

Stephanie Dumke and Freya Johnston

Thomas Love Peacock: *Crotchets Rampant*

Crotchet Castle (1831), his sixth work of fiction, secured Peacock's reputation as 'the wittiest writer in England'.¹ The key figure in the tale, Mr Crotchet, is also a vanishing one; recently retired from the City, he is hungry for chat and dispute. A man who is 'very hospitable in his establishment, and liberal in his invitations', he gathers each year a troupe of experts, cranks, and quacks to argue with one another for his pleasure. He says little himself, beyond remarking that:

The sentimental against the rational, the intuitive against the inductive, the ornamental against the useful, the intense against the tranquil, the romantic against the classical; these are great and interesting controversies, which I should like, before I die, to see satisfactorily settled.²

As V. S. Pritchett remarked, 'The desire for settlement comes with peculiar force to stockbrokers'.³ And yet—as is typical in Peacock's novels—debate quickly breaks down. Crotchet junior's proposal that the assembled group should 'try to settle all the questions over which a shadow of doubt yet hangs in the world of philosophy' (ch. 2, p. 20) fosters little interest in doing any such thing. Instead, the dividing lines between individual opinions and positions become exaggerated, dramatized, and hardened—with the prospect of a beautiful woman, idyllic scenery, a good dinner, and plenty of drink standing in for any intellectual resolution.

Marilyn Butler observed of *Crotchet Castle* that, 'As always in Peacock's books, the real issue emerges in the form of a debate between the "ancients" and the "moderns"'.⁴ The author urges us to think of that ancient-modern distinction in terms of poetics, and in so doing he turns the adjectives 'ancient' and 'modern' into 'classical' and 'romantic'. We are told in Chapter 10, for example, that 'Mr. Chainmail fought with Doctor Folliot, the battle of the romantic against the classical in poetry' (p. 92). In 1831, the year of *Crotchet Castle's* publication, Thomas Carlyle could still claim that 'we are troubled with no controversies on romanticism and classicism'.⁵ Yet Peacock was well informed by the periodicals of his time, which included reviews of continental works elaborating on the classical-romantic distinction—August Wilhelm Schlegel's *Über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (1809–11), for instance, and Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (1813). As a regular reader of the *Edinburgh Review*, Peacock is likely to have come across William Hazlitt's appraisal of John Black's 1815 translation of Schlegel's *Lectures*, which included a long rehearsal of the classical-romantic faultline.⁶

Peacock's varied uses of the word 'romantic' illustrate the word's developing senses and applications. In *Headlong Hall* (1815), 'romantic' describes—like 'picturesque'—landscape features: 'romantic woods', a 'romantic pass', 'romantic Meirion', and 'romantic pleasure-grounds'.⁷ In *Melincourt* (1817)—in addition to a 'romantic chasm', 'romantic scenery', and a 'romantic valley'—we find the adjective describing states of mind and isolation: 'romantic seclusion' and 'romantic solitudes'.⁸ In *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), 'romantic' sounds as if it is being deployed critically when it refers to a certain contemporary type of thought and literature; yet the meaning is at times vague and playful, as when Peacock writes of 'the distempered ideas of metaphysical romance and romantic metaphysics' (ch. 2, p. 13). Combined with the language of dreams, visions, and fanciful projects in descriptions of Scythrop's views on philosophy, life, and emotion (e.g. ch. 10, pp. 63-9), the meaning of 'romantic' is muddled up with the sentiment of love and with the fantastic.

What Peacock criticizes in his contemporary authors is only certain tendencies, especially those of popular literature: 'the darkness and misanthropy of modern literature', introspection, and the supposed mysticism and obscurity of German philosophy.⁹ These qualities are contrasted with only some aspects of classical literature: comedy, cheerfulness, and clarity.¹⁰ Moreover, Peacock's interpretation of classical literature is deliberately one-sided. As H. D. F. Kitto reminds us, 'The greatness of Greek art [...] lies in this, that it completely reconciles two principles which are often opposed: on the one hand control and clarity and fundamental seriousness; on the other, brilliance, imagination and passion.'¹¹ These are the two principles that Peacock satirically divides into 'ancient' and 'modern'.

In Chapter 1 of *Crotchet Castle*, the narrator elaborates on the origins and aspirations of his title character, whom Lady Clarinda later calls 'a good tempered, half-informed person, very unreasonably fond of reasoning, and of reasoning people' (ch. 5, p. 42). Mock-heraldic terminology works to signpost the personal qualities and social standing of 'Ebenezer Mac Crotchet, Esquire', who is:

the London-born offspring of a worthy native of the "north countrie," who had walked up to London on a commercial adventure, with all his surplus capital, not very neatly tied up in a not very clean handkerchief, suspended over his shoulder from the end of a hooked stick, extracted from the first hedge on his pilgrimage; and who, after having worked himself a step or two up the ladder of life, had won the virgin heart of the only daughter of a highly respectable merchant of Duke's Place, with whom he inherited the honest fruits of a long series of ingenuous dealings.

Mr. Mac Crotchet had derived from his mother the instinct, and from his father the rational principle, of enriching himself at the expense of the rest of mankind, by all the recognised modes of accumulation on the windy side of the law. [...]

He had married an English Christian, and, having none of the Scotch accent, was ungracious enough to be ashamed of his blood. He was desirous to obliterate alike the Hebrew and Caledonian vestiges in his name, and signed himself E. M. Crotchet, which by degrees induced the majority of his neighbours to think that his name was Edward Matthew. The more effectually to sink the Mac, he christened his villa Crotchet

Castle, and determined to hand down to posterity the honors of Crotchet of Crotchet. He found it essential to his dignity to furnish himself with a coat of arms, which, after the proper ceremonies (payment being the principal), he obtained, videlicet: Crest, a crotchet rampant, in A sharp: Arms, three empty bladders, turgescant, to show how opinions are formed; three bags of gold, pendent, to show why they are maintained; three naked swords, tranchant, to show how they are administered; and three barbers' blocks, gaspant, to show how they are swallowed. (ch. 1, pp. 5-7)

Jokes about provenance, extraction, inheritance, and derivation yield to a number of equally slick ironies about sinking and obliterating the past. With Jewish blood on his mother's side, Mr Crotchet is the son of a commercial adventurer from Scotland who made his fortune in London. He boasts 'a smattering of many things, and a knowledge of none' (ch. 1, p. 12), and duly embodies what Samuel Taylor Coleridge called the 'plebification' of learning.¹² For that, Peacock lays the blame squarely at the feet of Lord Brougham and his Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. Crotchet's coat of arms teasingly represents not only the dubious character who has paid for it, but the fiction that bears his sham, crack-pot name and residence. Peacock's heraldic composition is the satirical offspring of Ben Jonson, who in act 3 of *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599) gives the dull-witted Sogliardo a coat of arms that travesties his social aspirations and boorish character.¹³ Like Jonson, Peacock combines real heraldic terms such as 'rampant' and 'pendent' with spurious ones; this extract from *Crotchet Castle* is the only source for the *Oxford English Dictionary's* obsolete nonce-word 'gaspant', defined as 'A mock-heraldic term for: gasping'. In Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), there is a bear rampant ('its noblest posture') on a family crest: in other words, a bear standing on the sinister hind foot with its forepaws in the air, the sinister above the dexter.¹⁴ But it is harder to work out what a 'crotchet rampant' might be doing. That we aren't quite able to reconstruct Crotchet's coat of arms is part of a comic impulse that toys with our ideas of what can and cannot be seen—a question involving ancient and modern decorum as well as the distinction between the visual and the verbal. Chapter 7, for instance, is entirely occupied by a debate about naked statues of Venus, and whether or not they ought to be on show at home.

In one sense, it is obvious that crotchets and crotcheteers are indeed rampant—that is to say, both violent and widespread—in Peacock's story. Someone who is 'rampant' is on the up, both figuratively and socially, with the unwelcome implication of unchecked growth. This view of the burgeoning mercantile class, newly enriched and eager for legitimacy, emerges very clearly from Peacock's 'heraldry of morals and intellect' in *Crotchet Castle*.¹⁵ But 'rampant' in this context also means something like 'extruded' or 'on show'. Elizabeth Barrett Browning had this sense in mind, and associated it with Peacockian heraldry, when she wrote in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, seven years after *Crotchet Castle* had been published: 'I do not like in man or woman the constant carrying about of an intellect rampant, like a crest!'¹⁶ This is what everyone does in Peacock: they carry their intellectual foibles and hobby-horses with

them as badges of their identity, and such attributes determine every aspect of what they say and do. The titular character's personal crotchet is his Boswellian penchant for hosting combative discussion. Other characters are obsessively concerned with water, poison, transcendental philosophy, biography, medieval virtue, co-operation and community, opera, classical scholarship, and rivers. Heraldry is itself a crotchet, in fact, given that both words may describe the kind of fanciful, riddling artistic or mechanical contrivance of which this novel is a prime example.

Between 1829 and 1834, in his day job at East India House, Peacock was working intensively on the problem of how to secure a faster trading passage to and from India. His enquiries concerning the relative merits of the Egyptian and the Syrian routes were transmitted to the Consul-General at Alexandria, in 1829—the same year in which he produced a 'Memorandum respecting the application of steam navigation to the internal and external communications of India'.¹⁷ Five years later, in a *Report from the Select Committee to the House of Commons, on Steam Navigation* (1834), Peacock appeared as one of the chief witnesses before the committee. He furnished much of the research and commentary incorporated into the finished document and its appendices—materials that he also went on to summarize, from a distance, in an article on the *Report* for the *Edinburgh Review*.¹⁸

Peacock was therefore in the curious position of contributing testimony and of repeatedly, anonymously, glossing his own evidence and performance as a speaker; he wrote in and about the same document in the first and third person, as it were, and over a period of some years. He is by turns 'Mr Peacock', quoted as an authority on navigation, and an anonymous narratorial surveyor of all the relevant evidence, and then a reviewer of the whole thing (one who just so happens to note that 'Mr Peacock' has been proved right on a crucial point).¹⁹ This combination of being on the ground and well above it clearly suited Peacock's gift for evidence-based reasoning and for the dispassionate and quizzical appraisal of a vast field of enquiry from ancient to modern times. It also suited his elusive, heraldic character as a satirist. The layout of the *Report* on steam navigation, in its various guises and supplementary materials, complements and shapes that of Peacock's anonymous fiction, a distinctive kind of writing that typically alternates between brief sections of third-person narrative and long passages of argumentative testimony, given by talking heads of extreme and opposing views.

Such formal papers, like Peacock's fiction, thrive on the display of classical learning, on the one hand, and on the other reveal an expert knowledge of the latest technological and social developments. They gleefully demolish faulty logic and inattentive reading in a manner that is witty, urbane, and detached. Like the novels, the bureaucratic writings concern themselves with the examination and transmission of information. They are interested in the nuts and bolts of how money is moved from one place to another, in trade and power, in how we communicate, and in how we travel. Above all else, surveying and testing the limits of a

‘remarkable’ and ‘great diversity of opinion’ (as the *Edinburgh Review* article on the *Report* phrases it) is Peacock’s chosen territory—whether in technical reports or in fiction.²⁰

Both kinds of writing often chart the progress of rivers, native and foreign, as well as different views of the world; Peacock combines the two, punningly, in phrases such as ‘the current of opinion’, his version of Samuel Johnson’s ‘stream of life’.²¹ Rivers and talkers are constitutive and representative of the public mood, at least as that mood is embodied in Peacock’s whimsical, serpentine work. *Crotchet Castle* appeared in the middle of the period in which he was writing on steam vessels and trade routes, and it charts another kind of watery investigation—a pleasure cruise along the Thames. Resembling his first three novels in its sociable, country-house setting, *Crotchet Castle* also takes from the two historical romances which precede it a lyrical and pastoral atmosphere. At the same time, Peacock’s fictional speakers routinely paraphrase or spout verbatim whole passages from the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly Review* (among many other publications). Readers are typically directed via the footnotes, more or less fully, to the original sources, but as in Alexander Pope’s *Dunciad* (1728–44) the dividing line between main text and subordinate commentary is unstable. Material that might conventionally have been relegated to footnotes seeps upwards and invades the dialogues, so that a novelistic character can appear to become little more than an animated collage of quotations. Italics may or may not indicate the points at which these speakers are ventriloquizing other writers, whether English, French, German, Welsh, Greek, or Latin.

Rather than ask us to credit his human outlines with the three-dimensional properties of real people, Peacock is apparently inviting us to discredit and laugh at a public arena in which all these printed opinions can possibly be circulating and be taken seriously. But the omnipresence of quotation and recycled commentary in his work is about more than that. The sheer range of authorities cited in the notes and creeping into the dialogues goes well beyond anything that might be deemed necessary or faithful to present-day reality, however cacophonous—indeed, it spans the whole period from ancient to modern times, from wearily familiar arguments to the strangest pockets of occult knowledge. Peacock likes to set long-forgotten points of view in direct competition and contention with the latest scientific and philosophical trends.

The effect of all this is sometimes poignant as well as curious and funny. Self-evidently second-hand creations and yet absolutely fresh, thanks to their oddity and Pinocchio-like air of innocence, Peacock’s characters are talking anthologies of their originator’s source materials. Perhaps they too dream of becoming real people. But even their fictional plausibility is repeatedly subdued to what they live and work in: the medium of print. Perhaps that is why so few of them ever change their minds or try to escape their ruling passions; it might also explain why many of them suffer from dizziness and topple over. For all the debate and

argument in Peacock's novels, hardly anyone is persuaded to give an inch on the views with which he or she began (one noble exception to this rule is Sir Telegraph Paxarett in *Melincourt*, who agrees to renounce sugar and join the anti-saccharine society when Mr Forester has convinced him of the iniquity of 'colonial produce').²²

Even those characters in the novels that are clearly based on real people (Coleridge, Byron, Brougham, and so on) are built primarily out of quotations from and reviews of their own works, rather than on any attempt to realize them as individuals in private and domestic life. Peacock, seeking to maintain his own detachment and impersonality, applied that same rule to his creations in general. He writes in the teasing spirit of the bookseller in Jonathan Swift's *Battel of the Books* (1704), who warns readers to:

beware of applying to Persons what is here meant, only of Books in the most literal Sense. So, when *Virgil* is mentioned, we are not to understand the Person of a famous Poet, call'd by that Name, but only certain Sheets of Paper, bound up in Leather, containing in Print, the Works of the said Poet.²³

But Swift appears to be more interested in authors-as-books than in readers-as-texts. Peacock's cast of characters, saturated in print, is the direct descendant of Giuseppe Arcimboldo's sixteenth-century portrait of a man composed entirely of books, a work that pays homage to, and sends up—as Peacock does—the absorbing love of scholarship. The effect is necessarily different in painting, a visual rather than a verbal form of communication. Peacock's printed words are overwhelmingly *about* printed words. His novels show you the metamorphosis of a human being into a body of text, a printed artefact, someone who is all mouth and no trousers.

'All mouth' because these fictions are definitively oral: people eat, drink, sing, talk, and laugh. Reviewers hailed his satires as chaste not only because of Peacock's style, but because of their weirdly evacuated content.²⁴ He may cite and praise Aristophanes, Petronius, Butler, Voltaire, Swift, and Rabelais, but unlike those satiric predecessors he tends not to render the body as a gross or indecorous presence. Even when people fall over, the result is typically neither messy nor fatal. In his official concern for risk management, his precise observations, inscrutable humour, and stylistic purity, Peacock resembles his fellow bureaucrat Franz Kafka more closely than he resembles most English novelists. The demonstrable link between the two authors is Charles Dickens, who began his career by publishing and imitating Peacock's work and who was in his turn imitated by Kafka—especially in *Der Verschollene* (1927), or *The Man who Disappeared*, parts of which Kafka summed up as 'glatte Dickens-Nachahmung' ('pure Dickens take-off').²⁵ Peacock and Kafka, both named for birds,²⁶ wrote highly polished tales, cryptic and experimental in different ways; each also tried to keep himself, and his

personal wounds, well hidden. It was the aspiration of each man to become an author who disappeared.

The impersonal stance of Peacock's works, like that of Kafka's, is meant to discourage us from viewing them as self-expressive, from detecting in them any subjective centres. Reiner Stach observes of Kafka that 'He wanted to his texts to see the light of day, but remain in the dark himself'.²⁷ The same is true of Peacock, who protested at every opportunity against the intrusively biographical spirit of his age. He was a man of such contrasting and sometimes contradictory qualities that he would have sympathized with Kafka's feeling, recorded in his diary, that he had virtually nothing in common with himself—the flipside of David Bromwich's remark that 'Peacock's sympathies are so generous that one suspects him of having been a member of every group he satirized'.²⁸ The conundrum of Peacock is his attachment to disguise combined with 'an intense love of truth, and a clear apprehension of truth', qualities he recognized as 'essential to comic writing of the first class'.²⁹ There is a risk that such widespread and conflicting sympathies—or the persistent failure to sympathize with oneself—will lead to disintegration, the loss of coherence. Alertness to that possibility may be one reason why both Kafka and Peacock excelled, in their fiction and in their professional capacities, as reporters of accidents.³⁰

Take, for instance, one moment from *Headlong Hall*—a work whose title combines falling with building, and destruction with preservation—in which intellectual folly, energy, and gunpowder unite to produce an explosion. The episode concludes not in disaster, but in the miraculous preservation of life. Squire Headlong, whose 'thoughts, words and actions' exhibit 'a remarkable alacrity of progression', resolves to blow up a projecting rock, which happens to support one of Peacock's many faulty towers. Just as the process of ignition begins, Mr Cranium and Mr Panscope appear unexpectedly at the window. They survive the blast, but Mr Cranium suddenly bounds, 'under the elastic influence of terror, several feet into the air'. His descent into the water is described with suave, mathematical precision:

His ascent being unluckily a little out of the perpendicular, he descended with a proportionate curve from the apex of his projection, and alighted, not on the wall of the tower, but in an ivy-bush by its side, which, giving way beneath him, transferred him to a tuft of hazel at its base, which, after upholding him an instant, consigned him to the boughs of an ash, that had rooted itself in a fissure about half-way down the rock, which finally transmitted him to the waters below.

Squire Headlong anxiously watched the tower as the smoke which at first enveloped it rolled away; but when this shadowy curtain was withdrawn, and Mr Panscope was discovered, *solus*, in a tragical attitude, his apprehensions became boundless, and he concluded that the unlucky collision of a flying fragment of rock had indeed emancipated the spirit of the craniologist from its terrestrial *vinculum*.

Mr. Escot had considerably outstripped his companions, and arrived at the scene of the disaster, just as Mr. Cranium, being utterly destitute of natatorial skill, was in imminent danger of final submersion. The deteriorationist, who had cultivated this

valuable art with great success, immediately plunged in to his assistance and brought him alive and in safety to a shelving part of the shore.³¹

One joke here is that a deteriorationist saves the day—and, in having learnt to swim, he turns out to have cultivated something ‘valuable’, quietly giving the lie to his relentlessly dire view of the world. Theories are trumped by experiences, but in Peacock the encounter does not have to be fatal—as it often is in, say, Voltaire’s *Candide ou l’optimisme* (1759). What this passage reveals is the impulse to preserve life, hope, and good humour, and to have a dig at ‘attitudes’, whether deteriorationist or tragical, without quite destroying them. The image of a fall is itself pregnant with moral comedy of the deteriorationist and tragical variety; and the graceful ease of Peacock’s description exists in calm, knowing, humorous counterpoint to the flagrant indignity of what is happening: a frightened man drops a long way down, looks silly, but lives.

In *Nightmare Abbey*, Scythrop’s mental and emotional activity is concealed behind stone walls, but there are moments of crisis and dramatic exposure when those walls are breached. In Chapter 3, Marionetta walks in and demands clarification, just as Scythrop is standing on a table imagining what it would be like to terrify her by throwing off his dressing-gown. Glowry’s entry, in Chapter 13, to demand a conclusion to his wooing of Marionetta brings in all the residents of Nightmare Abbey and exposes Scythrop’s double affections to both women.³² The guarded exterior and fear of intrusion also figure in ‘Boozabowt Abbey’ (c. 1859), one of Peacock’s last, unfinished works. Here, the Abbot questions Brother John about his past (he apparently enjoyed his previous life in another stronghold, this time placed over a highway—until that stronghold was invaded). The Abbot observes that John, an instinctively private man, exaggerates his natural good cheer in order to bury a secret unhappiness. This promising start, apparently heralding a plot of tragic interest, is left undeveloped. The exposure of personal woe remains no more than a threat. But it raises the possibility that fear of biography has arrested the progress of fiction. Peacock long outlived most of his friends; like Brother John, perhaps he suffers most in secret, when he appears to be at his sunniest.³³ However lightly ironic their tone and happy their sociability, his novels are about human loss and damage. Images of ruined fortresses and broken towers are scattered all over his otherwise typically pristine work because he strives to protect what he knows cannot endure.

On the whole, then, Peacock’s satirical fiction endeavours to rise above the intimate and the personal, in terms of self-exposure and attacks on anyone’s private life as well as in terms of the more degenerate or unruly aspects of the human body. The fallibilities with which he is concerned are primarily those of the mind. Having said that, his stories are highly flirtatious and they all end in marriage. The female characters are usually intelligent and necessarily articulate (given that the novels in which they appear consist chiefly of dialogue), while also happy to pose as nymphs and statues against a variety of pastoral and classical backdrops.

It should be obvious from all this that Peacock's men and women are unlike those of other novelists. He does not tend to portray interiority—indeed, he tries for the most part to avoid it. Rather, his characters, both male and female, exist primarily in order to share, voice, and test the limits of their ideas. Peacock's fiction is omnivorous and outward-facing, indebted to philosophical tracts, lectures, classical dialogues, and to the rhythms of parliamentary debate. It is also a form akin to heraldry in its tendency to display allegiances and affiliations without explaining them. Like heraldic devices, Peacock's fictions are overt and suggestive, rather than three-dimensional; and, like heraldic devices, they make use of quotation, mottoes, epigraphs, and allusions in a teasing, cryptic fashion.

In Chapter 1 of *Crotchet Castle*, the mention of 'A sharp' in the titular character's insignia gestures towards the fact that a 'crotchet' is also the symbol for a quarter note in music (p. 7). A 'crotchet rampant' might therefore be describing the appearance of a score. As if to realize this possibility, one copy of the first edition of *Crotchet Castle*, held by the Bodleian Library, has been rebound with golden musical crotchets dancing up and down in triplicate across the spine. As early as the 1570s, playful associations were being made between the crotchet that is a 'whimsical fancy, perverse conceit, or peculiar notion' (*Oxford English Dictionary*), and the musical symbol of the same name: Anthony Wood writes in 1691 of a musician 'possess'd with crotchets'.³⁴ But the item 'crotchet rampant' slyly indicates, too, a tendency for the clash of opinions (personal crotchets) to give way to erotic and amorous plots. A 'crotchet', as it relates to the human anatomy, might be 'rampant'—that is, lustfully erect—because this is a story about young men charging around the country in hot pursuit of young women.

The turgescient bladders that feature on Crotchet's coat of arms perhaps indicate inflated, impractical opinions; such bloated opinions in turn resemble the bubble of financial speculation, pregnant with imminent disaster, that Peacock is satirizing. The gold represents the object of human greed—but also the opposite of paper money, yet another target of his fiction (and poetry). The swords emphasize how opinions are enforced. The three open-mouthed barbers' blocks are wooden heads on which to display wigs, possibly indicating the helpless stupidity of those blockheads made to swallow other people's views. All things considered, Ebenezer Mac Crotchet, or E. M. Crotchet, Esquire, has obtained something rather different from his 'dignity' (p. 7). He has purchased a mysterious, satirical emblem of the tale and of the society within which he moves. And in the novel itself, Crotchet, like his author, may be allied by turns with progress towards change and with a resistance to it.

As he grows older, we are told, Crotchet gradually moves from a career of recklessness to one of hoarding and safeguarding. His 'caution', Peacock says, 'got the better of his instinct, or rather transferred it from the department of acquisition to that of conservation' (ch. 1, p. 6). Stirring in that language of departments is the birth of a Dickensian comedy of bureaucracy.

Possessing no claim on his Thames valley estate and its castellated villa beyond those of strictly legal ownership and a spurious coat of arms, Crotchet represents an aggressive new class only recently identifying itself with the interests of ‘conservation’ and desperate for social legitimacy. The novel involves a match between Crotchet junior, a partner in a loan-jobbing firm, and Lady Clarinda, daughter of Lord Foolincourt—one of the old, impoverished nobility and the owner of a rotten borough. Lady Clarinda’s brother, Lord Bossnowl (which translates, not to put too fine a point on it, as ‘knobhead’),³⁵ is engaged to Crotchet’s daughter (whose name, Lemma, means ‘profit’ or ‘gain’). Clearly, the deciding social factors are now economic. Having said that, they do not win out in this novel. Lady Clarinda, as she informs her dismayed erstwhile suitor, Captain Fitzchrome, is now ‘a commodity in the market’ (ch. 5, p. 44). She seems to know that she is performing in a story of someone else’s contrivance. Her perfectly executed, often savage, repartee, especially when it touches on her own entrapment, resembles the ‘rather too light & bright & sparkling’ exchanges of Elizabeth Bennet with Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).³⁶ But while Elizabeth bags a landed estate, Clarinda eventually settles for her impoverished first love—and this despite her remark to him that ‘love in a cottage is very pleasant [...] but would not the same love be a great deal safer in a castle, even if Mammon furnished the fortification?’ (ch. 3, p. 30).

At the centre of the fiction—indeed, occupying the middle two chapters, which is presumably a structural pun—lies a debate about the Middle Ages that takes its cue from Scott’s novels. Mac Quedy dismisses the whole period as one ‘of brutality, ignorance, fanaticism, and tyranny’; Chainmail, however, defends it vigorously, citing Richard I as ‘the mirror of chivalry, the pattern of honor, the fountain of generosity, the model to all succeeding ages of military glory’ (ch. 9, p. 87). The decade leading up to *Crotchet Castle* saw publication of several works of eulogistic medievalism—by John Lindgard, William Cobbett, and Kenelm Digby—and Chainmail’s invocation of the Middle Ages as a reprimand to contemporary social and political developments was, by 1831, a familiar technique. Peacock himself had already made use of it; in 1818, he told Shelley that his prose tale *Maid Marian* (1822) would be ‘a comic romance of the 12th century which I shall make the vehicle of much oblique satire on all the oppressions that are done under the sun’.³⁷ Mac Quedy echoes several utilitarian commentators on how the feudal and chivalric emphasis of the new medievalism could act as a mask for tyranny. John Stuart Mill’s speech on ‘The Utility of Knowledge’ (1823) claimed that ‘this appeal from the age of civilization to the age of barbarism is made, we may observe, by those and by those alone who now, as then, would wish to see the great mass of mankind subject to the despotic sway of nobles, priests and kings’. Three years later, writing in the *Westminster Review*, he argued that ‘the compound of noble qualities, called the *spirit of chivalry* (a rare combination in all ages) was almost unknown in the age of chivalry [...] the age so called was equally distinguished by moral depravity and by physical wretchedness’.³⁸

Chainmail, with his feudalistic sympathies, is clearly in line with the backward-looking Cobbett, while Mac Quedy, a Scotsman and political economist, is a spokesman for the forward-looking views of David Hume and the enlightenment school. So Crotchet's coat of arms is emblematic of a past–present, old–new, ancient-modern pattern that governs *Crotchet Castle* as a whole. In the final chapter, a medieval Christmas feast at Chainmail Hall is disrupted by a pre-Reform Bill riot. As angry, starving labourers besiege the door, Chainmail's pampered guests discuss why this surprising 'piece of the dark ages' has made its presence felt (ch. 18, p. 141). They blame Sir Simon Steeltrap who, we have been told earlier, 'has enclosed commons and woodlands; abolished cottage-gardens; taken the village cricket-ground into his own park [...]; shut up footpaths and alehouses' (ch. 5, p. 49). As social criticism, this seems clear enough: the tenant farmers have been unjustly driven to poverty and despair. Yet near the end of *Crotchet Castle* the narrator, apparently unsympathetic to their plight, has them chased off rather than fed (ch. 18, p. 144). The party is thus restored, with the implication that there can be no feast without cruelty, at least not in the present; charity belongs in the past. Chainmail certainly thinks the modern age has excluded it, having already told Mac Quedy:

I do not see, in all your boasted improvements, any compensation for the religious charity of the twelfth century. I do not see any compensation for that kindly feeling which, within their own little communities, bound the several classes of society together, while full scope was left for the development of natural character, wherein individuals differed as conspicuously as in costume. Now, we all wear one conventional dress, one conventional face; we have no bond of union, but pecuniary interest; we talk any thing that comes uppermost, for talking's sake, and without expecting to be believed (ch. 10, p. 89).

Is this endless talk about anything to be taken as tragic, or funny, or both? Whose side is Peacock on? Time and again in *Crotchet Castle* the old trumps the new, but the new is instantly capable of fighting back, of sneering at the old. The resulting tale is a curious elegant farrago in which the author appears to be at once forward- and backward-looking, progressive and satirically resistant to progress. Although Mac Quedy is often the butt of the joke, Peacock might well have agreed with his claim, at the end of Chapter 2, that to be able to laugh at something is an index of civilization (p. 21).

In debates with the 'classical' Rev. Dr Folliott, the antiquarian Mr Chainmail does not escape unscathed with his admiration for the Middle Ages, and his experiment of reviving medieval society is shown to have failed. But the Greek-loving Folliott can hardly be understood as faithfully embodying or transmitting Peacock's views. Seconding the composer Mr Trillo's scheme to 'Regenerate the Athenian theatre', Folliott also categorically declares that Trillo himself should be barred from the theatre for his lack of Greek. A lady may enter the theatre by herself only if she can 'construe and metricise a chorus' (ch. 6, pp. 60-61).

Exchanges such as this indicate that Peacock was far more eager to see the spirit of Greek literature revived than to promote the mere display of learning. Folliott reveals himself to be inconsistent in his enthusiasm for Greek art when, in the next chapter, he criticizes at some length Crotchet's not 'altogether delicate' collection of nude statuary (pp. 67-74). The idea that Greek thought and art could ever be fully revived in the modern age is exposed as a delusion.

In its sheer comprehensiveness *Crotchet Castle* does achieve an integration of sorts of the 'classical' and the 'romantic'. Songs and traditional ballads of medieval origin are included at several points, gesturing towards the Greek combination of arts. Chapter epigraphs and quotations from classical works alternate with quotations from 'modern' works in the widest sense of that word: Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663-78), François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-64), and Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (1483-95). The idyllic, harmonious atmosphere evoked by allusions to and quotations from Menander, Virgil, and Theocritus is realized in the five chapters set in Wales.

That said, there was nothing more congenial to Peacock than producing arguments on both sides of a question. It is both a frustration and an achievement of his works that they represent the viewpoints of warring parties 'with so much nicety and exactness, as to keep the said question eternally pending, and the balance of the controversy perpetually in statu quo.'³⁹ At one point in *Nightmare Abbey*, Flosky stops talking because he finds himself 'unintentionally trespassing within the limits of common sense' (ch. 7, p. 50). You might similarly conclude of Peacock that, as soon as he finds himself on the brink of signing up to any cause or belief, he jumps ship.

The same fear of commitment might be ascribed to Swift. Like Peacock, Swift reveals in his work what Johnson called a 'vigilance of minute attention' to domestic life.⁴⁰ Yet each of them also relentlessly dodges privacy or domesticity; Peacock's castles are not really houses, or not only houses. Jean-Jacques Mayoux thought that he 'n'a pas eu de vie extérieure'—but it can seem to be the case, contrariwise, that Peacock lacked interiority.⁴¹ In these novels of talk, indoor scenes at home repeatedly turn into staged debates. Even when alone, his characters are speaking out loud and performing to an audience of some sort, and it seems likely that the private is being repeatedly turned into the public as a means of safeguarding true privacy. As in heraldry, so in fiction, display—or discovery, as Peacock prefers to call it—is the best form of concealment. The architecture and language of 'cells and recesses, sliding pannels and secret passages', used to describe Scythrop's adaptation of his domestic surroundings in *Nightmare Abbey* (ch. 2, p. 15), is related to the author's desire to trounce or obviate biographical enquiries about himself and his characters. Another, more obvious reason for that language and architecture to be deployed is that Peacock is writing, at least in *Nightmare Abbey*, spoof Gothic.

Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) transports its reader through the 'subterraneous passage', 'secret passage', 'intricate cloisters', and 'long labyrinth' of the castle cellars. The winding syntactical patterns and repetition of such phrases as 'miserable forever' in the course of Isabella's flight from Manfred are intended to create a stylistic maze to match that of the physical scene.⁴² Peacock, in his elegantly wayward manner, follows suit. Combined with the Gothic features of some of his novels is a Scriblerian and satirical 'Architecture of Vaults and Cellars', a form of words and of literary pursuit associated with bathos—that is, with failed sublimity that ends up at the bottom of a building, or a lake, or indeed at the foot of a page in the form of a spoof annotation.⁴³ Terry Castle (a good name for a Peacockian character), has written that 'In Gothic fiction's relentlessly "architectural" obsessions [...] we not only see the inevitable (punning) Gothic linkage between *buildings* and *stories* but the genre's presiding fantasies of self-enclausation, physical debilitation, and psychic surrender writ large'.⁴⁴ Passages, like stories, have this punning character, being at once connections in buildings and quotations from arcane sources, as well as indicating the relationship between them. They are part of Peacock's version of 'canting heraldry', a comic form of allusive encryption that Scott described in 1830 as 'a species of art disowned by the writers on the science, yet universally made use of by those who practise the art of blazonry'.⁴⁵

History, or the weight of the past, is often experienced in Gothic fiction as a form of tyranny or oppression. Peacock does not view or treat history in this way. For him, biographical prurience is the real threat. By comparison with the live danger of personal exposure, history and heraldry are both informative and diverting. The epigraph to 'Caledonian War Whoop' in *Paper Money Lyrics* (1837) boldly proclaims: 'By the Coat of our House, which is an ass rampant, I am ready to fight under this banner'.⁴⁶ In the nineteenth century, as in the sixteenth, the satirist rampant can unmask social climbers and numbskulls, concealing all trace of the herald other than his blazing wit:

CARLO

But ha' you arms? Ha' you arms?

SOGLIARDO

I'faith, I thank God I can write myself gentleman now. Here's my patent [*Showing them a document*]. It cost me thirty pound, by this breath.

PUNTARVOLO

A very fair coat, well charged and full of armoury.

SOGLIARDO

Nay, it has as much variety of colours in it as you have seen a coat have. How like you the crest, sir?

PUNTARVOLO

I understand it not well. What is't?

SOGLIARDO

Marry, sir, it is your boar without a head, rampant.

PUNTARVOLO

A boar without a head. That's very rare.

CARLO

[*Aside to Puntarvolo*] Ay, and rampant too. Troth, I commend the herald's wit, he has deciphered him well: a swine without a head, without brain, wit, anything indeed, ramping to gentility. [*To Sogliardo*] You can blazon the rest, signor, can you not?⁴⁷

¹ Anon., *Literary Gazette* (19 Feb. 1831), 115–17 (p. 115).

² Thomas Love Peacock, *Crotchet Castle*, eds. Freya Johnston and Matthew Bevis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), ch. 1, p. 8; ch. 2, p. 19. Further references are given in the text.

³ V. S. Pritchett, 'Thomas Love Peacock: The Proximity of Wine' (1944), repr. in *The Complete Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991), pp. 102–8 (p. 102).

⁴ Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1979), p. 186.

⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *Carlyle's Works*, 20 vols. (Boston: Estes & Lauriat, 1884), vol. 14, p. 149.

⁶ William Hazlitt, 'Schlegel on the Drama', *Edinburgh Review*, 26 (1816), repr. in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: Dent, 1930–34), vol. 16.

⁷ [Thomas Love Peacock], *Headlong Hall* (London: T. Hookham, Jun., and Co., 1816 [1815]), ch. 11, p. 145; ch. 7, pp. 94, 97; ch. 13, p. 162; ch. 3, p. 25.

⁸ [Thomas Love Peacock], *Melincourt*, 3 vols. (London: T. Hookham, Jun. and Co. and Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817), vol. 1, ch. 10, p. 139; vol. 2, ch. 25, p. 167; vol. 1, ch. 4, p. 38; vol. 1, ch. 1, pp. 6, 8.

⁹ *The Letters of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. Nicholas Joukovsky, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), vol. 1, pp. 121–2.

¹⁰ 'Works of mere amusement that teach nothing may have an accidental and transient success but cannot of course have influence on their own times and will certainly not pass to posterity'. Thomas Love Peacock, 'Essay on Fashionable Literature', repr. in *Nightmare Abbey*, ed. Nicholas A. Joukovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Appendix B, pp. 119–20. Further references to *Nightmare Abbey* are given in the text.

¹¹ H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 25.

¹² 'You begin with the attempt to popularize learning and philosophy; but you will end in the plebification of knowledge' (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend* (1818), vol. 3, p. 132).

¹³ Ben Jonson, *Every Man out of his Humour*, ed. Randall Martin, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), act 3, scene 1, lines 175–94.

¹⁴ *The Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels*, vol. 1: *Waverley; or, 'tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. P. D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), ch. 11, p. 49.

¹⁵ See *OED* 'to ramp': 'to rear or stand on the hind legs, as if in the act of climbing'; 'to grow vigorously, luxuriantly, or excessively; to shoot up rapidly, to flourish'; Samuel Taylor Coleridge on William Pitt in *Inquiring Spirit: A New Presentation of Coleridge from his Published and Unpublished Prose Writings*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York: Pantheon Books, 1951), p. 269.

¹⁶ *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford*, eds. Meredith B. Raymond and Mary Rose Sullivan, 3 vols. ([Waco, Texas]: Armstrong Browning Library of Baylor University 1983), vol. I, p. 80.

¹⁷ See *The Letters of Thomas Love Peacock*, vol. 1, pp. lxxv–lxxvi, cxxviii; vol. 2, pp. 224–5.

¹⁸ [Thomas Love Peacock], *Report from the Select Committee on Steam Navigation to India; with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index* (House of Commons, 14 July 1834), pp. 2–20; [Thomas Love Peacock], 'Art. X.—Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons, on Steam Navigation to India; with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index', *Edinburgh Review*, vol. LX (1834–5), pp. 445–82. See also John Tyree Fain, 'Peacock's Essay on Steam Navigation', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, vol. 35 (1970), 11–15.

¹⁹ [Peacock], 'Art. X.—Report from the Select Committee', p. 456.

²⁰ [Peacock], 'Art. X.—Report from the Select Committee', p. 445.

²¹ For Peacock's 'current of opinion', see e.g. *Crotchet Castle*, ch. 4, p. 36; for Johnson's 'stream of life', see e.g. *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. XVI: *Rasselas and Other Tales*, ed. Gwin J. Kolb (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 176.

²² [Thomas Love Peacock], *Melincourt*, 3 vols. (London: T. Hookham, jun., and Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1817), vol. 1, ch. 5, pp. 65–6.

²³ *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift, A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, ed. Marcus Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 141.

²⁴ See e.g. the review of *Nightmare Abbey* in *La Belle Assemblée*, n. s. 18 (1818), 202–5, and P. B.

Shelley's letter to Peacock on the 'chastity' of that novel. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), vol. 2, p. 98.

²⁵ See 'Recollections of Childhood. By the Author of *Headlong Hall*', *Bentley's Miscellany*, vol. 1 (1837), pp. 187–90; Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 1–6; Franz Kafka, diary entry (8 October 1917), in *Tagebücher 1910–1923* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992), p. 391.

²⁶ 'Kavka' means 'jackdaw' in Czech.

²⁷ Reiner Stach, *Kafka: The Decisive Years*, trans. Shelley Frisch (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press), p. 344.

²⁸ Franz Kafka, diary entry (6 January 1914), in *Tagebücher 1910–1923*, p. 255; *Romantic Critical Essays*, ed. David Bromwich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 184.

²⁹ 'French Comic Romances', in *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols. (Constable, 1924–34), vol. 9, p. 262.

³⁰ In 1908, after gaining a law degree and working for an Italian insurance company, Kafka was hired by the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague.

³¹ *Headlong Hall*, ch. 8, pp. 111, 119–20.

³² Thomas Love Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey*, ed. Nicholas Joukovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), ch. 3, p. 34; ch. 13, pp. 184–201.

³³ Thomas Love Peacock, 'Boozaboutw Abbey', in *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, vol. 8.

³⁴ Anthony à Wood, *Athenæ Oxonienses: An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops who have had their Education in the Most Ancient and Famous University of Oxford*, 4 vols. (London: Thomas Bennet, 1691), vol. 1, p. 768.

³⁵ See *OED* 'knobhead', sense 1.a: 'A slow-witted person; a knucklehead' (1738).

³⁶ Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 4 February 1813, in *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre le Faye, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 203.

³⁷ *Letters of Thomas Love Peacock*, vol. 1, p. 156.

³⁸ John Stuart Mill, 'The Utility of Knowledge' (1823) and 'Modern French Historical Works' (1826), in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson, 33 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), vol. 26, p. 261; vol. 20, p. 20.

³⁹ *Headlong Hall*, ch. 1, p. 6 n.

⁴⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets: With Critical Observations on Their Works*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press), vol. 3, p. 210.

⁴¹ Jean-Jacques Mayoux, *Un épicurien anglais* (Paris: Nizet and Bastard, 1933), p. 1.

⁴² [Horace Walpole], *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*, ed. W. S. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 25, 27, 52, 84.

⁴³ *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, eds. Norman Ault and Rosemary Cowler, 2 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936–86), *Peri Bathous* (1728), vol. 2, p. 190.

⁴⁴ Terry Castle, 'The Gothic Novel', in *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!: Essays on Women, Sex and Writing* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 73–108 (p. 88).

⁴⁵ Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft, addressed to J. G. Lockhart, Esq.* (London: John Murray, 1830), Letter III, p. 98 n.

⁴⁶ Thomas Love Peacock, 'Shadwell's *Humourists*', *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, vol. 7, p. 131.

⁴⁷ Ben Jonson, *Every Man out of his Humour*, act 3, scene 1, lines 166–78.