Critical Theories of Biography in England, 1800 - 1831.
Thesis submitted for the degree of D. Phil. by A. F. T. Lurcock, University College. Trinity Term, 1978.

Abstract.

The years 1800 - 1831 mark the period when ideas about biography were first widely discussed. The critical principles are described as they evolved against the background of the huge proliferation of biography which accompanied the "Age of Personality." The past and present were generously documented with biographies long and short, although reviewers grew increasingly hostile to redundant and extended works. The emergence and acceptance of autobiography and literary biography were the most important innovations.

The complex task of framing an aesthetic for biography is then described. The major findings are the importance and place given to detail, the rejection of life-and-times and the welcoming of life-and-letters forms of biography. The argument that biographers should incorporate abundant original materials is then detailed, as it affected the use of letters, diaries, autobiography, anecodotes, and conversation. The discrediting of these original materials by over-use is traced. Lastly, two moralistic issues are considered; how a biographer might be truthful and yet conform to powerful demands not to speak unduly ill of the dead or to touch on taboo subjects, and the writing of biography for utilitarian purposes.

During the period biography was reviewed extensively for the first time, and reviews and independent assessments provide a large amount of material. Although the findings interestingly reflect the age at many points, nothing like a Romantic theory of biography emerges. Rather, the period established the major areas of biographical discussion, which are little altered 150 years later. The thesis deals also with unfamiliar areas of the work of many of the best known writers of the generation.

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INTRODUCTION.

Biography has been described as "the last major discipline uncorrupted by criticism."[1] Several recent writers have noted the lack of comment on biography as a prelude to their own studies, but despite their efforts the judgment remains a valid one. Most studies of biography centre upon general principles, illustrated with necessarily brief surveys of the main practitioners. The purpose of this work differs in two ways from most of the studies now available. Firstly, I have kept strictly within a period of thirty-one years, and have therefore been able to cover the material very thoroughly. A full generation is long enough, though, to make confident conclusions possible. Secondly, I have not been principally concerned with analysing or assessing the actual achievments either of biographers or of particular biographies. I have considered the theory and practice of biography as it emerges, and have paid particular attention to what biographers were consciously setting out to achieve, and to what the commentators thought that biographers ought to do.

The early nineteenth century is of unique interest in the history of biography. This is the period when life-writing was for the first time widely discussed. Before the time of Boswell there was little biographical criticism at all, yet by 1831 the main areas of discussion had emerged. These have altered very little in the intervening century and a half. Historically this was the period when human personality began to be of overwhelming interest. The resulting assumptions and opinions about the documentation of personality go far beyond the aesthetics of biography, and throw

1. Quoted by J. L. Clifford, From Puzzles to Protraits (1970), p.102.

light on the psychological and philosophical basis of the Romantic Movement in England. A close examination of this neglected area gives an often unexpected perspective on this otherwise well-documented period, and should offer a contribution to the intellectual history of the age.

D. A. Stauffer's Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England (Princeton, 1941) deals very fully with the biographies published during that century, and while I have drawn on his examples and conclusions whenever I have traced themes back before 1800, I have preferred not to adapt his materials to my own methods of investigation. The year 1800 is itself an important one, because of the publication of two important biographies, Currie's Life of Burns and Malone's Life of Dryden, and of the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. 1800 is also, as M. H. Abrams points out in a similar context to this, "a good round number."[1] My terminal date 1831, although it is numerlogically less satisfying, saw the publication of Croker's edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson, and the reviews of this dealt at length with the place of Boswell as a biographer, and with the place of biography in Literature. As F. R. Hart observes, they "climaxed forty years of considerable importance in the history of biographical theory."[2]

In one sense the year 1800 is not a dividing line from the eighteenth century at all. Many of the trends in biography which I describe were not novel to the nineteenth century, but simply became more noticeable as biographical activity increased, or reached a pitch of critical discussion during the period. Thus a lot of eighteenth century material is also nineteenth century material. A glance at the printing history of a few books shows this clearly. Boswell's Life of Johnson went through four editions before

1. The Mirror and the Lamp (New York, 1958), p.22.
2. In "Boswell and the Romantics," E. L. H. XXVII (1960), 45.

1800, and seven between 1800 and 1831,[1] and even quite minor works such as Topham's Life of Elwes or Lackington's Memoirs were revised and reprinted frequently in the early years of the new century. Hart's advice not to let criticism stop with the first edition[2] should be heeded; the early nineteenth century not only added to the eighteenth-century, but it continued it. "The average reader in the year 1820," writes Ian Jack, "was as likely to be reading a book written in the eighteenth century as a book by one of his contemporaries."[3]

One advantage of beginning this study in 1800 is that it coincides with the first great era of literary reviewing in Britain. The Edinburgh from 1802, the Eclectic from 1805, and the Quarterly from 1809 were only the most prominent of the periodicals which in every issue reviewed biographies. The monthly magazines, particularly the London, the Monthly, and Blackwood's all followed suit, and together with the reviews provide the chief early sources for critical ideas of biography, and a body of sustained critical opinion which simply had no counterpart before 1800. It is true that the publication of Boswell's Tour in 1786 had produced a torrent of criticism and critical parody, but not until Francis Jeffrey began reviewing biographies in the Edinburgh and John Foster in the Eclectic did biography begin to be regularly judged and appraised as a genre. The only detailed study of the biography of the period, by J. W. Reed, largely ignores this vital material on the grounds that "to compound a critical theory from snippets of the periodical reviewers would produce only nonsense."[4] The present

1. The dates are 1791, 1792 (Dublin), 1793 (revised), 1799, 1804, 1807, 1811 (two), 1822, 1826, 1831.
2. "Boswell and the Romantics," p.44.
3. English Literature 1815 - 1832 (Oxford, 1963), p.405.
4. English Biography in the early Nineteenth Century (New Haven, 1966), p.66.

work will, I trust, refute this prediction.

Biography in the early nineteenth-century was not the Romantic side-show which might be presupposed from the dominance of other forms of writing, or from the absence of masterpieces. Two of the ablest critics of the time, Jeffrey and John Wilson Croker, each published more than twenty-five reviews of biographies in the Edinburgh and Quarterly respectively.[1] Wordsworth and Coleridge contributed to the debate, and Byron was at the centre of some of the most spirited biographical controversies of the generation. The list of the writers of the period who contributed periodical criticism of biography includes Scott, Hazlitt, Southey, Carlyle, Lockhart, Peacock, Macaulay, and James Mill. Most of these had also published biographies by the end of the period. In fact, of the great writers of the epoch, only Keats and Jane Austen are absent from this study.

When one consults even the most detailed literary surveys, it appears, though, that the Romantic period was for biography merely a hiatus between Boswell and Lockhart. Oliver Elton devotes two large volumes to the literature of the period 1780 - 1830, but only two pages to biography. Although he pertinently points out that Boswell's Life of Johnson may be read as "the best possible preparation for the study of the romantic period," he ignores the biography of the period because it produced no "first-rate" work, remaining "a quarry for future labourers rather than a chiselled slate."[2] A. W. Ward offers the opposite interpretation. He states that the facts from biographies of the period are forgotten while the works embodying them

1. Croker, according to Jack, "wrote more than fifty reviews of biographies and memoirs covering the period 1775 - 1825." (Jack, p.333.) It is symptomatic of the neglect that neither J. A. Grieg (in Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review (Edinburgh, 1948), nor D. Nichol Smith (in his introduction to Jeffrey's Literary Criticism (1910)), so much as refer to Jeffrey as a reviewer of biography.

2. A Survey of English Literature 1780 - 1830 (1912), II, 398.

remain: "many of them have not floated away into oblivion with the outward facts of the lives recorded in them." He does not specify which these lives are, and excuses his neglect on the grounds that "few have secured for themselves a permanent place in our literature." [1] Ian Jack confines his discussion of biography to two writers, Moore and Lockhart, and then deals generously with the strength of autobiography during the period.[2] Even these most detailed histories bear out Leon Edel's complaint that "of all the branches of literature, I believe that biography is the most taken for granted, the least discussed." [3]

When one turns to the small number of studies devoted entirely to biography, there is little more to be discovered about the form in the early nineteenth-century. The older of these, English Biography by W. H. Dunn, (1916) and The Development of English Biography by Harold Nicolson (1927) only notice the absence of "great models."[4] Nicolson, especially, falls into the sort of generalisation which suggests unfamiliarity with biographies of the period. He writes that during the 1790s "the germ of seriousness had infected the youth of England," that this produced earnestness, "and with earnestness hagiography descended upon us with its sullen cloud." [5] More recent studies offer no more information. J. A. Garraty devotes a chapter of The Nature of Biography (1958) to "Nineteenth century trends," writing that "outstanding works were scarce .... Throughout the

1. Cambridge History of English Literature XIV (Cambridge, 1916), p.106.
2. Jack, pp.356 - 374.
3. "Biography: the Question of Form." Friendship's Garland: Essays presented to Mario Praz on his seventieth Birthday. Ed. Vittorio Gabrieli (Rome, 1966), II, [343].
4. Dunn, p.181.
5. Nicolson, pp. 113,110.

first third of the nineteenth century, while the romantic movement was at its peak, no one approached the level of Boswell or Johnson." [1] He mentions only one work, Moore's Life of Byron. P. M. Kendall's The Art of Biography (1965) has even less to say. He sees nineteenth century biography as a seed which did not germinate,[2] and leaves it at that. The most recent general study is Biography (1977) by A. Shelston in the Critical Idiom series; he writes nothing about the early nineteenth century, but refers to it as "an important period of transition which I am conscious of not having dealt with adequately in this study." [3]

Mention must be made of J. W. Reed's English Biography in the early Nineteenth Century. "What a slippery set of principles biographical criticism rests upon," [4] he concludes, and I cannot but agree, for my own reading of the biography and criticism of the same period has led me to conclusions which, although not incompatible with his, are widely different in scope and emphasis. I have not been as dismissive of him as Hart is,[5] but have referred to Reed's arguments and conclusions where appropriate. In particular his estimate on the influence of the Evangelicals on biography has been valuable.

It is a little surprising how slight the interest in the biography of the period has been, particularly when one considers the enthusiasm which it aroused at the time. There is abundant evidence that biography had unmistakably assumed importance as a literary genre. The Annual Review

1. Garraty, p.90.
2. Kendall, p.102.
3. Shelston, p.76.
4. Reed, p.165.
5. F. R. Hart, Lockhart as Romantic Biographer (Edinburgh, 1971). He writes of Reed: "His interpretations of biographical theory in the period we have both studied differ basically from mine. Further dialogue, then, seems futile." (p.[262].)

for 1803 introduced its biography section with the suggestion that biography was at least the equal of any other genre:

> The richness of the Biographical Department, in the literary history of the last year, atones, in a considerable degree, for the deficiencies and worthlessness which unfortunately characterise some of the other divisions. 1

One may note too H. Murray's suggestion in 1805, that biography was now of age, and able to compete on equal terms with fiction,[2] as well as the great enthusiasm of those who promoted biography. "In general," wrote Thomas Carlyle, "biographies are the best of all things for me." [3]

A Note on Titles and Texts.

I have throughout taken liberties with the titles of biographies. The reason is simply that most of the biographies of the period incorporated in their titles a synopsis of the materials and often a description of the media; the congested title-pages which resulted, although they are a distinctive feature of the genre at this time, do not bear full transcription. I have silently shortened all titles to a length which, while still leaving no doubt about what work is being referred to, does not interrupt the text. When I am dealing with reviews I have always adopted the shortened running-title of the biography from the review, and for other books I have simply adopted the reviewers' evident principles for shortening titles.

Although many of the most important reviewers of the period collected and reprinted their periodical criticism, I have throughout worked from and quoted from the original reviews. Carlyle, for one, certainly revised his

1. I, 456.
2. Morality of Fiction (Edinburgh, 1805), pp. 7-8. See below, p.29.
3. Letter to J. A. Carlyle. Sanders and Fielding, Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle. (Duke University, 1970), IV, 338.

reviews for republication. In order to avoid any possible bibliographical blunders, I have preferred in all cases to use the originals. Partly for the sake of consistency I have done this even for writers like Hazlitt and Peacock, whose criticism has been more recently collected in scholarly editions. Only exceptionally have I been forced to abandon this principle. I have attributed anonymous reviews to their real authors wherever possible, except where I have considered that there is no usefulness at all in recalling the name of an unknown or forgotten reviewer. The attributions have been made by reference to the Wellesley Index.[1] In addition I have used H. and H. C. Shine's The Quarterly Review under Gifford (Chapel Hill, 1949) for articles in the Quarterly before 1824. Southey's articles in the Annual Review are identified from K. Curry's list in the Bulletin of Bibliography XVI (1939), 195 - 197, and Foster's in the Eclectic from J. E. Ryland's list in his Life and Correspondence of John Foster (1846), II, [580] - 586. Other identifications are attributed in the relevant footnotes.

1. The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals 1824 - 1900, ed. Walter E. Houghton. (Toronto, I, 1966; II 1972.)

PART 1

AN AGE OF BIOGRAPHY.

CHAPTER 1.

THE BACKGROUND.

> Smith very amusing. In talking of Sir T. Lawrence's death, he said he had heard that it was entirely owing to his bandage (after bleeding) coming off, and the ignorance of his servant in not binding it on again, that he lost his life. On my remarking the additional ill-luck, after such a death, of falling into the hands of such a biographer as Campbell, he started up, and exclaimed theatrically, "Look to your bandages, all ye that have been blooded; there are biographers abroad!" 1

i. The End of Penury.

The "penury of English biography," which Johnson mentioned in the first sentence of his Lives of the English Poets,[2] was very soon remedied. Johnson's own biographies had contributed to a shift in taste, and after his death in 1784 his many biographers demonstrated the extent of his influence. He "has given the example to his numerous biographers," remarked James Keir in 1791,[3] and three years later a speaker in one of James Hay Beattie's Dialogues of the Dead observed that "Johnson has been compared to Acteon, who was worried by his own dogs."[4] By the turn of the century the proliferation of biography was becoming a cause of comment. "The present age has abounded in biographical works," noted the Monthly Review in 1800, "and they yet continue to increase."[5] The Annual Review agreed:

1. Thomas Moore, Memoirs, Journals and Correspondence, ed. John Russell (1853 - 1856), VI, 117. (Hereafter cited as Journal).
2. "Abraham Cowley." Everyman ed., I, I.
3. [James Keir], An Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq. p.107.
4. Essays and Fragments in Prose and Verse (Edinburgh, 1794), p.50.
5. Monthly Review XXXIII (November 1800), 251. (Review of Annual Necrology).

> Of single lives, largely detailed, the number and the merit is now become very considerable. We have, indeed, experienced a glut; but in whatever estimation we may hold the inferior fry, the larger shoal is well worth taking and preserving. 1

John Watkins commented wryly that the days of biographical penury were past-- "it can hardly be said of our times, that an indifference prevails in regard to departed merit." For him the difficulty was one of selection, since

> of late years, thanks to the officious zeal of friendship, and the active industry of literary undertakers, Biographical Memoirs have become as multitudinous, prolix, and veracious as epitaphs in a country churchyard. 2

"Lives," agreed Thomas Moore, were "the rage." [3]

Even if Johnson's charge of penury had referred especially to literary biography, as it may well have done,[4] it would no longer have been true in the new century. The opening years of the nineteenth century saw long, detailed biographies of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Dryden, and Milton, while Cowper, who had taken no part in public life, was in 1803 the subject of three biographies,[5] two of which went into later editions. Reviewing Forbes' Life of Beattie the Annual Review quoted some of Johnson's complaints about the paucity of biographical material, and the reviewer reflected:

> Posterity will not have the same complaint to make

1. Annual Review VII (for 1808), 205. (Review of Lempriere's Universal Biography).
2. Preface to his Universal Biographical Dictionary (New ed. 1821), p.iii.
3. Attributed by F. R. Hart, "Boswell and the Romantics." E.L.H. XXVII (1960), 46.
4. See James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, ed. G. B. Hill, rev. L. F. Powell and R. W. Chapman. (6 vols. Oxford, 1934 - 1964) II, 40 and V, 240. (Hereafter cited as Life of Johnson).
5. By. W. Hayley, J. Corry, and S. Greatheed.

> against the present age.... Materials for the literary history of the greater part of the eighteenth century, are abundant, and we may conjecture with some probability that those for the nineteenth century will be still much more ample. Scarcely has there been, during a considerable period, a man of any eminence in literature, of whom we do not possess either memoirs from his own pen, or accounts furnished by the zeal and affection of his surviving friends, full even to superfluity. Still our gratitude predominates over our complaint. 1

A quarter of a century later the sentiment was still echoed. Croker, in the preface to his 1831 edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson, lamented that there had been no Boswell to record Addison, Swift, Milton and Shakespeare - "we can hardly refrain from indulging ourselves with the imagination of works so instructive and delightful." [2] For reasons which are suggested in a later section of this chapter, literary biography was the branch of biography which least tired readers and which least aggravated critics.

The same cannot be said of autobiography. Among Johnson's expressed preferences that for autobiography [3] was the one most fully met after his death, and after about 1800 the writing and publishing of autobiography became extremely common. The list of writers who at this time wrote autobiography is an impressive one - Coleridge (in the letters to Poole), Wordsworth, Scott, De Quincey, Clare, Galt, Hogg, Gifford, Moore, Brydges, Hobhouse, Haydon, Leigh Hunt, Trelawny and Byron were the principal ones, and they were all writers of stature, whose main work lay elsewhere. The autobiographical writings of intellectuals and men of letters were well received - "the distinguished privilege of these modern times," claimed

1. Annual Review V (for 1806), 351.
2. Croker's edition, I, xxviii.
3. The chief evidence is in the Idler No.84, Sat. Nov. 24th, 1759. Further examples of Johnson's views on autobiography can be found in B. Evans, "Dr. Johnson's Theory of Biography," R.E.S. X (1934), 301 - 311.

Brougham [1] - but the form was also enthusiastically espoused by non-literary men of no stature, and the critical opposition to their writings was vehement. Whereas the common reaction to autobiographies of nobodies in the eighteenth century had been indulgent, the swelling increase in their numbers by the 1820s made critical reaction increasingly testy. The change in the attitude of the Monthly Review is revealing; in 1792 it had greeted Lackington's Memoirs with the comment:

> Should anyone ask, what there can be in the memoirs of a shopkeeper to engage the public attention? the natural answer must be, buy them, and then you will know. 2

A generation later the same publication rudely brushed aside J. Cradock's apologies for writing his life,

> for he certainly has every right to become his own biographer. At least there never was a period when such a right could be less properly disputed than the present, as it seems to be the prevailing mode for every man and woman of every degree to pester the world with reminiscences of their lives from the cradle to the verge of the grave. 3

The proliferation of literary biography and autobiography, and the contrasting critical reactions towards them, is one of the outstanding features of this "age of biography," and each is examined in detail below.

It was the "biographical part of literature" that Johnson liked best, and his remark "I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful" [4] lived after him. Many took him at his word, and both sentence and sentiment

1. Edinburgh Review (July 1804), 378. (Review of Lord Chatham's Letters to his Nephew).
2. Monthly Review NS VII (February 1792), 207
3. Ibid NS I (February 1826), 213.
4. The Rambler, No.60, Sat. October 13th, 1750.

were echoed in the prefaces to countless early nineteenth century lives.[1] Doubts about the truth of Johnson's dictum, though, were raised almost as soon as it was put into practice. The Annual Review reflected the debate; it was always pleased with the strength of its biographical section, but often critical of individual productions. Thus in the volume for 1806 the Biography section was introduced positively:

> Biography is a kind of writing, perhaps more generally interesting than any other, and of which many admirable specimens have of late been added to the permanent store of British Literature. Nor will last year yield to any of the preceeding, in the number or value of its productions in this class.

Yet the first article, a review of Wooll's Memoirs of Warton, began on the very same page, to satirise the trend;

> The moment any great public character breathes his last innumerable advertisments announce the publication of his life by different authors.... It is surprising that Warton should have escaped so long. 2

Even quite early in the century reviewers were ceasing to agree that "there has rarely passed a life..."; in 1807 a reviewer commented, "we cannot but earnestly wish that the present epidemical disease in literature, the custom of making very large books about individuals, may in due time... decline and disappear." [3] In 1798 it was still possible to commend, as Robert

1. For example, Miss Benger's Memoirs of the late Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton (1818), p.6; Jay's Memoirs of Winter (Bath, 1808), pp. xvi-xvii; Brydges' Recollections of Foreign Travel (1825), I,3; the phrase was reechoed by reviews; See Quarterly Review IV (August 1810), 104, and Eclectic Review NS XXIX (June 1828), 537.
2. Annual Review V, 298.
3. Eclectic Review 111 (i) (January 1807), 2. (Review of Forbes' Life of Beattie). Cf. the Critical Review's notice of Meadley's Life of Algenon Sydney: "We have a multitude of lives, the suppression of which would have occasioned no injury to mankind, nor loss of credit to the writers." (4th Series, V (March 1814), 248).

Bisset did, the writing of different versions of the life of one subject:

> No one individual can know all the facts which may form the materials of an entertaining and useful life. Variety of narratives, if authentic, impartial, and not trivial, will tend to the greater ends of biography. Although there is no such life of Johnson, as Johnson himself could have written on a similar subject, yet much advantage has accrued to society from different writers having undertaken an account of his life. 1

Twelve years later Southey, himself a biographer and well-disposed towards the genre, protested at the very trend which Bisset had praised. He condemned the large number of biographies which Nelson's death had generated within five years,[2] and proved his point by physically weighing one of them, (by J. S. Clarke and J. McArthur):

> In general, critics may be said to deal out their strictures by dry measure. This,however, is so ponderous a concern, that it may more fitly be estimated by avoirdupois weight. We have weighed it in the balance, and a score weight kicks the beam. This is calculating not merely upon an appetite in the public, but upon an absolute bulimia. Is it to be supposed that they can possibly digest one-and-twenty pounds of biography, even when Nelson is the subject? 3

The development of biography from penury to plethora is to some extent explicable in external terms; biography naturally took its share of the increased output of books which resulted from the revolutions in printing, papermaking, and publishing during the early decades of the nineteenth century.[4] In the same way the age of biography could not

1. Life of Burke, p.3.
2. A count by one of Nelson's recent biographers produced the figure of twenty-four. (Carola Oman; quoted by J. W. Reed, p.53.)
3. Quarterly Review III (February 1810), 222.
4. For a summary of these developments which are outside the scope of this investigation, see J. R. Reed, pp.18-19, and Colin Clair, A History of Printing in Britain (1965), pp.205-229.

have existed without the large new reading public which improved education was producing. The existence, as distinct from the merits, of these changes was noted on every side. A Quarterly article in 1813 opened with the statement:

> The diffusion of wealth, literature, and curiosity; the increased disposition to read, and the increased ability to buy books, have not only added to the number and fertility of living writers, but have also occasioned the press to groan under vast additional load of posthumous publications. 1

The Introduction to the first number of the Retrospective Review in 1820 reported on the cultural state of the nation:

> Never was education so common as at the present - never were books so commonly dispersed, so multifariously read. We present a spectacle of what, perhaps, was never before seen in any age, certainly neither Greek nor Roman, that of a whole nation, employing nearly all its leisure hours from the highest to the lowest rank in reading - we have been truly called a READING PUBLIC. 2

J. S. Buckingham, in the opening article of the first number of the Athenaeum in 1828, claimed that contemporary literature and that of a century before were as different "as the literature of any two civilised and co-existing nations could possibly be."

> The main cause of this, has been the increased wealth of the higher, and the increased knowledge of the lower orders of the people. These gave the first impulse to a demand for an increased number of books: and the very circulation which supplied such demand, served only to create fresh desires; - so that cause and effect, continually revolving in a circle, have gone on producing and re-producing, with such an accelerating speed, that if we continue thus to advance in almost geometrical progression, we may contemplate, at no very distant period, such an accumulation of literary productions, as to verify, without hyperbole, the Oriental peroration of the

1. Quarterly Review IX (July 1813), 313. (Review of Correspondence of Gilbert Wakefield.)
2. Retrospective Review I i (1820), iv.

> Evangelist, who apprehended that 'even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.' [1]

This spiralling expansion of reading public and publishing does not in itself explain why biography flourished so during the period, but it was necessary and enabling condition.

R. A. Gettmann, discussing the artistic and commercial aspects of nineteenth century publishing, writes that "every student of literary history must have asked himself the question, Why should ephemeral works ... ever have been published?"[2] A more precise question, and one more relevant to this study, is why so much of this ephemeral literature should have been biographical. The evidence of the time suggests three areas in which answers to this may be found. In the first place this was the "Age of Personality", a convenient shorthand term for the habit of the age to focus on named individuals and their unique experiences. Secondly there was the importance being given to the lives of the humble and obscure, a change greatly strengthened by a movement of interest away from spectacular public achievment to private and psychological history. Lastly the low repute of the novel as a form of literature at this time effectively removed it as a serious literary competitor to biography for a large class of readers.

ii. The Age of Personality.

When Coleridge complained about the excesses of "this AGE OF PERSONALITY", he was labelling a cultural phenomenon which could reveal

1. Reprinted and attributed in Selected Prose and Poetry of the Romantic Period (ed. G. R. Creeger and J. W. Reed), (New York, 1964), p.4.
2. A Victorian Publisher, A Study of the Bentley Papers (Cambridge, 1960), p.179.

itself in strikingly trivial ways, but which was at the same time one of the important identifying features of the Romantic period. The concept of interpreting artistic work in terms of the personality of the artist is analysed later in this chapter; Coleridge's complaint was of the trivial and tasteless aspects of, as he continued,

> this age of literary and political Gossiping, when the meanest insects are worshipped with a sort of Egyptian superstition ...; when the most vapid satires have become the objects of a keen public interest purely from the number of contemporary characters named in the patchwork Notes. [1]

Gettmann describes a revealing practice of what he terms "the exploitation of personalities" by Colburn and Bentley, who inserted in advertisments for their novels "puffs" to suggest biographical bases for fictional characters, and even published keys to the characters in some of their novels.[2] Coleridge returned to the discussion in The Friend, where he claimed that personal scandal and tittle-tattle had taken the place of rational criticism:

> For to what do these Publications appeal, whether they present themselves as Biography or as anonymous Criticism, but to the same feelings which the scandal-bearers and time-killers of ordinary life seek to gratify in themselves and their listeners? [3]

Coleridge referred Lockhart to these passages when, in 1820, he published a private letter from Coleridge in Blackwood's Magazine.[4] "These public-

1. The Friend (ed. B. E. Rooke) (1969), I, 210 - 11.
2. Gettmann, pp. 62 - 64.
3. The Friend I, 358 - 359.
4. "My sentiments on the nature of all intrusions into public Life, and of mere private personalities in all shapes I have given at large in the Friend," Letters, ed. Griggs, (Oxford, 1956 - 1971), V, 125. (The circumstances are given by Griggs, pp. 123 - 124).

ations" included some of the more controversial biographies of the period. A reviewer of Nelson's Letters to Lady Hamilton remarked that "Lady Hamilton is only secondarily guilty. The public themselves are the first offenders." [1] Many commentators agreed that publishers were not to blame for supplying a public demand for any kind of book.[2]

Leigh Hunt, in his description of Byron in Sketches of the Modern Poets, agreed with Coleridge's diagnosis - "This is said to be 'an age of personalities,' and it is so," he wrote, adding that the purpose of his own book was "to give the interest of personality without anything of the scandal of it". [3] The unprecedented interest in contemporaries was complemented by an inquisitiveness about personal details of figures from the past. This was a process which became increasingly common after the publication of Boswell's Life of Johnson, and was one which on the whole met with approval. Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works were praised because they brought the reader closer to Gibbon as a person:

> The former publication of his Memoirs, and the present one of his more artless and contemporary Journal, have enabled those who have heretofore contemplated Mr. Gibbon in the distant and dignified character of the historian, to form a nearer and more familiar estimate of his character as a scholar and a man.[4]

So giddy was the progress of this change that the traditional equation of life and works often became inverted, and it began to be possible for a

1. British Critic NS II (November 1814), 524.
2. "The fault is in the public, not in the publishers: and the reform must begin at the true source, - among the people themselves." J. S Buckingham in the Athenaeum I (1828), i.
3. Leigh Hunt's Literary Criticism, ed. L. H. and C. W. Houtchens (New York, 1956) pp. 154 - 155.
4. Quarterly Review XII (January 1815), 385.

man's life to give importance to his works. Brydges claimed that "it is Burns' life which has thrown a halo round his poetry",

> and the melancholy excitement awakened by Shelley's fate in a sea-storm has drawn a notice and popularity upon him, of which neither his writings nor his character acquired the smallest portion when alive. [1]

By contrast, Brydges claimed, Bloomfield was soon forgotten by the public "because no anecdotes or wonders have been told of him." [2] Personality cults arose around Burns, who according to Lockhart "began to be visited continually in his own house by curious travellers of all sorts",[3] around Scott, who was for many years as much an object of pilgrimage as the Scottish scenes which he had popularised, and, of course, around the memory of Chatterton, "the sleepless Soul that perished in his pride."[4] "Relics" of famous men were sought and collected;[5] the use of a semi-religious term indicates the element of worship which Coleridge so much disliked.

It was with Byron that the search for relics became most intense, and in him the Age of Personality found its fullest expression. Moore, working on his biography of him, described to Murray how an offer had been made

1. The Autobiography, Times, Opinions, and Contemporaries of Sir Egerton Brydges (1834), II, 368 - 369.
2. Cf. Thomas Moore's letter to Byron about the failure of his Fables of the Holy Alliance: "The fact is, the Public expected personality,..and were disappointed not to find it." (July 17, 1823; Letters of Thomas Moore, ed. W. S. Dowden (Oxford, 1964), II, 518).
3. J. G. Lockhart, Life of Robert Burns (Everyman ed.), p.136.
4. W. Wordsworth, "Resolution and Independence" vii. For a detailed account of the Romantic reaction to Chatterton, see E. H. W. Meyerstein, A Life of Thomas Chatterton (1930), pp. 501 - 529.
5. Cf. J. White, Memoirs of Nelson (2nd. ed., 1805), p.vi: "As every relic, however trifling, of a man so extraordinary as Lord Nelson, cannot fail to prove interesting, we lay before our readers a facsimile of his handwriting, taken from original letters."

him for all the Byron materials which were surplus to his requirements:

> A man has written me a comical proposal, reminding me of the sole question some wiseacre put to Canova on visiting his workshop, viz. "What he did with his chippings?" - this gentleman having heard that you and I are so overstocked with materials of Lord Byron that we actually do not know what to do with them, offers to take the refuse off our hands at a guinea per line! What do you think of this for 'the trade?' [1]

Doris Langley Moore records that the undertakers who emptied the preserving fluid from Byron's "coffin" reported many attempts to purchase "small quantities as souvenirs, some even offering as much as half a sovereign."[2] Pride of place, though, must go to the anecdote of Byron's dogs, as related by Moore in his diary:

> Drury had some dogs (two, I believe) sent him that had belonged to Lord Byron. One day he was told that two ladies wished to see him, and he found their business was to ask, as a great favour, some relic of Lord Byron. Expecting to be asked for some of his handwriting, or a bit of his hair, he was amused to find that it was a bit of the hair of one of the dogs they wanted. The dog being brought forward the ladies observed a clot on his back, which had evidently resisted any efforts at ablution that might have been exerted on the animal, and immediately selected this as the most precious part to cut off; "the probability," they said, "being that Lord B. might have patted that clot. [3]

Such ludicrous extremes of personality-cult do not diminish the serious significance which underlay them - the fact that political and military history, as well as all areas of artistic work, were more and more being studied in terms which returned to the personality of the agent or artist.

The tendency to bring any character who was of public note into a

1. Moore to Murray, March 13, 1828; S. Smiles, A Publisher and his Friends (2nd. ed., 1891), II, 312 - 313. (Not in Dowden's edition of Moore's letters).
2. The Late Lord Byron (1961), p.77. She cites "Murray mss" as her source.
3. Journal V, 186. The cult continues; in December 1976 the collar of Byrons's dog Boatswain was sold at Southebys for £460.

personal focus also operated retrospectively. Beside the cult of Byron there arose simultaneously the cult of Shakespeare. For the first time, and, as Malone frequently lamented, two hundred years too late, Shakespeare the man became an object of enquiry, and, as R. D. Altick remarks, "the quest of the historical Shakespeare was both the most extravagant manifestation and the most fitting symbol of the century's urge to translate literature into a series of biographical documents."[1] No doubt the cult carefully nurtured by Garrick for his Stratford Jubilee of 1769, and confirmed by Boswell's ritual kissing of the Ireland forgeries in 1795,[2] paved the way for this biographical quest. The activity after 1800 was impressive. Apart from Malone's sober and scholarly activities,[3] the early years of the century witnessed what Abrams has called "the largest mass of conjectural biography under which any author has ever staggered on his way to immortality."[4] It was as if, suddenly, Shakespeare's work could not be appreciated without a knowledge of the man. The attraction of the relics and the haunts of the famous was not simply superstitious. Such sights provided and important stimulus for the romantic imagination. Washington Irving (who had discovered in Stratford-upon-Avon that "Shakespeare's chair" was so popular with visitors that "it had to be new bottomed at least once in three years") showed this in his reaction to the nearby Lucy mansion. His description of the great hall, where he "fancied" the whole scene of Shakespeare being brought in as a poacher, is a description of his own reaction to it.[5] Similarly Haydon's moving evocation of the

1. R. D. Altick, Lives and Letters. A History of Literary Biography in England and America. (New York, 1969), p.98.
2. For an account of this episode see B. Grebanier, The Great Shakespeare Forgery (1966), pp.127 - 128.
3. These are described below, pp. 113-119.
4. The Mirror and the Lamp, p.249.
5. The Sketch Book (World's Classics ed.), pp.317, 335. (First published 1819 - 1820.)

death of Johnson is an account of his own feelings after reading Boswell's account:

> Everything rushed into my mind-- all the accompaniments, the expiring rushlight, day just beginning to break, the attendants gently stepping towards the window, whispering to each other, and holding back the curtain to see how day was breaking, the stars twinkling in the clear blue sky before the blaze of sunlight drowned their splendour, and now and then Johnson's awful voice asking pardon of his Creator. It brought many, many things crowding on my mind.[1]

Biography was the richest symptom of the age of personality, and was at the same time one of the fuels which continued to fire it.

iii. "Such and so various are the ways of men."

Byron's dog and Shakespeare's chair are amusing symptoms, but the important features of the age of personality were the social and intellectual ones. The dates by which I have limited this study, 1800 to 1831, take us more or less from the publication of the Lyrical Ballads to the first Reform Bill, and its political recognition of a greatly changed fabric of society. The biography of the period documents this change. The chorus of opposition to the published biographies, autobiographies, diaries and letters of nineteenth century nobodies, represented vociferously by Lockhart,[2] was very often a scarcely-concealed attack on the changing times which had made such writing possible. No-one, it now seemed, was disqualified from being a subject for biography. A significant development in early nineteenth century biography is that accounts of the lives

1. Haydon's Diary, September 13,1808. (Autobiography and Memoirs (ed. T. Taylor), New ed. (1926), I, 71.

2. See especially Quarterly Review XXXV (January 1827), 149 ff.: "Modern primer-makers must needs leave confessions behind them, as if they were so many Rousseaus. Our weakest mob-orators think it is a hard case if they cannot spout to posterity. Cabin-boys and drummers are busy with their commentaries de Bello Gallico...."

of the obscure were largely non-sensational; indeed, as commentators were only too ready to point out, they were often totally devoid of all incident. In the eighteenth century, by contrast, obscurity itself had not been enough to justify a biography; that had required a brush with fame, unusual adventures, or entertaining eccentricities or deformities. Stauffer remarks that "hanging was the most nearly certain way to immediate biographical fame in the eighteenth century."[1]

Now the lives of the obscure became possible subjects for biography without their being unusually pious, wicked or adventurous; "a place is found," wrote Adolphus"for individuals of humbler merit and less extended celebrity."[2] There were various reasons for this, in the first place changes in English society itself. "What an age we live in!" wrote Fenton in a letter from Oxford early in the century,

> how every thing is turned topsy turvy. Who would have thought of a sugar-baker giving a masqued ball? seeing a Prince at a painter's rout, among opera-dancers, and charlatans of every sort? or a bookseller issuing cards for a conversatione? [3]

In this area biography provides a chronicle of social fact, as a reviewer remarked of Lempriere's Universal Biography in 1812:

> In throwing the eye over the pages of a general biographical history, the reader must be struck by observing the number of persons on the record of fame who have been born in humble stations.[4]

"Slow rises worth by poverty deprest," Johnson had written in 1738,[5]

1. Stauffer, I, 199.
2. J. L. Adolphus, Biography, a Prize Essay recited in the Theatre at Oxford, June 3rd, 1818. [Oxford], 1818.
3. Dated Oxford, October 12th, 1807. [R. Fenton,] A Tour in Quest of Genealogy (1811), p.11.
4. Monthly Review LXVIII (July 1812), 296.
5. S. Johnson, "London", l. 177.

out of his own hard experience. By contrast the proliferation of self-help agencies after about 1800 greatly enhanced the prospects of the worthy poor, and the biography of the period records their changed expectations. The biographies, and especially the autobiographies, of justifiably proud self-made men are a large and significant area of the age of biography. The voice of Cobbett was a new and uncompromising note in autobiography: "With respect to my ancestors, I shall go no further back than my grandfather, and for this plain reason - that I never heard talk of any prior to him."[1] During this time, too, it ceased to be a matter for comment that a man had risen from lowly origins. Campbell opened his brief life of William Whitehead," 'It would be vain,' says his biographer, Mason, The Poet, 'to conceal that he was of low extraction.'" Campbell comments, "This is really making too much of a small thing. Every day certainly witnesses more wonderful events, than the son of a tradesman rising to the honours of a poet laureat, and the post of a travelling tutor."[2]

As well as social fact, though, it was a change in the way of looking at humble life which was reflected in the biography of the time. Johnson's description of the "state of man confined to the employments and pleasures of the country" in the Rambler 36[3] could hardly be taken seriously by readers of the Lyrical Ballads, a work which itself, as Robert Mayo has demonstrated, treated "objects of sympathy" which were familiar to "every reader of magazine poetry" in the 1790s.[4] The changed social climate in which

1. The Life of William Cobbett by himself. (2nd edition, 1816), p. 2 .
2. Thomas Campbell, Specimens of the British Poets (1819), VII, I .
3. "The state of a man confined to the employments and pleasures of the country is so little diversified, and exposed to so few of those accidents which produce perplexities, terrors, and surprises in more complicated transactions, that he can be shown but seldom in such circumstances as attract curiosity."
4. R. Mayo, "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads," P.M.L.A.LXIX (I), (1954), 495.

biography now flourished is epitomised in the difference between Gray's Elegy, with its deliberately assumed attitude towards the humble poor and the author's conscious - even selfconscious - adoption of the role of a looker-on, and the unprotected involvment of Wordsworth, in his own person, in, for example, "Simon Lee". Johnson's guesses about life in the country-side, ideas which could be illustrated a score of times from The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse alone, could not be taken seriously by any reader who knew the details of the life of Burns; Lockhart cited the offending passages from the Rambler 36 with dismissive scorn in his Life of Burns, remarking:

> Such were the notions of the great arbiter of taste, whose dicta formed the creed of the British world, at the time when Burns made his appearance to overturn all such dogmata at a single blow.[1]

Jacques Barzun stresses in his study of Romanticism how writers and thinkers of the Romantic period kept a close association with reality:

> What the romanticists of the period 1790 to 1850 sought and found was not a dream world into which to escape, but a real world in which to live. The exploration of reality was the fundamental intention of romantic art.

In turning away from neo-classical preoccupations, he writes, the "romanticists" "turned to the world about and within them."[2] The reality of the outer world was displayed perhaps most dramatically by books of travel, but biography certainly provided a solid staple of topographical, practical, military and historical information. Biography was a popular vehicle for knowledge, and there were few areas of the physical world which it did not

1. Life of Burns, pp.227 - 228.
2. Classic, Romantic and Modern (revised edition, 1961), p.58.

document. The artisans whose autobiographies so revolted Lockhart[1] were an important part of this outer world.

When "romanticists" turned to "the world within them" there can be no question that biography provided the most valuable material. For those who made it their business to be interested in and to investigate the human mind, the precise social rank of the possessor of the mind was of little consequence. Intellectually the Age of Personality manifested the view that human beings were important as individuals: "We are more interested in the progress of the human mind, than in that of empires," wrote D'Israeli,[2] and increasingly it was the uniqueness of individual human minds, rather than "mankind from China to Peru" which became interesting to observers. Stauffer, commenting on the precursors of "Romantic Biography" at the end of the eighteenth century, concluded that

> the spirit of romanticism increases the number of possible subjects for biography until it equals the number of human beings in the world, and also multiplies in each case the possibilities of treatment.[3]

Stauffer's assumptions about romanticism and the imagination beg many questions, as will be seen. There is no doubt, however, that a spirit was abroad, romantic or scientific, which was conductive to an enormous multiplication of possible subjects. Many commentators on biography in the early nineteenth century were afraid that biography had indeed become infinitely extendable. Adolphus wrote that there was "scarcely any class or description of human life" which was closed to biography, but he was not content to ascribe the change to "curiosity" or "imagination." The

1. See below, pp. 68-69.
2. I. D'Israeli, in his "Dissertation upon Anecdotes," Literary Miscellanies, (1801), p.7. Byron remarked in a letter to D'Israeli that "you are curious in such things as relate to the human mind." (June 10th, 1822. Letters and Journals, ed. R. E. Prothero, (1898 - 1901) VI, 88).
3. Stauffer, I, 166.

details of the lives of individuals he considered as subject matter for scientific observers, and he wrote that there was "scarcely any class or description of human life which was not eligible to be recorded."

> The shades of human disposition are so infinitely varied, and, in the narrow space assigned to human action, the paths are so many and so diversified, that an accurate observer of characteristic circumstances may continually point out new facts in the moral history of man, or at least discover new illustrations of those already known.[1]

For these reasons, Adolphus argued, biography would never run dry even "when other subjects have been exhausted" - a truism greeted not always with the air of satisfaction with which he described it.

What Adolphus termed "the moral history of man" was a recurring interest in the earlier nineteenth century. Stanfield's Essay on the Study and Composition of Biography (1813)[2] embodied what might be termed the empirical psychology of the time in its underlying belief that biographical material could provide all the data necessary for a "scientific" study of the mind.[3] Lowness of birth, of intelligence, or of achievement, for that matter, was no longer of any relevance in collecting data for what Hart has called "the new science of psychological differentiation," which manifested itself in the endless "recording of human diversity."[4] D'Israeli welcomed this as an area of study which could be pursued by an individual with no other material than his own mind, no other apparatus that the ability to study it, and no more industry than was needed to note

1. Biography, p.15.
2. Published in Sunderland. This remarkable study is discussed below, pp. 101ff.
3. The Preface to the 1824 edition of the Characters of Theophrastus explained Theophrastus' aims in similar terms - "he designed to collect materials for a comprehensive and scientific Natural History of Man." (Howell's edition, p.xiv).
4. Lockhart as Romantic Biographer, p.5.

down his observations. The man able to fulfil these functions "will form a journal to himself peculiarly interesting, and, probably, not undeserving the meditations of others."[1] This belief was wide open to abuse by anyone with a touch of vanity about him, but is, nonetheless, one of the important factors underlying the biographical, and particularly the autobiographical abundance of the age. It should, though, be qualified by the realisation that few writers worked directly from the principles of D'Israeli or Stanfield; the scientific influence on the proliferating volumes was at least at one remove, and many writers were exploiting a trend which they themselves may not have understood.

iv Plutarch

An indication of the biographical bias of the period is a sustained interest in Plutarch. J. and W. Langhorne's six volume translation of the Lives, first published in 1776, had proved very popular. It was corrected in the sixth edition of 1795, reached a ninth edition in 1805, and was further reprinted in 1812 (three volumes) and 1821. Francis Wrangham's new edition of Langhorne was published in six volumes in 1809, and reached a fifth edition (seven volumes) in 1831.[2] Sixteen editions in sixty years is the measure of a popularity which during the period made the name Plutarch synonymous with biography. There were in addition many imitations of Plutarch, of which the best known was also Wrangham's production, The British Plutarch (1817), which was based on an eighteenth century work of the same name. This, Michael Sadleir tells us, "though described

1. Literary Miscellanies, p.121 Brydges concurred broadly with this view, but with a typical reservation: "We should be glad to know also how work far inferior intellects and bosums, - but not equally glad." (Autobiography, II, 123).
2. It was one of the books which Byron ordered in Ravenna. (Letter to Murray, dated 28th May, 1821. Letters and Journals, V, 300).

as 'A New Edition, rearranged and enriched with Several Additional Lives,' consisted almost entirely of rewritten material, and all the notes were his ab initio."[1] The century had already seen the Modern Plutarch (six volumes, 1807), and earlier John Murray's first commercial success as a publisher in his own right had been the Revolutionary Plutarch (1803), which he followed up with the Female Plutarch.[2] In addition there was a Juvenile Plutarch in its fourth edition in 1820,[3] John H. Parry published his Cambrian Plutarch in 1824, and in 1828 Lockhart "was suggesting to Scott the idea of a 'Scottish Plutarch,' which was never achieved."[4] It is obvious that "Plutarch" was regarded as an effective label, and was used to lend its respectability to biography. A reviewer explained that since "biography is an undertaking of... very questionable legitimacy" it is politic to "stun and quell the prepared cavillers with the imposing sound of such names as Plutarch, Tacitus...."[5]

The name of Plutarch could certainly enhance the reputation of a biographical compilation, not merely through associations of vague respectability, but also because of the three cardinal merits claimed for Plutarch as a biographer at this time. In the first place Plutarch was a didactic writer, and his works promoted virtue, which, he wrote "through its

1. "Archdeacon Francis Wrangham. 1769 - 1842." Supplement to the Bibliographical Society Transactions XII (Oxford, 1937), 36.
2. A Publisher and his Friends, I, 38 - 41.
3. One recalls that Mary Garth, after her marriage to Fred Viney, "wrote a little book for her boys, called 'Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch,' and had it published by Gripp and Co., Middlemarch." George Eliot, Middlemarch, Ch. 86, (Everyman edition, II, 358).
4. Andrew Lang, The Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart (1897), II, 37.
5. Eclectic Review X, (September 1813), 291. (Review of A. Stephen's Memoirs of John Horne Tooke).

expression in acts, at once so affects a man that the moment he admires the thing done he emulate the doer."[1] This, as Chapter V (Part II) describes, was the most prominent use of biography in the early nineteenth century, and was a Plutarchian association which carried a heavy weight of respectability. Secondly, Plutarch used, and made a feature of his writing, small telling details to hit off character. In an often quoted passage, he wrote:

> We are not writing histories but lives; it is not always the case that virtue and badness is disclosed by the most glorious actions. Indeed, it often happens that a minor incident, a saying or a jest, show up character more clearly than battles with numerous casualties, armies fighting each other, and cities under siege.[2]

The passage was cited by Boswell (in Langhorn's translation) in the opening chapter of the Life of Johnson, and the use of significant detail became during the period an axiom of biography.[3] More important than either of these principles of biographical practice, though, was what may reasonably be termed "the Plutarchian view of history" - history seen as the lives of great men. Alan Wardman writes in his study of the Lives:

> Without exception, the heroes of the Lives were public men whose activities, used by Plutarch as a clue to their character, had a decisive effect on some important historical events of their own lifetime, Whether he is justified or not, Plutarch thinks that outstanding men determine the course of historical events; thus the Athenian victory at Salamis is seen as the expression of Thermistocles' character in the world of action, and the

1. Quoted by R. H. Barrow, Plutarch and his Times (1967), p.54. Much was made of this attribute of Plutarch in the Langhorne Preface: "The history of such men is a continuous lesson of practical morality, a series of models of valour, moderation prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, and in short every personal and social virtue." (1809 edition, I, xx).
2. A. Wardman, Plutarch's Lives (1974), p.4. The passage is from Alex. I.2. See also Classical Quarterly XXI (1971), 254.
3. See below, pp. 109-110.

> liberation of Greece in the second century B.C. is attributed, not to Roman policy as a whole, but to the character of one particular Roman, Titus Flamininus. The character of his heroes cannot be divorced from their historical significance.[1]

The evidence for this view prevailing during our period is largely inferential; the very fact that this was an age of biography and not at all of great historical writing indicated where the interest lay. Much of the history which was published at this time appeared in the form of memoirs and biography - military history especially.[2] Hazlitt's Spirit of the Age presented contemporary intellectual history in terms of personalities, while Landor, Ian Jack tells us, "read history in an oddly Plutarchian way, as the lives of great men."[3]

v. The forbidden novel.

Among the many strong positive reasons for the great expansion of biography during this period there was a major negative influence; the deep opposition to the novel, on artistic and even more on moral grounds, turned large numbers of readers to biography by default. Mrs. Barbauld summarised the spirit of the times in her introductory comments to The British Novelists in 1810, when she wrote that "a collection of Novels has a better chance of giving pleasure than of commanding respect."[4] The whole of Mrs. Barbauld's prefatory article, "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-writing," was defensive; the following is a representative observation:

1. Ibid., p.3.
2. One reviewer remarked warmly on "the more than average crop of military memoirs, that has of late been brought into the market. The supply is of all sorts and varieties." (Eclectic Review 3rd Series I, 54. Review of Memoirs of Miller).
3. I. Jack, English Literature 1815 - 1832 (Oxford, 1963), p.346.
4. The British Novelists; with an Essay, and Prefaces Biographical and Critical, in fifty volumes, I [i].

> Though a great deal of trash is every season poured out upon the public from the English presses, yet in general our novels are not vicious; the food has neither flavour nor nourishment, but at least it is not poisoned.[1]

In the early years of the century, as Marilyn Butler points out,

> the novel still had a low intellectual reputation, often on the grounds that it depicted silly, sentimental behaviour, a dangerous example to growing girls; and even the intellectual novelists of the 1790s had not made the form respectable, since they were associated with radicalism and with sexual promiscuity.[2]

Reviewers were slow and reluctant even to accept the novel as a literary genre. Jeffrey frequently reviewed fiction in the Edinburgh (though not as frequently as biography), and while he did not share the view that novels were generically disreputable, he did consider that they were "generally regarded as among the lower productions of our literature."[3] J. T. Taylor observes astutely that when a novel did come in for praise, it was "only in comparison with productions of its own class," and he cites a British Critic writer's claim that a novel is not to be criticised for lacking "qualifications which we in general expect to find in a literary production."[4] So low was the art of novel-writing held, that some novelists refused to use the term; Madame D'Arblay's Camilla was presented to the King and Queen as "sketches of character and morals,"[5] and Maria Edgeworth claimed in the Advertisement to Belinda (1801) that she was

1. Mrs. Barbauld, I, 55. The Essay occupies the first fifty-nine pages.
2. Maria Edgeworth (Oxford, 1972), p.307.
3. Edinburgh Review, XXVIII (March 1817), 193. (Review of Tales of my Landlord).
4. J. T. Taylor, Early Opposition to the English Novel (New York, 1943), pp.12 - 13. The quotation is from the British Critic, N S VIII (October 1817), 430. There is a similar claim in Athenaeum for September 17th, 1828, 735.
5. Amy Cruse, The Englishman and His Books in the early Nineteenth Century (1930), p.17.

offering only "a Moral Tale - the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel," which she associated with "folly, error and vice."[1] The burgeoning popularity of the novel was associated as well with the middle-class public's habit of reading entirely for amusement. Circulating Libraries were tinged with the same pollution since they were filled mainly with novels; when a book was produced for Mr. Collins to read from to the Bennet ladies, "everything announced it to be from a circulating library," and Mr. Collins "started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels."[2]

Much of the moral outrage which was vented upon the novel had a religious basis. The Eclectic Review, strongly non-conformist, never reviewed fiction at all, while more specifically sectarian organs such as the Methodist Magazine and the Christian Observer mentioned it only to warn of its perils. Taylor quotes from the Minature of 1804: "It has been well observed, that the reading of novels is to the mind what dram-drinking is to the body."[3] Such critics did not confine themselves to sniping in periodicals; broadsides also were launched against the immorality of the novel. Such a work was the Rev. Edward Mangin's Essay on Light Reading, as it may be supposed to influence moral conduct and literary taste (1808). Mangin stressed the didactic imperative of fiction "to teach us, by virtuous and vicious examples, what we ought to follow and what to avoid," and issued a"general caution" against romance and fiction in all their guises.[4] Another was Vicesimus Knox's essay "On Novel-Reading," which began: "If it be

1. Quoted by M. Butler, p.307. This is the fastidiousness which was satirised by Jane Austen in Ch.5 of Northanger Abbey.
2. Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, Ch.14.
3. Taylor, p.105. The quotation is from the Miniature II (April 30th, 1804), 22.
4. Mangin, pp.5 - 6, 77.

true that the present age is more corrupt than the preceeding, the great multiplication of Novels has probably contributed to its degeneracy."[1]

The objections against novels were urged even more vociferously where any influence upon the young, and especially upon young ladies, was possible. Mangin thought that novel reading gave them a poor preparation for life,[2] and many parents agreed with him. The Rev. Legh Richmond, for example, wrote to his daughter in 1822:

> Fully as I can enter into the beauties of works of fiction, yet I exceedingly dread their tendency. The utmost caution is requisite in meddling with them. The novelist I unequivocally proscribe.... It is a maxim in regard to books, as well as companions, that what does not improve invariably injures.[3]

The success of doctrines of this sort in converting the young may be seen in the results of prize essay competitions set by the Juvenile Library in 1801 and 1802. One topic was "Whether such a love of Novels as excludes all other reading, or no reading at all, is most to be condemned," and the four prize winners, all girls of fourteen, condemned novel reading, Miss Elizabeth Parker arguing that

> the love of novels is, without doubt, extremely pernicious, as it introduces false ideas into the mind, vitiates the taste, and has a tendency to corrupt the heart.[4]

Miss Eliza Sinclaire agreed that a "love of novels is the most pernicious taste a young person can acquire."[5] These were the opinions at the turn

1. Works of Vicesimus Knox (1824), I, 78.
2. Mangin, pp.16 - 17.
3. Letter dated June 7th, 1822. T. S. Grimshawe, A Memoir of the Rev. Legh Richmond. (3rd Edition, 1828), p.492. Cf. John Clayton, Sketches in Biography (Edinburgh, 1825), p.x: "The indiscriminate reading of novels is dangerous to young persons."
4. The Juvenile Library, I (1801), 121.
5. Ibid, 127. Cf. also V (1802), 135 - 136, where Master J. P. Wood (14) denounces novels as "pernicious."

of the century of middle-class children, who were to become the reading public of the early nineteenth century.

As far as juveniles were concerned these opinions led directly to the sort of didactic sub-biography which is outlined in Part II, Chapter 5. The only sort of fiction which was likely to be approved was that which displayed its credentials on the title page. Miss Avery describes the practice, and cites an example outstandingly apt for present purposes:

> Conscientious writers of fiction for the young usually sub-titled their works "a moral tale" to make it perfectly clear that their works were in no way tainted.... Miss M. Woodland's A Tale of Warning, or, The Victims of Indolence (1810), the story of Agatha who "imbibed a pernicious passion" for light novels, which during her husband's absence abroad leads her fatally to neglect her child, and to her own painful death as well.[1]

By about 1820 Scott's Waverley novels were an important influence in establishing the novel on a respectable moral basis with reviewers and with the public; "the first Scots novels had scarcely appeared when all stigma attached to the craft had ceased to exist," claimed a writer in the Universal Review.[2] By this time, though, the Evangelicals had a stranglehold on children's literature, and the influence of the ideas about fiction held by the Clapham sect coincided with that of the Quakers. Thomas Clarkson reported in 1806:

> The Quakers believe that there is among novel readers a peculiar cast of mind. They observe in them a romantic spirit, a sort of wonder-loving imagination, and a disposition towards enthusiastic flights of fancy, which to sober persons has the appearance of a temporary derangement.[3]

1. G. Avery, Nineteenth Century Children (1965), p.17.
2. Universal Review (July 1824), 562. (Review of Some Account of the late Gilbert Earle Esq..) A similar claim was made in the Athenaeum, (September 17th, 1828), [735].
3. T. Clarkson, A Portrait of Quakerism (1806), I, 126. The argument of Ch. VI (122 - 131) is that novels "prevent moral improvement" "by creating an indisposition towards other kinds of reading." (122).

The Methodists, too, were opposed to the novel, and their concern with misspent time seemed set fair to convert novel-reading into a sin. The Methodist Magazine returned repeatedly to the calculation of time wasted, asserting that novels could be tolerated only if "amusement be the end of human experience."[1]

As a result of these coinciding pressures there was a huge middle-class readership which, with varying degrees of conviction, was effectively forbidden to read novels, or who, if they did read them, did so surreptitiously[2] and certainly not exclusively. Lackington had described in 1791 how "many, very many have come to my shop who have discovered an enquiring mind, but were totally at a loss what to ask for, and who had no friend to direct them."[3] For this great new class of readers, as well as for the traditional middle-class reading public, biography offered limitless and highly respectable reading matter. I do not think that any single fact more fully explains the extraordinary output of biographies at this time. An enormous, and largely new reading public took to biography for negative reasons. The "delight" of biography, so frequently extolled by its proponents,[4] was really a novelistic quality, and needed to be combined with fact, with things which were true, in order to achieve respectability. The advertisement for Hunt and Clark's series Autobiography stressed that "no description of reading comes so near works of fiction in fascination as Biography."[5] This claim is of central importance; biography offered

1. Quoted by J. F. Taylor, p.105.
2. Cf., for example a letter from Macaulay to his sisters, quoted by Taylor, p.108.
3. J. Lackington, Memoirs, q. Gettmann, p.60.
4. See below, Part II, ch.5.
5. Monthly Literary Advertiser, June 1826, 44.

the pleasures of fiction with none of the reproaches.[1] It was because biography unambiguously avoided the alleged shortcomings of fiction that it was so respectable. Its reputation therefore had to be kept up. The apparently determined anti-literiness of biography as a genre is described in the next chapter; here it may be suggested that the typical reluctance of biographers to indulge their imagination or to vary their literary approach as the novelist did was a safety measure, a sign of their determination to steer clear of even the suspicion of fiction. If this is so, then the influence of the novel on biography was two-fold. Firstly, it diverted readers, and therefore writers, towards biography, turning it into the repository for ideas and the channel for talents which in more recent times have been preempted by fiction. Secondly it ensured that biography would remain a clearly distinguishable, and, as it turned out, a very inferior artistic form.

H. Murray argued confidently in 1805 that biography was of age, that it was no longer incapable of "exciting a sufficient degree of interest," and that it could now take over from fiction the task of "supplying the deficiencies of history." "Of late," he wrote,

> it seems more and more to have attracted the attention of the public. The chief cause has probably been the great diffusion of literature among the middling, and even the lower classes of society. The circumstance, according to all appearance, is likely, not only to continue, but to increase; and the taste for this species of biography may be expected to keep pace with it.[2]

1. Allan Cunningham described the second series of D'Israeli's Curiosities of Literature (1823) in similarly revealing terms: "While they shed abundance of light on the character and condition of literary men, and shew us the state of genius in this land, they have all the attractions, for general readers, of the best romances." (Athenaeum, December 14, 1833; quoted by J. E. Sandys, C.H.E.L. XII, 365). Likewise Blackwood's Magazine; autobiography "unites much of the entertainment of the novel, with the proud satisfaction of seeming to be engaged with an instructive book." (26 November 1829, 737-8). See also the Preface to Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson (3rd ed. 1810) I, xxviii

2. Morality of Fiction, pp. 7 - 8

The prediction was an accurate one. The "diffusion of literature" continued, and the large new reading public, more or less debarred from reading fiction, was waiting for books. All biographers needed to do was to produce them, and this they did, as we shall now see.

CHAPTER II.

THE RANGE OF BIOGRAPHY.

> The richness of the Biographical Department, in the literary history of the last year, atones, in a considerable degree, for the deficiencies and worthlessness which unfortunately characterise some of the other divisions. Not only have the lives of several eminent character[s], already known and recorded, been written afresh, and presented to the public in a new light, and with additional circumstances of interest, but some of the distinguished moderns, lately deceased, have during the last twelvemonth, been worthily recorded, and associated with the illustrious of former ages, who, by general consent, have been selected as models and examples of human nature.
>
> Arthur Aiken.[1]

i. Biography and the Past.

During the early nineteenth century biography caught up with events. Full biographies, of unprecedented (and in many cases unsurpassed) length and inclusiveness, presented figures from ancient, mediaeval and modern history and literature, from Moses to Charles James Fox. At the same time that the records of the past were being ransacked as never before for biographical purposes, the lives of contemporaries too were being written. The simultaneous exploitation of the distant and immediate present gave biography a limitless horizon.

The writing of new biographies of subjects long dead has been touched on already, and will be a recurring topic. As the interest in biography increased a demand also grew up for famous biographies which had been long out of print. The widespread revival and reprinting of these older books

1. From his Introduction to the Biography section of the Annual Review I (for 1803), 456.

was unprecedented. It was not simply that contemporary biographers were unable to keep up with the demand; there was a clear wish to have the whole of British (and not only British) biography, past and present, to hand. The fourteen volumes of the Retrospective Review, from 1820, reviewed no fewer than fifty-six older and mostly out-of-print books of memoirs, thirty-one of which were regular biographies, and we are told that they were "much appreciated by contemporaries."[1] S. W. Singer republished Roper's famous Life of Sir Thomas More, first in a small edition for antiquarian buyers (1817), and then, on recommendation, "in a form which would give it more extensive circulation." Singer recommended the work to those who were "gratified by authentic pictures of ancient manners,"[2] and to the same sort of interest was owed the republication of Walton's Lives, Cavendish's Wolsey, and Selden's Table Talk.[3] During the early 1820s a series of older biographical classics was published under the title Select Biography; these were advertised thus:

> Under the above Title it is proposed to publish Monthly, at a moderate Price, in a convenient and uniform Size, after the Manner of Sharpe's Classics and the Percy Anecdotes, a Selection of the most approved Pieces of Biography extant in the English Language.[4]

Clearly these were not meant as curiosities for bibliophiles. They were cheap reading editions, and often had modernized spelling for, as Singer observed in his Preface to Cavendish's Life of Wolsey, "the disguise of old spelling would have deterred many from reading this interesting narrative, to whom it will now afford pleasure."[5]

1. C. I. Dastur, The Retrospective Review. (Unpublished Oxford B. Litt. thesis. Ms. B. Litt. 319), p.103. He points out that the Retrospective "is symptomatic of the time, and was born of that interest in and tenderness for tradition which affected not only scholarship and criticism but creative art." (p.68).
2. 1822, p.5.
3. There were several editions of all of these works during the period.
4. Monthly Literary Advertiser, April 1820, 31.
5. 1825, p.xxii.

The interest in and appetite for things of the past is more strikingly seen in the number of documents, diaries, and memoirs of previous centuries which were published for the first time during the early nineteenth century. The Nichols' great antiquarian works started during this period; Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century (1812 - 15) and Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century (1817 - 58). More lastingly famous were the diaries of Evelyn (1818) and of Pepys (1825), Spence's Anecdotes of Pope (1820 - simultaneously in two different editions), and Aubrey's Brief Lives (1813). The publication of Evelyn's diary was probably the turning point, and Upcott claimed that it was the success of this which enabled Lord Braybrook to have Pepys' diary transcribed in the certainty that it would be a publishing proposition.[1] The preface to the first edition of the Diary was very tentative, but the work was successful, and quickly ran into a second edition.[2] The critical response to Pepys' diary seven years later was resoundingly and almost unanimously favourable. The details of his reception are described and analysed in a later chapter; in this survey we may simply record that the Westminster Review thought it "the most curious of those ms memorials of old times, which the inquisitive spirit of the present age has raked up from the dust of neglected libraries,"[3] and that the Literary Gazette wrote that it was "the very beau ideal of what we desire for such records."[4]

1. Temple Bar XLVII (1876), 93-4. Quoted by E. S. de Beer in his Introduction to The Diary of John Evelyn (Oxford, 1965), I, 54.
2. The second edition is dated 1819, and there was a New Edition in five volumes in 1827.
3. Westminster Review IV (October 1825), 408.
4. Quoted, along with many other favourable reviewers'comments, in Colburn's advertisement for the work in the Monthly Literary Advertiser, February 10th, 1826.

This great enthusiasm should cause no surprise to the cultural historian. Its origin can be seen as far back as Macpherson's Ossian, Chatterton's Rowley Poems and Ireland's Shakespeare forgeries. F. R. Hart notes that by 1831 Johnson and his circle were beginning to arouse a similar kind of antiquarian interest, revealed in the reviews of Croker's edition of Boswell's Life.[1] Altick describes the reverence towards old documents at this time as a "symptom of the romantic infatuation with the past."[2] This was a taste fuelled by every sort of non-contemporary biography, but more especially by biographies which printed documents and letters more or less verbatim, and most of all by the extended printing of diaries with no editorial interference. Altick's burlesque is hardly fanciful:

> As antiquarians went about unlocking muniment rooms of ancient castles and mansions, prying open oak chests in cathedral chapter houses, and blowing the dust of centuries from official records, anything sufficiently ancient seemed worth printing.[2]

This feeling for the past is shown too in a favourite metaphor of some the biographers of the time, who saw themselves as salvaging human history from time's ever-rolling stream. The "pen of Biography," wrote one,

> must seek and arrange its materials upon the spur of the moment, whilst minor or more minute events are floating on the stream of living recollection, ere they pass into the ocean of forgetfulness.[3]

Another biographer made the claim the justification for his whole work:

> It was from seeing this literary object in so perishable state, and from wishing to preserve a name of such celebrity from floating down the tide of oblivion, that the present Editor has been induced to publish these Memoirs.[4]

1. "Boswell and the Romantics," pp.44ff.
2. Lives and Letters, p.196.
3. George III, His Court, and Family (1820), I, [v] - vi. The metaphor was a popular one: cf Monthly Review CVII (October 1825), 150.
4. W. Cooke, Memoirs of Samuel Foote, (1805), I, vi. The fame of an actor was seen as particularly transient, and therefore as particularly in need of biographical preservation; cf. Biography of the British Stage, (1824), [v] - vi.

The rescuing of such details from the past was often greeted as miraculous: the Eclectic typically greeted one such work with the claim that it was "recovered from the ruins of Time, like a precious piece of sculpture from the ruins of Herculaneum."[1]

ii. Biography and the Present.

The exploitations of the rich biographical past was only half of the achievement of the writers of this period. Although biographies published during the subject's lifetime were still rare - Watkins' Life of Byron (1822) is one example - the speed with which biographers moved in after the death of a potential subject was often commented upon unfavourably. "No sooner does an eminent person die," remarked one reviewer, "than his scrutoire is ransacked and his friends are solicited for materials to make a volume."[2] Frequently the dates speak for themselves. Sheridan died on July 7th, 1816, and the Preface to Watkins' two volume Life of Sheridan (1817) is dated "London, November 20th 1816." When Owen Rees urged Thomas Moore to apply to Byron's family for material for his proposed biography, Moore replied that he would do so "as soon as the funeral was over, but that it would be indecorous till then."[3] In fact he was almost a non-starter, for Dallas' Recollections of Lord Byron was on sale on the day of

1. Eclectic Review III (January 1807), 16. (Review of Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson). Carlyle greeted Croker's edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson as "an indubitable conquest ... gained over our great enemy, the all-destroyer time." (Fraser's Magazine V (May, 1832), 380.
2. Quarterly Review IX (July 1813), 313. (Review of Correspondence of the late Gilbert Wakefield). The British Critic reviewer of Nelson's Letters to Lady Hamilton wrote in similar vein that "no sooner is the breath out of the body of a man of the slightest note, than some officious friend rushes into his study, seizes his port-folio, empties its contents on a bookseller's counter...." (N S II (November 1814), 524).
3. Moore's Journal, June 19th - 30th, 1824; Journal IV, 209.

Byron's funeral. Prospective biographers had pursued Cowper with similar urgency: Norma Russell relates how "in a letter to Hayley on 5 July 1800, Lady Hesketh wrote that as administrix of Cowper's estate, she was daily warding off applications from people who wanted to write Cowper's Life."[1] The writing of "instant" biography was not an entirely new phenomenon - Cibber had complained of it in his Apology[2] - but its wide extension is a remarkable development of the period. The activities of Mr. Eavesdrop in Peacock's Crotchet Castle are a surprisingly mild comment on the habits of biographers of this sort:

> After the lapse of a day or two the captain was missed, and everyone marvelled what had become of him.... Mr. Eavesdrop hoped that the particulars of his fate would be ascertained, and asked if anyone present could help him to any authentic anecdotes of their departed friend.[3]

Typically biographies of this sort were catchpenny works, taking advantage of the temporary interest in the recently dead. Carlyle wrote that "no sooner does a great man depart and leave his character as public property, than a crowd of little men rushes towards it."[4] Such writers made the work of respectable biographers more difficult by satiating the public, and previewing the materials. "Instant" biographies came in for some of the most consistently scathing comments from reviewers: The Universal Review's comments on Medwin's and Dallas' books on Byron are a good example:

> Arbuthnot called Curl "a new terror of death," for he wrote a memoir of every notable person who died during

1. N. Russell, A Bibliography of William Cowper to 1837 (Oxford, 1963), p.244.
2. He wrote of "many hasty writers" who had produced biographies "in less time after their [subjects'] Deaths than one could suppose that it cost to transcribe them." (An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, (ed. R. W. Lowe (1889), I, 5). Savage wrote to Cibber of a personal experience of the same sort; "a kind of bookseller visited me to solicit me for an account of myself to be printed at my decease." (printed in the Literary Beacon, October 1791, p.285).
3. The Novels of Thomas Love Peacock, ed. Garnett (1963), p.718.
4. Edinburgh Review XLVI (June 1827), 176 (Review of Doring's life of Richter).

> his time. But the sable king comes on us now with augmented terrors; for the generation of Curls has multiplied, and no man can be sure of his character an hour after the physician has received his final fee.[1]

Much "instant" biography was disreputable, but not all. It was generally recognised that the best time for collecting biographical information was immediately after the subject's death, or even during his lifetime. The academic argument was put by Dugald Stewart, explaining in the Preface to Biographical Memoirs that the Royal Society of Edinburgh was anxious to follow the example of other academies in preserving information about its members:

> In forming this design, they indulged the hope of being able, not only to preserve, in their Transactions, such notices with respect to the lives of their more distinguished Colleagues, as might be of use to future Biographers; but to record, while facts were yet recent and recollections lively, the impressions which their characters and manners had left on the memory of their surviving friends. A Portrait executed in these circumstances, might, they thought, even if it should exhibit nothing but a faithful Outline, prevent, at a more distant period, those misconceptions both of men and things, which are the natural consequences of oral tradition.[2]

The wish to establish a definitive version of a life while it could still be done authoritatively was a common reason for publishing biographies immediately after the subject's death. But even such an apparently practical and unmercenary motive could be controversial. It has been demonstrated how Cowper after his death was alternately claimed by Evangelical and anti-Evangelical biographers, each writer trying to make his own version seem definitive.[3] It even became a habit of biographers to cast their

1. Universal Review II (November 1824), 241. The joke may have been a chestnut: the T.L.S. review of P. M. Kendall's The Art of Biography remarks that "no doubt his strictures on the nineteenth century English and Scottish biographers are just, and as a Chief Justice of that period remarked of Campbell's Lives of the Chief Justices, they added a new terror to death." (December 16th, 1965, p.1181).
2. D. Stewart, Biographical Memoirs (Edinburgh, 1811), Preface, pp.v - vi.
3. L. Hartley, "Cowper and the Evangelicals. Notes on Early Biographical Interpretations," P.M.L.A. LXV (1950), 719 - 731.

rivals in the role of villain; Maria Edgeworth wrote:

> As it had happened to my father after the loss of his friend Mr. Day, he was, after the death of Dr. Darwin, called upon almost immediately to defend his memory against some of those, whose dreadful trade it seems to be, to rob the dead of reputation.[1]

Thus, as well as having academic value, "instant" biography could provide a series of contradicting documents in an open-ended debate on the merits of a subject recently dead. It also fed the age of personality, for it could hardly be disassociated from gossip about the living.

The publication of unfavourable or contentious biographies could have the effect of flushing out unwilling biographers, as Peacock's Memoirs of Shelley were precipitated by other biographies of the 1850s. Robert Burns' brother Gilbert attempted to undo the bad effects of Currie's Life of Burns, and wrote to Wordsworth for advice on the "best mode of conducting the defence of his brother's injured reputation."[2] A much more remarkable development during the early nineteenth century, though, was the emergence of what might be termed "defensive" biography. As it became obvious that no-one of any note at all could hope to avoid the attentions of biographers, it became common for biographies and autobiographies to be written with real or feigned reluctance, with the object of forstalling any less sympathetic or less malleable version. Moore claimed this as his justification for undertaking the life of Byron, as he explained in a letter asking Douglas Kinnaird for his co-operation:

> If we could get all the world to preserve silence on the subject of Byron's private character, I agree with Hobhouse that it would be better to let him in future live only in his works; but if every rascal who ever

- Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. (1820), II, 267 - 268. Mrs. Butler has pointed out to me that the rival in this case, Anna Seward, actually was a villain.
- The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. W J B Owen and J W. Smyser (Oxford, 1974), III 117 .

> broke bread with him is to be suffered to depreciate and vilify his character,[1]

then, he wrote, Byron's friends had a clear duty to defend his memory. Especially striking during this period is the number of autobiographies written to correct the anticipated excesses of possible biographers.[2] The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin opened explicitly with such a claim:

> In the following work I profess to give a history of my public life; a measure fairly eligible, and perhaps not injudicious; for, were I not to undertake this task, some one of those kind friends, who have been at the trouble to know my affairs, my character, my conduct, my intentions, my very heart and mind, better than I do myself, might have the accomodating condescension to do it for me.[3]

Similar reasoning was used by Scott and by Byron in defending their own autobiographical writings, and more credibly, since their productions were free from the special pleading which must inevitably accompany a four-volume autobiography intended for immediate publication. The Memoir of the early years of Sir Walter Scott, written by himself[4] was a product of apprehension rather than of egocentricity, as the opening explains:

> The present age has discovered a desire, or rather a rage, for literary anecdote and private history, that may be well permitted to alarm one who has engaged in a certain degree the attention of the public.... I may be therefore permitted, without an extraordinary degree of vanity, to take the precaution of recording a few leading circumstances (they do not merit the name of events) of a very quiet and uniform life - that, should my literary reputation survive my temporal existence, the public may

1. February, 1828. Letters ed. Dowden, II, 598.
2. "To preserve their own actions from oblivion and misrepresentation, some writers have been their own biographers." Vicesimus Knox, Essays Moral and Literary XCIV ("Cursory Thoughts on Biography"), Works (1824) I, 465.
3. 1803, I,i. The work runs to four volumes.
4. This is dated Ashestiel, April 26th, 1808. It was discovered by Lockhart when his work on the Life of Scott was already well-advanced, and he printed it verbatim at the opening of his biography.

> know from good authority all that they are entitled to know of an individual who has contributed to their amusement.[1]

Scott's defensive measures, and his attempt to circumscribe the public's right to knowledge, were of no avail, and Lockhart dismissed his views as completely inappropriate to the public of the 1830s. "It appeared to me, however," he wrote, "that the Author's modesty had prevented him from telling the story of his youth with that fulness of detail which would now satisfy the public."[2] Byron, like Scott, claimed that the writing of his memoirs was forced upon him:

> You will perhaps say <u>why</u> write my life? Alas! - I say so too, but they who have traduced it and blasted it, and branded me, should know - that it is they, and not I - are the cause. It is no great pleasure to have lived, and less to live over again the details of existence, but the last becomes sometimes a necessity and even a duty.[3]

The reluctant autobiographer was one of the stranger manifestations of the age of biography.

The richness of the biographical material which at this period was collected "while facts were yet recent" contrasts very sharply with the difficulties experienced by biographers of subjects from much earlier times. The true state of the materials for the life of Chaucer was revealed with engaging frankness by Richard Ryan:

> Of the history of Geoffrey Chaucer... it is astonishing that we should know absolutely nothing. His very descent is involved in inpenetrable obscurity; for while one of his biographers asserts that he was of noble stock, another declares that he was the son of a knight; a third, that his father was a vintner, and a fourth, that he was a merchant; there is a fifth opinion, which seems best entitled to credit, viz. that nothing can be said with

1. J. G. Lockhart, <u>Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott</u> I (1837), I.
2. <u>Ibid</u>. Author's Preface.
3. Letter to Lady Byron, December 31, 1819. Lovelace, <u>Astarte</u> (1921), p.300.

any certainty respecting his origin.[1]

Malone's incredulity at the neglect of the details of Shakespeare's life reveals a similar absence of material, and is an eloquent complaint from the age of biography:

> That almost a century should have elapsed, from the time of his death, without a single attempt having been made to discover any circumstances which could throw a light on the history of his private life, or literary career; that, when the attempt was made, it should have been so imperfectly executed by the very ingenious and elegant dramatist who undertook the task: and that for a period of eighty years afterwards, during which this "god of our idolatory" ranked as high among us as any poet ever did in any country, all the editors of his works, and each successive English biographer, should have been contented with Mr. Rowe's meagre and imperfect narrative, are circumstances which cannot be contemplated without astonishment.[2]

The shortage, or even the absence of biographical information about many figures from the past did not greatly inhibit biographers, as Chapter I (Part II) demonstrates. After about 1800, though, the variety of contemporaneous biographical records made it certain that the same sort of deficiency would never be suffered by biographers of the future.

iii Brief Lives

The importance to biography of the reviews and other periodicals was three-fold. They provided much of the criticism and the theory--and consequently a great deal of the material used in this study--and also gave, in summaries and in features, short biographies of their own. The reviews characteristically summarised and gave extracts from the books chosen for

1. R. Ryan, Poetry and Poets:... Anecdotes Relative to the Poets of Every Nation together with Specimens of their Work and Sketches of their Biography. (1820), I. 156. There is a very similar statement applied to Shakespeare by C. Symmons, The Life of William Shakespeare [1826], p.6.
2. The Life of William Shakespeare. Vol.II of The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare (1821), 10 - 11.

notice, and connected works, particularly different biographies of one person, were often dealt with in one review, the reviewer providing a précis of the information on the subject to date.[1] Southey, reviewing Elliott's Life of Wellington in the Quarterly, wrote, "it gives us a fair occasion for presenting a summary of the exploits of our great captain."[2] The summary occupies almost sixty pages. One of Southey's reviews, the Quarterly notice of lives of Nelson, was on John Murray's suggestion turned into a book.[3] With a little revision Southey made this article into his famous Life of Nelson. In an age of large and multi-volume biographies, the reviewers often saw their task as one of necessary and drastic abridgment. The Westminster's notice of the Memoirs of the Countess of Genlis opened with what was by 1827 a standard protest against large biographies ("an injudicious experiment upon the perseverance of the reading public"), and claimed that this was "precisely the sort of work which it becomes our vocation to wade through and abridge for the use of the public."[4] So great was the amount of biography published about Nelson, that there was even a

1. This, as John Clayton pointed out, was not a simple task: "Mere abridgment may be a very useful labour, but it is a humble one: the task of condensation, by which the facts scattered over numerous volumes are selected, placed in order, connected by a new narrative, and commenced upon according to their degree of interest, is much more difficult." Sketches in Biography, p.ix.
2. Quarterly Review XIII (April 1815), 216.
3. Smiles, II, 112.
4. Westminster Review VI (July 1826), 134. The reviewer rightly claimed that this sort of notice extended the circulation of the work. Cf. a critical remark about Grimshaw's Memoir of Legh Richmond; "a little compression would have made it more accessible to a large class of readers whom he would wish to benefit." (Eclectic Review 3rd Ser. II (August 1829), 149). John Foster had long before predicted, only half in jest, that if the trend towards long biographies continued, reviewers would "have the plea of absolute necessity for resorting to the practice of which they have sometimes been most unrighteously accused. that of reviewing books without inspecting them." (Eclectic Review III (January 1807), 2. (Review of Forbes' Life of Beattie).

need for the abridgment to be abridged. The Critical Review praised Southey for rendering

> a very acceptable service to a numerous class of his majesty's liege subjects, who are either rolling on the ocean, or idling on terra-firma, by the present more compendious and more portable life of the greatest maritime hero whom England ever produced.

Remarking that Clarke and M' Arthur's massive Life was "ill-calculated for the common reader,"[1] the reviewer offered a fifteen page synopsis of Southey's work. Reviewers performed the same service when biographies were very expensive. The two quarto volumes of Pepys' Memoirs cost six guineas, and the Eclectic reviewer did not anticipate that his readers would be able to afford them:

> We shall now proceed to lay before our readers some copious extracts of a more interesting nature, which, as the price of the volumes renders them hardly accessible to a large class of readers, will, we apprehend, be not unacceptable.[2]

All this is quite extraordinary, and is evidence that the copiousness and the lavishness of biography had passed beyond all reasonable market considerations.

Apart from the reviews, which existed, ostensibly, to review books, most of the magazines of the period carried series of biographical articles. The London Magazine offered "Critical Sketches of Modern Authors" from volume I, and "Lives of the Poets," presented as a continuation of Johnson's Lives, from volume IV. Fraser's Magazine had "The Gallery of Illustrious Characters" (with portraits) monthly from June 1830, and an occasional series of "Literary Characters by Pierce Pungent" from April 1830. Four of what Leigh Hunt intended as a long series of "Sketches of the Modern Poets"

1. Critical Review, 4th Series IV (July 1813), II.
2. Eclectic Review, N S 24 (July 1825), 76.

appeared in the Examiner during 1821; the author wrote that his intention was "literally, to give sketches of the principal features of the living poets as an artist might sketch those of their faces."[1] Further monthly series could be found in the Evangelical Magazine (from 1797), in the Universal Magazine (1804 - 14), the New Universal Magazine (from 1814), in La Belle Assemblée, and in the Theatrical Inquisitor and Monthly Mirror. The list could be easily extended. Biography was very clearly part of the staple diet of the readers of monthlies. Even the weeklies continued the trend, with the Mirror providing regular items of "Select Biography" from 1823. This type of short biography was reflected, and unwittingly parodied, in children's periodicals of the period. The Juvenile Library (1800 - 03) carried, as well as a series of "Moral and Instructive Biography," one of "Lives of Celebrated Children," such as "Volney Beckner, born at Londonderry, in 1748, and devoured by a shark at the age of twelve years."[2] As the supply of celebrated children was limited, recourse was had to "Accounts of the Infancy and early Progress of Great Men."[3] Usually the brief life was journalistic, and described contemporaries; Leigh Hunt's Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries provides an example of similar pieces being published in book form, while Hazlitt's Spirit of the Age, published in 1825, shows that the brief life could be refined to provide a new species of "character" writing.

The reviews and magazines by no means had the monopoly of short lives, even of contemporaries. The early years of the century, particularly up to 1816, saw a large number of biographical dictionaries published. These were much more than a simple continuation or updating of the eighteenth

1. Leigh Hunt's Literary Criticism, p.148.
2. The Juvenile Library, I, 189.
3. The editor wrote, "The childhood of man is a mirror in which, with more observing eyes, we might see his whole life in miniature." I, 118.

century tradition represented by Oldys and Towers' Biographica Britannica (1747 - 66.)[1] A combing of Bent's Monthly Literary Advertiser for the years covered by this study suggests that there were upwards of fifty biographical dictionaries published - or at least announced. The landmarks of the period were Aiken's General Biography (ten volumes, 1800 - 15) and Chalmers' General Biographical Dictionary (32 volumes, 1812 - 17). This was very much larger than the previous edition of the work (1798 - 1810); Chalmers provided 3934 additional lives, and of the remaining five thousand articles rewrote 2176.[2] Of the more portable works John Watkins' Universal Biographical Dictionary (1813) was the most popular. It was revised in 1821 to include "every name of importance" down to that date.[3] The desire that biographical dictionaries should be up to date was a common one, and works which dealt with historical characters overlapped those which described contemporaries. One of the best known repositories of short contemporary biographies was the series of annual Public Characters, running from 1798. The work claimed repeatedly that it had introduced a "new species of biography" in raising "literary statues to living genius and virtue," and argued that there were many advantages "which society may derive from thus antici-

1. William Cowper's lines "On observing some Names of little Note recorded in the Biographia Britannica" did not lose their point in the nineteenth century:
"Oh, fond attempt to give a deathless lot
To names ignoble, born to be forgot!
In vain, recording in historic page,
They court the notice of a future age:
Those twinkling tiny lustres of the land
Drop one by one from Fame's neglecting hand:
Lethaean gulphs receive them as they fall,
And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all."
Poetical Works (Oxford, 1934), p.307.
2. Information from the Gentleman's Magazine *NS* III (February 1835), 207 - 209.
3. Monthly Literary Advertiser, May 1821, p.38.

pating the trophies which have usually been appropriated to the tomb."[1] Biographical compilations, like the general class of biography, brought themselves up to date through this "new species of biography." John Watkins in the Preface to A Biographical Dictionary of Living Authors, repeated the popular complaint about the past neglect of biography, and commended modern industry for being "usefully employed in rescuing forgotten merit from total oblivion." He continued:

> The negligence of which we complain affords a lesson of caution with regard to existing genius, that those who come after us may not have reason to bring against us a similar accusation.[2]

The biographical details of the recently dead were collected also in magazine obituaries and in funeral sermons. An obituary was sometimes reprinted, or apparently off-printed, from the Gentleman's Magazine and circulated privately.[3] Often the Gentleman's Magazine obituary was used as the basis for other necrological notices, and was printed, though not always published, in a bewildering number of expanded and contracted versions. Only when an author provides a pedigree can we be certain of the line of descent; thus Thomas Fisher's Memoir of Grant was, according to his own account, first published in the Gentleman's Magazine in December 1823. Early in 1824 it was reprinted "either entire or abridged by other

1. Quotations from the Preface to the 1800 - 1801 volume. The claims were repeated in the Preface to the 1807 edition, the editor adding that the work had received "a most flattering reception in England." Vol.IX, [5].
2. 1816, Preface, [v].
3. Two examples must suffice. James Boswell wrote in the Advertisement to A Biographical Memoir of the late Edmund Malone, Esq. (1814; unpublished), "The following sketch originally appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine. A few copies of it (with some additions) are now reprinted for private distribution among the friends of the late Mr. Malone." Similarly Malone's account of William Windham was reprinted "not for publication" from the Gentleman's Magazine for June 1810.

monthlies," and was made the leading article in the Annual Biography and Obituary for 1824. In default of any fuller life being produced he reprinted it for private circulation in 1833.[1] Funeral sermons too were often published as pamphlets, sometimes going into two or three editions. Sometimes a brief biography was added when the funeral sermon was published, although such an addition was unnecessary when the funeral sermon was itself a memoir.[2] Often the profits were promised to the collection for the widow and children. The private memoir, printed for circulation among friends, seems to have been as common as the funeral sermon;[3] the usual formula was that typified by the Advertisement to the Memoir of the late John Bowdler (1825):

> The following Memoir having been in the course of the last winter circulated among the friends of the deceased, is now, at the request of many of them, published for sale.

Such a publication might prove commercially successful for no apparent reason: the Rev. Joshua Gilpin's A Monument of Parental Affection to a Dear and Only Son was written as an example of piety for his parishoners in 1808, and was in its seventh edition in 1823. A commoner way for a private memoir to become public was for it to serve as the nucleus for a larger work. Thomas Sharp explained in the Preface to his biography of his father that the work, begun as a private memorandum for the grandchildren, grew into two large volumes, expanding so far that "what was the first and sole design is now become the last and the least part of the whole work."[4]

1. Memoir of the late Charles Grant (1833), prefatory note.
2. Cf. the Advertisement to Rev. B. Carpenter, Memoirs of Rev. Hugh Worthington [1813], [i]: "The greatest part of these Memoirs was delivered from the Pulpit in the form of a Sermon, and it may, perhaps, be thought that they still retain too much of that form."
3. As so few were published it is impossible to estimate how common they were except by examples seen.
4. Thomas Sharp, The Life of John Sharp (1825), I, iv-v.

Similarly James Northcote apologised in the Preface to the first edition of his Life of Reynolds, because he had been "drawn into it by degrees, as we commonly are to all the sins we commit."[1] This was the sort of growth that John Foster in the Eclectic attacked as a "swelling fungous sort of biography."[2] Thus apart from the proliferation of sub-biographical necrological pamphlets, obituaries could take on independent existence as short lives or snowball into full-scale biographies.

It had been the practice even before the turn of the century to collect obituaries in the Annual Necrology, a publication which was greeted in 1800 as "a work written on a good plan, and... sure to gain attention, at a time when biographical notices are certainly more sought than at any former period."[3] From 1817 the obituary notice was systematized in the Annual Biography and Obituary, a publication organised in four parts, viz. I. Memoirs of Celebrated Men who have died during the Year. 2. Neglected Biography. 3. Analysis of recent biographical Works. 4. A general biographical List of Persons who have died during the Year. The plan was soon modified, and the second and third categories practically abandoned.[4] The Preface to the first volume claimed it as an attempt "to wipe away the charge of biographical penury," and to gratify curiosity "before it has been suffered to evaporate in protracted expectation."[5] Despite criticisms of its selection and treatment, it did provide an annual supplement to the

1. The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1818), I. Preface.
2. Eclectic Review III (January 1807), 2. (Review of Forbes' Life of Beattie).
3. British Critic XVI (July 1800), xiii.
4. A reviewer of the 1824 edition wrote, "In the present volume of this convenient work, the analysis of biographical works and the neglected biography are omitted, to allow a greater space for original memoirs. The former of these may, we think, be very properly left to us Reviewers: the latter might be rendered very acceptable." Eclectic Review N S XXI (April 1824), 366 - 367.
5. 1817 Volume, p.v.

dictionaries, and until 1830, at least, all the volumes were kept in print.[1] Throughout the period, additionally, as long before and after, the Gentleman's Magazine was considered to provide the most reliable obituaries, and its articles were frequently plundered. The editor of the Annual Biography and Obituary justified such lifting on the grounds that obituaries provided information of general utility, which should be open to all.[2] Altogether, when obituaries, brief lives of contemporaries, and biographical dictionaries of contemporaries are considered, the claim for a "new species of biography" seems justified. Its value was twofold; it was concise and it was up to date. A reviewer of the 1824 volume stated that

> it forms a useful depository for information not wholly uninteresting, which would otherwise be lost; for, with all the voracity of the reading public, it cannot digest quarto or octavo memoirs of every celebrated painter, poet, politician, physician, ecclesiastic, soldier, or dramatic performer that may die within the year.[3]

In some measure these works may be seen as a practical answer to the criticism that biography was too profuse and too expensive for most readers. They provided, as well as biographical digests, a finely meshed net to catch briefly even the really obscure subjects, who could only exceptionally achieve commemoration in individual volumes.

The widespread popularity of biography is amusingly displayed in the number of collected brief lives issued with the word "biography" in the title; the following selection of titles shows the trend. Biography for Boys (1799) and for Girls (5th edition, 1809), Eccentric Biography (1801), Martial Biography (1804), Holy Biography (1812), Musical Biography (1814), Biography of the Blind (1820), Select Female Biography (1821), Juvenile

1. Monthly Literary Advertiser, March 1830, p.19.
2. 1826 Volume, p.v.
3. Eclectic Review N S XXI (April 1824), 367.

Biography (1824), Modern General Biography (1827), and Moral Biography (1828). In addition the word "biography" was extended to natural history;[1] Bingley's Animal Biography was published in four volumes in 1829, and the same year saw Biographical Sketches of Dogs published in Edinburgh. The family was completed with the appearance of Ornithological Biography by J. J. Audubon in 1831. Biography did not confine itself to the printed word. Priestley's A Chart of Biography was in its fourteenth edition in 1806, and in 1820 subscriptions were invited for a Medallic Biography.[2] Few of these works are of any interest, but the list is a reminder that the word, like the form, was overused and extended during this period. The lives of animals and household objects must remain outside the scope of this study, and those interested in learning about The Adventures of a Pincushion or The Vicissitudes of a Cat should turn to studies of the juvenile literature of the period.[3]

iv. Prefatory Biography.

Another form of short life which came into its own during this period was the prefatory memoir. Sir William Jones' statement that "the best monument that can be erected to a man of literary talents is a good edition of his works," was put into practice to the extent that it is unusual to find any important author whose works were not either collected or reprinted during the period. Almost invariably the works were prefaced by a biography, excused by a claimed need for information when the author was obscure, and

1. N.E.D. meaning 3, first recorded there in 1854.
2. London Magazine II ix (September 1820), 332.
3. Such as F. J. H. Darton's Children's Books in England (2nd edition, Cambridge, 1958).

for concise information when his life was well-known.[1] There was, as with obituaries, a great deal of intrading and borrowing, and endless bibliographical complications. These may be best illustrated by examining the treatment of one author, Smollett. Robert Anderson edited Smollett's Miscellaneous Works in six volumes in 1796, prefixing an enlarged version of a short life which had originally accompanied the poetical works in the 1794 Edinburgh edition of the British Poets. This Life was further revised, with large additions and occasional deletions, in each of the five further editions of the Miscellaneous Works, (1800, 1806, 1811, 1817, 1820) and was also printed separately (Edinburgh, 1803). J. Moore prefixed a Life to his eight volume edition of the Miscellaneous Works of 1797, and of various other editions of the works, that of 1824 (twelve volumes) carried a short anonymous memoir. Another Life appeared with the Poetical Works of 1794, and further lives by E. Sandford, with the Select Poems of 1822, and by S. W. Singer in volume 66 of the British Poets (1822). It is hardly surprising that Scott, penning his own prefatory life for Ballantyne's Novelists' Library should have found that recent researches had left him "little except the task of selection and abridgment."[2] Prefatory lives were almost as abundant as the editions and selections of the works, and for an author as frequently reprinted as Johnson or Burns the bibliographical problems defy disentanglement. F. B. Snyder, one of Burns' bibliographers, records twenty complete editions of Burns between 1800 and 1820, in addition to countless selections. Most of these had prefatory lives derived from Currie's Life. After 1820, writes Snyder, "the editions of part or all

1. Cf. John Johnson, Preface to Volume III of Cowper's Poems, 1815: "To such readers as happen not to have perused his [Hayley's] more copious Work, I may venture to recommend the following "Map of Cowper's Life."
2. Ballantyne's Novelists' Library II (1821), [i].

of the work become numerous that I make no attempt to list them." His estimate is that up to 1851 275 editions and selections of Burns' work had appeared, "the great majority of which contained biographical sketches," and that, even more amazingly, "there had been at least one hundred and fifty more or less significant biographical memoirs, reviews, or formal biographies."[1]

Prefatory biographies were as a rule forty or fifty pages in length, but occasionally extended to many hundred pages. Sometimes they were reprinted, and often apparently off-printed, as pamphlets separate from the works.[2] Not only a great deal of biographical energy, but the talents of some of the most distinguished antiquarian scholars of the age were expended upon these productions. The better known practitioners were Malone, Kippis, Singer, Nichols, and, most prolific of all, Chalmers.[3] Well-known writers, too, lent their names to collected editions by means of the prefatory life; Campbell's British Poets (1819) and Scott's Lives of the Novelists (1821 - 24) both probably depended more on the authors' reputations than on their inherent biographical excellence. Some of the best and best known biographies of the time, including Currie's Burns, Todd's Spenser, and Malone's Dryden were published as prefaces to the works. More commonly, though, the prefatory life was seen by its practitioners as

1. F. B. Snyder, "Burns and his Biographers," Studies in Philology XXV, 401 - 415.
2. There are number of these among the Godwin Pamphlets in the Bodleian Library. Often the title page was re-set, but the Roman numbers of the pagination usually give away the origin.
3. Chalmers' remarkable output is described under his entry in the D.N.B. It includes forty-five volumes of the British Essayists with prefaces historical and biographical, a twenty-one volume enlargement of Johnson's Poets (1810), the ninth edition of Boswell's Johnson (1822), County Biography (1819-20), and many lives in the British Gallery of Contemporary Portraits (1809-16).

a distinct form of biography. M'Nicoll in his Life of Cowper prefixed to Newton's 1816 edition of the poems compared his own work very favourably to "literary productions of some magnitude," and considered himself as bound by "the limits of prefatory memoir." M'Nicoll made it clear that he did not intend to "make a book;"[1] undoubtedly one of the influences on the form was a reaction against the sort of "book-making" described below. Prefatory biography flourished in the early nineteenth century as never before or since. Its real significance lies not so much in the immense and complicated biographical industry which was involved, as in the unchallenged assumption that no writer's works could be considered apart from the details of his life. From this time life and works became an inseparable compound.[2]

v. Useful and Useless Biography.

As well as the publication of such a variety of biography, both new and old, this period saw also a great deal of familiar material being recast into biographical or autobiographical form. It became common to publish in such form matter - often military, topographical or religious - which was not of essentially biographical interest. A striking example of this is Richard Mant's biographical version of the New Testament. The author saw this as no more than an updating, and claimed in the Preface "a style more suited to the literary taste of the present day."[3] The existence of such a taste is confirmed by the publication of J. G. Bevan's Life of the Apostle Paul (1807) and of John Campbell's Remarkable Particulars of the Life of Moses (1808). Many writers capitalised upon the demonstrable

1. 1816, pp.iv-v.
2. See below, Ch.IV, "Literary Biography."
3. Biographical Notices of the Apostles, Evangelists, and other Saints (Oxford, 1828), p. [vii].

popularity of biography as a form; they included novelists, with the fictional autobiography one of the popular novelistic forms of the period.[1] Lockhart often urged the biographical medium for contemporary "useful knowledge," and he ensured that the Family Library included a large proportion of biography. He was convinced that it was "the most effective way of teaching history to the class of readers he sought."[2] "Certainly," he wrote to Constable, "I am of the opinion that much is to be done by throwing the materials of history into the ever-attractive form of biography."[3] Harnessing the attractions of biography for instructional and for morally didactic purposes was one of the conspicuous uses of biography during this period, and is the subject of Pt. II, Ch.V. Apart from these areas, biography became increasingly the medium not only for general history, but for the history of music, the theatre, the Church, natural history (Ornithological Biography), and many other branches of knowledge.[4] This trend was wholly in the spirit of the times. First-hand accounts - and in particular accounts converted to the first person - and all experience viewed through the grid of personality, was a formula which provided a great deal of

1. Galt and Lockhart were important writers of first-person fiction. The Athenaeum reviewer of The Member wished that "Mr. Galt would do nothing but write imaginary autobiographies." (Quoted by Jack, p.233).

2. Gettman, p.37.

3. T. Constable, Archibald Constable and his Literary Correspondents, (Edinburgh, 1873), III, 315.

4. Biography was a potent weapon in "the march of intellect." The first nine of Murray's Family Library were planned as biographies, and most of the rival series relied almost as much on biographies. (Bentley's National Library and Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia, for example). The prospectus for the Library of Entertaining Knowledge promised "Anecdotes of Individuals remarkable for their ardent pursuit of Knowledge under unfavourable circumstances." (Monthly Literary Advertiser, November 1828, p.85), but what such works generally provided was not didactic biography in the sense of direct moral example; its use rather demonstrated the popularity of the form by adopting it as the most acceptable vehicle for knowledge.

Romantic literature which was semi-autobiographical.

The encouraging reception given to "useful" biography contrasts very markedly with the reviewers' disparagement of biography which for one reason or another they considered to be useless. Biography was the genre most frequently cited under the charge of "book-making," a recurrent term of literary reproach. As far as biographies were concerned there were two fairly distinct classes of uselessness identified by the commentators; those which were purely unnecessary, and those which had been written for mercenary notices.

Firstly, then, there were repeated criticisms of biographies, looser "memoirs," and collections of letters, which were of no discernible merit whatsoever, and which could not even be explained, as autobiography could, by authorial vanity. Such works were often dismissed by reviewers as "pieces of literary manufacture."[1] A reviewer of Lady Suffolk's Correspondence exclaimed: "Here are two thick octavo volumes of letters, of which not above a dozen are in any way worthy of publication."[2] Jeffrey, in particular, repeatedly criticised the habit of expanding a few interesting facts or letters into a full-dress, or even multi-volume biography; reviewing Forbes' Life of Beattie he acknowledged the merits of both writer and subject, but added:

> He has filled two quarto volumes with the correspondence of his friend; and protesting, as we have always done, against the multiplication of needless quartos, and the publication of ordinary epistles, we cannot avoid saying, that his book is a great deal larger, and a great deal duller, than we are bound to tolerate.[3]

The reviews of the time contain repeated but futile complaints about the

1. Eclectic Review IX (September 1812), 971 (Review of C. V. Williams' Life of Percival).
2. Edinburgh Review XL (March 1824), 147.
3. Ibid. X (April 1807), 172.

publishing of unnecessary books, either produced from materials totally devoid of general interest, or else padded and spun out from the most meagre materials. On this the Edinburgh and Quarterly could agree;[1] the latter complained of Meadley's Memoirs of Paley thus:

> We surmise that he was partly swayed by a certain desire of making a book: which same desire has further impelled him to spin out his memoirs, by introducing needless repetitions and dwelling too much on trivial circumstances - also to fill up half a goodly octavo, by cramming in analyses of Paley's sermons, tracts formerly published....[2]

The Edinburgh, at the same time wrote, of Cayley's Memoirs of Sir Thomas Moore:

> We should exhaust the reader's patience, were we to detail the whole body of evidence which has gone to convince us, that Mr. Cayley's object, in penning these Memoirs, was neither to vindicate his hero's fame, nor to accomodate, enlighten, or amuse the public - nor, even what is a more common motive than either, to put money in his pocket - but simply to make a book.[3]

This was a phenomenon which again and again filled reviewers with incredulity - that such useless volumes should be produced with no ulterior motive at all, not even the desire for financial profit.

As might be expected, the "more common motive" for writing biography, the hope of financial gain, was much more frequently condemned. The numerous criticisms of this sort of writing were often very censorious. Brydges, a literal amateur of literature, passed frequent pained comment on books which were "little better than manufactures,"[4] and Maginn in 1831

1. Jeffrey wrote to Charles Wilkes (May 5, 1819), "Entre nous, however, the Life of Fulton is--bad as possible; and after reading it with a design of contradicting the Quarterly, if possible, I ended by agreeing with them." Lord Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey (2nd ed., Edinburgh, 1852), II, 186.
2. Quarterly Review II (August 1809), 83.
3. Edinburgh Review XIV (July 1809), 363.
4. Autobiography, II, 131 - 132.

gave a more specific diagnosis of this malaise in literature:

> Books are not now written to the glory of the human intellect, and for the proud meed of mental distinction; but for the passing calls of the stomach, for the payment of an upholsterer's, tailor's, or a milliner's bill.[1]

Years later Gillies, looking back on the period, concluded that "no sooner has the notion of writing for pecuniary gain acquired pre-eminence in the mind of an author than his proper vocation is gone."[2] It was a frequent sneer of the reviewers of the time that the chief stimulus to biographical activity was the mercenary one. Croker resorted to very heavy-handed irony to suggest such a motive in his review of Warden's Conversations with Buonaparte:

> Mr. Warden says, that in publishing these Letters, 'he has yielded, rather reluctantly, to become an author, from persuasion he scarce knew how to resist, and to which he had some reason to suspect resistance might be vain.' (p.vi). He consented reluctantly to become an author! .... How he could be forced by an irresistible power to publish, is more than we can comprehend, unless, as we shrewdly suspect, that irrestible power was a talismanic paper inscribed with certain figures of pounds, shillings, and pence, which were at once the object and reward of the imposture.[3]

Five years later he observed, as if it were a commonplace, that "large prices will be found the surest stimulant to valuable publications."[4]

Biography, whether financially motivated or not, was only one branch of book-making, but it was the most notorious one. It was also the one most open to criticism, for here an authors bad literary tact or profit-making enterprise necessarily involved his subject. Cashing in on an aquaintanceship with the famous was often criticised vehemently by reviewers; the

1. Fraser's Magazine IV (April 1831), 8. Quoted by Gettman, p.60.
2. R. P. Gillies, Memoirs of a Literary Veteran; including Sketches and Anecdotes of the most distinguished literary characters from 1794 to 1849. (1851), III, 81.
3. Quarterly Review XVI (October 1816), 211.
4. Quarterly Review XXV (July 1821), 414. (Review of Lord Waldegrave's Memoirs).

Universal Review's complaint about the biographical activities of Byron's erstwhile friends is a good example:

> Formerly the last office of friendship was to see the man quietly inurned; but the friendship of our days is of a more enduring cast, it adjourns from the cemetry, only to renew its sorrows in the counting-house, and smit with the love of the departed, and of pounds, shillings, and pence, weeps a testimonial quarto.[1]

There was the added objection that in a period when writers were setting up as gentlemen (Scott is the clearest example), such works were considered ill-bred as well as mercenary. Jeffrey wrote of Hardy's Life of Lord Charlemont, "this is the life of a Gentleman, written by a Gentleman: - and, considering the tenour of many of our late biographies, this of itself is no slight recommendation."[2]

An author's need to fill his stomach, described with such contempt by Maginn, was often admitted by authors of the time in their correspondence. It provides a partial explanation, too, for the glut of biographies, since biography, as Pt. II Ch. 1 shows, was commonly thought of as needing very little specialised talent, and therefore as open to inexperienced writers. Leigh Hunt, one of many of Byron's friends who sought solvency through memoir, was honest enough to admit as much in print. In the preface to his Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries he wrote:

> I must even confess, that such is my dislike of these personal histories, in which it has been my lot to become a party, that had I been rich enough, and could have repaid the handsome conduct of Mr. Colburn with its proper interest, my first impulse on finishing the work would have been to put it on the fire.[3]

This astonishing admission had the critical reception it deserved, particularly and at enormous length in Blackwood's Magazine ("What mean and

1. Universal Review II (November 1824), 241.
2. Edinburgh Review XIX (November 1811), 95.
3. 1828 , I, iv.

miserable contradictions and inconsistencies are crowded and huddled together here.")[1] The Monthly Review saw the whole work as yet another proof of the prostitution of letters ("The wretched woman who, under the veil of night, offers her attractions to those who are disposed to pay for them, may tell a similar tale"), and of "a disposition that prevails among certain classes of literary men, to degrade their pursuits into a mere matter of trade; to produce a given number of words for a proposed reward."[2] The inability of indigent writers to avoid writing hack biography was widespread, yet some of the more significant biographies of the period owed their existence to the same stimulus. Thomas Moore, for example, wrote in reply to Hobhouse's high-minded refusal to co-operate in his proposed Life of Byron, agreeing to the objections in principle:

> My opinion as to the objections against writing a Life of Lord Byron at present is very much the same as your own; and if I can possible avoid the task, it has all along been my desire to do so. But untill [sic] I can discharge, in some other way, the heavy obligations I am under, I must at least seem to entertain the intention.[3]

A bizarre light is thrown on the whole position of biography at this time by the realisation that Moore could not afford not to write his Life of Byron. Many biographies were endured, or even invented, by publishers anxious to do an author a good turn; an extreme example of this was Murray's

1. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine XXIII (March 1828), 377. The whole review takes up pp.362 - 408, in double columns.
2. Monthly Review N S VII (March 1828), 302, 300.
3. Moore to Hobhouse, 17th January, 1826. Hobhouse had written, "I shall not be able to bring myself to be a party to your project." (Letters, II, 548 - 549). Only just over a year earlier Moore had written to Col. Doyle to ask him to act as a go-between with the Byron family, and added "it must be... the desire of his friends, that some hand, on whose delicacy they can rely, should undertake the task, instead of leaving it to persons, who have no object but to make money by his memory." (Letter dated November 5th 1824; Letters, II, 530 - 531).

putting money into Campbell's pocket by means of the seven volumes of the Specimens of the British Poets with "Biographical Notices."[1] The interest in biography was dependable enough for it to be a stand-by for authors, in the way that text-books have been in more recent times.

A mercenary aspect of biography which was naturally little criticised was the memorial volume or set produced to supply the material wants of the deceased subject's family. Such a work as Memoirs of the late Rev. James Garie, (1802) "Compiled by William Gardner. Sold for the Benefit of Mrs. Garie and Family," escaped the criticisms usually levelled at panegyric and useless biography; the British Critic merely commented:

> Except the benevolent object of this publication, to assist the widow and her family, there seems nothing in the life, character, or talents of the individual himself to require or justify these Memoirs.[2]

Men of letters commonly appointed literary executors to edit or write their memoirs; this, as well as the genuine goodwill of men of letters such as Southey, produced a number of volumes of lives and letters.[3] Thomas Moore's own expectations are made clear in his will:

> I also confide to my valued friend Lord John Russell (having obtained his kind promise to undertake this service for me), the task of looking over whatever papers, letters, or journals I may leave behind me, for the purpose of forming from them some kind of publication, whether in the shape of memoirs or otherwise, which may afford the means of making some provision for my wife and family.[4]

Such hopes, however much they depended upon the goodwill of friends and executors, at least assumed the commercial success of printed "papers, letters, or journals," and are yet another demonstration of the dominant popularity of biographical material.

1. See Smiles, I, 325ff, for the details of this transaction.
2. British Critic XX (1802), 445.
3. For example, Southey's edition of Kirke White (Two volumes, 1807).
4. Journal, I [v].

CHAPTER III

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

"... and if this mood
Desert me not, I will forthwith bring down
Through later years the story of my life." [1]

Wordsworth

Although the biography of the early nineteenth century has received scant attention from literary historians, few have failed to mark that this was a great age of autobiography.[2] The genre cannot be ignored in a period framed by Gibbon and Mill, and containing Wordsworth's Prelude, De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater, and Coleridge's Biographia Literaria. This is indeed the point where the word autobiography enters the language. The Supplement to the N.E.D. gives an instance of the word rejected as a coinage in 1797, and dates its regular usage from 1809. In fact, earlier instances can be found in the Annual Review for 1805, and for 1806, where the word autobiographer is also found, fourteen years before the first usage recorded in the Supplement.[3]

I have followed the principle adopted by Stauffer, that "the distinction between biography and autobiography is largely artificial."[4] and material is therefore, like his, organised along lines which do not normally separate the two. There are several reasons for doing this. Firstly, while the period is very rich in autobiographical writing, comparatively

1. The Prelude (1805 version), I, 11. 637 - 639. (Ed. J. C. Maxwell, 1971), p.70.
2. "The tendency towards autobiography was ubiquitous," writes Jack (p.364). Oliver Elton, though, ignores autobiography.
3. Annual Review IV, 449; V, 298.
4. Stauffer I, 3 . P. M. Kendell similarly includes autobiography as a "close relative." (p.29).

little of it took the form of complete, formal autobiographies. Autobiographical pieces and fragments were much more common, and were often used by biographers as materials, and incorporated into biographies.[1] Secondly, even when a completed autobiography was published, many of the critical problems raised by commentators - matters such as its uses, its relation to the truth, and its documentation - were the same as those raised by the whole class of biography. Lastly, there is little evidence that contemporary critics kept the two species distinct. Autobiography was, of course, recognised as an exciting new form and greeted enthusiastically, but as a rule simply as the best type of biography. Stanfield wrote that there were three classes of biography; autobiography. biography written by "a discerning friend," and plain biography.[2] Another commentator made a distinction between biography and "original biography," "the result of actual observation: ... of this, there are two descriptions: the lives of eminent persons, written by their acquaintance or friends; and the lives of such characters, written by themselves."[3] In other words, the differences between biography and autobiography were not of kind.

The principal writers who at this time wrote memoirs of themselves have been mentioned already. It would be difficult to dispute Roy Pascal's claim that "this period may be properly called an 'age' of great autobiography." He identifies the "decisive" period as that between Rousseau's Confessions (1782) and the final volume of Goethe's Poetry and Truth (1831), incidentally reminding us that the phenomenon of autobiography was a European one.[4] Wayne Shumaker states in his study English Autobiography,

1. This practice is described in detail in Part II, Ch.III below.
2. Essay, pp.155 - 156.
3. British Critic N S I (February 1814), 149. (Review of Northcote's Reynolds.)
4. Design and Truth in Autobiography (1960), pp.36,50.

by way of a "general conclusion," that

> before 1600, autobiographies of the modern type are nearly impossible to find; after 1600, they follow one another at decreasing intervals, until at last, about 1800, their authors seem to be writing in a tradition instead of feeling their way into a new literary genre.[1]

In England the coming of age of autobiography may be put at 1796, with the publication of Gibbon's Memoirs of my Life and Writings in Lord Sheffield's redaction. The "really significant fact" about this work, Shumaker remarks, is that "for the first time the extended autobiography of a celebrated Englishman, intimate but not bearing upon religious experience, was printed and widely disseminated within a few years of his death."[2] Four years later Wordsworth had completed the first version of The Prelude and became the first British poet of any note to write an autobiography.[3] Within a very few years, though, autobiography had become the rule for all writers, and not to produce one was, by the Victorian period, a "financial sacrifice."[4] The period can thus be seen to have established the tradition of literary autobiography which we still have today.[5]

After about 1800 autobiographers no longer seem to be a special category of writer; Pepys and Boswell, Jack has suggested, seem to belong to "some particular psychological category,"[6] but now the writing of autobiography was an activity shared by a large miscellaneous class which had

1. English Autobiography, Its Emergence, Materials, and Form (Berkeley, 1954), p.5.
2. Ibid. p.27.
3. See J. C. Maxwell's edition of The Prelude (Penguin Books, 1971), Introduction pp.17 - 19. Perhaps one should except Lord Herbert of Cherbury, whose autobiography was first printed by Horace Walpole in 1764.
4. Jack, p.365.
5. The tradition is amusingly described by Alan Pryce-Jones in "The Personal Story." The Craft of Letters in England, ed. J. Lehmann (1956), pp.26 - 43.
6. Jack, p.364.

little save their literacy in common. Clearly men were now looking at themselves in new ways; the self-regarding aspects of the age which nurtured "the egotistical sublime" have been remarked by almost all writers on the Romantic period. No single model could account for such a profound and comprehensive change, yet the possibility of Rousseau's influence, at least indirectly, seems likely. "The best of all his works is the Confessions," wrote Hazlitt in the Round Table,[1] and this was the work of Rousseau which was particularly in Richard Edgeworth's mind as he embarked upon his own Memoirs.[2] The readiness of men to examine their own lives - as well as the willingness of the public to read the results - reveals the importance which was being accorded to the uniqueness of men. The individuality which was now sought at the expense of uniformity could be rendered very effectively and made very interesting by a narration in the first person. There was also during the period a growing sense among men who would never in an earlier age have thought of becoming authors, that they might be interesting because they were typical of some trade, or particular area of life, although not unusually gifted or at all famous. Moore recorded in his Journal his own interest in such writing:

> Talked with Dumont before dinner - told me Miss Edgeworth was preparing her father's memoirs for the press; said that the details of a life passed usefully in that middling class of society must always be interesting. He had not seen either Holcroft's or Gifford's "Memoirs"; recommended them to him (particularly the latter), as among the most interesting specimens of autobiography we have.[3]

For many readers the interest of autobiographies was not intrinsic or formal,

1. The Complete Works of William Hazlitt. Centenary Edition, ed. P. P. Howe (1930 - 1934), IV, 90. ("On the Character of Rousseau.").
2. Butler, p.105n.
3. Dated September 19, 1818. Journal II, 166 - 167.

but rather that they documented unfamiliar areas of human life.

Autobiography, like other biography, supplemented its accounts of contemporaries with works disinterred from earlier times, and translated from other languages. The major achievement in this field was the publication, between 1826 and 1832, of thirty-three volumes in a series called "Autobiography." This was advertised as "A Collection of the most instructive and amusing Lives ever published, written by the Parties themselves."[1] Like other biographical series, they were cheap reprints intended as reading copies, not as antiquarian curiosities.[2] The first volume, Colley Cibber, contained in the Advertisement striking claims for the form:

> There is such an essential distinction between self-composed and other Biography, that the principal literary object of our undertaking is at once apparent. It is, in fact, to collect into one consecutive publication, genuine materials for a diversified study of the human character, by selecting the most curious and interesting Autobiographical Memoirs now extant.

Autobiographies were thus claimed as documents for the study of man, the assumption being that the characters were best equipped to reveal themselves. Autobiographies were also revived in the Retrospective Review, and here it was their value as good examples of the genre which was stressed. The Life of Benvenuto Cellini was described as

> perhaps, the most perfect piece of autobiography that ever was written, whether considered with reference to the candour and veracity of the author, the spirit of the incidents, or the breathing vitality of the narrative.[3]

These formal qualities made it a subject for revival. Both original and

1. Monthly Literary Advertiser. September 1830, p.67. The wording was repeated on the title-pages of volumes in the series.
2. "Besides other advantages, this Series will include cheap Editions of many scarce and curious Works, which cannot at present be obtained without considerable trouble, even at high Prices." Monthly Literary Advertiser, September 1830, p.67.
3. Retrospective Review IV i (1821), I.

translated works were warmly reviewed.

Masked by the more or less formal autobiographies and the large number of unmistakably autobiographical pieces, was a large body of miscellaneous literary work which was autobiographical in all but form. The best-known letter-writers and essayists of the period - notably Cowper, Lamb, Hazlitt, Byron, and Keats - wrote predominantly about themselves, and their letters had for readers the same attractions as autobiography. The unprecedented reliance upon letters by biographers of the time could only have occurred during a period when their value as autobiography was highly regarded. "I hate concealment and love to give a faithful journal of what passes within me," wrote Lamb to Coleridge.[1] This seemed a frequent achievement of letter-writers, so that throughout the period biographers allowed their subjects to tell their own story through letters.[2]

The dissemination of familiar letters clearly influenced the essay[3] of the period, and explains how it, too, developed in the direction of autobiography. Few of Lamb's innumerable commentators have failed to point out that he drew largely on his own history for the material of his essays. "So constantly, indeed," writes a typical editor of the Essays of Elia and Eliana,"does this personal element enter into Lamb's writings, that a very interesting life might be compiled from them alone."[4] More recently commentators have tended to remark upon the autobiographical basis of the

1. October 3, 1796. Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb ed. E.V. Lucas (1935) I, 43 - 44.
2. For a discussion of the "life-and-letters" biography see Part II, Ch.1 below.
3. Cf. a modern view: "Only a person who is congenitally self-centered has the effrontery and the stamina to write essays." Essays of E. B. White (New York, 1977), p.vii.
4. In "A biographical Essay on Elia" prefixed to the Bohn's Popular Library edition (1926), p. [xi].

essays, denying the claim of literal truth. Malcolm Elwin writes that "Elia is one of the most successful masquerades in autobiographical fiction,"[1] while G. L. Barnett claims that "it is Lamb's personality as expressed in his essays, that has kept them from neglect."[2]

Lamb, in his review of the first volume of Hazlitt's Table Talk, gave a "commentary on the autobiographical nature of Hazlitt's work as an essayist."[3] In the opening paragraph he praises Hazlitt as one of those essayists who impart "their own personal peculiarities to their themes. By this balm they are preserved."[4] For Lamb the autobiographical elements of the essays were both an attraction and the unifying factor. Hazlitt's essays, are in fact autobiographical in a way quite different from Lamb's own. He illustrated human nature from his own observation, and not least from his observation of himself. A general remark about the English in his essay "On Means and Ends" is supported by the typical parenthesis "to judge by what I discover in myself."[5] Ian Jack argues that Hazlitt "stands to earlier essayists rather as Wordsworth stands to earlier epic poets," in turning from mythology to personal experience for his subject matter, and points out that many of his essays "are in fact chapters of autobiography."[6]

1. Introduction to his edition of The Essays of Elia (1952), p.xi.
2. Charles Lamb and the Evolution of Elia (Bloomington, 1964), p.4. Barnett provides an interesting discussion of the inter-operation of Lamb's letters and essays, pp.76 - 103. See also Richard Haven, "The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb" (E.L.H. XXX (1963), 137 - 146) where he argues similarities between Lamb's Essays and Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry as both revealing "the replacement of an external 'public' principle of structure by one that is internal and 'private'."
3. Barnett, p.42. He describes here and in "An unpublished review of Charles Lamb" (M.L.Q. XVII (1956), 352 - 356) the restrictions placed on quotation from this ms..
4. Barnett, p.43.
5. Works XVII, 212.
6. Jack, p.274. Catherine M. Maclean has actually compiled an autobiography, Hazlitt Painted by Himself (1948), from portions of the essays.

The same could be said of some minor essayists, notably of De Quincey[1] and of Brydges, whose chief subject in most of his essays, as elsewhere, is himself.

It was autobiographies which provoked the most eloquent and exasperated complaints of uselessness from reviewers - perhaps because vanity was an additional aggravation. The published lives of artisans were much more commonly commonly autobiographies than biographies: the successors to James Lackington still seemed busy convincing the world of their worth. Presumably only those who moved in more literate society could depend upon survivors or executors capable of memorial authorship. As early as 1809 Isaac D'Israeli had written of his fear of the "pernicious" tendency of "an epidemical rage for autobiography,"[2] and the complaints grew to a crescendo in the late 1820s. In the Quarterly in January 1827 Lockhart dealt with a bundle of ten autobiographies, remarking tartly "England expects every driveller to do his Memorabilia."[3] One of Lockhart's ten, the Life and Times of Fredrick Reynolds, was similarly taken in the following month (together with the Reminiscences of Michael Kelly) by the Eclectic as a whipping-boy for the whole superfluous class:

> There is a superabundence of this flimsy sort of autobiography afloat at the present moment; and we have taken up these volumes as giving a fair sample of an ephemeral species of literature, sufficiently well adapted to meet the tastes of light and lounging readers, but supplying little interesting information to inquirers of a more fastidious temper.[4]

A few months later the Monthly Review joined the chorus in similarly haughty

1. Described by Dobrée as "the most autobiographical of writers." (Introduction to his selection Thomas de Quincey (1965), p.I).
2. Quarterly Review I (May 1809), 386. (Review of Memoirs of Percival Stockdale.)
3. Ibid. XXXV (January 1827), 149.
4. Eclectic Review N S XXVII (February 1827), 114.

terms, condemning "the plague of autobiography, which has already diffused its insect progeny far and wide, to the infinite annoyance of all his majesty's subjects."[1] All in all, 1827 seems to mark the period when the reviewers' patience ran out; an article two years later in Blackwood's Magazine predicted that the whole genre, "one of the most universally agreeable kinds of reading," would be hopelessly discredited by these examples, for "the era of its splendour is rapidly passing away."

> Really, if stock-jobbers and contractors are to give us accounts of their profits and losses, and if every unfortunate female,... if every swindler and thief-taker is to nauseate the public with the details of their vulgar vices, relying upon the names of those whose pockets they have, after their respective fashions, assailed or protected, for exciting a prurient curiosity that may command a sale, the very name of autobiography will, we apprehend, ere long be loathingly rejected in the drawing-room, as fit only for the kitchen or servant's hall.[2]

The Blackwood's writer interpreted the direction which autobiography was taking as a symptom of a serious cultural deficiency in the country. Other commentators, while obviously alive to these fears, took a more lighthearted view. The Athenaeum in 1829 made its own comment on the prevalence of autobiography by publishing a skit, the "Memoirs of the Life of William Dobbs, some time Tallow Chandler, in the Town of Melton, in Somersetshire."[3] D. M. Moir's Mansie Wauch, first published anonymously in Blackwood's in 1828, opens in similar satirical vein, the author explaining in the "Preliminaries" how he came to be an autobiographer:

> Having, within myself, made observation of late years, that all notable characters, whatsoever line of life they may have pursued, and to whatever business they might belong, have made a trade of committing to paper all the surprising occurrences and remarkable events

1. Monthly Review NS V (July 1827), 349. (Review of Reminiscences of Dibdin).
2. Blackwood's Magazine XXVI (November 1829), 737 - 738.
3. Athenaeum XCIV (August 12, 1829), 503 - 504. The skit is continued in No.XCV 519 - 520, then lapses.

> that chanced to happen to them.... I have found it incumbent on me, following a right example, to do the same thing.[1]

There was a strong reaction against the surge of autobiography during the latter part of the period, but neither parody nor the more sustained criticism provided by the invective of the reviewers, can be seen to have had any effect on the flow.

1. The Life of Mansie Wauch, Tailor in Dalkeith. Written by Himself. (Edinburgh, 1828), p. [ix].

CHAPTER IV.

LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

> "Sir," said Imlac, "my history will not be long: the life that is devoted to knowledge passes silently away, and is very little diversified by events."[1]

On February 1767 Johnson was reading in the library of Buckingham House when George III came in to speak with him. Towards the end of the conversation the king "expressed a desire to have the literary biography of this country ably executed, and proposed to Dr. Johnson to undertake it."[2] In the Hebrides six years later Johnson said that "he did not think that the life of any literary man in England had been well written."[3] It was six years after this that he published the first of his Lives of the English Poets. The Lives have been considered by literary historians as establishing literary biography as a genre in England,[4] and their author, Altick writes, "was the most fortunate event in English literary biography."[5]

The turning of the tide after about 1780 may be seen in evidence already presented. There was no writer of any importance at all whose life was not written or rewritten during the early nineteenth century. New editions of the works--of historians, philosophers and scientists, as well

1. Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abysinia. Ch.8.
2. Life of Johnson, II, 40.
3. Ibid., V, 240.
4. See, for example, Harold Nicolson, pp.79 ff., and J. A. Garraty, p.84.
5. Lives and Letters, p.46.
6. For some poets the biography by Johnson became the standard one, reprinted with successive nineteenth-century editions of the works. The Rev. A. Dyce's edition of the Poetical Works of William Collins (1827), for example, contained the Life by Johnson (pp. 1 - 8), followed by "Notes on Johnson's Life of Collins, by the editor." (pp. 9 - 36).

as of men of letters-- almost invariably contained prefatory memoirs, and a "literary life" thus became the expected complement to any works which were thought worth printing. So rapid and overwhelming was the change that it is difficult for a modern reader to realise that literary biography has not always been held in the esteem to which Johnson helped elevate it. Yet as late as 1778 Horace Walpole, in the opening of his Life of Mr. Thomas Baker, wrote that "the deep or extensive learning of a man of letters is but a barren field for biography," and concluded that authors are not "such benefactors to the world, that the trifling incidents of their lives deserve to be recorded."[1] Such support as there was for this view in the new century came usually from men of letters who, like Wordsworth, wished to preserve the privacy of authors' lives:

> Assuredly, there is no cause why the lives of that class of man should be pried into with the same diligent curiosity, and laid open with the same disregard of reserve, which may sometimes be expedient in composing the history of men who have borne an active part in the world.[2]

Wordsworth's Letter was published in 1816, and even then presented an outdated view, which was frequently and strongly refuted. The opening words of Memoirs of the Rev. W. Wood (1809) are typical: "That the lives of studious and literary men are commonly barren of literary incidents, is an observation so trite as scarcely to bear a repetition." Biographers soon ceased to be defensive; William Morgan depreciated the "exploits of heroes and conquerers" in favour of the "retired occupations of the philosopher and the divine,"[3] and the same formulation occurs repeatedly in the opening

1. "Life of Mr. Thomas Baker," written in 1778, and first published in the five volume edition of Horace Walpole's Works (1798), II, 341.
2. "A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns." Prose Works III, 122. Scott too tried in his "memoir" to circumscribe what the public was "entitled to know of an individual who has contributed to their amusement." (Lockhart's Life I, [1])
3. Memoirs of Rev. Richard Price (1815), p.2.

pages of biographies of subjects who had not been men of action. So many biographers agreed that the charge that writers' lives were "barren of incident" was a "trite objection," that their objection itself became trite.[1] Brydges, more than any other commentator, returned repeatedly to the topic, claiming that historical events were of only transitory worth, while thoughts and reflections were eternally valuable:

> There is nothing more vulgar or contemptible than the opinion that they only who have lived in the heat of action can afford proper materials for memoirs.[2]

While Brydges may have been trying to enhance the reputation of the style of life which he had set himself, his remarks are of more than personal application. He even devoted a special number (No.87) of The Ruminator to the subject,"Lives of Literary Men abundant in Materials for Biography."[3]

Several influences, of which the reputation of Johnson's work was only one, combined to bring about this radical change in estimating literary biography. In the first place the tendencies of the age to discredit fiction and romance carried over, to a degree, and threw an unfavourable light on the more spectacular forms of biography. Literary biography was felt to possess a dignity not shared by accounts of adventures and escapades, however true they might be. A reviewer of the Memoirs of Victor Alfieri remarked:

> A scholar's life, indeed, is not often chequered by any very striking or important events: but why should biography be degraded to the level of romance?

The reviewer disparaged spectacular biography, though it was natural that

1. e.g. Miss Benger, Memoirs of Hamilton, p.[1]. J. E. Stock, Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Beddoes (1811), p.[1].
2. Autobiography, I 276. Similar statements may be found in his essay "On the proper Objects of Biography." The Ruminator (1813) I, 47 - 58.
3. II, 224 - 228.

there should be some readers for whom the pleasures of literary biography were "too refined to be sensibly felt and easily comprehended."[1] To read narratives which not only were true, but which had none of the allure and excitement of what Brydges often called "hairs breadth escapes," certainly became a recognisable form of literary sophistication at this period. Brydges contemptuously contrasted literary biography with "the life of a highwayman or home-breaker... full of surprising events." He concluded, "I remember, when I was a child, that I was deeply delighted with such reading."[2] The slow shift of interest away from the spectacular towards the contemplative in biography was also, as Adolphus suggested, a natural extension of interest when one area had been satisfied:

> As literature and science begin to assume their just preeminence among human pursuits, the province of Biography is rapidly extended; and men who have had no share in the public transactions of their age, but have adorned it by their genius or their labours, are allowed to divide our attention with princes, warriors, and politicians.[3]

Interest in literature and science made the description of the study or the laboratory as interesting for one class of reader as the accounts of battles or political events were for another. Adolphus assumed that his audience in the Sheldonian Theatre belonged exclusively to the former class, and expected them to agree that the interest of biography was in relating "what studies have matured the scholar, what incident has aroused the poet, or

1. Eclectic Review VI (June 1810), 518.
2. Autobiography, I, 190.
3. Biography, p.4. Stauffer records (I, 257) that this "shift in emphasis to include the contemplative as well as the active life" could be seen in the latter half of the eighteenth century. "A straw to show which way the wind blew may be seen in the difference between the policies of the first and second general editors of the Biographia Britannica: William Oldys consciously formulates his intention not to include too many literary figures; Andrew Kippis speaks almost with contempt of men of action and statecraft, and assures the reader that literary men will be amply and generously commemorated."

what lessons have formed the philosopher."[1]

The changes which were occurring in biography, then, reflected the high esteem in which writers were held. Many commentators remarked on a complete reversal of role; rather than being the poor relations of men of action, authors and scholars were increasingly being seen and described as the really important and influential forces in the country. Robert Bisset, writing in the Historical Magazine in January 1800, identified the "secret charm" of literary biography as the insight which it provided into the real as opposed to the apparent sources of power and influence:

> Those naturally engage the most of the attention of their fellow-men, whose exertions have the greatest influence on the common fate of humanity....The man of letters, who produces a book which is read even but by a thousand different persons, and suggests to the mind of each of them but one or two new resolutions, exercises, in this, a power unobtainable by the busiest and most ambitious of men in mere active life.[2]

The disparagement of "mere active life" is reflected in several ways. The interest in the contemplative life, and the importance attached to it is already strong in Gibbon, and is seen particularly in his elevation of Boethius, the sage who attempts to understand what cannot be defeated or deflected. It was among such figures, rather than among soldiers, that the architects of nations were now identified. When we turn to the contemporary scene in literature, we are struck by the important position of poets; there has been no period before or since when poetry has been so remunerative. Interest in poetry meant interest in poets, and particularly in those who could be exalted as superior minds. The leader-writer in the

1. Biography, p.4.

2. P.465. (Review of Memoir of the Life of Dr. John Gillies). Peacock's Scythrop adopts this view when he regards the seven copies which his book has sold as "the seven golden candle-sticks with which I will illuminate the world." (Nightmare Abbey II; Novels, p.364.)

Athenaeum for June 4th, 1828, claimed boldly in the concluding paragraph of an article "On some of the Uses of Literary Biography" that the genre

> has no better or more interesting purpose than the view it gives of the greatest and purest intellects, struggling under the adverse influences of human fortune.... In the lives, therefore, of literary men, we are not to look for events or actions that may startle us, or interest the curiosity, but for such as may show the influence which the changing circumstances of existence have upon superior minds, or the power which an exalted intellect exercises over a mutable and capricious fortune.

Earlier in the same article the writer had aligned himself with the detractors of "mere active life." "Some men are important to society by their actions; others by their sentiments," he wrote, and while the former showed their influence on the life of the nation by "manifest operation," the effect of intellectual influence was incalculable: "The action of men's minds, more purely intellectual, is like the breathing of a gale impressing and agitating the waters of existence, but silently and invisibly."[1] A reviewer of Monk's Life of Bentley described a great writer as "the image and representative of the state of the public mind during his own age," and considered that "often the most lively and distinct history of some particular period is to be found in the biography of some distinguished man of letters."[2]

At a time when authors, and particularly poets, were so exalted, and when the age recognised itself as one of personality, no writer could expect to remain concealed behind the comparative anonymity of his works. The "natural curiosity" which excused so much biographical activity at this time would not allow it, and the enormous number of literary lives - independent as well as prefatory - which resulted has been described already. The

1. The Athenaeum XXXII (June 4, 1828), [1].
2. Quarterly Review, XLVI. (November 1831), 118.

anonymous life prefixed to an edition of Gray at the turn of the century typifies this view of literary biography. The writer claimed no importance for the details of Gray's life - "the incidents can scarcely be expected to comprise any thing uncommon or remarkable" - but considered that the details should nonetheless be given, because "a Reader, who is pleased with the productions of the Poet, very naturally desires to know something of the man."[1] Godwin made a more personal and specific claim for enlightened curiosity:

> I know not how it is with other men; but for myself, I never felt within me the power to disjoin a great author from his work. When I read with delight the production of any human invention, I pass irresistibly on to learn as much as I am able, of the writer's personal dispositions, his temper, his actions, and the happy or unhappy fortunes he was destined to sustain.[2]

Claims such as these contain inextricably an element of special pleading, or at best of enlightened self-interest, in their justification in general terms of the particular sort of biography which they are purveying, but the number and popularity of biographies of this sort demonstrates the truth of the claims. It is clear that very few early nineteenth century readers were content to ignore the existence of the man behind the works. The deficiences of the immediate and distant past were made up, and of the numerous series of biographies of living contemporaries a very large proportion was literary.

The interest in the lives of writers was typical of the time, and soon ceased to need any justification. While it must be allowed that a good deal of such curiosity was fundamentally idle, there was a genuinely novel interest at work. What really sets the early nineteenth century

1. The Poetical Works of Thomas Gray LL.B. with some Account of his Life and Writings. (2nd. Edition, 1800), p. xvii .
2. Lives of Edward and John Phillips, Nephews and Pupils of Milton. (1815), Preface, p.vi.

quite apart from any previous literary age is the way in which biographical inquisitiveness about authors became an essential element in appreciating and understanding their works. By the 1820s the sort of claim represented by Godwin had been superseded by profounder claims for literary biography. The Athenaeum leader cited above claimed that literary biography was valuable for "the illustration it affords of literary men's productions."

> Not only many a particular passage in an author's works may be powerfully illustrated by certain circumstances in his life; but the very spirit of his style, the moods of thought and feeling, to which he is found most constantly resigning himself, may be more distinctly traced and understood by the commentary given in the memorials of his fortunes.[1]

Such claims for literary biography have moved far beyond curiosity, and make it the necessary counterpart of the works, without which they cannot be properly understood. This is an important change in the direction of biography, and one brought about by a change in literature itself. Much Romantic literature virtually incites biography.

M.H. Abrams' study of early nineteenth century poetics, The Mirror and the Lamp, explores the change of the whole orientation of imaginative literature during this period. What he calls the "radical shift to the artist in the alignment of aesthetic thinking"[2] was a breaking of the frame of neo-classic theory, and a reorientation of "all critical discussion towards the new magnetic north of the expressive and creative artist."[3] As, at this time, a work of art came to be seen as the expressive creation of an individual rather than as a result of an impersonal obedience to aesthetic rules and artistic models, it grew to be of biographical interest. Altick

1. The Athenaeum, XXXII (June 4, 1828), [1].
2. M. H. Abrams, p.3.
3. Ibid., p.94.

claims that since it was an axiom of Romantic theory that "the potter left his thumbprints on the vase," then "a knowledge of his life, his personality, and the conditions of the age that affected them could help define the special qualities of the works to which his name was attached."[1] One need look no further to account for the glut of literary biography; it was no longer a matter of mere curiosity to want to know the details of an author's life, but a critical necessity for the understanding of his works. Poets now wrote more than ever before in the first person, and, as Abrams sharply observes, it was likely to be a different sort of first person, for it was a tendency of the time

> to convert the lyric "I" from what Coleridge called the "I - representative" to the poet in his proper person, and to express experiences and states of mind which can be verified from the testimony of the poet's private letters and journals.[2]

Burns was a very early example of this phenomenon. Currie wrote in 1796:

> The biographer of Burns has not many events to relate - the history of his life may be confined to a very few pages; and in regard to his character, that, in my mind, is displayed in almost every poem he wrote, to such as have the comprehension necessary to receive it. The very circumstance of Burns having pourtrayed himself in such vivid colours, is a decisive proof of his superior genius. It is not often that the real character of an author appears in his works.[3]

Although Wordsworth testily maintained a stand resembling the modern theory of the autonomy of a work of art, his was a dissident view.[4] His contemporaries demonstrated overwhelmingly that they wanted to read the lives of authors.

1. Lives and Letters, pp.94 - 95.
2. Abrams, p.98.
3. Letter to Syme, dated Liverpool, August 15, 1796. Quoted from the Annual Burns Chronicle XXVIII(1919), 14 - 15, in R.D. Thornton, James Currie. The Entire Stranger and Robert Burns, (Edinburgh, 1963), p.343.
4. In "A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns." The view was shared to some extent by Scott and Peacock, both historical critics.

The dissemination of "expressive" theories brought biography and criticism very close together. According to them the life of a creative artist could not fail to be a commentary upon his work. As it turned out, though, the equation was more frequently inverted, and there is abundant evidence that during the period an artist's work was seen as a commentary upon his life. As Abrams puts it, "the exploitation of literature as an index to personality first manifests itself in the early nineteenth century: it is the inevitable consequence of the expressive point of view."[1] The implications for biography were almost limitless, for everything which an artist had ever produced now became potential biographical material. A generation earlier the view had been devastatingly exploded by Johnson in the Life of Thomson, commenting on an earlier biographer's remark "that an author's life is best read in his works,"[2] but the times were now more suited to its kindly reception. Biographers of poets at this time usually agreed with Brydges' claim that "all original writers of high poetry have let out their own character in their compositions, even when they least intended it."[3] The anonymous writer of the "Memoir of William Cowper" prefixed to the 1824 edition of the Poems presented an extreme example:

> If there is one individual whose memoir it is less necessary to prefix to an edition of his works than another, it is the poet, Cowper; nor is it on the ground of the particulars of his life being so well

1. Abrams, p.23.
2. S. Johnson, Lives of the English Poets. (Everyman Edition, II, 291). "His observation was not well timed," Johnson continues. "Savage, who lived much with Thompson, once told me how he heard a lady remarking that she could gather from his works three parts of his character: that he was a "great lover, a great swimmer, and rigorously abstinent;" but, said Savage, he knows not any love but that of the sex; he was perhaps never in cold water in his life; and he indulges himself in all the luxury that comes within his reach."
3. Autobiography, II, 410.

> known, but because his feelings, character, and situation, are so powerfully and correctly depicted in his poems, that to read them is to make you master of his whole history, character and conduct. It is true the dates of his birth and death, or the fact that died a bachelor, may not be recorded in his works; but his character is there portrayed in colours the most vivid and the most correct.[1]

Such an extreme view, taken literally, would have put biographers out of business, but even this writer nonetheless continued with his memoir. Literary biographers now became scrutinisers of the works, and had to practice the arts of literary detection. The method which for Cowper was quite unexceptionable was extended, and used promiscously to establish the details of the lives even of writers who had written in quite different traditions. Three examples must suffice for demonstration. Thomas Moore, whose first published volume was a translation of the Odes of Anacreon wrote that "the soul of Anacreon speaks so unequivocally through his odes, that we may consult them as faithful mirrors of his heart."[2] Godwin made a similar assumption in his Life of Chaucer, observing rather than arguing that "it is sufficiently evident from Chaucer's works, which are the best materials for arranging his life, that he lived to an advanced age."[3] At the beginning of Todd's Life of Spenser we are told:

> That Spenser cultivated, with successful attention, what is useful as well as elegant in academical learning; is evident by the abundance of classical allusions in his works, and by the accustomed moral of his song.[4]

All of these writers had been forced by lack of real biographical material

1. The Poems of William Cowper (1824), p.[i]. See also Campbell's "Life of Cowper": "The nature of Cowper's works makes us peculiarly identify the poet and the man in perusing them." Specimens of the British Poets (1819), VII, 350.
2. Quoted by Howard Mumford Jones, The Harp that Once (New York, 1937), p.57.
3. William Godwin, Life of Geoffrey Chaucer (1803), I, 4.
4. H. J. Todd. "Some Account of the Life of Spenser." (Vol.I of his edition of The Works of Edmund Spenser (1805), hereafter cited as Life of Spenser.

into writing "life-and-times" biographies, a form fully described in the next chapter. Their way of proceeding, in order to make up this deficiency, is nonetheless remarkable. One might reasonably ask Moore how he knew that Anecreon was a purely autobiographical writer. Understanding the writings by referring to the life is one thing, and a natural one in an age which had abandoned neo-classical rules of composition. Reconstructing the life by reproducing the writings, though, involved the retrospective application of early nineteenth century ideas of composition to works whose mode of composition was, in the cases where such help was resorted to, quite unknown. Yet the practice was widespread and unchallenged. The reversal of the views expressed by Johnson was sudden and unanimous.

Shakespeare's biographical fortunes were so extensive during the period, that they require separate treatment. It was the lyric form, according to Abrams, which "had long been particularly connected by critics to the state of mind of its author,"[1] and the productions of lyric writers were therefore regarded as especially amenable to autobiographical interpretation. Dramatists were recognised as a different category, devoted to the creation or recreation of characters rather than revelation of their own. Coleridge, it seems, agreed when he remarked in 1830 that "Shakespeare's poetry is characterless; that is, it does not reflect the individual Shakespeare."[2] Hazlitt made Shakespeare an exception to his definition of genius, a definition which tied even a writer's most exalted productions to his character:

> It is rarely that a man even of lofty genius will be able to do more than carry on his own feelings and character, or some prominent and ruling passion, into fictitious and uncommon situations. Milton has by allusion embodied a great part of his political and personal history in the chief characters and incidents of Paradise Lost. He has, no doubt, wonderfully adapted and heightened them, but the

1. Abrams, p.84.
2. May 12, 1830 (Table Talk and Omniana (1917), p.86).

> elements are the same; you trace the bias and opinions of the man in the creations of the poet. Shakespear (almost alone) seems to have been a man of genius raised above the definition of genius. ... His genius consisted in the faculty of transforming himself at will into whatever he chose: ... He was the Proteus of human intellect.[1]

Keats, who had heard Hazlitt lecturing about Shakespeare, agreed about his impersonality.[2] It is hard to believe that the ingenuity of early nineteenth century biographers would have been thwarted by such views, and they would surely have been able to locate "Shakespeare the man" in his plays had they found it necessary. The need was removed, though, by their discovery of the sonnets. Wordsworth wrote in his Essay Supplementary to the Preface to the Poems of 1815: "There is extant a small Volume of miscellaneous poems, in which Shakespeare expresses his own feelings in his own person."[3] The note of discovery here is probably not false, for the sonnets had been omitted from most eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare, and the growth in interest in them after 1800 is "synchronous with the development of the biographical bias in criticism."[4] Although Wordsworth may have reached his view independently - one which he later popularised in his claim for the sonnet that "with this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart"[5] - the principle originated with A. W. Schlegel as early as 1796, and became available in English in 1815 in John Black's translation of the 1808 Lectures:

> These sonnets paint most unequivocally the actual situation and sentiments of the poet; they make us acquainted with the passions of the man; they even contain remarkable confessions of his youthful errors.[6]

1. W. Hazlitt, "On Genius and Common Sense," Table Talk, V. (Works, VII, 42).
2. See Abrams, p.246.
3. W. Wordsworth, Poetical Works (1936), p.745.
4. Abrams, p.246. The sonnet-form had, of course, begun to return to favour in the 1780s with Bowles, Coleridge, and Charlotte Smith.
5. W. Wordsworth, "Scorn not the Sonnet," Works, p.206. (First published in 1827).
6. John Black, A. W. Schlegel's Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, revised by A.J.W. Morrison (1846), p.252. Quoted by S. Schoenbaum, Shakespeare's Lives (Oxford, 1970), p.253.

F. Schlegel called the dramas "objective" and the sonnets "subjective;" from the latter Shakespeare could be seen to preserve "amidst all his stern functions, a heart overflowing with tenderness, purity, and love."[1] For ardent biographers starved of facts, these discoveries were a godsend. Drake annotated Schlegel:

> I am convinced, indeed, that if, in the present day, any fresh light is to be thrown on the character ... of Shakespeare, it must be from a very close and profound study of his Sonnets.[2]

In the following year Anna Jameson wrote in her Memoirs of the Loves of the Poets that she looked "to the Sonnets for intimate revelation."[3] These early decades of the century laid the foundation of the discovery of Shakespeare the man, a line of descent which passes via Carlyle, ("His works were so many windows, through which we see a glimpse of the world that was in him"), through Dowden to Caroline Spurgeon.[4]

Edmund Malone, Shakespeare's most distinguished biographer of the period, eschewed these methods. For him the public records and extant documents were the sole repositories of biographical fact. Only when he had established from these sources that Anne Hathaway was seven-and-a-half years older than Shakespeare did he feel confident to suggest that the fact "perhaps gave rise to a part of the following beautiful verses on the subject of marriage" - the lines in A Midsummer Night's Dream I i, and the

1. F. Schlegel, Lectures on the History of Literature (1818), II, 144. The lectures were delivered in 1812, and first published in English in Edinburgh in 1815.
2. Nathan Drake, Memorials of Shakespeare (1818), p.105.
3. Quoted by Schoenbaum, p.309.
4. Carlyle, quoted from Abrams, p.249. E.Dowden, Shakespeare: his Mind and Art (1874). Caroline Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and what it tells us (Cambridge, 1935). One should not forget Stephen Daedelus' theory of Hamlet, "prying into the family life of a great man." (James Joyce, Ulysses; Penguin edition, p.189).

Duke's words in Twelfth Night "Let still the woman take An elder than herself."[1] This is an isolated instance of Malone referring to the works for biographical purposes; even here the reference is merely illustrative. Malone described his principles in this regard in his Life of Dryden:

> To deduce an author's character from sentiments expressed in his writings, when they are at variance with the tenour and actions of his life, and to found an eulogy on such delusive ground, (a method which has sometimes been followed), though it may please his zealous admirers, can afford no gratification to lovers of truth. His works, however, may be safely appealed to, when they strongly enforce the practice of those virtues for which the writer, through life, was eminently distinguished. The pages of Dryden, therefore, may with confidence be produced, in confirmation of the concurrent testimony of his friends.[2]

Malone thus resisted the common assumption of the time that the "man" and the "author" were the same person. Hazlitt upheld Malone's distinction, claiming that in this respect authors were distinct from other subjects of biography:

> In passing from the public to the private life of kings, of statesmen and warriors, we have, for the most part, the same qualities and personal character brought into action, and displayed on a larger or a smaller scale, - and can, at all events, make a pretty tolerable guess from one to the other. But we have no means to discover whether the moral Addison was the same scrupulous character in his writings and in his daily habits, but in the anecdotes recorded of him.[3]

This was, though, a minority view, and was often mentioned only to be refuted. "It is often lamented," wrote G. W. Meadley in 1809, "that the man should be very unlike the author."[4] In practice it was ignored rather than

1. The Life of William Shakespeare (1821), pp.112 - 113. (Vol. II of The Plays and Poems).
2. E. Malone, Life of Dryden (1800), I, 469. (Vol. I of Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden).
3. Edinburgh Review XXXIII (May 1820), 303. (Review of Spence's Anecdotes).
4. G. W. Meadley, Memoirs of William Paley, D. D. (1809), p.ix.

lamented. The growing confidence that all artistic production was personal expression left Malone's judicious principles far behind. By the end of the period Carlyle had emerged as a spokesman for the view that a writer was expressed completely in his writings (the "ideal outline of himself"), leaving the biographer only the task of deciphering and filling out "into an actual coherent figure."[1] In this short period we thus see the writer's productions being given a totally new importance; from being possible illustrations of his life they had become the stuff of it.[2]

The growth of literary biography can be associated also with a characteristic of the period already described, the increasing interest in the human mind and its workings. Students of the mind naturally found much of their material in the descriptions of contemplative rather than of active life. Even when the life was eventful the interest was not necessarily centered on the action; one reviewer noted that "the life of Gilbert Earle is less the history of events than the effects which they have produced in the character of their actor."[3] D'Israeli considered the investigation of the mind as the prime object of biography: "As the human mind became the great object of our enquirey," the old complaint that the life of a man of letters "could not be deemed very interesting" became invalid, to the

1. T. Carlyle, "Jean Paul Friedrich Richter," Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (1899) II, 101. (First published in the Foreign Review in 1830).
2. Cf. T. Moore's comment: "In one so imaginative as Lord Byron, who, while he infused so much of his life into his poetry, mingled also not a little of poetry with his life, it is difficult, in unravelling the texture of his feelings, to distinguish at all times between the fanciful and the real." Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: with Notices of his Life (1830), I, 200 - 201. (Hereafter cited as Life of Byron).
3. Universal Review I (July 1824), 563.

extent that "it has become the labour of criticism, to compose the life of an author."[1] Miss Benger's refutation of old-fashioned views of literary biography led her to a detailed statement of the "higher objectivity" of biography, the aims which it had beyond collating "facts, and dates, and... events."

> Should it not rather trace the progress of character, as developed in those habits and principles which operate universally on the happiness or misery of mankind? The history of the individual, to be complete, must include the history of his mind, and exhibit all its passions - its prejudices - its affections - whatever belongs to its moral system.
>
> In a life devoted to quiet and seclusion, there may have occurred revolutions of opinion and vicissitudes of feeling, which, to those who would study human nature, are no less curious, and even more interesting, than the external changes of fortune which popularly arrest attention and awaken sympathy.[2]

This realisation that the "mind has mountains" was reiterated in extenso by Brydges. He graphically described mental states in the language of drama and adventure:

> The life of a person of morbid sensibility may be termed a PERPETUAL WARFARE. Every day, every night, every hour, presents trials of his patience and fortitude more equal to those which, to an individual less trembling alive, are caused by the dangers of a compaign.[3]

Brydges wrote elsewhere that the "workings of the mind are what we want to know from a literary man."[4] Mental stress and moral problems, he emphasised, are not only "as valuable and interesting as the history of battles and shipwrecks, and mighty vicissitudes," and "hair-breadth scapes by sea and land," but are more useful as well, because they are within the compre-

1. Literary Miscellanies, p.120.
2. Memoirs of Mrs. Hamilton, pp. 1 - 2.
3. The Ruminator, I, 224. (Essay no.87).
4. Autobiography, I, 337.

hension, if not the experience, of most people.[1]

Biographical theory does in this area fall into line with the aesthetic trends of the time. History now came to be seen less as the record of immutable events, and more as that which is felt and believed. Gibbon's work, Abrams tells us, "is far more an history of his own mind and opinions, than of the decline and fall of the Roman empire." The Romantic artist was important as a conveyor of ideas, and therefore his inner history was of more interest than the outward events of his life. Furthermore, the works were seen as the real events, because they were focal expressions of the artist's mind and consciousness. Coleridgean criticism, with its diminished sense of the artefact, and enlarged sense of the artist at the centre, was complemented by the sort of literary biography which was now being acclaimed.

As biography and criticism drew closer together, commentators began to be interested in the genesis of a work of art, as well as in appreciating it as a finished product. Sheridan was the first author whose methods of works were exhibited at any length by biographers; Thomas Moore edited and printed selections from Sheridan's rough drafts and "rejected scraps of dialogue" which "lie about, like the chippings of a Phidias, in this workship of wit."[2] Similar extracts were given in Sheridaniana, introduced

1. The Ruminator, I 225. Similar opinions are found in the Autobiography II, 120, 190, and 400, as well as elsewhere in Brydges writings, and Adolphus considered that biographies of men of letters were closer to the common reader. (Biography. pp.13 - 14).

2. Thomas Moore, Memoirs of the Life of Sheridan (1825), p.176. Whitaker anticipated both phrasing and sentiments in his review of Mathias' edition of Mason's Life and Writings of Gray. "After a long interval ... the dust and sweepings of his yard are rummaged, the chippings and chizzlings are carefully selected...." (Quarterly Review XI (July 1814), 305 - 306).

by a similar image:

> It was thought worth while to gather up those sparks which flew off in the polish of the diamond, which must always be of value, in proportion to the beauty of the jewel of which they were once a part.[1]

The habit which literary biographers began to develop at this time, of exhibiting "chips from the workshop," arose naturally from the interest in mental phenomena and in the artist as creator, and is a nineteenth-century innovation. The earliest example which I have found is in Hayley's Cowper, where he prints "The Lines on Friendship," which "seems to have been retouched by its author." As well as the corrected state, Hayley gives all of the original readings at the foot of each page.[2] It was to be expected that such an innovation should have its detractors. Often the use of such literary illustrations was included in blanket denunciations of the promiscuous publishing of private papers as book-making,[3] but there were reasoned objections as well. Lockhart, reviewing Moore's Life of Sheridan, objected that the result of displaying "the sweepings of an ... author's study" was simply to make his productions seem "strangely laboured." He concluded, "we believe that Mr. Moore really does injustice to the natural vein of Mr. Sheridan."[4] The Monthly Review thought the "curiosities" valueless because they "do not afford any tangible traces of the progress of Sheridan's mind."[5]

Moore's principal achievement was to recreate, from a variety of rough

1. Sheridaniana; Anecdotes of the Life of Sheridan (1825), p.176.
2. W. Hayley, Life of Cowper (New ed. Chichester, 1809), II, 424 - 440.
3. For example, the Annual Review VI (for 1807) condemned the bulking-out of the Memoirs of Mrs. Carter with early poems and fragments "disrespectfully dragged back to notice, under the name of 'literary curiosities.'" (p.387). A more reasoned objection is made in the Volume V (for 1807), 299, in remarks on Wooll's Memoirs of Warton.
4. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1828), 592.
5. Monthly Review 2nd. Series CVIII (October 1825), 151.

papers and earlier versions, the way in which Sheridan wrote The School for Scandal. The achievement was, as Altick remarks. "a critical exercise far in advance of its time."[1] Moore's claim was that

> to trace even the mechanism of an author's style through the erasures and alterations of his rough copy, is, in itself, no ordinary gratification of curiosity;.... It is, indeed, like being admitted by some magical power, to witness the mysterious processes of the natural world, to see the crystal forming by degrees round its primitive nucleus.[2]

Moore here writes of literary genesis in a scientific way which is very reminiscent of D'Israeli. Few of Moore's critics either understood or cared about his innovation. Jeffrey stood out as the only commentator to have grasped the importance of what he had done:

> By far the most remarkable chapter, however, in the literary part of the book, is that entitled "Unfinished Plays and Poems," in which Mr. Moore has gratified his readers with a variety of very curious and interesting extracts from his author's papers, that have never hitherto seen the light. Many of those, as it appears to us, have very great merit, and deserve to be recorded as fragments of a master's hand--and all have considerable value, as illustrating the character of the author's genius, and his habits of composition.[3]

Moore's decision to give so much detail of Sheridan's manuscripts no doubt had an element of book-making about it; that Moore did not appreciate fully his own achievement is suggested by his virtual abandonment of the procedure in his Life of Byron, although much of the material was there for readers discerning enough to interpret it. The reviewer in the Athenaeum remarked:

> The rude germs of many of his finest thoughts are traceable in his letters. Several of his noblest and lovliest statues, which now "enchant the world," may be seen in rough and unhewn masses in his epistles - nay, hewn in the rough, with all the form without the finish! The material - the marble is there - before it is carved into poetry.[4]

1. Lives and Letters, p.108.
2. Memoirs of Sheridan, pp.154-5, 174.
3. Edinburgh Review XLV (December 1826), 10.
4. The Athenaeum CLXVI (January 1, 1831), 1.

Exhibiting the "chips from the workshop" was still rather infrequent in the early nineteenth century. Nonetheless, Moore's achievement, and Jeffrey's warm commendation of it is a significant, if minor turning point in the history of biography; no literary biographer writing today would omit an account of his author's rough drafts. "More than ever today," Richard Ellmann has written, "we approach great works of literature through their preliminary fits and starts. Those who feel nonplussed in the dining room may fancy themselves at home in the kitchen."[1]

1. Review of Ulysses: a Facsimile of the Manuscript (ed. C. Driver), in the New Statesman, September 10, 1976, p.342.

PART II

THE PRACTICE AND CRITICISM OF BIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY AS AN ART

> An English biography is made in this wise: The biographer gets a dust-cart into which he shovels diaries, reminiscences, old letters, until the cart is full: then he dumps the load in front of your door. That is Vol. I. Then he goes forth again on the same errand, and there is Vol. II. Out of this rubbish the reader constructs a biography.
>
> Thomas Sergeant Perry.[1]

> It takes two to give excellence to any man's Life and Letters: the author of the Life and the author of the Letters must both be up to the mark.
>
> G. O. Trevelyan.[2]

It was natural that during the age when the amount of biography increased so greatly writers should be concerned to establish standards and rules both for composing and for judging it. Biography never had a spokesman of the status of a Fielding or a Coleridge; what was considered to be the art of biography must be pieced together from comments on intentions and achievement in reviews, in essays, in private correspondence, and in those parts of published biographies in which the author stands back to consider the principles of his work. Biography had demonstrably not become an art by 1831, but during the early years of the century it increasingly came to be judged as one; the publication of Godwin's Life of Chaucer in 1803 provoked one of the earliest concerted criticisms of a biography, and is a striking example of commercially independent critics judging a work by objective literary standards.[3] By the 1820's it is

1. Quoted by L. Edel, "Biography: the Question of Form." Friendship's Garland, II, 346.

2. In the Preface to his Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay, World's Classics edition (1932), I, [v].

3. The unpopularity of Godwin's political views made it likely that anything which he wrote would be badly received, of course, but the objections to the Life of Chaucer were made on clear artistic grounds. (See below pp. 124 ff) The reviewers included Southey and Scott.

striking how frequently biographers are conscious of and anxious for their artistic role; Thomas Moore's letters and diaries from the time that he was working on his Life of Byron are notable evidence of this concern. Although the contents of a biography were usually regarded as its most important feature, there was a growing interest in the biographer and in his mode of proceeding. By 1828 a critic could remark almost casually that "the intrinsic interest and value of a biographical memoir, not unfrequently depend upon the writer, more than upon the subject of it."[1]

1. Eclectic Review N S XXIX (June 1828), 537. (Review of Gregory's Life of Good.

i. Some Difficulties

To establish biography even tentatively as an art is far from simple, and the difficulties may be outlined first. Firstly, reviewers of biography were usually concerned with content rather than with form, and like reviewers of most other books - even novels - gave up their space largely to summary. Although comment of some sort was usually made upon the literary achievement, only very rarely did it constitute the main burden of the review. It was a common assumption with biography that "the matter will support the style,"[1] and a reviewer's comment on Field's Memoirs of Parr is typical: "The book, as a literary production, indeed, has little or no merit, and derives all its interest merely from its subject."[2] Many commentators held the artistic achievement of biographers in such low esteem that the absence of literary merit provoked no more than a passing comment.

A second complication is that during the generation after Boswell, when biography had, in Altick's words, "achieved dignity as a serious literary genre," it had still not shaken off its closest relatives, history and journalism. The relation with history was a vexed one - was biography an alternative or a subsidiary ? - while, as Altick states, "the conflict between the claims and purposes of biographical journalism and those of dignified biographical art become ever sharper."[3] Even within the area that could clearly be labelled "Biography" there were generic complications. At a time when the taste for autobiography and for having the subject tell his own story was so strong, the distinction was not always observed between formal, composed biographies, and volumes which simply printed letters and

1. Quarterly Review III (February 1810), 219. (Review of Lives of Nelson).
2. Monthly Review N S VII (February 1828), 207.
3. Lives and Letters, p.144.

diaries verbatim. F. R. Hart has demonstrated that for contemporary commentators often "the Memoirist's peculiar virtues were negative." Artlessness, he explains, was praised by reviewers because it was associated with authenticity. His analysis of the reviews of Pepys' Diary leads him to the conclusion that "the abundant and revealing materials ... consistently imply that memoirs are valuable because they lack dignity, proportion, and form."[1] Hart describes in detail what he repeatedly terms the "paradox" of the age, that the art of biography was considered to consist in its apparent artlessness. As far as it applies to the large body of work which consisted principally of documents, Hart's view can be supported with ample evidence from the period.

A third view which hampered the acceptance of biography as an art, and one much commoner among practising writers, was that which saw the writing of biographies as, in Stanfield's words, "an agreeable, easy task."

> Such persons would feel surprise, were they requested to draw the likeness of the most familiar face, without having first acquired the general principles of the art of painting.[2]

W. R. Thayer probably had this passage in mind when he wrote, more recently, of Thomas Moore's writing a life of Byron, that it

> merely illustrates the widespread fallacy which still survives, that anybody can write a biography. Moore, being a popular poet, must necessarily be a great biographer; but they would not have predicted that he would be the best man to choose to compose a symphony or to paint a portrait.[3]

1. "Boswell and the Romantics", pp. 48 - 49.

2. Essay, p.15.

3. "Biography in the Nineteenth Century," North American Review CCXI, (1926), 635.

The implications of Carlyle's ironical advice to Thomas Murray was very similar - that neither invention, genius or principle is necessary for the biographer.[1] The Westminster review of Moore's Life of Sheridan took a more extreme view, arguing that because anyone can write a biography "it is not likely to requite according to their expectations more ambitious writers." This was effectively a plea for biography to be left to the "drudges."[2] Admissions such as William Jay's were not as common as perhaps they ought to have been at a time when hack writing was so widespread; he wrote in the Preface to his Life of Winter:

> The work ought to have been better: and probably would have been if more time had been allowed by the importunity of friendship; but I have done what I could in a very few weeks of frequent interruption and indisposition.[3]

Confessions of artistic negligence are more commonly found in private correspondence. Even biographers who were "acquainted with the nature of their task"[4] did not necessarily implement their knowledge. Thus it became a common complaint that artistically the novelist had more to recommend him; "the greater part" of biographies, wrote one reviewer, "are little superior to novels on the score of authenticity, and inferior to them in every other quality."[5] Another review opened with a striking

1. "In the biographical line (to speak Merchant like, in this trading district) I have formed rather high expectations of you. That sort of writing has been very little cultivated in Britain; its uses, however, are manifold and obvious; whilst success in it is rewarded by a meed of fame more promptly as well as more plentifully paid - than in other researches where the expense of thought and industry is much greater." (Letter dated June 7, 1819) (Letters, I, 181).

2. Westminster Review IV (October 1825), 371.

3. P. xx.

4. S. Johnson, The Rambler, 60.

5. Quarterly Review XXXIX (April 1829), 497. (A review entitled "State and Prospects of the Country.").

call for biographical skill:

> 'Sepulchrum haud pulchrum pulcharai feminai' is an incongruity not peculiar to Gruter. But departed genius, as well as departed beauty, claims a master's hand; the one in the sculptor, the other in the biographer. Yet it has too often been the misfortune of both to have their memories consigned to humble friends and unskilful, though flattering, artists.[1]

A fourth difficulty is presented by the large number of biographies published at this time which were unashamedly devoid of any artistic principles. Such works come under the heading of "bookmaking"[2], and simply had their proportions trimmed to a publisher's target, to the amount of material available, or to the capacity of the writer's memory. The first of these was condemned in a satirical article on Toulmin's Memoirs of Bourne:

> The ancients, absurdly enough, measured the size of their volumes by the facts and reflections naturally relating to their subject. At present, the geometry of the book is first agreed upon, and then the facts must be so told as to occupy the pages previously allotted them; and if, after due stretching, they should still be deficient, they must be eked out with appendices and supplements, no matter on what subject, to the requisite length.[3]

Peacock made a similar criticism of Leigh Hunt's reminiscences, but he blamed the bookseller, "who wanted to append a given number of pages to the name of Lord Byron."[4] The second is betrayed very strikingly in a letter by J. Wooll to the publishers Caddell and Davis, who had agreed to pay him £500 for his Biographical Memoirs of the late Joseph Warton.

1. Ibid. IX (July 1813). (Review of Meadley's Memoirs of Dr. Paley). The quotation is from Gruter's Inscriptiones antiquae totius orbis Romanis (Heidelburg, 1603).

2. Cf. Jeffrey's notice of Hayley's Life of Cowper: "Among the other symptoms of book-making which this publication contains ....." (Edinburgh Review II) (April 1803), 65.

3. Eclectic Review V (December 1809), 1136.

4. Westminster Review XII (April 1830), 274. (Review of Moore's Life of Byron)

He wrote:

> When I first wrote to you I talked of 2 Vols - afterwards when the agreement was on the tapis I finally decided on one. This was in great Measure owing to the dying State of Mr. Sadleir of Northampton from whose intimacy with Dr. Warton I expected to derive great assistance. He has now to the astonishment of all his friends in a great Measure recovered. In case during the Work I should find from this and other quarters those additional Materials which will render it necessary to extend the work I am sure that you will think with me that some allowance will be due for the 2d Volume.

In this case the firm resisted Wooll's suggestion, explaining that "Experience has proved to us that Works of this Description may easily be made too voluminous."[1] The third of the controlling principles was criticised by the Monthly Review when a reviewer complained that three-quarters of Boaden's Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons

> seem to have been expressly reserved for whatever came uppermost in Mr. Boaden's memory at the time of writing, no matter whether remotely, or immediately, or not at all connected with his principal subject, or with any other subject of whatever nature, with which he has thought proper to replenish his pages.[2]

There was a good deal of incidental criticism of biographies which were used as a general depository for miscellaneous material.

The acceptance of biography was hindered, lastly, by the view most notoriously put forward by Macaulay in his review of Croker's edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson. Macaulay's view of Boswell was that "if he had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer."[3] This denied him any conscious skills at all, and simply credited him with the ability of being an undistorting glass. The only art which Macaulay

1. T. Besterman, The Publishing Firm of Cadell and Davis (1938), pp. 154 - 155.
2. Monthly Review NS IV (January 1827), 66.
3. Edinburgh Review LIV (August 1831), 18.

allowed Boswell was that of selecting as a subject one who had lived a life of artistic proportions, and becoming his medium. Reed claims that it was particularly in exemplary biography that the biographer was seen merely as the medium:

> The subject was the real artist, acting out the virtuous progress, battling an adverse environment, holding the good thought. The biographer was amanuensis to this artist of life.[1]

This view, that the virtues of any biography are inherent in the subject[2] represents an extension of the view that formlessness in biography is a virtue, turning as it does a perceived quality in one biography into a sine qua non for all types.

It is the claim of this chapter that the early nineteenth century was the time when biography was first widely recognised as an art, and began to overcome the obstructions and objections outlined above. Stauffer considers that it was particularly in what it learnt from the novel that biography came of age as an art before 1800, but although his study is entitled The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England, it is the art as discerned by him, and not as propounded by contemporaries, which is his subject. Toward the end of his book he admits that even the few comments on the art of writing biographies which he has managed to glean "were no more than casual remarks, swallowed up and lost without a trace in the conventional theories and unthinking practices of the century."[3]

1. J. R. Reed, p. 37.

2. Macaulay wrote much the same of Southey, claiming that in the Life of Nelson "the subject did not require the exercise of those reasoning powers the want of which is the blemish of his prose. It would not be easy to find in all literary history, an instance of a more exact hit between wind and water." (Edinburgh Review L (January 1830) 530 - 531. Review of Southey's Colloquies of Society).

3. Stauffer, I, 547 - 548. Stauffer had no chance of seeing the criticism of Roger North, first published by J. L. Clifford, in Biography as an Art (1962), pp. 27 - 37.

After 1800 the reviewers changed this, and their views were augmented by a growing number of independent pronouncements and published opinions. Stanfield's Essay on the Art and Composition of Biography, published in 1813, was the first, and is still the only textbook for biographers.[1] As well as this single full-length work there was the lecture "Biography" given by J. L. Adolphus in the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, on June 3rd, 1818, and consequently published, and occasional essays by Brydges, Drake, Foster, Knox, and Wordsworth, all of which will be noticed in their place.

ii. Stanfield's Essay

Stanfield's Essay on the Study and Composition of Biography was published at Sunderland in 1813. It is a large and very ambitious work, in three long parts, each divided into chapters, with many of the chapters further divided into sections. Part I, "Biography as it has been treated and the Disadvantages it has laboured under", identifies the difficulties as lying "in the subject itself", in the deficiencies of the writer, and in the "relative situation" of the two. Part II, "Materials of Biography with Improvements suggested", lists the need for "preliminary Studies", for "biographic Spirit", for "impartiality and moral power", the necessity of describing small as well as great events, and the need to use letters and anecdotes. Part III, "Composition", summarises the earlier parts, and then in order deals with the importance of the biographer's introduction, his treatment of "preliminary character", and of the various stages of life from conception to senility. Further chapters deal with

1. "Such questions as form and idea, composition and structure, are seldom raised. Percy Lubbock's Craft of Fiction is an honoured book wherever the novel is discussed; no book called The Craft of Biography has been written." L. Edel, "Biography: the Question of Form," p.343.

the importance of dwelling on character with "attention and warmth" and with "Professional Biography", recommending different treatment of subjects "according to the aim of their pursuits."

Stanfield writes in his Introduction that his aim is to be "an instrument of directing to this interesting subject the attention of those more qualified to undertake the task."[1] Though the size and inclusiveness of the Essay belie the modesty of this aspiration, Stanfield's work nonetheless went largely unnoticed. It was not though, as Altick claims, "completely neglected,"[2] for there were at least four contemporary reviews. John Foster in the Eclectic thoroughly approved the purposes of the work:

> It is also very desirable that this department of writing could be brought a little within the economy of literary good order, could be subjected to some reasonable laws of selection, proportion and good workmanship. From the way in which this class of works is very commonly executed, we might be tempted to conclude that all such laws are inapplicable, or suspended, or abrogated. For, almost any man, who has acquired a little skill in putting sentences together, accounts himself qualified to write a life.

After further complaints, that similarly any person is considered a fit subject, any object worth a digression, and any written material suitable for verbatim quotation, Foster asked:

> Who would not be glad if this vicious state of an important literary province could be reformed by the establishment of a system of principles and rules that should have the effect of reducing biography to the strictness of a science, or at least of an art.[3]

It was only the purpose, though, which Foster approved. Almost everything else, Stanfield's pseudo-psychological approach, his loftiness, and the

1. Essay, pp. vi-vii.

2. Lives and Letters, p.184. Altick misdates the work 1816.

3. Eclectic Review NS I (February 1814), 114.

"parade of scientific phraseology"[1] were censured at length.

The other reviews agreed on the need for legislation on biographical writing. Having granted the need, though, they did not regard Stanfield's specific as ideal. Foster's criticism of his method was shared by the writer in the Critical Review, who concluded that "there are many good remarks in this essay; but as a whole, it is prolix and tedious."[2] The Monthly Review made a more specific criticism, objecting to Stanfield's assumption that the art of biography was perfectible, and that rules for writing it could be fixed for all time:

> The author lays down his rules without reserve or qualification; as if some specific form of representation constituted the idea of a perfect biography, and ought on every occasion to be adopted; whereas the same life should be differently written according to its purpose.[3]

The Critical Review took a different view of this, and approved of the establishment of an unattainable ideal so that "we may never be satisfied with a vapid mediocrity."[4] It was only the Literary Panorama which regarded the Essay as a panacea. The reviewer even praised Stanfield's "orderly, impressive, and judicious method," and concluded:

> If the principles adduced in this volume be strongly insisted on, how few once thought eminent among men would furnish subjects for biography ! What extensive breaches would such laws, if enforced, produce in every library ! Nevertheless, they are proper to be enacted, and though we will not try memoirs already written and printed by these rules, yet we frankly recommend an acquaintance with them to whoever is about to favour the public with a composition allied to biography, or biographical history.[5]

1. Ibid., 124, 125.
2. Critical Review 4th Series IV (December 1813), 598.
3. Monthly Review LXXIV (August 1814), 365.
4. Critical Review 4th Series IV, 592 - 593.
5. Literary Panorama XIV, (October 1813), Col. 432.

This last critic's hope that biographers would note Stanfield's principles and act upon them was not fulfilled. The Essay had no observable effect, and it seems to have been forgotten altogether until J. L. Clifford gave extracts from it in his Biography as an Art; Selected Criticism 1560 - 1960, in 1962.[1] The contemporary critics' strictures on the Essay's pretentious presentation and mechanical method were justified, but they all, as a result, missed the central critical importance of the work - that Stanfield was making a plea for biography to be treated as an art. He assumes that the biographer is an "artist". His concern throughout is that biography is a form of composition, and he repeatedly emphasises the imperative of the biographer's composing hand. His artistic concern is seen in his criticism of unthinking biographical practice; he particularly deplores the uncritical accumulation of anecdotes, the automatic inclusion of letters, and the slavish following of chronology. Most striking is his insistence that "the character is all in all," and that the art of biography is the art of conveying character, and not the ability to construct a compilation.[2]

iii. Compilation, and the Place of Detail

The distinction between a biographer and a compiler looms large in the biographical criticism of the period.[3] It had been made originally in 1775 by Mason in his Life of Gray, where he claimed that he had been a "compiler" in order to render Gray's character directly, adding that

1. Pp. 60 - 71. It is briefly discussed by Altick, pp. 184-185.

2. Essay, pp.60, 78, 79, 190, 276.

3. The distinction between compilation and other forms of writing is made very clearly by Hazlitt in "On Genius and Common Sense" (Table Talk V), Works VII, 48.

he "chose to be this rather than a biographer."[1] Biographers who made such a decision had been criticised for neglecting their artistic task by Johnson, who fifteen years earlier had written of biographers who

> rarely afford any other account than might be collected from public papers, but imagine themselves writing a life when they exhibit a chronological series of actions or preferments.[2]

Johnson was here considerable in advance of his time, for the distinction did not become common until the end of the century, where it is found in Bisset's Life of Burke:

> To collect useful facts, requires only industry, observation, and common judgment. To compose an inductive history or biography requires much higher powers; yet the lower exertions are beneficial in affording materials.[3]

The denigration of these "lower exertions" is a feature of the biographical criticism of the period. Hallam considered that "a mere narrative .... is easy to give,"[4] another reviewer asked "to what purpose is it to tell us that a man was born and died at such a period and place,"[5] and a generation after Bisset the view was expressed by J. A. Paris in his Life of Sir Humphry Davy, with a force and explicitness which clearly derived from his reading of biographies during the intervening period:

> After all, the great end of biography is not to be found, as some would seem to imagine, in a series of dates, or in a collection of gossiping anecdotes and table-talk, which, instead of lighting up and vivifying the features, hang as a cloud of dust upon the portrait.[6]

1. W. Mason, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. Gray (York, 1775), pp. 400 - 401. (Prefixed to his edition of the Poems).
2. The Rambler, No. 60.
3. Pp. 2 - 3.
4. Edinburgh Review XIII (October 1808), 116. (Review of Scott's ed. of Dryden).
5. Critical Review 4th Series V (March 1814), 247 - 248. (Review of Meadley's Life of Algernon Sydney).
6. 1831, I, 57. The image had been earlier used by Coleridge, who complained of "huge volumes of biographical minutiae, which render the real character almost invisible, like clouds of dust on a portrait." (The Friend I, 356 - 357).

The view that it is no virtue in the biographer to be able to provide a chronology of dates and happenings, and that criticism begins with his treatment of these materials, was a common one. Brydges' view that "mere facts instruct us little in character"[1] points also to a new interest in character, which has already been described. As far as the formal art of biography was concerned, the value placed on "mere detail" was summed up by Adolphus when he wrote that "activity and perseverance in the collection of facts are virtues of easy attainment."[2]

Reed claims that the selectivity which the nineteenth-century biographer was expected to exercise was "motivated by propriety, not by the claims of literary art."[3] This is not strictly true. While it is true that more, and more passionate concern was aroused by affronts to propriety than by neglect of design or arrangement, commentators did frequently discuss the artistic challenge presented to the biographer by the selection of detail. Altick summarises the problem:

> The crux of the artistic problem resided, then, not so much in the value of "detailism" per se as in the discrimination the biographer should exercise over the particulars he had assembled and the method by which he should present them. It was generally recognised that the intentions of biography as a literary form could be frustrated as completely by excess as by neglect of detail.[4]

"Excess" and "neglect" of detail; these were the extremes which the biographer was expected to avoid. The "right" selection of the details of private life" was described by one reviewer as essential to biography, but as especially difficult in the life of a public figure. Here it could be "embarrassing", but "to dismiss these matters entirely, as various authors have done, is to strip biography of its peculiar advantage, its

1. Foreign Travel II, 277 - 278.
2. Biography, pp. 19 - 20. Compiled biographies, wrote another critic, "enable us to bestow praise upon the performance, without ascribing any great merit to the author." (Monthly Review NS VII (February 1828),207).
3. J. R. Reed, p. 48.
4. Life and Letters, p. 193.

essential attraction."[1] The role of biography was commonly seen as filling in the details ignored by more general history. William Empson, writing in the Edinburgh, stated bluntly: "Biography may be expected to afford a good deal of the information which more general history either is not able, or will not condescend, to give."[2] Brougham and Jeffrey both agreed. Brougham regarded the giving of detailed information as the very essence of biography, and took Dugald Stewart severely to task for neglecting this in his Account of Dr. Robinson:

> Personal biography is one of those walks, we can scarcely call them subordinate, in treading which, a man must stoop to contemplate and pick up objects of a less dignified nature and less extensive mass than those which beset the path of the annalist. Unless the biographer will condescend thus to lower his attention, his work will neither be useful, nor satisfactory, nor pleasing, nor, in one word, biographical.[3]

Brougham's statement is remarkable, since he was not writing as an advocate of biography. Jeffrey, too, used the word "condescend" to describe the biographer's use of "trifling things." He criticised the Memoirs of Alfieri, although it contained "pretty copious and minute" details, because the author did not know how to select and use them:

> It is not that he does not condescend to talk about trifling things, but that he will not talk about them in a lively or interesting manner; and systematically declines investing any part of his statement with those picturesque details, and that warm colouring, by which alone the story of an individual can often excite such interest among strangers.[4]

It was a widely-held view that biographers should, almost as an article of their profession, include detail which had been intelligently selected

1. Quarterly Review XXXIV (September 1826), 459. (Review of Prior's Life of Burke, by R. Wellesley).
2. Edinburgh Review LI (July 1830), 503. (Review of Jefferson's Memoirs and Correspondence).
3. Edinburgh Review III (April 1803), 233 - 234.
4. Edinburgh Review XV (January 1810), 275 - 276.

and skilfully incorporated. The distinction between history and biography was made too by Lockhart, who criticised the lives of Sheridan by Watkins and by Moore because "the stateliness of their historical vein stoops reluctantly" to the personal details of their subject. For Lockhart, as for the three Edinburgh reviewers cited above, this was a major criticism, for "these were precisely the matters that ought to have occupied the chief part of their attention."[1] It was not simple curiosity which demanded these details, for they were regarded as necessary if the biographer was to perform his important task of conveying character. Brydges objected strongly to the custom of concluding a biography with a general estimate of character, which "deal[s] in vague, general terms" with the subject, instead of presenting precise information.[2] The "minutiae" of conduct, wrote an Eclectic reviewer, "furnish the best criterion of real character .... It is in little circumstances ... that we ascertain character."[3] The character, concluded a contemporary reviewer of Stanfield, should be "a condensed inference from the facts."[4]

The criticism of those biographers who refused to descend to detail in their work is balanced by the frequent censure of "minute biographers", those who swamped their work with excessive detail. The activities of such writers had come in for ridicule since the time of Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides.[5] Scott was poking gentle fun at them when he wrote in his Memoir:

1. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1828), 591.
2. Autobiography II, 429.
3. Eclectic Review I (February 1805), 88. (Review of Hamilton's Agrippina).
4. Monthly Review LXXIV (August 1814), 364.
5. "I am fully aware of the objections which may be made to the minuteness on some occasions of my details of Johnson's conversation, and how happily it is adapted for the petty exercise of ridicule." Life of Johnson I, 33.

> We went to London by sea, and it may gratify the curiosity of minute biographers to learn that our voyage was performed in the Duchess of Buccleuch, Captain Beatson, master.[1]

The reviewers were frequently exasperated by such detail: "the meagre, uninteresting, and indeed trifling details, of eminent persons," wrote one "are absolutely offensive to every reader of taste and discernment."[2] Leigh Hunt, similarly, asked if Moore thought "that the mightly mind of posterity will busy itself with his bustling details."[3] Jeffrey berated the prolixity of the Edgeworth memoirs, as "parodying the spirit of heroic biography." "We think the public might have been spared the account of Mr. E.'s bad nursing, and of the various schools he attended, and the nicknames he received before he was eight years old."[4] A more specific objection came from Croker:

> There is nothing whatever in Mr. Edgeworth's childhood worth notice; and considering the minute facts which he condescends to record of his infancy, it is surprising that there should be so little to distinguish him from the herd of boys.[5]

The biographer's ability to select telling details was often mentioned by commentators as the distinguishing mark of the artist. In his use of details, they maintained, the biographer showed his discrimination by selecting those which individualised his subject and marked him off from other men. Coleridge objected to the biographer including undistinguishing detail and "heaping together a multitude of particulars, which can prove nothing of any man that might not have been safely taken for granted of

1. Life of Scott I, 19.
2. Eclectic Review NS VI (December 1816), 566. (Review of Bonney's Life of Jeremy Taylor).
3. Review of Moore's Life of Byron, Tatler, January II, 1831; Literary Criticism, p. 304.
4. Edinburgh Review XXXIV (August 1820), 514.
5. Quarterly Review XXIII (July 1820), 514.

all men."[1] In the same paper in The Friend he emphasised the difference between detail which is insignificant and that which is only apparently so, the latter serving to "distinguish the subject ... from ordinary men."[2] Adolphus, after disparaging the mere collection of facts, claimed the power of discrimination as the biographer's highest art:

> To discern the frivolous from the important, to resolve on adopting and on rejecting, to select materials with that unerring judgment which permits no distinguishing part of the character to escape, yet rejects those indifferent circumstances which belong equally to all men, is a perfection of art which few authors have approached.[3]

The biographer was expected not so much to steer a course between neglect and excess of detail, but rather to discriminate between which were useful and which useless.

Adolphus describing the biographer in ideal perfection conformed with Stanfield's view that "the selection ... requires both penetration and discretion." The biographer should not include everything which he gleans, neither should he reject "any passage, however minute, which may serve to throw a ray of light on individual pecularity, or can direct it to any distinct aspect of the general human character."[4] Some biographers preferred to err deliberately on the side of inclusiveness rather than trust their judgment or risk any material being lost.[5] A common attitude was that of writers "so well described by Lord Hailes in one of his papers in the "World", who think that a fact ought to be recorded, merely because

1. The Friend I, 357 - 358.
2. Ibid. 356 - 357. Cf. Brydges Autobiography I, 88 - 89. "What is common to all can convey no information."
3. Biography, pp. 19 - 20.
4. Stanfield, p. 162.
5. A reviewer of Tweddell's Remains sympathised with the editor for being "rather anxious to omit nothing which could be considered as a literary relic of his brother, than fearful of making too indiscriminate a display." Quarterly Review XIV (October 1815), 226.

it is a fact."[1] There were other defences of copiousness. William Empson thought that familiar and trivial details should be tolerated because they were the "guarantee" of the authenticity of the work, however tedious in themselves.[2] R. L. Edgeworth wrote that circumstances "in themselves entirely trivial" should be included because they "give an air of reality."[3] Other commentators followed Johnson in thinking that nothing connected with the life of a great man could be thought too minute to record.[4] Thomas Moore saw more clearly than any reviewer, and certainly than any other practising biographer of the time, the need for subordinating detail to total design. In his Advertisement to Sheridan's Works he expressed his fears that what the biographer "gains in minuteness and precision of detail, he may lose in the general effect of the whole," and that

> in recording only the littleness of the great, he may resemble one who would give us a map of the narrow lanes and passages of Constantinople, instead of a splended panorama of its seas, its temples, and its palaces.[5]

Moore, at least, resolved this problem; in a letter he wrote to Rogers while working on the Life of Byron he explained his view that "biography is like dot engraving, made up of little minute points, which must all be attended to, or the effect is lost."[6]

1. Letter from Forbes to Beattie (January 9, 1786) about Boswell's Tour. Forbes' Life of Beattie II, 181 - 182. Cf. London Magazine (January 1823), p. 450: "Who but the veriest fool would crave to have little failings, detracting peculiarities, helpless faults, recorded minutely ?"
2. Edinburgh Review LIII (March 1831), 83. (Review of the Schiller/ Goethe Correspondence).
3. Memoirs I, 251.
4. E.g. Gentlemen's Magazine LXX (September 1800), 812. "Can anything, then, that is connected with so great a name be thought too minute ?"
5. 1821 , I, viii-ix.
6. Dated April 21, 1828. Letters II, 608.

Thomas Carlyle distinguished consistently in his biographical criticism between compilation and real biography, remarking in 1838 that Lockhart's Life of Scott was "not so much a composition, as what we may call a compilation well done."[1] Ten years earlier, reviewing Lockhart's Life of Burns, he had explained his view that "if an individual is really of consequence enough to have his life and character recorded," then a mere collection of external facts will not be sufficient. Such subjects deserve a full composition, as opposed to a mere "life". "Few individuals, indeed," he added, "can deserve such a study,"[2] but Burns he believed to be one of the few, and therefore felt justified in complaining of both Currie's and Walker's biographies of him, since they "err alike in presenting us with a detached catalogue of his several supposed attributes, virtues, and vices, instead of a delineation of the resulting character as a living unity."[3] Carlyle's most striking description of a contemporary biography came in the Edinburgh in 1827, provoked by a German work, Doring's Life of Richter:

> He first ascertains ... the date and place of the proposed individual's birth, his parentage, trade, appointments, and the titles of his works (the date of his death you already know from the newspapers): this serves as a foundation for the edifice. He then goes through his writings, and all other writings where he or his pursuits are treated of, and wherever he finds a passage with his name in it, he cuts it out, and carries it away. In this manner, a mass of material is collected, and the building now proceeds apace. Stone is laid on the top of stone, just as it comes to hand; a trowel or two of biographic mortar, if perfectly convenient, being perhaps spread in here and there, by way of cement; and so the strangest pile suddenly arises; amorphous, pointing every way but to the zenith - here a block of granite,

1. Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, IV, 28. See also Hazlitt on compilation, "Table Talk" (Works, VII, 48).
2. Edinburgh Review XLVIII (December 1828), 270. Carlyle did not oppose the writing of these "lives", but simply wished to distinguish them from true biographies: "Many lives will be written, and, for the gratification of innocent curiosity, ought to be written, and read and forgotten, which are not in this sense biographies."
3. Ibid. 260.

> there a mass of pipeclay; till the whole finishes, when the materials are finished - and you leave it standing to posterity, like some minature Stonehenge, a perfect architectural enigma.[1]

This is the most explicit of the attacks on compiled biography to be found during the period.

iv. Edmund Malone

A species of biography which was particularly vulnerable to the charge of compilation was the elaborately researched and documented academic study associated with the name of Edmund Malone. It is only in recent years that Malone's eminence as a biographer has been fully recognised. J. M. Osborn's praise for his Life of Dryden[2] has been echoed more recently by S. Schoenbaum's eulogium of the posthumous Life of Shakespeare:

> On the Shakespeare genealogy Malone has brought to bear all his incomparable gifts for patient, minute investigation. He has corresponded with anyone who could supply information, he has travelled everywhere: he has searched the parish registers not only of Stratford, but also of the neighboring villages, he has retrieved wills from the Consistory Office, in Worcester and elsewhere, he has studied documents in the College of Arms. He succeeds in dispelling the mist of confusion and obscurity that had for so long surrounded the poet's family.

Schoenbaum's conclusion is that Malone "had erected a new foundation for the study of Shakespeare's life."[3] Malone's emphasis on the necessity for thorough research, unwavering attention to detail, and the following up of every possible line of investigation, whether promising or not, was praised by many contemporaries. It was particularly valued by other writers on Shakespeare and on Dryden, who had found so much of their research done for

1. Edinburgh Review XLVI (June 1827), 177-178. The text was much revised for the collected Essays. The image had been used earlier by a reviewer, who described Malone's Life of Dryden as "a ponderous and tasteless mass, composed of sand and stone and marble, and rubbish, with very little mortar to hold it together." (Critical Review 2nd Series (January 1801),35)
2. In John Dryden: Some Biographical Facts and Problems (revised ed., Gainesville,1965), pp. [39] - 71.
3. Shakespeare's Lives, pp. 243, 248.

them; Scott freely acknowledged his debt in the opening words of the Advertisement to his Life of Dryden: "In the Biographical Memoir of Dryden, it would have been hard to exact, that the Editor should rival the criticism of Johnson, or produce facts which had escaped the accuracy of Malone."[1] The Monthly Review echoed Scott's words in reviewing his work, remarking that "to glean after so industrious and minute a gatherer as Mr. Malone must be regarded as an unpromising occupation."[2] Much of the good influence which Malone's methods had on his contemporaries was indirect; his work as a biographer set scholarly standards by which other biographers came to be judged. The Quarterly complained of Jones' edition of Baker's Biographia Dramatica in terms which made it clear that in biography the incompetent amateur was no longer to be tolerated:

> This inconsiderate employment of incompetent persons is the more to be regretted, and the more strongly to be censured, since with the assistance now so liberally and laudably afforded by collectors, a work illustrative of the history of the drama might be written worthy of the subject.[3]

When Scott wrote about biography, words such as "laborious" and "industrious" were strong commendations. He praised Churton's Life of Dean Nowell for "its patient industry and long research," for its close detail, its exact corroborations, its precise reference to sources, and its use of original authorities, concluding with the hope that it would "establish a salutary precedent: what has already been performed may hereafter be required."[4] Indeed, Scott saw the application of Churton's stringent standards as a means for bringing to the writing of biography some sort of order. This was one of the few firm suggestions of the time for a specification for biography,

1. Miscellaneous Works (Edinburgh, 1869), I, [v] - vi.
2. Monthly Review LVIII (February 1809), 143.
3. Quarterly Review VII (June 1812), 286. The reviewers were Gilchrist and Gifford.
4. Quarterly Review III (February 1810), 112. This quality was so important to Scott that he praised Barrett's Life of Swift generously, although the work was very deficient, because the investigation had been carried out painstakingly. (Quarterly Review I (February 1809), 164 - 165).

for a firm requirement of biographers:

> This will be thought hard measure; but the world is deluged with flimsy memoirs of which it is fitting to stop the progress by some severe critical enactment. It is high time that they be compelled, on pain of infamy, to learn before they presume to teach; to inquire before they begin to inform; and thus the world will no longer be inundated by the loose and flimsy issue of indolence, inaccuracy, and want of general information.[1]

There was here a clearly expressed hope that the standards established and typified by Malone would be adopted for the general improvement of biography.

Malone was a powerful influence on biography, but made no contribution to the art of formal composition. The Life of Dryden is a work of seminal importance in the history of biography, but its significance lies in the emphasis on research, and in Malone's ideas of what a biography should contain, not in the actual presentation of the findings. Osborn singles out a number of characteristics: Malone's careful sifting of material from earlier biographies, his combing of Dryden's writings for biographical hints, his use of early periodical literature, family papers and registers, testing by chronology, scholarly digressions, and opposition to "expressive theory" in biography.[2] Of these only Malone's faiblesse for scholarly digressions is connected with the actual form of biography. Malone insisted that the biographer's task, far from being easy and agreeable, was "tedious and often unsatisfactory," and that only by method and application could a writer hope for any success.[3]

Contemporary opinion of Malone's biographical methods was mixed. From a later standpoint his contribution to the art can be seen as almost entirely beneficial, but to his contemporaries his virtues were not always obvious.

1. Ibid. My italics.
2. John Dryden, pp. 43, 45-46, 47ff., 50, 56, 64-65, 69.
3. Life of Dryden, p.2.

This was partly due to his irremediable digressiveness, which in the Life of Dryden is seen in both text and notes. Both reveal Malone's unwillingness to discard material. The physical appearance of Malone's pages is often similar to that of the most detailed modern critical edition, with a narrow ribbon of text above a thick body of footnotes. It was the publishing of all this material, rather than the pursuit itself of detailed research, which was criticised and ridiculed.[1] Hallam was the principal scourge; Malone's Dryden predated the Edinburgh Review by two years, but in his review of Scott's Life of Dryden in 1808 Hallam made good the lost opportunity. Offering the faintest of praise, contrasting "labouriousness" unfavourably with "talents", Hallam soon warmed to his subject, calling Malone's book

> an eminent instance of that undistinguishing collection of rubbish, which the amateurs of black-letter have principally introduced. All facts, great and small, to the purpose or not, are set down indiscriminately by these writers: but, if a choice must be made, the frivolousness of an anecdote seems to be its best recommendation. ...A biographer of this class finds his appetite more ravenous, in proportion as the trash before him is less nourishing.[2]

The review was more serious than this outburst suggests. Hallam saw clearly that the detailed research which "is imposed as a duty upon the historian" should not be neglected by or denied to the biographer. Even by applying the criterion of usefulness, he argued, only a subjective verdict could be reached, so that neither for biography nor the history "can the limits between essential accuracy, and frivolous minuteness, be defined by any written canons." Hallam, concerned only with Malone's literary achievement and not with his usefulness to later scholars, thought the Life of Dryden a

1. An exception was the Monthly reviewer's comment: "His volume supplies us with much extraneous matter; which, however ill-placed, cannot be regarded by us as altogether unacceptable." (LVIII (February 1809), 138).
2. Edinburgh Review XIII (October 1808), 117-118.

failure. Scott's use of material digested from Malone was more to his liking.[1]

Malone's Dryden had been greeted on publication with a satirical pamphlet which, according to Osborn, "killed the sale of his book."[2] This was the Essence of Malone, written by George Hardynge but published anonymously.[3] A long burlesque of the detail and copiousness of Malone's work, the satire was neatest in some of the "Biographical Canons" which it established:

> Canon I. A Biographer should not only be correct in trifles, and copious to their details, but he should reform his own frequent inaccuracies backwards and forwards, till the reader is more in the dark than ever !
>
> Canon II. The life of A, should be the lives of B, C, D, etc. to the end of the alphabet; for which the reader is to pay in the additional size of the volume.
>
> Canon V. A Biographer should refute errors, and especially if they are trivial[4].

These comic complaints, F. R. Hart remarks, "make a manifesto against formlessness in biography."[5] The campaign was continued in the Pursuits of Literature, with a mock sermon on a text taken from Malone:

> "He eat, with Madam Reeve, tarts at the Mulberry Garden," etc. Malone's Life of Dryden p. 466. These Mulberry Tarts, were not given to Dryden by the Minister of King Charles, but he paid Madam Reeve for them himself; though Mr. Malone has most unaccountably neglected to

1. Ibid.,116.
2. John Dryden, p.66.
3. The full title is worth preserving. It was The Essence of Malone, or the "Beauties" of that fascinating Writer, extracted from his immortal Work, in Five Hundred, Sixty-nine Pages, and a Quarter, just published; and (with his accustomed felicity), entitled "Some Account of the Life and Writings of John Dryden !!" Published in 1800 the work quickly went into a second enlarged edition.
4. Essence, pp. 10, 16, 79.
5. Lockhart as Romantic Biographer, p. 21.

> mention the price, and also how many he eat at one visit to the lady; which are the only omissions of consequence in that most fascinating piece of Biography.[1]

Malone did not share the joke, and it is not hard to see why, for he took his art very seriously indeed. Important and minute matters are treated alike by him with meticulous concern. When in the Life of Shakespeare, for instance, he turns to the stories of Shakespeare's deer-stealing exploits, outraged feeling combines with scholarship: "If it be a mere fiction, it is the bounden duty of the historian of his life, minutely and explicitly to refute an unfounded calumny." "Traditionary evidence,"[2] as Malone calls it, must be examined piece by piece, and neither accepted nor rejected automatically. To deal with the deer-stealing allegation Malone brings in all his heavy academic machinery. He first shows that Sir Thomas Lucy, the reputed owner of the deer, was certainly a J.P. in Stratford during the relevant period, then examines the contemporary attitude to deer-stealing and finds that it was not treated as a serious crime. Finally he establishes by diverse documentary proof that in any case Lucy had no enclosed land near Stratford, and is able to conclude that there neither could nor would have been charges brought against Shakespeare. Malone was not deterred by parody from his conception of biography; there is in the Bodleian Library a copy of the Life of Dryden annotated by him for a second edition. It shows the last gaps being filled, and final corrections and confirmations being made. No other figure of the time was so clear or so unswerving in his understanding of the art of

1. [T. J. Mathias], The Pursuits of Literature (16th ed. 1812), p.286.
2. Pp. 118-119. Andrew Caldwell wrote to Malone (April II, 1801) "you have so completely shewn the danger of trusting to Traditions, and exposed their blunders and inconsistencies, I shall hardly ever believe a good thing again." (Bodley MS. Malone 38 f 171). See also Life of Dryden, pp. 148, 286.
3. Ibid., pp. 119-149.

biography.[1]

What the commentators had to say about the place of detail reveals their limitations as well as their importance. The insistence that biographers should be precise and particular if they were to perform their task of conveying character, and that the subject himself should be a fully-focused and detailed figure, was important, and established a biographical principle which has hardly been doubted since. The reviewers, while criticising biographies which did not perform this important task, treated with undistinguishing rigour works which exhibited the opposite failing. The criticisms of excessive detail produced some of the more eloquently exasperated criticisms. This inconsistency is seen clearly in the treatment of Malone. The critics demanded facts and accuracy, and then proceeded to pillory the one biographer of the period who made it his business to provide them. It is a clear sign of how the admitted need for an aesthetic for biography was still in a state of flux. The shortcomings of the reviewers are more marked when one turns from the criticisms of the Edgeworth Memoirs to the work itself. Jeffrey and Croker (like other reviewers of the book) had certainly read it, since they were able to perform the accepted reviewers' task of summary, yet neither took any notice of what Edgeworth in the book itself claimed that he was attempting. They consequently treated the whole work as a repository of fact and produced the criticisms already cited. Edgeworth's own Introduction, the opening words

1. His reputation among contemporaries is further revealed by the large number of requests for scholarly information, preserved in the Bodleian collection. (E.g., MS. Eng. Letters c 15).

of the book, reads:

> I write my life, not because it contains extraordinary adventures, any uncommon series of good or bad fortune, any instances of superior talents, or heroic virtues; but, because from habits acquired in educating a large family, I can develope [sic] with some certainty the circumstances, which have formed my character, and influenced my conduct.

His running commentary on the very details which were criticised explains repeatedly their presence in the book: "This I notice, because the possibility of remembering from so early an age has been doubted."[1] Edgeworth was attempting an experimental autobiography, an imaginative re-evocation of details of his early life which were memorable, and which he later understood to be significant. His commentators understood well enough that Rousseau's theories had dictated Edgeworth's activities as a parent and teacher, but did not see that the Confessions lay behind the Memoirs. Now Croker and Jeffrey were able critics, the latter especially of the novel, and they were certainly not bigoted in this instance, or determined to misrepresent Edgeworth. They simply failed to understand what he was trying to do - indeed, they do not appear to have realised that he was attempting anything. This was a critical blind spot; one may hazard that had Wordsworth's Prelude, with its very Rousseauesque "spots of time", appeared in the 1820's it would have received even shorter shrift.

The fact that no clear critical principle evolved during this period when the place of detail was so much discussed is not surprising. The discussion continues; J. L. Clifford has recently demonstrated from reviews of mid-twentieth century biographies "the same split - some readers complaining about too much trivial evidence, others eagerly asking for the

1. Memoirs, I, 22. He similarly explains why he has included "circumstances in themselves so trifling." (pp. 44-45).

fullest coverage."[1] Whether a biographer of Henry James should record, as Leon Edel did, his refusal of the vice-presidency of Rye Cricket Club, is clearly not agreed. Such discussions are a modern-dress version of the debate which has been outlined above.

1. From Puzzles to Portraits, pp. 116 - 117.

v. Life-and-Times Biographies

An important aspect of the biographer's art which was often singled out for discussion was the ability to steer a "life" course through the rocky shoals of the "times". Several forces influenced biographers to neglect the life and concentrate on the times. Firstly, lack either of judgment or of confidence led some writers to include everything for fear of missing out anything important; Northcote explained in the Preface to his Life of Reynolds, "I have given all I could recollect and would not make myself the judge by omitting any."[1] The risk of superabundance was thought by some commentators to be worth taking: "It is certainly safer for some writers to give us all they know, than to permit themselves the power of rejection," remarked D'Israeli.[2] Then at a time when, for whatever reason, large and multi-volume books were in vogue, the addition of the "times" provided an obvious and relevant way of expanding the life; this was a simple book-making device, and was often greeted as such by reviewers.[3] Lastly, the use of old records, journals, periodicals and newspapers, pioneered by Malone, was an encouragement to verbatim quotation, and also led to the sort of digression which was parodied in the Essence of Malone. Life-and-times biography is a notable nineteenth century form, and extended from Godwin's Life of Chaucer (1803) to Masson's Life of Milton Narrated in Connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his Time, in six massive volumes (1859 - 1894).

1. I, iv-v.
2. Literary Miscellanies, p.63. Cf. Ralph Griffiths' review of Boswell's Life of Johnson, where he urged the reporter "Give us all; suppress nothing; lest in rejecting that which, in your estimation may seem to be of inferior value, you unwarily throw any gold with the dross." (Monthly Review N S VII (January 1792), 3-4. Quoted by J. L. Clifford, From Puzzles to Portraits, p. 116).
3. Repeatedly by the Eclectic; "the approved recipe of modern book-making" is condemned, for example, in NS XXII (October 1824), 313.

The pattern of the life-and-times biography possibly derived from Boswell's Life of Johnson, and certainly Boswell's title-page seems to have served as a model for many other works. Bower's Life of Beattie (1804) provides a good example; the full title reads:

> An Account of the Life of James Beattie, LL.D. Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic, Aberdeen. In which are occasionally given Characters of the Principal Literary Men, and a Sketch of the State of Literature in Scotland during the last Century. Some Poems, not generally known to be Dr. Beatties, are also introduced in the Course of the Narrative.

It is a short step from this to the full title of Godwin's Chaucer (1803):

> Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, the early English Poet: including Memoirs of his near Friend and Kinsman, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster: with Sketches of the Manners, Opinions, Arts and Literature of England in the Fourteenth Century.

This work, according to Professor Lounsbury, deserves "the distinction of being the most worthless piece of biography in the English language,"[1] and Altick describes it as "among the worst received literary biographies of the century."[2] However justified the complaints, Godwin was at least innocent of deception; his title-page is an accurate description of the work, and in his Preface he explains fully his conception of the "full and complete life of a poet." He thought it necessary to detail the times of a poet in order to discover "the cause which made him what he was," so that "to delineate the state of England, such as Chaucer saw it, in every point of view in which it can be delineated, is the subject of this book."[3] The method is seen as well as anywhere in the opening chapters:

1. Studies in Chaucer (1892), I, 192.
2. Lives and Letters, p. 208.
3. Life of Chaucer, I, viii.

> He who loves to follow the poet through the various scenes from which his mind receives its first impressions, will be eager in this place to recollect what sort of a city London was at the beginning of the fourteenth century ....[1]

Godwin proceeds to outline the history of London under the Romans, Saxons, and Normans, and up to Chaucer's time, and in the same way uses Chaucer as a springboard for disquisitions on the state of learning, chivalry and romance, the Church, and so forth. Scott characterised the book accurately in the Edinburgh, and wrote that

> the incidents of Chaucer's life serving as a sort of thread upon which to string his multifarious digressions, bear the same proportion to the book that the alphabet does to the Encyclopaedia, or the texts of a volume of sermons to the sermons themselves.

He entered a strong protest

> against this mode of book-making. If a biographer be at liberty to introduce into his story a full account of every contemporary subject of disquisition, however little connected with his hero, by virtue of a gratuitous supposition, with whatever scenes he may take a fancy to describe, it is obvious, that unless an author's mercy temper his strength, the rights of the courteous reader are in no small peril.[2]

Southey reviewed the work in the Annual Review, and exposed Godwin's achievement, chapter by chapter, in merciless detail:

> Chaucer must have seen castles and cathedrals and palaces; so the eighth chapter is upon Gothic architecture, and contain a full description of a castle, from Grose![3]

Godwin's Preface to the Life of Chaucer, as well as explaining in detail his purposes, made clear also that he did intend the work as a genuine intellectual experiment. He did not claim the life-and-times style as a model for all biography, but as necessary for the "full and complete

1. Ibid. 4 - 5.
2. Edinburgh Review III (January 1804), 439, 442.
3. Annual Review II (for 1803), 404.

life of a poet," which

> would include an extensive survey of the manners, the opinions, the arts and the literature, of the age in which the poet lived. This is the only way in which we can become truly acquainted with the history of his mind, and the causes which made him what he was. We must observe what Chaucer felt and saw, how he was educated, what species of learning he pursued, and what were the objects, the events and the persons, successively presented to his view, before we can strictly and philosophically understand his biography.

Godwin was an avowed anti-antiquarian, and his purpose, to enable the reader "to feel for the instant as if he had lived with Chaucer," to catch his interest and to incite his curiosity, he saw as opposed to the activities of scholars - "men of cold temper and sterile imaginations."[1] In adopting this approach Godwin was accepting the idea of environment as a significant influence on his subject. It might have been expected in an age when thinking men, and poets especially, were alive to the influence of natural objects, and were understanding the importance of environment as a formative influence,[2] that the addition of the times would add an important dimension to biography. It did not, though, nor did any commentator on any example of the life-and-times biography in the period either take it seriously or see its possibilities. Southey summarised the critical standpoint when he wrote that Godwin should have "endeavoured to show what effect Chaucer produced upon his age, instead of what effect his age produced upon him."[3] Among contemporaries only Coleridge seems to have scented Godwin's intentions; he summarised his private criticisms

1. Life of Chaucer, I, viii - ix.
2. One thinks particularly of Wordsworth, Coleridge and De Quincey in this connection. A.O.J. Cockshut makes a parallel point about nineteenth century biographers ignoring the formative influences of childhood, asking of Southey's Life of Wesley, "had he never heard that the child is father of the man ?" (Truth to Life: the Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century (1974), p.19.)
3. Annual Review II (for 1803), 472.

thus:

> In short, a Life of Chaucer ought in the work itself, and in the appendices of the work, to make the Poet explain his Age and make the Age both explain the Poet, and evince the superiority of the Poet over his Age.[1]

Apart from the conservative refusal to allow that the subject might not only act, but be acted upon by his times, this form of biography became too closely associated with artistic slovenliness,[2] and with the worst feature of book-making, its gigantism, to be accepted as a proper literary form. A typical complaint was that made of James Boaden's Life of Mrs. Jordan: "Boaden wanted to make a book, and page-filling was the object, not biography." As a result, as far as actors and plays were concerned, it was "quite enough that the one performed, or the other was acted during the life of Mrs. Jordan, to give them a legitimate claim to swell the pages."[3]

Despite so many objections, Godwin's Chaucer went into a second edition in 1804, becoming the pattern and even the inspiration for other works of the sort. The Monthly Review in 1826 criticised a biography in which the author

> seems only to have looked upon each of even the most trivial circumstances in Dr. Bateman's life as a sort of text, or motto, upon which he was to write a dissertation. .... He indulged himself one evening in reading some book of poetry, and this simple accident gives rise to a long and tiresome discourse upon poetry in general, from the time of Homer down to the present day.[4]

1. Letter to Godwin, June 10, 1803. Letters, II, 951.
2. Cf. D'Israeli: "Discernment and taste, would only be detrimental to the views of bulky publishers." (Curiosities of Literature (7th edition, 1823) I, 42.)
3. Fraser's Magazine II (January 1831), 736.
4. Monthly Review NS III (September 1826), 81. Review of Life of Thomas Bateman. Many other examples of this criticism could be adduced; Jeffrey criticised Hardy's Life of Caulfield for enlarging upon "matters of general history, with which Lord Chalemont has no other connection than that they happened during his life, with a minuteness which would not be tolerated in a professed annalist." Edinburgh Review XIX (November 1811), 96. See also Sir Sidney Lee's Principles of Biography (Cambridge, 1911), pp. 26-30.

Both the basis and tone of the criticism is the same as that which had been directed at Godwin more than twenty years earlier.

With Chaucer, as, a few years later, with Shakespeare, this scheme of biography was dictated partly by the almost total absence of biographical facts. Even the few facts which were known about Shakespeare became fewer during this period after they had been subjected to Malone's scrutiny. According to Malone, Rowe's Life,[1] until then the standard biography, provided no more than eleven facts, of which eight were false, one doubtful, and only the dates of Shakespeare's baptism and funeral certainly true.[2] Shakespeare's biographers may be pardoned for having suspected a conspiracy. John Britton supposed that Shakespeare

> either neglected to preserve, or destroyed all records, and memoranda, relating to his own life and writings. Hence the laudable curiosity of the present age is unrewarded by facts, and is held in continued and aggravated suspense, as to the pecularities of his personal actions and pursuits .... An extraordinary and astonishing degree of mystery envelopes his name.[3]

James Boaden voiced a popular sense of incredulity that while a great deal of useful material was still coming to light from Shakespeare's age, not a single document relating to Shakespeare remained:

> All the effusions which friendship or business must have poured from his pen during a town life, and the reasonable produce of his retirement from a mind so essentially active, ALL, as if collected together in one mass destroyed BY AUTHORITY, had vanished away, and were entirely lost to posterity.[4]

It is with these deficiencies in mind that we should view Augustine Skottowe's use of the Godwin method in his two-volume Life of Shakespeare (1824). The

1. Published with his edition of Shakespeare in 1709, and reprinted (in shortened form) with most editions of Shakespeare for over a century.
2. Life of Shakespeare, pp. 69-70.
3. Remarks on the Life and Writings of William Shakespeare (1814), p.6.
4. Memoirs of Kemble (1825), II, 163. Quoted by Schoenbaum, pp. 199-200.

life itself occupies only one eighth of the work (pp. 1 - 96), and even of this small portion most is taken up by an account of the medieval and Elizabethan theatre.

The desperate shifts of the biographer, concealed behind Godwin's and Skottowe's bogus assumption that the reader "will naturally wish to know ... " were not needed when the subject of the biography was more recent and the material more copious. In these cases, and particularly when the subject was a public figure, a different justification for rendering the times was given. Watkins' claim is typical:

> The history of Mr. Sheridan is so connected with that of the times in which he lived, as to render some account of public affairs essentially necessary, to the illustration of his character and conduct.[1]

The higher the public position of the subject, argued Mary Hays in the Preface to her Female Biography, the more clearly does biography resemble history: "The reign of an absolute monarch is strictly biographical, and ... the character of the sovereign is read in the history of his times."[2] The Annual Biography and Obituary made the claim for Napoleon, one of those public characters whose memoirs "are so complicated with general history as to render them an epitome of the principal events of the times in which he flourished."[3] The necessity, in political biography at least, for including a detailed picture of the times was not accepted by all biographers, and was strenuously opposed by most reviewers. Sheridan's second major biographer, Thomas Moore, suspended his narrative to deliver a homily on the subject; after disclaiming any intention of imitating "those biographers, who swell

1. Life of Sheridan (1817), II, 195. A similar argument was employed by W. Wilson in his Memoirs of the Life and Times of Defoe (1830); "the history of his life is very much interwoven with the events of the times." (I, viii-ix).
2. 1803, I, vi-vii.
3. Volume for 1821, p. [I].

their pages with details that belong more properly to History," he remarked:

> A writer of political biography has a right, no doubt, like an engineer who constructs a navigable canal, to lay every brook and spring in the neighbourhood under contribution for the supply and enrichment of his work. But, to turn into it the whole contents of the Annual Register and Parliamentary Debates is a sort of literary engineering, not quite so laudable.[1]

Even though it was against these expressed intentions, Moore nonetheless wrote in the life-and-times style, just as Watkins had, and both authors were taken to task by Lockhart, who considered that they had "done injudiciously in writing the life of Mr. Sheridan so much as if they had been composing the political history of his time." Lockhart did admit, though, that "to draw the necessary line of distinction" between biography and history "is not the work of ordinary judgment and taste."[2]

The reviewers of the period insisted again and again that it was possible to write a biography "in which credit shall be given to the reader for a general acquaintance with the history of the last fifty years." The Life of Horne Tooke was greeted as typical of a popular form of deceptive biography, where "under pretence of writing biography" the authors "deluge the public with vast amounts of contemporaneous history."[3] Some considered that works like this inverted the true purpose of biography, which was to supplement history, not to repeat or paraphrase it. Jeffrey advised readers to think twice before spending money on such publications, and "to consider whether the secrets they contain are worth knowing, or whether a file of ancient newspapers might not afford them as amusing anecdotes and as authentic information."[4] The most striking of these

1. Life of Sheridan, p.410.
2. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1828), 574.
3. Quarterly Review XII (June 1812), 314.
4. Edinburgh Review V (January 1805), 477 (Review of the Correspondence and Memoirs of John Wilkes).

criticisms was Napier's complaint in the Edinburgh that Marshall's Life of Washington had so confused the subject with the general history of America that "he has even gone to the length of giving us, under the title of a life of Washington, a whole quarto volume, in which his name is not once mentioned, except at the head of the page."[1] Stanfield's advice on the subject was clear. He wrote that the introduction to a biography should "give a review of the times and general circumstances; so far as their influence bears on the commencement of the history."[2]

A particular complaint of Lockhart's in his remarks on Moore's Life of Sheridan was that Sheridan was too insignificant a figure to stamp his name on the times in which he lived. The reader, Lockhart wrote, is certain to ask himself "how many, after all, are the events in the public history of England with which posterity will, in any manner whatever, connect the name of Sheridan ?"[3] Lockhart's view was that the production of a biography in the life-and-times style implied that the life really had some effect on the times. He expressed this view very forcibly in an earlier Quarterly article where he angrily dismissed a batch of ten autobiographies. The finest contempt was reserved for the two-volume Life and Times of Fredrick Reynolds, a minor dramatist:

1. Edinburgh Review XIII (October 1808), 150. Conversely a biography which was short and to the point was elaborately praised by the Eclectic because "it has neither note, appendix, nor supplement. It is neither enriched nor illuminated, with extracts from parish registers, or papers found at the bottom of old chests; nor does it contain an account of everything and everybody that had any manner of connexion with Zwinglius." (Eclectic Review IX (September 1812), 329) (Review of Hess' Life of Zwinglius.)
2. Essay, p. 191.
3. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1828), 574.

> The "Times of Fredrick Reynolds !" - such is the style by which the child that is unborn will distinguish the last quarter of the eighteenth century of the Christian era, and the first of that now in progress. Hide your diminished heads, ye Pitts, Burkes, Cannings ! For what purpose, ye Scotts, Byrons, Crabbes, etc., have you
> " - trimmed what poets call the midnight taper ?" -
> But men must be contented with their fit places in the procession of fame.[1]

The only writer of the ten who came in for any praise at all was a Mr. Brasbridge, who had called his book Fruits of Experience, and did not claim to have had any impact on his times:

> He knows well that the world would have stood very much where it does although he had never sold silver forks in Fleet Street, and therefore that he is by no means entitled to give name to his age.[2]

As has been shown, though, even writers who had good reason for involving the life of their subject in his times received little support from the critics.

The hostile reception which this type of publication received suggests that biography as a form was now held in some regard. A point often made by critics was that these works, while swamping the reader with "contemporaneous history", revealed nothing at all of the subject's "private life and social character."[3] When they were no longer viewed as biographies, though, such works ceased to be so objectionable. When there was no "original" biography, the use of a central figure as a unifying point was sometimes admitted as being a convenient way of presenting history. A review of Elmes' Memoirs of Wren, for example, took the view that the history of architecture was far more important than the details of Wren's personal life:

1. Quarterly Review XXXV (January 1827), 149. The quotation is a badly-mangled version of Byron's Don Juan I, 218.
2. Ibid., 157, Lockhart thought that Mr. Brasbridge was "to be commended for the modesty of his title-page."
3. Eclectic Review XXII (October 1824), 313. (Review of Prior's Life of Burke).

> The life of Sir Christopher Wren is a central point in the history of Architecture in England; and the subject might be with propriety made the medium of information, embracing the rise, progress, and vicissitudes of the art, while it should include extensive and important illustrations of its principles and practice.[1]

When the subject was unremarkable, explained another commentator, the biographer needed particular talents "to keep up the reader's attention:"

> Through the skill of a writer, a subordinate personage may be made the theme of a work which, though long, shall not prove tedious; this is by the judicious mixture of collateral matter, slightly, perhaps, connected with the main subject, yet sufficiently so, not to appear intrusive and irrelevant.[2]

Similarly a reviewer of the Historical Life of Joanna of Sicily accepted the principle of selecting a single historical personage "for the purpose of illustration by contemporaneous details."

> Joanna, indeed, ... is not the most conspicuous character in her own biography, the materials to illustrate which are necessarily doubtful and scanty. But this defect has been supplied by the ample researches which the Author has directed into the various collateral events of one of the most interesting periods of modern history.[3]

Even a reviewer opposed on principle to the life-and-times biography could see that the life of one man might reasonably serve "as a centre of union for a diversity of extraneous information," and agree that "this may be one method of writing a detached portion of literary history." The method became objectionable when the biographer "professes one thing and performs another."[4] Works which did not disappoint any biographical expectations escaped this criticism, and when they did not masquerade as biographies could be praised for such virtues as they did exhibit.

1. Eclectic Review N S XIX (June 1823), 539.
2. Annual Review I (for 1802), 589. (Review of Shepherd's Life of Bracciolini.)
3. Eclectic Review N S XXIII (May 1825), 385, 412. This quality of book is suggested by the unusual title - Historical Life.
4. Critical Review 4th Series I (March 1812), 290. (Review of Kerr's Memoirs of Smellie).

Biographies on the life-and-times principle were among those most roughly treated by the reviewers. It was the violation of proportion which was particularly condemned. Stanfield thought that in Godwin's Life of Chaucer "the bulk of extrinsic matter is ... disproportionate to the proposed subject."[1] Scott diagnosed the fault of the Life of Kemble in similar terms - "the fore-ground and back-ground are too extensive for the principal figure" - and he suggested that the material would have been better arranged in two volumes, one for the life and the other for the times.[2] The ideal upheld by commentators was expressed succinctly by G. W. Meadley in the Preface to his Memoirs of Algernon Sydney, where he hoped that he had remembered "the chief duty of a biographer, to trace the progress of his hero, through surrounding circumstances, and not too minutely to detail the story of his *age*."[3]

vi - Life-and-Letters Biographies

While the life-and-times model could find little independent support as a form of biography, another form which presented similar artistic problems of proportion and relevance, "life-and-letters", had a much better reception. This species had been popularised by Boswell's Life of Johnson (1791), but derived from Mason's Life of Gray (1775), to which Boswell acknowledged his own debt.[4] The purpose and method were well described by Forbes in the Introduction to his Life of Beattie (1806). Forbes proposed to follow Mason's method

1. Essay, p. 71.
2. Quarterly Review XXXIV (June 1826), 204-205.
3. 1813, pp. xi - xii.
4. Life of Johnson, I, 29.

> by producing some of the most interesting of Dr. Beattie's letters, and connecting them by a narrative, at proper periods, of the principal incidents of his life. By this method, he will, in no inconsiderable degree, be his own biographer.[1]

The practice of letting a subject be "his own biographer" had a mixed reception from reviewers. John Foster described the method as "constructing large biographical works out of an assemblage of letters," and he ironically listed several "plausible recommendations" ~~of the method.~~ These were 1) The modesty of the author, who does not often need to obtrude himself into the narrative. 2) The certainty that a series of letters covering half a lifetime will show in some degree the progress of the subject's mind. 3) The "impunity" of the work - "there is little to be attacked in such a book, except what its author has not written." 4) The "extreme facility of the performance."[2] It was welcomed more sincerely by Jeffrey; reviewing Hayley's Life of Cowper in the Edinburgh, he remarked that the method "has many evident advantages in point of liveliness of colouring, and fidelity of representation. It is something intermediate between the egotism of confessions, and the questionable narrative of a surviving friend."[3] Another review of Hayley admitted that the Mason method "possesses some advantages," particularly "that of making the subject, in a great measure, his own historian," and that of producing a "strong impression of authenticity."[4] Despite some reservations (described below), the life-and-letters form was accepted by critics, as the life-and-times never was, as a valid form of biography.

1. I, iv. Variations on the phrase were common throughout the period. Moore intended Byron "to relate his own story" (Life of Byron, II, 647), Stanfield wrote that a subject might be "his own historian" (p.77), and Lockhart proposed to make Scott "his own historiographer " (A. Lang, Life of Lockhart, II, 162.)
2. Eclectic Review III (January 1807), 3. (Review of Forbes' Life of Beattie.)
3. Edinburgh Review II (April 1803), 64-65.
4. Annual Review II (for 1803), 457.

The "extreme facility", as Foster called it, of the life-and-letters method was as obvious to its practitioners as to the commentators. It could lead to the sort of circumstantial defence which was used in the Preface to J. E. Stock's Memoirs of Beddoes, where the author explained that in his anxiety to "give a history of Dr. Beddoes' opinions" he had used Beddoes' own published and unpublished manuscripts. Stock explained that as editor

> he has frequently made use of the Doctor's own expressive language. In many instances, indeed, his style was so simple and concise that it scarcely admitted of compression; while in others it was so eloquent and impressive, that it would have been an injustice to his reputation to state his sentiments in any words but his own.[1]

Where the letters were all of indispensable value the biographer might feel that he owed it to his subject to be a "compiler". Once the biographer had decided to do this, his task was lightened; a reviewer of Hayley's Life of Cowper remarked that Cowper himself

> without intending it, ... has become his own biographer. The office of the editor, therefore, as far as this object is concerned, is only that of collecting the communications which the poet made to his friends, and chronologically arranging them.[2]

The convenience to a biographer of having his subject do a great deal of the work did not go unnoticed. One reviewer described it as "a method which certainly lessens the trouble of the biographer, and affords him the opportunity of making up a volume at the least expense of intellectual labour."[3] The biographer could even save himself the trouble of transcribing the letters, and send off the originals to the printer. Thomas Moore admitted how attractive this convenience of the form was; writing

1. Pp. ii-iii. The same anxiety was shown by Lockhart about Scott: "My sole object is to do him justice, or rather to let him do himself justice." (A. Lang, Life of Lockhart II, 117).
2. Monthly Review XLIV (July 1804), 241.
3. Eclectic Review 3rd Series II, (August 1829) 169-170. (Review of Bond's Memoirs of Fisk.) The phrase recurs in the Eclectic: Cf. NS XXII (October 1824) 313.

to Scott about his Life of Byron, he remarked:

> If Murray can be brought to anything definitive on this subject, I shall not be long in dispatching the work, as our materials, when united, will be ample and will enable me I think to make Byron tell his own story, which is not only the pleasantest sort of biography but by far the easiest to the writer.[1]

All life-and-letters biographies, though, cannot be ascribed to authorial laziness; biographers were also the victims of circumstances. To some extent Hayley's success with the Life of Cowper was a piece of luck, for however appropriate the reviewers thought the form, it was partly forced upon Hayley by the lack of other material. It was similar deficiency which forced another form upon Godwin. In a letter to the Rev. J. Newton, Hayley explained that since he did not expect to survive Cowper, he had never thought of collecting material for his biography, so that for some periods of Cowper's life, he lamented, "I have felt like a poor Labourer in Ægypt condemned to make Bricks without Straw."[2]

Sometimes, when commentators questioned neither the usefulness nor the effectiveness of using letters in biography, they showed an artistic concern with the method by which the letters were incorporated into the narrative. The review of Hayley's Life of Cowper in the Annual Review offered a detailed critique of epistolary biography,[3] mentioning as a defect that "the thread of narrative is broken." Although the letters themselves provide "excellent matter" and unmatchable illustration for the author, "it is only to this chequered mode of mingling them entire, with the staple of the writers narration, that we venture to propose our objections."[4]

1. Letter dated November 23, 1826. (Letters II, 562). Cf. also Moore's letter to Murray (April 21, 1826; II, 709): "I shall have little to do myself but in way of notes, and shall most willingly give the pas to my Maestro through the remainder of the Volume." At one time Moore considered staying out of the biography altogether. (Diary entry for July 3, 1827: Journal V, 185).
2. February 16, 1803. (Bodleian MS. Auto. d. 21, fol. 194).
3. The term "epistolary biography" is first found in 1826. (Eclectic Review NS XXVII, 57).
4. Annual Review II (for 1803), 457.

The particular concern was common in the Annual Review; reviewing Cayley's Life of Raleigh in a later volume, Southey advised the author "to make the whole narrative his own, and remove the originals to the appendix."[1] Scott similarly criticised the inclusion of large numbers of letters because, whatever their value, they "interrupt the narrative." "The biographer," he stated, "should always study to give his work the appearance of continuity.... The text ought to be expressed historically, in the language of the author himself."[2] Brydges agreed, writing that he "would rather have letters as an appendix to a life, but they interrupt a narrative."[3] This was a view endorsed by Stanfield, who, although he approved of "the discreet insertion of relevant letters" as an aid to authenticity, believed that the inclusion of letters adversely affected "the composition and ultimate design of regular biography."[4] The concern which these critics showed for the role of the biographer is aesthetically very significant. They saw that however valuable or interesting a subject's letters themselves were, their incorporation into a biography was distinctly an artistic matter.

There can be few biographies at all which contain more letters than Lockhart's Life of Scott. Carlyle characterised it as a do-it-yourself biography, and claimed that the work "if uncomposed, lies printed and indestructible here, in the elementary state, and can at any time be composed, if necessary, by whosoever has a call to that."[5]

1. Ibid. IV (for 1806), 483.
2. Edinburgh Review VII (October 1805), 204 (Review of Todd's Life of Spenser).
3. Autobiography II, 190
4. Essay, p. 78.
5. Critical and Miscellaneous Essays IV, 28.

He was here pinpointing a quality of many biographies of the time which printed large numbers of the subject's letters and other documents. "The relation which such works bear to genuine biography," wrote a reviewer of one of them, "is that of documents and materials, of which future writers may be able to avail themselves" if the need later arises.[1] Biographies of this sort could be purely negligent; Thomas Sharp (who described himself as the "compiler") introduced many letters into his life of his father, inviting the reader simply to take them or leave them - "if they are thought superfluous, they may be passed over. If proper the reader is welcome to them."[2] The same method, though, could also be seen as very judicious, and Jeffrey praised the "Mason method" of printing letters because it "enables the reader to judge for himself." He had many reservations about the method, not least that it presupposed "much leisure in those who wish to be masters of it,"[3] but even his guarded approval of the principle of leaving something for the reader to do is significant. Commentators found much to recommend in a scheme of biography which

> pays the reader the compliment of allowing him to form his own judgment of the talents and characteristics of the individual who is made to furnish this posthumous disclosure of his feelings.[4]

There were more specific recommendations as well. Simple transcripts of letters could be used, argued another reviewer, where the biographer was

1. Eclectic Review 3rd. Series II (August 1829), 149. (Review of Grimshaw's Memoir of Legh Richmond.) A similar view was suggested by John Murray, writing to Campbell in 1814: "I will send you Hayley's "Cowper"; it affords material for a very long, and a peculiarly interesting life." (S. Smiles, I, 333).
2. Life of John Sharp I, xx.
3. Edinburgh Review III (April 1803), 64 - 65. (Review of Hayley's Life of Cowper.)
4. Eclectic Review 3rd Series (August 1829), 170. (Review of Bond's Memoir of Fisk.)

conscious of "some nice and delicate points in the story, upon which he does not choose to express himself with the responsibility of an author."[1] Moore adopted this principle in his description of Byron's last illness, and his refusal at first to be bled. "What followed," he wrote, "I shall, in justice to Mr. Millingen, give in his own words."[2] Except in cases like this, though, the choice facing a biographer was seen as a simple one between documentary authenticity and artistic unity. To attempt the first would, wrote the Eclectic reviewer, "impair its compactness." Popularity was likely to be "more effectually secured by blending or melting down the rich materials into a coherent mass." Nonetheless, despite the objections, the reviewer came down on the side of compilation:

> It is always more satisfactory to possess information in its primary and unimpaired communication. Language is always parcel of thought, and parole evidence is beyond comparison better than the imperfect analysis of a brief.[3]

It was a minority view, but a significant one, which viewed digestion and interpretation as popularisation. The idea of doing justice to the subject often coincided with authorial unadventureousness to produce the sort of biography recommended by Dr. Drury to Moore:

> He thought that enough of original matter of Byron might be collected to make up a volume of such a size as would spare me the trouble of doing more than merely prefixing a light prefatory sketch to it.[4]

Moore's biographical practice, in fact, was to combine epistolary and objective biography; in the conclusion of the Life of Sheridan, after hoping that he had "sufficiently furnished the reader with materials out of which

1. Annual Review II (for 1803), 457. (Review of Hayley's Life of Cowper.)
2. Life of Byron, II, 766.
3. Eclectic Review 3rd.Series III (May 1830), 418. (Review of Gleig's Life of Munro.)
4. Moore's Journal, July 3, 1827. (V, 185).

to form his own estimate of the character of Sheridan," he begged space "to convey the impressions left upon myself" without any "presumptious hope of influencing the deductions of others."[1]

The balance of critical opinion was in favour of the biographer being "sagacious and impartial," organizing his material rather than being organized by it. Biographers were much less likely to be criticized for "blending" their materials into a "coherent mass,"[2] than for resigning such biographical functions, or delegating them to the reader. That these matters were constantly rehearsed is perhaps more significant than the balance of the conclusions. Even in the life-and-letters form, perhaps the loosest of all types of biography, artlessness was not usually considered a virtue. None of this criticism touched on the value of the letters themselves - "that the familiar letters of men of eminence are, of themselves, highly pleasing, no one will call in question,"[3] was a frequent observation. There certainly was, as F. R. Hart points out, a "contemporary demand for ungarbled originals,"[4] but this was a different matter from the publishing of large numbers of letters as a substitute for regularly composed biography.

1. P. 699.
2. The phrases are from the Eclectic Review 3rd. Series III, 418. (Review of Gleig's Life of Munro).
3. Annual Review II (for 1803), 457. (Review of Hayley's Life of Cowper.)
4. In "Proofreading Lockhart's Scott", Studies in Bibliography XIV (1961), 5.

vii - The Rule of Proportion

Biographies which incorporated either the times or the letters formed a large proportion of those criticised by reviewers for excessive length. Literal transcripts of documents were seen as producing biography which was long-winded, digressive and repetitious. It was this "indiscriminate profusion" which Stanfield thought "detrimental," and "without any succession and coherence."[1] Often, as has been shown in Chapter I, the critics did no more than vent their exasperation at the great length of biographies, but at other times some artistic advice was offered, and canons proposed. The reviews of Hayley's Life of Cowper are worth attention here, because the complaints were not the more usual ones of simple excessive length, but remarked more precisely that the size of the book was quite disproportionate to Cowper's literary importance. Jeffrey pointed out that the Mason method of writing biography demands a great deal of space, money and time to complete, and that a figure who had been on the very edge of public life hardly merited such lavish treatment:

> While the biography of Shakespeare and Bacon shrinks into the corner of an octavo, we can scarcely help wondering that the history of the sequestered life and solitary studies of Cowper should have extended into two quarto volumes.[2]

The Annual Review complained that Hayley's method destroyed "all due proportion of length, to importance of matter,"[3] and another reviewer regarded the book as a piece of self-indulgence on Hayley's part, claiming that he "did not know how to keep the prosaic mean." Cowper's few distinguishing qualities were admitted; "estimable characteristics undoubtedly, but not likely to animate and interest Empires."[4] The reviewers all

1. Essay, p. 77.
2. Edinburgh Review III (April 1803), 65. (Hayley added a third volume in 1804).
3. Annual Review II (for 1803), 457.
4. Monthly Review XLI (July 1803), 226.

pointed out anxiously that they intended no disrespect to Cowper's memory; their objection was simply that the size of the biography was so much greater than Cowper's life warranted. The principle is still recognised, and Michael Holroyd's monumental Lytton Strachey (1967-1968) had a reception similar to that of the Life of Cowper.

Jeffrey's misgivings about the writing of indiscriminatingly long biographies were formulated more clearly in his review of the Edgeworth Memoirs. In describing how he "took up the book with some prepossession against that lavish scheme of biography, by which both great and small names in our history have been lately overlaid," he suggested that biography could destroy the distinction between important and unimportant characters, by treating both with undistinguishing lavishness. He thought "two octave volumes rather more than could be required to tell all that the public would care to know" of Edgeworth.[1] It was left to other critics to lay down the rule of proportion explicitly. John Foster complained of Forbes' Life of Beattie that "this swelling fungous kind of biography confounds all the right proportions in which the claims and the importance of individuals should be arranged, and exhibited to the attention of the public." He likened the biographical treatment which devoted multiple volumes to a nonentity while skimping the life of an important and influential subject to that "political rule of proportion by which Old Sarum, consisting of one house, is represented by two illustrious senators, while many very populous towns are not represented at all."[2] Foster spelled out his principle in even clearer detail in a later Eclectic

1. Edinburgh Review XXXIV (August 1820), 121.
2. Eclectic Review III(i) (January 1807), 2. (Review of Forbes' Life of Beattie).

article:

> It may not be easy to decide what is the discreetest course with respect to the exterior equipment of a biographical work, when the person to be celebrated lived rather a long time since, and, though highly respectable, did not possess that kind of eminence which is to remain visible through all time. In such a case, the principle of fair proportion would seem to recommend a book of very moderate show and presence.

This "principle of fair proportion" was extended later in the article to the suggestion that the "exterior equipment" - the number, size, and even appearance of the biographical volumes - should "indicate the importance of the subject."[1] Other commentators agreed that

> as, in ancient times, the dimensions of the tumulus indicated the rank of the deceased, or the honour in which his memory was held; so, in the present day, there seems to be a pleasure felt in accummulating a literary mound that shall correspond in some degree, as to its size, to the estimation felt for the departed.[2]

The principle lay behind much of the biographical criticism of the time. The possible consequences of abandoning the rule of fair proportion are glanced at in one reviewer's notice of Stock's Memoirs of Beddoes:

> If every physician had a quarto devoted to his memory, who could put in as good a claim to it as Dr. Beddoes, the lives of physicians would soon surpass in size and number those of the saints and martyrs even of the Romish pale.[3]

A reviewer of S. W. Singer's Life of Spence attacked the profusion of biographies of "well-behaved gentlemen"; after an assurance that he was motivated only by "a jealousy for the dignity of letters," he stated that "if any biography had been necessary, the account ought to have been

1. Ibid.,VIII (May 1812), 526-527. (Review of Wilmot's Life of Hough).
2. Eclectic Review 3rd. Series II (August 1829), 149. (Review of Grimshaw's Memoir of Legh Richmond.)
3. Critical Review 4th Series I (January 1812), 36-37.

more proportioned to the space which he occupies in the eye of mankind."[1] From the criticism of life-and-times and of life-and-letters biographies, then, a strong artistic canon emerges; that a biography should in its external proportions reflect an acceptable estimate of the subject's importance.

Stanfield agreed with the many critics cited above that "the principal figure must be kept ostensibly before us, and care taken that the individual character be never lost in the crowd of surrounding circumstances." He emphasized that the biographer should take care to avoid swamping his works with contemporary incidents "which, however brilliant and interesting in themselves, throw no light on the character, designs, or connections of the personage ... whose very nature we are endeavouring to investigate."[2] The assumption in much of this criticism was that the character of the subject, what really distinguished him from other men, should be the central and controlling theme of a biography. In the same way that reviewers often saw it as their task to abridge a long biography for the common reader, they sometimes thought it their duty to assemble the character from the miscellaneous pieces scattered through the book. Scott, after complaining in the Quarterly that "the history of Kemble is divided into so many detached pieces, that it seems like the body of an old man cut and ready for Medea's kettle," stated that he would "endeavour to collect some of the scattered fragments."[3] Carlyle made frequent similar criticisms of biography which was discursive instead of unifying, and which offered scattered details "instead of a delineation

1. Monthly Review XCI (March 1820), 246-247.
2. Essay, pp. 259-260.
3. Quarterly Review XXXIV (June 1826), 204-205.

of the resulting character as a living unity."[1] In another place he asked how "that unhappy Biographic brotherhood" could be persuaded to go beyond the collection of dates and facts, and "making use of them, look beyond the surface and economical form of a man's life, into its substance and spirit." The true representation of a subject, according to Carlyle, can be established only by passing beyond the detailing of external facts, to examine the inner springs of action. That is "that ideal outline of himself, which a man unconsciously shadows forth in his writings," and it is this figure, not the one created by "Index-makers" which "it is the task of the Biographer to fill up into an actual and coherent figure."[2] In general Carlyle showed himself in agreement with Stanfield's "position" that "the character should not for a moment be lost to the artist's or the student's view,"[3] but he had a much clearer and more explicit idea than Stanfield of what the term "character" involves.

Carlyle might have been echoing Stanfield when he wrote that "the truth is, Biographies are in a similar case with Sermons and Songs; they have their scientific rules, their ideal of perfection, as all things have."[4] This could serve as a summary of Stanfield's Essay. Both commentators are called to mind by Wordsworth's published opinions on biography in A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns:

> Biography, though differing in some essentials from works of fiction, is nevertheless, like them, an art, - an art, the laws of which are determined by the imperfections of our nature, and the constitution of society.

1. Edinburgh Review XLVIII (December 1828), 268. (Review of Lockhart's Life of Burns).
2. Foreign Review essay on Richter (Essays, II, 101).
3. Essay, p. 276.
4. Foreign Review V (1830), 5. (Review of Life of Richter).

This should not be quoted out of context; in its place it is a piece of special pleading for suppression. It continues: "Truth is not here, as in the sciences, and in natural philosophy, to be sought without scruple,"[1] making clear that Wordsworth was chiefly interested in establishing biography as an art so that he could rule it out as a science. Nonetheless he did have ideas about prefatory biography which are worth noting:

> I know of no better model as to proportion, and the degree of detail required, nor, indeed, as to the general execution, than the Life of Milton by Fenton, prefixed to many editions of the Paradise Lost.[2]

"Proportion", "degree of detail", "general execution"; these are the main pre-occupations of the present chapter, but Wordsworth says no more about them. A hint of his leaning, though, is given by referring to Fenton's Life of Milton. It is about two thousand words long. Hobhouse might have agreed; he advised Moore in 1826 that as far as Byron was concerned "the next best thing to no Life, was a short Life."[3]

1. Prose Works, III, 121.
2. Ibid., 118
3. Journal, May 14, 1826. Recollections of a long Life (1909), III, 134.

viii - Conclusion

Throughout the period commentators repeatedly refuted the idea that the writing of biography could be "an agreeable easy task."[1] When it came to specifying the abilities which a biographer needed there was less agreement, and an amusing collection of contradictory claims could be compiled. Carlyle suggested "talents" and "diligence",[2] James Boaden "docility" and "zeal",[3] while Stanfield proposed a list of qualifications rivalling Imlac's requirements for a poet.[4] What the various commentators did agree upon was that the art of biography demanded unusual qualities from its practitioners. Some went so far as to suggest that these formal qualities were valueless in themselves, and required in addition deep commitment and intuitive sympathy from the biographer. Carlyle wrote that "Diligence, Fidelity, Decency, are good and indispensable: yet without Faculty, without Light, they will not do the work."[5] Stanfield would have recognised that Carlyle was here writing about "biographical spirit." This he tortuously defined as "that peculiar taste, that inclination, that earnestness," and later as "that sympathetic enthusiasm" which Plutarch, for example, was too prolific to attain. The biographical spirit, he explained, does not come "at once upon the mind like a gift of inspiration. It can be acquired only by patient study and habitual reflection." Without biographical

1. Stanfield, p.15. Cf. John Johnson's Letter to Hayley (October 13, 1801): "Before you can be satisfied as a faithful Biographer, many a winding path must be retraced in the vale of tears, where no flowers are, neither grass, but brambles waving over sharp flint." Bodleian MS. Eng. Misc. d 134, fol. 82.)
2. Fraser's Magazine V (May 1832), 380.
3. Life of Mrs. Jordan (1831), II, 135.
4. Essay, p. 86.
5. Fraser's Magazine V, 380.

spirit the materials, however carefully collected, could not be transmuted to biography: "Without such enthusiasm, rich materials, even when molded by correct judgment, will but coldly draw forth our languid approbation."[1] In his belief in the startling transformational powers of this "spirit" Stanfield was naively literal, but there was a good deal of agreement with his insistent belief that biography could not be created by scissors and paste alone. The frequently found preference for a biographer who had known the subject well arose from similar feelings, that commitment was as indispensable as competence.

This chapter opened with an account of the obstacles which hindered biography from being accepted as an art. During the period biography sufficiently overcame them to emerge as a permanent and completely independent literary genre. The considerable limitations of that genre must, though, be admitted. In the years after 1800 biography might have developed in any of the three main directions described in this chapter; Godwin's model of the formative environment; Malone's documented history; and Edgeworth's interior history. All three were clumsy writers, and perhaps as a result, their experiments went largely unremarked. Commentators preferred to establish the art of biography on a much more superficial level. The advances which were made were considerable, but when the possibilities are glimpsed, must be judged as disappointing.

Yet a great deal was achieved. Wordsworth's claim that biography had its own laws now began to come true. The concern for form, the principal theme of this chapter, was certainly something new, and the stubborn refusal of critics of all persuasions to allow even a minor writer to ignore it was unprecedented. The most striking of the findings here

1. Essay, pp. 21, 23.

is the insistence that the biographer should be a selective and interpretive artist, and the balancing claim that the ability to collect and assemble material, though often valuable, is not in itself a biographical skill. This claim may be found at the end of the eighteenth century in a periodical understandably overlooked by Stauffer, the Looker-on. Here there is criticism of biographers who

> have thought it enough to scrape together a loose and undigested mass of anecdotes, without attending to the great points of arrangement and colouring; they have heaped a pile of facts together without troubling to observe if they united in their conclusions: so that the reader is at last abandoned to his own unaided judgment, and undecided opinions, unable to reconcile the multifarious collection of contradictory elements, and incongruous parts.[1]

This typical criticism applies to all the main classes of biography considered in this chapter - the compilation, the scholarly, the life-and-times, and the life-and- letters biography. In these areas were stated for the first time the critical principles of authorial control and structural unity, principles which are today unquestioned. The other major development was the realisation that shape in biography was more important than size. Half-acre biographical tombs became a byword during the period, while the rival claims of well-wrought urns were endlessly extolled by commentators. It was now agreed that a biography should be a "regular composition" rather than a bundle, and that it might even exhibit "biographical elegance".[2] The views of the period were gently summarised by Napier in his review of Marshall's five volume Life of Washington, when he wrote that the hero's name "might be carried down to posterity by some less ostentatious but more tasteful and pleasing monument.[3]

1. [W. Roberts et al], The Looker-on: a periodical paper by the Rev. Simon Olive-Branch. (4th ed., 1797), I, 140-141.
2. The phrases are from the British Critic NS I. (February 1814), 150, and Todd's Life of Spenser (1805), I, A4v.
3. Edinburgh Review XIII (April 1815), 215-216.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY AND THE USE OF LETTERS

> We have often had occasion to observe, that scarcely any department of the library is in more danger of being overstocked, than that which is appropriated to publications compiled from private correspondence. When persons of any celebrity die, their drawers and cabinets are ransacked for letters; and even the honour of the deceased and the duties of friendship are disregarded, when the temptation of making money by the sale of the MSS presents itself.
>
> Monthly Review[1]

> I am able to cover almost every inch of the ground with his own letters, which is the best footing Biography can have.
>
> Thomas Moore, of his Life of Byron.[2]

i. The Use of Letters

The use of letters in biography had an authority as old as Walton, who included at least one letter in each of his Lives.[3] The practice had been condemned by Thomas Sprat, who categorically refused to print any private letters in his Life of Cowley (1668)[4], but Sprat was a century later refuted by Mason. "I am well aware," he wrote, "that I am here going to do a thing which the cautious and courtly Dr. Sprat (were he now alive) would highly censure."[5]

1. LXV (June 1811), 195. (Review of Archbishop Nicolson's Letters.)
2. Letter to Murray, November 7, 1828. Smiles, II, 313. (Not in Dowden.)
3. Walton's Lives were published between 1640 and 1678. See R. E. Bennett, "Walton's Use of Donne's Letters" Philological Quarterly XVI (January 1937), 30-34.
4. The pertinent passage is reprinted by Clifford in Biography as an Art, p. 12.
5. Memoirs of Gray, p.4.

This apart though, neither the artistic nor the moral issues of including letters in biographies were much discussed in the eighteenth century. Mason's Gray was the acknowledged model for Boswell's Life of Johnson,[1] and both these works demonstrated that biographical practice was changing, yet neither of them brought the issue of letters into public discussion. The new century saw a deluge of published letters, and the publication of private correspondence became a matter of major literary controversy. The tone of Currie's Life of Burns indicated that the author was still feeling his way, and experiencing, as he himself admitted in the Advertisement, "some anxiety as to the reception it may meet with. The experiment we are making has not often been tried; perhaps on no occasion, has so large a portion of the recent and unpremeditated effusions of a man of genius been committed to the press."[2] These claims were certainly well-founded, but the use of letters did not remain tentative for long. Hayley's two-volume Life of Cowper (1803) was augmented by a third volume in the following year; Mrs. Barbauld edited Richardson's Correspondence in six volumes in 1804, and the biographical path which led to Moore's Life of Byron (1830) and Lockhart's Life of Scott (1837-1838) was strewn with large correspondences.

As well as reflecting the general increase in publishing activity, the increase in the number of epistolary publications was a mark also of improving educational standards. Particularly it reflected the acquisition and practice of the art of letter-writing. The study of the art was very

1. "I have resolved to adopt and enlarge upon the excellent plan of Mr. Mason." Life of Johnson, I, 29.
2. The Works of Robert Burns (Liverpool, 1800), II, v. (Introduction to the letters).

widespread, with The Complete Letter-Writer[1] frequently used as a model. A reviewer remarked in 1814 that

> a singular consequence often results from this practice, that the letters of a man, whose life has been employed in the study of the ancient models both of history and of eloquence, is often surpassed both in neatness of thought and suavity of language, by those of a well-educated female, or of a forward merchant's clerk.

The writer saw the cultivation of the art of letters as an index of national taste and manners:

> In the infancy of refinement there is crudity and harshness, which pervades the epistles even of the most consummate scholars .... The progress of cultivated manners is masked by an increase of attention to the style of general correspondence. The narration of the most common facts assumes a neat and elegant garb, and the reflections of the writer are dictated in a certain terseness of thought and epigrammatic turn of expression, which constitutes the epistolary style.[2]

The separation of "the epistolary style" was a mark of the development of letters into a genre with its own identity. George Colman apologised for the style of literally reprinted letters in terms which make clear how advanced in these matters he thought his own age:

> Fidelity to the manuscripts has been observed; and many of the earlier epistles, being printed ad literam, will be found to teem with barbarisms in grammar, style, orthography, and punctuation: - imperfections common enough among eminent men of former days, but which now might make "even Butchers weep !"[3]

The interest in letters was a cultural phenomenon wider than and partially independent of biography. There was during the period a vogue

1. Mention should also be made of the Classical English Letter Writer, or Epistolary Selections, which was praised because it "is not conducted upon the plan of the ancient ready letter-writers, containing blank forms for letters of condolence, respect, love, etc. with blanks for the names of the personages concerned; but it is a publication containing, in a cheap and useful form, the letters of our most celebrated English classics, upon various occasions." (British Critic NS III (June 1815)
2. British Critic NS I. (February 1814), 122. (Review of Letters written by eminent Persons in the 17th and 18th Centuries.)
3. Posthumous Letters (1820), p. ix.

for collecting letters and autographs. William Upcott's "Original Letters" (ms date 1824) is an example of this; it consists of a large bound volume of 230 letters by English poets who died before 1824, and two volumes of similar size, "Living Poets," containing contemporary letters.[1] Collections of this sort were frequently published as well, the material being provided by both distant and recent times. The best-known and best-received of these were William Ellis' Original Letters[2] from British Museum manuscripts. Similar collections with the identical title included that by Sir John Fenn (1822)[3] and by Rebecca Warner, published in 1817 at Bath, where in the following year she published also her two volumes of Epistolary Curiosities, previously unpublished letters of, respectively, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Openly fictional letters were also popular; Thomas Moore's Intercepted Letters, or, the Two-penny Postbag (1813) used the fiction that a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice had picked up a packet of letters dropped by a postman, and this, according to Moore's biographer, "set the style for a small regiment of imitators, and became, like Rejected Addresses, the talk of the town."[4] The same joke was used in the two volumes of The General Post Bag (1814 and 1815), containing letters from thinly-disguised public figures, allegedly picked up after a coach raid.

1. Bodleian MSS. Montague d 1 - 3.
2. Three volumes, 1824; Second Series, four volumes, 1827. Brougham's review concluded, "We rise from the study of these very interesting volumes with renewed gratitude to the learned Editor, and new wishes that he may speedily continue his researches and selections." (Edinburgh Review XLVI (June 1827), 217.
3. Announced in the Monthly Literary Advertiser, January 1822, p.6.
4. H. M. Jones, The Harp That Once, p. 145.

In 1821 Scott attempted the bogus letter in a more scholarly way when he wrote his Private Letters of the 17th Century. These, with their quaint spelling and spoof apparatus, were a much more serious attempt to fool the public, but in the event were never published.[1] Although there is no evidence that biographers of the time actually fabricated letters they did sometimes amalgamate portions of different letters into a single text. This practice has been admirably analysed by F. R. Hart, who describes it as

> merely an effective means of simplifying and clarifying the structure of his compilation. It allowed him to satisfy the contemporary demand for ungarbled originals - "In publishing letters," wrote one editor, "the epistolary form and manner must be preserved" - and at the same time to eliminate irrelevant or repetitious portions of documents otherwise valuable.[2]

All this was, he points out, "an artistic device", not an attempt to dupe the reader. Biographers of the time were not embarrassed by the procedure; Isaac Taylor remarked of his Memoirs of Jane Taylor that "there is scarcely an entire letter in the collection, but the exscinded parts will not often seem wanting to the reader."[3] Fictional letters, and those constructed from original parts, are both evidence of the great popular appeal of the letter-form. "The Romantic interest in the past," a recent critic has written, "reflected in Chatterton's Rowley poems and Ireland's forgeries, stimulated the collection of manuscripts. Biographers of many nineteenth-century and twentieth-century authors, whose correspondence is preserved in libraries throughout the world, must now contend with enormous masses of

1. According to Douglas Grant's introduction to his edition of the work, the letters grew into The Fortunes of Nigel. (Oxford, 1947; p.20).
2. "Proofreading Lockhart's Scott," Studies in Bibliography XIV (1961), 5-6.
3. 1825, I, xvii.

material."[1]

Burns was one of those who had studied the art of letter writing, so for his letters no apology was needed. Currie warned against considering Burns' letters as always the unpremeditated effusions of the moment:

> Though in general no man committed his thoughts to his correspondents with less consideration or effort than Burns, yet it appears, that in some instances he was dissatisfied with his first essays, and wrote out his communications in a fairer character, or perhaps in more studied language.[2]

A letter quoted by Lockhart reveals this habit of Burns more explicitly:

> I engaged several of my school-fellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This improved me in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and I pored over them most devoutly; I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me.[3]

It is clear from this that one of the results of publishing collections of letters was their use as models. Even Burns, an author very little given to literary affectation, sometimes took care to write "literary" letters. The increase in the number of letters published owed much to the rise of literary biography. Literary figures were among the most prolific correspondents, and their letters were so highly valued as literature that they were frequently regarded as extensions of the writings, and added to the collected works. The most striking example was Cowper, whose reputation as a letter-writer came to eclipse his fame as a poet.[4] There were very few authors whose works were not augmented with letters

1. Gordon Haight, "To whom it may concern - and others," T.L.S., January 26, 1973, p. 88.
2. Works of Burns II, vi-vii.
3. Written to Dr. Moore. Life of Burns, p.21.
4. The new edition of Hayley's Life (1809) opens, "The popular favor shown to the Life of Cowper since its first appearance, may be justly ascribed to that irrestible attraction, which readers of every class have felt and acknowledged, in perusing the letters of the departed poet." (I, 21.)

at this time. Where, as with Shakespeare, no letters could be found, they might be forged.[1]

By the early nineteenth century the principle of including letters in biographies had become firmly established. There was, to be sure, endless discussion and frequent controversy, as to how many letters should be published and which ones should not be, but the principle went largely unquestioned. Brydges, like many of his contemporaries, thought that "Bishop Sprat had a strange taste when he thought it wrong to select for publication letters from Cowley's private correspondence."[2] Failure to include letters was a far more frequent cause of complaint than either redundancy or tastelessness in the selection published. Again and again biographers who, for whatever reason or obeying whatever scruple, had omitted to include letters in their works, were taken sternly to task by the reviewers. There was far more praise for biographers who, retiring almost completely from their works, confined themselves to interepistolary comment,[3] than there was for those who took the more arduous course of treating letters merely as their raw material, and digested them into the fabric of a composed biography. Lockhart, reviewing Watkins' Memoirs of Sheridan, implied that the failure to quote "a single private letter or document of any kind" was a sign of its mediocrity and a cause of its failure.[4] William Morgan's timid justification of omitting many letters in his Memoirs of the Rev. Richard Price was savaged by James Macintosh

1. See Schoenbaum, pp. 328,ff.
2. Autobiography I, vii.
3. Jeffrey, for example praised the "pleasing, modest, and effectual way" in which Lord Collingwood's life had been produced. (Edinburgh Review XLVII) (May 1828), 387.
4. Quarterly Review XXXIII, (March 1828), 561.

in the Edinburgh:

> Mr. Morgan has committed some unfortunate errors in his biographical system, which deprive it of its principal interest and importance .... He has omitted original letters, and characteristic anecdotes. Fortunately for the world, the biographers of Gray and Johnson adopted a contrary system.... He tells us ... that ... "he would not gratify idle curiosity by the indiscriminate publication of letters written in the confidence of private friendship." As this last circumstance bestows their whole value on the letters, the force of the reason depends upon the two epithots "idle" and "indiscriminate," and it may be answered by asking, why he did not "gratify reasonable curiosity, by a judicious selection of the letters."[1]

Letters were valued in this way by many commentators, not only as necessary for biography but as the most important single feature. William Empson, writing in 1831, was speaking for his age when he wrote of "the importance we attach to letters, as constituting the only basis of by far the most valuable kind of biography."[2]

There was perhaps no biographical tenet of the time which was more widely accepted than that "original letters ... are the soul of biography."[3] Brydges, ruminating upon Mrs. Carter's letters, considered that "the collections of letters of eminent literary characters, which have been given to the public within the last ten years, have added materially to the stock of innocent and instructive amusement."[4] The influential Henry Kett agreed:

> No species of writing gives a more perfect insight into the minds of men, than their Letters. In the letters of persons of distinction, we expect the justness of observation, which belongs to history, and the ease and

1. Edinburgh Review XXV (June 1815), 171-172. The offending passage is on pp. v - vi of Morgan's work (1815).
2. Ibid., LII (January 1831), 434. (Review of Life of Heber.)
3. Athenaeum CXLII (July 17, 1830), 441. (Review of Lives of Remarkable Youth.)
4. The Ruminator, I, 144.

> good humour of elegant conversation. They place us in the situation of correspondents, and we seem honoured by the confidence of the great and the good, the witty and the gay of various ages and countries.[1]

An Edinburgh reviewer was in 1810 making for letters the claims which we have already seen made in Chapter I for biography generally, writing that "there are few historical documents more interesting than letters of eminent men regarding the affairs in which they were actively engaged."[2] Hazlitt's review of Horace Walpole's Letters, in the Edinburgh, was much more enthusiastic and personal, and his rapture was almost unqualified. With the single exception of the productions of dull military men, Hazlitt wrote, letters were unfailingly revealing:

> We like them the more, for letting us into the follies and treacheries of high life, the secrets of the gay and the learned world, and the mysteries of authorship. We are ushered, as it were, behind the scenes of life; we see gay ladies and learned men, the wise, the witty and the ambitious, in all the nakedness, or undress at least, of their spirits.[3]

The Westminster reviewer of Ellis' Original Letters supported Hazlitt's claims - "private letters draw up the political curtain" - and echoed the Edinburgh reviewer's preference for letters over history; as well as "containing all which the generality of readers care to know of past ages, there is an indescribable pleasure in exploring the real merits of those transactions in our history of which all have read, and of prying into secrets which were never intended to be divulged."[4] It is possible, as has been shown in Chapter II, that these virtues which commentators

1. Elements of General Knowledge (Oxford, 1802), I, 243-244. The work reached its eighth edition in 1815.
2. Edinburgh Review XVI (August 1810), 447. (Review of Sadler's State Papers.)
3. Ibid. XXXI (December 1818), 83. Hazlitt considered that "there is a spirit and freedom in the tone of works written for the post, which is scarcely ever to be found in those written for the press."
4. Westminster Review VIII (July 1827), 128.

perceived in letters were sometimes accidental benefits, owing more to the sloth than to the enterprise of the compiler. Nonetheless, biographers did frequently set about their task with the specific aim of providing information to complement and excel history. G. R. Gleig's preface to his Life of Munro makes the claim clearly:

> With respect to the plan itself, it has been adopted as presenting the best opportunities of making the reader come, as it were, into personal contact with the individual whose story he peruses. In his own letters, especially in those addressed to his nearest relatives and most intimate friends, a much more accurate idea is to be formed of a man's character, than from any history detailed in the third person.[1]

Kett's belief that letters "place us in the situation of correspondent" emphasised that the medium of letters is more direct than any formal composition. William Empson pointed to the difficulty in getting "at the truth as regards literary men." Biography he found completely unsatisfactory because of inherent limitations and unavoidable prejudice in the form, and because of the near-impossibility of indicating "the inward man himself." Autobiographies he found even less satisfactory, because they were subject to apology, vanity and conceit, and were therefore even further from the truth than biography was.

> But this objection does not apply to familiar letters, written with no eye to publication, in which, though the writer is truly painting his own character, he does it unconsciously; and where the scattered strokes which he has traced first assume significance and meaning, when they are all collected and combined - perhaps after death has for ever put a stop to the chance of their being retouched or altered by the hand by which they were originally drawn.[2]

This was a very sustained and dogmatic statement of a view which, for all

1. 1830, I, xi.
2. Edinburgh Review LIII (March 1831), 82-83. (Review of the Schiller/Goethe Correspondence.)

its obvious superficiality, was both natural and widespread. "Letters are certainly the honestest records of great minds, that we can become acquainted with," wrote Hazlitt.[1] His view was a common one; Swift's letters, it was claimed by another commentator "may now be regarded ... as exhibiting his private sentiments upon every subject."[2] The notion that letters provide the best means of getting "at the truth" of a subject was a basic one, and although its detailed application by different practitioners produced biographies of very different sorts, the belief was the most important underlying reason for filling biographies with letters.

Many readers felt that letters came "from the heart." The Quarterly reviewer of the Life of Sir Stamford Raffles wrote that the letters it contained were unstudied and unpolished, but had the important compensation "that, in the full and free scope of familiar correspondence, we have all the freshness and warmth of friendship, expressed in sentiments poured forth directly from the heart."[3] For the same reason the reviewers of the Private Correspondence of Cowper remarked that his pathos "bursts warm from a heart in which every right and true feeling had its home."[4] Coleridge saw clearly that the value of Cowper's letters did not lie in the information they contained; he wrote to Sir George and Lady Beaumont:

> What a refreshment of heart did I not find last night in Cowper's Letters. Their very defects suited me. Had they been of a higher class, as exhibitions of

1. Edinburgh Review XXXI (December 1818), 83. (Review of Horace Walpole's Letters).
2. [C.H.Wilson], Preface to Swifteana (1804) I, vii-viii.
3. Quarterly Review XLII (March 1830), 405-406.
4. Ibid. XXX (October 1824), 185.

> Intellect, they would have less satisfied the then craving of my mind.[1]

Hazlitt remarked more specifically that in Cowper's letters "we see the fluctuations of his melancholy nature more plainly, than in all the biographical dissertations of his affectionate editor."[2] Cowper was the most popular letter-writer of his time, and the success of Hayley's Life was by common consent due to the excellence of the letters. Their spontaneity and freedom from literary self-consciousness and style were the qualities which attracted readers.

Although there was particular praise for the letters of literary figures, the qualities admired were not the same ones as these authors revealed in their published works. The idea of seeing the "man behind the mask" meant one thing for Hayley, something quite different for Hazlitt, who preferred "sweet neglect" to "the adulteries of art":

> A poet, in his private letters, seldom thinks it necessary to keep up the farce of feeling; but casts off the trickery of sentiment, and glides into the unaffected wit, or sobers quietly into the honest man. .... [Gray] is glad to escape from the austerity of composition, and the orthodoxy of thought; and feels a relief in easy speculations or ludicrous expressions.[3]

Although it was already known that Gray's letters had been polished by Mason,[4] the alterations were not such as to spoil their effect. Pope's correspondence, on the other hand, found no favour. Hazlitt thought that his letters "although extremely elegant, are failures as letters. He wrote them to the world, and not to his friends; and they have therefore

1. Dated August 12, 1803. Letters, II, 965. Cf. Moore's Life of Fitzgerald (1831), I, 71-72. "The great charm of these letters lies neither in the descriptions nor reflections, much livelier and profounder than which might, in this age of showy and second-hand cleverness, be parroted forth by persons with not a tithe of Lord Edward's intellect."
2. Edinburgh Review XXXI (December 1818), 83.
3. Ibid.
4. See Rev. John Mitford, Advertisement to Works of Thomas Gray (1816), pp. A2v ff.

much the air of universal secrets."[1] This feeling was common long before Pope's editings of his own letters were widely known. In the words of Pope's modern editor, the letters "became in a sense a part of his works, capable of polish, revision, amalgamation, transfer to correspondents other than the original recipients - capable even, though very seldom, of actual falsification."[2] It was because these qualities were noticable that Pope's letters fell into disrepute during the early nineteenth century. Scott was one of the critics who sensed the lack of "heart" in the letters, and he wrote of them as examples of those which

> are written with a secret consciousness that they may one day or other come before the public. It is then that each sentence is polished, each sentiment correct; and that a letter, ostensibly addressed to one private friend, is compiled with the same sedulous assiduity as if it were to come one day flying abroad on all the wings of the press.[3]

The replacement of Pope by Cowper as a model for epistolary writing is the clearest evidence of a shift in taste from public to private letters.[4]

Although the enthusiasm for letters was strong, the appetite of reviewers was not insatiable. Many of the misgivings about the number of biographies, outlined in Chapter I, were echoed in the comments on the large number of letters published, both in biographies and in separate collections. Empson remarked that the "quantity rather than the quality"

1. Another reviewer complained of Pope's letters that "the manner is far too rhetorical and declamatory," and asked "what is letter-writing without heart ?" Quarterly Review XXX (October 1823), 185-186. (Review of Private Correspondence of Cowper).
2. G. Sherburn, Correspondence of Alexander Pope (Oxford,1956), I,x.
3. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1826), 282. (Review of Pepys' Memoirs).
4. Cf. Mrs. Piozzi's recommendation of Johnson's letters: "The good taste by which our countrymen are distinguished will lead them to prefer the native thoughts, and unstudied phrases to the more laboured elegance of his other works." Quoted by Nathan Drake, Essays Biographical, Critical, and Historical (1809), I, 454.

of the letters published in the Life of Heber was their notable feature.[1] Twenty years earlier a reviewer of Anna Seward's Letters had remarked similarly that

> the familiar correspondence of very few, even among the great and the gifted, can be so lively, touching, and original, as to afford universal pleasure. Of late it has been common to publish, rather voluminously, the letters of eminent persons deceased; and it is not invidious to say, that, in most instances, a few specimens would have been more acceptable than the whole.[2]

Jeffrey noted dryly of Mrs. Montague's Letters that "there are many works, besides those of the old Sybil, the value of which may be prodigiously increased by diminishing their number."[3]

It was the undistinguishing quality of many published letters which was seized upon by critics. Johnson had commented back in 1763 that "if Derrick's letters had been written by one of a more established name, they would have been thought very pretty letters,"[4] and it was still commonly believed that a man's slightest pre-eminence would necessarily be reflected in his letters. The way in which biographers introduced their subjects' letters is often revealing. Hayley prefaced one of Cowper's with the remark that it was "so full of genuine piety, and true pathos, that it would be an injury to his memory to suppress it."[5] Thomas Moore defended himself in his Life of Fitzgerald against the view "that my selections from his correspondence might have been more sparing" by insisting on their "simplicity and warm-heartedness," and describing them in the words of

1. Edinburgh Review LII (January 1831), 432.
2. Eclectic Review VII (October 1811), 849-850.
3. Edinburgh Review XV (October 1809), 87.
4. Life of Johnson, I, 456.
5. Life of Cowper, I, 203.

Beaumont and Fletcher:

> There is no art in 'em,
> They lie disorder'd in the paper just
> As hearty nature speaks 'em.[1]

Moore was claiming that the value of the letters lay in the absence of any conscious, formal literary qualities, not in the presence of any other particular virtue. In his Life of Sheridan he justified the insertion of a group of letters on a much more slender basis:

> The following letters, which passed between him and his son Richard during his absence, though possessing little other interest than that of having been written at such a period, will not, perhaps, be unwelcome to the reader.[2]

The Preface to George Colman's Posthumous Letters gave much more positive and specific grounds for including letters:

> Some of the letters from celebrated men, in this collection, possess little further interest than that of having been written by them; - but the epistolary small-talk of distinguished persons, or a specimen of their familiar style, or a note to them of the most trivial description, are interesting to perhaps nine readers out of ten.[3]

For Colman letters represented the most interesting of the personal ephemera associated with the "age of personality", and the question of intrinsic value or interest did not arise. The connection with the personality was enough. In many volumes of this sort no claim was made for the letters being of any value, or for them being characteristic of the writer. It was freely admitted that anyone could have written them, and that they were printed only because they happened to have been written

1. I, x-xi.
2. P.44. Bucke similarly introduced some of Akenside's letters: "Their subjects are not very important, but having been written by so eminent a person, - unimportant as they are in other respects, they cannot be considered in any other light than as interesting curiosities." On the Life, Writings, and Genius of Akenside (1832), p. 173.
3. Preface, p.viii.

by someone famous. Southey summarised this view in his remarks on Rousseau's Original Correspondence:

> There is nothing in these volumes that can repay the reader for the time spent in perusing them. We have never seen a more worthless correspondence; still the correspondence of such a man as Rousseau, worthless as in itself it may be, must be regarded as a literary relic.[1]

Apart from very minor concessions such as that made by Southey, the reaction of the reviewers to the proliferation of printed correspondence was uniformly unfavourable. Brougham, reviewing Lord Chatham's Letters to his Nephew, objected that they "may not only be such as would excite no regard whatever, were they attached to another name, but even such as to raise little emotion, though given to the word [sic] as his authenticated productions."[2] Ten years later another reviewer complained of Mrs. Montague's Letters:

> They are letters which no one, receiving them from an acquaintance, would grudge the postage. But we cannot sufficiently wonder at the partiality of the publisher, in thinking the public so far interested in Mrs. M., as to receive with eagerness and applause the diary of her illnesses, and the history of every glass of Tunbridge-water that she drank.[3]

Dugald Stewart showed unusual sensitiveness in his Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid. After defending the usefulness to the reader of a study of personal correspondence, and absolving Reid of any suspicion of "accommodating his letters ... to the humours and principles of those whom he addressed," he stated firmly: "I am far, at the same time, from thinking, that the correspondence of Dr. Reid would be generally interesting;

1. Annual Review (for 1804), III, 487-488.
2. Edinburgh Review IV (July 1804), 377-378. Exactly the same point was made of Richardson's Life and Correspondence by Jeffrey (Ibid. V (October 1804) 34.)
3. Eclectic Review NS I (April 1814), 407.

or even that he excelled in this species of writing."[1] A reviewer in 1814 made what was becoming a standard complaint about the "indiscriminate and unthinking, though aimiable zeal of posthumous kindness", and suggested that between copiousness and frugality "there is a middle way, from which whoever departs will disgrace instead of honouring those whom he strives to serve."[2] Those who subscribed to Sprat's views about the publication of letters were as few as the writers whose letters deserved full publication; the commentators endorsed the Quarterly view that the letters published should be good enough to enhance their writer's reputation.

It has already been shown that letters which appeared to come "from the heart" found a special affection among readers and reviewers. A contemporary definition of a letter expressed further qualities which many readers of the time looked for in private correspondence - informality, confidence of privacy, and freedom from literariness: "Letters should be easy and natural, and convey to the persons to whom we send them, just what we would say to those persons if we were present with them."[3] The quality prized above all others in letters was that they should have been written without any view to publication. Hayley wrote in his Life of Cowper:

> The letters not intended for the eye of the public have generally obtained the greatest share of popular applause; and for this reason, because such letters display no profusion of studied ornaments, but abound in the simple and powerful attractions of nature and truth.[4]

1. Biographical Memoirs (Edinburgh, 1811), p. 514.
2. Quarterly Review XI (July 1814), 312 (Whitaker's review of Mathias' edition of Mason's Gray.)
3. Quoted by Joseph Taylor on the opening page of Eccentric and Humorous Letters of Eminent Men and Women, 1824.
4. IV, 207.

Often the triviality, or even the grammatical shortcomings, of letters were welcomed as a sign that the writer was sincere and that he had no wider public in mind. Thus Currie, though not concealing Burns' cultivation of the art of letter-writing, valued his artistic failures more than his successes:

> In a composition never intended to see the light, elegance, or perfect correctness of composition will not be expected. These however will be compensated by the opportunity of seeing our poet, as he gives the incidents of his life, unfold the peculiarities of his character, with all the careless vigour and open sincerity of his mind.[1]

Reviewers repeatedly stressed the attraction of letters "never intended to see the light," and claimed that "the world has been innocently amused, and our knowledge of human nature enlarged, by the perusal of letters not originally destined for publication."[2] Maria Edgeworth stressed repeatedly in her volume of the Edgeworth Memoirs that her father's letters were the unstudied effusions of the moment. She insisted, as many biographers did, that the value of private letters to the biographer was that they undesignedly revealed the subject. She explained that she had printed letters of her father's

> which have not any pretension to literary value, but which may show what were his habits of domestic life, and the course of his thoughts and occupations, during a long period of years. Without need of my assertions, every reader of discernment and feeling will at once perceive, that these letters are not manufactured for

1. Life of Burns, I, 34.
2. Monthly Review NS LI (September 1806), 2. (Review of Forbes' Life of Beattie). Similarly the Edinburgh reviewer welcomed the Letters of Mad. du Deffand as "a valuable addition to the mass, not very considerable as yet, of printed letters, perfectly natural and unaffected, and visibly never meant for publication." (Vol. XVII (February 1811), 311,) and Brougham greeted the Burke/Lawrence Correspondence as "written in the unrestrained freedom of intimate friendship, without the most distant view of publication." (Vol. XLVI (October 1827), 269).

> the public, but written in the fulness of the heart, and in the careless ease of private confidence. Such are the only letters worth seeing.[1]

James Macintosh explained that it was confidentiality which "bestows their whole value on the letters."[2] Hayley claims for Cowper's letters were similar, but added a plea for recognition of their literary value: "It was at all times his custom, to display his own heart to his confidential correspondents, not only with the utmost frankness and fidelity, but with an enchanting talent peculiar to himself."[3] Hayley's rather tedious reiteration of these two qualities in Cowper's correspondence was his way of insisting that the letters combined the qualities of two separate classes of publication - familiar and literary letters.

For Francis Jeffrey, too, the literal contents of private letters were of secondary value. He praised "the great and growing store of those contemporary notices, which are every day familiarizing us more and more with the living character of bye-gone ages."[4] Even the tittle-tattle tediousness of Richardson's Correspondence he thought almost outweighed by what he termed the secondary interest, that, (in Mrs. Barbauld's own words, which he quoted approvingly),

> nothing tends so strongly to place us in the midst of the generations that are past, as a perusal of their correspondence; and that to have their letters, and their very handwriting before our eyes, gives a more intimate feeling of their existence, than any other memorial of them.[5]

Exactly a quarter of a century later Jeffrey reiterated the claim in his

1. Memoirs, II, 70. On August 15, 1783 she had written to Fanny Robinson praising Gray's letters at the expense of Pope's - "They are not the stiff performances of an author written under the rod of Criticism and under the Pressentiment sic that they would be published." (Quoted by Marilyn Butler, p. 154).
2. See above, p. 157.
3. Life of Cowper, I, 23.
4. Edinburgh Review L (October 1829), 75. (Review of Memoirs of Lady Fanshawe).
5. Ibid. V (October 1804), 34.

review of the Memoirs of Lady Fanshawe:

> It is in such writings alone, confidential letters - private diaries - family anecdotes - ... that the true springs of action are disclosed .... They are the true key to the cipher in which public annals are almost necessarily written; and their disclosure, after long intervals of time, is almost as good as the revocation of their writers from the dead.[1]

This property of letters to recreate vividly the atmosphere of the past was a further recommendation to the biographer.

The enthusiastic reception given to letters which adventitiously revealed their writer had to be tempered with suspicion when the letters were of recent date. During the early nineteenth century it became increasingly clear that, for a variety of reasons, even the most private of letters could not be unfailingly relied upon as an index to the writer's true character, or as a statement of his real beliefs and feelings. The need for the biographer to be careful - and even suspicious - when using his subject's letters is now widely recognised.[2] Already back in the eighteenth century Johnson had sensed that there was a great deal of premeditation and polish in Pope's letters:

> It has been so long said as to be commonly believed, that the true characters of men may be found in their letters, and that he who writes to his friend lays his heart open before him. But the truth is that such were simple friendships of the "Golden Age," and are now the friendships only of children. Very few can boast of hearts which they dare lay open to themselves, and of which, by whatever accident exposed, they do not shun a distinct and continued view; and, certainly, what we hide from ourselves we do not shew to our friends. There is, indeed, no transaction which offers stronger temptations to fallacy and sophistication than epistolary intercourse.

Johnson insists that even a letter to a friend is "a calm and deliberate performance." He argues further that a private letter, being directed at an

1. Edinburgh Review L (October 1829), 75.
2. Eg. J. A. Garraty, The Nature of Biography (1958), p. 153.

individual rather than "the world", can be better accommodated to the known personal taste of the recipient.[1] Hayley agreed that Pope's letters were "deficient in that air of perfect ease, that unstudied flow of affection, which gives the highest charm to epistolary writing," but Johnson's other remarks he rejected vehemently. Cowper, he wrote,

> could never subscribe to that dangerous, and sophistical dogma of Dr. Johnson, in his splenetic disquisition on the Letters of Pope, that "friendship has no tendency to secure veracity." ... A good man must rather wish to afford his bosum friend the most accurate knowledge of his real character, than to obtain a precarious increase of regard by any sort of illusion.[2]

The violence of the expression is understandable when one considers that Johnson's view would, if accepted, have torpedoed the very basis of Hayley's work. One obvious truth in Johnson's remarks - that a letter-writer takes some account of his recipient - came to be accepted by biographers who did not depend entirely upon letters. Lockhart realised that Burns presented different faces to different correspondents:

> His letters to Mrs. Dunlop form a very large proportion of all his subsequent correspondence, and, addressed as they were to a person, whose sex, age, rank, and benevolence, inspired at once profound respect and a graceful confidence, will ever remain the most pleasing of all the materials of our poet's biography.[3]

On the other hand, Lockhart noted, "when writing to men of high station, at least, he preserves, in every instance, the attitude of self-defence."[4] Byron too adapted his letters to particular recipients, as Moore must have known, since he noted in his diary a passage from a letter to Lady Melbourne:

1. "Life of Pope" (Lives of the Poets II, 206.) Stanfield pointed out that a letter from Johnson to Mrs. Thrale (October 27, 1777) contradicted this statement, missing the fact that the letter was ironical. (Essay, p. 176; the letter is in Letters (ed. Chapman) II, 228.
2. Life of Cowper, IV, 206-207.
3. Life of Burns, p. 65.
4. Ibid., p. 89.

"I am going to write a civil letter to such an one, a gallant letter to some one else, an ambitious one to another, and a sincere one to Tom Moore."[1] Despite the pat on the back which this passage offered him, Moore did not use it in his biography since it would have counteracted the literary premise which he shared with Hayley - that a man's letters are always revealing and expressive documents. It was not often, of course, that material obviously more dependable than private letters could be found, against which their truthfulness and sincerity could be measured.[2] Scott was amused at the disparity which he found between the diary and letters of Samuel Pepys:

> We ought to mention some curious and valuable letters which occupy the latter part of the second volume. The reader may be amused with comparing the style of Pepys and his sentiments as brushed and dressed, and sent out to meet company, with his more genuine and far more natural effusions of a night-gown and slipper description.[3]

Earlier in the same article he had berated the reliability of letters, and he concluded his comparison of Pepys the frank diarist with Pepys the letter-writer conscious of a possible public thus:

> The conclusion is that there can be little reliance placed on the sincerity of letter-writers in general, and that in estimating the mass of strange matter which is preserved in contemporary correspondence, the reader ought curiously to investigate the character, situation, and temper of the principal correspondent, ere he can presume to guess how many of his sentiments are real; how much is designed as a gentle placebo to propitiate the feelings of the party whom he addresses; how much intended to mislead future readers into a favourable estimate of the writer's capacity and disposition.[4]

1. Entry dated July 3, 1827. (Journal V, 185). Cf. Keats, "I wish I knew always the humour my friends would be in at opening a letter of mine to suit it to them [as] nearly as possible." (q. Jack, p. 123).
2. Although some commentators saw that autobiography was always true, even when it attempted to mislead (see below, pp. 216f), Stanfield alone made the same claim for letters, which, he wrote, were rewarding "if even a person should design to conceal his actual sentiments and purposes, or should self-delusion lead him unconsciously to the gloss of palliation or disguise." (p. 174).
3. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1828), 314.
4. Ibid., 314.

In the very first number of the Quarterly, Scott had advanced different arguments against placing any faith in the value of private correspondence. He denied that the interest in reading letters was attributable to "any other cause than ordinary curiosity," and claimed that

> in fact, letters, at least those of a general and miscellaneous kind, very rarely contain the real opinions of the writer. If an author sits down to the task of formally composing a work for the use of the public, he has previously considered his subject, and made up his mind both on the opinions he is to express, and on the mode of supporting them. But the same man usually writes a letter only because the letter must be written, is probably never more at a loss than when looking for a subject, and treats it when found, rather so as to gratify his correspondent, than communicate his own feelings.[1]

The fact that letters are usually unpremeditated was for Scott a reason to discredit them as revelations. What other commentators saw as unconscious disclosures Scott interpreted as empty courtesies. His were strong arguments for regarding letters neither as spontaneous overflowings of natural feeling nor as representing the private and true opinions of the writer. The confidence which had been expressed at the beginning of the century by Hayley and Kett, that letters were like "frank, confidential conversations,"[2] could not be sustained. As more and more letters were published, and their credentials were closely examined, commentators came to see that even letters which were written with no view to publication could not, for reasons inherent in their very nature, be used for biographical purposes without reservations.

1. Quarterly Review I (February 1809), 23. (Review of Cromek's Reliques of Burns). Wordsworth's views were strikingly similar. Few general readers, he wrote could determine "what portion of these confidential communications escapes the pen in courteous, yet often innocent, compliance - to gratify the several tastes of the correspondents." (A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns; Prose Works, III, 120)

2. Life of Cowper, IV, 207. In letters, wrote Kett, we observe characters "as they thought in their retired moments, when, withdrawn from the bustle of the world, they gave free scope to their unrestrained opinions, and poured them without reserve into the bosums of their friends." (Elements of General Knowledge, I, 203-204)

Wordsworth agreed with Scott, and drew the consequences for biography. He complained that though the correspondence of Burns had been printed, no guidance had been given as to how to read and interpret it. He was criticising not only the "ill-selected medley"[1] of Burns' correspondence, but the underlying principle of "do-it-yourself" biography, the assumption that the subject's letters "require no comment from his biographer."[2]

> We have the author's letters discharged upon us in showers; but how few readers will take the trouble of comparing those letters with each other, and with the other documents of the publication, in order to come at a genuine knowledge of the writer's character !

The "mass of mankind", he maintained, was incapable of "distinguishing opinions and sentiments uttered for momentary amusement merely of the writer's own fancy, from those which his judgment deliberately approves, and his heart faithfully cherishes."[3] For Wordsworth the impossibility of the public understanding private letters aright was the grounds for objecting in principle to their publication. How difficult it was to interpret even letters which could be of great biographical value Thomas Love Peacock demonstrated in his review of Moore's Life of Byron. Byron's habit of "mystification," he claimed, had misled biographers such as Hunt, who were not in tune with his badinage:

> "For example, Lord Byron writing from Constantinople, says to his mother:-
>
> 'H. who will deliver this is bound straight for England: and as he is bursting with his travels, I shall not anticipate his narratives, but merely beg you not to believe one word he says, but reserve your ear for me, if you have any desire to be acquainted with the truth.'

1. Prose Works, III, 120.
2. The phrase is from Hayley's Life of Cowper, II, 418.
3. Prose Works, III, 120-121.

> No one, who reads this volume, will suppose this to be anything but a jest; but we can easily conceive his reminiscents reporting it thus: 'He had a very bad opinion of Mr. Hobhouse's veracity, and emphatically cautioned me against believing a word he said.'[1]

Both Wordsworth and Peacock suggest that the biographer is in a better position than the reader can be expected to be to explain and comment on the letters which he prints. That biographers so frequently failed to do this suggests that even when laziness was not a motive they preferred to be impartial, and to hand on matters of interpretation to the reader. Because this could be so misleading, Wordsworth and Peacock both emphasised that the biographer had a specific interpretive duty, and that his task was not finished with the simple provision and printing of letters.

The reviewers' reservations become even stronger when we turn from letters whose only disqualifications as biographical material are the uncertainties inherent in the form to letters written with a conscious awareness of their possible future use as biographical material. It was a consequence too obvious not to have been foreseen, that the use and publication of letters would lead to the writing of letters which had publication in mind. George Steevens, writing in 1766, predicted much of what actually happened in the nineteenth century:

> I cannot forbear to think these posthumous publications injurious to society. A man conscious of literary reputation will grow in time afraid to write with tenderness to his sister, or with fondness to his child; or to remit on the slightest occasion, or most pressing exigence, the rigour of critical choice, and grammatical severity. That esteem which preserves his letters, will at last produce his disgrace; when that which he wrote only to his friend or his daughter shall be laid open to the public.[2]

1. Westminster Review XII (April 1830), 274.
2. Preface to XX of the Plays of Shakespeare, I, 18-19, quoted in Monthly Review XLVI (January 1805), 29.

During the nineteenth century, writers of letters often directed them at the public which they suspected might be the final recipients, or else took steps to suppress them. So familiar letters, at the same time that they were beginning to be held in very high esteem, began for that very reason to be distorted, or even destroyed. In welcoming Forbes' Life of Beattie in 1806, the Monthly Review made the reservation that the pleasure of epistolary biography could not be endlessly repeated, warning that the publication of familiar letters could make future writers cautious:

> How far are we at liberty to publish the communications of confidential friendship ? In this respect, too many editors have obviously exceeded the bounds of discretion; and the general imitation of their example would materially tend to banish all those pure and exalted emotions, which have their origin in the unreserved interchange of sentiment and affection. We trust, however, that enough of honour is still left among the friends of the great and the learned, to prevent the diffusion of such an evil.[1]

Only a year later the Annual Review saw the threat to "unreserved" letters as urgent, and the danger as specific:

> If the fashion for publishing "correspondences" continues much longer in vogue, it may be anticipated to produce an unfavourable influence on epistolary style. ... We cannot but augur that the ease, almost to carelessness, which gives such grace to familiar and confidential correspondence, will soon be exchanged for a stiffness and formality, heartless, uninteresting, and repulsive. Letters, instead of being, as they were formerly, channels of "the soft intercourse from soul to soul," will be rival specimens of composition.

The writer realised that the publication of what was never intended for publication would soon simply destroy the genre, and that letters, like other writings, would be composed in such a way as to be prepared "against the severity of verbal criticism."[2]

1. Monthly Review NS LI (September 1806), 1-2.
2. Annual Review for 1805 , 517-518 (Review of Hertford's and Pomfret's Correspondence).

Within a few years the prediction had come true. In 1814 a reviewer of Letters of the 17th and 18th Centuries remarked on the particular value of these older letters, written in times before the suspicion of their being written for publication had thrown a shadow over the spontaniety of the genre:

> Even, however, among the real letters of eminent men, which it is now too universally the custom for officious friends to publish after their decease, there is continually visible an affected neatness and a laboured ease, which indicates in the writer an ulterior view to posthumous publication.[1]

Such feelings of indignation were even more strongly expressed in the Retrospective Review in 1821, where letters deliberately written for the press were compared very disadvantageously with real private letters:

> The charm which belongs to this sort of reading has led to the publication of whole libraries of letters, some of which have been too evidently composed rather for the press than the post, and have thereby lost much of their interest.

There followed a comparison between the letters of Cowper, which "we feel assured ... are ... the careless effusions of tenderness and friendship, poured out from the overflowings of his own heart," and those of Anna Seward, who, "intent upon posthumous publication, sits down with malice propense, not to say what she thinks, but to think what she shall say." The Retrospective reviewed only books from former ages, and perhaps for this reason the reviewer was particularly sensitive to what he saw as the defilement of a previously pure genre. "Letters prepared for the press," he concluded, "are the most sickening and tiresome of all compositions."[2]

1. British Critic NSI (February 1814), 122-123. The writer added that "there is a charm in the native simplicity of a correspondence dictated by the occasion of the moment."
2. Retrospective Review IV (1821), 184. (Review of Howell's Familiar Letters.)

By 1825 these criticisms of private letters had become assumptions. Thomas Moore, introducing the letters of Mrs. Sheridan in his Life of Sheridan remarked of them, as if it were a critical commonplace, that "their chief charm is unaffectedness, and the total absence of that literary style, which in the present day infects even the most familiar correspondence."[1] One result of the discrediting of private letters was that the large number of biographies which continued to rely heavily upon their subject's correspondence were obliged to justify them in a way which had not been necessary at the beginning of the century. Isaac Taylor, for example, elaborately exempted his sister Jane's letters from the criticism generally affecting the genre. He wrote in the preface to his Memoirs of her:

> Her letters give the true image of her mind; and will hold up a living portrait of her character. ... Of all the kinds of affectation, there was none she more abhorred than that which too frequently appears in the conversation and letters of persons who think they have some literary reputation to support. ... "Some people," she says, "think it a great recommendation to be able to write a clever letter; but if there is any thing I dislike to receive, it is a clever letter."[2]

The epistolary qualities which had been assumed by Hayley, and by the readers of his Life of Cowper, now had to be argued and claimed.

Leslie Marchand, in his introduction to Byron's letters and journals, admits that the letters which Byron addressed to individuals sometimes had a wider audience in view, particularly the audience of Murray's parlour, but he considers it untypical, quoting Byron's remark "I am not a cautious letter-writer and generally say what comes uppermost at the moment."[3] A letter such as the one to Murray dated September 28, 1822 shows, though, a clear awareness of the literary worth of what he had written:

1. Moore, p.483. Moore was also, of course, puffing his own publication.
2. I, xvii-xviii. Cf. also I, 196, "her letters were ever the genuine expression of her feelings."
3. In my Hot Youth (1973), p.I. Marchand quotes from an unpublished letter of November 14, 1822.

> If, by your own management, you can extract any of my epistles from Lady Caroline Lamb, they might be of use in your collection (sinking, of course, the names and all such circumstances as might hurt living feelings, or those of survivors); they treat of more topics than love occasionally.[1]

Byron's contemporaries seemed well aware that his letters were not purely private. Moore, at work on the Life of Byron, wrote to Murray of the letters from Italy, "he was shooting his shafts far beyond Albermarle Street when he wrote these."[2] Moore introduced one of these letters with the remark that "this letter was, of course, (like most of those he addressed to England at this time) intended to be shown."[3] Though hardly any commentator, either at the time or since, has thought this to lessen the attraction of the letters, the fact remains the Byron's correspondence provides an early example of the corruption of private letters. Moore was careful not to stress the public quality of the letters, although Byron himself regarded them as an extension of his works.[4] They are evidence to support the advice with which Adolphus ended his remarks upon letters - that they "are not to be considered an unquestionable index of character."[5]

To anticipate a wider public was one resource of the letter-writer who wished to prevent his privacies from being paraded in print. Another, or an additional method was to retrieve the letters and destroy them, along with any other private papers. Letters were burnt also by recipients.

1. Quoted by Smiles, I, 438.
2. Ibid., II, 314-315. This is another important Moore letter not printed by Dowden.
3. Life of Byron, II, 229. Macaulay remarked in his review that many of Byron's letters "were not written merely for the person to whom they were directed, but were general epistles, meant to be read by a large circle." (Edinburgh Review LIII (June 1831), 545.
4. The review in the Athenaeum CLXI (January 1, 1821), stated that "such letters do not belong to executors or legatees: they are the property of posterity."
5. Adolphus, pp. 21-22.

The spate of epistolary bonfires in the nineteenth century[1] can be blamed upon the justified fear of publication, for even the publishing of collections of historical material could, as Isaac D'Israeli pointed out, "spread an alarm."[2] Lady Hesketh clearly intended that her own private letters should be spared the fate which she had helped to arrange for Cowper's. She wrote to Hayley: "I do hereby declare that if ever you shew any letters of mine either to man, woman, or child, or if you do not burn them the moment they are answered, I never will forgive you, nor even write another line."[3] In 1827 a Dr. Croley, writing to William Blackwood in support of the principle of anonymity on "Maga" expressed the same hopes, which in the event, Mrs. Oliphant noted, "were quite unjustified."

> I take it for granted that you scrupulously burn all letters. You are mortal like the rest of us; and it would not be well that a collector of manuscripts should lay hold of your porte-feuille for the benefit of the reading world.[4]

The Quarterly reviewer of Warburton's Letters quoted approvingly the editor's remark that a

> man of eminence owes it to himself, to put together, all such letters and papers as he would wish to have preserved, and to destroy the rest. There is otherwise no security against the folly and indiscretion of those, into whose hands they may afterwards come.[5]

He regretted that the editor's advice had not been taken. Such action was taken, though, by R. L. Edgeworth, who in 1817 burnt some thousands of letters

1. Some are described by Altick, pp. 160-162, and others by G. Haight in T.L.S., January 26, 1973, p.87.
2. Quarterly Review XXIII (July 1820), 403. (Review of Spence's Anecdotes).
3. Bodleian MS. Eng. Misc. d. 135 fol. 100. The letter is a transcript. Cf. Maria Edgeworth to Harriet Beaufort (April 14, 1825). "I should think it a great breach of confidence if anyone published or gave up for publication after my death any letter of mine." (Transcript kindly provided by Mrs. Colvin.)
4. William Blackwood and his Sons (1897), I, 480.
5. Quarterly Review II (November 1809), 401-402.

written to him,[1] and in the same year Sydney Smith burnt his own letters to Francis Horner. He explained to Lady Holland:

> I have got back all my letters from Leonard Horner. He offered and I accepted them as well for myself as for Mrs. Sydney. Mine were of a description that are intended for immediate combustion. It is hardly a fair practice to keep letters. It ought not to be done if the correspondent does not like it, and that nobody does like it is clear, for it would put an end to any correspondence, or render it not worth keeping up.[2]

Thus, at a time when private letters were being valued as never before, their use in biography - of near-contemporaries, at least - was not only being restricted by doubts about their sincerity, but was even being prevented by deliberate destruction.

Another way in which a correspondent could hope to guard against his letters being appropriated by biographers or published by zealous friends was that accidentally stumbled upon by Dr. Croley. Mrs. Oliphant unkindly remarks that "Croly's epistles, of which there are many, are defended from the curiosity of the public by an armour almost as effectual [as burning]. They are dull."[3] Wordsworth returned repeatedly to his settled dislike of the publication of private letters in any form,[4] and he claimed to have adopted Croly's prophylactic by design:

> Speaking of letter-writing, Taylor mentioned Southey's industry, and Wordsworth said that he had such a horror of having his letters preserved, that in order to guard against it he made them as bad and dull as possible.[5]

1. Edgeworth Memoirs, II, 69-70. "He said, he felt he should not have time to look over all his friends' letters, and that his mind could not feel at ease, unless those which he had not examined were destroyed."
2. Letters ed. N.C.Smith (Oxford, 1953), I, 278. The irony of citing this opinion from a private letter ought not to go unremarked.
3. William Blackwood and his Sons, I, 480.
4. See M. L. Peacock Jnr., The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth (Baltimore, 1950), pp. 72-73.
5. P. W. Clayden, Rogers and his Contemporaries (1889), II, 158.

The worthlessness and dullness of letters, though, as reviewers rarely tired of pointing out, were no deterrent to the biographers who wished to use them.

ii. The Suppression of Letters

It was, as has been seen, letters "not intended for publication" which were particularly valued for biographical purposes. Inevitably this was the very kind of letter which was most likely to contain matter which, for various reasons, was thought unfit for publication. The popular taste for reading private letters in print thus brought with it a new ethical problem of how much which was really private might be made public. Some of the main causes for concern were sexual (though there were others), and the two figures whose letters most dramatically raised these problems were Burns and Byron. "What shall be done with these letters ?" wrote one of Burns' executors in 1796. "Avaunt the sacrilege of destroying them or shutting them up for ever from the light. But on the other hand, can we bring them into light ?"[1] A generation later Thomas Moore, at work on his Life of Byron, wrote to Murray about some of the letters from Italy, "we shall be obliged to sacrifice most of his Venetian Amourettes."[2] So it came about that the very quality which many critics thought the chief reason for publishing letters, and the guarantee of their authenticity, became a principal cause of their suppression. Currie admitted this publicly:

> Of the following letters of Burns, a considerable number were transmitted for publication, by the individuals to whom they were addressed; but, very few have been printed entire. It will easily be believed, that in a series of

1. Syme to Cunningham, July 31, 1796. Annual Burns Chronicle IX (1930), 40.
2. February 15, 1829. Smiles, II, 314-315. (Not in Dowden.)

> letters, written without the least view to publication, various passages were found unfit for the press, from different considerations.[1]

Some of these excisions simply reduced the tediousness of repetition, but principally Currie was confirming the decision of Syme to destroy such of Burns' letters "as may touch on the most private and delicate matters relative to female individuals."[2] This, like the burning of Byron's memoirs in 1824, was done on grounds of public decency rather than to protect privacy. Unlike the bonfires described above, the fate of Burns' letters was a deliberate destruction of information; the letters were destroyed because of what they contained, not because they were private. Moore, similarly, revealed that he had had "to suppress ... whatever passages in his Journals and Letters might be supposed to bear too personally and particularly" upon "certain affairs of gallantry."[3] He later pleaded guilty to the suppression of many letters "to which Lord Byron, no doubt, in his fearlessness of consequences, would have wished to give publicity, but which, it is now more probable, will never meet the light."[4]

The need to preserve common decency was assumed rather than analysed; it was expressed periodically in comments such as those provoked by Nelson's letters to Lady Hamilton,[5] and in Sydney Smith's Edinburgh notice of Madam d'Epinay, in which he remarked that "there are some letters and passages

1. Works of Robert Burns, II, v-vi.
2. Letter to Cunningham (undated). Annual Burns Chronicle XI (1936), 36-37.
3. Life of Byron, II, 57.
4. Ibid., II, 806. There is evidence that Moore censured the letters also to maintain Byron's credit: Maria Edgeworth wrote to Honora Edgeworth, "Lockhart told me ... that in the mass of Mss letters which he had seen Lord Byron had abused outrageously every friend he ever had in the world at some time or other. ... If all had been published the whole truth would have convinced the public that Lord B.'s opinion of Sir S. Romilly or of anyone was not worth a straw." (February 19, 1831). Letters from England, ed. C. Colvin (Oxford, 1971), p. 484.)
5. See J.W. Reed, pp. 53-58.

which ought not to have been published; which a sense of common decency and morality ought to have suppressed."[1] The letters which produced this kind of reaction can hardly have been regarded as spectacular even in contemporary terms, and from the viewpoint of a decade which has seen James Joyce's most intimate love letters in print every letter published in the nineteenth century appears innocuous in the extreme. Commentators more frequently wished suppression upon letters which were merely private, and which had been written in the tacit understanding that they would remain so. For such critics "not meant for publication" meant precisely what it said. The general comments on biography in the Annual Review for 1804 argued that despite the admitted advance in biography which came of making the subject "his own biographer", there were ethical objections to publishing letters. This style of biography was said to induce "unprincipled persons to violate the confidence of epistolary correspondence" by "pampering ... an impertinent inquisitiveness into circumstances which strangers have no right to know." The writer acknowledged no extenuating circumstances:

> The letter which one friend receives from another is always communicated under an implied condition, if not of absolute secrecy, yet at least of discretion, in the selection of persons to whom it is confided; and, to violate such a trust, requires a much more ample justification, than many editors can allege on their own behalf.[2]

The British Critic ten years later, stung by the publication of Nelson's letters to Lady Hamilton, spelt out the rule of conduct for biographers unequivocally:

1. Edinburgh Review XXXI (December 1818), 44-45.
2. Annual Review (for 1804), 470. Anne Elliot, too, felt that "no private correspondence could bear the eye of others." (Persuasion Ch. 21).

> We do not think that we are not exceeding the limits of our judicial capacity, when we pronounce in this our court of literature that the posthumous publication of a confidential letter, which the author did not intend, or would not have wished to appear before the public, is nothing less than a moral breach of trust: and for a third person to publish a letter not addressed to himself, is guilty of the like offence, knowing the same to have been confidential.[1]

Thomas Moore in his Life of Sheridan made pointedly much of his "scruples - over-delicate, perhaps," in not including letters whose omission harmed his work, because of his "objection to the exposure of any papers received under the seal of private friendship."[2] Maria Edgeworth too, while agreeing with some of her contemporaries that next to autobiography a man's "private letters afford the best means of obtaining an insight into his character," preferred deliberately to sacrifice even the most valuable letters rather than violate "private confidence." "No one," she wrote, "could have a greater horror than my father felt at the publication of private letters."[3] She shared his opinion, and gave repeated earnest of her consistency.[4]

Scott asked Constable to adjust some of the published letters from Anna Seward which referred to letters which he had written to her, because they "reflect severely upon living characters."[5] It was a plea commonly accepted by biographers. Peacock wrote that "all that can fairly be

1. British Critic NS II (November 1814), 534.
2. Life of Sheridan, p.78. Similar sentiments occur on p.632. That Moore's problem was a genuine one is indicated by journal entries, such as that for October 20, 1818 - "Rogers thinks I must not give extracts from Mr. T. Grenville's letters, he being still alive ... so I suppose I must give them up." (Journal II, 196).
3. Edgeworth Memoirs, II, 68-69.
4. She wrote to Harriet Beaufort (April 14, 1825) explaining that she had told Mrs. Aiken "that it was my principle that private letters should not be made public without the special desire of the parties." (Transcript kindly provided by Mrs. Colvin.) See also Memoirs II, 301, where she explains that she has omitted letters because of her "conscientious regard to the feelings and interests of the living."
5. The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, ed. H.J.C. Grierson (1932-1937), I, 273.

required of any one, to whom the papers of another are consigned in trust for the public, is an early and ungarbled publication of all that do not in any way trespass on the privacy of the living."[1] Sydney Smith wrote to Lady Holland of Mme du Deffand's letters that he thought "Miss Berry's introduction of matter so offensive to the living very injudicious and blameable."[2] Many biographers made avowed sacrifices to avoid this kind of fault. The editor of Anna Seward's Letters claimed that

> some of the letters contained in her bequest have been omitted; - such chiefly as relate to the characters or connections of living individuals, and touch upon circumstances, which although very naturally introduced into letters among friends, were evidently not designed for the world [3]

Other biographers preferred pruning to omission. Isaac Taylor, in order to avoid any "violation of the confidence reposed in me by her correspondents," cut his sister Jane's letters, to the extent that "there is scarcely an entire letter in the collection." He claimed an exemption "for the living from the demands of that curiosity which it is usual to gratify relative to the dead who have occupied a place in public esteem."[4] Even the editor of Nelson's Letters to Lady Hamilton, one of the most widely abused publications of the era, explained that he had slightly cut the letters "from the most honourable feelings to individuals, as they would certainly have given pain."[5] The concensus of critical opinion was that the remaining parts still succeeded in giving pain.

1. Westminster Review XIII (October 1830), 314. (Review of Randolph's Memoirs of Jefferson.)
2. December 5, 1810; Letters, I, 194.
3. Letters of Anna Seward (Edinburgh, 1811), I, x-xi.
4. Memoirs of Jane Taylor, I, xiv.
5. Letters of Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton (1814), I, vi.

The issue of the censorship of letters is only a small part of the much wider question of how much the biographer should tell, the subject of Chapter IV below. As far as the subject can be isolated in the use of letters, the critical conclusions indicated, as usual, a middle way, dictated by the natural tact of the biographer. At the extremes there was no dispute. Letters which could do harm to individuals or to society were to be suppressed, unless there was an overbalancing benefit. On these grounds the publication of Richardson's Life and Correspondence was judged "both improper and injudicious, as it can only tend to lower a very respectable character, without communicating any gratification or instruction to others."[1] Avoiding this fault, some biographers rushed into its opposite, but the principle on which they then worked - that the innocuousness of anyone's letters was sufficient reason in itself for their publication, was equally unacceptable. Anna Seward wrote:

> It is only zeal without judgment, and the enthusiasm of partiality, which can take pleasure in reading a great man's letters, which might have been those of any tolerably educated mind, on which genius had never shone.[2]

Reviewers returned repeatedly to the biographer's judiciousness as the controlling power, and tended to censure any lapse from good judgement. The Quarterly reviewer of Tweddell's Remains described the book as "a wreath" woven by Tweddell's brother for his tomb, and added that it

> might perhaps have been woven with more judgment and discretion; some of the letters, to which we shall have occasion to refer, should undoubtedly have been suppressed. All that is affectedly querulous or uncharitably censorious might have been represented by a due number of asterisks, and there would still have been left abundance of what is sensible, and elegant, and humane.[3]

1. Edinburgh Review V (October 1804), 32.
2. Memoirs of the Life of Darwin (1804), p. viii.
3. Quarterly Review XIV (October 1815), 226.

Many years later Lockhart made a similar complaint about Moore's Life of Byron:

> Mr. Moore has thought it his duty to the memory of his friend to print, "with but little suppression," his own letters relative to his Italian amours. The biographer states in the first place, that, "to throw a veil altogether over these irregularities would be to afford but a partial portraiture of his character;" to which we answer, that Mr. Moore was not reduced to the necessity of either veiling them altogether, or exhibiting Lord Byron's letters concerning them "with but little suppression."[1]

Johnstone, discussing the role of letters in biography, expressed the ideal more succinctly, hoping that he had "adhered to delicacy as strictly as to truth."[2]

1. Ibid., XLIV (January 1831), 204-205.
2. Works of Parr (1828) VII, [iii].

iii Conclusion

The pattern of Mason's Life of Gray became established in the generation after Boswell almost as standard, and it has, to some extent, been followed ever since. The years now being studied were formative for biography, and particularly for the role of letters. Readers of biography valued letters especially for what they revealed of the private character behind the public image, yet, as this chapter has also revealed, a number of important caveats arose almost simultaneously. Private letters were not necessarily self-explanatory, and after they had been selected and silently edited by a biographer their value was often apparent rather than actual. It was understood that what the public saw of anyone might be a facade, and readers of biographies hoped to penetrate beyond it. This gave letters an important role. Readers were not aware, though, that the "real character" of a subject such as Burns or Byron, presented by means of selected letters, edited by the biographer, was also a facade, the mask behind the mask. Letters had such a high prestige as the embodiment of unquestionable documentary truth, that only slowly and with reluctance did commentators become aware of their imperfections.

Some of the most thoughtful parts of Stanfield's Essay were prompted by his consideration of the role of letters in biography, and this is the area where he most fully represented the views of his time. He shared the view that "familiar letters" provide biography with "some of its most valuable materials," and thought that their value to the biographer was second only to that of autobiography, provided that they met the familiar conditions - were "written in a spirit of enlightened confidence, and without any view to future publication." He thought that the "discreet insertion of applicable letters" was indisputably beneficial, but condemned the "indiscriminate profusion" of repetitious letters. He had, as has been

seen, a particular concern for the "composition and ultimate design of regular biography," and thought that letters should always be subordinate to the design, and not dictate it. Nonetheless, he believed that letters were indispensible to the biographer, that they were "to biography what state-papers are to history," and "the very chart and compass of biography." While realising that letters were liable to various objections, he thought them "too valuable a depository of biographic matter to be given up on slight objections." They represented for him the personal part of the biographer's material, to be weighed against the public accounts and to fill out the public profile. He thought letters even more valuable than constant observation, because they revealed the subject's "very thoughts and purposes" rather than his "ostensible actions." In the assessment of letters, he wrote, a biographer's powers are tested to the full; he must ensure that his respect for and knowledge of their author does not warp his reading. He must take into account the "character, foibles, and general design of the man," the relationship between him and his correspondent - in general and on the particular occasion - and whether the letters seem to have any wider public in mind. Only then may they be "consulted with safety and advantage."[1]

1. Stanfield, pp. 76 - 78, 174 - 176.

CHAPTER III

OTHER MATERIALS OF BIOGRAPHY

> We cannot judge either of the feelings or of the characters of men with perfect accuracy from their actions or their appearance in public; it is from their careless conversations, their half-finished sentences, that we may hope with with greatest probability of success to discover their real characters. The life of a great or of a little man written by himself, the familiar letters, the diary of any individual published by his friends, or by his enemies after his decease, are esteemed important literary curiosities.
>
> Maria Edgeworth.[1]

Phrases such as "regularly composed biography" have frequently been used in this study to describe the type of biography with which most readers today are familiar; in them the biographer, principally in his own person, narrates the life of his subject, drawing from time to time upon letters and diaries, as well as upon the writings of others, to illustrate and authenticate his own work. This form, now largely unquestioned, was a very uncommon one in the early nineteenth century. Southey's Life of Nelson, a model of this familiar form, significantly is the one biography from the whole period whose literary place has been upheld by twentieth century critics.[2]

The last two chapters have described how collections of letters and generous infusions of contemporary history were used to swell our biographies. This was not the only ready-made material which biographers incorporated into their work. Diaries, autobiography, anecdotes, ana, and conversation were all regarded as valuable material, and a biographer was likely to make as liberal use of them as of the subject's private correspondence. All

1. Preface to Castle Rackrent (1800). (Oxford Novels ed (1964), pp [1] - 2.
2. See, for example, Harold Nicolson, The Development of English Biography (1928), pp. 114-115.

of these categories were contained in Boswell's Life of Johnson, and Croker claimed in the Preface to his 1831 edition that this comprehensiveness was the reason for the "general applause" which greeted the book, for

> the work combines within itself the four most entertaining classes of writing - biography, memoirs, familiar letters, and that assemblage of literary anecdotes which the French have taught us to distinguish by the termination Ana.[1]

"Biography" was not in the early nineteenth century the name of a strictly defined literary form, so much as a general term to describe a whole department of literature. The "Reviews of Literature" and lists of recent and forthcoming publications which were included in most of the periodicals of the time always listed under the heading "Biography" many works of which it could be said only that their contents were of biographical rather than of fictional or, say, topographical interest. The term "biography" was used extensively by commentators, and although it occurs too in the titles of collected brief lives,[2] it is not found on title-pages from the period. Here the characteristically ample titles gave more specific information about the contents. The commonest general heading was "memoirs", which, despite claims that it should "be confined to strict propriety to the recollection of events which have fallen under the personal cognisance of the author,"[3] came to be used indiscriminately to describe biography, autobiography, recollections of people and even places, the history of a reign, or the chronicles of a circle. The title-page usually made clear which type of memoir was being

1. Croker's edition, I, [v].
2. See above, pp. 49-50.
3. British Critic NS XXII (March 1822), 316 (Review of Lucy Aiken's Memoirs of the Court of King James)

proffered. The titles of Thomas Moore's two best known biographies, for example, made clear the differences between them; Memoirs of the Life of Sheridan and Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: with Notices of his Life.

None of the biographical materials examined in this chapter can be defined as closely or as unambiguously as a letter can. The anecdote, and especially the literary anecdote, is a form whose definition is even now not agreed;[1] many items published as anecdotes in this earlier period would now be regarded as epigrams, or perhaps as items of literary history. It is no easier to define a diary. R. A. Fothergill, in his study of the diary as a literary form, distinguishes four distinct types of diary - of travel, of public events, of conscience, and of personal memorandum.[2] These were all well represented within the period, while beyond them lies a large no-man's-land of works obviously within the genre yet resisting categorization - letter-books, meditations, literary worksheets, occasional essays, and commonplace books - which may be broadly regarded as forms of regular personal writing. Haydon's Diary, for example, includes all of them.[3] At other times diaries overlap autobiography, with the two often not distinguished, and placed under the umbrella title of "memoirs".

The common attraction claimed for these small personal details, found particularly in anecdotes, diaries, and recorded conversation, was that they could satisfy the reader's curiosity. It was a belief frequently repeated and reformulated during this time that while it was

1. This can be seen in the various reviews of The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes, published in 1975. For example, Nigel Dennis in the Sunday Telegraph, June 22, 1975, p.12.
2. Private Chronicles (1974), p.14.
3. The title of Tom Taylor's original edition reflected this diversity: The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), edited from his Journal.

thoroughly reprehensible to be inquisitive about contemporaries, curiosity about minute and personal details from the past was, as Jeffrey put it in his review of Pepys, "a very liberal and laudable desire," not to be confused with "that hankering after contemporary slander" with which the age was "so miserably infested, and so justly reproached."[1] Going further than this, Scott opened his review of Pepys by explaining that curiosity, no matter whether anile or enlightened, was simply a wish to know more than the public exterior revealed. The reader would therefore "turn willingly to those volumes which promise to lay bare the motives of the writer's actions, and the secret opinions of his heart."[2] This was a commonly acknowledged species of inquisitiveness,[3] not only about important or public figures, but also about authors. Brydges expressed a popular sentiment when he claimed:

> We want to know of an author, who has written on subjects extraneous to himself, what are his own private convictions and sentiments. I believe that this curiosity is very generally prevalent.[4]

Brougham, in his important statement on the Romantic view that biography must be detailed and personal, valued private information every bit as highly as the public record, adding that the "gratification of this double curiosity is the province of biography."[5] Scott defended the interest in such details against the charge of childishness and caprice, remarking

1. Edinburgh Review XLIII (November 1825), 24.
2. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1826), 281.
3. John Bigland's Letters on the Study and Use of ancient and modern History (1805), opens with a discussion "Curiosity is inherent in man."
4. Autobiography II, 150.
5. Edinburgh Review II (April 1803), 231. (Review of Stewart's Account of Dr. Robertson.) His statement occupies pp. 230-235.

that "there is a natural touch of philosophy in our curiosity."[1] In this way curiosity was sublimated into a respectable literary taste, to be satisfied by the various means now to be described.

i. Diaries

> We converse with the absent by letters, and with ourselves by diaries.
>
> D'Israeli.[2]

The Memoirs of Samuel Pepys, Esq. was one of more than 120 diaries published between 1800 and 1831. The habit of diary-writing began to blossom after about 1760, and as with biography generally, the early nineteenth century saw older - particularly seventeenth century - diaries coming into print as the same time as those of near-contemporaries. By about 1830 the backlog had been largely cleared.[3] The private diary as a form soon became as popular with readers as the private letter, and for the same reasons. However pedestrian the contents, and however much the editor might have garbled them, both gave biographical information in an attractive and apparently first-hand documentary form. The literal worth of the contents was of secondary importance. Usually diaries were not published in full, but were dismembered for use by the biographer, and became substantial constituent parts of published biography. Even in this form they were still considered attractive, because, like letters,

1. Quarterly Review XXXIV (June 1826). (Review of Life of Kemble).
2. Curiosities of Literature (seventh edition, 1825), V, [i].
3. This information is obtained from an analysis of William Matthews' British Diaries: an annotated Bibliography of British Diaries written between 1442 and 1942 (Univ. of California, 1956).

they could provide those minutiae of a subject's life which are one of the notable features of biographical taste after Boswell.

The Memoirs of Samuel Pepys, Esq., the most famous of all English diaries, were published in 1825, edited by Lord Braybrook. The reviews were favourable and enthusiastic, only that in the Eclectic[1] being at all adverse, and they reveal how well the work was suited to the taste of the age. The critical reaction may be summed up by Jeffrey's exclamation in the Edinburgh; - "we can scarcely say that we wish it a page shorter."[2] The detailed grounds for this enthusiasm, as F. R. Hart points out,[3] are as revealing as the reception itself, for the informality and freedom from literariness impressed the reviewers far more than the factual information which the work contained. It is very significant that it was the style which was singled out, for the same number of the New Monthly Magazine which praised the quality of "idle gossip" in Pepys carried also a review of Moore's Life of Sheridan, criticising its style as "too glittering and fanciful" for serious biography.[4] The reviewer suggested that the formal account of the public career of a subject should be matched by formal and dignified language, while the personal details which go to delineate "the man" should adopt a correspondingly lighter tone. Isaac D'Israeli wrote that the same distinction existed between diaries and formal biographies. He explained that absence of "reserve or hesitation" was the hallmark of "the diurnal page," and that

1. It contained observations such as "we cannot conceive that either the manners or the habits of the age are much illustrated by such memoranda." (Eclectic Review NS XXIV (July 1825), 76.
2. Edinburgh Review XLIV (November 1825), 54.
3. E.L.H. XXVII, 50-51.
4. New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal (1825), II, 98, 484. A similar criticism was made of Moore's style in the Westminster Review, IV, 205.

while some biographies detailed only the life, a diary portrayed the character:

> These Diaries form that other Self, which Shaftesbury has described every thinking being to possess; and which, to converse with, he justly accounts the highest wisdom.[1]

This was true of Pepys; the style which was so admired in his writing was supremely apt to give his "character" and not his "life". There is no evidence that biographers or reviewers at the time saw Pepys as a model biographer. He was seen as an outstanding example of this particularly valued branch.[2] The publication of Pepys, nonetheless, stands as the apotheosis of a new kind of biographical language, which had been introduced by Boswell. Immediacy was now being valued more than detachment. When D'Israeli demanded that "biography should not be written with eloquence,"[3] he was coveting the quality of the best post-Boswellian biography, where the directness of the ungarbled source material was the stamp of authenticity.

The qualities which the reviewers remarked upon in Pepys in 1825 indicate clearly one reason why the diary form was so valued by contemporary readers of biography. The "disposition to idle gossip" which the New Monthly Magazine reviewer claimed as "an essential ingredient for the memoir writer"[4] was not idle in any pejorative way, but only in the sense that it was unjudging and was put forth with no view to the valuations

1. In "Some Observations on Diaries, Self-biographies, and Self-characters." Literary Miscellanies pp. 122-123.
2. Here I take issue with F. R. Hart (see E.L.H. XXVII, 50-51).
3. Literary Miscellanies, p.123.
4. II (1825), 98.

of futurity. The Westminster also singled out this quality of Pepys for praise, and was "glad that Mr. Pepys was not his own editor," since he would then have removed the most interesting parts, and the work

> would have come forth into the world, invested with a gravity and decorum due to the rank of a "high official station;" and deprived of all, or most of those singular confessions, unconscious exhibitions of character, and pieces of private and ministerial intelligence, which give them a rare and inestimable value.[1]

Scott, although convinced that the editing of the diary had not materially damaged it, resented editorial interference having taken place at all, remarking "we are not fond of abridgments and castrations."[2] In the Edinburgh Jeffrey, as has been seen, found every detail valuable. For these commentators Pepys' diary was a direct and detailed transcript from his life, and its chief virtue was that it had not been either written or extensively edited for the public.

The ubiquitous curiosity about individuals was obviously not to be satisfied by formal accounts of their public actions. Increasingly commentators looked for personal revelation, and readers expected to be taken behind the scenes. While biographies of public figures were expected to reveal "the man", literary biographies were expected to display the writer at work, "in his work-room, in his shirt-sleeves," as Virginia Woolf was to put it a century later.[3] D'Israeli suggested that the shift away from public figures - statesmen and warriors - towards scholars and

1. Westminster Review IV (October 1825), 411.
2. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1826), 288. Cf. Edward Mangin's view that "the trifles are the beauties. ... Not one word of the precious original should have been suppressed." (The Parlour Window (1841), pp. 155-156.
3. In a review of Arnold Bennett's Books and Persons (T.L.S., July, 1917. Quoted by S. Hynes, Edwardian Occasions (1972), p. 271.)

men of letters as subjects for biography was the sign of a much deeper shift of interest:

> But as the human mind became the great object of our inquiry, and to detect and separate the shades of the passions the great aim of the Biographer; reflecting men perceived, that the philosopher, like other men, had his distinct characteristics.[1]

These characteristics, described in detail in Chapter I, were to be found in the personal life, and particularly in the personal writings - letters and diaries - of those who were not famous or public figures. Haydon claimed that his diary was "the history, in fact, of my mind."[2] Those who, like Pepys and Evelyn, had lived in the public eye, became interesting now for other reasons.

The enthusiasm for the informal, unofficial sort of biography so well exemplified by Pepys, was not an arbitrary or passing quirk of literary taste, but arose from the conviction that writing of this sort really provided the most revealing and therefore the most valuable biography. The evident authenticity and truth to his life impressed the reviewers of Pepys' writings, and was generally what made diaries attractive as material for biographers. Aside from the general preference of biographers for compilation rather than composition, a personal diary gave them material which provided a vivid portrait. In the pages of a diary, the subject could appear as he had done to his own contemporaries. This was a claim made particularly about Byron; Mary Shelley observed that "his own letters and journals mirror him as he was," a remark which explains her delighted discovery, related in a letter to Murray about

1. Literary Miscellanies, p. 123.
2. Autobiography and Memoirs, I, 77.

Moore's Life, that "the Lord Byron I find there is our Lord Byron."[1] Pepys, though, was a more usual sort of character than Byron. With him the diary was not just a reflection but a revelation; those who had known him personally would have been astonished to read it.

One reason why diaries so quickly became, after Boswell's time, a primary source and staple of biography was the belief that they could, in a way which was impossible for any other class of material, establish the truth. At one level they provided concrete facts - dates, times, and places - which aided the biographer's unquestioned task of establishing the record of what had happened. It was at this time, though, as the next chapter describes, that the deeper truth of personality came to be seen as important, and to establish this rather than to provide a painstakingly accurate account of outward events was consequently regarded as the biographer's real task. The literal account was often ridiculed as pedantry and condemned as tedious, and it became increasingly discredited as the early years of the century passed. Now that the concern for depicting "the man" as well as the public figure was so strong, it was commonly believed that diaries could be used as a touchstone for judging sincerity and establishing authenticity. D'Israeli described this quality very strikingly, writing that "when Cato wishes that the breast of every man were diaphanous it is only a metaphorical expression for such a Diary."[2] The importance of diaries for such information became perhaps even greater during this period, as letters began to become discredited as infallible indices of character.

1. Letter to Murray, January 19, 1830. (Letters ed. Jones (University of Oklahoma, 1944), II, 28-29. She apparently wrote in a different vein to Moore, who replied to her, "I am glad you like the Byron - but shall not answer your criticisms, for fear you should give me more of them." (Letters, II, 681.)
2. Literary Miscellanies, pp. 122- 123.

More and more, the sort of personal detail best provided by a diary - and often not to be obtained elsewhere - became an indispensable complement to the public career of the subject. Thomas Sharp remarked on this in the preface to his biography of his father, emphasising that both aspects of the life were important. "When the exterior and interior life are found to tally so exactly," he wrote, "they confirm and bear witness to each other."[1] Further than this, for a biographer the diary provided a definitive version of what had happened, and this, as far as it described personal details, could scarcely be overruled. There was no point in looking further. Thus when Currie wanted to establish what Burns' political sympathies were, he simply referred to "his common-place book, where he could have no temptation to disguise."[2] Thomas Moore, too, assumed that Byron's journal must be the final arbiter of truth:

> I shall now lay before the reader such notices of his school life as I find scattered through the various note-books he has left behind. Coming, as they do, from his own pen, it is needless to add, that they afford the livliest and best records of this period that can be furnished.[3]

Hazlitt, in his Life of Thomas Holcroft, made much more detailed claims for the diary's usefulness as biography, perhaps because the diary occupies such a large part of his book:

1. The Life of John Sharp I, xix.
2. Life of Burns (Vol. I of his ed. of The Works of Robert Burns (Liverpool, 1800)), 218.
3. Life of Byron I, 40. Moore's credulous reading is supported by a journal entry of Byron's: "This journal is a relief. When I am tired - as I generally am - out comes this, and down goes everything. But I can't read it over; and God knows what contradictions it may contain. If I am sincere with myself (and I fear that one lies more to one's self than to any one else), every page should confute, refute, and utterly abjure its predecessor." (December 6, 1813; quoted by Marchand, In my Hot Youth, p.18.) Byron wrote elsewhere that "everything written is written for the purpose of being read." (D. L. Moore, The Late Lord Byron, p. 292.)

> Though this diary is not filled with great events, or striking reverses of fortune, it exhibits a perfect picture of the life, habits, and amusements of a literary man. It is my wish to bring the reader as nearly acquainted as I can with the subject of these memoirs; and I know no better way of doing this, than by exhibiting in his own words almost every thought or circumstance which passed through his mind during the above period.

For these reasons Hazlitt thought that the diary would provide "a more satisfactory account" than any other, and that the detailing the minutiae of his life over two years would give "some notion of the rest."[1]

When, as was frequent, religious diaries were plundered to form or to ballast a devotional biography, the truthfulness was seen as ever more unquestionable, and as vouched for by something very like a divine guarantee. The Rev. T. S. Grimshaw claimed that

> a diary, in its spiritual use and character, is a record of the soul's state of feeling, in reference to the all-seeing eye of God; and therefore must necessarily be supposed to be the genuine expression of all its inward movements, to the exclusion of every thing that, by any possibility can be supposed to be deceptive or assumed. In this sense, it is one of the most solemn acts of intercourse that can subsist between the soul and its God.[2]

That a man could deceive himself was only incomprehensible; that he should lie to God was unthinkable.

Although, as has been shown in the last chapter, letters were very highly valued by biographers and readers alike for the important insights into character which they provided, there were dissident voices which specifically argued the superior merits of diaries for this purpose.[3]

1. Works, III, 168-169. The diary occupies 59 of the 185 pages which constitute Hazlitt's part of the Life. The rest consists of quoted autobiography and letters.
2. A Memoir of the Rev. Legh Richmond, pp. 56-57.
3. Diaries were also believed to be more "natural" and therefore more revealing than autobiography. Whitaker, reviewing Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works, described his Journals as "more artless and contemporary" than his Memoirs. (Quarterly Review XII (January 1815), 385.

Scott, in his Quarterly review of Pepys, impugned "the sincerity of letter-writers in general," and systematically dismissed letters as a reliable source of personal information. He argued that the "discrepancies between epistolary sentiments and the real character of the writer" had no equivalent in private diaries. There, he considered, "we come several steps nearer to the reality of a man's sentiments." Scott speculated on the reasons why a man should spell out his most personal affairs and feelings, but finally could only marvel:

> Indeed such seems the force of the principle of sincerity in this sort of self-communing as renders it wonderful how much such records contain of what is actually discreditable to the writers.

Scott's conclusion was that the incentive to falsehood is slighter in diaries than it is in letters, and that the veracity must therefore be correspondingly greater - "there must be more fair dealing betwixt ourself and our conscience, than ourself and anyone else."[1] It was this belief which underlay both his and others' enthusiasm for Pepys; Scott's own comments echo the prefatory remarks of Lord Braybrook:

> The journal contains the most unquestionable evidences of veracity; and, as the writer made no scruple of committing his most secret thoughts to paper, encouraged no doubt by the confidence which he derived from the use of short hand, perhaps there was never a publication more implicitly to be relied upon for the authenticity of its statements.[2]

Scott found that from the "whole tenor of the diary" "Mr. Pepys wrote under a feeling of security, and therefore with a frankness not often to be found among diarists."[3] These were the qualities which made Pepys the prince of diarists. Lord Braybrook had warned the reader "not to

1. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1826), 282-283.
2. Memoirs of Samuel Pepys, Esq., F.R.S. (1825), I, vii.
3. Quarterly Review XXXIII, 284.

expect .... accuracy of style or finished composition,"[1] but he need not have apologised for it. Like the absence of polish in private letters, it was a proof that the writer had had no thoughts of publication in mind.

Boswell's Life of Johnson, with its Pepysian detail, was such popular reading in the Romantic age for the same reason. Lockhart, reviewing Croker's edition of Boswell, praised Boswell in the same terms that others had praised Pepys. "Never," wrote Lockhart,

> did a man tell a story with such liveliness and fidelity, and yet contrive to leave so strong an impression that he did not himself understand it ... unconscious, all the while, of the real gist and bearing of the facts he is narrating.

For Lockhart this "liveliness and fidelity" rather than the contribution which the work made to history was what provided "the main charm of the book."[2] Macaulay went further than this, claiming that the only value of Boswell's work lay in what he unintentionally revealed of himself:

> Those parts of his book which, considered abstractly, are most utterly worthless, are delightful when we read them as illustrations of the character of the writer. Bad in themselves, they are good dramatically ... Of all confessors, Boswell is the most candid. Other men who have pretended to lay open their own hearts - Rousseau, for example, and Lord Byron - have evidently written with a constant view to effect, and are to be then most distrusted when they seem to be most sincere.[3]

Macaulay's Boswell is a completely transparent and guileless writer, too stupid to fake sincerity. It was because of this that he revealed himself as could only Pepys beside, secure in his shorthand code.

Diaries were not such a frequent resort as were letters for the

1. Memoirs, I, vii
2. Quarterly Review XLVI (November 1831), 8.
3. Edinburgh Review LIV (September 1831), 18-19.

biographer who wanted to discover and reveal the man behind the mask. The reasons for this were largely practical. In the first place, many more people wrote letters than kept journals, and even those who did both wrote vastly more in the letter form. This may not be true of Pepys, but the disparity is obvious with every other writer who essayed both forms - Cowper, Scott, and Byron, for example. Whereas letters usually remained with the recipient and could not always be recalled by the writer or his family - in fact the tendency to hoard letters was particularly strong at this time - it was both easy and common for writers and their heirs to mutilate or destroy diaries. Beyond these practical considerations, there was a long tradition of publishing letters, which are after all written to be read, which was not easily extended to purely personal diaries. Indeed, the inherent distastefulness of publishing obviously personal diaries, reinforced by the frequent admonitions of the reviewers, hobbled many biographers. Thomas Moore, for example, felt obliged to suppress publication of a great deal of Byron's journal. Although he claimed that he had had to omit the most personal parts, which "would the most livelily pique and gratify the curiosity of the reader," he still believed that he had given enough (and "as much ..... as is producible")

> to indulge harmlessly that taste, as general as it is natural, which leads us to contemplate with pleasure a great mind in its undress. [1]

This "undress", the quality which Moore thought the most attractive, was naturally the one most liable to objection. With journals as with letters, those which were most revealing and interesting were the ones

1. Life of Byron, I, 435.

whose publication was seen as most reprehensible,[1] the most outrageous breach of confidence. They were so seen particularly when they touched on the personal concerns of other people, and when they contained religious confessions.[2]

One such piece of writing whose publication was criticised and resented was Cowper's Memoir, published in two rival editions in 1816.[3] W. S. Walker wrote in the Quarterly that "what it might be proper and beneficial for Cowper to write for his own private admonition, it may not be equally proper to publish to the world."[4] The Eclectic reviewer considered that the publication was an act of barbaric insensitivity ("It was casting pearls before swine. It was throwing open the closet of the anatomist to the gape of the vulgar,") and that it was "a violation of the sacredness which seems to attach to the secrets wrung from a wounded heart."[5] This was an extreme reaction to what was seen as a particularly objectionable publication. More calmly Thomas Sharp argued that while it was dishonourable and indefensible to publish private devotional diaries "purely to gratify the curiosity of men," they might reasonably be made public when the object was to benefit mankind with the aim of "making them better."[6] Another biographer

1. Cf. Croker's comment, "a life which is worth reading ought never to have been written." (Quarterly Review LXII, 215).
2. There were objections, too, to the printing of diaries which dishonoured their subject by being barren and boring. The Augustan Review (III (November 1816), 511-512) complained of Dr. Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales in the Year 1774 (edited by R. Duppa): "The majestic teacher of moral wisdom may sometimes have nodded, but it was not quite fair in Mr. Duppa to communicate those nods to the reader of his publication."
3. Information about the publication and history can be found in Norma Russell, Bibliography of Cowper (Oxford, 1963), pp. 192-201.
4. Quarterly Review XVI (October 1816), 123.
5. Eclectic Review NS VI (October 1816), 314.
6. Life of John Sharp, I, xvi.

questioned only the propriety of not publishing improving diaries: - "it became an interesting inquiry, how far it would be proper to withhold them from that more enlarged sphere of usefulness which would result from their publication."[1] Sharp also claimed, more convincingly, that however private a diary was, it might always "be decently and unblameably appealed to, and quoted for the establishing truth, and detecting falsehood and mistakes."[2] Sharp believed that the biographer had a duty to his subject's reputation, and that he should use diaries as an aid to "doing justice" to it.

The publication of Cowper's and Johnson's diaries was attacked because the damage done to the writers was not compensated by any usefulness. Pepys' diary, though, with the aid of slight editing, was found unreservedly interesting. The Eclectic reviewer remarked that the diary, although it "would not have been worth printing in the year 1700, will be read with interest in 1825."[3] The interest shown here in Pepys was as much antiquarian as biographical: the sort of familiar and domestic detail which diaries provided was of the greatest interest when it illuminated the life of an historical period. When the subject was recent, though, such detail was frequently superfluous, and unless it concerned someone of unusual interest, would simply duplicate the reader's own experience. Another reviewer of Pepys wrote that diarists who confined their writing to what was "interesting at the moment" were of little more use to posterity than was the historian of public events, while

1. David Ramsay, Memoirs of the Life of Martha Laurens Ramsay (1815) p.v.
2. Life of John Sharp I, xv - xvi.
3. Eclectic Review NS XXIV (July 1825), 75. The observation was a common one.

diarists who wrote without such a limitation were illuminating on matters "to which time has given importance."[1] It was with this in mind that Malone, in L. F. Powell's words, "took farewell of the Book, which he had done so much to perfect."[2] Malone forecast that

> highly as it is now estimated, it will, I am confident, be still more valued by posterity a century hence, when all the actors in the scene shall be numbered with the dead; when the excellent and extraordinary man, whose wit and wisdom are here recorded, shall be viewed at a still greater distance.[3]

The prediction was justified within a generation. One of the reviewers of Croker's 1831 edition thought that it had halted the progress of the work towards oblivion.[4] Johnson had by then become an historical subject, and all the details about him however ludicrous they were or would have been to contemporary critics of Boswell in 1791,[5] were now, like other ephemeral matter, material to be rescued from the stream of time.

With published diaries, though, as with published letters, it is possible to detect the law of diminishing returns. The very fact that Scott, like Lord Braybrook, singled out Pepys' shorthand cipher as an important factor in his confidence of secrecy,[6] suggests that he believed

1. New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal II (1825), 98. Stanfield made a similar defence of what he termed "light circumstances." (Pp. 62-63).
2. Life of Johnson, I, 15.
3. Advertisement to the 4th edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson, dated June 20, 1804. Quoted in Powell's edition, I, 15.
4. Monthly Review XV (1831), 453-454; q. Hart E.L.H. XXVII, 44.
5. An account of Boswell's reception in 1791 would be out of place here. It should be mentioned, though, that the Life of Johnson, was much ridiculed and parodied by contemporaries.
6. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1826), 284.

other diarists not to have been equally secure. The possibility of unauthorised reading, not to mention publication, could influence the writing of a diary, or even inhibit it altogether. The known keeping of a diary, Sir Arthur Ponsonby suggests,[1] can also radically affect the behaviour of those likely to provide its subject matter. It would be surprising indeed if at this time when private papers were so commonly and so indiscriminately printed after their author's death, if some diarists, like some letter writers, had not anticipated the public which their journals might eventually reach. The danger of this happening was certainly evident to contemporaries, and doubts about the reliability of a diary would be effectively as damaging as conviction - "mere suspicion in that kind/Will do as if for surety." Reviewers contemplated with considerable alarm the continuing practice of publishing private diaries. One reviewer of Grimshaw's Memoirs of Legh Richmond remarked that "a very large proportion of the extracts from Mr. Richmond's private journals" "were totally unfit for the public eye." The reviewer regretted this the more because he believed that the publication "must tend to deter others from the useful practice which Mr. Richmond was accustomed to recommend."[2] This must also have been the meaning of D'Israeli's cryptic remark that "Many ... journals yet remain in their MS state, and some, unfortunately for journal-writing, have been published."[3]

Whether or not diarists actually anticipated publication, a major change in their attitudes towards their writing can certainly be detected

1. English Diaries (1923), p.3.
2. Eclectic Review 3rd Series II (August 1829), 150.
3. Literary Miscellanies, p. 121.

at this time. This is described by Fothergill as "the growing consciousness in the mind of the diarist of diary-writing as literary composition."[1] It is a reasonable assumption that, together with greater awareness of the diary as literature, there came the realization that the diary might possibly be read or published. This may in some measure account for the great enthusiasm for the diaries from former times. Evelyn and Pepys, like letters from the seventeenth century, could be seen as springing from a time before the genre had been spoiled by self-consciousness.

The diary as an extension of the author's literary activity rather than, or as well as, an expressive document, is exemplified by Scott's Journal, begun in 1825 with a specific model in mind:

> November. 20 Sunday ...
>
> I have bethought me on seeing lately some volumes of Byron's notes that he probably had hit upon the right way of keeping such a memorandum-book by throwing aside all pretence to regularity and order and marking down events just as they occurd to recollection.[2]

This Journal is a public document; a reader is always assumed, and sometimes addressed. With letters there was usually a convention, real or pretended, that the writer really was addressing an individual; Scott in his Journal did not use any parallel convention, and there is no pretence that it is either private or secret. Haydon's diary falls into the same class:

> I acquired in early life a great love of the journals of others, and Johnson's recommendation to keep them honestly I always bore in mind.
>
> I have kept one now for thirty-four years. It is the

1. Private Chronicles, p.32. The whole of this part of Fothergill's book should be consulted for its analysis of how diary-writing, as practiced by Fanny Burney, Dorothy Wordsworth, Haydon, and Scott, was a literary activity quite unlike Pepys' writing.
2. W.E.K. Anderson's edition, (Oxford 1972) p.[1]. This would also have been exactly the time that Scott was reading Pepys' diary; his review was published in the Quarterly the following March. One must suspect that he was influenced by a work which he praised so highly.

> history, in fact, of my own mind.... I hope that my journals, if ever they are thought worthy of publication, may give as much pleasure to others as other journals have given delight to me.[1]

The literary self-consciousness revealed in adopting models for a diary, and imagining its publication, was a predictable result of publishing diaries and using them in biographies.

ii. Autobiography

> "There can be no perfect biography but that which is written by a man's self; who, not only has it in his power to trace with accuracy and connection the continued progression of his pursuits and actions, but is, also, competent to view with conscious certainty the motives which produced them and the ends to which they were directed."
>
> Stanfield.

Stanfield claimed in the opening pages of his Essay that the principal materials for the biographer "can never be furnished with certainty and exactness, but from the genuine stores of a man's own consciousness." It was, Stanfield wrote, only the paucity of what he termed "self-biography"[2] which forced the biographer to turn to other, inferior material. For him even biography written by an intimate and "discerning friend", though it had much to commend it, was only a second best. The great blossoming of autobiography during the early years of the nineteenth century is a fact of literary history. The opening chapter has outlined how this branch of writing came to be condemned as a plague by the 1820's,

1. Dated November 30, 1803. Autobiography and Memoirs, I, 77.
2. Essay, p.2. One of Stanfield's reviewers called the term "the author's hybrid dialect." (Monthly Review LXXIX (August 1814), 357.)

but although so often a cause of bitter complaint, these autobiographical writings provided an enormous quarry of material for biographers. The dependence on autobiographical material is another striking feature of biography in this period. Full autobiographies from earlier times were frequently published, while autobiographical sketches and fragments were eagerly siezed upon. Either they were printed separately (Johnson, Cowper), included in a documentary biography (Burns, Scott), or had their material incorporated into a formal biography.

Autobiographies, whether full or fragmentary, appealed to the public sense of curiosity. They were frequently utilised by biographers in the same way that diaries were, to much the same extent, and with a very similar purpose. Indeed, neither class of writing can be so clearly defined as to avoid any overlap.[1] The "formal difference" between the two is described by Roy Pascal; autobiography

> is a review of a life from a particular moment in time, while the diary, however reflective it may be, moves through a series of moments in time. The diarist notes down what, at that moment, seems of importance to him; its ultimate, long-range significance cannot be assessed.[2]

Autobiography, he concludes, is "a shaping of the past," and so it cannot be used to establish reliably what the subject's spontaneous thoughts and immediate personal reactions were. In this way it was less useful than the diary, but it did share with it many characteristics useful to the

1. For example, R. P. Gillies remarks that Scott's Journal "has always appeared to me a model of autobiography." (Memoirs of a Literary Veteran (1851), III, 110.

2. Design and Truth in Autobiography, p.3. John Foster suggested that in order to keep the form pure, autobiography should be written not daily or weekly, but "at certain considerable intervals, as at the end of each year, or any other measure of time that is ample enough for some definable alteration to have taken place in the character or attainments." (Essays (11th edition, 1835), p.78).

biographer. Like a diary, an autobiographical piece could affirm the truth of events in a way which no other account could easily rival or finally contradict, and could provide details otherwise unrecorded. This sort of detail, as we have seen, was highly regarded when it threw light on the character of an important person or when it described the manners and events of a distant historical age. In this way any autobiography, like any diary, could after many years acquire unintended importance as a record of a former age. There were many such autobiographies published during the earlier nineteenth century.[1]

On the other hand, the usefulness of autobiography to biographers was in many ways distinct from that of a diary. It was usually, though not always, written with an audience in mind, and so was unlikely to provide unexpected insights and revelations. Even though readers were assumed, it was understood, as one reviewer remarked, that "no-one ever published memoirs of himself entirely for the benefit of others."[2] Vanity, as well as the wish to deceive others, were qualities for which a biographer had to make allowances in his interpretation. In any case autobiography, as a considered judgment, could be expected to be much more in line with the author's public figure than a diary was. A final distinction is that since autobiography was a purely voluntary activity no biographer who used it could be charged with intrusiveness. The only exception was when, like Byron's memoirs, it revealed the private affairs of others, or, like Cowper's, was intended only for the writer's own admonition or for the eyes of a very few intimates.

1. See above, Part I, Ch. III, as well as William Matthews, British Autobiographies, an annotated Bibliography of British Autobiographies published or written before 1951. (Univ. of California, 1955).
2. Quarterly Review IV (August 1810), 104. (Review of Huet's Memoirs of his Life.)

Of all these functions, the ascertaining of the truth, in the different ways in which the word was comprehended, was considered as the most important. Johnson had stated:

> The writer of his own life has at least the first qualification of an historian, the knowledge of the truth; and though it may be plausibly objected that his temptations to disguise it are equal to his opportunities of knowing it, yet I cannot but think that impartiality may be expected with equal confidence from him that relates the passages of his own life, as from him that delivers the transactions of another.[1]

One fact was seen as incontrovertible; there were many things which only an autobiographer could tell, and in these areas no objective biographer could be better informed. Brydges reverted again and again to this point:

> There are those who think that no man can know himself, because he always judges of himself with partiality; but in defiance of this, he must know himself better than he can know any one else, and better than any one else can know him.[2]

In his Autobiography he argued, as Johnson had, that an autobiographer may conceal or exaggerate - "Would a hunchback paint his own deformity ?" - but that nevertheless "the best materials of biography are derived from self-written memoirs."[3]

Practising biographers shared the belief in the value of autobiography, with the result that biography during this period was constantly aspiring towards the condition of autobiography. There is no other way to explain the continued and heavy use which biographers made of their subjects'

1. The Idler 84 (November 24, 1759.) The remarks were frequently quoted and endorsed, e.g. by Jay in the preface to his Life of Winter (Bath,1808), pp. xvi-xvii.
2. Foreign Travel, II, 184. Similar sentiments are found in the Autobiography I, 122 and 211.
3. Autobiography II, 70-71.

letters, journals, and conversations, as well as of more conventional biographical material.[1] To have the subject "tell his own story" or "be his own biographer," as it was variously expressed, was to attempt the conversion of biography into autobiography. Waldo H. Dunn claims that since 1800 the course of biography "has been determined by two influences: that exerted by Boswell's Life of Johnson, and that similar, but more powerful influence, exerted by autobiography."[2] Dunn then demonstrates how very autobiographical Boswell's method was; he might well have gone further, to show how the work was Boswell's as well as Johnson's autobiography. Both characteristics were common, with biographies containing the autobiography of the writer as well as of the subject, and they provide double testimony to the dominance of autobiography. The presence of the biographer as a character in his own work was common and often not beneficial. Doris Langley Moore remarks on this as an obstacle for later biographers:

> The concern of memoirists to portray themselves in relation to Byron rather than to portray Byron causes a large amount of literature to yield a very small proportion of reliable information.[3]

Such egoism meant that there was even more autobiography than is immediately apparent.

The great attraction of autobiography as material for biographers was that it did not simply disclose facts, but could reveal feelings and motives. Coleridge began his series of autobiographical letters to

1. Laziness has already been mentioned as a factor which led a biographer towards compilation. (Above, pp. 135f.).
2. English Biography, p. 157.
3. The Late Lord Byron, p.2.

Poole with this observation:

> My dear Poole,
>
> I could inform the dullest author how he might write an interesting book - let him relate the events in his own Life with honesty, not disguising the feelings that accompanied them.[1]

Brydges, like many of his contemporaries, thought that there was no value in reading autobiographies which "do not lay anything open beneath the surface," and concluded that "if inward workings are not frankly disclosed, nothing valuable is done."[2] Another writer considered that valuable autobiography was very rare, and was to be expected only from writers who "turn an eye of ardent curiosity into the internal operations of their minds and wills."[3] Such deliberate and often sustained attempts at self-analysis were not often to be found in letters and diaries,[4] which were more likely to provide accidental revelation and random insights. To this extent autobiography's contribution to biography was an unique one.

The seven letters which make up John Foster's essay "On a Man's Writing Memoirs of Himself"[5] support this view of the value of autobiography. Foster rejects the details of the "subordinate economy of life" which make biography, and even fiction, "so unreasonably long."

1. Dated February I, 1797. Letters, I, 302. My italics.
2. Autobiography I, 231.
3. Retrospective Review I (i) (1820), 94.
4. Religious diaries are an exception to this. Like religious biographies they may be regarded as a separate species of writing.
5. Originally published at the turn of the century, Foster's Essays were revised for the ninth edition of 1830. Quotations here are from the eleventh edition, 1835, which follows the ninth. It was in its thirtieth edition in 1863.

"Men carry their minds as for the most part they carry their watches, content to be ignorant of the constitution and action within," he remarks, and the result of this is that a man who has experienced a whole range of exciting activities is better qualified to describe them "than to write the history of his own mind." Foster believes that the "practical life" is an important part of autobiography, but that it is worth nothing if the "internal principles" are ignored. The "exterior life" he sees as secondary - "the imperfect offspring of that internal state, which it is the primary and more difficult object to review," and it is this, "whether displayed in actions or not, which forms the leading object of inquiry."[1]

It was recognised at this time that autobiography could be instrumental in establishing the psychological truth about an individual, even when the facts it disclosed appeared useless, or were distorted or false. However deficient or inaccurate it might be when compared to the records, it could not fail to be revealing, for it was direct evidence. A reviewer described what sort of truth should be looked for in autobiography:

> Whatever a man says of himself is genuine: whether it be true or false it is equally his own. Even in hypocrisy he is no hypocrite, for deceit is then natural to him .... Let him represent himself as he will, we shall see him more nearly as he is, than any other man on earth could have exhibited him; and this consideration alone, in our opinion, outweighs every objection that can be advanced against autobiography.[2]

Autobiography might distort or ignore the historical record, but as far

1. Foster, pp. 3, 6, 7, 67-68.
2. Eclectic Review II (June 1806), 414-415. (Review of Memoirs of Richard Cumberland.) Cf. also Edward Calumy's remark that "writers ... very often draw their own native characters without at all designing it." (Quoted by Stauffer, I, 258.)

as the truth of character was concerned, it could provide only valuable material, although it might be valuable in a way not intended by the author. Croker agreed that autobiography is always true evidence of personality; he wrote of Napoleon Buonaparte's memoirs that "many of the facts are notoriously false, and most of the commentaries are studiously delusive; but the memoirs are not, on that account, less characteristic of the author, less entertaining to the casual reader, or less important to the critical history of the man."[1]

Stanfield, too, was concerned for the truth of biography, but in a much more literal sense. He valued autobiography because he believed that it was the form most likely to reveal the facts:

> There can scarcely appear any circumstance more attractive to the lover of biographic writing than this accumulation of facts, worthy to be recorded, coming from the pen of him who is best acquainted with their nature and arrangement, and most interested in establishing their value and veracity.

It was for him a matter of reality rather than appearance, and he argued that since "the mere circumstance of writing in the first person, will impress the reader that he is attending, only, to an ex parte evidence," the first-person form of presentation harmed the autobiographer's purpose. For this reason he commended Caesar, and others who "have imparted their memoirs in the third person."[2] Stanfield was unusual in wanting to filter off the truth which he believed autobiography to contain from the manner of its telling. Most other commentators found this first-person narration not only attractive as a style, but vital for the appearance of authenticity, as well as being a guarantee of the

1. Quarterly Review XLVIII (December 1832), 456. (Review of Memoirs de Louis XVIII.)
2. Essay, p.30.

author's own handiwork. Southey, for example, criticised Hayley's Life and Writings specifically because it was written in the third person, and he complained that "by this useless artifice of style, one charm of auto-biography is destroyed. The truth remains; but the stamp which should authenticate it, is wanting."[1] This "stamp" was thought much more vital than an appearance of objectivity. The subjective and "expressive" qualities were the special contribution which autobiography was able to make to biography, and it was at this period that they were particularly valued. Autobiography therefore became one of the actual materials of biography, which could be quoted verbatim, not simply used as source material for the biographer to digest.

Many commentators looked for a "plain, unvarnished"[2] style in autobiography and understandably so, for autobiographers, like writers of letters and of diaries, were becoming conscious of the possible value of their writing. This can be seen, for example, in the "Biographical Fragment" by Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton, which forms the opening of the Memoirs of her by Miss Benger. After the familiar echo of Johnson ("there is no person, however insignificant ... "), she wrote:

> I sit down to recall and to record every event which I can imagine to have been in any way conductive to the formation of my character and sentiments.[3]

When compared with, for example, Johnson's autobiographical piece, this is very revealing. It is deeply conscious of its potential value, and

1. Quarterly Review XXXI (March 1825), 264.
2. Retrospective Review i (1820), 94. See also D'Israeli, Literary Miscellanies, pp. 123-4, and Forster, Essays, p.78.
3. Memoirs of the late Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton (1818), p.6.

it uses a heavy biographical approach - it goes back to Saxon times. She also destroys the value of what she writes by designedly telling what would only be valuable as an accidental revelation. Autobiographical material of this sort, with the selection and interpretation already done, had lost its principal use as raw material for the biographer. The calls for a simple style reflected a wish to return to a sort of writing which could, like letters and diaries, be regarded as unspoiled source material.

For purposes of appearance, no doubt, as well as for motives of economy, biographers liked to include autobiographical fragments in their work in the same way that they included other documents. The phenomenon which has been described already as "defensive autobiography", pieces such as Scott's "Memoir of his early Years, written by Himself" (used by Lockhart in the opening of his Life of Scott), were particularly useful. Biographies could also contain autobiographical pieces written by people other than the subject. Currie, for example, printed verbatim many first-hand accounts - many of which he had elicited from correspondents - such as the letter from Mr. Syme describing a jaunt with Burns to Galloway. He also quoted in full Burns' own autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore,[1] as well as printing other documents by Burns. Currie was thus as much editor as author.

1. Life of Burns, pp. 206-213, 34-57.

iii. Anecdote and Ana.

> I talked to him a good deal of what I had seen in Corsica, and of my intention to publish an account of it. He encouraged me by saying, "You cannot go to the bottom of the subject; but all that you can tell us will be new to us. Give us as many anecdotes as you can !"
>
> James Boswell.[1]

> Sometimes we have things in this way: - "P.S. Oh ! the anecdote ! * * * * * ..... - p. 558.
>
> The extreme folly of such a specimen of publication is really sufficiently ludicrous to amount to an excellent jest. Oh ! the anecdote, indeed ! This should stand at the head of anecdotes of book-making, if ever Sholto and Reuben Percy take them in hand.
>
> Thomas Love Peacock.[2]

The anecdote was one of the most striking legacies of eighteenth century biography. Stauffer calls it "the most characteristic form which biography assumes during the last half of the century,"[3] and it has been recorded that "over 100 books with 'anecdote' in the title were published in England during the last 30 years of the eighteenth century."[4] In the new century the stream hardly abated, and many of the branches of biography mentioned in the opening chapter were further illustrated by specialised collections of anecdotes; the Advertisement to Anecdotes of Monkeys (1825), for example, mentions Bingley's Animal Biography as its inspiration. Two writers whose careers span the turn of the century were particularly associated with the form. John Nichols (1745-1826)

1. Life of Johnson II, II.
2. Westminster Review XII (April 1830), 299. (Review of Moore's Life of Byron, I.)
3. Stauffer, I, 486.
4. J. Wain in The Observer, June 22, 1975. (Review of The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes.) See also Robert Mayo, "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads." (P.M.L.A. LXIX (i), 514-515) for further evidence that "the period was abundantly anecdotal."

crowned his career as an antiquarian with his nine volumes of Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century (1812-1815),[1] while the other great anecdotalist, Isaac D'Israeli, produced many large-scale collections, including Calamities of Authors (two volumes, 1812), Quarrels of Authors (three volumes, 1814), and Curiosities of Literature (begun in 1791; five volumes, 1823). D'Israeli also wrote a Dissertation upon Anecdotes (1791) which was included in his Literary Miscellanies (1801), and his correspondence suggests that he was something of a consultant in anecdotes.[2] Although the last two decades of the eighteenth century may be regarded as the "heyday of the anecdote,"[3] the activities of these two writers demonstrate the strong continuance of the form. As late as 1826 Richard Ryan observed that there was an "enormous and increasing demand for works of Anecdote."[4] As well as being "the most characteristic form" which biography took, anecdotes also provided a very large and still-expanding body of material for conventional biographers.

The term anecdote, originally understood as "secret, private, or hitherto unpublished narratives or details of history" came in the later eighteenth century to mean "the narrative of a detached incident, or of a single event, told as being in itself interesting or striking."[5] Johnson admitted this second meaning to the fourth edition of his

1. This work, Jack remarks, is another "reminder of a fact often forgotten: that a great number of books relating to that century, and to the later seventeenth century, first appeared in our period." (P.404).
2. See the Malone letters in the Bodleian Library, and, for example, two letters from Malone to John Taylor printed in the latter's Records of my Life (1832), II, 156.
3. Stauffer, I, 490.
4. Poetry and Poets, I, ii.
5. Definitions from the N.E.D. The first example of the second meaning is dated 1761.

Dictionary (1773): " t is now used, after the French, for a biographical incident, a minute passage of private life."

Commentators sometimes blurred the distinction between anecdotes and mere details. D'Israeli rejected "frivolous" anecdotes, but the examples which he gave were simply curious details and items of information, anecdotes in the earlier recorded sense.[1] For the purposes of this chapter anecdote is understood in the latter sense, as an episode or detached event. Small narrations of this sort had an existence quite independent of biography. Published collections were often arranged by subject-matter rather than under the names of characters, an arrangement especially suited to give impact to didactic compilations. The Percy Anecdotes were published in forty parts in as many months between 1820 and 1823, and arranged by subject (such as Captivity, Science, and Humanity.) The popular volumes compiled by the Rev. Charles Black were also arranged by subject, in this case alphabetically. Stanfield had pointed out that anecdote collections are "oftner critical than biographical,"[2] a tendency seen particularly in William Seward's Anecdotes of Distinguished Persons (5th Edition, 1804), four enormous volumes of anecdotes, elaborately catalogued and arranged under country and time. In such works anecdotes were being used non-biographically, but were parallelling a function - that of being didactic or of illustrating history - often performed by regular biography. The two qualities thought necessary for an anecdote were that it should be short and self-contained, and that it should be illustrative. A recent critic has summarised the definition: "the

1. Literary Miscellanies, pp. 61-63.
2. Essay, p. 182.

anecdote aimed above all at re-creating reality by capturing an incident complete with back-drop, character, and action."[1] John Northcote described anecdotes as "small characteristic narratives,"[2] and the editors of the Percy Anecdotes called them simply "little episodes."[3] It was in this small compass that the chief attraction of an anecdote lay. As example they provided easily swallowed didactic capsules; "neither toil nor leisure is necessary," remarked the Percy editors,[4] while another compiler wrote that anecdotes, being so small, were the more easily disseminated:

> The editor ... fully convinced of the sterling quality of the silver, considers the smallness of the pieces as the means of securing its universal currency.[5]

Brevity was thought to be a necessary but not a complete condition for an anecdote, for Northcote's term "characteristic" was also a vital defining element. The function of an anecdote was to put a salient feature of the subject's character neatly into a nutshell, not simply to entertain the reader.

The popularity of anecdotes undoubtedly owed more to their attractiveness than to their usefulness as example. A word often used to describe their attraction was piquancy.[6] Thomas Campbell's jeu d'esprit of "Le Bon Dieu coming to London to sell the copyright of the Bible and going round the publishers" ends with a visit to Colburn, who

1. J. A. Garraty, The Nature of Biography (1958), p.81.
2. The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds (2nd ed., 1818), I, ix.
3. "Reuben and Sholto Percy" (ed.), The Percy Anecdotes (twenty volumes, 1823), I, [i]. (The authors were J. C. Robertson and T. Byerley.)
4. Ibid. Similarly we read on the first page of Domestic Anecdotes (1825) that "anecdotes of domestic life," though unexciting, may "be the means of conveying much valuable instruction."
5. The Flowers of Anecdote, Wit, Humour, Gaiety & Genius (1829), p.iv.
6. Used, for example, in Private Memoirs of Foreign Courts (1827), I, v.

> doubts whether it will take with the fashionable world. He suggests a few alterations of high life - the manger and the fisherman are decidely low - and a few piquant anecdotes about the court of King Herod.[1]

D'Israeli thought more highly of anecdotes, and refused to class them among the "literary luxuries," yet compared them to the fruit and wine at a meal; not sufficient in themselves but a refinement of civilised living,[2] and Henry Hallam guardedly agreed that they furnished "at least a grace and ornament to society."[3] There was a welcome for any book "professing to give us 'many original anecdotes of distinguished persons,'" because it appealed to "that love of chit-chat and gossiping, of hearing and retailing news, which, we believe, is inherent in all, from the philosopher down to the chambermaid."[4] Byron's reflections in Don Juan on the stories told about Milton at university and as a married man reveal a hint of exasperation with piquant anecdotes:

> All these are, certes, entertaining facts,
> Like Shakespeare's stealing deer, Lord Bacon's bribes;
> Like Titus' youth, and Caesar's earliest acts;
> Like Burns (whom Doctor Currie well describes);
> Like Cromwell's pranks; but although truth exacts
> These aimiable descriptions from the scribes,
> As most essential to their hero's story,
> They do not much contribute to his glory.[5]

A feeling of anti-climax was to be expected, perhaps, when such trivial stories were compared to the life and achievements of a famous character. Hazlitt wrote of Wilson's Life and Times of Defoe that "few things, in an

1. M. Sadlier, Bulwer: a Panorama (1931), pp. 204-205.
2. Literary Miscellanies, pp. 5 -6.
3. Edinburgh Review XIII (October 1808), 116. (Review of Scott's edition of Dryden.)
4. Eclectic Review X (December 1813), 545. (Review of Northcote's Reynolds).
5. Don Juan III, xcii.

ordinary life, can come up to the interest which every reader of sensibility must take in the author of Robinson Crusoe."[1] Since the anecdote was a particularly suitable vehicle for scandal, it sometimes aroused stronger feelings. A reviewer of J. T. Smith's Nollekens and his Times thought it his "duty to reprobate in the strongest language that we can use, the fashion ... of ... publishing every scandalous and piquant anecdote, which can be supposed salable in a depraved market." The fashion for retailing this sort of anecdote, he wrote, should "remain exclusively with the low weekly press, with which it commenced."[2]

Whether biographical or not, anecdotes were certainly expected to be genuine. Authenticity was required of all biographical materials, but anecdotes were the most easily misattributed and therefore came in for particular scrutiny. The "most scrupulous attention has always been paid to their authenticity" we read in the preface to one such work,[3] and this was a common claim, in the traditions of Malone and Boswell. Alicia Lefanu wrote that honesty of intention was not enough in a biographer, and that only communication with the surviving relatives could achieve the reliability "which will leave not a suspicion upon the correctness of the anecdotes related."[4] There were frequent criticisms of attaching well-known anecdotes to new subjects; Croker, reviewing the Edgeworth Memoirs, rejected Richard Lovell Edgeworth's chestnuts, remarking that his "anecdotes do not always seem to bear that character

1. Edinburgh Review L (January 1830), 400.
2. Monthly Review NS IX (December 1828), 429.
3. Memoirs of a Picture (1805), I, vi-v.
4. Memoirs of Mrs. Francis Sheridan (1824), p.313.

of strict authenticity which makes the whole charm of family history or of autobiography."[1] A reviewer of the Walpoliana remarked:

> Many of the anecdotes and bon mots, if not in Joe Miller, are sufficiently common and ancient to have been inserted in the early editions of that immortal author; and the piquancy of others consists in their profaneness.[2]

A very similar remark was made by Francis Douce in a manuscript note in his own copy of the Walpoliana, where he wrote that the editor "has made an entertaining book ... introducing at the same time jokes that did not belong to Walpole, but to Joe Miller."[3] With such concern for authenticity, the accuracy which Boswell had aspired to was frequently emulated. Critics objected to the tendency which anecdotes had to sacrifice truth to entertainment.

The care for the genuiness of anecdotes was not simply a species of pedantry. Their importance and value was seen principally as their contribution to biography, and it was as one of the materials of biography that their accuracy was jealously regarded. At one extreme anecdotes could make up a whole biography or autobiography. The actor John Bernard's overvoluminous autobiography, for example, was abridged by his son for publication in two volumes of anecdotes, presented "as a series of views of dramatic life."[4] Richard Watson actually called his autobiography, published in 1817, Anecdotes of the Life of Richard

1. Quarterly Review XXIII (July 1820), 513.
2. Monthly Review XXXII (June 1802), 178.
3. In the Bodleian copy of the second edition (1800). The anonymous author was Pinkerton. A similar complaint was made by Alicia Lefanu about one of Watkins' rare anecdotes of Sheridan. (Memoirs of Mrs. Francis Sheridan, p. 401). The first of many editions and versions of Joe Miller's Jests was produced by John Mottley in 1739.
4. John Bernard, Retrospections of the Stage (Boston, 1832), I, v.

Watson. Such works were exceptional. The more common view was that anecdotes were just one of several valuable materials, and that the biographer should use them as he did letters or diaries.[1] Their value therefore depended partly upon the skill of the biographer who used them; D'Israeli wrote that in the hands of "a writer of penetration," "anecdotes, even should they be familiar to us, are susceptible of deductions and inferences, which become novel and important truths."[2] In this form anecdotes are a constantly recurring feature of early nineteenth century biography, and the occasional biographer who failed altogether to provide them was likely to be rebuked by reviewers. Chapter II described how biographers at this time were expected to describe the private as well as the public life. The biographer should, in Napier's words, give "a full view of his hero's character and actions." Anecdote was an important component of this "full view," as he made clear in an Edinburgh article:

> We do not recollect any book calling itself the history of a life, more unpardonably deficient, in all that constitutes the charm and soul of biography. We are never permitted to see the great man in his private and voluntary occupations ... [there is no] sketch or anecdote that might fix a distinguishing feature of private character in the memory.[3]

Brougham's long and adverse article on Stewart's Account of Dr. Robertson in the Edinburgh centred around the same criticism: "The care with which Mr. Stewart has avoided all descriptive anecdote, is indeed mortifying to the very natural curiosity inspired by a perusal of Robertson's works."[4]

1. But cf. Altick's view, that "biographical materials do not make biographies, and this flood ... had the actual effect of diverting the biographical impulse into a side channel." (Lives and Letters, pp. 33-34.)
2. Curiosities of Literature, V, 173.
3. Edinburgh Review XIII (October 1808), 149. (Review of Lives of Washington.)
4. Ibid. II (April 1803), 232.

Brougham's opinion is central to the whole critical theory of biography in this period. "Personal biography" required that the author should "stoop" to anecdote, and if he failed to do this, the work quite simply was not biographical.

The view that anecdotes were a vital ingredient of biography was thus part of a wider taste, which was an insistence on depicting "the man" rather than the history of his time.[1] It was the function of anecdotes to fill out the profile, and to bring to life the figure who could only be indicated by the outward details of his life. The editor of Addisoniana prefixed his collection of anecdotes with a "Sketch of the Life of Addison," which was intended merely as a frame-work on which to hang the vivifying anecdotes:

> The life of Addison having been written by various hands, it will not be expected that much can be added to what is already told; and the nature of the present work requires only a general outline of those features which it is the business of the following pages to fill up and portray in all their minute and particular circumstance.[2]

Addison's life, in other words, could not be related entirely by anecdotes, which require a biographical and chronological setting, but certainly could not be told without them either. In an earlier chapter it was shown how the art of biography was understood, in part, as the ability to select and use the telling detail. With anecdotes, similarly, readers looked for a representation in miniature. Anecdotes were used by biographers not principally to provide relief, but to summarise aspects of the subject, clinch them, and make them memorable.[3] It was this sort of literary

1. The commentators' insistence on this, seen particularly in their repudiation of "Life and Times" biography, is fully discussed above, pp. .
2. Addisoniana (1803), I, xv. The anonymous editor was Sir Richard Phillips.
3. "What is recognised is the connection, in every miniature episode, between the unique occurrence and the general nature it inevitably illustrates." Fothergill, p.26.

economy which impressed D'Israeli:

> A well-chosen anecdote frequently reveals a character, more happily than an elaborate delineation; as a glance of lightning will sometimes discover what has escaped us in full lights,[1]

while James Northcote noted that anecdotes were unmatched in revealing the real character of the subject:

> Anecdotes ... are always valuable, as being frequently more illustrative of the real dispositions of men than their actions of greater publicity, and therefore particularly requisite in biography.[2]

Such statements echo the advocates of Plutarch.[3]

For the great majority of biographers, though, anecdotes provided another way of satisfying the wish of readers to be "taken behind the scenes," and of giving new insights into the subject's personal - and even domestic - life. A great man's valet or servant could provide anecdotes which revealed much of the essential man;[4] in Pride and Prejudice it is the anecdotal talk of Darcey's housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, which first reveals the true, hidden nature of the man.[5] Croker equated domestic anecdotes with the true character:

> Anecdotes of the private life of remarkable persons are one of the most amusing and not least valuable departments of history; they bring the reader more intimately acquainted with the character of the individual than public events can do.[6]

1. Literary Miscellanies, p.16.
2. Life of Reynolds, I, ix.
3. See above, pp.20-23.
4. "More knowledge may be gained of a man's real character by a short conversation with one of his servants than from a formal and studied narrative begun with his pedigree and ended with his funeral." The Rambler, 60.
5. Pride and Prejudice, Ch. XLIII.
6. Quarterly Review XVI (October 1816), 208. (Review of Warden's Conversations with Buonoparte.)

This view was enthusiastically enlarged upon by the London Magazine reviewer of Spence's Anecdotes in 1820; for him the anecdotes were so revealing that they cancelled the need for any more formal biography:

> Their slight but characteristic sketches, - afford a truer insight into the real characters of these eminent persons, than could be gathered from whole tomes of biography, written to set off the poet, with little knowledge of, or regard to, the man. From Spence's hint of Prior's slipping from Oxford and Bolingbroke, to pass the evening with his Chloe at a little ale-house, we have a clearer inkling of the author of ALMA and HANS CARVEL, than could be collected from the grave histories of the negotiator of Utrecht. [1]

Dr. Johnson relished anecdotes because they were revealing, but also because their subject-matter consisted of "small and petty occurrences," (of which "the main of life is, indeed, composed.")[2] They therefore made biography more realistic. They also made it more applicable,[3] a favourite view of Johnson's, and one restated by "Lady Irwin" in one of Bingley's Biographical Conversations (1818), when she claims that "anecdotes of private and domestic life" are the most effective, because "the happiness or misery which is detailed in such anecdotes, it is at least within the bounds of possibility, we may ourselves experience."[4]

D'Israeli would not perhaps have agreed with Johnson that "histories of the downfall of kingdoms and revolutions of empires are read with great tranquillity;"[5] yet he shared the view that what was important and

1. London Magazine I ii (February 1820), 192. D'Israeli agreed with this view (Curiosities of Literature, V, 173.)
2. The Rambler, 68.
3. See below, Chapter V, "The Uses of Biography".
4. W. Bingley, p.4. This sort of easy identification was also the rationale for the death-bed scene, as Hayley pointed out: "In sketches of biography the latter hours of the person commemorated are observed to excite a peculiarity of interest, which Addison has well explained by saying - "The dying man is one, whom, sooner or later, we shall certainly resemble."" (Life of Cowper, III, 460)
5. The Rambler, 60.

elevated was also remote from human experience. His Dissertation upon Anecdotes placed them first of all as a valuable material of history: "It is alone by anecdote that the genius of an age or nation is thoroughly to be understood." He argued that everywhere it is the individual and parochial which is more interesting and more valuable than the general and national. A parish register might prove more interesting than "a dull chronicle of the reign of monarchs," and an historian should "oftner have recourse to diaries of individuals, than the archives of a nation."[1] This highly Johnsonian view of history as being remote from human experience is fundamental to D'Israeli's arguments. Anecdotes in his view were what humanised history, and brought it closer to biography.

The enthusiasm for anecdotes grew up at the same time as literary biography was becoming a popular genre, and the two tastes are connected. The lives of authors were particularly liable to anecdotal narration, as Stanfield pointed out:

> If the character be a literary one, the temptations for the gathering of anecdotes are multiplied. Every tale, incident, or saying, that can be collected, is seized with avidity.[2]

Brougham, in his comments on Stewart's Account of Dr. Robertson, made the distinction between the "literary biography" of an author, and what Stewart had actually provided, a "dissertation upon the merits of his works." The literary biography of a writer "is a narrative ... of the events which distinguished the progress of his mind in its literary attainments," and requires the sort of illustration which anecdotes provide.[3] "Without the use of literary anecdote," wrote D'Israeli, "it is

1. Literary Miscellanies, pp. II, 6-7, 9.
2. Essay, p.60. See also D'Israeli's essay "Literary Anecdotes" (Curiosities of Literature V, 173-178.)
3. Edinburgh Review III (April 1803), 232.

vain to attempt literary biography."[1] He attacked those who, apparently "born with an antipathy to anecdotes," demanded merely the "works" of an author. He emphasised that anecdotes "serve as a comment on" an author's writings, and thought it "certain that these little circumstances serve greatly to lead us into his genius, and the proper understanding of many passages."[2] Wordsworth's view that an author's works provided the only biography which was required[3] met with little support. Brougham argued that literary biography should contain anecdotal information for the very reason that it was what could not be elicited from the writings. Readers, he wrote,

> would be disappointed at finding, in the biography of an author, no account of his manners - no anecdotes of his peculiarities - no personal history of the man; because these are circumstances on which the recital of his literary achievements throw little or no light.[4]

It was this sort of information which Brougham regarded as the province of literary biography. Carlyle went further. In his Edinburgh notice of Lockhart's Life of Burns, he put the interest of Burns' poems very firmly in the background ("mere occasional effusions"), stating that "true and genial as his poetry must appear, it is not chiefly as a poet, but as a man, that he interests and affects us."[5] The same was true even of Cowper, whose life was less striking than Burns'. John Johnson, sending to Hayley information for the life of Cowper, wrote that he was

1. Literary Miscellanies, p.45.
2. Ibid., p. 54.
3. "Our business is with their books .... And, of poets more especially, it is true - that, if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished." ("Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns." Prose Works III, 122.)
4. Edinburgh Review III (April 1803), 231.
5. Ibid. XLVIII (December 1828), 273.

"aware of the necessity that is imposed ... on you, by the Laws of Biography, to speak of the man Cowper, as well as the poet."[1] The close association of anecdotes with literary biography was cemented at this time.

These views about anecdotes are strikingly demonstrated in the comments on the two major biographies of Sheridan published during the period. Watkins' Life was published some months after Sheridan's death in 1816; it was a long and dull work, and was scarcely reviewed at all. Moore clearly believed that Watkins' treatment left much to be desired, and set to work on his own biography. This Life of Sheridan (1825), long delayed by Moore's enforced absence abroad, did not strike the reviewers as an improvement. Lockhart reviewed them together in the Quarterly, condemning both on the grounds which were becoming increasingly common as biographical criticism, that they neglected to present "the man ":

> The works of Dr. Watkins and Mr. Moore are, as it appears to us, inexplicably, and almost equally, deficient in anecdotes of Mr. Sheridan's private history .... The stateliness of their historical vein stoops reluctantly to even the occasional record of the personal adventures and domestic habits of their hero, although these were precisely the matters that ought to have occupied the chief part of their attention.[2]

Lockhart's complaint that Sheridan "the man" was ignored in order to portray the dramatist and legislator was echoed by another reviewer's criticism that Moore's "fastidiousness had rendered the details of an eccentric and diversified life more sterile than the anecdotical taste

1. Letter dated November 2, 1801. Bodleian M.S. Eng. Misc. d. 134 fol. 86v.
2. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1828), 591.

of the time will relish."[1] According to these lights Moore's work was a failure.[2] Yet he did not produce this sort of biography by accident. His journal reveals that he was a lover of anecdotes, and he often wrote them down. The dryness of the work stemmed from Moore's notions of what was proper to biography, and not to any lack of material. Even when an anecdote was called for and he had one to hand, he often did not use it. The most he would do was mention a trait - for example Sheridan's "boyishness" - and illustrate it with an anecdote in a footnote.[3] Other anecdotes about Sheridan he collected but did not use at all. This is revealed in a journal entry for October 21st, 1818:

> Walked to meet Rogers, who said he would call upon me. Talked chiefly of Sheridan. Told me several anecdotes, some of which I have written down in my notebook as fit to use; the rest practical jokes, not easily tellable."[4]

The examples of anecdote which he quoted (such as Sheridan strewing the hall with plates and cutlery) are not found in his Sheridan, but do turn up, interestingly enough, in the Sheridaniana, a volume of anecdotes published in 1826. In this Moore's deficiences as Sheridan's biographer are specifically cited as the justification of a new work:

> Had Mr. Moore's work at all answered the expectations of the admirers of wit and of Sheridan, who looked on the annonce of his life by Mr. Moore, as a promise of the opening of a rich mine of wit, the present Volume would not have been published. When the "Life" appeared, therefore, the disappointment was proportionate to the expectation - the anecdotes and the bon mots were equally few and familiar.[5]

1. New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal II (1825), 483.
2. There were favourable reviews, though, in the Monthly Review (CVIII, 149-162), and the European Magazine (NSI, 295-300).
3. Life of Sheridan, p. 456. The same procedure is used on pp. 438, 440 and 444.
4. Journal, II, 196.
5. Sheridaniana, pp. iv - v.

The Notice to Sheridaniana states the aim of the work - to "comprehend all that is most interesting and piquant" about Sheridan. The book was intended to appeal to the "lovers of gossip" which, the New Monthly reviewer claimed, was "that great majority of the book-buying public."[1] Biographies which omitted to include anecdotes were thus not only liable to strong criticism, but were even likely to be supplemented and superseded.

Sheridaniana, as the title indicates, was a different sort of book altogether from Watkins' or Moore's. Ana was a loose category for a numerous and popular branch of literature, and it always included a large proportion of anecdotes among its varied material. In France it had long been a well-established literary genre. J. M. Osborne records that "eighteenth century book catalogues often group together 'Livres Français d'Ana' as one of the set categories." In England the term had long been familiar; Osborne cites Chambers Cyclopaedia of 1728: "Ana's, or books in ana, are collections of the memorable sayings of persons of learning and wit."[2] Johnson in his Dictionary defined ana as "loose thoughts, or casual hints, dropped by eminent men, and collected by their friends." The poverty of both number and quality of English books in ana, especially when compared with the profusion of the French, was a frequent cause for lament at this time. It is found, for example, in S. W. Singer's Preface to his 1820 edition of Spence's Anecdotes, and is amplified in

1. New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal II, (1825), 483.
2. Preface to his edition of Spence's Anecdotes (Oxford 1966), I, xviii.

reviews of the work.[1] It was still a matter for comment for Croker in 1831, and he saw the comparative poverty of the genre as a reason for the sustained popularity of Boswell's Johnson.[2] It is strange that he should have done so at this date. While it is true that a few works apart from Boswell's were held up as shining examples of the genre - especially Selden's Table-Talk, Aubrey's Lives, and Spence's Anecdotes - there was a fast-growing catalogue of minor works in ana. The following may be mentioned from one number of the Monthly Literary Advertiser: The Spirit of the French Anas, Walpoliana, Swiftiana, Addisoniana, and Bookiana, all in two volumes.[3] The list is a long one from Verulamiana (1803), by way of Anonymiana (1809; 2nd edition 1818), to Bottomleiana (1831).

Books in ana were not, though, well established as a genre.[4] Often they were extended to include the bon-mots of, and anecdotes about the subject. The Walpoliana followed this formula, with the addition of a number of "original letters". A striking variant was Georgiana; or Anecdotes of George the Third (1820), of which more than half consists of monodies, elegies, elegaic lines and stanzas, tributes, odes, and dirges upon his death, topped with extracts from the funeral sermon. This loosening and extension of the much more rigid French formula was described

1. Eg. London Magazine, I, ii (February 1820), 191-192. Cf. also the opening of the preface to Swiftiana (1804): "Collections of the memorable sayings, and occurrences attending persons of learning and wit, have long been recognised in the learned world, under the title of ANA: and from the amusement and information they afford, it has often been lamented that, while they form a leading feature in the history of continental literature, they have been almost entirely neglected, and are nearly unknown in England."
2. Preface to his edition of Boswell, I, [v].
3. March 1806, p.18.
4. D'Israeli wrote that "Ana are usually confined to a single person, and chiefly run on the particular subject connected with that person." (Quarterly Review XLV (July 1820), 402), but this was his own ideal.

in the advertisement to Anonymiana:

> Whereas compilations of this species were originally supposed to consist of such heterogeneous and miscellaneous articles as casually dropped from the mouths of great men, and were noticed by their families, the plan was afterwards adopted by professed authors, who chose to write in that mode; and with some shew of reason, since certainly some good things, and on various subjects, may occur to men of literature, which cannot properly be introduced in their works; and though highly worthy of being preserved, would be lost, unless perpetuated in some such manner as this.[1]

This reluctance to let "good things" go unrecorded is natural to biographers, and not all of them at this time resisted the impulse with the firmness which Moore did in his Life of Sheridan. John Galt, for example, added an Appendix to his Life of Lord Byron, to contain the leftover anecdotes. He introduced it thus:

> The detached anecdotes of Lord Byron are numerous, and many of them much to his credit: those that are so, I am desirous to preserve, and should have interwoven them in the body of the work, could I have found a fitting place for doing so, or been able to have made them part and parcel of a systematic narrative.[2]

The haphazardness for which Galt apologised was more commonly claimed by compilers of ana as a positive ingredient of the form. Pinkerton wrote in the Preface to Walpoliana that his work was "beneath all criticism," and claimed attention merely as a bran-tub, with no pretensions towards the merit of literary composition:

> This apology may be requisite for the editor's disregard of any plan, or connexion of parts, in the present miscellany, which contains anecdotes, remarks, letters, etc. etc. just as they were registered, or happened to start from memory, or from the drawer. It would have been a matter of slight toil to have arranged the whole under distinct heads, had not the absence of art, and the want of order, been considered as charms of the landscape.[3]

1. 1809 , pp. vi-vii. The anonymous author was Samuel Pegge.
2. 1830 , p. [331]. The Appendix, pp. [331] - 364, contains thirty-three items.
3. Walpoliana I, iii.

Thus ana, sometimes inadvertently and sometimes deliberately, tended to be removed from the realms, and absolved from the rules of regular biography. Biographers could not ignore such books when gathering their material, however, for even the most worthless collection of biographical odds and ends might contain something of value, while good ana, as Stanfield put it, "claim a respectful degree of notice," because

> for auxiliary materials as well as essential facts, towards defining and elucidating an individual character, a more ample and discriminate treasure cannot be found in the whole range of biographical compilation.[1]

Collections of ana, then, as well as being a revealing branch of biography, were also another source of material for the biographer,[2] and a repository for scraps and anecdotes left over from a regularly composed biography.

Stanfield categorically distinguished a "mere relater of anecdotes" from a "writer of lives," dismissing the former as unsystematic, and his work as a "disorderly accumulation." He believed that anecdote collections, although useful, could not possibly be a substitute for properly composed biography:

> The rage for accumulating anecdotes gives enjoyment to the collector; and the exhibition gratifies those who look for the reiteration of amusement, but who would feel fatigued by the attention requisite to follow a series of facts and events, ... strung together by the laws of agency and consequence.[3]

This sort of contempt was rare, but Stanfield was not alone in his disparagement. Dugald Stewart in his Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid admitted that "a trifling incident" could occasionally "paint a peculiar

1. Essay, p.188.
2. Thomas Moore, for example, wrote to Murray particularly asking for Alexander Kilgour's Anecdotes of Lord Byron. (Letter of March 25, 1828; Letters, II, 602). His description of the offer made for his own trimmings from his Life of Byron is quoted above, pp.11-12.
3. Essay, pp. 16, 59.

feature better than the most elaborate description," but still claimed that there were "few, if any anecdotes" which could illuminate a character. Anecdotes were, he asserted, usually misleading, because they were not self-interpreting, and presumed in the reader "a rare capacity to discriminate and to generalise." Rather than risk "a very false conception" of his subject, Stewart chose deliberately to give no anecdotes, and to make his pages "barren".[1] Brydges was opposed to the perpetuation of anecdotes because they satisfy curiosity and then "lose their zest."[2] He argued repeatedly and convincingly that anecdotes worked against truthfulness by emphasising striking rather than solid characteristics. "Besides," he added, "the truth in half such anecdotes is sacrificed to a bon mot."[3]

It was a minority view that anecdotes hampered the attempt to portray character accurately; it demonstrates, though, that the inclusion of anecdotes in biography was not a slavish or unconsidered taste. More and more during the early nineteenth century biographers were coming to realise that anecdotes, like letters and diaries, could not be ignored, for they had "a potent power to illuminate the past which simple narration of events could not match."[4]

1. Biographical Memoirs, p. 513.
2. Autobiography II, 409.
3. Foreign Travel, 1, 5-7. Similar sentiments are found in the Autobiography, I, 161-162, and II, 119. Brydges even suggested that authors should take evasive action to deny "anecdote hunters" their material. (Anti-Critic (1821), p.131.)
4. J. R. Reed, p.12.

iv. Conversation

> We are not satisfied with the published works of a great author; we like to see him face to face .... It is not enough to hear a set speech; we must also hear his familiar conversation.
>
> James Crossley.[1]

> The most elaborate and highly finished delineation of a character is infinitely weaker and less instructive than a few well-chosen sketches from the open and easy intercourse of private life; and the powers of genius are often as justly estimated by the irregular brilliancy of conversation, as by the steadier and more concentrated lustre of published writings.
>
> Adolphus.[2]

Originally "ana" meant a collection of the memorable sayings of an individual, but this purpose was, as has been seen, adapted by early nineteenth century practitioners to embrace more varied subject-matter. There were, though, a few works which tried to confine themselves more strictly to verbal material, and these were often referred to as "table talk." The term is first recorded in the title of Selden's Table-Talk: being the Discourses of John Selden, Esq.; or his Sence of Various Matters of Weight and High Consequence (1689), a work much admired in our period. There was in the early nineteenth century a series of books entitled The Library of Anecdote and Table-Talk,[3] but here the title was effectively no more than an alternative for "ana". As far as it was differentiated, table-talk, as the title implied, recorded a man's sayings in company,

1. Retrospective Review I i (1820), 161. (Review of A MS Volume of Sir Thomas Browne's Letters to his Son.)
2. Biography, p.21.
3. Each volume was prefaced with Johnson's words, quoted from Boswell's Tour, "I love anecdotes...." See also Life of Johnson, I, 33.

among the circle of his friends. Hazlitt wrote of his own Table Talk:

> The title may perhaps serve to explain what there is of peculiarity in the style or mode of treating the subjects ... It ... occurred to me as possible to combine the advantages of these two styles, the literary and the conversational. ... The same consideration had an influence on the familiarity and conversational idiom of the style which I have used.[1]

It was a species of public conversation, and Coleridge's, published posthumously in 1835, is a notably pure example. Generally it was more extended, less committed to point and epigram than was the anecdote, and did not consist entirely of bon mots.

While table-talk - public conversation - cannot be clearly distinguished and detached from anecdotes and ana, the records of private conversation certainly can.[2] Although the use of conversation in biography had a long pedigree, going back at least to Roper's Life of Thomas More (1578), its exploitation was largely a post-Boswellian phenomenon. What Boswell had produced was a unique method of revealing the real man:

> That the conversation of a celebrated man, if his talents have been exerted in conversation, will best display his character is, I trust, ... well established in the judgment of mankind.[3]

Stanfield agreed about these possibilities, in one of the warmest passages in his whole Essay:

> Could conversation be retained with such a degree of accuracy, as to give a presumptive confidence in the fidelity of the reporter's statement, the information, as well as the spirit, imparted by this valuable addition, would appear to advance the composition of biography almost to a state of perfection. When it is

1. Advertisement to the Paris edition. Works VIII, 333.
2. Private conversation was, indeed, a source of anecdote. Thomas Moore wrote of those "oral communications" "in which the memory of the relater becoming, as it were, gradually charged, the sparks of anecdote are always more freely and livelily elicited." (Advertisement to Works of Sheridan (1821), I, vi.)
3. Life of Johnson, I, 31.

> recollected that many, if not most, of the essential scenes of life have been transacted in this form, their representation, if warranted by sufficient authority, would not only exhibit the external form, but would also lay open the internal springs and genuine operations, which disclose and generally determine the character.[1]

Compared with such enthusiastic expectations, the record of the age is disappointing in the extreme. Instead of becoming the trail-blazer for a new kind of biography, Boswell was treated largely as a sport. The artistic possibilities of lending biography "something of the realistic air of fiction"[2] were largely ignored. The spirit of the age favoured dialogue - witness Hazlitt, Peacock's novels, and Landor's Imaginary Conversations - but the literary conservatism which so shackled biography at this time brought even Stanfield up short with the blank statement that "the scrupulous delicacy of modern criticism does not admit the introduction of Dialogue into regular Biography."[3]

Most initial reactions to published conversation were positive; readers felt that an important new revelatory area of biography had been opened up. William Otter wrote of Clarke:

> As the letters now exhibit in a narrower field the qualities which accompanied him, when he spoke, no one who reads them with attention will be at a loss to discover what his conversation once was.[4]

Hazlitt, who was himself to collect the Conversations of James Northcote, wrote, "we take a particular interest, we confess, in what is thus spoken aside, as it were, and without a consciousness of being overheard."[5]

1. Essay, pp. 184-185.
2. Altick, p. 209.
3. Essay, p. 184.
4. Life of Rev. Edward Daniel Clarke (1824), p.340.
5. Edinburgh Review XXXI (December 1818), 83-84. (Review of Horace Walpole's Letters).

D'Israeli saw such publications as an almost supernatural way of reviving the past, and as the real counterpart of the fictional "Dialogues of the Dead" which had had such a vogue in the eighteenth century:

> With such substitutes we are enabled, in no ordinary degree, to realise the society of those who no longer exist; and (if I may hazard the expression) to become more real cotemporaries with the great men of another age, than were even their cotemporaries themselves.

The value of conversations was, for D'Israeli, exactly that of letters "not intended for publication," and he maintained the distinction, so often made with letters, between deliberate composition and unpremeditated effusion:

> When a man of genius displays conversible talents, his conversations are frequently more animated, more versatile and, I must add, more genuine than his compositions. Such literary conversations may be compared to waters which flow from their source; but literary writings resemble more frequently an ornamented fountain, whose waters are forcibly elevated in artificial irregularities, and sparkling tortuosities.[1]

The preference for reading what an author did not write rather than what he did is found in its most extreme form in Hazlitt's essay "On the Conversation of Authors." Hazlitt wittily describes the education which a writer rudely undergoes when he is snatched from the sanctuary of his study and "goes more into the world, where he finds that there are other opinions, and other pretensions to be adjusted besides his own." When they have thus adapted, authors become interesting:

1. Literary Miscellanies, p.43. The view is put rather less pompously in the Preface to the Walpoliana. "Complete ease and carelessness he regarded as the chief charms of conversation. To have employed therefore a more elevated style, or more formal arrangement, in these trifling pages, would have been so far from an improvement, that it would have destroyed their genuine effect." (I, [i] - ii.)

> There is more to be learnt from them than from their books. This was a remark of Rousseau's, and it is a very true one. In the confidence and unreserve of private intercourse, they are more at liberty to say what they think ....[1]

This was yet another dimension of the age of personality.

Brydges, while appreciating the value of conversation to biography, did not think that "much trust is to be put in" it. Boswell and D'Israeli had pointed out that only men who had exerted conversational talents were worth recording, and Brydges added that "very few" were so constituted as to conduct "this rapid mode of commmunicating knowledge." He claimed additionally that "few people talk unambitiously, and he who talks ambitiously seldom gives any useful information."[2] Hazlitt agreed that "the fault of literary conversation" is that it "resembles a battle rather than a skirmish, and makes a toil of a pleasure .... Those who have a reputation to lose are too ambitious of shining, to please."[3] The problem of distinguishing a speaker's real opinions from the false or the facetious was as difficult with printed conversations as with printed letters. Brydges wrote that "the charm of Boswell's 'Johnson' is the register of the great moralist's opinions, though much caution must be used in distinguishing what he merely throws out in the heat of argument."[4] Beyond this he saw the obvious distinction between written and spoken testimony - that they were used for different levels

1. From The Plain Speaker (1826). Works, XII, 32-33.
2. Foreign Travel, I, 87. (Letter dated July 21, 1824.)
3. "On the Conversation of Authors." Works, XII, 32. The Preface to Walpoliana stressed this as a general truth, to which Walpole was an exception: "Horace Walpole was not one of those who regard conversation as an exercise of gladiatorial talents, or who study moral maxims, or arrange bon mots, to be introduced into future colloquies."
4. Autobiography II, 43. It followed from this that a biography written by a close friend was considered most reliable, since he was most likely to be able to distinguish such false appearances. Thus Moore could remark with confidence that "to such sallies, whether in writing or conversation, but little weight is to be allowed." (Life of Byron, I, 24.)

of meaning and seriousness, and to judge and interpret conversation as if it were considered composition could not fail to be misleading. He thought that this applied particularly to Byron.[1] The difference between writing and talking is not just a difference of medium, as Sydney Smith pointed out to Lord Holland:

> I know your theory is that a man should write as he talks, in which I have the good luck to differ from you totally; for in talking eyes legs arms and fingers help .... A man who writes as he talks should give a lively engraving of himself on every page.[2]

Maria Edgeworth's refusal to retail any of her father's conversation sprang from principles similar to those which Brydges held:

> His openness in conversation went too far, almost to impudence; exposing him not only to be misrepresented, but to be misunderstood. Those, who did not know him intimately, often took literally what was either said in sport, or spoken with the intention of making a strong impression for some good purpose.[3]

If this were the direct effect of a man's conversation on his hearers, the further inscrutibility imparted by its printing out would greatly increase the chances of misinterpretation. She refused to regret her omission, and defended it on several grounds - that to have kept a record of her father's conversation "would have destroyed our mutual confidence," that such information would at the best be useless and at the worst highly misleading to the public, and that only Boswellian thoroughness, which she could never hope to attain, could give any proper idea of the

1. Autobiography, II, 162. Charles Bucke made a similar complaint about Moore's Byron: "I was greatly surprised, and ... not a little offended at the biographer's having given permanence to what, I should hope, was but a mere momentary opinion of Lord Byron." Life of Akenside (1832), p. 213.
2. Letters, I, 113.
3. Memoirs II, 361-362.

original.[1]

The publishing of conversations which breached private confidence was so uncommon, compared with letters and diaries, that fulminations against them were correspondingly rare. One has to wait for N. P. Willis' Pencillings by the Way (1835) for a concerted attack on published conversation.[2] Bishop Percy took exception to the practice on grounds more public and moral than Maria Edgeworth's. He felt that the anti-social effects were the most important, and feared for conversation what Sydney Smith had feared for letters - that the practice of publishing them would render them "not worth keeping up."

> It is surely an exception more than venial to violate one of the first and most sacred laws of society, by publishing private and unguarded conversation of unsuspecting company into which he was accidentally admitted.[3]

The feeling of outrage at abusing social confidence and hospitality is found frequently in scattered attacks on the publications of Byron's various amanuenses during the latter part of the period. A generation earlier Brougham had given vent to an extraordinary outburst in the first number of the Edinburgh Review:

1. Ibid. II, 365. As an account of Maria Edgeworth's views, this should be balanced by her Preface to Castle Rackrent (1800). "The talents of a biographer are often fatal to his reader. For these reasons the public often judiciously countenances those, who without sagacity to discriminate character, without elegance of style to relieve the tediousness of narrative, without enlargement of mind to draw any conclusions from the facts they relate, simply pour forth anecdotes and retail conversations, with all the minute prolixity of a gossip in a country town." (P.3.)
2. See Altick, pp. 130-131.
3. Posthumous note to the third edition of Anderson's Life of Johnson (Edinburgh, 1815), p.6.

> There is one kind of sport that we cannot help thinking as cruel and treacherous, as that of shooting birds by surprise, although men only, and not birds, are its objects. It consists in gaining admittance into literary and private circles; receiving all manner of assistance and polite attention; passing whole nights in such society; listening to the unrestrained converse of the social hours, with the invidious ear of a spy; suppressing the breath of censure, in order to hear the more; taking advantage even of the sentiments of friendship and hospitality: and all this for the base purpose of publishing what has been incautiously told, or taken by surprise.[1]

Coming as it does, in the middle of a genial account of Scandinavian field-sports, this is perplexing in its outrage, yet is an indication of the reception which the Boswell formula would have met if it had caught on. The tone, and several of the phrases, anticipate Peacock's treatment of Moore's Life of Byron a generation later.[2]

The reasons why conversation was so rarely published, so little used by biographers, and therefore so little discussed are worth some speculation. Brydges suggested that good conversation was simply a much rarer accomplishment than good letter-writing,[3] and certainly there were no manuals of instruction, no Complete Conversationalist. Another difficulty was that whereas a letter required only a recipient, recorded conversation demanded an amanuensis ready with his note-taking equipment in the right place at the right time; compared with letters the survival rate for conversation is infinitessimal. Even if circumstances were auspicious, there was still the arduous business of transcription to be done before a conversation could even begin to rival the usefulness of a

1. Edinburgh Review I (October 1802), 169. (Review of Acerbi's Travels.)
2. Westminster Review XII (April 1830), [269]-304.
3. Foreign Travel, I, 87.

letter. As material for biography, conversation was even more fraught with difficulty. Unlike letters, diaries, and autobiographical pieces, it could not be resurrected from the past. Only a biographer in the highly unusual position of Boswell, collecting his material from a living subject for planned future use, could ever possess more than the odd item of conversational material. The biographers who did possess such material would most probably be relatives or intimates, and would be, like Maria Edgeworth or Lockhart, the people most reluctant to reveal it. No amount of ransacking of archives, or the fabled cob-webbed trunks, could ever reveal such material. Lastly, even if conversational records were available, they were much less satisfactory as practical biographical material than the other forms; a diary or a sequence of letters, for example, could be used as a chronological framework for a biography, whereas conversations were at best occasional illustrative material. Despair of emulating Boswell certainly inhibited biographers from attempting to follow his pattern,[1] but these practical obstacles must have been a much more effective deterrent.

"Accurate interpretation of tone, also - the private wave length upon which the writer communicated with each correspondent -," writes Altick, "was indispensable to the correct evaluation of a letter's contents."[2] To interpret conversation was an even more hazardous exercise, and one so undependable that even biographers who might have used it preferred to forego it altogether. Lockhart explained why:

1. As F. R. Hart suggests, (E.L.H. XXVII, 58.)
2. Lives and Letters, p.318.

> To report conversations fairly, it is a necessary prerequisite that we should be completely familiar with all the interlocutors, and understand thoroughly all their minutest relations, and points of common knowledge, and common feeling, with each other. He who does not, must be perpetually in danger of misinterpreting sportive allusion into serious statement .... In proportion as a man is witty and humorous, there will always be about him and his a widening maze and wilderness of cues and catchwords, which the uninitiated will, if they are bold enough to try interpretation, construe, ever and anon, egregiously amiss - not seldom into arrant falsity.

It was principally for these reasons that Lockhart declined "to Boswellize Scott."[1] Lockhart was writing with Byron's fate at the hands of his various amenuenses before him as an historical fact. More than 150 of Byron's interlocutors recorded their experiences in one form or another,[2] and many of them were victims of his habit of mystification. The reviewer of one of them commented:

> It is very true that Lord Byron was fond of trifling in conversation, ... he was, we know, well content to startle and astonish people who thrust their impertinence upon him; he was beset by a pestilential race, who watched and noted down all he said and did.[3]

Thomas Moore, as Byron's biographer, was well aware of the real value of his subject's conversation, and when he quoted it he often went a good way towards neutralising its effects with cautionary comment:

> Though such was, doubtless, the general cast of his opinions at this time, it must be recollected, before we attach any particular importance to the details of his creed, that, in addition to the temptation, never easily resisted by him, of displaying his wit at the

1. Life of Scott IV (1837), 151.
2. See the collection by E. J. Lovell, Jr., His very Self and Voice (New York, 1954). Contemporary recordings of Coleridge can be found in Coleridge the Talker, by R. W. Armour and R. F. Howes (New York, 1940).
3. The Athenaeum CXXXVIII (June 19, 1830). (Review of Kennedy's Conversations on Religion with Lord Byron.)

> expense of his character, he was here addressing a person who, though, no doubt, well-meaning, was evidently one of those officious, self-satisfied advisers, who it was the delight of Lord Byron at all times to astonish and mystify.[1]

In the same way that the publication of private letters threatened the pure continuance of the genre, the publication of conversations, or the mere knowledge that any listener was likely to make a note of them, might affect what was said. For obvious reasons the comparison is limited, and conversation must have been much less inhibited than private letters demonstrably were. Peacock was provoked by the breach of trust and by the lapse of manners in characters such as his own Mr. Eavesdrop. He wrote that Byron was in Italy

> haunted in his retirement by varieties of the small Boswell or eavesdropping genus, who, as a very little penetration must show him, would take the first opportunity of selling his confidences to the public, if he should happen to drop anything for which the prurient appetite of the reading rabble would present a profitable market.[2]

To Peacock, though not to all of Byron's contemporaries, the spuriousness of such information was obvious; in Hart's words, "for Byron, the post-Boswell awareness that every visitor had his notebook, every talkative table its Medwin or its Lady Blessington, made sincerity inconceivable."[3] A reviewer of Medwin's and Dallas' reminiscences of Byron put the matter more clearly:

1. Life of Byron I, 135.
2. Westminster Review XII (April 1830), 271-272. (Review of Moore's Life of Byron.)
3. E.L.H. XXVII, 55.

> For Captain Medwin, Mr. Dallas, and the other cloud of biographers with whom we are threatened, there can be but one plea; that Lord Byron was acquainted with their intentions to journalise him. Yet, if they can offer this, it follows, that the "Conversations" lose even their trivial use as discoveries of his mind, and are as artificial and as much made up for sale as any other work of the author.[1]

The parallel with Byron's letters is exact; his conversation was a similar extension of his public facade. Some years earlier Barry O'Meara's Napoleon in Exile; or, a Voice from St. Helena - one of the very few biographies written in the Boswellian style - had had a similar reception. A reviewer claimed that Napoleon, knowing that his words were being recorded, carefully "regulated his subjects" so that they should add up to the justification of his conduct which he had been prevented from writing.[2] In this way his amenuensis became his dupe.

1. Universal Review II (November 1824), 243.
2. British Critic NS XVIII (July 1822), 34.

v. Conclusion

These two chapters which have dealt with the materials of biography qualify in several important respects the conclusions of the preceeding chapter. Against the hesitant evolution of an aesthetic for biography, one which stressed an appropriate size and form, and which required the biographer to be in charge of his materials, must be placed a comparatively philistine view of the biographer's function. Many commentators rated highly the passive role of the biographer as a collector and smooth purveyor of material which was most valuable when he intruded into it least. Biography was thus being stretched two ways; at the same time as it was being greeted as a new and important literary genre it was expected to provide in ungarbled form original data for the scientific study of man. The interest in source-material meant that that became the major component of published biography, and it was the incorporation of such material into a biography of respectable artistic pretensions which caused for writers such problems as have been outlined. In fact it was impossible to satisfy both sets of demands, and most biographers took the easier course. The uncritical equation of letters, diaries, ana and conversation with the truth was at best credulous and naive, and the concern with the pollution of these sources was correspondingly strong. The provision of so much source-material was popular because readers could believe that they were exercising their own judgment; "do-it-yourself" biography appealed to readers who felt a distrust of the "meddling intellect." As a result we see during the period a strong defence, broadly ranged under the banner of authenticity, of the very class of biography which was being attacked on aesthetic grounds.

In several ways the paradox can be explained, but it cannot be removed. The two demands on biographers were fundamentally contradictory. One of the chief results was a polarisation of types of biography, which very soon became apparent in "Life" or "Life and Letters" as variant titles. (This simply made an already emergent distinction official.) A similar distinction came to be recognised between lives and ana, with the view that there was room for both species, but that they should not be confused. A reviewer of Northcote's Life of Reynolds wrote that the "anecdotes are so inartificially strung together, or rather have so little connection, that the performance assimilates much more to a bundle of bon-mots, or witticisms, or 'felicities in ana,' than to the character of a regular composition."[1] The criticism was simply that the book was mistitled. As an ingredient of "regular biography" anecdotes, like letters, required "the hand of a skilled writer." What we see, then, is biography taking off as an independent form, but at the same time taking with it requirements from these other species (life-and-letters, ana, etc.). For biography proper the findings of these chapters are simple - there was a repeated demand that biographers should illustrate and authenticate their work very fully with original, untouched material. It is very interesting to see how these tendencies have worked out a century and a half later. Currie's Life of Burns was a composite biography,[2] and with the addition of photographs would look very like the sort of biography which has become a feature of the 1970's - Stephen Spender's D. H. Lawrence

1. British Critic NS I (February 1814), 150.

2. The principal items in Currie were as follows: Prefatory remarks (pp. 1-31), Burns' autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore (pp. 34-57), Gilbert Burns' narrative of Burns (pp. 61-79), letter of Mr. Murdoch to J. C. Walker about Burns (pp. 87-98), letter of Dugald Stewart to Currie (pp. 137-152), Dr. M. Adair's account of a visit to Edinburgh with Burns (pp. 169-173), and a letter from Mr. Syme, describing a jaunt to Galloway with Burns (206-213).

and W. H. Auden, for example. Such works stand independent of regular biography, while the publishing of letters has become a literary enterprise entirely distinct again. This is seen notably in Churchill and Gilbert's Winston Churchill, where the letters and documents are given in companion volumes.

Back in the early nineteenth century, while the biographer was expected to use his tact and taste to provide a suitable size and shape for his work, any display of literary virtuosity on his part laid him open to the charge of insincerity. The view was put most clearly by Maria Edgeworth:

> Some may perhaps imagine, that the value of biography depends upon the judgement and taste of the biographer; but on the contrary it may be maintained, that the merits of a biographer are inversely as the extent of his intellectual powers and of his literary talents. A plain unvarnished tale is preferable to the most highly ornamented narrative. Where we see that a man has the power, we may naturally suspect that he has the will to deceive us, and those who are used to literary manufacture know how much is often sacrificed to the rounding of a period or the pointing of an antithesis.[1]

What all of the materials discussed here have in common is simply that they were believed to be more "original" and therefore more true. "That love of truth," wrote Maria Edgeworth, "which in some minds is innate and immutable, necessarily leads to a love of secret memoirs and private anecdotes."[2] Superficially irreconcilable with art, the truth became the fervently sought aim of biographers.

1. Author's Preface to Castle Rackrent, pp. 2-3.
2. Ibid., p. [1].

CHAPTER IV

WHAT SHOULD A BIOGRAPHER TELL ?

> Mr. Malone was quite a gentleman in his manners, and rather of a mild disposition, except when he had to support the truth, and then there were such firmness and spirit in what he said, as could hardly be expected from one so meek and courteous.[1]
>
> The more I think and the more opinion I receive about the Life of Sheridan, the more I see reason to quake upon the subject - Truth will be deadly, and vague praise will be cowardly - so what am I to do ?[2]
>
> Thomas Moore.

Thomas Moore, working on his Life of Sheridan, recorded in his journal how, after a sleepless night, he had decided to accept Macintosh's advice not to conceal Sheridan's "criminalities", and "to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth."[3] Although Stanfield wrote that the biographer "gives evidence upon oath,"[4] the middle term in the legal formula played only a very minor part in biographical theory and practice; "the whole truth" was rarely demanded. James Beattie thought that biographies, like "monumental inscriptions", belonged to history, and that "the writers of them should give the truth, if possible the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."[5] "The whole truth", though, was only rarely possible. Byron, writing about his Memoirs to Isaac D'Israeli in 1822, described how in them

1. John Taylor, Records of my Life (1832), II, 152.
2. Letter to Murray, December 23, 1817. Letters I, 434.
3. May 31, 1819. Journal II, 317.
4. Essay, pp. 139-140. See also p. 133: "To possess the noble confidence of declaring the whole truth, is the indispensable test required from the writer who engages in the composition of personal history."
5. Letter to Rev. Dr. Laing, December 14, 1790. Forbes, Life of Beattie II, 271.

> I have told what, as far as I know, is the truth - not the whole truth - for if I had done so I must have involved much private and some dissipated history; but, nevertheless, nothing butthe truth, as far as regard for others permitted it to appear.[1]

Wordsworth, in his comments on Currie's Life of Burns, argued that the impossibility of relating the whole truth was a strong reason for not attempting it:

> If, said I, it were in the power of a biographer to relate the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, the friends of the surviving kindred of the deceased, for the sake of general benefit to mankind, might endure that such heart-rending communication should be made to the world. But in no case is this possible.[2]

Reviewers and biographers agreed in principle that biography should be truthful.[3] For Adolphus the imperative was unmistakable:

> We must remember that Biography, as partaking of the character of History, is subject to the same inflexible rules, and deviations from truth even in favour of the warmest friendship are blemishes to be atoned for, not refinements to be applauded.[4]

Biographers and autobiographers alike repeatedly paid respect to the principle. Monk claimed in the Preface to his Life of Bentley that he had "had no object in view except the establishment of truth,"[5] and Haydon wrote in the Introduction to his Autobiography that "When a man writes a life of himself or others the principle of truth should be the basis of

1. Letters and Journals VI, 88.
2. Prose Works III, 118.
3. Yet again the way had been pointed by Johnson. The Rambler 60 concludes: "If we owe regard to the memory of the dead, there is yet more respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth." Boswell quoted all of this final paragraph to justify his own treatment of Johnson. (Life I, 31.)
4. Biography, p.28.
5. P.xiii. See also the Eclectic review of the work, 3rd Series IV (September 1830), 190.

his work."[1] Still, "the truth and nothing but the truth" would be a misleading summary of the principles involved in this area of biography. Altick has written:

> Biographers seldom lied outright, and to that extent their professed or implied adherence to the code of their veracious craft was not disingenuous; but they did not hesitate to adjust facts where desirable, and even more, they felt bound to suppress whatever, in their judgment, posterity should not be told. From every side, the spirit of the age pressed the biographer to select, evade, conceal, and extenuate.[2]

None of these are easily observable features of biographical practice, and only the last, extenuation, need be visible at all in the completed work. Superabundance of material often compelled biographers to use some form of selection, and it was therefore open to them to select from those areas of their subject's life which were not discreditable. Some of Thomas Moore's letters to John Murray during the composition of his Life of Byron show this selective process at work.[3] He described his methods more revealingly to Mary Shelley:

> I must do with him [Shelley], as with Byron - blink nothing (that is, nothing but what is ineffable) - bring what I think shadows fairly forward, but in such close juxtaposition with the lights, that the latter will carry the day. This is the way to do such men real service.[4]

It is difficult at this point to draw the line between selection and suppression - should one say that the harmful has been suppressed, or the innocuous selected ? Brougham actually preached this sort of selectiveness as a principle, writing that biographers should "delineate only those parts which decency does not command us to veil."[5]

1. Autobiography and Memoirs 1, 3.
2. Lives and Letters, p.147.
3. A good example is the letter of January 25, 1830. (Letters II, 683.)
4. Letter dated September 3, 1829. Letters, II, 653.
5. Edinburgh Review III (April 1803), 234. (Review of Stewart's Account of Dr. Robinson.)

Evasions and concealments were commonplace. They were brought into being not only by the desire to enhance the subject, but often by a pressing need to render him an exemplary figure.[1] In addition such treatment was frequently made necessary by the code which prohibited absolutely the mention of insanity, drunkenness, matrimonial strife and infidelity, sexual indulgence, and, Altick suggests,[2] filial impiety. These were subjects for evasion and concealment, whoever the practitioners or victims were. In fact, any reference to anyone in a biography, even a minor figure, being actuated by any species of unaimiable behaviour was likely to meet objections.[3] Maria Edgeworth's "indiscretion" in publishing her father's "sneer at the union which gave her birth" was strongly attacked by Croker in the Quarterly. He believed that this, like the details of Edgeworth's unseemly marriages, was a truth which ought not to have been told:

> It is one of the inconveniences not to say the indecencies of what Miss Edgeworth has chosen to publish, that it brings under public notice, and consequently under public criticism, subjects which should have remained buried in the bosum of her family.[4]

Jeffrey in the Edinburgh agreed, finding "some traits of indelicacy" in exactly those areas about which Croker had protested. In particular he thought that the fact of Edgeworth's marriage successively to two sisters might "well have been allowed to repose in the obscurity into which it had naturally fallen."[5] It was a common observation of critics that a

1. For an account of didactic biography see below, Ch. VI.
2. Life and Letters, p.165.
3. Reviewing Hayley's Life of Cowper, for example, Jeffrey mentioned "little jealousies on the part of Mrs. Unwin (which the biographer might well have passed over in silence.)" (Edinburgh Review III (April 1803), 71-72.
4. Quarterly Review XXIII (July 1820), 513, 536.
5. Edinburgh Review XXXIV (August 1820), 122.

biographer's treatment of his subject did not require him to "draw his frailities from their dread abode."

The greatest problem which the modern investigator faces when dealing with the treatment of the taboo subjects in that they were taboo for reviewers and commentators as well as for biographers. The principles have therefore to be deduced from the habits of writing men, and are largely unstated.[1] Only on the rare occasion that a biographer stepped out of line might the reviewers speak out, but even then they were as likely to let such a publication sink in silence. Nevertheless, the small amount of evidence which can be adduced points to a hardening of public attitudes towards vice and laxity. F. K. Brown, in his pioneering study of the period, Fathers of the Victorians, cites examples of sexual innuendo, and open reference to the illegitimate children of the great, from the ultra-respectable Public Characters at the turn of the century.[2] A generation later, though, Thomas Moore admitted to having suppressed details of "certain affairs of gallantry in which he [Byron] had the reputation of being engaged" "because of the spirit of the times." He felt "a deference to that particular sense of decorum in this country, which marks the mention of such frailties as hardly a less crime than the commission of them."[3] "Such frailties" became progressively unmentionable, and by 1831 could hardly be referred to at all.[4]

1. With insanity there simply is not enough evidence even to surmise the principles. Hayley wrote: "The misfortune of mental derangement is a topic of such awful delicacy, that I consider it the duty of a biographer rather to sink, in tender silence, than to proclaim ...." (Life of Cowper, I, 34.) Naturally enough this claim was not taken up by reviewers. The insanity of George III may have influenced behaviour; certainly any discussion of his "unhappy malady" was considered "indecorous." (George the Third: his Court, and Family (1820), II, 368.
2. 1961, pp. 17-18.
3. Life of Byron, II, 51.
4. A.O.J. Cockshut describes the years 1813 to 1914 as "a parabola of prudence and restraint. It is at its height from about 1840 to 1875." (Truth to Life, p.32.)

Underlying these changes was religious influence, particularly that of the Methodist and the Evangelical Movements. The direct effect of these - and particularly of the latter - upon religious biography was so substantial that religious biography may be regarded almost completely as a subspecies; F. K. Brown describes its most important branch:

> A story of piety and single-minded devotion is told by all the biographies of the Evangelical clergy. There are more of them than of the laymen of the Party and few indeed of the High Church clergy. The biographers were naturally Evangelicals, except in extraordinary cases, usually the subject's son, daughter, wife, niece, or son-in-law, curate or chosen disciple .... There is no known one of the clerical biographies but was reprinted, and some of them many times.[1]

The indirect effect of the Evangelical Movement, though, on the attitudes of the age towards all forms of sensual indulgence, was enormous, and the effect on biography very marked. Harold Nicolson's picture of the Victorian Age dropping like a curtain[2] has been radically reassessed in recent years, and the antecedents of its more striking features traced back to the later eighteenth century. F. K. Brown's book outlines, with a wealth of illustrative evidence, the great changes which the Evangelical Movement brought about in public life in the early nineteenth century. Religious life, and the effects of religion on life, changed almost beyond recognition during the generation after Wilberforce founded the "Proclamation Society" in 1787, and this period was indeed the footing of the Victorian Age, the transitional period during which, according to Brown's reviewer, "respectability became the chief social virtue while religion was a prime

1. Fathers of the Victorians, p.403. A reviewer of Gilbert's Life of Williams wrote: "The Biographical department of Dissenting Literature is more remarkable for its extent than for its excellence .... But few can claim an exemption from the neglect which eventually awaits publications of this kind." (Eclectic Review NS XXIV (October 1825), 281.)
2. The Development of English Biography, p.110.

interest of millions. Soon the century was to take on that tone of well-meaning idealism and grey prudishness which we now regard as typically Victorian."[1] With such forces at work, it was to be expected that most biographers would make their subjects conform to the times. Every age has its own Shakespeare, and it is hardly surprising that the one which produced Dr. Bowlder's should have produced biographies which were similarly emasculated.[2] The trend towards more and more suppression is clearly seen in the list of unmentionable subjects, unmentionable no matter who was involved.

Sexual promiscuity was one of the earliest targets of the reform campaign.[3] Early in the century Currie had displayed no awkwardness in concealing Burns' womanising. "The banks of the Ayr," he wrote, "formed the scene of youthful passions of a still tenderer nature, the history of which it would be improper to reveal."[4] For Thomas Moore, though, more than a quarter of a century later, the problems were far greater. He wanted to combine allegiance to the "sense of decorum" which forbade the mention of "frailities" with his own conviction that biographers should tell the truth. The inherent contradiction he resolved by the strange expedient of suppressing details of Byron's amorous history in England, while giving them in Italy, "a region where less caution is requisite," with a bold flourish. He explained that "to throw a veil altogether over these irregularities of his private life would be to afford - were it

1. T.L.S. January 5, 1962, p.17.
2. The author of the Family Shakespeare was Dr. Bowlder's sister Henrietta Maria, and the first edition (twenty plays, in four volumes) was published at Bath in 1807. Details are given by Dr. Susan Shatto in a letter to The Times, published March 30, 1976.
3. Any reference to sex at all was unusual. Bingley assures the reader in the preface to his Animal Biography that the work contains nothing which could embarrass a young lady, and the education of Byron's Don Juan contained nothing which "hints continuation of the species." (Don Juan I, xi.)
4. Life of Burns, I, 128.

even practicable - but a partial portraiture of his character."[1]

Drunkenness was a later target of the reformers; and temperance and total abstinence societies, F. K. Brown records, "sprang up only after 1830." In the earlier years of the century there was no sense of opprobrium in taking alcohol (though perhaps there was in drinking spirits.) "So far as is known, all Evangelical ladies and gentlemen took wine," remarks Brown, and he describes many of them.[2] Quite heavy drinking, unlike sexual laxity, continued into the nineteenth century as a feature of fiction (in Peacock's novels, for example) even when it was becoming a taboo subject in biography. In biography it became less and less mentionable, a process which can be observed in successive biographies of Burns. Currie could hardly have hoped - nor did he attempt - to suppress the fact that Burns was a tippler, when the three volumes of Works which the Life prefaced treated the delights of drink as a principal topic. Currie nonetheless tried to keep Burns' life more private than Burns himself had, remarking simply "let us refrain from the mention of errors over which delicacy and humanity draw the veil."[3] This discretion was insufficient for later commentators; Peterkin's Review of the Life and Writings of Robert Burns (1815) refutes in tedious detail Currie's picture of the habitual alcoholism of Burns' last years, concluding:

> The truth is, that the convivial excesses and other errors of Robert Burns, were neither greater nor more numerous than those which we every day see in the conduct of men who stand high in the estimation of society.[4]

1. Life of Byron II, 51. See also Moore's Journal entry for January 5, 1821; Journal, III, 188. Byron himself had pointed out that
   What men call gallantry, and gods adultery,
   Is much more common where the climate's sultry. (Don Juan, I, lxiii.)
2. Fathers of the Victorians, pp. 404, 405.
3. Life of Burns, I, 221.
4. Peterkin, pp. xlviii - xlix.

It is a determined effort, but leaves Burns in far worse light than Currie's suggestive silence had. By the time we reach Lockhart's Life of Burns (1828), all direct reference to Burns' drinking is omitted. Lockhart simply gives short extracts from some of the milder of the accounts cited by Peterkin.[1]

The truth about Cowper could not be presented even in the most roundabout way without proving objectionable either to his surviving relatives or to the biographer's scruples. Hayley's refusal to reveal Cowper's madness led him to give a false view of Cowper's life, and for this he was still being criticised more than twenty years later. A reviewer of Cowper's Private Correspondence sympathised with Hayley's inability to bear the thought of Cowper's affliction, but considered that

> this consideration, if allowed to have any other influence than that of leading him to touch the subject with all the delicacy of friendship, should have deterred him altogether from writing and publishing the Memoirs. There was no necessity imposed upon him. Had the life of Cowper been deemed a tale unfit for the public ear, it might have been left untold.[2]

The alternative of silence had already been suggested by Adolphus:

> He who professes to inform mankind is bound to inform them truly; but it is better to renounce the office of Biography, when it offers only the alternative of dishonest concealment or hateful disclosure.[3]

1. Life of Burns, pp. 174 ff. Sheridan's biographers similarly sought to extenuate, then conceal his drunkenness. Cf. the anonymous Memoirs of Sheridan (1816), pp. xxxi-xxxii; Watkins' Life of Sheridan (1816) II, 384; Moore's Life of Sheridan (1825) refers euphemistically to when "the Rubicon of the Cup was passed." (p. 683.)
2. Eclectic Review NS XXI (March 1824), 195. Hayley had defended himself against such criticism (Life of Cowper I, 109, IV, 174.) Southey supported Hayley's suppressions (Quarterly Review XXXI (March 1825), 257.)
3. Biography, pp. 29-30.

This was Peacock's view, which he still held forty years later:

> No man is bound to write the life of another. No man who does so is bound to tell the public all he knows .... As there is no moral compulsion to speak of the matter at all, it is better to let the whole story slumber in silence.[1]

Peacock's view was far removed from the practicalities of life-writing. There were no means, either moral or legal, of silencing or restraining a determined biographer, and the publication of a biography which was considered deficient could lead to the subject becoming, as Burns and Cowper did, a shuttlecock between opposing interpreters. Many writers who became biographers did so with genuine unwillingness, as Peacock did of Shelley, and only because they could not bear to see untruth and misrepresentation go uncorrected. Biographers adopted the reluctant stance more frequently than autobiographers, and usually more sincerely as well. Brougham wrote how "infinitely more agreeable" it was that biographers "interested in defending the memory of their friend" should tell the truth immediately rather "than that hereafter, as has uniformly happened in such cases, the unavoidable defect should be supplied by multiple falsehoods."[2] Thomas Moore used these arguments to defend his writing of some of the more intimate areas of Byron's life:

> Nor should I have felt that I had any right to allude thus to the religious opinions of one who had never, by promulgating his heterodoxy, brought himself within the jurisdiction of the public, had not the wrong impression, as it appears, given of those opinions, on the authority of Lord Byron, rendered it an act of justice to both friends to remove the imputation.[3]

1. Memoirs of Shelley, Brett-Smith's edition (Oxford, 1909), p.2.
2. Edinburgh Review II (April 1803), 238-239. (Review of Stewart's Account of Dr. Robertson.)
3. Life of Byron, I, 279.

The argument is the same one that Byron himself used to explain his writing of his own memoirs.[1]

While the practice of concealing intimate or contentious matters in biography was widely criticised by reviewers, there was no compensating praise for panegyrical biographies. Panegyric was attacked with as much vehemence as any other deficient branch of biography.[2] Indeed, it was sometimes singled out to the extent of being regarded as a distinct literary form, not to be judged as biography at all; a reviewer of Morgan's Memoirs of Price remarked dismissively that "the work before us is rather to be considered as a panegyric upon Dr. Price, than as a piece of biography."[3] Two important articles in the Eclectic, in 1826 and 1829, suggested a distinction between biography proper and those works, which although not necessarily pure panegyrics, do not set out in any way to be works of "professional" biography. The difficulties which arise from judging all the various biographical works by the same standards, as if they were all of similar scope, shared similar aims, and aspired to the same excellence, are apparent at every turn in the biographical criticism of the period. "There are two very different descriptions of biographical memoir," opened one of the Eclectic articles:

> One may be designated as historical, the other as elegaic or monumental. In the one, the distinguished character and memorable actions of the dead are the prominent subject of the narrative: in the other, the tribute of affection and regret naturally assumes a more sentimental cast.

1. See above, p. 40.
2. Panegyrical biographies were often compared to flattering portraits; one writer wrote that the main difficulty in giving a faithful account "arises from a disposition in the delineator of manners, similar to that which generally prevails in the painter of faces, namely, a certain habitual, and sometimes an involuntary bias towards flattery." (Memoirs of a Picture (1805), I, [iii].
3. British Critic NS V (February 1816), 137. It may be noted that the distinction is foreshadowed by Boswell (Life of Johnson I, 30). See also Works of Gray (1825), I, xxxii - xxxiii.

In a "monumental" memoir the reviewer sees no place for the activities of the "philosophical" or the "genuine" biographers, and criticism of the former by standards applicable only to the latter seems to him to be a perverse misapplication: "In reading such memorials, we find it equally necessary and desirable to dismiss every feeling of the critic; nor would it be fair to try such works by the standard of biographical excellence."[1] In exactly the same way the earlier article opens with a description of "several unpretending volumes of religious biography."

> Drawn up, for the most part, for the private circle of friendship or religious connexion, they seem to claim an exemption from the severity of criticism. Even a fair appreciation of their intrinsic value, in a literary point of view, might seem harsh and unfeeling to those who bring to the perusal of the volume the partial feelings inspired by personal intimacy and fond remembrance; and we respect those feelings too sincerely to wish to do them violence, although our stern notions of critical duty may restrain us from gratifying them to the utmost.

There is here a serious questioning of the literary role of such biographies, revealed in the reluctance of the writer either to suspend or to apply the rules of literary criticism. Both the numerousness and the size of these publications he finds difficult to accept, but allows that "if the public are of a different opinion, far be it from us to contest the point."[2] The huge extent of this sort of biography, and the reception it provoked, has been sufficiently indicated already. The general critical asperity of reviewers was so widespread, that it is almost surprising to find a generous comment like this:

> Those who were unacquainted with the estimable Author of the Dairyman's Daughter, will not think the volume too large, in which everything relating to him is thus affectionately accumulated.[3]

1. Eclectic Review 3rd Series II (August 1829), 149. (Review of Grimshaw's Memoir of Legh Richmond.)
2. Eclectic Review NS XXVI (July 1820), 56-57. (Review of Binney's Memoir of Morell.)
3. Ibid. 3rd Series II (August 1829), 149.

Surely, though, this is fair ? The harmlessness of such panegyrics had been remarked upon right at the beginning of the century by Brougham, who described how the death of a virtuous private citizen was likely to lead to his biography being written by a friend. Such men, he wrote, "naturally endeavour, by all possible means, to trumpet forth his praises, and conceal his defects even at the expence of truth." This whole class of biography Brougham saw as totally released from the rules generally governing the telling of the truth:

> In all this the public is wholly unconcerned; it is entirely a family matter. The interests of truth or of virtue can never be injured by the falsehoods which vanity or affection draw from a few private individuals, which are propagated through a narrow and insignificant circle, and which tend to gloss over the faults, or raise the virtues of a personage, so wholly unimportant, that no exaggerations can extend his notoriety, or prevent his name from being forgotten in a month.[1]

As there can come no general harm from exaggerating the virtues of a subject, he argues, so can there arise no general good from unearthing discreditable truths, since the account will be read only by friends and relations, who will simply be hurt. A great deal of critical indignation would have been saved had all reviewers passed by this large class of writings which were, after all, not attempting what Stanfield called the "sacred duties"[2] of the biographer. They were memoirs of the pious - often clergymen - meant as inspiring reading for the converted, and were reviewed largely in sectarian reviews. They belong, if anywhere, to the history of religion, not of biography.

Even if the distinction between these sorts of biography had been

1. Edinburgh Review II (April 1803), 236. (Review of Stewart's Account of Dr. Robinson.)
2. Essay, p.133. Hayley also wrote of his "sacred duty" to Cowper. (Letter to Lady Hesketh, September 16, 1805: Bodleian MS Eng. Misc. d. 135 fol. 119-120.)

commonly recognised, though, the case against panegyric would still have remained. The writing of panegyric fundamentally contradicted contemporary views of the function of biography. The view was stated clearly by Southey in his Quarterly article on lives of Nelson; although alive to the biographer's difficulties, and the occasional need for suppression, he complained:

> Not unfrequently the dead have been embalmed, when for the instruction of posterity they ought to have been dissected. It is not necessary, that the evil deeds of all men should be written in brass; but the effrontery of cloaking them over, not merely by indiscriminate eulogy, but by praising them for qualities the very opposite to those by which they were marked, is a species of falsehood as severely to be reprobated in literary history, as the crime of bearing false witness is in a court of law. There may be no occasion to gibbet such offenders, but it is intolerable that they should lie in state.[1]

Many agreed with Anna Seward that "human beings, whatever may have been their talents, whatever their good qualities, are seldom found perfect except on the pages of their eulogists."[2] Her own practice was to refuse to gloss over the imperfections of her subject, and Scott praised her Life of Darwin for this especially, singling out above all her "discriminating Justice."

> Biography the most interesting perhaps of every species of composition, loses all its interest with me when the shades and lights of the principal character are not accurately & faithfully detaild nor have I much patience with such exaggerated daubing as Mr. Hayley has bestowd upon poor Cowper. I can no more sympathise with a mere eulogist than I can with a ranting hero upon the stage & it unfortunately happens that some of our disrespect is apt rather unjustly to be transferrd to the subject of the panegyrick.[3]

1. Quarterly Review III (February 1810), 219.
2. Memoirs of Darwin, p. 430.
3. Letters I, 180. (The letter is placed March 1803).

Anna Seward agreed with him about Hayley's Cowper, and objected to Hayley's "lavish iteration of applausive epithets." Her objections were simply that eulogy was not truthful, and that the result of describing Cowper, that "often elevated, but not first-rate Poet," as if he were Milton, debased critical terminology, and was therefore harmful as well as distasteful.[1] In her Memoirs of Darwin she claimed that "unfounded eulogium" was distasteful to all who "prefer truth to enthusiasm." She wrote that characters

> ought to be drawn with dispassionate fidelity, or not attempted; that though just biographic record will touch the failings of the good and the eminent with tenderness, it ought not to spread over them the veil of suppression.[2]

This was a carefully considered position, granting nothing more than tactful treatment to the good, while refusing to suppress or to condone anything.

Anna Seward was only one of many practising biographors who took a stand against eulogy. It was in the nature of eulogy that biographers should oppose it more than reviewers did, since for them such opposition was a justification of telling the truth, and an anticipatory defence against any charge of scandal-mongering. In reviews, though, rejection of a particular panegyric might too easily be mistaken for an attack on the character of its subject. In the same year as Anna Seward another biographer, Alexander Bower, gave a reasoned rejection of panegyric:

> It has become very common for modern biographers to fill their narratives with little else than unqualified panegyric. They may thus pay a tribute of affection and gratitude to their departed friend, or to him that

1. Letter to Scott, March 26, 1806. W. Partington, The Private Letter Books of Sir Walter Scott (1930), p. 257.
2. Preface, p. x.

> is the object of their admiration. But the hero of the tale, in this case, is an ideal personage, and only fit to be introduced into a work of fancy. Delicacy and good manners indeed require that (as Metastasio expresses it) one should not be exposed to public view in his shirt and night-cap; yet, unless a true representation be given, it can do little honour to those whom it is intended to exalt, and cannot serve the interests of mankind.[1]

He insists that a work of biography must avoid trespassing on the territory of fiction, yet, like so many contemporary commentators, he ends on a questioning note. The danger of panegyric was clear, but the way to avoid it was not.

The most forthright condemnations of panegyric came from the writers who most completely aimed to avoid it. The anonymous author of the Memoirs of Lady Hamilton described in 1815 how "an evil practice has of late years prevailed, of eulogizing persons of note," instead of providing what biography required, a detailed and accurate account of all their actions:

> This method of substituting panegyric for history has indeed become so general, that it would not be surprising to see a justificatory memoir of GUY FAWKES, or an apology for the conduct of NELL GWYN.

The flight of fancy was extended for two pages of examples of "this shameful violation of literary justice," both in the public sphere - "the bloodiest regicides of ancient and modern times have been canonized as patriots," - and in the private - "we have seen female libertinism justified as the assertion of freedom." The author suggested further that apart from the ludicrous falsehood of such writing, it failed both in credibility and in usefulness.[2] Watkins took up the point in his Memoirs of Sheridan,

1. An Account of the Life of James Beattie, p.96.
2. Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 9-11. The mention of "female libertinism" probably alludes to Godwin's Memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft.

where he claimed that panegyric, although obviously intended as praise, had exactly the opposite effect. After citing a laudatory verse, beginning "Long shall we seek his likeness, long in vain," Watkins exclaimed:

> Hyperbolic nonsense like this is any thing but praise, and the reader who had no other knowledge of the subject than what the lines convey would be at a loss to understand them as meant for irony or panegyric.[1]

Since, as Anna Seward pointed out, "the errors of public figures are too well known,"[2] the attempt at eulogy might rebound, and draw attention to those very areas of the life which the biographer had attempted to conceal. Thus a reviewer commented that Hayley's falsifications of Cowper's life were worse than unproductive, because "the mystery which was suffered to hang over the subject, only served the more to excite curiosity, and to draw attention to the subject."[3] Two years earlier the Eclectic had taken exception to a claim about Hayley himself, that his "life and conduct are entitled to the highest panegyric." The reviewer wrote that extended panegyrics "defeat the Writer's purpose, and provoke a reference to points which he either ignorantly or disingenuously passes over in silence."[4] Panegyric was thus seen as deficient from two points of view - as lacking the truthful qualities required of biography, but as not succeeding, either, in concealing the truth. These commentators considered that the true ends of biography had been sacrificed in vain. Other writers took a firm moral line on panegyric. "If what I recommend is more plausible than true," stated Brydges, "then I commit a moral wrong,"[5] and Adolphus believed

1. Watkins, II, 390. The verses are the concluding lines of Byron's "Monody."
2. Memoirs of Darwin, p.x.
3. Eclectic Review NS XXI (March 1824), 195.
4. Ibid. NS XVII (February 1822), 188. (The remarks complained of were in the Annual Biography and Obituary.)
5. Autobiography II, 244.

that "deviations from truth ... are blemishes to be atoned for, not refinements to be applauded."[1]

The truthfulness of biography was threatened, however, not so much by the deliberate (and usually obvious) falsehoods of eulogy, as by the feeling summed up in the tag de mortuis nil nisi bonum. The idea that - taboo subjects apart - the dead should be protected against any judgment on their doings was impatiently rejected by biographers. The most extended and spirited rejection of the principle occurs in the first chapter of the Memoirs of Lady Hamilton. Much of this deals with the didactic purposes of biography, arguing that the efficacy of moral lessons depends upon their being true.[2] The argument is relentless. Too often, we are told, the old principle has been "made an excuse for error, and an apology for depravity," and though it is generally beneficient in intention,

> it never could have been intended to operate as an act of indemnity, to cover in oblivion the deeds of those who have endeavoured to loosen the foundation of morality by their principles, or to render vice attractive by their example.

If the "doctrine" were really like this,

> and did it lay survivors at all times, and in every circumstance, under the immutable obligation of concealing the obliquities of those who have been removed from this busy stage, ... history would be no better than romance.

Not only would the application of the principle turn history into fiction,[3]

1. Biography, p.28. For the full quotation, see above, p. 256.
2. Cf. Eclectic Review 3rd Series IV (September 1830), 190. "Of what value were the instruction which, while inviting us to receive lessons of truth, would commence by deceiving us ?"
3. The criticism of bad biography as "romance" or "fiction" was common. Mary Shelley wrote to Trelawny of Shelley's life; "The private events were sad and tragical. How could you relate them ? As Hunt has, slurring over the real truth - Wherefore write fiction ? and the truth - any part of it is hardly for the rude cold world to handle." (Letter of December 15, 1829; Letters II, 23-24.)

but it would compel the historian and biographer to justify - or even to apologise for - their honourable practice of "describing men as they truly were." If memoirs cannot be both pleasing and truthful, they should be merely truthful. The writing of panegyric is thunderously denounced, and the allegedly common practice of sacrificing historical truth "at the shrine of public opinion, or to gratify the feelings of private friendship" is seen as an even more "shameful violation of literary justice."[1] What biographers commonly did was to ignore the claims for reverence towards the dead - particularly the long-dead - and depict their subjects warts and all. Walter Wilson, for example, stated unreservedly in his Memoirs of Defoe that he had

> never consciously deviated from that strict fidelity which is essential to secure confidence. If he has at any time invaded the adage, De Mortuis nil nisi bonum, it is because he has had a greater reverence for truth than for flattery; and can discover no good reason why unprincipled men should be sheltered from the opprobrium which they have entailed upon their actions.[2]

Such defences of telling the truth were rarely disinterested, and were often the prelude to contentious revelation.

What the biographer might tell depended also upon how long the subject had been dead. During the writing of his Life of Addison Johnson checked himself with the consideration that he was " 'walking upon ashes, under which the fire is not yet extinguished,' " and thought that the time was come rather "to say 'nothing that is false, than all that is true.' "[3]

1. Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. [1]-2, 3, 10.
2. 1830, I, xvi.
3. Lives of the Poets, I, 346.

The sentiment, and indeed the wording, were frequently echoed by biographers and commentators.[1] Francis Wrangham apologised in the Preface to his British Plutarch (1817) for his failure to provide articles on Burke, Windham, Pitt and Fox, and assumed that his readers would sympathise with his reasons:

> The public will perhaps think with me that it would be "to tread upon ashes, under which the fire is not yet sufficiently extinguished to bear the foot of the biographer." Years upon years must elapse before their conduct and character can be discussed with the freedom, or appreciated with the temper, of history.[2]

The editor of Cowper's Memoirs, published in 1816, thought that sixteen years was sufficient hiatus. He did not disapprove of Hayley's omissions, but believed that his tactful judgments might now be reversed:

> The motives of that delicate abstinence from all minute details, on the subject of COWPER'S derangement, which Mr. HAYLEY then thought it proper to observe, were, doubtless, of the most honourable kind. But the lapse of years, and consequent change of circumstances, may render that advisable at one time, which was once objectionable.[3]

In this instance, in fact, Cowper's surviving relatives were alarmed, and tried to have the book suppressed legally.[4] The argument was, though, a serious and sincere one.

Although opinions as to whether a biographer might tell the whole truth about the dead - and particularly about the recently dead - were so divided, there was no disagreement about the rights of the living. Nothing

1. See, for example, Public Characters of 1800-1801, p.338: "He who writes anecdotes, and draws characters of men who have recently died, is stirring up ashes which are not yet cold, and may chance to burn his fingers."
2. I, xv-xvi. See also Public Characters of 1800-1801, p. 338.
3. Memoirs of the Early Life of William Cowper, Esq., written by Himself. (2nd ed., 1816), p.v. Lady Hesketh's stipulations had, though, made it superfluous for Hayley to exercise his scruples. See below, p.278, n.2.
4. Bibliography of Cowper, pp. 193-194.

but good, but preferably nothing at all, was to be told about them. The suppression of material was defended even when it was merely offensive to living relatives, without directly involving them. Brougham, reviewing Stewart's Account of Dr. Robinson thought that no-one would be "much inclined to blame" Stewart's "delicate fear of raking up things which, from their minuteness, might offend surviving relatives," even though, on Brougham's own analysis, this was what made the work so gravely deficient.[1] Lockhart called Thomas Moore to order in his review of the Memoirs of Sheridan on similar grounds:

> What kind of right has Mr. Moore, under the pretence of writing the life of Mr. Sheridan, to drag before the public the private life and confidential communications of any living person ? We really believe that such an inroad on the peace of society is unexampled.[2]

He made the plea again in his review of Moore's Life of Byron, claiming that "some consideration was due, after all, to the feelings of persons still more nearly connected with the deceased poet than the biographer."[3] Moore had tried to be more careful here, and many of the famous asterisks were his visible attempt to spare the living. Too many for most commentators, they were too few for some individuals.[4] Lockhart cited as an ideal Lord Holland's defence of Walpole's Memoirs - "no man is now alive whose character or conduct is the subject of praise or censure in these Memoirs."[5] The plea that the living should be spared notoriety gave Lockhart in his Life of Burns the rationale for concealing the whole truth

1. Edinburgh Review III (April 1803), 233.
2. Quarterly Review XXXIII (March 1828), 583.
3. Ibid. XLIV (January 1831), 206.
4. Peacock called them "mockeries of reserve." (Westminster Review XII (April 1830), 299.) Moore, though, wrote to an unidentified correspondent that he should have "strewn those stars ... more plentifully." (Letter dated March 7, 1830; Letters II, 688-689.)
5. Quarterly Review XXXIII, 583.

about Jean Armour's pregnancy; he merely remarked that "the time is not yet come, in which all the details of this story can be expected."[1] Currie repeatedly clipped Burns' writings because of "the delicacy and respect due to living characters."[2] A similar concern for Burns' living relations justified a veto on his personal diary; Lockhart wrote: "This most curious document, it is to be observed, has not yet been printed entire. Another generation will, no doubt, see the whole of the confession."[3] Lockhart's attitude was shared by most reviewers and respectable biographers, and was well summarised by Southey:

> The time is not yet come when the life of our great Nelson can be fully and faithfully related; his private history cannot be laid open without greater injury to individual feelings than the public has any right to inflict for the gratification of its curiosity.[4]

This limitation was an important part of the theory of biography. For a biographer to be obliged, or to oblige himself to avoid describing the relations of his subject with a surviving spouse, children or friends was a very large curtailment. To make every concession in this direction meant a collision with another principle, for it left the biographer with very little factual truth which he could tell.

It was, in fact, recognised that anyone who wrote the life of a contemporary, especially of a relative or friend, was unlikely to be able to be impartial. The very act of writing a biography, argued one commentator, gave the writer an undeclared interest which was in conflict with

1. P.57.
2. Life of Burns, p.162. See also p.163.
3. Life of Burns, p. 91.
4. Quarterly Review III (February 1810), 220. (Review of lives of Nelson.)

"the moral purpose of biography"; which was the telling of the truth.[1]

Anna Seward's view, that neither relative nor friend was equipped to tell the truth, was more forcibly expressed:

> Biography of recently departed Eminence is apt to want characteristic truth, since it is generally written either by a near relation,
>
> > Who writes to share the fame of the deceased,
> > So high in merit, and to him so dear !
> > Such dwell on praises which they think they share.
> >
> > (Young's Night Thoughts)
>
> or by an highly obliged friend, whom gratitude or affection render blindly partial, and who is influenced by a desire of gratifying ... the surviving family.[2]

Stanfield concurred with this view:

> Affectionate regard or tenderness of reputation will suppress particulars which, though important to biography, do not reflect great honor on the deceased. Family pride will have the same effect, perhaps in a greater degree.

He therefore advised intending biographers to be prepared to resist "a solicitude for the opinion of friends, a dread of the resentment of families, fear of the displeasure of patrons, and indignation of party." Optimistically he thought that forewarned was certain to be forearmed, and that when "extraneous circumstances" had been removed, only "industry" would be needed for the biographer to display the truth.[3] Brougham wrote that it was

> in general highly improper, to say the least of it, that much deference should ever be paid to the feelings of relations: in these cases they are the parties least concerned; their number is so small, their stake so trifling, and the injury their feelings can sustain so inconsiderable, in a comparative

1. British Critic NS I (January 1814), 79. (Review of Stephen's Memoirs of Horne Tooke.)
2. Memoirs of Darwin, p.viii.
3. Essay, pp. 14, 135.

> view, that it would be wholly unworthy of a man to steer according to their wishes, in performing so sacred a duty as that entrusted to the biographer.[1]

It was very rare, though, for biographers, however conscious they were of this claim to achieve, or even consistently attempt, this degree of impartiality.

It is not always possible to distinguish a biographer's natural solicitude for his subject's reputation from actual restraints imposed from outside. When the latter of these can be isolated dramatic thwarting of the biographer's intentions is sometimes revealed. An early example is the control which Lady Hesketh exercised over the material which Hayley used for his Life of Cowper.[2] Thomas Moore abandoned the idea of writing Canning's life because his own friendship with Lord Grey, and Lady Canning's interference, would have prevented him from executing the job truthfully. "If left to myself," he wrote, "I might perhaps manage to do justice to all parties, without offending any; but under the dictation of Lady Canning the thing would be impracticible."[3] Such restraint on biographers was an important practical corrective to even the most strongly-held ideals about the biographer's relationship to the truth.

Johnson analysed "the great impediment of biography" as "the necessity of complying with times, and of sparing persons .... What is known can seldom be immediately told, and when it might be told, it is no longer

1. Edinburgh Review II (April 1803), 237. (Review of Stewart's Account of Dr. Robertson.)
2. "He was enjoined to confine himself 'to a General Outline of our beloved Friend's Character, and to a criticism of his Works, rather than make a Novel of it, by inserting any Facts, either real or supposed, that concern only his private history.'" Norma Russell, Bibliography of Cowper, p.245.
3. Journal entry for February II, 1830. Journal, VI, 107.

known."[1] Like many of Johnson's statements about biography, this passage was frequently quoted, paraphrased and echoed in the early nineteenth century. Its implications were expounded in the Westminster Review in 1825:

> It is a necessary condition of Biography that the period most favourable for collecting and testing materials, is the least favourable to the publication of an impartial history.

The biographer who sets to work while the contemporaries of his subject are surviving "finds himself therefore rich in facts, but at the same time crossed and beset on all sides by personal considerations which few have sufficient strength of purpose to disregard."[2] The advantages and disadvantages of writing biography soon after the death of the subject were seen as inseparable. It was not possible for a biographer to write for his contemporaries and for posterity at the same time; either he was forbidden to tell the truth, or prevented from ascertaining it.

While the families of the famous might wish even after many generations to preserve a false image, independent commentators usually thought that the lifetime of the people directly concerned was long enough to wait. Byron had himself given the example of delay over the publishing of his own "memoirs", and their destruction in John Murray's fireplace brought widespread criticism, because their potential harmfulness was only temporary. T. Doubleday wrote to Blackwood arguing against destruction:

> No man, you will tell me, is bound to publish what may be deemed libellous; but this is a reason for delaying, not destroying. Libels are things of a lifetime, and like harsh wine grow mild by keeping:

1. "Life of Addison," Lives of the Poets I, 345-346.
2. Westminster Review IV (October 1825), 371. (Review of Moore's Sheridan.) One of many similar formulations is found in the prefatory Life in Poems and Songs of Robert Burns (Air, 1819.)

> the lapse of a few years takes out their sting .... The character of Justice Shallow, when written, was a bitter libel upon that worthy knight Sir Thomas Lucy .... But would that have been a valid reason for burning "Henry the Fourth" and the "Merry Wives of Windsor" ? The author of the Twopenny Postbag will surely never say that.[1]

It was thus with especial complacency that biographers of subjects long dead justified their telling of the truth, or even claimed that after a long period of time they were the first to be in a position to tell it. W. Wilson stated that "the truth is seldom told in a man's life-time," and claimed that it was "the privilege of posterity to adjust the characters of eminent men, and to arbitrate the disputes between them and their opponents."[2] R. L. Edgeworth was able to smother a last-minute suspicion that in his account of the life of Day he might have done an injury or betrayed a confidence. He recalled himself with the reflection that "he had been long dead when this was written; he left behind him no children, nor any near connexions; all our common friends outlived him but a short time, and when this comes before the public, I shall myself be no more."[3]

When the disreputable truth about their subject was already widely known, biographers and their critics sometimes considered that they were absolved from silence. The disgrace of telling anything discreditable belonged apparently only to the first teller. Watkins, a pillar of biographical rectitude, allowed himself to write of Lord Byron's quarrel with his wife because no "moral biographer"[4] could pass the matter over in

1. William Blackwood and his Sons, I, 493.
2. Memoirs of the Life and Times of Defoe, III, 641.
3. Memoirs, I, 350. He was mistaken, for Mrs. Bicknell (Day's Sabrina) was still alive. See Maria Edgeworth, Letters from England 1813-1844, pp. 121-122.
4. The phrase is Stanfield's (p.27).

silence, but also because the facts had already been "made matter of public notoriety."[1] Watkins' view seemed to be that since these lamentable truths were in any case widely known, the wisest course of action was to salvage some salutary warnings from the wreckage of Byron's life. Although Watkins did not theorise on his treatment of Sheridan, his account of his drunken decline appears to have been motivated by the same ideas. Sheridan's end was notorious, so Watkins could hardly have hoped to conceal it. Instead he drew the moral that "such is the heavy import which men of eccentric genius have to pay for sacrificing their time and talents in uncertain pursuits."[2]

The Eclectic reviewers were not alone in their readiness to condone both the partiality and the selectiveness of the "commemorative" biographies of those who had been of no consequence in the world. This amnesty was not extended, though, to those who had chosen to enter public life. In biographies of such men the truth was expected, and the discrepancy between appearance and truth was likely to be more striking with public figures than with pious clerics. As a reviewer remarked, "no two things resemble each other less than the private habits, and public exertions of men of the greatest talents."[3] Brougham early in the century stated the principle that a public figure is public property, and that the destruction of his privacy, however regrettable, must be regarded justifiably as a "tax" on his fame. While the memoirs of private individuals were, he wrote, "entirely a family matter,"

1. Life of Byron (Published anonymously 1822), pp. 230-231.
2. Memoirs of Sheridan, II, 384.
3. Quarterly Review I (February 1809), 40. (Review of Orford's Anecdotes of Painters.)

> the case of a great and public character is diametrically opposite to that of an obscure and private individual. As his time and talents were not his own; as his life was devoted to the public service; as he belonged not so much to the family in which he ate, and drank, and slept, as to the great community for whom he read and thought: so, after his death, his name and character is the property of the public; and it is the interest of the world that the whole truth should be made known.

Compared with these issues the weight of relatives' objections was, he thought, very slight, and certainly not so great that a biographer should "steer according to their wishes."[1] The Quarterly agreed; the reviewer of Prior's Life of Burke considered that Burke's "private life is a species of public property, which may be approached and explored, without any danger of the imputation of a vulgar and prying spirit of inquiry."[2] The Westminster would not waive this principle even for royalty; it was stated in the review of the Character of George IV that both his public and his private character were important, so that in discussing him it "will be requisite ... to view him in his private life, and in his official capacity." The late king was regarded "as completely matter of history,"

> and respecting him, as respecting every other historical personage, truth and freedom of speech are undeserving of reproach. If it be requisite, that the history of mankind be correctly told, it is absolutely necessary that contemporaneous history and contemporaneous opinions should exist; and also, that such history should be complete, and such opinions unreserved.[3]

In these three representative notices one can sense the political imperatives of what is now called public accountability behind the biographical criticism.[4]

1. Edinburgh Review III (April 1803), 236, 237.
2. Quarterly Review XXXIV (September 1826), 486. Cf. Brydges' justification of his attack on Pitt: "Historical characters are fair subjects of rational and honest discussion." Foreign Travel II, 98.
3. Westminster Review XIV (January 1831), 104.
4. The motto of the Edinburgh was "Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur."

It is significant that the three principal reviews were so much in agreement, and the explanation is perhaps that they were all alive to the public issues of biography. Adolphus was insulated from these issues:

> Vainly would it be urged, that a duty to society requires the sacrifice of private feelings to the interests of moral and historical knowledge. No public claim can have power to violate the sanctity of that reserve which affection and good faith alike enjoin.[1]

This was a minority view. The point was sometimes made that even writers "come voluntarily before the public."[2] The legislators of the world could not expect to remain anonymous as well as unacknowledged. "What, indeed," asked Brougham, "an an author, but a public character, who has made himself known to mankind by his influence on their minds, as the general or the minister has distinguished his name by the effects of his measures upon the destinies of the world ?"[3]

The abundant materials which biographers of the period so liberally transfused into their works were a principal cause of the elephantiasis which afflicted the genre throughout the century. Chapter I of this Part has charted the slow movement towards the conception of biography as an art, and illustrated the condemnation of over-bulky biographies. The question "how much ?" was not only an aesthetic problem of inclusiveness,

1. Biography, pp. 29-30. Cf. the epitaph cited in the London Magazine's obituary of Kemble (January 1823, p.450.)

> Reader pass on, nor idly spend your time
> In bad biography and bitter rhyme;
> For what I am - this cumbrous clay insures;
> And what I was, - is no affair of yours.

2. Hazlitt, reviewing Coleridge's Biographia Literaria. (Edinburgh Review XXVIII (August 1817), 493.)

3. Ibid. III (April 1803), 230.

though, but was also an ethical one. In this area, it may be concluded that what was required of the biographer was "the truth and nothing but the truth." Whether or not "the whole truth" could be given depended upon a complex of considerations: whether the life included matters which it was not proper to mention, whether the subject was a near-contemporary, whether there were living relations who could be compromised or embarrassed, whether the subject had come voluntarily before the public, and whether the biography was written with any other motive than that of giving the facts of a life. Within the limits of vilification and whitewash, therefore, what a biographer might tell varied for each subject; the ethics of biography were far more complicated than the aesthetics.

CHAPTER V

THE USES OF BIOGRAPHY

> It is universally allowed, that no kind of reading is more beneficial than history, so it is likewise admitted, that there is no class of historical writing so applicable to common instruction as biography: for the lives of individuals are generally written more naturally and with greater sincerity, than larger histories.[1]

The attractiveness of the varied materials described in chapters II and III of this Part was what principally gave biography its recognised value as entertainment. The "delight" of reading biography was extolled repeatedly by commentators; there is scarcely a page of this whole investigation which does not in some way illustrate the fact. Almost always, though, such claims were balanced or outweighed by encomiums to the form's instructiveness. Croker's view was representative:

> Memoirs may, we think, be called the most instructive of the amusing and the most amusing of the instructive departments of literature: they combine individual characters and feelings with public transactions - dignifying the levity of private anecdotes, and enlivening the gravity of historical events.[2]

Mrs. Pilkington, a committed moralist and pedagogue, put entertainment firmly into second place, claiming in the Preface to her Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters (1811) to "have experienced a greater solicitude to improve than to entertain." One of the reasons that panegyric was discredited was that it was useless for instructional purposes.

1. J. Northcote, Life of Reynolds (2nd edition, 1818), Preface, pp. x-xi.
2. Quarterly Review XIX (July 1818), 460. (Review of Dangeau's Memoirs de Louis XIV.)

This concern for the usefulness of biography was so extensive that the attractiveness of the genre was often, it seems, valued only incidentally, because it made the works alluring to a public which would not otherwise be drawn to such improving reading.

i. Biography and History

Biography, because it was true, performed a useful function for history. The relationship between the two, as it was seen at the turn of the century, was described by Henry Kett:

> Biography is a branch of history, which in point of importance and moral utility ranks as high as any. The biographer by his accurate researches supplies the deficiencies of the historian. What the latter gives us only in outlines and sketches, the former presents in more complete and highly finished portraits. Their province does not merely extend to those who have acted upon the great theatre of the world, as sovereigns, statesmen, and warriors; but to all who have improved human life by their useful discoveries, adorned it by their works of genius, and edified mankind by their examples.[1]

The distinction made between the biographer and historian has been foreshadowed in earlier chapters.[2] Southey was one of the many who iterated the view, writing in his review of Evelyn's Memoirs that journals

> are among those works which acquire by time more value than they lose: they are the subsidiaries of history, and preserve the memory of many things which history disdains to notice, as trifling as they are trivial, but which become objects of curiosity when they are obsolete and ancient.[3]

The attraction of the whole sub-historical branch of literature was very widely felt. Richard Fenton, believing that he had brought genuine

1. Elements of General Knowledge I, 241-242.
2. See above, pp. 128-130.
3. Quarterly Review XIX (April 1818), 12.

Shakespearean relics in Wales, wrote back excitedly that "his Journal, recording, like most diaries, the most trifling events, carries you back to the days of Queen Bess, and you are brought acquainted with things that history never informs you of."[1] The sentiment was echoed many years later in Jeffrey's important review of Pepys' Memoirs: he wrote that a man's journals "help us to understand the character of his times," and he saw them as confirming historical judgments; they "make us feel more assured."[2] As well as a branch of history, though, biography was more and more coming to be viewed as the essence. D'Israeli was only one of many who took a "Johnsonian" view, believing that familiar and domestic detail provided not the illustrations of history but the reality.

One important task which biography was seen as performing for history was that of interpreting it for the common reader. It was frequently described as history for the common reader, history presented in terms - social and intellectual - which ordinary people could understand. "It is thus," wrote Adolphus, "that Biography enlightens and animates the materials of History, and brings down the greatness of political events to a natural association with the ordinary occurrences of life."[3] Francis Wrangham, the reviser of Langhorne's Plutarch and editor of the British Plutarch (1816), wrote to Brydges that he had "always been singularly partial to biographical composition," and preferred it to history. The reason, he explained, was that "even if we were Lynxean enough" to discern the threads which guide the public events of history, we should still learn

1. Richard Fenton A Tour in Quest of Genealogy (1811), p.38. (Letter dated October 19, 1807). Fenton's "discoveries" are described by Schoenbaum in Shakespeare's Lives, pp. 328-332.
2. Edinburgh Review XLIII (November 1825), 54.
3. Biography, pp. 6-7.

nothing germane to ourselves, because "the subjects are usually Princes, or Statesmen, or Warriors, who have but too often little in common with the mass of their species." Biography, by contrast, described "men whom we can understand and follow."[1] The distinction was stated categorically by a contemporary reviewer of Lempriere's Universal Biography:

> Biography is, to learned men and their works, what history is to illustrious men and sovereign princes. .... The latter ... is the school of statesmen and politicians; the former is the mart for the general chapman, the storehouse of materials, applicable to common wants, the magazine of quotidian utility.

There is no suggestion anywhere in the discussion that either form is superior; the subject matter of the two is seen as complementary. History, it was argued, provided a Mirror for Magistrates, certainly important but limited in its application, whereas biography was useful to people in ordinary circumstances. The shortcomings of history were its "propriety" and "stately march," which inhibited it from giving personal information, or details of subjects "as it were by their fire sides."

> In histories there is a majesty, which keeps us distant from great men; in memoirs, there is a familiarity, which invites us to approach them. In histories, we appear only as one who joins the crowd to see them pass; in memoirs, we are like concealed spies, who pause on every little circumstance, and note every little expression.[2]

None of these commentators intended to denigrate history. Their only purpose was to confirm its position in relation to biography, a position which was being radically rethought. Adolphus saw the transference of interest from history to biography as a natural development: "As an acquaintance with general history becomes more widely diffused," he

1. Letter dated July 3, 1824. M. Sadleir, "Wrangham: a Supplement." (The Library, 4th Series XIX, 439.)
2. Annual Review (for 1808), VII, 205. The view is reminiscent of D'Israeli.

explained, readers seek more detailed knowledge, and "turn from the wider and more comprehensive survey of events with awakened but unsatisfied curiosity."[1] In other words, they turn from history to biography. Other commentators saw the change as rooted more excitingly in the spirit of the times. Lockhart preached the Romantic view that biography was the key to history; "History is the essence of innumerable Biographies."[2] "History," explained John Dunlop, "treats of man, as it were, in the mass;"[3] in an age when personality was so highly valued there could be only a limited appeal for such treatment. James Mill saw history as the starting point for biography, and as irrelevant thereafter:

> An acquaintance with the general facts of modern history, is, after all, but an introduction to that accurate knowledge of affairs which can only be gained from the study of Biography. Into this all the details of the annalist, and much of the speculation of those who write the philosophy of history, resolve themselves.[4]

The rewriting of history in biographical terms had been touched upon already as symptomatic of the age:[5] "Some of the most interesting details of history, are to be found only in the form of Memoirs," wrote one reviewer.[6] Another, reviewing a clerical biography, claimed that

> the real history of the Church of Christ is contained in the lives of its true members, and much that is peculiarly interesting in the religious and domestic history of our country, is to be found only in the annals of the Biographer.[7]

1. Biography, p. [3].
2. "On History," Critical and Miscellaneous Essays II, 86.
3. History of Fiction (Edinburgh, 1814), I, x.
4. Edinburgh Review XVII (November 1810), 39. (Review of Memoirs du Prince Eugene.) The observation was a common one, and can be found in Bisset's Life of Burke, p. [1], and in the Eclectic Review VII (1817), 588.
5. See above, pp. 53-54.
6. Eclectic Review NS VII (June 1817), 588. (Review of lives of Revs. Brown and Buchanan.)
7. Ibid. NS XXII (September 1824), 266. (Review of Hinton's Life of Hinton.)

Bisset also took this view, echoing Johnson in his claim that we are "more interested in individual enjoyment and suffering, than in the prosperity or adversity of nations. Of history, therefore," he concluded, "the most instructive and interesting kind is Biography."[1]

The claim that biography was useful as history assumed that history itself had a larger usefulness. What were the purposes to which biography sublimated its own aims ? The answer was very clear to Adolphus: "Whatever praise may belong to this species of writing as a graceful appendage and supplement to History, it surpasses History itself in moral instruction."[2] Adolphus supported the often-quoted definition of history as "philosophy teaching by example."[3] More specifically, he claimed that the shape of a biography, showing all the parts in relation to one another in a completed whole, was the ideal vehicle for such instruction, and far superior to the formless mass of history. In biographies "the moral is more certain and more easily to be deduced." Biography he saw as the microcosm of history, revealing patterns, conclusions, and even retributions with a finality and clarity which history could not rival:

> The events of an age, or succession of ages, are only part of a great and unfinished series, and whatever ingenuity may be exerted in reducing any portion of history to a complete and consistent scheme, there must yet remain many perplexities to be solved, and many imperfections to be supplied, out of the stores of succeeding years.

While the outcome is always clear to God, he argues, the human philosopher

1. Life of Burke, p.[1].
2. Biography, p.7.
3. Bolingbroke's in his Study and Use of History. Cf. Anecdotes of Distinguished Persons (fifth ed., 1804): "History has been called 'Philosophy teaching by examples.' Biography may be said to be Philosophy rendered dramatic, and brought home to 'each man's business and bosum.'" I, [iii] - iv.

can only speculate about the part which the historical events play in the great plan. He demonstrates an additional advantage of the "moral effect" which biography provides; because it is complete, everything is directed to the same end, whereas in history the relationship of the parts cannot be seen, because the end is not clear, or even not known. The "variety of incidents and persons, and the perpetual intervention of occurrences apparently accidental" further weaken and dissipate the possible good. A host of evils is apparently condoned, because, unlike the crimes of an individual, their consequences are not immediately visible. A completed life, though, can be weighed in the balance.[1]

For these reasons - because it was complete and comparatively final - biography was seen as a less demanding study than history. Its moral implications were easy to grasp. It was seen as more useful, too, because it was closer to the experience and concerns of ordinary readers. This was claimed for most sorts of biography, not simply for that which was framed for specifically didactic purposes. Jeffrey wrote:

> Biography is amusing and easy. The knowledge which it communicates assimilates readily with our general literature; and the judgments which it suggests being formed without effort, and in the course of a pleasant occupation, are likely to be more candid and natural than those which are extorted by a more laborious study.[2]

This easiness was a middle way, avoiding both the extremes of entertaining fiction with its exciting tendencies, and of dull historicity with its tedious detail. This was the object which was claimed by Mary Hays in the preface to her Female Biography:

1. Biography, pp. 10-11.
2. Edinburgh Review IX (October 1806), 242. (Conclusion of a review of Lord Holland's Account of Lope de Vega.)

> My design was, not to surprise by fiction, or to astonish by profound research, but to collect and concentrate, in one interesting point of view, those engaging pictures, instructive narrations, and striking circumstances, that may answer a better purpose than the gratification of a vain curiosity.[1]

This striking of a medium between history and fiction was moral rather than aesthetic; the "better purpose" was a didactic one.

The class of biography which aimed most unremittingly at utility was religious biography. Much of this was a rewriting of religious history in terms of personality, as a reviewer explained in introducing one of them:

> All that is really valuable in ecclesiastical history, too, has come down to us in this shape. The real history of the Church is to be found, not in the history of councils and of heresies, but in the lives of martyrs and confessors, reformers and evangelists, in whose glorious fellowship the subject of these Memoirs has gone to take his station, where his works will follow him.[2]

Religious biography cannot be judged by the same standards as other biography. It was distinct particularly because its purpose was not to rescue personal details from oblivion, nor to detail accurately the life of an individual, nor even to entertain, but simply to provide an object of inspiration for the converted. Its usefulness was its principal function. As a reviewer explained, "it can be of no utility to put it upon record that a man was born, eat, drank, slept, and died;" the subject must be shown in some useful light, not just as typical of the species.[3]

1. I, vii.
2. Eclectic Review NS XVIII (December 1822), 482. (Review of Scott's Life of Scott.)
3. Ibid. X (November 1813), 497. (Review of Clarkson's Memoirs of Penn.)

These works were usually reviewed only in religious periodicals (such as the Eclectic and Monthly Repository,) and thus even in abstract were read only by the faithful. Although they were thus removed from general biography, their range was very wide; memoirs of the recently dead were supplemented with numerous lives of the long-deceased "whose conduct and tempers may be properly proposed as a lesson and a reproof to our own time,"[1] and prominent churchmen shared this publicity with the humble poor. With the latter there was no necessity to fabricate justifications or to invoke the name of Johnson, for spiritually no life could be obscure, not even Catherine Haldane's. ("Catherine Haldane was born December 3, 1795, and died June 5, 1802. Her course was short .... ")[2] No life was so removed that it could not provide a Christian with a lesson.

There was, indeed, much edification to be had from biographies of the obscure, but still the life-story of a public figure could offer a more impressive lesson. The Christian virtues are more striking in a man who has achieved material success:

> The memoirs of individuals eminent in respect of their combining talent and station with true piety, are indeed calculated to answer a purpose of more direct, though not more extensive utility. They are Christianity made easy to the learner.[3]

This describes the object of religious biography unambiguously; again example is preferred to precept. One reviewer observed that "the lives of Christians of Mr. Scott's stamp, are the best sort of practical commentary on Christianity. Of such persons the Apostle Paul speaks

1. Quarterly Review XIV (October 1815), 236. (Review of lives of Melancthon and Taylor.)
2. Early Instruction Recommended in a Narrative of the Life of Catherine Haldane [n.d.] [3].
3. Eclectic Review NS VII (June 1817), 589. (Reviews of lives of Brown and Buchanan.)

as being "living epistles," intelligible to all men."[1] Commentators repeatedly pointed out that biography was useful in providing practical examples of religious teaching, and it was a popular formula for a biographer to assert that his "principal object" was "to instruct, exhort, and admonish the living, by calling their attention to the example of the dead."[2]

Admonishion was an important element. The purpose of religious biography was not merely to cheer on the faithful. Biographies of the worthy were addressed to a public which was often presumed to be in need of the stern lessons which they offered. Occasionally this lesson was conveyed to the reading public at large by one of the reviews. In 1815, for example, the Quarterly reviewed lives of Melancthon and Jeremy Taylor, remarking that these were examples of biographies of great men long dead "whose conduct and tempers may be properly proposed as a lesson and a reproof to our own times." The pressing contemporary need for such a lesson was heavily underscored - "never, perhaps, was there an era in the church of England when the study of such examples would have operated more beneficially than at the present."[3] The editor of the Biographia Evangelica made a similar claim, but much more dramatically, giving in the Preface a terrifying, fire-and-brimstone account of the state of England, overwhelmed by "a torrent of wickedness and delusion," and already beginning to suffer God's displeasure. Against this tide of profanity the editor proposed to pit the forces of biography:

1. Ibid. NS XVIII (December 1822), 481.
2. I. Milner, Account of the ... Rev. Joseph Milner (1804), p. [I].
3. Quarterly Review XIV (October 1815), 237.

> With this view it hath been suggested, that (as nothing makes stronger impressions upon the mind than Example) a Review of the Lives and Principles of the most eminent Persons in the Protestant Churches, from the beginning of the Reformation to the present day, might be a providential means of assisting, at least, in giving a check to this general innundation of infidelity and false opinions. The attentive perusal and consideration of what those great and good men maintained, suffered for, or died in possession of; may, in the hand of GOD, be instrumental in leading others to follow their example.[1]

Biography was a very suitable vehicle for making explicit the stern ways of God to men.

Didactic Biography

Religious biography was, with only a few exceptions, a sub-species of biography, best understood if considered apart from the rest of the genre. To find didacticism there is not surprising. What is extraordinary is to find it in almost every other area of biography as well. Didacticism, the pursuit of what Kett called "moral utility", was the principal useful purpose of most biography, whether claimed and prosecuted by the author, or singled out and highlighted by commentators. Didactic biography involved the attempt to inspire or to bamboozle the reader into following the good example of the subject's life. All biographies were not like this - some, indeed, exhibited flawed subjects as warnings - but, as J. I. M. Stewart has remarked, the generalisation holds good for most of the important ones in every age:

1. Rev. Erasmus Middleton, Biographia Evangelica (1810), I, i - ii. See also I. Milner (ed.), Works of the late Joseph Milner (1810), VIII, 457.

> There is invariably an assumption that we are being afforded a gratifying vision of persons who on balance are overwhelmingly estimable. The crimes and follies of mankind are painfully evident to us all; but biography is not the right theatre for their exhibition at large. There, as in tragedy according to the conception of Aristotle, they should have no more prominent place than is necessary for the furtherance of other designs.[1]

This treatment was certainly not confined to the great names. At the other end of the spectrum the claim of virtuous example was the commonest last-ditch justification for publishing the life of nonentity. It was, indeed, so common, that when one reads such works a century and a half later, the biographers' expressed aspirations towards works of uplifting moral example soon ceases to register; they become, as Reed puts it, "a prefatory formula almost as prevalent as the fictional safeguard 'any similarities to any persons living or dead.'"[2] That biographers should have felt the need to defend and even to excuse their work on non-biographical grounds reveals a remarkable lack of confidence in what they were doing. As a general rule these professed aims cannot be regarded as contrived defence of otherwise unjustifiable book-making. The claims were taken seriously by reviewers, often endorsed, and even proposed by them.[3] Didactism, unlike most aspects of biography, passed largely without ridicule. Here biographers and reviewers agreed.

Apart from religious biography, there were two areas where didacticism was particularly prominent. Firstly there were the biographies which were regarded as a branch of useful knowledge. Biographies were an important weapon in the fight against ignorance. A number of biographies first

1. "Biography." The Craft of Letters in England, ed. J. Lehmann (1956), pp. 12-13.
2. J. R. Reed, p.31.
3. E.g. London Magazine I v (May 1820), 565. (Review of Edgeworth Memoirs.)

appeared under the auspices of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. The purpose was to provide practical examples for the readers to imitate, not pious ones. Lockhart's Life of Burns, which first appeared in this series, emphasised Burns' success in raising himself in the world, and ignored the more obvious moral lessons which could have been drawn. Other biographies were not part of any series but emphasised the same lesson; these included the lives of Reynolds by Northcott and by Faringdon.

The second and more obviously didactic form of biography was the class aimed at juvenile readers, which often took the form of collections of short biographical sketches. The call made by the Annual Review was hardly needed:

> Instead of pampering the imagination of our youth with fictitious tales, let them be taught to associate with deeds of heroism, generosity, patience, and mercy, the real names of those individuals in whom these virtues have shone with particular lustre.[1]

For this purpose religious biography was particularly useful: "Sacred Biography," one reviewer remarked, "is a copious source of pleasing instruction to persons of all ages, classes, and conditions; but it is especially calculated to form the lives and direct the conduct of the young."[2] Some of the improving publications for juveniles are described by S. A. Egoff; The Children's Friend (1820 - 1860) is a good example:

> Its pages were devoted to the condemnation of worldly pleasure and to the praise of the lives and death of remarkably pious young children whose early deaths showed remarkable instances of religious convictions.[3]

1. Annual Review VI (for 1807),437. (Review of Malling's Great and Good Deeds of the Danes.)
2. British Critic NS V (January 1816), 109. (Review of Lacey's Life of Moses.)
3. Children's Periodicals of the Nineteenth Century (1951), p.10.

Even entertainment as a lure was frequently lost sight of in the single-minded pursuit of virtuous example, as the governess-like introduction to The Juvenile Plutarch evinces:

> The examples of early virtue and genius have been selected with care, delineated with exactness, and placed in such a point of view, and attended with such remarks, as may best serve to form proper models for the consideration and imitation of young persons of both sexes.[1]

In such works the unremitting didacticism overwhelmed all other biographical concerns, so that often all individuality was refined away from the portraits until they became either saintly likenesses or cautionary tales. The contents page of Mrs. Pilkington's Biography for Girls conveys the tone:

Louisa Harrington: or, the Victim of Pride	I
Emily Manley; or, Gratitude Displayed	33
Sally Bowman; or, Filial Fondness	75
Emma Hamilton; or, Human Vicissitudes	104
Lucy Lutridge; or, Vanity Punished	141
Frances Hindos; or, the Aimiable Orphan	171 [2]

Girls were regarded as a particularly susceptible class of reader. Godwin, for example, prefaced his Life of Lady Jane Grey with the statement that she was "the most perfect model of a meritorious young creature of the female sex, to be found in history: her example therefore is the fittest possible to be held up to the fairest half of the rising generation."[3] Not only girls, but females generally were seen as particularly capable of improvement, as the Introduction to Select Female Biography made clear:

1. Preface to the fourth edition (1820).
2. Quoted from the fifth edition (1809). This work is rather like The New Game of Virtue Rewarded and Vice Punished (1810), described by F. J. Harvey Darton in Children's Books in England, p. 153.
3. Published under the name of Theophilus Marcliffe, (1806).

> Happy shall I deem myself, if the bright examples of suffering virtue, of exalted piety, of active benevolence, and of talents chastened and improved by the noblest principles, should cherish in the bosom of the reader, any of those valuable qualities, which, even in the bleak and churlish atmosphere of this world, bring forth abundant fruits of refreshment and consolation.[1]

This was another class of biography which for present purposes may be regarded separately, not because it declared its intentions, but because it had no others. Such works were neither written nor read as biography.

Even when these two groups of work have been removed from consideration, though, the phenomenon of didacticism remains as a large and important one in biography. It is found consistently in the work of respected authors and in the biographies of important subjects, works which quite clearly had much wider aims than those of moral utility. It was a frequent and reasonable assumption that while biography was not a branch of useful knowledge, yet as far as it had any effect the effect was a good one.[2] The fact did not need to be laboured. From time to time it was clearly stated, as in the Preface to White's Memoirs of the professional Life of Nelson, in an opening reminiscent of that of Pride and Prejudice:

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that nothing more strongly tends to cherish those virtues which honour human nature, than the memoirs of characters who have been particularly distinguished by them. Independent of the interest which they never fail to

1. Second edition (1829), p.vi.

2. Anne Elliot, for example, speaking with the bereaved Captain Benwick, "ventured to recommend a larger allowance of prose in his daily study; and on being requested to particularize, mentioned such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances." (Jane Austen, Persuasion, Ch. XI.)

> excite, they scatter in generous minds seeds of emulation, which spring up, and in time produce noble fruit.[1]

Against these rather extravagant hopes may be placed claims for biographical usefulness which had a more scientific basis. The interest in biography as providing data for the study of the human mind has been described already. R. L. Edgeworth was one of the most passionate advocates (and, indeed, practitioners) of this class of writing:

> The only advantage, which the world can gain from the publication of the lives of individuals, is the knowledge of the circumstances that tend to the formation of character, or of those which influence the happiness of life: on these, therefore, I dwell.[2]

James Aiken stated that "the only proper object of history and biography, beyond that of mere amusement, is the study of man,"[3] while biographies of Christians, according to one reviewer, "bear the same relation to the truths of the Bible, as the records of experimental science do to the physical principles they are employed to illustrate."[4]

Many commentators of the period, though, were less interested in this than in providing practical examples for emulation. Aiken himself explained that what he admired was the ability of biography to portray "persevering efforts overcoming a crowd of obstacles, and distinguished eminence gradually arising out of moderate beginnings."[5] Adolphus distinguished biography from history by stressing that it had moral rather than

1. Second edition, 1805.
2. Memoirs, I, 253.
3. Letters from a Father to his Son (1800), pp. 233-234.
4. Eclectic Review NS XVIII (December 1822), 481. (Review of Life of Scott.)
5. Letters, II, 233-234.

intellectual utility.[1] Kett saw this too; by arousing the spirit of emulation, he thought, only good could result, since the mere contemplation of the lives of good men "is a high gratification to the mind, and inspires it with an admiration and a love of those virtues, which come within the reach of general imitation."[2] Many commentators agreed with Kett that because they provided a practical lesson these were the only valuable qualities in biography. Brougham praised Lord Chatham's Letters to his Nephew for the same reasons - that they were "a practical lesson and example of eminent virtue."[3] Francis Wrangham argued for biography on Platonic grounds: "Virtue must be rendered visible as it were by being embodied in real characters." This for him constituted "the utility of Biographical Collections in general."[4]

Moral utility was high among the priorities which the biographer had to weigh up. Even personal privacy usually gave way when it conflicted with the cause of morality. The editor of Cowper's Memoir claimed the greater importance of "moral utility" as his justification for publishing private details whose relation would otherwise have been indefensible:

> Above all, in such a case as this, there may be considerations of moral utility, in favour of a circumstantial publication, which ought to overrule and supercede all considerations of mere personal delicacy.

These were grounds which he thought justified "rescuing it from privacy."[5]

1. Biography, p.13.
2. Elements of General Knowledge, I, 242.
3. Edinburgh Review IV (July 1804), 386.
4. Preface to the British Plutarch (new edition, 1816), I, [xi].
5. Memoir of the early Life of William Cowper, p.v.

When moral utility conflicted with truth, though, the balance altered, and it became no longer an over-ruling consideration. This conflict is strikingly seen in Stanfield's chapter on "Impartiality and Moral Power," where he describes the three qualities necessary for the biographer as competence, impartiality, and "moral power." The "two great ends of biography" he defines later in the chapter; they are "to obtain a deeper insight into the principles of the human mind, and to offer examples to practical observation and improvement."[1] One of Stanfield's reviewers pointed out that the twin topics of this chapter were "injudiciously connected," because

> an impartial and morally meretorious characterization are in some cases inconsistent. We believe that we must prefer the impartial system. The vicious have a right to know whether advancement in life is occasionally favoured more by cultivating or by repressing meretricious propensities; ... whether manners do not avail more than virtues, and figure than manners; whether rashness outstrips prudence, and plasticity succeeds better than principle.[2]

This argument, which put moral utility below truth in the hierarchy of biographical rules, was widely accepted. The importance given to truth in biography, and the poor standing of mendacious - particularly panegyrical - works has already been described. As truth could not be compromised, other means had to be adopted in order to maintain the didactic imperative. A reviewer of Mary Hay's Female Biography explained what should be done:

> It is, indeed, no advantage to the cause of virtue to disguise the truth, or to describe human characters as faultless: yet the less the reader is invited to dwell on vicious examples, the better. Let the just and appropriate merit of females, as well as males, be marked by their biographer, but let their de-merits be specified only to be condemned.[3]

1. Essay, pp. 134, 145.
2. Monthly Review LLXIX (August 1814), 361, 362.
3. Ibid. XLIII (January 1804), 93.

The practice was commonly followed. White's Memoirs of Nelson, quoted above, contains no mention of Lady Hamilton. If it had, Nelson would have had to be presented as quite a different sort of example.

There were three courses of action open to the biographer faced with the life of a reprobate. Firstly he could turn away from the subject altogether.[1] Wrangham took this view unreservedly, and was not prepared to allow such characters any place in his British Plutarch:

> An apology will hardly be expected from me for having excluded from this Pantheon of British Worthies such names as Foote, and Shenstone, and Churchill and Sterne.... It shall not be my fault if a passion be kindled in any ingenuous bosum for pugilism or profligacy, in or out of canonicals.[2]

Though unusual as a statement of policy, the practice was a popular one in the early nineteenth century, for the "rogue biography," a notable form in the eighteenth century,[3] practically died out as a class, at a time when increased publishing activity might have been expected to extend it. The second course open to the biographer was that followed by White with Nelson, the distortion of the life into a panegyric. This was a frequent practice, but one which was commonly condemned, because it was untruthful, and also, as a reviewer pointed out, because it "ceases to be that operative lesson, in which the warnings of unsuccessful error speak more impressively than the encouragements of prosperous virtue."[4] The third course was for the biographer to recognise openly that his subject did not present a model for imitation, and to adjust his aim accordingly. The

1. As Peacock was to write in his Memoirs of Shelley, "no man is bound to write the life of another."
2. I, xiii - xvi.
3. The genre is discussed by Stauffer, I, 196-256. He writes that "hanging was the most nearly certain way to immediate biographical fame in the eighteenth century." (p. 199).
4. Monthly Review NS I (January 1826), 90. (Review of Taylor's Memoirs of Jane Taylor.)

Monthly reviewer cited above was one of those who recognised clearly that not all lives could be used directly to promote "moral power." There was a point at which biographies became useless as example, and beyond which more moral mileage was to be obtained by holding obvious vices up for detestation, than by exhibiting dubious virtues for imitation.[1]

The anonymous biographer of Lady Hamilton demanded of biography "a discrimination of excellence and defects" because where "these are not stated with fidelity, and balanced with judgment, the reader is misled." The axiom that biography is, of all descriptions of writing, "the most impressively adapted for moral purposes" was reiterated:

> The mistake of describing the fair side of human nature only, has a direct tendency to contract the mind within a sphere wherein little exertion will seem requisite to become eminent either in knowledge or virtue.

The writer believed that the unquestionable moral purpose of biography could subsume even the most dissolute life for its purposes:

> Such is the wise order of Providence, that the very errors and crimes of men are oftentimes made subservient to the general good, by being rendered beacons and landmarks to warn other passengers, in this probationary course, against falling by those delusions which have proved fatal to so many of the most favoured of the human race.[2]

1. Cf. the Introduction to the 1762 abridgment of Plutarch's Lives, I, vi. "An ingenious gentleman of my acquaintance, when asked what was the best lesson for youth ? answered, The Life of a good man: being asked, what was the next best ? replied The Life of a bad one." (Quoted by Stauffer, I, 312.)

2. Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 5, 6-7, 11.

The bad life as a warning beacon became a favourite image.[1] Haydon used it in his Author's Introduction to his Autobiography - "my mistakes I hope will be a beacon to the inexperienced"[2] - and Watkins in the concluding paragraph of his Memoirs of Sheridan:

> Such was Richard Brinsley Sheridan, whose memoir will be of service if it be regarded as a beacon pointing out the extreme danger of resting satisfied in the possession of splendid talents without applying them to any efficient and practical purposes in the great business of human life.[3]

Thomas Moore, also writing about Sheridan, deplored the failure of biographers to face up to the dark sides of their subjects' lives, and their practice of resorting to vagueness "as the means of evading disagreeable truths," because "the world is defrauded of one half of that lesson - as useful at least in warning as encouraging - which the history of Genius and its frailities bequeaths to mankind."[4] Throughout the period biographers stressed this two-way utility, often as the concluding reflection of the work. Anna Seward, for example, ended her Memoirs of Darwin with the statement that "while the intellectual powers of the wise and the renowned, excite admiration, their errors may not less usefully be contemplated as warnings, than their virtues as examples."[5] The view that biography could be exemplary by negative as well as by positive means was often promoted by biographers, because the detection and publication

1. An early usage is in Monboddo, On the Origin and Progress of Language (1774), I, 3. "My errors may be of use, by serving as beacons to direct into the right course men of greater learning." (N.E.D. beacon 6b (fig.)). The use of the word in the juvenile prize essays at the turn of the century shows that it was then widespread. Cf. The Juvenile Library I, 169; the bad "are held up as beacons to warn the juvenile adventurer of the quicksands and rocks which surround him."
2. Autobiography and Memoirs, I, 3.
3. II, 398.
4. Advertisement to Sheridan's Works (1821), I, ix - x.
5. P. 430.

of vice, for whatever purposes, made for more exciting biographies than simple blandishments to virtue.

The double utility of biography is displayed very neatly in Northcote's Life of Reynolds. Reynolds is described as having raised himself by his own abilities as near to perfection as a human being could be expected to arrive. By contrast, William Gandy, of whom Northcote added a brief memoir in an appendix to the second edition, was made to stand as an example of the opposite sort:

> I cannot close the memoir of this man without noticing how much it proves that the greatest abilities may become totally useless to the possessor, and lost to the world at large, if not directed by virtue and industry, for the lives of such persons, as they exhibit an example of the distresses to which idleness and want of moral principles may expose men of parts, may be a useful lesson to the rising generation.[1]

"The knowledge of what we ought to avoid," wrote Northcote, is as important as knowing "what we ought to pursue." Therefore "even the lives of bad men may become profitable examples, to point out the misery that is ever attendant on bad conduct."[2] Unfortunately for biographers, though, only fiction could provide such clear cut and dependable lessons, and ensure the consequent misery. In reality the most virtuous lives were frequently the most obscure, while there were in the earlier nineteenth century a number of men who attained great fame without being morally admirable figures. Burns, Nelson, and Byron were the most notable of these flawed heroes, and they posed perplexing problems for biographers working on the premise that "the good end happily, the bad unhappily."[3]

1. Life of Reynolds, II, 345.
2. Ibid. Preface, I, xi.
3. Miss Prism's definition of fiction in Wilde's Importance of being Earnest.

The moral shortcomings of all these men were common knowledge, but they were all, in their own way, popular heroes, and so could not be used as warning beacons. What was the biographer to do ? One commentator of the time complained that the depiction of men of genius not only failed to take any account of morality, but seemed actually to propose bad principles:

> It is too common ... to represent the failings of men of genius, in such colours as almost to convert them into virtues; and it is quite an ordinary thing to talk of the incompatibility of orderly habits with brilliant talents, insomuch that many would-be geniuses, have actually invested themselves with the eccentricities of others, to which they had no natural bias, fearing to walk in the paths of soberness and propriety, lest they should be reproached with dulness and stupidity.[1]

The reviewer went on to commend one biographer for "exposing this prevalent notion," but in truth it was a notion which was not disposed of easily or simply. Another writer, M'Nicoll, thought that care should be taken not to counteract the good effects of a writer's works by writing his life, for "the celebrity of his labours may give a powerful sanction to the defects of his character." If there was any likelihood of this, M'Nicoll concluded, "his life may well be spared."[2] It did not seem practicable, though, to "spare" even Cowper's, let alone men of the importance of Burns, Nelson, and Byron. How could their lives be told so as not to conflict with the important moral objects of biography ? One solution was that finally adopted, twenty-six years after the death of Robert Burns, by his brother Gilbert. This was to abandon the attempt at vindication - which was still being valiantly continued by Peterkin in 1815 - and to display

1. Eclectic Review NS VII (April 1817), 373. (Review of Adams' Memoirs of Hunter.)
2. Life of Cowper, p. iv.

the life undisguisedly as a cautionary narrative. Such a reappraisal involved altering the whole focus of the biography from Burns' triumphs to his failures and unhappinesses, and especially to those which could be attributed to his moral defects. The biographical sketch which Gilbert Burns prefixed to the 1822 edition of the poems concludes with the statement that Burns' failings

> have been detailed in this sketch of his life, from motives for which no apology is necessary: to guard ambitious and ardent minds from similar irregularities and wanderings, and to explain why such a man, after the first burst of popular applause was past, lived and died more unhappily than would probably have been the case had he never known what it was to be caressed and admired.[1]

This treatment was possible with Burns many years after his death, but could hardly be expected to operate for national heroes such as Nelson and Byron when they were still vividly remembered. Nelson's infidelities were well-known long before the publication in 1814 of the letters to Lady Hamilton, but his death in battle could not be seen, even by the most moralistic biographer, as retribution for his sins. His biographers either ignored the relationship with Lady Hamilton, as White did, minimized it, like Southey, or else claimed that the moral example cut one way only. This was Brougham's view. According to him Nelson was to be admired and imitated as a public figure, but his personal behaviour was to be ignored:

> The notorious fact of Lord Nelson's domestic misconduct to his wife, has too long held out a kind of sanction to the false reasoning, which seeks to shelter kindred delinquencies under the authority of great examples.[2]

1. Poems (1822), I, xxv.
2. Edinburgh Review XXIII (September 1814), 404. (Review of the Letters to Lady Hamilton.)

Pascal wrote that "the example of Alexander's chastity has not made as many chaste men as his drunkenness has made drunkards."[1] In the 1820's it was feared that the example of Byron would inspire more men to adultery than to poetry and liberty. The fear was eloquently expressed six months after Byron's death:

> It is not to be suffered that a habitual infidel, a habitual debauchee, and a habitual rebel to the honour and name of his country, should be held up to public admiration, on the simple plea that he wrote verses of whatever excellence. There is danger in this absurd and giddy homage; because half the vices of mankind are the work of imitation .... Let us deify Byron, and we shall find tens of thousands, who, without his ability, will exult to follow his heartless, debasing, and profligate example.[2]

Even worse than this, as Gally Knight pointed out in a letter to John Murray shortly after the publication of the second volume of Moore's Life of Byron, was the likelihood that readers would select for imitation only those aspects of Byron's life which the moral view would wish to ignore:

> I regret to see Lord Byron's amours so openly paraded before the public. It is an indecorous exhibition, and but too likely to do harm, for young men will admire the whole of the life, because it belonged to genius; and will imitate the only part of it with which mental superiority had nothing to do.[3]

This was the problem. The various solutions which were found illustrate a remarkable determination on the part of biographers to make moral utility their object, however unpromising the material. Thomas Moore's reasoning was based upon the idea that Byron's genius was a compound rather than a mixture, so that its constituent parts could not be separated out as

1. Quoted from the Pensées by A. Maurois, Aspects of Biography (Cambridge, 1929), p.123.
2. Universal Review II (November 1824), 258-259. (Review of Medwin, Dallas, et al..)
3. A Publisher and his Friends, II, 323. The dangers seen in Byron were similar to those attributed to fiction.

extenuation and excuse for the behaviour of others:

> Neither is any great danger to be apprehended from the sanction or seduction of such an example; as they who would dare to plead the authority of Lord Byron for their errors must first be able to trace them to the same palliating sources.[1]

Byron's "moral derangement," he wrote, could be extenuated by his genius, but not excused even in him. Brydges shared Moore's ideas of Byron's genius, believing that "many of the traits and habits most blamed in his character proceeded from this source, and could be no more separated from his genius than the thunder can be separated from the lightning."[2] He thus agreed with Moore that Byron after his death was a special case, exempt from ordinary criticism. Other commentators disagreed with such judgment, but at the same time they did not want to pillory Byron either. The writer on Byron in the Annual Biography and Obituary for 1825 was content simply to rap his knuckles in passing:

> Solicitous, however, as the Editor has been to do justice to Lord Byron's genius, he has, at the same time, too deeply felt the duty which, in common with every public writer, he owes to the cause of public morals and decency, to allow the injury which that cause has sustained from the highly gifted individual in question to pass without any animadversion.[3]

A third attitude to Byron was the uncompromisingly extreme one taken by Watkins in his Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Lord Byron, published anonymously in 1822, with the deliberate and avowed purpose of using a biography as "the only effectual means of abridging his influence by a detection of his errors." The biography was an exposure of Byron's life,

1. Life of Byron, II, 52.
2. Foreign Travel, I, 133. (Letter dated June 24, 1824.)
3. P. iv. In the volume for the following year the principles which had been relaxed for Byron were reasserted; the editor lamented that "at a time when the public mind is unceasingly vitiated by narratives of the profligate adventures of strumpets and swindlers, every opportunity is not anxiously embraced of counteracting the pernicious tendency" with "the bright example" of virtuous men. (Volume for 1825, p [iii]).

written to "undeceive those" who might be misled. Byron's life he thought pernicious, and therefore "a full and candid examination of the author's history is necessary in order to correct the mischief likely to be produced by the influence of his name, and the popularity of his writings."[1] It was unusual for a full-length biography to be devoted so unremittingly to exposure. Watkins' work represents, though, an important use of biography at the time, one summed up by William Cooke in his Memoirs of Samuel Foote: "We are writing the life of a man, not an apology for his life; as biography would be worse than useless to mankind, if it did not operate as an example of reproof, as well as of approbation."[2]

The great concern over the moral influence of Byron's life overshadowed discussion of the moral tendency of his works. This was typical. The view that a writer's life was of less interest than his works found no place at all in the discussion of moral utility. Even if the writings expressed the most enthusiastic support for morality, they were not regarded as carrying more weight than the life. Fielding had opened the first chapter of Joseph Andrews with the observation, which he claimed as already "trite", that "Examples work more forcibly on the Mind than Precepts." His conclusion that "a good Man therefore is a standing Lesson to all his Acquaintance, and of far greater use in that narrow Circle, than a good Book" was widely accepted and repeated. Mrs. Pilkington wrote in 1811 that it was "universally acknowledged."[3] The same force of example was

1. Preface, pp. 12-13.
2. I, 3-4.
3. Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters, Preface. She quoted "Examples move where precept fails,/And sermons are less read than tales."

claimed by Cooke:

> Of the uses of biography so much has been already said, that it is almost unnecessary to add to the number of encomiasts. Theoretic writers only lay down rules by which mankind may be instructed by precept; but biography describes events, not as they might but as they actually have happened.[1]

This was perhaps the most common justification for biography, and particularly for religious biography, at this time, summarised by Walter Wilson's remark that the dead "teach us by their actions no less than by their writings."[2] Scott endorsed the view, writing in his autobiography that "few sermons can be read with so much profit as the Memoirs of Burns, of Chatterton, or of Savage."[3] The usefulness of biography in revealing how successfully the subject had lived up to his own precepts was frequently noted. All the responsibility for the life, and sometimes for the selection of the works, fell upon the biographer, and this was often seen as an onerous trust. In Fielding's words, again, the biographer, "by communicating such valuable Patterns to the World... may perhaps do a more extensive Service to Mankind than the Persons whose Life originally afforded the Pattern."[4] Almost a century after Joseph Andrews Empson argued the point strongly in the Edinburgh:

> An individual life is soon gone, and its immediate consequences, whether for good or for evil, are "cribb'd and cabin'd" within a very bounded sphere. It is through its influence by example, - it is in its moral effects on his fellow creatures, as comrades, followers, admirers, victims, that the thoughts and actions of a human being may acquire a fearful vitality,

1. Memoirs of Samuel Foote, I, [1].
2. Life and Times of De Foe, I, 2. Wilson stresses the moral utility of biography (citing Plutarch and Johnson), and he reads Defoe in the same spirit. He takes a more moral view of Moll Flanders than Moll herself does; for him the work proves that "vice is sure to bring down its own punishment." (III, 490-491.)
3. Lockhart, Life, I, 2.
4. Joseph Andrews, Book I, I.

> and reach to the utmost end of time. He may thus be made a contemporary protector or corrupter through all future ages. A biographer, therefore, who undertakes by his express office to preserve the memorials of a life, which would otherwise have been quickly forgotten in the grave, is more answerable for these main and lasting consequences, than the person whose existence he prolongs.[1]

Empson saw this as a responsibility and as an opportunity, for while a great deal depended upon the choice of subject, the author was enabled, as biographer, to wield an influence which he could never otherwise have hoped to attain. So, it might be added, was the subject.[2]

Another class of biographies, often dismissed by the critics as valueless, had a different sort of justification. Thomas Moore remarked to Dumont of the Edgeworth Memoirs that "the details of a life passed usefully in that middling class of society must always be interesting."[3] This was because they were so close to the experience and interests of many readers. Maria Edgeworth herself argued that from the biographies of subjects "in different classes of society various results may be expected." The life of a military hero, according to her, would have only limited application, yet emulation would produce from time to time the great soldiers which the country required,while "the biography of private individuals has a more humble, but not less useful object - to improve mankind in the social and domestic virtues, by showing how much these tend to human felicity."[4] The frequently invoked Johnsonian dictum "there has

1. Edinburgh Review LI (April 1830), 250. (Review of Life of Munro.)
2. One reviewer wrote that some people (including Kirke White) had done more for morality by dying young "than their personal exertions could have effected if their time on earth had reached the utmost limits of human existence." Eclectic Review VII (October 1811), 896. (Review of Worgan's Poems.)
3. Moore's Journal, September 19, 1818. Journal II, 166-167.
4. Memoirs, II, 431-432. Her view was a common one, echoed, for example, by a reviewer of the Life of Raffles who wrote that it "cannot fail to operate forcibly on the minds of those placed in similar situations." Quarterly Review XLII (March 1830), 407.)

rarely passed a life..." was not always an unreasoning extenuation of yet another needless memoir; sometimes it was claimed on authentically Johnsonian grounds. William Jay wrote:

> For the purposes of biography, those lives are the most eligible that are the most imitable; and these are derived from characters that belong to our own community, that are found in the same relations and conditions with ourselves.[1]

The practice was warmly approved by reviewers. One explained:

> Between splendid and useful biography, a great and marked distinction subsists. The lives of kings and heroes may furnish much to dazzle and captivate: but we must descend to the history of more ordinary beings for circumstances that are applicable to the generality of mankind. In the memoirs of such men as Dr. Adam, though little occurs that is attractive to individuals who read for mere amusement, we find these facts recorded which are of infinite value to the young aspiring mind.[2]

The great majority of biographies neither aimed at moral utility nor achieved it. As far as there was any answer to the multifarious criticisms of apparently useless biographies, illustrated in Chapters I and II, though, it was simply this: that such works were best adapted potentially to be useful to their readers. The first number of the Eclectic Review, for example, claimed that informal autobiographical memoirs held "the first rank in utility, though perhaps not in splendour, of biographical writings,"[3] and the point was emphasised by James Northcote in the Preface to his Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds:

> In respect to benefit and application, we are much more interested in a knowledge of the lesser occurrences, even of great men's, than of the more exalted actions from whence they derive their glory, because it is in every

1. Memoirs of Winter, p. xiv.
2. Monthly Review LXVI (December 1811), 386. (Review of Life of Dr. Adam.)
3. Eclectic Review I (January 1805), 49. (Review of Memoirs of Wakefield.)

> one's power to imitate them as men, though very few have opportunities of emulating them as heroes.[1]

Conversely, when utility was the major consideration, biographies of the famous could often be criticised as remote and inapplicable.[2] Hence the reviewer's exasperation when dealing with religious biographies which were useless for purposes of practical morality: "Now, in the name of common sense," asked one, "what concern have ordinary Christians, desirous only of learning their duty to their neighbours, with King Lysimachus, Edepsum, or the Tragasaean salt ?"[3]

For the purposes of emulation the ideal biographical subject had to be within the reader's power of imitation morally as well as in terms of rank. Johnson had long before pointed out the practical shortcomings of panegyric: "If nothing but the bright side of characters should be shown, we should sit down in despondency, and think it utterly impossible to imitate them in anything."[4] This was echoed in a condemnation of the brief biographies contained in the Annual Biography and Obituary for 1827 as panegyrics rather than "fair and honest estimations." The writer concluded that "biography, in order to be useful, should present us with both sides of the medal."[5] Panegyric was useless if it set an impossible standard for emulation, but it could also fall down simply by being tedious and therefore uninspiring. A boring biography, whatever its other merits, was unlikely to be useful. Sydney Smith, writing to Lord Grey in 1820,

1. 2nd Edition (1818), I, x-xi.
2. Cf. Johnson's hatred of the Punic War. (Mrs. Piozzi, Anecdotes (1786), p.80, also Life of Johnson III, 206. n.1.)
3. Quarterly Review XIV (October 1815), 245. (Review of lives of Melancthon and Taylor.)
4. Life of Johnson, IV, 53.
5. Monthly Review NS IV (February 1827), 142.

commended Defoe's Life of Colonel Jack as "entertaining enough when his hero is a scoundrel, but waxing dull as it gets moral."[1] It was necessary that a good life should be shown to be desirable as well as attainable.[2]

The approach of didactic biographers was certainly different from that of novelists. Scott's practice, for example, was to avoid making his didacticism too overt. He told Maria Edgeworth at Edgeworthstown in August 1825 that "the rats won't go into the trap if they smell the hand of the ratcatcher."[3] In biographies of the period, though, the ratcatcher often stood by in his regalia. Readers could be addressed directly; the Dedication of Modern General Biography expressed "anxious hopes" that the reader, "in reviewing the patience, industry, and other excellencies" of the subjects "may be stimulated to the practice of virtue, and to a due improvement of your several talents."[4] With books for juveniles there was rarely any concealment at all; the parade of intention was perhaps intended to disavow at the outset any fictional entertainment. The fact that a number of precocious teenagers, including the fourteen-year-old Thomas Love Peacock, could deliberate on the prize essay question "Is History or Biography the more improving study ?"[5] shows how little

1. January 24, 1820. Letters I, 344.
2. Cf. Topham's Life of Elwes, (12th edition, 1805), p. 100. "A very ingenious man used to say, 'that had it been his lot to live near such a man as RICHARDSON'S Sir Charles Grandison, he would have got out of the country as soon as he could !'"
3. Letter from Maria Edgeworth to Mrs. Ruxton, December 19, 1825. Quoted by Butler, p. 446.
4. Wellington, Salop., 1827. The conclusion of Juvenile Biography (1824), made the same point. (p. 145.)
5. In The Juvenile Library I; see also Juvenile Essays (Sheffield, 1805).

subterfuge there was. The assumption that biography was an improving study was shared by readers and writers alike.

There was a further species of utility sought by writers and acknowledged by critics, one which was more practical than moral. D'Israeli's claim in his "Dissertation upon Anecdotes" that anecdotes can have a practical application pointed to this:

> While such anecdotes form a source of amusement, they convey at the same time some of its most valuable instructions. We learn from these anecdotes of Poussin and of Pope, that a painter must bring home moss and flowers, and a poet sentiments and images.[1]

Slight and even facetious as these examples are, they do represent useful knowledge; the rise of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge witnesses its importance at this time, yet it was biography rather than the Society's tracts which provided it. Practical utility was sought not so much in the details of painting or carpentry, or even poetry, as at the level of what was later to be termed self-help. Well might reviewers remark on the usefulness of "the biographies of the clever and virtuous men, who, from humble life, have raised themselves into opulence and estimation in our own country."[2] It was from this viewpoint that Peterkin saw Burns, not as a warning beacon, but as an example for practical emulation:

> Born and educated a Scottish peasant, he affords a striking example of what the spirit of man, even in the most unfavourable circumstances, can achieve. Many may be dazzled by his fame, and some misled by his errors: but a much greater number must be roused, by contemplating his condition in life, and his works, to exertions and to pursuits, which will brighten the glories of our country.[3]

1. Literary Miscellanies, p.52.
2. Universal Review II (November 1824), 303-304. (Review of Self Advancement.)
3. A Review of the Life of Robert Burns, x - xi.

Northcote's Life of Reynolds was typical of this sort of biography; it did not inculcate pious behaviour, nor was it overtly utilitarian, yet it demonstrated how assiduous cultivation of original talents could bring fame, fortune, and happiness.[1]

"The concept of biography as an instrument of edification," in Altick's phrase, "was all-pervasive,"[2] and this was so even where it was not spelled out. The principal uses have been set forth in this chapter; others have been described already in the course of this study, and need only be mentioned here. Firstly biography provided unrivalled information about the way of life of by-gone ages; Pepys' diary was welcomed by some reviewers principally for the picture which it gave of English life during the Restoration. Biography also provided data for the emerging science of psychology. It was also held in high esteem by literary critics, who rarely at this time separated biography from criticism. Apart from all these practical uses was the task which biography performed for the nation in providing literary memorials to the faithful departed:

> And as our country is entitled to its share of honour, in having produced many persons eminent in all faculties, whose memorable virtues, learning, and public labours have deserved to be transmitted to posterity; so it is some further credit to it, that justice has usually been done to their merits by the pens of their survivors, which, after the public have been deprived of their personal services, have kept their characters alive for the instruction and improvement as well as the entertainment of those that come after them.[3]

1. The same view is found in Joseph Farington's Memoirs of Reynolds (1819).
2. Lives and Letters, p.87.
3. Life of John Sharp, I, iii - iv.

The opening chapter illustrated how strong was the opposition to writers who confused biography and history. It was an odd twist of literary taste which led biographers to treat biography so pre-eminently as a useful form or medium, and thus to blur the very distinction which was even then being so arduously achieved.

CONCLUSION

"In proportion as country advances in Literature," wrote Joseph Adams, "biography becomes a more interesting study."[1] The early nineteenth century was such a period of advance, and both production and criticism of biographies were important activities. The chief areas of interest can now be seen. They are the ways in which the emerging theory of biography reflected the times, the development of a body of critical opinion about biography, and the role of the reviewers in establishing it. Finally, the similarity of the principles established by 1831 to those still propounded today suggests that the period was a formative one for biographical theory. Beyond these findings, the commentators deliberated on the numerous details which make up the main part of this study and which all provide evidence of a continuous, strong, and minute concern for the state of biography.

As Part I has documented, the profusion of biography in the early nineteenth century was intimately linked with philosophical, cultural and social aspects of the age. The explosion of biography as a genre demonstrates in the clearest way the shift of interest from mankind to individual man. More specifically, the sudden blossoming of autobiography and literary biography, and their warm reception, were notable literary innovations. The former, as Hart writes, "gave the reader direct access to the particulars," as distinct from a third party's generalisations,[2] and the latter established the important connection between biography and criticism, one which was stressed too by prefatory biography. Jacques

1. Memoirs of John Hunter (1817), I.
2. Lockhart as Romantic Biographer, p.9.

Barzun might have been writing of biography when he wrote of the Romantic poets that "the greater part of their poetry was the record of observation, whether of their own souls, or the world outside. The accuracy is sometimes painful, and the detail excessive."[1] The interest in letters and conversation, especially, is part of the same trend; again there was "direct access" to the voice of the subject. As well as reflecting such significant shifts in taste, the rise of biography was seen as important for reasons as diverse as its connections with "the march of intellect" and personality cults, the significance of obscure lives, and of the personalising of history. The reviewers who saw in the age of biography a symptom of the times were certainly right.

At the opening of the century, Altick writes, "biography was only beginning to attain independent status as a literary genre."[2] No longer a branch of history, its new-found emancipation showed itself in the jealous concern of the commentators that its rules should be recognised and respected. This was successful to such an extent that the offspring excelled the parent: the age of biography "was not a period of distinguished historical writing."[3] The art of biography was established only slowly, and with many qualifications and contradictions. Where commentators agreed was in their call for biography to be rescued from the hands of drudges, and in their belief that a biographer required talents beyond those for accumulation. Carlyle pleaded this eloquently:

1. Classic, Romantic and Modern, p.62.
2. Lives and Letters, pp. 78-79.
3. Jack, p.355.

> The qualifications of a Biographer have sometimes been rated low: but to illustrate human character, to trace the progress of philosophical discovery, to estimate and class the creation of "the poet's pen" - to do all this properly, no ordinary talents and diligence in the use of them, are absolutely requisite.[1]

When we turn to the actual exercise of these skills, we see that the biographer's competence was judged mainly on his ability to use documentary detail. The preceeding pages have shown this to be the major concern of commentators. Although the resort to documents found a great deal of favour with the "Romantic" reading public, it encouraged works which were artistically very pedestrian. There was very little experiment with the form of biography. Beyond the establishment of the life-and-times and the life-and-letters forms, and the acceptance of autobiography and literary biography as new branches, the period is primarily one of consolidation. The extraordinary conservatism of biography is seen most strikingly in the adoption and general acceptance of letters as a principal medium at the very time that they had been abandoned by novelists for more realistic forms. The critics misunderstood and made disreputable the one branch of biography which could have been expected to blossom at this time; the idea of environmentalism never recovered from what Altick calls its "grand-scale misapplication"[2] in Godwin's Life of Chaucer.

The conservatism was compounded by the prosaic and utilitarian tone of most of the biographical reviewing. The choice of works for review was undiscriminating; a critic would review a biography even when he considered that "to such a work, the rules of rational criticism would be

1. Letter to Thomas Murray, June 7, 1819. Letters I, 181.
2. Lives and Letters, p.219.

wholly misapplied. It is at too great a distance beneath them."[1] The biographical criticism requires extensive winnowing before the principles which underlie it begin to emerge, but the repeated, exasperated attacks on unnecessary and ephemeral biography do have their own significance. One finds also consistent, informed criticism from many of the most eminent critics of the age. The actual amount of criticism is not more surprising than its repudiation by biographers. The monthly lambasting of unnecessary, over-long and incompetently-executed biographies had no effect on the practice, as a reviewer lamented:

> We are quite tired of giving good advice to authors. Our pains are all thrown away upon the stiff-necked generation; and we may complain with the Dean of St. Patrick that our exhortations could not be less attended to if they were delivered from the pulpit.[2]

The general superiority of the criticism to the practice of biography is evident at every turn, and the contrast between them must be stressed. No attempt has been made here to evaluate the practice. Before 1800 there was, as J. L. Clifford found, very little theoretical writing about biography. After about that date criticism began to abound, and it is this first generation of biographical theory which has been examined here.

By 1831 biography and biographical criticism were both recognisably what they are today. Autobiography, in particular, changed the face of biography during the period, and the pressure to allow the subject to be his own biographer became irresistible. As a result, the incorporation of original material had become by the end of the period almost mandatory.

1. Monthly Review NS VII March 1828, 379. (Review of Reminiscences of Henry Angelo.)
2. Quarterly Review XIII (July 1815), 408. (Review of Dunlop's History of Fiction.)

It was so widespread, in fact, that it began to be discredited for purposes of revelation. Although the Victorian heyday of life-and-letters biography has given way in our own time to separate, full-scale publication of letters, the principle that letters represent some of the biographer's most valuable materials has never since been doubted. As has been suggested earlier, the composite, illustrated biographies which are a feature of our time would have been familiar to early nineteenth-century readers. Similarly the popular series "Writers and their World"[1] is nothing other than the notorious life-and-times biography in a new format. Other areas of discussion continue into the present age. The question of how much a biographer should reveal took place in the shadow of Boswell's Life of Johnson, which changed the basis from which all later theorists worked. "Everyone who followed was forced to consider at least the possibility of rivalling Boswell's comprehensive coverage."[2] Lockhart, reviewing Croker's 1831 edition of Boswell, wrote that "the Boswellian style of biography was quite new." Although some readers were ashamed to find it so attractive, he wrote, the example could not be ignored:

> The curiosity of the public having been so gratified as to a single illustrious man, and their satisfaction made so apparent in the boundless popularity of the performance, the evil, if evil it were, was done, and could not be repaired. From that time a new spirit animated all this department of literature.[3]

It should be noted, too, that in almost every area of this study Johnson himself had anticipated the theories in his own fine biographical criticism.

1. Published by Thames and Hudson.
2. J. L. Clifford, From Puzzles to Portraits, p. 114.
3. Quarterly Review XLVI (November 1831), 18.

The debate is continued today in recognisably similar terms. Should Holroyd have detailed Strachey's homosexuality, or Edel have described James' constipation ? Today, with the streamlining of research and improvement of retrieval systems, we are perhaps in an even worse position to judge when the recording of trivia becomes ludicrous. The psychological basis of what makes an incident revealing or important is certainly now better understood, but this too is an aspect of biography which can be traced back to the time of R. L. Edgeworth and D'Israeli. As early as 1825 a reviewer could write that parts of a biography were "distinguished for their prolixity, although it cannot be denied that they contain many things which are curious in a 'psychological' point of view."[1] Of the aspects of biography examined here only its use for didactic purposes is irrevocably dated. In other respects the period can be seen as the seedbed of modern biographical discussion.

Sir Sidney Lee, lecturing at Cambridge in 1911, echoed a complaint a century old when he said that "that mass of laborious works which bears the title of 'the life and times' of this or that celebrated person calls for censure."[2] Lytton Strachey's attempt a few years later to bury "those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead" has had no lasting effect. Strachey has himself been commemorated in two massive volumes, which contain generous portions of his times and his letters. The "subtler strategy"[3] which Strachey championed has

1. Monthly Review CVIII (October 1825), 150. (Review of Moore's Life of Sheridan).
2. Principles of Biography, p.29.
3. Eminent Victorians (1918), pp. viii, vii.

not been popular.[1] When we turn to published theory, it must be remarked that after more than 150 years there is still no handbook to supercede Stanfield's. Biography as a form is still hardly discussed; while individual novelists, poets, and dramatists have periodicals devoted to them, biography does not merit one for the whole genre. The early nineteenth century was very much richer in biographical criticism than our century has been. And yet, as A. O. J. Cockshut has written recently, "for nearly two centuries we have been living in a golden age of biographical writing."[2] The reputation of our own age is certainly maintained by such works as Edel's Henry James, Ellmann's James Joyce, and Holroyd's Lytton Strachey. The failure of modern critical theory to match these advances makes one appreciate more fully the initiative and perceptiveness of the first generation of biographical critics, a century and a half ago.

1. The two-volume format for literary biography has found renewed favour in the most recent times, with notable lives of Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Hardy, and E. M. Forster.
2. Truth to Life, p.II.

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