Some Observations upon an Article in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1819

[work in progress]

This pamphlet was unpublished in Byron’s lifetime – perhaps because his London associates wondered at the self-defeating gesture it involved, whereby publicity would be given to a rumour about him (the “League of Incest”), which did not have wide currency, and to a group of poets (the Lakers, and Keats), whom he despised, even though no-one read them and even though their combined sales never reached the number achieved by a single print-run one of his own works.

On January 5 1819 Hobhouse had written to Byron, advising the suppression of *Don Juan*. Part of his argument had been as follows:

Neither Southey, Wordsworth nor Coleridge have any character except with their own crazy proselytes some fifty perhaps in number: so what harm can you do them and what good can you do the world by your criticism?

... This consideration, therefore, makes me sum up with strenuously advising a total suppression of *Don Juan* ...

Three years later, on November 4th 1822, Hobhouse visits the protestant cemetery in Rome, and shows no knowledge in his diary that anyone called Keats has been buried there for over a year. Byron’s proposed pamphlet, in which the Lakers and Keats are treated as considerable literary figures, shows a wider reading than that of his supposedly sophisticated London colleagues, and a better judgement as to how contemporary poetry will seem to posterity. Nevertheless, to any contemporary reader the pamphlet would have seemed trivial.

As indicated below, Byron began the pamphlet in Ravenna on March 23rd 1820; he sent it to Murray on March 28th. On April 23rd he wrote that he did not want it published – a characteristic move, designed to hand the responsibility to Murray if it did by chance get into print. On May 20th he changed his mind, having looked at the proofs; and on June 8th changed it back again, having received a remonstrance from Hobhouse (Hobhouse’s 1820 diary contains no references to the work). Later he wished the critical, as opposed to the personal section, appended to an edition of *Hints from Horace*; but the whole idea came to nothing, and the pamphlet, appendix, or note, was forgotten, as the relationship between publisher and poet deteriorated.

*Some Observations upon an Article in Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* was first published by Murray in his 1833 complete Byron.

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1: *Byron’s Bulldog*, p.260.
Some Observations upon an Article in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1819

Dedication to Isaac d’Israeli Esq.,

To the amiable and ingenious author of *The Calamities* and *Quarrels of Authors*, this additional Quarrel and Calamity, is inscribed by one of the Number.

Motto. “Why how now Hecate? you look angrily” (*Macbeth*).

March 15th 1820.

“The Life of a writer” has been said, by Pope I believe, to be “a warfare upon earth”. As far as my own experience has gone I have nothing to say against the proposition – and like the rest, having once plunged into this state of hostility, must, however reluctantly, carry it on. An article has appeared in a periodical work entitled *Remarks on Don Juan*, which has been so full of this spirit on the part of the writer as to require some observations on mine.

In the first place – I am not aware by what right – the writer assumes this work, which is anonymous, to be my production. He will answer that there is internal evidence – that is to say – that there are passages which appear to be written in my name or in my manner – but might not this have been done on purpose by another? He will say, “Why not then deny it?” To this I could answer that of all the things attributed to me within the last five years – Pilgrimages to Jerusalem – Deaths upon Pale Horses – Odes to the Land of the Gaul – Adieus to England – Songs to Madame La Valette – Odes to St. Helena – Vampires, and what not – of which, God knows, I never composed nor read a syllable beyond their titles in advertisements, I never thought it worth while to disavow any, except one which came linked with an account of my “residence in the Isle of Mitylene” where I never resided – and appeared to be carrying the amusement of those persons who think my name can be of any use to them, a little too far.

I should hardly therefore, if I did not take the trouble to disavow these things published in my name and yet not mine, go out of my way to deny an anonymous work; which might appear an act of supererogation. With regard to *Don Juan*, I neither deny nor admit it to be mine. Everybody may form their own opinion, but if there be any who now, or in the progress of that poem – if it is to be continued – feel or should feel themselves so aggrieved as to require a more explicit answer privately – and personally – they shall have it.

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2: Isaac d’Israeli (1766-1848), father of Benjamin; literary critic. Author of *Calamities of Authors* (1812-13), and *Quarrels of Authors* (1814). B.’s dedication indicates a respect for his expertise.

3: The Hecate scene in *Macbeth* (III v), is regarded as the work of Thomas Middleton. B. uses the line to indicate the strife and destruction he anticipates if his pamphlet is published.

4: Pope actually wrote, “The life of a wit is a warfare on earth” (preface to *Works*, 1717).


6: “That Lord Byron has never written any thing more decisively and triumphantly expressive of the greatness of his genius, will be allowed by all who have read this poem” – *Blackwood’s*, p.512.

7: All works attributed to B. since 1816. *The Vampire* is by Polidori.

I have never shrunk from the responsibility of what I have written, and have more than once incurred obloquy by neglecting to disavow what was attributed to my pen without foundation.

The greater part, however, of the Remarks on Don Juan contain but little on the work itself, which receives an extraordinary portion of praise as a composition. With the exception of some quotations, and a few incidental remarks, the rest of the article is neither more nor less than a personal attack upon the imputed author. It is not the first in the same publication – for I recollect to have read some time ago similar remarks upon Beppo (said to have been written by a celebrated northern preacher) in which the conclusion drawn was that “Childe Harold – Byron – and the Count in Beppo were one and the same person” – thereby making me turn out to be, as Mrs Malaprop says, “like Cerberus three Gentlemen at once.”

That article was signed “Presbyter Anglicanus”, which I presume, being interpreted, means Scotch Presbyterian. I must here observe, and it is at once ludicrous and vexatious to be compelled so frequently to repeat the same thing, that my case as an author is peculiarly hard in being everlastingly taken or mistaken for my own protagonist. It is unjust and particular. I never heard that my friend Moore was set down for a fire-worshipper on account of his Guebre – that Scott was identified with Roderick Dhu or with Balfour of Burleigh – or that notwithstanding all the magicians in Thalaba, anybody has ever taken Mr Southey for a conjuror. Whereas I have had some difficulty in extricating me even from Manfred – who, as Mr Southey slyly observes in one of his articles in the Quarterly, “Met the devil on the Jungfrau – and bullied him”, and I answer Mr Southey, who has apparently in his political life not been so successful against the great Enemy, that in this Manfred exactly followed the sacred precept “Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.”

I shall have more to say on the subject of this person – not the devil, but Mr Southey before I conclude – but for the present I must return to the article in the Edinburgh Magazine.

In the course of this article, amidst some most extraordinary observations, there occur the following words: “It appears in short as if this miserable man, having exhausted every species of sensual gratification, having drained the cup of sin even to its bitterest dregs, were resolved to show us that he is no longer a human being, even in his frailties, but a cool unconcerned fiend laughing with a detestable glee over the

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9: “The nature and causes of our difficulties will be easily understood by those of them who have read any part of Don Juan – but we despair of standing justified as to the conclusion at which we have arrived, in the opinion of any but those who have read and understood the whole of a work, in the composition of which there is unquestionably a more thorough and intense infusion of genius and vice – power and profligacy – than in any poem which had ever before been written in the English, or indeed in any other modern language” – Blackwood’s, p.512.

10: B. refers to the last sentence of a previous Blackwood’s article, signed PRESBYTER ANGLICANUS: “In evil hour did you step from your vantage-ground, and teach us Harold, Byron, and the Count of Beppo are the same” (Vol. III No. XV, June 1818, p.329).

11: Compare TVOJ, 79, 1-3: “Three gentlemen at once” (as sagely says / Good Mrs Malaprop): a line from Sheridan’s The Rivals (1775), IV ii. It occurs shortly after the unmasking of Jack Absolute. Mrs Malaprop, forsaking her usual pattern of verbal mismanagement, says, ... you are not like Cerberus, three gentlemen at once, are you?

12: In “The Fire-Worshippers” section from Lalla Rookh (1817).

13: Roderick Dhu is in Scott’s poem The Lady of the Lake (1812); Balfour of Burleigh in his novel Old Mortality (1816).

14: The hero of Southey’s epic Thalaba the Destroyer (1801) fights an array of evil conjurors.

15: Southey makes this joke in the Quarterly Review, Vol. XXI No. XIII (1819), p.366. Murray must have told B. who had written the anonymous article.

16: James 4:7.
whole of the better and worse elements of which human life is composed.” In another place there appears “the lurking place of his selfish and polluted exile.”17 – “By my troth these be bitter words!”18 With regard to the first sentence, I shall content myself with observing that it appears to have been composed for Sardanapalus, Tiberius, the Regent Duke of Orleans, or Louis XV, and that I have copied it with as much indifference as I would a passage from Suetonius, or from any of the private memoirs of the Regency, conceiving it to be amply refuted by the terms in which it is expressed, and utterly inapplicable to any private individual. On the words “lurking place” and “selfish and polluted exile”, I have something more to say. How far the capital city of a government which survived the vicissitudes of thirteen hundred years, and might still have existed but for the treachery of Buonaparte and the iniquity of his imitators – a city which was the emporium of Europe when London and Edinburgh were dens of barbarians – may be termed a “lurking place”, I leave to those who have seen or heard of Venice to decide. How far my exile may have been “polluted” it is not for me to say, because the word is a wide one, and with some of its branches may chance to overshadow the actions of most men; but that it has been “selfish” I deny. If, to the extent of my means and my power and my information of their calamities, to have assisted many miserable beings, reduced by the decay of the place of their birth, and their consequent loss of substance; if to have never rejected an application which appeared founded on truth; if to have expended in this manner sums far out of proportion to my fortune – there and elsewhere – be selfish, then have I been selfish. To have done such things I do not deem much – but it is hard indeed to be compelled to recapitulate them in my own defence by such accusations as that before me – like a panel before a jury, calling testimonies to his character – or a soldier recording his services to obtain his discharge. If the person who has made this charge of “selfishness” wishes to inform himself further on the subject, he may acquire not what he would wish to find – but what will silence and shame him – by applying to the consul-general of our nation resident in the place19 – who will be in the case either to confirm or deny what I have asserted.

I neither make, nor have ever made pretensions to sanctity of demeanour, nor regularity of conduct; but my means have not been expended principally on my own gratification – neither now nor heretofore – neither in England nor out of it – and it waits but a word from me – if I thought that word decent or necessary – to call forth the most willing witnesses, at once witnesses and proofs, in England itself – to show that there are those who have derived not the mere temporary relief of a wretched boon, but the means which led them to immediate happiness and ultimate independence – by my want of that very “selfishness” as grossly as falsely now imputed to my conduct.

Had I been a selfish man – had I been a grasping man – had I been in the worldly sense of the word even a prudent man – I should not be where I now am; I should not have taken the step which was the first that led to the events which have sunk a gulf between me and mine; but in this respect the truth will one day be made

17: “We look back with a mixture of wrath and scorn to the delight with which we suffered ourselves to be filled by one who, all the while he was furnishing us with delight, must, we cannot doubt it, have been mocking us with a cruel mockery – less cruel only, because less peculiar, than that with which he has now turned him from the lurking-place of his selfish and polluted exile, to pour the pitiful chalice of his contumely on the surrendered devotion of a virgin-bosom, and the holy hopes of the mother of his child” – Blackwood’s, p.514.
18: Mistress Quickly’s words at Henry IV II, II iv 161 app.
19: B.’s friend Richard Belgrave Hoppner. After B.’s death he gave Thomas Moore testimony of the poet’s charity when in Venice.
known – in the mean time, as Durandarte says in the Cave of Montesinos, “Patience, and shuffle the cards”.

I bitterly feel the ostentation of this statement, the first of the kind I have ever made: I feel the degradation of being compelled to make it; but I also feel its truth, and I trust to feel it on my death-bed – should it be my lot to die there. I am not less sensible of the egotism of all this – but, alas! who have made me thus egoistical in my own defence, if not they who by perversely persisting in referring fiction to truth – and tracing poetry to life – and regarding characters of imagination as creatures of existence – have made me personally responsible for almost every poetical delineation which my fancy and a particular bias of thought may have tended to produce?

The writer continues, “Those who are acquainted – as who is not? – with the main incidents of the private life of Lord Byron” and assuredly, whoever may be acquainted with these “main incidents” the writer of the Remarks on Don Juan is not, or he would use a very different language. That which I believe he alludes to as a “main incident” happened to be a very subordinate one – and the natural and almost inevitable consequence of events and circumstances long prior to the period at which it occurred. It is the last drop which makes the cup run over, and mine was already full. But to return to this man’s charge: he accuses Lord Byron of “an elaborate satire on the character and manners of his wife.” From what parts of Don Juan the writer has inferred this, he himself best know; as far as I recollect of the female characters in that production, there is but one who is depicted in ridiculous colours, or that could be interpreted as a satire upon anybody. But here my poetical sins are again visited upon me – supposing that the poem be mine. If I depict a Corsair, a Misanthrope, a Libertine, a Chief of Insurgents, or an Infidel, he is set down to the author – and if in a poem by no means ascertained to be my production there appears a disagreeable, casuistical, and by no means respectable female pedant – it is set down for my wife. Is there any resemblance? If there be, it is in those who make it – I can see none. In my writings I have rarely described any character under a fictitious name – those of whom I have spoken have had their own – in many cases a stronger satire in itself than any which could be appended to it. But of real circumstances I have availed myself plentifully, both in the serious and in the ludicrous. They are to poetry what landscape is to the painter – but my figures are not portraits. It may even have happened that I have seized on some events that have occurred under my own observation, or in my own family – as I would paint a view from my grounds, did it harmonize with my picture; but I never would introduce the likenesses of its living

20: See Don Quixote, II xxii-xxiii.
21: “Those who are acquainted, (as who is not?) with the main incidents in the private life of Lord Byron; – and who have not seen this production, (and we are aware, that very few of our Northern readers have seen it) – will scarcely believe, that the odious malignity of this man’s bosom should have carried him so far, as to make him commence a filthy and impious poem, with an elaborate satire on the character and manners of his wife – from whom, even by his own confession, he has been separated only in consequence of his own cruel and heartless misconduct” – Blackwood’s, p.514.
23: On reading Don Juan, Annabella agreed: “I am very much relieved to find that there is not any thing which I can be expected to notice, and I am thankful that none for whom I am interested can be pained or injured. – As for myself, I do not think that my sins are in the pharasaical or pedantic line, and I am very sure that he does not think they are, but avails himself of the prejudices which some may entertain against me, to give a plausible colouring to his accusations – I must however confess that the quizzing in one or two passages was so good as to make me smile at myself – therefore others are heartily welcome to laugh” (to Theresa Villiers, July 15th 1819).
members – unless their features could be made as favourable to themselves as to the
effect – which in the above instance would be extremely difficult.

My learned brother proceeds to observe that “it is in vain for Lord Byron to
attempt in any way to justify his own behaviour in that affair – and now that he has so
openly and audaciously invited enquiry and reproach – we do not see any good reason
why he should not be plainly told so by the voice of his countrymen.”24 How far the
“openness” of an anonymous poem – and the “audacity” of an imaginary character
which the writer supposes to be meant for Lady Byron – may be deemed to merit this
formidable denunciation from their “most sweet voices”25 I neither know nor care, but
when he tells me that I cannot “in any way justify my own behaviour in that affair”, I
acquiesce, because no man can “justify” himself until he knows of what he is accused,
and I have never had – and, God knows, my whole desire has ever been to obtain it –
any specific charge in a tangible shape submitted to me by the adversary – nor by
others – unless the atrocities of public rumour, and the mysterious silence of the
lady’s legal advisers may be deemed such. But is not the writer content with what has
been already said and done? Has not “the general voice of his countrymen” long ago
pronounced upon the subject – sentence without trial – and condemnation without a
charge? Have I not been exiled by ostracism, except that the shells which proscribed
me were anonymous? Is the writer ignorant of the public opinion, and the public
conduct upon that occasion? If he is – I am not. The public will forget both long
before I shall cease to remember either.

The man who is exiled by a faction has the consolation of thinking that he is a
martyr; he is upheld by hope and by the dignity of his cause, real or imaginary: he
who withdraws from the pressure of debt may indulge in the thought that time and
prudence will retrieve his circumstances; he who is condemned by the law has a term
to his banishment, or a dream of its abbreviation – or it may be the knowledge or the
belief of some injustice of the law or of its administration in his own particular; but he
who is outlawed by general opinion without the intervention of hostile politics, illegal
judgement, or embarrassed circumstances – whether he be innocent or guilty must
undergo all the bitterness of exile without hope – without pride, without alleviation.

This case was mine. Upon what grounds the public founded their opinion, I am
not aware – but it was general, and it was decisive. Of me or of mine – they knew
little except that I had written what is called poetry – was a nobleman – had married,
become a father – and been involved in differences with my wife and her relatives; no
one knew why, because the persons complaining refused to state their grievance.

The fashionable world was divided into parties, mine consisting of a very small
minority. The reasonable world was naturally on the stronger side, which happened to
be the lady’s, as was most proper and polite – the press was active and scurrilous –
and such was the rage of the day that the unfortunate publication of two copies of
verses, rather complimentary than otherwise to the subjects of both, were tortured into
a species of crime or constructive petty treason. I was accused of every monstrous
vice by public rumour and private rancour; my name, which had been a knightly or a
noble one since my fathers helped to conquer the kingdom for William the Norman,
was tainted. I felt that, if what was whispered and muttered and murmured was true –
I was unfit for England; if false – England was unfit for me. I withdrew – but this was
not enough. In other countries – in Switzerland – in the shadow of the Alps – and by

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24: “It is in vain for Lord Byron to attempt in any way to justify his own behaviour in that affair; and, now that he has so openly and audaciously invited inquiry and reproach, we do not see any good reason why he should not be plainly told so by the general voice of his countrymen” – Blackwood’s, p.514.
25: The sarcastic phrase of Coriolanus, at II iii 111.
the blue depth of the Lakes – I was pursued and breathed upon by the same blight. I crossed the mountains, but it was the same – so I went little farther and settled myself by the waves of the Adriatic, like the stag at bay who betakes him to the waters.\footnote{26: Not a quotation from, but a reference to, the First Lord’s speech in As You Like It II i.}

If I may judge by the statements of the few friends who gathered round me, the outcry of the period to which I allude was beyond all precedent, all parallel, even in those cases where political motives have sharpened slander and doubled enmity. I was advised not to go to the theatres lest I should be hissed, nor to my duty in parliament lest I should be insulted by the way – even on the day of my departure my most intimate friend told me afterwards that he was under apprehensions of violence from the people who might be assembled at the door of the carriage. However, I was not deterred by these counsels from seeing Kean in his best characters; nor from voting according to my principles, and with regard to the third and last apprehensions of my friends – I could not share in them – not being made acquainted with their extent till some time after I had crossed the Channel. Even if I had been so, I am not of a nature to be much affected by men’s anger – though I may feel hurt by their aversion, against all individual outrage I could protect or redress myself – and against that of a crowd, I should probably have been enabled to defend myself with the assistance of others, as has been done on similar occasions.

I retired from the country, perceiving that I was the object of general obloquy; I did not indeed imagine like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that all mankind was in a conspiracy against me – though I had perhaps as good grounds for such a chimera as ever he had – but I perceived that I had to a great extent become personally obnoxious in England – perhaps through my own fault – but the fact was indisputable, for the public in general would hardly have been so much excited against a more popular character without at least an accusation or a charge of some kind actually expressed or substantiated – for I can hardly conceive that the common and everyday occurrence of a separation between man and wife could in itself produce so great a ferment. I shall say nothing of the usual complaints of “being prejudged”, “condemned unheard” “unfairness”, “partiality” and so forth – the usual changes rung by parties who have had, or are to have, a trial – but I was a little surprised to find myself condemned without being favoured with the act of accusation, and to perceive in the absence of this portentous charge or charges, whatever it or they were to be, that every possible or impossible crime was rumoured to supply its place – and taken for granted. This could only occur in the case of a person very much disliked, and I knew no remedy – having already used to their extent whatever little powers I might possess of pleasing in society. I had no party in fashion – though I was afterwards told that there was one, but it was not of my formation – nor did I then know of its existence – none in literature – and in politics I had voted with the Whigs – with precisely that importance which a Whig vote possesses in these Tory days, and with such personal acquaintance with the leaders in both houses as the society in which I lived sanctioned: but without claim or expectation of anything like friendship from anyone except a few young men of my own age and standing, and a few others more advanced in life – which last it had been my fortune to serve in circumstances of difficulty. This was in fact to stand alone – and I recollect, some time after, Madame de Staël said to me in Switzerland, “You should not have warred with the World – it will not do – it is too strong always for any individual. I myself once tried it in early life – but it will not do”. I perfectly acquiesce in the truth of this remark; but the World had done me the honour to begin
the war; and assuredly if peace is only to be obtained by courting and paying tribute to
it, I am not qualified to obtain its countenance. I thought, in the words of Campbell,

Then wed thee to an exiled lot,
And if the World hath loved thee not,
Its absence may be borne.27

I recollect, however, that having been much hurt by Romilly’s conduct (he
having a general retainer for me had acted as adviser to the adversary – alleging, on
being reminded of his retainer, that he had forgotten it, as his clerk had so many),28 I
observed that some of those who were now eagerly laying the axe to my roof-tree29
might see their own shaken, and feel a portion of what they had inflicted. His fell and
crushed him.30

I have heard of, and believe that there are human beings so constituted as to be
insensible to injuries – but I believe that the best mode to avoid taking vengeance is to
go out of the way of the temptation. I hope that I may never have the opportunity – for
I am not quite sure that I could resist it, having derived from my mother something of
the perforvidum ingenium Scotorum.31 I have not sought, and shall not seek it, and
perhaps it may never come in my path. I do not in this allude to the party, who might
be right or wrong, but to many who made her cause the pretext of their own bitterness.
She indeed must have long avenged me in her own feelings – for whatever her
reasons may have been (and she never adduced them to me at least). She probably
neither contemplated nor conceived to what she became the means of conducting the
father of her child, and the husband of her choice.

So much for “the general voice of his countrymen”: I will now speak of some in
particular.

In the beginning of the year 1817, an article appeared in the Quarterly Review32
– written, I believe, by Walter Scott, doing great honour to him and no disgrace to me
– though both poetically and personally more than sufficiently favourable to the work
and the author of whom it treated. It was written at a time when a selfish man would
not, and a timid one dared not, have said a word in favour of either. It was written by
one to whom temporary public opinion had elevated me to the rank of a rival – a
proud distinction, and unmerited, but which has not prevented me from feeling as a
friend – nor him from more than corresponding to that sentiment. The article in

27: Thomas Campbell, Lines on Leaving a Scene in Bavaria, XVII, 5-7.
28: Hobhouse’s diary for March 15th 1816 reads, “Came home – called on Byron. He agreed to make
Romilly sole and final arbitrator [of the Separation], and signed a paper empowering me to tell him so.
I went to Romilly, saw him, and showed the paper. He was not aware that Byron had ever retained him.
His clerk showed him the retainer. He said, ‘I have done a very incorrect thing in being consulted by
Lady Byron’. He lamented the affair was not likely to be terminated amicably – he said it might easily
be done – however, he declined arbitrating, even if Lady Byron would permit him, and I took my leave
and came home.”
29: A recurrent theme in B. is the destruction of the home. See Don Juan I, 36, 4-6; a letter to Moore
(BLJ VI 69) describing his own misery during the separation: “I could have forgiven the dagger or the
bowl, any thing, but the deliberate desolation piled upon me, when I stood alone upon my hearth, with
my household gods shivered around me;” Don Juan, III sts.51-2, for the similar feelings of Lambro;
and Marino Faliero, III ii 361-4: My pure household gods / Were shiver’d on my heart h, and o’er their
shrine / Sate grinning Ribaldry and sneering Scorn.
30: For B.’s feelings on Sir Samuel Romilly’s suicide, see BLJ VI 80-81 (November 23rd 1818, letter to
Hobhouse).
31: “The Scots’ over-heated temperament”.
question was written upon the third canto of *Childe Harold* – and after many observations which it would as ill become me to repeat as to forget, concluded with “a hope that I might yet return to England.” How this expression was received in England itself I am not acquainted – but it gave great offence at Rome to the respectable ten or twenty thousand English travellers then and there assembled. I did not visit Rome till some time after, so that I had no opportunity of knowing the fact, but I was informed long afterwards that the greatest indignation had been manifested in the enlightened Anglo-circle of that year, which happened to comprise within it – amidst a considerable leaven of Welbeck Street and Devonshire Place\(^34\) broken loose upon their travels, several really well-born and well-bred families, who did not the less participate in the feeling of the hour. “Why should he return to England?” was the general exclamation: I answer – “Why?” It is a question I have occasionally asked myself, and I never yet could give it a satisfactory reply. I had then no thoughts of returning, and if I have any now they are of business, and not of pleasure. Amidst the ties that have been dashed to pieces there are links yet entire though the chain itself be broken. There are duties, and connections, which may one day require my presence – and I am a father. I have still some friends whom I wish to meet again, and, it may be, an enemy. These things and those minutest details of business which Time accumulates during absence in every man’s affairs and property may and probably will recall me to England – but I shall return with the same feelings with which I left it, in respect to itself – though altered with regard to individuals, as I have been more or less informed of their conduct since my departure – for it was only a considerable time after my departure that I was made acquainted with the real facts and full extent of some of their proceedings and language. My friends – like other friends – from conciliatory motives withheld from me much that they could – and some things which they should have unfolded however, that which is deferred is not lost – but it has been no fault of mine that it has been deferred at all.

I have alluded to what is said to have passed at Rome, merely to show that the sentiment which I have described was not confined to the English in England – and as forming part of my answer to the reproach cast upon what has been called my “selfish exile” and my “voluntary exile.” “Voluntary” it has been – for who would dwell among a people entertaining strong hostility against him? How far it has been “selfish” has been already explained.

I have now arrived at a passage describing me as having vented my “spleen against the lofty minded and virtuous men” – meaning, I humbly presume, the notorious triumvirate known by the name of Lake Poets, in their aggregate capacity, and by those of Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge, when taken singly.\(^35\) I wish to say a word or two upon the virtues of one of those persons, public and private, for reasons which will soon appear.

\(^{33}\): Wishful thinking. Scott does not say this in the *Quarterly* article.

\(^{34}\): Expensive areas of London’s West End.

\(^{35}\): “We shall not needlessly widen the wound by detailing its cruelty; we have mentioned one, and, all will admit, the worst instance of the private malignity which has been embodied in so many passages of *Don Juan*; and we are quite sure, the lofty-minded and virtuous men whom Lord Byron has debased himself by insulting, will close the volume which contains their own injuries, with no feelings save those of pity for Him that has inflicted them, and for Her who partakes so largely in the same injuries; and whose hard destiny has deprived her for ever of that proud and pure privilege, which enables themselves to despise them. As to the rest of the world, we know not that Lord Byron could have invented any more certain means of bringing down contempt inexpiable on his own head, than by turning the weapons of his spleen against men whose virtues few indeed can equal, but still fewer are so lost and unworthy as not to love and admire” – *Blackwood’s*, p.515.
When I left England in April 1816, ill in mind, in body, and in circumstances, I took up my residence at Cologny by the Lake of Geneva. The sole companion of my journey was a young physician, who had to make his way in the world, and having seen little of it, was naturally and laudably desirous of seeing more society than suited either my present habits or my past experience. I therefore presented him to those gentlemen of Geneva for whom I had letters of introduction, and having thus seen him in a situation to make his own way, retired for my own part entirely from society – with the exception of that of one English family living at about a quarter of a mile’s distance from Diodati, and with the further exception of some occasional intercourse with Coppet, at the wish of Madame de Staël. The English family to which I allude consisted of two ladies, a gentleman, and his son, a boy of a year old.

One of “these lofty minded and virtuous men”, in the words of the Edinburgh Magazine, made, I understand, about this time or soon after, a tour in Switzerland. On his return to England, he circulated, and for anything I know invented, a report – that the gentleman to whom I have alluded and myself were living in promiscuous intercourse with two sisters, “having formed a League of Incest” (I quote the words as they were stated to me), and indulged himself in the natural comments upon such a conjunction – which are said to have been repeated publicly with great complacency by another of that poetical fraternity, of whom I shall say only that even had the story been true he should not have repeated it as far as it regarded myself – except in sorrow. The tale itself requires but a word in answer – the ladies were not sisters – nor in any degree connected except by the second marriage of their respective parents – a widower with a widow – both being the offspring of former marriages. Neither of them were, in 1816, nineteen years old. “Promiscuous intercourse” could hardly have disgusted the great patron of Pantisocracy (does Mr Southey remember such a scheme?), but there was none.

How far this man, who, as author of Wat Tyler, has been proclaimed by the Lord Chancellor guilty of a treasonable and blasphemous libel, and denounced in the House of Commons by the upright and able Member for Norwich as a “rancorous renegado”, be fit for sitting as a judge upon others, let others judge. He has said that for this expression “he brands William Smith on the forehead as a Calumniator,” and that “the mark will outlast his Epitaph.” How long William Smith’s epitaph will last, and in what words it will be written, I know not: but William Smith’s words form the epitaph itself of Robert Southey. He has written Wat Tyler, and taken the office of Poet Laureate – he has in the Life of Henry Kirke White denominated reviewing “the ungentle craft”, and has become a reviewer, he was one of the projectors of a

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36: Dr William Polidori, B.’s personal physician. They did not get on, and Polidori was dismissed.
37: Mary Godwin, Clare Clairemont, Shelley, and young William Shelley (whom B. does not make clear was also son to one of the “ladies”).
38: B. first heard of the rumour (which was spread by Southey, Landor, Brougham, Lady Shelley and others), from John Hanson in November 1818. He does not deny “intercourse”, but denies that it was “promiscuous”.
39: Southey’s republican tragedy Wat Tyler was written in 1794, but not published until 1817. See TVOJ, 96, 8.
40: Wat Tyler was argued over in Parliament, by William Smith, the member for Norwich, and Southey’s friend C.W.W.Wynn, on 14 March 1817, during a debate on the Seditious Assemblies Bill. What Smith, a liberal, angry at Southey’s more recently published reactionary views, actually said was “...that what he most detested, what filled him with disgust, was the settled, determined malignity of a renegado” (quoted Madden, Robert Southey the Critical Heritage, p.236).
41: Southey, Letter to William Smith, M.P.
42: Compare TVOJ, 98, 3. Southey had befriended Henry Kirke White, and in the year after his death edited Remains of Henry Kirke White, with an Account of his Life. Here he says, apropos of the first
scheme called “Pantisocracy” for having all things including women in common (query common women?), and he sets up as a moralist, he denounced the battle of Blenheim, and he praised the battle of Waterloo, he loved Mary Wollstonecraft, and he tried to blast the character of her daughter (one of the young females mentioned), he wrote treason and serves the king, he was the butt of the Anti-Jacobin, and he is the prop of the Quarterly Review – licking the hands that smote him, eating the bread of his enemies, and internally writhing beneath his own contempt; he would fain conceal under anonymous bluster, and a vain endeavour to obtain the esteem of others after having forever lost his own, his leprous sense of his own degradation. What is there in such a man to “envy”? Whoever envied the envious? Is it his birth, his name, his fame, or his virtues, that I am to “envy?” I was born of the aristocracy which he abhorred, and am sprung by my mother from the kings who preceded those whom he has hired himself to sing; it cannot then be his birth – as a poet, I have for the past eight years had nothing to apprehend from a competition – and for the future “that life to come in every poet’s creed”, it is open to all. I will only remind Mr Southey, in the words of a critic who if still living would have annihilated Southey’s literary existence now and hereafter – as the sworn foe of charlatans and impostors from Macpherson downwards – that “those dreams were Settle’s once and Ogilby’s”, and for my own part I assure him, that whenever he and his sect are remembered, I shall be “proud to be forgot.” That he is not content with his success as a poet may be reasonably believed – he has been the nine-pin of reviews: the Edinburgh knocked him down, and the Quarterly set him up, the government found him useful in the periodical line, and made a point of recommending his works to purchasers, so that he is occasionally bought (I mean his books, as well as the author), and may be found on the shelf, if not upon the table, of brutal review Kirke White’s work received, ... the opinion of a reviewer ... has more effect ... than it ... would have ... if the mystery of the ungentle craft were more generally understood. (Remains, vol.I p.23.) He italicises the phrase, as if quoting a previous writer.

43: Compare TVOJ. 97, 5-6. From 1794 to 1796 Coleridge, Southey and others had planned to set up a community by the Susquehannah river in America. It was to be governed according to an utopian blueprint derived from Godwin’s Political Justice. The only tangible result was that Coleridge married the sister of Southey’s fiancée. Free love formed no part of its agenda, despite anything B. says.

44: The Battle of Blenheim (1798); Southey’s only good poem. See TVOJ, 96, 8.

45: The Poet’s Pilgrimage to Waterloo (1815). See TVOJ, 96, 8. The one Southey poem that made money.

46: There is evidence that Southey “cast a favourable eye on” Mary Wollstonecraft. He wrote to Grosvenor Bedford on June 12th 1796: “… were I a heathen I would build a temple & worship the Maid of Orleans – Charlotte Corde – & the Wife of Roland – by the by it were better to distinguish him as the husband of such a woman, than her as the wife only of even so excellent a man. she was indeed a wonderful woman. I repent now of saying so little of her in Joan of Arc – & I repent me more of omitting to speak of Charlotte Corde. these women ought to be mentioned in another edition & the edition to be dedicated to Mary Wollstonecraft. of this last woman you may perhaps not know the miserable situation. she married Imlay – who used her wickedly & left her. she struggles with calamity awhile – but it is not many weeks since she attempted to drown herself! – she is an excellent woman – of mild – feminine & unassuming manner & whose character calumny cannot blacken (Bodleian M.S. English Letters c. 22. 192).

47: Comical conservative periodical of the late 1790s. It had parodied Southey’s Lines on Marten the Regicide as Lines on Brownrigg the ’Prentice-icide.

48: Southey reviewed regularly for the Quarterly. Murray hated him, and Gifford cut his articles up.

49: Mrs Byron was descended from the Kings of Scotland.

50: Pope, Imitations of Horace, Epistle II i 74.

51: James Macpherson (1736-96), forger of the supposed poems of Ossian.

52: Johnson, The Young Author, 28.

53: B. returns to this theme in the figure of the prostitute-poet at Don Juan III sts. 78-87.
most of the gentlemen employed in the different offices. With regard to his private virtues, I know nothing; of his principles, I have heard enough. As far as having been to the best of my power benevolent to others, I do not fear the comparison – and for the errors of the passions, was Mr Southey always so tranquil and stainless? Did he never covet his neighbour’s wife? did he never calumniate his neighbour’s wife’s daughter? – the offspring of her he coveted? So much for the Apostle of Pantisocracy.

Of the “lofty minded virtuous” Wordsworth, one anecdote will suffice to speak his sincerity. In a conversation with Mr Rogers upon poetry, he concluded with “after all I would not give five shillings for all that Southey has ever written”. Perhaps this calculation might rather show his esteem for five shillings than his low estimate of Mr Southey, but considering that when he was in his need and Southey had a shilling, Wordsworth is said to have had generally sixpence out of it – it has an awkward sound in the way of valuation. This anecdote was told me by Moore – who had it from Rogers – who had it from Wordsworth himself – so that it has a most poetical genealogy. I give my authority for this; and am ready to adduce it for Mr Southey’s circulation of the falsehood before mentioned.

Of Coleridge I shall say nothing – why, he may divine.54

I have said more of these people than I intended in this place, being somewhat stirred by the remarks which induced me to commence upon the topic. I see nothing in these men as poets, or as individuals – little in their talents and less in their characters – to prevent honest men from expressing for them considerable contempt, in prose or rhyme, as it may happen. Mr Southey has the Quarterly for his field of rejoinder, and Mr Wordsworth his postscripts to Lyrical Ballads, where the two great instances of the Sublime are taken from himself and Milton.55 “Over her own sweet voice the stockdove broods”,56 that is to say, she has the pleasure of listening to herself, in common with Mr Wordsworth upon most of his public appearances. “What Divinity doth hedge”57 these persons that we should respect them – is it Apollo? Are they not of those who called Dryden’s Ode “a drunken song”58 who have discovered that Gray’s Elegy is full of faults (see Coleridge’s life, vol. 1st, note, for Wordsworth’s kindness in pointing this out to him),59 and have published what is allowed to be the very worst prose that ever was written to prove that Pope was no poet and that William Wordsworth is. In other points, are they respectable – or respected? is it on the open avowal of apostacy – on the patronage of government – that their claim is founded? Who is there who esteems these parricides of their own principles? They are in fact well aware that the reward of their change has been anything but honour. The times have preserved a respect for political consistency, and even the changeable honour the unchanged. Look at Moore – it will be long ere Southey meets with such a

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54: B. had given Coleridge £200 in 1816, and persuaded Murray to publish Christabel and Kubla Khan.
55: Wordsworth, Preface to the Lyrical Ballads.
56: Wordsworth, Resolution and Independence, 5. Should be “his voice”.
57: Hamlet, IV v 123.
58: B.’s source for this is neither Wordsworth, Coleridge, nor Southey, but Leigh Hunt, Feast of the Poets, p.110.
59: Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, : “Mr. Wordsworth’s having judiciously adopted ‘concourse wild’ in this passage for ‘a wild scene’ as it stood to the former edition, encourages me to hazard a remark, which I certainly should not have made in the works of a poet less austerely accurate in the use of words, than he is, to his own great honour. It respects the propriety of the word, ‘scene,’ even in the sentence in which it is retained. Dryden, and he only in his more careless verses, was the first, as far as my researches have discovered, who for the convenience of rhyme used this word in the vague sense, which has been since too current even in our best writers …”
triumph in London as Moore met with in Dublin — even if the government should subscribe for it, and set the money down to Secret Service. It was not less to the man than to the poet, to the tempted but unshaken patriot, to the poor but incorruptible fellow-citizen, that the warm-hearted Irish paid the proudest of tributes. Mr Southey may applaud himself to the world, but he has his own heartiest contempt, and the fury with which he foams against all who stand in the phalanx which he forsook is, as William Smith described it, the “rancour of the renegade” – the bad language of the prostitute who stands at the corner of the street and showers her slang upon all – except those who may have bestowed upon her her “little shilling.”

Hence his quarterly overflowings, political and literary, in what he has himself termed “the ungentle craft,” and his especial wrath against Mr Leigh Hunt — notwithstanding that Hunt has done more for Wordsworth’s reputation as a poet (such as it is), than all the Lakers could in their interchange of self-praises for the last twenty-five years.

And here I wish to say a few words on the present state of English poetry. That this is the Age of the Decline of English Poetry will be doubted by few who have calmly considered the subject. That there are men of genius among the present poets makes little against the fact, because it has been well said that “next to him who forms the taste of his country – the greatest genius is he who corrupts it.” No-one has ever denied genius to Marini, who corrupted not merely the taste of Italy, but that of all Europe, for nearly a century.

The great cause of the present deplorable state of English poetry is to be attributed to that absurd and systematic depreciation of Pope, in which for the last few years there has been a kind of epidemical concurrence. Men of the most opposite opinions have united upon this topic. Warton and Churchill began it; having borrowed the hint probably from the heroes of the Dunciad – and their own internal conviction that their proper reputation must be as nothing till the most perfect and harmonious of poets, he who, having no fault, has had REASON made his reproach, was reduced to what they conceived to be his level – but even they dared not degrade him below Dryden. Goldsmith and Rogers and Campbell, his most successful disciples, and Hayley, who, however feeble, has one poem “that will not be willingly let die” (The Triumphs of Temper) kept up the reputation of that pure and perfect style, and Crabbe – the first of living poets — has almost equalled the master. Then came Darwin, who was put down by a single poem in the Anti-Jacobin, and the Cruscans – from Merry to Jerningham – who were annihilated (if nothing can be said to be annihilated) by Gifford, the last of the wholesome English satirists.

60: Moore had a fine reception in Dublin in June 1818.
61: B. misattributed a harsh Quarterly review of Hunt’s 1818 poem Foliage to Southey.
62: Giambattista Marini (1569-1625), rococco Italian poet. In the prose preface to Don Juan B. refers to Wordsworth as This rustic Gongora and vulgar Marini of his Country’s taste ...
63: Joseph Warton (1722-1800), and Charles Churchill (1731-61), elsewhere a Byronic alter ego (see Churchill’s Grave), both criticised Pope.
64: William Hayley, The Triumphs of Temper (1781).
65: Compare EBSR, 857-8: This fact in Virtue’s name let CRABBE attest: / Though Nature’s sternest Painter, yet the best.
66: The Anti-Jacobin printed The Loves of the Triangles, a parody of Erasmus Darwin’s The Loves of the Plants.
67: William Gifford, B.’s “literary father” (BLJ XI 117 and XI 123), had by 1820 written no poetry for years. He had satirised the Della Cruscans in The Baviad (1791), and The Maeviad (1795).
At the same time Mr Southey was favouring the public with *Wat Tyler* and *Joan of Arc*, to the great glory of the Drama and Epos.\(^{68}\) I beg pardon – *Wat Tyler* with *Peter Bell* was still in Mss., and it is was not till after Mr Southey had received his Malmsey Butt,\(^{69}\) and Mr Wordsworth became qualified to gauge it,\(^{70}\) that the great revolutionary tragedy came before the public and the Court of Chancery.

Wordsworth was peddling his *Lyrical Ballads* – and brooding a preface\(^{71}\) to be succeeded in due course of years by a postscript, both couched in such prose as must give peculiar delight to those who have read the prefaces of Pope and Dryden – both scarcely less celebrated for the beauty of their prose than for the charms of their verse. Wordsworth is the reverse of Molière’s Gentleman, “who had been talking prose all his life without knowing it”,\(^{72}\) for he thinks that he has been all his life writing both prose and verse, and neither of what he conceives to be such can be properly said to be either one or the other.\(^{73}\) Mr Coleridge – the future Vates – poet and seer of the *Morning Post*, (an honour also claimed by Mr Fitzgerald of the *Rejected Addresses*),\(^{74}\) who ultimately prophesied the downfall of Buonaparte, to which he himself mainly contributed by giving him the nickname of “the Corsican,” was then employed in predicating the damnation of Mr Pitt, and the desolation of England in the two very best copies of verses he ever wrote – to wit – the infernal eclogue of *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter* and the *Ode to the Departing Year*.\(^{75}\)

These three personages, Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, had to all of them a very natural antipathy to Pope, and I respect them for it, as the only original feeling or principle which they have contrived to preserve. But they have been joined in it by those who have joined them in nothing else – by the *Edinburgh* reviewers, by the whole heterogeneous mass of living English Poets – excepting Crabbe, Rogers, Gifford and Campbell – who, both by precept and practice, have proved their adherence; and by me, who have shamefully deviated in practice – but have ever loved and honoured Pope’s poetry with my whole soul, and hope to do so till my dying day. I would rather see all I have ever written lining the same trunk in which I actually read the eleventh book of a modern epic poem at Malta in 1811 (I opened it to take out a change after the paroxysm of a tertian, in the absence of my servant, and found it lined with the name of the maker – Eyre, Cockspur Street – and with the epic poetry alluded to),\(^{76}\) than sacrifice what I firmly believe in as the Christianity of English poetry – the poetry of Pope.

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\(^{68}\): *Wat Tyler* was written in 1794; *Joan of Arc* (Southey’s first epic), in 1796.

\(^{69}\): That is, until Southey became Poet Laureate (salary: £100 p.a. and a butt of wine), in 1813.

\(^{70}\): That is, until Wordsworth became Collector of Stamps for Westmoreland (also 1813).

\(^{71}\): “brooding” echoes *Resolution and Independence* l.5, misquoted above.

\(^{72}\): In Molière’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, M. Jourdain is amazed to be told that he’s been talking in prose all his life, without realising it.

\(^{73}\): B.’s note: Goldsmith has anticipated the definition of the Lake poetry – as far as such things can be defined: “Gentlemen – the present piece is not one of your common epic poems, which come from the press like paper kites in summer; there are none of your Turnuses or Didos in it; it is an heroidal description of Nature. I only beg you’ll endeavour to make your souls in unison with mine, and hear with the same enthusiasm with which I have written”. Would not this have made a proper proem to the Excursion – and the poet, and his pedlar? It would have answered perfectly for that purpose had it not been unfortunately written in good English.

\(^{74}\): For William Fitzgerald, see *EBSR*, first line. He had had a Drury Lane address rejected.

\(^{75}\): Coleridge, *Fire, Famine. And Slaughter. A War Eclogue* (1798); and *Ode to the Departing Year* (1796).

\(^{76}\): For another “trunk-lining” joke relating to Southey’s books, see HfH, 659-62: “But why this vain advice? once published books / Can never be recalled – from pastry cooks! / Though “Madoc,” with “Pucelle,” instead of punk, / May travel back to Quito – on a trunk!” For Eyre, see BLJ II 81.
But the Edinburgh Reviewers, and the Lakers – and Hunt and his school, and every body else with their school, and even Moore, without a school, and dilettanti lecturers at institutions, and elderly gentlemen who translate and imitate, and young ladies who listen and repeat – baronets who draw indifferent frontispieces for bad poets, and noblemen who let them dine with them in the country, the small body of the wits and the great body of the Blues, have latterly united in a depreciation of which their fathers would have been as much ashamed as their children will be. In the meantime, what have we got instead? The Lake School, which begun with an epic poem “written in six weeks” (so Joan of Arc proclaimed herself), and finished with a ballad composed in twenty years – as Peter Bell’s creator takes care to inform the few who will enquire. What have we got instead? A deluge of flimsy and unintelligible romances imitated from Scott and myself, who have both made the best of our very bad materials, and erroneous System. What have we got instead? Madoc, which is neither an epic, nor anything else; Thalaba, Kehama, Gebir, and such gibberish, written in all metres and in no language. Hunt, who had powers to have made The Story of Rimini as perfect as a fable of Dryden – has thought fit to sacrifice his genius and his taste, to some unintelligible notions of Wordsworth which I defy him to explain. Moore has – but why continue? – all, with the exception of Crabbe and Rogers and Campbell, who may be considered as having taken their station, will by the blessing of God survive their own reputation without attaining any very extraordinary period of longevity. Of course there must be a still further exception in favour of those who, having never obtained any reputation at all, unless it be among provincial literati, and their own families, have none to lose; and of Moore, who as the Burns of Ireland, possesses a fame which cannot be lost.

The greater part of the poets mentioned however have been able to gather together a few followers. A paper of the Connoisseur says that “It is observed by the French that a Cat, a Priest, and an old woman are sufficient to constitute a religious sect in England”. The same number of animals – with some difference in kind – will suffice for a poetical one. If we take Sir George Beaumont instead of the priest, and Mr Wordsworth for the old woman, we shall nearly complete the quota required – but I fear that Mr Southey will but indifferently represent the CAT, having shown himself but too distinctly to be of a species to which that nobler creature is peculiarly hostile. Nevertheless I will not go so far as Wordsworth in his postscript, who pretends that no great poet ever had immediate fame, which being interpreted, means that William Wordsworth is not quite so much read by his cotemporaries as might be desirable. This assertion is as false as it is foolish. Homer’s glory depended upon his present popularity; he recited, and without the strongest impression of the moment, who would have gotten the Iliad by heart, and given it to tradition? Ennius, Terence,

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77: Southey boasts in the Preface to Joan of Arc that over eleven of its original twelve books were written in six weeks, whereas …
78: … Wordsworth declares in the Dedication to Peter Bell (1819 – it is dedicated to Southey), that the poem has been gestating for twenty-one years.
79: Southey’s Madoc / Madoc in Wales (1805), Thalaba the Destroyer (1801), The Curse of Kehama (1811), and Landor’s Gebir (1798); for the last, see TVOJ, Preface.
80: Hunt claimed in his preface that The Story of Rimini was written in “an actual, existing language”.
81: “It is observed by the French that a Cat, a Priest, and an Old Woman are sufficient to constitute a religious sect in England. So universally it seems, are learning and genius diffused throughout this island, that the lowest plebeians are deep casuists in matters of faith as well as politics …” (The Connoisseur, No LXI, March 27, 1755).
82: Sir George Beaumont (1753-1827), friend and patron of Wordsworth.
83: Ennius (239-169 BC), Roman tragic writer whose plays exist only in fragments.
Plautus, Lucretius, Horace, Virgil, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Sappho, Anacreon, Theocritus – all the great poets of antiquity were the delight of their cotemporaries. The very existence of a poet previous to the invention of printing depended upon his present popularity – and how often has it impaired his future fame? Hardly ever; history informs us that the best have come down to us. The reason is evident: the most popular found the greatest number of transcribers for their Mss., and that the taste of their cotemporaries was corrupt can hardly be avouched by the moderns, the mightiest of whom have but barely approached them. Dante, Petrarch Ariosto, and Tasso were all the darlings of the cotempory reader. Dante’s poem was celebrated long before his death, and after it. States negotiated for his ashes, and disputed for the sites of the composition of the Divina Commedia. Petrarch was crowned in the Capitol. Ariosto was permitted to pass free by the public robber who had read the Orlando Furioso. I would not recommend Mr Wordsworth to try the same experiment with his Smugglers. Tasso – notwithstanding the criticisms of the Cruscanti – would have been crowned in the Capitol but for his death.

It is easy to prove the immediate popularity of the chief poets of the only modern nation in Europe that has a poetical language. In our own, Shakespeare, Spenser, Jonson, Waller, Dryden, Congreve, Pope, Young, Shenstone, Thomson, Johnson, Goldsmith, Gray, were all as popular in their lives as since. Gray’s Elegy pleased instantly, and eternally. His odes did not, nor yet do they please like his Elegy. Milton’s politics kept him down, but the epigram of Dryden, and the very sale of his work in proportion to the less reading time of its publication – prove him to have been honoured by his cotemporaries. I will venture to assert that the sale of the Paradise Lost was greater in the first four years after its publication than that of The Excursion in the same number – with the difference of nearly a century and a half between them of time, and of thousands in point of general readers, notwithstanding Mr Wordsworth’s having pressed Milton into his service as one of those not presently popular, to favour his own purpose of proving that our grand-children will read him – the said William Wordsworth. I would recommend him to begin first with our grandmothers. But he need not be alarmed – he may yet live to see all he envies pass away – as Darwin and Seward, and Hoole, and Hole and Hoyle have passed away – but their declension will not be his ascension; he is essentially a bad writer, and all the failures of others can never strengthen him; he may have a sect, but he will never have a public, and his “audience” will always be “few” without being “fit,” except for Bedlam.

It may be asked me why, having this opinion of the present state of poetry in England, and having had it long – as my friends and others well know – possessing too as a writer the ear of the public for the time being – I have not adopted a different plan in my own compositions, and endeavoured to correct rather than encourage the taste of the day. To this I would answer, that it is easier to perceive the wrong than to pursue the right, and that I have never contemplated the prospect of filling (with Peter Bell – see its preface) permanently a station in the literature of the country. Those who

84: Petrarch was crowned in Rome in 1341.  
85: The robber had no intention of robbing Ariosto; he merely apologised for not having recognised and saluted him. The legend is glanced at at CHP IV st.41.  
86: Wordsworth did not write anything called The Smugglers – B. has misread an advertisement in the Quarterly.  
87: In the first decade of its life, Wordsworth’s The Excursion sold approximately one copy per year.  
88: Erasmus Darwin, Anna Seward, Barbara Hoole and Richard Hole, have indeed passed away; but Wordsworth lives on (2007).
know me best know this, and that I have been considerably astonished at the temporary success of my works, having flattered no person and no party, and expressed opinions which are not those of the general reader.\textsuperscript{89} Could I have anticipated the degree of attention which has been accorded, assuredly I would have studied more to deserve it. But I lived in far countries abroad, or in the agitating world at home which was not favourable to study or reflection, so that almost all I have written, has been mere passion, passion it is true of different kinds – but always passion – for in me (if it be not an Irishism to say so), my indifférence was a kind of passion – the result of experience, and not the philosophy of nature. Writing grows a habit, like a woman’s gallantry; there are women who have had no intrigue, but few who have had but one only; so, there are millions of men who have never written a book, but few who have written only one. And thus having written once, I wrote on; encouraged no doubt by the success of the moment, yet by no means anticipating its duration, and I will venture to say, scarcely even wishing it. But then I did other things besides write, which by no means contributed either to improve my writings or my prosperity.

I have thus expressed publicly upon the poetry of the day the opinion I have long entertained, and expressed of it to all who have asked it, and to some who would rather not have heard it. As I told Moore not very long ago, “We are all wrong except Rogers, Crabbe, and Campbell.”\textsuperscript{90} Without being old in years, I am old in days, and do not feel the adequate spirit within me to attempt a work which should show what was right in poetry, and must content myself with having denounced what is wrong. There are, I trust, younger spirits rising up in England who escaping the contagion which has swept away poetry from our literature, will recall it to their country, such as it once was, and may still be.

In the mean time the best sign of amendment will be repentance, and new and frequent editions of Pope and Dryden.

There will be found as comfortable metaphysics and ten times more poetry in the \textit{Essay on Man} than in \textit{The Excursion}. If you search for passion, where is it to be found stronger than in the \textit{Epistle from Eloisa to Abelard}? – or in \textit{Palamon and Arcite}? Do you wish for invention, imagination, sublimity, character? seek them in the \textit{Rape of the Lock}, the fables of Dryden, the \textit{Ode on Saint Cecilia’s Day}, and \textit{Absalom and Achitophel}: you will discover in these two poets only all for which you must ransack innumerable metres, and – God only knows – how many writers of the day, without finding a tittle of the same qualities, with the addition of wit – of which the latter have none. I have not however forgotten Thomas Brown the younger,\textsuperscript{91} and \textit{The Fudge Family},\textsuperscript{92} nor \textit{Whistlecraft},\textsuperscript{93} but that is not Wit, it is Humour. I will say nothing of the harmony of Pope and Dryden in comparison, for there is not a living poet (except Rogers, Gifford, and Crabbe), who can write a heroic couplet. The fact is that the exquisite beauty of their versification has withdrawn the proper attention from their other excellencies, as the vulgar eye will rest more upon the splendour of the uniform than the quality of the troops. It is this very harmony particularly in Pope which has raised the vulgar and atrocious cant against him, because his versification is

\textsuperscript{89}: This becomes, in the \textit{Letter to John Murray}, a much stronger self-critique by B.

\textsuperscript{90}: B. wrote this to Murray, not to Moore: see BLJ V 265 (letter of September 15th 1817).

\textsuperscript{91}: “Thomas Brown the Younger” was the pseudonym under which Moore wrote \textit{The Fudge Family}.

\textsuperscript{92}: Moore’s Whiggish satire \textit{The Fudge Family in Paris} (1819).

\textsuperscript{93}: John Hookham Frere, \textit{Prospectus and Specimen of an intended National Work by William and Robert Whistlecraft} (Murray, 1818); “The Monks and the Giants”, the ottava rima inspiration for Beppo.
perfect; it is assumed that it is his only perfection, because his truths are so clear – it is asserted that he has no invention, and because he is always intelligible, it is taken for granted that he has no genius. We are sneeringly told that he is the “poet of reason”, as if this was a reason for his being no poet. Taking passage for passage, I will undertake to cite more lines teeming with imagination from Pope than from any two living poets, be they who they may. To take an instance at random from a species of composition not very favourable to imagination – satire; set down the character of Sporus – with all the wonderful play of fancy which is scattered over it – and place by its side an equal number of verses from any two existing poets, of the same power and the same variety. Where will you find them?

I merely mention one instance of many in reply to the injustice done to the memory of him who harmonized our poetical language. The attorneys’ clerks, and other self-educated genii, found it easier to distort themselves to the new models than to toil after the symmetry of him who had enchanted their fathers. They were, besides, smitten by being told that the new school were to revive the language of Queen Elizabeth – the true English – as everybody in the reign of Queen Anne, wrote no better than French, by a species of literary treason. Blank verse – which, unless in the drama, no-one except Milton ever wrote who could rhyme – became the order of the day, or else such rhyme as looked still blanker than the verse without it. I am aware that Johnson has said – after some hesitation – that he could not “prevail upon himself to wish that Milton had been a rhymer”. The opinions of that truly great man – whom it is also the present fashion to decry – will ever be received by me with that deference which Time will restore to him from all – but with all humility, I am not persuaded that the Paradise Lost would not have been more nobly conveyed to posterity, not perhaps in heroic couplets, although even they could sustain the subject, if well balanced, but in the stanza of Spenser, or of Tasso, or in the terza rima of Dante, which the powers of Milton could easily have grafted on our language. The Seasons of Thomson would have been better in rhyme, although still inferior to his Castle of Indolence – and Mr Southey’s Joan of Arc no worse – although it might then have taken up six months, instead of weeks, in the composition. I recommend also to the lovers of lyrics the perusal of the present Laureate’s odes by the side of Dryden’s on Saint Cecilia, but let him be sure to read first those of Mr Southey.

To the heaven-born genii and inspired young scriveners of the day, much of this will appear paradox, it will appear so even to the higher order of our critics; but it was a truism twenty years ago and it will be a re-acknowledged truth in ten more. In the meantime, I will conclude with two quotations both intended for some of my old classical friends who have still enough of Cambridge about them to think themselves honoured by having had John Dryden as a predecessor in their college, and to recollect that their earliest English poetical pleasures were drawn from the “little Nightingale” of Twickenham.

The first is from the notes to the poem of The Friends, pages 181-182: “It is only within the last twenty or thirty years that those notable discoveries in criticism have been made, which have taught our recent versifiers to undervalue this energetic, melodious, and moral poet; the consequences of this want of due esteem for a writer whom the good sense of our predecessors had raised to his proper station, have been

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94: Pope’s depiction of Lord Hervey at Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot, 305-33.
95: See Johnson, Life of Milton.
96: James Thomson, The Seasons (1730).
97: Thomson, The Castle of Indolence (1748), whose Spenserian stanzas provided B. a model for CHP.
98: That is, Pope.
NUMEROUS AND DEGRADING ENOUGH. This is not the place to enter into the subject, even as far as it affects our poetical numbers alone; and there is matter of more importance that requires present reflection." 99

The second is from the volume of a young person 100 learning to write poetry, and beginning by teaching the art. Hear him:

But ye were dead
To things ye knew not of, were closely wed
To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
And compass vile; so that ye taught a School *
Of Dolts to SMOOTH, inlay, and clip, and fit,
Till, like the certain wands of Jacob’s wit,
Their verses tallied. – Easy was the task:
A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
Of Poesy. – Ill-fated impious race
That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
And did not know it, no, they went about
Holding a poor, decrepit, Standard out
Marked with most flimsy mottos, and in large
The name of one Boileau!

* It was at least a Grammar “School”.

A little before the manner of Pope is termed,

… a Scism *
Nurtured by foppery and Barbarism
Made great Apollo blush for this his land.

* So spelt by the author.

I thought “foppery” was a consequence of refinement, but n’importe.
Further on we have,

The hearty grasp that sends a pleasant Sonnet
Into the brain ere one can think upon it,
The Silence when some rhymes are coming out,
And when they’re come the very pleasant rout;
The Message certain to be done tomorrow.
’Tis perhaps as well that it should be to borrow

99: Francis Hodgson, The Friends: a Poem (1818). Hodgson was an Anglican friend of B.
100: B.’s note: Mr Keats died at Rome about a year after this was written, of a decline produced by his having burst a blood vessel on reading the article on his Endymion in the Quarterly Review. I have read the article before and since, and although it is bitter, I do not think that a man should permit himself to be killed by it. But a young man little dreams what he must inevitably encounter in the course of a life ambitious of public notice. My indignation at Mr Keats’s depreciation of Pope has hardly permitted me to do justice to his own genius, which malgré all the fantastic fopperies of his style, was undoubtedly of great promise. His fragment of Hyperion seems actually inspired by the Titans, and is as sublime as Æschylus. He is a loss to our literature, the more so as he himself before his death is said to have been persuaded that he had not taken the right line, and was reforming his style upon the more classical models of the language. – November 12th 1821.
101: Keats, Sleep and Poetry (1818), 193-206; B.’s italics.
102: Ibid., 181-3; B.’s italics.
Some precious book from out it’s snug retreat,
To cluster round it when we next shall meet.
Scarce can I scribble on, &c. &c. 103

Now what does this mean?
Again,

And with these airs come forms of elegance
Stooping their shoulders o’er a horse’s prance. 104

Where did these “forms of elegance” learn to ride – with “stooping shoulders”?
Again,

Thus I remember all the pleasant flow
Of words at opening a Portfolio. 105

Again,

... yet I must not forget
Sleep, quiet with his poppy coronet:
For what there may be worthy in these rhymes
I partly owe to him: &c. 106

This obligation is likely to be mutual.
As a balance to these lines, 107 and to the sense and sentiments of the new school,
I will put down a passage or two from Pope’s earliest poems – taken at random:

Envy her own snakes shall feel,
And Persecution mourn her broken wheel,
There Faction roar, Rebellion bite her chain,
And gasping Furies thirst for blood in vain. 108

Ah! what avails his glossy varying dyes
His purple Crest, and scarlet-circled eyes
The vivid green his shining plumes unfold;
His painted wings, and breast that flames with gold. 109

Round broken Columns clasping Ivy twined,
O’er heaps of Ruin stalked the stately hind;
The Fox obscene to gaping tombs retires
And savage howlings fill the sacred quires. 110

Hail Bards triumphant born in happier days 111

Amphion there the loud creating lyre
 Strikes, and behold a Sudden Thebes aspire.
Cithæron’s echos answer to his call

103: Ibid., 319-27; B.’s italics.
104: Ibid., 331-2; B.’s italics.
106: Ibid., 347-50; B.’s italics.
107: The remaining quotations from Pope are placed in B.’s original in a note. Here they are placed in
the main text.
108: Pope, Windsor Forest (1713), 419-22.
110: Ibid., 69-72.
111: Pope, Essay on Criticism, l.189.
And half the Mountain rolls into a wall.\textsuperscript{112}

So Zembla’s rocks – the beauteous work of Frost
Rise white in air, and glitter o’er the coast,
Pale Suns, unfelt, at distance roll away,
And on th’impassive ice the lightnings play;
Eternal Snows the growing mass supply,
Till the bright Mountains prop th’incumbent Sky,
As Atlas fixed each hoary pile appears
The gathered Winter of a thousand years.\textsuperscript{113}

Thus when we view some well-proportioned dome,
The World’s just wonder, and even thine, O Rome!
No Single parts unequally surprise,
All comes united to the admiring eyes;
No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear,
The Whole at once is bold, and regular.\textsuperscript{114}

A thousand similar passages crowd upon me, all composed by Pope before his \textit{two and twentieth year} – and yet it is contended that he is no poet, and we are to be told so in such lines as I beg the reader to compare with these \textit{youthful} verses of the “\textit{No poet.”} Must we repeat the question of Johnson – “If Pope is not a poet, where is poetry to be found?”\textsuperscript{115} Even in \textit{descriptive} poetry, the \textit{lowest} department of the art, he will be found on a fair examination to surpass any living writer.

It may appear harsh to accumulate passages of this kind from the work of a young man in the outset of his career. But if he will set out with assailing the poet whom of all others a young aspirant ought to respect and honour and study – if he will hold forth in such lines his notions on poetry, and endeavour to recommend them by terming such men as Pope, Dryden, Swift, Addison, Congreve, Young, Gay, Goldsmith, Johnson, &c., &c., “a School of dolts”\textsuperscript{116} – he must abide by the consequences of his unfortunate distortion of intellect. But, like Milbourne, he is “the fairest of critics”\textsuperscript{117} by enabling us to compare his own compositions with those of Pope at the same age – and on a similar subject, viz. – poetry. As Mr Keats does not want imagination or industry,\textsuperscript{118} let those who have led him astray look to what they have done; surely they must feel no little remorse in having so perverted the taste and feelings of this young man, and will be satisfied with one such victim to their Moloch of Absurdity.

Pope little expected that the \textit{Art of Sinking in Poetry}\textsuperscript{119} would become an object of serious study – and supersede\textsuperscript{120} not only his own but all that Horace, Vida,\textsuperscript{121} Boileau, and Aristotle had left to posterity, of precept, and the greatest poets in all nations – of example.

\textsuperscript{112}: Pope, \textit{The Temple of Fame} (1715), 85-8.
\textsuperscript{113}: Ibid., 53-60.
\textsuperscript{114}: Pope, \textit{Essay on Criticism}, 247-52.
\textsuperscript{115}: Johnson, \textit{Life of Milton}.
\textsuperscript{116}: Keats, \textit{Sleep and Poetry}, 196-7 (quoted above).
\textsuperscript{117}: Pope, \textit{The Dunciad} II 325n. Luke Milbourne was a clergyman who criticised Dryden’s Virgil.
\textsuperscript{118}: “nor” (Mss.) In, B. chides Bowles for making the same error.
\textsuperscript{119}: Pope, \textit{Peri Bathous: Of the Art of Sinking in Poetry} (1727).
\textsuperscript{120}: Compare \textit{Don Juan}, Dedication, 3, 3: \textit{To supersede all warblers here below …}
\textsuperscript{121}: Marco Girolamo Vida, sixteenth-century Italian critic. See Pope, \textit{Essay on Criticism}, 705-8.
The above will suffice to show the notions, entertained by the new performers on the English Lyre, of him who made it most tuneable, and the great improvements of their variazioni.

The writer of this is a tadpole of the lakes, a young disciple of the six or seven new schools, in which he has learnt to write such lines and such sentiments as the above. He says “Easy was the task” of imitating Pope, or it may be of equalling him – I presume; I recommend him to try, before he is so positive on the subject, and then compare what he will have then written, and what he has now written with the humblest and earliest compositions of Pope – produced in years still more youthful than those of Mr Keats when he invented his new Essay on Criticism, entitled Sleep and Poetry (an ominous title), from whence the above canons are taken. Pope’s was written at nineteen and published at twenty-two.

Such are the triumphs of the new schools, and such their scholars. The disciples of Pope were Johnson, Goldsmith, Rogers, Campbell, Crabbe, Gifford, Matthias, Hayley, and the author of the Paradise of Coquettes; to whom may be added Richards, Heber, Wrangham, Bland, Hodgson, Merivale, and others who have not had their full fame – because “the race is not always to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong”, and because there is a Fortune in Fame, as in all other things. Now of all the new schools – I say all, for “like Legion they are many” – has there appeared a single scholar who has not made his master ashamed of him? unless it be Sotheby, who has imitated everybody, and not unfrequently surpassed his models. Scott found peculiar favour and imitation among the fair sex, there was Miss Holford, and Miss Mitford, and Miss Francis, but (with the greatest respect be it spoken), none of his imitators did honour to the original, except Hogg the Ettrick Shepherd until the appearance of The Bridal of Triermain and Harold the Dauntless, which in the opinion of some equalled if not surpassed him, and lo! after three or four years they turned out to be the Master’s own composition. Have Southey, or Coleridge, or t’other fellow, made a follower of renown? Wilson never did well till he set up for himself in the City of the Plague. Has Moore, or any other living writer of reputation, had a tolerable imitator, or rather disciple? Now it is remarkable that almost all the followers of Pope whom I have named have produced beautiful and standard works, and it was not the number of his imitators who finally hurt his fame, but the despair of imitation, and the ease of not imitating him sufficiently. This, and the same reason which induced the Athenian burgher to vote for the banishment of Aristides – “because he was tired of always hearing him called the Just” – have produced the temporary exile of Pope from the State of Literature. But the term of his ostracism will expire, and the sooner the better, not for him, but for those who banished him, and for the coming generation who

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122: T.J. Matthias, Trinity don, author of The Pursuits of Literature (1797).
123: Thomas Brown, The Paradise of Coquettes (1814).
124: George Richards (see EBSR 985-90); Reginald Heber, hymnist; Francis Wrangham, poet; Robert Bland, Harrow teacher and translator from the Greek Anthology; B.’s friends Francis Hodgson (see EBSR 983-4) and John Herman Merivale, poets and translators.
125: Ecclesiastes 9:11.
126: Mark 5:9.
127: Margaret Holford, Mary Russell Mitford, and Eliza Francis, poets.
128: Scott, The Bridal of Triermain (1813), and Harold the Dauntless (1817); both anonymous.
129: John Wilson, City of the Plague (1816).
130: The anecdote is from Plutarch’s Life of Aristides.
Will blush to find their fathers were his foes\textsuperscript{131}

I will now return to the writer of the article which has drawn forth these remarks, whom I humbly take to be John Wilson, a man of great powers and acquirements, well known to the public as the author of *The City of the Plague, Isle of Palms*, and other productions.\textsuperscript{132} I take the liberty of naming him by the same species of courtesy which has induced him to designate me as the author of *Don Juan*. Upon the score of the Lake Poets he may perhaps recall to mind that I merely express an opinion long ago entertained and specified in a letter to the said James Hogg, which he the said James Hogg, somewhat contrary to the Law of Pens, showed to Mr John Wilson, in the year 1815, as he himself informed me in his answer, telling me by way of apology, that “he’d be d—d if he could help it.” And I am not conscious of any thing like “envy” or “exasperation” at this moment which induces me to think better or worse of Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge as poets, than I do now, although I do know one or two things more which have added to my contempt for them as individuals. And in return for Mr Wilson’s invective, I shall content myself with asking one question: did he never compose, recite, or sing, any parody or parodies upon the Psalms, (of what nature this deponent saith not), in certain jovial meetings of the youth of Edinburgh?\textsuperscript{133} It is not that I think any great harm if he did – because it seems to me that all depends upon the intention of such a parody. If it be meant to throw ridicule on the sacred original it is a sin; if it be intended to burlesque the profane subject or to inculcate a moral truth, it is none. If it were, the Unbeliever’s Creed – the many political parodies of various parts of the Scripture and Liturgy – particularly a celebrated one of the Lord’s Prayer – and the beautiful moral parable in favour of toleration by Franklin, which has often been taken for a real extract from Genesis, would all be sins of a damning nature. But I wish to know if Mr Wilson ever has done this, and if he has – why he should be so very very angry with similar portions of *Don Juan*? Did no “parody profane” appear in any of the earlier numbers of *Blackwood’s Magazine*?\textsuperscript{134}

I will now conclude this long answer to a short article repenting of having said so much in my own defence, and so little on the “crying left hand fallings off, and national defections” of the poetry of the present day. Having said this, I can hardly be expected to defend *Don Juan*, or any other “living” poetry, and shall not make the attempt. And although I do not think that Mr John Wilson has in this instance treated me with candour or consideration, I trust that the tone I have used in speaking of him personally will prove that I bear him as little malice as I really believe at the bottom of his heart, he bears towards me. But the duties of an editor like those of a tax-gatherer are paramount and peremptory. I have done.

\textsuperscript{131} Pope, *An Essay on Man*, IV 388 (paraphrased).
\textsuperscript{132} John Wilson, *The Isle of Palms* (1812). B.’s intuition is wrong. The *Blackwoods* article was written by John Gibson Lockhart.
\textsuperscript{133} Andrew Nicholson (CMP 398), traces this reference to a parodic “‘Translation from an Ancient Chaldee Manuscript’ in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (vol. i no. i (Oct. 1817), pp.89-96)”. But *Blackwood’s* first volume was April 1817, and its October number was vol. ii. no. vii. See November 1817 (vol. ii no. viii), NOTE FROM THE EDITOR, explaining that an offensive *jeu d’esprit* in the October number has been withdrawn for the second edition. A further note identifies the piece as the “Chaldee” translation. I have yet to see this text. – P.C.
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