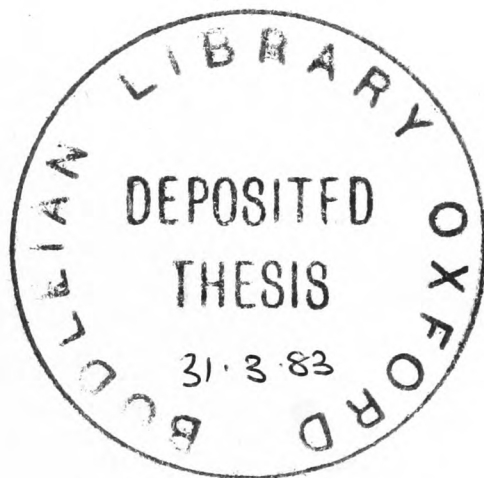


FRANCIS JEFFREY, SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE'S BIOGRAPHIA
LITERARIA, AND CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
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ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: Francis Jeffrey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, and Contemporary Criticism of William Wordsworth.

Name and college of candidate: William Henry Christie, Linacre College.

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The thesis examines Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth in the Biographia Literaria in the context of the contemporary review reaction to Wordsworth's poetry and theory of poetic diction, concentrating throughout on Wordsworth's most representative and persistent critic, Francis Jeffrey.

The thesis is divided into two sections, according to a distinction laid down in the opening pages of the Biographia. The first examines "the long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction", the second, "the real poetic character" of William Wordsworth.

The first section, on "The Language of Poetry", opens with a discussion of the explicit and implicit aspirations of the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, relating them to the theory of mind and nature in Wordsworth's poetry, and to Wordsworth's poetic practice. Chapter Two discusses Coleridge's reading of the Preface, its misrepresentation of the Preface's basic assumptions, and the extent to which Coleridge assimilates many of the arguments of the contemporary reviewers, only to move beyond them.

The second section, "The Poet, the People, and the Public", concentrates more closely on the criticism of Francis Jeffrey. Chapter Three deals, briefly, with the prejudices of Jeffrey's criticism - with the Edinburgh Review as an historical enterprise - and then, at length, with the principles of his criticism as revealed in his review of Archibald Alison's Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste and his reviews of other aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical writings. After establishing the critical ambiguity of Jeffrey's associationist aesthetic, Chapter Four moves to a comparison of Jeffrey's and Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth, treating their similarities and differences on the subject of poetic sensibility and poetic genius. The final chapter, Chapter Five, looks at the social and political implications of Jeffrey's rejection of Wordsworth, interpreting that rejection as prophesying and enforcing the isolation of the poet from the public.

Throughout, Coleridge's Biographia Literaria is seen as a coherent response to the contemporary reviewers generally, and, more specifically, to Francis Jeffrey's criticism of William Wordsworth.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Alison, Essays

Archibald Alison, Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste, sixth edition, in 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1825). [This is a reprint of the second, 1810 edition and, as far as may be gauged from Jeffrey's review of the second edition, is identically paginated.]

Biographia Literaria

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, edited with his aesthetical essays by J. Shawcross, in 2 vols (London, 1907).

Biographia Literaria (1847)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions, second edition, edited by Henry Nelson and Sara Coleridge, in 2 vols (London, 1847).

Coleridge Letters

Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, edited by Earl Leslie Griggs, in 6 vols (Oxford, 1956-1971).

Coleridge Miscellaneous Criticism

Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, edited by Thomas Middleton Raysor (London, 1936).

Coleridge Notebooks

The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, edited by Kathleen Coburn (New York, Princeton, New Jersey, and London, 1957-).

Coleridge Poetical Works

The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, in 2 vols (Oxford, 1912).

Coleridge Shakespearean Criticism

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, edited by Thomas Middleton Raysor, second edition, in 2 vols, Everyman's Library (London, 1960).

Coleridge Table Talk

The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, edited by T. Ashe, Bohn's Standard Library (London, 1896).

Contributions to the Edinburgh Review

Francis Jeffrey, Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, in 4 vols (London, 1844).

ER

Edinburgh Review.

The Friend (CC)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Friend, edited by Barbara E. Rooke, in 2 vols, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, IV (London and Princeton, New Jersey, 1969).

Home at Grasmere (Cornell)

William Wordsworth, 'Home at Grasmere' Part First, Book First, of 'The Recluse', edited by Beth Darlington, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca, New York, and Hassocks, Sussex, 1977).

Lay Sermons (CC)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lay Sermons, edited by R.J. White, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, VI (London and Princeton, New Jersey, 1972).

Lectures 1795 (CC)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion, edited by Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, I (London and Princeton, New Jersey, 1971).

Life of Jeffrey

Lord (Henry) Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, in 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1852).

The Music of Humanity

Jonathan Wordsworth, The Music of Humanity: A Critical Study of Wordsworth's Ruined Cottage, Incorporating Texts from a Manuscript of 1799-1800 (London, 1969).

On the Constitution of the Church and State (CC)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, On the Constitution of the Church and State, edited by John Colmer, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, X (London and Princeton, New Jersey, 1976).

The Prelude 1798-1799 (Cornell)

William Wordsworth, 'The Prelude', 1798-1799, edited by Stephen Parrish, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca, New York, and Hassocks, Sussex, 1977).

The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (Cornell)

William Wordsworth, 'The Ruined Cottage' and 'The Pedlar', edited by James Butler, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca, New York, and Hassocks, Sussex, 1979).

Wordsworth Letters

The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, edited by Ernest de Selincourt

Vol. I, The Early Years 1787-1805, second edition, revised by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967).

Vol. II, ^{Part 1} The Middle Years, 1806-1811, second edition, revised by Mary Moorman (Oxford, 1969).

Vol. III, The Middle Years, Part 2, 1812-1820, ^{second edition,} revised by Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford, 1970).

Vol. [IV], The Later Years, Part 1, 1821-1828, ^{second edition} revised by Alan G. Hill (Oxford, 1978).

Wordsworth Poetical Works

The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth,

Vol. I, edited by E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1940);

Vol. II, edited by E. de Selincourt, second edition (Oxford, 1952);

Vol. III, edited by E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, second edition (Oxford, 1954);

Vol. IV, edited by E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1947);

Vol. V, edited by E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1949).

Wordsworth The Prelude

William Wordsworth, The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts; Context and Reception; Recent Critical Essays, edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill, Norton Critical Edition (New York and London, 1979). [I choose this, rather than The Prelude, edited by Ernest de Selincourt, second edition, revised by Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1959), as textually more authoritative.]

Wordsworth Prose Works

The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, edited by W.J.B. Owen
and Jane Worthington Smyser, in 3 vols (Oxford, 1974).

PREFATORY NOTE

The footnotes are not intended to extend or modify the argument, but to substantiate claims made in the text and to supply a critical context for these claims.

Shattering of long and deep-rooted associations
always places the mind in an angry state / & even
when our own understandings have effected the
revolution, it still holds good / only we apply
the feeling to & against our former faith & those
who still hold it / Great good therefore of
such revolution as alters not by exclusion but by
an enlargement that includes the former, tho' it
places it in a new point of view.

Coleridge Notebooks

INTRODUCTION

Familiarity with famous passages in the Biographia Literaria (1817) probably leads readers to overlook its hodge-podge make-up. Besides the sections on the imagination and on Wordsworth as a poet, the book includes some letters written from Germany, an imaginary dialogue, a good deal about Coleridge's school years, "remarks on the present mode of conducting critical journals," a set of Italian madrigals in that language, ten theses on a proposed "Dynamic Philosophy," a lengthy footnote concerning someone whose venom Coleridge discusses on only "hearsay evidence," an anonymous letter advising him to revise the Biographia Literaria, a defense of the church establishment, a discussion of landscape painting, an argument intended to show "why the hand of Providence has disciplined all Europe into sobriety," and much else. Of course the subtitle is "My Literary Life and Opinions," but Tristram Shandy is not more capricious and a story by Jean Paul Richter, Hoffmann, or Tieck can scarcely be more anarchical in structure.

Howard Mumford Jones's assumption of a "lack of formal structure" in the Biographia Literaria is less acceptable to Coleridge scholars now than it was thirty years ago.¹ It is, however, a salutary reminder of Coleridge's confused intentions, and of the heterogeneous nature of the book. Coleridge himself gave sanction to this attitude when he apologised, pre-emptively, for foisting "so immethodical a miscellany" upon the public.²

A part of the explanation for the derangement of the Biographia has always been, appropriately, biographical.³ Its composition was certainly

1 Revolution and Romanticism (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1974), pp.286, 286-287 note.

2 Biographia Literaria, I, 64.

3 See Sara Coleridge's introduction to Biographia Literaria (1847), I, xxi.

a literal and literary attempt to discover intrinsic form and purpose - the coveted unity - in a life that appeared hopelessly disintegrated.

If The Ancient Mariner, as John Livingston Lowes suggested, fell "heir to the precious hoardings of Coleridge's unborn poems",¹ how much more true is it that the Biographia inherits the scraps of Coleridge's unborn prose works? Coleridge salvaged the Biographia out of much larger hopes, and out of many years of tentative planning and noting. In this, as in so many things, it is his prose counterpart to Wordsworth's The Prelude:

I had hopes
...that with a frame of outward life
I might endue, might fix in a visible home,
Some portion of those phantoms of conceit,
That had been floating loose about so long,
And to such beings temperately deal forth
The many feelings that oppressed my heart.²

Both The Prelude and the Biographia are elaborate, biographical introductions - the one to The Recluse, the other to "the PRODUCTIVE LOGOS human and divine"³ - that end, somehow inevitably, as more self-contained and more valuable than the unfinished works that they serve ostensibly to introduce. Both are attempts to justify the ways of the author to man ("Was it for this"?⁴). Where Wordsworth discovers Nature, and then his own mental powers, Coleridge discovers Wordsworth,⁵ but neither would have been possible without the friend to whom it is directly or obliquely

1 The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination, revised edition (London, 1930), p.208.

2 The Prelude (1805), I, ll.127, 128-133, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.34.

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 92; compare I, 179; I, 182. Indeed, Coleridge later called The Recluse "in substance, what I have been all my life doing in my system of philosophy", 21 July, 1832, Coleridge Table Talk, p.171.

4 The Prelude (1799), I, l.1, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.1.

5 "My nature requires another Nature for its support, & reposes only in another from the necessary Indigence of its Being", note of November, 1803, Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1679.

addressed. Characteristically, Wordsworth finds the unity of purpose that he seeks, or is "habitually impelled to create [it] where he does not find [it]".¹ Coleridge, on the other hand, in his record of the growth of a philosopher-critic's mind, apparently experiences what one critic has called "a breakdown in the process of self-construction".²

After the first four chapters of the Biographia a fragmentation of interests occurs, and the biography, the philosophy, and the literary criticism go their separate ways. It is even arguable that it is only in the first chapter that we find that perfect blending or reconciliation of interests that makes Coleridge's decision to write his "metaphysical works, as my Life, & in my Life" a brilliant and innovatory one.³ Here the various and casual details are at once engaging in their own right, and subservient to the main arguments about poetic language and poetic genius. Here the technique of the Biographia most resembles that of the Conversation poems.

It is, however, ill-sustained; with the second chapter Coleridge's personal grievances threaten the delicate balance of biography and criticism. In the third chapter, the chapter on Southey, Coleridge is repaying old debts, and the tone of his defence is correspondingly flat and perfunctory. Southey patently did not interest him enough, either as a man or a poet, for his case to become significant of anything beyond itself. It is only in the fourth chapter, and then only momentarily, that Coleridge regains that profound interpenetration of the personal and the impersonal that The Prelude achieves. Then follow the chapters

1 Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 138.

2 M.G. Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber: Coleridge in the Biographia Literaria", Philological Quarterly, L, no. 2 (April, 1971), pp.208-229 (p.223).

3 A decision made in about September-October, 1803, Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1515.

on metaphysics, interrupted, or rather disrupted, by extensive biographical digressions that have been variously interpreted as a ruse to minimize the extent of his plagiarisms,¹ and, more simply, as "cold feet".² Even the comparatively homogeneous final chapters on the theory and practice of Wordsworth have to survive footnotes and digressions, outbursts of indignation, warning, and apology, and the sudden interpolation of a cherished theory or opinion. Then, of course, the whole book has to survive the embarrassingly inapposite make-weight chapters that Coleridge imported to meet the requirement of length.

Most of the Biographia's editors have responded to this miscellaneousness by revising the original according to their own predilections, a practice that began in a slight way in the Victorian period when Sara Coleridge removed passages that she considered unworthy of a disinterested investigation into critical principles and contemporary practice.³ The allusions to Francis Jeffrey in chapters two and twenty two disappeared. Later censorship was less respectful. In his edition of Coleridge's Principles of Criticism: Chapters I., III., IV., XIV.-XXII. of "Biographia Literaria" (Boston, 1895) Andrew J. George implicitly acted on his frustration with the philosophical foundation, obviously feeling that "a complete revelation of the furnishing of Coleridge's mind and the forming of his art" required no such abstruse justification.⁴ Only chapter two was restored by George Sampson, who was explicit about his intentions:

1 Norman Fruman, Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel (London, 1972), p.101.

2 George Watson, in the introduction to his edition of Biographia Literaria, third edition (London, 1975) [first published 1956], p.xix.

3 Biographia Literaria (1847), I, clviii.

4 Coleridge's Principles of Criticism, p.xxi.

Coleridge's Biographia Literaria is a work of which a part is greater than the whole. It is fragmentary and discontinuous - a series of beginnings, with a conclusion that fits none of them. The separate presentation of its better portions is therefore an act of kindness to many readers, and especially to students, who (being young) dutifully endeavour to read the whole book, and find themselves dismayed, if not defeated, by the mass of imported metaphysic that Coleridge proudly lumped into the middle.¹

The attitude has survived, not just amongst those impatient with Coleridge the metaphysician, but also amongst those who take his speculations seriously. After all, as Sampson implies, it was not Coleridge but Schelling and Maass who were being purged.

George Watson's omissions of 1956 were at least based on biographical and bibliographical evidence.² Nevertheless, they reflect his beliefs about Coleridge's true intentions no less than the more cavalier selectiveness of many of his predecessors. The same evidence that he uses to justify the excision of Satyrane's Letters and the critique of Bertram should have prompted his removing those parts of the twenty-second chapter and the conclusion used to pad out the volume. It may be that "the last two are organic",³ but who is to decide? And should we not, with the Biographia, talk rather about degrees of relevance, than about absolute relevance (which is what the term "organic" implies)? The principle of selection in the composition of the Biographia was often anything but organic. The two sections that George Watson omits

1 Coleridge "Biographia Literaria" Chapters I-IV, XIV-XXII, Wordsworth Prefaces and Essays on Poetry 1800-1815, edited by George Sampson (Cambridge, 1920), p.v.

2 Biographia Literaria, ed. Watson, pp.xii-xviii. For a more thorough examination of this evidence, see Daniel Mark Fogel, "A Compositional History of the Biographia Literaria", in Studies in Bibliography, XXX, edited by Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville, 1977), pp.219-234.

3 Biographia Literaria, ed. Watson, p.xviii.

are only the more obviously adventitious inclusions.

It is curious, though illuminating, to think that only one edition has appeared since 1817 that has remained completely faithful to that edition,¹ and this of a book whose seminal importance has rarely been called into doubt.

The alterations of the various editors have been made in the spirit of Coleridge, on the assumption that there exists an Idea - "living, seminal, formative, and exempt from time"² - which organizes the Biographia ab intra; that we have only to cut back certain irrelevant or unworthy parts, and this organization and its Idea or principle will be revealed. Various critics have followed them in their pursuit of unity in multiteity, or, rather, in miscellaneity. George Whalley found this unity, or "integrity" as he calls it, in the criticism of Wordsworth which he considers the culmination of all that has gone before.³ The failure to follow through in the metaphysical section he attributes to "a bad attack of nerves",⁴ and Coleridge's integrity is somehow preserved because of, rather than in spite of, this crucial incompleteness. More recently, M.G. Cooke has discovered a sort of unity in schizophrenia, seeing in the Biographia an unsuccessful attempt at the parenthetical construction of an ideal personality.⁵ According to Cooke, in other words, it is unified by a prevailing consciousness that fails to achieve the imaginative integration that it seeks. For Norman Fruman the Biographia, like so much of Coleridge's work, is unified by a prevailing unconsciousness,

1 Shawcross's edition. The Everyman edition of 1906, introduced by Arthur Symonds, follows Sara Coleridge's 1847 edition.

2 Biographia Literaria, I, 69 note.

3 "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria", Essays and Studies, new series, VI (1953), pp.87-101.

4 "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria", p.87.

5 In his article "Quisque Sui Faber: Coleridge in the Biographia Literaria".

an "intellectual anxiety" that stems from deeper-seated psychological problems.¹ It records the posturings of a deceiving and self-deceitful personality. (In both of these cases, the Biographia turns out, ironically, to be very accurate autobiography, a claim that has never seriously been made for the work.)

David Erdman seems to me to be closer to the truth when he argues that the Biographia is a review of Wordsworth writ large, an "incarnation of 'the ideal review'", around the conception of which he revolved "'all his life'".² The Biographia is far from being a collection of disembodied pronouncements on poetry or on Wordsworth. It is the product of a specific intellectual and cultural milieu, within the context of which it must be read in order to be appreciated. There is no occult unity in the Biographia, but it does represent a coherent personal and critical response to the reviewers of the early nineteenth century, the "'synodical individuals'" who constitute, after Wordsworth, the most recurrent feature of the work.³ From the very first sentence, in which Coleridge complains of his treatment at the hands of the contemporary reviewers, to the final outcry of the conclusion, the last of many pertinent replies to those professors of bastinado,⁴ Coleridge carries on a debate with the Reviews.

The most pervasive influence of the reviewers can be seen in

1 Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel, pp.69-107 (p.70).

2 In the words of Northrop Frye - see Erdman's "Coleridge and the 'Review Business': An Account of His Adventures with the Edinburgh, the Quarterly, and Maga", The Wordsworth Circle, VI, no. 1 (Winter, 1975), pp.3-50 (p.3).

3 The phrase is Andrew Marvell's as quoted by Coleridge in Biographia Literaria, I, 29. For other uses, see The Friend (CC), I, 183 and note.

4 See Biographia Literaria, I, 110.

Coleridge's sustained attempt to establish the claims of genius. The Biographia is rather propaganda for "PHILOSOPHIC" poetry¹ and philosophical criticism than an attempt to institute a coherent metaphysical system.² It is enough for Coleridge's purposes to have sketched his "cartoon",³ as it had been for the Renaissance genius. The Biographia is, as the title allows, a defence not just of one literary life, but of literary life. The note of desperation results from the fact that literary life needed defending, that it was, according to Coleridge, being undermined by the very organs that should have been encouraging and ennobling literature: the reviews. What characterized their attitude was rather a lack of sympathy, expressed as a literal-minded, mock-bewildered refusal to understand. Instead of combatting the resistance of the reading public to what was new and vital, they encouraged it. The critics had, in fact, become identified with that public.

Coleridge's confrontation with the tallow-chandler in the tenth chapter⁴ is the comic counterpart of a series of confrontations that occur in the Biographia, as they had occurred outside it, between "the noble living and the noble dead" on the one hand,⁵ and an uncomprehending

1 On Wordsworth's potential for "the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM", see Biographia Literaria, II, 129.

2 See Jerome C. Christensen on the "rhetorical character" of the work in his "Coleridge's Marginal Method in the Biographia Literaria", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, XCII, no. 5 (October, 1977), pp.928-940 (p.934); what Christensen does not mention is that rhetorical strategies imply both an audience and aim distinct from that of philosophical "refutation", but no less valid.

3 See J.A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature: The Development of a Concept of Poetry 1791-1819 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), p.187, for the term, though not for its implications.

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 115-117.

5 The phrase is from The Prelude (1805), X, l.969, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.412.

public on the other. It prefigures, for example, the hypothetical confrontation of Coleridge the metaphysician with his readers which is anticipated in the letter that Coleridge addressed to himself in order to arrest the philosophical disquisition.¹ It also prefigures the confrontation of the philistine French officers with Michelangelo's Moses,² the elaborate analogy that Coleridge uses to characterize the confrontation of Francis Jeffrey and William Wordsworth.

There are, then, three main characters in the Biographia Literaria: Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Francis Jeffrey. Sara Coleridge omitted explicit references to the one person who is implicitly addressed throughout. Indeed, the very first sentence of the Biographia -

It has been my lot to have had my name introduced, both in conversation, and in print, more frequently than I find it easy to explain, whether I consider the fewness, unimportance, and limited circulation of my writings, or the retirement and distance in which I have lived, both from the literary and political world

- echoes the opening of Coleridge's first letter to Jeffrey of 23 May, 1808:

Without knowing me you have been, perhaps rather unwarrant[ab]ly, severe on my morals and Understanding - inasmuch as you have...frequently introduced my name when I had never brought any publication within your court - With one slight exception...I have not published any thing with my name, or known to be mine, for 13 years³

In their alternation of self-depreciation and stubborn pride, and in

1 Biographia Literaria, I, 198-201.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 92-94.

3 Coleridge Letters, III, 116.

many specific phrases and ideas,¹ the letters to Jeffrey look forward to the similar alternation of "exculpation" and accusation in the Biographia.²

It is to the controversy between Wordsworth and Jeffrey, however, that the Biographia primarily addresses itself. Coleridge's name had been unwarrantably introduced, and his reputation unwarrantably impeached, by the reviewers. Moreover, he was out to prove that any unanimity amongst the so-called school of which he was said to be a member was a fiction of periodical criticism. But Coleridge quickly becomes the critic of Wordsworth and fights his own battles, for the most part, only indirectly. The focus of the Biographia is on Jeffrey's "persecution" of Wordsworth,³ and the assumptions behind it; Jeffrey was by no means Wordsworth's greatest contemporary critic, but he was the most representative, the most influential, and certainly the most persistent. The focus of this thesis is also on Jeffrey's "persecution" of Wordsworth, as well as on Coleridge's endeavours to reconcile Jeffrey and Wordsworth in a tertium quid, "an inter-penetration of the counteracting powers, partaking of both".⁴ It is divided into two sections which correspond to the two "objects" that Coleridge proposed to himself as "not the least important to effect, as far as possible":

1 The analogy of the Ostrich eggs that Coleridge uses for the fate of his works, for example, having begun in an entry of September-October, 1802, in Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1248, found its way into the Biographia via Coleridge's third letter to Jeffrey of [circa 7 November, 1808], Coleridge Letters, III, 126, as well as other letters. See Biographia Literaria, I, 32.

2 Biographia Literaria, I, 1, 150.

3 Sydney Smith wrote to Jeffrey of the latter's review of The Excursion: "do not such repeated attacks upon the man wear in some little degree the shape of persecution?", [30 December, 1814], The Letters of Sydney Smith, edited by Nowell C. Smith, in 2 vols (Oxford, 1953), I, 250.

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 198.

a settlement of the long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction; and at the same time to define with the utmost impartiality the real poetic character of the poet, by whose writings this controversy was first kindled, and has been since fuelled and fanned.¹

Between the publication of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800) and the composition of the Biographia (1815-1817) a number of curious and elusive shifts in attitude took place on the part of all three. Coleridge dissociated himself from the Preface, with which he was too often identified for his own comfort, yet which was "half a child of [his] own Brain" (though only half).² His analysis of the Preface in the Biographia, the most informed and exhaustive of the contemporary analyses, assimilated, articulated, and formalized the complaints of many reviewers, while it moved beyond them.

Jeffrey, in his turn, assimilated many of the ideas of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, and turned them into criticisms of Wordsworth himself. But despite significant changes in emphasis in his own reviewing, the faults that he detected in Wordsworth remained substantially the same for thirteen years, from the review of Southey's Thalaba to that of The White Doe. Indeed, twenty-eight years later, when Jeffrey published his selected Contributions to the Edinburgh Review he was firm in his antagonism, despite some initial mollification in his introduction to the reprinting of the review of The Excursion. Significantly, he converted the one phrase that had become the catch-cry of the controversy into an exclamation: "This will never do!".³ As Henry Crabb Robinson laconically noted, "The friends of Wordsworth will not be pleased".⁴

1 Biographia Literaria, I, 1-2.

2 As he said in a letter to Southey, 29 July, 1802, Coleridge Letters, II, 830.

3 Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, III, 233.

4 On 3 December, 1843, Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, edited by Edith J. Morley, in 3 vols (London, 1938), II, 636.

I

THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY

Chapter One

WORDSWORTH AND THE LANGUAGE OF NATURE

the natural object is always the adequate symbol
Pound

I

Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Jeffrey were agreed that the language of poetry should be "friendly to one property of all good poetry", to quote Wordsworth, "namely good sense".¹ In the "long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction"² to which all three variously, and often bitterly, contributed, this ambiguous "property" was a common principle that survived both the "radical Difference" that Coleridge discovered between his own and Wordsworth's poetic theories,³ and the apparently total incompatibility between their shared beliefs and those of Francis Jeffrey. Each uses good sense or common sense as a test of the linguistic, and conceptual, integrity of a poem: "the truth and nativeness, both of...thoughts and diction".⁴ It is the foundation upon which Coleridge in the Biographia develops Wordsworth's theories of poetic language, because, according to Coleridge, it is the substance of poetic genius itself: "GOOD SENSE is the BODY of poetic genius".⁵

The first four chapters of the Biographia are an expression of

1 Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 132. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the Preface will be to the 1800 edition.

2 Biographia Literaria, I, 1.

3 In a letter to William Sotheby of 13 July, 1802, and again in a letter to Southey, 29 July, 1802, Coleridge Letters, II, 812, 830.

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 4.

5 Biographia Literaria, II, 13.

The early nineteenth century was not the first time that the language of poetry had undergone "a slimming course".¹ The argument of the Preface represents the culmination of a recent reaction, one that had begun early in the eighteenth century, against artificial poeticisms; Jeffrey's own reviewing testifies to the extent to which many of the assumptions behind the Preface had become commonplace. In the Lectures that indisputably influenced Wordsworth and Coleridge, to choose but one example, Hugh Blair endeavoured "to explode false ornament, to direct attention more towards substance than show", and sought the substitution of principles "of reason and good sense" for those of "artificial and scholastic rhetoric" prevalent in his own day. His Lectures were designed to "recommend good sense as the foundation of all good composition".²

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- 1 The Frogs, 1.941, Ancient Literary Criticism, p.19. The styles of Aeschylus and Euripides were subsequently to become, respectively, the grand style and plain style of classical rhetorical and poetic theory. Even at its most plain, however, the language of Greek poetry retained an artificial quality in relation to direct speech; "Greek poetical language", to quote C.M. Bowra, "was a product of artistic creation and far removed from Wordsworth's ideal of poetical style" - The Greek Experience (London, 1957), p.142.
 - 2 Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, second edition, 3 vols (London, 1785), I, 4. Here, as elsewhere throughout this chapter, I use Blair to establish the currency of many of the ideas of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Jeffrey in the eighteenth century. I am not attempting a detailed investigation of the sources of the Preface - for which see W.J.B. Owen, both in Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 167-188, and in his comprehensive edition of Wordsworth's Preface to 'Lyrical Ballads' (Copenhagen, 1957). As Owen points out, the Preface "is less original than has sometimes been thought...in that many of its aesthetic, psychological, and sociological presuppositions are quite commonplace, especially in the numerous writings on aesthetics in English which appeared during the eighteenth century, based often on the associationist psychology of Locke and Hartley or on the primitivistic theories of culture and literature which are characteristic of the Scottish 'Common-sense' philosophers", Introduction to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 112. Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric has the advantages, firstly, of being compendious; secondly, of being representative of much eighteenth-century, especially primitivist, thinking; and, lastly, of being known to Coleridge - see George Whalley, "The Bristol Library Borrowings of Southey and Coleridge, 1793-8", The Library, fifth series, IV, no.2 (September, 1949), pp.114-132 (p.125). As A.M. Kinghorn has said, the Preface "transformed the theories of Beattie and Blair into a more practicable scheme of things without, in fact, adding very much to what the latter had said", in his article "Literary Aesthetics and the Sympathetic Emotions - a Main Trend in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Criticism", Studies in Scottish Literature, I, no. 1 (July, 1963), pp.35-47 (p.47).

It is of course to Dr Johnson that we turn for a model of this type of criticism. Coleridge's schoolmaster and early mentor, James Bowyer, who receives such extensive tribute in the first chapter of the Biographia, was by all appearances a critic in the tradition of Johnson,¹ a dogmatic spokesman for the obvious who "showed no mercy to phrase, metaphor, or image, unsupported by a sound sense".² Coleridge's recollection of Bowyer's explosion against the empty conventions of the day, the "poetic diction" of adolescent poetry in the late eighteenth century, strongly resembles Johnson's indignation in the face of pretension and superfluity:

"Harp? Harp? Lyre? Pen and ink, boy, you mean! Muse, boy, Muse? Your Nurse's daughter, you mean! Pierian spring? Oh aye! the cloister-pump, I suppose!"³

The tendency of both Bowyer and Johnson - and, one may add, Jeffrey - was to demystify and to control excess. The memoir and tribute to Bowyer in the Biographia subtly supply a biographical counterpart to the role Coleridge would have good sense play in poetry. It is implied, that is, that Bowyer's influence is in the same relationship to Coleridge's mature aesthetic theory, as good sense is to poetry, that both are fundamental and stabilising.

There is no reason to doubt that the importance that Coleridge placed on this criterion of the sensible reader dated back to his schooldays and to his "juvenile poems".⁴ The ambivalent attitude towards a simplicity

1 M.H. Abrams has remarked this: "the Reverend James Bowyer, a hard headed, heavy-handed, and on the whole quite eighteenth-century rationalist, not unlike Dr. Johnson" - see his "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Diction and Figures", in English Institute Essays, 1952, edited by Alan S. Downer (New York, 1954), pp.171-201 (p.192).

2 Biographia Literaria, I, 5; compare later on "the sound, good sense of my old master" (I, 9).

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 5.

4 See Biographia Literaria, I, 3.

conformable to good sense which in the Biographia he attributes to his younger self is reflected in his earlier feelings about Religious Musings, for example. Although at one time he pinned all his hopes on it,¹ he was forced early into a recognition of the "vicious affectation in the phraseology of that poem".² The same ambivalence is highlighted by the almost ludicrous incongruity between the manner and the matter of an early work like "To a Young Lady...", in which Coleridge insists that in some of his poems, or "flowers" as he calls them,

Ne'er lurk'd the snake beneath their simple hues;
No purple bloom the Child of Nature brings
From Flattery's night-shade: as he feels he sings.
(11.42-44)³

In Coleridge's own words, "My judgement was stronger, than were my powers of realizing its dictates".⁴

Indeed the tribute to Bowyer in the Biographia may have been a way of circumventing the shadow of Dr Johnson, by using Bowyer as a surrogate for his more famous model. Having earlier and publicly opposed Johnson,⁵

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- 1 See his letter to Benjamin Flower, 1 April, 1796: "I rest for all my poetical credit on the Religious Musings", Coleridge Letters, I, 197.
 - 2 In a letter to Thomas Poole of 5 May, 1796, Coleridge Letters, I, 207. Compare his letter to John Thelwall, 17 December, [1796]: "As to my own poetry I do confess that it frequently both in thought & language deviates from 'nature & simplicity'", Coleridge Letters, I, 278. On Coleridge's vocabulary it is interesting to note Dryden using the phrase "vitious affectation" to describe "language unnatural" in his "Of Dramatick Poesie, An Essay" (1668), The Works of John Dryden, edited by Samuel Holt Monk, Vol. XVII, Prose 1668-1691 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1971), pp.2-81 (p.68).
 - 3 Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 64-66 (p.66).
 - 4 Biographia Literaria, I, 3.
 - 5 Besides various criticisms of Johnson in Coleridge's Shakespeare Lectures, there is the following attack in a lecture on Macbeth and Hamlet (which, admittedly, may have been omitted): "Johnson, the Frog-Critic. How nimbly it leaps, how excellently it swims - only the fore-legs...are too long and the hind ones too short", Coleridge Shakespearean Criticism, I, 73n. Coleridge's private opinion of Johnson was severe: "Important. The great injury done to mankind by a man of no genius, no real wisdom, attaining to the very height of that reputation (as Dr Johnson, the most fertile instance)...These men easily obtain... <reputation, which they call fame,> by sympathizing with Ignorance, & with vulgarity of Head & Heart in pompous archiparnassian Language", Coleridge Notebooks, III, 3321.

Coleridge is able to employ, without hypocrisy, techniques and arguments that Johnson had made famous. Although Coleridge spoke, albeit disparagingly, of a copy of his work in the house of his Cumberland landlord in September 1800,¹ its influence on the Preface, written later that year, remains speculative. By the time of the composition of the Biographia, however, Coleridge had almost certainly re-read Johnson and based much of his practical criticism on him. Coleridge's revision of Wordsworth's criticism of Gray's "Sonnet on the Death of Richard West" is an example worth quoting:

The second line,

"And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire;"

has indeed almost as many faults as words. But then it is a bad line...because it conveys incongruous images, because it confounds the cause and the effect ...; in short, because it differs from the language of GOOD SENSE! That the "Phoebus" is hackneyed, and a school-boy image, is an accidental fault, dependent on the age in which the author wrote, and not deduced from the nature of the thing. That it is part of an exploded mythology, is an objection more deeply grounded.²

All this would have found favour with Dr Johnson, whose influence is manifest in both the content and the style of the passage. In Johnson's own words, he too was averse to the juxtaposition of "heterogeneous ideas";³ felt that "Criticism disdains to chase a schoolboy to his common-places";⁴ argued that the "state of the age" should be considered

1 In a letter to William Godwin, [8 September, 1800], Coleridge Letters, I, 619.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 58.

3 "Life of Cowley" in Lives of the English Poets by Samuel Johnson, LL.D., edited by George Birbeck Hill, 3 vols (Oxford, 1905), I, 1-69 (p.20).

4 "Life of Gray", Lives of the Poets, III, 421-445 (p.436).

when judging a writer;¹ and objected to the "old mythology" on the grounds of its irrelevance in a Christian society.² More to the point, he was equally ruthless when scrutinising the grammatical and logical sense of an idea or an image to which he took exception.

By the time of the Biographia, Coleridge was only occasionally content with so nebulous a standard as "plain sense and genuine mother English",³ and often sought unsuccessfully to clarify the issues and lend this standard a dignity by adding to the "grounds of plain sense" qualifications like "and universal logic"⁴ - "universal" no doubt to distinguish it from the specious "logic of wit" that Coleridge saw organising Augustan poetry.⁵ From here it is not far to the grandiose and manifold model of "TRUTH, NATURE, LOGIC, and the LAWS of UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR" which, though impressive, and useful enough when arrayed against the obvious excesses of the eighteenth century, is compounded of elements of varying degrees of ambiguity and in the context adds up to little more than the more humble "plain sense".⁶

Still, the association with "Truth" and "Nature" is crucial.⁷ What

1 "Preface to Shakespeare, 1765", The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol. VII, Johnson on Shakespeare (the first of two volumes), edited by Arthur Sherbo (New Haven and London, 1968), pp.59-113 (p.81); see also Johnson's "Life of Dryden", Lives of the Poets, I, 331-487 (p.411).

2 "Life of Waller", Lives of the Poets, I, 249-300 (p.295).

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 21. Coleridge thought the language of his translation of Schiller's Wallenstein "for the greater part, natural & good common-sense English - to which excellence if I can lay fair claim in any book of poetry or prose, I shall be a very singular writer at least" - see the letter to Josiah Wedgwood, 24 July, 1800, Coleridge Letters, I, 610.

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 4.

5 Biographia Literaria, I, 11.

6 Biographia Literaria, I, 14. Compare Blair's promise, in his Lectures on Rhetoric, to give an account "of the Construction of Language, or the Principles of Universal Grammar" (I, 122).

7 "Every poetic fashion", as Owen Barfield has observed, "begins in this way as a return to Nature", Poetic Diction, second edition (London, 1952), p.163.

annoyed Wordsworth and Coleridge, and all those critics who protested on behalf of good sense, was the perversity with which the Augustans had refused to call a spade a spade. So often the Augustans insisted on translating through periphrasis a simple object into, for example, an image of abstract genus and attribute: calling a spade a tool of the flat and metal kind.¹ Fastidiousness masquerading as a sense of decorum resulted in the Augustan belief that, as Johnson observed in Gray, their language was "more poetical as it was more remote from common use".² The same belief found even less favour with Wordsworth and Coleridge, as the Preface shows, than it did with Johnson. At its worst, Augustan poetry shunned common usage so scrupulously - using diction, as Geoffrey Tillotson has observed, "as stilts to escape the mud"³ - that it created an entire poetic world that was a paraphrase or translation of reality with little obligation to the original. The "most obvious thoughts", according to Coleridge, are dressed "in language the most fantastic and arbitrary".⁴ Coleridge creates his own example in the Biographia. A phrase like "I will remember thee" would become in the hands of an Augustan versifier:

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- 1 The "most pronounced trend was the coupling of the adjective with the noun in a kind of glossy stock phrase, or periphrase, which was sometimes...abstractly definitional (by genera and properties)", William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (London, 1957), p.341.
 - 2 "Life of Gray", Lives of the Poets, III, 435. Johnson may have had Gray's famous letter to Richard West of [8] April, [1742], in mind: "The language of the age is never the language of poetry", The Correspondence of Thomas Gray, edited by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, revised by H.W. Starr, in 3 vols (Oxford, 1971), I, 192.
 - 3 See his Augustan Poetic Diction (London, 1964) - being a corrected reprint of Chapters I-IV of the author's Augustan Studies (London, 1961) - p.42.
 - 4 Biographia Literaria, I, 15. Compare Coleridge, in 1823, on his own early poem "Dura Navis" as "a Putting of Thought into Verse", Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 2n.

"—Thy image on her wing
Before my FANCY'S eye shall MEMORY bring"¹

The precision and directness demanded by good sense that here rejects the periphrasis as absurd, Coleridge elsewhere in the Biographia elevates into an aesthetic of self-justification: "nothing can permanently please, which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise".² It is the natural extension of a belief in the perfect propriety of the choice and placement of each word that Coleridge adopted from Bowyer;³ for Coleridge, that is, one merit of any poem is its resistance to alteration and reorganisation, its "untranslatableness in words of the same language without injury to the meaning".⁴ The fact that Coleridge was cavalier about the words of others, and that in the Biographia he misquotes and adapts poetry and prose,⁵ should not impeach his judgement of bad Augustan poetry. It is clearly difficult to justify the squeamish substitution of "swains" for "shepherds",

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- 1 Biographia Literaria, I, 14. Similarly, Coleridge describes "the first distich in Addison's Cato" - "'Port[us]. The dawn is over-cast, the morning lours, / And heavily in clouds brings on the day.'" - as "a translation into poetry of 'Past four o'clock, and a damp morning'", Coleridge Shakespeare Criticism, I, 18. Was Coleridge implicitly challenging Lord Chesterfield's letter to his son of 26 October, 1739, in which the same lines are commended as a translation of "a cloudy morning" ("This is poetical diction; which would be improper in prose")? - see Letters Written by Lord Chesterfield to His Son, edited by Charles Stokes Carey, in 2 vols (London, 1912), I, 63.
 - 2 Biographia Literaria, II, 9. Compare Coleridge Table Talk, 1 March, 1834: "I require in everything what, for lack of another word, I may call propriety, - that is, a reason, why the thing is at all, and why it is there or then rather than elsewhere or at another time" (p.275).
 - 3 Bowyer "showed no mercy to phrase, metaphor, or image...where the same sense might have been conveyed with equal force and dignity in plainer words", Biographia Literaria, I, 5.
 - 4 Biographia Literaria, II, 115.
 - 5 If proof were needed, the various omissions and alterations in three passages that Coleridge quotes at the end of chapter IX - from Grynaeus, Barclay, and Hooker - would by themselves justify the criticism. See Biographia Literaria (1847), I, part 2, pp.167-169 and notes (the quotation from Milton is substantively correct).

although recent studies of convention and artifice have redressed the balance in favour of pastoral poetry.¹ Nor is it any easier to justify such periphrasis as "finny myriads" and "fleecy files" (and I am quoting, incidentally, from the early verse of Wordsworth and Coleridge²), although an understanding of the categorising Augustan mentality has given us an historical perspective perhaps lacking to Coleridge.³ To Wordsworth and Coleridge, at least, such a translation of reality offended good sense.

For this reason it is appropriate that the linguistic translation of Homer by Pope was central to the debate. The advocates of a simple diction singled out Pope's Homer from all Augustan poetry for its wordiness and distortion. Time and again it is translation that bears

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- 1 James Sutherland's A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry (Oxford, 1948) is, throughout, an explicit and implicit defence of eighteenth-century poetry against the accusations of Wordsworth, though he tends to accept Wordsworth's terms. Studies of various aspects of the complex artificiality of eighteenth-century poetry include Jean H. Hagstrum, The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray (Chicago, 1958), Chester F. Chapin, Personification in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry (New York, 1955), and Tillotson's Augustan Poetic Diction. On this last, see the more general study of Arthur Sherbo, English Poetic Diction from Chaucer to Wordsworth (Michigan, 1975), especially chapter 1, "Some Origins of Poetic Diction" (pp.21-43).
 - 2 "Finny myriads" occurs in Wordsworth's "Septimi Gades", 1.37, Wordsworth Poetical Works, I, 297; "fleecy files" in the tenth line of Coleridge's "Perspiration. A Travelling Eclogue", Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 56. Wordsworth's letter to Ann Taylor of 9 April, 1801, shows that, like Coleridge, he was aware of the extent to which he had unthinkingly aped the prevailing style, Letters, I, 328. See Paul D. Sheats on Wordsworth's early pride in "poetic diction", "the pride that in 1800 he would criticize all the more harshly because it had been his own", The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, 1785-1798 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973), p.53.
 - 3 See, for example, Geoffrey Tillotson: "Where the Augustan diction is of the 'scaly breed' kind, it is.... a survival from the ancient means of keeping distinct the different groups of created things.... This sort of diction was involved in the way human beings looked out of themselves at the external creation. It was sacred to their philosophy", Augustan Poetic Diction, p.70. For a general discussion, compare Donald Davie, Purity of Diction in English Verse (London, 1952; re-issued with new postscript, 1967), pp.40-53.

the full force of the criticism. Johnson's own rendering of Proverbs 6. 6-11, is an example well known from Wordsworth's Appendix to the 1802 Preface.¹ Given the preference for diffuse expression, the strict requirements of Augustan verse form exaggerated this tendency to wordiness at the cost of concision and often sense. Typically, Jeffrey fulminates "against the man who could think of violating the matron-like simplicity of the Mantuan bard" (ironically a periphrasis for Virgil) "with glittering and meretricious graces", and includes him amongst "the deserters from genuine English".²

In the Biographia Coleridge claims that he did "not stand alone" in regarding Pope's translation of Homer as the "main source of our pseudo-poetic diction",³ and proceeds to expose the absurdity of an isolated example. Nor was he alone in thus closely analysing passages from the translation in the context of a discussion of poetic language. Discounting the article "on Chalmers's British Poets in the Quarterly Review" which he cites himself,⁴ Blair in his Lectures three times performed such analysis, at one time quoting a passage from Homer with the expressed regret that "when it comes into Mr Pope's hand, it evaporates in three pompous lines, each of which repeats the same image in different words", and at another complaining that, in "the midst of the elegance and luxuriancy of Mr. Pope's language, we lose sight of the

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 162-163.

2 In a review of William Sotheby's translation of The Georgics of Virgil, ER IV, no. 8 (July, 1804), article IV, pp.296-303 (p.297).

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 26 note.

4 The Southey article to which Coleridge refers - his review of Chalmers's The Works of the English Poets, Quarterly Review, XI, no. 22 (July, 1814), article XIII, pp.480-504 - contains no such detailed analysis, as H.N. Coleridge and Shawcross have pointed out - see Biographia Literaria (1847), I, part I, p.40 note, and Biographia Literaria, I, 26 note, 215.

old Bard's simplicity".¹ In the former we are reminded of Coleridge's criticism and mocking rewording of the opening of Johnson's The Vanity of Human Wishes, itself a loose translation of Juvenal:

Dryden in his translation of Juvenal had said 'Look round the world' - Doctor Johnson swells this out into the following lines:

Let observation with extensive view
Survey Mankind from China to Peru.

Mere bombast and tautology, as if to say, 'Let observation with extensive observation observe mankind extensively'.²

It is little wonder that a second-generation Romantic like Leigh Hunt could make little of Pope's Homer: "It was not that I did not admire Pope; but the words in his translation always took precedence in my mind of the things".³ By this time the reaction against the Augustans was in full swing and a critical vocabulary had been firmly established. Only Hunt's professed open-mindedness was not typical of the poetic radicals of his day. Wordsworth, for one, never mitigated his harsh criticism of this translation - "It will require yet half a century completely to carry off the poison of Pope's Homer"⁴ - and, more generally, of this supervention of language on reality. In 1802 he attacked the diction which substituted "a motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas" for the "plain humanities of nature".⁵ In the 1815 "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" he attacked

1 Lectures on Rhetoric, III, 165-6; III, 244. The third example occurs at I, 85-86.

2 See the transcript of Coleridge's sixth lecture in the 1811-12 series, Coleridge on Shakespeare: The Text of the Lectures of 1811-12, edited by R.A. Foakes (London, 1971), p.70. Or was it Wordsworth's criticism and rewording? - compare p.62.

3 The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt, edited by J.E. Morpungo (London, 1949), p.88 (my italics).

4 As he wrote to Walter Scott, 18 January, 1808, Wordsworth Letters, II, 191.

5 Appendix to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 161-162.

the spuriousness of the imagery in MacPherson's Ossian: "It will always be so when words are substituted for things".¹

The precedence that words took over things in the struggle to create an elegant, literary language shunning the commonplace, was the logical outcome of a poetry that manifested no faith in the world around it. What resulted was "poetic diction, arbitrary and subject to infinite caprices" in the words of the Preface,² "that worse defect of arbitrary and illogical phrases" that Coleridge detected in bad and youthful poetry.³ In periphrastically translating a simple object into this literary language, the tendency was towards diffuse and abstract images, or rather figures of speech, the word "images" being used too loosely. As Coleridge observed, the result is "an amphibious something, made up, half of image, and half of abstract meaning", and is more often than not unable to be visualized.⁴ In our own century, Marjorie Latta Barstow has aptly

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, III, 77. Compare Blair on "those frothy writers" with whom "it is a luxuriancy of words, not of fancy", Lectures on Rhetoric, II, 29; and, more recently, Tillotson on the "eighteenth-century nature-poem", which "depends for half its existence on its paper and ink, on its words as words", Augustan Poetic Diction, p.31. In his review of The Excursion, James Montgomery paid Wordsworth the great compliment that "the words seem rather the thoughts themselves made palpable, than the symbols of thoughts", Eclectic Review, second series, III (January, 1815), pp.13-39 (p.24). Had he Wordsworth's note to The Thorn in mind? - "the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as things, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion", Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 513.

2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 144.

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 58.

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 15. Thus Coleridge notes in November, 1803, that a "True & easy Test of Poetry" designed to detect this specious imagery might be to ask if "a well educated man born blind" could have written it, Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1692. So Wordsworth on "the poetry of the period intervening between the publication of the Paradise Lost and the Seasons" in the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (1815): "A blind man, in the habit of attending accurately to descriptions casually dropped from the lips of those around him, might easily depict these appearances with more truth", Wordsworth Prose Works, III, 73.

described the "peculiarity" of the Augustan "elegances of speech", with an obvious debt to Coleridge:

they suggest an image, not by using the word or words associated with it in everyday experience, but by using, in its stead, another image associated with it only in verse - a kind of accepted symbol for the image. Hence, instead of the clear and coherent pictures suggested simply by a list of the common names of the phenomena that actually occur together in nature...we are given a heterogeneous mass of substitute images, which cannot be actually visualized without somewhat ridiculous results.¹

Like both Wordsworth and Coleridge, Johnson objected to this language as a "fiction", a poetic diction dissonant with nature, on the grounds of nature's inherent superiority: "an epithet or metaphor drawn from Art degrades Nature".² Jeffrey's judgement of Pope is based on the same priority:

There are no pictures of nature or of simple emotion in all his writings. He is the poet of town life, and of high life, and of literary life.³

Both preached the dangers of a literary language; indeed, few were more afraid of arbitrariness than Dr Johnson.⁴

1 Wordsworth's Theory of Poetic Diction: A Study of the Historical and Personal Background of the Lyrical Ballads, Yale Studies in English, edited by Albert S. Cook, LVII (London and New Haven, 1917), p.66. Compare Josephine Miles: "the suggestibility of the 1740's, the hint of sight, the figure veiled, the shadowy anatomy of an abstraction", in her, The Continuity of Poetic Language: The Primary Language of Poetry, 1540's-1940's (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1948, 1950, 1951; collected, with a new Preface, New York, 1965), p.205.

2 "Life of Gray", Lives of the Poets, III, 437.

3 In his review of Weber's edition of the plays of John Ford, ER XVIII, no. 36 (August, 1811), article I, pp.275-304 (p.281).

4 See, for example, Johnson's observation in a letter to Joseph Baretti of 10 June, 1761: "Men will submit to any rule, by which they may be exempted from the tyranny of caprice and of chance", Boswell's Life of Johnson, Together with Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales, edited by George Birkbeck Hill, revised and enlarged by L.F. Powell, in 6 vols (Oxford, 1934), I, 365.

Inevitably nature and good sense become allied. Coleridge, for example, in a letter to Josiah Wedgwood of 24 July, 1800, aspires to the "excellence" of "natural & good common-sense English",¹ and in the Biographia describes the Preface as a "remonstrance in behalf of truth and nature" and talks of Wordsworth's "justifiable preference for the language of nature and of good sense".² Both he and Wordsworth see a fidelity to nature in the form of descriptive accuracy as integral to simplicity, an accuracy only achieved by close and extended observation of the objects of nature. The practical result in Wordsworth's own case, as Paul D. Sheats points out of the 1794 revisions to Descriptive Sketches, was that Wordsworth continued

to discipline his language on behalf of the object, attempting to clarify the relation between word and thing and in general to render the linguistic surface of his style as unobtrusive as possible. Nouns become concrete and denotative: they derive value from the object they name, and not from periphrasis.³

As an example of the "false notions" to which this descriptive accuracy is opposed, Wordsworth cites, in the letter to John Wilson of June, 1802, that which has prevailed "from generation to generation as to the true character of the nightingale". With Coleridge, he sees the notion of the nightingale as a melancholy bird as a literary fraud endorsed by successive generations of poets ignorant of the natural world. A large part of the aim of Coleridge's "The Nightingale", the letter suggests, is to disillusion readers and point to the dangers of this ignorance.⁴ Again, ample precedent may be found in the eighteenth

1 See above, p.20 note 3(my italics).

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 28, 70.

3 The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, p.100.

4 [7 June, 1802], Wordsworth Letters, I, 355-356.

century. Joseph Warton, for example, expressed his belief that

if our poets would accustom themselves to contemplate fully every object, before they attempted to describe it, they would not fail of giving their readers more new and more complete images than they generally do.¹

Coleridge, although later suspicious of "observation" (which becomes a technical term in his critical theory in creative opposition to "meditation"²), had earlier accounted it among the "chief excellencies of Bowles, that his Imagery appears almost always prompted by the surrounding Scenery".³ A large part of the respect he and Wordsworth discovered for Bowles is attributed to this accuracy and its expression, "so natural and real".⁴ But the locus classicus of this association is the well known passage in the Preface:

I do not know how without being culpably particular I can give my Reader a more exact notion of the style in which I wished these poems to be written than by informing him that I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject, consequently I hope it will be found that there is in these Poems little

1 An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope, fourth edition, in 2 vols (London, 1782), I, 48.

2 See, for example, Coleridge on Shakespeare's characters as "drawn rather from meditation than from observation, or rather by observation, which was the child of meditation", in Coleridge on Shakespeare, ed. Foakes, pp.78-81 (p.78).

3 In a letter to Southey of 17 December, 1794, Coleridge Letters, I, 139. Compare the note of March, 1805, in which he implicitly challenges Augustan notions of generality and propriety: "at first we are from various causes delighted with generalities of Nature which can all be expressed in dignified words / but afterwards becoming more intimately acquainted with Nature in ~~its~~ her detail we are delighted with distinct vivid ideas, and with vivid ideas most when made distinct / & can most often forgive and sometimes be delighted with even a low image from art or low life when it gives you the very thing by an illustration", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2484.

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 10. Compare the early letter to John Thelwall of 17 December, [1796], in which Coleridge describes Bowles as "with the exception of Burns, the only always-natural poet in our language", Coleridge Letters, I, 278.

falsehood of description, and that my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance.¹

This fit language is spelled out in the letter to Ann Taylor:

You flatter me, Madam, that my style is distinguished by a genuine simplicity. Whatever merit I may have in this way I have attained solely by endeavouring to look...steadily at my subject.²

A simple language disciplined, as Sheats says, "on behalf of the object" - this was the implicit or explicit aim of those critics who attacked the "vulgar poetical diction" of their predecessors, their contemporaries, or themselves.

There can be no doubt that stock images and descriptive passages as predictable as Elizabethan Petrarchanism proliferated in eighteenth-century nature poetry, and that they encouraged in many readers no more than a comfortable delight in their familiarity. There are hacks in every age. But Wordsworth and Coleridge were not simply concerned with hack writing. They felt that a system of language in only arbitrary relation with reality, or rather a poetry whose obligations were first to an artificially established body of "poetic" expressions, could, by being "mechanised as it were into a barrel-organ", become the province

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 130, 132. Late in life Wordsworth still prided himself in this discipline; of the early, and over-elaborate Evening Walk he maintained, in an Isabella Fenwick note, that "There is not an image in it which I have not observed", Wordsworth Poetical Works, I, 318 (the Analytical Reviewer agreed; he praised Wordsworth because his images in Descriptive Sketches and, by implication, An Evening Walk were furnished "by actual and attentive observation", Analytical Review XV (March, 1793), pp.294-296 (p.294) and pp.296-297). And see also his comment on the late poem "Lyre! though such power do in thy magic live" in the Isabella Fenwick note to "The Forsaken": "the natural imagery of these verses was supplied by frequent, I might say intense, observation of the Rydal torrent", Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 473.

2 9 April, 1801, Wordsworth Letters, I, 328.

of "bunglers that had failed in the lowest mechanic crafts".¹ As Blair had warned against the formalization of these expressions, which were then "handed down from every writer of verses to another, as by hereditary right",² and as Warton warned against "that disgusting impropriety of introducing what may be called a set of hereditary images",³ so Wordsworth slighted that "large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets".⁴ It was unnatural: a self-referring language created for and by poets, both exclusive of a larger part of the reading public and neglectful of the world of "flesh and blood".⁵

The Appendix to the 1802 Preface makes it clear that the chief debt of these arguments for a reformation of poetic language is to the then popular aesthetic of primitivism and that the linguistic paradigm owed a great deal to the related Sublime style.⁶ Ever since 'Longinus' disparaged "turbid diction" and "confused imagery" in his treatise On

1 Biographia Literaria, I, 25, 27. Compare "the poetasters who ring changes on the common-places of magazine versification" of Jeffrey's review of Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI, no. 21 (October, 1807), article XIV, pp.214-231 (pp.217-8).

2 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 439.

3 An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope, I, 43.

4 Preface (1800), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 132.

5 Preface (1800), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 130. Compare Wordsworth on Elizabeth Barret [Browning], as quoted by Henry Crabb Robinson: "'Her poems are too ideal for me. I want flesh and blood'", 3 January, 1839, Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, edited by Edith J. Morley, in 3 vols (London, 1938), II, 562.

6 Compare W.J.B. Owen, Wordsworth as Critic (Toronto and London, 1969): "Wordsworth's new ideas are commonplaces of certain eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetics which are based, in particular, on primitivistic theories of language and literature" (p.65). Owen, however, is discussing the sanction given to figurative language by the additions of 1802, as distinguished from the "simple and unelaborated" language advocated by the 1800 version of the Preface. While the eighteenth-century aestheticians were all agreed that primitive utterance was spontaneous in origin, and therefore genuine, there is some uncertainty as to how figurative such a language would be.

Sublimity, sublimity had been associated with simplicity of expression.¹

To quote Blair: "conciseness and simplicity are essential to Sublime Writing".² Informing both was this respect for nature, as Blair goes on to make plain:

What are the proper sources of the Sublime? My answer is, That they are to be looked for everywhere in nature. It is not by hunting after tropes, and figures, and rhetorical assistances, that we can expect to produce it. No: it stands clear, for the most part, of these laboured refinements of art.³

What Blair talks of as detracting from the true sublime, the Preface rejects as detracting from poetry. While insisting on the superiority of the sublime, Blair at least retains a reduced place in his scheme for its alternative, the beautiful. M.H. Abrams explains this dualism:

The characteristic pattern of neoclassic reasoning about diction...was dichotomous, in accordance with an underlying conception of poetry which looked both toward the nature it must reflect and toward the reader it must affect.... This dual obligation was often reflected in a systematic and progressive distinction of the verbal medium of a poem into the two components of matter (satisfying the claims of truth to nature) and ornament (satisfying the claims of aesthetic pleasure).⁴

When in the Preface Wordsworth asks the reader to choose "Poetry in which the language closely resembles that of life and nature" and to reject "artificial distinctions of style", he invokes the principles of sublimity and beauty respectively, the male and female principles of

1 In the third chapter, see Ancient Literary Criticism, p.464.

2 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 83.

3 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 93.

4 "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Diction and Figures", p.173.

eighteenth-century aesthetics.¹ He also rejects this dualism. According to Blair, on the other hand, in that poetry which opts for the glitter of poetic diction, "the Beautiful may remain", even though "the Sublime is gone".²

It is no accident, then, that Biblical paraphrase and Pope's Homer should have been singled out for special censure, as embodying the worst of poetic diction, by the primitivist critics. Following further hints from 'Longinus', Homer and the Bible were held as exemplary of the style at once simple and sublime.³ Even Johnson, not himself a primitivist, speaks with reverence of "the nakedness and simplicity of the authentick narrative" of the Bible,⁴ and approvingly of Homer's "awful simplicity".⁵ In a recorded conversation of 1827, Coleridge shows how this simplicity is again related to nature:

Our version of the Bible is to be loved and prized for this, as for a thousand other things, - that it has preserved a purity of meaning to many terms of natural objects. Without this holdfast, our vitiated

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 152, 144. The sexual basis of these principles is apparent in John Dennis's early discussion of the effects of the sublime in writing, which he claims, "does not so properly persuade us, as it ravishes and transports us...it gives a noble Vigour to a Discourse, an invincible Force, which commits a pleasing Rape upon the very Soul of the Reader", "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry" (Chapter IV), The Critical Works of John Dennis, edited by Edward Niles Hooker, in 2 vols (Baltimore, 1939), I, 359.

2 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 84.

3 The controversial reference to Genesis 1.3 in On Sublimity occurs in chapter 9 (Ancient Literary Criticism, p.470); for references to Homer see passim.

4 "Life of Cowley", Lives of the Poets, I, 49.

5 "Life of Pope", Lives of the Poets, III, 82-276 (p.238). For all this Johnson felt that poets should eschew Biblical motifs and the Biblical style, and praised Pope's translation of Homer as "certainly the noblest version of poetry which the world has ever seen", see the "Life of Waller", and the "Life of Pope", Lives of the Poets, I, 292-293; III, 119.

imaginations would refine away language to mere abstractions.¹

Homer and the prophets had the advantage of being both chronologically and stylistically primitive. From this nebulous point onwards, as the primitivist history of literature has it, poetry and eloquence became progressively more corrupt.² Wordsworth traces this familiar history with little modification in the Appendix to the Preface (1802), and Jeffrey endorses it when he says in an article on the poetry of Burns that "almost all the great poets of every country have appeared in an early stage of their history, and in a period comparatively rude and unlettered".³

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- 1 24 June, 1827, Coleridge Table Talk, p.49. Compare Coleridge Notebooks, III, 3415: "the Bible, & many religious Books, which at all events would give [the reader] the best & most natural Language".
 - 2 For a typical primitivist history see Blair's thirty-eighth lecture, Lectures on Rhetoric, III, 84-113 (especially pp.84-99). Johnson's version of the progression of poetic language both gives a concise idea of the generally accepted theory, and captures the ambivalence Johnson felt towards the smooth professionalism of the best Augustan verse: "There is a time when nations emerging from barbarity, and falling into regular subordination, gain leisure to grow wise, and feel the shame of ignorance and the craving pain of unsatisfied curiosity. To this hunger of the mind plain sense is grateful; that which fills the void removed uneasiness...; but repletion generates fastidiousness, a saturated intellect soon becomes luxurious, and knowledge finds no willing reception till it is recommended by artificial diction. Thus it will be found in the progress of learning that in all nations the first writers are simple, and that every age improves in elegance", "Life of Pope", Lives of the Poets, III, 239.
 - 3 Review of Cromeek's Reliques of Robert Burns, ER XIII, no. 26 (January, 1809), article I, pp.249-276 (p.251). Jeffrey also proved himself a child of the modern age when in 1795 he chose as his model for a translation "of the Argos of old Appollonius" not Pope's but Cowper's Homer - see the letter to Robert Morehead of 22 December, 1795, in Life of Jeffrey, II, 20. Compare Jeffrey's review of William Hayley's The Life and Posthumous Writings of William Cowper Esq., vols I and II, ER II, no. 3 (April, 1803), article V, pp.64-86 (pp.84-86), for Jeffrey's later, qualified approbation.

II

When Dr Johnson deprecated artificial language it was for moral reasons, rather than because of a simple distaste for descriptive inaccuracy. He had another, stricter accuracy in mind: the internal one of sincerity. Sincerity - the "congruence between avowal and actual feeling", to use Lionel Trilling's definition¹ - has invariably involved an accurate description of nature, the spade called spade. Only the dissembler, it is assumed, has time for elaborate speech. Because straightforward and simple speech is popularly held to symbolise authenticity of narrative or description, it becomes, at least periodically, a poetic demand as well. Thus protestations of "honest plain words" have always been with us,² with the heart as the conventional repository of sincerity. Sidney's *Astrophel*, to choose but one example, was admonished by his Muse when he rehearsed a variety of established poetic tropes to prepare an address to his beloved:

'Foole,' said my Muse to me, 'looke in thy heart and
write'³

But traditionally the poet's 'sincerity' was expected to perform the rhetorical and pragmatic function of suspending disbelief, rather than to fulfil the more abstract and moral demand that the poet be,

1 Sincerity and Authenticity (London, 1972), p.2.

2 "BEROWNE: Honest plain words best pierce the ear of grief", Love's Labour's Lost, V, ii, 745, the Arden Shakespeare, fifth edition, edited by H.C. Hart, revised by Richard David (London, 1956), p.178.

3 Astrophel and Stella, sonnet 1, line 14. The same protest was itself a Petrarchan convention, "with all the authority of the master behind it", as Richard B. Young points out in his "English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's Astrophel and Stella", in Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton, Yale Studies in English, edited by Benjamin Christie Nangle, Vol. 138 (New Haven, 1958), pp.1-88 (p.6). For the Sidney reference, see The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, edited by William A. Ringler, Jr. (Oxford, 1962), p.165.

above all, true to his own self. Behind the developing concern throughout the eighteenth century for immediacy and authenticity of poetic experience lay Horace's celebrated dictum: "If you want me to cry, mourn first yourself; then your misfortunes will hurt me".¹ In Johnson this becomes a moral obligation, divorced from its effect upon the audience. In the "Life of Cowley", for example, he insists that "the basis of all excellence is truth: he that professes love ought to feel its power".² Blair, inhabiting both the old world of Renaissance rhetoric and the new world of primitivist aesthetics, relates this directly to the language of poetry when he argues that "the great rule with regard to the conduct of...Figures" is that the writer must "never affect the style of a passion which he does not feel".³ Thus, for Wordsworth, at the time of the composition of the Preface, the idea of a "natural language" was closely identified with feeling. M.H. Abrams has described this language:

instead of being construed as an imitation of speech "suitable to the speaker and to the occasion," [it] is given a genetic and psychological significance, and either parallels or coincides with his other prime criteria, "spontaneous," "genuine,"...and..."sincere." The equivalence between the "natural" language of the poet and the prose language "really spoken by men" is a genetic equivalence, in that both originate instinctively, under the impulse of actual feeling.⁴

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- 1 In "The Art of Poetry", Ancient Literary Criticism, p.282. For a brief history of this dictum in the eighteenth century, see M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Critical Theory and the Critical Tradition (London, Oxford, New York, 1953), pp.71-2.
 - 2 Lives of the Poets, I, 6; later in this "Life" Johnson paraphrases the Horatian dictum: "when he wishes to make us weep he forgets to weep himself" (I, 37).
 - 3 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 449, 450.
 - 4 In his article on "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Diction and Figures", p.177. Compare Jeffrey on Burns: "His poetry was almost all written primarily from feeling, and only secondarily from ambition", ER XIII (January, 1809), p.256. There are also times when Wordsworth pushes beyond this to actually identify poetry with feelings; "Poetry thus becomes essentially a function of the inner man", as Stephen K. Land observes, "whilst words remain the adventitious instruments of the worldly" - see Land's article "The Silent Poet: An Aspect of Wordsworth's Semantic Theory", University of Toronto Quarterly, LXII, no. 2 (Winter, 1973), pp.157-169 (p.164).

The heart and associated metaphors structure the demands in the untraced quotation in the first chapter of the Biographia for a language of poetry at one with "the native redness of the blood, the meaning itself, flowing from the heart as a genuine passion",¹ and are implied in Wordsworth's desire to keep the reader in "the company of flesh and blood".² Coleridge discovered in the "natural thoughts" and "natural diction" of Bowles and Cowper the first poets who reconciled "the heart with the head".³ Jeffrey also valued the pivotal role Cowper had played in recent literary history:

setting at defiance all the imaginary requisites of poetical diction and classical imagery - dignity of style, and politeness of phraseology - [Cowper] ventured to write again with the force and the freedom which formed the great characteristic of the old school of English literature.⁴

This is where Jeffrey's and Johnson's advocacy of sincerity, manifest as a distrust of artifice, can help us to understand the Preface, and to appreciate how established were many of its beliefs. Instead of "the simple and enthusiastic votary of nature and virtue", Jeffrey complained of the Abbé de Lille, "he frequently appears like a fine gentleman paying compliments to the sylvan goddesses".⁵ Similarly, Johnson found Milton's Lycidas a chilling experience:

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- 1 "sanguinis e materiæ ipsius corde effluentis rubor quidam natus et incalescentia genuina", Biographia Literaria, I, 7. I have used George Watson's translation - see his edition of Biographia Literaria, p.5 note. The 'quotation' may, of course, be Coleridge himself - see editorial discussion in Biographia Literaria (1847), I, 10 note; Biographia Literaria, I, 206.
 - 2 Preface (1800), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 130.
 - 3 Biographia Literaria, I, 16.
 - 4 In his article on Weber's edition of Ford, ER XVIII (August, 1811), p.282.
 - 5 In his review of de Lille's Le Malheur et La Pitié, ER III, no. 5 (October, 1803), article II, pp.26-42 (p.31).

It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius, nor tells of 'rough satyrs and fauns with cloven heel.' 'Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief.'¹

For Johnson the petty inconsequentialities of an "exploded mythology" betokened a mind at leisure and therefore insincere,² and highly artificial poetry like the pastoral offered nothing, except possibly the opportunity for his favourite poets to cut their teeth on verse.³ Blair's insistence that the poet "is not at leisure to follow out the play of Imagination" testifies to the same distrust.⁴

In Wordsworth's second "Essay upon Epitaphs" it is "leisure" again, detached and dispassionate, that creates the conditions for an inauthentic response. Wordsworth wishes

to establish a criterion of sincerity, by which a Writer may be judged; and this is of high import. For, when a Man is treating an interesting subject, or one which he ought not to treat at all unless he be interested, no faults have such a killing power as those which prove that he is not in earnest, that he is acting a part, has leisure for affectation, and feels that without it he could do nothing.⁵

And, finally, Coleridge condemns that poetry which is a "species of wit", a purely cerebral exercise that "implies a leisure and self-possession both of thought and of feeling, incompatible with the steady fervor of

1 "Life of Milton", Lives of the Poets, I, 84-200 (p.163).

2 See above, p.20, note 2, and p.19.

3 "It seems natural for a young poet to initiate himself by Pastorals, which, not professing to imitate real life, require no experience", "Life of Pope", Lives of the Poets, III, 224.

4 Lectures on Rhetoric, II, 418.

5 Wordsworth Prose Works, II, 70.

a mind possessed and filled with the grandeur of its subject".¹ Clearly, as with most Protestant writers, this leisure that the various critics detect is tainted with immorality, leisure that breeds false representation or, in poetry, affected diction.

So often the purer, plainer diction is posed as the masculine alternative to effeminate decadence in poetic language. The supervision of word over object is implicitly compared with what were accepted as the priorities of female vanity. Language seen as the "dress of thought"² signalled an obsession with superficialities, with manner before matter, with outward aspect before inner integrity. Wordsworth accordingly complained that the poems of Thomas Moore "smell of the perfumer's and milliner's shops",³ and Blair admitted only "such ornaments of Style... as are manly, not foppish".⁴ Coleridge looked back to the "manly simplicity of the Greek, and of our own elder poets",⁵ and Jeffrey found in Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage "a certain plain manliness and strength of manner, which is infinitely refreshing after the sickly affectations of so many modern writers".⁶

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 68. It is significant that Coleridge attributes the disfiguring poetic diction of Wordsworth's Descriptive Sketches, not to "leisure" as we might expect, but to "impatient strength", a youthful inspiration that tries to utter all at once - see Biographia Literaria, I, 56.

2 The phrase is, of course, Johnson's - see "Life of Cowley", Lives of the Poets, I, 58, and compare Pope: "Expression is the Dress of Thought", Essay on Criticism, II, 318, The Poems of Alexander Pope, edited by John Butt, Vol. I, Pastoral Poetry and an Essay on Criticism, edited by E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London and New Haven, 1961), pp.233-326 (p.274).

3 As quoted in Christopher Wordsworth, Memoirs of William Wordsworth, Poet-Laureate, D.C.L., in 2 vols (London, 1851), II, 473.

4 Lectures on Rhetoric, II, 58.

5 Biographia Literaria, I, 4.

6 ER XIX, no. 38 (February, 1812), article X, pp.466-477 (p.467).

The association of elaborate diction with effeminacy is important, not for its mute acceptance of the historical commonplace that women are irredeemably vain, but for the accusation of vanity itself. The French and their literature had come to enshrine this perversion of values for the many who displayed what Henry Crabb Robinson believed to be "truly British": "a depth of contempt towards France".¹ "Oftentimes", writes Coleridge,

in perusing French tragedies, I have fancied two marks of admiration at the end of each line, as hieroglyphics of the author's own admiration at his own cleverness.²

It is not uncommon to find French literature dismissed as foppish, self-regarding, and unnatural when compared with "Saxon simplicity".³ Jeffrey shared none of Coleridge's contempt for the French, but he did share this orthodox British belief. Though he found in de Lille a poet as "natural" as any France had produced, for example, he criticized him because, like all French writers, de Lille "never forgets himself in the ardour of composition, and seldom lets the reader forget him".⁴

1 See his review of Wordsworth's Convention of Cintra in The London Review, II, no. 4 (November, 1809), p.252. Compare Coleridge on the French as "the most light, unthinking, sensual, and profligate of the European Nations, the very phrases of whose language are so composed, that they can scarcely speak without lying!" in The Friend, no. 4 (7 September, 1809), in The Friend (CC), II, 52; and on the French language as "the very own language of conversation, & colloquial writing, of light passion, and the social Vanity, which finds...its main pleasure in pleasing so as to be admired for pleasing", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2431 f4. One should not, of course, forget that the two countries were at war.

2 Biographia Literaria, I, 14.

3 The phrase is from Thomas Quayle, Poetic Diction: A Study of Eighteenth Century Verse (London, 1924), p.192.

4 In his review of Le Malheur et La Pitié, ER III (October, 1803), p.29. Compare Dryden on the heroes of French drama, whose "good breeding seldom extends to a word of sense", in the Preface to All for Love, and in his "Dramatick Poesie, An Essay": "in most of the irregular Playes of Shakespeare or Fletcher...there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing, then there is in any of the French" - see John Dryden, Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays, edited by George Watson, in 2 vols (London, 1962), I, 224, and The Works of John Dryden, XVII, 54.

Coleridge's complaint echoes Blair, who cites approvingly the case of another critic who laid a book aside when "he found the pages thick bespangled with the point which is called, 'Punctum admirationis'".¹ With or without the reference to punctuation the complaint was common. Johnson criticises certain linguistic habits as "practised, not by those who talk to be understood, but by those who write to be admired".² Thus the vain poet studies himself in the mirror of his own language while the world around him is ignored. Wordsworth felt that

The man whose eye
Is ever on himself does look on one,
The least of Nature's works³

And so, attributing poetic diction to poetic vanity, he sets about introducing a simpler language.

III

It is a long way from this, however, to the profound suspicion of art that Wordsworth betrays in the Preface, a suspicion normally associated with those whose Utopia, like Plato's, would be without poets.⁴

1 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 450.

2 "Life of Cowley", Lives of the Poets, I, 40; compare the "Life of Dryden", in which Johnson deprecates words that are too remote from day to day discourse because they "draw that attention on themselves which they should transmit to things" - a very Wordsworthian priority (Lives of the Poets, I, 420).

3 "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree", ll.55-7, Wordsworth Poetical Works, I, 92-94 (p.94).

4 See the relevant parts of Republic, Books II and III (376c-398b), translated by Paul Shorey in The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters, Bollingen series LXXI, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, New Jersey, 1961), pp.623-643. On the anti-literary aspect of Wordsworth, see Helen Darbishire, The Poet Wordsworth, the Clark Lectures, 1949 (Oxford, 1950), pp.5-57, and, following this, Roger Sharrock, "Wordsworth's Revolt Against Literature", Essays in Criticism, III, no. 4 (October, 1953), pp.396-412, reprinted in A.W. Thomson (ed.), Wordsworth's Mind and Art (Edinburgh, 1969), pp.56-72; to quote Sharrock, for example: "his meditation on the problems of language led him to plan a poetry which should dispense with all social and literary associations, and present 'the thing itself'" - Wordsworth's Mind and Art, p.71.

The more one examines the theory, the clearer the moral implications of the various arguments become, as does the reason for the "moral and intellectual importance of habituating ourselves to a strict accuracy of expression" that Coleridge claims in the Biographia.¹ "Literary revolutions", as J.F. Danby has observed, "notoriously, are only aspects of changes affecting a wider field".²

We are first acquainted with the basis of much of Wordsworth's subsequent criticism in a passage in his fragmentary "Essay on Morals". "The whole secret of the juggler's trick", he writes of spurious ethical argument, "lies (not in fitting words to things (which would be a noble employment) but) in fitting things to words".³ This was probably written in late 1798.⁴ Two years before, in the character of Rivers in The Borderers, Wordsworth had examined the power of rhetoric to encourage vice. Rivers constrained things to fit words to the extent of having another man murdered.⁵ He was of the type of commanding genius described, in the second chapter of the Biographia, as impressing "their preconceptions on the world without, in order to present them back to their own view with the satisfying degree of clearness, distinctness, and individuality". Such a man is transformed in "times of tumult" from a Prospero-like figure "formed to exhibit a perfect poem in palace, or

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 115. Compare Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2625, in which Coleridge transcribes a sonnet of Strozzi, "regretting its falseness to Nature. I cannot but think, that this mode of belying the lovely countenance of Things & red-ochring the rose, must be injurious to the moral tact both of the authors & their admirers. S.T.C."

2 The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems 1797-1807 (London, 1960), p.9.

3 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 103.

4 See W.J.B. Owen's introduction, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 101.

5 "He is perpetually imposing upon himself, he has a sophism for every crime", Preface to The Borderers, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 77.

temple, or landscape-garden" into "the shaping spirit of Ruin".¹ Like the poet who uses an affected diction, what he creates reflects only himself.

Wordsworth alludes to the intimacy of the relationship between poetic and ordinary language, between language and morality, and between language and society, at the opening of the Preface:

to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence, of which I believe it susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved: which again could not be determined, without pointing out, in what manner language and the human mind act and react on each other, and without retracing the revolutions not of literature alone but likewise of society itself.²

Like Coleridge, when in 1801 he proposed a treatise on poetry that would replace contemporary systems of ethics and metaphysics,³ Wordsworth was confident that any full discussion of poetry, specifically poetic language, should not be an exclusively aesthetic discussion. The Preface

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- 1 Biographia Literaria, I, 20, 21. Napoleon has, for Coleridge, just such a commanding genius: "Poet Bonaparte - Layer out of a World-garden", Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1166; so has Kubla Khan, laying out his gardens and his pleasure dome, but destined, perhaps, to become a "shaping spirit of Ruin" in the prophesied wars. Like chapter II of the Biographia, "Kubla Khan" seems to me to be comparing two types of genius.
 - 2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 120. Compare "Essay upon Epitaphs, III": "Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts.... Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve", Wordsworth Prose Works, II, 84-5. Compare also Coleridge on the ill-effects of Italian "Jargoning", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2812, and his quotations on language, education, and society in Biographia Literaria, II, 22.
 - 3 In a letter to Humphry Davy, 3 February, 1801, Coleridge Letters, II, 671; in an earlier letter to Davy, of 9 October, 1800, he had discussed a prototype of this, "an Essay on the Elements of Poetry", which "would in reality be a disguised System of Morals & Politics" - Coleridge Letters, I, 632.

does more than just propose the efficacy of a language in healthy correspondence with reality. The metaphors of the argument point to a complex social and political attitude behind these assumptions about individual and social sanity. The affectations of "the Enchanter GAUDYVERSE"¹ are worse than feminine, they are promiscuous. The Augustan Muse is a meretrix, associated not just with London, but with London's vice, or rather with London as a composite symbol of vice. Even the prose writers, says Coleridge in the Biographia, "strive to be in the fashion, and trick themselves out in the soiled and over-worn finery of the meretricious muse".² A diction capable of mechanical permutations only, such as the diction of the poetasters that Coleridge likens to printers' type arbitrarily combined, becomes morally significant when it reflects and encourages an equally artificial and a vitiated state of society. In "poetic diction" Coleridge and Wordsworth concentrate all their dislikes. In damning it they muster all their political and moral venom.³ Poetic diction, it seems, is as self-indulgent, otiose, elitist, and idolatrous as the contemporary beaux

Who lose the deepening twilights of the spring
In ball-rooms and hot theatres.⁴

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- 1 The expression occurs in a letter to Humphry Davy, 25 July, 1800, Coleridge Letters, I, 612.
 - 2 Biographia Literaria, II, 21.
 - 3 Compare T.S. Eliot: "it is Wordsworth's social interest that inspires his own novelty of form in verse, and backs up his explicit remarks upon poetic diction; and it is really this social interest which (consciously or not) the fuss was all about", The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England, second edition (London, 1964), p.74. The social and political motivation behind the Preface has been universally acknowledged; compare also Heffernan: "Wordsworth wished to reform not only poetry but the social order as well", Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry, pp.36-37.
 - 4 "The Nightingale. A Conversation Poem", ll.36-7; Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 264-267 (p.265).

The Preface discloses convictions both Puritan and republican, which explain the "almost religious" admiration that, with the poems, it inspired in the "young men of ardent minds" and "liberal education".¹

It was not the first time that language and the human mind had been thought to "act and react on each other". In one of the works that Coleridge cites as his critical models (though with deceptive emphasis), Tacitus traces the relation between eloquence and society, using the metaphor of the human body in varying degrees of health.² Blair had directly attributed the decay of eloquence in imperial Rome to "a succession of some of the most execrable tyrants that ever disgraced, and scourged the human race". The epithets applied to that society are precisely those epithets most commonly applied to Augustan verse:

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- 1 Biographia Literaria, I, 55. Coleridge no doubt had in mind admirers like the young De Quincey, who wrote to Wordsworth on 31 May, 1803: "you will never find any one more zealously attached to you - more full of admiration for your mental excellence and of reverential love for your moral character - more ready (I speak from my heart!) to sacrifice even his life - than he who now bends the knee before you", quoted in John E. Jordan, De Quincey to Wordsworth: A Biography of a Relationship; with the Letters of Thomas De Quincey to the Wordsworth Family (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), p.31; and John Wilson, "who", wrote De Quincey, "without knowing me in those or for many subsequent years, shared my feelings towards both the poetry and the poet", in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, VI, no. LXI (January, 1839), pp.1-12 (p.2). Though this article was reprinted in The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey, edited by David Masson, in 14 vols (London and Edinburgh, 1889-90), II, 229-252, references to Wilson were omitted. For Wilson's less "reverential" letter, though "ardent" in its admiration, see 'Christopher North': A Memoir of John Wilson, compiled by his daughter, Mrs. Gordon, in 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1862), I, 39-48; it is dated 24 May, 1802, and was sent from the University of Glasgow where Wilson was a student.
 - 2 In his Dialogus de Oratoribus. Nor was Tacitus the first to draw the parallel, as D.A. Russell points out: "Again and again - in the 4th century B.C., in Hellenistic times, under Augustus, in the period of the Second Sophistic - we see the same sort of conflict develop: an increase in sophistication of wit or language, then a reaction (often thought of in moral terms) toward a purer and more classical manner" - see Russell's article, "Theories of Literature and Taste", in David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby (eds), Literature and Western Civilization, Volume I, The Classical World (London, 1972), pp.417-434 (p.418). (The Coleridge reference is Biographia Literaria, I, 40, 219.)

"Luxury, effeminacy, and flattery, overwhelmed all".¹ Wordsworth picked up the theme when he bemoaned the "gross and violent stimulants" to which he saw his own age in danger of succumbing, and which he saw as blunting "the discriminating powers of the mind".² Like Kotzebue's and other "sickly German tragedies" on the London stage, the language of poetry was full of "moving accidents".³ This conviction survives Wordsworth's political radicalism, as the following note dictated to Isabella Fenwick makes clear:

Every month for many years have we been importing plants and flowers from all quarters of the globe. ... Will their botanical names ever be displaced by plain English appellations, which will bring them home to our hearts by connection with our joys and sorrows? It can never be, unless society treads back her steps towards those simplicities which have been banished by the undue influence of Towns spreading and spreading in every direction, so that city-life with every generation takes more and more the lead of rural. Among the ancients, Villages were reckoned the seats of barbarism. Refinement, for the most part false, increases the desire to accumulate wealth.... This selfishness wars against disinterested imagination in all directions, and, evils coming round in a circle, barbarism spreads in every quarter of our Island. Oh for the reign of justice, and then the humblest man among us would have more power and dignity in and about him than the highest have now.⁴

Predictably, then, the Lyrical Ballads could not expect to appeal to those who "passed their lives chiefly in cities", as Coleridge

1 Lectures on Rhetoric, II, 214. Blair actually cites Tacitus's Dialogus de Oratoribus at this point, though he cites it as De Causis Corruptae Eloquentiae, the title of a lost dialogue of Quintilian with which it was confused, and the title which Coleridge uses.

2 In the Preface (1800), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 128.

3 "'Tis a common tale, / By moving accidents uncharactered", The Ruined Cottage, MS. B, II, ll.290-291, The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (Cornell), p.58. Compare "Heart-Leap Well", ll.97-98: "The moving accident is not my trade; / To freeze the blood I have no ready arts", Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 249-254 (p.252). (Wordsworth attacks popular theatre in the Preface, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 128, 130.)

4 See the note to "Love Lies Bleeding", Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 495.

concluded,¹ where the time and the place ensured that this "corrupt" language "was received as a natural language".²

When the Preface is examined in the context of the earlier political and theological writings of the two poets, it will be seen to have assimilated many of their radical ideas, and literature itself will be seen to have assumed much of the responsibility for social and spiritual revolution.³ Christopher Wordsworth makes this point in his biography when he expresses his suspicion that the clue to Wordsworth's "poetical theory",

in some of its questionable details, may be found in his political principles; these had been democratical, and still, though in some degree modified, they were of a republican character. At this period he entertained little reverence for ancient institutions, as such; and he felt little sympathy with the higher classes of society.⁴

It takes no great subtlety to see the analogy between the false distinctions created by poetic diction, and the "titles, stars, ribbands, and garters, and other badges of fictitious superiority" that Wordsworth stigmatizes in his unpublished A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff.⁵ The

1 Biographia Literaria, I, 50-51.

2 See Wordsworth's Appendix to the Preface (1802), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 161.

3 For studies of the early political ideas of Wordsworth and Coleridge, see John Colmer, Coleridge: Critic of Society (Oxford, 1959); Carl R. Woodring, Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge (Madison, 1961); the introduction to Lectures 1795 (CC); F.M. Todd, Politics and the Poet: A Study of Wordsworth (London, 1957); and Leslie F. Chard, II, Dissenting Republican: Wordsworth's Early Life and Thought in Their Political Context, Studies in English Literature, Volume LXVI (The Hague and Paris, 1972). For the Preface in this context, see especially Politics and the Poet, pp.99-100, and Dissenting Republican, pp.235-238.

4 Memoirs of William Wordsworth, I, 125.

5 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 44. Compare Wordsworth to William Matthews, 23 May, [1794]: "I am of that odious class of men called democrats", Wordsworth Letters, I, 119.

arbitrary monarch of the same Letter, whose "own passions and caprice are...the sole guides of his conduct",¹ is a first cousin to the Poet in the Preface who renders the reader "utterly at [his] mercy" by employing "poetic diction, arbitrary and subject to infinite caprices".² The inherited language of the poet and the inherited authority of the aristocracy are both examples of those "Hereditary distinctions and privileged orders of every species" which Wordsworth thought "must necessarily counteract the progress of human improvement".³ As he wrote later in the Prelude,

in the regal sceptre, and the pomp
Of orders and degrees, I nothing found
Then, or had ever even in crudest youth,
That dazzled me.⁴

Wordsworth, in other words, in his theory of poetic language, shows himself a true Republican and child of the French Revolution, at least as it was interpreted by Maximilian Robespierre:

We wish to substitute in our country morality for egotism, probity for a mere sense of honor, principle for habit, duty for etiquette, the empire of reason for the tyranny of custom, contempt for vice for contempt for misfortune, pride for insolence, large-mindedness for vanity, the love of glory for the love of money, good men for good company, merit for intrigue, talent for conceit, truth for show, the charm of happiness for the tedium of pleasure, the grandeur of man for the triviality of grand society,

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 40.

2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 144.

3 Wordsworth to William Matthews, [8] June, [1794], Wordsworth Letters, I, 123. Is there not perhaps an echo here of Tom Paine? - "I smile to myself when I contemplate the ridiculous insignificance into which literature and all the sciences would sink, were they made hereditary; and I carry the same idea into governments. An hereditary governor is as inconsistent as an hereditary author", The Rights of Man; Part the Second. Combining Principles and Practices (London, 1792), p.21.

4 Prelude (1805), IX, 11.212-215, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.322.

a people magnanimous, powerful, and happy for a
people lovable, frivolous, and wretched - that is to
say, all the virtues and miracles of the Republic
for all the vices and puerilities of the monarchy.¹

The separation of language by the Augustans into 'high' and 'low' reflected their general breakdown of the universe and society into rigidly - and, to Wordsworth and Coleridge, arbitrarily - distinct classes.² "The question of diction", as Geoffrey Tillotson has observed,

was secondary, though it was often discussed by
itself, to the question of matter. It was the need
they felt to keep kinds of matter apart that lead
them to keep kinds of words apart.

Moreover, the reason why "things in general were more thoroughly departmentalized" for the Augustans than they were subsequently, as Tillotson goes on to suggest, was partly "the deeper divisions among the social classes".³ Wordsworth and Coleridge certainly saw the language of the bulk of poetry reflecting and perpetuating this social iniquity.⁴ Diction had become a major contributor to that dubious pleasure derived from the sense "of understanding what they are conscious the lower Classes of their Countrymen would not be able to understand" which, Coleridge was persuaded, "the greater number of Read[ers rel]ceive

1 As quoted in Howard Mumford Jones (apparently from a translation by F.M. Anderson) in Revolution and Romanticism (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1974), p.23.

2 "Expression is the Dress of Thought, and still / Appears more decent as more suitable / ...For diff'rent Styles with diff'rent subjects sort, / As sev'ral Garbs with Country, Town, and Court", An Essay on Criticism, ll.318-319, 321-323, The Poems of Alexander Pope, I, 274, 275.

3 Augustan Poetic Diction, pp.64, 65.

4 Compare Gene W. Ruoff: "Wordsworth's anger stems from moral indignation that language, the surest anchor of the human community, has been turned into an instrument of social stratification" in his article "Wordsworth on Language: Toward a Radical Poetics for English Romanticism", The Wordsworth Circle, III, no. 4 (Autumn, 1972), pp.204-211 (p.210).

from our modern writers".¹ The direct connection can be seen in an early note of Coleridge's which records with obvious distaste a precept of Adam Smith: "Duty of a Poet to write like a Gentleman".² It is more apparent in the letter Wordsworth wrote to John Wilson that uses the same precept for the same purpose. Wordsworth criticizes those readers who

are disgusted with the naked language of some of the most interesting passions of men, because either it is indelicate, or gross, or [vul]gar, as many fine ladies could not bear certain expressions in The [Mad] Mother and the Thorn, and, as in the instance of Adam Smith, who, we [are] told, could not endure the Ballad of Clym of the Clough, because the [au]thor had not written like a gentleman.³

Wordsworth's promotion of "the language really used by men" is therefore best understood in relation to such statements as Smith's, and as the following by Addison:

since it often happens, that the most obvious Phrases, and those which are used in ordinary Conversation, become too familiar to the Ear, and contract a kind of Meanness by passing through the Mouths of the Vulgar, a Poet should take particular care to guard himself against Idiomatick ways of speaking.⁴

The point that Wordsworth makes in the letter to Wilson is that the educated gentlemen to whom the urbane Augustans appealed, and whose

1 In the letter to William Wilberforce of January, 1801, composed on Wordsworth's behalf and accompanying a copy of the Lyrical Ballads (1800); see Coleridge Letters, II, 666.

2 Coleridge Notebooks, I, 775. In an article in the European Magazine, XX (August, 1791), pp.133-136, "A", from Glasgow, recalls Adam Smith's saying that "'It is the duty of a poet to write like a gentleman. I dislike that homely style which some think fit to call the language of nature and simplicity, and so forth. In Percy's Reliques too, a few tolerable pieces are buried under a heap of rubbish'" (p.135); small wonder that Coleridge and Wordsworth remembered this. I am indebted for this quotation to Kathleen Coburn, Coleridge Notebooks, I, 775 note.

3 [7 June, 1802], Wordsworth Letters, I, 354-5.

4 The Spectator, no. 285, Saturday, January 26, 1712, The Spectator, edited by Donald F. Bond, in 5 vols (Oxford, 1965), III, 10.

language they sought to imitate, are by no means representative of humanity.¹ They may constitute the reading public, the public that pays for "books of half a guinea price, hot-pressed, and printed upon superfine paper",² but to Wordsworth this was a social and economic distinction and not a critical distinction. In the Prelude he recalls his discovery of

How books mislead us - looking for their fame
To judgments of the wealthy few, who see
By artificial lights - how they debase
The many for the pleasure of those few,
...flattering thus our self-conceit
With pictures that ambitiously set forth
The differences, the outside marks by which
Society has parted man from man,
Neglectful of the universal heart.³

Coleridge's early conclusions on class distinction were, but for the vehemence and occasional hysteria with which they were expressed, identical to Wordsworth's. "I dislike fine furniture, handsome cloathes, & all the ordinary symbols & appendages of artificial superiority - or what is called, Gentility" he wrote to his wife, Sara.⁴ On the status of 'the Gentleman' he was more contemptuous:

with th[e] young men at Oxford & Cambridge 'the Gentleman[' is] the all-implying Word of Honour - a thing more blasting to real Virtue, real Utility, real Standing forth for the Truth in Christ, than all the Whoredoms & Impurities which this Gentlemanliness does most generally bring with it.⁵

Coleridge's related comments in the 1790s on the corruption of art

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- 1 Compare Carl Woodring on the Preface: "Without specific political argument, Wordsworth tries to communicate a version of the democratic in his distinction between a people of natural growth and a public of artificial subservience", Wordsworth (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p.22.
 - 2 To quote the letter to Wilson, Wordsworth Letters, I, 355.
 - 3 The Prelude (1805), XII, 207-210, 215-219, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.448.
 - 4 [13 November, 1802], Coleridge Letters, II, 881.
 - 5 In a letter to John Prior Estlin, 1 March, [1800], Coleridge Letters, I, 577.

by elitism are concerned more directly with the "Loath'd Aristocracy"¹ than are Wordsworth's. Three poems reflect his antipathy towards the sort of artificial world of aristocratic culture and patronage which was seen adversely to influence the language of poetry. "Ode to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire" is a trite poem which expresses Coleridge's surprise that a member of the aristocracy could have any sensitivity when "many a bright obtrusive form of art" had "Detained [her] eye from Nature".² "To a Young Ass" confronts the world of 'high culture' more directly. In that poem Coleridge states his preference for the "dissonant harsh bray" of the ass over

Handel's softest airs that soothe to rest
The tumult of a scoundrel Monarch's Breast³

Coleridge's fullest statement occurs in "Lines Composed in a Concert-Room", a poem that exploits the contrast between the stifling atmosphere of the polite soirée, and the freedom and health of an evening outside, in a way that anticipates his own "The Nightingale" and Wordsworth's The Prelude:

Nor cold, nor stern, my soul! yet I detest
These scented Rooms, where, to a gaudy throng,
Heaves the proud Harlot her distended breast,
In intricacies of laborious song.

These feel not Music's genuine power, nor deign
To melt at Nature's passion-warbled plaint;
But when the long-breathed singer's uptrilled strain
Bursts in a squall - they gape for wonderment.

1 The phrase occurs in Coleridge's "Perspiration. A Travelling Eclogue" (l.2), Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 56.

2 ll.13, 14, Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 335-338 (p.336).

3 I am quoting from the earliest, MS. version (October, 1794), ll.34, 35-36; Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 74-76 (p.76 and apparatus criticus).

Hark! the deep buzz of Vanity and Hate!
 Scornful, yet envious, with self-torturing sneer
 My lady eyes some maid of humbler state,
 While the pert Captain, or the primmer Priest,
 Prattles accordant scandal in her ear.

O give me, from this heartless scene released,
 To hear our old Musician, blind and grey...
 By moonshine, on the balmy summer-night,
 The while I dance amid the tedded hay
 With merry maids, whose ringlets toss in light.

Or lies the purple evening on the bay
 Of the calm glossy lake, O let me hide
 Unheard, unseen, behind the alder-trees,
 For round their roots the fisher's boat is tied,
 On whose trim seat doth Edmund stretch at ease,
 And while the lazy boat sways to and fro,
 Breathes in his flute sad airs, so wild and slow,
 That his own cheek is wet with quiet tears.¹

For an overview of this reaction against aristocratic culture it is best to look to Francis Jeffrey, whose historical awareness made him sensitive to the wider implications of the criticism of the false distinctions of poetic diction. Impatience with the radical disproportion between inner worth and outward show that was the focus of criticism, was a reflection of the changing temper of the times and of a more general impatience with the dogma of the eighteenth century. "The end of our refinements", wrote Jeffrey in 1815,

has been to disabuse us of many mistakes, and cure us of many affectations - to make smart talking and pretensions to wit and vivacity rather vulgar accomplishments, and to restore our original English taste for honest, manly good sense, and something of a cold and contemptuous severity of judgment. Artificial spirits, and mere frivolous glitter, we believe, were never so little in request among us. Aristocratic distinctions too, have been robbed of much of their importance, by the growing claims of opulence and respectability; - and talents can no longer command general admiration, but by their union with some degree of integrity and moral worth.²

1 11.1-15, 18-28, Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 324-325 (pp.324-325).

2 In a review of the anonymous Paradise of Coquettes, ER XXIV, no. 48 (February, 1815), article VIII, pp.397-412 (pp.398-9).

The Puritan spirit of the argument is as apparent as the republican. The sophistication of Augustan verse is often criticized in terms similar to those of the Puritan vilification of Babylon, "the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: / With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication".¹ Besides hierarchy, the unjustified mystery, the lavish waste, and the idolatry that contemporary non-conformist critics like Coleridge found in the Churches both of Rome and England, are all characteristic of poetic diction.² Most relevant is the motif of idolatry, for it parallels the substitution of words for things that Wordsworth and Coleridge attacked in corrupt diction.³ What is implicitly condemned in the second Commandment - "Thou shalt not make thee any graven image"⁴ - and in the Puritan demand for its literal observance, is the barrier set up by the image between the individual and God. The religious medium, that is, distracts by claiming attention for its own sake. The dissolution of this medium to reveal Nature unadulterated, Coleridge describes in the apocalyptic third sonnet of the "Sonnets on Eminent Characters", the sonnet to Priestley:

RELIGION at his strong behest
Starts with mild anger from the Papal spell,
And flings to earth her tinsel-glittering vest,

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- 1 Revelation 17. 1-2. Dislike of social hierarchy of course went hand in hand with a dislike of hierarchy and power within the established church; see Coleridge's note to line 320 of Religious Musings (1797) - line 322 of the 1803 version: "I am convinced that the Babylon of the Apocalypse does not apply to Rome exclusively; but to the union of Religion with Power and Wealth, wherever it is found", Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 121.
 - 2 As in most things, Coleridge singles out the French: "France is my Babylon, the Mother of Whoredoms in Morality, Philosophy, Taste", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2598.
 - 3 For Coleridge on idolatry, see his early lectures on Revealed Religion in Lectures 1795 (CC), especially lecture 2, pp.139-142; and lecture 5, pp.201-202.
 - 4 Deuteronomy 5. 8 (Exodus 20. 4).

Her mitred State and cumbrous Pomp unholy;
 And JUSTICE wakes to bid th'Oppressor wail
 Insulting aye the wrongs of patient Folly;
 And from her dark retreat by Wisdom won
 Meek NATURE slowly lifts her matron veil
 To smile with fondness on her gazing Son!¹

The distractions of poetic diction, another "tinsel-glittering vest", struck Wordsworth and Coleridge as possessed of precisely this idolatrous opaqueness.² The association of idolatry with sensuality links it metaphorically to a sensuous, meretricious, and superficial language that reflected only the vanity of the poet and reader in its 'marks of admiration', and prevented the direct apprehension of superior reality.³ Poetic diction is comparable to, and embodies, the spurious 'truths' of those ruled by the "dead letter". These truths are, according to Wordsworth,

but a block
 Or waxen image which yourselves have made,
 And ye adore.⁴

Coleridge was as fully aware of the religious significance of this inversion of values as he was of the other far-reaching ramifications of the action and reaction of "language and the human mind":

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- 1 Lines 6-14, Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 81-2 (pp.81-2).
 - 2 The sonnet to Priestley, needless to say, is marred by its own poetic diction, especially by a very eighteenth-century use of personification of the kind singled out for abuse in the Preface (1802), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 131.
 - 3 Even the neo-Classicist Joshua Reynolds withheld the highest praise from "him who, by the help of meretricious ornaments, however elegant and graceful, captivates the sensuality...of our taste", Discourse VII, Discourses on Art, edited by Robert R. Wark, revised edition (London and New Haven, 1975), p.129.
 - 4 Prelude (1805), VIII, ll.432, 434-436, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.288. The Pauline distinction between the letter and the spirit is crucial to Wordsworth's beliefs about language; like Paul, Wordsworth saw himself as the minister of a "new testament; not of the letter...for the letter killeth", II. Corinthians 3. 6.

When the material forms or intellectual ideas which should be employed to [rep]resent the internal state of feeling, are made to claim attention for their own sake, then commences Lip-worship, or superstition, or disputatiousness, in religion; a passion for gaudy ornament & violent stimulants in morals; & in our literature bombast and vicious refinements¹

IV

The language of "low and rustic life" was chosen as the best practical exemplar of this pure language.² As Wordsworth was to observe later in the Prelude,

the rural ways
And manners which it was my chance to see
In childhood were severe and unadorned,
The unluxuriant produce of a life
Intent on little but substantial needs,
Yet beautiful - and beauty that was felt.³

The language of such a disciplined life, therefore, satisfied the criteria developed in the Preface, by not being decadent in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's terms - not urban, effeminate, or elitist; "from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the action of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions".⁴ The eighteenth-

1 In his letter to Wilberforce of January, 1801, Coleridge Letters, II, 666 (the "violent stimulants in morals" echoes the "violent stimulants" of the drama attacked in the Preface, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 128). On 7 December, 1802, in a passion against anthropomorphism, Coleridge wrote to John Prior Estlin that the "tendency to Idolatry seems to me to lie at the root of all our human Vices - it is our Original Sin", Coleridge Letters, II, 893. Little wonder that he planned an analysis "OF IDOLATRY philosophically investigated", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2103.

2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124.

3 Prelude (1805), VIII, ll.205-210, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.278.

4 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124.

century primitivists and their disciples had been content to rest with a theoretical lingua communis, sensible enough not to identify this too closely with any particular social group. In Wordsworth's tendentious choice of "low and rustic life" lies the source of the "long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction".¹ Contemporary readers could not have been insensible to the challenge in the word "low". "Low" words, or "words used commonly upon low and trivial occasions",² were precisely those censured by the Augustan critics. The later "humble", which Wordsworth substituted in 1832, looks pious and apologetic in comparison.³ Nor could his readers have been insensible to Wordsworth's dubbing this "the real language of men".⁴ They were being told that their own life and language was an elaborate fiction.

Yet if this rustic language is a political and literary challenge, it is also a metaphor for a language of more pristine integrity than one of mere good sense, or chronological and social primitivism, or moral and social righteousness. An understanding of this begins at the probable source, in Hartley's Observations on Man, of the phrase "philosophical language" that Wordsworth uses to describe the language of the rustic⁵:

1 Biographia Literaria, I, 1.

2 The phrase is Johnson's, from the "Life of Cowley", Lives of the Poets, I, 59. Compare Blair: "The Sublime, indeed, rejects mean, low, and trivial expressions", Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 96.

3 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 125 and note.

4 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 118.

5 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124. Compare The Prelude (1805), I, 11.230-233: "I yearn towards some philosophic song / Of truth that cherishes our daily life, / With meditations passionate from deep / Recesses in man's heart" - Wordsworth The Prelude, p.40. For the subsequent differences between Wordsworth and Coleridge over the notion of a "philosophic" poem, see below, p.118, note 1.

If we suppose Mankind possessed of such a Language, as that they could at Pleasure denote all their Conceptions adequately, i.e. without any Deficiency, Superfluity, or Equivocation; if, moreover, this Language depended upon a few Principles assumed, not arbitrarily, but because they were the shortest and best possible...this Language might be termed a philosophical one¹

Essential to all Hartley's theorizing are the belief in the return of an earthly paradise and, as an Optimist, the related supposition that all association contains a preponderance of pleasure that is driving mankind towards this millenium.² It is significant that in Wordsworth's Preface all poetry is said to contain a similar "overbalance".³ "Association", Hartley argued, "has a Tendency to reduce the State of those who have eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, back again to a paradisiacal one".⁴ In the meantime, he continued, until this language can be achieved, "where the Writer endeavours to express himself with Plainness, Sincerity, and Precision, being first duly qualified by the Knowledge of his Subject" (the demands common to the antagonists of poetic diction) "and the Reader pays a due Regard to him, as his Teacher...the ill Effects of the Confusion of Tongues become evanescent".⁵

1 David Hartley, Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations, 2 vols (London, 1749), I, 315.

2 Hartley believed that "the Motions which are previous and subservient to the obtaining of Pleasure, and the Removal of Pain, will be much more frequent, from the very Instant of Birth, than those which occasion Pain", and that since "God is the Source of all Good, and consequently must at last appear to be so, i.e. be associated with all our Pleasures, it seems to follow...that the Idea of God, and of the Ways by which his Goodness and Happiness are made manifest, must, at last, take place of, and absorb all other Ideas, and He himself become, according to the Language of the Scriptures, All in All", Observations on Man, I, 112, 114.

3 "The end of Poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure", Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 146.

4 Observations on Man, I, 83.

5 Observations on Man, I, 317-318.

Thus for Hartley this "philosophical language", and both lost and attainable human perfection, were co-extensive; it had been the language of Eden - "it is no improbable Supposition, that the Language given by God to Adam and Eve, before the Fall, was of this Kind"¹ - and it would signal the advent of the final paradise: "Was human Life perfect, our Happiness in it would be properly represented by that accurate Knowledge of Things which a truly philosophical Language would give us".² Wordsworth chose the language of rustic life because it approximated to, and represented, this paradisaical ideal in which all "Conceptions" are denoted "adequately", in which word and object come together in a way that radically differed from the 'licentious' poetry of the eighteenth century.³

In Hartley's system, moreover, the development of language towards this sublime coincidence was analogous to human perfectibility:

since our imperfect Languages improve, purify, and correct themselves perpetually by themselves, and by other Means, so that we may hope at last to obtain a Language, which shall be an adequate Representation of Ideas, and a pure Channel of Conveyance for Truth alone, Analogy seems to suggest, that the Mixture of Pleasures and Pains, which we now experience, will gradually tend to a Collection of pure Pleasures only.⁴

And not only did it prophesy and would it reflect perfection, it also actively fostered perfection: "the Use of Words...is the principal Means by which we make intellectual and moral Improvements".⁵ Hartley argued that having a language adequate to the expression of that which is

1 Observations on Man, I, 316.

2 Observations on Man, I, 320.

3 Compare Abrams, who argues that Wordsworth cancels the traditional "distinction between matter and ornament, by substituting an integral for the old differential analogues of style", in his article "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Diction and Figures", p.178.

4 Observations on Man, I, 320-321.

5 Observations on Man, I, 287.

apprehended, a "sincere" language that was also adequately understood by a hearer, would be like having new senses encouraging and sharing new perceptions.¹ It is this idea, that such a language is an agent of millennial progress, that lies behind the Preface.² Thus not only is the rustic language held up as exemplary but, through the ministrations of right-minded poets, a language imitative of it could aid in the rectification of man's relationship with nature.³ This was Wordsworth's paradise.

It is evident from that portion of Home at Grasmere almost certainly composed in the spring of 1800,⁴ just before the composition of the Preface, that paradise was not the historical phenomenon for Wordsworth that it was for Hartley. On returning to the Lake District Wordsworth felt that he and Dorothy

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- 1 "And if we suppose a Number of Persons thus making a Progress in pure unmixed Happiness, and capable both of expressing their own Feelings, and of understanding those of others, by means of a perfect and adequate Language, they might be like new Senses and Powers of Perception to each other, and both give to and receive from each other Happiness indefinitely", Observations on Man, I, 320.
 - 2 On Wordsworth's later, qualified millenarianism see his "Reply to 'Mathetes'": "let us allow and believe that there is a progress in the Species towards unattainable perfection, or whether this be so or not, that it is a necessity of a good and greatly gifted Nature to believe it", Wordsworth Prose Works, II, 11.
 - 3 Jeffrey has much to say on this sort of ambitiousness on the part of the poet in his review of Southey's The Curse of Kehama: "It is this miserable trick of overrating the importance of all our conceptions, that has made our recent literature so intolerably diffuse and voluminous....we must have long speculative introductions...practical inferences - historical deductions - and predictions as to the effect of our doctrines, or the neglect of them, on the fate of men, and of the universe, in all time coming", ER XVII, no. 34 (February, 1811), article XI, pp.429-465 (p.436).
 - 4 See Beth Darlington's introduction to her edition of Home at Grasmere (Cornell). Scholars are agreed that the first 468 lines were probably composed in 1800. For the arguments about the subsequent 500-odd lines, compare Darlington's introduction with Jonathan Wordsworth, "On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life", Review of English Studies, new series, XXXI, no. 121 (February, 1980), pp.17-29.

Might even thus early for [themselves] secure...
 A portion of that blessedness which love
 And knowledge will...hereafter give
 To all the Vales of earth and all mankind.¹

Here, as elsewhere in Home at Grasmere, the allusions to a recovered paradise are obvious. As the gratification of intense and prolonged desire, Wordsworth's and his sister's paradise is a superior Eden that fulfils not only necessities, but hopes as well.² From the "Prospectus to the Recluse", probably the product of the same period,³ we gain an even more accurate idea of this re-defined paradise to which, as to Milton's far happier paradise within,⁴ all have immediate access:

Paradise and groves
 Elysian, fortunate islands, fields like those of old
 In the deep ocean - wherefore should they be
 A History, or but a dream, when minds
 Once wedded to the outward frame of things
 In love, find these the growth of common day?⁵

This 'marriage' of mind and nature is the philosophical development of what was discussed above as the insistence, in the Preface and elsewhere, that the poet's eye be kept firmly on its object. But the allusion here to a spiritual union of mind and nature goes way beyond the familiarity with the external world that was necessary for descriptive accuracy. The profounder consonance of word and object suggested by the image of legitimacy and consecration is in obvious metaphorical contrast to the

1 MS. B, 11.252, 254-6, Home at Grasmere (Cornell), p.52.

2 MS. B., 11.122-128, Home at Grasmere (Cornell), p.44.

3 See Darlington's introduction, Home at Grasmere (Cornell), pp.19-22. The "Prospectus" is, of course, the tailpiece of Home at Grasmere; lines 1002-1014 on the marriage of mind and nature, to which I refer below, are a later inclusion (see Home at Grasmere (Cornell), pp.21-22).

4 "A paradise within thee, happier farr", Paradise Lost, XII, 1.587, The Works of John Milton, edited by Frank Allen Patterson et al., in 18 vols (New York, 1931-1938), II, Part II, p.399.

5 MS. B., 11.996-1001, Home at Grasmere (Cornell), p.102.

meretricious use of poetic diction, the product of a mind in only promiscuous relation with nature. In keeping with the metaphor, the Preface opposes "the real language of men" to "adulterated phraseology",¹ and the 1805 Prelude describes Fancy as an "adulterated Power".²

The early version of the Prelude, however, is more helpful towards an understanding of Wordsworth's paradise and of its language. Here he looks back to a childhood when the "collateral objects and appearances" of nature "impressed" the poet's mind.³ The association of prelapsarian innocence with rural life was hardly new, nor was the idea of nature exerting a "beneficent influence".⁴ But the origins of Wordsworth's belief in the salutary power of the Nature's "forms, or beautiful or grand"⁵ lay not in Biblical history, in the Classical Golden Age, or in the primitivist aesthetics of the eighteenth century, but in his own childhood, however obvious it is from the Preface that he found in the primitivist aesthetics a support and a vocabulary.⁶ Wordsworth's theory of language expresses his encompassing theory of mind and nature. Just as the perfect language in Hartley's system was the inevitable result, and analogue, of reconstituted paradise, so the Preface treats rustic language as the spontaneous effusion of men whose passions "are

1 See the Appendix to the Preface (1802), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 161.

2 Book VIII, l.592, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.296.

3 "Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep / Until maturer seasons called them forth / To impregnate and to elevate the mind", Part I, ll.422, 423, 424-426, The Prelude 1798-1799 (Cornell), p.53.

4 The phrase is Wordsworth's - see The Prelude (1805), XI, 278, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.430.

5 The Prelude (1799), I, l.378, The Prelude 1798-1799 (Cornell), p.52.

6 For the similarity between the views of Wordsworth and of the eighteenth-century primitivists on the relationship between nature and the elementary feelings see Owen's commentary, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 167-168 (note to ll.90-107).

incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature".¹ They speak as they feel because they feel as they should.

In his faith in the rustic, Wordsworth generalizes from his own experience, the pantheistic exemplum of which is in the 1799 Prelude:

Ah! not in vain ye Beings of the hills!
And ye that walk the woods and open heaths
By moon or star-light, thus from my first dawn
Of childhood did ye love to intertwine
The passions that build up our human soul,
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man
But with high objects, with eternal things,
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying by such discipline
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.²

The precise nature of this influence is anticipated in the incomplete "Essay on Morals", where Wordsworth rejects conventional ethical argument as a means of moral amelioration because such argument fails "to melt into our affection[s], and incorporate itself with the blood & vital juices of our minds".³ It fails in the formation of those moral "habits" that the individual should obey in making moral decisions. A more detailed anatomisation of these "habits of mind" is developed in the Preface itself, where the poet explains that the unconscious influence of these habits ensures that each of the Lyrical Ballads has a "worthy

1 The Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124. Compare The Prelude (1805), II, 51-2: "the beauteous forms / Of Nature" - Wordsworth The Prelude, p.68. In The Prelude (1799) these had been "beauteous scenes" (II, 1.49), The Prelude 1798-1799 (Cornell), p.55.

2 I, 130-141, The Prelude 1798-1799 (Cornell), p.46.

3 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 103. On the relationship between this Essay, the early Prelude, and the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, and on "the familiar and central belief held by Wordsworth, that poetry as a moral force upon our habits touches the fountains or archetypes of human life more powerfully than the publications of the whole tribe of moral philosophers", see Geoffrey Little, "An Incomplete Essay upon Moral Habits", Review of English Literature, II, no. 1 (January, 1961), pp.9-20 (pp.19-20).

purpose":

our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings connected with important subjects will be nourished, till at length...such habits of mind will be produced.¹

Similarly Coleridge hailed the "disinterested Patriots" in his lectures of 1795 as "men who have encouraged the sympathetic passions till they have become irresistable habits".²

However, Wordsworth's theory of moral habits differs from that of the "Essay on Morals", and of Coleridge's early lectures, in the formative and sustaining role it attributes to nature. The relationship between the forms of nature, their perception and assimilation, and these habits - in other words, the salutary power of "those shapes sublime" in nature³ - is outlined in a fragment written in 1798 and later included in The Excursion:

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 126. W.J.B. Owen points to a relevant fragment in which Wordsworth defines the poet as "one whose habits must have needs / Been such as shall have fitted him no less / For moral greatness", MS. W. The Prelude (Oxford), p.524. See Owen's commentary in his edition of Wordsworth The Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1957), pp.163-165 (p.163). Compare also a late letter to Daniel Stuart, 7 April, 1817: "All...moral cement is dissolved, habits and prejudices are broken and rooted up; nothing being substituted in their place but a quickened selfinterest", Wordsworth Letters, III, 376. Here the debt to Burke is obvious - compare, for example, Burke on "prejudice", "which renders a man's virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature", in Reflections on the Revolution in France, The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, published by George Bell and Sons (London, 1880), II, 359.

2 "A Moral and Political Lecture", Lectures 1795 (CC), p.12.

3 Prelude (1805), III, 102, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.96.

By
 [?by] contemplating these forms
 In the relations which they bear to man
 ...We shall acquire
 The [] habit by which sense is made
 Subservient still to moral purposes
 A vital essence, & a saving power¹

Without nature, the consummate, paradisal union was doomed to fail. The social and political ramifications of divorcing men from nature by moving them into cities was "a rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society", as Wordsworth explained to Charles James Fox.² Wordsworth saw the move as cutting people off from the source of all true feelings: "passions linked to forms so fair".³ More importantly for our purposes, he saw it as cutting them off from the source of all true expression; as Stephen K. Land observes, his "reaction against the manifold linguistic abuses of his day drove Wordsworth to identify poetry with feelings rather than with their expression".⁴

Another term Wordsworth used for "habits" was "manners".⁵ To

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- 1 The Ruined Cottage MS. B., [47^r], ll.6-7, ll-14, The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (Cornell), p.263. Compare The Excursion, IV, ll.1230-1231, 1246-1249, Wordsworth Poetical Works, V, 148, 149.
 - 2 In the letter of 14 January, 1801, accompanying a complimentary copy, Wordsworth Letters, I, 313. Compare Jeffrey's review of Mrs [Anna] Grant's Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders of Scotland: "She draws a striking picture of the wretchedness and degradation which the Highlander necessarily experiences, when he is driven out of this Eden of his imagination, divorced for ever from the dwellings of his forefathers, and from all the objects, occupations and amusements, to which his habits and affections were conformed", ER XVIII, no. 36 (August, 1811), article XII, pp.480-510 (p.503; my italics).
 - 3 I am quoting Ruth, l.142, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 231.
 - 4 In his article "The Silent Poet: An Aspect of Wordsworth's Semantic Theory", p.164.
 - 5 Compare Johnson: "MANNER...[in the plural] 9. General way of life; morals; habits", A Dictionary of the English Language: in which the Words are Deduced from their Originals...by Samuel Johnson, LL.D., in 2 vols, sixth edition (London, 1785), Vol. II. I am indebted for this definition to the editors of Wordsworth The Prelude, p.36 note.

Wordsworth in 1799 "manners connected with the permanent objects of nature" were manners in the deepest sense, as he explained in a letter to Coleridge,¹ or, in the words of the Prelude, "manners erect".² It was the absence of such manners in urban writers that Wordsworth lamented in the letter. And it was manners in this sense, and their linguistic expression, that Wordsworth's Pedlar observed in his wanderings:

much did he see of men,
 Their manners, their enjoyments, and pursuits,
 Their passions, and their feelings, chiefly those
 Essential and eternal in the heart,
 Which, 'mid the simpler forms of rural life,
 Exist more simple in their elements
 And speak a plainer language.³

In the quotation from the Prelude (1799) above, the passions are described as "intertwined" with the animated forms of nature, to the ultimate purification of "the elements of feeling and of thought". Not unexpectedly, then, Wordsworth chose to imitate the language of rustics in his poetry "because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived".⁴

To call this language 'pastoral' implies a stylization of reality common to the urban, cloistered poets against whom Wordsworth reacted and for whom it required, in Johnson's words, "no acquaintance with the living world".⁵ For Wordsworth the language and ambience of which it is

1 See the letter of 27 February, [1799], Wordsworth Letters, I, 255. Compare Roger N. Murray on the "dialectic of man and nature out of which true manners evolve", in his Wordsworth's Style: Figures and Themes in the 'Lyrical Ballads' of 1800 (Lincoln, 1967), p.91.

2 "Manners erect, and frank simplicity", The Prelude (1805), IX, 1.220; Wordsworth The Prelude, p.322.

3 The Pedlar MS. E., 11.300-306, The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (Cornell), p.408.

4 Preface, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124.

5 See the "Life of Cowley", Lives of the Poets, I, 4 and see above, p.38 note 3.

a product, and which it is selected to describe, is the living world.

It is therefore pastoral in the deepest sense, and Wordsworth's poetry is pastoral poetry "of a wider range" prophesied by Blair in his Lectures.

Having established that the Pastoral was "of all Poems, the most meagre commonly in the subject", Blair continues:

I much question, however, whether this insipidity be not owing to the fault of the Poets, and to their barren and slavish imitation of the antient pastoral topics, rather than to the confined nature of the subject. For why may not Pastoral Poetry take a wider range? Human nature, and human passions, are much the same in every rank of life.... there will... be abundant scope for a careful observer of nature to exert his genius ["I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject"]. The various adventures which give occasion to those engaged in country life to display their disposition and temper ["the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation"]; the scenes of domestic felicity or disquiet [compare The Ruined Cottage]; the attachment of friends and of brothers [compare The Brothers]; the rivalship and competitions of lovers [compare The Thorn, the "Lucy" poems]; the unexpected successes or misfortunes of families [compare Michael], might give occasion to many a pleasing and tender incident.¹

Wordsworth's was a pastoral poetry which he felt, or wished urgently to feel,² had sound basis in the lives of the Cumberland statesmen. His own experience had elevated a platitude about rustic straightforwardness and elaborated it into a philosophy of language.

1 Lectures on Rhetoric, III, 127-8. The Wordsworth quotations in square brackets are from the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 132, 128. Compare Robert Heron, Journey through the Western Counties of Scotland..., 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1793), II, 349: "Pastoral Poetry needs not to employ itself upon fictitious manners and modes of life, but may, with higher poetical advantages, paint the humble virtues, the simple pleasures, the inartificial manners of our peasantry, such as they actually exist"; I am indebted for this quotation to A.A. Mendilow, "Robert Heron and Wordsworth's Critical Essays", Modern Language Review, LII, no. 3 (July, 1957), pp.329-338 (pp.330-331).

2 See below, pp.101-102.

The identification of poetry with feeling is, however, only one of a series of identifications implicit and explicit in Wordsworth's early poetry and theory. It is more than feeling which distinguishes his idea of poetic language from the universal language described by Johnson in Shakespeare's comic characters:

If there be, what I believe there is, in every nation,
a stile which never becomes obsolete, a certain mode
of phraseology so consonant and congenial to the
analogy and principles of its respective language as
to remain settled and unaltered; this stile is probably
to be sought in the common intercourse of life, among
those who speak only to be understood, without ambition
of elegance.¹

Wordsworth's is a transcendent language that aspires to the forms of nature themselves, and not just to the passions with which they are intertwined. His language, at least in theory, is an attempt to present these forms to the reader without, as we have seen, any interference from the artistic medium. It is an attempt to articulate

things that hold
An inarticulate language²

More precisely, it is an attempt to 'transliterate' the language of

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- 1 In the "Preface to Shakespeare, 1765", The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, VII, 70. Compare Jeffrey, in an article on de Lille, on "that universal language, by the use of which, Shakespere has found his way, from the closet of the student, into the workshops of our manufacturers, and the cottages of our peasantry", ER III (October, 1803), p.31.
 - 2 The Ruined Cottage MS. B., [46^r], ll.2-3, The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (Cornell), p.261. Compare the transcription in Coleridge's letter to his brother George, [circa 10 March, 1798], Coleridge Letters, I, 397-398, and The Excursion, IV, ll.1204-1207: "...living things, and things inanimate, / Do speak, at Heaven's command, to eye and ear, / And speak to social reason's inner sense, / With inarticulate language", Wordsworth Poetical Works, V, 147-148.

nature into the language of poetry.¹ 'Transliterate' is admittedly a clumsy word, but some such term is required to distinguish the process from the arbitrary translation of reality into poetic language of which the Augustans were guilty.

The "earth / And common face of Nature", Wordsworth recalls in the early Prelude, "spake to me / Rememberable things".² Time and again one is reminded of the propriety in calling Wordsworth's ideal language a 'language of nature', because time and again the forms he would embody in his language are identified with just that: Nature's language. John Jones is right in claiming for Wordsworth's theory "an inclusive perfection, admitting no distinction between language and not-language".³

The idea behind Wordsworth's identification of nature and poetry is the traditional one of nature as a liber creaturarum, an idea summed up by Coleridge in his lectures of 1795: "We see our God everywhere - the Universe in the most literal Sense is his written Language".⁴ Similarly, in "Frost at Midnight", Coleridge makes the well-known promise to his son Hartley:

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- 1 This aspiration is most apparent in the Preface (1800) when Wordsworth argues that, though denied the artificial aids of conventional poetry, "there is still left open to me...the entire world of nature, from which I am at liberty to supply myself with endless combinations of forms and imagery" - the forms and imagery are, it will be noted, nature's, not the poet's. Though Wordsworth retains this idea after 1832, he does not emphasise the identity of the form and image in nature with the form and image in art. See Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 144, 145.
 - 2 Part I, ll.418-420, The Prelude 1798-1799 (Cornell), p.53.
 - 3 The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination (London, 1954), p.66.
 - 4 See the first fragment of a theological lecture, Lectures 1795 (CC), p.339. Compare Coleridge Notebooks, II, 1889: "Views from Etna & such Heights are sublime / for they are a true Language". For a selection of references to "Nature as the symbolic language of God" in Coleridge, see note 3, pp.94-95 of the Lectures 1795 (CC), and for discussion see J.A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature: The Development of a Concept of Poetry 1791-1819 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), pp.46-56.

so shalt thou see and hear
 The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
 Of that eternal language, which thy God
 Utters, who from eternity doth teach
 Himself in all, and all things in himself.¹

In the "Semi-atheist" Wordsworth,² however, this traditional theory is not only wrested from its theological context but it is also given an immediacy and concreteness alien to Coleridge.. He talks familiarly in the Prelude, for example, of "those shapes sublime / Wherewith I had been conversant",³ of "sounds that are / The ghostly language of the ancient earth",⁴ and of the "strange utterance" of "the loud dry wind".⁵ Even the "face of every neighbour" that he met "Was as a volume" to him.⁶ Less equivocally, he discovers in "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"

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- 1 Lines 58-62, Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 240-242 (p.242). Mary Jacobus describes this as "a Berkeleian lesson" in her Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads' (1798) (Oxford, 1976), p.67, but it is, of course, older than Berkeley; as M.H. Abrams has said, "Wordsworth's 'speaking face of earth and heaven' is a lineal descendant of the ancient Christian concept of the liber naturae, whose symbols bespeak the attributes and intentions of its author", Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (London, 1971), p.88; in this light, compare the twelfth-century writer, Hugh of St Victor: "Universus enim mundus iste sensibilis quasi quidam liber est scriptus digito Dei" ["For this whole visible world is a book written by the finger of God"], in Eruditionis Didascalicae, liber septimus, cap. IV, Patrologiae Cursus Completus, second series, edited by J.-P. Migne, in 221 vols, Vol. CLXXVI, Hagonis de S. Victore...Opera Omnia (Paris, 1854), p.841. (I use the translation of C.S. Singleton as quoted in Gabriel Josipovici, The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction, second edition (London, 1979), p.29 to which I am indebted for this quotation.)
 - 2 Coleridge wrote of Wordsworth in a letter to John Thelwall of 13 May, 1796, that "this man is a Republican & at least a Semi-atheist", Coleridge Letters, I, 216.
 - 3 The Prelude (1805), III, ll.102-3, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.96.
 - 4 The Prelude (1799), Part 2, ll.357-358, The Prelude 1798-1799 (Cornell), p.63.
 - 5 The Prelude (1799), Part 1, l.64, The Prelude 1798-1799 (Cornell), p.44.
 - 6 The Prelude (1805), IV, ll.58-59, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.128.

In nature and the language of the sense
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.¹

The list of allusions to nature's language could be extended indefinitely. The unique Wordsworthian blend of experiential immediacy with philosophical significance behind this idea, and of the sensual with the super-sensual, is perhaps best exemplified by the following passage from The Pedlar:

The clouds were touch'd,
 And in their silent faces did he read
 Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
 Nor any voice of joy: his spirit drank
 The spectacle. Sensation, soul, and form
 All melted into him²

The idea of the liber creaturarum itself; the quasi-religious "touch'd"; the paradox of reading the unutterable; the sensual verb "drank" to describe spiritual apprehension - all contribute to the power of this passage, itself an attempt to express the "unutterable". It is into this final unity of "Sensation, soul, and form" that Wordsworth hoped language would also "melt". In a fragment from the Peter Bell MS., Wordsworth makes quite explicit the identification of poetry and transcendent form, and the potentially formative powers of a truly natural poetic language, when he refers to

that considerate and laborious work,
 That patience which, admitting no neglect,
 [?By] slow creation doth impart to speech
 Outline and substance, even till it has given
 A function kindred to organic power -
 The vital spirit of a perfect form.³

1 Lines 108-111, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 259-263 (p.262).

2 MS. E 11.194-199, The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (Cornell), p.398.

3 Fragment (b) of Wordsworth The Prelude, p.495.

In other words, the "outline" of this language would have an influence on the mind of the reader identical to that of the "mountain's outline" on the mind of the Pedlar, which, with

its study form
Gave simple grandeur, & its presence shaped
The measure & the prospect of his soul
To majesty, such virtue had the forms
Perennial of the ancient hills; nor less
The changeful language of their countenance
Gave movement to his thoughts & multitude
With order & relation¹

In consonance with nature, then, "that is...eternal nature", as Wordsworth wrote to John Wilson, the poet "ought to a certain degree to rectify men's feelings...to render their feelings more sane pure and permanent".² What better way than to have his language dissolve before "the speaking face of earth and heaven" and have the poem become, in its influence on the feelings and hence habits, one of those "things that teach as Nature teaches"?³ That the language of "low and rustic life" was believed to share this "power like one of Nature's"⁴ is apparent from a passage sent to Poole on 9 April, [1801], for insertion into his copy of Michael, though never included in any printed text. It describes the fireside conversation of Michael's exemplary family:

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- 1 Addition to MS. D. of The Ruined Cottage, [56^v], ll.24-27 and [57^r], ll.1-4; The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (Cornell), p.372. Compare The Prelude (1805), VII, ll.722-730, Wordsworth The Prelude, pp.264, 266. W.J.B. Owen obviously had this passage in mind when he argued that "the attempt to define a permanent rhetoric is for Wordsworth a means of aligning poetry with nature, of giving it, as far as possible, a form as 'steady' and as 'perennial' as that of the mountain", Wordsworth as Critic, p.5.
 - 2 In the letter of [7 June, 1802]; Wordsworth Letters, I, 355.
 - 3 The Prelude (1805), V, ll.12, 231 (my italics), Wordsworth The Prelude, pp.152, 162.
 - 4 The Prelude (1805), XII, l.312, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.452.

Yet there were times in which they did not want
 Discourse both wise and pleasant, shrewd remarks
 Of daily prudence, cloth'd in images
 Lively and beautiful, in rural forms
 That made their conversation fresh and fair
 As is a landscape¹

To borrow a phrase from The Excursion, this is "the poetry of common speech".²

A later, more diffident rhetorical question of Wordsworth's in Home at Grasmere appropriately equates this language, through metaphor, with one specific natural phenomenon - a stream:

Is there not
 An art, a music, and a stream of words
 That shall be life, the acknowledged voice of life?
 Shall speak of what is done among the fields,
 Done truly there, or felt, of solid good
 And real evil, yet be sweet withal,
 More grateful, more harmonious than the breath,
 The idle breath of sweetest pipe attuned
 To pastoral fancies? Is there such a stream,
 Pure and unsullied, flowing from the heart
 With motions of true dignity and grace,
 Or must we seek these things where man is not?³

The analogy of the stream, with the common metaphorical association of music, perfectly captures the yearning after a meta-language that will resist analysis, yet be perfectly expressive. To adapt the notorious lines of Archibald MacLeish, it will be a form of communication that does not mean, but is.⁴ Its aspiration to the condition of music anticipates

1 Wordsworth Letters, I, 324.

2 The Excursion, V, l.392, Wordsworth Poetical Works, V, 166.

3 MS. B., ll.620-631, Home at Grasmere (Cornell), p.76. Helen Darbishire drew attention to this crucial passage in her The Poet Wordsworth, pp.53-4.

4 "Ars Poetica", ll.23-24: "A poem should not mean / But be"; other lines are of interest in a discussion of the leech-gatherer and the poetry of nature: "A poem should be palpable and mute / ... / Silent as the sleeve-worn stone / ... / A poem should be wordless / ... / A poem should be motionless in time" (ll.1, 5, 7, 9) - see Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems 1917-1952 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1952), pp.40-41.

the aesthetic struggle of the symboliste movement, though without the urgency or despair of that movement.¹ This urgency is anticipated by Coleridge, especially in his Notebook entries. One such entry Coburn dates April, 1804:

Soother of absence. / O that I had the Language of
Music / the power of infinitely varying the expression,
& individualizing it even as it is / - My heart plays
an incessant music / for which I need an outward
Interpreter / - words halt over & over again!²

In the Home at Grasmere passage, the implicit answer to the final question is equally negative; "these things", this language, must be sought "where man is not". Yet Wordsworth seems reconciled to the alternative of silence:

Be this
A task above my skill; the silent mind
Has its own treasures, and I think of these,
Love what I see, and honour humankind.³

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- 1 See, for example, Paul Verlaine's "Art Poétique" (ll.1-4): "De la musique avant toute chose, / Et pour cela préfère l'Impair / Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air, / Sans rein en lui qui pèse ou qui pose." Œuvres poétiques, edited by Jacques Robichez (Paris, 1969), pp.261-262 (p.261). See also, Walter Pater's well known statement in "The School of Giorgione": "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other works of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form...yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it", in his The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, sixth edition (London, 1901), p.135. Compare Coleridge Notebooks, II, 3231: "What is MUSIC? - Poetry in its grand sense? Answer. Passion and order aton'd!" It also, of course, looks back to the ancient association of poetry with music; similarly, as Rosemary Harriott observes, the "comparison of flowing speech to a river is as old as Homer"- Poetry and Criticism Before Plato (London, 1969), pp.88-89.
 - 2 Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2035. Compare II, 2998: "what are Words but air? & impulses of air? O who has deeply felt, deeply, deeply! & not fretted & grown impatient at the inadequacy <of Words to Feeling,> of the symbol to the Being? - ...O what then are Words, but articulated Sighs of a Prisoner heard from his Dungeon! powerful only as they express their utter impotence!"
 - 3 Home at Grasmere MS. B., ll.642-645, Home at Grasmere (Cornell), p.78. As in Samuel Beckett, and indeed most Romantic and post-Romantic writers, so in Wordsworth, "the language itself makes a continued act of defiance"; however, as Bernard Bergonzi also says of Beckett, "seldom can a movement towards silence and non-being have been so talkatively expressed", The Situation of the Novel, second edition (London, 1979), p.40.

Whatever possibilities are suggested or denied in this digression in Home at Grasmere it is, appropriately, Wordsworth's finest expression of the finest expression theoretically available to the poet. It is a paradisaal language that he hopes will present to the reader the love of a woman for her dead husband, a scene from low and rustic life, "the still, sad music of humanity".¹

In insisting on the superiority of this language to the "idle breath" of the pastoral pipe, Wordsworth insists that it must transcend literature in the limiting, self-contained sense. It aspires, rather, to reproduce "the pure breath of real life", the effects of which Wordsworth discusses in The Prelude:

By simple strains
Of feeling, the pure breath of real life,
We were not left untouched. With such a book
Before our eyes we could not chuse but read
A frequent lesson of sound tenderness,
The universal reason of mankind,
The truth of young and old.²

This language will be the identification of art and the forms of nature in a state of 'higher innocence', able to comprehend "real evil" - opposed, no doubt, to the artificial vice of urban society - in much the same way that in "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" the poet's love of nature is said to have progressed beyond thoughtless youth to encompass the inevitable pain of existence.

The regenerative powers traditionally attributed to music and to nature explain their association in the poetry, as Coleridge's early poem "The Dungeon" makes apparent:

1 "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey", 1.91 (my italics), Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 261.

2 The Prelude (1805), VI, 11.471-477, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.214.

With other ministrations thou, O Nature!
 Healest thy wandering and distemper'd child:
 Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,
 Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets,
 Thy melodies of woods, and winds, and waters,
 Till he relent, and can no more endure
 To be a jarring and a dissonant thing,
 Amid this general dance and minstrelsy;
 But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,
 His angry spirit heal'd and harmoniz'd
 By the benignant touch of Love and Beauty.¹

A similar association is consistently invoked throughout Wordsworth's poetry. Indeed it is surprising how often nature is actually identified with music in crucial passages. No better example could be found than the opening of the 1799 Prelude:

Was it for this
 That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
 To blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song,
 And from his alder shades, and rocky falls,
 And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
 That flowed along my dreams? For this didst thou
 O Derwent, travelling over the green plains
 Near my "sweet birth-place," didst thou beauteous Stream
 Make ceaseless music through the night and day,
 Which with its steady cadence tempering
 Our human waywardness, composed my thoughts
 To more than infant softness, giving me,
 Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,
 A knowledge, a dim earnest of the calm
 Which Nature breathes among the fields and groves?²

The movement from nature and the forms of nature to music in Wordsworth's poetry seems almost instinctive.³ In the "Lines Composed a Few Miles

1 Lines 20-30 (my italics), Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 185. Compare Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1505: "Ode to Music - the thought I lost was that perhaps Music bringing me back to primary Feelings did really make moral regeneration".

2 Part I, ll.1-15. The human mind becomes identified with this harmonious influence: "The mind of man is fashioned and built up / Even as a strain of music", Part I, ll.67-68. See The Prelude 1798-1799 (Cornell), pp.43, 44.

3 The same idea survives in the more self-conscious analogizing of the later poems; see, for example, "Airey-Force Valley" (composed 1835): "the light ash! that, pendent from the brow / Of yon dim cave, in seeming silence makes / A soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs, / Powerful almost as vocal harmony / To stay the wanderer's steps and soothe his thoughts", ll.12-16, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 209.

above Tintern Abbey", for example, the poet looks forward to the time when Dorothy's

mind
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
 Thy memory be as a dwelling-place¹
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies¹

The movement is emphasised if we regard the famous line on the "music of humanity" in its context, where the subtle transition from sight to hearing - away from the despotic eye, the basest of the senses - reflects the general refinement of the poet's sensibility and the corresponding movement in the poem from the natural to the supernatural:

I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity,
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
 To chasten and subdue.²

When in the 1805 Prelude the poet addresses Nature directly, the identification and aspiration are unmistakable:

Oh! that I had a music and a voice
 Harmonious as your own, that I might tell
 What ye have done for me.³

In the poem Resolution and Independence, Wordsworth also likens speech, this time of the leech-gatherer, to a stream:

The old Man still stood talking by my side;
 But now his voice to me was like a stream
 Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;

1 Lines 139-142, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 263.

2 Lines 88-93, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 261.

3 XI, 11.20-22. The whole passage (XI, 9-22) should be consulted, combining as it does the central images of The Prelude of breath, breeze, stream, and music and culminating in this aspiration to reproduce the beneficent influence of nature, which all of these symbolize; Wordsworth The Prelude, p.416.

And the whole body of the Man did seem
 Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
 Or like a man from some far region sent,
 To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.¹

It is a stanza in which both languages converge, relating what the character says and what he is, the part he plays in both the poet's and nature's formative language. The poet does not attend to the leech-gatherer's speech as he would to normal speech; that he "scarce heard" this language is suggestive. It communicates subliminally, we would say, but that is not all. The leech-gatherer's speech becomes subservient to his "whole body", 'incorporated' in a higher language. Here the utterance is inseparable from the utterer. It is the poet's, and thence the reader's, total experience of the old man that is important: not what he had to say, but the quality of that voice, the firmness of the mind, and their relationship with the ancient body. They "moveth all together" if they move at all.²

In the earlier version of the poem the poet's apprehension is of an intractable reality, the man "presented in the most naked simplicity possible", for the leech-gatherer simply "was".³ It is an attribute shared by the animate and the inanimate. In his agelessness and simplicity he is likened, even elevated, to a natural object:

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
 Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
 Wonder to all who do the same espy,
 By what means it could thither come, and whence;
 So that it seems a thing endued with sense:

1 Lines 106-112, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 235-240 (p.239).

2 See line 77, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 237.

3 "'A lonely place, a Pond' 'by which an old man was, far from all house or home' - not stood, not sat, but 'was'" - see the letter to Mary and Sara Hutchinson of 14 June, [1802], Wordsworth Letters, I, 366.

Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposes, there to sun itself;

Such seemed this Man¹

Coleridge describes a similar phenomenon in his Notebooks: "The rocks and Stones ~~seemed-to-live~~ put on a vital semblance; and Life itself thereby seemed to forego its restlessness, to anticipate in its own nature an infinite repose, and to become, as it were, compatible with Immoveability".² In the case of the leech-gatherer, we can see his gradual metamorphosis taking place in the mind of the poet as the leech-gatherer himself comes in and out of focus. He becomes in the poem, through life, one of the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.³

So it is that elsewhere Wordsworth's characters are themselves the language of nature, rather than the speakers of it. They are the language which nature utters and which the poet aims to re-present, with no interference from the medium, for the responsive reader to heed or assimilate as he does the forms of nature outside poetry. Early, in the "Essay on Morals", Wordsworth had disparaged those

series of propositions, which, presenting no image to the [?mind] can convey no feeling which has any connection with the supposed archetype or fountain of the proposition existing in human life⁴

1 Lines 57-64, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 237.

2 Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1189.

3 For an excellent, if slightly cryptic, analysis of this crucial Wordsworth poem, see Hugh Kenner: "when a sensibility has grown attuned, as had Wordsworth's, to the domain of quiet objects (no motion have they now, no force), then a man may seem like a huge stone, or like a sea-beast, or like a cloud, and when he commences to speak our first awareness will be physiological...and our next stylistic...and man and speech, between our acts of attention to his meaning, will dissolve into that unreality within the skull where phenomena are classified...The incompatibility Wordsworth had discovered between speech and people who seem to be things is the special case of some radical incompatibility between language and the silent world where things appear", The Pound Era (London, 1972), pp.25-26 (p.26).

4 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 103.

It is a demand for the moral exemplum given a more profound rationale, and deferring to a subtler working of the human mind. It is a demand for the less crudely moral poetry of the kind Wordsworth was capable of writing. The figures of the poetry, like the forms of nature to which they approximate, are 'images' connected with the "supposed archetype or fountain" of human life. As he says in The Prelude,

Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power,
The thought, the image, and the silent joy;
Words are but under-agents in their souls¹

It was perhaps with a feeling that the leech-gatherer's actual words are incongruous with his role as part of a higher language that Sara Hutchinson complained of his speech as "tedious". In his stung reply to this letter, Wordsworth seems unaware that it is precisely because of the claims that he is making for the total experience, that speech and the suggestion of self-consciousness on the leech-gatherer's part seem strangely trivializing.² Similarly Michael is more impressive when he is silent and his life and sentiments are rendered in the second person. In his inarticulate grief he is, like the silent symbol of the leech-gatherer moving through the poet's mind, and a more moving and effective figure.³

The tight-lipped discharged soldier is a further example. He is discovered appropriately enveloped in silence, his "Groans scarcely audible" akin to the voice of the leech-gatherer "Scarce heard".⁴ When

1 The Prelude (1805), XII, ll.270-272, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.450.

2 See the letter to Mary and Sara, 14 June, [1802]; Wordsworth Letters, I, 367.

3 Michael, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 80-94. Compare, for example, ll.331-417 with ll.454-472.

4 The Prelude (1805), IV, l.432, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.146.

forced to speak he is "Concise in answer".¹ But again it is conversation better retold than repeated, and Wordsworth implicitly recognises the irrelevance of speech to the figure, or form, of the soldier by making the two out of consonance:

in all he said
There was a strange half-absence, and a tone
Of weakness and indifference, as of one
Remembering the importance of his theme
But feeling it no longer.²

It is more than a patronizing aloofness that keeps these figures silent and preserves their dignity. It is crucial to their role as "things that hold / An inarticulate language".³ The Idiot Boy exemplifies this. His one speech is literally inarticulate, out of joint.⁴ With a language of nature corresponding to the powers of nature as ideal, it is little wonder that Wordsworth's major challenge to the contemporary sensibility should be a 'natural'. But while he is as a person inarticulate, in his person he is most articulate.

Edward Bostetter has suggested that "the transformation" of the discharged soldier is "from individual into abstraction",⁵ but this only confuses his inanimation with that of an allegorical figure. Abstractions abound in the poetry against which Wordsworth fought. Wordsworth's figures have the non-humanity of nature, not of abstract thought. They are designed to teach in the way Wordsworth believed nature taught, not in man's way.

1 The Prelude (1805), IV, 1.473, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.148.

2 The Prelude (1805), IV, 11.474-478, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.148.

3 See above, p.68 and note 2.

4 "'The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo, / And the sun did shine so cold!'" (11.450-451), Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 67-80 (p.80). And see the Isabella Fenwick note: "The last stanza - 'The Cocks did crow [etc]...' - was the foundation of the whole", Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 478.

5 In his The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron, revised edition (Seattle and London, 1975), p.60.

V

There are, then, two 'natural' languages outlined in the Preface and in Wordsworth's early poetry. The first is the transparent language that endeavours to represent without modification, and that became equated with the language of prose. It is symbolic in the most literal sense of the word: composed of signs that automatically invoke the object or idea for which they stand and become, in Coleridge's phrase, the "smooth market-coin of intercourse".¹ It is this that is authorized by the common sense demand that a spade be called a spade. The other language is the "essence" or "idea" of this.² It transcends art altogether by being rather than representing nature - eternal nature, of course, not accidental or perishable nature. Like the being or "Surpassing life" in the Prelude which "is, / And hath the name of, God",³ the name and the entity become one. It is the identification to which, in the Home at Grasmere fragment quoted above, we saw Wordsworth aspire. It was implicit in many of the earlier metaphors of nature's language.

Both languages are ways of mediating between mind and nature without interference from the medium, and are essentially anti-literary

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 98.

2 I use these terms as Coleridge defined them at the end of the eighteenth chapter of the Biographia: "Essence, in its primary signification, means the principle of individuation, the inmost principle of the possibility of any thing, as that particular thing. It is equivalent to the idea of a thing, when ever we use the word, idea, with philosophic precision" (II, 47).

3 The Prelude (1805), VI, 11.155, 156-7; Wordsworth The Prelude, pp.192, 194.

in their struggle to dispense with the subjective element of creativity.¹

"Symbolism", as J.F. Danby observes, "is not Wordsworth's concern.

Poetry for Wordsworth should purpose truth to life because it is life that is symbolic".²

1 In a fragment of a Shakespeare lecture Coleridge, typically, reconciled the two languages: "The sound, sun, or the figures, S, U, N, are pure arbitrary modes of recalling the object, and for visual mere objects not only sufficient, but have infinite advantages from their ve[ry no]thingness per se. But the language of nature is a subordinate Logos, that was in the beginning, and was with the thing it represented, and it was the thing represented. Now the language of Shakespeare (in his Lear, for instance), is a something intermediate, or rather it is the former blended with the latter, the arbitrary not merely recalling the cold notion of the thing, but expressing the reality of it and, as arbitrary Language is an heirloom of the human race, being itself a part of that which it manifests", Coleridge Shakespearean Criticism, I, 185.

2 The Simple Wordsworth, p.29.

Chapter Two

JEFFREY AND COLERIDGE ON WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF LANGUAGE

Philippus answered that the Macedonians were...gross,
clubbyshe and rusticall, as they had not the witte
to call a spade by any other name than a spade.

Erasmus, Apophthegms

I

In his campaign to correct contemporary taste, with its "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation",¹ Wordsworth seems to have pre-empted Francis Jeffrey. Jeffrey wrote to his cousin Miss Crockett on March 9, 1792, of similarly ambitious plans:

There is a charm in simplicity and naturality of expression, for which neither excellent sense, nor egregious sentiment, nor splendid diction, can compensate. But this simplicity, in this vile, conceited, and puerile age, it is infinitely difficult to acquire; and all our best writers since Shakespere, except the gentle Addison, and sometimes Sterne, have given up the attempt in despair, and trusted to gaudier vehicles for the conveyance of their respective reputations to the ears of posterity, and the mansion of fame; which practice, you will allow, is greatly to the prejudice of those who are taught to consider them as the models of fine writing. However, I intend in a year or two to correct the depravity of taste, and to revive the simple and the sublime in all their purity, and in all their majesty. This, you will perceive, is private and confidential.²

The allusion to Addison, however, should alert us to the different object that Jeffrey had in mind.³ The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads and the

1 Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 128, 130.

2 Life of Jeffrey, II, 9.

3 Compare Johnson, as quoted by Boswell: "'Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison'", Life of Johnson, I, 225.

various allusions to a language of nature in Wordsworth's early poetry push "simplicity and naturality" beyond anything Jeffrey or Dr Johnson would have countenanced.

It is important to recognise therefore, with W.K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, that at least "two kinds of protest against poetic diction have occurred":

that of the classicist, hostile to pedantry and affectation, appealing to polite idiom, the educated spoken word; and that of the romantic, hostile to the same things, but appealing to the primitive, the naive, the directly passionate, the natural spoken word.¹

Wordsworth's is, needless to say, an extreme case of the "romantic" position as defined here. When, on the other hand, all Jeffrey's various and sometimes contradictory comments are taken into account, his protest is that of Wimsatt's and Brooks's classicist. Many of the elements of the more radical approach are certainly discoverable in his reviews. The assumptions behind his appreciation of Cowper, for example,² and his depreciation of the Augustans and the French in the name of spontaneity and sincerity,³ all suggest the identification of poetry, if not with nature, then with emotion. On the controversial topic of rustic life, too, Jeffrey seems at times in substantial agreement. In an article on

1 In their Literary Criticism: A Short History (London, 1957), p.343. For Classical precedents, see above, p.45, note 2. It is to the "simplicity of the Greek, and of our own elder poets" that Coleridge refers in the Biographia (I, 4); in the influential William Enfield article the "perfect models of fine writing" are not "the best objects" of nature (Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124) but "the Greek poets", Monthly Magazine II (July, 1796), pp.453-456 (p.455). In Blair, as in most commentators, classicism and primitivism merged - see Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 33; II, 37.

2 See his review of William Hayley's Life...of William Cowper, Esq., ER II (April, 1803), p.81.

3 See above, p.40.

Scott's The Lady of the Lake he confesses his inability to view the life of the Scottish Highlander "without feeling, that there is no existing people so well adapted for the purposes of poetry".¹ The only difference is that, in a curiously competitive way, he substitutes "the rustics of Scotland" for "their brethren of the same condition in the South" as "far fitter subjects for poetry".²

But the "force and the freedom" Jeffrey praises in Cowper is that of "the old school of English literature".³ His standards remain literary ones. In spite of the primitive emphasis on passion and expression, Elizabethan literature is as primitive a literature as Jeffrey is prepared to admit. Moreover, for all his admiration for Cowper's "shaking off the tawdry incumbrance of that poetical diction which had nearly reduced the art to the skilful collocation of a set of appropriated phrases", he was also critical of "the unlucky introduction of expressions unquestionably too colloquial and familiar" in his poetry.⁴ It was a complaint frequent in his criticism: Joanna Baillie had "reduced the language of [her] pieces, in many places, rather too

1 ER XVI, no. 32 (August, 1810), article I, pp.263-293 (p.280). Similarly, Jeffrey argued that the success of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists was due to the fact that their "illustrations, and figures of speech, are more borrowed from rural life, and from the simple occupations, or universal feelings of mankind" than other dramatists - see the review of Weber's edition of Ford's plays, ER XVIII (August, 1811), p.285. Here, as elsewhere, one can detect the influence of Wordsworth. See below, p.310, note 2.

2 See Jeffrey's review of James Grahame's British Georgics, ER XVI, no. 31 (April, 1810), article IX, pp.213-223 (p.216). If by "South" Jeffrey meant 'South of England', then Wordsworth and Coleridge would have agreed with him, see Wordsworth's Pedlar "Among the hills of Athol he was born", The Excursion, I, l.108; Wordsworth Poetical Works, V, ll and his letter to Scott of 7 November, 1805, Wordsworth Letters, I, 641; and see Coleridge on the Statesman below, p.104. (In the original version the Pedlar "was born of lowly race / On Cumbrian hills", MS B., ll.47-48, The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (Cornell), p.44.)

3 In the review of Weber's Ford, ER XVIII (August, 1811), p.282.

4 Review of Hayley's Life of Cowper, ER II (April, 1803), pp.81, 82.

near to the level of common speech"¹; in Grahame's The Sabbath the "diction throughout is tainted with vulgarity, and there is no selection of words, images or sentiments, to conciliate the favour of the fastidious reader".² The examples that Jeffrey gives of vulgar expression in any writer betray the assumption, which Wordsworth and Coleridge attacked, that poetic diction should embellish an object or action, and translate it out of the realm of vulgar life. In his review of James Hogg's Queen's Wake, for example, he condemns the phrase "'drawn up the bed cover'" as "absolute vulgarity".³

Jeffrey's common sense came up with a different language altogether. His discussion of the "simplicity and naturalness of the language" of Byron's Beppo gives us a more accurate idea of what he meant by those terms:

the free but guarded use of all polite idioms, and even of all phrases of contemporary currency that have the stamp of good company upon them, - with the exclusion of all scholastic or ambitious eloquence.... good verse, entirely composed of common words, in their common places; never presenting us with one sprig of what is called poetical diction...but running on in an inexhaustible series of good easy colloquial phrases.⁴

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- 1 Review of her Plays on the Passions, ER II, no. 4 (July, 1803), article I, pp.269-286 (p.278).
 - 2 ER V, no. 10 (January, 1805), article XIV, pp.437-442 (p.441).
 - 3 ER XXIV, no. 47 (November, 1814), article VIII, pp.157-174 (p.173). Compare his objections to the "lowness and vulgarity" of certain expressions in Scott's Marmion, ER XII, no. 23 (April, 1808), article I, pp.1-35 (p.32), and his criticism of Charles James Fox's expressions "'made no point'" and "'the crying injustice'" in his review of Fox's History of James II, ER XII, no. 24 (July, 1808), article I, pp.271-306 (p.304). Compare, also, his reflections on what "is sometimes exceedingly homely and vulgar" in the Scottish philosopher Forsyth, ER VII, no. 14 (January, 1806), article VII, pp.413-[4]36 (p.435).
 - 4 ER XXIX, no. 58 (February, 1818), article II, pp.302-310 (p.303). Byron's "use of 'the language of everyday' in Beppo and Don Juan", as Ian Jack remarks, "has nothing to do with the theories of Wordsworth", English Literature 1815-1832, The Oxford History of English Literature, X (Oxford, 1963), p.68.

The simplicity that Jeffrey had in mind, that is, was the "elegant simplicity" of the classicist (the phrase is his¹). He wanted what was common in experience and appealed to the common sense without being too 'common' or vulgar, ever careful to preserve a distinction "between simple homeliness and absolute vulgarity".² With Johnson he firmly believed that

the most heroick sentiments will lose their efficacy, and the most splendid ideas drop their magnificance, if they are conveyed by words used commonly upon low and trivial occasions, debased by vulgar mouths, and contaminated by inelegant applications.³

Wordsworth felt that lowness, vulgarity, and triviality were more often than not in the mind of the censor, and that aesthetics such as this display, like revulsion from idiots, a "false delicacy" and "a certain want of comprehensiveness of think[ing] and feeling".⁴ Typical would be

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- 1 From his review of The Works of...Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, ER II, no. 4 (July, 1803), article XXI, pp.507-521 (p.520). What Jeffrey had in mind was defined by Donald Davie in his Purity of Diction in English Verse: "a pure diction is governed by two sorts of precedent, on the one hand the usages of previous poets, on the other hand the usages of polite conversation. These were just the standards to which...we saw Johnson appealing, when he criticized a locution of Gray" (p.33).
 - 2 See his review of James Hogg's Queen's Wake, ER XXIV (November, 1814), pp.159-160. Coleridge reiterates the classical formula when, in a letter to William Lisle Bowles of 16 October, 1797, he discusses Osorio: "If there be any thing with which I am at all satisfied, it is - the style. I have endeavoured to have few sentences which might not be spoken in conversation, avoiding those that are commonly used in conversation", Coleridge Letters, I, 356.
 - 3 "Life of Cowley", Lives of the Poets, I, 58-59.
 - 4 See the letter to John Wilson, [7 June, 1802] - Wordsworth Letters, I, 356. Of course in his later poetry there "is an ever-increasing emphasis upon craftsmanship in his talk about poetry, and in his practice there is more of literary", to quote John Jones, The Egotistical Sublime, p.175; with this, Wordsworth developed a fastidiousness of his own: "The stanza, as you have been accustomed to quote it, is very faulty", he wrote to Barron Field on 24 October, 1828, of ll.33-34 of "The Green Linnet", "'Forth he teems' is a provincialism. Dr Johnson says, 'A low word, when used in this sense'", Wordsworth Letters, [IV], 644. I am not concerned here with the shift in Wordsworth's attitude to the language of poetry. Suffice it to quote from Field's letter to Wordsworth of 10 April, 1828, where he uses the Preface against Wordsworth's alterations of 1827: I detect "'a little disposition in your

the reviewer of Lyrical Ballads in the New London Review who insisted on distinguishing "the simple style from a style of simplicity": "By a simple style we may suppose a colloquial diction, debased by inelegance, and gross by familiarity. Simplicity is a manner of expression, facile, pure, and always elegant". His assumptions are even more apparent when he concludes that the "simple style has all the squalid nakedness of a BEGGAR, and simplicity, the lovely nudity of a GRACE".¹ When in The Prelude Wordsworth describes his search into "the depth of human souls" of the humble and dispossessed, he turns the word "vulgar" against such fastidiousness by describing his subjects as

Souls that appear to have no depth at all
To vulgar eyes²

On the controversial subject of a language peculiar to poets Jeffrey often betrayed a neo-classical conservatism: "Every language has its own idiom - its own class of words appropriate to poetry - its own artifices of phrase and rythmical [sic] structure, in which, [a] great part of what is strictly called style, both in prose and poetry, consists".³ And the association of literature with gentility that the

alterations, to mitigate that simplicity of speech, which you taught us was the true language of the heart, and to make some tardy sacrifice at the shrine of poetic diction", he wrote, and then went on to complain of other alterations made "'whether or not in deference to the utter want of sympathy of Mr Jeffrey or the conceit of Mr Hazlitt'" - as quoted in Geoffrey Little, "A Lesson in the Art of Poetry: Barron Field and Wordsworth's Later Revisions", AUMLA (Journal of the Australasian Universities Language & Literature Association), XLVI (November, 1976), pp.189-205 (p.190).

1 New London Review; or, Monthly Report of Authors and Books, I (January, 1799), pp.33-35 (p.34).

2 The Prelude (1805), XII, 11.166, 167-8; later Wordsworth substituted the less powerful and paradoxical "careless", The Prelude (1850), XIII, 1.168 - see Wordsworth The Prelude, pp.446, 447.

3 Review of de Lille's Traduction de l'Eneide, ER VII, no. 13 (October, 1805), article VIII, pp.134-147 (p.135).

young Wordsworth and Coleridge had found so abhorrent was also assumed by Jeffrey, despite occasional critical remarks to the contrary. Indeed the critical debate sparked off by the Preface often only thinly veils a deeper, political antagonism motivating it. When at his most conservative, Jeffrey treats the Lake poets as subversive as the sans culottes, "furnishing themselves from vulgar ballads and plebeian nurseries".¹

The observation, though acrimonious, is not unjustified. How inextricably bound were political and aesthetic commitments has been discussed above. Wordsworth's letter to Francis Wrangham of 5 June, 1808, strongly suggests that "Wordsworth had deliberately preferred the crude sub-literary street-ballads of his own time", as F.W. Bateson points out.² This appeal to the "middling and lower orders" struck Jeffrey not only as subversive but also as absurd, especially in an author "who has had occasion to indite odes to his college bell, and inscribe hymns to the Penates".

The arts "do not take their models from what is ordinary, but from what is excellent" he protested.³ To overlook a refined and liberal education and seek excellence in "a different and a scantier gradus ad Parnassum"

1 Review of Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.218. The same attitude is implicit in his review of The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson when he discusses Richardson's "volume of Familiar Letters for the use of persons in inferior situations": "It may be of singular use to Mr Wordsworth [sic] and his friends, in their great scheme of turning all our poetry into the language of the common people", ER V, no. 9 (October, 1804), article II, pp.23-44 (p.31).

2 Of the "Half-penny ballads" Wordsworth confesses to Wrangham: "I have many a time wished that I had talents to produce songs, poems, and little histories, that might circulate among other good things in this way.... Indeed some of the Poems which I have published were composed not without a hope that at some time or other they might answer this purpose", Wordsworth Letters, II, 248. Bateson uses the text of the poem "Babes in the Wood", of which Wordsworth was so fond, as his evidence - see his Wordsworth: A Re-interpretation, second edition (London, 1956), p.135.

3 Review of Southey's Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), pp.67, 66.

is to turn one's back on the achievements of civilisation.¹

It was not so much to the art that Wordsworth did use that Jeffrey objected, however, as to the art he did not use. "Their simplicity", Jeffrey complained of the Lakers,

does not consist, by any means, in the rejection of glaring or superfluous ornament, - in the substitution of elegance to splendour, or in that refinement of art which seeks concealment in its own perfection. It consists, on the contrary, in a very great degree, in the positive and bona fide rejection of art altogether.²

Although he disapproves, Jeffrey was the only contemporary critic to appreciate the seriousness of Wordsworth's revolt against language and literature. In the objection itself, the two different protests against poetic diction are contrasted, and Jeffrey's allegiance is declared. It was not that he was entirely unsympathetic: "There is something very noble and conscientious, we will confess, in this plan of composition".³ It was rather that he felt Wordsworth was overlooking two important things. The first was that only some poetry is subjective or passionate and that, while the language of this may require no artificial elevation,

The case, however, is extremely different with the subordinate parts of a composition; with the

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- 1 Review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.218. Twentieth-century commentators have followed Jeffrey in remarking that, in the words of Marjorie L. Barstow, "the language of the Lyrical Ballads is as much the result of conscious art as the language of Paradise Lost", Wordsworth's Theory of Poetic Diction, p.172. T.S. Eliot made the point in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Wordsworth's "own language was as capable of artificiality, and no more capable of naturalness, than that of Pope - as Byron felt, and as Coleridge candidly pointed out" (p.26). For more recent discussion, see Stephen Maxfield Parrish, The Art of the 'Lyrical Ballads' (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973), passim, but especially the opening pages and pp.83-97 and 115-128; see also, Mary Jacobus, Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads' (1798) (Oxford, 1976), pp.209-261.
 - 2 In the review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), p.65.
 - 3 Review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), p.65. Was Jeffrey remembering earlier aspirations of his own (see above, p. 84)?

narrative and description, that are necessary to preserve its connection.... if magnificence or beauty is ever to be observed in them, it must have been introduced from some other motive than that of adapting the style to the subject... A poet who aims at all at sublimity or pathos, is like an actor in a high tragic character, and must sustain his dignity throughout, or become altogether ridiculous.¹

Coleridge echoes this idea in the Biographia when he insists

that a poem of any length neither can be, or ought to be, all poetry. Yet if an harmonious whole is to be produced, the remaining parts must be preserved in keeping with the poetry; and this can be no otherwise effected than by such a studied selection and artificial arrangement, as will partake of one, though not a peculiar property of poetry.... the property of exciting a more continuous and equal attention than the language of prose aims at, whether colloquial or written.²

The second point which Jeffrey felt that Wordsworth had overlooked was that "the chief recommendation of poetical language is certainly derived from those general associations, which give it a character of dignity or elegance, sublimity or tenderness"³ - that language, in other words, is an artificial thing that relies for its effect on convention.⁴

1 Review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), p.65. Compare his complaint that, in Scott's Marmion, there are "passages in which the flatness and tediousness of the narrative is relieved by no sort of beauty, nor elegance of diction, and which form an extraordinary contrast with the more animated and finished portions of the poem", ER XII (April, 1808), p.33.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 11.

3 Review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.217. Jeffrey would not have accepted the broader tolerance of the twentieth century, represented by a critic like Winifred Nowotny: "there are no bad words or good words; there are only words in bad or good places", The Language Poets Use (London, 1962), p.32; it is difficult to overlook the influence of Wordsworth on this sort of statement.

4 Compare Johnson, "words being arbitrary must owe their power to association, and have the influence...which custom has given them", "Life of Cowley", Lives of the Poets, I, 58. Coleridge's Notebooks show his struggling with the associations of language: "In reading Pindar, I was 'struck on a heap' (to use a very vulgar but yet forcible & could it be divested of its associated meanness, highly poetical phrase)", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2835.

To quote Blair: "Words, as we now employ them, taken in the general, may be considered as symbols, not as imitations; as arbitrary, or instituted, not natural signs of ideas".¹ The reviewer of Poems in Two Volumes in The Satirist, whose ideas may well have derived from Jeffrey's article on the same work, summarizes most cogently and comprehensively the case against Wordsworth on behalf of the majority of reviewers:

Of this grand system of poetry, which was thus first discovered by Mr. William Wordsworth, about the year of our Lord 1800, and was of course altogether unknown to Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden, the grand principle was, that nature could only be represented with fidelity by a close imitation of the language, and a constant adoption of the phrases, made use of by persons in the lowest stages of life: as if language were not entirely factitious and arbitrary; as if men in all ranks and situations were not the creatures of habit; as if the expressions of the meanest individuals were not the result of the education which they receive, while those of the higher orders are rendered natural by long usage to the well-informed and accomplished part of mankind.²

Assuming the arbitrariness of language, Jeffrey's retreats into the Augustan dualism between matter and manner, into the idea of language as "the dress of thought", and analyzes the pleasure of poetry into three distinct parts: imagination, passion, and diction. The distinction ushers in the even more reactionary belief in "the judicious or happy application of expressions which have been sanctified by the use of famous writers" as a "source of beauty" in poetic diction.

This discussion occurs in Jeffrey's review of Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes.³ To her partial transcription of a letter of Wordsworth's to Southey written three months later, Susan Wordsworth added the following,

1 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 133.

2 The Satirist, I (November, 1807), pp.188-191 (pp.188-9).

3 ER XI (October, 1807), pp.216-217 (p.217).

tantalizing note: "M^r Wordsworth then proceeds to examine M^r J[effrey]'s theory of diction which he pronounces to be very fallacious".¹ Wordsworth's ideas on a language exclusively for the literati, however, are sufficiently familiar from the Preface for us to guess what he had to say on that score. On the assumed dualism, the note added to "The Thorn" in the 1800 edition of the Lyrical Ballads is illuminating. There Wordsworth attempts to break down the distinction between at least passion and words, by treating words "not only as symbols of the passion, but as things, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion".²

But Jeffrey and the early objectors to the Preface were not the only ones ultimately provoked to "direct hostility" by the calculated affront of the Preface to what passed as poetry and good taste - and, by implication, to what passed as reality.³ The point at which the theory of language, with its political and social significance, becomes revolutionary, is the point at which Coleridge himself, by 1802 at the latest, and the Preface part ways.⁴ When in the Biographia Coleridge advocates a "natural

1 As quoted in Wordsworth Letters, II, 162.

2 Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 513.

3 See Biographia Literaria, I, 52.

4 Coleridge's letter to William Sotheby of 10 July, 1802, in which he confesses his suspicion that "there is, somewhere or other, a radical Difference" between his and Wordsworth's opinions on poetry, may be treated as a turning point. It is difficult to imagine their ever being in complete agreement. If the note referring to Chaucer's language as "pure and universally intelligible" could be proved to be Coleridge's rather than Wordsworth's, it would strongly suggest that Coleridge was trying to find literary analogues for Wordsworth's natural language, the only attempt of this kind throughout the Preface. W. Hale White and Markham Peacock, Jr, read the hand as Coleridge's, while W.J.B. Owen reads it as Dorothy Wordsworth's. Considering, firstly, that the claim Wordsworth is making for poetry in the paragraph on rustic language (which this note glosses) are for considerably more than 'intelligibility'; secondly, that next to these claims the footnote is almost bathetic; and, thirdly, that it is a unique comparison with other poetry, I believe the note to be either Coleridge's or an apologetic afterthought of Wordsworth - see Peacock's article "Variants to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads", Modern Language Notes, LXI, no. 3 (March, 1946), pp.175-177 (pp.176-177), and Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124 note and 169 (note to l.114, fn).

language, neither bookish, nor vulgar", he echoes the Augustan compromise.¹ Vulgarly and pedantry were of course the conventional Scylla and Charybdis between which the Augustan poet had been expected to steer. Proper "poetical diction", according to Johnson, was composed entirely of words "at once refined from the grossness of domestick use and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts".² Coleridge now considered good sense dictated a language like that of Chaucer, Gower, and, surprisingly, "of elegant and unaffected women".³ All these are a long way from the unliterary, if not anti-literary language of the rustic, and closer to the pure diction defined in our own century by T.S. Eliot:

every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)⁴

This reads remarkably like the lesson Coleridge learned from his old schoolmaster, James Bowyer.

The two further examples of poets of plain sense cited by Coleridge in the Biographia, the German poet Gellert and George Herbert, are a significant index to his change in attitude. In the case of Gellert, Coleridge is content to transcribe from his Notebooks an analysis of

1 Biographia Literaria, I, 13.

2 "Life of Dryden", Lives of the Poets, I, 420.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 71; compare the suggestion in his Notebooks that a test of the integrity of an image in Cowper would be to "read the poem to a well-educated but natural Woman, an unaffected gentle Being endued with sense and sensibility", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2433, f11 (one cannot fail to observe Coleridge's own anxieties in this criterion).

4 In his Four Quartets, "Little Gidding", V, ll.216-223, The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot (London, 1969), pp.171-198 (p.197).

Christian Garve's. The transcription, however, as Kathleen Coburn points out, is "far from being literal". Where, for example, Garve praised Gellert for writing "as people talk" (wie man spricht), Coleridge translates "just as one would wish to talk" - thereby introducing, as Coburn also points out, "an element of idealisation into the plain naturalism of Garve's statement".¹

Herbert he chose for a language ideal in a different way:

Another exquisite master of this species of style, where the scholar and the poet supplies the material, but the perfect well-bred gentleman the expressions and the arrangement, is George Herbert.²

Herbert's is not cited as the consummate poetic style, but my italics will suggest how radical a change Coleridge had undergone. The contempt for Adam Smith's dictum that a poet's duty is to write like a gentleman is a long way in the past.³ With this entirely different ideal of linguistic purity in mind, Coleridge criticizes Wordsworth for having confused a lingua communis, plain and unpretentious, with the language of the rustic:

the poet, who uses an illogical diction, or a style fitted to excite only the low and changeable pleasure of wonder by means of groundless novelty, substitutes a language of folly and vanity, not for that of the rustic, but for that of good sense and natural feeling.⁴

By 1815 and the composition of the Biographia Coleridge was to emphasize, in the idea of a simple language, the "classicist" virtues of perspicuity

1 See Biographia Literaria, II, 70; Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1702 and note.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 73; like Pope's ideal critic, "Tho' Learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere", An Essay on Criticism, III, l.635, The Poems of Alexander Pope, I, 311.

3 See above, p.50.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 41.

and propriety,¹ where Wordsworth had emphasised transparency and transcendence. How much closer Coleridge had come to Jeffrey's position, and yet how far he had developed beyond him, will become apparent as we trace Coleridge's argument against the Preface in more detail.

II

Coleridge had always been sceptical about "the poetry of common speech".² A whimsical note in an early letter captures his attitude to the democratization of poetic ability: "all men are poets in their way, tho' for the most part their ways are damned bad ones".³ However he may have felt about all men's talent for poetry in 1815, he was by then convinced that rustics were not only damned bad poets, but also that their language could not be less qualified as a substitute for poetic diction.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of the Biographia, Coleridge examines the language of rustic life without addressing himself directly either to the Hartleian assumptions behind Wordsworth's position, for which one cannot help but feel him in a large measure responsible, or to the theory of mind and nature with which these assumptions are

1 "Swift's style" Coleridge believed to be, in this line, "perfect; the manner is a complete expression of the matter, the terms appropriate, and the artifice concealed. It is simplicity in the true sense of the word", in his lecture "On Style", Lecture XIV of the 1818 Lectures on Literature, Coleridge Miscellaneous Criticism, pp.214-228

2 The Excursion, V, l.392, Wordsworth Poetical Works, V, 166. For an attempt at a more sophisticated expression of this idea, see fragment (b) of Michael, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 482-483.

3 Letter to Southey, 21 October, 1801, Coleridge Letters, II, 768. Coleridge, in this letter, is feeling his way towards the idea of imagination.

compounded. In his own terminology, he refuses to confront the "Essence, in its primary signification" of the rustic language, "the principle of individuation, the inmost principle of anything, as that particular thing".¹ Rather two eminently practical ways of combatting the argument suggested themselves to him. The first was to evidence the style, or styles, of the collection itself. Beyond a half-realized disgust with false description and the related false ornament, the Preface had given Wordsworth, and perhaps Coleridge, a congenial perspective from which to view the poems.² But the perspective had also created something of an optical illusion, for the homogeneity of style and intention presumed by his Preface is lacking.³ The variety of styles, that is, belies the existence of a single and universal poetic language. "This rule" therefore, as Coleridge concludes, "is applicable only to certain classes of poetry".⁴ We are back with a theory of genres.

The second way of controverting the theory, and the way of most interest to this study, was to concentrate on the psychological and environmental possibility of such a style. Accordingly, Coleridge asks

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 47.

2 See Coleridge to Joseph Cottle, [28 May, 1798]: "We deem that the volumes offered to you are to a certain degree one work, in kind tho' not in degree, as an Ode is one work", Coleridge Letters, I, 412. Compare Mark L. Reed on "Their effort to present...a fairer picture of the complete environment, emotional and intellectual, from which the achievement of Lyrical Ballads and its Preface had arisen than had existed", in his article "Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the 'Plan' of the Lyrical Ballads", University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXIV, no. 3 (April, 1965), pp.238-253 (p.243).

3 To quote Roger Sharrock, "Wordsworth is not consistent in his application of this technique, any more than his Preface is a consistent plea for extreme realism", Wordsworth's Mind and Art, ed. Thomson, p.67.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 30. Outside the Preface Wordsworth was distinguishing between, in the words of The Prelude (1805), the poetry of "lofty hopes" and "gifts / Of humbler industry" (I, ll.143-144) - by implication, between a high and a low style; Wordsworth The Prelude, p.36.

himself and his reader whether low and rustic life is in fact conducive to the purification of language: "here seems to be the point, to which all the lines of difference converge as to their source and centre".¹

In May or June of the year 1800, just prior to the composition of the Preface, Coleridge made a note that anticipates his rejection of the rustic and his language as parochial in the Biographia: "Adam's Smith's arguments on the superiority of Rustics false, I think - Farmers talk always of their own occupations".² In the Biographia itself Coleridge pursues a perversely literal-minded examination of the rustic language to the point where, in exposing its absurdity as a poetic language, he becomes slightly absurd himself, and very patronising:

Let the management of the POOR LAWS in Liverpool, Manchester, or Bristol be compared with the ordinary dispensation of the poor rates in agricultural villages, where the farmers are the overseers and guardians of the poor. If my own experience have not been particularly unfortunate, as well as that of the many respectable country clergymen with whom I have conversed on the subject, the result would engender more than scepticism concerning the desirable influences of low and rustic life in and for itself.³

Coleridge had, of course, been "anxious" at one time that his son Hartley and his subsequent children "should be brought up from earliest infancy in the simplicity of peasants", and for cogent reasons:

Man was not made to live in Great Cities!... The pleasures, which we receive from rural beauties, are of little Consequence compared with the Moral Effect of these pleasures - beholding constantly the Best possible we at last become ourselves the best possible. In the country, all around us smile

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 32-33.

2 Coleridge Notebooks, I, 735.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 32.

Good and Beauty - and the Images of this divine
καλοκαγαθόν are miniaturized on the mind of the
beholder.¹

This was written in March, 1795. The terms may be more conventionally Platonic than the Preface's,² but the complete confidence in the ameliorative operation of nature is here. By 1800, when Coleridge made the note doubting the superiority of rustics, he was in the process of modifying a theory that was proving too absolute and naive.

Not that the combination of a theoretical belief in nature's efficacy with a knowledge of its fallibility would have been peculiar to Coleridge. Wordsworth himself was hardly the Parson Adams figure that Harriet Martineau drew in her letter to Elizabeth Barrett of 8 February, 1846:

here while every justice of the peace is filled with disgust & every clergyman with almost despair at the drunkenness quarrells & extreme licentiousness with women - here is dear good old W[ordsworth] for ever talk^g of rural innocence & deprecate^g any intercourse with towns lest the purity of his neighbours sho^d be corrupted.³

Instead, as early as 1800, Wordsworth, "not betrayed by tenderness of mind", was aware that low and rustic life had its seamier side with a correspondent idiom:

1 As he said in a letter to George Dyer, 10 March, 1795; Coleridge Letters, I, 154. Compare Lecture no. 6 of his Lectures on Revealed Religion: "The smoakes that rise from our crowded Towns hide from us the face of Heaven. In the country, the Love and Power of the great Invisible are everywhere perspicuous, and by degrees we become partakers of that which we are accustomed to contemplate", Coleridge Lectures 1795, p.224; for related comments, see note 1 on this page.

2 Compare, for example, Diotima to Socrates in Symposium (translated by Michael Joyce): "it is only when he discerns beauty itself through what makes it visible that a man will be quickened with the true... virtue", Plato: The Collected Dialogues, p.563.

3 As quoted by Crabb Robinson, in The Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle (1808-1866), edited by Edith J. Morley, in 2 vols (Oxford, 1927), II, 621.

That Shepherd's voice, it may have reached mine ear
 Debased and under prophanation, made
 An organ for the sounds articulate
 Of ribaldry and blasphemy and wrath,
 Where drunkenness hath kindled senseless frays.¹

And as Hazlitt pointed out in his review of The Excursion, "the author himself lets out occasional hints that all is not as it should be among these northern Arcadians".² Wordsworth, however, wanted his vision of the agricultural community read in "the spirit of things", rather than by "the dead letter"

Whose truth is not a motion or a shape
 Instinct with vital functions.³

He chose therefore to ignore this side when preaching its theoretical superiority, feeling, perhaps, that he had accounted for it when he envisaged the language "purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust".⁴ These unspecified causes only beg the question. Coleridge is right when he argues that this corollary fails to distinguish satisfactorily between this and any other group in society.⁵

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- 1 Home at Grasmere, MS B., 11.398, 423-427, Home at Grasmere (Cornell), pp.62, 64. Compare MS Y. (October, 1804) drafts for The Prelude: "If upon mankind / He looks, and on the human maladies / Before his eyes, what finds he there...but sordid men, / And transient occupations, and desires / Ignoble and depraved. Therefore he cleaves / Exclusively to Nature" (11.180, 191-197), Wordsworth The Prelude, p.504.
 - 2 "Character of Mr. Wordsworth's New Poem, The Excursion", The Examiner, October 2, 1814 [i.e. the third instalment], pp.636-638 (p.637).
 - 3 The Prelude (1805), VIII, 11.432-434, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.288.
 - 4 In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124. Compare Jeffrey in the review of Thalaba: "In serious poetry, a man of the middling or lower order must necessarily lay aside a great deal of his ordinary language;...and steer clear...of every impropriety that is ludicrous or disgusting", ER I (October, 1802), p.67. In other words, Wordsworth and Jeffrey differ only on what they hold these "causes" of disgust to be; there is a characteristic vagueness about the words "real", "lasting", and "rational".
 - 5 Biographia Literaria, II, 38-9.

Part of the problem of the Preface lies in its attempt to have its rustic language both literally and symbolically, just as it wants the rustic to be both a political and social reality and a figure symbolic of the new Adam. By inviting just the sort of sociological scrutiny that Coleridge gives it in the Biographia, the language is in danger of failing to satisfy either expectation.

The tension between the literal and the symbolic is betrayed in Home at Grasmere in a telling conditional:

Ah! if I wished to follow where the sight
Of all that is before my eyes, the voice
Which is as a presiding Spirit here
Would lead me, I should say unto myself,
They who are dwellers in this holy place
Must needs themselves be hallowed.¹

This tempting logic proves, in fact, very unreliable. In a similar way, Wordsworth had as a child loved shepherds only indirectly, he tells us in Michael; a love that was the issue of a more direct love of nature:

not verily
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Where was their occupation and abode.²

But "the peasants whom he needs to see as sensitive by virtue of their favoured lives", as Jonathan Wordsworth has said, "have all-too-obvious faults".³

If Wordsworth only occasionally, and then grudgingly, admits this, Coleridge was only too eager to point it out. For besides the parochial ignorance that circumscribes the rustic's range of conversation there is, in his later view, an indifference to the very processes and forms

1 MS. B, 11.362-7, Home at Grasmere (Cornell), p.60.

2 Lines 24-26, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 81.

3 "On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life", p.20.

of nature that are expected to exert their formative influence. There were many peasants like Peter Bell, with hearts untouched

By lovely forms, and silent weather,
And tender sounds¹

To the peasantry of North Wales for example, argues Coleridge, "the ancient mountains, with all their terrors and all their glories, are pictures to the blind, and music to the deaf".² Coleridge had earlier made the relevant note during the tour of Scotland in 1803 of a little country girl "sent to dog & guide us" who responded to the prospects of nature by "yawning with stretching Limbs". Needless to say, the indifference of the child was "in droll dissonance with Dorothy's Raptures".³

In sharp contrast to this is Wordsworth's Michael:

grossly that man errs, who should suppose
That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,
Were things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts.⁴

But it becomes apparent that in both Wordsworth's and Coleridge's reflections on society Michael is by no means a typical peasant. Already by 1800 Wordsworth was qualifying his political definition of this class of rustic, deferring to certain social and economic conditions which he felt were necessary for the mind to be accessible to the workings of nature:

1 Lines 287-288, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 331-382 (p.342).

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 32.

3 Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1449.

4 Lines 62-64, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 82. Compare Wordsworth on "the Pastoral Swiss" in Descriptive Sketches (1793): "Nature, ever just, to him imparts / Joys only given to uncorrupted hearts. / ... / Think not, suspended from the cliff on high / He looks below with undelighted eye". Lines 490-1, 510-511, Wordsworth Poetical Works, I, 42-90 (p.72).

it is in truth
 A mighty gain - that Labour here preserves
 His rosy face, a Servant only here
 Of the fire-side or of the open field,
 A Freeman, therefore sound and unenslaved;
 That extreme penury is here unknown,
 And cold and hunger's abject wretchedness,
 Mortal to body and the heaven-born mind¹

Only his mind will be capable of nourishment, that is, who belongs to an independent class like "statesmen, men of respectable education who daily labour on their own little properties". The domestic affections whose decay Wordsworth laments in this letter to Fox of 14 January, 1801, are only apparent in the first place "if these men are placed above poverty".² As Wordsworth later wrote in The Prelude,

where oppression worse than death
 Salutes the being at his birth...
 And labour in excess and poverty
 From day to day pre-occupy the ground
 Of the affections, and to Nature's self
Oppose a deeper nature — there indeed
 Love cannot be.³

The idea I have italicized suggests the disturbing existence of a selfish and brutish nature "deeper" and more fundamental than "the beautiful and permanent forms of nature", indeed resistant to their influences, an idea which is incompatible with Wordsworth's more sanguine belief in human perfectibility.

Coleridge was also making early distinctions: "the small Estatesman, such as W[ordsworth] pain[ts in] old Michael, is a God compared to our Peasants & small Farmers in the South".⁴ This was in a letter of 1801.

1 Home at Grasmere, MS B, ll.439-446, Home at Grasmere (Cornell), p.66; compare The Prelude, VIII, ll.144-158, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.274.

2 Wordsworth Letters, I, 314.

3 The Prelude (1805), XII, ll.194-195, 197-201, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.446 (italics mine).

4 See Coleridge's letter to Humphry Davy, 11 January, 1801, Coleridge Letters, II, 664.

In the Biographia Coleridge complains publicly that the "persons introduced" in many of Wordsworth's poems - in his best poems, it is implied - "are by no means taken from low and rustic life". They have two advantages that raise them above the many agricultural labourers. The first is independence. The second is characteristic of Coleridge: a "solid and religious, EDUCATION, which has rendered few books familiar, but the Bible, and the liturgy or hymn book".¹ Religion of one sort or another was a persistent feature of Coleridge's political and social thinking from the Bristol lectures of 1795 through to On the Constitution of the Church and State, and more than any other feature distinguishes it from Wordsworth's.² One wonders how the republican Wordsworth would have reacted to Coleridge's early insistence that "Without religious joys, and religious terrors nothing can be expected from the inferior Classes in society - whether or no any class is strong enough to stand firm without them, is...doubtful".³

Wordsworth may have recognized the need for some formal education when in The Ruined Cottage he describes the Pedlar's early years:

when a child ere yet of age
To be a shepherd he had learned to read
His bible in a school that stood alone,
Sole building on the mountain's dreary edge,
Far from the sight of city spire, or sound
Of Minster clock.⁴

The image of the building on a mountain side merges both physically and

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 31.

2 Compare Basil Willey: the "quest for religious truth and the establishment of religious faith formed the master-current of [Coleridge's] life, to which all his other myriad interests were but tributary rills", Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London, 1972), p.11.

3 In a letter to Thomas Poole, 8 April, 1799, Coleridge Letters, I, 480.

4 MS B, 11.53-58, Wordsworth The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar, pp.44, 46.

The guides, the wardens of our faculties
 ...
 Sages, who in their prescience would controul
 All accidents, and to the very road
 Which they have fashioned would confine us down
 Like engines — when will they be taught
 That in the unreasoning progress of the world
 A wiser spirit is at work for us,
 A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
 Of blessings, and most studious of our good,
 Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?¹

Coleridge in the late 1790s may have agreed with these sentiments, or with the more axiomatic "Let Nature be your Teacher" of "The Tables Turned",² but Coleridge in the Biographia was insisting on a more traditional pedagogy. The new attitude is reflected in his debunking the idea of nature's ennobling effect on the Swiss mountaineers: "on the contrary", he protests, they are "in general better educated and greater readers than men of equal rank elsewhere".³ The indifference of the Welsh mountain-dwellers to nature he attributes to the fact that they are neither formally educated nor self-educated. It is even reflected in his preference for the pedantry "of the cloyster" before pedantry "of the lobby".⁴ By nature, and occasionally by profession,⁵

1 The Prelude (1805), V, ll.373-377, 380-388, Wordsworth The Prelude, pp.170, 172. Does Wordsworth have Tom Wedgwood's bizarre, Skinnerian academy in mind? For the details of this education programme, see Mary Moorman's William Wordsworth: A Biography, Part 1, The Early Years 1770-1803 (Oxford, 1957), pp.333-337 (Moorman herself makes the connection, pp.336-337).

2 Line 16, Wordsworth Poetical Works, IV, 57.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 32. Jeffrey attributed the superiority of the Scottish peasant to similar causes, "to our excellent institutions for parochial education" - see his review of Cromek's Reliques of Robert Burns, ER XIII, no. 26 (January, 1807), article I, pp.249-276 (p.276).

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 108.

5 I am referring, of course, to his tutorship of Charles Lloyd and his preaching for the Unitarians; see E.K. Chambers, Coleridge (London, 1938), pp.61-63 and the famous passage in Hazlitt's "My First Acquaintance with Poets", The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, edited by P.P. Howe, in 21 vols, Vol XVII, Uncollected Essays (London, 1933), pp.106-122 (pp.106-108).

a preacher and a pedagogue, it is no surprise that Coleridge defers throughout the Biographia to various clergy and teachers, like the "zealous and adroit missionaries" thwarted in their conversion of the natives by the amorality perpetuated by the tribal language.¹ Coleridge's arguments all point to the need for a guiding and educating class such as Wordsworth rejects here on behalf of nature, and which Coleridge later called a "clerisy".²

In all the depreciating analyses of "low and rustic life" in the Biographia, it becomes apparent that Coleridge's scepticism is directed, not just towards rustic sensitivity and understanding, but towards nature's formative powers as well. In 1803 Coleridge noted down the "more than curious Fact that when the country does not benefit, it depraves".³ By 1815 he was

convinced, that for the human soul to prosper in rustic life a certain vantage-ground is pre-requisite. It is not every man that is likely to be improved by a country life or by country labours. Education, or original sensibility, or both, must pre-exist, if the changes, forms, and incidents of nature are to prove a sufficient stimulant. And where these are not sufficient, the mind contracts and hardens by want of stimulants: and the man becomes selfish, sensual, gross, and hard-hearted.⁴

The suggestion of pre-existent education turns the 1799 Prelude on its

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 40.

2 "THE CLERISY of the nation, or national church, in its primary acceptation and original intention comprehended the learned of all denominations", On the Constitution of the Church and State (CC), p.46. Compare Table Talk, 10 April, 1832, in which the "clerisy of a nation" are described as "points of relative rest. There could be no order, no harmony of the whole, without them" (p.158). For an earlier expression of Coleridge's belief in the necessity of a guiding class, see Coleridge on the "thinking and disinterested Patriots" in his "A Moral and Political Lecture" (and in Conciones ad Populum), Lectures 1795 (CC), pp.12, 40.

3 Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1553.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 32.

head. Instead of nature being conducive to a correct moral and mental attitude, this attitude, developed in the class-room, is seen as conducive to the influence of nature. Nature therefore preaches only to the converted.

To take a more obvious example, there is in Coleridge's universalizing the "thoughts, feelings, language, and manners of the shepherd-farmers" of Cumberland and Westmorland an unmistakable denial of any peculiar advantage to be gained by living in contact with nature:

as far as they are actually adopted in those poems,
[they] may be accounted for from causes, which will
and do produce the same results in every state of
life, whether in town or country.¹

Of those causes, two of the three principle ones are those mentioned above of independence and religious education. Nature, once only insufficient, now becomes unnecessary. It was precisely these manners, as composites of the thoughts and feelings incorporated with the forms of nature, and the language which expresses them, that were central to Wordsworth's theories in The Pedlar, the Prelude (1799), and the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads.² It is seldom recognized that in the Biographia Coleridge attacks the very heart of Wordsworth's philosophy.

As if to settle the question once and for all, Coleridge offers the evidence of the languages of "uncivilized tribes", which are destitute of words for the "simplest moral and intellectual processes". "Yet these tribes", he continues triumphantly, "are surrounded by the same nature as our peasants are".² It was a point that [^]Charles Burney

¹ Biographia Literaria, II, 31.

² Biographia Literaria, II, 40. Coleridge had never been the Prophet of Nature that Wordsworth entitles him in the closing lines of The Prelude, though he did teach the lesson that Wordsworth there describes; Wordsworth The Prelude, p.482.

had made in his review of the Lyrical Ballads in the Monthly Review of June, 1799. Referring to "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" Dr Burney asked rhetorically

Is it not to education and the culture of the mind
that we owe the raptures which the author so well
describes, as arising from the view of beautiful
scenery...? The savage sees none of the beauties
which this author describes.¹

If the Preface betrays a complex of political and social attitudes, so too does the Biographia. As the role of nature pales into insignificance, the conservatism of Coleridge's position becomes apparent. It is difficult to say exactly where Coleridge stood politically at any one time.² Perhaps if he had written his history of the Levellers in 1799 we would have a better idea of his stance at the end of the century.³ It is safe to say, however, that there is a consistently paternalistic attitude struck in his writings -

To calm and guide
The swelling democratic tide⁴

- an attitude that went hand in hand with a profound contempt for demagogues. Coleridge may have been "ONE OF THE PEOPLE" when he wrote his sonnet to Lord Stanhope, but even at the height of his religious and political radicalism in 1795 he insisted that the enlightened should

1 Monthly Review, second series, XXIX (June, 1799), pp.202-210 (p.210).

2 Like the editors of his Lectures 1795 (CC), I feel that Coleridge's conservatism and belief in hierarchy were implicit from the beginning, and also that, to quote Peter Mann, "By reason of his Christian, moral, and philosophical principles Coleridge found himself in a state of 'insulation'...from the democratic movement and its ideas" (p.lxxix).

3 See Coleridge Notebooks, I, 565.

4 I am quoting the first two lines of the quotation from Akenside's To the Right Honourable Francis Earl of Huntingdon which appears as an epigraph for Coleridge's "A Moral and Political Lecture", Lectures 1795 (CC), p.3.

speak up for, rather than speak to, the lower classes.¹ Even so in the Biographia he endeavours to placate Jeffrey and his kind by arguing that admirers of the Lyrical Ballads were not found "in the lower classes of the reading public".² Wordsworth, at least, had at one time wished they were.

Coleridge in the Biographia continually sides with the status quo - "that state of association, which actually exists as general", as he calls it³ - against the radical tenets of the Preface. When invoking the Aristotelean demand for generic attributes in language and characterization, and criticizing Wordsworth's selection as accidental and individual,⁴ he completely misreads the Preface. In his linguistic theory Wordsworth chose low and rustic life precisely because of its generic attributes.⁵ Coleridge objects to the class itself, as Jeffrey had objected to it in his review of Thalaba:

It is absurd to suppose, that an author should make use of the language of the vulgar, to express the sentiments of the refined.... Now, the different

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- 1 Coleridge may have chosen the signature for the Stanhope sonnet - Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 89 - to disguise his authorship; as Carl R. Woodring suggests, it is "unlikely", and not his usual practice. For this, and a discussion of other details, see Woodring's Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge (Madison, 1961), pp.108-110 (p.108). Compare the Introductory Address of Conciones ad Populum, Coleridge Lectures 1795, p.43 (and see, again, Peter Mann's introduction, pp.lxxvii-lxxviii).
 - 2 Biographia Literaria, II, 7. It could hardly be said that Coleridge, like Beaupuy in The Prelude, "to the mean and the obscure, / And all the homely in their homely works, / Transferred a courtesy which had no air / Of condescension" (The Prelude (1805), IX, 11.314-317, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.328). This is especially true of Coleridge in the Biographia.
 - 3 Biographia Literaria, II, 104-105. See below, pp.251-253.
 - 4 Biographia Literaria, II, 33-34.
 - 5 Where "are we to find the best measure of [human nature]? I answer... by looking out of ourselves to[wards me]n who lead the simplest lives most according to nature", letter to John Wilson, [7 June, 1802], Wordsworth Letters, I, 355.

classes of society have each of them a distinct character, as well as a separate idiom; and the names of the various passions to which they are subject respectively, have a signification that varies essentially according to the condition of the persons to whom they are applied. The love, or grief, or indignation of an enlightened and refined character, is not only expressed in a different language, but is in itself a different emotion from the love, or grief, or anger, of a clown, a tradesman, or a market-wench. ... The question, therefore, comes simply to be - which of them is the most proper object for poetical imitation? It is needless for us to answer a question, which the practice of all the world has long ago decided irrevocably.¹

For Wordsworth, on the other hand, when with Coleridge's help he was formulating his theory of language, class distinction was entirely adventitious, one of the arbitrary means by which "those points, of nature and condition, wherein all men resemble each other" are obscured.²

Coleridge, however, while he denies a monopoly on "the best part of language" to an inferior class, is not, like Jeffrey, interested in transferring it to any other class. As he wrote to Poole, "There are favoured Individuals, but not Classes".³ This characteristically Romantic notion informed Coleridge's theory of poetic language, distinguishing it both from that of the Preface, and from the socially inspired generic theories of Jeffrey and the eighteenth century. The third advantage that Coleridge mentions as necessary to render an individual susceptible to the influence of nature is, accordingly, "original sensibility".⁴ The other two, education and independence, are more general advantages, and correspond to "refinement" in Jeffrey's terms. They fail to account

1 ER I (October, 1802), p.66.

2 I am quoting from the first of Wordsworth's "Essays upon Epitaphs", Wordsworth Prose Works, II, 59.

3 On 8 April, 1799, Coleridge Letters, I, 480.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 32.

for a language of genius. But to this crucial development we will return later.

It is little wonder that when Coleridge at the end of Chapter XVII of the Biographia embarks on his more detailed analysis of the language of low and rustic life he should find it unmethodical. It is capable of expressing only "insulated facts" rather than of reflecting the "general law" or laws to which such facts submit and which are the province of the educated intellect.¹ (Ironically, much Augustan poetic diction was doing exactly as Coleridge recommends and reflecting laws and categories so general that they robbed the individual image of precision and concreteness.²) With syntax the rustic fared no better:

this order, in the intercourse of uneducated men, is distinguished from the diction of their superiors in knowledge and power.... There is a want of that prospectiveness of mind, that surview, which enables a man to foresee the whole of what he is to convey, appertaining to any one point; and by this means so to subordinate and arrange the different parts according to their relative importance, as to convey it at once, and as an organized whole.³

The stress, it will be noted, is in both cases on "uneducated" men. Coleridge has successfully manoeuvred the discussion around to the comparative defects of ignorance, disregarding the implicit and explicit opposition of urban and rural living in the Preface. Like all uneducated people the rustic wants method. (Shakespeare's *Mistress Quickly* is Coleridge's favourite example of this failing.) The first idea of this method, we learn from his treatise on the topic, is "a progressive transition from one step in any course to another". Rustic

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 39.

2 See above, p.23 note 3.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 44.

speech lacks the controlling, organizing "Principle of UNITY WITH PROGRESSION".¹

The rustic language also wants variety and innovation. Without its characteristic idiom, Coleridge argues, it is distinguished from other languages only insofar as the "notions, which the rustic has to convey, are fewer and more indiscriminate".² But this, with the expression of "insulated facts", is exactly what Wordsworth had in mind for his "philosophical language", the full significance of which escaped Coleridge when he chose wilfully to ignore the Hartleian assumptions behind the aspiration for a perfect language. Hartley gives an indication of the sacrifices this language involves in the passage where he supposes its use in Eden; "though it might be narrow", he says, it "answered all their Exigences perfectly well".³ The idea of depth and narrowness must surely have appealed to Wordsworth, who attributes the simple dignity of the rustics' speech to "the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse".⁴

As suspicious of abstruse philosophical, especially ethical, reasoning as he was of poetic diction -

the lifelessness
Of truth by oversubtlety dislodged
From grandeur and from love⁵

1 Coleridge Treatise on Method, p.2. See also Coleridge's Essays on the Principles of Method published as The Friend (1818), essays IV-XI (Coleridge's 'Treatise on Method' as it appeared in the Encyclopaedia Metropolitana (1818), vol I, had been tampered with); the best example of his illustrative use of Mistress Quickly is in essay IV - The Friend (CC), I, 448-524 (pp.450-451).

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 39.

3 Observations on Man, I, 316; compare Coleridge: "the distinct knowledge of an uneducated rustic would furnish a very scanty vocabulary", Biographia Literaria, II, 39.

4 In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124.

5 The most accessible version of these lines is in the reading text of The Pedlar, in Jonathan Wordsworth's The Music of Humanity, pp.172-183 (lines 177-179, p.178).

- Wordsworth sought a language capable of representing the few permanent truths and elementary feelings, "the primary laws of our nature".¹ Like poetic diction, this sort of "oversubtlety" was obscurantist and self-generated. It was also a fault to which Coleridge was prone: "My own Subtleties too often lead me into strange (tho' God be praised) transient Out-of-the-waynesses. Oft like a winged Spider, I am entangled in a new Spun web".² This was the "airy wretchedness / That battened on [his] youth" that Wordsworth mentions in The Prelude:

I have thought
Of thee, thy learning, gorgeous eloquence,
And all the strength and plumage of thy youth,
Thy subtle speculations, toils abstruse
Among the schoolmen, and Platonic forms
Of wild ideal pageantry, shaped out
From things well-matched, or ill, and words for things -
The self-created sustenance of a mind
Debarred from Nature's living images,
Compelled to be a life unto itself,
And unrelentingly possessed by thirst
Of greatness, love, and beauty.³

The similarity between these "shapings of the unregenerate mind"⁴ and

1 Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 122.

2 As he wrote to John Prior Estlin, 1 March, [1800], Coleridge Letters, I, 578. Compare the note of 6 January, 1806, in which, after a discussion of being "Hocus-pocused by metaphysical Etymology", Coleridge continues: "O Lord! What thousands of Threads in how large a Web may not a Metaphysical Spider spin out of the Dirt of his own Guts / but alas! it is a net for his own superingenious Spidership alone!", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2784.

3 The Prelude (1805), VI, ll.325-326; 305-316 (my italics); Wordsworth The Prelude, p.202. It is not far from here to the more sinister 'self-generation' of Oswald/Rivers in The Borderers: "Natures such as his / Spin motives out of their own bowels" (ll.1427-8), Wordsworth Poetical Works, I, 184. Compare Wordsworth on the substitution of words for things in the "Essay on Morals", Wordsworth's Prose Works, I, 103 and above, pp.25-26.

4 "The Eolian Harp", l.55, Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 100-102 (p.102). Coleridge had an extraordinary ambivalence towards his own metaphysical speculations, a fact that is not often recognized. The description of Coleridge in the sixth book of The Prelude no doubt derives from his own sense of self-distrust. Witness, besides "The Eolian Harp" itself, the association of "abstruse research" with opium in Dejection: An Ode, ll.87-93 (l.89) - Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 362-368 (p.367) -

the "vicious affectation" of poetic diction needs no gloss. Wordsworth felt, like the churchman Hartley, that "Innocence, and pure unmixed Happiness, may exist without any great Degrees of Knowledge"¹ and, in the words of Hugh Blair, that the principle "of a natural relation between words and objects, can only be applied to Language in its most simple and primitive state".² Coleridge, on the other hand, had come to feel that the "narrow circle" Wordsworth commends in country life could be claustrophobic, even vicious.

It was in Coleridge's interest to protest against the Faustian implications of the theory. Having largely forsaken poetry and given over his intellectual life to just that sort of philosophical speculation that is implicitly devalued in Wordsworth's theory, he had a great deal at stake in judging what a "philosophical language" should involve. This explains why his analysis of primitive ignorance and inarticulateness in the Biographia, though a salutary corrective to the unquestionable naivety of much of the Preface, is not without a trace of intellectual snobbery. Coleridge is in part reacting against the simple pattern many rustics imposed on their lives with platitudes (there is a fine line between the few and simple permanent truths represented by and in rustic speech and these indiscriminating and oversimplifying platitudes).

More positively, however, Coleridge felt that language could be genuinely creative: "The powers of conscious intellect increase by the accession of an organon or new word", he noted down in 1808.³ Another

and the distrust of the early letters to George Coleridge, 30 March, 1794; to Southey, 11 December, 1794; and to Benjamin Flower, [11 December, 1796], Coleridge Letters, I, 78, 133, 267. And witness the reference to "metaphysicks", and "theological controversy" as a "mental disease" in, of all places, the Biographia Literaria, I, 9, 10.

1 Observations on Man, I, 298.

2 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 132-3.

3 Coleridge Notebooks, III, 3268.

note, written four years previously, argues that whereas

Common people, and all men in common Life, notice only low & high degrees, & frame words accordingly / philosophers notice the kind & as it were element, & often finding no word to express this are obliged to invent a new word or to give a new sense to an old one¹

In the Biographia Coleridge therefore decides that the "best part of human language" is formed not in the countryside, but in the study, that it "is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself".² The best language, in other words, belongs to the scholar, or to the philosopher whose theory begins and ends in an act of self-construction. On the assumption that language was an instrument making ever finer discriminations, Coleridge would err, if at all, on the side of complexity. The following self-justification from the Biographia confirms this new priority:

My prose writings have been charged with a disproportionate demand on the attention; with an excess of refinement in the mode of arriving at truths; with beating the ground for that which might have been run down by the eye; with the length and laborious construction of my periods; in short with obscurity and the love of paradox. But my severest critics have not pretended to have found in my compositions triviality, or traces of a mind that shrunk from the toil of thinking.³

Convinced of the value of abstract thought and of formal education Coleridge completely glosses over the fundamentalism of the Preface's

1 Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1835.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 39-40. Compare Jeffrey on Dugald Stewart's "just ridicule" of that criticism "which could make us appeal...to the woods of Germany" - the phrase "woods of Germany" being a concise way of expressing Jeffrey's contempt for the Lake Poet's appeal to Nature and for their imitation of the Germans - see the review of Stewart's Philosophical Essays, ER XVII, no. 33 (November, 1810), article IX, pp.167-211 (p.197), and see also below, pp.236-239.

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 149.

commendation of rustic language, wilfully confusing poetic expressiveness with philosophic precision.¹

I would suggest that it is this conviction also that motivates Coleridge's excessive criticism of the image of the child as a "Seer blest" in the "Ode. Intimations of Immortality".² In Coleridge's new scheme, a child has neither the education nor the intellect to comprehend the type of mysterious knowledge that Wordsworth has in mind, or to articulate and thus organize the vision of the ode itself. Besides giving Coleridge an excuse to discuss pantheism, the child gave him an opportunity to express his support for more conventional hierarchies. In 1815 Coleridge's idea of truth was something refined and recondite discovered by an act of creative self-consciousness on the part of an educated intellect, then "transferred from the school to the pulpit, and thus gradually passed into common life" - disseminated, that is, by an educated elite.³

1 It was not the first time he had confused poetry with abstract philosophy. In his letter to Wordsworth of 30 May, 1815, expressing his disappointment with The Excursion, Coleridge reveals that what he had in mind for The Recluse was the philosophical refutation of materialism and the championing of transcendental philosophy - in fact what Coleridge himself proposed in the Biographia and the projected Opus Maximum (the same Coleridge who, in early 1800 had written that "A great Vice is metaphysical Solution in Poetry", Coleridge Notebooks, I, 673). The detailed expectations of the letter are absurd, not because of their ambitiousness, but because of their inappropriateness; Wordsworth did not think in those terms. His principal aim had been rather "to put the commonplace truths, of the human affections especially, in an interesting point of view", an aim that Coleridge felt he could now dispense with, having achieved it in the Poems in Two Volumes. The letter of Wordsworth to Coleridge, and Coleridge's reply, betray two radically different ideas of a "philosophic" poem - see Wordsworth Letters, III, Part II, 238; Coleridge Letters, IV, 570-576 (p.576). For a discussion of the change in Coleridge's idea of a "philosophic" poem, see Roy Park, "Coleridge's Two Voices as a Critic of Wordsworth", English Literary History, XXXVI, no. 2 (June, 1969), pp.361-381 (especially pp.365-367).

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 111-114.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 40.

Not surprisingly, the simple ballad "Babes in the Wood" that the Preface had opposed to the inanities with which such simplicity was often confused, also comes under fire in the general reaction of the Biographia against ignorance, idiots, and other innocents.¹ Despite the sustained attack on Jeffrey throughout the work, Coleridge often unwittingly supports attitudes held by him and his circle. Coleridge's distaste for what Jeffrey condemned as "vulgar ballads and plebeian nurseries" is a case in point.² Just how far Coleridge had moved from the late 1790s can be seen in a comment in Sibylline Leaves on a 'vulgar ballad' of his own:

The language was intended to be dramatic; that is, suited to the narrator; and the metre corresponds to the homeliness of the diction. It is therefore presented as the fragment, not of a Poem, but of a common Ballad-tale. Whether this is sufficient to justify the adoption of such a style, in any metrical composition not professedly ludicrous, the Author is himself in some doubt. At all events, it is not presented as poetry, and it is in no way connected with the Author's judgment concerning poetic diction.³

It was partly to combat the popular but false idea of Wordsworth's "turn for SIMPLICITY" that, as he tells us, Coleridge undertook the Wordsworth criticism towards which the Biographia is directed.⁴

1 On ignorance and "the PUBLIC" see Biographia Literaria, I, 163-164; on the Idiot Boy and his "anile" mother, II, 35-36.

2 See above, p.90, note 1.

3 As quoted in Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 267-268 (the ballad is "The Three Graves").

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 131. Typical would be New Annual Register for 1807: "The Minor Poets of the year are Mr. Wordsworth, who has given us two small additional volumes of 'Poems,' for the most part lyrical, and possessing his common ease and simplicity", XXVIII (1808), p.387.

III

Even if we set aside the Preface's dubious identification of poetry with the specific idiom of "low and rustic life", we still have to come to terms with its identification with, more generally, "the real language of men", as opposed to the unreal language of poets.¹ An example of how seriously Wordsworth took this dictum can be seen in the letter to Mary Hutchinson of 14 June, 1802, in which he discusses Resolution and Independence:

The poem is throughout written in the language of men
- 'I suffered much by a sickness had by me long ago'
is a phrase which anybody might use, as well as 'a
sickness which I had long ago'.²

That Wordsworth's interest is not purely colloquial can be seen in his further, equally dubious identification of this language with that of prose.³ The confusion has a literary history. Cowper had written to the Reverend Unwin in 1782 of the problems of what he called "the familiar style", which was, he said, "of all the styles the most difficult to succeed in":

To make verse speak the language of prose, without
being prosaic - to marshal the words of it in such an
order as they might naturally take in falling from
the lips of an extempory speaker, yet without meanness,
harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to

1 Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 118.

2 Wordsworth Letters, I, 365.

3 Roger Sharrock's excuses for Wordsworth ring a little hollow (especially when we think of Wordsworth's own prose and of his education in the Latin prose-writers): "Wordsworth...may well have thought that he had been talking prose all his life" - "Speech and Prose in Wordsworth's Preface", Essays in Criticism, VII, no. 1 (January, 1957), pp.108-111 (p.111).

displace a syllable for the sake of rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake.¹

It was because the real language of men was expected to approximate to nature that it was advocated by the Preface. Prose, traditionally less figurative and more referential, was also construed as being more faithful to nature, a construction based on the association of figurative language with the false diction of the Augustans. Thus the lines from Gray's "Sonnet on the Death of Mr Richard West" which are singled out for praise in the Preface are distinguished by their being devoid of figures of any kind² (or almost devoid, for as Coleridge suggests the line "My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine" is figurative and therefore alien to the language of ordinary conversation³).

According to the Biographia the whole argument is based on a false premise that confuses two distinct types of figure, as different as the real and the marble peach.⁴ The mistake becomes apparent if the type of genuine simplicity that Blair referred to in his Lectures is acknowledged: that which "stands opposed, not to Ornament, but to Affectation of Ornament".⁵ In the eighteenth chapter of the Biographia Coleridge submits that Wordsworth overreacted to this affectation by dismissing all ornament, and by suggesting incorrectly that language is poetic in inverse proportion to the number of figures it employs. As M.H. Abrams

1 17 January, 1782, The Correspondence of William Cowper, edited by Thomas Wright, in 4 vols (London, 1904), I, 430. Compare Hazlitt's "On Familiar Style", The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, Vol VII, Table Talk; or, Original Essays (London, 1931), pp.242-248 (especially p.242).

2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 132, 134.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 57.

4 See Biographia Literaria, II, 64-65, a passage to which I return below, pp.155-156.

5 Lectures on Rhetoric, II, 35.

notes, the term 'ornament' had become, in Wordsworth's criticism, "entirely pejorative".¹ Where Gray had "thought his language was more poetical as it was more remote from common use",² Wordsworth fled to the other extreme in claiming it was less so. The fact that "a poem of any length neither can be, or ought to be, all poetry" might have made the italicized lines acceptable to Coleridge (though even here he required some artificiality to preserve such lines "in keeping").³ His complaint is against their exclusive selection as the language of poetry, in practice as well as in theory. Coleridge, that is, not only thought poetry required "a certain Aloofness from [the la]nguage of real Life, which I think deadly to Poetry",⁴ but also regarded the equation of poetry and prose as Wordsworth's "fatal Cleopatra".⁵ In this, as in other things, he and Jeffrey were of one mind.⁶

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- 1 "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Diction and Figures", p.178. Compare Thomas Raysor: "Wordsworth overshot his mark and betrayed himself into an attack upon any style which differentiates poetry from prose", "Coleridge's Criticism of Wordsworth", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LIV, no. 2 (June, 1939), pp.496-510 (p.501).
 - 2 As Johnson claimed in the "Life of Gray", see above, p.21, note 2.
 - 3 Biographia Literaria, II, 11. Later, in chapter XXII, Coleridge suggests that for the style to be "in keeping" it need not be artificially distinguished from prose, but may be written in a "third, the neutral" style, "common to both" poetry and prose (Biographia Literaria, II, 97).
 - 4 See the letter to Tom Wedgwood, 20 October, 1802, Coleridge Letters, II, 877.
 - 5 I am alluding, of course, to Johnson on Shakespeare's puns, in his "Preface to Shakespeare" (1765), The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, VII, 74. This idea is echoed by many modern critics, among them George Whalley: "the Preface, far from securing Wordsworth's poetic freedom, consolidated his movement towards disaster" - see his article "Preface to Lyrical Ballads: A Portent", University of Toronto Quarterly, XXV, no. 4 (July, 1956), pp.476-483 (p.467).
 - 6 Jeffrey's attitude to the identification of poetry and prose is best observed in his review of James Cririe's Scottish Scenery, wherein "So large a quantity of pure prose was never divided before, we believe, into cuttings of ten syllables"; "the reverend author...appears to have borrowed a good number of hints from the inestimable treatise of the Bathos", ER III, no. 6 (January, 1804), article VI, pp.328-334 (p.329); compare the review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), p.63.

Jeffrey rightly saw the Preface as "a kind of manifesto", and felt that the poetry of the Lyrical Ballads itself, and more especially of Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes (1807), was "written avowedly for the purpose of exalting a system".¹ The mistake for Jeffrey was that, to an author of Wordsworth's "reading and education", a simple or prosaic style, apart from being undistinguished in itself, "must always be assumed and unnatural".² All but a few of Wordsworth's reviewers shared Jeffrey's belief. Most of his poems were dismissed as "unfortunate experiments", in the words of the New Annual Register, "on which genius and labour have been misemployed".³ Lucy Aiken's final, summary explanation for her review of the Poems in Two Volumes could stand, in its content and magisterial tone, as a collective statement for many reviewers of the Lyrical Ballads and Poems in Two Volumes⁴:

we were anxious to combat a system which appears to us so injurious to its author, and so dangerous to public taste.⁵

When Wordsworth, on the other hand, "is led to abandon his system",

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- 1 See the review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), p.65, and the review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.216.
 - 2 Review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), p.68.
 - 3 Review or notice of the Lyrical Ballads (1798), New Annual Register for 1798, XIX (1799), pp.309-310 (p.310).
 - 4 It is true, as John O. Hayden observes, that "the first edition of the Lyrical Ballads received very good support, even from the Antijacobin Review" but this favourable reception consisted largely of notices. See the Analytical Review, XXVIII (December, 1798), pp.583-587; Anti-Jacobin Review, V (April, 1800), p.[4]34; British Critic, XIV (October, 1799), pp.364-369; Monthly Mirror, VI (October, 1798), pp.224-225. The only extended and intelligent review which promoted the Lyrical Ballads was of the 1800 edition by John Stoddart in the British Critic, XVII (February, 1801), pp.125-131. After this the critical reputation of Wordsworth deteriorated rapidly. For Hayden's remark, see his The Romantic Reviewers 1802-1824 (London, 1969), p.78.
 - 5 Annual Review, VI (1808), pp.521-529 (p.529).

Jeffrey argued, "he does always write good verses".¹ Coleridge also made much of the contrast between the prosaic or trivial lines written "because the poet would so write", and the more figurative or dignified verse written "because he could not so entirely repress the force and grandeur of his mind".² Indeed both Jeffrey and Coleridge, although they disagreed about what was good poetry and what was bad, complained about the unevenness that was created by irrepressibly poetic expression breaking through Wordsworth's systematically flat or simple style. Thus one "disagreeable effect" of the "affected simplicity" of the new sect of poets was for Jeffrey "the extreme difficulty of supporting the same low tone of expression throughout, and the inequality that is consequently introduced into the texture of the composition".³ And the first characteristic defect of Wordsworth's poetry that Coleridge discovers in the twenty-second chapter of the Biographia is "the INCONSTANCY of the style":

Under this name I refer to the sudden and unprepared transitions from lines or sentences of peculiar felicity (at all events striking and original) to a style, not only unimpassioned but undistinguished. He sinks too often and too abruptly to that style,

1 Review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.228. There are precedents; see, for example, the review of Lyrical Ballads in the New London Review, I (January, 1799), pp.33-35 (p.34): "so far from these poems being entirely written in the eccentric principle he proposes, we shall find, that he has many exquisite thoughts exquisitely expressed". After Jeffrey's review, however, all the magazines and reviews took up this cry and - in the words of the Satirist, I (November, 1807), pp.188-191 (p.189) - "the world laughed at the system, without denying justice to Mr. Wordsworth's merit as a poet" (or at least so they imagined). Many modern scholars agree; "Wordsworth", writes Kenneth Allott for example, "had a theory of diction, but ignored it in practice in all his best poems" - see his article "Victorian Poetry and the Legacy of Romanticism", in R.T. Davies and B.G. Beatty (eds), Literature of the Romantic Period 1750-1850 (Liverpool, 1976), pp.189-206 (p.201).

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 96.

3 Review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), p.68.

which I should place in the second division of language, dividing it into the three species; first, that which is peculiar to poetry; second, that which is only proper in prose; and third, the neutral or common to both.¹

Of the five criticisms levelled at Wordsworth in this chapter, all but one are variations of bathos expanded from misgivings that Coleridge expressed to Southey in a letter of 1802, in which he remarked "here & there a daring Humbleness of Language & Versification" in Wordsworth's poetry.² Occasional notes in the Diaries of Henry Crabb Robinson suggest that this disenchantment of Coleridge's became a regular element of his discussions of Wordsworth. Concerning an evening "at Lamb's" on 15 November, 1810, for example, Robinson records that "of Wordsworth" Coleridge spoke

with great warmth of praise, but objected to some of his poems. Wishing to avoid an undue regard to the high and genteel in society, Wordsworth had unreasonably attached himself to the low, so that he himself erred at last. He should have recollected that verse being the language of passion, and passion dictating energetic expressions, it became him to make his subjects and style accord. One asks why tales so simple were not in prose.³

A note on the poem "To a Skylark" in a letter that Wordsworth wrote to Barron Field in 1828 indicates that Coleridge made his disappointment known to Wordsworth in the strongest possible terms: "this poem", writes Wordsworth, "Coleridge used severely to condemn, and to treat contemptuously".⁴ The reason for so treating it becomes apparent when we trace

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 97.

2 29 July, 1802, Coleridge Letters, II, 830. Coleridge did not so much treat Wordsworth as "a poet of purple passages", as Donald Davie has argued (Purity of Diction in English Verse, p.117), as wish that he were a poet of one long purple passage.

3 Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, Barrister-at-Law, F.S.A., selected and edited by Thomas Sadler, in 3 vols (London, 1869), I, 304-305.

4 24 October, 1828; Wordsworth Letters, III, Part 1, 644.

Coleridge's anxiety about the composition of The Recluse through the early years of the nineteenth century. One letter, from Coleridge to Thomas Poole on 14 October, 1803, will serve:

The habit too of writing such a multitude of small Poems was in this instance hurtful to him... / I rejoice therefore with a deep & true Joy, that he has at length yielded to my urgent & repeated - almost unremitting - requests & remonstrances - & will go on with the Recluse exclusively. - A Great Work, in which he will sail; on an open Ocean, & a steady wind... - great work necessarily comprehending his attention & Feelings within the circle of great objects & elevated Conceptions - this is his natural Element - the having been out of it has been his Disease -¹

The motivation for Coleridge's refutation of the Preface lies, therefore, as much in his conviction that its theory or system had corrupted, and was corrupting, Wordsworth's poetry, as it lies in Coleridge's middle-aged social and political beliefs. Wordsworth was being distracted from his true task of composing "the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM".² Throughout the Biographia Wordsworth's poetry is judged against the "impassioned, lofty, and sustained diction, which is characteristic of his genius"³ - against, that is, the great blank verse of the years 1798 to 1805.

1 Coleridge Letters, II, 1013.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 129. For a brief history of Coleridge's frustrations with Wordsworth's shorter lyrics, see Jared R. Curtis, Wordsworth's Experiments with Tradition: The Lyric Poems of 1802, with Texts of the Poems Based on Early Manuscripts (Ithaca and London, 1971), pp.5-10.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 6.

IV

Coleridge's theoretical definition of the language appropriate to poetry is revealed in the debate on metre. The Preface had insisted that the presence of metre heralded no essentially different language, that there is "no essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition".¹ Two months after the publication of the Preface in January, 1801, Coleridge was planning an essay on metre.² Even bearing in mind that, as Southey said, Coleridge spawned plans "like a herring",³ it is significant that a subject should occupy him that had received such extensive treatment in the document with which his own "opinions on the subject of poetry" were said to "almost entirely coincide".⁴ It might have been a purely technical analysis.⁵ But it is more likely that the essay would have attempted to answer the "true question" that the Biographia accuses Wordsworth of begging:

The true question must be, whether there are not modes of expression, a construction, and an order of sentences, which are in their fit and natural place in a serious prose composition, but would be disproportionate and heterogeneous in metrical poetry; and, vice versa, whether in the language of a serious poem there may not be an arrangement both of words and sentences,

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 134.

2 See his letter to Thomas Poole, [16 March, 1801], Coleridge Letters, II, 707.

3 The Life and Correspondence of the late Robert Southey, edited by Charles Cuthbert Southey, in 6 vols (London, 1849-1850), II, 190. Compare Coleridge Letters, II, 829-830 note.

4 In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 120; compare Coleridge to Daniel Stuart, [Circa 30 September, 1800]: "The Preface contains our joint opinions on Poetry", Coleridge Letters, I, 627.

5 Coleridge's Notebooks testify to the fascination that the technical problems of metre held for him; Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2224 alone bears this out.

and a use and selection of (what are called) figures of speech, both as to their kind, their frequency, and their occasions, which on a subject of equal weight would be vicious and alien in correct and manly prose.¹

It is now prose diction that is expected to be "correct and manly".

Coleridge uses the assumption that prose diction should, according to the best tenets of the Royal Society,² be chaste and directly referential to distinguish between prose and poetic diction. The Preface had used it to identify them.³ Coleridge's answer, in other words, is that there must certainly be a different diction for each, "that in both cases this unfitness of each for the place of the other frequently will and ought to exist".⁴

The Preface vacillates between implying that metre is a necessary evil, endangering the struggle of poetry to imitate life and nature by divesting language "in a certain degree, of its reality", and approving its conformity to an exalted pleasure principle, by which the individual

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 49.

2 The Royal Society, wrote Thomas Sprat in 1667, had "been most rigorous in putting in execution...a constant Resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many things, almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can", The History of the Royal-Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge (London, 1667), p.113. For a critical discussion, see Robert Adolph, The Rise of Modern Prose Style (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1968), especially chapter 3, "Glanvill, Sprat, and the Royal Society", pp.78-128.

3 "If the artificial diction of modern poetry would be improper, on similar occasions, in prose", William Enfield had written in the Monthly Magazine, II (July, 1796), pp.453-456, it would be "equally improper in verse" (p.455).

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 49. Earlier, in chapter IV, Coleridge had suggested "that there were some few of the tales" in the Lyrical Ballads in which he could not "find a sufficient cause for their having been recorded in metre", casually denying the identity of poetry and prose that he sets out to controvert more thoroughly in the second volume (I, 54).

"knows, and feels, and lives, and moves".¹ Metre is said to perform one of two functions: it either, rather slyly, creates the illusion of passion or importance, or it checks the passion of the poetry.²

Discussing the first function, the Preface had argued that Pope, "by the power of verse alone, has contrived to render the plainest common sense interesting".³ But this is precisely what Coleridge had in mind when he complained about the "translations of prose thoughts into poetic language" of Augustan verse.⁴ It was a technique recognised by Augustan theory. Johnson, in the "Life of Cowley", talked of the legitimate praise "often gained by those who think less, but are more diligent to adorn their thoughts",⁵ and Jeffrey commended the art "of clothing soft nothings in an imposing dress, excellently contrived to conceal their inward poverty".⁶ In fact Coleridge's phrase is just a cynical rendering of Pope's well-known definition of wit:

True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest⁷

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- 1 Preface (1802), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 147, 140.
 - 2 Preface (1800), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 146, 148. This second function of metre (discussed below), as René Wellek has remarked, "enhances what we would call aesthetic distance", A History of Modern Criticism, II, 142.
 - 3 Preface (1800), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 150.
 - 4 Biographia Literaria, I, 13.
 - 5 Lives of the Poets, I, 31.
 - 6 In his review of the anonymous Paradise of Coquettes, ER XXIV, no. 48 (February, 1815), article VIII, pp.397-412 (p.411).
 - 7 Essay on Criticism, II, ll.297-298, The Poems of Alexander Pope, I, 272-273. Compare Coleridge on the prose after the Glorious Revolution: "The thought was carefully kept down to the immediate apprehension of the commonest understanding, and the dress was as anxiously arranged for the purpose of making the thought appear something very profound", in Lecture XIV, "On Style", of the 1818 Lectures on Literature, Coleridge Miscellaneous Criticism, p.220.

In Wordsworth's other argument that metre could be used to invest an idea "with the appearance of passion"¹ there is a contradiction similar to that in the argument that it could be used to invest an idea with importance. The other great fault of the Augustans had been, to their detractors, the use of poetical phrases or words as mechanical signs for passions they evidently did not feel. It involved a codification of literary symbols, and the propriety of an image was "judged by authority - not by actual experience" because an imitation of passion was measured against what people had "been accustomed to regard as symbols of this state; not the natural symbols; i.e., as self-manifestations of it".² Compare this with what Wordsworth has to say about the operation of metre:

if the Poet's words should be incommensurate with the passion...then...in the feelings of pleasure which the Reader has been accustomed to connect with metre in general, and in the feeling, whether chearful or melancholy, which he has been accustomed to connect with that particular movement of metre, there will be found something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words.³

Metre has simply replaced diction as a literary symbol of passion. But as Coleridge pointed out in the Biographia, there was a metrical caprice, as well as a figurative caprice, to which the reader may be subjected.⁴ It was dangerous to invoke custom in an essay that asked its readers to lay aside their "honorable bigotry for the objects which have long continued to please them".⁵ We can do no better than quote Lucy Aikin:

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 150 (my italics).

2 From a MS. fragment, as quoted in Coleridge Shakespearean Criticism, I, 185 (my italics).

3 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 148 (my italics).

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 63.

5 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 156.

Is not Mr. W. aware that these very arguments might equally be urged in favour of that poetic diction which he is so anxious to banish from his pages, and that the same instances might be adduced in its support that he here brings in favour of metre?¹

It is, however, when Coleridge addresses himself to the second, inhibitory function of metre that he outlines a diction for poetry. There he claims that Wordsworth had considered metre only in operation, and not "abstractly and separately".² When Coleridge, on the other hand, considers metre "abstractly and separately" he discovers that it is not a part of the poetic antagonism or interpenetration of passion and will - not, that is, the voluntary checking of passion suggested by the Preface³ - but the result of this interpenetration. It is in this sense that metre is symbolic of a language radically different from the language of real life or of prose, for metre is justified by two further, "legitimate conditions" only:

First, that, as the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement.

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- 1 In the Annual Review, VI (1808), pp.521-529 (pp.522-523). S.M. Parrish's insistence that "Wordsworth offers in his theory of meter a defense of literary art", in his article "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Meter", Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LIX, no. 1 (January, 1960), pp.41-49 (p.47), does not obviate this contradiction. W.J.B. Owen's interpretation, that "artificial" metre is required to contrast with the "real" language in order to create that "similitude in dissimilitude" that Wordsworth seeks, is justified, but the question still remains: is not artificial diction itself an example of "similitude in dissimilitude", especially in relation to "real" or colloquial speech (see his Wordsworth as Critic, pp.31-32)? Once Wordsworth admits any artificiality he undermines his basic thesis.
 - 2 Biographia Literaria, II, 51.
 - 3 Compare Roger Sharrock: "We learn from the Preface that he regarded metre as something imposed on the poetic record...not as an integral part of the creative process", in Wordsworth's Mind and Art, ed. Thomson, p.66.

Secondly, that as these elements are formed into metre artificially, by a voluntary act, with the design and for the purpose of blending delight with emotion, so the traces of present volition should throughout the metrical language be proportionately discernible.¹

These "traces" are the products of the imagination, "first put into action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, controul".² Metre and language are both "artificial", not in the decorative, dispassionate sense of the term used by Jeffrey and the Augustans, but in a profound sense. Wordsworth's theory of a language corresponding to reality was based on a commitment to the identity of life and literature that failed to recognise important differences between them, to recognise that literature was a human and therefore radically artificial activity: "the sentiments and language are the poet's own, and his own too in his artificial character, as poet".³ Wordsworth had insisted that, "should the Poet interweave any foreign splendour of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests", then the "intelligent Reader" should be shocked.⁴ But for Coleridge that passion is itself a constitutive element of the "foreign splendour" of the poetic imagination that is manifested in every part of the poem. The best part of language is not the language of rustic life, or of real life, or of prose, chosen because they were the closest things that Wordsworth could think of to nature; on the contrary, the best part of language is formed by the "voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols... to processes and results of imagination".⁵

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 50 (my italics in the second paragraph).

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 12.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 107.

4 Preface (1802), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 137.

5 Biographia Literaria, II, 40.

Hand in hand with Wordsworth's struggle to identify poetry with nature or feelings went his struggle to preserve the equality of the poet and the reader.¹ His definition of the poet as a man speaking to men is based on the assumption that, but for artificial distinctions such as those encouraged by class and polite literature, human nature is everywhere the same.² It is an assumption that we now identify as "uniformitarian".³ For the Augustans also the poet had been a man speaking to men, but if they had used the phrase, as Geoffrey Tillotson points out, they would have meant something quite different: "they would have meant by 'man' the poet in his capacity as member of a civilized society, and by 'men' those other members of it who resembled him in everything but

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- 1 That it was a struggle is evident from the Preface itself, especially from the additions of 1802 in which Wordsworth attempted to exalt and to humble the poet simultaneously: he is a man "endowed with more lively sensibility...and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind", but he "must descend from this supposed height", Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 138, 143. The struggle is even more apparent in the letter to John Wilson of [7 June, 1802], Wordsworth Letters, I, 354, 355, where the recognition of superior sensibility is grudging and ambiguous, and Wordsworth falls back once again on his hypothetical rustic. With Max F. Schulz we should stress "that this difference" between the poet and his fellow man, "as Wordsworth continued to insist, is one of degree rather than of kind", in his "Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the 1800 Preface to Lyrical Ballads", Studies in English Literature 1800-1900, V, no. 4 (Autumn, 1965), pp.619-639 (p.637).
 - 2 Compare Wordsworth's "principal object" in the Lyrical Ballads - "to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them... the primary laws of our nature", Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 122 - with Johnson's praise of Shakespeare: "His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated", in the Preface (1765), The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, VII, 62.
 - 3 See Arthur O. Lovejoy, Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore, 1948), pp.79-82, though for Wordsworth, as for Johnson, this uniformity lies less in the Reason as it was conceived by the Enlightenment, and more in "the human heart by which we live" ("Ode. Intimations of Immortality", l.201; Wordsworth Poetical Works, IV, 285). And see the important statement in The Prelude (1805), Book XII, above, p.51 note 3.

poetic gifts".¹ This was Francis Jeffrey's assumption. His belief in who was to qualify as a member of this civilized society underwent a number of radical changes throughout his long career, but the assumption remained constant. With an irony of which he was probably aware, it became his principal weapon against Wordsworth and the Lake poets. However, Jeffrey's peculiar uniformitarianism and its critical consequences are the subject of the second part of this thesis and need not be discussed here.

In the Biographia, on the other hand, the poet is not only possessed of an education superior to the common man's, as is Jeffrey's man of letters, and of an organizing method in his thinking, he is also emphatically a poet speaking to men.² If Coleridge's distinction of education and method strike us, as they must have struck Wordsworth, as pedantic and self-defensive, the distinction of "original sensibility" is impossible to explain away.³ Indeed, it had become crucial to the self-definition that Wordsworth himself had developed with Coleridge's encouragement and in reaction to contemporary criticism.

For Coleridge, the poet is distinguished not merely by a greater sensitivity to nature, but also by the characteristic operation of his mind on that nature. After all, "What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet?".⁴ When Wordsworth made the mistake of wanting the question of what poetry is to be nearly the same as the

1 Augustan Poetic Diction, p.14.

2 Compare T.S. Eliot: "it is not the business of the poet to talk like any class of society, but like himself - rather better, we hope, than any actual class", The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p.72.

3 See above, p.112.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 12.

question of what nature is, he failed to account for this operation, and for what was to become for both him and Coleridge the most noble of all the mind's faculties: the Imagination.

The Imagination, to quote one of the two reviewers who anticipate Coleridge's important distinction, "has its own peculiar style".¹ Exactly what the New London reviewer had in mind it is difficult to say. Writing in her uncle's Annual Review, however, Lucy Aikin was more expansive. Like the New London reviewer she objected that it was "idle and sophistical to contend that because he does not write to poets he must not write like a poet", but Aikin had the courage and the space to attempt a definition of the characteristic activity of the poetic mind. Referring to the discussion of the poet's role that Wordsworth had interpolated into the 1802 edition of the Preface, she writes that

one who really deserves the name of a poet, must certainly add another faculty which is not even hinted at in this definition - we scarcely know how to name it, but it is that kind of fancy, akin to wit, which "glancing from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven," pervading, as it were, the whole world of nature and of art, snatches from each its beauteous images combines, adapts, arranges them by a magic of its own, peoples with them its new[]creations, and at length pours forth in one striking, brilliant, yet harmonious whole.

This faculty, which Mr. W[ordsworth] overlooks, is doubtless the true parent of that diction which he despises.²

It is an extraordinary compendium of a few new and many old ideas about the operation of the imaginative faculty. Looking back to the creation

1 New London Review, I (January, 1799), pp.33-35 (p.33). We might also include James Montgomery: "we know no law of nature, and we will acknowledge none of art, that forbids Genius to speak his mother-tongue, - a language which, in sound and structure, as well as in character and sentiment, exalts itself far above the models of common speech", Eclectic Review, IV (January, 1808), pp.35-43 (p.36).

2 Annual Review, VI (1808), pp.521-529 (p.523).

of imaginary beings by the "aggregating Faculty of the mind" which Coleridge called the Fancy, it also looks forward to the modifying and idealizing, animating and unifying activity of Coleridge's secondary imagination.¹

To understand fully why for Coleridge poetic language requires "a certain Aloofness from [the language of real Life]"² it is necessary to follow Coleridge's attempts to define the distinct poetry faculty. If it were evidence of this faculty in Wordsworth's early verse that inspired Coleridge to define it - "I no sooner felt, than I sought to understand"³ - it was the lack of evidence of the Imagination in the less outwardly ambitious poems like "The Sailor's Mother", "Anecdote for Fathers", and "Simon Lee" that sustained this inspiration. Coleridge's doubts about the "daring Humbleness of Language & Versification" that he discovered in Wordsworth's shorter lyrics of 1801-2,⁴ and his study of Shakespeare, led to a growing awareness of the inadequacy of both the extreme literalism and the extreme idealism between which Wordsworth, in the Preface and the early work, hovers so uneasily.

1 See the letter to William Sotheby, 10 September, 1802, Coleridge Letters, II, 865 and Biographia Literaria, I, 202. When a modern critic like Roger Murray points out that Wordsworth's "language", in spite of Wordsworth's theory, "has as its point of reference an inward landscape, one already tintured with feeling, modified in its transposition from external nature to the inward eye of the poet", he is working in the critical tradition of Coleridge and the early reviewers - see his Wordsworth's Style, p.138.

2 See above, p.122, note 4.

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 60.

4 See the letter to Southey, 29 July, 1802, Coleridge Letters, II, 830.

V

The central thesis of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads is that poetry should be a judicious imitation (and editing) of peasant conversation designed to reveal certain crucial human relationships and moral relations. It is, to quote Thomas Raysor, "a photographic, or rather a phonographic, theory of art".¹ In the light of recent eighteenth-century developments in aesthetics the theory appears anachronistic, a throwback, like the uniformitarianism that informs it. But the theory of imitation in the Preface is anachronistic in more ways than one. By the time it was written Wordsworth and Coleridge had themselves outgrown it. In the poetry and prose before the Preface there is ample evidence that the mind played an active part in perception, half creating the world it received. The important passage in the 1799 Prelude describing the quickening of the creative spirit, initiated and sustained by maternal love, establishes this beyond doubt:

Emphatically such a being lives,
An inmate of this active universe.
From Nature largely he receives, nor so
Is satisfied, but largely gives again;
For feeling has to him imparted strength,
And - powerful in all sentiments of grief,
Of exultation, fear and joy - his mind,
Even as an agent of the one great mind,
Creates, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds. Such, verily, is the first
Poetic spirit of our human life²

It may have taken the total disenchantment with materialist philosophy

1 In his article "Coleridge's Criticism of Wordsworth", p.503. This is a truth universally acknowledged - compare, for example, Heffernan, Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry, p.108; Sharrock in Wordsworth's Mind and Art, ed. Thomson, p.57; and George Watson, The Literary Critics: A Study of English Descriptive Criticism, second edition (London, 1973), p.108.

2 Second Part, 11.295-306, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.21.

in 1801 to ripen Coleridge's belief into a conviction that the mind was "not passive", but "made in God's Image...the Image of the Creator",¹ but it is implicit in the Conversation poems and explicit in Religious Musings.²

Indeed, the more carefully the Preface itself is examined, the more obvious it becomes that every qualification of this central, imitative thesis is a step away from nature and the language of real life.

(Certainly it is a step away from prose as it is defined.) Besides the distinction of metre, there is the qualification that poetic language be the language of excitement or passion, for example: "a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation".³ It is a salutary recognition of the intimate relationship between speech and the speaker, of the fact that "language is framed to convey not the object alone", as Coleridge notes in the Biographia, "but likewise the character, mood and intentions of the person who is representing it".⁴ And if this is true of all language, how much more true is it of the language of poetic genius? For him the objects of nature and his own "character, mood and intentions"

1 As he said in a letter to Poole of [23 March, 1801], Coleridge Letters, II, 707.

2 To the selections in John Spencer Hill's anthology of Imagination in Coleridge (London, 1978) may be added Religious Musings, ll.402-407 (Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 124) and, more importantly, the Conversation poems, especially "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and "Frost at Midnight", as well as occasional statements in letters such as that to his brother George [Circa 10 March, 1798] in which he mentions a decision "in poetry, to elevate the imagination & set the affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate impregnated, as with a living soul", Coleridge Letters, I, 397.

3 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 118.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 115-116. Compare the late letter to the young James Gillman of [22 October, 1826]: "it is the fundamental Mistake of Grammarians and Writers on the philosophy of Grammar and Language [to assume] that words and their syntaxis are the immediate representatives of Things, or that they correspond to Things. Words correspond to Thoughts; and the legitimate Order & Connection of Words, to the Laws of Thinking and to the acts and affections of the Thinker's mind", Coleridge Letters, VI, 630.

should be one; his "Heart & Intellect", that is, "should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature".¹

The theory that poetic language is the language of passion, "the Language natural to us in states of excitement",² was well established by the time Wordsworth wrote the Preface. Primitivist critics argued that the first poets, in fact the first users of language in any form, were dominated by passion and that their language was correspondingly more direct and sincere. The decadence of contemporary verse they attributed to the subversion of passion by more calculating, cerebral techniques of poetic composition.³ Coleridge would have met the theory in Blair, who was an advocate of the spontaneous type of poetry "where the greatest liberty is allowed to the language of passion".⁴ In this language are to be found such "bold and strong figures" as are the peculiar offspring of that passion. But the language will remain simpler than the deliberative one substituted for it by modern poets:

We should observe in what manner any one expresses
himself who is under the power of a real and a strong

1 As Coleridge wrote to William Sotheby, 10 September, 1802; Coleridge Letters, II, 864.

2 This definition occurs in a fragmentary draft of lecture III of the 1811-1812 Shakespeare lectures, Coleridge Notebooks, III, 4111 fl2; compare Coleridge Shakespeare Criticism, I, 148, II, 51. Compare, also, Jeffrey in his review of Mrs Grant's Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders, ER XVIII (August, 1811): "Strong feeling is always eloquent and original" (p.480).

3 Such techniques as Pope commends in Homer, in the Preface to his translation of The Iliad: "To throw his Language more out of Prose, Homer seems to have affected the Compound-Epithets. This was the sort of Composition peculiarly proper to Poetry, not only as it heighten'd the Diction, but as it assisted and fill'd the Numbers with greater Sound and Pomp, and likewise conduced in some measure to thicken the Images", The Poems of Alexander Pope, Vol. VII, The Iliad of Homer, edited by Maynard Mack (London and New Haven, 1967), p.10.

4 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 418.

passion; and we shall always find his language unaffected and simple. It may be animated, indeed, with bold and strong figures, but it will have no ornament or finery.¹

Because they "arise from Sentiment", these figures will be "the real and proper ornaments of Style".² Wordsworth added a more conservative version of the theory of poetic effusion to the 1802 Preface:

if the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures.³

In one sense, the change from the explicitly political and social model for imitation in the Advertisement for the Lyrical Ballads (1798) - "the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society"⁴ - to the more expressionist theory of the 1800 Preface, is more apparent than real. For while the new model is the real language of men "in a state of vivid sensation", the language of poetry is still an imitation, albeit of an expressive language.⁵ Even if it is argued that, by "endeavouring to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes", the poet actually experiences the passions, it does not alter the fact that the basic impulse is imitative rather than expressive. The poet is still humbled before the rustic:

1 Lectures on Rhetoric, II, 418.

2 Lectures on Rhetoric, II, 3. "That figurative language is the 'natural' expression of passion is a commonplace of eighteenth-century critical theory", as W.J.B. Owen points out, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 174 (note to 1.294ff.).

3 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 137.

4 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 116.

5 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 118 (my italics). Compare James Heffernan: "The difference between 'mimetic' and 'expressive' virtually disappears in Wordsworth's effort to identify the maker of poetry with the average man", Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry, p.47.

However exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a Poet, it is obvious, that while he describes and imitates passions, his employment is in some degree mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. So that it will be the wish of the Poet...for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs¹

What Wordsworth requires of the poet is a dramatic form of self-effacement.

Though no longer asked to employ a language not his own, he is now expected to have his language dictated by passions not his own. There is a curious echo here of Plato's depreciation of art in the Republic, especially in Wordsworth's odd choice of the word "shadows" to describe the fainter replica of "real and substantial" passion which "the Poet thus produces, or feels to be produced, in himself".² Socrates criticized the poets for imitating the material forms of spiritual Ideas, and thus for imitating imitations.³ In the 1802 Preface the combination of imitation and expression also leaves poetry at two removes from 'reality'. The beautiful and permanent forms of nature are reflected in the

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 138. This new humility required of the poet is based on a theory of creativity involving "sympathetic identification", a popular element of eighteenth-century poetics and ethics. Blair's description of Quintilian's oratorical method is typical: "setting before his own imagination...strong pictures of the distress or indignities which they had suffered, whose cause he was to plead...and putting himself in their situation,...he was affected by a passion similar to that which the persons themselves had felt", Lectures on Rhetoric, II, 417; compare Wordsworth on "emotion recollected in tranquillity": "the emotion is contemplated till... an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind", Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 148.

2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 138. Compare Socrates in Plato's Republic: "do you think that these men would have seen anything of themselves or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?", Book VII, 515a, Plato: The Collected Dialogues, p.747.

3 Republic, Book X, 595a-598d, Plato: The Collected Dialogues, pp.819-823.

passionate speech of the rustics (one remove), whose passions are then re-enacted by the poet, producing a language incommensurate with this speech (the second remove): "the language which it will suggest to him, must often, in liveliness and truth, fall short of that which is uttered by men in real life".¹

There is, however, a language of passion recommended by the Preface that is directly expressive of the poet's mind and emotions, rather than being a dramatic imitation. It is implicit in the well-known definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" of a man "possessed of more than usual organic sensibility".² Wordsworth has dispensed with the need for the poet to go elsewhere for his language, and has made the poet and his passion central to the act of creation. But for Coleridge, this identification of poetry with passionate utterance still failed to distinguish life and literature.

Coleridge made the pertinent note around the time of the composition of the Preface that a "child scolding a flower in the words in which he had himself been scolded & whipt, is poetry", because it combines "past passion with pleasure".³ By July 1802 this pleasure, now an exclusively aesthetic emotion, was foremost in his mind when registering the "radical Difference" he suspected existed between his own and Wordsworth's theories.

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- 1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 138. W.J.B. Owen rightly stresses the fact that when the poet "speaks to us in his own person and character", he has greater freedom than when he "describes and imitates passions" (Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 142, 138), but the priority that Wordsworth gives to "real and substantial action and suffering" prevails throughout - see Wordsworth as Critic, pp.74-75.
 - 2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 126. As Max Schulz observes, Coleridge's addition of a second reference to "organic sensibility" some eight lines later suggests that it was he who wanted to stress the differences between the poet and the people, while Wordsworth maintained their radical equality - see his "Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the 1800 Preface to Lyrical Ballads", pp.636-637.
 - 3 Coleridge Notebooks, I, 786 (Coburn dates this August-September, 1800).

This aesthetic emotion, he wrote to Sotheby, is generated by the creative act alone, and neither requires the sanction of real-life passion, nor attempts to imitate it:

In my opinion every phrase, every metaphor, every personification, should have it's justifying cause in some passion either of the Poet's mind, or of the Characters described by the poet - But metre itself implies a passion, i.e. a state of excitement, both in the Poet's mind, & is expected in that of the Reader - and tho' I stated this to Wordsworth, & he has in some sort stated it in his preface, yet he has [not] done justice to it, nor has he in my opinion sufficiently answered it. In my opinion, Poetry justifies, as Poetry independent of any other Passion, some new combinations of Language, & commands the omission of many others allowable in other compositions.¹

The same observation survives into the eighteenth chapter of the

Biographia:

as every passion has its proper pulse, so will it likewise have its characteristic modes of expression. But where there exists that degree of genius and talent which entitles a writer to aim at the honors of a poet, the very act of poetic composition itself is, and is allowed to imply and to produce, an unusual state of excitement, which of course justifies and demands a correspondent difference of language, as truly...as the excitement of love, fear, rage, or jealousy.²

Similarly, when Coleridge defined the "subtle Spirit" that informs poetry

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- 1 13 July, 1802, Coleridge Letters, II, 812. As early as 1796, in the Preface to his Poems (1796) Coleridge was insisting that "from intellectual activity a pleasure results" and using this pleasure to distinguish the work of art from "the painful subject of the description", Coleridge Poetical Works, II, 1136.
 - 2 Biographia Literaria, II, 56. When Coleridge describes Shakespeare's presentation of Venus and Adonis, he establishes that this emotion is not only separate from real passions, but also sufficient for poetry: "himself meanwhile unparticipating in the passions, and actuated only by that pleasurable excitement, which had resulted from the energetic fervor of his own spirit", Biographia Literaria, II, 15. Compare Tomalin report of the fourth 1811-12 Shakespeare lecture, Coleridge Shakespeare Criticism, II, 64, and Coleridge Notebooks, III, 4115, f26-f26^v.

in an unpublished letter of 1811 as "Passion and Imagination", he was quick to qualify: "it must be not merely Passion but poetic Passion, poetic Imagination".¹ His distinction anticipates the truism of T.S. Eliot that poetry is poetry, "and not another thing".² Mere passion, according to the Biographia, results only in the "increased activity" of the faculties; the product of passion is, more often than not, incoherence and repetition.³

This aesthetic emotion successfully distinguishes literature from life and therefore justifies certain types of literary artifice; more than that, it "demands a correspondent difference of language". But the language which it demands should not be confused with the more significant expression of Imagination and passion. The difference between the aesthetic emotion on the one hand, and poetic passion and poetic Imagination on the other, is that the former operates during composition and modifies utterance, and the latter operate prior to composition and modify "the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind".⁴

1 To an "Unknown Correspondent", [Circa 15-21 December, 1811], Coleridge Letters, III, 361.

2 In his Preface to The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism, second edition (London, 1928), p.viii. Compare Stephen Maxfield Parrish: "As against Wordsworth's dramatic propriety, Coleridge cited what he might have called poetic propriety", in "The Wordsworth-Coleridge Controversy", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LXXIII, no. 4, Part 1 (September, 1958), pp.367-374 (p.371).

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 42-43.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 12. This explains the important place in Wordsworth's scheme for the "silent Poet", like his brother John, whose "watchful heart", "inevitable ear, / And an eye practised like a blind man's touch" - which Wordsworth mentions in his Poems on the Naming of Places, VI, "When, to the attractions of the busy world", ll.80, 81, 82-83, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 118-123 (p.122) - made him "a Poet in everything but words", as he called him in a letter to Sir George Beaumont, 11 February, 1805, Wordsworth Letters, I, 541. Compare Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1162: "John that unperforming observer".

For both Wordsworth and Coleridge poetry, the creative act, was essentially prior to the poem;¹ its expression is not expression in the sense of 'effusion' at all, but is subservient to the original vision and may even require only the "appropriation of fixed symbols" of language.²

If I seem to use passion and Imagination interchangeably it is because the two are often confused in Coleridge's discussions of creativity. The reason is simple enough: the effect of passion upon perception helped Coleridge to formulate his theory of the Imagination. As Blair had observed, under "the influence too of any strong emotion, objects do not appear to us such as they really are, but such as passion makes us see them". Moreover, Blair had likened the operation of what he called imagination to the operation of passion, and related both specifically to poetic expression:

if the imagination has a tendency to magnify its
objects beyond their natural proportion, passion

1 Having said this, it should also be pointed out that the aesthetic emotion may operate as an agent of the Imagination, as Coleridge states explicitly in his draft of Lecture III of the 1811-12 Shakespeare lectures. The activity of the Imagination, with that of the Fancy, "modifies & corrects these truths" of Nature, "by that sort of pleasurable Emotion, which the exertion of all our faculties [*sic*] give in a certain degree". By and large, the function of the aesthetic emotion is "the production of a highly pleasurable Whole, of which each part shall communicate for itself a distinct & conscious pleasure" - in other words, of a poem - however intimately it may be related to the Imagination and Fancy, whose function is the production of poetry. "This...most general yet distinctive Character of...a Poem", as of poetry, "originated in the poetic Genius itself" - see Coleridge Notebooks, III, 4111, 4112, and compare 4115, f28: "Images tho' taken immediately from Nature & most accurately represented in words" - Wordsworth's ideal in the Preface - "do yet not characterize the Poet. - ...they must either be blended with or merged in, other images, the offering of the Poet's Imagination, by the Passion, by the specific modification of pleasurable Feelings which the contemplation of the Image had awakened in the Poet himself". For a discussion of the distinction between poetry and the poem, see Biographia Literaria, II, 11-12.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 40.

possesses this tendency in a vastly stronger degree;
and therefore not only excuses the most daring Figures,
but very often renders them natural and just.¹

For Coleridge also passion modified vision in a way distinctive of the Imagination, but of the Imagination as he was to conceive it; it unified - the familiar reduction of "multēity" into "unity"² - according to a predominant idea:

Who, said Coleridge, who knows the state of deep passion, must know that it approaches to that state of madness which is not frenzy or delirium, but which models all things to the one reigning idea.³

In a conversation recorded earlier by John Payne Collier, Coleridge had made the aesthetic relevance of this observation plain; in two distinct types of derangement he had found analogues for his two distinct poetic faculties: "Fancy might be considered delirium, and Imagination madness".⁴ In accordance with this distinction, the delirium of the young girl from the "Catholic town in Germany" which Coleridge discusses in the sixth chapter of the Biographia is characterized by the random association of images,⁵ by "Memory emancipated from the order of time

1 Lectures on Rhetoric, III, 89; I, 402-403.

2 Though I use the terms of Coleridge's Kantian "On the Principles of Genial Criticism" (Essay Third), Biographia Literaria, II, 228-243 (p.230), the idea itself unifies Coleridge's multitudinous output.

3 Collier's transcript of the twelfth 1811-12 Shakespeare Lecture, in Coleridge on Shakespeare, ed. R.A. Foakes, p.118.

4 21 October, 1811, Coleridge on Shakespeare, ed. R.A. Foakes, p.38. Compare Wordsworth's "Incipient Madness", on the mood "when grief, / Become an instinct, fastening on all things / That promise food doth like a sucking babe / Create it where it is not" (ll.8-11), Wordsworth Poetical Works, I, 314-316 (pp.314-315), and the related passage in the Preface (1802) in which Wordsworth describes the poet as "delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them", Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 138.

5 Biographia Literaria, I, 78-79.

and space".¹ Madness, on the other hand, rather than arbitrarily associating discrete atoms of experience, modifies every thought and perception.

Having remarked the similarity between strong passion or madness and Imagination, Coleridge is not always careful to differentiate between them. It is difficult, for example, to decide whether the anguish of Lear is an analogue of the workings of Shakespeare's Imagination, or an example of its workings, or both an analogue and an example:

we find undoubted proof in his mind of ~~the~~ Imagination or the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others, & by a sort of fusion to force many into one - that which after shewed itself in such might & energy in Lear, where the deep anguish of a Father spreads the feeling of Ingratitude & Cruelty over the very Elements of Heaven -.²

By citing the display of madness in a play such as King Lear, Coleridge avoided the necessity of distinguishing between it and the Imagination. He was afforded similar opportunities by Wordsworth's "The Mad Mother", a poem he considered

so expressive of that deranged state, in which from the increased sensibility the sufferer's attention is abruptly drawn off by every trifle, and in the same instant plucked back again by the one despotic thought, bringing home with it, by the blending, fusing power of Imagination and Passion, the alien object to which it had been so abruptly diverted, no longer an alien but an ally and an inmate.³

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- 1 As Coleridge characterizes Fancy, Biographia Literaria, I, 202. Compare Hartley: "When Ideas, and Trains of Ideas, occur, or are called up, in a vivid manner, and without regard to the Order of former actual Impressions and Perceptions, this is said to be done by the Power of Imagination or Fancy", Observations on Man, I [3] - Introduction, p.iii.
 - 2 From a note which Coburn dates March, 1808, Coleridge Notebooks, III, 3290 f14; compare Coleridge Shakespearean Criticism, I, 188.
 - 3 Biographia Literaria, II, 123.

Madness and Imagination actually merge in this passage; both are creative in an assimilating and unifying way. When in the Biographia Coleridge describes the images characteristic of "original genius" he again refuses to discuss the precise relation between passion and Imagination. Images, he argues,

become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion; or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity...; or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit,

"Which shoots its being through earth, sea, and air."¹

When he does fail to differentiate between passion and Imagination he is, of course, susceptible to the criticism levelled at the Preface of failing to discriminate between literature and life. But despite its confusion with Imagination, passion remains subordinate in Coleridge's system. Poetry must evidence not the effects of passion alone, but of the "interpenetration of passion and of will, of spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose" - an interpenetration achieved by the Imagination itself.²

These images of original genius are poetry's true "diction", genuine products of the Imagination and therefore distinct from both nature and prosaic language.³ They represent the humanizing of nature achieved

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 16. Because of the obvious indebtedness of this passage to Coleridge Notebooks, III, 4115, f28, "passion" may refer to the aesthetic emotion discussed above, though it is more likely to be to the "deeper emotion, arising out of and consonant with the state or circumstances of the Person describing it".

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 50.

3 "No Addison more careful to be poetical in diction than Shakespeare in providing the grounds and sources of its propriety", Coleridge Shakespearean Criticism, I, 19.

by art.¹ They will testify, firstly, to modification according to a unifying idea in the poet's mind and, secondly, to the animation of the "poet's own spirit". Though the two activities will be discussed separately, they are intimately related. Coleridge's theory of creativity evolved from a theory of "one Life" creating and informing all matter.² The creative mind, he felt, operated by unifying and animating as did the "one Life" to which it was analogous. The theory was first expounded cogently and at length in the famous letter to Sotheby of 10 September, 1802:

It must occur to every Reader that the Greeks in their religious poems address always the Numina Loci...All natural Objects were dead - mere hollow Statues - but there was a Godkin or Goddessling included in each - In the Hebrew Poetry you find nothing of this poor Stuff - as poor in genuine Imagination, as it is mean in Intellect- / At best, it is but Fancy, or the aggregating Faculty of the mind - not Imagination, or the modifying, and co-adunating Faculty. This the Hebrew Poets appear to me to have possessed beyond all others - & next to them the English. In the Hebrew Poets each thing has a Life of it's own, & yet they are all one Life. In God they move & live, & have their Being - not had, as the cold System of Newtonian Theology represents / but have.³

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- 1 For the extreme version of this, see Coleridge's essay "On Poesy or Art", which was, of course, heavily indebted to Schelling, Biographia Literaria, II, 253-263 and Shawcross's notes, pp.317-320. I am not concerned here with establishing Coleridge's intellectual debts, but with suggesting how far certain of his ideas, whatever their source, informed his theory of poetic language in the Biographia.
 - 2 For critical discussion of this, see I.A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination (London, 1934), pp.23-44, 141-164; James Volant Baker, The Sacred River: Coleridge's Theory of Imagination (Baton Rouge, 1957), pp.60-99; J.A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature, pp.93-97; W. Schrickx, "Coleridge and the Cambridge Platonists", A Review of English Literature, VII, no. 1 (January, 1966), pp.71-91; and John Spencer Hill's introduction to his anthology Imagination in Coleridge, especially pp.5-12.
 - 3 Coleridge Letters, II, 865-866.

The modifying and unifying operation of the Imagination - "the SOUL that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole"¹ - needs little more discussion here. The analogue and example of Lear's madness, which became a part of Coleridge's critical repertory, makes his point well enough. Lear's morbid vision of sexuality and filial ingratitude rampant in the world is manifest in his every thought and perception; it modifies "ab intra in each component part" as Coleridge argued the Imagination does,² and it modifies according to a single idea. Ideas in Coleridge's conception initiate the poem itself and inform its evolution. They are Platonic ideas as defined in the Biographia: "living, seminal, formative, and exempt from time".³ What the Imagination does is to realize these ideas through symbols, which give "outness to Thoughts".⁴ Imagery therefore will manifest this idea in a way unlike "the very language of men", who have no such informing vision. Critical analyses of Shakespearean drama by Caroline Spurgeon, G. Wilson Knight, Wolfgang Clemen, and L.C. Knights in this century have borne out the observation of Coleridge, in his own Shakespeare criticism, that there is such a principle within a play or poem of genius, and that it can be inferred from the complicated pattern of recurrent imagery that subtly, even subliminally, controls the reader's response.⁵ Coleridge, however, though he had none of the

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 13.

2 I am quoting from the marginalia in Coleridge's copy of the Stockdale Shakespeare, Coleridge Shakespearean Criticism, I, 5.

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 69 note.

4 "Language & all symbols give outness to Thoughts / & this the philosophical essence & purpose of Language", Coleridge Notebooks, I, 1387.

5 See Caroline Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (Cambridge, 1935); G. Wilson Knight, The Shakespearean Tempest: With a Chart of Shakespeare's Dramatic Universe (London, 1932), amongst his many other commentaries; Wolfgang Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery (London, 1951).

patience required to demonstrate the pattern itself, related his observation to a theory of creativity. The same theory enabled him to reconcile two apparently conflicting attitudes to Shakespeare's characters. They are to be treated neither as realistic characters with a life independent of the play,¹ nor as convenient fictions in the play as poems,² but as both: "at once nature, and fragments of Shakespeare".³ They are thus images writ large, similarly informed by the idea from which the play draws its organic totality. This realization that the characters of Shakespearean drama subserve an informing, artistic purpose was crucial to Coleridge's debate with Wordsworth, for it proved that even "the dramatic parts of composition" must be "coloured by a diction of the Poet's own".⁴

The second, "essentially vital" activity of the Imagination⁵ that we might be expected to recognize is animation, the transferring of

1 An attitude established in the eighteenth century by such critics as Maurice Morgann, though it had been "implicit from the beginning", to quote M.M. Badawi, Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1973), p.17. Morgann felt it "may be fit to consider" Shakespeare's characters "rather as Historic than Dramatic beings" - Shakespearian Criticism, edited by Daniel A. Fineman (Oxford, 1972), p.169 note - and Coleridge certainly encouraged the idea of "the re-creating psychologic (if not omni-, yet) hominiscience of 'the Myriad - minded' Bard" (see the letter to John Rickman, 25 January, 1813, Coleridge Letters, III, 428), an idea which found its most famous advocate in A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London and New York, 1904).

2 "A Shakespeare play is a dramatic poem" wrote L.C. Knights in his famous article "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth" (1933), reprinted in his 'Hamlet' and other Shakespearian Essays (Cambridge, London, Melbourne, 1979), pp.270-308 (p.273).

3 As he said in the sixth 1811-12 Shakespeare lecture, Coleridge on Shakespeare, ed. Foakes, p.67.

4 See the Preface, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 142. In a lyric poem, to reverse Wordsworth's emphasis, this will be even more imperative.

5 Biographia Literaria, I, 202.

"a human and intellectual life" to the images of nature.¹ When Coleridge exemplifies this activity in the fifteenth chapter of the Biographia it takes the rhetorical form of prosopopœia, or personification²:

In the two following lines...there is nothing objectionable....:

"Behold you row of pines, that shorn and bow'd
Bend from the sea-blast, seen at twilight eve."

But with a small alteration of rhythm, the same words would be equally in their place in a book of topography, or in a descriptive tour. The same image will rise into semblance of poetry if thus conveyed:

"Yon row of bleak and visionary pines,
By twilight glimpse discerned, mark! how they flee
From the fierce sea-blast, all their tresses wild
Streaming before them."³

His meaning is clear, though there is something mechanical about the performance. Coleridge felt that he was animating a flat, prose picture, but he could be accused with Pope of having transformed prose into a self-consciously 'poetic' language. He makes his point against the Preface nonetheless; mere descriptive accuracy does not constitute poetry. Coleridge chose the alternative of personification because it had been singled out for abuse in the Preface (1802) as the most characteristic and artificial of the Augustan figures of speech.⁴

1 See above, p.148 note 1.

2 Coleridge, in other words, revives an eighteenth-century faith in personification (a faith which Wordsworth rejected), except that he assimilates it into a more sophisticated theory of creativity; compare Blair: "We expect to find everything animated in the descriptions of a poet who has a lively fancy", Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 411, 415.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 16-17. This "union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human" - to use a phrase from "On Poesy or Art", Biographia Literaria, II, 254-255 - may be compared with an early note: "Children in the wind - hair floating, tossing, a miniature of the agitated trees, below which they played...", circa 1802, Coleridge Notebooks, I, 330. It was a favourite image, see "Kubla Khan", l.50, and Religious Musings, ll.250-251, for example, Coleridge Poetical Works, I, 298, 118.

4 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 131 and apparatus criticus.

However, the Biographia's demand is not for the indiscriminate re-introduction of personification. In the first chapter Coleridge juxtaposes passages from Shakespeare and from Gray in which Fate, represented in both cases by the personification of the capricious elements, is described as crippling and threatening youthful prosperity respectively:

the simile in Shakespeare

"How like a younker or a prodigal,
The skarfed bark puts from her native bay,
Hugg'd and embraced by the strumpet wind!
How like the prodigal doth she return,
With over-weather'd ribs and ragged sails,
Lean, rent, and beggar'd by the strumpet wind!"

to the imitation in the Bard;

"Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows,
While proudly riding o'er the azure realm
In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes,
YOUTH at the prow and PLEASURE at the helm;
Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,
That hush'd in grim repose, expects its evening prey."¹

The excerpt from Gray's "The Bard" is an ambiguous and sporadic personification allegory.² The personification remains abstract, intellectualizing and moralizing nature without actually giving it a "moral life".³ Nothing is "borrowed from one outward object to enliven and particularize some other".⁴ In the Shakespeare quotation, on the other hand, nature is

1 Biographia Literaria, I, 12.

2 Like the two lines from Wordsworth's An Evening Walk that Coleridge singles out for criticism in the fourth chapter, Biographia Literaria, I, 58 note.

3 Like Bowles, that is, Gray connects nature "by dim analogies with the moral world", "moralizing every thing" - see Coleridge's letter to Sotheby of 10 September, 1802, Coleridge Letters, II, 864 - unlike Wordsworth's Pedlar: "To every natural form, rock, fruit, and flower, / ... / He gave a moral life; he saw them feel / Or linked them to some feeling", The Ruined Cottage, MS. B., 11.80, 82-83, The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (Cornell), p.46.

4 Of which, even language "in real life" is capable, see Biographia Literaria, II, 98.

completely humanized, and the moral ideas have become, through action and vivid realization, like living things.¹ Coleridge is asking for a more discriminating approach to personification - indeed, to all figures of speech. Some were the genuine product of Imagination. The Preface had severely criticized the idea that it was "injudicious to write in metre unless it be accompanied with the other artificial distinctions of style".² But insofar as the "character, mood and intentions" of genius are artificial - not in nature, but operating on nature - then this is precisely what we should expect to find: "the sentiments and language are the poet's own, and his own too in his artificial character, as poet".³ The Imagination "blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial".⁴ The artificial, in the case of genius, actually turns out to represent a higher form of nature. Coleridge makes the point with a quotation from Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale:

This is an art,
Which does mend nature - change it rather; but
The art itself is nature.⁵

Coleridge reconciles the extreme naturalism of the Preface with the neo-Classical idea of poetic artfulness under which Jeffrey and the

1 Compare a modern commentator on Gray's poetry: "although Gray gives us pleasing pictures, these pictures decorate rather than animate the verse in which they appear. They have a 'static' rather than a 'mobile' effect", Chester F. Chapin, Personification in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry, p.73.

2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 144.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 107.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 12.

5 As quoted in Biographia Literaria, II, 51. Compare J. Middleton Murray on "the vast gulf which separates that artificiality of style which is the natural language of an original and unfamiliar mode of feeling, from that other artificiality which supervenes when the desire for accomplishment is present without any distinctive mode of feeling", The Problem of Style (London, New York, Toronto, 1922), p.18.

reviewers laboured, in order to create his tertium quid, "no other than an inter-penetration of the counteracting powers, partaking of both"¹: a language at once more 'natural' for the poet, and more profoundly artificial.

The question remains as to whether a practical discrimination of the authentic from the inauthentic is consistently possible. What criteria are we to use to identify true poetic diction, modified ab intra rather than mechanically ab extra? Coleridge obviously felt that the establishment or formalization of such criteria would itself tend to mechanize: "Could a rule be given from without, poetry would cease to be poetry, and sink into a mechanical art". His response is to place the onus on the individual poet and, by implication, the individual reader; "genial discrimination", he argues, is achieved by

meditation, rather than by observation...And...the latter in consequence only of the former...As eyes, for which the former has pre-determined their field of vision, and to which, as to its organ, it communicates a microscopic power

By remaining in contact with the living spirit within himself and nature, he can detect whether the Imagination has informed the images of the poem with the same spirit.

For, even as truth is its own light and evidence, discovering at once itself and falsehood, so is it the prerogative of poetic genius to distinguish by parental instinct its proper offspring from the changelings, which the gnomes of vanity or the fairies of fashion may have laid in its cradle or called by its names.... The rules of the IMAGINATION are themselves the very powers of growth and production. The words, to which they are reducible, present only the outlines and external appearance of the fruit. A deceptive counterfeit of the superficial

¹ I am quoting from Coleridge's suspended exposition of the philosophical basis of the Imagination, Biographia Literaria, I, 198.

form and colors may be elaborated; but the marble peach feels cold and heavy, and children only put it to their mouths.¹

IV

Coleridge's argument in the Biographia is that there is a language of genuine Imagination distinct from both the artificial and capricious diction of the Augustans, and the language of nature, or conversation, or prose, as defined by the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. In concentrating on the Preface he is obliged to ignore evidence that Wordsworth had progressed beyond a passive, imitative theory of art to a theory of poetry as uniquely capable of rendering the world transformed by the creative power of Imagination. A difficult passage towards the end of the fifth book of The Prelude in which this capability is defined is as good an indication as any of just how far Wordsworth had progressed:

Visionary power
Attends upon the motions of the winds
Embodied in the mystery of words;
There darkness makes abode, and all the host
Of shadowy things do work their changes there
As in a mansion like their proper home.
Even forms and substances are circumfused
By that transparent veil with light divine,
And through the turnings intricate of verse
Present themselves as objects recognised
In flashes, with a glory scarce their own.²

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 64-65.

2 Wordsworth is distinguishing between this, "the great Nature that exists in works / Of mighty poets", and "glittering verse", The Prelude (1805), V, ll.619-629, 618-619, 615, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.184. Even here, it will be noted, Wordsworth is reluctant to impose on Nature; the veil remains "transparent" and the glory is "scarce their own", rather than not their own. Compare the "Elegiac Stanzas, suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm..." where the artistic transformation is described as the "light that never was, on sea or land, / The consecration, and the Poet's dream" (ll.15-16; my italics) - Wordsworth Poetical Works, IV, 258-260 (p.259) - but where it also proves deceptive.

But the evidence of this progression is to be found not only in the development of Wordsworth's ideas from 1798 to 1815, but also in the Preface itself. When in 1802 Wordsworth added to his prescription that poetry contain incidents described in the "real language of men" the further condition that the poet "throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect" he attributes to the poet a more creative role than the rest of the Preface had allowed.¹ The Imagination itself is also a more creative faculty than its namesake had been in Blair's Lectures which contains, in the phrase the "colouring of the imagination", the verbal counterpart and possible origin of Wordsworth's phrase.²

Coleridge's apparently perverse concentration on the Preface, however, can only be understood in the context of literary history. The Preface had become the basis of contemporary opposition to Wordsworth and was dictating the reviewers' choices of 'typical' Wordsworth passages, directing their attention to the worst, most prosaic poetry; "drivelling", "childish", "namby-pamby" are the epithets that recur in the critical response.³ This poetry had preoccupied the reviewers' attention and made

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 123.

2 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 347. See also G.L. Little, "A Note on Wordsworth and Blair", Notes and Queries, new series, VII, no. 7 (July, 1960), pp.254-255.

3 In his review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), Jeffrey detected in the new sect, amongst other things, "the innocence of Ambrose Philips" (p.64). After 1805 this criticism features more prominently, as the following words and phrases from his review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), suggest: "silliness", "Childishness" (p.214); "infantine" (p.217); "plebeian nurseries" (p.218); "'Silly Sooth'" (p.219); "namby-pamby", "a professed imitation of one of Mr Philips's prettyisms" (p.220); "childishness and insipidity" (p.231). The cry was taken up by other reviewers: Lucy Aikin, Annual Review VI (1808), "a pretty tale for children" (p.526); Le Beau Monde, or, Literary and Fashionable Magazine, II (October, 1807), pp.138-142, "childish effusions" (p.138); British Critic, XXXIII (March, 1809), pp.298-299, "such flimsy, puerile thoughts" (p.298); Cabinet; or, Monthly Report of Polite Literature, III (April, 1808), pp.249-252, "puerile affectation" (p.249); Poetical Register for 1806-7 (1811), pp.540-541, "The drivelling nonsense of some of Mr. Wordsworth's poems is insufferable" (p.540).

Wordsworth the most ridiculed and parodied of all the major poets.¹

Worse than this was the persistent tendency to read all his poems, good and bad, as mechanical exercises conforming to a "system" laid down in the Preface that was wrongheaded in itself and corrupting to poetry. (Indeed, Coleridge felt this to be true of a few poems, but only of a few poems.²) By participating in the critical attack on the Preface, Coleridge hoped to highlight the disparity between Wordsworth's theory, which was all too well known, and his practice, which rarely gained the attention it deserved.³

There were of course other reasons for Coleridge's rigorous, occasionally pitiless, analysis of the Preface. He wanted for Wordsworth's sake, for example, to dispose once and for all of a theory which had misguided Wordsworth's genius, and in doing so to redirect Wordsworth's attention to "the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHICAL POEM".⁴ But Coleridge's reasons were not entirely selfless. He was also concerned to establish his independence, to dispel the idea of a "school" of Lake poets formed around Wordsworth with the Preface as its manifesto. Finally, Coleridge wanted to expound his own theory of poetic language, an exercise which inevitably involved a discussion of poetic genius and Imagination.⁵

1 For a discussion of representative parodies, see F.W. Bateson, Wordsworth: A Re-interpretation, pp.1-5. The parody by James and Horace Smith that Bateson mentions (p.1), from Rejected Addresses; or the New Theatrum Poetarum (London, 1812), was praised by Jeffrey in his review of the collection, ER XX, no. 40 (November, 1812), article X, pp.434-451, as having "succeeded perfectly in the imitation of his maukish [sic] affectations of childish simplicity and nursery stammering" (p.438). "To Coleridge", Bateson rightly points out, "there was no connection whatever between the defects and the excellences" (p.5).

2 See above, p.123, note 1.

3 "I was fully convinced that such a criticism was not only wanted; but that, if executed with adequate ability, it must conduce, in no mean degree to Mr. Wordsworth's reputation", Biographia Literaria, II, 130.

4 See above, p.126 note 2. M.H. Abrams makes this point in his article "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Diction and Figures", p.192.

5 "I have advanced no opinion either for praise or censure, other than as texts introductory to the reasons which compel me to form it", Biographia Literaria, II, 130.

Chapter Three

FRANCIS JEFFREY AND THE COMMON APPREHENSION

Philonous: I am content, Hylas, to appeal to the
common sense of the world for the truth of my notion
Berkeley, Three Dialogues

The attempt to define a language of poetry invariably involved a definition of the poet - how he differed from his fellow man, if at all, and what his obligations were to his audience, present and future: "Taking up the subject, then, upon general grounds, let me ask, what is meant by the word Poet? What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself?".¹ These questions preoccupied the contemporary critical response to Wordsworth's poetry, and the incompatible answers that Wordsworth and Jeffrey gave to these questions form the subject of the second part of this thesis.

Their answers also, unfortunately, differed markedly at different times. In the Preface Wordsworth had objected to the language of the Augustan poets as coterie, and had tried, in line with the primitivist theorists of the eighteenth century, to broaden the base of the poetic republic and to make poetry more widely and abidingly relevant. The poet was a man speaking to men. Wordsworth's ideal of the poet was an articulate peasant, the Pedlar. Poetry as an art was adventitious. Yet even while Wordsworth struggled to identify himself as a poet with other people, he betrayed a consciousness - sometimes grudging, sometimes

¹ Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 138.

priggish - of his own superiority. When the Pedlar's history is replaced by The Prelude, the idealized autobiographical element becomes explicit. The "Verulamian" passage "on the Dignity & nature...of a Poet" which Wordsworth interpolated into the Preface of the 1802 edition of the Lyrical Ballads is an indication of the ambivalence he felt about the status of the poet¹: on the one hand he exalts the poet as a man "endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind"; on the other he humbles the poet's art before "emanations of reality and truth".² From about 1807 onwards the Miltonic prayer of "fit audience find, though few" becomes a leitmotiv of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's discussions of the obligations of the poet,³ and the men to whom the poet is expected to speak become more and more exclusively those of a distant future, when Wordsworth has succeeded in creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed.

It was to this exclusiveness that Francis Jeffrey took such exception. Very much a representative of the contemporary reading public, Jeffrey had no patience with a poetic that found in popular disapproval only evidence of the degraded taste of the populace, and a poetry that so flagrantly disregarded public expectation: "Every feature which belongs to the situation, or marks the character in common apprehension, is scornfully discarded by Mr Wordsworth".⁴ To counteract

1 Coleridge to Southey, 29 July, 1802, Coleridge Letters, II, 830.

2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 138, 139.

3 Paradise Lost, VII, 1.31, The Works of John Milton, II, 212. Although the prayer is often quoted, for three important instances see the "Prospectus" to The Recluse, 1.23 and the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (1815), Wordsworth Prose Works, III, 7, 70; and Biographia Literaria, II, 120.

4 Review of Crabbe's Poems (1807), no. 23 (April, 1808), article VIII, pp.131-151 (p.135).

a tendency which he interpreted as solipsistic he adopted a position often extreme in its lack of sympathy and imagination. The conflict between the two - between the avant-garde poet and the prevailing taste, between private vision and public demands - is archetypal. But it is also prophetic. Jeffrey apprehended a future in which the poet was increasingly at odds with society, until finally alienated from it; in which the poet, despairing of traditional values, retreats into an entirely private language and mythology. As early as 1886 Algernon Moncrieff believed that history had confirmed Jeffrey's apprehensions, that the result of the Romantic revolution was "that poetry has in a great measure ceased to be written, and that what has been written has to a large extent ceased to be read".¹

Already we can observe an ironic shift in Jeffrey's and Wordsworth's respective attitudes. Wordsworth began with a "democratic", or at least republican, theory of poetry: the language of "the middle and lower classes of society" or, later and more generally, "the real language of men".² "The arts", countered Jeffrey, "do not take their models from what is ordinary, but from what is excellent".³ Jeffrey began, that is, by criticizing the Lakers for being too radical in their appeal to, and their choice of characters from, these "middle and lower classes". But he was also to criticize them for being too mystical and recondite for the ordinary reader, too "peculiar" or "singular" in their sentiments and expression for the middling classes at least. "Instead of employing the plain vulgar character, which may be read by all the world", the

1 "Craigcrook and Francis Jeffrey" in Lord Jeffrey and Craigcrook: A History of the Castle, by James Taylor (Edinburgh, 1892), p.29.

2 In the Advertisement (1798) and then in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 116, 118.

3 In the review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), p.67.

Lakers use "a sort of cypher, which can only be learned with pains and study". So Jeffrey argued in his review of Crabbe's Poems (1807).¹ The result in Wordsworth's case, he went on to argue in his article on The Excursion, is that "it is often extremely difficult for the most skilful and attentive student to obtain a glimpse of the author's meaning - and altogether impossible for an ordinary reader to conjecture what he is about".² In other words, Wordsworth is writing coterie literature, addressing himself to an even more restricted audience than that to which Wordsworth believed the Augustans had addressed themselves. It was not the only time that Jeffrey used the argument of the Preface against Wordsworth himself.

Thus the Lakers are criticized for taking "pains to keep down to the standard which they have proposed to themselves",³ and below the accepted standard, and also for affecting to rise above the standard set by the "ordinary reader". This apparent inconsistency can be attributed to a number of causes, not the least significant being the variety of Wordsworth's own poetry ("Goody Blake and Harry Gill" demands a different critical appraisal from the "Ode. Intimations of Immortality"). Wordsworth's attitude to the ordinary reader also hardened into contempt as the years of critical and popular neglect went by, and Jeffrey's criticism is as much a response to this as it is to the poetry. Moreover, while Wordsworth's attitude was hardening, Jeffrey was developing a faith in the ordinary reader as a criterion - a criterion he had dismissed as inadequate in his review of Thalaba. Intimately related to this, and a factor that did not so much cause as sanction the inconsistency, was the

1 ER XII (April, 1808), p.134.

2 ER XXIV, no. 47 (November, 1814), article I, pp.1-30 (p.4).

3 In his review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.217.

critical ambiguity of Jeffrey's associationist aesthetic. As a final cause one must consider a certain perversity on Jeffrey's part; it certainly does seem that when Jeffrey came to discuss Wordsworth "any stick [would] do to beat a dog", as Robert Daniel has suggested,¹ though this only begs the question of why Jeffrey chose to persecute Wordsworth.

I

All these causes must be taken into account. However, before we can proceed with an examination of Jeffrey's criticism, is it necessary briefly to confront the prior problem of deciding whether to take that criticism seriously at all - whether, that is, the arbitrariness apparent in his criticism of Wordsworth characterizes all Jeffrey's criticism. To take another example: in his review of Weber's edition of the plays of John Ford Jeffrey took what he described as a long-awaited opportunity to praise the Elizabethan dramatists, indeed to exalt their work before all other literature, and in doing so to denigrate the Augustans. The two more often than not went hand in hand. By 1811 the pattern of the critique would have been familiar to most of his readers. The exuberance of humour and imagination in the Elizabethans, their passion and 'sublimity', are extolled at the expense of the Augustan poets, whose wit and urbanity are said to restrict and falsify.² The argument can be found in the primitivist critics of the eighteenth century and in the Romantic critics.³ Its most

1 In his article "Jeffrey and Wordsworth: The Shape of Persecution", Sewanee Review, L, no. 2 (April-June, 1942), pp.195-213 (p.200).

2 ER XVIII, no. 36 (August, 1811), article I, pp.275-304 (see especially pp.278-282).

3 As Upali Amarasinghe points out, this movement in taste away from satirical poetry "may be traced back to Joseph Warton, and before him to William Ayres and Robert Shiels" - see Amarasinghe's Dryden and Pope in the Early Nineteenth Century, A Study of Changing Literary Taste 1800-1830 (Cambridge, 1962), p.22.

famous expression is in Matthew Arnold's Essays in Criticism, where Arnold follows Coleridge amongst others in dismissing the Augustan era as prosaic.¹ Jeffrey's criticism is quite harsh, in keeping with the spirited antagonism of the contemporary revolt against the Augustans (one thinks of Keats's scathing reflections on the rocking-horse of Augustan verse in Sleep and Poetry²). It is the advent of "French" and a "classical and a polite taste" that is regretted. "Southey, and Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and Miss Baillie" are criticized for having failed to emulate the Elizabethans, though Jeffrey finds in their attempt to do so an "indication of good taste".³ Largely on the strength of this article, R.C. Bald concluded, as many critics have done, that "Jeffrey clearly belongs to the Romantic movement".⁴

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- 1 See, for example, Arnold's "The Study of Poetry": "Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose", Essays in Criticism, Second Series, in The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, edited by R.H. Super, in 11 vols, Volume IX, English Literature and Irish Politics (Ann Arbor, 1973), pp.161-188 (p.181); Biographia Literaria, I, 11: "I...withheld from its masters the legitimate name of poets". Compare Jeffrey: "Pope is a satirist, and a moralist, and a wit, and a critic, and a fine writer, much more than he is a poet", ER XVIII (August, 1811), p.281.
 - 2 Lines 185-187, The Poems of John Keats, edited by Jack Stillinger (London, 1978), pp.69-78 (p.73).
 - 3 ER XVIII (August, 1811), pp.278, 283.
 - 4 In his article "Francis Jeffrey as a Literary Critic", The Nineteenth Century and After, XCVII, no. 576 (February, 1925), pp.201-205 (p.201). Byron Guyer, in an article on "The Philosophy of Francis Jeffrey", Modern Language Quarterly, XI, no. 1 (March, 1950), pp.17-26, includes a list of Jeffrey's critical opinions that are said to place "him much nearer the center of romanticism than has been generally realised" (p.18), all but one of which are derived from this review of Weber's Ford (and the other underestimates the influence of associationism on Romantic aesthetics). Karl Miller, in his Cockburn's Millenium (London, 1975), also cites Jeffrey's "lively interest in the Elizabethans at a time when many took none at all" as controverting the "notion of the Edinburgh Review as a bulwark of old-world conventionality" (p.171). Most classifications are based on an over-simplified view of Romanticism, equating it with "the reaction against the neo-classical elements of the eighteenth century" which Jeffrey occasionally joined - see Peter F. Morgan, "Principles and Perspective in Jeffrey's Criticism", Studies in Scottish Literature, IV, nos 3-4 (January-April, 1967), pp.179-193 (p.193). To suggest, as Morgan does, that he "leads" this reaction is simply not true.

Yet we find Jeffrey in his review of Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes using "the exquisite propriety of the words employed" in the poetry of Pope and Virgil as a measure against which Wordsworth is weighed and found wanting,¹ and we find scholars like William S. Ward insisting that "Jeffrey and his fellow contributors were far from embracing the Romantic point of view".² This reference in the article on Wordsworth is not an isolated one. In his review of Crabbe's Poems (1807) he harks back nostalgically to "the good old taste of Pope and Dryden".³ To go further back, in his review of Southey's Madoc, Jeffrey clings rather self-consciously to his "Virgil, and Pope, and Racine" in the face of the threat posed by the new poets of his generation.⁴

We can hardly put this discrepancy down to what Jeffrey, in his later, selected Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, called the "small inconsistencies, which I take to be incident to this kind of writing".⁵ Nor is it a question of his having accepted later in his critical career the literary historical view of the Restoration as the Fall. He continued throughout his writings, as Theodore Redpath has pointed out, "to use in his criticism, and to use inexorably, some of the Augustan criteria of literary value",⁶ and he continued to use the Augustan poets

1 ER XI (October, 1807), p.216.

2 In "Periodical Literature", in Some British Romantics: A Collection of Essays, edited by James V. Logan, John E. Jordan, and Northrop Frye (Ohio, 1966), pp.293-331 (p.298).

3 ER XII (April, 1808), p.146.

4 ER VII, no. 13 (October, 1805), article I, pp.1-28 (p.2). Southey may have provoked Jeffrey's reaction in his preface: "It assumes not the degraded title of Epic: and the question, therefore, is not whether the story is formed upon the rules of Aristotle, but whether it be adapted to the purposes of poetry", The Poetical Works of Robert Southey, collected by himself, 10 vols (London, 1837-1838), V, xxi.

5 Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, I, xiii.

6 The Young Romantics and Critical Opinion (London, 1973), p.25.

as exemplary. Henry Cockburn went so far as to claim in his Life of Lord Jeffrey that the opinions Jeffrey expressed in a collection of short critical judgements which he wrote at the age of seventeen, and which included appraisals of "Dryden, Locke, and Pope", "express the ultimate opinions of his maturer years".¹ Cockburn unfortunately did not expand on this, but what should be noted is that he saw no sudden volte face in the year 1811. Moreover, there is a review in February 1815 of an anonymous poem, The Paradise of Coquettes, in which Jeffrey not only describes the poem as "the best and most brilliant imitation of Pope that has appeared since the time of that great writer" and "a prodigy in this age of quarto ballads, romances, heroics, and sentimental simplicity", but recommends it as a "specimen of what may be effected by the steady application of good taste, patient retouching, and laborious correction".² Again the terms are familiar, though the argument has changed; with it has changed the status of Augustan verse. "Good taste" is once again associated with the period that extolled it. The poetry of Pope is asked to serve a variety of critical purposes, some of which must be called contradictory.

Other instances may be cited. In a review of Scott's Vision of Don Roderick Jeffrey asserts that the "great charm of poetry is, that it places before us the newest and most extraordinary objects".³ Yet he had said in a review of Thomas Campbell's Gertrude of Wyoming that "the most powerful and enchanting poetry is that which depends for its effect upon the just representation of common feelings and common situations".⁴ Whether poetry is believed to charm by its ordinariness or by its

1 Life of Jeffrey, I, 28.

2 ER XXIV, no. 48 (February, 1815), article VIII, pp.397-412 (pp.397, 411).

3 ER XVIII, no. 36 (August, 1811), article VI, pp.379-392 (p.380).

4 ER XIV, no. 27 (April, 1809), article I, pp.1-19 (p.3).

extraordinariness makes a crucial difference in judging a particular work.

When Jeffrey reviewed Cromek's Reliques he spoke of the "partiality which has led poetry to choose almost all her favourites among the recluse and uninstructed" in order to explain and approve Burns's precocious talent.¹ Less approving of Wordsworth's reclusive talent, however, he found reinforcement in the fact that it was "remarkable, that all the greater poets lived, or had lived, in the full current of society".² "For almost every assertion", as John Clive realized, "a contradiction may be found, if the search be diligent enough".³ The unmistakable inconsistency in Jeffrey's practical and theoretical criticism can be found, of course, in all critics. Yet in Jeffrey's case it seems more pronounced and the critic himself less aware.

A part of the explanation may be found in controversial biographical and historical evidence which must be taken into account before the theoretical framework of Jeffrey's criticism can be examined. Hazlitt remarked in Jeffrey's conversation and argument an inability to "rest on one side of a question: he is obliged by a mercurial habit and disposition to vary his point of view".⁴ So indeed did Carlyle, except that he interpreted it less charitably as a weakness typical of the legal profession to which Jeffrey was dedicated, as a partiality in which the

1 ER XIII (January, 1809), p.251.

2 In his review of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.3.

3 Scotch Reviewers: The 'Edinburgh Review' 1802-1815 (London, 1957), p.11.

4 In his essay "Mr Jeffrey" in The Spirit of the Age, The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, XI, 133.

need to win someone over subverted intellectual enquiry by making persuasion, and not truth, the end of argument: "one thing struck me in sad elucidation of his forensic glories. I found that essentially he was always as if speaking to a jury".¹ (Even Jeffrey's friend and biographer Henry Cockburn listed among Jeffrey's professional merits the "plausability with which his own sophistry was veiled".²) The result was a phenomenon that has been recorded by every commentator on the Edinburgh reviewers: "they all inclined to think in legal metaphors".³ So prevalent is this approach that one example must suffice - Jeffrey's invoking judgement against Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes: "Putting ourselves thus upon our country, we certainly look for a verdict against this publication; and have little doubt indeed of the result, upon a fair consideration of the evidence contained in these volumes".⁴

Jeffrey frequently acknowledged the relativity of review criticism. In response to a letter from Francis Horner questioning whether his review of Crabbe's The Borough had not appeared to contradict "the doctrines which you urged against Wordsworth", Jeffrey admitted that he

1 Reminiscences by Thomas Carlyle, edited by James Anthony Froude, in 2 vols (London, 1881), II, 41. Compare Lewis E. Gates, in his essay "Francis Jeffrey", in Three Studies in Literature (London and New York, 1899), pp.1-63: "He is always for or against his author; he is always making points" (p.12). A recent critic, Philip Flynn, in a full-length study entitled Francis Jeffrey (Newark and London, 1978) turns the familiar complaint on its head by arguing, I think erroneously, that Jeffrey's "best reviewing" is "the review as a judicial hearing" (p.40).

2 Life of Jeffrey, I, 243.

3 I am quoting Robert Daniel, "Jeffrey and Wordsworth: The Shape of Persecution", p.210.

4 ER XI (October, 1807), p.216.

had "overpraised [Crabbe] a little".¹ Later he was to include more of his reviews of Crabbe in the Contributions "because I fancy that he has had less justice done him".² In the same spirit, Jeffrey argued in a review of James Hogg that "it is generally of greater consequence to point out the faults than the beauties of writers who have risen to distinction".³ That this must give a false impression of the quality of any particular poem does not seem to have troubled him.

Personal friendships are also known to have affected Jeffrey's critical decisions. There were indeed many occasions when the Edinburgh "showed an almost Roman superiority to claims due to the personal ties of friendship", as the anonymous Edinburgh reviewer of 1902 pointed out.⁴ The same reviewer cites Jeffrey's treatment of Walter Scott, and it is true that his review of Marmion was marked by what Jeffrey himself later regretted as "needless asperities".⁵ The story of Scott's and Jeffrey's dining together after this "revisal of the flagellation" is well known.⁶

1 Francis Horner (1778-1817) was a close friend and regular correspondent of Francis Jeffrey. A political economist, attached to Holland House, his classical economic principles influenced Jeffrey and the Edinburgh, although, after four articles in the first number, he rarely contributed himself. Horner's letter to Jeffrey (16 July, 1810) can be found in the Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, M.P., edited by Leonard Horner, in 2 vols (London, 1843), Volume II; his discussion of Jeffrey on Crabbe and Wordsworth, p.53. For Jeffrey's reply to Horner (20 July, 1810), see Life of Jeffrey, II, 131.

2 Contributions to The Edinburgh Review, III, 3 note.

3 ER XXIV, no. 47 (November, 1814), article VIII, pp.157-174 (p.157).

4 In a review of the Edinburgh Review itself: ER CXCVI, no. 402 (October, 1902), Centenary Edition, article I, pp.276-318 (p.289).

5 In a letter to Scott of [11 August, 1810] accompanying an advance copy of his review of Scott's The Lady of the Lake: "I am now sensible that there were needless asperities in my review of Marmion", National Library of Scotland, MS.3879, f.161. Compare Scott's letter to J.B.S. Morrit, 3 October, [1810], in The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, edited by H.J.C. Grierson, 12 vols (London, 1932-1937), II, 381.

6 See Scott's letter to Robert Surtees, April, 1808, in The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, II, 54.

The recurring theme of Scott's discussions of Jeffrey's criticism is Jeffrey's ability, or rather compulsion, to separate his personal and his public reaction to a work; as well it might be, considering the review of Marmion. If we concentrate on his friendship with such writers as Scott, Thomas Moore, Mrs Grant of Laggan, Joanna Baillie, and even Byron, it appears almost as if Jeffrey used critical severity to encourage or to test a friendship - a technique to which Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey failed to respond.¹ But with other friends and writers, like Archibald Alison and Thomas Campbell, his letters show critical reservations which find no substantial place in his public

1 Scott wrote to Miss Seward on 10 April, 1806, that Jeffrey "often makes his best friends lose patience by that love of a severity which drives justice into tyranny", The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, I, 288. Jeffrey's review of Moore's Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems (1806) - ER VIII, no. 16 (July, 1806), article XVIII, pp.456-465 - led to an abortive duel and, subsequently, to respectful friendship, Jeffrey referring in a letter of 1823 to "my old friend Tommy Moore" (the letter, with no other details, is quoted in Lord Moncrieff's contribution to James Taylor's Lord Jeffrey and Craigcrook, p.24). For an account of the affair see Life of Jeffrey, I, 171-174. Even before Jeffrey reviewed her Essays on the Superstitions of the Scottish Highlanders - ER XVIII (August, 1811), pp.480-512 - Mrs Grant was writing to a Mrs Hook (5 June, 1810): "Do you know, notwithstanding my wrath for his manifold literary offences, I think I shall be forced to like the arch-critic himself" - see Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs Grant of Laggan, edited by J.P. Grant, second edition, in 3 vols (London, 1845), I, 245. Byron thought Jeffrey's changing attitude to his verse evidenced "a great soul" - journal entry, Sunday, 20 March, 1814, Byron's Letters and Journals, edited by Leslie A. Marchand, Volume III, 'Alas! the Love of Women' (London, 1974), pp.252-253; Byron, admittedly, did not realise that the review of his Hours of Idleness that provoked his English Bards and Scotch Reviewers was by Henry (Lord) Brougham, and not Francis Jeffrey - ER XI, no. 22 (January, 1808), article II, pp.285-289. Jeffrey had reviewed Joanna Baillie harshly on three occasions - firstly her Plays on the Passions, Vol.II, in ER II, no. 4 (July, 1803), article I, pp.269-286; secondly, her Miscellaneous Plays, in ER V, no. 10 (January, 1805), article XII, pp.405-421; lastly, the third volume of her Plays on the Passions, ER XIX, no. 38 (February, 1812), article I, pp.261-290. For the ultimate friendship with Joanna Baillie see Life of Jeffrey, I, 260-261.

analyses.¹ And after his severe treatment of his friend James Grahame's The Sabbath, which was published anonymously, Jeffrey's review of Grahame's British Georgics must be seen as an act of expiation.²

Nor was Jeffrey as averse to indirectly promoting party interests as his occasional protests about impartiality suggest. Of the style of Charles James Fox's work on the Restoration he spoke more disparagingly in a letter to Horner than he dared in public, where the occasional infelicities are put down to a "familiarity with spoken, rather than with written language".³ (This is admittedly like criticizing a clergyman for a partial review of the Bible.) In another letter, this time to Archibald Alison, Jeffrey hoped paradoxically that he had executed the review both "impartially" and with "a sufficient infusion of Whiggism".⁴ On 18 December, 1823, he wrote soliciting a review of Brodie's History of the Stuarts from John Allen because he heard that Allen approved it: "I am very anxious that so meritorious a work of a Scottish Whig should have some honour in the Review".⁵ It is easy to see how Scott gained the impression that Jeffrey was only ever respectful

1 Compare Jeffrey's letter to Campbell, 1 March, 1809, written after he had seen the proofs of Gertrude of Wyoming, quoted in Life and Letters of Thomas Campbell, edited by William Beattie, in 3 vols (London, 1849), II, 171-173, with the review of the poem itself - ER XIV (April, 1809). Jeffrey's analysis of Campbell's verse in this letter found more accurate expression later in the review of Weber's Ford, ER XVIII (August, 1811), pp.283-284. For Alison, compare the letter to Alison, 29 July, 1808, printed as Appendix I of this thesis, with the review of Alison's Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste (1810), in ER XVIII, no. 35 (May, 1811), article I, pp.1-46.

2 For reviews of The Sabbath and British Georgics, see ER V (January, 1805), pp.437-442, and ER XVI (April, 1810), pp.213-223, respectively.

3 Letter to Horner, 10 September, 1808, Life of Jeffrey, II, 124-125. Compare his review of the work, ER XII, no. 24 (July, 1808), article I, pp.271-306 (p.304).

4 See Appendix I, p.343 below.

5 Life of Jeffrey, II, 217.

towards a philosopher or a Foxite (and he might have added that the philosopher should be Scottish).¹ The new critical honesty heralded by the Edinburgh Review - "the Edinburgh aimed at scrupulous impartiality"² - was only fully realized in its independence from the publishers. In other words, it may have been above 'puffing' to promote other works that shared its publisher, but the practice of 'puffing' and related uncritical depreciation had not passed out of fashion.

Moreover, if Jeffrey were prepared to bend with political and personal exigencies occasionally, so was he prepared as a good businessman to take financial exigencies into account. A letter to a Mr König on 20 January, 1806, puts his position succinctly:

To be learned and right is no doubt the first requisite - but to be ingenious and original and discursive is perhaps something more than the second in a publication which can only do good by remaining popular - and cannot be popular without other attractions than those of mere truth and correctness.³

Critics are apt to quote his caution to Horner of 19 October, 1803, that "we must abate something of our general asperity" in the Review, but the entire passage of which this forms a part reveals a more pragmatic attitude towards political asperity:

Walter Scott has, in a manner, offered to do Godwin's Life of Chaucer; and as he understands the subject, and hates the author, I have a notion he will make a good article of it. We must abate something of our general asperity; but I think we should make one or two examples of great delinquents in every number, &c.⁴

1 Scott to J.B.S. Morrit on 3 October, [1810], The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, II, 381.

2 According to J.H. Alexander, Two Studies in Romantic Reviewing, Volume I, Edinburgh Reviewers and the English Tradition, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, 49 (Salzburg, 1976), p.105.

3 British Museum, Add MS. 32,439 f.235; published in Clive, Scotch Reviewers, p.54.

4 Life of Jeffrey, II, 86.

Next to this letter, Brougham's protest in his Life and Times rings a little hollow:

The rule was inflexibly maintained, never to suffer the insertion of any attack by a writer who was known, or even justly suspected, to have a personal difference with the author, or other sinister motive.¹

As William S. Ward has rightly observed, the Edinburgh was not "blind to the advantages to be gained from finding a 'dunce'".² Ward simply accepts the facts. It is pointless to pretend as some scholars do - Byron Guyer, for instance, but most earnestly James A. Greig³ - that Jeffrey was not susceptible to political, personal, or financial partiality. Guyer and Greig were responding to the combined attack on Jeffrey's reputation of Russell Noyes and Robert Daniel, who undoubtedly exaggerate the malice and opportunism of Jeffrey's own attacks on Wordsworth.⁴ Yet ignoring these facts can only result in a misrepresentation of the Edinburgh. More seriously than this, however, it fails to distinguish between those anomalies that are the accidental accompaniments of any human enterprise, and those that expose the weaknesses and contradictions of Jeffrey's practical and theoretical approach to literature.

One such practical approach, which deserves brief attention, is

1 The Life and Times of Henry Lord Brougham, written by Himself, 3 vols (Edinburgh and London, 1871), I, 259.

2 Some British Romantics, p.310.

3 See Guyer's other article on Jeffrey (besides, that is, "The Philosophy of Francis Jeffrey"): "Francis Jeffrey's Essay on Beauty, The Huntington Library Quarterly, XIII, no. 1 (November, 1949), pp.71-85; and James A. Grieg, Francis Jeffrey and the Edinburgh Review (Edinburgh and London, 1948).

4 Robert Daniel in "Jeffrey and Wordsworth: The Shape of Persecution"; Russel Noyes in his Wordsworth and Jeffrey in Controversy, Indiana University Publications, Humanities Series, 5 (Bloomington, 1941).

through wit. The vacillation that Hazlitt and Carlyle, with differing degrees of censure, saw as a personal trait, other critics interpreted as the arbitrary indulgence of wit: scoring points against the literature under discussion for neither truth nor partisanship, but to reflect the reviewer's ingenuity. An epithet popularly applied to Jeffrey by his acquaintances was "pococurante",¹ and the erroneous notion of Jeffrey as a dilettante, without genuine commitment or even feeling, has survived. The injured Earl of Elgin summed up the complaints of many of his contemporaries when he protested to the editor of the Edinburgh that, though "you scatter firebrands, and call it sport - your Review is the most intolerable nuisance that can exist in a civilized country".² Elgin was referring to the Review generally, and when it came to literary criticism Brougham and Sydney Smith were more guilty than Jeffrey.³ But the accusation is still warranted, and ample evidence can be cited to support it, not the least conclusive would be the reviews

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- 1 J.G. Lockhart in Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk, third edition, in 3 vols (Edinburgh and London, 1819), letter XXIV, talks of Jeffrey's "Pococurante disposition" (I, 307); Scott did not believe that "the world ever furnished a critic and an author who were more absolute poco curantés about their craft" than Jeffrey and he respectively - in a letter to Robert Surtees, April, 1808, The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, II, 54; Carlyle was more shrewd: he found Jeffrey a "sensitive man, with all his pretended pococurantism and real knowledge of what is called 'the world'" (Reminiscences, II, 27).
 - 2 Letter to the Editor of the Edinburgh Review, on the Subject of an Article in No. L of that Journal, on "The Remains of John Tweddell" (Edinburgh, 1815), p.32.
 - 3 See, for example, Brougham on Byron's Hours of Idleness, ER XI (January, 1808), and Smith on M.G. Lewis's Alfonso, ER I, no. 2 (January, 1803), article VI, pp.314-317. Two rare articles in which Jeffrey is completely dismissive and sarcastic are those on Sir John Sinclair's Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects, ER II, no. 3 (April, 1803), article XXIII, pp.205-211, and on James Cririe's Scottish Scenery, ER III (October, 1803), pp.56-60; to which may be added his short reviews for the Monthly Review, especially those in Vol. XL (January, 1803): articles 32, 41, and 50, all of which are very damning (pp.97-98, 103-104, 110). For a full list of these articles, see D. Nichol Smith's introduction to his selection of Jeffrey's Literary Criticism (Oxford, 1910), p.ix note 1.

of Southey and Wordsworth, as well as Jeffrey's own testimony: "I have allowed too much mischief to be done from my mere indifference and love of sport".¹

Jeffrey quite obviously enjoyed his reviewing and the writer under review was often made to suffer for it. Cockburn spoke of the temptation of the anonymous review in his Life:

how strong were the seductions of brilliancy, ridicule, or severity, to a knot of friends, whose pleasure in the exercise of their powers was not likely to be checked either by reflecting on its effects upon themselves, or by too much sympathy with the victims of their critical vigour.²

A few examples must suffice. Jeffrey's reviews of two books by Coleridge's friend the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson (Coleridge reviewed his third book for the Edinburgh) open with the rhetorical flourish of Jeffrey at his deflating best,³ the review of Clarkson's Memoirs of William Penn beginning: "It is impossible to look into any of Mr Clarkson's books, without feeling that he is an excellent man - and a very bad writer".⁴ The article on James Cririe's Scottish Scenery is more subtly derisive; the work is recommended to all those "who love to speculate on the inequalities of human genius".⁵ And however we feel about the general tenor and validity of Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth, his parody of the "annonce" of "The Thorn", is genuinely and justly humorous:

1 In a letter to Horner, 6 December, 1808, quoted in Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, I, 439.

2 Life of Jeffrey, I, 127.

3 Reviews of Clarkson's A Portraiture of Quakerism, ER X, no. 19 (April, 1807), article VI, pp.85-102, and of his Memoirs of William Penn, ER XXI, no. 42 (July, 1813), article X, pp.444-462.

4 ER XXI (July, 1813), p.444.

5 ER III (January, 1804), p.329.

'Of this piece the reader will necessarily form a very erroneous judgement, unless he is apprised, that it was written by a pale man in a green coat, - sitting cross-legged on an oaken stool, - with a scratch on his nose, and a spelling dictionary on the table.'¹

"Even the devoutest Wordsworthian will", as Lewis E. Gates has said, "relish Jeffrey's raillery at the expense of Wordsworth's occasional pompous ineptitude".²

According to Cockburn the preparations for the first number of the Edinburgh Review were infused with a sense of iconoclastic delight: "It happened to be a tempestuous evening, and I have heard [Jeffrey] say that they had some merriment at the greater storm they were about to raise".³ Moreover, an attitude towards the Edinburgh as light relief survives in the personal comments of all the original collaborators. Sydney Smith told Jeffrey that he took it as seriously as "the Game of Fives or billiards",⁴ and Horner described it as but "a matter of temporary amusement, and subordinate occupation".⁵ Amusement was apparently the key-note of the proceedings, though given the dubious status of the reviewer prior to the success of the Edinburgh, none of them was above a "pretended pococurantism"⁶ (Macaulay found Jeffrey

1 In his review of Crabbe's Poems (1807), ER XII (April, 1808), p.137.

2 Three Studies of Literature, p.11.

3 Life of Jeffrey, I, 125.

4 In a letter, [November or December, 1808], The Letters of Sydney Smith, edited by Nowell C. Smith, in 3 vols (Oxford, 1953), I, 147.

5 In a letter to James Loch, 12 December, 1802, Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, I, 212.

6 As Jeffrey wrote to Horner, 11 May, 1803, "The risk of sinking in the general estimation, and being considered as fairly articulated to a trade that is not perhaps the most respectable, has staggered me more ...than any other consideration" - though he added "I cannot help thinking that there are some peculiarities in our publication that should remove a part of these scruples", Life of Jeffrey, I, 145. An anonymous writer on "The Influence of the Press" in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XXXVI, no. 226 (September, 1834), pp.373-391, mused thus on the change effected by the Edinburgh: "We recollect

"a little too desirous to appear rather a man of the world, an active lawyer, or an easy careless gentleman, than a distinguished writer",¹ and the ignominy attached to reviewing as an occupation may well have been the reason).

How important the Edinburgh was to Jeffrey it is difficult to say. Henry Cockburn, who shared so many of the values of the Edinburgh reviewers, believed that once Jeffrey had accepted the editorship, the Review "for the next twenty-seven years became the principal business of his life".² A later historian of the Edinburgh, John Clive, expresses the opposite point of view (though without great conviction): "it would not be altogether wrong to say that Jeffrey never considered the Review as anything more than a subsidiary occupation".³ Whatever the truth about his commitment to the Edinburgh, Jeffrey certainly appeared comparatively indifferent. As he explained of the collaborators in his reply to Mr Thelwall's Letter to Francis Jeffray [sic], Esq, the Review "is a secondary object with all of them, and was undertaken more for the purpose of amusement, and of collecting the scattered

the time when our aristocratic exclusives sneered at the editor of, or contributor to, a review, and would have thought it an insult to be asked to meet the editor of a newspaper; but we have lived to see the one Lord Advocate of Scotland, and the other Lord Chancellor of England" (p.381); the first is, of course, Jeffrey, the second possibly an inaccurate reference to Brougham, then Lord Chancellor. For a thorough and influential history of the rise of reviewing in Britain, see Maurice Cross, "Preliminary Dissertation on the Progress of Periodical Literature; and the History, Principles, and Tendency of the Edinburgh Review", in his edition of Selections from the Edinburgh Review, in 4 vols (London, 1833), I, ix-cxxvii.

- 1 So he described him in a letter to his mother, Selina Mills Macaulay, 15 April, 1828, The Letters of Thomas Babbington Macaulay, in 6 vols, Vol. I (Cambridge, 1974), p.239.
- 2 Life of Jeffrey, I, 124.
- 3 Scotch Reviewers, p.43. Compare Jeffrey's disclaimer in his preface to Contribution to the Edinburgh Review, that the essays were "written hastily, in the intervals of graver occupations" (I, vii).

literature of the place, than from any other motive".¹

In all this Jeffrey is the magister ludi: "he handled the book as a thing to be played with".² Besides legal insincerity, Carlyle thought he also observed in Jeffrey a psychological inability to be serious. Jeffrey, in his turn, needled Carlyle about his need to be serious: "'You are so dreadfully in earnest!' he said to me once or oftener".³ Each of the more earnest among his friends - Carlyle, Playfair, Horner, even Scott - may be said to have "loved him sincerely", like Lord Webb Seymour, "in spite of his...being often troubled by onsets on his most cherished doctrines, and even by laughter at his grand philosophical designs".⁴ Jeffrey's own testimony suggests that there may indeed be some truth in the accusation that earnestness made him feel profoundly uncomfortable and distrustful. One of his rare personal reflections on Wordsworth occurs in a letter in protest against Horner's accusing him of fastidiousness with respect to the new poetry:

I am almost as great an admirer [of Wordsworth] as Sharpe. The only difference is, that I have a sort of consciousness that admirers are ridiculous, and therefore I laugh at almost everything I admire, or at least let people laugh at it without contradiction. You must be in earnest when you approve, and have yet

1 Jeffrey's supercilious review of Coleridge's friend John Thelwall's Poems...with a Preparatory Memoir appeared in ER II, no. 3 (April, 1803), article XXI, pp.197-202. Thelwall's response, the most comprehensive and, despite its understandable bitterness, most analytical of all the early criticisms of the Edinburgh's technique (see especially the long footnote, pp.8-22) was dated 31 December, 1803, but there are no other publication details. Jeffrey then wrote his Observations on Mr Thellwell's [sic] Letter to the Editor of the Edinburgh Review (Edinburgh, 1804) from which this quotation is taken (p.15).

2 According, that is, to Cockburn, Life of Jeffrey, I, 289.

3 Reminiscences, II, 40.

4 Life of Jeffrey, I, 140-141.

to learn that everything has a respectable, and a deridable, aspect.¹

To take this seriously would mean abandoning any attempt to discover principles ordering Jeffrey's voluminous review criticism.² Ridicule has become an indication of approval just as censure, Jeffrey implied in the opening of his review of James Hogg's The Queen's Wake, is a measure of public distinction.³

Where does this leave us? Should we, with the critic Robert Daniel, dismiss Jeffrey as an opportunist, the master of an urbane yet devastating technique, and ultimately unprincipled in both senses of the word - without critical principles and morally unscrupulous?⁴ The element of schadenfreude is undeniable, but there are limits to wit. As Horner pointed out in a letter to J.A. Murray of 28 November, 1815, "though Jeffrey often trifles with a subject expressly, and often argues for exhibition, he never leaves me in doubt, when he means to do so, and when he is for the time in earnest".⁵ And Daniel surely exaggerates the clever opportunism of the Edinburgh when he interprets it as

1 Letter to Horner, 3 September, 1804, Life of Jeffrey, II, 91.

2 John Clive implicitly accepts this assessment: "There are certain people for whom the very act of approbation, however well-deserved, holds something intrinsically and embarrassingly comical. Jeffrey was one of these", Scotch Reviewers, p.53.

3 See above, p.170, note 3.

4 In his "Jeffrey and Wordsworth: The Shape of Persecution". This appears to be David Erdman's opinion as well; in his article "Coleridge and the 'Review Business': An Account of his Adventures with the Edinburgh, the Quarterly, and Maga", The Wordsworth Circle, VI, no. 1 (Winter, 1975), pp.3-50, Erdman argues that, with the publication of Jeffrey's review of Southey's Curse of Kehama, Southey and Coleridge were apprised of the "painful truth...that the review business was abundantly profitable and utterly immoral" (p.18).

5 Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, II, 273. Even Sydney Smith, who acknowledged his own "excessive levity" in a letter to Jeffrey of 2 August, 1802, drew the line before religious flippancy in a later letter of January, 1808 - see The Letters of Sydney Smith, I, 72, 130. The first letter proves Jeffrey to have been concerned about the tone of levity.

deferring exclusively to such extraneous demands as sales and personal vanity. While the exigencies of review criticism - the need to maintain sales and the comparative speed with which each issue had to be produced - were unquestionably felt by Jeffrey, it would be wrong to dismiss his reviewing as illustrative only of "the opportunism of a critic who had not time enough for considered judgments".¹ The derision was more than just a contrivance to ensure popularity by finding "patronage", as one early critic put it, "in the malice of the age".² Jeffrey had had a long enough apprenticeship in the 1790s to settle his opinions and to prepare himself for the pressures of reviewing. Indeed, if we may trust an early essay that he wrote on criticism, he believed in the practical superiority of first impressions:

The human mind, at least mine, which is all I have to do with, is such a chaotic confused business, such a jumble and hurry of ideas, that it is absolutely impossible to follow the train and extent of our ideas upon any one topic, without more exertion than the conception of them required. To remedy this, and to fix the bounds of our knowledge and belief on any subject, there is no way but to write down, deliberately and patiently, the notions which first naturally present themselves on that point.³

For all Jeffrey's manifest enjoyment of the role of urbane sceptic offering doses of salutary realism to fuzzy-headed authors, like castor

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- 1 "Jeffrey and Wordsworth: The Shape of Persecution", p.209. Compare Walter Bagehot in an essay of October, 1855, "The First Edinburgh Reviewers", The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot, in 13 vols, Volume I, Literary Essays, the first of two volumes, edited by Norman St John Stevas (London, 1965), pp.309-341: "You must not criticise papers like these, rapidly written in the hurry of life, as you would the painful words of an elaborate sage" (p.329).
 - 2 John Ring, The Beauties of the Edinburgh Review, alias the Stinkpot of Literature (London, 1807), p.74. The first half of Ring's work is a convenient anthology of contemporary complaints against the Edinburgh over its first five years.
 - 3 Quoted in Life of Jeffrey, I, 30.

oil to recalcitrant children, there lay behind it a belief in himself as representing the surer opinion of mankind generally.¹ When Jeffrey addresses himself to "all the indifferent the solid the sceptical", it is not just to entertain them and to ensure their patronage, it is also because they "form after all the best and ultimate judge".² For if Jeffrey can be said to apply principles at all - and in his Contributions he claimed for his Review the novelty of having gone "deeply into the Principles" on which its judgments were grounded³ - they are principles he assumes to inhere in the common sense and common apprehension of mankind. Jeffrey's criticism has enough coherence to dismiss the idea of complete arbitrariness that would make his attacks on Wordsworth the product of a "motiveless malignity",⁴ though he was the first to admit that "the Review might have been more firmly conducted, and greater circumspection used to avoid excesses of all sorts".⁵ It is not possible to discover a totally coherent system in his criticism; any such system would be the butt, not the basis of his criticism. But when all the contingencies so far discussed are taken into account, there is an appeal to the common apprehension that occurs often enough, and has such extensive ramifications, as to make sense of Jeffrey's various criticism, or at least to help us through the maze of "the many conflicts and tensions, contradictions and compromises of his critical position".⁶

1 Compare Sydney Smith to Francis Jeffrey, 29 October, 1805: "I hear there has been a meeting between you and your patient Southey and that he was tolerably civil to his surgeon", The Letters of Sydney Smith, I, 109.

2 In a letter dated 25 July, 1805, University College (London) Library, MS.22, 123.

3 Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, I, ix.

4 To use Coleridge's phrase for Iago, Coleridge Shakespearean Criticism, I, 44.

5 In a letter to Horner, 12 March, 1815, Life of Jeffrey, II, 151.

6 So Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, II, 120.

II

It is well known that when Jeffrey supplied a theoretical framework for the discussion of the beauties and defects, virtues and vices of any particular work under review - or, more cynically, when he felt the need to ennoble or rationalize a critical intuition - he resorted to a theory of association based on his friend Archibald Alison's Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste.¹ Jeffrey's interest in the Essays, and the influence they exerted on his critical thinking, are apparent throughout his career. When at last he collected many of his essays in his Contributions to the Edinburgh Review in 1844 it was an expanded version of his review of the second, 1810 edition of Alison's Essays that was chosen as the leading article, a version that had appeared twenty years earlier in the Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica as the entry on "Beauty".² The interest was first manifest while he was at Oxford for nine months in 1791-2 when, at the age of eighteen, he

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- 1 Lewis E. Gates was the first to suggest the influence of Jeffrey's reading of Alison on his literary criticism, Three Studies in Literature, pp.28-29. Since then Byron Guyer has re-emphasised this influence in his article "Francis Jeffrey's Essay on Beauty", and since Guyer its importance has been generally recognized. What have not been realized are the problems and ambiguities in the theory itself, and the way in which they affect Jeffrey's criticism.
 - 2 The first edition of Alison's Essays appeared in 1790. Jeffrey reviewed the second edition in ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.1-46. (The second edition of the Essays contained, besides many minor substantive changes, an expanded introduction - possibly in response to Jeffrey's letter of 29 July, 1808, printed as Appendix I below - and a long section on the beauty of the "Human Countenance" added to the second of its two essays.) Jeffrey's "Essay on Beauty", the expanded version of his review, first appeared in the Supplement to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Volume II (Edinburgh, 1824), pp.172-197, although Cockburn says that it was written in 1816 (Life of Jeffrey, I, 245). The essay was finally incorporated into The Encyclopaedia Britannica or Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and General Literature, seventh edition, Volume IV (Edinburgh, 1842), pp.481-502.

wrote for his own use a long paper on the subject of beauty in the form of a dialogue. One passage survives in an extended quotation in Cockburn's Life of Lord Jeffrey. It confirms the debt to Alison's Essays and, as Cockburn's own introduction suggests, anticipates his mature aesthetic theory:

"For what is it, continued I, stopping and stretching out my arm, as I pointed to the landscape around us, - What else is it, do you think, Eugenius, that enables this retired valley, that peaceful stream, or these velvet hills, to warm and transport my bosom with the satisfaction in which it now overflows - what is it but the talisman, and the proof it affords of the happiness and security of so many of my brethren as are employed and supported, and many happy, in the cultivation and produce thereof. See! added I eagerly, and grasped his arm with violence - see that little dim distant light which shines like a setting star on the horizon; is there anything in the whole circle and series of objects with which we are surrounded on every side that pleases and affects you more than its soft and tranquil light, - than the long line of trembling fire with which it has crossed the lake at the bottom of the cliff under which it burns. And what is it that yields this simple object so high, a power of pleasing, but that secret and mysterious association by which it represents to us the calmness and rustic simplicity of the inhabitants of that cottage; by which we are transported within its walls, and made to see and to observe the whole economy and occupation of the household."¹

A similar passage, and certainly the same idea, survive into Jeffrey's 1811 review of Alison's Essays,² a review which gave Jeffrey the opportunity to heed the request Horner had made of him nine months earlier: "You must some day or other bring your thoughts on the philosophy of poetry and poetic expression into the form of a systematic essay".³ Jeffrey did more; he subordinated his thoughts on poetry to

1 Life of Jeffrey, I, 42-43. The last example of the distant light could be a gloss on the Evening Star passage of Wordsworth's Michael, ll.110-139, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 83-85.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.13-14.

3 In a letter of 16 July, 1810, Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, II, 53.

an inquiry into the origins of ideas of beauty, concentrating as Alison had done on the beauty of external nature.¹ In analysing and detailing Alison's theory, Jeffrey reveals his own.

The thesis is straightforward enough, and is implicit in the long quotation from the 1791 paper. No object, it argues, either in nature or art, is inherently or objectively beautiful. Aesthetic theories that attempt to ground themselves on such an hypothesis - those that insist on the inherent beauty of certain forms or lines or colours to which an observer responds directly, for example - are "radically erroneous".² For objects are beautiful only insofar as they evoke, through association, an aesthetic response which is in fact no more than a complex of elementary emotions common to all mankind:

It is the opinion of this excellent writer, to express it in one sentence, - that the emotions we experience from the contemplation of sublimity or beauty, are not produced by any physical or intrinsic quality in the objects which we contemplate; but by the recollection or conception of other objects which are associated in our imaginations with those before us, and consequently suggested by their appearance, and which are interesting or affecting, on the common and familiar principle of being the natural objects of love, or of pity, or of fear or veneration, or some other common and lively sensation of the mind.³

To say something is beautiful is a shorthand way of saying that it has indirectly excited one emotion or a combination of distinct emotions. These simple emotions, or sensations, or affections, or sentiments - Jeffrey confusingly uses the terms interchangeably - "form the foundation of the emotions of sublimity or beauty".⁴ The theory is atomistic, and,

1 "My illustrations will be derived, much less from the compositions of the Fine Arts, than from the appearances of common nature, and the experience of common men", Alison, Essays, I, xxvii.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.6.

3 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.3.

4 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.7.

because any aesthetic response is broken down into these simple emotions, it regards all aesthetic response as radically the same. In Jeffrey's words, the theory "establishes the substantial identity of the Sublime, the Beautiful, and the Picturesque".¹ "Associationists", as one critic has written, "tend in common to view reality as coming in quantitative chunks, whether 'ideas' ...or feelings or sensations or all these together".²

Any act of perceiving or recognising beauty is as individual and isolated as the mind acting. In fact an individual may legitimately, if meaninglessly, claim for an object a type of beauty not apparent to - or, as beauty is an emotion, not experienced by - any other individual. This falls into "the second class" of objects called beautiful which Jeffrey lists, "those in which the external object is not the natural and necessary, but only the occasional or accidental concomitant of the emotion which it recalls".³ It includes tastes confined to nations and other classes of men, as well as to individuals, and is opposed to universal beauty. Jeffrey claims that an object of this latter class "is necessarily and universally connected with the feeling" which comprises the aesthetic response "by the law of nature".⁴ Such an object, he insists, inevitably produces the sensation of beauty, because

1 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.40.

2 Walter J. Ong, "Psyche and the Geometers: Aspects of Associationist Critical Theory", Modern Philology, XLIX, no. 1 (August, 1951), pp.16-27 (p.21). Compare Coleridge: "How opposite to nature & the fact to talk of the one moment of Hume; of our whole being an aggregate of successive single sensations. Who ever felt a single sensation?... And what is a moment? Succession with interspace? Absurdity! It is evidently only the Licht-punct [punkt], the Sparkle of in the indivisible undivided Duration. Christmas Day, 1804", and later, in September, 1807, on "the needlepoint pinshead System of the Atomists" - Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2370, 3159.

3 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.17.

4 ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.10, 11 (my italics).

it inevitably invokes another object or event to which such an emotion is appropriate.¹

In "the great shifting of values from uniformity and generality towards individuality and diversity" in the eighteenth century,² this theory and others that anticipate it represent an attempt to reconcile diversitarian and uniformitarian values. While Jeffrey held that "all tastes are equally just and correct" and unique,³ moulded by the infinite variety of personal experiences, he also believed in those objects which of necessity invoke an identical response in all individuals, according to the uniform constitution of the human mind.⁴ Jeffrey's first example is the so-called sublimity of thunder: "Take, for example, the sound of thunder. - Nothing, perhaps, in the whole range of nature, is more strikingly and universally sublime". Yet in describing its operation on the mind he also makes the extrinsic nature of an object's beauty or sublimity plain:

it seems obvious, that the sublimity is produced, not by any quality that is perceived by the ear, but altogether by the impression of Power and of Danger that is necessarily made upon the mind, whenever that sound is heard. That it is not produced by any peculiarity in the sound itself, is certain, from

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- 1 Compare Jeffrey's review of Stewart's Philosophical Essays: "some [objects] acquire this power of pleasing, in consequence of associations that are Universal and common to the whole human race, while others are indebted for it to associations of a more particular and arbitrary nature", ER XVII (November, 1810), p.206.
 - 2 René Wellek, The Rise of English Literary History (Chapel Hill, 1941), p.24. Compare Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1936) on "the substitution of what may be called diversitarianism for uniformitarianism as the ruling preconception in most of the normative provinces of thought" (p.294).
 - 3 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.43.
 - 4 Thus the idea, to quote Leslie Stephen's essay "The First Edinburgh Reviewers", that "Jeffrey's fundamental principle" is "that taste has no laws, and is a matter of accidental caprice" - Hours in a Library, third series (London, 1879), pp.131-178 (p.161) - is, paradoxically, only half right.

the mistakes that are frequently made with regard to it. The noise of a cart rolling over the stones, is often mistaken for thunder; and as long as the mistake lasts, this very vulgar and insignificant noise is actually felt to be prodigiously sublime.¹

It is not surprising that a theory which identifies beauty as a psychological phenomenon should also be strictly anthropocentric. Jeffrey's final example of universal beauty, the beauty of landscape, accentuates this fact. Objects in a landscape are beautiful only insofar as they relate to human action or life, whether the objects are themselves man-made, as with the shining light in Jeffrey's early paper on beauty, or natural formations. Wherever we look

it is human feeling that excites our sympathy, and forms the object of our emotions. It is man, and man alone, that we see in the beauties of the earth which he inhabits; - or, if a more sensitive and extended sympathy connect us with the lower families of animated nature...it is still the idea of enjoyment - of feelings that animate the existence of sentient beings - that calls forth all our emotions, and is the parent of all the beauty with which we proceed to invest the inanimate creation around us.²

A love of sentient beings leads to a love of nature, and not vice versa. It is a reconciliation of the dualism set up by Socrates in Plato's Phaedrus: "I'm a lover of learning, and trees and open country

1 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.10. Compare Alison, Essays, I, 206-207. Coleridge used what he saw as the fallacy of this example, which he found in Erasmus Darwin's Zoonomia, to controvert the associationist definition of sublimity, on 14 May, 1804 - see Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2093 and note.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.14. An early paper of Jeffrey expresses the central tenet of classical humanism: "'All that regards man is interesting to me. Everything which explains his character and his contradictions; every investigation that promises to illustrate the phenomena which he unfolds, I pursue and explore with insatiable eagerness and affection'", Life of Jeffrey, I, 44.

won't teach me anything, whereas men in the town do".¹ The difference between the direct love of mankind on the one hand, and the simple emotion of love experienced in regarding the landscape on the other, is that the love occasioned by the landscape is mediated (Jeffrey's word is "reflected"²) through nature.

There is also a third class of sensation-producing, or emotion-producing, associations which Alison and Jeffrey feel deserves a special category of its own. This comprises associations which subsist between objects related to each other by "analogy" rather than by any implicit connection or contiguity.³ A definition Jeffrey offers in his review of Dugald Stewart's Philosophical Essays suggests that he believes contiguity in time and place to be the main, if not the exclusive, form of association:

From the experience and consciousness of all men, in all ages, we learn that, when two or more objects are frequently presented together, the mind passes spontaneously from one to the other, and invests both with something of the colouring which belongs to the most important. This is the law of association.⁴

Thus, to go back to the article on Alison, of the three main forms of association in Hume (Contiguity, Causality, and Resemblance)⁵ Jeffrey

1 Translated by R. Hackworth in The Collected Dialogues of Plato, p.479 (230d). Compare Johnson, "Life of Milton": "It was [Socrates's] labour to turn philosophy from the study of nature to speculations upon life, but the innovators whom I oppose are turning off attention from life to nature", Lives of the Poets, I, 100.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.26.

3 ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.22-25 (p.23).

4 ER XVII (November, 1810), p.183.

5 "To me, there appear to be only three principles of connexion among ideas, namely, Resemblance, Contiguity in time or place, and Cause or Effect", Hume's Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, third edition, revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), p.24 (section IV, § 19). In a note to this section Hume suggests that associations effected by "Contrast or Contrariety" could be considered a mixture of "Causation and Resemblance". Jeffrey added "Contrast" in the Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1824), II, 179.

has simply subsumed Causality under Contiguity, and split Contiguity into the "natural" and the "accidental".¹

The objects associated by analogy are experienced as beautiful or sublime, like those objects with an original connection in time and place, through a double process of association: first there is the movement in the mind from object to analogy, and second, the movement from the analogy to the sensation or emotion. Autumnal sights suggest the approach of death in man; "Who", asks Alison, "at this season, does not feel his mind impressed with a sentiment of melancholy?".² This sentiment then contributes to the complex emotion of beauty we experience when confronted with such sights.

The types of beauty are best differentiated by taking the example of an old tree observed in an open field. Contiguous association, related of course to "sentient beings", would suggest, say, protection from the elements, in turn associated with or eliciting the simple emotion of comfort.³ We call it beautiful because it makes us feel comfortable, although we may not be aware of the emotion. Analogy would envisage, perhaps, the dignity or wisdom of age in man, which would in turn be associated with correspondent simple emotions. The one is anthropocentric, the other anthropomorphic. Jeffrey observes that "the very structure of language" attests to the extent to which analogizing is instinct in the way man relates to the world. What "the poet does for his readers...by his original similes and metaphors...even the dullest of these readers do, in some degree, every day" - which is "to

1 Alison had also talked of "Connexion, or Resemblance" as the only two forms of association responsible for the emotion of beauty, Essays, I, 187.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.23; Alison, Essays, I, 17.

3 "Comfort" is one of the simple emotions that Jeffrey cites, ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.13.

confer mind and feeling" upon nature, "lending life and emotion to all objects".¹ The discussion, though unaware of its own implications, summarises the development of the idea of mind in eighteenth-century empirical psychology into the theories of vital human perception which characterize Romantic thought.² It is this insight into the relationship between mind and nature that occasionally led Jeffrey beyond neoclassical platitudes, especially in the criticism of Shakespeare that recent commentators have identified as "Romantic" in its premises.³ In his review of Hazlitt's Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, for example, Jeffrey praises Shakespeare's

indestructible love of flowers and odors, and dews and clear waters - and soft airs and sounds, and bright skies, and woodland solitudes, and moonlight bowers, which are the material elements of Poetry - and that fine sense of their undefinable relation to mental emotion, which is its essence and vivifying soul.⁴

In the Alison essay Jeffrey goes on to question his own theory: "If beauty be nothing more than a reflection of love, pity or veneration, how comes it, it may be asked, to be distinguished from these sentiments?".⁵ For Alison it was a train of thought or reverie that constituted not just the only, but also the necessary, distinction between the emotions of beauty and sublimity on the one hand, and the

1 ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.24-25.

2 For a discussion of this development see, for example, Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1946), especially pp.110-128.

3 See above, p.165 note 4.

4 ER XXVIII (August, 1817), p.473.

5 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.25.

simple emotion on the other:

Whatever may be the nature of that simple emotion which any object is fitted to excite, whether that of Gaiety, Tranquillity, Melancholy, &c. if it produce not a train of kindred thought in our minds, we are conscious only of that simple Emotion. Whenever, on the contrary, this train of thought, or this exercise of imagination is produced, we are conscious of an emotion of a higher and more pleasing kind; and which, though it is impossible to describe in language, we yet distinguish by the name of the Emotion of Taste.¹

For Alison, that is, the sensation of beauty must be fed by emotions associated not just with a simple object or event recalled automatically, but also with a series of images or thoughts which the object evokes and which the individual seems to be at liberty to control: "the effect is produced by means of a certain poetical creation, or a train of images and conceptions that are conjured up in the mind".² An example would be the sight of a sword, or the image of a sword in a work of art, considered beautiful because it has conjured up, with the help of the percipient, a scene of heroic action which in turn produces and is pervaded by, say, admiration (to use one of Jeffrey's simple emotions³). This actively involves the mind and introduces the important possibility that beauty or sublimity according to an associationist theory, far from positing the idea of a mind passively receiving and automatically responding such as Coleridge came to deplore, is in fact half creating the world it is receiving as beautiful. On at least one occasion Jeffrey takes this beyond the notion of an internal narrative associated with an object, to a chaos of emotions and images which are

1 Alison, Essays, I, 160.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.27; described by the critic Walter J. Ong as "a train of ideas with fancy hard on its heels", in "Psyche and the Geometers", p.18.

3 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.27.

organized, Prospero-like, into beautiful combinations varied at will and all productive of emotions of beauty:

All that we have, is a general and vague impression of a particular class of emotions, and an undefined sort of consciousness of the capability of the objects before us to suggest trains of ideas well fitted to give them scope. The objects themselves, however, do very rarely prescribe the precise nature of these ideas; and, while an immense multitude of loose analogies and kindred recollections roll dimly over the mind, we are left to form them into such groupes and combinations as we ourselves may select; and are tempted every moment to change the form of our cloudy creation, and to wander from one set of images and impressions to another.¹

However, Jeffrey was uncomfortable with Alison's distinguishing train of thought, perhaps because it gave so much freedom to the percipient and made critical unanimity impossible. He wrote to Alison on 29 July, 1808, expressing his reservations:

I must tell you too that I stumble a little on the threshold of your [?theory] not being able to see that emotions of taste are necessarily or ever usually received in the form of extended trains of thought - Both beauty and simplicity it appears to me are most commonly perceived in an instant - and in nine cases out of ten this perception is not followed by any train of thought at all - but gives place immediately to some other impression - and yet the sensation may have been very distinct and lively - [?How] then can...the emotions of taste be justly defined by the character of the trains of thought which suggest them?²

Alison ignored his implied criticism. To have taken cognizance of it would have required substantially rewriting or discarding the whole of the first Essay, and there were only two in the volume. Besides, Alison remained adamant: "unless this exercise of imagination is excited, the emotions of Beauty or Sublimity are unfelt".³ And he bowed

1 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.27; Alison, Essays, I, 164-165.

2 See below, Appendix I, p.342.

3 Alison, Essays, I, 8.

to Jeffrey's other suggestions about clarifying the nature of the simple emotions comprising the aesthetic response only so far as to bring the controversial definition forward, into the introduction. In his review of the second edition Jeffrey had to be content with playing down this caveat by listing it alongside other distinctions between simple and aesthetic emotions, and even then he allowed that it was on this that Alison most relied.¹ When he came to write his essay on beauty, however, Jeffrey took the opportunity of dissociating himself explicitly from this part of Alison's theory:

When he proceeds, however, to assert that our sense of beauty consists not merely in the suggestion of ideas of emotion, but in the contemplation of a connected series of such ideas, and indicates a state of mind in which the faculties, half active and half passive, are given up to a sort of reverie or musing, in which they may wander, though among kindred impressions, far enough from the immediate object of perception, we will confess that he not only seems to us to advance a very questionable proposition, but very essentially to endanger the evidence, as well as the consistency, of his general doctrine.²

Jeffrey believed rather that in most cases the perception of beauty or sublimity was "quite instantaneous, and altogether as immediate as the perception of the external qualities of the object to which it is ascribed".³ In holding that beauty is perceived "in an instant" Jeffrey

1 ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.26-27. In the Supplement to the...Encyclopaedia Britannica (1824), II, 189, and in his Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, I, 54, Jeffrey omitted the words "and this is the circumstance most relied on by Mr Alison" when discussing this train of ideas. Jeffrey also considerably modified the section, cutting it down from three pages to one, and, in doing so, omitting his disingenuous choice of some lines from "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" to exemplify his theory - see ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.29; compare Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 260 (11.19-22).

2 Supplement to the...Encyclopaedia Britannica (1824), II, 179; compare Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, I, 25, where after "a connected series" Jeffrey has added "or train".

3 Supplement to the...Encyclopaedia Britannica (1824), II, 179; Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, I, 26.

moves closer to the 'Inner sense' aestheticians whom he followed Alison in criticizing, aestheticians who assumed the existence of "'a natural sentiment', an instantaneously working 'instinct'".¹

This is especially true when Jeffrey answers the valid objection that his own theory blurred the distinction between beauty and the sentiments of "love, pity, or veneration" by claiming that, "in very many cases", they are not to be distinguished; that what we feel when confronted with an object to which we would apply the epithet "beautiful" is in no way different from direct sensation or emotion.² (To extend the above example, the sensation of comfort we would experience in being ourselves actually protected by the tree, and the sensation of comfort associated with the sight of the tree, are sometimes identical.) More often, however, there is a difference in the aesthetic response which is the result of its being mediated through a sensually perceptible object. Being less direct, it is therefore less intense and less distressful: "disencumbered of all those accompaniments which frequently give it a peculiar and less satisfactory character".³ It is also more transient.

Jeffrey did develop a subsidiary theory of the operation of the reader's mind in response to poetry which closely resembles Alison's theory, and he did use it as an evaluative principle. It finds its most extreme expression in the review of Crabbe's The Borough of April, 1810:

The chief delight of poetry consists, not so much in what it directly supplies to the imagination, as in what it enables it to supply to itself; - not in

1 See Bate, From Classic to Romantic, p.52.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.25.

3 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.26.

warming the heart with its passing brightness, but in kindling its own lasting stores of light and heat; - not in hurrying the fancy along by a foreign and accidental impulse, but in setting it agoing, by touching its internal springs and principles of activity.¹

A poem is good or "delightful" in proportion to the extent, number, and quality of the pleasurable associations it encourages the reader to create for himself.² The definition conjures up the rather absurd idea of the best poem being random words like "sunset" or "valley" placed at appropriately contemplative intervals.³ However, what should be stressed about this creative mental activity are its limits. It is circumscribed by the original object or image presented to the senses; the successful writers "impart their own impulse to the current of our thoughts and feelings, and give the colour of their brighter conceptions to those which they excite in us".⁴

If too much free play were granted the mind in association with the

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- 1 ER XVI, no. 3 (April, 1810), article II, pp.30-55 (p.32). Compare Jeffrey's article on de Lille's Traduction de l'Eneide: "the taste of Virgil dictated to him the precise point, where the reader has received just enough, to make out the rest for himself", ER VII (October, 1805), p.141. Coleridge uses the same traditional definition of imagination when, in his 1811-1812 lectures on Shakespeare, he says that the "power of Poetry is by a single word to produce that energy in the mind as compels the imagination to produce the picture", Coleridge on Shakespeare, ed. Foakes, p.110; Coleridge was not, however, talking about images that evoke associations.
 - 2 It may have been the sixth line of The Borough that reminded Jeffrey of Alison's definition; Crabbe had written "A part I paint - let fancy form the rest", Poems by George Crabbe, edited by Adolphus William Ward, in 3 vols (Cambridge, 1905), I, 285.
 - 3 Alison had also said that "the object itself appears only to serve as a hint to awaken the imagination", Essays, I, 58.
 - 4 Review of Gertrude of Wyoming, ER XIV (April, 1809), p.2. In Alison the "train of thought" is described as "analogous to the character or expression of the original object" (my italics), and the "ideas of Emotion" have "some certain and definite character" dependent upon "the nature of the emotion which is first excited"; what is more, "we are carried on by our conceptions, not guiding them", Essays, I, 4-5; 76, 77; 58.

objects it comes to regard as beautiful, then Jeffrey's major critical demand - that the poet treat only those subjects, or employ only those images, which are either traditionally associated with, or capable of being associated with, pleasurable emotion - would make no sense.¹ This demand is the foundation of Jeffrey's critical theory and it appears formally at the close of the review of Alison's Essays:

If we aspire...to be creators, as well as observers of beauty, and place any part of our happiness in ministering to the gratification of others - as artists, or poets, or authors of any sort - then, indeed, a new distinction of tastes, and a far more laborious system of cultivation, will be necessary. A man who pursues only his own delight, will be as much charmed with objects that suggest powerful emotions, in consequence of personal and accidental associations, as with those that introduce similar emotions by means of associations that are universal and indestructible. To him, all objects of the former class are really as beautiful as those of the latter...But if he conceive the ambition of creating beauties for the admiration of others, he must be cautious to employ only such objects as are the natural signs and inseparable concomitants of emotions, of which the greater part of mankind are susceptible; and his taste will then deserve to be called bad and false, if he obtrude upon the public, as beautiful, objects that are not likely to be associated in common minds with any interesting impressions.²

The demand for conformity, invoking the "public" as the poet's measure and his judge, is the key to Jeffrey's social, political, and critical thinking. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the review which

1 In his review of Crabbe's The Borough, Jeffrey makes it clear that the "reveries" that result from the best literature, far from being arbitrary, are in fact instigated only by certain subjects and images: "this highest and most delightful effect can only be produced by the poet's...dropping the rich seed of his fancy upon the fertile and sheltered places of the imagination. But it is evident, that the emotions connected with common and familiar objects...which fill every man's memory...are of all others the most likely to answer this description", ER XVI (April, 1810), p.32.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.44-45.

constitutes Jeffrey's most systematic revelation of his critical theory should work up to this caution. It is also telling that the closing summaries should include an allusion to the Lake poets in the admonition of that "proselytism, and arrogance in those who mistake their own casual associations for natural or universal relations".¹

III

Three general points should be made about Jeffrey's adaptation of Alison's associationist aesthetic. The first concerns the idea of universality. Associations based on laws of nature are easier to delineate in theory than in practice. Jeffrey's own examples betray an insecurity. For one thing he discusses female beauty under the headings of both universal and accidental association, and remains unaware of the irony.² Where the first discussion argued that the response to certain aspects of female beauty - youth, health, sexuality - is universal and inevitable, the second accepts that these aspects are beautiful only to those "who have been accustomed to recognise them as the signs of such qualities".³ The laws of nature have become the laws of custom. Even in his analysis of the most "universal" of all acknowledged forms of beauty, the natural landscape, the sense of inevitability that had attached to his original definition evaporates. "There is scarcely any one who does not feel and understand the beauty of smiling fields and comfortable cottages" argues Jeffrey, "but the

1 ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.45-46.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.10-13, 18.

3 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.18 (my italics).

beauty of lakes and mountains is not so universally distinguishable".¹

So the "cases, in which the visible phenomena are the natural and universal accompaniments of the emotion" were not always, by his own admission, universal.² One thinks of George Orwell's paradox about all animals being equal but some more equal than others.³ Again, in the long passage quoted above dealing with the obligations of the poet or artist, those associations are universal "of which the greater part of mankind are susceptible".

To reconcile his associationist aesthetic with a uniformitarian psychology, Jeffrey had assumed that between certain objects association operates as inevitably and universally as, say, gravitation in the natural world. Hume had used precisely that physical analogy, calling association "a kind of ATTRACTION, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural".⁴ In making this assumption, and distinguishing those objects from others associated only adventitiously, Jeffrey follows philosophers such as Hume and Hartley as well as Alison. However, Martin Kallich rightly separates this tradition from the tradition of Locke and his followers for whom association was only ever arbitrary and irrational, and who reduce all

1 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.15 (my italics).

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.17. Alison had also defined "that sensibility which is the most natural of all" as "the sensibility to the beauties of the country", and suggested by his superlative "most natural" a difference of degree, rather than kind, between the accidental and the natural - Essays, I, 90.

3 Animal Farm: A Fairy Story (London, 1945), p.87.

4 A Treatise of Human Nature, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1888), pp.12-13. Compare p.289, and An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature 1740, edited by J.M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge, 1938): "there is a secret tie or union among particular ideas, which causes the mind to conjoin them more frequently together, and makes the one, upon its appearance, introduce the other" (p.31).

association under the head of contiguity.¹ The equivocation at the centre of Jeffrey's thesis, and crucial to its evaluation, was thus implicit from the beginning of associationist theory; it is reflected in Ephraim Chamber's early definition in his Cyclopaedia:

ASSOCIATION of Ideas, is where two or more Ideas, constantly and immediately follow or succeed one another in the Mind, so that one shall almost infallibly produce the other; whether there be any natural Relation between them or not.²

Kallich describes two types of mental "movement": "(1) casual, or chance, or unnatural associations, according to contiguity in time and place; and (2) more regular, or natural associations, according to resemblance, contrariety, and causality".³ The first type of association subsists between objects connected only adventitiously, in the mind of the beholder. It is the only type Locke had accepted. The second, dear to the positive associationists, subsists between two objects already connected in nature by affinity or analogy.

But to assume that the laws of association observe the laws of nature, invariably or even occasionally, is a logical confusion, for however natural or necessary the relationship between two objects, association remains the product of subjective experience only. There is nothing in the physical nature of an object A that causes the mind to connect it with another object B, even if A were itself the cause of B. Laws of association may indeed be "natural"; they may operate invariably in all minds. But on what, or between which ideas, are they

1 In his book The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in Eighteenth-Century England: A History of a Psychological Method in English Criticism, Studies in English Literature, LV (The Hague and Paris, 1970), especially pp.9-16.

2 Cyclopaedia; or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, in 2 vols (London, 1728), I, 161 (my italics).

3 The Association of Ideas, p.14.

to operate? What if we have no experience of A causing B? We cannot, according to the associationist theory, connect the two objects. When Hume defined causality as an illusion resulting from the experience of contiguity in time and space he recognised the limits of association, though for a different purpose.¹ All association is in this sense "accidental".

Besides, Jeffrey makes no explicit mention of causality. Some of the associations he remarks do subsist between objects causally related, but there is no attempt to separate them from others related only by contiguity as Kallich has done. He follows Alison rather in distinguishing three types: the "natural", the "accidental", and the analogous - a false distinction when it is considered that analogies may be either "natural" or "accidental" according to Jeffrey's use of the terms. By "natural" association he means contiguous association universally experienced, and even here we have seen that he hesitates. Jeffrey would be the first to admit that "the visible and unequivocal signs of comfort" that he and most of mankind would perceive in "a common English landscape", would become the visible and unequivocal signs of discomfort for the impoverished agricultural labourer.² It is in this very arbitrariness that Jeffrey locates his own, and Alison's, claim to originality:

all tastes are equally just and correct, in so far as each individual speaks only of his own emotions. When a man calls a thing beautiful, he may indeed mean to make two very different assertions:- he may mean that it gives him pleasure, by suggesting to him some interesting emotion; and, in this sense, there can be no doubt that, if he merely speak truth,

1 See Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding (1975), pp.27-39 and ff. (Section IV, part I, §§ 23-33, and after).

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.13.

the thing is beautiful; and that it pleases him precisely in the same way that all other things please those to whom they appear beautiful. But if he mean to say that the thing possesses some quality which ought to make it appear beautiful to every other person...then he is as unreasonable and absurd as he would think those who should attempt to convince him that he felt no emotion of beauty.¹

For Jeffrey beauty is a sentiment, and, as Hume observed, "All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it".² But when Jeffrey goes on to counsel the creator to use "only such objects as are the natural signs...of emotions" he is flatly contradicting himself.³ Jeffrey's theory betrays that for him, as for Locke, all associations are accidental or adventitious, but that some are more accidental than others.

How could it be otherwise? If it were proved that an object or material quality produced the emotion of beauty inevitably and universally because of something inherent in it, causing or recalling another object, would this not be tantamount to proving the existence of objective beauty, which Jeffrey and Alison set out to refute? Nor is it adequate to retreat with Alison into the argument that "material Qualities" do not physically cause the sensation of beauty, as sharp instruments cause pain, but express some other non-material quality with which these sensations are associated.⁴ Dugald Stewart was to warn

1 ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.43-44.

2 "Of the Standard of Taste", essay XXIII of Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects, in 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1817), I, 221-246 (p.224).

3 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.45.

4 See, for example, Alison's discussion of forms, Essays, I, 314-376 (p.314); another example Alison offers is the ancient Greek temple, expressing through its proportions a fitness with which, accidental associations with classical culture aside, mankind invariably and universally associates certain sensations which constitute pleasure or beauty - Essays, II, 167-168.

associationist aestheticians against "that species of paralogism, to which logicians give the name of reasoning in a circle".¹

A more cogent and more satisfying reason for rejecting the possibility of associations "natural" in the strict sense, is that beauty would have become indisputable and taste universal. This was neither true, as Alison and Jeffrey both realised, nor was it desirable, as only Alison realised:

As no forms, or combinations of form could, in such a constitution of our nature, be beautiful but those which this law of our nature prescribed, then the period of their discovery must have been the final period of every art of taste. The exertions of the artist must of necessity have been confined to strict imitation.²

Thus Alison identifies the inherent dangers of the neoclassical aesthetics he was attempting to reconcile with his own, in order to retain theoretical recognition of objective standards of aesthetic judgement.³

Jeffrey avoided complete arbitrariness in aesthetic judgement by relying not on inflexible laws, but on consensus. The confusion of a belief universally held with a law of nature, a sort of creative or affirmative unanimity, is an ancient one: "in every inquiry the

1 The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart, Esq., F.R.SS., edited by William Hamilton, Vol. V, Philosophical Essays (Edinburgh and Boston, 1855), p.242.

2 Alison, Essays, II, 432.

3 In the first edition of the Essays - Edinburgh, 1790 - Alison had said that his investigation of "the NATURE of the FACULTY" by which the emotions of taste are received "would naturally lead" to the question of "whether there is any STANDARD by which the Perfection and Imperfection of this Faculty may be determined" (pp.xi-xii). In 1810 he was less certain; it "will probably lead" to "this important enquiry", Essays, I, xxvi (my italics in both cases). As it turned out, no independent discussion of a "STANDARD" of taste was written.

unanimity of the races of the world must be regarded as a law of nature" declared Cicero.¹ For Jeffrey, as we saw, natural association was any contiguous (or analogous) association 'universally' experienced. Of course a natural law cannot be proven by its exception. Jeffrey undermines the authority of association as a critical criterion when he admits the impossibility of complete unanimity. His position may then be compared with less philosophical pragmatists like Dr Johnson or Vicesimus Knox. After discussing the possibility of any 'laws' of taste, Knox concluded

that the feelings of the majority of men coinciding for a number of years in the same object, constitutes a standard sufficiently certain and uniform. Men are so like each other in the constituent principles of their minds, that the work which has pleased the greater part, during a long time, will please the whole, if their minds are properly cultivated, and will please them for ever.²

An object becomes beautiful only by democratic consent; the aptness of the political epithet will become apparent later. Jeffrey's critical standards are in fact quantitative, not qualitative. Neoclassicists like Reynolds had also abandoned certainty or "real...truth" - Reason perceiving the idea of general nature - as too difficult, and substituted the "apparent or secondary truths" of public opinion.³ But Reynolds could argue that this reflected laws of taste with all the necessity and invariability of the laws of motion. Jeffrey could not.

Custom and habit are the basis of Jeffrey's aesthetic response, consensus becomes the basis of his aesthetic judgement. This brings us

1 "omni autem in re consensio omnium gentium lex naturae putanda est", Tusculan Disputations, translated by J.E. King, Loeb Classical Library (London and New York, 1927), pp.36, 37 (I. xiii. § 30).

2 Essay XXVII of Essays Moral and Literary, The Works of Vicesimus Knox, D.D., in 7 vols (London, 1824), I, 147-151 (pp.148-149).

3 Discourses on Art, pp.122-123, 141 (Discourse VII).

at last to the second general point, which concerns the focus of Jeffrey's interest in the critical act. Within the scheme that M.H. Abrams sets out in the opening of The Mirror and the Lamp - arguing for the orientation of any critical theory towards either the Universe, the Audience, the Artist, or the Work itself¹ - Jeffrey's theory concerns itself primarily with the audience. The reader's mind, his associations and expectations, becomes the object of interest and the measure of a work of art. The foundations of a conspiracy of the reader and critic against the writer are obvious.

Critical theories concentrating on the reader had already been well established by the end of the eighteenth century, by both the associationist psychologists and the Longinian critics. "The consideration of abstract poetics and rules", as René Wellek observes, had given "way slowly to an analysis of the subjective impression of the reader or critic".² Alison actually quotes Addison as corroboration:

it is ever to be remembered, 'That Music, Architecture, and Painting, as well as Poetry and Oratory, are to deduce their laws and rules from the general Sense and Taste of mankind, and not from the principles of these Arts themselves; in other words, that the Taste is not to conform to the Art, but the Art to the Taste'.³

What Jeffrey's theory does is to adapt the Longinian measure of emotional reaction to the aesthetics of associationism, the basic units of which are the emotions of the Longinians (though simplified), mediated through the object to which the apparent response is made.⁴

1 Pages 6-7.

2 The Rise of English Literary History, p.24.

3 Essays, I, xxvii-xxviii (my italics).

4 Compare Bate, in From Classic to Romantic, on the "urging by Longinus of the psychological and emotional elements in the creation and understanding of art", and on 'Longinus' as "an authoritative rallying center for the defense of a subjective and emotional taste" (pp.46-47).

The great critical champion of "the common voice of the multitude", however, neither followed 'Longinus' nor subscribed to associationism; Dr Johnson invested the reader with an importance based on a uniformitarianism older than associationist psychology.¹ "For Johnson", to quote W.R. Keast, "nature is not an ontological, but a psychological, concept: it is defined, that is, not in terms of properties independent of the mind but in terms of its capacity to produce certain responses in men".² Jeffrey's debt to Johnson is difficult to assess.³ What is alone certain is that Jeffrey's systematic reference to the function of the reader as a critical touchstone reflects the work of Johnson.

The third and final point to be made about Jeffrey's article on Alison concerns his assumption that the natural object, and the imitation of that object in a work of art, are, for aesthetic purposes, interchangeable. Because he refuses to differentiate the response of the percipient to the object from his response to its imitation, Jeffrey fails, as does Wordsworth in the Preface, to discriminate between art

1 The "common voice of the multitude uninstructed by precept, and unprejudiced by authority", Rambler 52, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol. III, The Rambler (the first of three volumes), edited by Walter Jackson Bate (New Haven and London, 1969), p.280.

2 "The Theoretical Foundation of Johnson's Criticism", in Critics and Criticism 'Ancient and Modern', edited by R.S. Crane (Chicago, 1952), pp.389-407 (pp.399-400).

3 Cockburn's one reference to Johnson in his discussion of Jeffrey's early essays suggests that Jeffrey later felt that he had developed beyond him: "Johnson, as might be expected of a youth, is almost the only one whom he rates far higher than he did afterwards", Life of Jeffrey, I, 28. Jeffrey's most direct reference to Johnson in his articles is more deferential than this would lead us to expect, but it is also extremely vague; Johnson is described as leaving "behind him, in his casual excursions into the regions of speculation, those giant vestiges that serve for ever to guide the track of more laborious adventurers", in his review of Grimm's Correspondance Literaire, Philosophique et Critique, ER XXIII, no. 46 (September, 1814), article II, pp.292-319 (p.294).

and life.¹ Nowhere is there any mention of a peculiarly aesthetic emotion of the kind Coleridge is at pains to define. I spoke earlier of the response one has to a tree in a field, simplifying in order to elucidate Jeffrey's theory. There the tree was associated with comfort by a sympathy that relates to its function of protecting "sentient beings". The simple emotion of comfort with which this visual object is associated differs in no way from the same emotion associated with a visual image in a poem.

In a sense this is because nature has pre-empted the role of art in the theory. Objects in nature, specifically "beautiful objects", become symbolic of something other than themselves: "we feel indignation, or pity, or admiration, in consequence of seeing some piece of inanimate matter that merely suggests or recalls to us the ordinary causes or proper objects of these emotions".² Proper or ordinary causes of these proper emotions are "reflected" only by this "intervenient imagery" which, as we saw, produces most often only secondary emotions - fainter, more diffuse, more transient in comparison.³ This, or something like this, has traditionally been considered the role of art, mediating between reality and the individual. Yet it is also true that Jeffrey refuses to differentiate in his theory because he often fails in practice to see any difference between the objects of nature in a landscape and in a poem, and because he wants to use reality to discipline art.

1 Again, Alison had set a precedent: "If the Fine Arts are in reality arts of imitation" he wrote in his Introduction, "their Principles are to be sought for in the subject which they imitate", Essays, I, xxvii.

2 ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.27.

3 The phrase "intervenient imagery" is Wordsworth's, The Prelude (1805), III, 1.555, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.118.

IV

The simple emotions excited by reality or art in Jeffrey's aesthetic have their ethical counterparts in the "moral feelings" he ascribes to all men, upon which the morality of a society is based, and which are "perfectly sufficient to direct the conduct of the individual". Without any reference to "the nature or origin" of our distinctions between right and wrong, the discriminating observer can discern in human society "general rules of morality". Again we have a system of discrimination built upon a general consensus that oscillates between unanimity and an unspecified majority, but which Jeffrey nonetheless accepts as indisputable:

The moral feelings...are the feelings which observation teaches us to impute to all men; those in which, under every variety of circumstances, they are found pretty constantly to agree, and as to which their uniformity may be reasoned and reckoned upon with almost as much security as in the case of their external perceptions. The existence of such feelings, and the uniformity with which they are excited in all men by the same occasions, are facts that admit of no dispute.¹

'Pretty constant agreement' gives way to the 'fact' of uniformity as Jeffrey, increasingly confident, becomes increasingly dogmatic.

The argument occurs in Jeffrey's review and criticism of Bentham's Traité de Legislation Civile et Penale and is perhaps the predictable

¹ ER IV, no. 7 (April, 1804), article I, pp.1-26 (pp.11, 15). The uniformitarianism that characterizes his ethics and his aesthetics, also characterizes Jeffrey's philosophy of mind: "Is it not", he asks in the review of Dugald Stewart's Philosophical Essays "universally understood to be almost the limited province of [the philosophy of mind], to explain the nature and distinctions of those primary functions of the mind, which are possessed in common by men of all vocations and all conditions?", ER XVII (November, 1810), p.180.

response of a practising lawyer to a legal theorist: "Mr Bentham seems to forget that there is such a thing as common sense in the world".¹ The moral sense and common sense are used interchangeably; commonalty sanctions morality. But common sense, we have seen, has taken on a quite specialized meaning. The feelings and thoughts that are the configurations of previous sense impressions in the associationist theory are construed as fundamentally identical, in that the basic sense units are common to all. Jeffrey's common sense is a product of a faith in the unerring operation of the public mind based on a theory that assumes all (or most) people are exposed to the same (or a similar) world, and therefore form the same (or similar) associations. In sharing the same basic materials poetry and morality are intimately related:

the elements of poetical interest are necessarily obvious and universal - they are within and about all men; and the topics by which they are suggested are proved to have been the same in every age, and every country of the world. Poetry...is in this respect indeed very nearly upon a footing with morality.²

Jeffrey did not, however, believe with Hartley that "all Reasoning, as well as Affection, is the mere Result of Association".³ In his review of Stewart's Philosophical Essays he quotes and approves Stewart's strictures on those "alchemists" in the philosophy of mind "'whose studies are directed to the pursuit of one single principle, into which the whole science may be resolved'", and cites as an example those who would "explain the whole of our intellectual operations by the single

1 ER IV (April, 1804), p.19.

2 Review of Southey's Madoc, ER VII (October, 1805), p.3.

3 Observations on Man, I, 499.

principle of the 'Association of Ideas'".¹ Jeffrey's complaint is against an exclusive materialism, and his case becomes apparent in his article on the Memoirs of Hartley's disciple and editor Joseph Priestley, when he supports the advocates "for the existence of mind":

All that they maintain, is, that these impulses or movements [of sense impressions] are not feelings or thought, but merely the occasions of feeling and thought, and that it is impossible for them to confound the material motions which precede their sensations, with the sensations themselves, which have no conceivable affinity with matter.²

It is important therefore to distinguish between sense impressions - the materials of common sense - and the faculty of common sense that observes and evaluates. Jeffrey's theory involves two analogies, the combination of which M.H. Abrams claims is a characteristic of eighteenth-century psychology:

One was the analogy of a mechanism, in which the images of sense follow one another according to the laws of mental gravitation. The other was the analogy of an intelligent artisan, or architect, who makes his selection from the materials so proffered, and then puts them together according to his pre-existent blueprint or plan.³

But the criterion to which Jeffrey resorts is itself common sense, for he protests in the same article that the confusion of such a "faculty of perception" and "external and separate" matter "certainly never

1 ER XVII (November, 1810), p.173; compare Stewart, The Collected Works, V, 14, who is actually quoting Joseph-Marie D gerando.

2 ER IX, no. 17 (October, 1806), article IX, pp.136-161 (p.158).

3 The Mirror and the Lamp, p.166; compare Bate, From Classic to Romantic, pp.100-102, who emphasizes the intuitionism of the operation of common sense, as of sentiment.

entered into the head of any plain man".¹ The protest merely begs the question. An explanation of the relationship between the mind and external matter would be required to explain why it did not enter the plain man's head.

In objecting to materialism (as to philosophical idealism) Jeffrey follows those thinkers, like Thomas Reid, for whom Philosophy had "no other root but the principles of Common sense".² Whenever reason or logic ran counter to the convictions of common sense, Reid invariably deferred to the latter:

If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them - these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd.³

Reid's argument was directed against those philosophers who disbelieved, or feigned disbelief, in the existence of things for which no logic could account. Jeffrey's theory at its extreme sees common sense as an instinctive knowledge or morality of the kind advocated by such sentimentalists as Henry Mackenzie, and proposes that the "end of our actions is prescribed to us by nature, and not by reason".⁴ Twenty years

1 ER IX (October, 1806), pp.154, 155. As always, it is difficult to pin Jeffrey down. In an article on Forbes's An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie (1806), written not more than six months later, he criticizes Beattie's "Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth" for the "perpetual appeal which it affects to make from philosophical subtlety to common sense", ER X, no. 19 (April, 1807), article XII, pp.171-199 (p.197). This apparent contradiction is partly obviated by Jeffrey's denying that common sense is a truth-finding faculty, see below, p.213 note 2.

2 An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense, The Works of Thomas Reid, D.D., third edition, edited by William Hamilton (Edinburgh and London, 1852), p.101.

3 The Works of Thomas Reid, p.108.

4 In a review of Robert Forsyth, The Principles of Moral Science, Volume I (1805), ER VII, no. 14 (January, 1806), article VII, pp.413-436 (p.416).

later John Stuart Mill justly remarked "the most elaborate attempt" in the article on Bentham's Traités "to erect sentimentality into a system, to clothe it in the garb of philosophy, and to support it by arguments having the semblance of being drawn from the principles of human nature".¹ For Reid common sense, though reinforced by experience, had also operated by instinct. Walter Jackson Bate describes this compromise between materialism and idealism exemplified by Jeffrey's and Reid's common sense as "instinctive association": "just as it shapes and unifies empirical data, instinctive association is itself developed, informed, and guided by its experience with them".²

The faculty which all men possess can only uniformly evaluate with reference to the materials to which all men have access. There was enough here in common for Jeffrey to trust the directions of the common sense, even if he did not trouble to define precisely what he meant by the term. But how far did that trust extend? When Reid used instinct to prove the existence of certain distinctions or entities, Jeffrey would not follow him. He backed down, for example, when Reid found proof of the existence of material objects in the common-sense conviction of their existence implicit in the act of

1 Westminster Review, I, no. 2 (April, 1824), article X, pp.505-541 (p.541). This criticism, like the authorship of the article, was the joint effort of James and John Stuart Mill. The original article in the Westminster on "Periodical Literature" cited above - I, no. 1 (January, 1824), pp.206-249 - was written exclusively by the father James; the "continuation of this article in the second number of the review", writes John Stuart, "was written by me under my father's eye", in the Autobiography of John Stuart Mill, edited by John Jacob Coss (New York, 1924), p.66, note 1.

2 From Classic to Romantic, p.111. Compare Reid, who talks about the inferences of common sense as "judgments not got by comparing ideas, ...but immediately inspired by our constitution", The Works of Thomas Reid, p.110.

perception.¹ "We think", wrote Jeffrey,

that the existence of external objects is not necessarily implied in the phenomena of perception; but we think that there is no complete proof of their nonexistence, and that philosophy, instead of being benefited, would be subjected to needless embarrassments by the assumption of the ideal theory.²

Reid's justification for believing the dictates of common sense, however, was pragmatic as well as ontological: "It is a bold philosophy that rejects, without ceremony, principles which irresistably govern the belief and the conduct of all mankind in the common concerns of life".³ In the end, that is, he relies on a consensus gentium for his faith, if not his proof. Whenever the confrontation between philosophy and common sense occurs, Reid begs leave "to think, with the vulgar".⁴ So does Jeffrey. "With regard to perception, indeed, and some of the other primary functions of mind", he wrote, "the profoundest reasonings lead us back to the creed and the ignorance of the vulgar".⁵ Moreover like Reid, Jeffrey rejected anything "contrary to the common apprehensions of mankind".⁶

A comparison of Jeffrey's scattered comments with the work of Reid

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- 1 For example: "The evidence of sense, the evidence of memory, and the evidence of the necessary relations of things, are all distinct and original kinds of evidence, equally grounded on our constitution: none of them depends upon, or can be resolved into another. To reason against any of these kinds of evidence, is absurd; nay, to reason for them is absurd. They are first principles; and as such fall not within the province of reason, but of common sense", The Works of Thomas Reid, p.108.
 - 2 In a review of William Drummond's Academical Questions Volume I (1805), ER VII, no. 13 (October, 1805), article XII, pp.163-185 (pp.172-173).
 - 3 The Works of Thomas Reid, p.102.
 - 4 The Works of Thomas Reid, p.106.
 - 5 In a review of Dugald Stewart's Life of Dr. Reid, ER III, no. 6 (January, 1804), article I, pp.269-287 (p.277).
 - 6 The Works of Thomas Reid, p.108 (my italics).

shows that Jeffrey escaped from the philosopher's world of proof and assumed certainty, into the world of Dr Johnson in which the business of living was paramount.¹ Jeffrey once said of material objects that "it must appear, at least, unprofitable refinement which would lead us to dwell on the possibility of their nonexistence".² "Unprofitable refinement" was equally anathema to Johnson; the phrase itself is Johnsonian.³ Moreover, the pragmatism which typifies Jeffrey's philosophy is, predictably, even more typical of his morality: "it does not appear to us - though casuists may mask dishonour, and purists startle at shadows...that any man of upright feelings can be at a loss for a rule of conduct".⁴ His conception of these rules of conduct, as of the rules of poetry, is "legalistic". To quote Thomas Crawford:

he is pre-eminently a judge to whom the laws of poetry are parallel to the laws of the land - crystallisations of the common sense and congealed experience of ages.⁵

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- 1 Philip Flynn insists that "Jeffrey was not kicking stones to refute Berkeley" (Francis Jeffrey, p.60), and it is true that Jeffrey found more philosophical and less theatrical ways of disposing of Berkeley (and the materialists, and the sceptics), but in the end his position is identical with Johnson's, whose "characteristically English confidence in the practically known" is proverbial (Bate, From Classic to Romantic, p.74). Jeffrey refused to allow that metaphysical studies have any certainty, or any power over "the conduct of men" - see ER XVII (November, 1810), pp.176-180, and especially p.185 - which is Johnson's position achieved with the help of the prevailing Scottish philosophy.
 - 2 In the Drummond review, ER VII (October, 1805), p.175.
 - 3 Compare Johnson on "idle subtilty" in the "Preface to Shakespeare, 1765", The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, VII, 88.
 - 4 Review of Leckie's Essay on the Practice of the British Government, ER XX, no. 40 (November, 1812), article IV, pp.315-346 (p.343).
 - 5 The Edinburgh Review and Romantic Poetry (1802-1829), Auckland University College Bulletin, no. 47, English Series, 8 (Auckland, 1955), p.13.

Chapter Four

JEFFREY AND COLERIDGE ON WORDSWORTH

'Pedlars,' and 'Boats,' and 'Waggon!' Oh! ye shades
Of Pope and Dryden, are we come to this?

Byron, Don Juan

all who view the 'idiot in his glory'
Conceive the bard the hero of the story.

Byron, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers

The principle of common sense controls the practical recommendations of Aristotle's Poetics and is still, despite a proliferation of critical approaches to literature, consistently invoked in criticism, especially in review criticism. Samuel Johnson is more remarkable for employing common sense than for advocating it, and we find in his work nothing resembling Reid's philosophical justification, or even Jeffrey's reasoned defence. In the "Life of Gray", however, Johnson explicitly defers to the common reader and to collective taste:

by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with
literary prejudices, after all the refinements of
subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be
finally decided all claim to poetic honours.¹

Jeffrey, then, shares his criterion of the common apprehension with Johnson; he frequently relegates the ultimate judgement of poetry, as does Johnson, to mankind generally, and not to rules or a critical élite:

1 The Lives of the Poets, III, 441.

A reputation that prevails so universally, and is retained so long, must necessarily be merited; and it would not only be presumptuous, but absurd, to call in question the reality of those excellences, to which the whole European world has borne so unequivocal a testimony.¹

It is to a collective wisdom of this kind that Jeffrey refers when, in his review of Thomas Moore's Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems, he recommends the epistles in heroic couplets because, of all those in the collection, they "approach the nearest to common sense".² When Jeffrey criticizes the antiquarian pedantry of Scott's Marmion, the tone and the sentiments are as unmistakable as those of his dismissal of "unprofitable refinement":

The world will never be long pleased with what it does not readily understand; and the poetry which is destined for immortality, should treat only of feelings and events which can be conceived and entered into by readers of all descriptions.³

Jeffrey combined with his pragmatism an unquestionable delight in philosophical argument and a need to ground his ideas on principles such as those laid down in his review of Alison's Essays and in his articles on ethics and philosophy. His debt to associationist aesthetics, for example, is nowhere more apparent than when, in a review of Thomas Campbell's Gertrude of Wyoming, he describes the class of poetry "which comes nearer to our conception of pure and perfect poetry" as one "calculated, we think, to please more deeply, and to call out

1 ER III (October, 1803), p.26. Compare Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare, 1765": "there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature", The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, VII, 67.

2 ER VIII (July, 1806), p.464.

3 ER XII, no. 23 (April, 1808), article I, pp.1-35 (p.32). Compare the review of Campbell's Gertrude of Wyoming: "the most powerful and enchanting poetry is that which depends for its effect upon the just representation of common feelings and common situations", ER XIV (April, 1809), p.3; compare also the article on Crabbe's The Borough, ER XVI (April, 1810), p.32.

more permanently, those trains of emotion, in which the delight of poetry will probably be found to consist".¹ But in most things he comes back to the position of Dr Johnson.

I

What are the "kindred impressions" to which "the heart and the affections naturally vibrate in unison"?² Jeffrey's aesthetic involves what Santayana called "the idealization of the familiar",³ and the demand for the familiar is, more often than not, a demand for naturalism, naturalness, or realism of some sort.⁴ "There is a consistency in nature and truth", declares Jeffrey in a review of Scott's Waverley, "the want of which may always be detected in the happiest combinations of fancy".⁵ The recourse to truth and nature, especially as approved by the hypothetical common sense, is the oldest recourse in literary criticism.⁶

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- 1 ER XIV (April, 1809), pp.1-2. Introducing the section entitled "Philosophy of the Mind, Metaphysics, and Jurisprudence" in his Contributions, Jeffrey talked of "having been at one time more addicted to the studies to which it relates than to any other - and still confessing to a certain partiality for them" (III, 300).
 - 2 Which Jeffrey demands of the poet in his review of Crabbe's The Borough, ER XVI (April, 1810), p.32.
 - 3 I am indebted to Walter Jackson Bate for Santayana's phrase, see From Classic to Romantic, p.7.
 - 4 Jeffrey's reputed realism had become such a by-word by 1936 that F.L. Lucas could write that 'Longinus' "is genuinely jarred by anything at all fantastic - 'this will never do'", The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal (Cambridge, 1936), p.58.
 - 5 ER XXIV, no. 47 (November, 1814), article XI, pp.208-243 (p.208). Compare of course, Dr Johnson: "Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature", "Preface to Shakespeare, 1765", The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, VII, 61.
 - 6 See, for example, Odysseus's compliment to the bard Demódokos on his songs of the Akhaians: "You shared it, one would say, or heard it all", The Odyssey, Book VIII, l.491, translated by Robert Fitzgerald (London, 1962), p.125.

The first and most obvious debt to Johnson - or, more generally, to the mimetic tradition - is the confusion of literature and life. This is hardly surprising when we consider that for Jeffrey, as for Johnson, literary activity was seen as fundamentally the same as any other activity, and its materials were seen as the same as the materials of morality and even 'metaphysics': the world as it appeared to the common apprehension. The significance of this world for other eighteenth-century critics is apparent in Joshua Reynolds's rejection of "whatever notions are not conformable to those of nature, or universal opinion" as "more or less capricious".¹ The two were seen as either interchangeable or equally reliable.

Because of his belief in the natural landscape as the 'most universal' of all forms of beauty,² Jeffrey prescribes "external nature" as the happiest choice available to the poet, the choice most likely to please the hypothetical common reader that Jeffrey invokes time and again:

There is something irresistibly pleasing in the faithful representation of external nature, even in her simplest and most ordinary aspects. All men have interesting associations with dawns and sunsets:- and the returns of summer and winter, as they indicate themselves upon the woods and waters, the mountains and fields of our home scenery, recal to every bosom a thousand impressions, more deep and touching than can usually be excited by objects far more new and extraordinary. A lively picture of nature, therefore, pleases everybody - and is the only thing, perhaps, that does so.³

"All men" have associations with these phenomena, all readers cannot resist the associations when confronted with their representations.

1 Discourses on Art, p.124 (Discourse VII; my italics).

2 See the review of Alison, ER XVIII (May, 1811), pp.13-17.

3 Review of Grahame's British Georgics, ER XVI (April, 1810), p.214.

Sometimes Jeffrey's demand for realism becomes literal-minded and slightly absurd, as when he objects to an image in James Grahame's The Sabbath because "there is no physical truth or propriety in considering Sunday as calmer than any other day in the week".¹

The same tendency to confuse literature with reality is evident in Jeffrey's criticism of Byron, who, he argues, "will never be thoroughly nor universally pleasing, till he learns to bespeak our interest for beings a little more like those whom we have been accustomed to love and admire".² When Jeffrey praises Cowper for the "truth of his descriptions" on the other hand, it is because they involve "the minute and correct painting of those home-scenes...with which everyone is internally familiar".³ Burns also achieved his fame by not rejecting "habitual associations".⁴ The list could be extended indefinitely. The intimacy of the relationship between common sense and the world of every-day reality for Jeffrey is most clearly seen, perhaps predictably, in his criticism of Shakespeare:

The great want of Fletcher is want of common sense; the most miraculous gift of Shakespere, his deep, sound, practical, universal knowledge of human nature, in all ranks, conditions, and fortunes.⁵

Considering that Wordsworth effected his literary revolution on behalf of truth and nature, it is ironic that the major charges brought against him should have been unnaturalness in sentiment - to which we shall return later - and a lack of realism in representation. Yet Jeffrey

1 ER V (January, 1805), p.439.

2 Review of The Corsair, ER XXIII (April, 1814), p.228.

3 ER II (April, 1803), p.84.

4 ER XIII (January, 1809), p.276.

5 In a letter to William Spalding, 23 May, 1836, Life of Jeffrey, II, 277.

argued that while Crabbe, like Cowper, "shows us something which we have all seen, or may see, in real life", the "gentlemen of the new school... invent for themselves certain whimsical and unheard of beings, to whom they impute some fantastical combination of feelings":

Now, we leave it to any reader of common candour and discernment to say, whether these representations of character and sentiment are drawn from that eternal and universal standard of truth and nature, which every one is knowing enough to recognize, and no one great enough to depart from with impunity; or whether they are not formed...upon certain fantastic and affected peculiarities in the mind or fancy of the author.¹

If, however, Jeffrey's objections to Wordsworth's characterization are examined more closely, it can be seen that the demands Jeffrey makes are not only for realism, but also for literary convention. For example, he uses the schoolmaster typical of both life and literature (in Crabbe, Goldsmith, and Shenstone) to exemplify the "type" to which Wordsworth's Matthew fails to conform.² Similarly, Martha Ray is disregarded as an eccentric attempt to draw a "frail damsel"; the passage "There was a boy" is not the conventional history of "the untimely death of promising youth"³ (a criticism even more suggestive of Jeffrey's total lack of sympathy for Wordsworth's poetry than his peremptory dismissal of the "Ode. Intimations of Immortality"⁴); and because love in "Strange fits of passion have I known" is treated unconventionally, it will not satisfy.⁵ Criticizing the Lakers in his article on Burns, Jeffrey identifies character with character type, reality with art; the Lakers,

1 In his review of Crabbe's Poems (1807), ER XII (April, 1808), pp.133, 136.

2 ER XII (April, 1808), pp.134-135.

3 ER XII (April, 1808), p.135.

4 In his review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.227.

5 ER XII (April, 1808), p.136.

he hopes, will "submit to be admonished by a self-taught and illiterate poet, who drew from Nature far more directly than they can do, and produced something so much liker the admired copies of the masters whom they have abjured".¹ The identification recalls the famous lines from Pope's Essay on Criticism:

When first young Maro in his boundless Mind
A Work t'outlast Immortal Rome design'd,
Perhaps he seem'd above the Critick's Law,
And but from Nature's Fountains scorn'd to draw:
But when t'examine ev'ry Part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same²

The familiar neo-Classical identification, and the echo of Johnson on Shakespeare in Jeffrey's criticism of Fletcher, raise the question of just how realistic Jeffrey felt literature should be. Johnson had of course decided that only "general nature" was, by definition, universally familiar; moreover "it is worth while to observe", to quote A.O. Lovejoy, how Johnson

brings out the logical connection between the demand for universality of appeal in a work of art and the neo-classical requirement that art shall restrict its "imitation of nature" to generic types and avoid the portrayal of the individual.³

A similar, less logical connection may be observed between Jeffrey's criterion of every-day reality and his more conventional criterion of the literary type. Jeffrey had no consistent attitude towards numbering the streaks of the tulip.⁴ His appreciation of the comparatively recent

1 ER XIII (January, 1809), p.276.

2 Part I, ll.130-135, The Poems of Alexander Pope, I, 254.

3 The Great Chain of Being, pp.290-291.

4 I am, of course, alluding to the "dissertation upon poetry" in the tenth book of Rasselas: "'The business of a poet, said Imlac, is to examine, not the individual, but the species...he does not number the streaks of the tulip'", The History of Rasselas: Prince of Abissinia, edited by G. Tillotson and Brian Jenkins (London, New York, and Toronto, 1971), p.28.

genre called the novel, and of the comparatively minute realism of the poet Crabbe, suggests a taste for more detailed and historical realism than Johnson could tolerate.¹ Against Wordsworth, however, he invokes a law of general nature and generic types as strict as any propounded by Pope or Johnson. Moreover, he was patently dissatisfied with the description of objects and events, however realistic, that were either inconducive to what he considered to be the end of the work under review ("details of preposterous minuteness"²), or were unworthy of the poet's attention - complaining, for example, of those passages in which Crabbe's "rare gifts of observation and description are lavished upon objects which no fidelity in the rendering, and no skill in the finishing can ever make interesting".³ If Crabbe's choice of object were occasionally uninteresting, Wordsworth's was almost invariably a positive affront:

spades or sparrows' eggs - or men gathering leeches -
or women in duffle cloaks - or plates and porringers -
or washing tubs - or any of those baser themes which
poetry was always permitted to disdain, without any
impeachment of her affability, till Mr Wordsworth
thought fit to force her into an acquaintance with
them.⁴

However, before proceeding to examine Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth

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- 1 For Jeffrey on the novel, see below, p.334 and notes 1 and 2; Crabbe's "characteristic", he argued in his review of Poems (1807), "is force, and truth of description" - ER XII (April, 1808), p.132 - and later, he found in the Tales (1812) "the same finished and minute delineation of things quite ordinary and common, - generally very engaging when employed upon external objects", ER XX, no. 40 (November, 1812), article II, pp.277-305 (p.278). It should be pointed out that Johnson did greatly admire Richardson's Clarissa; see Miss Reynolds's "Recollections of Dr. Johnson", Johnsonian Miscellanies, edited by George Birbeck Hill, in 2 vols (Oxford, 1897), II, 251.
 - 2 Of which he complained in his review of Wordsworth's Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.7.
 - 3 In his review of Tales (1812), ER XX (November, 1812), p.278.
 - 4 Review of John Wilson's The Isle of Palms, and Other Poems, ER XIX, no. 38 (February, 1812), article VI, pp.373-388 (p.374).

in more detail, it is important briefly to discuss the crucial ambiguity of Jeffrey's associationist aesthetic - an ambiguity that is raised by his reverting to an unequivocally neo-Classical idea of "truth and nature".

What happened, it must be asked, to the Johnsonian appeal beyond literary practice and literary theory - beyond "literary prejudices", "the refinements of subtilty, and the dogmatism of learning" - to "the commonsense of readers"?¹ It is precisely this appeal that is often found in Jeffrey's criticism - in his analysis of the poetry of Cowper, for example:

The gradual refinement of taste had, for nearly a century, been weakening the vigour of original genius. Our poets had become timid and fastidious, and circumscribed themselves both in the choice and the management of their subject, by the observance of a limited number of models, who were thought to have exhausted all the legitimate resources of the art. Cowper was one of the first who crossed this enchanted circle, who regained the natural liberty of invention, and walked abroad in the open field of observation as freely as those by whom it was originally trodden; he passed from the imitation of poets, to the imitation of nature, and ventured boldly upon the representation of objects that had not been sanctified by the description of any of his predecessors. In the ordinary occupations and duties of domestic life, and the consequences of modern manners, in the common scenery of a rustic situation, and the obvious contemplation of our public institutions, he has found a multitude of subjects for ridicule and reflection, for pathetic and picturesque description, for moral declamation, and devotional rapture, that would have been looked upon with disdain, or with despair, by most of our poetical adventurers.²

Coleridge in the Biographia would call Cowper, with Bowles, "the first

1 See above, p.215 and note 1.

2 ER II, no. 3 (April, 1803), article IX, pp.64-86 (p.81).

who combined natural thoughts with natural diction; the first who reconciled the heart with the head".¹ The revolutionary role that Cowper was felt by many in the early nineteenth century to have played in literary history is nowhere better expressed than in this passage from Jeffrey's review, though when he returned again to the subject in 1811 the parallel with Coleridge is more obvious: "There was something so delightfully refreshing, in seeing natural phrases and natural images again displaying their unforced graces".²

When in Jeffrey's criticism a poet is original, and commended for it, it is because he has broken through restrictive artistic practice and restimulated those "universal" associations that constitute a broader basis of critical consent. Given that taste is ultimately reliant on simple emotions, Jeffrey has appealed to a "superior tribunal", to use a metaphor of his own used in a similar context.³ He shared, at times, with all the important critics of his generation the desire to re-define the province of literature, to rescue "propriety" as a criterion from its death by excess at the hands of the neo-Classical critics, and to re-establish it on firmer foundations. In Jeffrey's case those foundations were the "feelings and events" that all mankind had in common.⁴

However, Jeffrey's bitter and conservative condemnation of Wordsworth for doing precisely that for which Cowper is praised - passing "from the imitation of poets, to the imitation of nature", and venturing "boldly on the representation of objects that had not been sanctified by the description of any of his predecessors" - shows his critical opinions to

1 Biographia Literaria, I, 16.

2 In the review of Weber's Ford, ER XVIII (August, 1811), p.283.

3 ER XVII (February, 1811), p.429.

4 See above, p.216 and note 3.

be inconsistent on this point. In fact, they are inconsistent for the very obvious reason that there is a crucial ambiguity in the application of his associationist theory of literature. To treat common sense or the common apprehension as opposed to, or independent of, the literary establishment, as Johnson did, is only one way of considering it. Another is to treat it as the basis of that establishment, whether it is expressed as abstract Rules or as standards embodied in the literary tradition. When common sense is identified with these Rules or standards, innovation such as Cowper's may be dismissed as contravening more permanent laws than mere literary ones. The doctrine of association as Jeffrey uses it both relies upon, and strengthens, pre-established relations, or custom.¹ But there may be any number of relations, and a person may have literary associations (hence expectations) that conflict with those that have been formed with external nature. Because Jeffrey does not trouble to separate literature and life, the possible conflict is never countenanced, although it quickly becomes apparent in the reviews. His criticism is unpredictable rather because of, than in spite of, his critical theory.

This ambiguity becomes strikingly apparent when, in his review of Campbell's Gertrude of Wyoming, Jeffrey claims that the object of poetry is

to awaken in our minds a train of kindred emotions....
But it seems obvious, that this is more likely to be
accomplished by surrounding us gradually with those
objects, and involving us in those situations with
which we have long been accustomed to associate the

¹ For a neo-Classical version of the same belief, see Reynolds, Discourse VII: "if any one...should therefore invent new orders of equal beauty, which we will suppose to be possible, they would not please; nor ought he to complain, since the old has that great advantage of having custom and prejudice on its side", Discourses on Art, p.139; compare pp.122-123. One can imagine the aged Reynolds delivering this to the students of the academy with an ironic smile.

feelings of the poet, - than by startling us with some tale of wonder, or attempting to engage our affections for personages, of whose character and condition we are little able to form any conception.¹

What we find is Jeffrey again moving subtly between the laws of nature and the laws of custom. It is the literature to which we are accustomed that is guaranteed to excite those simple emotions which constitute beauty, that is likely to be beautiful or good. The suspicion of novelty is explicit, and the attitude to the immediate literary tradition is a long way from the contempt for it implied in the review of Cowper. The same confusion is manifest in Jeffrey's conviction that Byron "will never be thoroughly or universally pleasing, till he learns to bespeak our interest for beings a little more like those whom we have been accustomed to love and admire".² As James Sutherland observed of the Augustan period:

What men have grown accustomed to becomes, in a stable period, to seem right and inevitable. Not only has it 'the right of possession', but it enjoys the further advantage of having behind it the consensus of opinion.³

The attitude of the article on Campbell towards innovation appears liberal when compared to Jeffrey's review of Thalaba, the review in which Jeffrey opened his attack upon the new "sect of poets" he saw threatening to subvert established poetic values. He does so from the vantage point of "standards" which "were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question".⁴ Thus he assumes the existence of literary rules as immutable

1 ER XIV (April, 1809), pp.2-3.

2 See above, p.219 note 2 (my italics).

3 A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry, p.35.

4 ER I (October, 1805), p.63.

as any the neo-Classical critic could invoke. The same is true in his review three years later of Southey's Madoc. The sins of the Lake poets inspired Jeffrey's most conservative diatribes. In the reviews of both of Southey's poems every form of supreme power - political, ecclesiastical, and divine - is ransacked for metaphors to suggest what Jeffrey sees as the incontrovertibility of tradition and Rules. In the Madoc review, for example, the great poets of the past are referred to as the "aristocracy of the literary worlds", as "poetical sovereigns", and as "the old oracles of poetical wisdom".¹

How is one to reconcile this with the more liberal deference to the collective pleasure of the reading public? Yet Jeffrey would have us do so, and it is the doctrine of association upon which he relies. The esteem in which accepted writers are held testifies to the universal propriety of their work:

The end of poetry is to please; and men cannot be mistaken as to what has actually given them pleasure. Accidental associations, indeed, may impose upon them for a season...[but] the emotions which [the successful poet] continues to excite under every variation of circumstances, the feelings which he commands among every class of his readers, and continues to impress upon every successive generation, can only be referred to that intrinsic merit, of which they afford indeed the sole and ultimate criterion.²

If one believes that there are rigid laws of human nature out of which develop laws of association, then it follows that the "classical" or canonical writers - in this case "Virgil, and Pope, and Racine" - have achieved their status by conforming to them and, as Alison realised to his credit, in doing so, exhausted the possibilities of

1 ER VII (October, 1805), pp.1, 2.

2 ER VII (October, 1805), p.2 (my italics).

literature.¹ The critic is then able to circumvent the more dubious and lengthy task of testing each image for the universality or accidentality of its association, or of appealing to popular opinion, and to go directly to "classical" literature as his model and measure. "Here", as Martin Kallich says of a passage in Hume, "nature and associationism and neoclassicism all merge".²

Jeffrey's occasionally operating on the confident assumption of the existence of these immutable laws of association and taste explains the survival of the image of him as a harsh, anachronistic neo-Classicist.³ He certainly could be. Yet he could also praise Cowper for transcending precisely those conventions which he later brought forward to shame Southey and Wordsworth into submission to the status quo. The juxtaposition of Jeffrey on the Lake poets and Jeffrey on Cowper points to the crucial ambiguity of the common apprehension as a critical instrument, and explains why Jeffrey, as Saintsbury wrote, "in the most puzzling way, lies between the ancients and the moderns in matter of criticism, and we never quite know where to have him".⁴

1 ER VII (October, 1805), p.2. Compare Jeffrey in an article on Scott's The Lady of the Lake: "as the elements of poetical emotion are necessarily limited, so it was natural for those who first sought to excite it, to avail themselves of those subjects, situations, and images that were most obviously calculated to produce that effect.... they got possession of all the choice materials of their art", ER XVI (August, 1810), p.268.

2 The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory, p.87.

3 "Jeffrey relied on a static and dogmatic authority", writes Russell Noyes, Wordsworth and Jeffrey in Controversy, p.47. See also Walter Bagehot on "The First Edinburgh Reviewers": "they like to trace the exact fulfilment of admitted rules", The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot, I, 330; Donald H. Reiman in his The Romantics Reviewed, part A, The Lake Poets, 2 vols (New York and London, 1972): "Jeffrey, liberal in politics and economics, was a literary reactionary" (II, 415); R.G. Cox, "The Great Reviews (I)", Scrutiny VI, no. 1 (June, 1937), pp.2-20: "The Edinburgh and the Quarterly based their judgments firmly on the eighteenth-century principles of Reason, Truth, and Nature" (p.4).

4 In his essay "Jeffrey", in Essays in English Literature 1780-1860 (London, 1890), pp.100-134 (p.115).

By remaining unaware of the ambiguity, Jeffrey's critics have been forced to oversimplify. Joseph Beatty's article on Jeffrey's criticism is a good example. Beatty argues "that the classical idea of decorum was at the basis of Jeffrey's commonsense criticism".¹ But if either were dependent upon the other, it was in fact the ideal of decorum upon common sense. The two criteria, decorum and common sense, turn out to be the changing faces of the same principle: "the foundation of taste is propriety and good sense".² Good sense is not necessarily common sense, of course, but Jeffrey's faith in the collective taste permits us to use them interchangeably. Even allowing for a distinction, the twin criteria of taste in Jeffrey's definition (bound by the singular verb) represent both objective literary and subjective psychological interests.

Literary propriety (observing associations sanctioned by the literary tradition) and common sense, are in an uneasy relationship in Jeffrey's criticism. They are variously opposed, allied, and even, as we saw, identified. When Walter Raleigh follows Beatty in interpreting the operation of common sense as jealous/y, and rightly, suspicious of innovation - out of respect, that is, for the literary tradition³ - he probes the central strength and weakness of Jeffrey's critical approach without realising it. What he reveals is the tendency of common sense to become identified with the status quo in art, both in fact and in theory. This identification allowed Jeffrey to make a constant reference via the psychology of the common reader to social values, a reference

1 "Lord Jeffrey and Wordsworth", PMLA, XXXVIII, no. 2 (June, 1923), pp.221-235 (p.222).

2 To quote his review of de Lille's Traduction de l'Eneide, ER VII (October, 1805), p.145.

3 On Writing and Writers, selected and edited by George Gordon (London, 1926): "Every age tries to keep new poets at bay. This is a mark of respect to poetry" (p.169).

with its own ambiguity, discussed in the next chapter. It also sanctioned Jeffrey's generalizing his distaste and suspicions, and allowed him to rationalize them into a philosophy.

Just as Wordsworth's characters were neither realistic nor conventional enough to satisfy Jeffrey's associationist criteria, his poetry generally failed to meet both the literary demands, and the psychological or emotional demands, of the reader. In this Wordsworth is to be distinguished from Cowper who, while he rejected the status quo in art, did not reject the status quo in natural beauty or in sentiment. Wordsworth, according to Jeffrey, consistently rejected whatever form the status quo may take. Jeffrey's critical attitude towards the world of every-day reality was not as slavish as might be inferred from many of his critical pronouncements,¹ but his attitude towards the world's opinion was. The basic deference is manifested in every area of his social and literary criticism as a distrust of eccentricity, or, to use a word that in Jeffrey's vocabulary is more charged with contempt, of "singularity": "few things could be more unfortunate than such an ambition of singularity".² The unity that underlies Jeffrey's ambiguous attacks on Wordsworth's choice of object or character, as well as his paradoxical counsel both against simplicity and against complexity, lies in this criticism of Wordsworth's eccentricity. Whether the standards are set by history or by popularity, by art or by nature, the Lake poets remained outsiders - and often, perversely, by choice. The notion of

1 Jeffrey praises James Hogg's fantasy "Kilmeny", for example; Hogg had been careful to exercise "a certain caution and temperance", and to preserve "a probability in the arrangement of impossible occurrences", ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.163 - a compliment which recalls Aristotle's recommending probable impossibilities before impossible probabilities in the Poetics, Ancient Literary Criticism, p.126 (Chapter 4, 1460^a).

2 In his review of Southey's Madoc, ER VII (October, 1805), p.3.

poetry as a superior form of pleasure that we find in Jeffrey's criticism only reinforced their obligation to conform: the "end of poetry is to please", Jeffrey cautioned in his review of Madoc, "and men cannot be mistaken as to what has actually given them pleasure".¹

The conservatism, indeed the circularity, of Jeffrey's insistence on the familiarity of the language and objects of poetry is a sad confirmation of the fears Wordsworth expressed towards the close of his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, about the unfavourable reception of his poems. He is fully aware, he says, that their novelty is more likely to arouse suspicion and hostility, rather than curiosity, because

all men feel an habitual gratitude, and something of an honorable bigotry for the objects which have long continued to please them: we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased. There is a host of arguments in these feelings; and I should be the less able to combat them successfully, as I am willing to allow, that, in order entirely to enjoy the Poetry which I am recommending, it would be necessary to give up much of what is ordinarily enjoyed.²

II

In an act of disintegration characteristic of the neo-Classical critics, Jeffrey divided the elements of poetry into description, sentiments, and diction; he discovers in Sotheby's Saul, for example, "delicacy and grace in many of the descriptions; a sustained tone of gentleness and piety in the sentiments; and an elaborate beauty in the

1 ER VII (October, 1805), p.2.

2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 156; compare Coleridge's contemptuous note of 1808-1809 on reviewers' "understanding, i.e. preconceived notions - Taste - preformed habits", Coleridge Notebooks III, 3445.

diction".¹ Poetry, in other words, concerns itself as much with sentiment, or the delineation of sentiments, as it does with the objects which invoke them. "A poem is intended to please by the images it suggests and the feelings it inspires", Jeffrey wrote in his review of Scott's The Lay of the Last Minstrel, "and if it contain delightful images and affecting sentiments, our pleasure will not be materially impaired by some slight want of probability or coherence in the narrative".² (Unwittingly, he moves from an affective to an imitative definition of poetry, from images and feelings evoked from the reader, to images and feeling represented in the narrative.) Cowper is praised for his "correct painting", not just of "those home-scenes", but also of the "private feelings with which everyone is internally familiar".³

This is as true of the subjective lyric, as it is of, say, Crabbe's objective narrative. The poet simply becomes a character in the poem. Jeffrey believed that the poet's manifest response to the objects and events of his poem should be as familiar or 'universal' as the objects or events themselves: the "objects for which he seeks to interest [the readers], are all objects of natural interest; and the emotions which he connects with them, are, in some degree, associated with them in all reflecting minds".⁴ The poet in this sense is like Robert Graves's reader over his own shoulder, a persona whose response is enforced by the reader's response: "Doubling the part of judge and patron".⁵

1 ER X, no. 19 (April, 1807), article XIV, pp.206-217 (p.207).

2 ER VI, no. 11 (April, 1805), article I, pp.1-20 (p.6); compare the letter to James Grahame of 8 April, 1801: "vivid imagery and natural sentiments delight however you arrange or [?introduce] them", National Library of Scotland, MS. 3519 f3.

3 ER II (April, 1803), p.84 (my italics).

4 Review of Wilson's Isle of Palms, ER XIX (February, 1812), p.374.

5 "The Reader over My Shoulder", l.15, Collected Poems 1975 (London, 1975), p.58.

What Jeffrey descried in Wordsworth's poetry, besides a radical unworthiness of the language and the objects, was a culpable eccentricity of response. Indeed, the use of language and the choice of objects were themselves indicative of the poet's sensibility, and, as the debate became less concerned with objective criteria, language and object were discussed almost exclusively as a reflection of the poetic sensibility; objects, that is, are dismissed, not because they are low or unworthy in themselves, but because they were "quite unfit to suggest...to any other person" reactions such as Wordsworth's.¹ It was not until the Poems in Two Volumes that Jeffrey was provoked by these objects to take issue, although the pattern of his critical response had been set by the reference, in the review of Thalaba, to the "poet who commemorates, with so much effect, the chattering of Harry Gill's teeth".² After 1807, the nests, spades, household tubs, and daffodils become shorthand terms with which Jeffrey suggests, contemptuously, the sort of trivia that would send Wordsworth into raptures. And it was not only Wilkinson's spade and the blind highland boy's "'HOUSEHOLD TUB'" that evoked these abnormal reactions,³ but, as we saw, the humble characters as well; indeed "the great point of controversy between Mr. Wordsworth and his objectors" was, as Coleridge has said, "THE CHOICE OF HIS CHARACTERS".⁴ "Instead of the men and women of ordinary humanity", wrote Jeffrey, "we have certain

1 As he argued in his review of Wilson's Isle of Palms, ER XIX (February, 1812), p.375.

2 ER I (October, 1802), p.68.

3 See Jeffrey's review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.225. That Coleridge shared his reaction is evident from his persuading Wordsworth to change it to the "Shell of a green Turtle" (1815-1820 version, l.118) - see Coleridge Notebooks, III, 3240; Wordsworth's letter to Barron Field, 24 October, 1828, Wordsworth Letters, [IV], 641 in which he regrets his decision, but does not reverse it, as Coburn suggests (3240 note); Wordsworth Poetical Works, III, 88-96 (p.92 apparatus criticus), 447-448.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 103.

moody and capricious personages, made after the poet's own heart and fancy".¹

A criticism founded on the psychology of the reader not unexpectedly focuses on the psychology of the poet. More than the fact that the Lake poets did not write like Pope, or Shakespeare, or Crabbe, or Campbell, or whoever Jeffrey might choose to characterize the literary establishment, they refused to respond like everybody else. Here again, in the Lyrical Ballads and the Preface, Wordsworth anticipates - and, in part, provokes - Jeffrey's conservative attack:

I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, sometimes from diseased impulses I may have written upon unworthy subjects.²

The Preface actually supplied Jeffrey with his central argument, and confirmed all that he had learned from Alison.

Jeffrey begins his criticism of the "fantastical sensibilities" of the Lake poets in his review of Thalaba with a familiar neo-Classical complaint against their "perpetual exaggeration of thought": "There must be nothing moderate, natural, or easy, about their sentiments. There must be a 'qu'il mourut,' and a 'let there be light,' in every line".³ "Let there be light" and "qu'il mourut" were over-worked examples of

1 In his review of Crabbe's Poems (1807), ER XII (April, 1808), p.134.

2 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 152; this passage, as Arthur Beatty points out, "reads like a direct reference to Alison's discussion of this same aspect of associationism", in his William Wordsworth: His Doctrine and Art In Their Historical Relations, third edition (Madison, 1960), p.51.

3 ER I (October, 1802), p.69.

sublime writing in eighteenth-century poetics; Jeffrey's criticism is of the false or forced sublime. Twelve years later, in his review of The Excursion, Jeffrey continues to censure "the forced and affected ecstasies in which this author abounds".¹ In Hugh Blair's compendium of eighteenth-century aesthetics, the fault is called "Bombast", and is defined as "forcing an ordinary or trivial object out of its rank, and endeavouring to raise it into the Sublime; or, in attempting to exalt a Sublime object beyond all natural and reasonable bounds".² Coleridge used the same term when he referred to the fifth and last fault of Wordsworth's poetry - "a disproportion of thought to the circumstance and occasion" - as "mental bombast".³

Jeffrey's most common complaint with contemporary poetry generally was with this over-reaction on the part of the poet, and the "miserable trick of overrating the importance of all our conceptions".⁴ Whether this exaggeration took the form of Byron's "demoniacal sublimity",⁵ or the mock-sublime of a contemporary poetaster, the complaint was the same. They were too often "hyperbolical about trifles", misled "into a sort of mock-heroic magnificence, upon ordinary occasions".⁶ In Southey's poetry, for example, Jeffrey discovers an "anxiety to present every thing, great or small, under the most imposing and advantageous aspect":

1 ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.12.

2 Lectures on Rhetoric, I, 98. "The desire of carrying things to a greater height of pleasure & admiration, than omnibus trutinatis they are susceptible of, one great cause of the corruption of poetry", noted Coleridge in March-April, 1806, Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2826.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 109.

4 As he said in his review of Southey's Curse of Kehama, ER XVII (February, 1811), p.436.

5 Review of "Lord Byron's Poetry", 1816, ER XXVII, no. 54 (December, 1816), article I, pp.277-310 (p.279).

6 As he said of Edward Young's letters to Samuel Richardson in a review of the latter's Correspondence, ER V, no. 9 (October, 1804), article II, pp.23-44 (p.36), and of Erasmus Darwin in his review of Crabbe's The Borough, ER XVI (April, 1810), p.53.

the tone of emphasis and pretension is never for a moment relaxed; and the most trivial occurrences, and fantastical distresses, are commemorated with the same vehemence and exaggeration of manner, as the most startling incidents, or the deepest and most heart-rending disasters.¹

It was to the Germans that Jeffrey turned, shuddering at the thought, to explain the Lakers' exaggerations, to the "simplicity and energy (horresco referens) of Kotzebue and Schiller".² While Jeffrey could accept the unreality of James Hogg's "Kilmeny", he was careful to distinguish it from "the vulgar horrors or exaggerations of the German school of incantation".³ The criticism of vulgarity and exaggeration often go together; he describes, on another occasion, "the plain vulgarity and prose ecstasies of the German drama".⁴ Jeffrey shared in the campaign against German literature led by the Antijacobin Review.⁵ Of course it failed to discriminate between the sentimental and demagogic melodramas of Kotzebue and the Sturm und Drang, and between the Sturm und Drang and the later work of Schiller and Goethe. In the period around the turn of the century, "Kotzebue and the 'Schauerromantiker' in general formed the main importation into England", writes D.F.S. Scott, and "the prevailing

1 In his reviews of The Curse of Kehama, ER XVII (February, 1811), p.435, and of Roderick: The Last of the Goths, ER XXV, no. 49 (June, 1815), article I, pp.1-31 (p.1).

2 ER I (October, 1802), p.64. In his review of Southey's Curse of Kehama he was still talking about the over-emphasis in "Mr Southey and Mr Wordsworth, and in the German dramatists whom they seem to copy", ER XVII (February, 1811), p.437.

3 ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.164.

4 In his first review of Joanna Baillie, ER II (July, 1803), p.282.

5 After their comprehensive study of German Literature in British Magazines 1750-1860, edited by Bayard Quincy Morgan and A.R. Hohlfield (Madison, Wisconsin, 1949), Walter Roloff, Morton Mix, and Martha Nicolai conclude that the Anti-Jacobin Review was "largely responsible for the reaction against German literature in 1800" (p.116 note M8). Compare Violet Stockley, German Literature as Known in England 1750-1830 (London, 1929) on the reaction "led by the Antijacobin" (p.9).

conception" of Goethe "was based on Werther and Götz von Berlichingen";¹ the prevailing conception of Schiller was based on the popular Robbers.

To Jeffrey all non-conformity was a form of affectation, and though "not altogether free from affectation himself", as Macaulay noted, he had "a peculiar loathing for it in other people, and a great talent for discovering and exposing it".² The utility word that Jeffrey used to denounce non-conformity, and it was not always religious non-conformity, was "methodistical".³ However wide the gulf between Wesley himself and the Primitive Methodists, Methodism was a movement that, in the words of a recent historian, "smacked of impertinence and indiscipline"⁴ and, one might add for Jeffrey, of "zeal".

J.A. Froude, taking him at his own word, concluded that Jeffrey "thought zeal for creeds and anxiety about positive opinions more and more ludicrous".⁵ Cowper's letters, written after he had found sanctuary

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- 1 Some English Correspondents of Goethe (London, 1949), pp.ix-x.
 - 2 In a letter to his mother, Selina Mills Macaulay, 15 April, 1828, The Letters of Thomas Babbington Macaulay, I, 239.
 - 3 Jeffrey shared this latitudinarian disdain with his friends and fellow-contributors. Francis Horner records a sermon delivered by Sydney Smith in a letter to Jeffrey, 26 April, 1801: "a most admirable sermon on the true religion of practical justice and benevolence, as distinguished from ceremonial devotion, from fanaticism, and from theology", Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, I, 156. In a review of Ingram on Methodism, ER XI, no. 22 (January, 1808), article V, pp.341-362, Smith lumped Methodism and Evangelicalism together as "one general conspiracy against common sense, and rational orthodox christianity" (p.342), a conspiracy that may be compared with the other, better known "formidable conspiracy" attacked by the Edinburgh: Southey's, Wordsworth's, Lamb's, and Coleridge's "against sound judgement in matters poetical", ER I (October, 1802), p.64. In an unpublished letter to Brougham of 12 July, 1810, Jeffrey commented that "Smith's anti-methodism was entirely too flippant - but on the whole not unorthodox", University College (London) Library, MS. 22, 129.
 - 4 R.W. Harris, Romanticism and the Social Order 1780-1830 (London, 1969), p.127.
 - 5 Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life 1795-1835, in 2 vols (London, 1882), II, 394. Froude is paraphrasing a letter to Carlyle of 8 December, 1833, for which, see David Alec Wilson, Carlyle to 'The French Revolution' (1826-1837) (London and New York, 1924), p.349.

with the Rev. Unwin, are criticized for their "Methodistical raptures and dissertations", and in the review of Southey's Madoc Jeffrey complains of "the methodistical and affected appellations by which the Deity is generally designated", as he did of "the mystical verbiage of the methodist pulpit" in Wordsworth's Excursion.¹ What offended Jeffrey was this over-reaction, a reaction disproportionate to the event, and as such failing to observe associations familiar to most men. In his second review of Grimm's Correspondance, Litteraire, Philosophique et Critique the distrust of zeal takes the form of an Olympian complacency: the "world goes on in its own grand and undisturbed progression, to the equal disappointment of the enthusiast and the alarmist".²

Scott was hardly exaggerating when he told Joanna Baillie that Jeffrey's "whole life and study has been to acquire a stoical indifference towards enthusiasm of every kind" (although his indifference was rather Epicurean than Stoic).³ Even Jeffrey's friend Mrs Grant was accused, with many of her contemporaries, of having an

active, ambitious [*sic*], and somewhat ill-regulated fancy - ...and an unfortunate affectation of oddity and irregularity - of being unable to resist digressions, or to reason upon ordinary things like ordinary mortals - that sometimes reminds us, rather disagreeably, of a very youthful imitation of the style of Tristram Shandy, or the German sentimentalists.⁴

Here is the admonition to think as others think, and here is the heritage

1 ER II (April, 1803), p.68; ER VII (October, 1805), pp.16-17; ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.4.

2 ER XXII, no. 46 (September, 1814), article II, pp.292-319 (p.310).

3 In a letter of 31 October, [1808], The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, II, 117.

4 Reviewing her Essays on the Superstitions of the Scottish Highlanders, ER XVIII (August, 1811), p.482 (my italics). Mrs Grant was herself proud of his campaign, praising him to a Mrs Gorman, for example, on 16 July, 1815, because he "speaks with contemptuous censure of all pretension and exhibition", Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs Grant of Laggan, II, 77.

of affectation in Sterne and the German dramatists. Here is also suggested Jeffrey's own critical heritage; it recalls Dr Johnson's dismissal of Tristram Shandy because "Nothing odd will do long".¹ Jeffrey, that is, identifies himself with the reaction against "enthusiasm" of the early eighteenth century, and, more generally, with Augustan humanism. The following description of the religious enthusiast Lacy, from Richard Kingston's Enthusiastick Impostors (1707), might just as easily be a description of Wordsworth from one of Jeffrey's reviews; according to Kingston, Lacy was possessed of

more than ordinary vanity and ambition of being thought wiser and better than the rest of the world, which, join'd with an affectation of singularity, and having the glory of starting something that's odd and out of the way, and being the originals of his own opinion, which he thinks is an infallible proof that the reach of his own understanding is above the common standard, is turn'd at length to subtlety and artifice, to doubling and insincerity, to deceive and being deceived.²

In embracing the values of Augustan humanism, Jeffrey naturally took over its prejudices as well. An aesthetic concerned primarily with the general and recognisable, in practice, to quote James Sutherland,

was only too ready to dismiss as unnatural any thought or feeling which lay outside the range of its experience, or which was markedly different from what had been customary.³

Few would argue with Jeffrey's criticism of the histrionics of Gothic

1 Johnson imagined that the public had already supported his judgement: "'Tristram Shandy' did not last", he said at the same time - Life of Johnson, II, 449.

2 As quoted in James Sutherland's A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry, p.13.

3 A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry, p.9; compare Johnson on the Metaphysicals: "whatever is improper or vicious is produced by a voluntary deviation from nature in pursuit of something new and strange", "Life of Cowley", Lives of the Poets, I, 35.

art in Germany, as in England. Wordsworth certainly shared Jeffrey's distaste.¹ But when Jeffrey discerned in something deviating from common sense and common sentiments both exaggeration and insincerity, he often assumed that any "enthusiasm" must be an affectation of intensity and peculiarity, confusing "unaffected warmth and elevation" with "the madness prepense of pseudo-poesy, or the startling hysteric of weakness over-exerting itself".² Edward Copleston exposed this assumption in his first criticism of the Edinburgh: "It is time to convince the world, that bitter invective and loud reproach do not always flow from the abhorrence of what is wrong, but often from the dislike only of what is different".³ But for the Augustans poetry was designed rather to confirm, than to extend the values and experience of the reader.

The "plain sçavoir faire of actual existence, and such a thorough scorn of mystification" that is evident in his philosophical reasonings is, predictably, even more evident in his literary criticism.⁴ One of

1 See his complaint about the vitiation of contemporary taste in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 128, 130.

2 In the language of the Biographia, II, 65-66.

3 Copleston's first critique of the Edinburgh was A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review against Oxford, Containing an Account of Studies Pursued in that University (Oxford, 1810); the reference is to p.4.

4 Lockhart approved these attributes of Jeffrey's conversation in his Peter's Letter to His Kinsfolk, I, 73 (letter VII). As his criticism of the Germans suggests, all metaphysics and mysticism were for Jeffrey simply a manifestation of contemporary superstition, metaphysics being an intellectual exaggeration comparable to the "prose ecstasies" of the German drama. Carlyle recalls that Jeffrey was "bent" on converting him from what the critic called "'German mysticism'", back "into dead Edinburgh Whiggism, scepticism, and materialism", Reminiscences, II, 26. Of course Jeffrey was proud of his own "metaphysical" interests, and critical of the "orthodox scholars of the south, who knew little of metaphysics themselves", as he said in his review of Forbes on James Beattie, ER X, no. 19 (April, 1807), article XII, pp.171-199 (p.197). And he was no materialist. He was disinclined, however, to examine the implications of his disbelief in materialism, as Roy Park points out in Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age: Abstraction and Critical Theory (Oxford, 1971), pp.14-15, and if by metaphysics we mean the speculative systems of idealist philosophers like Fichte or Schelling, then metaphysics was to Jeffrey a form of mysticism.

the many forms of over-reaction in Wordsworth's poetry was mysticism. Objects, events, characters, and even ideas, in themselves acceptable in poetry - as washing tubs and leech gatherers, according to Jeffrey, certainly were not - were distorted by the affected response of the poet: "Of the many contrivances" the Lake poets "employ to give the appearance of uncommon force...the most usual is, to w[ra]p it up in a veil of mysterious and unintelligible language".¹ Such was the case in Wordsworth's "rapturous mystical ode to the Cuckoo, in which the author, striving after force and originality, produces nothing but absurdity", and in the Immortality Ode. Such was also the case in The Excursion, in which Wordsworth displays his "talent for enveloping a plain and trite observation in all the mock majesty of solemn verbosity".²

Wordsworth accused the Augustans of precisely this mystification. Unless we are to advocate a "pleasure which arises from hearing what we do not understand", he argues in the Preface (1802), "the Poet must descend from this supposed height; and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves".³ Jeffrey turns the argument against Wordsworth himself, and finds in Wordsworth's poetry a similar attempt to translate what oft was thought, or oft seen, into an inappropriately heightened and exclusive language.

One example that Jeffrey cites from The Excursion is the vision of the Solitary on the Mountain-side in the second book, "an inflated description of an effect of mountain-mists in the evening sun".⁴ For Jeffrey this was by far the worst variety of the mock-sublime. In these

1 As he said in the review of Thalaba, ER I (October, 1802), p.70.

2 ER XI (October, 1807), pp.224-225, 227; ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.10.

3 Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 143.

4 ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.8.

and other passages, Wordsworth and the Lakers inflated and distorted, not what was ordinary and inoffensive in itself, but what was inherently or potentially beautiful. At the close of his review of Thalaba Jeffrey remarked with obvious frustration that Southey "seems naturally to delight in the representation of domestic virtues and pleasures, and the brilliant delineation of external nature". For Southey to treat these important subjects, subjects which came to rank highest in Jeffrey's requirements of poetry, in the "peculiar manner" of the new school, is to allow his considerable talent to be over-ruled by his "perverted taste".¹

Jeffrey's own taste is best understood by comparing his praise of "The Emigrant Mother" as "sweet and amiable verses on a French lady, separated from her own children", with his dismissal of the Immortality Ode as "illegible and unintelligible".² It is towards the 'sweet', the 'tender', and the 'pathetic' - in other words, towards the sentimental - that he gravitates throughout his critical writings.³ It comes as no

1 ER I (October, 1802), p.83.

2 ER XI (October, 1807), pp.226, 227.

3 Jeffrey's later love of Dickens, and the reasons he outlines for his almost total abandonment to Dickens's novels, confirm and exaggerate this tendency in his public reviewing. Cockburn has published a number of letters to Dickens, a passage from that of 31 January, 1847, will suffice: "Oh, my dear dear Dickens! What a No. 5 you have now given us! I have so cried and sobbed over it last night, and again this morning; and felt my heart purified by those tears, and blessed and loved you for making me shed them", Life of Jeffrey, II, 406-407. Leslie Stephen rather perversely saw this effusion on Dombey and Son as Jeffrey's only authentic critical utterance - Hours in a Library, third series, pp.163-164 - but Stephen treats it as a genuine (if senile) emotional response that is unique in Jeffrey's life. (Lockhart had earlier taken the same narrow view of Jeffrey's critical position when, in 1819, he described the Edinburgh reviewers as "men who had banished from their own minds a very great part of that reverence for Feeling" - Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk, II, 137.) But though there is ample evidence that Jeffrey could harden his heart for the performance of his "sterner duties" - see the review of Hogg's Queen's Wake, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.157 - this did not prevent him from indulging and recommending sentimentality on many other occasions throughout his career, the best known being his review of Campbell's Gertrude of Wyoming, ER XIV (April, 1809), to which may be compared his private partiality as revealed to Horner, Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, I, 457.

surprise, therefore, when we find him, having despaired of The Excursion as a whole, thankful for similar small mercies:

for the occasional gleams of tenderness and beauty which the natural force of [Wordsworth's] imagination and affections must still shed over all his productions, - and to which we shall ever turn with delight, in spite of the affectation and mysticism and prolixity.¹

These gleams are only apparent in Margaret's tragic history, the story of the loss of the Solitary's wife and children, and the lives of Ellen and others amongst the Pastor's tales.²

The review of The White Doe is the best indication of Jeffrey's genuine sense of frustration with Wordsworth's "unlucky habit of debasing pathos with vulgarity",³ of perversely obscuring the beautiful or the pathetic with his own peculiar sentiments. The life and death of Francis Norton, the one son who refuses to support his father's insurrection and whose refusal creates a conflict between his sense of family honour and his political beliefs, have all the pathos of a sentimental tale by Thomas Campbell. And yet this story, Jeffrey complained, is lost in ponderous symbolism and intimations of the supernatural:

there is something so truly forlorn and tragical in his situation, that we should really have thought it difficult to have given an account of it without exciting some degree of interest or emotion. Mr Wordsworth, however, reserves all his pathos for describing the whiteness of the pet doe, and disserting about her perplexities, and her high communion.⁴

The problem confronting contemporary poets as Jeffrey saw it, was

1 ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.3 (my italics).

2 ER XXIV (November, 1814), pp.7, 16-24.

3 As he calls it in his review of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.5.

4 ER XXV, no. 50 (October, 1815), article IV, pp.355-363 (p.361).

one of literary exhaustion. Convinced that "there is nothing new under the sun",¹ he was also convinced that most of the few possible ways of expressing the limited concerns of mankind had been exhausted. In attempting a more direct representation of the fundamental truths and feelings than their predecessors, the new generation resorted to extreme, and sometimes ridiculous, means:

Some of them set themselves to observe and delineate both characters and external objects with greater minuteness and fidelity [Crabbe ?], - and others to analyze more carefully the mingling passions of the heart, and to feed and cherish a more limited train of emotion through a longer and more artful career [Campbell ?], - while a third sort distorted both nature and passion according to some fantastical theory of their own, or took such a narrow corner of each, and dissected it with such curious and microscopic accuracy, that its original form was no longer discernable by the eyes of the uninstructed.²

This last "sort" is a reference to Wordsworth, whose obscurity, Jeffrey often argued, was a legacy of a metaphysical system such as that laid down in the Preface, and was grafted onto objects and events. (He also discovered in the language that they used evidence of composition "avowedly for the purpose of exalting a system", and therefore unnatural.³) Like the mysticism which it produced, this system came between the poet and the possibility of forming normal associations, and thus between the reader and the object of imitation, just as the poetic

1 "That there is nothing new under the sun, is a reflection which is more and more impressed upon us, the more minutely we are enabled to inform ourselves of the events and opinions of former times", in the second review of Grimm's Correspondence, ER XXIII (September, 1814), p.310. The idea of literary exhaustion, implicit in much neo-Classical thinking, was popular at the time, and probably finds its most complete, certainly its wittiest, expression in Thomas Love Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry (1820).

2 Review of Scott's The Lady of the Lake, ER XVI (August, 1810), p.268. Compare the review of Gertrude of Wyoming, ER XIV (April, 1809), p.3.

3 See above, p.123 note 1.

diction of the Augustans had. The Excursion bore "no doubt the stamp of the author's heart and fancy", but impressed upon this, and more apparent to the reader, was "his peculiar system".¹

It is in this sense that the object or character of Wordsworth's poetry becomes "a sort of cypher, which can only be learned with pains and study".² Wordsworth may have taken poetry out of the province of Augustan gentlemen, but he has restored it to the province, not of mankind generally, as he hoped, but of a small band of hierophants. This is not, according to Jeffrey, the desired end of poetry, which should please "without any laborious exercise of the understanding".³ One of Shakespeare's merits, for example, is his accessibility. In a letter of 1840 Jeffrey warns a Mrs Innes to beware of "stupifying" herself when reading the Bible "by poring and plodding in search of a profound meaning", and recommends on this account the plays of Shakespeare: "There are no such hidden mysteries in Shakespeare. He is level to all capacities, and 'speaks, with every tongue, to every purpose'".⁴ In a discussion of the difference between the English and French theatre, Jeffrey offers an explanation in terms of the dependence of the English stage upon popularity, what he calls "the nation at large".⁵ We are back

1 ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.1.

2 In his review of Crabbe's Poems (1807), ER XII (April, 1808), p.134. Compare Wordsworth on the substitution of "tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas" for the "plain humanities of nature" in the Appendix to Lyrical Ballads (1802), Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 161-162 (above p. 25 note 5), and Coleridge in the Biographia: "the composition of our novels, magazines, public harangues, &c., is commonly as trivial in thought, and yet enigmatic in expression, as if ECHO and SPHINX had laid their heads together to construct it" (II, 21-22).

3 As he wrote in his review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.216 (my italics). Compare his review of Byron's Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari and Cain, ER XXXVI, no. 72 (February, 1822), article V, pp.413-452: "poetry...deals only in obvious and glancing views", thus distinguishing it from philosophy (p.438).

4 6 February, 1840, Life of Jeffrey, II, 310-311.

5 In his first review of Grimm's Correspondance, ER XXI, no. 42 (July, 1813), article I, pp.263-299 (p.292).

with the common apprehension. In Wordsworth's poetry on the other hand,

it is often extremely difficult for the most skilful and attentive student to obtain a glimpse of the author's meaning - and altogether impossible for an ordinary reader to conjecture what he is about.¹

The state of affairs that Jeffrey apprehends, and resists, has been realised in the twentieth century; academic critics constitute an exclusive and specialized audience paid to decypher, to take "pains and study".

Jeffrey could not, however, refuse Wordsworth "the justice of believing that he is a sincere convert to his own system".² Until he reviewed Poems in Two Volumes, his assumption (and it was one that he continued to make intermittently in his discussion of Wordsworth over the years) was that Wordsworth, like the group of which he was the "great captain", was guilty of what he calls in the Madoc review "a strange series of affectations":

an affectation of infantine innocence and simplicity; an affectation of excessive refinement and preternatural enthusiasm; and an affectation of a certain perverse singularity in learning, taste, and opinions.³

But with the publication of Poems in Two Volumes Jeffrey was not so convinced that Wordsworth's reaction was an affectation bred of an "ambition of singularity". Wordsworth's "impulses" may have been "diseased", but they were not necessarily insincere. A long passage in the opening "dissertation" of the review of the Poems in Two Volumes makes Jeffrey's dilemma, and his resolution, apparent:

1 Review of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.4.

2 Review of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.4.

3 ER VII (October, 1805), p.3.

the author before us really seems anxious to court... literary martyrdom by a device still more infallible, - we mean, that of connecting his most lofty, tender, or impassioned conceptions, with objects and incidents, which the greater part of his readers will probably persist in thinking low, silly, or uninteresting. Whether this is done from affectation and conceit alone, or whether it may not arise, in some measure, from the self-illusion of a mind of extraordinary sensibility, habituated to solitary meditation, we cannot undertake to determine. It is possible enough, we allow, that the sight of a friend's garden spade, or a sparrow's nest, or a man gathering leeches, might really have suggested to such a mind a train of powerful impressions and interesting reflections; but it is certain, that, to most minds, such associations will always appear forced, strained, and unnatural; and that the composition in which it is attempted to exhibit them, will always have the air of parody, or ludicrous and affected singularity.¹

The passage is a compendium of the principles and prejudices of Jeffrey's criticism, and confirms that Wordsworth, as much as Alison, helped Jeffrey to clarify his ideas of literary propriety. In condemning Wordsworth's failure to satisfy "associations" observed by "most minds", Jeffrey invokes the familiar principle of general consent, and the psychology on which it is based. Poems should be written "in the consciousness that mens' eyes are to behold them", and any "inward transport and vigour" should take into account "what will be thought of them by those ultimate dispensers of glory".²

In a letter written three months after the publication of the review of Poems in Two Volumes, Wordsworth refers to this criticism of Jeffrey's as, though misguided, the only relevant contribution the article had to offer to a critical discussion of his poetry:

As to Jeffrey's Review there is nothing to say, for there is nothing in it that bears the least upon the question, except one sentence where he says, that,

1 ER XI (October, 1807), p.218.

2 Review of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.3.

whether from affectation or other causes, I have connected my lofty or tender feelings with objects such as a Sparrow's Nest, a Spade, a Leech gatherer, etc. which to the generality of mankind appear, and will continue to appear, ridiculous. Now M^r Jeffrey takes this for granted, which was the thing to be proved; and then proceeds to revile the poems accordingly. That, to a great number of persons, many objects such as I have written upon will be either unknown, indifferent, or uninteresting, or even contemptible there can be no doubt, but I suppose, generally speaking, that these people are, so far, in a state of degradation, at least that it would be better for them if they were otherwise. M^r Jeffrey takes for granted the contrary. Here we are at issue.¹

III

It is not often enough registered that Coleridge shared Jeffrey's conditioned distaste for the "unworthy objects" and characters of Wordsworth's poetry, and that he chose in the Biographia wilfully to ignore the revolution in subject matter effected by Wordsworth, a revolution comparable, and directly related, to the revolution in poetic language which Coleridge also played down. In doing so, he ignores the basic challenge to feel, without "gross and violent stimulants",² that the Wordsworthian sensibility offered, and continues to offer, to the reader; the lesson "that everything can be poetic, if it is perceived poetically, felt poetically".³ Almost everything that Wordsworth wrote before 1805 expresses this challenge either implicitly -

1 To Southey, [January, 1808], Wordsworth Letters, II, 162 (my italics).

2 In the words of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 128.

3 To quote John E. Jordan, Why the 'Lyrical Ballads'? The Background, Writing, and Character of Wordsworth's 1798 Lyrical Ballads (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1976), p.158.

His ancles they are swoln and thick;
His legs are thin and dry.

- or explicitly:

O Reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle Reader! you would find
A tale in everything.¹

Norman Fruman is right when he accuses Coleridge of making "no attempt to understand what Wordsworth was struggling to express".² The vehemence of Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth's "hysterical schoolmasters and sententious leechgatherers", and of Wordsworth's making a hero of "a person accustomed to higgie about tape, or brass sleeve-buttons",³ is at least an index to the defiance implicit in Wordsworth's choice.

Again and again Coleridge strikes at the heart of Wordsworth's philosophy and achievement in the Biographia; the "intensity of feeling disproportionate to...knowledge and value of the objects described", and the "thoughts and images too great for the subject" that he discovers⁴ (as does every other contemporary reviewer⁵) are two of the salient

1 "Simon Lee; the Old Huntsman" (1798), ll.35-36, 73-76, Wordsworth Poetical Works, IV, 60-64 (p.62 apparatus criticus and p.63).

2 Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel (London, 1972), p.499 note 46.

3 In his reviews of Crome's Burns, ER XIII (January, 1809), p.276, and of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.30.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 109.

5 See, for example, Hazlitt on the failure of The Excursion: "if the objects (whether persons or things) which he makes use of as the vehicle of his feelings had been such as immediately and irresistibly to convey them in all their force and depth to others, then the production before us would indeed 'have proved a monument'", The Examiner, 21 August, 1814, p.541; Lucy Aikin on "the undue importance he attaches to trivial incidents", Annual Review, VI (1808), p.529; the anonymous reviewers of Poems in Two Volumes in Le Beau Monde, II (October, 1807): "like a hysterical schoolgirl he had a knack of feeling about subjects with which feeling had no proper concern" (p.138), and in the Satirist, I (November, 1807): "Almost a ludicrous

examples. As may be inferred from his taking issue with Jeffrey, Wordsworth believed that the "circumstance and occasion" of humble life, natural and human, justified the sort of response previously reserved for 'heroic' characters and events.¹ He assumes - pompously, perhaps, but not unjustly - that any belief to the contrary was the product of "a false delicacy" and "a certain want of comprehensiveness of think[ing] and feeling".² John Wilson had challenged this assumption when, in 1802, he had criticized the Idiot Boy because "nothing is a fit subject for poetry which does not please".³ Coleridge echoes this complaint in the Biographia when he charges Wordsworth with not having

taken sufficient care to preclude from the reader's fancy the disgusting images of ordinary morbid idiocy, which yet it was by no means his intention to represent. He has even by the "burr, burr, burr," uncounteracted by any preceding description of the boy's beauty, assisted in recalling them.⁴

Of course Wordsworth had. Coleridge writes as if it were an oversight, as if the burr, burr, burr of the Idiot Boy, an inarticulate visionary,

contrast is produced between the swelling self-sufficiency of the writer, and the extreme insignificance of the object described" (p.189); and, finally, and most persistently, Jeffrey himself on Wordsworth's "connecting his most lofty, tender, or impassioned conceptions, with objects or incidents, which the greater part of his readers will probably persist in thinking low, silly, or uninteresting", ER XI (October, 1807), p.218.

- 1 "Wordsworth", recorded Henry Crabb Robinson, "in answer to the common reproach that his sensibility is excited by objects which produce no effect on others, admits the fact and is proud of it. He says that he cannot be accused of being insensible to the real concerns of life. He does not waste his feelings on unworthy objects", On Books and Their Writers, I, 166.
- 2 In the letter to John Wilson of [7 June, 1802], Wordsworth Letters, I, 356.
- 3 In Wordsworth's words - Wordsworth Letters, I, 354; Wilson had written "No feeling, no state of mind ought, in my opinion, to become the subject of poetry, that does not please", 24 May, 1802, 'Christopher North': A Memoir of John Wilson, I, 44.
- 4 Biographia Literaria, II, 35.

were not Wordsworth's greatest challenge to literature as a polite activity.¹

Coleridge, and Jeffrey, and Hazlitt, and Wordsworth's less distinguished contemporary critics, all subscribed to the traditional view that there is in nature an inherent hierarchy that should find expression in a correspondent hierarchy of subjects, and indeed of forms or genres.² According to this prevailing attitude, Wordsworth's voracious sensibility fails to discriminate.³ Wordsworth's response to the daffodils in "I wandered lonely as a cloud", which Coleridge cites in chapter XXII, is an excellent illustration, both of Coleridge's point, and of the extent to which he is out of sympathy with Wordsworth's approach. If we are going to describe the recollection of the feelings and images which accompanied the original vision of the daffodils as

"They flash upon that inward eye,
Which is the bliss of solitude!"

in what words shall we describe the joy of retrospection, when the images and virtuous actions of a whole well-spent life, pass before that conscience which is indeed the inward eye: which is indeed "the bliss of solitude?" Assuredly we seem to sink most

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- 1 "As between Wordsworth and Coleridge, it is important to note that the former...was the innovator, the iconoclast, the radical, both in theory and practice; while the latter...was full of hampering misgivings and retrospective qualifications. He stood aghast at Wordsworth's audacity, and thought him ruthless", George Maclean Harper, William Wordsworth: His Life, Works, and Influence, second edition, revised (London, 1929), II, 386.
 - 2 Dissatisfaction with Wordsworth's lower class hero, the Pedlar, reflects and concentrates what had been implicit in the critical reaction to Wordsworth from the beginning. Hazlitt, in his review of The Excursion, is only more honest than most: "we take leave of him when he makes pedlars and ploughmen his heroes, and the interpreters of his sentiments. It is, we think, getting into low company, and company, besides, that we do not like", The Examiner, 2 October, 1814, p.636.
 - 3 "An intense intellectual egotism swallows up every thing", said Hazlitt of The Excursion, The Examiner, 21 August, 1814, p.542.

abruptly, not to say burlesquely, and almost as in a
medly, from this couplet to —

"And then my heart with pleasure fills,
 And dances with the daffodils".¹

But we only "sink most abruptly" in the final lines if we are unable to conquer ludicrous associations, associations which Jeffrey allowed to predominate in his public determination not to be impressed.²

The significant role of the daffodils in Wordsworth's mental life is the point of the poem, the paradox if we are to use the term favoured by twentieth-century criticism. Similarly, in the other example that Coleridge used to prove Wordsworth's "mental bombast", the six-year-old child is paradoxically addressed as a "Seer blest"³; implicit in this address, that is, is the awareness that a child is not conventionally attributed with these extraordinary powers. (The further paradox that the child is at once a "Seer blest" and "blindly with [his] blessedness at strife" is also overlooked by Coleridge, who thus misses the point of the poem completely.⁴) It is perhaps an irony of literary history only that Coleridge's summary objections to the description of the child strike us as highly complimentary to Wordsworth's technique⁵:

If the words are taken in the common sense, they
 convey an absurdity; and if, in contempt of
 dictionaries and custom, they are so interpreted as

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 110.

2 See Scott on Jeffrey in a letter to George Ellis of 6 July, 1810: "I['ve] seen him weep warm tears over Wordsworths poetry & you know how he treats the poor Balladmaker when he is mounted into the Scorners chair", The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, XII, 324.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 109, 111-114.

4 "Ode. Intimations of Immortality", ll.115, 126 (my italics), Wordsworth Poetical Works, IV, 282, 283.

5 As Richard Harter Fogle suggests when discussing the same criticism, "We have come to place a high value upon poetic paradox", in his The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism, Perspectives in Literature, 9 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), p.88.

to avoid the absurdity, the meaning dwindles into some bald truism. Thus you must at once understand the words contrary to their common import, in order to arrive at any sense; and according to their common import, if you are to receive from them any feeling of sublimity or admiration.¹

For our purposes, however, the greatest irony of all is that Coleridge justifies his recourse to the status quo in terms identical to Jeffrey's. "The fourth class of defects", which were bracketed above with the fifth, arise "from an intensity of feeling disproportionate to such knowledge and value of the objects described, as can be fairly anticipated of men in general, even of the most cultivated classes; and with which therefore few only, and those few particularly circumstanced, can be supposed to sympathize".² The various concessions that Coleridge makes to contemporary criticism in the Biographia are all informed by Jeffrey's assumption that, in Coleridge's own words, "it will remain the poet's office to proceed upon that state of association, which actually exists as general".³ What could be more antipathetic to Wordsworth?

This compromise occurs in Coleridge's discussion of the Pedlar, which is vitiated by its own kind of obtuseness. Jeffrey's lordly contempt for Wordsworth's choice of the Pedlar as his hero and mouthpiece in The Excursion is certainly marked by a want of sensitivity; even Coleridge's elaborate and self-justifying analogy of the French

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 114.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 109 (italics mine, except "such"). Compare his statement to Crabb Robinson and others that Wordsworth "fixed 'with malice prepense' upon objects of reflection which do not naturally excite reflection or call for it" - pure Jeffrey - 15 November, 1810, Diaries, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, I, 305.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 104-105. Thus where David Ferry interprets Coleridge as arguing "that the poet is bound to a sane and just response" to actual circumstances and conditions, and contrasts this with Wordsworth's assertion of the "freedom to ignore whatever is irrelevant to his sublime egotism", he is in fact allying Coleridge with Jeffrey and the reviewers - see The Limits of Mortality: An Essay on Wordsworth's Major Poems (Middletown, Connecticut, 1959), p.7.

officers before Michelangelo's Moses is not unwarranted.¹ But is Coleridge any more ingenuous in his argument against the Pedlar?² To maintain, as he does, that the choice of profession is adventitious is not only unconsciously to allow "the pin-papers, and stay-tapes"³ with which the Pedlar is normally associated to belittle him, it is also to forsake a unique opportunity of interpreting for the general reader Wordsworth's philosophy of mind and nature. The same opportunity had, of course, been forsaken in Coleridge's discussion of language, the reason there as here being that Coleridge simply does not accept the basic premises of Wordsworth's philosophy:

this subject I have discussed, & (if I do not flatter myself) satisfactorily in the Literary Life, & I will not conceal from you, that this inferred dependency of the human soul on accidents of Birth-place & Abode together with the vague misty, rather than mystic, Confusion of God with the World & the accompanying Nature-worship, of which the asserted dependence forms a part, is the Trait in Wordsworth's poetic Works that I most dislike, as unhealthful, & denounce as contagious.⁴

It is, however, incumbent upon Coleridge to prove that the irrelevant details of the Pedlar's life are irrelevant to Wordsworth's purposes, and not to rob the Pedlar of his basic justification by assuming that nature and natural forms do not necessarily exert any beneficent influence. Nowhere is the failure to sympathize more apparent than in Coleridge's dismissal of the following lines from The Excursion on the

1 ER XXIV (November, 1814), pp.29-30; Biographia Literaria, II, 92-94.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 103-105.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 94 - Jeffrey's actual words were "tape, or brass sleeve-buttons" and, later, "flannel and pocket-handkerchiefs", ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.30.

4 Letter to Thomas Allsop, [8 August], 1820, Coleridge Letters, V, 95. See the whole letter for confirmation of Coleridge's disbelief in the formative or salutary influence of nature, as expressed in the Biographia.

Pedlar as "minute", and therefore irrelevant, "matters of fact":

"Among the hills of Athol he was born:
There, on a small hereditary farm,
An unproductive slip of rugged ground,
His Father dwelt; and died in poverty;
While he, whose lowly fortune I retrace,
The youngest of three sons, was yet a babe,
A little one — unconscious of their loss.
But, ere he had outgrown his infant days,
His widowed mother, for a second mate,
Espoused the teacher of the Village School;
Who on her offspring zealously bestowed
Needful instruction."

"From his sixth year, the Boy of whom I speak,
In summer tended cattle on the hills;
But, through the inclement and the perilous days
Of long-continuing winter, he repaired
To his step-father's school,"—&c.¹

Even if we were to accept Coleridge's Aristotelian definition,² which is vague, and points to the fastidiousness that led the Augustans away from particularity and even English place names; even if we were to accept the definition that the universal must never be sacrificed to the particular, it is still obvious that the details are far from adventitious. That the Pedlar was born among "the hills of Athol"; that he was reared "on a small hereditary farm" (compare Michael); that it was rugged and barely offered subsistence; that he had the instruction "needful" to explain his articulateness; that he tended cattle on the hills and did so "through the inclement and the perilous days" - all these details are integral to Wordsworth's conception of the moral grandeur of the Pedlar's character, and they are therefore integral to the poem. Why does Coleridge not identify these as "the opportunities which such a mode of

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 108. The series of questions that Coleridge poses here, on p.108, might be in direct response to Jeffrey's criticism of the choice of a Pedlar; Coleridge accepts the arbitrariness of his profession.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 33, 108.

life would present to such a man",¹ and which he accused Jeffrey of ignoring?

Nor do I believe that the disingenuousness ends here. It also marks the long, possibly ironic passage in which Coleridge praises the choice of the Pedlar as a testament to an egalitarian vision of the human community "kneeling before their common Maker". For all that, he continues, "I object nevertheless". Having decided that this assumption of a common nature is not just integral to the poetry, but is its "immediate object" - that it is not something assumed at all, but something the poetry sets out to prove - Coleridge condemns it as a mode of propaganda alien to poetry, and more appropriate to moral essays and sermons.² (Wordsworth had despaired of these media of instruction in his Essay on Morals because they futilely endeavoured to reason a person into morality.³) His criticism of the Pedlar is at least a rare and salutary recognition of Wordsworth's tendentious choice of low and rustic life, but, having ignored this tendentiousness elsewhere, he now dismisses it as a crude preoccupation.

Besides, Wordsworth's Muse is, as Hazlitt pointed out, "a levelling one".⁴ If Coleridge is going to read the choice of the Pedlar as a moral sermon, he must then take issue with the challenge to the conventional hierarchy whenever it occurs in Wordsworth's poetry, which is often - far, far more often than Coleridge, at the opening of chapter XXII of the Biographia, is prepared to countenance:

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 94.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 103-105 (p.104).

3 "I know no book or system of moral philosophy written with sufficient power to melt into our affection[?s]", Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 103.

4 In "Mr. Wordsworth" from The Spirit of the Age, The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, XI, 87.

the supposed characteristics of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, whether admired or reprobated; whether they are simplicity or simpleness; faithful adherence to essential nature, or wilful selections from human nature of its meanest forms and under the least attractive associations; are as little the real characteristics of his poetry at large, as of his genius and the constitution of his mind.¹

And Coleridge must even take issue with the only poetry that, in the Biographia, he is prepared to sanction, poetry "of the loftiest style, and on subjects the loftiest and of most universal interest".² The Prelude, as is generally recognised, makes the tendentious choice of a poet for its hero. How that would have horrified Jeffrey we have some indication from his attacks on Wordsworth's egotism that are discussed below.³ Like Jeffrey, Coleridge is rationalizing a conservative preference for 'noble' characters when, in his rejection of the Pedlar, he appeals to the criterion of pleasure and the prevailing "state of association". The "Hysteron-Proteron" is his, not Wordsworth's.⁴

IV

The mention of Hazlitt, Wordsworth's most perceptive contemporary critic, is a reminder of Coleridge's reluctance to accept both sides of Wordsworth, and to see both sides as mutually involved; the Wordsworth

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 95.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 108.

3 Though it should be pointed out that the egotism of Byron's Childe Harold fascinated Jeffrey, and that his own poetry and partiality suggest an appreciation of the "doleful egotism" (Biographia Literaria, I, 17) of sensibility - see ER XIX (February, 1812) and ER XXVII (December, 1816); Jeffrey's early poems transcribed into an exercise book by Margaret Loudon in January, 1809 in the National Library of Scotland.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 104-5.

of magniloquent, philosophic blank verse is all of a piece with the Wordsworth of "The Idiot Boy" and "To the Small Celandine". Coleridge would have censored these 'humbler' efforts entirely - "I really consider it as a misfortune, that Wordsworth ever deserted his former mountain Track to wander in Lanes & allies" - the reason being that they were an affectation, "written with a sectarian spirit, & in a sort of Bravado".¹ (Coleridge's identification with the "sect" no doubt made Wordsworth's choice even more discomfoting.²) In other words, Coleridge disliked them because they were composed, to quote Jeffrey, "avowedly for the purpose of exalting a system".³ But Wordsworth's various output is unified, as Hazlitt fully appreciated, by the subjective sensibility of the poet and egotist: "He is the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day, only because he is the greatest egotist".⁴ Wordsworth also recognized this when he talked of the overall architecture of his poetry.⁵

Whether, like Hazlitt and Keats, we see this egotism as sublime,⁶ or whether, like Jeffrey, we see it as ridiculous,⁷ we cannot fail to

1 See the letter to Thomas Poole of 14 October, 1803, Coleridge Letters, II, 1013.

2 "My literary friends are never under the water-fall of criticism, but I must be wet through with the spray", Biographia Literaria, I, 39.

3 In his review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), p.216; see above, p.123 note 1 and p.244 note 3.

4 In Table Talk: or, Original Essays, The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, VIII, 44.

5 In the Preface to The Excursion (1814), Wordsworth Prose Works, III, 5-6.

6 Compare Hazlitt on Wordsworth's rejection of "striking subjects...as interfering with the workings of his own mind, as disturbing the smooth, deep, majestic current of his own feelings" - The Examiner, 21 August, 1814, p.541 - with Keats on "the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" in a letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October, 1818, The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821, edited by Hyder Edward Rollins, in 2 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), I, 387.

7 See Jeffrey's review of The Excursion on "that tendency to extravagance or puerility, into which the self-indulgence and self-admiration of genius is so apt to be betrayed", ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.3.

remark the extent to which Wordsworth, as the prevailing consciousness, became the focus of attention in his own poetry. Not only, that is, did he obscure the beautiful and the pathetic with his own, eccentric responses, but he made these responses the central concern of the poetry. Jeffrey unquestionably had Wordsworth in mind when he complained that the Lake poets excited interest "more by an eloquent and refined analysis of their own capricious feelings, than by any obvious or very intelligible ground of sympathy" with the characters.¹

In the poetry written between 1794 and 1798 the intrusion of the author, whether addressing the reader or recording his own reactions, had been largely restricted to his guiding the response of the reader. While the poet may have momentarily occupied the foreground, he was content, to quote Roger Murray, to make "use of the self in an impersonal way to dramatize things".² The slightly smug conditional in "Simon Lee" which was quoted earlier ("O Reader! had you in your mind / Such stores as silent thought can bring")³; the teasing stanzas of "The Idiot Boy" in which Wordsworth underlines his anti-heroic intentions⁴; the quirky 'moral' of "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" ("Now think, ye farmers all, I pray, / Of Goody Blake and Harry Gill!")⁵; the purely functional inquirer of "Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquillity and Decay, A Sketch" (1798)⁶ - in each case the poet defers to his subject. "The Last of the Flock" (1798) presents the clearest example of this deference; the

1 In the review of Crabbe's Poems (1807), ER XII (April, 1808), p.133.

2 Wordsworth's Style, p.132 (Murray is actually talking about all of Wordsworth's poetry).

3 Lines 65-66, Wordsworth Poetical Works, IV, 63.

4 Lines 312-346, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 76-77.

5 Lines 127-128, Wordsworth Poetical Works, IV, 173-176 (p.176).

6 Wordsworth Poetical Works, IV, 247 (in 1815 he disappears altogether).

generalizing poet is replaced by the shepherd telling his own tale, and we are reminded of his existence only by the occasional address ("Ten children, Sir! had I to feed").¹ In The Ruined Cottage the poet and his journey frame the narrative, offering guidelines for the reader's emotional and philosophical response, but the central fact of Margaret's tragic history remains independent and does not exist in, and for, the consciousness either of the poet, or of the Pedlar as representative of the poet.

The case is very different with the leech-gatherer. What we witness in the course of Resolution and Independence, what the poem is about, is a transformation effected in the poet by a confrontation with a 'mode of being' allied to the natural world, and similar to it in its salutary influence, as I argued above.² The change in the title of the poem from The Leech-Gatherer to Resolution and Independence testifies to a more abstract, and subjective, preoccupation, for the title assimilates the story of the leech-gatherer, who originally simply "'was'", into a mental world.³ Similarly, in the poem, the poet's mind becomes the haunt and main region of his song:

In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually⁴

The poet has 'swallowed up' the leech-gatherer, to adapt Hazlitt's half critical, half awe-struck observation that, in Wordsworth, "an intense

1 Line 41, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 43-46 (p.44 and apparatus criticus).

2 See pp.77-79.

3 See Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 510-511 for Dorothy's Journal entries under the original title, and Wordsworth Letters, I, 366 (Wordsworth to Sara Hutchinson, 14 June, [1802], discussed above, p.80 note 2).

4 Lines 129-130, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 240 (my italics).

intellectual egotism swallows up every thing"¹; the peculiar felicity of this phrase can be understood if we think of how often Wordsworth uses images of ingestion to describe the mind's experiencing nature.

After 1798 this dramatization of his own sensibility became Wordsworth's characteristic or "singular" mode of proceeding; his poetry became more and more "a Faithful Transcript", to quote Coleridge's aspirations for The Recluse, "of his own most august & innocent Life, of his own habitual Feelings & Modes of seeing and hearing".² His Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns suggests that this self-dramatization, far from being the posturing of a compulsive egotist, was a technique integral to his campaign of widening and deepening the sympathies of his readers. Like Burns, Wordsworth avails

himself of his own character and situation in society, to construct out of them a poetic self, - introduced as a dramatic personage - for the purpose of inspiriting his incidents, diversifying his pictures, recommending his opinions, and giving point to his sentiments.³

Occasionally this self-dramatization took the form of self-deprecation - in "Anecdote for Fathers", for example, and "We Are Seven", and the fourth of the Poems on the Naming of Places ("POINT RASH JUDGMENT").⁴ More often, however, the poet uses his personality as exemplary. After the Lyrical Ballads he takes over, as hero, from the humbler characters of the earlier poems, and, occasionally and inevitably, a note of complacency is heard. Still interested in tracing "truly though not

1 In his review of The Excursion, The Examiner, 21 August, 1814, p.542.

2 In a letter to Richard Sharp, 15 January, 1804, Coleridge Letters, II, 1034.

3 Wordsworth Prose Works, III, 125.

4 Wordsworth Poetical Works, I, 241-243; 236-238; II, 115-117 (p.117).

ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature",¹ Wordsworth came to concentrate more and more on the poet as an exceptional human being. The subjectivity announced in the title Moods of My Own Mind chosen for a group of poems in Poems in Two Volumes was no doubt, as so often in Wordsworth, a calculated challenge.² But that these moods were not merely, to borrow a phrase from J. Middleton Murray, "the extravagances of the romantic sensibility - that uncontrolled indulgence of factitious and unimportant personal emotion",³ Wordsworth explains in a letter to Lady Beaumont:

There is scarcely a Poem here of above thirty Lines, and very trifling these poems will appear to many; but...do they not, taken collectively, fix the attention upon a subject eminently poetical, viz., the interest which objects in nature derive from the predominance of certain affections more or less permanent, more or less capable of salutary renewal in the mind of the being contemplating these objects?...

There is scarcely one of my Poems which does not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment, or to some general principle, or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution.⁴

The heightened sensibility that Wordsworth attributed to the poet thus enabled him to generalize his experience and to liberate himself from himself, and from his own idiosyncratic observation; to have, in composing, "no I but the I representative" before him, as Coleridge phrased it.⁵ With the additions to the Preface in 1802 Wordsworth

1 As he said in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 122.

2 To which the reviewers responded; see, amongst others, the Critical Review, third series, XI (August, 1807): "we would intreat Mr. W. to spend more time in his library and less in company with the 'moods of his own mind'" (p.403).

3 The Problem of Style, p.42.

4 21 May, 1807, Wordsworth Letters, II, 147, 148.

5 In Lecture VII of the 1818 Literary Lectures, Coleridge Miscellaneous Criticism, p.44.

developed a theory of more refined expressionism, of a poetry whose distinctive character, as Coleridge argued, originated in the "poetic genius itself",¹ but not in the poet. The truths to which the poet has access within his own mind sanction this type of self-preoccupation. So, at Cambridge, "turning the mind in upon itself", Wordsworth

Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts,
And spread them with a wider creeping, felt
Incumbences more awful, visitings
Of the upholder, of the tranquil soul,
Which underneath all passion lives secure
A steadfast life.²

Wordsworth was aware that this balance sought between the personal and the particular on the one hand, and the universal on the other, was a tenuous one. Using his own experiences as the basis for his poetry, Wordsworth ran the risk of becoming exclusively, rather than inclusively, personal:

But I am loitering even as if I thought
That all my hearers had one heart, and loved
Such matters as I love it³

According to Jeffrey, Wordsworth's hearers did have one heart, and when Wordsworth chose an object which was only an "accidental concomitant of the emotion which it recalls",⁴ he chose to ignore that heart. It is only a short step from accusing a poet of observing peculiar associations to accusing him of egotism. A poem like "Among all lovely things...", which recalls the incident of Dorothy's first experience of a glow-worm, certainly betrays a naive preoccupation with personal details, and seems

¹ Biographia Literaria, II, 12.

² The Prelude, III, 11.112-118, Wordsworth The Prelude, pp.96, 98.

³ Fragment (δ) proposed for inclusion in Michael, Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 481.

⁴ As in Jeffrey's second, and inferior, class of objects called beautiful, is his review of Alison, ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.17.

to justify Jeffrey's reminding him of the distinction between public and private emotion.¹ By promoting associationism, Jeffrey was far from promoting an attachment to local, personal and particular places and events that was the concomitant of such a theory.² He chose rather, as we saw above, to reconcile this with the uniformitarian ideals of neo-Classical poetics. We can imagine the disdain with which Jeffrey would have read the "Advertisement" to the Poems on the Naming of Places:

By Persons resident in the country and attached to rural objects, many places will be found unnamed or of unknown names, where little Incidents must have occurred, or feelings been experienced, which will have given to such places a private and peculiar interest. From a wish to give some sort of record to such Incidents, and renew the gratification of such feelings, Names have been given to Places by the Author and some of his Friends, and the following Poems written in consequence.³

Places of "private and peculiar interest" were proscribed by Jeffrey, as was the prattle of children in a room full of adults.⁴ There are certainly poems which, even to the most sympathetic reader, "do not finally hand over their experiences in such a way that they can be shared", as Roger Murray has said,⁵ and there are some, perhaps, that never shall.

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- 1 In his review of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814): "many things, which we still love and are moved by in secret, must necessarily be despised as childish, or derided as absurd, in all [polished] societies" (p.3).
 - 2 As it was, certainly, in the case of Wordsworth's associationism. See Alan D. McKillop, "Local Attachment and Cosmopolitanism - The Eighteenth-Century Pattern", in From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle, edited by Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (London, Oxford, New York, 1965), pp.191-218.
 - 3 Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 111.
 - 4 I am paraphrasing the letter of Jeffrey to James Grahame, 8 April, 1801 in the National Library of Scotland, MS. 3519 f3, this part reprinted in Clive, Scotch Reviewers, pp.158-159.
 - 5 Wordsworth's Style, p.106.

It is important to remind ourselves that the analysis of the Lake poets to which Jeffrey took exception was of their own "capricious feelings",¹ rather than of their feelings. After all, there was nothing new in Wordsworth's preoccupation with his own thoughts and feelings as a poet, instead of with the occasion of those thoughts and feelings. The literature of sensibility, so influential on Wordsworth's earliest productions,² was similarly preoccupied. Henry MacKenzie's introduction to Julia de Roubigné establishes one, amongst a thousand precedents:

I love myself (and am apt, therefore, from a common sort of weakness, to imagine that other people love) to read nature in her smallest character, and am often more apprised of the state of the mind, from very trifling, than from very important circumstances.³

And it is interesting that the lines which, for the contemporary reviewers, were the key to Wordsworth's eccentricity -

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears⁴

- are an echo of Gray's "Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude":

The meanest floweret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the air, the skies,
To Him are opening Paradise.⁵

1 In the review of Crabbe's Tales (1807), ER XII (April, 1808), p.133 (my italics).

2 The late eighteenth-century subjectivism of the earlier poetry, in spite of the "commitment to the natural image" that Paul Sheats rightly detects (The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, p.52), establishes a precedent for the later egotism and should qualify any idea of a sudden and complete movement from an objective to a subjective interest. Moreover, as The Prelude and the "Prospectus" to The Recluse demonstrate, the two were mutually involved.

3 Julia de Roubigné, A Tale. In a Series of Letters, the fifth edition, in 2 vols (London, 1795), I, x.

4 "Ode. Intimations of Immortality", ll.203-204, Wordsworth Poetical Works, IV, 285.

5 Lines 53-56, The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray: English, Latin and Greek, edited by H.W. Starr and J.R. Hendrickson (Oxford, 1966), pp.100-103 (p.102).

A more obvious antecedent was Burns, whose indirect influence on the shorter lyrics of the early 1800s Wordsworth acknowledges in "At the Grave of Burns, 1803". Burns had, according to Wordsworth,

showed my youth
How Verse may build a princely throne
On humble truth.¹

The direct influence of Burns is equally obvious in poems, like Wordsworth's "To the Daisy",² that self-consciously address aspects and objects of nature traditionally considered too slight. The twentieth line of "At the Grave of Burns, 1803" - "He sang, his genius 'glinted' forth" - actually alludes to one such Burns poem, entitled similarly "To a Mountain-Daisy".³ Despite the similarity between Wordsworth's "To the Daisy" and Burns's "To a Mountain-Daisy", Jeffrey found in the former nothing but triviality,⁴ and in the latter a "simple tenderness of...delineation".⁵ Burns's poem is certainly superior to Wordsworth's but the difference between Jeffrey's response to the two poems is explained by the fact that Burns's poem is both more conventional, in sentiment and structure, and more sentimental.⁶

1 Lines 34-36, Wordsworth Poetical Works, III, 65-67 (p.66).

2 Wordsworth Poetical Works, II, 135-138.

3 Wordsworth Poetical Works, III, 65; compare l.15 of Burns's poem, The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns, edited by James Kinsley, in 3 vols (Oxford, 1968), I, 228.

4 In his review of Poems in Two Volumes, ER XI (October, 1807), pp.218-219.

5 In his review of Cromek's Burns, ER XIII (January, 1809), p.262.

6 To quote Burns: "I am a good deal pleased with some sentiments myself, as they are just the native querulous feelings of a heart which, as the elegantly melting Gray says, 'Melancholy has marked for her own'", in a letter to John Kennedy, [20 April, 1786], The Letters of Robert Burns, edited by J. De Lancey Ferguson, in 2 vols (Oxford, 1931), I, 26. Burns was also Scottish, and even Jeffrey's friend and collaborator Sydney Smith, the original editor of the Edinburgh Review, was forced to complain in a letter to Jeffrey of 22 June, 1811: "You over-praise all Scotch books and writers", The Letters of Sydney Smith, edited by Nowell C. Smith, 2 vols (Oxford, 1953), I, 209.

Wordsworth, of course, saw his own reactions as anything but capricious; on the contrary, they were more direct and sincere than those dictated by custom. But this was also true of the poets of sensibility, in whom it is possible to detect an evangelical urge similar to Wordsworth's, a faith in "an universal tendency to the propagation" of refined taste such as we find occasionally in Jeffrey:

The inner circle, to which the poet delights chiefly to pitch his voice, is perpetually enlarging; and, looking to that great futurity to which his ambition is constantly directed, it may be found, that the most refined style of composition to which he can attain, will be, at the last, the most extensively and permanently popular.¹

Refined tastes - Jeffrey's for Jeffrey, Wordsworth's for Wordsworth - prefigure a hypothetical historical moment when taste will be both refined and universal in the strict sense.

But this implicit, uniformitarian faith of Wordsworth's was constantly shaken, though we see flashes of conviction throughout the rest of his career. His attentions were confined more and more to the "inner circle", a circle that contracted to such an extent that not only was Coleridge ultimately excluded, but so too were all Wordsworth's contemporaries. "'No one'", he told Crabb Robinson,

'has completely understood me - not even Coleridge. He is not happy enough...no man who lives a life of constant bustle & whose happiness depends on the opinions of others can possibly comprehend the best of my poems'.²

The historian Howard Mumford Jones has distinguished "the man of sensibility" from the "romantic sufferer":

1 In his review of Scott's The Lady of the Lake, ER XVI (August, 1810), p.266.

2 Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, Etc., edited Morley, p.49.

the man of sensibility feels intensely but he assumes
that what he feels anyone else would feel whose
emotions have not been blunted by custom or self-
regard

- this is the Wordsworth of the Lyrical Ballads and the Preface; "the Romantic sufferer", on the other hand, "insists that he is unique and solitary"¹ - this is what Wordsworth becomes. The emotional and practical weight came to rest with his conception of himself as unique, not as a prototype of the regenerated man, a Prometheus. If he is to inhabit a class at all, it will be the "noble living and the noble dead".² Or, if he saw himself as Prometheus, it was as the leader Prometheus, eternally to be distinguished from the mankind he champions, with a spiritual ear attuned to "the mighty stream of tendency",

inaudible
To the vast multitude; whose doom it is
To run the giddy round of vain delight,
Or fret and labour on the Plain below.³

The conviction that rings throughout The Prelude that he "possessed / A privilege", was "singled out... / For holy services",⁴ differentiates and isolates him from his fellow man.

In 1831 Jeffrey wrote a letter to Carlyle that, while it accepts the distinction of genius, implicitly questions the need for such men: "the more I see of philosophers and men of genius the more I am inclined

1 Revolution and Romanticism, p.244.

2 The Prelude (1805), X, 1.969, Wordsworth The Prelude, p.412.

3 The Excursion, IX, 11.87, 89-92, Wordsworth Poetical Works, V, 289.

4 The Prelude (1805), XII, 11.308-309; I, 11.62, 63, Wordsworth The Prelude, pp.452, 32.

to hold that the ordinary run of sensible, kind people, who fill the world, are after all the best specimens of humanity, and that the others are, like our cultivated flowers, but splendid monsters, and cases of showy disease".¹ He looks forward to the view, which we now identify as Freudian, of the artist as a neurotic, though he does not allow that the oblique expressionism of the work of art is a legitimate way of engaging with the 'normal' public.² This distinction and rejection are implicit in almost everything Jeffrey wrote. The trust in the common apprehension that pervades every area of his thinking made this an inexorable conclusion.

Once associationism is forced to admit that there is no necessary beauty or invariable standard of taste, that nothing is necessarily right, the problem of the individual whose associations reflect a constitutional difference of mind cannot be attributed to impaired sense, a 'blindness' to beauty as it were. Associationists treated this difference in one of two ways, both of which set the individual apart from society; "A man of Genius", for William Duff, "is really a kind of different being from the rest of his species".³ One way is to applaud the originality of genius, like Duff, and thus seek standards other than those of the common apprehension. This theory sees the associations of

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- 1 16 May, 1831, as quoted in Wilson's Carlyle to 'The French Revolution', p.204. Jeffrey is admonishing Carlyle for his threat to retire from the literary world. The letter should be read in its entirety (pp.202-205) for an understanding of Jeffrey's disbelief in "the dispensing power of genius", and of the humane basis of that disbelief.
 - 2 "If a person who is at loggerheads with reality possesses an artistic gift...he can transform his phantasies into artistic creations instead of into symptoms. In this manner he can escape the doom of neurosis", in his fifth lecture on Psycho-Analysis, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, edited by James Strachey (with Anna Freud), Vol. XI (London, 1957), p.50; compare Freud on "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming", Vol. IX (London, 1959), p.153.
 - 3 Critical Observations on the Writings of the Most Celebrated Geniuses in Poetry (London, 1770), p.339.

an original genius as superior to those of his fellows: subtler, more "truthful", more creative.¹ The other way of reacting, Jeffrey's way, is to persist with a uniformitarian ideal, however tenuous, and brand any diversity as irrelevant and even anti-social.²

The idea of a poet as singled out for "holy services" would have struck Jeffrey as the height of the egotism of genius, arrogating to itself divine powers. For it was not for the intrusion of the peculiar ways of perceiving, thinking, and feeling of the author that Jeffrey reserved his most bitter complaint, but rather for the assumption of the inherent superiority of these ways. This is "pitiful cant of careless feeling and eccentric genius", and it is Jeffrey's main criticism of Burns:

his belief...in the dispensing power of genius and social feeling, all matters of morality and common sense. This is the very slang of the worst German plays, and the lowest of our town-made novels.³

Jeffrey had detected what he took to be such an arrogant assumption in the Lyrical Ballads; in the Thalaba article he argues that the "leading principles" of the new "sect of poets", "seem to have been borrowed from the great apostle of Geneva".⁴ Later criticism is less playful. In the review of Wilson's The Isle of Palms, for example, Jeffrey defines this literary Calvinism as "the offensive assumption of exclusive taste, judgment and morality which pervades most of the writings of this tuneful

- 1 "By elevating and enlivening the fancy", wrote Alexander Gerard, the "enthusiastic ardour" of his genius "gives vigour and activity to its associating power, enables it to proceed with alacrity in searching out the necessary ideas", An Essay on Genius (London, 1774), p.69.
- 2 "No taste is bad for any other reason than because it is peculiar", in the review of Alison's Essays, ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.45.
- 3 In his review of Cromek's Burns, ER XIII (January, 1809), pp.254, 253.
- 4 ER I (October, 1802), p.63.

brotherhood".¹ Reflections such as these help to explain the relentless-ness with which Jeffrey pursued Wordsworth through the early years of the nineteenth century, singling him out for his own, "holy services".

V

The idea of genius as a disease that Jeffrey propounded in his letter to Carlyle raises the question of the moral implications of Jeffrey's aesthetic theory and the moral concerns of the criticism itself. Jeffrey prided himself in his Contributions on "having constantly endeavoured to combine Ethical precepts with Literary Criticism", indeed he believed that he had "more uniformly and earnestly than any preceding critic, made the Moral tendencies of the works under consideration a leading subject of discussion".² This is an extraordinary claim for someone working in the shadow of Dr Johnson and amidst a variety of contemporary Reviews and Magazines, of a variety of political and religious persuasions, that were making morality not the "leading", but the exclusive subject of the discussion. As William S. Ward records, "no terms were used more frequently in the average review than the word 'moral' and its variants"; it was a "moral and instructional purpose which the majority of the reviewers insisted that poetry should serve".³ Moreover it is rare that Jeffrey gets beyond establishing whether a work is accessible or inaccessible, or offering a general stylistic description using the critical jargon of the day. His leading principle was apparently

1 ER XIX (February, 1812), p.375.

2 Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, I, x.

3 In his examination of "Some Aspects of the Conservative Attitude toward Poetry in English Criticism, 1798-1820", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LX, no. 2 (June, 1945), pp.386-398 (p.392).

pleasure, not morality; "the higher wants and more refined pleasures of the species" are more generally to be satisfied than to be rectified.¹

It would be wrong, however, to describe Jeffrey's criticism as John Stuart Mill described the criticism of the Edinburgh Review generally, as indifferent "to the moral tendency of a work".² In its conformity to the readers' expectation, its capacity to please - "and men cannot be mistaken as to what has given them pleasure" - lies a work's moral justification. This is what Jeffrey means in his review of Madoc when he argues that, in respect of its dealing with materials "within and about all men", poetry is "nearly upon a footing with morality".³ The stimulation of common emotions, or the association of common or familiar sentiments with common and familiar objects, reinforces the social values which are pre-eminent in Jeffrey's criticism. It follows from the fact that association is anthropocentric, "that all mens' perceptions of beauty will be nearly in proportion to the degree of their sensibility and social sympathies".⁴ In this way Jeffrey identified the beautiful with the good.

Thus he argues that Crabbe's realism, his "giving a full and exact view of village life", aims at "an important moral effect".⁵ Thus, also, when Jeffrey appears to be talking only of moral adequacy - saying, for

1 See his review of Thelwall's Poems, ER II (April, 1803), p.197.

2 In the article in Westminster Review written on behalf of his father, I (April, 1824), p.536.

3 ER VII (October, 1805), p.3.

4 As he argues in his review of Alison, ER XVIII (May, 1811), p.44.

5 In the review of Crabbe's Poems (1807), ER XII (April, 1808), p.141; compare Jeffrey in his Contributions to the Edinburgh Review on Crabbe's "great powers of observation, his skill in touching the deeper sympathies of our nature, and his power of inculcating, by their means, the most impressive lessons of humanity" (III, 3), though here it is more closely allied to the idea of the sympathetic imagination in eighteenth-century sentimental philosophy.

example, of Beattie's Minstrel that its tenderness and solemnity "recommend it irresistibly to all good minds"¹ - he is referring to its moral tendency as well. Most often, as in the case of The Minstrel, it is a sentimental morality, and Jeffrey praises the poet's tenderness as commensurate with "the ordinary run of sensible, kind people, who fill the world".² As he wrote to John Wilson

for part, and not the least part of the merit of poetry, consists in its moral effects, and the power of exciting kind and generous affections seems entitled to as much admiration as that of presenting pleasing images to the fancy.³

Meritt Hughes has described Jeffrey's poetic as "Platonic", at least insofar as Jeffrey "accepted the final deliverance against poets in the Republic", and accepted it "the way that it was intended to be understood" - which is, Hughes continues, as a "liberal creed".⁴ Just how "liberal" Plato's ceremonious dismissal of the poets was, is open to argument, and some of the ways in which "the mimetic poet", according to Plato, "sets up in each individual soul a vicious constitution"⁵ - for which reason he is to be banished - are openly encouraged in Jeffrey's criticism.⁶ And in Plato's discussion in the Republic social issues

1 In his article on Forbes on Beattie's life and writings, ER X (April, 1807), p.198.

2 See above, p.269 note 1.

3 In a letter of early to mid-1816, as quoted in 'Christopher North': A Memoir of John Wilson, I, 210.

4 "The Humanism of Francis Jeffrey", pp.244, 245.

5 The Collected Dialogues of Plato, p.830 (Book X, 605b).

6 Jeffrey, for example, condones emotionalism in poetry, even to excess - see above, p.242 note 3; in the article on Crabbe's The Borough he goes so far as to declare that the demand for emotion is the primum mobile of life and art - "that agitation of which the soul is avaricious" - and to conclude from this that "the more distress we introduce into poetry, the more we shall rivet the attention and attract the admiration of the reader", ER XVI (April, 1810), p.37.

actually supervene on aesthetic ones: "we are not poets, you and I at present", Socrates tells Adimantus, "but founders of a state".¹ Jeffrey, on the other hand, binds the social and the aesthetic inextricably as we saw, arguing that the most socially efficacious will be the most "universally" satisfying. But paramount in both is the stability and harmony of the state for which the sanity, and conformity, of the citizens is responsible. In the important respect that both Plato and Jeffrey believed themselves to be promoting the security of the state from within by their censorship of literature, then Hughes is right.

What Hughes does not do is quote the one passage from Jeffrey's reviews that confirmed his analogy, and would have dispelled the doubt he has as to Jeffrey's awareness of this influence. In a review of Byron's tragedies Jeffrey makes the extreme claim that poets

ought fairly to be confined to the established creed and morality of their country, or to the actual passions and sentiments of mankind; and that poetical dreamers and sophists who pretend to theorise according to their feverish fancies, without a warrant from authority or reason, ought to be banished [from] the commonwealth of letters.²

For Coleridge, needless to say, this would never do. While making various and extensive concessions in the Biographia to the contemporary critics on the subject of poetic diction, Coleridge developed a distinctive theory of the language of the Imagination that superseded or subsumed these concessions. A similar compromise occurs in his discussion of sensibility. What the deference to audience expectations of the twenty-second chapter represents is an unexceptional and largely Aristotelian pragmatism, a concession designed to secure the interest of the reader by

1 The Collected Dialogues of Plato, p.625 (Book II, 379a).

2 ER XXXVI (February, 1822), p.438.

fulfilling "a previous and well understood, though tacit, compact between the poet and his reader".¹ Once this interest or "negative faith"² is secured, the poet is allowed, indeed must, express his peculiarity or ego:

Mem. To write to the Recluse that he must insert something concerning Ego / its metaphysical Sublimity - & intimate Synthesis with the principle of Co-adunation - without it every where all things were a waste - nothing, &c -³

Coleridge's criticisms of Wordsworth's disproportionate thoughts and emotions, in other words, are superseded by the larger sanction he gives to genius generally, and to Wordsworth's genius in particular.

One of the factors most conducive to the coherence of the Biographia as a critical response to contemporary reviewers is Coleridge's determination to establish the claims of genius before the claims of lesser mortals. "In all ages", he argues, there have been but a "few"

who measuring and sounding the rivers of the vale at the feet of their furthest inaccessible falls have learned, that the sources must be far higher and far inward; a few, who even in the level streams have detected elements, which neither the vale itself or the surrounding mountains contained or could supply.⁴

This passage is a part of the extended metaphor that Coleridge uses at the opening of chapter XII to characterize those of philosophic imagination. It is also part of a transparent endeavour to create a respect for metaphysical enquiry, as distinct from creating an understanding of metaphysics. The preliminary insistence on the rarity of

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 50.

2 That "negative faith, which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force", Biographia Literaria, II, 107.

3 This note of April-May, 1804 expresses Coleridge's own version of the "egotistical sublime", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2057.

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 166.

philosophical genius is, for this reason, more important for the overall argument, or exculpation, than the subsequent, virtuoso account of the self-constructing intelligence (most of which is, of course, a direct translation of Schelling¹). What Coleridge does in the Biographia is to create a parallel between himself, as a metaphysician, and Wordsworth, as a poet: "There is a philosophic no less than a poetic genius, which is differenced from the highest perfection of talent, not by degree but by kind".²

Moreover, both the poetic genius and the philosophic genius, as the purveyors of Ideas, demand only a restricted audience of illuminati - educated, sympathetic, and imaginative:

An IDEA, in the highest sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol; and, except in geometry, all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction. ΦΩΝΗΣΕ ΣΥΝΕΤΟΪΣΟΝ: and for those who could not pierce through this symbolic husk, his writings were not intended.³

To justify the exclusion of the common mind Coleridge, on another occasion, quotes Plotinus:

"in order to direct the view aright, it behoves that the beholder should have made himself congenerous and similar to the object beheld. Never could the eye have beheld the sun, had not its own essence been soliform," (i.e. pre-configured to light by a similarity of essence with that of light) "neither can a soul not beautiful attain to an intuition of beauty."⁴

Accordingly, the philosophic section of the Biographia is a condemnation, implicit and explicit, of 'metaphysicians' like "Beattie, and other less

1 See Shawcross's notes, Biographia Literaria, I, 266-270, Thomas McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (Oxford, 1969), pp.24-26, and Fruman, Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel, pp.102-105.

2 Biographia Literaria, I, 198.

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 100 (Coleridge is discussing Kant).

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 80 note.

eloquent and not more profound inaugurators of common sense on the throne of philosophy"¹ - Francis Jeffrey, for example. Moreover, Coleridge's defence of the mystic Boehme is an indirect condemnation of contemporary anti-enthusiasts - again, like Jeffrey - who refuse to discriminate between the "extravagant and grotesque phantasms" of the charlatan, and "the truly inspired": "All without distinction...branded as fanatics and phantasts".²

There are many geniuses in the Biographia whose thoughts and feelings are beyond the reach of common sense, or the common man, but, besides himself, it is Wordsworth that Coleridge is most keen to vindicate. Where Jeffrey and others dismissed Wordsworth as mystical, Coleridge insisted that Wordsworth's "strong sense" prevented his "mysticism" from becoming "sickly"³; where Jeffrey and others found the poetry too obscure for popular taste, Coleridge countered that "A poem is not necessarily obscure, because it does not aim to be popular"⁴; and where Jeffrey damned the "Ode. Intimations of Immortality" as "illegible and unintelligible",⁵ Coleridge insisted without censure that it would be "interesting, or perhaps intelligible, to but a limited number of readers".⁶ Against Coleridge's occasional support for Jeffrey's idea of the familiar, the orthodox, and the common, in chapter XXII and elsewhere, we should weigh the lines in the fourth chapter, and in The Friend as quoted in that chapter, which contain the finest expression of "the character and privilege of genius" as possessed by Wordsworth:

1 Biographia Literaria, I, 182.

2 Biographia Literaria, I, 96.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 115.

4 Biographia Literaria, II, 120.

5 ER XI (October, 1807), p.227.

6 Biographia Literaria, II, 127.

the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew drops. "To find no contradiction in the union of old and new; to contemplate the ANCIENT of days and all his works with feelings as fresh, as if all had then sprang forth at the first creative fiat; characterizes the mind that feels the riddle of the world, and may help to unravel it. To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances, which every day for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar;

'With sun and moon and stars throughout the year,
And man and woman;'

this is the character and privilege of genius".¹

¹ Biographia Literaria, I, 59; compare The Friend (CC), II, 73.

Chapter Five

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF JEFFREY'S
CRITICISM OF WORDSWORTH

a while he stood, expecting
 Their universal shout and high applause
 To fill his ear, when contrary he hears
 On all sides, from innumerable tongues
 A dismal hiss, the sound
 Of public scorn

Milton, Paradise Lost

When he settles on the standards set by a collective authority, Jeffrey finally, if reluctantly, rejects the right of superior minds to claim superior insight into, or sensitivity towards, reality. The decision reflects his belief in the ultimate sanction of "ordinary humanity", and his suspicion of the erratic and antisocial nature of genius. The "collision of equal minds, - the admonition of prevailing impressions" seemed to him necessary to reduce what he called the "redundancies" of genius,

and repress that tendency to extravagance or puerility, into which the self-indulgence and self-admiration of genius is so apt to be betrayed, when it is allowed to wanton, without awe or restraint, in the triumph and delight of its own intoxication.¹

What this represents is a thoroughly Augustan aversion to provinciality and solitude. "We polish one another", wrote Shaftesbury, "and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of amicable Collision".² It was

1 Review of Wordsworth's Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.3.

2 Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, second edition corrected, in 3 vols (London, 1714), I, 64.

not, however, without the corroboration of experience; Jeffrey's own seclusion in Herbertshire in the 1790s had taught him that

One is apt...to conceive an undue contempt for the world by living too much apart from it; and to acquire a kind of dictatorial and confident manner by pursuing all one's speculations without the interference of anybody, or the apprehension of any corrector.¹

The efforts of writers not subject to "the wholesome discipline of derision", such as one would expect in Paris, London, or Edinburgh, Jeffrey believed must necessarily tend to vanity and excess:

It has often occurred to us, indeed, that there is universally something presumptuous in provincial genius, and that it is a very rare felicity to meet with a man of talents out of the metropolis, who does not overrate himself and his coterie prodigiously. In the West of England in particular, there has been a succession of authors, who seem to have laid claim to a sort of omnipotence, and to have fancied that they were born to effect some mighty revolution in the different departments to which they applied themselves. We need only run over the names of Darwin, Day, Beddoes, Southey, Coleridge, and Priestley, to make ourselves perfectly intelligible.²

Jeffrey transferred his suspicion of provincial men of letters, with some geographical uncertainty, to the Lake poets. The first two stanzas of "The Thorn", for example, he ascribed, "without hesitation, to a certain poetical fraternity in the West of England". This was in April, 1808.³ He had already opened his October, 1807, review of the Poems in

1 As he wrote to Robert Morehead on 26 November, 1796, Life of Jeffrey, II, 28.

2 In his article on Priestley, ER IX (October, 1806), p.147. Jeffrey occasionally allows that "derision" may be indiscriminate; in his article on James Grahame's British Georgics, for example, he remarks that the author has been "too constantly engrossed" with the feelings of common humanity "to concern himself about the contempt of the fastidious, or the derision of the unfeeling", and praises Grahame because he "is not ashamed of his kindness", ER XVI (April, 1810), p.216.

3 In his review of Crabbe's Poems (1807), ER XII (April, 1808), p.137 note.

Two Volumes with the announcement that "This author is known to belong to a certain brotherhood of poets, who have haunted for some years about the Lakes of Cumberland".¹ The term "Lake poets" is itself an indication of Jeffrey's dislike of provinciality; their distance from the capital became at once a symbol of their eccentricity, and an explanation for it.² In the review of The White Doe, Wordsworth's "metaphysical sensibility, and mystical wordiness" are attributed, metaphorically, to dashing "his Hippocrene with too large an infusion of lake water"³ (a jibe that also refers to Wordsworth's description of himself as a "water-drinker" in the Preface of 1815⁴).

Jeffrey's most sustained criticism occurs in the article on The Excursion, in which Wordsworth is accused of having "sacrificed so many precious gifts at the shrine of those paltry idols which he has set up for himself among his lakes and his mountains":

if Mr Wordsworth, instead of confining himself almost entirely to the society of the dalesmen and cottagers, and little children, who form the subjects of his book, had condescended to mingle a little more with the people that were to read and judge of it, we cannot help thinking, that its texture would have been considerably improved.⁵

That Wordsworth "retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being

1 ER XI (October, 1807), p.214.

2 In his note "Chronology of the 'Lake School' Argument: Some Revisions", Review of English Studies, new series, XXVIII, no. 110 (May, 1977), pp.175-181, Peter A. Cook argues that "no evidence exists" for the use of the terms 'Lake Poets', 'Lake School', or 'Laker' "before 1814, and that first is not by Francis Jeffrey" (p.176); actually, Jeffrey began his review of Wilson's Isle of Palms with the words "This is a new recruit to the company of lake poets" in February, 1812 - ER XIX, p.373 - and described the Smiths' parody of Coleridge in Rejected Addresses as "unquestionably Lakish", ER XX (November, 1812), p.445.

3 ER XX (October, 1815), p.356.

4 Wordsworth Prose Works, III, 38.

5 ER XXIV (November, 1814), pp.3-4.

enabled to construct a literary Work that might live", obviously struck Jeffrey as self-defeating, and the title of the magnum opus - The Recluse - must have confirmed all his suspicions.¹ Unable to appreciate that Wordsworth's retirement was a form of exploration, rather than an escape - as retirement had been and would always be for himself - Jeffrey invoked the familiar commandment of Augustan humanism that it was not in solitude that one meditated "On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life".²

Though he appears to make an honourable exception of Wordsworth, "the exception of one extraordinary mind", Coleridge outlines a compromise with the world in the Biographia that is similar to Jeffrey's in the review of The Excursion. In the wish-fulfilling eleventh chapter, Coleridge advocates the adoption of a profession by a writer, so that he might live

in sympathy with the world, in which he lives. At least he acquires a better and quicker tact for the knowledge of that, with which men in general can sympathize. He learns to manage his genius more prudently and efficaciously.³

In Coleridge's very Augustan idea of an "amicable Collision", however, there is none of the political distrust that lies behind Jeffrey's animosity towards "the West". The provinces were the centre of religious dissent, something Jeffrey found in itself distasteful,⁴

1 As Wordsworth says in the Preface to The Excursion (1814), Wordsworth Prose Works, III, 5; the pomposity of the document to which the editor refers (p.3), can only be understood in the context of Wordsworth's hostile critical reception.

2 "Prospectus" to The Recluse, 1.1, Wordsworth Prose Works, III, 6.

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 152, 157.

4 See, besides his scorn for the Methodists above, pp.237-238, his article on Clarkson on Quakerism, ER X (April, 1807), pp.85-102, and a letter to Mrs Innes, 9 May, 1841: "Lady C[oltman] is very agreeable, though a zealous Unitarian, and I rather think the only truly agreeable person I know of that persuasion", Life of Jeffrey, II, 344.

but which also often went hand in hand with political radicalism: "In the corporate commercial towns, which were always the strongholds of the Protestant Dissenters, the aristocratic and democratic classes correspond closely with the Church and the Dissenting parties, respectively".¹ It was in the provincial towns that a viable alternative to the established church and culture was being fostered. London was no longer "the only political, economic and cultural centre", as it had been in the eighteenth century.² Their lacking the chastening discipline of metropolitan culture has meant, ironically, that it is to "the West" of England that we turn for the unique cultural legacy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But then Jeffrey was not interested in uniqueness. Established religion is the analogy Jeffrey used to describe the status of poetic tradition when, in the review of Thalaba, he condemned the presumptions of the new "sect of poets".³ All the prominent members of provincial culture that Jeffrey mentions in his review of Priestley's memoirs were dissenters. Even at the centre of the reform movement Jeffrey preserved his contempt: "What intense asses our provincial censors, and thorough, simple, sweeping, reformers, are!" he wrote to Cockburn.⁴ His favourite epithet, "Methodistical", combined the idea of geographical and religious eccentricity, with the idea of excessive and affected zeal. Zealousness, Jeffrey was convinced, distorted reality (which was reality only by common consent) and cried

1 M. Ray Adams, Studies in the Literary Backgrounds of English Radicalism, with Special Reference to the French Revolution, Franklin and Marshall College Studies, 5 (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1947), p.19.

2 To quote Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (London, 1977), p.268.

3 The "catholic poetical church" - ER I (October, 1802), p.63.

4 11 April, 1833, Life of Jeffrey, II, 259.

out for the urbane derision of the metropolis, or the metropolitan Edinburgh Review.

The same political motive can be traced in his attack upon 'mysticism', on its egocentricity and hence divisiveness; Blake is the true antithesis of Jeffrey, not Wordsworth. And a political motive is apparent in his impatience with German literature, which is hardly surprising when it is considered that the origin of the English interest in German literature lay in religious dissent. "There can be little doubt that the active religious intercourse between England and Germany, which was begun by Boehme and continued by Wesley and the Moravians, paved the way for the introduction of contemporary German literature into England".¹ How conscious of the relationship between the Methodists and the German pietists the anti-German critics were it is difficult to say. Their reaction was more likely a direct response to the violent passions and anarchy of Robbers and the anti-social clichés of Kotzebue. Violet Stockley describes the critical reputation of Sturm und Drang, and of all German literature, at the turn of the century:

With the progress of the anti-revolutionary wars and the strengthening of the Tory party in England, the "Sturm und Drang" literature of Germany came to be regarded as synonymous with all that was revolutionary in politics and free-thinking in philosophy. Its popularity was looked on by many as marking a decline of true taste and of sound morals.²

It was because the Edinburgh was primarily "an instrument of political enlightenment and social reform"³ that Jeffrey was committed

1 J.P. Hoskins, as quoted in Morgan and Hohlfield (eds), German Literature in British Magazines 1750-1860, p.39.

2 In her German Literature as Known in England 1750-1830, p.9.

3 As it was described by Walter E. Houghton in his edition, The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900, Volume I (Toronto and London, 1966), p.417.

to a certain type of literary criticism. It is time to turn to politics in order to understand exactly who the 'people' were on whose behalf Jeffrey attacked the élitist aesthetic that he discovered in Wordsworth's poetry.

I

Introducing his Contributions to the Edinburgh Review Jeffrey recalled a conviction he had expressed in a letter to Scott at the time of Scott's growing discomfort with the political tendency of the Edinburgh. As its editor he had never, he claimed - despite Lockhart's assertions in the Life of Scott - promised to eschew political controversy. On the contrary, "the Review...has but two legs to stand on. Literature no doubt is one of them: But its Right leg is Politics".¹ This is true not only of the many articles dedicated to contemporary political issues but of the literary articles themselves. The reviews of poetry, both practical and theoretical, are just as likely to betray the review's political commitments as are its views on the French Revolution, on the Napoleonic wars, on the Slave Trade, on Catholic emancipation, or on Reform. "The fact is", to quote John O. Hayden, "that politics pervaded the age, its literature, and its criticism".²

In political discussion, Jeffrey came to appeal to a tribunal of common sense embodied in those he called the 'people', a tribunal comparable to the one formed by the hypothetical common readers in his critical theory and practice. The 'people', however, like the common

1 Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, I, xvii.

2 The Romantic Reviewers 1802-1824 (London, 1969), p.38.

readers, could be used to support contradictory arguments. Turning to politics, in other words, we see the equivocation about the roles of established authority and popular consensus writ large. But while Jeffrey's political commitments are at times as ambiguous as his critical principles, to which they are intimately related,¹ they do help us to an understanding of those principles by clarifying their social and political implications.

The review of Southey's Thalaba is, once again, a good starting point, because it both reflects the political conservatism of the early Edinburgh, and offers an example of the extent to which politics and literature had become interrelated.² Like the forensic rhetoric borrowed from the reviewers' profession, the rhetoric of contemporary politics was more than just figurative; it reflected a faith in authority as a force for stability in both areas. Both literary and political authority tend "to settle and consolidate into a sort of patriarchal chieftainship, which gains strength by descent and duration", to quote Jeffrey on hereditary wealth and rank.³ Whatever is, becomes more right. This reliance on the strengthening of association through custom is best demonstrated by comparing Jeffrey's statement that the object of poetry

1 Compare Thomas Crawford, who suggests an analogy between the vacillating politics of the Edinburgh and its literary critical principles, The Edinburgh Review and Romantic Poetry, p.4; and Philip Flynn on the relationship between the literary and the political 'audience', Francis Jeffrey, p.164.

2 James and John Stuart Mill were quick to point out the Edinburgh's "sacrifices at the altar of aristocratic prejudice" in 1824, and two of their examples occur in the first number: "the one in a review of Southey's Thalaba, the other in an article on the sugar colonies", Westminster Review I (April, 1824), p.516.

3 In an article on The Plan of Reform proposed by Sir Francis Burdett (1809), ER XIV, no. 28 (July, 1809), article I, pp.277-306 (p.290).

"is more likely to be accomplished by surrounding us gradually with those objects, and involving us in those situations with which we have long been accustomed to associate the feelings of the poet",¹ with a justification of the social and political status quo in an earlier review:

"Men submit to be governed by the united will of those, to whose will, as individuals, the greater part of them have been previously accustomed to submit themselves".²

In the Thalaba article the Lake poets are accused of constituting "the most formidable conspiracy" against "sound judgement"³ in poetry - sound judgement being the province of a traditional literary aristocracy. In an age of government spying and strict laws against the Corresponding societies, we can be sure that the use of the term "conspiracy" was designed to inspire horror in the conservative reading public.⁴ The political element may, alternatively, be less metaphorical than direct. The unwillingness Jeffrey expressed in two reviews of Scott "to quarrel with a poet on the score of politics",⁵ is by no means evident in the

1 Review of Campbell's Gertrude of Wyoming, ER XIV (April, 1809), pp.2-3 (quoted above, pp.225-226).

2 In a review of Jean Sylvain Bailly's Memoires d'un Temoin de la Revolution (1804), ER VI, no. 11 (April, 1805), article XII, pp.137-161 (p.144).

3 ER I (October, 1802), p.64.

4 See, for example, M. Ray Adams, Studies in the Literary Backgrounds of English Radicalism, pp.9-10, for a convenient list of "repressive measures", official and unofficial, "directed against freedom of speech and meeting" (p.9), in the 1790s and early nineteenth century. Compare J. Steven Watson, The Reign of George III, 1760-1815, The Oxford History of England, XII (Oxford, 1960), pp.356-363 for more details. Between May, 1794, and April, 1801, the Habeas Corpus Act had been suspended temporarily on seven occasions - see Elie Halévy, England in 1815, translated by E.I. Watkin and D.A. Barker, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, I, revised edition (London, 1949), p.154 note 1.

5 Review of Marmion, ER XII, no. 23 (April, 1808), article I, pp.1-35 (p.35); compare the review of The Vision of Don Roderick, ER XVIII (August, 1811): "We are not very apt to quarrel with a poet for his politics" (p.389).

Southey articles. The "splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society" of which the Lake poets are accused,¹ may be compared with the "general discontent and disrespect for the constitution, usages, principles and proceedings of Parliament" which Sir Francis Burdett and Cobbett and their followers were accused of spreading abroad.² It is worth remembering that Gilbert Wakefield had, unlike Wordsworth, published his reply to the Bishop of Llandaff, and was imprisoned for two years;³ that one of the government's spies had been despatched to check on Wordsworth's and Coleridge's activities in Nether Stowey;⁴ and that it was within a year of the Thalaba article that Blake was tried for seditious language.⁵ Jeffrey may have been merely capitalising on the reputation for political dissidence Coleridge and Southey had acquired in the late years of the eighteenth century, not unjustly merging the Bristol radicalism of Coleridge and Southey with the literary radicalism of the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. The tone of the article is one of bemused and thus unthreatened superiority, and in "interpreting the Edinburgh's doctrine", as John J. Welker remarks, "it is necessary always to be on guard, for the tone so often belies the words".⁶ Yet even if the article is in part playful and

1 ER I (October, 1802), p.71.

2 In a review of Cobbett's Political Register, ER X, no. 20 (July, 1807), article IX, pp.386-421 (p.399).

3 Jane Worthington Smyser in her article "The Trial and Imprisonment of Joseph Johnson Bookseller", Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LXXVII, no. 4 (Summer, 1974), pp.418-435, discusses Wakefield's reply to Llandaff and its fate. Johnson was, of course, a friend of Blake's.

4 Biographia Literaria, I, 126-131. Compare A.J. Eagleton's account, "Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Spy", in Coleridge: Studies by Several Hands on the Hundredth Anniversary of His Death, edited by Edmund Blunden and Earl Leslie Griggs (London, 1934), pp.71-87.

5 See Mona Wilson, The Life of William Blake, edited by Geoffrey Keynes (London, Oxford, and New York, 1971), pp.171-178.

6 "The Position of the Quarterlies on Some Classical Dogmas", Studies in Philology, XXXVII, no. 3 (July, 1940), pp.542-562 (p.555).

opportunist, the accusations were of a serious nature and Jeffrey's criticisms were sincere.

The idea of an "aristocracy of the literary world", to which Jeffrey alludes in his review of Madoc,¹ implies not only that literature shares with society a strict hierarchy bound to observe due degree and propriety, but also that the aristocracy of society is to determine this degree and propriety. In a letter to his brother John, of July, 1803, Jeffrey congratulated himself that the "publication is in the highest degree respectable as yet, as there are none but gentlemen connected with it",² a pride which is confirmed by Cockburn's well-known witticism that the review was originally to be "all gentlemen, and no pay".³ Certainly this attitude is apparent in Jeffrey's defamation of Thelwall, whose literary and social aspirations are ridiculed simultaneously in a review of 1803:

The task of ministering to the higher wants and more refined pleasures of the species, being both more dignified and more agreeable than that of supplying their vulgar necessities, multitudes are induced to undertake it without any great preparation; and the substantial business of life is defrauded of much valuable labour, while the elegant arts are injured by a crowd of injudicious pretenders.⁴

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- 1 Jeffrey says of Southey, in his review of Madoc, that "he rather looks, we think, with a jealous and contemptuous eye on the old aristocracy of the literary world, and refuses the jurisdiction of its constituted authorities", ER VII (October, 1805), p.1. See above, p.227.
 - 2 Life of Jeffrey, II, 74.
 - 3 Life of Jeffrey, I, 133. At the time, one was a necessary condition of the other - see above, p.177 note 6.
 - 4 ER II (April, 1803), p.197. Thelwall's retort in his Letter to M^r Francis Jeffray, though a little histrionic, is fully justified: "O Gay! O Prior! O Franklin! how fortunate were the days of your temerity. Had the Edinburgh Review at that time existed, — had Messrs. Jeffray and Brougham then received their missionary delegation from the Grand Lama, would you have had the presumptuous vanity to have quitted your casts?" (p.54; Thelwall's spelling). As John Clive observes, when Jeffrey is discussing radicals like Thelwall and Priestley, he is "particularly willing to suspend his belief in the career open to talents", Scotch Reviewers, p.144.

It seems extraordinary that, with its manifest social and political complacency, and its tone of condescension, the Edinburgh could be accused of "wild and dangerous motions of equality, and the rights of man",¹ and of "infidelity in Religion; licentiousness in Morals; and of sedition and revolutionary principles in Politicks".² Nor was this reaction to the Edinburgh restricted to simple-minded Tories, who, in the wake of the French Revolution, identified any liberal or progressive sentiments with the atheism and the anarchy of the French Jacobins; the many "who, in their fright, saw in every Whig a person who was already a republican, and not unwilling to become a regicide".³ Scott was to leave the Edinburgh in 1809 in order to help form the Quarterly as a mouthpiece for Tory opposition.⁴

A part of the reason is that by 1808 the Edinburgh had altered its policies, giving vent to more 'popular' Whig opinions than it had allowed itself to express in the earlier issues. Modern scholars are not the only ones struck by the incongruity between the extreme conservatism of many early articles and the Foxite allegiance declared by the buff and blue colours of the original covers.⁵ A month after the

1 As it was by "An Independent Anti-Reformer" in an anonymous Letter &c [to the Editor of the Edinburgh Review], no publication details [c.1811; Bodleian Catalogue no. G. Pamph 2877(4)], p.76.

2 "Mentor", The Dangers of the Edinburgh Review: or a Brief Exposure of Its Principles in Religion, Morals, and Politics (London, 1808), p.4.

3 To quote Cockburn, Life of Jeffrey, I, 10; compare Jeffrey's review of Bailly's Memoires on the injury which the French revolution had inflicted upon "the cause of rational freedom", ER VI (April, 1805), p.137. For Clive on "the Edinburgh's campaign against hysterical anti-Jacobins" see Scotch Reviewers, p.96; and compare, on anti-jacobinism, Crane Brinton, The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists (Oxford, 1926): "the Conservatives saw a non-existent unity among their opponents" (p.44).

4 See, for example, Edgar Johnson, Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown, 2 vols (London, 1970), I, 298-303.

5 "Buff and blue, it is needless to say, had long been the colours of the Whig party", ER CXCVI (October, 1902), p.280. See John O. Hayden, who warns against using the buff and blue colours as "evidence that the Edinburgh was a Whig organ" in The Romantic Reviewers, p.19.

publication of the first number Francis Horner wrote to James Loch of the expectations that had been raised and disappointed by the original collaborators:

You will not be surprised that we have given a good deal of disappointment by the temperate air of our politics; nothing short of blood and atheism and democracy were predicted by some wise and fair ones, as the necessary production of our set.¹

Gradually between 1805 and 1807 the Review "became as much political as literary"² and with it, more "popular" in its politics. Jeffrey and Brougham, in particular, adopted policies suggestive of Cobbett and others who were clamorous for reform. The article Jeffrey wrote on The Political Register for the July, 1807 issue reflects this transition, cautioning Cobbett against discontent, but at the same time "allowing" the targets of popular abuse "to be evils as enormous as they are now represented".³ Finally, in an article reviewing Don Pedro Cevallos's Exposition of the Practices and Machinations which led to the Usurpation of the Crown of Spain in October, 1808, Brougham and Jeffrey attacked the fickle Spanish aristocracy and eulogised the popular insurrection against the Napoleonic regime in an article that interprets the events as a parable preaching the necessity of parliamentary reform:

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- 1 7 November, 1802, Memoir and Correspondence of Francis Horner, I, 204. In 1886 Lord Moncrieff recalled his father's response to the first numbers - and his father, James Moncrieff, was a friend of the original collaborators (see Life of Jeffrey, I, 205-209): "although as far removed from the radical ranks as a follower of Fox could be, I believe he thought the early numbers of the Review not true blue enough for his standard", Lord Jeffrey of Craigcrook, p.19.
 - 2 Life and Times of Henry Lord Brougham, I, 253, although Brougham does not specify the dates. James Mill's date of 1805 - "in the year 1805...a counterpoise begins to be placed in the popular scale" - is accurate enough, Westminster Review, I (January, 1824), p.235. Compare John Clive: "A definite tendency towards Benthamite ideas begins to manifest itself in the course of the year 1806", Scotch Reviewers, p.93.
 - 3 ER X (July, 1807), p.406.

Now, if any man thinks, that we should not extravagantly rejoice in any conceivable event which must reform the constitution of England, - by reducing the overgrown influence of the Crown, - by curbing the pretensions of the privileged orders, in so far as this can be effected without strengthening the Royal influence, - by raising up the power of real talents and worth, the true nobility of the country, - by exalting the mass of the community, and giving them, under the guidance of that virtual aristocracy, to direct the councils of England, according to the spirit, as well as the form of our invaluable constitution; - whoever believes, that an event, leading to such glorious consequences as these would not give us the most heartfelt joy, must have read but few of the pages of this Journal.¹

More than any other problem it was parliamentary reform that occupied Jeffrey in the early years of the nineteenth century. The war with Napoleon became progressively more complicated, and the Foxite anti-war policy seemed less adequate in the changing circumstances.² Anti-slavery was a comparatively non-partisan issue, and Catholic emancipation had been dropped in 1807.³ It was reform which, after years of neglect, began dramatically to polarise the nation; the Edinburgh Review returned to it again and again, and was later to take some pride in having promoted and resolved it.⁴ It is entirely fitting that Jeffrey

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- 1 ER XIII, no. 25 (October, 1808), article XIV, pp.215-234 (pp.233-234) (my italics). John Clive quotes the Courier's response: "Thomas Paine never published anything more seditious than the last No. of the Edinburgh Review", Scotch Reviewers, p.110. For the Earl of Buchan's histrionic protest, see John Clive, "The Earl of Buchan's Kick: A Footnote to the History of the Edinburgh Review", Harvard Library Bulletin, V, no. 3 (Autumn, 1951), pp.362-370, and compare Cockburn, Life of Jeffrey, I, 190 and note.
 - 2 See Flynn, Francis Jeffrey, pp.99-108, on the Edinburgh and the war with Napoleon.
 - 3 With the advent of the Portland administration (24 March, 1807); see J. Steven Watson, The Reign of George III, pp.440-446.
 - 4 J. Steven Watson dates the re-entry of reform into politics, after years of neglect following the beginning of the war with France, at about March, 1809, The Reign of George III, pp.449-450. The Edinburgh's campaign had begun, though quietly enough, with its first article - Jeffrey's analysis of the causes of the French Revolution (see below, p.302 note 6) - even if, as Flynn observes, his "first detailed article on parliamentary reform" was not until "his 1807 review of William Cobbett's Political Register", Francis Jeffrey, pp.117, 118.

was ultimately to draft the Scottish Reform Bill, submitted with its English counterpart in 1832.¹ Henry Cockburn, perhaps because of the controversial Don Cevallos article, consistently underplays Jeffrey's political conviction: "Jeffrey, though as enthusiastic a reformer as was consistent with prudence, made few personal contributions in this [the review] form to the cause".² This is simply not true. Jeffrey neglected as few opportunities to discuss reform as to discuss, or belittle, the Lake poets.

The Edinburgh's role in promoting the interests of an ever widening reading public, therefore, is comparable to its role in broadening the basis of political consent by promoting reform in parliament. Just as Jeffrey argued that "no government can be either prosperous or secure, which does not provide for expressing and giving effect to the general sense of the community",³ so we have seen that no critical decision can be "secure" that does not similarly reflect the general sense of the community. Carlyle was to pay a ponderous and bitter tribute to Jeffrey in his Reminiscences for his role in the great changes effected in the early years of the nineteenth century:

Jeffrey was by no means the supreme in criticism or in anything else; but it is certain that there has no critic appeared among us since who was worth naming beside him; and his influence for good and for evil in literature and otherwise has been very great. Democracy, the gradual uprise and rule in all things of roaring million-headed unreflecting, darkly

1 Life of Jeffrey, I, 310-336.

2 Life of Jeffrey, I, 246.

3 In an article subtitled "State and Prospects of Europe", ER XXIII, no. 45 (April, 1814), article I, pp.1-40 (p.29). In keeping with this popular orientation, Jeffrey was later to praise Macaulay's History for "exhibiting, not only the great acts and great actions of the time, but the great body of the nation affected by these acts" - in a letter to William Empson, 20 March, 1849, Life of Jeffrey, I, 458.

suffering darkly sinning 'Demos,' come to call its
old superiors to account at its maddest of tribunals;
nothing in my time has so forwarded all this as
Jeffrey and his once famous 'Edinburgh Review.'¹

Carlyle, tellingly, saw Jeffrey's literary criticism as central to his campaign for reform. Directly or indirectly, we can trace all Jeffrey's thought that is in any way systematic back to a wavering belief in the common sense of 'the people', based on a theory of association which assumes that "all men", exposed to the same world, have the same resources on which to draw in making decisions.

Yet before we take the quotation from the Don Cevallos review as a political manifesto for Jeffrey and the Edinburgh Review, it is important to enquire into the idea of the popular sanction which the Edinburgh took occasion to support whole-heartedly. For a start there was no single blueprint for reform; in the words of the historian R.W. Harris,

'Parliamentary reform' might mean many things; it might mean the end of royal patronage, or the increase of the representation of country gentlemen in parliament, or the abolition of rotten boroughs, or it might mean votes for all adult men.²

Moreover, 'popularity' was a dubious attribute in an age that still used 'democratic' as a term of abuse - "that pernicious cant that all men are equal" that Sydney Smith was quick to detect and condemn in the

1 Reminiscences, II, 64. Carlyle's sensitivity to anything that savoured of "democracy" is apparent in his reminiscence of the last time he saw Southey: "our talk was long and earnest; topic ultimately the usual one, steady approach of democracy, with revolution (probably explosive) and a finis incomputable to man", Reminiscences, II, 326. This sensitivity should, of course, be borne in mind when referring to Carlyle's opinion.

2 Romanticism and the Social Order 1780-1830 (London, 1969), p.10.

pages of the Edinburgh.¹

How wavering was this belief in 'the people' can be seen in Jeffrey's article on Francis Burdett's proposals for a reformed parliament, written not twelve months after that on Don Cevallos, which expresses his reservations about reform: "though we were to admit that a reformed Parliament would be considerably more honest than an unreformed one, we are not exactly aware that it must also be considerably wiser".² But this is not his last word; he then goes on to declare paradoxically that the "only check to the encroachments of power, and the oppressions of inceptive tyranny, is the spirit, the intelligence, the vigilance, the prepared resistance, of the people".³ We are back again with the Spanish peasants. It is as if Jeffrey preferred popular violence to the popular vote.⁴ Yet Jeffrey was as horrified as the most ardent Tory at "the transference of power which was effected by the pikes of the Parisian multitude", and as disgusted at the thought that "to win the favour of the vulgar, vulgar passions must be appealed to".⁵

1 See his letter to Jeffrey, 17 April, 1810, The Letters of Sydney Smith, I, 186. Discussing the use of the word "democracy", Raymond Williams in Culture and Society 1780-1950 (London, 1958) confirms that the word was used unfavourably: "in close relation with the hated Jacobinism, or with the familiar mob-rule" (p.xiv).

2 ER XIV (July, 1809), p.281. The pseudonymous "Macro" was the first, in a pamphlet of 1809, to point out the glaring contradictions in the Edinburgh's attitude to political authority. "Macro" cites the articles on Don Cevallos and on Washington (which was actually written by Macvey Napier, ER XIII, no. 25 (October, 1808), article X, pp.148-170) as his examples: The Scotiad, or Wise Men of the North!!! A Serio-Comic and Satiric Poem in Three Cantos (London, 1809), pp.32-33 note.

3 ER XIV (July, 1809), p.305.

4 This is the view taken by the historian Elie Halévy, who interprets this article of 1809 on "Parliamentary Reform" as advocating rebellion as a legitimate expression of public opinion, and as an alternative to direct representation - England in 1815, pp.148-149. In 1824 James Mill had come to the same conclusion, disparaging the Edinburgh's prevailing argument "that irregular and tumultuary ebullitions of the people in favour of liberty, are of singular importance", Westminster Review, I (January, 1824), p.227.

5 In the review of Bailly's Memoires, ER VI (April, 1805), p.148, and in an article on "War with America", ER XXIV, no. 47 (November, 1814), article XII, pp.243-265 (p.246). Compare Cockburn's reference to "his horror of popular commotion", Life of Jeffrey, I, 331.

The "general prevalence of an opinion" may be "almost the only test we can have of its truth", as Jeffrey believed,¹ but among whom is it to be prevalent? How are we to distinguish between these "vulgar passions" and the "simple emotions" shared by all mankind? One way is to distinguish, in Jeffrey's work, between the people as a large and underprivileged body clamouring for their rights, and the people as a theoretical premise on which to ground a doctrine of the common apprehension.² The first is a body to be championed because of the second, but also, perversely, not indulged - except in cases of extreme necessity. This is the way that James Mill read the politics of the Edinburgh Review.

Mill's article in the first number of the Westminster Review, for which he conscripted the research work of his son John Stuart, was a comprehensive analysis of the Edinburgh's twenty two years of political commentary, sensitive to every variation and contradiction.³ What he found was that the Edinburgh, by endeavouring to please both the interests existing in the state, was forced to compromise: "the spirit of compromise has been a marked characteristic of the Edinburgh Review".⁴ To Mill such compromise could only mean hypocrisy, for in a state of two elementary factions - the aristocratic and the democratic, the haves and

1 Article on Cowper, ER IV (July, 1804), p.282.

2 Jeffrey could, at times, scorn public opinion; see his review of Bailly's Memoires on "the dictates of the multitude who are not philosophers", ER VI (April, 1805), p.153. Compare above, p.213 note 5.

3 John Stuart Mill wrote of the founding of the Westminster - "a Radical organ to make head against the Edinburgh and Quarterly" - in his Autobiography, and of the work "devoted to reviewing the other Reviews": "this article of my father's was to be a general criticism of the Edinburgh Review from its commencement. Before writing it he made me read through all the volumes of the Review, or as much of each as seemed of any importance...and make notes for him of the articles" (pp.64-65).

4 Westminster Review, I (April, 1824), p.516.

have nots - flattering "the reigning prejudice" could only mean reinforcing those with power, under the simultaneous pretense of supporting the demands of those without it.¹ Thus, "by pompous talking about the public spirit of the people", the vanity of the underprivileged will be soothed, and the necessity of granting political or material satisfaction will be overcome: "they will be persuaded to believe they are something, by that which effectually proves they are nothing".² The airing of popular principles after 1805 Mill therefore interprets as only a token gesture, a sop for the Cerberus of popular discontent in increasingly troubled times. "The favourite opinions of people in power are the opinions which favour their own power", insists Mill; it is to these opinions, he continues, that periodical literature has been "under a sort of necessity", at least hitherto, "of serving as a pandar".³ More than this, the political vacillation of the Edinburgh Review represents an attempt to ingratiate the Whigs as a party with both the existing factions, and thus to claim that established power for themselves:

It is the interest of the Opposition...to act, in such a manner, or rather to speak...so as to gain favour from both the few and the many. This they are obliged to endeavour by a perpetual system of compromise, a perpetual trimming between the two interests. To the aristocratical class they aim at making it appear, that the conduct of their leaders would be more advantageous even to that class, than the conduct of the ministry, which they paint in colours as odious to the aristocracy as they can. On the other hand, to gain the favour of the popular class, they are obliged to put forth principles which appear to be favourable to their interests, and to condemn such measures of conduct as tend to injure the many for the benefit of the few. In their speeches and writings, therefore, we commonly find them playing at seesaw.⁴

1 Westminster Review, I (January, 1824), p.210.

2 Westminster Review, I (January, 1824), p.227.

3 Westminster Review, I (January, 1824), p.208.

4 Westminster Review, I (January, 1824), p.218.

It cannot be denied that Jeffrey's politics, and, with his, the Edinburgh's generally, conform to this seesaw pattern which Mill finds so disingenuous. The encouragement he gives to the people in the Burdett review smacks of exactly that empty flattery, especially in the light of Jeffrey's prevailing doubt as to the efficacy of reform. A letter to Francis Horner in 1815 suggests that this doubt was a product of a general pessimism:

Men will not be ripe for a reasonable or liberal government on this side of the millenium. But though old abuses are likely to be somewhat tempered by the mild measures of wealthy communities, and the diffusion of something like intelligence and education among the lower orders, I really cannot bring myself, therefore, to despise and abuse the Bourbons, and Alexander, and Francis, with the energy which you do.... I prefer, upon the whole, a set of tyrants, if it must be so, that we can laugh at, and would rather mix contempt with my political dislike, than admiration or terror. You admire greatness much more than I do, and have a far more extensive taste for the sublime in character.¹

If there is any consistent development in Jeffrey's political thinking it is from what Clive calls a "Burkean strain of awe before established institutions" in the earlier numbers of the Edinburgh,² through the resigned and pessimistic conservatism of this letter to Horner, to a popular conservatism in which Jeffrey emphasises, not the institution, but the public whom he imagines it collectively to represent: "the

1 9 June, 1815, Life of Jeffrey, II, 158. The letter also throws light on Jeffrey's critical position and persona, especially in the Wordsworth reviews.

2 Scotch Reviewers, p.93, though the epithet is too strong - Jeffrey obviously distinguishes his own ideas from Burke's in his review of Bailly's Memoires: "an act of Parliament is revered and obeyed, not because the people are impressed with a constitutional veneration for an institution called a Parliament, but because it has been passed by the authority of those who are recognised as their natural superiors", ER VI (April, 1805), p.144.

administration of the government can never be either safe or happy, unless it be conformable to the wishes and sentiments of that great body".¹ The political ideas are the same, but the emphasis and the justification changes. Certainly all three involve an element of seesaw. Mill realised that "public opinion operates in various ways upon the aristocratical class, partly by contagion, partly by conviction", and not just, as in cases of extreme disaffection, "by intimidation".² According to these possibilities, Jeffrey obviously believed that if the ruling classes acted on popular ideas and popular conviction, this would be the only indulgence "public opinion" would require. But the paradox that Mill discovers between theoretical support and practical neglect remains unresolved.

Taken together, Jeffrey's compromises and contradictions reflect the aspirations and apprehensions of what some modern historians have called "the liberal ideology". For E.J. Hobsbawm, for example, "the liberal ideology" in politics "was neither as coherent nor as consistent" as it was in economics:

Theoretically it remained divided between utilitarianism and adaptations of the age-old doctrines of natural law and natural right, with the latter prevailing. In its practical programme it remained torn between a belief in popular government, i.e. majority rule, which had logic on its side and also reflected the fact that what actually made revolutions and put the effective political pressure behind reform was...mobilization of the masses, and the more prevalent belief in government by a propertied élite - between 'radicalism' and 'whiggism' to use the British terms. For if government really were popular, and if the majority really ruled...could

1 Review of Leckie on the practice of the British government, ER XX, no. 40 (November, 1812), article IV, pp.315-345 (p.333).

2 Westminster Review, I (January, 1824), p.218.

the actual majority...be relied upon to safeguard freedom and to carry out the dictates of reason?¹

Jeffrey's answer to Hobsbawm's question was negative, even when he was struggling to identify the best interests of the people with the will of the people.

Mill oversimplified, however, when he interpreted as cunning or cowardice the compromise that Jeffrey and his contributors sought as a genuinely viable alternative. If the Edinburgh Review had to be considered as "the organ of or at all pledged to a party", argued Hazlitt in The Spirit of the Age, "that party is at least a respectable one, and is placed in the middle between two extremes".² Cockburn defined the doctrines Jeffrey expounded in an early, 200-page unpublished treatise, as those of "a philosophical Whig; firm to the popular principles of our government, and consequently firm against any encroachment, whether from the monarchical or the democratical side".³ (Cockburn gives some indication of how Jeffrey used the term "popular".) Jeffrey always maintained a faith in what Mill branded a disingenuous

1 The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848 (London, 1962), pp.239-240. This hesitancy explains why "it is always a little difficult", as R.J. White has said, "to acquit reformism from John Locke to Lord John Russell of a certain equivocation", in his The Age of George III (London, 1968), p.125. The seesaw, in Jeffrey's case at least, reflects the tension between a belief in the possibility of considerable human development and his persuasion (possibly the legacy of John Knox) "that men are considerably lower than the angels", expressed in a letter to Charles Wilkes, 9 May, 1818, Life of Jeffrey, II, 177-178.

2 The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, XI, 130.

3 Life of Jeffrey, I, 66: compare Cockburn's report of a speech Jeffrey delivered to "The Pantheon Meeting" on reform in 1820: "He made the first, and a very moderate, speech; well calculated for popular effect certainly, but which would have done most men honour in a fastidious parliament" (I, 261, 262).

compromise between aristocracy and democracy:

Do you not see that the whole nation is now divided into two, and only two, parties - the timid, sordid, selfish worshippers of power and adherents of the Court, and the dangerous, discontented, half noble, half mischievous advocates for reform and innovation? Between these stand the Whigs; without popularity, power, or consequence of any sort; with great talents and virtues; but utterly inefficient.... It is your duty, then, to join with that to which you approximate most nearly.... Join the popular party; which is every day growing stronger and more formidable.¹

Mill chose to ignore two points: first, the fact that Jeffrey sought a genuine balance between hereditary wealth and rank on the one hand and an "aristocracy of personal merit" on the other,² and second, Jeffrey's looking to a new and rapidly expanding class of "the people" as the repository of a new wisdom and a new power. In the first place, Mill refused to accept "the vast importance and high and difficult duties of a middle party, in all great national contentions".³ Jeffrey could be condescending and aloof, and he could be a demagogue as the moment chose, but when he discussed the political situation practically he always addressed himself to the need for averting civil war by reconciling the demands of the people, with the demands of the "200

1 In a letter to Horner, 21 December, 1809, published in Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, II, 12-13. Compare Jeffrey's letter to his brother John, 1 June, 1794, Life of Jeffrey, II, 16-17. In this Jeffrey, and with him the Edinburgh Review, reflects the gradual metamorphosis of the Whig party in the early nineteenth century. In the words of John Clive, "the age of oligarchy and faction was dead. The future of the Whig party lay...with that very Radicalism which Grey and most of his friends held for so long in contempt", Scotch Reviewers, p.78. Compare Halévy on the passing of "the days of political oligarchy", England in 1815, p.174.

2 For this phrase, see the article on Burdett and reform, ER XIV (July, 1809), p.291.

3 This Jeffrey re-affirms in a footnote to his "Short Remarks on the State of the Parties...1809", in Contributions, IV, 116. For the original article see ER XV, no. 30 (January, 1810), article XV, pp.504-521.

individuals, who are rather inclined to believe that they may do anything they please".¹ This was to be achieved by giving the people greater representation without, it must be admitted, greatly extending the franchise.

Mill's second oversight was a consequence of his refusal to believe in the related possibility of a viable middle class.² Jeffrey discovered in the 1790s that it was no longer adequate to talk in the terms Carlyle was still using in his Reminiscences, when he saw the people as an amorphous mass which he dubbed contemptuously the "Demos", invoking the time-worn analogy of the Hydra.³ Jeffrey saw that the French Revolution was in part instigated by a better educated and informed, and a wealthier, "people".⁴ That it is the middle class to which Jeffrey refers is confirmed by his belief that the just ambitions of this new enlightened class had, in the Revolution, been thwarted by the "needless asperity and injudicious menaces of the popular party".⁵ "The people are, upon the whole", he wrote in his review of "The State of Parties" in 1809, "both more moral and more intelligent than they ever were in any former period".⁶ Thus the idea of a popular sanction takes on a

1 Letter to Horner, 18 September, 1806, Life of Jeffrey, II, 110-111.

2 Hobsbawm points out that Mill was unusual in trusting the "capacity" of the middle class "to retain the support of the labouring poor permanently even in a democratic republic", The Age of Revolution, p.240. In this trust - thus identifying the aims of both the middle classes and the masses - lay his disagreement with the Edinburgh.

3 See above, pp.293-294.

4 See the review of Mounier's De l'Influence attribuée aux Philosophes... sur la Revolution de France, ER I, no. 1 (October, 1802), article I, pp.1-18: the Revolution "proceeded from the change that had taken place in the condition and sentiments of the people; from the progress of commercial opulence; from the diffusion of information, and the prevalence of political discussion" (pp.7-8).

5 In the review of Bailly's Memoires, ER VI (April, 1805), p.141.

6 ER XV (January, 1810), p.515.

narrowing meaning. What Karl Miller says of Henry Cockburn is as applicable to his friend Jeffrey: "For Cockburn, by and large, 'the people' were those people who deserved the vote. As Brougham put it, a year later, in the House of Lords, 'if there is the mob, there is the people also'".¹

We should pause here to register a warning issued by the historian G. Kitson Clark about the use of the term "middle class":

It may be that straight historians, the historians so to speak of the legitimate stage, have by now become a little uneasy about the use of those words, but what one might call para-historians - the writers and broadcasters on the history of art, the literature critics, the politicians and preachers dabbling in history - still use those words with avidity and with them the whole weary range of phrases which have become normal in any description of England at any period of the nineteenth century - 'the rising middle class', 'the predominant middle class', 'middle-class taste', and perhaps above all 'middle-class morality'.²

But apart from the extreme difficulty of explaining the distinctions that Jeffrey is making within "the people" without resorting to such terms as "middle class", there is the added rationale that, as Kitson Clark himself goes on to point out, "a belief in the importance and significance of the middle class in the nineteenth century derives from contemporary opinion".³ Jeffrey talked in the plural of "the middling

1 Cockburn's Millenium, p.107.

2 The Making of Victorian England, Being the Ford Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford (London, 1962), p.5. Compare R.J. White, who refers, disapprovingly, to the middle class as "that favourite causa causans (jointly with 'the Industrial Revolution') of almost everything in the history of modern England", The Age of George III, p.231, and Howard Mumford Jones, who is more despairing: "Throughout history the middle class has always been rising", Revolution and Romanticism, p.40. Still, they all subscribe to some version of the idea of an ascendent middle class.

3 The Making of Victorian England, p.6. Kitson Clark also later admits that, though "too indefinite and subjective to be used with any comfort", "the conception is too important and significant to be abandoned" (p.119). One early use of the term is attributed by the Oxford English Dictionary to Jeffrey's friend, and the prolific

classes" in 1807, when he warned the higher classes that Cobbett's "sentiments prevail among the middling classes of the community",¹ and in 1812 when he defined them rather unenlighteningly as "almost all those who are below the sphere of what is called fashionable or public life, and who do not aim at distinction or notoriety beyond the circle of their equals in fortune and situation".²

Jeffrey knew that the best way to render the "mob" less of a threat, and avoid "the plain danger of doing what might be right for a perfectly instructed society, for one just enough instructed to think itself fit for anything",³ was to promote the interests of the "people", or middle class.⁴ He expressed this, though less cynically, in a letter to Horner of 1806:

contributor to the Edinburgh, Henry (Lord) Brougham, in 1831: "By the people...I mean the middle classes, the wealth and intelligence of the country, the glory of the British name". Compare Hobsbawm, who says "the actual term 'middle class' first appears around 1812", The Age of Revolution, p.185, though Hobsbawm perhaps follows the OED, whose first entry is dated 1812. Raymond Williams records the chronology of the terminology of class-consciousness in his Culture and Society: "First comes lower classes, to join lower orders, which appears earlier in the eighteenth century. Then, in the 1790s, we get higher classes; middle classes and middling classes follow at once; working classes in about 1815; upper classes in the 1820s" (p.xv) - a chronology which suggests that Wordsworth's use of the term "middle...classes" in the Advertisement to Lyrical Ballads (1798), may be one of the earliest - Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 116.

1 ER X (July, 1807), p.421.

2 In a review of Crabbe's Tales, 1812, ER XX, no. 40 (November, 1812), article II, pp.277-305 (p.280 note).

3 Quoted from a letter to William Empson, 26 November, 1837, Life of Jeffrey, II, 294.

4 Walter Bagehot appropriately defined the popular appeal of the Edinburgh in a paradox, of which he seems unaware: "Its appeal is to the people; as has been shown, it addresses the élite of common men, sensible in their affairs, intelligent in their tastes, influential among their neighbours", "The First Edinburgh Reviewers", The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot, I, 323.

I agree with you entirely in thinking that there is in the opulence, intelligence, and morality of our middling people a sufficient quarry of materials to make or to repair a free constitution; but the difficulty is in raising them to the surface.¹

In looking to the middle class or classes for material and moral salvation, Jeffrey, as Clive observed of the Edinburgh generally, anticipates the faith in middle-class virtues commonly associated with Victorian England.²

In a passage introducing a review of the Memoires de Frederique Sophie Wilhelm de Prusse Jeffrey takes up this idea of the sanity and stability of the middle class. By associating its virtues directly with the social conformity required of its members, the passage offers an interesting variation on the theme of the common apprehension:

Philosophers have long considered it as probable, that the private manners of sovereigns are vulgar, their pleasures low, and their dispositions selfish; - that the two extremes of life, in short, approach pretty closely to each other; and that the Masters of mankind, when stripped of the artificial pomp and magnificence which invests them in public, resemble nothing so nearly as the meanest of the multitude. The ground of this opinion is, that the very highest and the very lowest of mankind are equally beyond the influence of that wholesome control, to which all the intermediate classes are subjected by their mutual dependence, and the need they have for the goodwill and esteem of their fellows.³

1 18 September, 1806, Life of Jeffrey, II, 110; compare Horner who, in the letter to Jeffrey which this answers, characterized "genuine democracy" as "moderate but increasing incomes, a careful education of their youth, and a strict observance of the great common virtues", 15 September, 1806, Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, I, 374.

2 Scotch Reviewers, p.148.

3 ER XX, no. 40 (November, 1812), article 1, pp.255-277 (p.255). Jeffrey occasionally regrets this "wholesome control"; see the article on The Paradise of Coquettes, ER XXIV (February, 1815), pp.398-399 for example, from which I quoted above, p.53.

Jeffrey supported the philosophers; the Edinburgh Review must be recognised as instigating the self-consciousness of the middle class, or classes, and with it a consciousness of their own independence from, and superiority to, both the aristocracy and the mob or lower orders.¹ Jeffrey's complex attitudes towards "popular" government are summed up by E.J. Hobsbawm in an entirely different context: "Middle-class demands - often philosophically formulated as the inevitable working out of the tendencies of history - carried out by an enlightened state".²

Thus over the years "the people", with significant qualifications, gradually became the repository of political wisdom, just as they had become the repository of literary and other wisdom. (Jeffrey talked of "old established commonwealths, either political or literary".³) But to whom did Jeffrey refer when he invoked "the people" in literary criticism?

Many of the reviews represent Jeffrey's thinking through his ideas about 'popularity' and its value in print. Nowhere is this exercise more apparent than in his review of Scott's The Lady of the Lake. A theory of poetic merit so allied with an aesthetic theory of universal

1 In his book The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880 (London and Toronto, 1965), the social historian Harold Perkin describes the same phenomenon in somewhat different terms: "At some point between the French Revolution and the Great Reform Act, the vertical antagonism and horizontal solidarities of class emerged on a national scale from and overlay the vertical bonds and horizontal rivalries of connection and interest" (p.177)!

2 He is actually defining "German moderate liberalism", The Age of Revolution, p.249.

³ ER VII (October, 1805), p.1.

association might be effective enough when criticizing an unpopular author who does not appeal to the critic, but it presents problems when dealing with patently inferior literature that has achieved a large measure of popularity. Scott's poetry presented precisely this problem to Jeffrey.

"A popularity so universal is a pretty sure proof of extraordinary merit", the review begins, "a far surer one, we readily admit, than would be afforded by any praises of ours".¹ In this disparity lay the critic's dilemma. Jeffrey proceeds to demur, and to establish "the precise limits of the connexion which...indisputably subsists between success and desert, and to ascertain how far unexampled popularity implies unrivaled talent".² But the interest of the article on The Lady of the Lake lies not in the fact that Jeffrey postpones the possibility of universal agreement - a shrewd enough tactic in itself, and comparable with his doubts about extending the franchise - but in the implicit faith it expresses in the middle-class reader, with whose growing morality and intelligence the politics of the Edinburgh have acquainted us. The Victorian publisher Charles Knight observed that there "appears to have been a sort of tacit agreement amongst all who spoke of public enlightenment in the days of George III. to put out of view the great body of 'the nation' who paid for their bread by their weekly wages";³ so it was in Jeffrey's case.

1 ER XVI (August, 1810), p.263. The change which Jeffrey's attitude had undergone in advocating any amount of popularity may be seen by comparing this assumption with a passage from his review of James Montgomery's The Wanderer of Switzerland, and other Poems, ER IX, no. 18 (January, 1807), article VI, pp.347-354, on the "young, half-educated women, sickly tradesmen, and enamoured apprentices.... who take off editions, - and create a demand for nonsense" (p.348).

2 ER XVI (August, 1810), p.263 (my italics).

3 In his The Old Printer and the Modern Press (London, 1854), pp.226-227. I am indebted for this quotation to Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900 (Chicago and London, 1957), p.41.

The province of literature could seem at times quite as radical, and the public to which literature appealed or wished to appeal as broad, as anything in Tom Paine - or, indeed, in Wordsworth. Jeffrey finds exemplified in the labouring and underprivileged class, he says in an article on Crabbe's The Borough, the simple emotions which form the basis of the common apprehension. The sentiments, like some in his political essays especially when taken out of context, are characterized by "that pernicious cant that all men are equal" to which Sydney Smith took exception:

Now, the delineation of all that concerns the lower and most numerous classes of society, is...on a footing with the pictures of our primary affections... It is human nature, and human feelings, after all, that form the true source of interest in poetry of every description; - and the splendour and the marvels by which it is sometimes surrounded, serve no other purpose than to fix our attention on those workings of the heart, and those energies of the understanding, which alone command all the genuine sympathies of human beings, - and which may be found as abundantly in the breasts of cottagers as of kings.¹

"Status naturae levelling" was the description the horrified "Macro" applied to such sentiments.² The more conservative, or reactionary, members of the public saw in the Edinburgh's support of "the great reading multitude" the threat of general literacy.³ The "Independent Anti-Reformer", for example, denied that "no danger is to be apprehended from what" the Edinburgh spoke of as "the prodigious development of the understanding and intelligence in the great mass of the people, or (in more correct language) from the prodigious development of seditious and

1 ER XVI (April, 1810), p.33; compare above, p.294 note 1.

2 The Scotiad, or Wise Men of the North!!!, p.27, ll.17-20.

3 For this phrase, see below, Appendix I, p.342.

democratical principles".¹

Yet in the review of Crabbe we are no sooner encouraged in a sympathy based on equality, or rather on a shared emotion, than Jeffrey explains, on the following page, the real reason for the reader's pleasure: "our concern for their sufferings is at once softened and endeared to us by the recollection of our own exemption from them, and by the feeling, that we frequently have it in our power to relieve them".² The emotions excited are not in fact common at all, but are common only to a particular, philanthropic class. In terms of Jeffrey's aesthetic theory they are accidental, peculiar to a group and not relevant to mankind universally. Jeffrey's enjoyment of this type of imitation is one described by Coleridge in the Biographia as "that pleasure of doubtful moral effect, which persons of elevated rank and of superior refinement oftentimes derive from a happy imitation of the rude unpolished manners and discourse of their inferiors". It is marked by "the reader's conscious feeling of his superiority awakened by the contrast presented to him".³ It represents, for our purposes, an escape from the idea that the emotions common to the masses constitute the emotion of beauty upon which taste is grounded.

In another review of Crabbe, this time of the Tales (1812), Jeffrey defers once again to the "humble" classes as a measure of common emotion: "to all the more tender and less turbulent affections, upon which the beauty of the pathetic is altogether dependent, we apprehend

1 In his Letter &c [to the Editor of the Edinburgh Review], p.49 (italics mine). For a discussion of the contemporary literacy debate, see Altick's The English Common Reader throughout, but especially pp.81-172, and R.K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader 1790-1848: Literacy and Social Tension (London, 1955).

2 ER XVI (April, 1810), p.34.

3 Biographia Literaria, II, 30.

it to be quite manifest, that their proper soil and nidus is the privacy and simplicity of humble life".¹ This class is not, however, humble in the sense that Wordsworth, to whom the passage is obviously indebted, used the term in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads.² Jeffrey refers rather to the familiar middle or "middling classes". Crabbe is praised because he chose for imitation those situations and sentiments that would be familiar to the middle-class reader. His poetry, Jeffrey argues, has the numerical virtue of appealing to a larger number of readers than "fashionable" poetry does - upwards of 200,000. The audience of "fashionable or public life" numbered only 20,000.³ (The population of Britain, incidentally, was about twelve millions, which confirms

1 ER XX (November, 1812), p.281.

2 Preface (1800): "Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language", Wordsworth Prose Works, I, 124. Jeffrey's reviews of Crabbe and Cowper are those most obviously reminiscent of Wordsworth (for Jeffrey on Cowper see above, p.223); his defence of "Mr Crabbe's inimitable description and pathetic pleading for the poor", for example, might be Wordsworth on "The Idiot Boy": "The subject is one of those, which to many will appear repulsive, and, to some fastidious natures perhaps, disgusting", ER XVI (April, 1810), p.43, and Jeffrey on the middling classes may be compared with Wordsworth on "the lower classes of society": "though their taste may not be so correct and fastidious, we are persuaded that their sensibility is greater", ER XX (November, 1812), p.280 - compare Wordsworth to John Wilson, [7 June, 1802], Wordsworth Letters, I, 354-358 (p.356). Little wonder that Francis Horner responded to Jeffrey's review of The Borough with a caution: "Does not your critique, in some of its expressions and illustrations, break in a little upon the doctrines which you urged against Wordsworth?...a captious person might set you in some sentences against yourself", 16 July, 1810, Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, II, 53.

3 ER XX (November, 1812), p.280. (In his Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, III, 54, these figures are changed to 300,000 and 30,000 respectively.)

Knight's assessment of Georgian ideas of "public enlightenment".¹) It is interesting to see Jeffrey take his quantitative theory of critical judgement so far; utilitarian sociology had obviously had its effect.

He does, however, argue for more than the numerical superiority of the "middling classes", attributing to them a superior sensibility.² As Jeffrey on politics and society had looked forward to the reign of the middle class in Victorian England, so in his review of Crabbe he looks forward to the middle-class literature of the coming century:

the humble and patient hopes - the depressing embarrassments - the little mortifications - the slender triumphs, and strange temptations which arise in middling life, and are the theme of Mr Crabbe's finest and most touching representations, - can only be guessed at by those who glitter in the higher walks of existence; while they must raise many a tumultuous throb and a fond recollection in the breasts of those to whom they reflect so truly the image of their own estate, and reveal so clearly the secrets of their habitual sensations.³

Jeffrey was surely closer to the truth about Crabbe when, in his earlier review of Poems (1807), he remarked that "instead of that uniform tint of pensive tenderness which overspreads the whole poetry of Goldsmith, we find in Mr Crabbe many gleams of gaiety and humour".⁴ But the later review gives us a better idea of the values, and the reading public, on which Jeffrey came to rely.

1 Especially when, as a tentative estimation, two thirds of the working-class population were literate - see Webb, The British Working Class Reader, p.21 (it was certainly "much larger than has generally been thought", p.23). For my population figures I rely upon Sir Llewellyn Woodward, The Age of Reform 1815-1870, The Oxford History of England, XIII, second edition (Oxford, 1962), p.1.

2 "persons in middling life would naturally be most touched with the emotions that belong to their own condition, but that those emotions are in themselves the most powerful, and consequently the best fitted for poetical or pathetic representation", ER XX (November, 1812), p.281.

3 ER XX (November, 1812), p.280.

4 ER XII (April, 1808), p.132.

Whatever the change in his attitude to Crabbe, however, and despite his dismissal of "the middling and lower orders" in the article on Southey's Thalaba,¹ this was not simply a later development of Jeffrey's social and literary theory. In 1801 Jeffrey wrote to his brother John of the sickness and death of his intended father-in-law, suggesting that it "is in these ordinary and vulgar calamities of private life...that the most exquisite misery is endured. Campaigns and revolutions are nothing to them".² Throughout his life this attitude played a progressively more prominent part in his public criticism. In the same letter in which Horner asked Jeffrey to bring his "thoughts on the philosophy of poetry and poetic expression into the form of a systematic essay", he requested one other work for which he believed Jeffrey eminently qualified: "a little treatise on the ethics of common life, and the ways and means of ordinary happiness".³

Before the idea of Jeffrey as the prophet of Victorian middle-class England is pushed too far, however, it should be registered that the epithet "Victorian" is as problematic as "middle class". Indeed Walter E. Houghton found in Jeffrey's attitudes the very antithesis of those of the Victorian period, and saw in the confrontation of Jeffrey and Carlyle a symbol of the confrontation of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries respectively.⁴ Certainly Jeffrey carried many

1 See ER I (October, 1802), p.67.

2 2 October, 1801, Life of Jeffrey, II, 59.

3 See letter of 16 July, 1810, Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, II, 53.

4 In his The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven and London, 1957), pp.224-226. Merrit Hughes's implicit comparison is with the Houdon bust of Voltaire: "Jeffrey's fine, smiling realism and the dry light of his mind Carlyle could not away with, so he called the critic, not too inaptly, the Scotch Voltaire" - "The Humanism of Francis Jeffrey", p.249. The early, conservative critics of the Edinburgh had anticipated them. The Rev. James Somerville lumped together "the philosophers of Paris and Edinburgh", in his Remarks on

of the assumptions of the Augustan humanists into the nineteenth century, as we saw. Moreover other, more specific objections can be found to seeing in the Edinburgh the making of Victorian England. While its economic policy was undeniably tailored to the new age, for example, Jeffrey found many of the new mercantilist values abhorrent.¹ And if the rise of religious consciousness is seen as central to an interpretation of Victorian England, then the pages of the Edinburgh, and especially of Jeffrey's contributions, are unrepresentative, for they are devoid of religious discussion.² Critics, like poets, can look before and after. The statement that Jeffrey, through the Edinburgh, championed the interests of the new class or classes should be qualified by further stating the obvious fact that he was supporting only such attributes of the new class as he approved. The increased intelligence and morality of the middle class, its unostentatious wealth and culture,

an Article in the Edinburgh Review; in which the Doctrine of Hume on Miracles Is Maintained (Edinburgh, 1815) - as the title implies, Somerville feared the Edinburgh was labouring "to make converts to infidelity" (p.33); 'Peter Morris's' friend Mr Wastle regarded the contemporary "Scotch philosophers", and "above the rest, Mr Jeffrey and the Edinburgh Reviewers, as the legitimate progeny of the sceptical philosophers of the last age" in Lockhart's Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk, II, 128 (letter XL); and George Gilfillan mirrored these contemporary objections when in 1845 he complained of the "air of levity and dogmatism, added to a sneering, captious, sceptical spirit, imbibed from intimacy with 'Candide' and the 'Philosophical Dictionary'", A Gallery of Literary Portraits (Edinburgh, 1845), p.4.

1 See Flynn, Francis Jeffrey, pp.90-91.

2 See Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England, Chapter VI, "The Religion of the People". One of Jeffrey's rare articles on theology - review of William Payley's Natural Theology, ER I, no. 2 (January, 1803), article III, pp.287-305 - ends, as Philip Flynn points out in Francis Jeffrey, pp.85-86, without commitment: "The metaphysical objections of the atheistical philosophers are not perhaps sufficiently weighed and refuted" (p.304). A late letter to his son-in-law William Empson, describing a friendly "disputation", best captures his attitude: he discussed "the good and object of going to church, though I confined my views chiefly to the moral rather than to the religious effects", 1 June, 1847, Life of Jeffrey, II, 417.

and more than anything its sense of public responsibility - these were the attributes that Jeffrey endeavoured to reinforce. These people were his ideal reading public.

Jeffrey showed varying degrees of humility when he found himself differing from the reading public. The review of Scott's The Lady of the Lake represents Jeffrey's struggle to superimpose his own, "refined" taste on the misguided taste of a credulous public. Normally, however, whenever the critic discovers himself disapproving where the public approves, "even he poor man is obliged to torment himself in inventing an excuse for it when every body else is pleased".¹ It was his policy, that is, to use the Review as an expression of public opinion, at least "in most things":

We have been too long conversant with the untractable generation of authors, to expect that our friendly expostulations should have any effect upon them, - except as exponents of the silent, practical judgment of the public. To that superior tribunal, however, we do think ourselves entitled to refer; and while we, who profess the stately office of correcting and instructing, are yet willing, in most things, to bow to its authority, we really cannot help thinking, that a poet, whose sole object is to give delight and to gain glory, ought to show something of the same docility.²

Accordingly a review often devotes its "judgment" to an anticipation of

1 As Jeffrey wrote to James Grahame, 8 April, 1801. The letter is in the National Library of Scotland, MS. 3519 (f3).

2 To quote from his review of Southey's Curse of Kehama, ER XVII (February, 1811), pp.429-430 (*italics mine*). Cobbett is actually accused of having "rather followed than fashioned the impressions of those for whom his publications are intended", ER X (July, 1807), p.421, but Cobbett's "public" is lower on the social scale than his own. For Jeffrey's ambivalence towards Cobbett's reading public the whole article should be consulted.

the public reaction, in the present and in the future. Reputation becomes the central issue. This is, of course, the inevitable result of a theory that measures its standards by the common apprehension. At times the technique of anticipation verges on self-parody:

For our own parts, however, we are of opinion, that [The Lady of the Lake] will be oftener read hereafter than either [Marmion or The Lay of the Last Minstrel]; and that, if it had appeared first in the series, their reception would have been less favourable than that which it has experienced.¹

"For our own parts", wrote Jeffrey again, this time in an article on Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, "when we speak in our collective and public capacity, we have neither resentments nor predilections".² There is a peculiar propriety in Jeffrey's using, like other reviewers of the period, the first person plural throughout his criticism. Edward Copleston disliked the air of authority with which "the plural we" is charged:

under the sanction of this imposing style, your strictures, your praises, and your dogmas will command universal attention, and be received as the fruit of united talents, acting on one common principle - as the judgments of a tribunal who decide only on mature deliberation, and who protect the interests of literature with unceasing vigilance.³

Jeffrey, as an exponent "of the silent, practical judgment of the public", would have agreed with Copleston's mocking analysis. He assumed that as a critic he represented, even as he would a judge, the combined wisdom of mankind, and he spoke with a confidence appropriate to that assumption, "though casuists may mask dishonour and purists startle at

1 ER XVI (August, 1810), p.273. I have italicised these two words to clarify the meaning.

2 ER XIX, no. 38 (February, 1812), article X, pp.466-477 (p.477).

3 In his Advice to a Young Reviewer, with a Specimen of the Art (Oxford, 1807), p.1.

shadows".¹ Where Copleston saw the technique as arrogating to itself more authority than it was entitled to, other critics, like Joseph Beatty, followed Jeffrey himself in seeing the Edinburgh as possessed of precisely that authority.²

Jeffrey would also have acceded to Copleston's assessment that the contemporary reviewers followed rather than fashioned public taste.³ Leslie Stephen made the same basic error as Copleston when he complained of Jeffrey that "though he affects to be a dictator, he is really a follower of the fashion".⁴ Though the tone is dictatorial, Jeffrey was proud of his enshrining the public taste. The argument simply reflects different attitudes to this taste, and to the status quo generally. We know that Jeffrey believed in it, with reservations, and that he continued to believe in it even when he discarded the idea of universal or inevitable associations and was forced to admit that it offered, at best, a rule of thumb. Discussing literary criticism in his second review of Hayley's Cowper he argued that

It is not easy, indeed, to say to what degree the judgements of those who live in the world are biassed by the opinions that prevail in it; but, in matters of this kind, the general prevalence of an opinion is almost the only test we can have of its truth; and the judgement of a secluded man is almost as justly convicted of error, when it runs counter to that opinion, as it is extolled for sagacity, when it happens to coincide with it.⁵

1 See above, p.214.

2 See Beatty on "the common-sense reason of the populace, sometimes personified in a critic", in his article "Lord Jeffrey and Wordsworth", p.221.

3 "It will greatly lighten your labours to follow the public taste, instead of taking it upon you to direct it", Advice to a Young Reviewer, p.3.

4 Hours in a Library, third series, p.162.

5 In his second article on Cowper, ER IV, no. 8 (July, 1804), article II, pp.273-284 (p.282).

The sentiments are pure Johnson, even down to the hint of regret: "Of things that terminate in human life the world is the proper judge", Johnson wrote in his Life of Pope, "to despise its sentence, if it were possible, is not just; and if it were just is not possible".¹

Again, as in his aesthetic theory, Jeffrey is confusing the consensus gentium with absolute values. The implications and limitations of this democratic notion of truth are highlighted by comparing it with what John Stuart Mill, sensitive to the tyranny of the majority, has to say in On Liberty of public opinion: "If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind".² Mill was writing over fifty years later, having no doubt experienced some of the ill effects of "that wholesome control" that people in the middle class or classes exercised over each other's lives. The second chapter of Mill's On Liberty might have been designed to answer the tendency of Jeffrey's and the Edinburgh's to overrate the public voice.

It is impossible to say to what degree the Edinburgh followed public taste, and to what degree it fashioned it. The relationship was symbiotic. Even Jeffrey's biographer observes, disapprovingly, that the habit of the reviewer's anonymous criticism "exalts each into an

1 Lives of the Poets, III, 210. Compare Jeffrey's review of Cromek's Reliques of Robert Burns on "the ultimate judgment of the public" as "always sound, or at least decisive", ER XIII (January, 1809), p.255.

2 Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Vol. XVIII, Essays on Politics and Society, edited by J.M. Robson (London and Toronto, 1977), p.229; compare later: "Mankind can hardly be too often reminded, that there was once a man called Socrates, between whom and the legal authorities and public opinion of his time, there took place a memorable collision" (p.235).

invisible chair of public censorship"¹ - censorious, that is, not of the public, but on behalf of it. What Kitson Clark has to say about the illusion of anything approaching democracy may be applied to the tacit influences of the Edinburgh Review over the readers it purported to represent:

the mass of ordinary people are probably too inchoate, too confused in mind and too intermittent in their interest to give any definite lead, and the idea of democratic initiative is often the cloak for the operations of a small minority, to whose views the majority normally gives assent.²

Cockburn alluded to this dependence when he said of the Edinburgh, in the year 1809, that "its periodical appearance was looked for as that of the great exponent of what people should think on matters of taste and policy".³

Yet it is enough for our purpose that Jeffrey believed he did represent public opinion. As he wrote to Alison:

from my careless and hasty way of reading I have generally found my own impressions those of the great reading multitude - Where I am puzzled the herd puzzle too - and where I grow impatient to know what an author would be at, I reasonably presume that ordinary readers will [?worry/weary] a little also.⁴

It may not show great depth in periodical criticism, but it showed Jeffrey's resigned faith in "the great reading multitude" as the ultimate touchstone. It is ironic that D. Nichol Smith should compliment Jeffrey

1 Life of Jeffrey, I, 127.

2 The Making of Victorian England, p.233.

3 Life of Jeffrey, I, 188.

4 See Appendix I below, pp.342-3. Later in the century Sir George Newnes, co-introducer of the popular daily papers, was making the same claim in a very different social and political environment: "'I am the average man'...'I am not merely putting myself in his place. That is the real reason why I know what he wants'", as quoted in Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (London, 1932), p.179.

because his choice of quotation "will commonly be found to have anticipated the more deliberate choice of the reading public".¹ Jeffrey represented public opinion relative to the laws of poetry previously established, which were merely an expression of that opinion. There may be some anomalies and defects but he believed that, as he said appealing beyond politics to the people, "in a certain stage of civilization there is generated such a quantity of intelligence and good sense as to disarm absurd institutions of their power to do mischief, and to administer defective laws into a system of perfect equity".² When not indulging the pessimistic side of his nature, Jeffrey believed that Britain at least was arriving at a similar stage, and that the Edinburgh Review was responsible for encouraging it by promoting the interests of both the intelligent and sensitive members of the established classes, who represented stability, and the rising middle class whose increasing intelligence, wealth, morality, and public spiritedness entitled them to self-determination. In this light he saw his own "dissertations" as embodying the zeitgeist, as "humbly conceived to be among the legitimate means by which the English public both instructs and expresses itself".³

1 In the introduction to his selection of Jeffrey's Literary Criticism (London, 1910), pp.xii-xiii.

2 In his review of Bentham's Traité de Legislation, ER IV (April, 1804), pp.19-20.

3 In his article on the "State and Prospects of Europe", ER XXIII (April, 1814), p.39. Horner describes it more accurately in a letter to Jeffrey himself of 5 June, 1807, as "a most useful channel for the circulation of liberal opinions very extensively among the higher and middling classes of the people of England", Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, I, 403.

II

It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that when Jeffrey talks of "universal associations" he means those associations which prevail amongst the growing middle-class reading public. The softening of his attitude towards infringements of the neo-Classical rules is a part of his attempt to reconcile aristocratic, Augustan values with the values, and demands, of this new reading public. I spoke earlier of the potential for conspiracy between the critic and the public on the one hand, and against the author on the other, in an aesthetic exclusively dependent upon consensus;¹ in Jeffrey's levelling distrust of the "mystical" and the "methodistical" this conspiracy has been realised. Lockhart saw Jeffrey's object as

merely to make the author look foolish; and he prostitutes his own fine talents, to enable the common herd of his readers to suppose themselves to be looking down from the vantage-ground of superior intellect, upon the poor, blundering, deluded poet or philosopher, who is the subject of the review.²

Lockhart exaggerates the malice prepense, but it is a fair description of the game Jeffrey occasionally plays, certainly of the one he plays with Wordsworth, which is marked by a complete lack of humility.

Worse than this is the tendency of this indiscriminate and reductive approach to become philistine, a tendency which is part of the larger problem of literary history raised by the discussion of Jeffrey's responsibility to a new reading public. The new reliance on the reader in eighteenth-century literary theory was not just an appeal to a

1 See above, p.205.

2 Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk, II, 131 (Letter XL).

hypothetical entity, unprejudiced and unliterary, but also reflected a new economic reliance on the reading public: "the dependence of the author upon the nobleman was slowly being replaced by the appeal of the artist to middle-class purchasers".¹ An examination of the precise causal relationship between the growing concentration upon reader's psychology in art theory on the one hand, and the increasing dependence upon an expanding middle-class audience on the other, is beyond the scope of this essay. But the relationship existed and should be recognised.

The English men of letters in the eighteenth century generally looked upon the changes with relish, seeing in them what one writer calls "that hoped-for later dispensation - an autonomous and inviolable author working for a free and responsible audience".² Johnson's theoretical and practical faith in the public is legendary. So well known was it that, when Prime Minister Canning was approached for patronage of a Royal Society of Literature, he could refuse with authority: "'I am really of opinion, with Dr. Johnson, that the multitudinous personage, called The Public, is after all, the best

1 H.M. Jones, Revolution and Romanticism, p.49.

2 I am quoting from César Graña's book, Bohemia versus Bourgeois, a study of the relationship between, in the words of the subtitle, French Society and the French Man of Letters in the Nineteenth Century (New York and London, 1964), p.40. There is no equivalent study of this changing relationship throughout the Romantic period in Britain, although the response of the Romantic poets to their public is often so important to their art and to their ideas of themselves as artists, and is crucial to a discussion of the one rallying point of all Romantic theory: the Imagination. This is no doubt partly because the lines between different ideologies and different historical periods in France are better defined, and events and attitudes lend themselves more easily to generalization. Some brief studies of English literature do exist, however, though they tend to concentrate on the artist: see, for example, Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, Part I, Chapter 2, on "The Romantic Artist"; Frank Kermode, Romantic Image, Part I, Chapter 1, on "The Artist in Isolation". (Williams's is the broader and, for my purposes, the more relevant study.) Historians like Halévy and Hobsbawm analyse this phenomenon, and Ian Watt discusses some eighteenth-century developments in his The Rise of the Novel (London, 1957).

patron of literature and learned men'".¹ Without exaggerating its historical significance, Johnson's letter to the Earl of Chesterfield, which manages to articulate centuries of resentment against capricious private patronage, is symbolic of this changed and changing attitude.² Johnson's friend Oliver Goldsmith also exulted in his new found independence:

At present the few poets of England no longer depend on the Great for subsistence, they have now no other patrons but the public, and the public collectively considered, is a good and a generous master....

A man of letters at present, whose works are valuable, is perfectly sensible of their value. Every polite member of the community by buying what he writes, contributes to reward him.³

Of course private patronage had not died out by the end of the eighteenth century; the biographies of Wordsworth and Coleridge alone contradict such an oversimplified view of the economic history of authorship.⁴ And Johnson received a pension of £300 a year that at once looks back to aristocratic patronage - it was a gift from the king, instigated by Lord Bute - and, insofar as there seem to have been no

1 As quoted in A Publisher and His Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of the late John Murray, edited by Samuel Smiles, in 2 vols (London, 1891), I, 237 note. I am indebted for this quotation to Halévy, England in 1815, p.500.

2 See The Life of Johnson, I, 261-263.

3 In his Citizen of the World, Letter LXXXIV, The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, edited by Arthur Friedman, Volume II (Oxford, 1966), p.344.

4 Whether Raisley Calvert's £900 legacy or Lord Lonsdale's help in purchasing Broad How, his £100 gift, and the position of Distributor of Stamps that he secured for Wordsworth, adds up to patronage it is difficult to say - see Moorman, Wordsworth The Early Years, pp.250-253; William Wordsworth: A Biography The Later Years 1803-1850 (Oxford, 1965), pp.60-63, 244 - but the assistance of Lord Lonsdale's and Sir George Beaumont's help in various ways made up for the negligible remuneration he received for his creative work. Coleridge, of course, was granted an annuity by the Wedgwood brothers, see James Dykes Campbell, Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Narrative of the Events of His Life (London and New York, 1894), pp.82-84.

obligations attached to the grant, also looks forward to the state patronage of the arts in the twentieth century.¹ Or, to look at it from the other angle, the public voice had always been a voice to be reckoned with in England. When the Earl of Southampton refused Shakespeare patronage,² he ensured that he depended on "the nation at large" - to use Jeffrey's phrase³ - in a strictly economic sense.

Still, a publishing revolution did begin in the 1790s which guaranteed "that in the nineteenth century the number of English readers, and therefore the productions of the press, multiplied spectacularly".⁴ The very inception and survival of the Edinburgh Review was a symptom of the new and extensive interest in reading amongst a broader public than had existed one hundred years earlier - though one hundred years earlier Addison and Steele might fairly be said to have begun encouraging and satisfying this interest. Publishing details register this change. Johnson received ten guineas for his "London" from Robert Dodsley, and told Boswell years later that he "'might, perhaps, have accepted of less; but that Paul Whitehead had a little before got ten guineas for a poem; and [he] would not take less than Paul Whitehead'".⁵ That was in 1738. In 1819 George Crabbe received "the munificent sum of 3,000 l." for Tales of the Hall⁶ (a success in which Jeffrey's reviews must have played no small part).

1 The Life of Johnson, I, 372-377.

2 Or was it financially untenable? - whatever the reason, in 1594, "Southampton now departs from the biographical record"; S. Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life (Oxford, 1975), pp.127-134 (p.134).

3 See above, p.245 note 5.

4 Richard Altick, The English Common Reader, p.1.

5 The Life of Johnson, I, 124.

6 The Life of George Crabbe by His Son, with an introduction by Edmund Blunden (London, 1947), p.230.

That Johnson was comparatively unknown should be taken into account, but still Rasselas only earned him £100, and that was published after the famous Dictionary.¹ If we except Pope,² only the novelists Richardson, Fielding, and Smollet thrived on the market, and thrived precisely because of the changing constitution of the reading public.³ A comparison between the actual number of copies of various titles sold explains why such a disparity in financial reward should exist. In the middle of the eighteenth century, according to Richard Altick, "four or five editions, totalling less than 9,000 copies, were all the market could absorb of even the most talked-of novel in a single year". In 1818 Scott's Rob Roy sold more than this in a fortnight, and in 1848 Dickens's The Haunted Man sold twice this number on the first day (ten years earlier the first instalment of Nicholas Nickleby had sold 50,000 copies).⁴

The reason why Wordsworth and Coleridge received patronage was because, by the early nineteenth century, the dream of a reasonable and sympathetic public had turned sour. At best, the majority saw the fine arts as ornamental and peripheral to life, fulfilling "the higher wants and more refined pleasures of the species" to quote Jeffrey.⁵ (And these "wants" were best satisfied by the sort of literature to which

1 The Life of Johnson, I, 341.

2 Pope made the "munificent sum" of £10,000 for his translation of Homer - see Pat Rogers, An Introduction to Pope (London, 1975), p.6.

3 See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, especially chapter 2, "The Reading Public and the Rise of the Novel". Compare Raymond Williams: "in the nineteenth century there was a major, and at times spectacular, expansion in reading, while in the eighteenth century there was again an important expansion which both created regular journalism and changed the social basis of literature", The Long Revolution (London, 1961), p.156.

4 Altick, The English Common Reader, pp.50, 383, 384.

5 In his review of Thelwall's Poems, ER II (April, 1803), p.197.

they had become accustomed; what had given them pleasure would do so again, without too much exertion on their part.) At worst, the middle-class public, "deprived by their eagerness to accumulate wealth of the leisure necessary for the appreciation of the fine arts", could be "imbued with a spirit of positive antipathy towards the artistic".¹ What resulted was that extraordinary ambivalence which characterizes the attitude of the Romantic poet towards his public. No better example of this exists than the Biographia itself, the very composition of which testifies to Coleridge's need to justify himself before a public that he suspects is hostile, and which he is convinced is inferior.² Throughout the Biographia he neglects few opportunities to impeach the judgement of the reading public whom, from the opening epigraph, he has been simultaneously trying to befriend. The tone, therefore, ranges from the maudlin and self-abasing at one extreme - as in the attempt at the close of the tenth chapter to ingratiate himself with the "gentle reader" - to the confident (even arrogant) at the other:

it is time to tell the truth; though it requires some courage to avow it in an age and country, in which disquisitions on all subject, not privileged to adopt technical terms and scientific symbols, must be addressed to the PUBLIC. I say then, that it is neither possible or necessary for all men, or for many, to be PHILOSOPHERS.³

That the insecurity is not exclusive to Coleridge (though it is

1 To quote Elie Halévy, England in 1815, p.486.

2 In a note of January, 1805, Coleridge reminded himself to "combat stoutly the opinion of a PUBLIC as a good thing / it is Perdition / trace it in every country - while a Court is the great Judge, Poetry & Oratory becomes over-decorous, over delicate, stupid stately / but then men of Learning write to men of Learning, & the number of Readers is small, then rise the Suns, Moons, and Stars out of the Chaos - but when the PUBLIC are the Judge, O Heavens!... / dullest parts of dull prose Tragedy with the grossest parts of Farce, always a web of Jacobinism", Coleridge Notebooks, II, 2395.

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 150-151 (p.151); 163-164.

intensified in his case) is evident from the public and private utterances of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and even the more popular Byron, each of whom came to look upon the public with either cultivated indifference - an indifference so often reiterated as to belie itself - or varying degrees of contempt.¹ Not surprisingly, Wordsworth is the most extreme in his denunciation; as the greatest egotist, he was the least inclined to compromise:

It is impossible that any expectations can be lower than mine concerning the immediate effect of [Poems in Two Volumes] upon what is called the Public.... the pure absolute honest ignorance, in which all worldlings of every rank and situation must be enveloped, with respect to the thoughts, feelings, and images, on which the life of my Poems depends. The things which I have taken, whether from within or without, - what have they to do with routs, dinners, morning calls, hurry from door to door, from street to street, on foot or in Carriage; with Mr. Pitt or Mr. Fox, Mr. Paul or Sir Francis Burdett, the Westminster Election or the Borough of Honiton;... what have they to do with endless talking about things no body cares anything for except as far as their own vanity is concerned...what have they to do

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- 1 Shelley wrote "to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms", as he said in the Preface to Prometheus Unbound; the close of the same Preface is typical: "The having spoken of myself with unaffected freedom will need little apology with the candid; and let the uncandid consider that they injure me less than their own hearts and minds by misrepresentation", Shelley Poetical Works, edited by Thomas Hutchinson, second edition, corrected by G.M. Matthews (London, New York, and Toronto, 1970), p.207. Keats's insecurity is betrayed by the "undersong of disrespect to the Public" in the first Preface to Endymion, concerning which Keats wrote to Reynolds: "a Preface is written to the Public; a thing I cannot help looking upon as an Enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of Hostility", 9 April, 1818, The Letters of John Keats, I, 266-267; for the Preface see Poems, edited by Stillinger, pp.738-740. Byron's enormous popularity soon waned, his activities became a scandal, and he was driven to defy the public; "As to myself I shall not be deterred by any outcry", he wrote to Douglas Kinnaird (?), in November, 1822, "your present public hate me, but they shall not interrupt the march of my mind", The Works of Lord Byron, Letters and Journals, Volume VI, edited by Rowland E. Prothero (London and New York, 1901), p.140.

(to say all at once) with a life without love? in such a life there can be no thought; for we have no thought (save thoughts of pain) but as far as we have love and admiration. It is an awful truth, that there neither is, nor can be, any genuine enjoyment of Poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live, or wish to live, in the broad light of the world - among those who either are, or are striving to make themselves, people of consideration in society. This is a truth, and an awful one, because to be incapable of a feeling of Poetry in my sense of the word is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God.¹

Instead, the romantic poet sought sympathy in friendship (hence the success of the Conversation or 'Friendly' poems²), in a return to a patron, and in the self - which explains the private reference to which Jeffrey objected.

In the third chapter of the Biographia, Coleridge shows himself not just the victim of the changing "relation which the authors themselves have assumed towards their readers", but also fully aware of it:

From the lofty address of Bacon: "these are the meditations of Francis of Veralum, which that posterity should be possessed of, he deemed their interest:" or from dedication to Monarch or Pontiff ...there was a gradual sinking in the etiquette or allowed style of pretension.

Poets and Philosophers, rendered diffident by their very number, addressed themselves to "learned readers;" then, aimed to conciliate the graces of "the candid reader;" till, the critic still rising as the author sank, the amateurs of literature collectively were erected into a municipality of judges, and addressed as THE TOWN! And now, finally, all men being supposed able to read, and all readers able to judge, the multitudinous PUBLIC, shaped into personal unity by the magic of abstraction, sits nominal despot on the throne of criticism. But, alas! as in other despotisms, it but echoes the decisions of its invisible ministers.³

1 As he wrote to Lady Beaumont on 21 May, 1807, Wordsworth Letters, II, 145-146.

2 For a study of Coleridge's Conversation poem in this light, see Kelvin Everest, Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-1798 (Sussex, 1979).

3 Biographia Literaria, I, 41-42.

As this last sentence suggests, the attitude of the Romantic poet was not merely a response to that which Raymond Williams calls "the impact of a market relationship".¹ It was also a response to the big Reviews and Magazines, those organs of public opinion - "the legitimate means by which the English public both instructs and expresses itself"² - which often elaborated this economic relationship into a philosophy of the artist's social responsibility. Jeffrey was the first and foremost critic of his generation to use the public, and the public sensibility, as weapons against artistic "singularity". The artist, as we think of him, was only then coming into existence, gradually dissociating and isolating himself from the society into which he had been born.³ Jeffrey had genuine misgivings about the instability and social irresponsibility of the exclusively literary life,⁴ misgivings that find a faint echo in chapter XI of the Biographia. Jeffrey resisted this tendency, already apparent in the eighteenth century, just as he resisted, as we saw, the associated assumption that the artist has a superior sensibility and a vision that enforces this isolation.⁵

However, in criticizing the artist for his anti-socialness, Jeffrey

1 Culture and Society, p.35.

2 See above, p.319.

3 See Williams, Culture and Society, pp.xv-xvi, 32-33. In late nineteenth-century French Romanticism, contempt for the reading public reached an extreme. Baudelaire's fable "Le Chien et Le Flacon" from Le spleen de Paris uses the analogy of a dog recoiling from fine perfume: "Ah! misérable chien, si je vous avais offert un paquet d'excréments, vous l'auriez flairé avec délices et peut-être dévoré. Ainsi...vous ressemblez au public", Oeuvres Complètes, edited by Marcel A. Ruff (Paris, 1968), p.151.

4 For example, he thoroughly approved when Cowper lamented in a letter that, with more timely diligence, "I had never been a poet perhaps, but I might by this time have acquired a character of more importance in society", ER II (April, 1803), p.66.

5 See Kermode, Romantic Image, p.7.

helps to create the conditions he purports to fear. By dwelling on the poet's difference, and using the reading public against the writer - trying the writer at the court of ordinary humanity, to use a metaphor closer to Jeffrey's heart and procedure - he was encouraging the alienation both psychologically and economically. Like many another pronouncement of the Edinburgh, it was, in Coleridge's words, "a prophecy meant to secure its own fulfilment".¹ Jeffrey's influence with his readers was immense. Instead of attempting to interpret the work of contemporary writers for his readers,² he felt obliged to disparage anything that failed to meet the expectations of the "men of literature and ordinary judgment in poetry",³ whose responses resembled his own hurried response. It would be impossible to over-estimate the importance of "the ordinary run of sensible, kind people, who fill the world" in his judgement.

There can be no question that the bitterness that marks Wordsworth's attitude to the public taste, and the "querulous egotism" and insensitivity that mark the middle years of his life,⁴ date from the review of Poems in

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 92.

2 Scott complained to the injured Joanna Baillie that Jeffrey wanted "that enthusiastic feeling which like sun-shine upon a landscape lights up every beauty", 31 October, 1808, The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, II, 116. The role of the critic defined here by Scott, Theodore Redpath and Patricia Hodgart in our century define as that of an "enlightened interpreter", regretting its occasional sacrifice to 'judgment' in the Edinburgh - see their Romantic Perspectives: The Work of Crabbe, Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge as Seen by their Contemporaries and by Themselves (London, 1964), p.23. I differ from them only in allowing much less enlightened interpretation to the Edinburgh than they imply. When, however, Jeffrey reviewed Hazlitt's Characters of Shakespeare's Plays he drew attention to precisely this critical attribute, and it encouraged in Jeffrey some of his finest critical prose. See ER XXVIII, no. 57 (August, 1817), pp.472-488 (p.473).

3 Review of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.4.

4 The phrase is from Coleridge's Preface to Poems on Various Subjects (1796), Coleridge Poetical Works, II, 1135.

Two Volumes, when Jeffrey used the public taste to humiliate him.¹ It is then that we find him confiding in Walter Scott, of all people, that, had Scott's Marmion been much better than his Lay of the Last Minstrel, "it could scarcely have satisfied the Public, which at best has too much of the monster, the moral monster, in its composition".² In his "Reply to 'Mathetes'", published in Coleridge's The Friend, the "general taste" is described as "capricious, fantastical, or grovelling" (Wordsworth no doubt had in mind critics representative of the general taste, like Jeffrey, as the objects of this public "grovelling").³ Even his proposed changes to the copyright laws⁴ were inspired by his bitter sense of neglect at the hands of Jeffrey and, through Jeffrey, the contemporary public. Final confirmation of this bitterness, if any were needed, can be found in the long, uncompromising discussion of the distinction between the Public and the People in the "Essay, Supplementary

1 As Sara Coleridge said of her father, he "was goaded into some degree of egotism by the charges continually brought against him", Biographia Literaria (1847), I, xviii. "No one will ever know how deeply Wordsworth was hurt by Jeffrey's criticism, or how far his practice of poetry was modified in consequence of it" - thus Willard L. Sperry, Wordsworth's Anti-Climax (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1935), p.100; more recently, W.J.B. Owen has recognized the importance of the reviews, which is to recognize the importance of Jeffrey: "Biography and criticism have, perhaps, paid too little attention to the effect upon Wordsworth of the failure of the Poems of 1807", in his article "Costs, Sales, and Profits of Longman's Editions of Wordsworth", The Library, fifth series, XII, no. 2 (June, 1957), pp.93-107 (p.106).

2 In a letter of 4 August, [1808], Wordsworth Letters, II, 264.

3 Wordsworth Prose Works, II, 9; in the same "Reply", Wordsworth dramatizes the conflict between himself on the one hand, and the Edinburgh and the reading public on the other, in a thinly-veiled allegorical contrast between "the WORLD" and "INTELLECTUAL PROWESS" (II, 15). Wordsworth "always th[ought] that he was robbed of his just fame & consequently of his just emolument by the Edinb. Rev.", Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, Etc.; being Selections from the Remains of Henry Crabb Robinson, edited by Edith J. Morley (Manchester and London, 1922), p.51.

4 For a brief history of his interest, see Moorman, Wordsworth: The Later Years, pp.550-555, and see his letter to Richard Sharp, 27 September, [1808], Wordsworth Letters, II, 266.

to the Preface" (1815), an elaborate revision of the earlier definition of the poet as "a man speaking to men" that Jeffrey had taken over for his own social and political purposes:

Still more lamentable is his error who can believe that there is any thing of divine infallibility in the clamour of that small though loud portion of the community, ever governed by factitious influence, which, under the name of the PUBLIC, passes itself, upon the unthinking, for the PEOPLE. Towards the Public, the Writer hopes that he feels as much deference as it is entitled to: but to the People, philosophically characterised, and to the embodied spirit of their knowledge, so far as it exists and moves, at the present, faithfully supported by its two wings, the past and the future, his devout respect, his reverence, is due.¹

Crabb Robinson recalled "once hearing M^r W. say, half in joke, half in earnest - 'I have no respect whatever for Whigs, but I have a great deal of Chartist in me'. To be sure he has".²

1 Wordsworth Prose Works, III, 84.

2 In a letter to Mary Wordsworth, 7 March, 1848, The Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle, II, 665.

CONCLUSION

Jeffrey's main objection to Wordsworth's poetry was to its eccentricity, its removal from the world of ordinary men, like himself, who were clear-sighted enough to see where their duty lay, and to whom he entrusted the final say in all matters, political and poetical. With singular insight, and a sense of personal insult, Jeffrey had discovered that the "inhabitants of towns...and most of those who are engaged in the ordinary business or pleasures of society, are cast off without ceremony as demoralized and denaturalized beings" in Wordsworth's writings.¹ For Jeffrey on the other hand, at least in his argument with Wordsworth, the poet was a spectator ab intra, a man speaking to such men as these. Wordsworth's refusal to heed their expectations meant, amongst other things, that he took his eye off the subject. "A lively picture of nature", according to Jeffrey, "pleases everybody",² but Wordsworth's "effusions on that may be called the physiognomy of external nature, or its moral and theological expression, are eminently fantastic, obscure, and affected".³ Instead, Wordsworth had created an exclusive, in fact a private mythology - "idols which he has set up for himself among his lakes and his mountains"⁴ - and wrote rather to be admired, than understood. The terms of Jeffrey's criticism are well-known from the Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

1 Review of Wilson's The Isle of Palms, ER XIX (February, 1812), p.375.

2 Review of Grahame's British Georgics, ER XVI (April, 1810), p.214.

3 Review of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.6.

4 Review of The Excursion, ER XXIV (November, 1814), p.3 (my italics).

The same values that rendered Jeffrey unsympathetic to the best poetry of the period, predisposed him towards contemporary fiction:

We have often been astonished at the quantity of talent - of invention, observation, and knowledge of character, as well as of spirited and graceful composition, that may be found in those works of fiction in our language, which are generally regarded as among the lower productions of our literature, - upon which no great pains is understood to be bestowed, and which are seldom regarded as the titles of a permanent reputation. If Novels, however, are not fated to last as long as Epic poems, they are at least a great deal more popular in their season; and...we have no hesitation in saying, that the better specimens of the art are incomparably more entertaining, and considerably more instructive.¹

This last sentence contains the key. Novels, like the Edinburgh itself, were the legitimate means by which the new middle-class public expressed and instructed itself, by concentrating the collective mind on "the inestimable value and substantial dignity of industry, perserverence, prudence, good humour, and all that train of vulgar and homely virtues that have hitherto made the happiness of the world".²

This is not to reduce Jeffrey's criticism to an unconscious pandering to the prevailing ethos of a new class, or of any class - to ideology in the Marxist sense. It was a theory based on the mutual dependence of the writer and the reader that sought to strengthen that dependence by emphasizing the common apprehension. Indeed, Jeffrey's criticism of the isolated poet, and the social and political premises of that criticism, have been taken over by the Marxist commentators in our own century. Georg Lukács, for example, explained the alienation of the creative writer and the critic "under present-day capitalism" (he was writing in

1 Review of [Walter Scott], Tales of my Landlord, ER XXVIII, no. 55 (March, 1817), article IX, pp.193-259 (p.193).

2 Review of Maria Edgeworth's Popular Tales, ER IV, no. 8 (July, 1804), article VI, pp.329-337 (p.330).

1934) in terms that recall Jeffrey on Wordsworth:

Social isolation, hothouse cultivation of personal mannerisms, confusion regarding fundamental ideological questions intensified through a conscious and exaggerated subjectivity in posing these questions and through an overstrained rationalism and foggy mysticism, which are the inevitable concomitants;... such are the chief factors making for the "abnormal" relationship of the writer to the critic.¹

It is hardly surprising, then, that when the Marxist V.G. Kiernan examined the poetry of Wordsworth, his criticisms should echo Jeffrey's:

"There is a practically complete absence of normal human beings; Wordsworth is alone with his sister in a circle of children, ancients, beggars, imbeciles".²

However, Jeffrey's response to Wordsworth's aberrations was not that of the twentieth-century Marxist, but that of the eighteenth-century humanist. What we witness in the reviews of Wordsworth is "the calculated distortion of the satirist":

the satirist was deliberately reinforcing the agreed standards of the age by pointing at the eccentric, the anti-social, the freethinker, the profligate, the antinomian.... by continually keeping the edge of distinction sharp, the satirists helped to make their readers more continually and more completely aware of their own half-conscious and unspoken beliefs.³

The same motivation explains the exaggerated lack of sympathy in Jeffrey's reviews of Wordsworth. The refusal to understand, expressed as a pretence

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- 1 "The Writer and the Critic", in his Writer and Critic and Other Essays, translated by Arthur Kahn (London, 1970), pp.189-226 (p.194).
 - 2 "Wordsworth and the People", with a postscript (1973), in Marxists on Literature: An Anthology, edited by David Craig (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp.161-206 (pp.171-172). These anti-Romantic clichés are not restricted to Marxist critics; compare F.L. Lucas, The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal, passim, but especially p.136, and E.E. Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists, pp.5-6, amongst many others.
 - 3 James Sutherland, A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry, pp.40, 39.

at being puzzled, is at least as old as the Platonic dialogues, and is a technique, not of objective criticism, but of fiction. Jeffrey's attitude is Mephistophelean, using realism to reduce idealism, and human nature to reduce human aspiration. He could be, as the poet James Hogg observed, "a perfect devil incarnate for frolic and mischief".¹

As in the distortions of satire, however, positive values are implicit. Jeffrey's eye was on the moral, as well as the rhetorical value of literal-mindedness and scepticism. In Grimm's Correspondance he discovered the attitude which is apparent in much of his own work, and in the other pages of the Edinburgh Review:

in the midst of all this levity...he seems to be continually actuated by an enlightened, though not very enthusiastic, philanthropy; and to keep an observant, though unimpassioned eye, upon every thing that promises to affect the happiness of the great body of mankind. There is a tone not only of gayety but of good humour throughout all his lucubrations: - And a perpetual recollection of the infirmity of human reason - the mutability of systems and opinions - and those successive 'follies of the wise,' which have so often made the boast of one age the derision of the next, all tend to maintain in him a tone of great temperance and moderation, and to save him from that dogmatism of affirmation, which alone seems to be without the pale of his toleration. Upon the whole, we are of opinion that he would have made an excellent reviewer.²

This passage might fairly be taken as a manifesto, a rare definition of the function of periodical reviewing at the present time. It was one of control, and we should not therefore be surprised to find its values only discernible relative to contemporary literature and work. With the characteristic 'siege mentality' of the Augustan humanist, Jeffrey saw

1 Alan L. Strout reprinted, and discussed, "James Hogg's Forgotten Satire, John Paterson's Mare", in Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LII, no. 2 (June, 1937), pp.427-460 (see p.450).

2 ER XXIII (September, 1814), p.294 (*my italics*).

himself as living in an age of considerable "dogmatism of affirmation", of which the Preface to Lyrical Ballads became at once a symbol and an example. He opposed this tendency, at times, with a dogmatism of negation, but more often with irony, and by attempting to place a system or aspiration, as the appreciation of Grimm suggests, in a larger, historical context.

Coleridge also sought to overcome the problem of the historical relativity of taste, but not just, as Jeffrey had done, by suggesting that certain familiar objects and shared reactions are of a universal interest that survives the fashionable and the subjective, and that may be expressed as laws dictating the use of certain subjects, words, and forms and proscribing the use of others. Poetry, for Coleridge, derives its universality from the poetic genius, not from its familiarity or conventionality. The familiar must, in the end, be re-created and rendered unfamiliar.

Coleridge reconciled universality with mere custom or association by using the model of historical Christianity: to express the "Spirit of Poetry common to all ages - and to imitate the ancients wisely, we should do as they did, that is, embody that Spirit in Forms adapted to all the Circumstances of Time, State of Society, &c."¹ In other words, he accepts the mutability implicit in the word 'taste', because the "Spirit of Poetry" must operate on and through something; as a spirit it is useless. The objects on which it operates, and the forms in which it expresses itself, should therefore observe the proprieties of any given period, "that state of association, which actually exists as general".²

1 See his letter to Richard Saumarez, 12 August, [1812], Coleridge Letters, III, 419. Compare Coleridge Shakespearean Criticism, I, 204.

2 Biographia Literaria, II, 104-105.

So with language: the "market-coin of intercourse" are arbitrary symbols,¹ historically determined, but they are necessary for the expression or incarnation of the poetic spirit. It is the responsibility of genius to transform this convention called language into something more expressive, to reconcile the spirit with the letter, "for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life".² But language remains a convention, and the words used must not be too vulgar or prosaic on any mistaken assumption that they can be that which they represent.

This is Coleridge's compromise with Jeffrey and the reading public. It explains the conservatism that characterizes much of the Biographia's argument against Wordsworth, and it explains Coleridge's wilfully ignoring the more radical aspects of Wordsworth's theory and practice. Ironically, in his attempt to secure "Mr. Wordsworth's reputation" by suggesting that Wordsworth was not the iconoclast portrayed by the reviewers, Coleridge in the Biographia has done some disservice to his "fame".³ Like Hazlitt's ambivalence, Jeffrey's disdain, albeit affected and exaggerated, communicates more forcefully the originality, the sense of excitement, and the challenge that Wordsworth offered to his contemporaries.

1 Biographia Literaria, II, 98.

2 II Corinthians 3. 6.

3 For this distinction, see Biographia Literaria, II, 130-131 (p.130).

APPENDIX

JEFFREY'S LETTER TO ALISON, 29 JULY, 1808

Jeffrey's handwriting is notoriously difficult to read. In his frustration, Sydney Smith once suggested the motto "mens sine manu" (letter to Jeffrey, 4 November, [1809], Letters of Sydney Smith, I, 171). Words and phrases that presented more than the usual difficulty have been enclosed in square brackets with a question mark. Those left blank were either illegible to me or damaged. Fortunately, the gist of the letter survives, as do most of its interesting reflections.

Ref.: National Library of Scotland, MS. 5319, f230-233.

To Revd Arch^d Alison

Edin 29 July 1808

f230 My dear Sir

There is scarcely anybody thinks so clearly as you do - and nobody can express their thoughts more luminously - Yet your book is generally complained of as obscure - and those who are most delighted with it confess that there is something unpleasing and unsatisfactory in the doctrinal part - the explanation and statement of the theory - I once thought that this was owing in some degree to the eloquence of the style, and the richness of the images and the illustration[?]s that [?came over] the philosophy - when looking at the book again I perceive th[at] it is owing to the incompleteness of the theory you [?have] hitherto expounded, and to your having reserved the statement as well as the illustration of the other [?parts] of it to some future publication - Now as I have [?no] great trust in [?futurities], and as the present work may be made very valuable by a very little addition I must insist on your supplying this defect and opening up your whole theory so far in the introduction as to give the reader a notion of the conclusion towards which he is tending and of the propositions which you expect ultimately to [?make] out - Even if you [?were]] than I am afraid you are to favour the world with the sequel of these Essays you could neither impair the interest nor [?hurt] the form of the subsequent parts by this brief [?enunciation] of their contents - and I do assure you, - with all the authority I can borrow for the occasion - that it is absolutely necessary for you so far to anticipate the remaining parts of the work as to enable the reader to say what is [?your] theory of taste - and what is the proposition which you have begun to prove ——— It is extremely unpleasant

to be detained long upon premisses when we do not so much as know ~~the~~ whereabouts the conclusion is to be for which they are to prepare us - and indeed it is quite usual as well as comfortable to begin with an [?announcing] the points we mean to establish - and then to [?array/assay] our proofs - and gradually bring them to bear on it - Warburton has done this - and Locke and D^r. Reid do it always. It is the greatest objection to [] admirable work that he (like you) has [] it _____

f231 If you understand me rightly you will have the satisfaction of seeing th[a]t you will have very little to do — all I want is th[a]t you explain the nature of the simple Emotions in the succession of which the pleasures of taste consist - explain it in two sentences - dogmatically - without illustration[?s] defense or commentary - just say what your [?doctrine] is - and leave the [??rest] of it to the second part of the work - I have said th[a]t you must do this - and you will forgive me for adding that without this explanation the theory in your present work is not only unsatisfactory but inexplicable - When you tell me th[a]t external objects are not beautiful or sublime in consequence of any material quality - but only ~~by~~ in consequence of some association which enables them to suggest ideas of simple emotion - I must know what you mean by ideas of simple emotion before I can admit or deny, or at all understand your proposition - The only truly simple emotions are pleasure and pain - and of pleasures and pains some are of the body and others of the mind - If you mean ultimately to maintain that everything is beautiful or sublime which accompanies or suggests [?some] any of [?those/these] emotions - then you ought [] to say so - and - right or wrong - nothing can be more easily said - If on the other hand the feelings of beauty &c only arise from the suggestion of some particular classes of emotion[?s], you ought in the very beginning to tell us what they are and let us [?have] the pleasure and entertainment all along of observing [?the concurrence] of those qualities in the illustrations you successively introduced for other purposes - at present while we are left in the dark as to the nature of these particular emotions an inquisitive reader is painfully perplexed with the very diversity and apparent incongruity of these illustrations - From what I myself have been able to collect there seem to be at least three separate classes of emotions ~~the~~ recognized by you as the sources of the pleasures of taste. 1st the [?direct] emotions of pleasure or pain foreseen or apprehended by the individual himself - as in thunder - tempests - battles and many other cases of the depends on

utmost sublimity - where the whole grandeur ~~consists in~~ a sense of immediate danger and a mixture of terror - 2 Emotions of sympathy with the pleasures or pain of others - or of sentient beings in general - This seems to be your most copious source - that is to it you refer the [] beauty of spring and autumn - and well as

almost all landscape as everything dependent on a sense of [?utility] - which can be a source of emotion only by sympathy - 3^{dly} Emotions arising from the perception of a certain analogy relations

between material and mental qualities or ~~situations~~ - as in the [?peculiar] expression of [?spring] [], [?ruins] &c and

the [] or strength of vegetables - works of art &c — I believe there may be still more classes - but I [?enumerate] those only to show you how much your theory in its present shape must bewilder and distress an attentive reader - who feels the anxiety of all readers to know what it is th[a]t is meant to be [?proved] by so much eloquence and ingenuity - these three classes of emotions, are totally distinct in their own nature - and are connected with the objects to which they impart beauty or sublimity by quite different relations - yet while your [?estimate] that ~~these~~ it is only a particular description of simple emotions that have the power of exciting feelings of beauty &c you cautiously
f232 abstain from dropping any kind by which we may discover what it is th[a]t constitutes this particular class ----

I have made all this a good deal too long because I am anxious th[a]t you should understand my meaning - and I have no time to reduce it into aphorisms - The little addition I wish you to make will be placed in the Introduction - and may perhaps need to be alluded to once or twice afterwards - It cannot require more than three or four pages - and probably a good deal less -- Since I have set my reviewing [] to a sheet of letter paper I must tell you farther that I think you might improve your book by abridging some of your illustrations, /&/ the points that are most obvious and likely to be admitted - and throwing in a few more quotations of beautiful passages ---

I must tell you too that I stumble a little on the threshold of your [?theory] not being able to see that emotions of taste are necessarily or ever usually received in the form of extended trains of thought - Both beauty and simplicity* it appears to me are most commonly perceived in an instant - and in nine cases out of ten this perception is not followed by any train of thought at all - but gives place immediately to some other impression - and yet the sensation may have been very distinct and lively - [?How] then can ~~it be a good definition of~~ the emotions of taste be justly defined by the character of the trains of thought which suggest them?

You know what makes me [say] all this - and therefore I make no apology for it - I think your book by far the most rational original and philosophical of any th[a]t has yet been published on this interesting subject - and I am sincerely anxious to secure to it that general and high estimation to which it is so well entitled - There is something terribly like accident in the fate of philosophical writings - not from any want of judgment in the [?public] - But from such a want of interest in the subject as prevents them from coming to the knowledge of that great and last judge - By the help of the review I think I can [] secure for you a fair hearing - and should feel still more gratified if I thought I could contribute by any hints of mine to render the sentence glorious I have the less hesitation in telling you what I take to be the main fault of the book, and the chief obstruction to its popularity - that from my careless and hasty way of reading
own

f233 I have generally found my impressions those of the great reading multitude - Where I am puzzled the herd puzzle too - and where I

[*Jeffrey probably meant "sublimity".]

grow impatient to know what an author would be at, I reasonably presume that ordinary readers will [?worry/weary] a little also - [?your] accurate and careful students do not [?offend] so good on average ———

Do not take the trouble to answer all this - but make such use of it as you can in [?preparing] your copy for reprinting - I am in the middle of the fret and vexation of my review - I have done Fox - I hope impartially [tear] a sufficient infusion of Whiggism - [?my] London [?contribu]tors distress me with all [] perfidy - and I have no rescuer at home ——— Write a line to say that you are well and enjoying idleness and long remembered scenes - I still hope to see Smith here next month - and have no doubt of Brougham - Playfair or Seymour will be back [?to] in a fortnight - So I hope you do not mean to prolong your stay immeasurably [?as/and] that you will be so much [] on your return as to be able to allow a great [] dinner [?of the] --- [?Macleod] is quite well - and [?his] wife too - the [] [] yet - I have great comfort in their vicinity - [?Hewart] I hear talks of three [] on the third - which is something too much - The Spanish patriots will not do I fear - nor do I see any solution for Europe - as things are - Tell me what I can do to [] or to please you and do believe me

Most affectionately yours F. Jeffrey

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- I - Works of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Jeffrey.
- II - Bibliographies.
- III - Works of Other Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Writers, including Memoirs and Correspondence.
- IV - Literary and Historical Background; General Studies; Anthologies and Collections.
- V - Criticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge.
- VI - Criticism of Jeffrey and the Edinburgh.
- VII - Miscellaneous.

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