paul Schlueter, *An Encyclopaedia of British Women Writers* (Chicago and London, 1988), p. 279.

Whatever the reason, Mary's moderate success with *Mrs. Leicester's School* (running into eight editions by 1823) reflects, besides her talent, an established market for children's writing, as surely as the steady growth in popularity of the *Tales from Shakespeare* reflects their appeal as training for that familiarity with Shakespeare fast becoming a national cultural imperative.

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## Liberal; Liberalism

Used of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, 'liberal' is a generic epithet used to characterize those concerned to maintain or secure for the individual citizen various 'liberties' or rights under law, where 'the individual citizen' referred *either* to an abstract universal — 'all men', according to America's famous *Declaration of Independence*, being entitled to 'Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness' — *or* to one who, by virtue of property, possessed an 'interest' in the conduct of the affairs of the nation.

Although it was 1859 before Britain had a Liberal Party, 'liberalism' had been around at least since Locke's *Two Treatises on Govt* of 1698. Because liberal thinking during our period divided on certain issues — liberal Whigs and, later, philosophic Radicals like Bentham rejected the Lockean assumption of natural, inalienable rights under God, for example — liberalism is best thought of as a reticulated system of changing policies unified by the assumption of certain freedoms of person, property, conscience, and opinion, and the aim progressively to minimize the constraints imposed by government (*laissez faire*), whose authority derives exclusively from the people, to protect the people.

Prominent amongst the freedoms coveted by liberalism in the period were those of speech, assembly, worship, and (persistently denied to Catholics and Nonconformists) advance within the establishment.

The basic freedom from arbitrary arrest or imprisonment (*habeas corpus*) was taken for granted, at least until the 1790s when, under Pitt, even that was more honoured in the breach than the observance. Consequently, liberalism during the war with France often presents as a *via negativa*; as opposition to legislative oppressions.

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## Lyric

The most common form of poetry throughout the period, the lyric also came to be seen more abstractly as its purest or quintessential form.

Taking 'lyric' to include its origins in or as song *and* the use of a personal voice, we can think of it as a poem mimetic of musical structure and of an experience undergone by a characteristic sensibility. Subsuming innumerable specific configurations — from the inherited sonnet, ode, etc., to the innovative 'greater Romantic lyric' identified by M. H. Abrams — the lyric was the most common genre of our period. (Wordsworth, for example, wrote more sonnets than any other British poet.) Addressing and meditating an image, idea, or emotion, the experiencing self re-presented in the typical lyric of the period demands its own attention, often effectively constituting the object of its meditations.

The lyric was encouraged by a number of related phenomena: a primitivism and antiquarianism seeking to recuperate (as 'spontaneous' and more 'sincere') unsophisticated poetry from the past or the geographically and/or socially remote; a conception of 'poetry' as a mode of apprehension, rather than artistic construction ('What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet?' — Coleridge<sup>1</sup>); the dismantling of a Classical and neoClassical hierarchy of genres only reluctantly accommodating certain kinds of lyric.

Beyond this, a more symbolic 'lyric spirit' or 'lyricism', frequently characterized as feminine, is envisioned as supervening upon the genres of epic and tragedy — masculinist; agonistic; complicit with authoritarianism — in a (prophetic) celebration of the fulfilment of the human spirit. The fourth act of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* involves a version of this myth of poetic genre.

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## Newspapers

Though inhibited by taxes, political pay-offs, and sporadic prosecutions, the newspaper grew steadily more popular throughout the period, having become by the early nineteenth century indispensable to educated, especially political culture and becoming so for a progressively wider audience.

If, as William Cobbett wrote of the Press in 1811, 'the public may, in time, see how *they* will be affected by the *freedom* or *slavery* of this great and moral engine'<sup>1</sup>, the Government had seen it a hundred years previously. In 1713, with the experience of the Civil War not that far behind, taxes on newspapers (stamp duty) and on newspaper advertisements had been introduced to restrict readership by keeping up the price. In spite of this, the number of periodicals entitled to the name of 'newspaper' — journals or weeklies carrying the most recent information relevant to a specific readership — grew steadily. By the mid eighteenth century, there were around a hundred, though many offered only limited information about trade or commerce; by 1800, well over 250, with proportionately more not only featuring the foreign and domestic 'news' once the exclusive province of the élite, but also offering interpretative commentary. With the political and cultural consciousness of the extra-parliamentary nation quickening under the impetus of war, first with America and then with France, and its effect on

<sup>1</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, The Collected Works, 7, in 2 vols (Princeton, N.J., 1983), II, 15.

<sup>1</sup> In his *Political Register*, 23 February 1811; as quoted in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Essays on His Times*, Collected Works 3, ed. David V. Erdman in 3 vols (Princeton, N. J., and London, 1978), I, cxlv.



trade and prices, the newspaper made itself indispensable by gratifying and encouraging that consciousness.

Of the more influential dailies, *The Morning Chronicle* began in 1769, *The Morning Post* in 1772, *The Morning Herald* in 1780, and *The Times* in 1788. The circulation of these reached as many as 6,000 during the Napoleonic period, with the evening *Courier* (begun 1792) peaking at around 16,000. The introduction of steam-driven machinery in 1814 by *The Times* removed technological inhibitions to expansion.

Precisely because they were influential, however, so too were they ‘influenced’. Ministerial payments to the press had become so well established by the 1790s (Walpole, for example, was reputed to have spent upwards of £10,000 over the years) that Pitt was paying editors of newspapers from the Civil List secret service money. The Whig Opposition, in its turn, funded alternative press support.

Polemic might have been house-trained by payment and the perennial threat of arrest for ‘seditious libel’, but information was still at a premium and competition fierce. Henry Crabb Robinson was appointed the first official ‘foreign correspondent’ for *The Times* in 1802 and by the early nineteenth century the Press had established the ubiquitous presence for which it has become renowned. Government was soon intercepting ‘packets’ sent by journalists from the battlefields in Europe to keep itself up to date and letters of contemporary politicians are full of marvelling over events, at home as well as abroad, brought to their attention by the newspapers.

A genuinely popular press, radical or conservative, was another matter. In the last two decades of the century, ‘philosophic’ or educated radicals like the young Coleridge began publishing news commentary every eight days to avoid the newspaper tax, but the circulation of such sporadic efforts remained severely limited. It was not until after Cobbett’s *Political Register*, begun in 1802 and issued for 2d. by 1816, that the radical ‘pauper’ press began to develop, and not until 1855, when the tax (increased during the unrest following Waterloo) was finally abolished, that the newspaper could begin to develop into the feature of all literate households it finally became at the turn of the twentieth century.

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**Peacock**, Thomas Love (b Weymouth, 18 Oct. 1785—d Lower Halliford, Jan. 1866) Poet, Satirical Novelist

As a poet, Peacock shared in the revisionary Hellenism of the 1810s and 20s; as satirical novelist, he stood goodnaturedly opposed to a manifold of contemporary follies, ‘progressive’ as well as reactionary, writing in the Menippean tradition against the presumption of authority and knowledge.

Peacock’s status as an eccentric — a Classicist and satirist in a ‘Romantic’ period — is best used to explain his work, not explain it away, especially now the commentary of literary historians like Mikhail Bakhtin has recovered and theorized eccentric Classical genres like Menippean satire.

In *Headlong Hall* (1816), *Melincourt* (1817), *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), *Crotchet Castle* (1831), and *Gryll Grange* (1860) — his satirical novels/romances and his most characteristic work — representatives of contemporary society, especially of its intelligentsia, meet in secluded retreats to begin a pattern of feasting, debate, and courtship. A succession of *symposia*, punctuated by brief and stylized comic action, allows for the play of the obsessive ideas or ‘humours’ figured by the various characters, with the emphasis on play: on linguistic play — neologisms and macaronics; pedantry, preciosity and vulgarity; catalogues and cant — and on formal play — narrative, epistles, poems, and songs; dialogues and lectures; prefatory inscriptions and extensive footnotes.

Significantly, all voices are permitted utterance in the festive atmosphere. More significantly perhaps, the courting with which the *symposia* alternate moves towards a final marriage in which all participate.

The serio-comic tradition is characterized by Peacock himself in an essay on ‘French Comic Romances’ as one in which ‘characters are abstractions or embodied classifications, and the implied or embodied opinions form the main matter of the work’; it is the tradition of ‘Aristophanes, Petronius Arbiter, Rabelais, Swift and Voltaire’<sup>1</sup>. To *disembody* those abstractions and opinions, however, reading the satires only in terms of contemporary ideas and ideologies, or to identify them too exclusively with their ‘originals’, would be to disavow their formal heterogeneity and fly in the face of that tradition. Impatient with the aggressive, partisan politics of the age, Peacock’s works betray no strong political attitude.

Indeed, the assumption implicit in their heterogeneity, Cynic if not cynical, is that there is no *one* way of perceiving or understanding the world; that ideas are pathological or ‘humorous’ and competition for the ‘truth’ absurd. But while the laughter derides and negates, it also celebrates and renews; the symposiac spirit of sociability and affirmation pervades, making the ‘comic’ vision of the novels’ ritual marriages less perfunctory than archetypal.

Peacock’s reputation has suffered from his friendship with Shelley, rather as his tongue-in-cheek essay on *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820) is best known for having precipitated Shelley’s now classic *Defence of Poetry* (1821). That the essay’s iconoclastic wit should have robbed it of its interest as an early, often acute example of an historical materialist theory of poetic production makes its fate in Romantic scholarship typical of Peacock’s works generally. As so often, the comic has been read as frivolous, the frivolous as irrelevant.

Peacock only stands to gain from a developing understanding of, and taste for, the comic — a mode, as Peacock himself suggests in *Nightmare Abbey*, vulnerable to a ‘Romantic’ self-consciousness devoid of self-irony.

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## Reform Act 1832

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, in 10 vols (London, 1924-1934), IX, 257-261 (p. 258).

With an economic crisis following Waterloo came renewed agitation for the long overdue reform of parliament, the most contentious political issue from 1815 until 1832 when the Reform Bill became law, reorganizing parliamentary representation and initiating the movement towards modern democracy.

The Reform Act was the first major piece of legislation owing its existence to organized, extra-parliamentary protest and petitioning. An electorate little changed since 1430 gave a quarter of the Commons' 658 seats (some with only 11 or 12 voters) to powerful landowners and left another quarter under their unchallenged influence or secured by licensed blackmail or bribery. The Reform Act — dispensing with 56 English borough constituencies returning two members and reducing representation in another 30 to one, for example, while creating 41 in previously un- or under-represented areas — certainly shocked parliament itself.

In the context of radical demands, however — universal manhood suffrage; annual parliaments; a secret ballot — the Act was cautious. Restrictions on voting rights still left 70-80 per cent of adult males without a vote, and while urban industrial centres would return members for the first time, increases in county seats and boundary changes in the boroughs tended to strengthen the landowning interest.

With few exceptions, the Whigs who forced the Bill through a recalcitrant Lords by threatening to create enough peers for a majority, were interested only in obviating glaring electoral iniquities and including the middle-class, property owning interest — thus securing the sovereignty of parliament in the face of the threat of revolution. This they achieved. That a wedge had been driven between the middle and labouring classes in the process was no accident.

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### Reviewing

The cultural authority creatively assumed and enforced by the big reviews of the early nineteenth century confirms both the extent to which Britain had become a 'print culture' and the extent to which that culture had become politicized.

In the 1730s, the London booksellers were obliged by copyright expiry actively to promote their material in the provinces, and periodicals like *The Gentleman's Magazine*, begun in 1732 with accurate and comprehensive lists of recent books and a wide circulation, played a crucial role. To make more informed choices, however, readers looked to reviewing. The *Monthly Review* was established in 1749; the Tory *Critical Review* in 1756, partly in reaction to its success — setting a pattern for the early nineteenth century, when the Tory *Quarterly Review* (1809) would follow the Whig *Edinburgh Review* (1802).

When a legal decision finally abolished any claim to 'perpetual copyright' in 1774, the living author became a more viable commercial proposition, publishers more reliant upon reviewing, and reviewing more integral to the network of ancillary or supplementary genres that were proliferating throughout

the eighteenth century (Goldsmith compared publishing's excrescences to the Persian army's going into battle with ten attendants for every soldier).

The endeavours of eighteenth-century reviews like the *Monthly* and the *Critical* to discuss or at least register as many publications as possible resulted in their *remaining* ancillary or contingent. With the determination of the *Edinburgh* 'to be distinguished, rather for the selection, than for the number of its articles'<sup>1</sup>, reviewing as a form ceased to be simply a service industry entering 'no farther into the province of criticism, than just so far as may be indispensibly necessary to give some idea of such books as come under our consideration' (to quote the editorial policy of the *Monthly*'s Ralph Griffiths<sup>2</sup>) and begins to take priority over the publications under review, which become rather material for an inductive, reflective and self-reflexive political and cultural production. So central to the official culture had the reviews made themselves by 1831 that Thomas Carlyle looked with foreboding toward the day when 'all Literature has become one boundless self-devouring Review'<sup>3</sup>.

Exploiting the new importance placed by a consolidating print culture on being informed and on having opinions, reviewing offered readers (besides a substitute for reading 'the original') a critical orientation. In a complicated symbiosis, reviewers in turn claimed reviewing was a passive conduit: 'among the legitimate means by which the English public both instructs and expresses itself' (to quote Francis Jeffrey, the *Edinburgh*'s longest and most successful editor)<sup>4</sup>. Identifying with consumers, they often conscripted them against the pretensions of authorship.

The uneasy relationship subsisting between the reviewer and the professional author dates back to when they were born and raised together by the exigencies of a radically revised, while rapidly enlarging booktrade. Contributors to the *Monthly* and *Critical*, the *Analytical Review* (1788) and the *British Critic* (1793), however, still tended to be either practitioners or diffident extractors. With the *Edinburgh* reviewers we first witness the phenomenon of the specialist critic: the *expert critic*, so to speak, rather than the expert or amateur. And the often antagonistic attitude taken by nineteenth-century reviewing played a crucial role in reinforcing the self-consciousness of authorship.

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**Rogers, Samuel** (*b* Stoke Newington, 30 July 1763—*d* London, 18 December, 1855) Banker, Poet, Patron, Art Connoisseur

Rogers's indifference to either political party, along with the wealth he derived from his family's banking business and the phenomenal success of his fastidiously crafted poetry, gave him the access he craved to most of the distinguished social and cultural groups of the day, where he could indulge a passion for gossip, art, and talented company.

<sup>1</sup> In the Advertisement to the first number (October 1802) of the *Edinburgh Review*.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the 'Edinburgh' 1788-1802* (London, 1978), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> From 'Characteristics'; see *A Carlyle Reader: Selections from the writings of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. G. B. Tennyson (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 67-103 (p. 87).

<sup>4</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, XXIII, 39.

Few of the vast numbers of memoirs and diaries written by public figures of the period, male or female, are without some reference to Rogers, an *habitué* of Holland House and other fashionable London gatherings and an inveterate ‘caller-in’ also renowned for his own breakfast parties at St James’s Place. In a sociable period, Samuel Rogers was sociable to a fault — or to the detriment of his reputation, for he features so often as an acerbic gossip as to have left largely this impression.

Rogers was in fact a successful banker, before handing the family business over to his younger brother in 1802; a talented and successful poet (his *Pleasures of Memory* of 1792, written in polished rhyming couplets with a complex aural patterning, ran to nineteen editions by the turn of the century and by 1820 had sold around 25,000 copies); an art connoisseur with commitment and assured taste — upon both of which he was prepared to act, becoming a major figure in the establishment of the National Gallery and contributing many of the finest works from his own collection (still valued at £150,000 on his death).

Though discriminating, Rogers was equally generous with financial assistance to poets and painters without his income of £5,000 a year (few went without his help with money, comment, or proof-reading). And throughout ninety two years he was more capable of genuine friendships than his reputation would suggest, with people of all ages and as different as William Gilpin and Charles James Fox (whose epitaph he wrote); Lord Byron and the Duke of Wellington; Lady Holland and Mary Shelley; Moore and Wordsworth; Ruskin and Dickens.

Byron — who admittedly ran hot and cold — celebrated Rogers’s *Pleasures of Memory* in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) as one of the redeeming literary features of the age and published his *Lara* with Rogers’s *Jacqueline* in 1814. Ruskin dedicated his *Stones of Venice* (1853) to him as the author of *Italy*, the work on which Rogers lavished inordinate care in the 1820s and 30s, combining with his love of both poetry and art (scrupulously attending to the illustrations by Turner and Stothard that he commissioned) the political liberalism and religious tolerance that he inherited from his Dissenting parents and the philosophical radicals amongst their friends. (Joseph Priestly was a familiar of his childhood, spending his last night with the Rogers family before his self-exile to America, and Richard Price inspired him to wish to enter the ministry from which he was disqualified by a weak voice.) Though neither radical nor populist himself, he devoted the time not spent in gossip, composition, and touring France and Italy (where in 1821 he joined the Byron-Shelley circle) to many liberal causes of the day, promoting and subscribing heavily to the new University of London, for example.

When Rogers was offered the laureateship on the death of Wordsworth in 1850, sensitive to his eighty seven years and always diffident about his own talent, he recommended its award to Tennyson, another friend and a poet whose work he admired — as well he might have, for it was heavily influenced by his own.

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## Romantic Irony

Friedrich Schlegel developed the theory of Romantic irony to characterize, both ontologically and rhetorically, an attitude of detached scepticism adopted by the highest ‘modern’ or post-classical art towards its own activity and/or material: ‘Internally: the mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all limitations, even above its own art, virtue, or genius’ (*Kritische Fragmente*, 1797)<sup>1</sup>.

According to Schlegel’s construction, ironic works of art are informed by an awareness that their own expressive or representational means are *necessarily* incommensurate with the transcendental Idea they strive to comprehend; are necessarily ‘fictions’. The paradox ironically acknowledged of noble beauty created only to fail — and the more noble and beautiful the aspiring creation, the more acute the sense of failure and the deeper the irony — is also recognised as a paradigm of ‘the human condition’.

One corollary of this awareness of the limits of human apprehension and creativity is that apprehension and creativity — the artist’s and the reader’s — become themselves the subject matter of the work of art. Inadequate discourse (or fiction) is for critical purposes displaced by discourse *about* fictiveness and fiction-making.

While in the German Romantic aestheticians such as “Irony is not merely negative, it is rather through and through positive” (Köpke)<sup>2</sup> — a version of the *felix culpa* or fortunate fall, in fact — the term sometimes designates a Byronic pessimism about the self-sabotaging idealism of humanity. The concomitant awareness of its own fictiveness that art betrays thus becomes desperate, even nihilistic, anticipating recent forms of anti-humanist deconstruction.

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**Smith**, Sydney Revd (b Woodford, Essex, 3 June 1771—d London, 22 Feb. 1845) Reviewer and Wit

Sydney Smith appeared a fifth columnist in the Established Church he entered in 1797, using the *Edinburgh Review* he projected and help to found in 1802, and his best known work the *Letters of Peter Plymley* (1807-8), to attack its intolerant obstruction of that ‘enlightened’ social progress to which his Whig liberalism committed him.

One result of Smith’s efforts at social reform was the Church’s obstructing his own social progress. Recall to his living at Foston, Yorkshire, in 1808 meant exile from London, where from 1803 he had preached, written, especially talked with great success, even lectured on ‘moral philosophy’ to packed houses at the Royal Institution. A renowned wit with a passion for the society (and food) found in Edinburgh, and later at Holland House, he was at home in the metropolis for which a twenty-year failure to advance in the Church left him yearning. (Not until very late in his life was he created canon-residentiary at St Paul’s, London.)

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Peter Firchow, in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe*, ed. Kathleen Wheeler (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 40-44 (p. 41).

<sup>2</sup> As quoted by Wheeler, *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe*, p. 19.

Though he attacked an Establishment that upheld the Test and Corporation Acts denying non-Anglicans access to office and acted the bigotted tyrant in Ireland, Smith was no hypocrite, preferring Dissent or Catholicism. The ‘No Popery’ sentiments of the old Dissenters were for him ‘the most intolerable circumstance’ in the Irish dispute<sup>1</sup>, and he had a thoroughly protestant attitude to Catholic ‘nonsense’ and ‘superstition’.

Smith was temperamentally and politically impatient with any manifestation of ‘the narrow and exclusive spirit that delights to keep the common blessings of sun, and air, and freedom from other human beings’<sup>2</sup>. Sometimes fervent, rarely ‘Swiftian’ (violent or grotesque), Smith’s satire always remained ideologically and stylistically ‘polite’: an epitome of the moderate, ‘common sense and orthodox Christianity’ for which he stood<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, CX (March 1827), p. 425.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Ian Jack, *English Literature 1815-1832*, Oxford History of English Literature, X (Oxford, 1963), p. 331.

<sup>3</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, XXII (January 1808), p. 341.