

Born in a Crowd:  
Subjecthood Across Authorial Modes in the  
Nineteenth-Century Writer's Market

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**Abstract**

This dissertation examines representations of authorship and subjecthood in the Romantic period as products of market position and publishing mode. In doing so, it views the traditional concept of Romantic individualism commonly associated with the solitary poet as a strategy developed to help the author navigate a complex writer's market. Rather than focusing upon individualism as the defining authorial model for this period, however, my project presents it as one example of a diverse range of representational strategies employed by different authors operating from different positions within the market. To this end, this study compares the authorial model of the independent poet with authors engaged in a variety of other modes of publishing, including hack essayists, serialized poets, periodical editors, and celebrity authors.

By examining authors operating across different publishing modes, I demonstrate that each one's concept of public identity is shaped principally by his or her particular market position, as defined by working relationships with peers, involvement in the particulars of publishing, exchanges with the critical press, and engagement with readers. These authors include William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Charles Lamb, and Francis Jeffrey. By juxtaposing their different models of authorship, this study seeks to bridge the longstanding discourse regarding the social isolation of the Romantic poet with more contemporary streams of scholarship into the material realities of the nineteenth-century publishing industry. Drawing upon the social philosophy of the Frankfurt School and Eric Gans' theory of Generative Anthropology, I examine how different strategies of representation were developed to preserve personal meaning and sustain public attention. By comparing responses to the rise of the writer's market and the ubiquity of print culture, this dissertation argues that Romantic period authors demonstrate a distinctly modern understanding of public identity as a product of mediation in mass media culture.

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## Legend

This dissertation uses abbreviations when citing the primary sources listed below. For complete bibliographic information, see the Bibliography on page 317.

*WWMW* – *Wordsworth's Major Works* (1984)

*LWDW* – *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* (2000)

*CWCL* – *The Complete Works of Charles Lamb* (1912)

*WCML* – *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* (1903)

*LCML* – *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* (1975)

*BLJ* – *Byron's Letters and Journals* (1973)

*CPW* – *The Complete Poetical Works* [of Lord Byron] (1980)

*LLEL* – *Letters By Letitia Elizabeth Landon* (2001)

*PLG* – *Poems From The Literary Gazette* (2003)

*CW* – *Critical Writings* [of Letitia Elizabeth Landon] (1996)

## **Introduction – Taking Your Selfhood to Market**

In the Fall of 2015, I had the opportunity to teach an upper-year seminar course at the University of Toronto Scarborough on the relationship between British authors and their audiences during the long eighteenth century. On the final day of the course I had my students read a series of album verses by Charles Lamb. I had discovered these poems in the process of researching this dissertation and I was interested to see how my students would respond to the social dynamics of albums in Regency England. As I shall discuss more thoroughly in chapter 2.2, a young woman's album had both social and creative functions. The album served as a blank canvas upon which the owner could practice painting, compose amateur verse, and arrange collage art. It also served as a volume for collecting autographs of one's family, friends, and acquaintances, allowing debutantes entering the public world of adult relationships to keep a record of their growing social lives. As such, the album helped young women face the difficult transition into adulthood by allowing them to both express themselves and share that expression with others. Often shared during social occasions in the drawing rooms of homes, albums were a way to invite a new acquaintance deeper into one's private life. To share favourite fragments of poetry and one's own artistic efforts contained in the album was to reveal an intimate part of one's private life. To have such acquaintances contribute to that volume made them a part of that life. And yet, as Lamb enjoyed pointing out, the impression of one's identity created by an album was a self-consciously constructed image. In choosing how to fill one's album, the owner selected poetry and art that would convey an ideal impression of her identity. In short, the album presented a contradictory combination of the intimate and the artificial.

When I asked my students to consider whether they felt the nineteenth-century album had any twenty-first-century equivalents, the conversation quickly turned to social networking and the forms of self expression that take place on websites like Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr (evidently, I was the only one who used Twitter). My students were eager to discuss the subtle (and less than subtle) ways changing a profile picture or posting a video to one's wall can convey an impression of one's self to the world. Their comments demonstrated the ease with which their generation can express and interpret identity through digital media. Before bringing the focus back to Lamb's poetry, we also discussed the students' frustrations or misgivings regarding the role these websites play in our social lives. Some expressed concern that an online social life threatens to displace more genuine offline relationships, that there is something delusive about this highly mediated form of socializing. Others voiced frustration with people whose use of digital media they deemed too blatant. There is something disingenuous about those who try too hard to convey their personality and interests through frequent posts and updates (photos of fancy dinners were a particular pet peeve). However, most of the students were comfortable with the dissonance that exists between their online and offline lives. There was a general understanding that a Facebook profile serves as an extension of one's identity that is a partial abstraction, neither entirely accurate nor entirely false.

One could potentially draw a number of connections between our own cultural milieu in the first decades of the twenty-first century and that of England during the first decades of the nineteenth century, but the most striking is perhaps the rapid proliferation of media throughout both public and private life. No doubt it is trite to observe that the rise of the Internet and digital media has transformed the way people communicate and

interact. That a classroom of Millennials can readily parse the fragmented, mediated nature of public identity is hardly surprising, given that they are the first generation to be raised in a culture where creating and sharing media serves as a basic form of daily social interaction. Nonetheless, the digital revolution has raised numerous questions surrounding the transformation of public identity that have yet to be fully answered. Similarly, the early nineteenth century in Britain was a period in which print media came to permeate everyday life. From the political cartoons advertised in the windows of print shops, to the appearance of advertising posters pasted upon walls, to the explosion of newspapers, and the inflating market for books, print media could be found throughout the metropolitan streets and homes of Regency England. Authors from this period were also part of a generation adapting to a new cultural reality that raised questions regarding the basis of identity and social bonds. This dissertation examines how the diverse representations of subjecthood and authorship employed during the Romantic Period respond to the rise of mass print culture and the advent of the commercial writer's market.

To this end it will focus on literature produced between the late 1790s and 1830s. This timeline was selected in part to conform to the conventional chronology of British Romanticism, but also to capture a particular period of transition for print media and the writer's market. This period begins at a time when the growing predominance of the writer's market co-existed along with older publishing models of patronage and subscription. Thus, we shall see how authors publishing at the outset of this period were compelled to compete for sales and consider the implications of market success for their literary worth, even as they depended upon these traditional systems to sustain their

livelihood. Throughout this period, we will see how various authors adjusted to the tension that existed between writing as a mercantile profession and as an aristocratic pursuit. By the 1830s, this tension became less pronounced as popular modes of print such as periodicals and annuals gained increasing acceptance amongst middle- and upper-class audiences. By situating this study within this timeframe, we will map a progression, not just from the early to post-Romanticism, but also in the development of the writer's market: beginning at a time of uncertain transition and concluding as commercial print products reached new heights of cultural legitimacy and ubiquity.

In the decades leading up to the turn of the nineteenth century, a number of social developments, including the growth in literacy rates, the falling price of paper, and the rising affluence of the middle class, culminated in the rapid expansion of the publishing industry. The number of newspapers and periodicals published in England between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries increased at an exponential rate. The number of different newspapers produced in England more than doubled in forty years, rising from 50 titles in 1782 to 135 titles in 1821. In another decade, it would nearly double again, rising to 248 titles in 1833 (St. Clair 576). As the opportunities for writers increased along with the number of publications, so too did their wages. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the *Edinburgh Review* became the most influential periodical in England. One primary reason for its success was the remarkably high wages it could afford to pay its writers, helping to attract a dedicated staff of educated essayists and critics who could potentially make a living wage from their contributions (Erickson 75,

Christie 35).<sup>1</sup> This raise in pay quickly became the norm for competing periodicals, including the *Quarterly Review*. At the same time that the expansion of the periodical press was creating more opportunities for writers, book publishing underwent the transformation from a system of patronage to a general commercial model.<sup>2</sup> Whereas eighteenth-century poets such as Alexander Pope and Thomas Gray had published their works via private subscriptions and wealthy benefactors, nineteenth-century poets predominantly entered into varying business agreements with their publishers, selling manuscripts for flat rates or agreeing to profit sharing schemes by taking on the costs of publication. At the same time, publishers of poetry responded to increasing demand by increasing the output from 1,121 titles in 1815 to 1,789 titles in 1832 (Erickson 26).<sup>3</sup> The transition to commercial publishing had a leveling effect, transforming authorship into a profession that could be pursued by a diverse segment of the population, rather than the exclusive pursuit of those with connections to the upper classes.<sup>4</sup>

As Raymond Williams observes, this transformation had multiple effects on the relationship between authors and their audiences. While the transition to a commercial based publishing industry brought the author a rise in social status, it also disrupted the

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Erickson notes that the initial pay rate for the *Edinburgh Review* of 10 guineas per page was twice that of the best paying periodicals of the previous decade, which represented “a radical revaluation of the importance of authors” (75).

<sup>2</sup> As Dustin Griffin points out, it is inaccurate to consider these as mutually exclusive systems that can be divided into distinct periods. Instead, the eighteenth century “is characterized by overlapping ‘economies’ of patronage *and* marketplace” (10). Consequently, Griffin also notes that forms of patronage persisted into the nineteenth century. While it is true that patronage did not simply disappear with the rise of the marketplace, the general decline of the former system does mirror the rise of the latter.

<sup>3</sup> It bears noting that this increase was followed by a sharp decline mid-century as novels came to displace poetry as the most popular form of literature. Nonetheless, the cultural shift towards novels during the Victorian period does not see a decrease in the size of the publishing industry or the number of books being produced on a yearly basis.

<sup>4</sup> In her article “Women and Print Culture, 1750 – 1830” Michelle Levy discusses how this transformation helped make publishing more accessible to women authors, who could make a greater profit from a single publication than most working women could hope to earn in a lifetime (36).

clear lines of social decorum that had connected author and audience under the system of patronage: “against the dependence, the occasional servility, and the subjection to patronal caprice had to be set the direct relation of the act of writing with at least some part of society, personally known, and the sense, when relations were fortunate, that the writer ‘belonged’” (33). The transition into the commercial market expanded the author’s audience from a clearly defined, closed circle of readers to an amorphous mass of consumers, giving rise to a number of new challenges. The act of publishing through the market required authors to compete for the popular acceptance of a vaguely defined audience. Failure to obtain a substantial readership could give rise to resentment of the public. Moreover, the indices of success often proved imprecise. Were sales figures a more accurate indication of a work’s success than critics’ reviews? Was either truly indicative of literary merit? If a poor review was based upon an inaccurate interpretation, the author could find their work misrepresented to the public by an unsympathetic reader. The commercial model of publishing was characterized by a loss of control resulting from the author’s reliance upon “the workings of an institution which seemed largely impersonal” (Williams 33). As Williams goes on to point out, one response that is common to many of the canonical Romantic poets is a combative attitude towards audiences and critics, and a tendency to blame them for failing to accurately receive and appreciate a given work.

In *Reading, Writing and Romanticism* (2000), Lucy Newlyn defines the concept of an anxiety of reception. This anxiety stems not only from a concern over misinterpretation and a breakdown of communication, but a larger concern over the seemingly arbitrary authority being granted to readers and critics. More pertinent to this

dissertation, however, is her account of the strategies employed by specific poets as a means of combating the deterioration of their authority. Newlyn shows how attempts to reestablish control over their work, ranging from the formation of intimate reading spheres to the writing of aggressively dictatorial prose supplements, often led authors to assume an antagonistic stance towards readers and to withdraw from the public scene. By revealing how attempts to preserve a private, authoritative dimension within public writing may have served to further distance authors from audiences, Newlyn provides a valuable foundation for this study's own examination of the way rigid authorial intent places limitations upon communication in the writer's market. Building upon this foundation, however, first requires reconciling her observations with more recent, contradictory scholarship.

In *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public* (2007), Andrew Franta complicates Newlyn's work by discussing how Romantic authors sought to come to terms with the primacy of reader reception. He recognizes the same anxiety towards reception Newlyn ascribes to Romantic authors, but argues that, rather than causing a withdrawal from the public, it led authors to carefully consider the different ways readers might react to their works and to encourage independent interpretations. Tracing the impact of these considerations in the works of canonical authors, Franta offers an approach to Romantic literature that involves a "shift from author to reader and intention to effect" (14). While Newlyn and Franta appear to occupy contrary positions, respectively emphasizing either the monologic or dialogic qualities of Romantic literature, their findings are compatible. In reality, an author's desire to encourage individual interpretations coexisted with attempts to clarify authorial intent. One need

only consider Wordsworth's seemingly contradictory request that the reader "in judging these Poems... would decide by his own feelings genuinely," made in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, a document ostensibly meant to limit and define the parameters of his poetic project (*WWMW* 613). By revealing how authors came to predict and make allowance for the interpretations of readers, Franta contributes to the critical understanding of how these authors had to reconceive their relationship with readers in reaction to the modernization of the publishing industry.

When read in conjunction, the resultant impression that arises from these scholars' work is of a writer's market in which diverse strategies were employed to cope with the widening hermeneutical divide separating authors from audiences. My aim in taking up this critical discourse is to better understand the factors which influenced a given author's choice of strategy by illustrating how a particular author's application of these strategies was informed by his/her position with regards to the larger writer's market. I am using the word "position" as a composite term that will require some explanation. Essentially, it describes how an author is situated within the writer's market, as defined by the matrix of professional relationships surrounding that author: affiliations with publishers, editors, fellow writers, critics and readers (both familiar and unfamiliar). More than just a product of social ties however, an author's position must be understood as involving his or her attitude towards these relationships. Thus, Wordsworth's position as a poet operating independently within the market is also defined by his antagonism towards critics, his carefully negotiated dealings with publishers, his resistance to editorial control, his apprehension regarding the larger reading public, and the personal relationships that comprised his private reading circle. One goal of this dissertation will

therefore be to consider how operating as a professional poet, one who marketed his works as collected volumes and exercised strict control over the publishing process, influenced Wordsworth's approach to addressing readers and figuring his own authorial voice.

However, rather than focus on models that prioritize authorial intent, I will concentrate on contrasting positions held by a variety of authors. I will examine writers who operated in a variety of modes within the publishing industry, namely Wordsworth, Francis Jeffrey, Lamb, Lord Byron, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon. Such authors may initially appear incommensurable. After all, it is to be expected that a poet like Wordsworth and an editor like Jeffrey would address their readers in disparate fashions. Despite the stark difference between these two authors' modes of writing however, both are required to convey an authorial persona to serve as context for the readers' experience of the text. The persona employed by Jeffrey in his anonymous reviews, that of an impartial arbiter of taste, is no less functional than Wordsworth's various narrative stances. Far from presenting a problem, the variety of authors and modes of writing to be examined will help us re-conceptualize Romantic selfhood as simply one method of negotiating the writer's market during a period in which authors operating from diverse positions in the market developed disparate strategies. Recognizing the assertive authorial stance as just one (markedly influential) example of a number of such strategies encourages a more nuanced understanding of how Romantic individualism manifested in different ways for different poets, always as a response to the specific challenges of navigating the writer's market from a particular position.

Examining a range of different authors also provides the grounds for a more thorough examination of the different ways that authors were negotiating their relationship with readers through various facets of the market in the first decades of the period. The similarities and tensions that exist between authors operating in different publishing modes are often ignored in studies of the Romantic Period. This can be traced back to the influence of Romanticism scholars of the mid-twentieth century, whose emphasis upon the expressive function of the period's poetry shaped the following decades of scholarship. M. H. Abrams' analogy of Romantic poetry as a lamp, which draws inspiration from within the author rather than reflecting the world without, and Geoffrey Hartman's concept of the unmediated vision of the poet established the turn to self-expression as the defining quality of the period. The more recent historicist movement has challenged the primacy of these poets and helped to refocus attention to marginal authors and modes of writing. Regardless of such efforts however, independent poets are often discussed separately from the literary exchanges of the periodical press. Mark Parker and David Stewart have each argued that periodicals should be studied as works of literary merit and developed methodological approaches for doing so. While these scholars have helped diversify the field by creating foundations for further study of the periodical press, their respective works focus solely upon the literary world comprised by the periodicals. As such, they do not collapse the division between independent poets who published through booksellers and authors who worked in the periodical press.

As Mark Schoenfield has illustrated, this opposition can be traced even further back to the antagonism that originally existed between these two forms of publishing.

Periodicals and their reviewers often portrayed themselves as cultural authorities, determining the bounds of good taste and setting the standards of art. Yet, despite the significant influence they held over readers, working for periodicals was denigrated as a low form of writing, lacking the eminence of true literature. By examining how the dynamics of corporate authorship and institutional language affect the agency of individual authors contributing to periodicals, Schoenfield's research into the periodical press establishes a useful precedent for my own study. Where Schoenfield illustrates how periodical authors like William Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey understood the necessity of surrendering a degree of autonomy in order to participate in the periodical, my own study will examine how these kinds of experiences come to implicitly shape the way periodical authors' represented subjecthood in their work. As I will attempt to demonstrate, where the independent poet's experiences publishing and competing within the market engender a highly individualistic voice, authors who occupy collaborative positions within the market are more likely to reject static concepts of authorship and challenge the notion of a stable public identity.

If we are to achieve an accurate understanding of how authors' strategies of representation were informed by their various positions within the writer's market, it is essential to read these different modes of authorship alongside one another. Doing so reveals an interactive influence that runs across both groups. Poets reacted to the way periodicals addressed and identified themselves with their readers and vice-versa, and both often adapted, and sometimes subverted, the methods of their peers. While I will draw attention to some fundamental differences between the strategies of those writing independently and those collaborating within a larger body, the goal is not to classify the

writers along such lines. In fact, the writers who participated in the creation of periodicals occupied a variety of market positions and subsequently defy simple categorization. For instance, working in his roles as a reviewer and an editor for *The Edinburgh Review*, Jeffrey was careful to present a consistent public façade for both his reviews and his magazine. By contrast, Lamb, whose regular contributions to *The London Magazine* appeared under the pseudonym Elia, illustrates a playful tendency to undermine the readers' impressions of his alter ego. Furthermore, Wordsworth and Byron, the two writers who will serve as my examples of independent poets, each portrayed radically different models of authorial identity. I will be careful not to draw a hard line separating these two groups. Indeed, the final discussion of Landon shall demonstrate how some authors occupy hybrid positions joining the individualism of the celebrity poet with the fluid authorship of the periodical press. As the author with the most complex network of professional relationships, Landon demonstrates the exacting specificity required to accurately address each author's relative position within the market. Nonetheless, the distinction of publishing individually will come to be seen as one of the more significant variables informing an author's position and, thus, his/her strategies for representing selfhood.

#### Habermas's Positivism and Adorno's Dialectic

To review, this dissertation will address the work of a variety of writers in an attempt to show how renditions of authorship acted as strategies for addressing a mass reading public. In doing so, it will show how variations in strategies were informed by the particular professional circumstances a given writer operated within, most notably his

or her position within the social network that made up his or her corner of the writer's market. To this end, the dissertation discusses authors representing a range of positions, including hack essayists, serialized poets, periodical editors, and celebrity authors. Doing so provides a thorough picture of the various forms of authorial representation being practiced beyond the traditional concept of Romantic selfhood. This brings us to an underlying question: if these different strategies of representing identity are to be understood as methods of addressing readers through the market, what were the driving concerns that propelled authors to adopt these strategies? What are we attempting to assess in examining and comparing these different models of authorship? While each author's motives and strategies will vary, comparing them allows us to examine how these authors understood the text's role in mediating their relationship with their audience. Each author's model of representation reflects a different understanding of the text's capacity for facilitating interpersonal communication, representing subjecthood, and sustaining the reader's attention.

Strategies of authorial representation were not always meant to reduce the perceived distance between author and reader or to convey a sincere sentiment. Such goals of genuine expression are commonly associated with Romantic individualism. Paul Michael Privateer offers a useful summation of this concept: "individuality is understood as something that can be textualized in terms of a voice; it is a poetic 'being there' modeled after a material 'being' which writing can presumably deliver into being through language" (1). In such a model, externalization of an authentic self into a legible representation through the text offers the reader an opportunity to take part in a personal exchange. Such an objective motivates the author's desire to ensure accurate

interpretation in what Newlyn terms a search for sympathetic identification. Wordsworth explicitly establishes this social objective of literature when he defines the role of the poet as a man speaking to men. Within this model, the poet attempts to break through the barriers of distance and anonymity that disrupt interpersonal contact in market society.

However, it is questionable whether this ambition of achieving sympathetic understanding was viewed as an achievable goal by many of these authors. Indeed, numerous scholars have challenged the association between Romantic poets and transparently personal verse. For example, Privateer's own study of Romantic identity is more concerned with how authors complicate this model, showing "how the ideology of autonomous individuality is subverted poetically by voices that presumably should be acting as its agent" (9). Meanwhile David Simpson persuasively argues that Wordsworth's poetry challenges the feasibility of establishing interpersonal contact through written media. These scholars reveal how poets traditionally interpreted by Abrams and Hartman as attempting to render selfhood explicit, were actually acknowledging and articulating the paradoxical challenges such a task entailed. In addition to studying how authors addressed the challenges of achieving sympathetic understanding with their readers, this dissertation will also consider authors whose works undermined the very concept of accurate public self-representation. After all, not every rendition of authorial identity from this period sought to achieve a degree of earnest transparency.

Romantic literature is rife with examples of unreliable narrators, biographical red herrings, and fictitious personae. In some cases, such as Lamb's *Elia* essays, a satirical posture is made clear to the reader as the author alternates between personal reflections

and blatant fabrications. For other authors, such as Byron, the fictionalizing of selfhood is subtler and, at times, even deceptive. There is obviously a great deal of earnest sentiment behind Byron's many poetic alter egos, but his ability to blur the lines of fact and fiction to play with readers' expectations is well documented. Other authors, such as Landon, present a remarkable ability to generate entirely performative authorial voices that, while alluding to a distinct persona, disrupt the very notion of a stable underlying selfhood. In each of these cases, the creation of an authorial persona still serves to mediate the impersonal distance of the market place. However, their motivation for doing so is not to accurately communicate a personal message, so much as to challenge the reader's perception of the textual subject and provoke further contemplation.

To better outline the motivations and methods of representation these authors demonstrate in their engagement with the writer's market, I will draw upon the social theory of the Frankfurt School, as well as Eric Gans' theory of generative anthropology. The theoretical distinction that exists between the discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas and the more skeptical dialecticism of Theodor Adorno will serve as opposing models of representational hermeneutics. While this dissertation will come to associate Habermas's positivistic approach to identity more strongly with certain authors and Adorno's negative (or dialectical) approach with others, the goal is not to draw a hard distinction along these lines or to designate specific authors with specific theoretical models. Elements of both theories can be identified across the various authors' works. Instead, the two theorists will serve as opposing poles on a spectrum of representational strategies employed by authors to render the textual subject and address their audience. However, a limitation of the Frankfurt School theorists is the exclusive focus they place upon social

communication between subjects as the ultimate end of expression. Despite their differences, both Adorno and Habermas operate under the premise that the primary aim of expression is to form meaningful communicative connections between individuals. This fails to consider the fact that subjects use expression within market culture for other ends. Thus, Gans' concept of a Romantic aesthetic will be introduced to broaden the scope of our examination, considering how models of representation were also used to mediate imitation and desire within the market.

Models of authorial representation that seek to preserve the fidelity of the author's personal perspective and communicate that perspective to the reader can be figured with reference to Habermas's distinction between Lifeworlds and Systems. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas defines Lifeworlds as the independent perspectives of living subjects and Systems as the abstract, functional structures that propel society (e.g. economies, markets, bureaucracies). For expressive freedom and communicative action to be possible, it is important that the concerns of these larger Systems do not override and assimilate the concerns of Lifeworlds, a process Habermas terms colonization. For example, it is important that a nation's laws not place undue restraints upon personal liberties for the sake of maintaining social order. These terms can be used to contextualize the concerns of the Romantic poet interested in combating misinterpretation within the print industry. The marketing concerns of editors, the mediating function of critics, and the broad dissemination across a mass reading public represent the demands of a system that threaten to overwrite the individual author's perspective. A central tenet of Habermas's theory is that, for a public system of communication to operate effectively, it is essential to preserve the voice of the social monad. This principle of what

I shall refer to as positive identity therefore reflects one extreme approach to authorial representation, which serves as a motivation (if not an achievable goal) for some of the authors discussed in this study. Under such a model, the comprehension of another subject's particular perspective helps establish meaningful connections between author and audience, combatting the alienating complexity of the writer's market.

By contrast, Adorno argues that positivistic concepts of identity ultimately undermine individualistic representation and promote homogenization within market culture. As Adorno explains in *The Negative Dialectic*, any act of identification is a suppressive act that, rather than building towards an accurate representation, places inadequate limitations upon a subject. Such positivistic formulations of identity halt what should be an ongoing dialectical process, instead accepting the result of a single synthesis as truth. As Adorno states, "as an apriori task of thought... identity seems positive and desirable" (148). It seems desirable for the speaker to be identifiable, just as it seems desirable for a conjecture to formalize into a certainty. After all, for identity to perform its hermeneutical purpose as a concept, to represent a subject to others in a sensible fashion, it must assume a stable form. But in doing so, the identity becomes inert and halts the process by which it is further refined and more finely realized. Thus, "we relish [identity] as adequacy to the thing it suppresses" (148). Adopting a positive concept of identity is a natural consequence of committing one's self to the static medium of the printed word. Participation in the writer's market requires the author to desist from the active process of self-definition realized through the acts of composition so that his or her work can undergo the reifying process of publication. What Habermas promotes as

necessary for communication, Adorno conceives as a process of reification and limitation. Negative dialectics resists this process:

Dialectics is a protest lodged by our thinking against the archaicisms of its conceptuality. The concept in itself, previous to any content, hypostatizes its own form against the content. With that, however, it is already hypostatizing the identity principle: that what our thinking practice merely postulates is a fact in itself, solid and enduring. Identifying thought objectifies by the logical identity of the concept. On its subjective side, dialectics amounts to thinking so that the thought form will no longer turn its object into immutable ones, into objects that remain the same. (153 – 154)

The formation of a definite identity reifies its subject as a static concept. A negative dialectic combats this stasis by ceaselessly gesturing towards that which is irreconcilable to the concept. Doing so redefines the objective of identification as a continual refinement of one's understanding of the subject, rather than arriving at an adequately suppressive definition. This process of ongoing negation represents an opposing principle of representation to Habermas's positivism. The ironic, dissembling articulations of selfhood employed by certain authors will be found to employ this dialectical model. By inviting the reader to make suppositions regarding the author's identity, by offering a tempting prospect of selfhood, and then undermining its credibility, these authors discourage readers from investing in a cultural ideal of positive identities. Rather than attempt to impart a definite sense of authorial intent to readers, treating the text as a comprehensive statement in a communicative exchange, these authors encourage the

reader to reconsider the potential for transparency in publications written for a mass market, to consider the indeterminate elements of the text, and to prolong their contemplation of the textual subject.

Thus, expressive poetry that renders inner vision explicit is in part a product of authors responding to this challenge surrounding publication. Yet, at the same time that it helps the author gain agency, commitment to static concepts of identity threatens to undermine the expressive function of the text. The assertion of a fixed authorial vision at the heart of the text provokes totalizing interpretations that, however consistent with that vision, place limits upon its meaning. The very quality that was meant to guarantee a clear reception now stands to undermine the text's communicative function by transforming the author's words from an expressive act into a denotative sign. Thus, the many examples of ambiguous narrative elements, of indeterminable identities, of texts that explore the limits of intersubjective insight, all spring from a resistance to the reification of the subject that can result from the text's publication.

As members of the Frankfurt School, both of these theorists demonstrate a Marxist concern with responding to the repressive logic of capitalist culture, though Habermas's theory does capitulate to the systemic requirements of the market. While he warns of the threat Systems pose towards the expression of individual Lifeworlds, Habermas also admits that some degree of mediatization is necessary for communication to function on a society-wide scale. In other words, the commercial concerns of the print industry must be taken into consideration if authors are to reach their audiences at all. The key to effective communication is to ensure a balance between the requirements of the System and the expressive freedom of Lifeworlds. Promoting the priority of positive

identity as the basis of a communicative model therefore requires a degree of complicity with the development of market society.

By contrast, Adorno argues that all attempts to assert positive identity are subsumed by the restrictive logic of consumer culture. Rather than render the individual distinct however, holding to such indices of identity serves to minimize difference and halt dialectic growth. Alternatively, promoting a persistent incredulity towards ideals of positive identity can make individuals less susceptible to the reductive logic of the market. As Martin Morris explains in his comparative study of Habermas and Adorno, a negative dialectic not only resists the epistemological reification of object into concept, it presents an alternative method of representing individuals within society:

The negation of identity is more than a critique of knowledge, it is a critique of the psychic and social relations of domination that produce this kind of knowledge... Adorno's notion of the true society finds its truth in the conflict and tragedy of nonidentity. (133)

According to Adorno, while the allocation of static concepts to complex ideas may be an inevitable aspect of human cognition, it is important to resist complacency with merely adequate concepts. Any attempt to distill one's identity into a positivistic conception does more to frustrate accurate representation than encourage it. A dialectic process of continuous contradiction and redefinition is the only method of representation that cannot be co-opted, defined, and restricted by market culture.

Herein lies a limitation of Adorno's theory, both in terms of understanding market culture and contextualizing the representational strategies of Romantic period authors. By defining market logic as inherently positivistic, Adorno fails to account for the important

role negation plays in the process of identification and imitation that drives competition within the market. Consider the example of Byron's repeated ironic subversion of his own authorial persona throughout his career. In many ways, this allowed him to affect the kind of liberating negation of identity Adorno describes, invalidating the limited perception of his identity that existed in his readers' imagination and helped to sell his poetry. While this process of identification through negation allowed him to defy the market's expectations, it would be inaccurate to say that it allowed him to disengage from its influence. Indeed, Byron's career demonstrates how a negative dialectic can be an effective strategy for succeeding in the market and sustaining the public's attention. This is another motivation for adopting a representational model within the writer's market: the competitive compulsion to secure the regard of the audience. In order to address this motive and the role that negation of identity plays in effectively navigating the market, I will draw upon Gans' theory of generative anthropology.

#### Gans and Competitive Desire in the Market

Building upon Rene Girard's concept of mimetic desire and competition, Gans' theory posits language and culture as the product of humankind's need to defer competitive violence. Unlike Girard however, Gans argues that the deferral of competitive desires is achieved through the mutual regard of a sacral sign that is equally unavailable to all individuals within a society. In pre-market society, this sacral focus of desire was defined as a communal centrality. By allowing individuals to symbolically engage with the sacral centre (without any individual actually being able to seize that central position), cultural rituals mitigated violent competition. The development of

market society radically changed this dynamic by relocating the sacral centre from a public, communal source to a personal source, arising from within individuals. That is to say, in a secular market society, the individual is granted sufficient autonomy to define his or her own concept of and relationship with cultural centrality. This individually determined centre is defined in opposition to dominant cultural trends: “Bourgeois individuals must find the origin within themselves, pose themselves as ontologically prior to the collectivity; by the same token the collectivity as thus defined must appear inauthentic to individual originary intuition” (Gans 166). For Gans, the Romantic esthetic develops in response to these new conditions by relocating the source of meaning to the individual subject. His observations regarding Romanticism and the influence of the free market on the mitigation of social competition present a productive contrast to Habermas and Adorno for a number of reasons.

First, Gans helps illustrate the limits of the Romantic author’s resistance to the market by explaining how that resistance ultimately serves as a means to better compete within the market, so that while “the romantic... is in principle hostile to the market... the romantic lifestyle... is in fact a preparation for life and career in market society” (166). Acquiring centrality requires the individual to define him or herself as unique from the collective. The individual is placed in the paradoxical position of rejecting market culture in order to command attention within it. Furthermore, the individual’s efforts at self-definition are undermined by the success of the model they present. As Gans says, “it is naïve to suppose that the emanation of language from the periphery can take place without the conversion of its place of emission into a new center” (169). While the Romantic individual begins by defining a concept of centrality from the position of the

periphery, occupying a place of difference within the cultural order, the public's identification of this new centre renders it a model for imitation. This perpetuates a constant search for a new peripheral position as the successful model comes to define that which must be rejected. While a classical aesthetic could continually refer to a public definition of a sacred centre, in the romantic aesthetic a model of centrality can only be valid once before another model must be discovered along the newly defined periphery. This can be related to Adorno's ceaseless search for difference. However, where Adorno presents this search as an alternative to the limiting, positivistic logic that drives market society, Gans understands it to be part of an ongoing process of modeling identity that is informed by the market itself. Rather than help foster a "true society [that] finds its truth in the conflict and tragedy of nonidentity" (Morris 133), this social model helps mitigate competitive desire within the market.

Thus, even those authors who eschew positivistic strategies of representation can be beholden to the priorities of the market. Elusive approaches to selfhood prove to be an effective means of maintaining demand within the market. An authorial voice that incorporates obscure and contradictory elements, denying readers full disclosure, can help an author avoid being labeled, copied, and over-exposed to the point of obsolescence. While an author requires a distinct voice to attract interest, having a versatile voice helps sustain it. For example, the varying dramatic personae Landon employed in her serialized poems for the *Literary Gazette* nicely demonstrate how strategies that disrupt identity can serve to perpetuate the interest of the market. Her constant performance of new identities and fluid shifting between authorial façades becomes an exhaustless source of inspiration, rendering new voices for the continuous

public consumption. While Landon serves as an example of an author who was complicit with commercial trends, Gans's theory also outlines the limitations of resistance for those authors who sought to defy the market's influence. Gans illustrates the pervasive influence that the market had upon authors attempting to exert control over their representation. In the new commercial model of publishing, even mavericks and outliers were implicit in its competitive logic. To reject dominant models, as many Romantic authors did, was to attend to its expectations and strive for its attention. As Gans notes, "The esthetic of market society thrives on its hostility to market exchange" (165).

It is this pervasive nature of the market's influence that informs the variety of representational strategies that shall be examined in this dissertation. The Romantic author's attempt to define an individual model of authorship responds to the demands of this shift to market culture. Addressing a diffuse mass readership, competing amongst a plethora of voices, adapting to a culture saturated by the printed text, authors of this period demonstrate a keen sensitivity to the way text mediates identity and connects writer with audience. While each of these authors developed a self-conscious authorial voice in response to these challenges, they are not all characterized by the inward turn that defines the voice as an extension of the self. By surveying authors who operated in diverse modes and positions within the market, this dissertation will demonstrate the variety of strategies these authors employed. I will show how each author adapted a model of authorship that responded to the particular conditions of their position in the market. Romantic period authors reveal a distinctly modern understanding of public identity as a product of mediation in mass media culture. The sophistication of their

representational strategies is informed by the variety and complexity of the market conditions they adapted to.

The first chapter of my dissertation examines William Wordsworth's concept of subjecthood, both in representing others through his poetry and in conceptualizing his own voice through his critical prose. Wordsworth strove to establish an ideal sympathetic understanding, both with the subjects he wrote about and with his readers. While outlining the obstacles that inevitably interfere with mutual understanding, his writing emphasizes the primacy of the author in determining the meaning of a communicative exchange. As such, it is the responsibility of the reader to discern authorial intent. By examining Wordsworth's publishing practices and contrasting his critical prose with that of his harshest critic, Francis Jeffrey, this chapter shows that Wordsworth's emphasis upon the primacy of the author is a result of his experiences engaging with the market as a professional poet. As an author who published collected works directly to the market and exercised stringent creative control over his publications, Wordsworth provides a representative model of authorial autonomy.

Chapter two contrasts this initial model by focusing on the career of Charles Lamb, an author who pursued writing as a casual interest and engaged in more varied modes of publishing. As a freelance hack, Lamb's engagement with the publishing industry was characterized by a willingness to collaborate and adapt to market conditions. I assert that this market position informs his representation of authorship as a transient product of textual mediation. This chapter begins by examining how Lamb's popular series of Elia essays represent public identity as a shifting concept, defined not by individual subjects, but by the varying contexts in which they are encountered. The

chapter then moves on to examine Lamb's collection of album verses, which demonstrate how the mediation of identity extends into the private sphere. Lamb's decision to publish these poems, transforming their meaning by transplanting them from private inscription to mass publication, reflects his tendency to experiment with different forms of textual mediation. Thus, I argue that Lamb's position as a hack writer with diverse experiences in the writer's market fostered an appreciation for the conditional nature of identity within an increasingly pervasive print culture.

In the third and final chapter, I examine two examples of celebrity authors, Lord Byron and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, comparing how each responded to the public's attention. As celebrities, both poets constructed authorial personas in response to the expectant gaze of their readers, each finding ways to perpetuate the public's interest while also denying its influence. First, this chapter compares Byron's strategy of self-representation in composing *The Giaour* during the first year of his fame to his more ironic approach in his final epic *Don Juan*. I argue that Byron developed increasingly sophisticated strategies for frustrating his readers' desire for insight into his life, but never stopped provoking their curiosity. Next, I discuss Landon's weekly verse sketches from the *Literary Gazette*, examining how her focus upon surface descriptions serves to flatten the textual subject. This chapter argues that Landon's hybrid position within the publishing industry as an editor, critic, and poet led her to represent authorial self as a performative composite resulting from serialization, rather than an explicit identity described within a given text.

## Chapter 1 – William Wordsworth: Professional Poet

### 1.1 Representing Others

Everything is tedious when one does not read with the feeling of the Author.

– William Wordsworth's letter to Sara Hutchinson of June 14, 1802

William Wordsworth's career was characterized by contentious relationships. From the antagonistic discourse with critics regarding his poetic theories, to the frustration directed towards his readers in his supplementary texts, to the frequent disagreements with close friends found in his letters, at times Wordsworth appears to have been strong-minded to the point of obstinacy. Yet, there are few other authors, from any literary period, who display a greater preoccupation with the individual's potential for empathy and understanding. Throughout his encounter poems, Wordsworth's depictions of the rural poor emphasize both the moral primacy and the challenges inherent to acts of sympathetic identification. This chapter will attempt to illustrate how Wordsworth's particular position as a professional poet writing for a consumer audience informs his rendition of an authorial voice and, consequently, shapes the communicative function of his poetry. But, before examining how Wordsworth approaches the challenge of representing himself to readers, it is important to understand the complications surrounding his attempts to represent others. Examining how Wordsworth's poetry outlines his own empathetic limits and observing how he struggles to comprehend the lives of others will serve to clarify the concerns motivating his persistent attempts to render himself legible to readers.

In the famous preface to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth's attempts to justify the prosaic style of his poems lead him to explain its potential applications in representing common subjects. What follows is a complex qualification of the poet's role in representing others. For Wordsworth, the advantage of describing situations from common life in a "language really used by men" (*WWMW* 596) is the clarity and resonance such descriptions can have for readers. His claim that plain-spoken, rural language can render emotions in such a way that they "may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated" (*WWMW* 597) implies that his use of this language will allow him to describe subjects more effectively and that readers will be more likely to correctly comprehend his words. However, this emphasis on the accurate representation of the subject clashes with another function of the poet as described by Wordsworth: to colour the subject matter of his poetry with his imagination so as to render it new and interesting to the reader. How can the use of language spoken by common people be reconciled with the poet's need to exercise his imagination? Wordsworth addresses this contradiction directly, but the discussion of the function of the poet that follows points to a larger unresolved concern.

He begins by suggesting that the poet should not seek to elevate the language of his subject, as to do so would be unnecessary. Instead, the poet will find language "dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures" (*WWMW* 603) so long as he selects a proper subject. That is to say, the imaginative spark of poetry is less a matter of the poet embellishing his subject and more a matter of accurately representing its inherently poetic nature. This would seem to imply that the true role of the poet is to represent the subject of his poetry faithfully. Yet, this notion is almost immediately

complicated as Wordsworth quickly moves on to directly pose the question, “What is a poet?” (603)

He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind... To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events... he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement. (*WWMW* 603 - 604)

It is the poet's role to facilitate communication, to be “a man speaking to men,” but he does this by channeling his own experiences and passions for the reader. While the object described by his poetry in *Lyrical Ballads* is the everyday language and situations to be observed among the rural populace, it is the poet's keen sensibility and enthusiasm that make them poetic. The Wordsworthian poet is defined by his capacity to empathize with the people he encounters and to later recall (conjure up) that empathetic experience so that he can grant it expression. The subject of the poem, therefore, is not the stranger being described; it is the poet's experience of the stranger. Wordsworth is making a fine yet significant distinction between poetry as an accurate representation of an object as it appears in nature and poetry as the poet's subjective experience of that object. His earlier

insistence on the innate poetry of the common individual's natural language is complicated by this admission that transforming that language into a poem requires the poet to present it in his own voice, presenting the reader with a paradox.

One could be forgiven for suspecting Wordsworth was being intentionally abstruse in an attempt to covertly assert that the poet can fulfill two contradictory functions: representational accuracy and poetic enhancement. Regardless, both his peers and his critics took notice of and exception to his notion of a poet utilizing the language of the common man. In one of his earliest critiques of the Lake school, an 1802 review of Robert Southey's long poem *Thalaba*, Francis Jeffrey digresses from the subject at hand to directly address the ideas expressed in Wordsworth's preface:

The truth is, that it is impossible to copy [the poor and vulgar's] diction or their sentiments correctly, in a serious composition; and this, not merely because poverty makes men ridiculous, but because just taste and refined sentiment are rarely to be met with among the uncultivated part of mankind; and a language, fitted for their expression, can still more rarely form any part of their 'ordinary conversation.' ("Review" 157)

Grounded in a classist distinction between the vulgar nature of the poor and the elevated language that defines serious poetry, Jeffrey's objection is that the topic itself is unsuitable. Wordsworth's desire to depict a humble subject in a refined medium creates a dissonance of tone that insults Jeffrey's classical sensibilities. While this objection points towards a more fundamental disagreement between Jeffrey and Wordsworth concerning the proper object of poetry, a principle Wordsworth intended to challenge through the preface, Jeffrey hits upon a sensitive point. Despite Wordsworth's insistence on the

natural dignity of common language, his own admission that the poet's writing should render it more striking and emphatic points to the same discrepancy indicated by Jeffrey. There is a qualitative distinction between poetry and everyday language, even if that distinction springs from the poet's "lively sensibility" rather than his "refined sentiment" as Jeffrey would have it.

Another contemporary of Wordsworth to challenge this concept of the poet's mimetic function was his closest friend and collaborator, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Despite having withheld his name from early editions of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge was believed by many to be involved in the collection, connecting him to the views espoused in Wordsworth's critical prose.<sup>1</sup> Over time, Coleridge became increasingly dissatisfied with this association. *Bibliographia Literaria* began as an attempt to establish his own approach to literary theory and distinguish his views from those of Wordsworth. Central to this distinction is a disagreement regarding the proper source of poetic language and a more skeptical attitude regarding the poet's ability to appropriate it. Coleridge questions the inherent worth of common language, arguing that a poet's inspiration should not be drawn from scenes of rustic life but rather from a more abstract, internal source: the imagination. For Coleridge, the rustic nature of a subject is more likely to distort his language and render any underlying sentiments incoherent. A poet should be less concerned with accurately miming the external world and concentrate on the more daunting task of understanding and controlling his own creative voice. Once again, Wordsworth's emphasis on the artistic value of rural language is refuted on the grounds that poetry must take a higher, more sophisticated form. Whereas Jeffrey's objection

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<sup>1</sup> H. W. Garrod has argued that the initial success of *Lyrical Ballads* was due in part to the public's suspicion that Coleridge was the primary author (66).

arises from conflicting definitions of taste and the poet's role in culture (ideas to be discussed in greater detail in the following section), Coleridge's metaphysical concerns allude to a more fundamental concern regarding the poet's voice.

Susan Eilenberg asserts that while both Wordsworth and Coleridge express reservations regarding the poet's ability to accurately represent a subject, be it the poet himself or another person, they each come to a very different conclusion. For Coleridge, a speaker's command of language is always qualified by the inevitable discrepancy that exists between articulation and meaning, between description and reality, which threatens to make authorial intention irrelevant. As Eilenberg shows, Coleridge's preoccupation with the indeterminacy of speech colors his poetry through recurring themes of mute and dispossessed voices, notable in *Christabel* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In the latter poem, the wedding guest's paralysis and the Mariner's unnatural compulsion to relate his tale dramatize the potential of language to enslave both listener and speaker (Eilenberg 35). While Coleridge's poetry evokes a sense of uncanny dread rising from this lack of control, his prose attempts to incorporate such elements of uncertainty into his literary theory. *Bibliographia Literaria*'s disorderly, digressive, at times plagiaristic style often undermines Coleridge's intention to create his own authoritative philosophical treatise. Rather than interpret these contrary aspects of *Literaria* as flaws however, Eilenberg suggests that they serve to illustrate Coleridge's conviction that authorial ambitions for complete accuracy and control over language are delusive (153). Instead of the author imposing a systematic philosophy upon the act of writing, he finds that it is the act of writing that leads him. Coleridge establishes this notion of the author being guided by a greater, external influence when he defines the two distinct forms of imagination:

The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identified with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. (205 - 206)

The author's creativity is merely a distributary fed by the more powerful currents of a divine source of imagination. Any pretensions to control or ownership on the part of the author are rendered moot. Thus, for Coleridge, writing cannot be approached as an objective process whereby the talented author can more readily wield language to accurately represent a given subject or mimic a given voice. It is a wholly subjective act, insofar as he can only speak in the voice he has been given.

By contrast, even though Wordsworth recognizes that an author's words can never achieve complete fidelity to their subject, he insists that authentic representation remain the ultimate goal of the poet. As Eilenberg emphasizes, despite his misgivings, Wordsworth "refuses to allow a distinction between the poet and his characters or between the poet's voice (when he is a true poet) and his characters' voices" (172). Even as he admits in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that this sets an impossible standard for the poet, that "his situation is altogether slavish and mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering," the sentences that immediately follow reaffirm his conviction to pursue this goal. Even if the poet cannot perfectly represent his subject, "it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let

himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs” (*WMMW* 604). By describing this triumph in terms of a momentary delusion, Wordsworth admits that the apparent authenticity of the representation is a result of rhetorical sleight of hand. Consumed by his sensibility for the feelings of another, the poet mistakes his own thoughts and perceptions for those of his subject and represents them as such. This admission concedes the illusory nature of the poet’s representation, but more importantly it stresses the remarkable degree of determination and empathy required to produce it. Where Coleridge surrenders control in the face of abstract principles of truth and imagination, Wordsworth insists that it is the great ambition of the poet to vie with these principles and in doing so shape language to suit its subject as accurately as possible. The significance of his determined pursuit of this ideal is often understated in contemporary scholarship addressing the social communicative function of Wordsworth’s poetry.

This focus upon accurately representing the language and sentiments of others corresponds to a Habermasian ideal of communicative understanding. For Habermas, meaningful communication on a social level depends on the accurate expression and reception of the individual perspectives that constitute various Lifeworlds, the very same principle that defines the poet’s task in the Preface. Moreover, Habermas’s concern that Lifeworlds may be mediatized by the functional Systems that constitute political and economic forces is mirrored in Wordsworth’s concerns that the accelerating pace of culture and the industrialization of England’s economy would disrupt people’s capacity for sympathetic identification. Wordsworth’s comments in the Preface regarding the negative influence of “frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of

idle and extravagant stories in verse” (*WMMW* 599) have been analyzed extensively. A more thorough but less frequently referenced example of Wordsworth’s concerns is a letter sent to the leader of the Whig party, Charles James Fox, in January 1801.

In this letter, one of many sent out with copies of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* to various prominent political and cultural figures, Wordsworth gives voice to his concerns regarding modernization and hints at the role his poetry might play in combating its influence. Just as revealing as the letter’s message regarding his poetry, however, is the way it attempts to engage Fox in a personal exchange. He begins by describing Fox as a praise-worthy politician based on his capacity to recognize people as distinct individuals despite commonly encountering them en masse:

Necessitated as you have been from your public situation to have much to do with men in bodies, and in classes, and accordingly to contemplate them in that relation, it has been your praise that you have not thereby been prevented from looking upon them as individuals, and that you have habitually left your heart open to be influenced by them in that capacity.

(*LWDW* 1: 313)

Fox represents a rare example of a politician who refuses to let the abstract System of governance he represents interfere with his capacity for empathy and his ability to identify with his countrymen on an individual basis. He is an ideal figure for guaranteeing communicative action: an individual in a position of power who is also a sympathetic listener, “open to be influenced.” It is in this regard that Wordsworth seeks to address him, the letter itself being an exercise in Habermasian communication: a message presenting a stranger’s personal opinions of public matters. Wordsworth is

concerned that Fox grant him the same consideration he does the public, and his admission that “being utterly unknown to you... if I am justified in writing to you at all, it is necessary, my letter should be short” is quickly supplemented by the hopeful petition that “I have feelings within me which I hope will so far shew themselves in this letter, as to excuse the trespass which I am afraid I shall make” (*LWDW* 1: 313). This request that Fox give due consideration to a stranger’s feelings mirrors the implied contract that exists between poet and audience. The goal of the letter after all is to prolong their engagement as Wordsworth directs Fox’s attention to his publication in the hopes that his poems will influence the latter’s thoughts and actions. Both the letter and the poems are private texts being presented in a public mode. As such they are reliant upon the reader’s receptive nature.

More than simply reflect the feelings of the author however, the poems have the additional function of expressing the feelings of their subjects as rendered by the author. In reading Wordsworth’s poetry, Fox will not only gain insight into one individual Lifeworld, but will theoretically be exposed to those other individuals the poet has laboured to represent so accurately. The poetry will therefore act as a go-between, connecting the politician to the marginalized perspectives of the rural poor and facilitating their recognition in a public sphere that Habermas shows to have been primarily comprised of the bourgeois. It is in this regard that the accuracy of Wordsworth’s representation serves as a crux, as he tells Fox:

The poems are faithful copies from nature; and I hope, whatever effect they may have upon you, you will at least be able to perceive that they may excite profitable sympathies in many kind and good hearts, and may

in some small degree enlarge our feelings of reverence for our species, and our knowledge of human nature, by shewing that our best qualities are possessed by men whom we are too apt to consider, not with reference to the points in which they resemble us, but to those in which they manifestly differ from us. (*LWDW* 1: 315)

If Wordsworth's poetry is to excite these sympathies in the reader, to inspire a new understanding of figures traditionally defined by difference and disregarded, in other words if his poetry is to recast the public perception of the rural poor, it will do so by presenting "faithful copies from nature." In this context, the emphasis upon mimetic accuracy as the great task of the poet in the Preface takes on a social-communicative dimension.

To avoid exaggerating Wordsworth's intentions however, it is important to note how carefully he qualifies this poetic effect in his letter to Fox. Wordsworth is not suggesting that his poetry can provide an articulate voice for the rural subject and at no point does he claim to speak for them. Instead, he rather humbly hopes that the poems might foster "in some small degree" sympathy within the reader so that they will consider each subject with new interest. His poetry does not constitute a communicative exchange between its marginalized subjects and the reading public. But it can inspire the common regard for individuals required to foster such communication. In this sense, Wordsworth's poetry holds to a Habermasian ideal, not because it serves as the kind of discursive act that characterizes the public sphere, but because it seeks to nurture the conditions required for such a discourse, to encourage readers to be attentive to the

foreign Lifeworlds that constitute the wider public (even if they are not part of the specific public that forms the bourgeois public sphere defined by Habermas).

This distinction between speaking for and speaking about others has already been noted by a number of scholars, including Regina Hewitt, James H. Averill, David Simpson, and Brian McGrath. Whereas Jeffrey and Coleridge each objected to Wordsworth's desire to appropriate the voice of the rural poor and present it as poetry, these contemporary critics offer an alternative conception of his project. Rather than seek to close the gap that exists between the poet and the other, Wordsworth's poems stress the persistence of this distance by depicting the poet's inadequate attempts to form an authentic understanding of his poetic subject. In doing so he helps generate the kind of sympathy for the subject he alludes to in his letter to Fox without actually committing to a totalizing depiction of a stranger. Hewitt argues that the ability to observe and respect the differences separating individuals, rather than the ability to understand them, is essential to what she terms Wordsworth's sociological approach. The narrator is unable to comprehend the secret thoughts of Johnny Foy in "The Idiot Boy" and unable to correct the innocent perspective of the girl in "We Are Seven," but his failure serves as a reminder of the persistence of individual human difference. Averill identifies this focus on difference in a literary tradition of sensibility. As Averill points out with reference to *The Man of Feeling*, the focus of works of sensibility is not to identify with the suffering subject but to identify with the keen observer as he empathizes with that suffering. Rather than offer a comprehensive understanding of the subject, each of Wordsworth's encounter poems serves as an experiment in pathos, presenting the reader with a new depiction of emotional distress. These depictions allowed the reader to indulge in

vicarious emotional drama, but Averill also notes that Wordsworth laboured to distance his work from such sensationalism. Wordsworth wanted to tap into emotional extremes, not simply to thrill the readers, but to develop their capacity for empathy.

The emphasis placed upon the irreconcilable distance between the poet and his subject by Hewitt and Averill corresponds to Wordsworth's admission that the poet's ability to synchronize his emotions with a subject's relies upon a temporary "delusion," as well as to the sentiments in his letter to Fox. Perceiving society as a product of the individuals that comprise it, Wordsworth writes poetry that illustrates the diversity of individuals while encouraging respect and sympathy in the face of inexorable differences. Thus understood, Wordsworth's poetic project also denies the possibility that respect and sympathy can lead to eventual understanding and communication. To assert that the actual aim of Wordsworth's poetry is to accentuate the inevitable preponderance of differences that prevent mutual understanding is to deny a key Utopian element of his literary theory. If the poet gazing upon the subject and the audience reading the poet's words can only perceive degrees of distance, without gleaning genuine insight, sympathetic identification becomes untenable. While I concur that Wordsworth's encounter poems serve as meditations upon the persistence of alienation, it is my assertion that his indeterminate depictions of the rural poor ultimately serve to reinforce the important role that acts of positive identification play in his poetry. The remainder of this section will examine how Wordsworth's careful delineations of the limits of interpersonal insight in two encounter poems, "Simon Lee" and "Resolution and Independence," relate to his conviction that it is the poet's task to present a distinct, authentic voice and the reader's task to accurately comprehend it.

The Limits of Empathy in “Simon Lee”

“Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman” provides a seemingly straightforward example of Wordsworth probing into the life of a stranger and presenting it as a lesson in sensibility. Simon Lee appears as a haunting figure of rural decline. His “long blue livery-coat,” a sign of pride in his former employment as the huntsman of Ivor, only serves to highlight his otherwise destitute state. With the decline of aristocratic patronage, he has been left struggling to obtain sustenance from his small patch of land, lingering on as the “sole survivor” of an outmoded social structure. Simon Lee’s status as a public figure, known for his former levity and current desperate circumstance, places his wretched condition on display and makes him an identifiable symbol of similar cases. As Wordsworth goes on to describe his frail appearance, detailing his swollen ankles and thin legs, he becomes a spectacle of rural poverty. As Averill points out, the narrator’s use of the colloquial “you” throughout the first half of the poem draws the reader into the role of spectator. The juxtaposition of the half-blind Simon Lee and the gazing eye of the reader “calls attention to the separation between the man struggling in the fields and the one holding the book” (163). The poem therefore foregrounds the distance between the empathetic reader and the suffering subject. Yet it also feeds the reader’s desire to close that distance, by explaining the subject’s past and identifying the root cause of his poverty so that he ceases to be another anonymous victim. This picture of Simon Lee is of course incomplete and, while it helps familiarize the reader, it cannot provide thorough insight. By providing a sense of familiarity while consistently reminding the reader of his detachment from the subject, Wordsworth both provokes empathy and frustrates any

hope of closure. In the final section of the poem, he associates his own encounter with Simon Lee with this dissatisfying sense of estrangement.

The final third of the poem is designed to provoke and manipulate readers' expectations and curiosity. From the start, the poem's subtitle promises readers that an incident will be related, prompting them to expect an eventful conclusion. Leading into the poem's conclusion however, Wordsworth playfully mocks the reader's desire to be entertained and prepares them for disappointment: "My gentle reader, I perceive / How patiently you've waited, / And I'm afraid that you expect / Some tale will be related" (69 – 72). Wordsworth's tone in this passage is at once convivial and sardonic. There is an element of familiarity in his directly addressing the reader regarding his or her expectations. And yet his polite reference to the gentle reader's patience has accusatory implications: the average reader is likely bored by the description of Simon Lee's suffering and expects the poem to take a more eventful turn. But the actual incident turns out to be markedly unremarkable: the narrator assists Simon Lee in severing a root. As both Averill and McGrath point out, this twist is meant to frustrate readers' expectations and discourage passive reception of the poem. Wordsworth's tone continues to antagonize as he explicitly challenges the reader to adapt, to perceive the remarkable in a common occurrence rather than the sensationalistic entertainment provided by the majority of popular literature:

O reader! had you in your mind  
Such stores as silent thought can bring,  
O gentle reader! You would find  
A tale in every thing.

What more I have to say is short,  
 I hope you'll kindly take it;  
 It is no tale; but should you think,  
 Perhaps a tale you'll make it. (73 – 80)

Wordsworth's repetitive use of "gentle" to prefix "reader" begins to drain the epithet of its sincerity, suggesting that the narrator does not take his reader's gentle nature for granted. Rather, the reader must prove him or herself to be gentle by rising to the narrator's challenge and finding significance in the quotidian act of charity performed by the narrator. As Averill points out, this challenge is intended to force the reader to re-examine his or her reading habits and become "aware not only of Simon Lee but also of what it means to read 'Simon Lee'" (165). The poem does not allow the reader to simply enjoy the pleasurable thrill of sensibility, an act that sensationalizes the subject's suffering for consumption. Instead, the reader is left questioning the appeal of such vicarious forms of empathy.

The desired effect of "Simon Lee" is therefore to encourage reflection, making readers aware of the removal that exists between their experience with the text and its actual subject. McGrath's interpretation of the poem takes this notion of uncertainty even further by asserting that the relation between the subject and the narrator himself is just as questionable. The poem concludes with Simon Lee brought to tears by the assistance of the narrator in severing the root. The cause of Simon Lee's tears is left ambiguous: they may be tears of overwhelming gratitude for the simple gesture of kindness or tears of frustration resulting from the ease with which the narrator accomplished the task he toiled at for so long. The final lines of the poem relate the narrator's reaction to those tears:

The tears into his eyes were brought,  
 And thanks and praises seemed to run  
 So fast out of his heart, I thought  
 They never would have done.  
 - I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds  
 With coldness still returning.  
 Alas! The gratitude of men  
 Has oftener left me mourning. (97 – 104)

Simon Lee's gratitude leaves the narrator perturbed, but, much as for the poor man's tears, there is no definite explanation for this reaction. He finds the degree of Simon Lee's gratitude troubling, but whether it is because he is overcome by the affection, saddened by the old man's desperate state, or abashed by his own display of youthful vigour is not made explicit. As in "We Are Seven," Wordsworth does not presume to present a coherent, penetrating portrait of Simon Lee. Instead the poem's conclusion focuses upon an inarticulate interaction, a moment of partial and imperfect relation between poet and subject. McGrath goes further than Averill in emphasizing the central importance of the poem's ambiguity. Concentrating on the rhetorical flourishes throughout the final stanza of the poem, such as the dramatic pause indicated by the hyphen and the operative "Alas!" in the penultimate line, McGrath raises the possibility that the narrator's reaction to Simon Lee may actually be one of apathy. It may be that the narrator's measured language indicates the absence of an emotional connection: "The force of the emotional response seems to come from the poet-narrator's surprise, but 'oftener' introduces a calculating mind and an emotional or psychological distance at

what one assumes is the most affectively powerful moment in the poem” (577). These signals of emotional distance indicate that the narrator may have become too critical in his scrutiny of others’ misery. The result is a poem that presents inscrutable figures that defy clear interpretation, so that “Readers are left stranded somewhere between taking the poet-narrator as an example – to the extent that he exhibits the kind of emotional response Wordsworth is looking to produce in readers of his poems – or as a counter-example – to the extent that he suffers from an inability to hear Simon’s gratitude or witness his suffering” (580). Like Averill, McGrath claims that the true focus of “Simon Lee” is not the suffering of the old man, but the narrator’s perception of that suffering. By reading the narrator’s own charitable concern in uncertain terms, McGrath interprets the poem as a cautionary example of how sensibility can alienate the would-be sympathizer from the pitiable other.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, “Simon Lee” can be interpreted as a meditation upon alienation. While the majority of the poem relates Simon Lee’s personal history and establishes a sense of familiarity between the old man, the narrator, and the reader, the degree to which this furthers mutual understanding is questionable. In the end, the poem does not serve to reduce the communicative distance that separates strangers but instead reflects upon the source and persistence of that distance. The reader is left to consider Simon Lee’s undisclosed feelings and fate and to share in the narrator’s vague sense of dissatisfaction. In this way, the poem confronts both reader and poet with the limits of their empathy. However, to assert that “Simon Lee” is designed to disabuse the reader of idealistic

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that in this regard McGrath’s reading deviates from Averill’s. Where Averill reads the challenge to make a tale of the encounter with Simon Lee as encouraging the reader to seriously consider the old man’s situation, McGrath suggests that the desire to make a tale out of such scenes of suffering turns the old man into a spectacle, further distancing the reader.

notions of sympathetic identification and question the feasibility of cultivating genuine understanding through literature is to overlook another, more optimistic aspect of the poem. Wordsworth focuses on the factors that frustrate understanding in order to make readers mindful of the differences separating individuals, but this mindfulness is only relevant insofar as it prepares the reader to better comprehend the subject's voice.

It is this central desire to achieve a fuller comprehension of the subject that lends the poem's conclusion its emotional resonance. In contrast to McGrath's reading of the narrator's attitude as ambiguous and possibly uninterested, I interpret the final stanza as evidence of the narrator's desire to enter into a more intimate social compact with Simon Lee. The old man's tears derive their significance as a tragic sight, regardless of their cause, from the ease with which the narrator assisted him. The extreme desperation and vulnerability of the old couple are not truly illustrated until these tears reveal the remarkable consequence of the severing of a single root. In this moment the narrator is granted insight into the lives of Simon Lee and his wife, insight into the private reality of their situation beyond what can be gathered from the background details and local hearsay provided in the beginning of the poem. But, as this is only a passing encounter, a single incident, the narrator's glimpse is a fleeting one. His insight and his aid are not sustainable and the elderly couple must return to a state of isolation. More's the pity.

The narrator is left mourning, not simply because he is touched by Simon Lee's gratitude, but because the inordinate degree of gratitude for the negligible effort expended testifies to the old man's severe vulnerability. The couple's suffering is a result of their solitude. Bereft of the support that was once provided by the patronage of Ivor Hall, they struggle to maintain some degree of dignity. Left to their own devices, the

simplest tasks have become impossible obstacles. As the narrator's aid illustrates, the slightest support of a neighbor could make a world of difference. Yet, the narrator's ability to assist Simon Lee is limited by the same alienation that limits his ability to tell his tale. Perhaps this alienation is a result of the couple's pride, driving them to retain some sense of autonomy, such that "you with your utmost skill / from labour cannot wean them" (53 – 54). Or perhaps it is simply the inevitable result of the impersonal distance that exists between villagers during a period of rural depopulation. Regardless, the narrator is no more able to claim intimate insight into Simon Lee's life than he is able to regularly work the land for him. The ephemeral nature of their relationship prevents both possibilities. Thus, poem's conclusion simultaneously highlights the difficulty of overcoming the impersonal distance separating individuals and the dire cost of failing to do so. "Simon Lee" does not simply encourage a more discriminating approach to acts of empathy, but also reinforces the importance of such attempts. The observation of and respect for individual differences that Hewitt argues are central to Wordsworth's sociological model are inadequate grounds for social intercourse. Beyond forcing readers to consider the gulf separating empathy from understanding, the encounter poems affirm the presence of a voice that needs to be heard and understood.

In many ways this could be seen as an anachronistic observation. After all, by calling attention to the way poems like "Simon Lee" carefully outline the bounds of authorial insight, scholars like Hewitt, Averill and McGrath have helped advance Wordsworth studies beyond traditional accusations regarding the poet's appropriation of the subject's voice, which can be traced back as far as Jeffrey and Coleridge. Is it not regressive to return to asserting that these poems posit the presence of an essential

identity within each imperfectly conveyed subject? I do not believe so, for two reasons. First, neither insight is exclusive. Wordsworth can refrain from creating essentializing portraits of his subjects, and can even use his poetry to illustrate the impracticality of such a task, and still invest in the idealistic notion that such a portrait can and should be articulated. Second, these two aspects of Wordsworth's encounter poems derive their significance from one another. Such a scene detailing the breakdown of communication and the final alienation of narrator from subject depends upon the potential for genuine understanding for its dramatic impact. As Averill emphasizes, understanding these shortcomings is meant to develop the sensibility of the readers, training them to be keener listeners.

#### The Limits of Insight in "Resolution and Independence"

Moving forward in Wordsworth's career, we can see him shifting his emphasis away from poetry's potential to facilitate public communication and nurture understanding across social classes. Written four years after "Simon Lee" as part of a series of poems originally intended for a third edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, "Resolution and Independence" presents a very different kind of interaction between its narrator and its principal subject, the old leech-gatherer. Like "Simon Lee," the poem is inspired by an actual encounter between Wordsworth and an impoverished rural individual, and once again it follows the poet's attempts to establish communication with the stranger. However, this narrator's efforts are so ineffectual that the poem comes across as a parody of the earlier work. Continually distracted by his own private concerns, the narrator of "Resolution and Independence" is quick to form superficial impressions of the stranger

and continually fails to listen to his story, repeating questions and missing their answers. The poem appears to abandon the desire for communicative comprehension that characterized Wordsworth's previous work, instead investing the subject with an identity drawn from the poet's own initial impressions. While it does stand at a turning point in Wordsworth's poetic oeuvre that saw a decreased concern with representing the voices of others, "Resolution and Independence" also sees him reaffirm the importance of an underlying principle of effective communication: the primacy of the speaker's voice. Rather than attempting to mimic another's voice, perceive a stranger's story, and render it legible to readers, the poet can only ensure the integrity of his own voice. Thus, "Resolution and Independence" is a poem in which failure to be heard does not diminish the significance of speech.

Whereas the focus in "Simon Lee" remains on the titular character throughout, from its outset "Resolution and Independence" is a poem about the poet. The poem begins as the Wordsworthian narrator describes the dueling passions of a poet. After observing the sense of joy and wellbeing he feels from passing through the countryside the morning after a storm, the narrator falls into a fit of melancholy as he begins to dwell upon the dangers of isolation and privation that threaten the poet's existence. Such concerns would have been pressing on Wordsworth's peace of mind during the poem's composition in 1802, lending it a further autobiographical dimension.<sup>3</sup> Established as a self-reflective poem, it seems only appropriate that the appearance of the old leech-gatherer be described as a colourfully poetic vision:

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<sup>3</sup> These dilemmas include financial pressure, anxiety regarding the settlement of Lord Lonsdale's debt to his father, preparing the household for his marriage to Mary Hutchinson, and the recent reconnection with his estranged French lover Annette Vallon and their daughter Caroline. For a thorough explanation of their impact on Wordsworth's state of mind in early 1802, see Chapter 1 of Jared Curtis's *Wordsworth's Experiments with Tradition*.

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie  
 Couch'd on the bald top of an eminence,  
 Wonder to all that do the same espy,  
 By what means it could thither come & whence;  
 So that it seems a thing endued with sense,  
 Like a Sea-beast crawl'd forth, which on a shelf  
 Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself.

Such seem'd this Man, not all alive nor dead. (64 – 71)

Immediately the leech-gatherer is figured as an inhuman other whose sublime nature mystifies the narrator. In a description that is as demeaning as it is reverential, the old man comes to personify the land, manifesting its rugged, ancient nature to such a degree that his humanity becomes uncertain. Likened to an immobile, insensible feature of the landscape (a rock, a sea creature), the old man is denied any potential for agency. Instead, he is conflated with the simple, naturalistic setting that provides context to the narrator's transformative gaze. In sharp contrast to the inquisitive search for familiarity behind the personal history of "Simon Lee," the narrator indulges in his own initial impressions and tellingly perceives the poetic subject as a mute by-product of his imaginative passions.

This projective dynamic continues as the narrator engages the leech-gatherer in discussion, making a typical investigative question and welcoming the stranger to relate his background and situation to the wandering poet: "'What kind of work is that which you pursue? / 'This is a lonesome place for one like you'" (102 – 103). While the line of questioning suggests another attempt to foster familiarity, the narrator's tendency to

prioritize and project his own thoughts is already evident. His use of the broad referent “one like you” suggests he has already classified the stranger in his mind and, as Charles Rzepka has noted, the author’s concerns with the stranger’s profession reflect his own recently disrupted train of thought regarding professional anxieties. More noteworthy than the phrasing of the question though is the (absent) response. Although the leech-gatherer replies, the poet does not share his words. Instead, the reader is told the impression these words make upon the narrator, purposively omitting the kind of personal exchange he sought with Simon Lee. Just as the narrator’s initial description imagines the stranger as a mute rock, neglecting to relate his speech renders the old man inarticulate. The irony of course is that this is far from the truth. The narrator finds himself surprised to hear “Choice word & measure’d phrase, beyond the reach / Of ordinary men, a stately speech” (109 – 110) coming from the leech-gatherer. His initial impression is disproven as he finds the man’s well-spoken nature belies his humble appearance. This would seem to indicate an underlying message regarding the deception of first impressions and the native dignity of the common man, themes fitting with the sentiments expressed in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Yet the narrator gives no indication of internalizing such a lesson and continues to exclude the old man’s voice as the poem is drawn once again into his own private meditations: “his voice to me was like a stream / Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide” (114 – 115). As the details of the man’s life are lost upon the narrator’s deaf ears, his words become indistinguishable, bleeding together to form a singular impression coloured by the author’s imagination so that “the whole body of the man did seem / Like one whom I had met with in a dream” (116 – 117).

While both poems illustrate the disconnection that persists between narrator and stranger, the mournful conclusion of “Simon Lee” bespeaks the narrator’s dissatisfaction, and his challenge that readers “make a tale” of the story implies his hope that alienation can at least be reduced. By contrast, in “Resolution and Independence” there is no such hint of regret. The poem ends with the narrator taking confidence in the leech-gatherer’s dignity and perseverance. Wholly derived from the desire for a reassuring symbol of autonomy, the figure of the leech-gatherer as he appears in the poem is a product of the narrator’s own preoccupied mind. Far from being regrettable, this detached vision is celebrated as a welcome salve to poetic anxiety. Certain scholars have asserted that this acceptance of interpersonal detachment is colored by a dramatic irony that is essential to Wordsworth’s social commentary. For instance, R. Clifton Spargo explains that Wordsworth is keenly aware of how the act of representing the vagrant poor serves to curtail questions of ethical responsibility. Existing on the fringes of society, always lacking a recognizable identity, the vagrant figure’s perpetual call for charity presents an ongoing case of alienation with no solution. However, the potential alms-giver can find relief by making “efforts to limit the other through representation and make him or her ‘accessible’” (57). In “Resolution and Independence,” Wordsworth’s decision to depict the leech-gatherer from the narrator’s perspective, to read him as a dignified and uplifting figure, excuses him from confronting the more troubling aspects of their interaction, such as his moral obligation to a man whose vulnerable position is effectively minimized throughout the poem. Spargo asks, “Are we then to read the perception of an independence that refers to both leech-gatherer and poet as the poet’s solution to this dilemma and, quite possibly, as a willful self-deception?” (75). If the reader is intended to

view this fanciful depiction in an ironic light, as the poet putting his convenient self-deception on display for all to see, this could imply that the poem constitutes a self-conscious critique of the author's earlier attempts to accurately represent the rural poor. Accepting that "Resolution and Independence" abandons the unfeasible task of achieving authentic knowledge of the other and instead dramatizes the degree to which representations of the other are informed by the author's gaze, Spargo's point that the poet renders the other accessible as a means of limiting social interaction helps contextualize this shift. Identification of the other does not facilitate communicative interaction but rather defers it, assigning an identity as an alternative to the Sisyphean task of cultivating a perpetually partial understanding. By boldly highlighting the solipsistic nature of such representations, "Resolution and Independence" subverts his earlier ambition to accurately communicate the voice of the stranger to the reader.

David Simpson has argued that the poet's accounts of the vagrant poor are designed to deflate just such a Habermasian concept of communication. For Simpson, the most distinguishing characteristic of Wordsworth's vagrant figures is the absence of distinct individualism. Deprived of an autonomous voice, vagrants such as the leech-gatherer and the old Cumberland beggar appear as ghostly figures whose mechanical, circuitous movements across the countryside serve as reminders of their deprivation. This presents a radically different conception of Wordsworth's poetic project. Following Habermas's model, effective public communication requires that sympathetic identification take place between the different Lifeworlds. This means that the individual must be conceptualized in terms of positive identification: a stable, definitive conception of subjecthood. However, as Simpson explains, "Where neither the self nor the other can

be stabilized for clear representation and simple, direct discourse, there proves to be little or no basis for any grand model of dialogic democracy” (25). Characterized by a lack of definitive representation, by an articulate voice whose words indistinctly lump together, the depiction of the leech-gatherer does not foster the understanding necessary for public dialogue. Instead, it illustrates how individuals who exist on the margins of society are denied both a public identity and a voice.

Spargo’s and Simpson’s respective readings contend that the inability of the narrator to hear and understand the leech-gatherer indicates a broader repudiation of positive identification as a model of public representation. Attempts to comprehend another individual in stable terms, to achieve a thorough understanding of his or her genuine selfhood, are delusive. Rather than helping to engage with the subject in a dialogue, this concept of representation simply accommodates convenient designations that help mollify concerns of alienation. By ironically drawing attention to the inadequacy of the narrator’s interactions with the leech-gatherer, “Resolution and Independence” complicates the goal of accurate representation previously discussed with reference to “Simon Lee.” While it is true that the poem acts as a critical reassessment of his approach to representing strangers, to claim as Simpson does that Wordsworth rejects poetry’s potential to sustain a Habermasian model of communication may be overstating the case. An alternative reading of the poem with reference to the details surrounding its composition will help illustrate that, despite the narrator’s disconnect, the leech-gatherer’s voice may still be interpreted as a reassuring instance of self-representation.

The original drafts of what would become “Independence and Resolution” were written in May of 1802. In the following month Wordsworth would show the untitled

draft (commonly referred to as “The Leech-Gatherer”) to Coleridge and mail a copy to Mary and Sara Hutchinson. Their responses were encouraging but critical and, in light of their comments, Wordsworth revised the poem over the following weeks into the version that would eventually be published in 1807 (Curtis 100). Sara Hutchinson complained that the poem focused too much attention on the leech-gatherer’s speech in which he related his story to the narrator, a section she described as tedious. Clearly, the final version of the poem in which the leech-gatherer’s speech is overwritten by the impressions it made upon the author proves that Wordsworth heeded her criticism. However, in his letter of response, he defends his original version, emphasizing that the leech-gatherer’s remarkable life requires no embellishment.

I then describe him, whether ill or well is not for me to judge with perfect confidence, but this I can *confidently* affirm, that, though I believe God has given me a strong imagination, I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an old Man like this, the survivor of a Wife and ten children, travelling alone among the mountains and all lonely places, carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has entailed upon him. (*LWDW* 1: 366 - 367)

Wordsworth’s deference to the power of the leech-gatherer’s story, his faith in its ability to speak for itself, suggests the poem was originally motivated by the same ideals of communication and empathy already identified with “Simon Lee,” as does his insistence that Sara Hutchinson must feel *something* in contemplating the leech-gatherer’s situation. As he explains in the letter, the poem’s strength is determined less by his words than the

reality of the old man they describe. His aim is simply to serve as a medium between subject and reader to the best of his ability.

However, the letter also gives indication of the inward-turn the poem would soon take. Frustrated by Hutchinson's apathy, Wordsworth decides to describe, in the letter, his original experience and personal feelings upon meeting the leech-gatherer so that she can better comprehend the striking quality of the man that inspired the poem. This is the same strategy that he would take in redrafting the poem, changing the focus from a description of the leech-gatherer and his tale to an account of the narrator's thought process during the encounter. Comparing what remains of "The Leech-Gatherer" with "Resolution and Independence," we see a shift from objective, empirical descriptions to subjective impressions.<sup>4</sup> The passage that best exemplifies Wordsworth taking creative liberties with the leech-gatherer, the analogy that envisions him first as a stone and then as a sea-beast, first appears in "Independence and Resolution" and precedes the original, more straightforward description of his clothes and countenance. Even the minor amendment of replacing the original lines, "I to the border of a Pond did come / By which an Old man was, far from all house or home" (55 – 56), with the more colourful alternative, "I spied a Man before me unawares; / The oldest Man he seem'd that ever wore grey hairs" (55 – 56), shows Wordsworth's decision to base the poem in his own perceptions. This change in strategies constitutes an important turning point in both the design of the poem and Wordsworth's overall approach to representing subjects in writing.

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<sup>4</sup> The manuscript, which is missing large sections where pages were torn out, was originally published in *Cornell Library Journal*, no. 11 in Spring, 1970.

Indeed the significance of this change is evident in Wordsworth's poetic theory. W. J. B. Owen, one of the principal chroniclers of Wordsworth's critical prose, has observed that the additions made to the preface of the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* produce a theoretical contradiction. Owen points out that the mimetic theory described in the 1800 preface, with its goal of mimicking the language of men, clashes with the expressive theory of the 1802 preface, in which there is an increased emphasis on the poet's task of elevating and embellishing language (76).<sup>5</sup> Is it the poet's task to represent his subjects accurately or to vividly re-conceptualize them for readers? Coinciding with his revision of the preface in 1802, Wordsworth's frustration with Sara Hutchinson's letter and the subsequent changes made to "The Leech-Gatherer" help account for this contradiction.

Accepting that the encounter poems were meant to offer a partial window into their subjects' lives, to generate sympathetic understanding in the reader, it is clear why Wordsworth took exception to Hutchinson's disinterest. Lucy Newlyn has emphasized the important role Wordsworth's inner circle of readers played in the poet's career. Intimate relations like his sister Dorothy, his wife Mary Hutchinson, sister-in-law Sara Hutchinson, Coleridge, Southey and Lamb could serve as a reassuringly familiar audience, compensating for the less sympathetic reactions arising from harsh critics or a faceless public. As a result, Wordsworth could be especially sensitive to his friends' criticism, often chiding them for lacking sensibility when they failed to fully appreciate his work. After all, if a close relation cannot appreciate his work, what will the public make of it? In this instance, the inability of his friend to identify with the foreign figure of

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<sup>5</sup> This 1802 addition is the "What is a poet?" section considered at the beginning of this chapter. Owen's observation regarding this clash is consistent with the inconsistencies already pointed out.

the leech-gatherer prompts Wordsworth to make a drastic change, abandoning his attempts to accurately represent the stranger and instead making his own thoughts the subject of the poem. Just as his private reading circle provided an intimacy that was lacking in the mass readership, this refocusing upon the poet's experience attempts to establish a more immediate connection between the author's perspective and the reader's reception. By removing a degree of separation, Wordsworth no longer requires the reader to comprehend the stranger's voice as it is mediated through the poem; the reader is to identify with the author's voice itself, to "read with the feeling of the author" (*LWDW* 1: 367) as he tells Hutchinson. The poem is shaped by the same communicative ambitions previously discussed: the reader's sympathetic identification with the subject (no longer the stranger but now the poet's experience of that stranger). Nevertheless, an important concession has been made in this communicative model. Insofar as the reader's interest and sympathy require an immediate relationship between the speaker and the sentiments he describes, the poet must surrender any pretension to accurately representing others to the reading public. Wordsworth can only speak for himself, can only express his own experiences, if a given subject is to be accurately contemplated by and forcibly communicated to the reader, to borrow the language of the 1800 preface. This inward-turn signals what Jared Curtis refers to in his reading of the poem as a key transition in Wordsworth's career, moving from the language of men to the language of vision (98).

Despite his intent to provoke interest in the vagrant's story, Wordsworth found it necessary to overwrite that story with his own more vivid reflections in order to engage his reader. In many ways this reading concurs with Simpson's interpretation of the leech-gatherer as a haunting figure of deprivation, defined by the absence of a discrete identity

and the breakdown of communication. However, returning to “Resolution and Independence” with Sara Hutchinson’s letter in mind, Wordsworth’s careful exclusion of the leech-gatherer’s voice takes on a note of bittersweet irony. Despite the priority given to the narrator’s voice, his relationship with the leech-gatherer often reflects that of the inadequate reader with the poet. The narrator’s oblivious, easily distracted nature appears to lampoon the insensitive reading habits for which Wordsworth censures his sister-in-law. This ironic note is emphasized by the narrator’s repeated failure to listen. Every time the leech-gatherer provides an eloquent account of his life, the narrator’s attention (and thus the poem’s) is drawn into digressive visions of his own professional anxiety. He becomes locked in a farcical catch-22. By (mis)interpreting the leech-gatherer’s obscure, humble labour on the moor as a symbol of the unappreciated poet’s creative toil, the narrator simultaneously affirms the old man’s status as misunderstood and validates his own dread. And with each repetition the narrator appears increasingly ridiculous, at first dumbly repeating his initial inquiries, “How is it that you live? & what is it you do?” (133) and then simply standing mute, creating an awkward silence that the leech-gatherer must fill (146 - 147). While the sentiments expressed in these digressions certainly reflect Wordsworth’s genuine misgivings regarding reader reception and his own fate as a poet, by indulging in such reflections to the exclusion of his original subject, he satirizes the insensibility inherent to listeners/readers who fail to identify with a speaker/author.

Meanwhile, the grace and composure of the leech-gatherer throughout imply that while his voice may be largely omitted from the poem, it is nonetheless substantive. The leech-gatherer accepts the narrator’s inattention with courteous good humour. At no point does the narrator’s failure to register his words detract from his dignified manner or his

willingness to share his story. Ultimately, the unwavering quality of his speech does make an impression upon the fanciful narrator, generating the poem's concluding lines:

I could have laugh'd myself to scorn to find

In that decrepit Man so firm a mind;

“God,” said I, “be my help & stay secure!

“I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely Moor.” (151 – 154)

The narrator comes to recognize his folly in misjudging the leech-gatherer's character and drawing such negative associations from his appearance (although, tellingly, as the poem concludes he persists in projecting symbolic meaning upon the leech-gatherer). More important than the significance the narrator assigns to the leech-gatherer, however, is the integrity of the old man's voice. Unaffected by the narrator's negligence and misconceptions, his tranquil constancy undercuts the poet's concerns with misinterpretation and the limits of sympathy. It is by maintaining his integrity as a speaker that the leech-gatherer demonstrates the titular qualities of resolution and independence. In truth, the poem's title has multiple referents. It describes the tenacity with which the leech-gatherer maintains his livelihood, and it encapsulates the lesson of perseverance assigned to his labour in the final lines. But it also refers to the primacy of the speaker in communicative exchanges as demonstrated by the leech-gatherer: regardless of the audience, the old man's resolve validates his voice independent of its reception. This validation of the unheard speaker represents a new approach to public communication for Wordsworth, with a new role to be filled by the poet.

Under this new approach, communication still depends on the accurate identification of the speaker's Lifeworld by the audience. However, as Wordsworth

discovers from his own experiences and his friends' feedback, even an attentive listener cannot be expected to forge perfect sympathies, especially not within impersonal public spaces. Such public spaces include both the rural paths of England where Wordsworth briefly encounters his poetic subjects and, as shall be the focus of the following section, the mass-produced text where an unfamiliar, casual readership briefly encounters the poem. "Resolution and Independence" sees the Wordsworthian poet's task shift away from facilitating such understanding between individuals across disparate social strata. Wordsworth can no more guarantee the reader's comprehension than he can himself hope to accurately reproduce the tales of his encountered subjects. He finds an alternative in the leech-gatherer's example: rather than speak for others, the poet's task is simply to preserve the integrity of his own voice. Rather than facilitate a broad network of communicative links between rural poor and urban consumer, the poet's task is to focus upon the single link between author and reader. The reader must be made to recognize the poet's perspective and, to this end, Wordsworth must render his work in the vivid impressions and intimate details afforded by his own perspective, as he did for Sara Hutchinson. To overcome the degradation of meaning that affects the public utterance, to be understood by strangers, the speaker must disregard misinterpretations and trust in the resonance of his own voice.

Thus, despite the exclusion of his voice from the revised poem, the leech-gatherer does not lack identity. Rather, his depiction demonstrates positive identity, exhibiting the persistent presence of a definite selfhood that waits to be discerned. In this regard he serves as a model for the poet entering the writer's market. Indeed, the leech-gatherer has long been interpreted as a model for the poet. Scott Hess observes that, in addition to

serving as an example of autonomy, the leech-gatherer also reflects Wordsworth's notion of the poet as a wanderer, with his circulating movement across the moors representing the author's circulation through the print market (248). For Hess, this relates to Wordsworth's attempts to define his own professional identity as an author. Charles Rzepka further develops this notion of the leech-gatherer as the poet in the marketplace, suggesting that the leech-gatherer's willingness to share his story with the narrator, even as he toils to earn his income, indicates Wordsworth's desire for a gift-based model of exchange. According to Rzepka, "Resolution and Independence" was composed at a time when Wordsworth was growing uncomfortable with the prospect of marketing his work to the public. Torn between financial need and artistic integrity, Wordsworth views the leech-gatherer as an example of how he can find a balance: "Income earner and gift giver, the Leech-gatherer as poet is both an agent of the marketplace and an agent of divine grace" (Rzepka 243). As these scholars emphasize, "Resolution and Independence" is not simply a poem about communication between strangers, but specifically a poem that ruminates on the mediation of the commercial market and its influence on the author/reader relationship. For Rzepka, the encounter with the leech-gatherer helps Wordsworth imagine an alternative relationship in which he presents his poetry as a gift, removed from the compromising factors of marketing and profit. The following section will further consider how Wordsworth's position as a professional author navigating the writer's market informs his approach to rendering his authorial voice and addressing his readership. In doing so, it will help explain why Wordsworth turned to a language of vision, to once again borrow Curtis's term, that prioritized the singular speaker as a response to the threat of misinterpretation. In contrast to Rzepka, I will consider the

possibility that Wordsworth's relation to his readers was increasingly influenced by the logic of commodity culture.

## 1.2 – Representing One’s Self in the Market

Wordsworth’s image as an outright opponent of consumer culture has been radically complicated by the past two decades of scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Although Wordsworth expressed frustration with mass reading audiences and a concern that the fast pace of urban culture would “blunt the discriminating power of the mind” (599), he was a capable marketer who carefully managed every commercial aspect of his publications. His letters and prose works reveal an author who contemplated reader demographics and understood how the periodical press served as a source of publicity, an author wary of editorial interference and protective of his intellectual property. Wordsworth’s aptitude for the market can partially be explained as a result of his being historically situated between the decline of patronage and the rise of authorship as a legitimate profession. As a result, he maintained a very distinct position, neither wholly dependent nor wholly free from demands of the marketplace.

On one hand, Wordsworth did benefit from traditional forms of literary patronage, receiving financial support from various sources. In 1795, at the outset of his writing career, he received a legacy of £900 from Raisley Calvert that “invaluably confirmed Wordsworth’s sense of poetic destiny” (James, “Wordsworth” 71). In 1802, he inherited a more substantial legacy of £4000 from the Earl of Lonsdale.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in 1813 he became the Distributor of Stamps for the Westmoreland district, a position that would

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<sup>1</sup> The scholars whose work informs my account of Wordsworth’s market acumen include Lee Erikson, Susan Eisenberg, Mark Schoenfield, Nikki Hessel, Brian Goldberg, Thomas Pfau, Scott Hess, Richard Swartz, and Peter J. Manning, though this is far from an exhaustive list of those responsible for the shifting perception of his attitude towards the writer’s market.

<sup>2</sup> This amount was a payment for services rendered by Wordsworth’s father, John Wordsworth, who had served as the solicitor for James Lowther, the Earl of Lonsdale. Lonsdale had withheld this payment for many years, contesting the Wordsworth family’s claims until his death in 1802, at which point his son William Lowther finally settled the debt.

provide him with a regular income for the following three decades. Together, these sources of income provided Wordsworth with the financial freedom he needed to pursue his writing career, instilling a sense of independence from the demands of consumer audiences.

However, Wordsworth was rarely free from financial concerns, and his preoccupation with bolstering his income is evident at various stages of his life. In the years immediately following his inheritance from Calvert, Wordsworth wrote numerous letters to his brother Richard, requesting assistance and inquiring after the Lonsdale debt. In 1802, Wordsworth's poetry reflects the financial pressure caused by his impending marriage to Mary Hutchinson and the uncertainty surrounding Lord Lonsdale's estate (Curtis 3). This anxiety regarding his income continued into the later stages of Wordsworth's life: his campaign to amend copyright law in the 1840s was likely motivated by a desire to secure a financial legacy for his children and their families through his writing (Erickson 62). As this chapter will discuss, Wordsworth's interactions with the publishing industry demonstrate that, despite his benefactors, he still had to consider the practical challenges of earning a livelihood throughout his career. In this sense it might be said that Wordsworth was compelled to learn how to navigate the market, while still feeling removed from its influence.

It would be inaccurate to think of Wordsworth's generation as the first to face the prospect of writing poetry as a commercial endeavour or as entering into a world suddenly bereft of patronage. In *Authoring The Self*, Scott Hess provides a thorough account of how eighteenth-century poets conceived their authorial identity in relation to the market, placing Wordsworth at the end of a process of gradual acclimation. Inheriting

various strategies employed by such poets as Thomas Gray, James Beattie, and William Cowper to distance themselves from the perceived taint of commercialism, Wordsworth did not originate the concept of the professional writer. Rather, he refined a professional posture that began developing a century earlier with Alexander Pope. Showing how Wordsworth's approach to poetic self-representation is informed by his approach to the commercial marketplace, Hess's study provides a foundation for the following discussion. However, Hess does not address how Wordsworth's particular career path compares to those of his contemporaries, instead choosing to figure him as the end point of this development. By using Wordsworth as an example of a "lyric self which emerged out of eighteenth-century poetry, and which has since become a paradigm of deep personal identity generally... a specifically authorial self, generated out of the conditions, tensions, and contingencies of print culture" (4), Hess presents a blanket concept of Romantic self-representation that does not begin to consider how individual authors experienced these conditions and tensions in different ways. The present study will attempt to expand upon Hess's work by examining various forms of professional authorship that appeared in the early nineteenth-century writers' market, starting with Wordsworth's. Ideally, it will provide the basis for a broader survey of how the variety of professional positions existing within that market during this period produced different forms of authorial voice.

Examining how his calculated publishing practices helped him manage the connection between poet and public, this section will assert that the concept of authorship expressed through Wordsworth's critical prose was a result of his specific position in the writers' market. Doing so requires viewing Wordsworth's increasing emphasis upon the

priority of the speaker and the persistence of positive identity as more than a product of his changing attitude to the communicative function of his work, as was discussed in the previous section. Instead, the current section will consider how Wordsworth's conception of the author's relationship with the reader, as well as his underlying communicative concerns, are shaped by the challenges he faced as a professional poet publishing prestige collections of his poetry.

The notion of the professional poet has been a popular focus of recent scholarship, with a number of studies examining how the increasing predominance of egalitarian professionalism in English society influenced Wordsworth's conception of the socially engaged poet. Though these scholars draw varying conclusions, they clearly demonstrate a connection between Wordsworth's self-conscious construction of professional identity and the manner in which he addressed his readers. For instance, Thomas Pfau has argued that Wordsworth's depictions of the rural poor perpetuate a developing middle-class aesthetic that favours the implicit mediation of meaning. Wordsworth's frank depictions of the suffering and familial affection of rustic figures naturalize the rustic social values they represent without explicitly endorsing them. This subtle approach illustrates Wordsworth's engagement with a middle-class sensibility, one that requires the reader to "agree to abide by the professional rules by which the market operates, in particular to accept *mediation* as constitutive of all literature" (105). Whereas Pfau traces the market's influence in the implicit mode of Wordsworth's poetry, Mark Schoenfield identifies Wordsworth's professionalism with the explicit language of his prose. Once again, Wordsworth's relationship to his readership is shaped by his participation in the marketplace. In contrast to Pfau, Schoenfield describes the various ways Wordsworth

attempts to supersede the mediation of market forces so as to establish a more direct, genuine connection with his audience. Couched in legalistic terms, prose supplements such as the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* seek to establish a contract with readers that can combat the intrusive interpretations of critics (*Professional* 110). In this regard, Schoenfield shows how Wordsworth's commitment to the entrepreneurial spirit of the market led him to resist its multivalent nature.

The seeming contradictions between Pfau's and Schoenfield's findings reflect Wordsworth's paradoxical relationship with the market. In truth, it is not difficult to reconcile their different observations in relation to a writer capable of pairing enigmatically subjective poetry with constrictively exacting theory, a poet that, as Lucy Newlyn points out, drew a somewhat specious distinction between writing for the people and writing for the public (96). It is challenging to account for Wordsworth's attitude towards the market insofar as he simultaneously valued and condemned its popular potential. In another more recent study of Wordsworth's professional identity, Brian Goldberg helps account for this paradox. Like Pfau, Goldberg identifies Wordsworth's investment in the advancement of middle-class professionalism. Wordsworth's efforts to establish poetry as a recognized profession are driven in part by a desire to obtain the social legitimacy already achieved by lawyers, doctors, and scholars. In doing so, he seeks to claim his place in the rising egalitarian social order enabled by the market and espoused by the Whig tradition of Locke, Addison, and Defoe. Conversely, Goldberg also notes that Wordsworth's desire to embrace professionalism is tempered by his claim to a more aristocratic notion of gentility that can preserve his authority from critics and other unsympathetic readers. According to Goldberg, Wordsworth is able to achieve this

balance by establishing the grounds for a “professional gentility” through his prose writing, a position that allows him “to (theoretically) control readership and affiliation, and to enter into productive social relations with an anonymous literary marketplace while maintaining the gentlemanly integrity he also craves” (223). Wordsworth’s concept of the professional poet is an amalgam of traditionalist and progressive ideals: a modern social-leveler who can still claim a degree of privileged rank. As Pfau and Schoenfield conjunctively indicate, he is a poet who accepts the market’s mediation when it originates from the individual interpretations of his readers, but who resists mediation as it applies to matters of public reception and reputation opined by the critical press.

As all of these scholars illustrate, Wordsworth’s professional negotiation of the writer’s market influenced his conceptualization of the communicative dynamic he shared with his readers. In the previous section, it was observed that Wordsworth strives to engender an accurate understanding of his work, but also acquiesces to the limits of sympathetic identification and the inevitability of subjective interpretations. The result is poetry that often eludes definitive interpretations even as it gestures towards the ultimate primacy of the poet/speaker’s voice as a source of meaning. Wordsworth’s persistence in maintaining this primacy, in tracing the presence of a definite identity that cannot be rendered explicit, can be linked to his tenacious efforts to dictate his place in the market, even as he embraces its democratic nature.<sup>3</sup> Building upon the composite understanding of Wordsworth’s professional identity provided by these scholars, I will attempt to further explicate Wordsworth’s complex position with regard to the market. Rather than

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<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this argument, the democratic nature of the market refers to the influence of popular opinion and tastes in determining an author’s reputation and opportunities for publication. I have chosen the term “democratic” to indicate that the writer’s market represents a system where an author’s situation can be determined by the accord of the public. As the following discussion of his marketing techniques will illustrate, Wordsworth was not inconsiderate of public reading habits when publishing his poetry.

focus upon his investment in a professional-class ideology, this chapter will examine the specific publishing practices Wordsworth undertook in order to better engage with his readers. Considering how he adapted to the market's demands while also maintaining tight control over his creative output, I shall assert that Wordsworth's notions of identity and communication are informed by his commercial acumen. His particular position within the market, that of a fiercely independent poet attempting to define his social status and earn a livelihood through his work, an author controlling nearly every aspect of his publications, has a determining influence on his positivistic views of subjecthood. This initial case study of a more conventionally Romantic, self-sustaining model of identity shall serve to place the authors discussed in subsequent chapters into sharp relief.

### Marketing Poetry and the Popular Press

As Raymond Williams points out in *Culture and Society, 1780 – 1950*, one of the most important changes brought on by the shift from writing poetry under a system of patronage to writing for a commercial market was the loss of a direct relationship with one's audience:

Under patronage, the writer had at least a direct relationship with an immediate circle of readers, from whom, whether prudentially or willingly, as mark or as matter of respect, he was accustomed to accept and at times to act on criticism. It is possible to argue that this system gave the writer a more relevant freedom than that to which he succeeded.

(Williams 32)

Writing for the commercial market left the poet to address a nebulous readership composed of unknown individuals with varying tastes and temperaments. Under such a system, reception could only be divined from varying, incongruous sources (sales figures, personal relations, a discordant critical press). This placed the poet in the precarious position of devising work to suit a hypothetical reader only to receive conflicting reports of its success. The turn towards highly personalized, expressionistic poetry provided a partial solution to this difficulty, but also raised new problems. Once the object of poetry became the expression of an individual's sentiments, the reader's comprehension ceased to be a criterion of its quality. The poet no longer needed to struggle to comprehend an increasingly ambiguous audience while composing a work. While this aided in the creation of poetry, it only exacerbated the issue of its reception. Within the commercial market, courting a diverse readership was more important than ever before. A distinct, idiosyncratic voice could help the professional poet distinguish himself within the market and often helped attract critical notice and dedicated readers. At the same time, discouraging indicators of a work's reception (conflicting reviews, wavering sales) were made all the more provoking. For the expressionist poet casting his or her voice out into the masses, commercial rejection carried with it the insult of personal rejection, or at least misapprehension. Either the public did not care for the poet or they did not understand him or her. It is within this context that we must read Wordsworth's famous claim in the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" of 1815 that the poet's task involves "creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed" (*WWMW* 657). Despite his antagonistic, dictatorial tone, a close examination of Wordsworth's attempts to better address his readership exposes a poet struggling to acclimatize, but not compromise, his work. As we shall see,

Wordsworth made efforts to adapt his publications to suit the conditions of the market, ensuring that his work reached and was read by the public, while preserving the poetic content within.

As Hess explains, even those eighteenth-century poets who did not write under direct patronage could find ways of acquainting themselves with their audiences. Circulating one's work through private subscriptions was a profitable recourse for many eighteenth-century poets and ensured at least some degree of social relation between poet and reader. Failing that, poets could rely upon their professional status in other fields to ingratiate themselves to unfamiliar readers. For example, James Beattie identified himself primarily as a philosopher rather than as a poet to prevent being associated with the commercial circulation of his work (Hess 135). The reputation that came with being a pastor or professor helped verify the author's legitimacy as a serious man of letters, providing a secondary solution to the impersonal distance of the market. While the author's reputable background could not substitute for personal familiarity, it could help disarm any initial alienation amongst unacquainted readers. Wordsworth's attempts to utilize these same strategies at the beginning of his career were short lived. His early professional aspirations of joining the church or distinguishing himself as an academic were already abandoned by the time he published *An Evening Walk*.<sup>4</sup> Around that same time he discussed plans to begin a journal, *The Philanthropist*, with his friend William Mathews, a project that would require building up a subscription amongst personal acquaintances.

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<sup>4</sup> As Brian Goldberg points out Wordsworth still entertained ideas for alternative careers as late as his trip to Germany in 1799 (217). However, Goldberg also points out that once Wordsworth committed to writing poetry for a living, his drive to validate this career as a legitimate professional identity led him to measure himself "against other professionals, from beginning to end [of his career]" (4). In this sense, Wordsworth was attempting to combat the stigma associated with the commercial publication of poetry, the stigma that encouraged Gray and Beattie to find shelter in more traditional professions.

In an enthusiastic letter to Mathews outlining the project in great detail, Wordsworth urges that they compose preliminary manuscripts to be dispersed amongst their friends in an attempt to raise money for broader publication. In addition to funding the journal, these friends would also help disseminate it. Wordsworth asserts that the success of their periodical would require, “in each considerable town of Great Britain and Ireland, a person to introduce the publication into notice. To this purpose, when it is farther advanced, I shall exert myself amongst all my friends” (*LWDW* 1: 127). His belief that a circle of immediate companions can serve as an intermediary, accommodating the author’s relationship with a mass readership, shows Wordsworth’s interest in an eighteenth-century model of commercial writing, one in which the detached operations of the marketplace can still be evaded.

Unfortunately, Wordsworth would not put this strategy to the test. Despite his initial enthusiasm, he quickly abandoned the *Philanthropist* project, in part due to his unwillingness to join Mathews in London working as a parliamentary reporter. In a letter to Mathews postmarked January 10, 1795, Wordsworth explains that he is ill-suited to the role, citing his inadequate memory and penmanship, as well as his “being subject to nervous headaches, which invariably attack me when exposed to a heated atmosphere or to loud noises” (*LWDW* 1: 139). Although he reiterates a desire to relocate to London for work, his following letter to Mathews, dated October 1795, opens by addressing his pleasure at living with Dorothy in Racedown “in perfect solitude”<sup>5</sup> (*LWDW* 1: 155).

While it is impossible to say whether a subscription model would have proven an effective method of distribution for the ill-fated *Philanthropist*, Wordsworth’s hesitancy

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<sup>5</sup> The content of the October letter suggests that Wordsworth had written to Mathews during the intervening months. However, if this is the case, these letters have not been preserved and/or discovered.

to engage in the hectic urban world of political journalism gives some indication of its limited potential. After all, the basis for a successful subscription model is a robust social network, as Wordsworth recognizes when he emphasizes the need to promote their magazine from town to town. Throughout the eighteenth century, subscription-based circulation proved most successful for writers with high-profile social connections or some claim to public notoriety. Alexander Pope's aristocratic connections enabled him to set a remarkable precedent by turning a strong profit mainly through subscription sales. Even a reclusive figure like Thomas Gray could access a healthy circle of readers based on his reputation as an academic and his friendship with Horace Walpole. Wordsworth had none of these advantages and, as his reticence to relocate to begin his career in political writing indicates, he was not disposed to seek them out. In 1795, as a young, relatively unknown writer, his ability to generate an extensive social circle of readers across multiple urban centers would require a willingness to travel and ingratiate himself into public life, something that he admittedly lacked. As an isolated writer with a small circle of scattered friends and mentors, Wordsworth's situation would not permit him to employ the publishing strategies of the previous century. However, he was in an ideal position to embrace new strategies better suited to the conditions of the mass marketplace. Indeed, while his letters to Mathews detail an aborted consideration of antiquated methods, they also preview his aptitude for operating under these new circumstances.

Specifically, they show that Wordsworth understood the importance of consciously shaping a text to address specific segments of a multi-faceted reading public. Jon Klancher has shown that nineteenth-century periodicals went beyond defining

audiences along economic, political, and geographic lines, further refining distinctions by imposing their own language and taste upon readers. Acts of reading constituted complicit acts of identification as each journal distinguished the grounds of its discourse (and that of its readers') from that of its competitors' and as readers came to associate with their favourite periodicals (20). Thus, one's choice in periodical became a more precise index of identity than the distinction of being a Whig or a Tory. Klancher goes on to argue that Wordsworth's attempt to theorize a natural, rustic language in the 1800 Preface was driven by a desire to combat this division of readers with a humanist form of writing (140). Yet, the letters to Mathews reveal that, years prior to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth was prepared to leverage and perpetuate such divisions to secure a sympathetic readership:

As to our readers you think that we should endeavour to obtain as great a variety as possible, you cannot, however, be ignorant that amongst the partizans of this war, and of the suspension of the *habeas corpus* act amongst the mighty class of selfish alarmists we cannot obtain a single friend. We must then look for protection entirely amongst the dispassionate advocates of liberty and discussion; these whether male or female, we must either amuse or instruct nor will our end be fully obtained unless we do both. (*LWDW* 1: 127)

Wordsworth's discretion is in large part driven by political necessity. With the suspension of habeas corpus, publishing a periodical dedicated to endorsing "gradual and constant reform of those abuses which, if left to themselves, may grow to such a height as to render, even a revolution desirable" was a difficult and potentially hazardous

undertaking (*LWDW* 1: 125). However, Wordsworth's realization that any attempt to address the English public as an undifferentiated whole would be ineffective also illustrates his understanding of the writers' market. To gain traction within the public sphere, their message would have to be consciously directed towards readers predisposed to accept it. Furthermore, Wordsworth's observation that "we must either amuse or instruct nor will our end be fully obtained unless we do both" corresponds to Klancher's account of how distinct readerships are further refined in the periodical market. Once the authors of *The Philanthropist* attract (amuse) a potential audience, they can begin to actively shape (educate) their readers' tastes. Despite Wordsworth's outspoken distaste for the impersonal nature of the commercial print industry and his desire to elide its dissociative machinery, he comprehends its functionality. From the outset of his career he understood that identifying and categorizing readers according to abstract criteria was necessary to opening a channel amongst them.

Wordsworth's sensitivity to the nuances of reader demographics was not limited to his fledgling interest in political periodicals. Throughout his career, he displayed an understanding of both mass- and niche-marketing that allowed him to reach audiences and earn a livelihood through his poetry. In part, this entailed utilizing popular forms of commercial mass media that he often railed against in his letters and prose, including urban newspapers. Of all the Lake School poets, Wordsworth was the furthest removed from the world of newspapers. He did not have Coleridge's firsthand experience as a journalist, nor did he embrace periodicals as a medium for original poetry to the same degree that Southey did. Moreover, Wordsworth's outright opposition to newspapers is clearly stated in the 1800 Preface, in which he positions *Lyrical Ballads* as a counter to

the numbing excesses of the daily news. Nonetheless, he was not averse to using newspapers to attract new readers. Wordsworth and Coleridge published a selection of poems from *Lyrical Ballads* in various daily newspapers in an effort to better promote both the first and second editions of the collection.<sup>6</sup> This willingness to address readers through the very medium their poetry seeks to curb illustrates a degree of flexibility on the part of the authors. To properly influence the public's taste and sensibility, they must be willing to accommodate its current reading habits. Such a compromise recognizes that *Lyrical Ballads* is in fact part of that same popular consumer print culture.

That being said, these forays into the popular press were carefully managed to ensure the poets were not associated too closely with newspapers. Poems published in papers such as the *Morning Post* and the *Courier* included a note indicating they were originally published in *Lyrical Ballads*. As Nikki Hessel writes, "this mode of presentation showed the poems to be simultaneously engaged with newspaper culture and distanced from it" (340). More than simply advertising *Lyrical Ballads*, the note established the poems' legitimacy by identifying their original publication in an independent volume, "remind[ing] readers they were not composed... with the norms and fashions of the dailies in mind" (Hessel 340). Thus, Wordsworth's involvement with newspapers comes with a stipulation: readers must understand that he does not write for the newspapers and they must be led to view his poetry in its proper context. This highlights two notable characteristics of his publishing practices. First, while Wordsworth

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<sup>6</sup> It may be objected that it was likely Coleridge's decision to publish these works in newspapers and not Wordsworth's. In fact, the question of who was primarily responsible is subject to debate. Considering his increasing control over the publication of later editions, it is reasonable to surmise that Wordsworth was both compliant and partially responsible for these decisions. Nikki Hessel convincingly asserts that each poet engaged with newspapers in his own manner and discourages scholars from drawing "a demarcation of spheres that places Wordsworth outside and Coleridge inside newspaper culture" (341).

accepts the practical necessity of the popular press in addressing a broad audience, he is still compelled to draw a qualitative distinction regarding his writing. Second, in submitting his work through such channels, Wordsworth remains wary of intermediation and takes steps to maintain control over his creative property. By carefully selecting the promotional excerpts and framing the poems as part of a larger project, he disrupts the newspaper editors' ability to determine context. Such haughty habits seem to contradict the previously observed capacity for compromise. Yet, it is this particular combination of strict authorial control and commercial adaptability that defines Wordsworth's skillful navigation of the market.

Such qualities are still evident decades later as Wordsworth nears the end of his career. In 1829, he once again deigned to take part in mass-market periodicals when he agreed to contribute some poems to a new literary annual entitled *The Keepsake*. In the 1820s, literary annuals proved to be very profitable, while the market for volumes by individual poets was on the decline (Manning, "Keepsake" 50). Combining works of verse and prose by a variety of writers with high quality engravings and fine silk binding, annuals provided middle-class readers with a sampling of sophisticated literature and an attractive status symbol for their drawing rooms. With such titles as *The Forget-Me-Not*, *The Talisman* and *The Gem*, annuals were marketed as unique, personal objects in an attempt to belie their status as mass-produced commodities. The subject matter of the works within mirrored the sentimental tone of the title. Many of the established authors who were solicited to contribute to annuals were weary of their blatantly commercial, plebeian nature. Thomas Moore rejected them as a matter of principle and Sir Walter Scott carefully avoided investing too much time in his contributions (Ledbetter and

Hoagwood 7 – 8).<sup>7</sup> Regardless, annuals could boast some of the most respected names in literature, especially the remarkably successful *Keepsake*, whose initial issue presents a virtual who's who of the Romantic period: Walter Scott, Thomas Moore, Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Felicia Hemans, Robert Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth himself.

The success of *The Keepsake*'s editors, Frederic Mansel Reynolds and Charles Heath, in assembling such an impressive line up of authors was largely due to the lavish commissions they offered. As Peter J. Manning explains, this was the deciding factor for Wordsworth, who, having declined previous offers, could not refuse the generous terms of a hundred guineas for a relatively small amount of writing ("Keepsake" 49). It is possible to interpret Wordsworth's final complicity as a sign of desperation or even defeat. The rise of annuals as "the foremost venue for the publication of poetry in England" coincided with a general decline in sales for many individual poets (Ledbetter and Hoagwood 3). Unable to compete for sales against the annual and its finely wrought façade, the poet of vision was required to bend to popular taste. However, the annuals proved to be an opportunity for Wordsworth as well as a threat. In the 1820s, his reputation as one of the period's great poets was finally beginning to cement. While annuals might initially threaten his sales, they also allowed him to capitalize on his rising fame and reach a wider, younger audience that could be induced to read further. As Manning asserts, "Still more important than the payment *The Keepsake* offered was the stimulus of renewed exchange with an audience, fresh starts rather than reworked collected editions" ("Keepsake" 61). Considered in context with the previously discussed

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Moore did ultimately contribute to the first issue of *The Keepsake*, though it was against his will. After multiple rejections, the editors managed to retrieve a discarded draft he had written and published it without notifying him.

examples of Wordsworth's strategic engagements with the print industry, his contribution to *The Keepsake* does not appear as an exceptional instance of compromise. Instead, it is best understood as a further instance of his continual adaptation to the changing conditions of the market or, as Manning puts it, "a manifestation of an investment in the literary market present from the beginning of his career" ("Keepsake" 61).

Despite this beneficial arrangement, Wordsworth's cooperation with *The Keepsake*'s editors was ultimately disrupted by concerns over control. After rejecting a number of sonnets included in Wordsworth's original submission, Reynolds and Heath requested that he compose new poems to fulfill his contract. Wordsworth refused to comply, arguing that he had already fulfilled the contract by supplying the quantity of poems they had agreed upon. As a result, he severed his connection with *The Keepsake* and was only featured in its first volume. At its root, this dispute is the result of two conflicting conceptions of commercial writing. For Reynolds and Heath, payment affords editors the right to determine the content and evaluate the quality of the author's work. Under this conception, the text is treated as a commodity in the Marxist sense. Its worth is dictated, not by the conditions of its production as experienced by the author, but by its exchange value as established by the editors. For Wordsworth, determining the text's value remains within the author's purview as an inherent right of its creator. The editors may purchase publishing rights, the ability to control the text's circulation, but their money cannot purchase a share in the creative process or the authority to determine a poem's merit. Of course, it was entirely reasonable for Reynolds and Heath to expect the degree of editorial control typical of such publications, especially considering their lavish payment. Wordsworth's decision to deny them this control and terminate a very

profitable arrangement indicates his particular intolerance for the practices of the periodical press, specifically its tendency to leave creative talent beholden to business interests. Once again, his ability to adapt to the popular press is curbed by his concern for authorial autonomy, and ensuring the primacy of the poet trumps pandering to the tastes of the public reader.

Wordsworth's insistence that creative integrity not be reduced to a factor in commercial exchange can easily be construed as a sign of resistance towards market forces that would commoditize his poetry. After all, a poet cannot be "a man speaking to men" if editors are permitted to define his work in order to suit sales projections and consumer trends. In Habermasian terms, such a situation constitutes a disruptive degree of mediatization of Lifeworlds by the functional Systems of society, a process that renders interpersonal expression void. Still, it would be fallacious to conclude that Wordsworth rejects the abstract concerns of commercial exchange necessitated by the marketplace. As Wordsworth explains to Reynolds in a letter regarding his submissions to *The Keepsake*, his primary concern is "the fitness of the Articles for the Market" (*LWDW* 5: 14).<sup>8</sup> Wordsworth's desire to preserve an uncompromised, intimate model of communicative exchange does not prevent him from identifying his audience according to broad demographics or figuring them as irresponsive consumers. Considered in conjunction, Wordsworth's experiences with political journals, newspapers, and annuals reveal him to be an enterprising but fastidious professional author, simultaneously concerned with selling his product en masse and upholding his creative vision. Doing so

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<sup>8</sup> Wordsworth's mercenary attitude in this situation may be partially due to feelings of ambivalence towards poems composed for an annual. It is important to note, however, that he expressed similar concerns regarding his own individually published works (as shall be discussed further in the following section). He also expressed a sense of pride and satisfaction in the works he submitted to *The Keepsake* (Manning, "Keepsake" 60).

requires the professional poet to effectively utilize the methods of the popular press, while limiting the intrusive influence of its machinery. In this sense, Wordsworth cannot be said to repudiate commodity exchange in favour of a more idyllic dynamic represented by gift exchange. Rather, he seeks to influence the conditions upon which his poetry is valued, packaged, and mediated by the commodity market before reaching his readers' hands. These efforts to exert control over the reception of his writing were most fully realized through his repeated publication of collected volumes.

#### Publishing Collections: Free-Market Logic and Self-Definition

While Wordsworth sometimes leveraged the periodical press in order to reach a broader audience, he primarily published his poetry in the form of collected volumes. These multi-volume anthologies were marketed directly to consumers wealthy enough to afford the high price point. When the market for poetry lagged Wordsworth would supplement his efforts with the release of individual poems such as *The White Doe of Rylstone*, but he never ceased reissuing his canon, with collected works published in 1815, 1821, 1827, 1832, 1836, 1845, and 1849-50.

As has already been discussed, Wordsworth's professional ambitions included gaining both financial independence and cultural clout through his writing. Difficulty achieving these goals would eventually lead him to publically discredit commercial success as an index of literary merit in his "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," where he would claim that a lack of immediate popularity amongst public readers was a distinguishing quality of England's greatest poets. Nonetheless, it is clear from his persistent repackaging of his poetic canon that Wordsworth believed lasting literary

repute required a strong market presence.<sup>9</sup> His investment in the market originated with the considerable initial success of *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>10</sup> Originally conceived as a literary experiment meant to gauge public interest and raise funds for a trip to Germany, the encouraging sales of the first edition led Wordsworth to seriously pursue poetry as a profession. *Lyrical Ballads* proved to Wordsworth that he could earn profits and praise through the literary marketplace. Unfortunately, his future publications would not fare as well. His subsequent collection, *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), only saw one printing of 1,000 copies, out of which 230 remained unsold in 1814; his 1815 collection would sell out over the course of five years, but only saw a single printing of 500 copies (St. Clair 661). Despite this decline, Wordsworth remained committed to publishing poetry in the form of fairly expensive anthologies, continually negotiating with publishers in order to offset losses and keep his work in circulation. Indeed, his ability to maintain the interest of publishers willing to accommodate him over the decades suggests his efforts were not misguided as his ongoing presence in the market allowed him to take advantage of his increasing fame in the 1820s and 30s.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As Andrew Bennett has shown, it was not uncommon for poets of this era to deny the significance of commercial success and immediate reception, looking instead to posterity and the reception of future generations. Wordsworth's case is exceptional in that he went to the effort of explicitly formalizing his resistance to the market while still dedicating a tremendous amount of effort and attention to managing the commercial release of his work.

<sup>10</sup> *Lyrical Ballads* would not come close to matching the remarkable sales numbers achieved by Byron and Scott in the following decade. However, its sales were strong enough to require four printings in the span of five years, which certainly constitutes an encouraging success for a relatively unknown poet.

<sup>11</sup> An important factor to mention regarding Wordsworth's increasing caché was the influence of *Blackwood's Magazine*, which featured a number of articles championing Wordsworth's literary merit. Despite Wordsworth's opposition to the influence of periodical criticism, which shall be discussed further on in this chapter, his turn in fortunes was due largely to the positive influence of such magazines, that posed him as a principled alternative to a Byronic model of poetic genius. For a thorough account of *Blackwood's* promotion of Wordsworth, see chapter 4 of David Higgins's *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine*.

Lee Erickson's account of Wordsworth's negotiations during this period offers some insight into the poet's assertive, determined approach to the market (58 – 59). In the 1820s, Wordsworth agreed to share the costs of printing his works with his current publisher Thomas Longman in order to defray the risk to the publisher. It was not an ideal financial situation for Wordsworth, but it did afford him greater license to determine matters of cost and quantity when printing his works. In 1836, when the opportunity arose to leave Longman and begin publishing through Edward Moxon, the principal publisher of poetry in the early Victorian period, Wordsworth capitalized on the situation. Rejecting Moxon's original terms, which would see his works sell at a lower price point, Wordsworth succeeded in obtaining a highly profitable agreement that ultimately placed the publisher at a loss. This incident helps illustrate two interesting characteristics of Wordsworth's market strategy. First, as Erickson observes, Wordsworth was not afraid to affix a high cost to his collections. Even when operating within a declining market, he evidently "preferred a higher margin of profit even if it meant reduced sales" (58). Wordsworth was conscious of how branding and pricing influenced not only profits but also the prestige of the author and the public's perception of his work. His lack of concern regarding the amount of copies sold conforms to his conviction that great poets are not to be defined by popular opinion. However, this does not indicate that Wordsworth dismissed market value as a means of measuring literary prestige. Rather, it implies that, at this stage in his career, he considered it more important that readers be willing to pay a respectable amount for his work than that they purchase his work in great quantities. Attracting an elite audience of sophisticated, wealthy readers would serve to

validate his status as a great poet. Fully aware of how the market mediates a poet's work, Wordsworth actively determined the effects of that mediation for his own publications.

Secondly, his deal with Moxon provides a prime example of the high degree of control Wordsworth exercised over every detail of his creative product. This desire for increased authorial control may have been the greatest contributing factor to Wordsworth's penchant for publishing his poetry as collected works. Authors were at less risk of creative interference when dealing directly with publishers. In comparison to periodical editors, publishers were less likely to surreptitiously alter an author's work.<sup>12</sup> There was no danger of a given poem appearing alongside the uncomplimentary contributions of some unfamiliar contemporary. Indeed, such matters of sequence and arrangement were of chief importance to Wordsworth when designing his collections, as evident from the meticulous method of categorization he applied to his 1807 publication *Poems in Two Volumes*. Wordsworth intended for readers to experience these poems in a certain order, designing the volumes to elicit intertextual readings.<sup>13</sup> Thus, authorial control extends beyond matters of text to include the contextual and paratextual elements of a volume. Wordsworth's concern with a publication's front matter and arrangement is perhaps most evident in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. From the addition of the extended preface to the reordering of poems to the inclusion of his name as author, Wordsworth's influence can be traced in every aspect of the finished product. It is

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<sup>12</sup> It must be noted that publishers and/or hired editors did assess and alter authors' submissions during this period. In Wordsworth's case, there are instances of Longman making alterations to his work, such as his exclusion of lines from "The Orchard Pathway" in 1807 (Curran 236). Nonetheless, publishers were more likely to confer with authors regarding such changes, especially when the author was sharing production costs.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Curran nicely illustrates this quality of *Poems in Two Volumes* with his interpretation of the Miscellaneous Sonnets section. Examining the thematic connections that run between the sonnets, passing through movements of rising transcendence and falling despair, Curran shows that the individual works take on new significance when read in their original context as a series (247).

important not to understate the significance of these modifications. As Gerard Genette observes, “Whatever aesthetic or ideological investment the author makes in a paratextual element (a ‘lovely title’ or a preface-manifesto), ... is always sub-ordinate to ‘its’ text, and this functionality determines the essence of its appeal and its existence” (12). For Genette, the paratextual elements of a publication are an extension of textual meaning, and as such they serve as a means for authors to augment and readers to assess that meaning. Seemingly subtle changes to the presentation and packaging of the volume have a cumulative effect on the work as a whole, which, in turn, is shaped by its overarching design. Every aspect of a publication provides the author with an opportunity to reinforce the expressive function of the larger work. In the case of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth’s editorial touches constitute a deliberate framing of the collected poems into a more cohesive product, one better suited to define its reception in the market, both in terms of determining interpretive responses and courting a specific readership.

The changes made to *Lyrical Ballads* allow Wordsworth to distinguish his work within the crowded literary marketplace by presenting the publication as a product of his distinct authorial vision. As Susan Eilenberg explains, many of the amendments to the second edition serve to minimize Coleridge’s presence in the volume, so that “the new edition was not so much a collaboration between the two poets as a somewhat anxious celebration of the appropriative power of Wordsworth’s voice” (4). The preface to *Lyrical Ballads* not only allows Wordsworth to formalize his own creative philosophy, but also establishes Coleridge’s contributions as an incongruous presence that further delineates Wordsworth’s authoritative control over the publication. Eilenberg describes this assertion of creative ownership in terms of propriety: the use of appropriate speech to

“underwrite [the] legibility of identity” (12). By clearly distinguishing his voice as a product of the creative theory espoused in the preface (and as the converse of Coleridge’s voice), Wordsworth renders the new edition an act of creative self-definition. Exercising control over the volume’s textual/paratextual framework serves as the means for him to coalesce the individual poems into a collective authorial statement, one that serves to reify his authorial identity as both a recognizable voice for his readers and as the proprietor of *Lyrical Ballads*.

This concern with the assertion of identity through both creative vision and authorial ownership persisted throughout Wordsworth’s career, leading to his active campaign to amend copyright laws in the 1830s.<sup>14</sup> The emphasis Wordsworth placed upon controlling his creative output can be viewed as a product of his professional ambitions. After all, obtaining a position of professional gentility (to once again borrow Goldberg’s term) required both achieving commercial success and establishing artistic autonomy. The composite image constructed of Wordsworth thus far, that of an author both reaching out to his readers through the market and carefully defining the terms upon which he is to be read, appears well suited to these ambitions.<sup>15</sup> From his selective engagement with the popular press to his willingness to articulate his creative vision,

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<sup>14</sup> Wordsworth’s arguments supporting the creation of more rigorous copyright laws provide useful insight into his views of the relationship between creative vision and creative property. A thorough examination of his writings on copyright law is beyond the scope of this chapter, but this issue has been effectively addressed by Martha Woodmansee in her article “The Genius and the Copyright” and Richard G. Swartz in “Wordsworth, Copyright, and the Commodities of Genius,” as well as by Eilenberg. Swartz’s observation that the defense of copyright required defining the author as “an economic agent with definite material interests” is especially pertinent (484). Swartz illustrates how Wordsworth conceptualized authorial identity as a concern of ownership and propriety.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that while these habits did help Wordsworth achieve commercial success in a number of ways, their influence on sales was not always positive. As shall be discussed in the following section, it was Wordsworth’s desire to disrupt the influence of critics through his prose supplements that led to Francis Jeffrey’s critical attacks against the Lake School, which in turn had a negative impact on the sales of his poetry throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth-century. Nonetheless, we should not discount the role his assertive self-advocacy played in securing his long-term success.

Wordsworth seemingly attempts to both excel within the market and rise above it. Hess and Goldberg, among others, have noted the influence Wordsworth's professional ambitions had upon his marketing tactics. Often overlooked though is the role his position in the market played in shaping his critical prose. Just as Wordsworth adopted tactics that would help him achieve his poetic ambitions, he theorized a concept of authorial representation that was informed by his experiences navigating the market. Despite his outspoken resistance to the application of commercial standards in determining literary merit, Wordsworth's commitment to ideals of positive identity and proprietary authorship resulted from his own investment in the cultural logic of market society.

The permeation of the free market throughout European society in the eighteenth century developed in synchrony with the increasing influence of individualistic self-definition upon social mores.<sup>16</sup> Deidre Lynch's study of the relationship between market culture and character depth in eighteenth-century novels helps account for this congruency. Lynch details how aspects of early free-market society, such as the rise in social mobility, generated a conflict between positivistic and fluidic approaches to identity. Rounded characters that demonstrated interiority and encouraged layered interpretations provided readers with a reassuring example of stable identity at a time when class distinctions were becoming increasingly porous (126). As a result, character depth became a sign of integrity. Conversely, Lynch illustrates that certain characters,

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<sup>16</sup> Different studies attribute the increasing influence of self-definition to varying factors. Charles Taylor's study *Sources of the Self* examines this development from a philosophical standpoint, identifying its source in the humanistic doctrines of the English Puritans. Meanwhile, Dror Wahrman sees the growing emphasis on positivistic self-identification as a reaction to increased contact with foreign cultures and specific instances of political upheaval. Though neither of these authors focuses upon the influence of the market, each one charts the growth of individualism across a similar timeline that corresponds with the development of free-market society in Europe.

specifically those written by Frances Burney, demonstrate the pleasure of shedding and assuming new identities through the use of capital (168). Money afforded members of the middle class the freedom to alter their appearance, to mimic the fashions of their social superiors, to determine their public persona. This freedom renders identity superficial and inconstant, but still encourages the subject to adopt (if not internalize) clearly defined concepts of selfhood. Thus, market culture seems to present a paradox: romanticizing the distinct, fixed identity, supposedly rooted in authentic inner-selfhood, it also enables capricious fluctuations between such identities.

Eric Gans' concept of the Romantic esthetic interprets this paradoxical tension between stable and fluctuating identities as a self-replicating function of market society. For Gans, in addition to enabling the individual to define his or her own identity, the market prompts him or her to do so in opposition to the larger market culture. Individuals must "pose themselves as ontologically prior to the collectivity; by the same token, the collectivity as thus defined must appear inauthentic to individual... intuition" (166). Not simply an act of positive identification on the part of the individual, self-definition occurs as an instance of differentiation from the social whole. This perpetuates an ongoing process of individuals figuring themselves in contradistinction to the evolving cultural fashions they help create. Whether intended to counteract the inconstancy of social distinctions or exercise the freedom that inconstancy afforded, the compulsion to define one's identity in certain terms was prompted by market culture. Indeed, for Gans the combined interplay of such acts of identification and differentiation constitutes the market itself.

As a social upstart hoping to achieve a traditionally grounded position of cultural authority, Wordsworth was committed to the contrary ideals of social mobility and fixed identity jointly realized within the market. Moreover, as an agent within the market, he was compelled to distinguish his voice, often through acts of differentiation from the edicts of popular and critical tastes. Unlike Byron, whose unprecedented success rendered him the focus of the market and led him to reinvent himself for his reading public (as shall be discussed in chapter 3), Wordsworth remained along the periphery of market culture through most of his career. He remained a poet of note, read and debated by the late Romantics, commonly referenced by the critical press, and sought out by the publishers of annuals. Yet, his sales dragged and his reputation suffered from harsh reviews throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century. After the initial success of *Lyrical Ballads* had subsided, broad acceptance would elude Wordsworth until many years after the death of Byron. A maverick of moderate popularity, he was always relevant but never fashionable. As a result of this particular position, Wordsworth was able to define a consistent authorial identity that was in perpetual conflict with the larger culture. Frequently employing the trope of the misunderstood genius, he construed his middling success as a sign of artistic integrity.<sup>17</sup> The most explicit example of this oppositional stance appears in the prose supplements published with his first collected edition of poetry in 1815. The publication of this collection constitutes a decisive act in the fashioning of Wordsworth's authorial identity. While the creation of the collection itself served as an opportunity for Wordsworth to set the bounds of his poetic canon, the prose supplements bookending the collection framed the poetry in the author's own

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<sup>17</sup> For thorough explanations of his use of this strategy see Lucy Newlyn's *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism* and David Higgins' *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics*.

account of his cultural priority. Establishing his authoritative works for the first time, Wordsworth affixed a paratext that allowed him to contextualize their reception in opposition to the mediation provided by the literary magazines. Written mainly in response to the attacks of his harshest critic, Francis Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh Review*, the preface to *Poems* (1815) and the closing “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface” present Wordsworth’s most aggressive act of oppositional self-determination. By comparing Wordsworth’s theory of subjective interpretation with Jeffrey’s concept of communally derived, objective standards of taste, we can see how their conflicting views of literature result from their contrasting positions within the market and, consequently, their clashing conceptions of how the market ideally serves to connect authors and audiences.

#### Wordsworth’s 1815 Collection: Speaking at the Public

The prose works that bookended the 1815 collection are largely responsible for Wordsworth’s reputation for hostility towards his readers. Indeed, both clearly assert the primacy of authorial vision and the threat posed by unsympathetic and unrefined readers. In the 1815 preface, it is possible to trace echoes of the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in Wordsworth’s account of imagination as having “no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects” (*WWMW* 631).

Wordsworth’s admission in that earlier preface that the poet is unable to accurately represent the external world, discussed at the outset of this chapter, returns now with a new emphasis. In 1815, having long since turned to the language of vision that guided his revision of “The Leech-Gatherer,” Wordsworth no longer expresses a desire to test this

limitation and “confound and identify his own feelings” with others (*WWMW* 604).

Rather, he appears to accept that poetry is solely a product of the author’s mind, bound to project his own perceptions upon the objects he describes. No longer curbing his creative vision in the pursuit of sympathetic understanding, Wordsworth describes his creative process as a matter of fashioning external objects to create an original, personal and lasting impression: “Guided by one of my own primary consciousnesses, I have represented commutation and transfer of internal feelings, co-operating with external accidents to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the imagination” (*WWMW* 635). No less aware of the limits of his perception than he was in 1802, Wordsworth embraces the particular light of his own subjective gaze. As imaginative self-expression becomes the self-fulfilling aim of poetry and authorial vision is granted primacy, the poet is no longer obligated to accurately comprehend what he sees and hears.

Instead, that task falls upon the reader. In the “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface,” no longer focused upon defining the role of the poet, Wordsworth sets about defining the ideal reader. He begins this task by setting out the problematic figure of the unsympathetic reader. Splitting readers into two classes, the young, inexperienced reader and the cynical, experienced critic, Wordsworth laments the deficiencies of each one. Whereas the young reader is too susceptible to fancy, too likely to be carried away by feelings, the older reader has become too limited in his outlook, unwilling to experience a text beyond the strict interpretive framework he has adopted. Each reader presents the danger of misinterpretation: “They come prepared to impart so much passion to the Poet’s language, that they remain unconscious how little, in fact, they receive from it”

(*WMMW* 643). Just as when he charged Sara Hutchinson with the task of reading with the feelings of the author, Wordsworth is responding to the threat of readers who overwrite his authorial intention with their own perspective. Lucy Newlyn identifies the essay's tension towards readers as a defensive reaction to the discouraging reception of previous publications. *Poems in Two Tales* and *The Excursion* had both sold poorly and received a critical drubbing. Realizing that "the public could be relied on not at all; and that the reception of future volumes must be more tightly controlled than ever," Wordsworth takes the offensive, blaming his readers for their lack of comprehension (Newlyn 94). By placing the onus upon the reader to understand the author's intentions, Wordsworth appears to move away from the communicative model of expression that informed *Lyrical Ballads*. Rather than serving as a node in a network, accommodating understanding between readers and subjects, Wordsworth's poems constitute a one-way transmission from author to reader. This establishes a hierarchical relationship where "the main criterion of a reader's health appears to be the willingness to enter Wordsworth's own associative world – which means, effectively, that one set of private associations win out over another, not that communication involves entering a shared (and public) domain" (Newlyn 107). Thus, the penchant for control witnessed in Wordsworth's business dealings begins to place limitations upon the reader, as he posits a singular, correct interpretation of his work. In this sense, his desire to create "the taste by which he is to be enjoyed" leads him to dictate the terms by which he is to be read (*WMMW* 657).

While it would be difficult to dispute that Wordsworth's anxiety about reception manifests as hostility towards his readers in the essay, it is important not to overstate the degree to which he discounts the legitimacy of reader response. Andrew Franta presents a

rebuttal to Newlyn's analysis, noting that, "despite the Essay's effort to define and expand the domain of poetic genius by extending it to include the poet's command over his readers, he cannot ignore that the relationship he describes entails contingencies of response which escape the poet's control" (59). As Franta points out, Wordsworth views all strong reactions to his poetry, be they positive or negative, as valid. In Wordsworth's words, even misguided interpretations stand as "proofs that for the present time I have not laboured in vain" (*WWMW* 657). Wordsworth is not simply admitting that diverse reactions are an inevitable part of courting a mass readership; he is emphasizing the importance of individual interpretation to the reading process. Indeed, it is possible to identify multiple points throughout the preface and the essay in which Wordsworth explains how readers must be allowed a degree of autonomy and encouraged to actively engage with a text. In the preface, he describes this freedom as an inherent aspect of reading poetry, which requires the reader to exercise "a voluntary power to modulate, in subordination to the sense, the music of the poem" (*WWMW* 630). The very nature of metered verse makes reading an intuitive process, shaped by the reader's disposition. This emphasis upon reader involvement is central to the concept of author-reader relation set out towards the end of the "Essay, Supplementary." In a passage frequently cited as an example of Wordsworth's disdain for readers, he likens the lax reader to "an Indian Prince... stretched on his Palanquin" supported by the efforts of the poet (*WWMW* 659). As Newlyn rightly points out, this comparison reveals Wordsworth's underlying sense of vulnerability at the hands of a readership whose fickle tastes may dictate his status as a poet (91). Yet this image is intended as a foil for Wordsworth's model of the ideal reader: one that, while influenced by the author, ultimately proves capable of thinking for

himself: “he is invigorated and inspired by his Leader, in order that he may exert himself, for he cannot process in quiescence” (*WWMW* 659). It is not the author’s goal to impose his vision upon the reader, but to spur the reader to contemplate the work from his own perspective. Creating taste is not an act of coercion, but an act of cultivation; it is “to call forth and bestow power” (*WWMW* 659) in the reader so that he may realize an existing potential for insight and understanding.

By drawing attention to this interest in the variety of reader responses, Franta contributes a crucial counterpoint to our evolving understanding of Wordsworth’s relationship with his audience. While I concur with the central tenets of his argument, I find that Franta overstates the extent of Wordsworth’s desire to authorize independent interpretations. Specifically, Franta’s assertion that Wordsworth undergoes a shift from attempting to evoke mutual feelings between reader and author “to a broader and, in Wordsworth’s case, even ill-defined notion of feeling as a placeholder for any effect a text might be imagined to have on its readers” overlooks a number of key remarks within the “Essay, Supplementary” (60). Even though we may conclude that Wordsworth wishes his readers to determine their own responses to his work, this does not mean that he views all responses as equally valid. On the contrary, he persists in asserting an evaluative distinction between strong and weak readers. This distinction is based upon a capacity for sympathy: the ability to access “the profound and exquisite in feeling” through “the exertion of a co-operating *power* in the mind of the Reader” (*WWMW* 659). Reconciling Wordsworth’s acceptance of diverse interpretations with this lingering concern for sympathetic understanding requires that we abstain from totalizing conceptions of his attitude towards readers. By 1815 Wordsworth was clearly sensitive to

matters of reception, but his relationship with his readers was neither entirely hostile nor entirely liberal. Not unlike his interactions with the publishing industry, his approach to addressing readers shows a peculiar combination of flexible allowance and rigid control.

Recognizing the multiplicity of interpretations inherent to a mass-readership, Wordsworth does not attempt to dictate meaning to his readers. Rather than approach poetry as a means of communicating a particular idea en masse, he emphasizes its ability to exercise and refine the individual's interpretive capacities. Thus, so long as readers exert their discriminatory faculties, they may be said to legitimately engage with the poetry. However, the refinement of a faculty is not a final goal unto itself. Readers are encouraged to exert themselves so that they can arrive at a more perfect understanding of what they read. The recognition of authorial intent, "to read with the feeling of the Author," is still the proper goal for the careful reader, even if it is not to be achieved on a massive scale. Thus, sympathetic identification serves as both the fundamental goal and, paradoxically, the secondary function of poetry. These mixed purposes are evident as Wordsworth describes the subjective nature of the poet's craft:

Remember, also, that the medium through which, in poetry, the heart is to be affected, is language; a thing subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations. The genius of the poet melts these down for his purpose; but they retain their shape and quality to him who is not capable of exerting, within his own mind, a corresponding energy. (*WWMW* 660)

There is a note of disapproval in Wordsworth's passing reference to the reader who proves incapable of achieving the "corresponding energy" necessary to appreciate the poet's forging of words to a singular purpose. Yet this censure is offset by his admission

that language, by its very nature, is necessarily shaped by “arbitrary associations” too numerous to anticipate. Caught between these statements, Wordsworth’s description of the poetic genius is simultaneously assertive and conditional. Poetry is a crucible, rendering a public world of fluctuating language into the definitive product of the author’s voice. Yet this voice cannot force itself to be heard. It is dependent upon the reader’s effort and cooperation. The task of the poet is to provoke this effort, to turn passive readers into active readers. The task of the reader, first and foremost, is to make this effort, to interpret the poem under his or her own power. The goal of doing so, however, is to arrive at the *correct* interpretation, to comprehend authorial intent.

This concept of the elusive yet definite meaning contained within the poem brings us back to the dynamics of positive identity and communicative exchange associated with “Resolution and Independence” in the previous section. Like the stalwart leech-gatherer’s unheard tale, the poet’s intended meaning waits buried within the text. The incapacity of the audience to access this truth, to accurately listen/read, does nothing to diminish its integrity. Nor does the failure to achieve understanding invalidate the attempt. What matters is that the poet writes with integrity and the audience reads with interest. Nonetheless, for Wordsworth to charge his readers with achieving the keen comprehension that eludes the narrator of “Resolution and Independence” seems like a harsh double standard. After all, if the poet abandons his efforts to obtain perfect sympathy with his subject in favour of a self-referential approach, what hope remains for the reader to gain such insight? Indeed, this shifting of responsibility onto the reader constitutes a subtle rhetorical tactic, allowing Wordsworth to reassert the primacy of the author. Even if the narrator of “Resolution and Independence” does not fully understand

his encounter with the leech-gatherer, as the active voice composing the poem, he determines its meaning as it pertains to the text. The reader has no such recourse.

Thus, the prose supplements framing Wordsworth's 1815 collection establish a relationship between the author as a determinate origin and the reader as an ancillary receiver. In doing so, the publication maintains the basic structure of a Habermasian communicative act, with its emphasis on individual acts of accurate expression and reception. David Simpson's observation that the exchanges depicted in the encounter poems prove too unstable to constitute a discourse or "any grand model of dialogic democracy" remains valid (25). Nevertheless, the "Essay, Supplementary" reiterates that Wordsworth's poetry was intended to constitute a meaningful communication between two subjects, albeit a communication that can flow in only one direction. Specifically, Wordsworth sets out the conditions for communication suited to the circumstances mediating the commercial publication. The professional poet, disseminating his work through the market, cannot take part in a dialogue with the individuals that comprise his irresponsive mass-readership. Unable to speak *with* his readers on an individual basis, he can only speak *at* them. As the product of a single voice, the encounter poem cannot comprise a discourse or "dialogical democracy" between subject, poet, and author. It can only form a single component of such a network of exchange. It is this elementary step of a larger communicative act that Wordsworth wants to achieve by positing a definite message and encouraging each reader to comprehend it, independently and (ideally) accurately. In this sense, the primacy of the author emphasized in Wordsworth's poems and prose is not (solely) a matter of artistic pride, but rather a requirement of communicating through the market.

From his experiments with popular publishing methods to his tight-fisted control over creative property, Wordsworth's experiences navigating the market inform his theory. Writing from a position of professional autonomy, his account of the author/reader relationship reflects the distance separating producers and consumers in the market. Insisting upon the underlying disconnect separating authorial intention and reader response, Wordsworth naturalizes the practical divide constituted by the mass production and broad distribution of the commercially circulated text. Thus, the distance posed by the machinery of the print industry (the editors, printers, transporters, and vendors of the physical text) is figured as an inherent aspect of the reading experience. Of course, this perceived divide between authors and readers was not an inherent part of operating within the writing market. As the upcoming sections discussing Jeffrey, Lamb, and Landon shall illustrate, different authors operated at varying degrees of removal from their peers and readers. Wordsworth's conception of a distant, dissenting reading public is one specifically suited to his particular situation as an independent poet.

Encouraging scholars to consider the context of poetry as it originally appears in print, Neil Fraistat points out that "returning [poetry] to a book that itself has a particular place in its own culture and society" allows us to view the publications themselves "as indices of poets' conceptions about their audience and representations of how they would like to present themselves to that audience" (4). Wordsworth was clearly aware of the influence textual circumstances would have on the reception of his poems, as he deliberately designed the 1815 collection to be an exercise in canon formation, as well as an attempt to wrest control of his literary reputation from his critics. Beyond the order of the poems and the arguments of the supplements however, the most important textual

quality to consider is the collected volume's status as a product in the market. The process of printing a work en masse to be sold to a diffuse audience prompts concerns of design and reception. While the poet composes his poetry as a manuscript, he may exercise extensive control over his work, revising as he sees fit. The process of reproduction and distribution transforms the text from a mutable act of expression to a fixed, finalized printed work. The need to commit to an authoritative version in making this transition reinforces the emphasis upon the definitive voice. While the act of publication calls for the reification of authorial meaning, it subsequently threatens the stability of that meaning by exposing the text to the varied interpretations of a mass audience. As the "Essay Supplementary" illustrates, Wordsworth's solution is to place the reader in the passive role of listener. In addition to discounting problematic misinterpretations, this approach allows him to avoid addressing readers as a general aggregate. Instead, the "Essay Supplementary" figures the reader as an individual taking part in an interpersonal exchange with the author by encouraging each reader to exercise his or her own critical faculties to reach a true understanding of the poetry. It is only in this way that the poems may serve as a communicative point of contact, bridging the divide between author and reader. This concept of the text as an interaction joining individuals reflects the movement of the commercial publication through the market: not as an open-ended text shared by an undifferentiated mass, but as a closed volume purchased by a discerning reader.

One purpose of the prose supplements was to preserve this one-to-one reading experience by preventing third parties from swaying the reader. Wordsworth's desire to achieve an interpersonal connection requires the reader to form his or her own personal

interpretation. This goal is threatened when readers defer to others' opinions in order to determine the merits of a work, especially those of critics. At the outset of the nineteenth century, literary critics held great influence over popular taste. The circulation of reviews grew steadily, with the two most popular reviews, the *Edinburgh Review* and its Tory counterpart the *Quarterly Review*, peaking at close to 14,000 readers in 1817 – 1818 (Erickson 78).<sup>18</sup> As Erickson notes, these influential quarterlies reviewed fewer books than monthly publications such as the *Critical Review* or the *Monthly Review*, but their articles were longer, allowing for more intensive analysis. The quarterlies took advantage of their less frequent circulation, examining their monthly counterparts to determine which books garnered the most attention and debate. By covering only the most important publications, a quarterly “effectively functioned as a relatively inexpensive review of reviews” (Erickson 76). In this manner they served as guides for selective readers who could not afford to waste their money and attention on insignificant literature. The public referred to these periodicals to learn which authors merited reading. The prose supplements disrupt the literary critic's influence over the reader's opinion by providing the collection with its own critical framework for understanding the poetry within. Indeed, the “Supplementary Essay” specifically discredits critics when it describes the class of readers who allow their preconceived ideas to restrict their range of sensibility, so that “if they stumble upon a sound rule, are fettered by misapplying it, or by straining it too far; being incapable of perceiving when it ought to yield” (*WWMW* 644). Critics come to represent the inadequate Public that threatens to force its views

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that such figures likely underestimate the actual readership, as single copies of periodicals were commonly shared and read by multiple people.

upon the People. Enclosing the poetry within the book, the prose supplements act as shields, rebuffing such external sources of mediation that operate within the market.

### Francis Jeffrey: Speaking for the Public

Wordsworth had good reason to want to preempt the critical press: a major contributing factor to the commercial failure of his 1807 publication was Francis Jeffrey's review in the *Edinburgh Review*. Jeffrey was the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* and Wordsworth's harshest critic, routinely attacking Wordsworth's work throughout the early years of his career. A number of factors have been used to account for Jeffrey's enmity towards Wordsworth. As theorists, both Wordsworth and Jeffrey made conflicting claims to cultural authority, with each man posing a threat to the other's legitimacy. Moreover, as William Christie explains, they each held to fundamentally different aesthetic philosophies.<sup>19</sup> An overlooked third aspect, central to matters of authority and philosophy, is the difference between the men's positions within the print industry. Considering how Jeffrey's particular role as the editor of a popular review dictated his relationship to peers and readers sheds new light upon his opposition to Wordsworth. It also provides a useful contrast for illustrating Wordsworth's particular market logic.

Jeffrey's sustained, biting criticism represented Wordsworth as a promising poet spoiled by his own misguided philosophy. His attacks began in 1802 with a review of Robert Southey's epic poem *Thalaba*, in which he identifies Southey as part of "a sect of poets... dissenters from the traditional systems of poetry and criticism" (*WWCH* 153). Although Jeffrey singles out Southey as one of the sect's "key champions and apostles,"

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<sup>19</sup> Christie's comparative analysis shall be discussed in the following pages.

in reality Southey's poem was little more than a pretext for Jeffrey to launch a critical tirade in reaction to Wordsworth's preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (*WWCH* 153).<sup>20</sup> Lucy Newlyn has suggested that the source of Jeffrey's ire was Wordsworth's attempts to justify his poetry directly to his readers in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (93). Indeed, Jeffrey's many references to the poet's false pretensions to original genius and disdain for traditional conventions indicate that he is reacting to more than the ideas expressed in the preface: his attack responds to the poet's attempt to define his own criteria for literary merit. Such a response is no doubt partially inspired by the challenge Wordsworth poses to Jeffrey's position as an arbiter of literary taste, but his antagonism is more than a matter of self-preservation. Rather, Jeffrey's opposition is grounded in his traditionalistic outlook, which is in turn the product of an education informed by the Scottish Enlightenment. In the late eighteenth century, Scotland's leading rationalist philosophers were shaping the country's university curriculum. Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and Dugald Stewart all held chairs at major universities and their lectures established educational standards for years to come (Flynn 19). Philip Flynn describes the significant influence of George Jardine, Jeffrey's professor of Logic and Rhetoric, upon the young man's development: "[his instruction] introduced him in systematic fashion to the Western traditions of moral, epistemological, and aesthetic inquiry, drilled him in analysis, taught him the right questions to ask when studying the methodology of a physical scientist, political economist, or aesthetician" (29). Jeffrey was taught to apply objective standards to determine matters of morals and taste. As a result, his aesthetic theory often adheres to the formalist logic of Classicism and his

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<sup>20</sup> William Christie has noted that in a separate anonymous review of the poem published in the *Monthly Review*, Jeffrey is actually quite complimentary in discussing the poem's many strengths, confirming that Wordsworth was the real target of his rancour in the *Edinburgh Review* article (61).

hostility towards Wordsworth largely stems from the poet's disregard for established aesthetic standards. For instance, in the *Thalaba* review, Jeffrey objects to Wordsworth's proposal to use simple and familiar language on the grounds that it cannot suit all subject matter. While unembellished language may prove appropriate to convey a sense of sublime passion, poetry also consists of passages that require delicacy, in which "we are most frequently offended with low and inelegant expressions; and... the language, which was intended to be simple and natural, is found oftenest to degenerate into mere slovenliness and vulgarity" (*WWCH* 155). For Jeffrey, there are rules that dictate the language of poetry. A particular subject matter can only be properly expressed using a particular tone. In such a traditional model, the suggestion that poetry seek to naturalize language rather than refine it is untenable.

Jeffrey's outlook is more strictly enforced in his 1807 review of *Poetry in Two Volumes*, when he explicitly disqualifies readers who lack the classical education necessary to appreciate aesthetic formalism: "One great beauty of diction exists only for those who have some degree of scholarship or critical skill. This is what depends on the exquisite *propriety* of the words employed, and the delicacy with which they are adapted to the meaning which is to be expressed" (*WWCH* 188). Jeffrey is clearly reaffirming his authority as a classically educated reader, a posture he would reinforce throughout the review via his references to Wordsworth's childish and affected style. Despite his elitist tone however, his claim to authority is based upon more than his knowledge of ingrained formalist rules. William Christie explains how Jeffrey adapted his understanding of Enlightenment philosophy to develop his own aesthetic philosophy grounded in associationism and consensus. Jeffrey outlines his philosophy in his review of Archibald

Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1811). In proper empirical form, Jeffrey begins with the premise that aesthetic values can be traced to a measurable source. Specifically, he asserts that these values are a product of the associations formed between certain stimuli and the powerful sensations they produce, so that "the power of taste is nothing more than the habit of tracing those associations, by which almost all objects may be connected with interesting emotions" (Jeffrey 16). The regular recollections of scenes that give rise to pleasurable sensations engender our notions of beauty. In turn, universal standards of beauty result from the common experiences shared by mankind. As Christie points out, it is at this point that Jeffrey's definition of beauty presents a paradox (71). If beauty is a result of circumstantial conditions experienced by the individual, how can certain objects and images be universally, inevitably beautiful? For Jeffrey, the solution is to explain that these universal standards of beauty do not constitute a priori truths, but are rather based upon long-standing consensus. Thus, the sight of a sunrise may be considered beautiful insofar as it generates common associations in those who view it. Founded upon this principle of aesthetic conformity, Jeffrey's critical outlook could not account for poetry dedicated to peculiar perspectives and marginalized figures. Jeffrey's hypothetically universal consensus "did not include, pointedly... the children, idiots, rural outcasts and eccentric old men of the poetry of William Wordsworth" (Christie 72).

This distinction highlights an important point of conflict between the two writers. Jeffrey did not oppose Wordsworth simply because he refused to abide by aesthetic conventions. Rather, his criticism reacts to the priority Wordsworth places upon subjective interpretation, a concept that is antithetical to his own philosophy. While both

Wordsworth and Jeffrey placed value in the opinion of the individual reader, each man defined that value differently. Wordsworth's concern with actively engaging with individual readers has already been discussed. He values the reader's particular opinion to the extent that it is self-originating and empathetic: a unique perspective seeking to understand another unique perspective. For Jeffrey, the individual reader's opinion is significant because it forms part of the larger consensus that defines and upholds broader standards of taste. Indeed, Jeffrey prefaces his 1807 review by claiming that "it belongs to the public, and not to us, to decide upon [the poetry's] merit" (*WWCH* 187). Jeffrey appears confident that public opinion has turned against Wordsworth at this point and will ultimately validate his review. This act of bowing to public opinion appears somewhat disingenuous as his review goes on to pass judgment upon Wordsworth, playing a substantial role in determining public opinion. His deference to public consensus can be viewed as grounded in his own status as an agent for creating and enacting that consensus. However, Jeffrey's regard for the public is indicative of more than a rhetorical strategy intended to reinforce his own authority. He emphasizes the importance of consensus because, as editor and contributor for a major review, he experiences agency as part of a larger coordinative effort.

Over the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Jeffrey held a position of remarkable influence over England's literary scene. As a writer, his critical works reached a dedicated audience, the size of which rivaled the most popular authors of the period. His sense of authority manifests in the didactic tone of his writing, which often poses Jeffrey as an educator to his middle-class audience or, as Brian Bates notes, a doctor presiding over the public's cultural health. As the declining sales of Wordsworth's

collected volumes demonstrate, this condescending tone contributed to the influence of his criticism. As the principal editor of the *Edinburgh Review* from 1802 to 1829, Jeffrey exercised control over the work of his peers and was responsible for maintaining the periodical's cohesive outlook. He was not a wholly imperious editor, viewing the *Edinburgh Review* as a collaborative endeavour that was capable of bringing disparate voices together to form a consistent whole. Yet, collaboration often took the form of editorial intervention. Jeffrey was not afraid to make alterations to his contributors' articles, sometimes rewriting major sections without notifying the original author (Christie 40 – 41). Providing a detailed account of Jeffrey's editorial practices, Christie shows that many articles were ultimately the product of two or three authors, so that "composition proceeded in [an] *ad hoc*, mosaic way far more often than is generally credited" (42). While such cases serve as evidence of Jeffrey's domineering authority, they also illustrate his view of periodicals as a collaborative medium. Writing in a periodical is not meant to be a univocal expression as it is in Wordsworth's poetry. Rather, articles are the product of a blending of voices. Nor is Jeffrey's voice representative of the periodical. As influential as Jeffrey was as editor, other major contributors such as his fellow founders Sydney Smith, Francis Horner, and Henry Brougham also shaped the tone of the publication, often lending conflicting points of view on political and intellectual topics. Indeed, Brougham may have contributed as much or more to the writing and rewriting of articles as Jeffrey (Christie 43). Jeffrey's purpose when editing others' work was not to recast their words to suit his taste, treating the *Edinburgh Review* as his own mouthpiece, but to harmonize the variety of voices to

form the overall tenor of the publication. His function as a writer, in this sense, was to create consensus.

As a result, Jeffrey does not consider a text to be the property of its author. This is evident in the preface he wrote in 1843 for the first collected volume of his works, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*. Consider the highly qualified terms with which Jeffrey claims responsibility for the body of his critical work:

It will not I think be expected, or required, of me, that I should look back – from *any* station - upon the part I took in originating and conducting such a work, without some mixture of agreeable feelings: And, while I seek not to decline my full share of the faults and follies to which I have alluded, I trust I may be allowed to take credit, at the same time, for some participation in the Merits by which these were, to a certain extent at least, redeemed or atoned for. (vi)

One could rightly interpret his apparent reticence to take credit for his own writing as a requisite display of false modesty appropriate to such a publication. Certainly the preface is full of such examples. However, such a conclusion overlooks the degree to which Jeffrey's protracted apologia exposes his unease at the prospect of the publication.

Unaccustomed to having his name singled out and affixed to a body of work, unsure how to measure his role in its creation, Jeffrey avoids taking credit as the sole creator of the collected volumes. He is quick to clarify at the outset of the preface that "The papers in question are the lawful property, and substantially at the disposal, of the publishers of the *Edinburgh Review*," whose decision it was to publish the current work, limiting his involvement to having hesitantly "allowed it to go out with the sanction of my name" (v).

While he expresses a certain amount of pride in the works as they once existed within the review, sanctioning their current form risks his being “betrayed into an act, not of imprudence merely, but of great impropriety” (v). For Wordsworth, publishing a collected volume and writing a preface provide a necessary opportunity to formalize his proprietary relationship to his poetry. For Jeffrey, such a scenario creates an imposition, accrediting him for articles that are neither his property nor his sole responsibility.

This disparity between Wordsworth and Jeffrey illustrates how each man adapted his conception of authorial agency to suit a particular professional situation in the literary market. Jeffrey does not view writing or reading as private acts because giving weight to an isolated interpretation ignores public context. This view is cultivated by his experiences serving as a medium for public consensus through the *Edinburgh Review*. As a critic, Jeffrey’s ability to situate a text within the larger context of contemporary standards of taste and the traditions of critical theory validates his reading. As an editor, he experiences writing not as a form of individualistic self-expression, but as a process of synthesis, providing the review with a discernible voice that does not belong to a single writer. Jeffrey interacts with the writing market from within a nexus of readers and writers, subscribers and peers. Consequently, he considers the voice of the author, both when reviewing others’ and when situating his own, to be beholden to the collective. It is then only natural for Jeffrey to reject Wordsworth, a poet who insists that interpretation take place on an individual level. Concerned with the challenges of achieving genuinely mutual understanding, Wordsworth discounted the prospect of creating mass consensus as being highly problematic. Instead, he conceptualized the text as a private interaction between the author and the reader, defining its meaning through the former’s voice and

prompting the latter to interpret it independently, because he experienced the market as a one-way channel, bringing him into contact with other individuals through the sale of his poetry. In this sense, the emphasis placed upon the definite voice of the speaker in Wordsworth's poetry, a constitutive model to our critical concept of Romantic selfhood, must be understood as the product of a particular approach to market culture, one that dictated his poetry's expressive power and limitations.

In the following chapters, this study will examine authors operating from alternative positions throughout the market. These chapters will often use Wordsworth's model of authorial autonomy and his valorization of sympathetic understanding as a point of contrast. The central importance of autonomy and empathy to traditional concepts of Romantic selfhood speak to Wordsworth's influence upon our perception of the Romantic period. By presenting this as only one of a number of postures being applied within the market at this time, this study takes part in a larger movement within current scholarship attempting to disrupt the primacy of the poet of genius. However, as this opening chapter sought to illustrate, Wordsworth's approach to authorship is influential because it wrestles with the challenges of communicating within market society. As an individual author struggling to engage with a diffuse public, Wordsworth speaks to modern concerns with preserving the personal voice from the mediation of the market. Nonetheless, the fact that this struggle led him to apply exacting control over his work, alienating both critics and publishers, while achieving only middling success for many years, suggests that other strategies of representation may have been more conducive to engaging with the public, at least in the short term.

## Chapter 2 – Charles Lamb: The Casual Contributor

### 2.1 – Freelancing and Elia's Textuality

“He hath not so fixed his identity (like a rusty vane) to one dull spot, but that, if he seeth occasion, or the argument shall demand it, he will be born again in future papers, in whatever place, and at whatever period, shall seem good unto him.”

– “Elia to His Correspondents” from the *London Magazine*, November, 1821

Elia, the pseudonym affixed to a popular series of essays written by Charles Lamb and published in the *London Magazine* in the 1820s, stands as the Romantic period's most enigmatic example of authorial identity. On one hand, the Elia essays exemplify the popular appeal of the distinct, personalized voice. In the tradition of Addison and Steele's Isaac Bickerstaff, it was common practice for reviewers and essayists to construct fictitious personas to serve as their mouthpieces. Dedicated readers were attracted to the familiar tones of such recurring personae as James Hogg's rustic “Ettrick Shepherd”, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright's flippant “Janus Weathercock”, and “Christopher North,” the pen name shared by *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine's* editors. Amongst those of his peers, Elia's voice is perhaps the most recognizable. Tending to focus upon quaint matters of urban life, the Elia essays are infused with a tone of gentle humour and fond nostalgia. Elia's playful and digressive narration creates a striking impression in the minds of his readers. E. V. Lucas, Lamb's 20th-century archivist and biographer, best conveys the sense of familiarity and confidence provoked by these essays when he makes the bold claim that “our prose literature probably contains

no work more steeped in personality” (Lucas 444). Yet, despite the familiarity he so readily evokes in readers, Elia is presented as little more than a figment of our imagination. A construct composed of materials biographical, borrowed, and invented, Elia does not represent Lamb in earnest or stand as his own rounded character. Rather, Lamb often foregrounds Elia’s fictive nature, reminding readers that this personable voice is only a simulacrum. Fluctuating back and forth on a spectrum between intimate confessions and imaginative fabrications, the Elian essays allowed Lamb to explore the different ways text mediates the relationship between reader and author. Reading the Elian essays in combination with Lamb’s poetic publications reveals the author’s dedication to both preserving and exposing the strained pretense of intimate exchange made possible through print.

Recently, recognition of this kind of textual play within the essays has led to a renewed scholarly interest in Lamb. Though held to be one of the great English essayists throughout the nineteenth century, Lamb’s critical reputation experienced a sharp decline in the 1930s and 40s. Several prominent scholars either ignored Lamb for not conforming to their increasingly refined definitions of Romanticism or derided him for his informal tone and quotidian subject matter, construing his insouciance as a lack of artistic integrity.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Lamb received little attention throughout the middle of the twentieth century until interest began to be revived by a select few scholars in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>2</sup> Studies such as Fred V. Randel’s *The World of Elia: Charles Lamb’s Essayistic*

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<sup>1</sup> For a prime example, see Denys Thompson’s “Our Debt to Lamb,” which condemned Lamb’s writing as banal and amoral.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the following scholars, it is important to recognize the long-standing research carried on by The Charles Lamb Society, which has been published in *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* since 1935. The many contributions of the members of this society to our understanding of Lamb as a writer would be difficult to

*Romanticism* (1975), Robert D. Frank's *Don't Call Me Gentle Charles!* (1976), and Gerald Monsman's *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer* (1984) were the first monographs to illustrate how Lamb engages with the work of his peers in unique, often challenging ways. While these studies contributed formative insights to the current discourse surrounding Lamb's work, each one is hindered by a compulsion to define his work with reference to conventional Romantic themes, such as original genius, imaginative power, or personal memories (respectively). It is only more recently, as critical discourse moved away from an overriding conception of Romanticism, that Lamb has been studied as an author in his own right.

Rather than define Lamb as derivative of a larger movement, a new wave of scholars has begun to consider how his essays represent a form of self-expression markedly different from the poetry of his Lake School friends. It is now clear that more than simply adapting Wordsworth and Coleridge's dramatic renditions of memory, intimacy, and alienation to his own personal ruminations, Lamb challenges the basic assumptions such poetic ideals are built upon. Based upon the research of scholars such as Simon Hull, Mark Parker, Karen Fang, James Treadwell, David Stewart, and Sara Lodge, a new critical discourse has begun to examine the Elia essays as a unique instance of textual identity, one especially adapted to the knotted interactions of the popular press. A number of contentious points have risen across these readings, as many of these critics reach varying conclusions regarding Lamb's commitment to expressive sincerity, desire for social intercourse, and complicity with consumer culture. As a result of this discourse, Lamb is proving to be one of the period's most pertinent authors to our

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summarize. Suffice it to say, their work will be seen to inform this chapter's discussion of Lamb's relationships and professional development.

evolving understanding of the relationship joining high romanticism, periodical literature, and free market culture. By contrasting his position within the market against that of the professional poet, this chapter will illustrate how Lamb's playful approach to textual identity results from his particular situation, bridging the provincial poets and the periodical press. A significant amount of recent Lamb scholarship focuses upon the connection between Elia's unfixed identity and the polyphonous nature of periodicals in general and the *London Magazine* specifically.<sup>3</sup> However, whereas these studies imply that the periodical press provided an accommodating medium, well suited to Lamb's idiomatic style, the following sections consider how Lamb developed his essayistic style in response to his particular experiences with his poetic peers.

This chapter examines Lamb's career in three stages: it will begin with a brief discussion of the early lyric poetry he produced as part of Coleridge's writing circle, then focus upon a more exhaustive examination of the Elia essays, and conclude by discussing Lamb's late return to poetry with his largely overlooked series of album verses. In doing so, it will follow a progression in Lamb's work, as he moves from a highly personal mode of poetry, to the public context of the periodical, and finally to a mode that blurs the line between private and public spheres. As Lamb transitions away from lyric poetry and comes to experiment with more varied modes of writing, he develops a nuanced understanding of how the act of publication moves textual identity beyond the determining control of either author or reader. Instead, his work demonstrates how the textual subject is a product of mediation, formed in a public nexus of meaning.

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<sup>3</sup> Pertinent examples for my argument include but are not limited to Simon Hull's *Charles Lamb, Elia, and the London Magazine*; James Treadwell's *Autobiographical Writing and British Literature, 1783 – 1834*; David Stewart's *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture*; and Sara Lodge's "By Its Own Hand: Periodicals of Romantic Authenticity." The specific views espoused by these authors will be discussed and compared later in the chapter.

Whereas the Elian essays demonstrate how the complex public life of the text renders textual identity shifting and uncertain, his final experiments with album verse show how a text can take on dual meanings as it shifts between public and private contexts. As a result, Lamb measures the degree to which the proliferation of public print culture came to encroach upon private modes of writing in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

### A Writer Afterwards

The friendship of William Wordsworth and Charles Lamb presents an odd case of two men who bore nearly as many similarities as they did striking contrasts. An overview of their canon shows a number of common themes joining the authors: reflective works of childhood memories, encounters with strangers and transients, meditations on attachment and estrangement. Despite such common subject matter, their styles were radically different: the solemnity Wordsworth instills into his pastoral scenes stands in sharp contrast to the lighthearted irony of Lamb's essays on urban life. On the surface, their personalities seem equally at odds: Wordsworth the sober laureate, Lamb the sybaritic wit. Nonetheless, the two men formed a lasting friendship built upon mutual respect. Lamb was a great admirer of Wordsworth's poetry and often praised his work in letters and the critical press.<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth's fondness for Lamb is evident in the familiar tone of his letters. His memorial poem "Written After the Death of Charles Lamb" creates a glowing portrait of Lamb as a symbol of patience and compassion in the face of suffering.

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<sup>4</sup> Lamb's original review of *The Excursion* stands as one of the most considerate and insightful of Wordsworth's contemporary reviews. Lamb was greatly annoyed when the editors of the *Quarterly Review* altered the review to appear more biting. He subsequently wrote to Wordsworth to apologize, claiming he had "never felt more vexed in [his] life" (*LCML* 3: 128).

When first brought together by Coleridge, the two men did not form an immediate bond. Alan G. Hill describes their first sustained meeting at Nether Stowey in July of 1797 as awkward and strained, citing Lamb's "cold and non-committal" references to Wordsworth in subsequent letters (86). There are a number of possible reasons for an initial aversion. Hill suggests the two men may have been distracted by personal concerns or that Lamb may have been jealous of the attention Coleridge paid to his newest, closest friend. It also seems possible that Wordsworth's reserved nature was simply too much at odds with Lamb's irreverent spirit. As Coleridge recounts in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," Wordsworth and Lamb went on a long walk through the countryside that day, while he was forced to remain at home nursing an injured foot. One can only imagine how the two newly acquainted men got along in the absence of their common friend. It stands to reason the walk may not have been as pleasant as Coleridge imagines in his poem. This tension between Wordsworth and Lamb continued throughout the first few years of their correspondence.

In January of 1801, Lamb famously sparked a heated exchange with an offended Wordsworth when he shared his reactions to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Indeed, the incident stands as one of the finer examples of Wordsworth's sensitivity to criticism. Lamb is remarkably even-handed in his letter, praising his favourite selections while offering qualified criticism of Wordsworth's attempts to direct his reader in "The Old Cumberland Beggar." Although it is true that he saves his highest praise for Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, he also speaks very warmly of "The Song of Lucy," "The Mad Mother," and "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey." Ignoring these compliments in his response, Wordsworth accuses Lamb of the familiar crime of

possessing too narrow a “range of sensibility” before lecturing him on the proper merits of certain passages from the collection. While Wordsworth’s reaction appears needlessly defensive, there is clearly a note of provocation in Lamb’s original letter, most notably when he launches into his justification of the wonders of urban life:

Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don’t much care if I never see a mountain in my life. I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments, as any of you mountaineers can have done with dead nature. The Lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the innumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, waggons, playhouses... The wonder of these sights impels me into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fullness of joy at so much Life. – All these emotions must be strange to you. So are your rural emotions to me. (*LCML* 1: 267)

Lamb’s insistence that London can just as readily inspire feelings of organic harmony with one’s surroundings as the hills above Tintern Abbey alludes to an alternative form of social contact to that found in Wordsworth’s poetry. As opposed to the direct engagement of individuals depicted in “Simon Lee” and “Resolution and Independence,” Lamb describes a connectedness gained through immersion in the public. This defense of the city betrays his own sensitivity to the apparent condescension of Wordsworth and Coleridge, friends who rarely took the time to write to him and looked down upon his living situation in London.<sup>5</sup> More than just an example of Wordsworth’s inability to

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<sup>5</sup> In a letter to his friend Thomas Manning dated February 15, 1801, Lamb expresses annoyance that Wordsworth and Coleridge can only be bothered to write to him when they want to reprove him for misinterpreting their poetry.

accept criticism, these letters illustrate an underlying disconnect between the two men. Their disparate notions of social interrelation, both as it should occur between a reader and writer and between strangers on a street, were born of their contrasting situations as authors and manifested through their writing.

Of all their dissimilarities, the most pronounced difference between Lamb and Wordsworth may have been their self-conceptions as authors. While Wordsworth consciously cultivated his reputation as a poet, Lamb was less concerned with matters of literary status. One way to account for this difference is to consider the two authors' different living situations. Described by Lucas as "a man and brother first, an East India clerk next, and a writer afterwards," Lamb took his responsibilities as a provider very seriously (Lucas 443). From 1792 to 1825, he worked as a clerk for the East India Company. The job required him to work six days per week for upwards of nine hours per day, leaving precious little time to write. Lamb's commitment to the Company over three decades was due in no small part to his dedication to his family. Lamb began working to support his aging parents, whose health had begun to decline. In 1796, his sister Mary, exhausted from her own labours and suffering from an anxiety attack that the courts would term a fit of "lunacy," killed their mother with a kitchen knife in the family's small London home. Charles was able to secure his sister's freedom on the condition that he would provide her with constant care and support. With the exception of occasional relapses that required Mary to return to the care of the asylum, Charles spent the remainder of his life living with and looking after his sister. In truth, Mary's presence

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Coleridge's poem "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," though intended as a sympathetic reflection on Lamb's situation in London, presents Coleridge's feelings of antipathy towards the city as pity for his less fortunate friend. For a more thorough discussion of this aspect of the poem, see chapter 4 of Felicity James's *Charles Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s*.

was rarely a burden. The two siblings had a fond, loving relationship and shared in a healthy social life, visiting often with friends. Though Charles was Mary's financial provider and legal guardian, Mary also provided Charles with emotional support and worked with him on writing projects.<sup>6</sup> Despite Mary's positive influence however, Charles's pressing responsibilities certainly contributed to his casual attitude towards his writing.

Lamb's indifference towards his reputation as a writer is evident in any number of anecdotes. From his early experiments in drama, when he joined the audience in booing the only staging of his play *Mr. H---, A Farce*, to his last collected volume of works, which he described in the dedication as no more than "Trifles" and "Advertisement Verses" for his good friend and publisher Edward Moxon, Lamb exhibited a blithe attitude towards his work throughout his career (*CWCL* 708). Such self-deprecation may well have been a defensive posture meant to gird Lamb against the threat of rejection by his readers, but it was a posture he ably employed. This ambivalence was paired with a reluctant work ethic. Far from being a model of the self-regulating Romantic genius, Lamb frequently depended upon others to impel his efforts. George L. Barnett has pointed out that Lamb was highly dependent upon friends and acquaintances to secure writing opportunities (30). For instance, Leigh Hunt, having published some of his work in the *Examiner*, heaped praise upon Lamb prior to the publication of his 1818 collection (Riehl 10). Hunt's publicity helped boost Lamb's public profile and, along with the recommendation of his friend William Hazlitt, was in part responsible for Lamb's

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<sup>6</sup> Jane Aaron's *A Double Singleness: Gender and the Writings of Charles and Mary Lamb* outlines the full extent of Charles Lamb's symbiotic relationship with his sister and the significant, mutual influence they had upon one another's writing.

inclusion in the *London Magazine*.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the assistance Lamb received finding work, he often required encouragement to complete his work. As Barnett goes on to explain, “once enlisted as a contributor, Lamb had to be prodded repeatedly to continue sending his monthly essays” (30). For Barnett, it is no coincidence that the series of Elia essays concluded as the quality of the *London Magazine* began to decline, as it was the community of talent surrounding the magazine that drove him to write. According to Hazlitt, his career as a writer could only have flourished under such circumstances, as Lamb “would probably never have made his way by detached and independent efforts; but fortunately for himself and others, he has taken advantage of the Periodical Press, where he has been stuck into notice” (419). This dependence on others can be seen prior to his work for the *London Magazine*, as Lamb frequently collaborated with partners whose efforts propelled his own, from his earliest work with Coleridge to his work with his sister. Mary’s account of their joint labour upon *Tales from Shakespeare* offers a candid look at Charles’s writing process:

Charles has written Macbeth & Othello, King Lear & has begun Hamlet, you would like to see us as we often sit writing on one table (but not on one cushion sitting) like Hermia & Helena in the Mid-summer’s Nights Dream. or rather like an old literary Darby and Joan. I taking snuff & he groaning all the while & saying he can make nothing of it, which he always says till he has finished and then he finds out he has made something of it. (*LCML* 2: 229)

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<sup>7</sup> As Barnett notes, John Scott, the editor of the *London Magazine*, was already familiar with Lamb from his earlier contributions to the *Champion*. However, Scott originally considered Lamb as, at best, a reserve writer (30).

In addition to describing Charles's downbeat attitude towards his own work, her account of the siblings in terms of an old domestic couple implies a state of reassuring intimacy from which her brother could draw the necessary strength to complete his work. As Jane Aaron points out in her study of Charles and Mary Lamb's working relationship, Charles's tendency to represent himself as the passive figure in most hierarchical relationships, "with the governed rather than the governor," stands in sharp contrast to his contemporaries' concerns with masculine self-assertion (4).

Despite his apparent diffidence, Lamb was clearly committed to his craft. He continued to write diligently while working long hours at the East India Company. During those years he struggled to find a successful outlet for his writing, experimenting with a variety of modes including poetry, novels, dramas, criticism, and biography. Considering the range and extent of his output, it would be reductive to construe Lamb as a victim of circumstance, too burdened by everyday obligations to fully develop as a poet. Instead, Lamb's career typifies another model of authorship that had emerged within the developing writer's market: the freelance or hackney author.<sup>8</sup> The proliferation of periodicals reached a pitch at the outset of the nineteenth century, as publications grew in both scope and circulation. Jon Klancher has estimated that over 4000 periodicals were

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<sup>8</sup> Before continuing it is important to qualify my use of the term "hackney." The term carries two connotations: first, it signifies work that is done for hire and, secondly, it signifies a stigma of inferiority and amateurism. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a direct correlation between these two uses of the word. The majority of writers working for hire through the periodical market were viewed as an inferior breed of author, threatening the dignity of true men of letters. However, as Paul Keen has pointed out, this correlation did not go unchallenged. Even in the eighteenth century there were those who questioned this condemnation of hackney writers, including Samuel Johnson: "Not everyone could contribute to the republic of letters in similar ways, and the various genres within which they toiled could never be stripped of their hierarchical relations, [Johnson] acknowledged, but none of this ought to negate authors' equal right to professional esteem" (Keen, *Spectacle of Modernity* 141). Lamb commanded a remarkable degree of respect as a periodical essayist, due in part to his popularity and the humility of his tone. Nonetheless, he was not entirely free from the stigma of his position. My own use of the term hackney when referring to Lamb in this study is intended to call attention to the contractual nature of his writing, rather than to stigmatize him. Nonetheless, it is important to account for the presence of this stigma, especially when discussing his humble demeanour and critical reception.

launched between 1790 and 1832 (ix). In the eighteenth century, the most distinguished periodicals were small in scale, serving as vehicles for individual authors: Addison and Steele's *Spectator*, Goldsmith's *The Bee*, or Johnson's *Rambler*. As larger formats became economical, more substantial publications took over. In 1802, the *Edinburgh Review* set a new precedent in wages, offering its writers a rate of ten guineas per sheet, an already high figure that would continue to rise over the next ten years (Christie 35). For the editors of the *Edinburgh*, this was a means of attracting a more select, higher quality of writer, but the standard they set would influence subsequent publications. Writing for reviews and magazines became more profitable and the growing market for periodicals began to accommodate a wider pool of writers. For the many authors writing with varying frequency for various outlets, publishing demanded qualities quite different from Wordsworth's assertive control. Producing work for a collaborative publication required writers to join a distinct voice with a degree of pliancy in order to respond to the desires of editors, the work of peers, and the public's current interests. Moreover, the ability to secure opportunities to work often depended upon cultivating relationships with those same editors and peers. Considered in this context, Lamb's affable nature, unassuming attitude, and wandering trajectory as a writer signal an aptitude for negotiating a different facet of the literary marketplace than that occupied by Wordsworth's competitive sale of prestige collections.

The nineteenth-century periodical press has become a prominent focus in literary scholarship over the past few decades, as scholars have begun to view periodicals as primary sources of literature, rather than as supplementary material. For these scholars, accounting for authorial agency within periodicals presents a fundamental challenge.

Klancher's foundational work in this area established terms for discussing the influence of periodicals by focusing upon the consolidated voice of the publication. By illustrating how periodicals cultivated finer distinctions amongst the reading public in order to distinguish themselves from their competitors, Klancher's study conceptualizes these publications in terms of a joint identity. His observations are essential to understanding the influence these publications had in shaping cultural and political discourse; however, his study also established a precedent for defining the agency of periodicals in terms of a uniform, overriding voice. By focusing upon the periodical itself as the primary subject for study, Klancher overlooks the complex circumstances affecting the agency of the individual contributor. This theoretical challenge of accounting for the voice of specific writers subsumed within the periodical's collective has been addressed by a new wave of scholars building upon Klancher's work. For instance, Mark Parker identifies a number of challenges facing the scholar who attempts to analyze the voice of the individual contributor and illustrates how "the form of the magazine itself undermines... an exclusively author-centered... approach" (4). First, periodicals present the practical challenge of identifying authors who frequently wrote anonymously, collaboratively, or pseudonymously. Moreover, any attempt to distinguish the author from the publication must account for the ways authors adapted their voices to suit particular periodicals. Such strategies could involve altering their tone, moderating their political views, or leveraging the publication's reputation to "write with the force of the magazine or review behind them" (Parker 4). Considering the plethora of ways the larger body of the periodical can affect the individual author, Parker notes that periodicals do not simply present a different context for studying literature but "a range of modalities... from authorial autonomy to

collaborations between editor and contributor. In between we have elusive hybrids” (5). As a result, any effort to incorporate periodicals as an object of study in the critical discourse of Romantic period literature requires a strategy for discussing authorial agency that eschews the author-centered approach frequently applied to canonical poets.

More than one strategy has been employed in order to address this challenge. Attempting to find a middle-ground between figuring agency in terms of the periodical and in terms of the author, Parker focuses on specific runs or sequences of related articles appearing across a set time span. This approach allows him to isolate an author’s voice while still considering the mediating influence of the periodical. Meanwhile, Mark Schoenfield’s work in *British Periodicals and Romantic Identity* addresses the issue directly by examining the underlying tension that existed between authors in the ‘lower’ sphere of periodical writing and those considered legitimate men of letters, comparing their disparate models of authorial representation. Carrying forward with this new focus upon the literary relevance of the periodical press to Romanticism, this study follows the example set by these scholars by considering how the specific textual conditions mediating Lamb’s essays also shape his authorial voice in contrast to the example set by Wordsworth in the previous chapter. Whereas both Schoenfield and Parker focus upon the distinctions between periodical authorship and independent authorship, however, this study’s focus upon the challenge of addressing a mass readership presents a common problem shared by both the periodical hack and the serious poet. While each applies an authorial voice adapted to the conditions of his particular medium, both are responding to similar pressures and obstacles arising from the literary market. A comparison that is sensitive to the different mediating factors affecting authors across different media

without segregating their work into discrete discourses can help establish the grounds for a more thorough examination of authorial representation in the Romantic period.

The basis for such a comparison has already been demonstrated to some extent by the previous chapter's discussion of Francis Jeffrey. Both Jeffrey and Wordsworth attempted to achieve similarly didactic relationships with their readers, but applied disparate approaches in doing so. Charles Lamb presents a useful third point of comparison, joining the sensibility of the Lake school with the practices of the periodical press. As the following sections will illustrate, the Elia essays present a unique challenge to traditional concepts of Romantic self-expression, utilizing the personal tone of Lamb's peers while subverting the very notion that a published text can serve as a medium for an intimate exchange. Moreover, the contrast between Jeffrey's authorial voice as an editor of a review and Lamb's as a contributing essayist helps illustrate the variety of positions existing within the literary market. Despite both taking part in the periodical press, each author posits a unique authorial identity, as different from the other's as it is from Wordsworth's. Once again, this is a result of their distinct positions as writers. David Stewart, further refining the language of the discourse surrounding periodicals, highlights an important distinction between quarterlies such as Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review* and literary magazines such as Elia's *London Magazine*. Describing how periodicals defined themselves in contrast to their competitors, Stewart notes that literary magazines reject the focused, authoritative voice commonly used in reviews, choosing instead to embrace a diversity of styles. As a distinctly metropolitan voice in the growing network of periodicals, the *London Magazine* embraces the inclusive nature of print culture,

representing itself as a miscellany of views and ideas.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, the review serves as a polemical authority on matters of political and cultural import and therefore “demands a consistency of opinion that the magazine, in principal, denies” (Stewart 27). This contrast between Lamb’s and Jeffrey’s mediums helps contextualize the different ways each writer represented authorial agency: the former as a voice lost within a crowd, the latter as a voice rising over the crowd. Focusing upon multiple forms of modality within the periodical press will expand the scope of this study’s discussion, helping to avoid posing a false dichotomy between the Romantic poet’s positive selfhood and periodicals as a singular antithesis.

#### Personal Poetry and Lamb’s Turn to Prose

This chapter will examine how Lamb’s prose essays emphasize the artificiality of authorial identity, an approach which stands in sharp contrast to Wordsworth’s concern with accurately conveying authorial intent. Whereas Wordsworth encourages readers to exert every effort to better comprehend a text’s true, underlying meaning, Lamb’s textual playfulness in the Elia essays gesture towards the absence of such certitude. While this seems indicative of a fundamental divide between the two authors, it is important to consider how these approaches to authorial presence both respond to a common challenge. Both authors seek to establish a personal connection with their readers and both authors recognize that the subjective nature of textual meaning renders this impractical. So long as the text’s significance is subject to contextual mediation and

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<sup>9</sup> As James Treadwell notes, the *London Magazine* was specifically designed as a response to the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Intended to offer an urban alternative to the influence of Scottish periodicals, it derives its eclectic approach from the variety and pace of London (*Autobiographical* 218).

diverse interpretations, its meaning cannot be authoritatively fixed. As discussed in the previous chapter, Wordsworth's solution is to encourage the reader to pursue a common understanding of the text and to aspire towards a shared, authentic understanding, despite its impracticality. Conversely, Lamb's solution is to embrace the text's mediated and variable construal. In doing so, Lamb does not attempt to bridge the divide between author and reader, so much as place this distance in its proper perspective. Douglas Stewart notes that drawing attention to the artificial nature of textual intimacy was characteristic of magazine writers. It was not uncommon for popular personas such as Christopher North to self-consciously reference their own insubstantiality, appealing to readers by including them in an inside joke. To this end, "Elia invites readers into his confidence, but only on the basis that the effect of intimacy is recognized for what it is: an effect, not a reality" (Stewart 155). However, before examining how Lamb adopts and adapts the irony of the pseudonymous, it is important to consider how his background in poetry informs his approach to representation as a hackney author. The personal, reflective nature of Lamb's essays and their ironic execution both result from his first frustrated ventures in verse.

In her study of Lamb's earliest poetry, Felicity James details sources of friction arising from his close working relationship with Coleridge. While preparing works for publication in Coleridge's 1796 collection *Poems on Various Subjects*, the two young poets formed part of a tight-knit writing circle comprised of friends from their school days at Christ's Hospital. Founded upon Pantisocratic principles of friendship, the circle embraced ideals of universal compassion and sensibility, openly sharing in one another's work. Such an environment would seem to naturally suit Lamb's propensity for

collaboration. Yet, James notes that “[w]hile in private the group freely misquoted, suggested changes, and even parodied one another’s work, Coleridge’s very public alterations of Lamb’s works provoked a dismayed reaction” (*Lamb* 58). Lamb’s correspondence with Coleridge at the time reveals the two trading many meticulous suggestions for revision. However, when Coleridge alters Lamb’s more personal poems prior to publication, Lamb becomes defensive:

I love my own feelings. They are dear to memory... I charge you, Col.  
Spare my ere lambs - & tho’ a Gentleman may borrow six lines in an epic  
poem (I should have no objection to borrow 500 & without  
acknowledging) still in a Sonnet – a personal poem I do not “ask my  
friend the aiding verse.” (*LCML* 1: 21)

This would seem to indicate that, at the outset of his career, Lamb shared Wordsworth’s regard for the integrity of authorial intent, specifically as it applied to the publication of this highly personal brand of poetry. As Fred Randel points out, Lamb’s confessed concern that Wordsworth and Coleridge, with their imposing genius, threaten to overwrite his identity is a conventionally Romantic anxiety over originality (5).<sup>10</sup> Lamb’s strained working relationship with Coleridge was a major cause of his conversion from verse to prose, from defending the integrity of his authorial voice to satirizing its very premise. However, a close examination of his early poems reveals that, even as Lamb

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<sup>10</sup> In a sense, Lamb was right to be concerned. His ties to Coleridge would see him identified as a member of the Lake School by the critical press. This had severe consequences for the reviews of his earliest publications as critics attacked Lamb on the basis of his political radicalism (Riehl 7). He only managed to separate himself from direct association with the Lake School when he began to distinguish himself as a critic and essayist, gaining his first positive reviews from the critical press in 1808 with his *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who Lived About the Time of Shakespeare* (Riehl 9).

protested Coleridge's interference, he did not aspire to the same standards of poetic autonomy that were central to the work of the Lake school poets.

Comparing the original versions of Lamb's poems with Coleridge's revisions, James notes a common thematic disparity. Exploring themes of sympathetic communion with one's surroundings, Lamb's earliest verse often places the poet within comforting scenes of seclusion, concluding with the poet dissolving into another figure. For example, "Effusion XII: Methinks how dainty sweet it were" imagines a Sylvan bower, where the poet finds relief from the outside world in the sympathetic embrace of a romantic companion. While Lamb's original version of this poem embraces the notion of an idealistic retreat, Coleridge's revised versions take on threatening overtones as "the extreme emphasis Coleridge places on the ideal of private attachment leads him into a corresponding anxiety over its dangers" (James, *Lamb* 64). As a result, in Coleridge's versions the narrator closes by parting from the bower and confessing his regret at the time lost in hiding. While James credits this closing emphasis to Coleridge's anxieties regarding the danger of solipsistic escapism, she also notes that Lamb's verse demonstrates an optimistic faith in the power of sympathetic communion, making the bower "a place of mutual creativity, where the lovers sit and tell stories to one another" (*Lamb* 68). With this in mind, it is possible to interpret Coleridge's misgivings regarding Lamb's work as indicative of not just a fear of overindulging in private sentiments, but a fear that such an intimate commingling may compromise one's sense of self. Such a fear is illustrated by Coleridge's decision to overwrite his friend's contributions to his publication rather than to confer with him. Lamb's faith in such sympathetic communion is expressed even more boldly in "Effusion XIII: I could laugh to hear the midnight

wind,” which sees the poet embracing a wild storm to the point of dissolving into nature, “till it seemed a pleasant thing to die, - / To be resolv’d into th’ elemental wave, / Or take my portion with the winds that rave” (*WCML* 5: 4). While the lines may convey a grim tone, Lamb is not describing an act of self-destruction so much as an encouraging process of symbiosis, as his embrace of death creates a resolution, connecting him with his portion of nature. Again, Coleridge alters this concept of self-effacement, affixing closing lines that see the poet awake and recover from his reverie. This new ending “transforms the sonnet into a demonstration of egotism, where the environment is used by the poet to confirm and strengthen his sense of self” (James, *Lamb* 61). Lamb would eventually overwrite Coleridge’s changes in subsequent publications, reclaiming his work. Nonetheless, Lamb abandoned poetry as a serious vocation. While his stated reasons for doing so were personal, his decision was no doubt influenced by his concern over these conflicting notions of sympathy and collaboration.<sup>11</sup> His desire for an egalitarian bond could not be reconciled with Coleridge’s assertive brand of poetic genius. Indeed, such a desire was wholly incompatible with the very enterprise of professional poetry in the market as it was then constituted.

As Wordsworth’s career so vividly illustrates, to compete for a share of the literary marketplace requires the poet to cultivate a strong and distinct identity. Lamb accepts that expressive poetry demands a degree of reverence for the author’s voice. However, once the assertion of that voice becomes a goal unto itself, the poet becomes closed to the possibility of mutual interaction. Lamb’s turn away from verse can therefore

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<sup>11</sup> As Lamb explained to Coleridge, he stopped writing poetry because he felt it was a distraction to his duties to his family. However, his derisive phrasing in this letter suggests an added element of personal distaste for the egotism of the medium, as he describes his rejection of “the trappings of laureateship” and his satisfaction “that the weakness troubles me no longer” (*LCML* 1: 64). Coleridge’s increasingly distant attitude and Lamb’s subsequent feelings of rejection were also contributing factors.

be understood as rejection of a medium that requires individualism to supersede companionship. In their respective articles, Tim Milnes and Alison Hickey offer two distinct examinations of Lamb's turn away from verse. Collectively, their research indicates a connection between Lamb's philosophical skepticism and his rejection of professional competition, both originating from his dispute with Coleridge. For Milnes, the ironic uncertainty that characterizes the Elia essays denotes an epistemological ambivalence that can be traced back to his frustration with Coleridge's rationalistic stoicism.<sup>12</sup> Reacting to the detachment of Coleridge's letters, which addressed their waning friendship in coolly objective terms, Lamb develops an ironic indifference towards metaphysical principles of knowledge and truth. Thus, we can relate Elia's subversive disregard for facts and names to "Lamb's suspicion... that the epistemic urge frequently drives – and is driven by – alienated and maladapted human emotions" (Milnes 328). Meanwhile, Hickey describes how Lamb's experiences working with Coleridge and Charles Lloyd inform his ideal of a less competitive, more symbiotic collaboration with his sister Mary.<sup>13</sup> In juxtaposition to Lamb's account of his working relationship with Mary as a form of subjective plurality, Hickey draws attention to the anxious terms in which he described his experiences as a poet competing in the market. In the dedication to his 1818 collection, Lamb describes authorship "as a sort of warfare" (*WCML* 5: 1). As Hickey notes, in this metaphor his friends become "comrades entering

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that this drama takes place prior to Coleridge's adoption of German idealism, a branch of philosophy that would have a lasting influence upon his work and lead him to incorporate aspects of epistemological skepticism.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Lloyd was a student of Coleridge and mutual friend of both Coleridge and Lamb. After contributing work to a collaborative volume of verse, Lloyd had a falling out with his mentor when he learned that Coleridge had criticized his works under a penname in the *Monthly Magazine*. He would later collaborate with Lamb on a collection of poems entitled *Blank Verse* in 1798. James interprets the opening dedication of *Blank Verse*, which celebrates the endurance of friendship, as a barb directed at Coleridge (*Lamb* 123).

the antagonistic realm of the literary marketplace together, but also as rivals competing for fame, in an engagement that blurs the distinction between love and animosity” (737).

Lamb’s attempts to blend and obscure his own authorial presence with others are therefore a reaction against the pressure to differentiate himself against his fellows, a pressure that he associated with publishing in the marketplace.

Common to both Milnes’ and Hickey’s observations of Lamb’s break with Coleridge is his opposition to positivistic thinking and its asocial implications. This common thread draws a connection between the philosophical drive to define and categorize objects of inquiry and the market’s divisive cultivation of identity through competition. By abandoning poetry, Lamb rejects a literary form that elicits the author’s most intimate avowals in its composition, only to isolate and compartmentalize such sentiments through its mediation. Returning to the preamble to his first collected volume of works in 1818, Lamb’s misgivings regarding authorial self-assertion are on full display. Far from the theoretical jockeying undertaken in Wordsworth’s paratexts, Lamb begins his canon of “slender labors” with a dedication, paying homage to the influence Coleridge has had on his work: “It would be a kind of disloyalty to offer to any one but yourself a volume containing the *early pieces*, which were first published among your poems, and were fairly derivatives from you and them” (*WCML* 5: 1). To call the dedication deferential would be an oversimplification. As always, Lamb’s prose is sprinkled with ironic insinuations. For instance, it is hard to know exactly where his sincerity lies when he reflects on his broken partnership with Coleridge and Lloyd:

How this association, which shall always be a dear and proud recollection to me, came to be broken, - who snapped the three-fold cord, - whether

yourself (but I know that was not the case) grew ashamed of your former companions, - or whether (which is by much the more probable) some ungracious bookseller was author of the separation. – I cannot tell.

(*WCML* 5: 1)<sup>14</sup>

Lamb's hesitancy to assign blame may well be in earnest. Yet, glibly placed in parentheses and hastily declared prior to the actual accusation, his attempt to reassure Coleridge that he is not suspected carries a light note of sarcasm. Typical of Lamb's irony, the true sentiment may be masked, but its presence can still be felt.<sup>15</sup> His tone becomes less ambiguous as he goes on to lament the loss of their partnership. As Hickey notes, the organic terms Lamb uses to describe this partnership directly contrast the militaristic terms of their competition, as Coleridge is figured as a supportive tree, propping up Lamb's poetic vine (738). In doing so, Lamb informs the reader that the following poems are not the work of a singular voice, but the product of an authorial amalgam that is now lost to time. The dedication may not be wholly deferential, but its outward focus still runs counter to the brand building employed by Wordsworth. Even at one of the most pivotal moments in his publishing career, Lamb declines the opportunity to define his voice and single himself out as a poet. Instead, he turns to a more appropriate, prosaic outlet.

Milnes argues that, while Lamb's prose frequently undermines the prospect of obtaining firm knowledge, he was "at least partly aware" that he could not escape "the

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<sup>14</sup> The mention of an ungracious bookseller is a reference to Joseph Cottle, a publisher who served as an intermediary for Lloyd and Coleridge during their falling out (Hickey 737 - 738).

<sup>15</sup> In his comparison of Lamb to Richard Steele, Randel provides what may be the most accurate and useful definition of Lamb's unique brand of irony: "Steele's irony consists in his declaring a value judgment opposite to what he means, damning by fulsome praise, while [Lamb] means what he says and the opposite too" (14). All future references to Lamb/Elian irony refer to this method of simultaneously combining sincerity with satire.

desire to *know*, to be certain of truth in the world” (333). Pointing out moments in the Elian essays where he exposes his own anxiety regarding uncertainty, Milnes asserts that Lamb merely professed indifference to mask his own epistemological crisis. As a result, “Lamb’s writing... is neither a new kind of philosophical knowingness nor ironic indifference, but an oscillation between the two” (Milnes 338). It is true that the Elian essays display a wistful affection for intimate understanding and the revelation of essential truths. Lamb always admired the potential for poetry to distill and share the author’s personal sentiments, and he maintained his respect for Coleridge’s ability to write poetry that discloses “all the most hidden and delicate affections of the mind” (*LCML* 1: 59). Lamb’s love for the self-reflective expressionism he practiced as a poet is evident in his prose writing. Moreover, his incorporation of such traits is a major factor in the idiomatic style and popularity of his essays. However, rather than adopt Milne’s view of Lamb as a closeted essentialist, hiding behind a veneer of indifference, it is possible to understand his ironic wavering as demonstrating an alternative method of understanding. By inviting readers to form tentative impressions of the figures he describes while always gesturing to the limits of their knowledge, and by illustrating how a public entity may exist in flux as a composite of such conceptions, Lamb prompts readers to understand identity, not as a fixed concept, but as a continuous act of dialectic. Such a hermeneutic approach denies the restrictions placed upon understanding by unequivocal acts of identification. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno explains that such restrictive definitions, while pragmatic, are ultimately contradictory, as they provoke ever-finer disparities between the specific object and the concept. Therefore, “the more relentlessly our identarian thinking besets its object, that farther will it take us from the identity of the

object” (*Negative* 149). While positive identification seeks to understand an object by limiting its potential meaning, dialectic allows for a continuous refinement of understanding by continuously denying closure.

Lamb’s application of such a dialectic process is perhaps best exemplified in Elia’s essay on his childhood education, “Christ’s Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago” written in 1820. This particular essay serves as a response to an earlier work on the same topic, “On Christ’s Hospital, and the Character of the Christ’s Hospital Boys,” written by Lamb and originally published in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1813. In “Christ’s Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago,” Elia’s voice is composed of multiple perspectives, joining Lamb’s memories of the school with those of Coleridge to create a fictional hybrid. Elia begins the essay by claiming to be Lamb’s former schoolmate, establishing himself as a distinct subject. He presents his memories of their alma mater as a response to Lamb’s earlier account in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, which served as a fond meditation upon the school’s formative influence upon his life. By contrast, Elia’s account draws upon Coleridge’s troubled experiences at the school, describing the difficulties faced by students who, unlike Lamb, were not lucky enough to have family members and providers living close at hand. Elia challenges Lamb’s portrait of the school as a bastion of proper charity, remembering “those *whole-day-leaves*, when, by some strange arrangement, we were turned out, for the live-long day” (*WCML* 2: 13). Whereas Lamb “was a home-seeking lad” who could take advantage of days off to return to the comforts of his family, Elia provides a voice for those boys who found themselves with nowhere to go and nothing to eat (*WCML* 2: 13). In addition to Coleridge’s recollections, Elia incorporates some of Lamb’s own less favourable memories that were left out of the

earlier article, such as his fright upon seeing another student placed in chains and locked in a cell as punishment for having run away. By revealing the range of experiences that constitute student life at Christ's Hospital, Elia calls into question the earlier essay's reliability as a testimonial.

More than providing a telling counterpoint, "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago" illustrates the artificial nature of all autobiographical writing. As James Treadwell illustrates in his thorough comparison of these two essays, the childhood portrait Lamb creates in *The Gentleman's Magazine* was itself a self-consciously constructed fiction. In an attempt to defend the reputation of Christ's Hospital against charges of corruption, Lamb's earlier essay recasts his own childhood in the traditional model of the Christ's Hospital Boy, "rewrit[ing] the self in order to assimilate it into the character of the institution" (Treadwell, "Impersonation" 509).<sup>16</sup> As a result, Lamb obscures his own voice within the work, creating a supposedly authentic memoir that speaks more to the school's reputed identity than it does to the author's. The Elia essay presents itself as a more earnest account of the students' experiences, incorporating the harsh realities of school life politely left out of the earlier version. Yet, despite the latter essay's more affecting tone and content, "Elia is not so much contradicting his precursor as showing that his precursor has no identity at all" (Treadwell, "Impersonation" 511). That is to say, rather than attempt to disprove the initial depiction of Christ's Hospital by replacing it with a more accurate one, Elia's highly personalized prose exaggerates the original's self-authorizing manner. After reading the two essays, the audience is no more

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<sup>16</sup> As a charitable institute, Christ's Hospital was dedicated to providing education to children from disadvantaged families. However, reports that the school had accepted students from wealthy families led to a review of the school's admission policies in 1809 and an investigation under the Court of Chancery in 1811, which in turn led to ongoing public concern over the school's reputation (Treadwell, "Impersonation" 503 - 504).

ready to give credence to the enigmatic Elia than they are to the clearly biased Lamb. Instead, they are left to draw upon each narrative to assemble a composite impression of their common subject. The resultant conception of Christ's Hospital (and of Lamb's childhood) is not affirmatively defined by either text. Rather, it is a product of an intertextual dialectic, as the reader navigates towards veracity via their declarations and discrepancies.

Adorno defines "traditional philosophy" as an epistemological stance that seeks to understand "the unlike by likening it to itself" only to find "in so doing it really knows itself only" (*Negative* 150). If this approach may be associated with Wordsworth's subjective position in "Resolution and Independence," as his contemplation of the alien leech-gatherer triggers a self-conscious inward turn, Lamb may be said to practice an obverse stance: one that attempts "to become aware of a likeness by defining it by that which is unlike itself" (*Negative* 150). As an alternate model to the assertive autobiographical voices of his poetic peers, Lamb's Elian identity rejects the search for authenticity. This aversion to defining selfhood can be seen in "Elia to his Correspondents," where the author responds to two readers who have sent queries regarding Elia's background. Citing contradictory accounts regarding Elia's hometown that appear in separate essays, these close readers attempt to expose the flaws of Lamb's illusion. After a rather biting explanation of the basic principles of irony and allegory, Elia mocks their misguided attempts to pin down his identity with specific facts: "He hath not so fixed his identity (like a rusty vane) to one dull spot, but that, if he seeth occasion, or the argument shall demand it, he will be born again in future papers, in whatever place, and at whatever period, shall seem good unto him" (*CWCL* 121). An uncommon example

of Lamb blatantly breaking with character, referring to Elia in the third-person even as he writes under his name, this passage confronts the reader with Elia's fictive nature.

Readers are thus prompted to consider that Elia's function is not to present them with a believable façade, but to serve as a versatile mouthpiece whose circumstances can be endlessly rewritten to suit new situations and create new contrasts. To define him in fixed terms only limits this potential, leaving him stuck in place like a rusted hinge. This little exchange between Elia and his readers suggests that Lamb was not concerned with achieving an intimate connection with his readers. Despite their childhood memories and personal reflections, the majority of which can be traced to Lamb, the Elian essays are not meant to provide readers with a window through which they can observe and know the soul of the author. Instead, these essays approach the connection between author and reader, and between all subjects comingling in a public scene, as an ongoing act of mediation.

#### Elia Identity and "The South Sea House"

If Charles Lamb's pliant attitude towards writing predisposed him to work within the medium of the literary magazine, the medium itself seems to have drawn out Lamb's talent for composing charmingly personable, yet artfully unreliable narratives through the figure of Elia. Though their interpretations of the essays vary, a number of contemporary scholars have asserted that Elia's identity is a result of the structure of the *London Magazine*. Treadwell relates the conversational tone and capricious subject matter of the Elian essays to the magazine's status as a monthly staple of the middle-class family. Elia's versatility in addressing any number of sundry topics "is clearly determined by the

*London*'s format: brief essays, appearing at intervals, requiring no connection between one and the next other than the same signature and some uniformity of tone" (*Autobiographical* 216). While this format lent Elia the character of a familiar guest, the communal nature of the magazine placed the essays within a discursive interchange between his fellow writers. Describing Elia as "[m]anifestly 'at home' ... in the heterogeneous and fragmentary environment of the *London*," Simon Hull's recent monograph examines multiple instances of Elia's essays responding to issues discussed in concurrent articles, such as the debate surrounding the Cockney school or the contributions of Thomas De Quincey (12).<sup>17</sup> For Hull, reading Lamb requires placing specific articles within the larger context of the magazine. Moreover, Elia took on a life of his own amongst the contributors of the magazine, being addressed, described and teased in articles by Wainewright's Janus Weathercock and Hazlitt. Indeed, in the very issue of the *London* containing Lamb's elegy for the staged death of Elia, the editors publish a playful response, hinting that Lamb was his murderer and assuring readers that Elia's ghost would continue to write for them (*WCML* 2: 402). This episode is particularly indicative of Elia's status as a shared creative property.<sup>18</sup> While frequently based upon Lamb's own voice and experiences, Elia represents a principally textual identity, existing within the collaborative space of the magazine. His identity is not analogous to a single author or substantiated by a single text. Thus, as Treadwell claims,

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<sup>17</sup> Treadwell also comments upon this quality of Elia's articles, noting that he was also susceptible to the published responses of the magazine's readers, which "appear in the magazine as part of the overall discursive field which creates him" (*Autobiographical* 320). In "Voice Together: Lamb, Hazlitt, and the *London*", Mark Schoenfield examines another example of Elia's discursive character by reading his essay "The Old and New Schoolmaster" against a preceding article by William Hazlitt. Schoenfield's article will be discussed further later in this chapter.

<sup>18</sup> Lucas suggests that this eulogy was meant to signal Lamb's retiring this penname following the recent publication of a collection of his earlier essays (*WCML* 2: 399). If this is true, the editors' article could be indicative of an attempt to prolong Elia's contributions, raising intriguing concerns regarding the limits of Lamb's control over his communal pseudonym.

“Elia’s self-presentation is shaped not by the inwardness of selfhood but by the medium of publication” (*Autobiographical* 215). Taking full advantage of his pseudonym’s metafictional nature, Lamb uses Elia to challenge his readers’ desire to assign authentic identities to textual voices.

The first Elian essay to be published in the *London Magazine* (August 1820), “The South Sea House” provides a characteristic example of Lamb’s ability to invite readers into a personal account, while denying them a clear sense of the author’s sincerity. The article’s basic premise bears the influence of the Lake school: the sight of a familiar location inspires the narrator to recount memories from a point in time in his youth. Specifically, Lamb recalls his earliest days of employment in the South Sea House, where he worked for some months before transferring to the East India Company in 1792. The South Sea House itself serves as a symbol of the past, described as a ghostly memory of the South Sea Company’s faded glory, with its “stately porticos; imposing staircases; offices roomy as the state apartments in palaces – deserted, or thinly peopled with a few straggling clerks” (*WCML* 2: 2). That this image of decline is itself a memory of the South Sea House as the narrator first experienced it in his youth, rendering it a memory of a memory, amplifies the essay’s nostalgic tone. As such, the locale serves as an appropriate focal point for the author’s wistful recollections of his own past. Except, it is not Lamb’s past. Not entirely. Though based upon Lamb’s memories, the essay contains inaccuracies and skewed details, starting with the narrator’s claim that his employment with the South Sea House dates back forty years (at which point Lamb would have been five years old). It is possible Lamb chose to exaggerate this detail in order to further emphasize the essay’s bygone subject matter. However, the dissonance

this inaccuracy creates between Lamb and Elia coalesces with the composite nature of the narrator's account. That is to say, Lamb's narration combines his own memories of the South Sea House with two other subjective positions: those of John Lamb and Felix Ellia. The essay's latter half largely consists of fond character portraits of the company's whimsical clerks. Having served at the South Sea House for only a matter of months, Lamb's familiarity with these men was likely due in large part to his brother John, who worked there throughout his entire adult life (Lucas 73 – 74). Where John Lamb served as a source of content for the essay, Felix Ellia provided a potential proxy for its delivery. The inspiration for the pseudonym, Ellia was newly employed at the South Sea House in 1791 when he met Charles Lamb, and the two likely grew acquainted during Lamb's subsequent visits (Chandler 673). While the real Ellia's influence upon the fictive Elia is mostly negligible, his connection to the South Sea House implies his importance to this initial work.<sup>19</sup> By borrowing the name of an obscure but nonetheless real figure, Lamb displaces his memories of his former workplace into a separate, hypothetical voice that is not entirely fact or fiction. As a result, Lamb was able to invent a persona, unique to the text of the essays, whose ambiguous composition was simultaneously referential, autobiographical, and fictional. Even as Lamb invites readers to share in his private memories, he casts aspersion upon their factuality. "The South Sea House" does more than blur the line between biographical truth and fictional embellishment however; the

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<sup>19</sup> In his thorough examination into the life of Felix Ellia, David Chandler suggests some possible connections between the two. Certain references made by Lamb to Elia's childhood and family background appear to have been inspired by his former acquaintance (671 – 672). Nonetheless, the vast majority of Elia's thoughts and characteristics are clearly more closely tied to Lamb. It appears Lamb had fallen out of contact with Felix Ellia by the time he began writing for the *London Magazine*, as evident from his surprise and sorrow upon learning that his former acquaintance had passed away in 1820, a fact Lamb discovered nearly a year after the fact. In an uncanny coincidence, Felix Ellia died within a month of the publication of "The South Sea House" (Chandler 680).

essay illustrates the rarity of intimate understanding by repeatedly drawing attention to the point at which knowledge of others breaks down into supposition.

A great deal of the essay is dedicated to Elia's recollections of his fellow company men and their charming eccentricities. His attention to detail lends these memories a tone of fond familiarity. Yet the extent of Elia's insight into the lives of his friends proves limited by the public nature of his relationship, and his overall impression proves greatly informed by setting. The reader learns about outward appearances, such as the aristocratic pretensions put on by Thomas Tame and his wife, or the friendly concerts John Tipp held in his suite, but never gains enough information to accurately imagine their private lives. Instead, Elia describes the men as they appeared in public: in their haunts throughout town and within the offices of the South Sea House. Evans the cashier is known by his dour attitude towards work in the morning but transforms into a new man as he leaves the office and calls upon friends for tea. Outside of the South Sea House, Evans's animated enthusiasm is closely associated with his love for the city, as he relates stories of "old and new London – the site of old theatres, churches, streets gone to decay – where Rosomond's pond stood – the Mulberry-gardens – and the Conduit in Cheap – with many a pleasant anecdote" (*WCML* 2: 4). For Elia, Evans becomes an extension of his surroundings. John Tipp provides an especially stark example of the influence a change in environment can have upon one's behaviour and, consequently, public identity. Despite having a passion for the fiddle that led him to regularly host parties for musicians from across London, at his desk "Tipp was quite another sort of creature [and] all ideas, that were purely ornamental, were banished" (*WCML* 2: 6). The fact that Elia is not sure how to reconcile these contrasting aspects of Tipp's character is indicative of his limited

insight into his character. Tipp's artistic side remains an anomaly, and for the remainder of the passage we are provided with a portrait of Tipp the accountant: "His life was formal. His actions seemed ruled with a ruler. His pen was not less erring than his heart. He made the best executor in the world" (*WCML* 2: 6). Due to their working relationship at the South Sea House, Elia's description of Tipp is coloured by the facet of his personality with which he was most familiar: his professional demeanor. And so his constancy of heart is conflated with the accuracy of his pen.

Elia's manner of constructing incomplete sketches of his friends based upon the context in which he encountered them mirrors the process by which readers form concepts of authors based upon the limited context afforded by a textual voice. Just as Elia's textual identity renders him a product of his medium, the identity of the South Sea clerks is mediated by their surroundings. Lamb attempts to draw attention to this parallel by highlighting the partial nature of Elia's descriptions, presenting them not as reality, but as a product of his mind, evoked by memories of the South Sea House: "With what reverence have I paced thy great bare rooms and courts at eventide! They spoke of the past: - the shade of some dead accountant, with visionary pen in ear, would flit by me, stiff as in life" (*WCML* 2: 2). The clerks themselves, or more accurately Elia's memories of them, appear only as extensions of the house, described as ghosts haunting its halls, retracing the paths Elia knew them to frequent. As shades of the narrator's past, the clerks cannot be understood beyond the bounds of his memory, which is itself limited to the context of the South Sea House that ties them together. Demonstrating the subjective nature of its account, "The South Sea House" outlines the hard limits placed upon interpersonal insight by the material circumstances surrounding a relationship. By

illustrating a fragmentary knowledge of his own friends, Elia prompts readers to contemplate their own contingent understanding of the enigmatic narrator.

Sara Lodge nicely sums up the results when she describes the essay as “a blatantly rhetorical exercise that advertises and revels in its unreliability” (189). For Lodge, by flaunting its inaccuracies and half-truths, the essay engages in a double play with authenticity. While the very nature of the personal essay establishes an earnest tone, drawing the reader into its confidence, Lamb’s playful teasing unsettles the reader’s complacency. For example, the opening lines of the “The South Sea House” help the reader identify with the author by establishing a common ground for its subject:

Reader, in thy passage from the Bank – where thou hast been receiving thy half-yearly dividends (supposing thou art a lean annuitant like myself) – to the Flower Pot... didst thou never observe a melancholy looking, handsome, brick and stone edifice, to the left – where Threadneedle street abuts upon Bishopsgate? (*WCML* 2: 1)

Along with helping the reader form an image of their hypothetical narrator, this initial description situates the South Sea House in relation to identifiable landmarks and presents it as a shared experience for fellow urbanites. From the outset, Elia addresses the reader on familiar terms, basing the proceeding narrative in a relevant, factual object. Yet, the resulting confidence is upturned at the conclusion of the essay, when Elia directly taunts his audience with its lack of certainty:

Reader, what if I have been playing with thee all this while – peradventure the very *names*, which I have summoned up before thee, are

fantastic – insubstantial – like Henry Pimpernel, and old John Naps of Greece: -

Be satisfied that something answering to them has had a being.

Their importance is from the past. (*WCML* 2: 7)

In these final lines of the essay, Elia drops all pretext and admits to his unreliability as a narrator. Reminding the reader that anything or everything could have been a fabrication, he calls into question the essay's nature as an intimate avowal. By doing so, he is not attempting to undercut the sentiment of the essay or the reader's engagement. After all, such artfully evoked familiarity is essential to the appeal of his writing. Rather, he is reminding the reader that such familiarity is ultimately a rhetorical effect of the text. At the same time, he demonstrates that the value of these character portraits does not rest in their factuality or their potential to distill some fundamental truth regarding their subjects. The reader's knowledge of these figures remains dependent upon the author's representation, as Elia indicates when he tells the reader they will need to "be satisfied something answering to them has had a being." At the same time, this admission informs the reader that these figures do exist independent from the text. Ultimately, the reader is left to dwell upon their uncertainty regarding these conjectural identities that are both comprised by and distinct from the text. By refusing to verify these figures in concrete terms, Elia reminds his readers that one's public identity is always a construct, separate from one's private identity; a fact especially relevant for authors.

Sociality, Spectacles, and Strangers

One year after Lamb wrote to Wordsworth to assert his preference for urban scenery over the mountains of the Lake District, he developed his description of London's charms into a short essay. Published anonymously in the *Morning Post*, "The Londoner" expands upon his professed attachment to the city's crowds. In the original letter, Lamb emphasizes the affective power of these city scenes, which appear to overwhelm him: "The wonder of these sights impels me into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fullness of joy at so much Life" (*LCML* 1: 267). In a similar passage, clearly adapted from the former, Lamb broadens the scope of this empathic connection:

Often, when I have felt a weariness or distaste at home, have I rushed out into her crowded Strand, and fed my humour, till tears have wetted my cheek for inutterable sympathies with the multitudinous moving picture, which she never fails to present at all hours, like the scenes of a shifting pantomime. (*WCML* 1: 39 - 40)

Once again, Lamb finds his emotions stirred by a city that appears to reach out and offer him succor. In addition to describing his emotional reaction, this passage indicates a deeper connection to the crowd as he shares in its blending sea of emotions. More than an independent response, his tears are part of a communal sensibility. In this manner, Lamb is contradicting London's reputation as a lonely, isolating place and attesting to a latent form of sympathy that exists amongst strangers in a crowd. This innate bond with the crowd is repeatedly reinforced as the narrator figures himself to be an emanation of the city itself: born at its epicenter, "where the conflux of the eastern and western inhabitants... meet and jostle," and "nursed amid her noise, her crowds, her beloved

smoke” (*WCML* 1: 39, 40). Such descriptions of organic interconnection are prominent throughout the essay. Just as prominent, however, are the essay’s references to theatrical illusions. Even as Lamb claims sympathy, his words render the crowd insubstantial. As a “moving picture” and “shifting pantomime,” the crowd takes on the two-dimensionality of a stage play, presenting only a delusive impression of substance (*WCML* 1: 40).

Correspondingly, the narrator takes on the role of the spectator, engaging with sights and sounds rather than actual people. In this sense, his claim to be “a speculative Lord Mayor of London” presents an especially convoluted example of Lamb’s ironic wordplay. His great compassion for the people of the city renders him a hypothetical mayor. Yet, just as his claim to mayor is speculative, his compassion for the people is a form of creative conjecture, not unlike the bond formed with a dramatic character. Moreover, his speculative compassion is the result of his own passion for spectating. Thus, “The Londoner” presents a paradoxical quandary that would later come to typify readers’ relationship with Elia: what does it mean to feel attachment to the spectacle of a stranger?

In order to address this question, it is necessary to consider the larger critical debate surrounding the theme of escapism in Lamb’s work. One could argue that Lamb’s willingness to indulge feelings based upon superficial impressions of strangers allows him to avoid more substantial interactions with the world around him. Such an argument would be consistent with Elia’s frequently insular focus upon nostalgic fantasies, prosaic diversions, and consumer indulgences. Indeed, Elia’s essays often present a retreat from the public world. “The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple” provides a strong example in which Lamb’s childhood memories of growing up in London’s Temple district, among the antique fountains and eccentric barristers, create a nostalgic cloister within the

surrounding city. Randel refers to the essay as recalling a golden period of prelapsarian innocence (57), while Frank notes that the appeal of the essay lies in its ability to create a world apart from present day reality, where “the Benchers, streets, buildings, and actual London settings are important because they have been hallowed by memories and imagination” (75). In *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer*, Monsman reads the Elian persona itself as a device that allows Lamb to indirectly address his fears and neuroses brought on by the trials of caring for his sister while avoiding “confessional candor” (27). These readings suggest that Lamb’s choice of mode and subject matter were intended to avoid direct contact with an unpleasant world.

More recently, critics have begun to examine how this insularity is affected by his position in the highly politicized world of the periodical press. For instance, Schoenfield asserts that the Elian essays’ inclusion in the discursive space of literary magazines ultimately imposed upon them a political significance that was not provided by their author. Pointing to the interplay between two essays published in the same issue of the *London Magazine*, Lamb’s “The Old and the New Schoolmasters” and Hazlitt’s “On Antiquity,” Schoenfield notes how each author’s meditation upon the past is inflected with lingering anxieties regarding the French Revolution. However, it is only by comparing Lamb’s work with Hazlitt’s more overt references to these anxieties that the reader becomes aware of the political undertones glossed over in the Elian episode. Hazlitt “unfolds the political dimension of Lamb’s essay, in a sense... against Lamb’s will” (“Voices” 268). Parker both builds upon and complicates Schoenfield’s point by arguing that it is this apolitical aspect of Lamb’s essays that appealed to John Scott, the editor of the *London Magazine*. Noting Scott’s history as a political moderate, Parker

asserts that Elia's "warm, domestic recollections" were incorporated into the magazine as a means of pacifying readers, so that "in Scott's hands the essays become soothing displacements" (42). Like Schoenfield, Parker implies that Lamb's writing only takes on a political dimension through the intervention of a peer. For Parker however, the only true political implication to be drawn from the Elia essays is their utter lack of political content. These readings not only uphold Lamb's critical reputation as an author whose reflections serve as a convenient escape from reality, they read this quality as his distinguishing contribution to the magazine, characterizing him as a passive counterpart to his more actively engaged peers.

While recurring themes of personal enclosures and quaint diversions do signal Lamb's preoccupation with the line dividing the private and the public, it would be reductive to interpret his essays as signaling a withdrawal from the latter. Rather than attempting to measure Lamb's concern with the wider world in terms of explicit commentary, this section will conclude by considering how his Elia depictions of subjecthood challenge overt approaches to social engagement. By figuring urban subjects as spectacles, provisionally mediated by the "shifting pantomime" of the surrounding city, Lamb forces readers to acknowledge the conditional nature of public identity. In doing so he discourages the reader from investing in essentialist models of representation and encourages more protracted contemplation of another's character. This quality of Lamb's writing takes on broader social significance when his focus turns to public figures encountered while moving through London.

"The Praise of Chimney Sweeps" consists of a number of affectionate anecdotes, mainly focusing on chimney sweep's innocent charm as a fixture of London street life.

The sweep's status as an aesthetic object is immediately established in the opening lines:

"I like to meet a sweep – understand me – not a grown sweeper – old chimney-sweepers are by no means attractive – but one of those tender novices, blooming through their first negritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek" (*WCML* 2: 108).

Elia's superficial enjoyment of the sweeps, along with his willful blindness towards the unsightly results of their lives of labour, typifies a distinctly urban form of blasé detachment commonly associated with Lamb's writing. Indeed, the essay is often cited as a prime example of Lamb's tendency to avoid confronting contentious issues. Judith Plotz claims "The Praise of Chimney Sweeps" contributes to a trend in Romantic literature for depicting children as idyllic symbols of innocence. Relating this trend to McGann's concept of the Romantic Ideology, Plotz emphasizes how figuring childhood as a time of natural purity ignores the material conditions actually affecting children (24). Thus, by allowing his imagination to present these young labourers as charming spectacles, Lamb is guilty of obscuring the children's suffering and becomes complicit in their exploitation. Various instances from the essay lend credence to Plotz's interpretation. It is worth noting that the young sweeps' aesthetic appeal is a result of their youthful vigour contrasting and outshining the "first negritude" of their labour, creating the pleasant impression that their spirits are not stained by their work. As the passage continues, Lamb describes how, "these almost clergy imps, who sport their cloth without assumption; and from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind" (*WCML* 2: 109). In addition to further emphasizing the purity of the children, as their humble station raises them above the adults on the street, their defining virtue becomes the modesty with which

they endure. Rather than serving as a call for active charity, the sweeps' suffering serves as a lesson in complacency. Elia's essay goes on to create an informed and endearing account of the lives of sweeps, but this smug, dispassionate tone is maintained throughout.

Although this nonchalant quality is undeniable, Plotz's interpretation is ultimately undermined by her willingness to accept Elia at face value. Pointing out how such readings "undervalue the potential for the dissent of irony," Simon Hull presents a counter reading of the essay, providing a rare defense of Lamb's capacity for astute social commentary (122). For Hull, "The Praise of Chimney Sweeps" is a satire written in the Swiftian tradition, intended to provoke readers with its shallow, callous attitude. Emphasizing the perceived cruelty of the urban populace, he plays with readers' expectations: "When an ostensibly more appropriate mood of pathos seems about to surface... Elia breaks off and provokingly returns to the superficial impressions created by outward appearance" (Hull 128). This ironic tone is frequently overlooked because its main thrust is intricately tied to contemporary views on the Poor Law and charity. As both pauperism and the cost of poor relief increased at the outset of the nineteenth century, the public became increasingly apathetic towards acts of charity beyond those required by taxation (Hull 123). In response to this apathy, philanthropic campaigns became more heavy-handed, emphasizing charity as a moral imperative and using the image of the poor chimney sweep to incite feelings of pity and guilt. Such activists included members of Lamb's circle, including the Quaker poet Bernard Barton and editor James Montgomery, who solicited Lamb to contribute to his political publication *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend and Climbing Boy's Album*. As Hull observes, Lamb's

inability to write a poem for the album (he instead offered Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper" from *Songs of Innocence* as a substitute) indicates "a sense of unease with the moral certitude of Montgomery's reformist project" (130). Lamb had reason to be uneasy. The forthright, didactic tone of such altruistic efforts painted the issue in broad strokes, representing the sweeps as miserable objects of charity and readers as guilt-ridden heels. Once again, Lamb's double-pronged irony results in a challengingly nuanced message. Although Lamb's detached stance towards the topic is intended to provoke readers, he ultimately endorses such casual concern for sweeps as a welcome alternative to more assertive altruism.

For Hull, Lamb is certainly taking a stance by presenting the simple acts of kindness described in "The Praise of Chimney Sweeps" as a more productive form of charity than the altruistic campaigns of his peers. More relevant to this study than the presence of a topical message, however, is Hull's observation that Lamb views this issue as a pressing question of representation. In response to the benevolent philanthropist's broad caricatures and moral hierarchies, Lamb's depiction of sweeps as puckish adventurers lends them a degree of dignity. Hull views this depiction as part of a leveling, carnivalesque tableau, where the laughter of a young sweep, directed at Elia as he falls on the street, places him on equal footing with the rest of London's citizens (133). This approach is nicely illustrated in the lengthy passage explaining the sweeps' love for *saloop*, a simple broth of milk, sugar and boiled sassafras. It is possible to interpret this passage as evidence supporting Plotz's argument. Elia's explanation of the mixture and speculations regarding its appeal for the young sweeps carries an air of detached observation. His description of the sweeps leaning over their bowls as "no less pleased

than those domestic animals – cats – when they purr over a new-found sprig of valerian” dehumanizes the sweep, casting his account in terms of a zoological study of a species’ habits (*WCML* 2: 110). Yet, a close reading of this passage reveals expressions of deference for the humble gruel, exposing the affected nature of his haughty voice. In true Elia fashion, the mixed signals conveyed by tone and content play with the reader’s sense of sincerity:

I have never yet adventured to dip my own particular lip in a basin of his commended ingredients – a cautious premonition to the olfactories constantly whispering to me, that my stomach must infallibly, with all due courtesy, decline it. Yet I have seen palates, otherwise not uninstructed in dietetical elegancies, sup it up with avidity. (*WCML* 2: 109)

The rather pretentious admission that his stomach is too sensitive for him to have tasted the broth is played up for comical effect by his absurd verbosity. Having led the reader to laugh at the tone’s pretention, his claim that respectable sources reportedly enjoy the saloop appears genuine. By the end of the passage, Elia frames the broth in wholly positive terms, figuring it as a cherished indulgence for the urban working class and a welcome treat to bestow upon a hungry sweep. Rather than belittle the subject’s simple pleasures, Elia helps the reader to understand their appeal and encourages their indulgence. In a recent article supporting Hull’s argument, Peter J. Newbon observes that, far from idealizing the sweep as Plotz asserts, Lamb embraces a Hogarthian aesthetic that does not shy away from depicting low subject matter, warts and all (26). Elia’s affectionate description of the sweeps’ mean pleasures and squalid conditions challenges activists’ mawkish, condescending characterizations and lends the essay its moral import.

Hull and Newbon effectively illustrate how a critical lack of context undermines Plotz's interpretation.

However, it is possible to complicate their respective readings by considering how, more than offering a contrasting perspective of its subjects, "The Praise of Chimney Sweeps" demonstrates the circumstantial basis of all such figurations. This aspect of the essay becomes apparent when we observe how rather than developing a focused portrait of the sweep, Elia provides a variety of anecdotal snapshots. In each of these cases, the sweep's character is mediated by his surroundings, which situates him in a new way in relation to the spectator. The essay begins with Elia describing his childhood impression of sweeps as figures of adventure, arising from chimneys as triumphant heroes, "the brandished weapon of his art victorious like some flag waved over a conquered citadel!" (*WCML* 2: 109). This fantastic image of the sweep as he appears in a child's imagination is placed in relief in a later passage, when the adult Elia comes to view the sweep eye-to-eye after slipping on the icy roads of Cheapside. Pointing and laughing at Elia's embarrassing fall, the sweep here becomes a figure of "joy, snatched out of desolation" as Elia admits that he cannot begrudge the child's mockery (*WCML* 2: 111). This anecdote is immediately followed by a second-hand account of a lost and tired chimney sweep that somehow found his way into a state-bed in Arundel Castle. Imagining the novel image of the young child's blackened head resting cherub-like upon the white pillows, Elia explains the scene as evidence of the sweep's inherent nobility. Additionally, this scene stands out as an especially affecting depiction of the sweep's innocence and vulnerability. Read in conjunction, these varying encounters create what Slavoj Žižek would term a parallax view in which the chimney sweep's changing significance is the result of Elia's

shifting vantage point. Viewed from below, by youths predisposed to gaze up at the world, the sweep is a champion, emerging in victory from chimneys. Gazed down upon as he rests in an aristocrat's bed, the sweep is an innocent whose natural purity transcends social rank. With each new angle, viewed against an ever-changing backdrop, the sweep proves to be a versatile figure, inspiring pity and respect. The resulting characterization of the sweep incorporates all of these observed qualities without being defined by any of them. Rather than capture the sweep's essence as a subject, the essay illustrates how, as a figure in the urban tapestry, he is understood as an object, a product of mediation.

In this sense, Lamb is providing more than what Hull terms a folkloric image of the sweep, intended to serve as a foil to more sentimental stereotypes. He is attempting to show how all attempts to assign identity to public figures are conjectures, informed more by the situation of the spectator than the quality of the spectacle. This observation is not intended to dismiss Hull's insightful explanation of Lamb's polemical critique. Rather, it attempts to expand on the implications of Hull's reading by indicating how such destabilizing contrasts are central to Lamb's accounts of modern society. Written nearly a century and a half before Guy Debord would articulate the interpenetration of cultural spectacle and social reality, Lamb's essay demonstrates the constitutive power of mediated images. Both earnest and knowingly contrived, his depiction of the sweep shows how "[t]he spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a real product of that reality [while] conversely, real life is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing it and aligning it and aligning itself with it" (Debord). Whereas Debord condemns this spectacle as a ubiquitous false narrative that deludes and pacifies the public, Lamb embraces its multivalent nature, acting as a guide for his reader.

Rather than simply expose the insubstantial nature of the sweep as spectacle, Lamb's essay offers a variety of enjoyable portraits, inviting the reader to consider the sweep from multiple angles. Understanding subjects in the public sphere is realized through this pleasure of spectating; it is enacted through the perpetual contemplation of the stranger, rather than the identification of some definitive instance. To form attachments to strangers is to feel "inutterable sympathies with the multitudinous moving picture" they present. These sympathies must remain, to some degree, unutterable insofar as their object remains indefinable. Nonetheless, as the essay's descriptions of passing acts of charity suggest, perpetual curiosity concerning a subject may prompt perpetual regard, whereas comprehension satisfies and curtails both as the subject's public identity becomes "adequacy to the thing it suppresses" (Adorno, *Negative* 148).

Like many hack authors of the period, Lamb's experiences within the writer's market varied widely. By the time he began writing as Elia, Lamb had already been censured as a romantic poet, flatly rejected as a satirical playwright, and celebrated as a scholar of Shakespeare. With each new mode of writing and each new creative partnership, he met a different reception. Accordingly, Lamb understood his voice to be as much a product of the conditions of its mediation as of authorial intent. As Elia, he experimented with the freedom that came with this knowledge, testing the readers' ability to know a textual subject.

Elia reflects the dual nature of periodicals: at once transient and enduring. There is something unmistakably personable about the tone of his essays, just as there is something reassuringly familiar about each new issue of a periodical. Yet, just as the periodical is rewritten each month in response to contemporary events, the enigmatic Elia

is “born again in future papers, in whatever place, and at whatever period, shall seem good unto him” (*CWCL* 121). During a period of accelerating proliferation of print media, Elia illustrates the polyvalent nature of public identities and public texts as they circulate throughout the press, reminding the readers that their perception of the textual subject is contingent upon its mediation.

While Lamb’s work for the *London Magazine* illustrates the inconstancy of the textual subject in public print, his works would go on to address more personal modes of writing. The next section of this chapter will consider how Lamb’s late series of album verses extend his view of mediated identity by examining the permeation of print culture into the private home.

## 2.2 Private and Public Mediation in *Album Verses*

In 1830, a young poet by the name of Edward Moxon founded his own publishing firm in New Bond Street, London. Moxon's press would eventually publish some of the most important collections of poetry of the mid-century, including Wordsworth's grand 1845 collection and the first edition of Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* Its first publication, however, was a less notable volume of poems by Charles Lamb entitled *Album Verses, with a few others*. Lamb agreed to publish the poems at the request of his close friend Moxon, who required an inaugural text to demonstrate the high quality of book binding his firm could produce. In the opening dedication to Moxon, Lamb makes reference of this motive in an apparent attempt to distance himself from his poetry: "I feel little interest in their publication," he writes. "They are simply – *Advertisement Verses*" (*WCML* 5: 304). Lamb's desire to discount his own poetry as "Trifles" of little relevance beyond their function as a marketing tool, published merely as a favour to a friend, may have been an earnest expression of disinterest. Long retired from the serious pursuit of poetry, Lamb introduces the volume to the reader as little more than a cobbled together collection of lesser works he just happened to have at hand. However, as the previous section has illustrated, the ever-dissembling Lamb is rarely so forthright in stating his opinion. Reference to his correspondence reveals that, as early as 1827, Lamb had expressed his intention to publish these works as part of an annual, indicating he had confidence in their commercial viability before Moxon had use for them (*LCML* 3: 120). Due to a wealth of conflicting evidence, it is difficult to determine Lamb's true regard for this publication with any certainty. This chapter will consider the possibility that, beyond Lamb's mixed feelings for the literary merit of albums, his decision to publish *Album Verses* was driven by a desire to experiment with different forms of mediation.

Before entering into greater detail regarding the poems themselves and their critical reception, it is necessary to outline the social function and cultural significance of albums. The publication's title, *Album Verses*, refers to the nine poems that open Lamb's collection, each of which was originally inscribed in a young lady's album. In the 1820s, the solicitation and composition of such poems were a popular practice. When debutantes from middle- or upper-class families reached maturity and began to enter into society, they would often be given albums as presents from older relations (Matthews 145).<sup>1</sup> Albums served a variety of purposes, but their functions can be divided into two primary categories. First, as a blank canvas, albums provided women with a creative outlet for practicing amateur watercolours and verse, as well as arranging collages from prints, found objects, and (later) photographs. In this regard, the album served as an important medium for female artists still struggling with limited agency in the public market (Di Bello 23).<sup>2</sup> Second, as a social text, the album served as a record of acquaintances. For a young woman who was just beginning to ease her way into an adult life of public interaction, having old and new friends contribute works or add their signatures to the album provided a reassuring sense of connection and stability to her widening social circle. Such autographs were typically supplied by personal acquaintances, but the contribution of a well-known poet was an especially coveted prize (Matthews 145). Thus, poets of varying repute in the 1820s and 30s were often asked to inscribe a short verse in the albums of young women. These young women could be the daughters, nieces, or students of the poet's friends and relatives, but they could also

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<sup>1</sup> While Matthews clearly states that albums were primarily identified with young women, this was not always the case. Citing the example of Mr. and Mrs. George Birkbeck's family album, Patrizia Di Bello explains that albums also served as shared texts, collectively owned and assembled by the entire family (29 – 30).

<sup>2</sup> Various scholars have examined this creative function and its influence. Tracing the roots of albums back to France in the eighteenth century, Anne Higonnet has shown how the amateur watercolours of aristocratic women facilitated the development of a distinct feminine aesthetic. Meanwhile, Patrizia Di Bello has shown how the collage works of Victorian women "used the realistic charge of photographs to give power to their fantasies and validate their experiences" (23).

be virtual strangers. Indeed, unsolicited requests from strangers were all too common and poets from this period often complained of the imposition.

Lamb was no exception. In 1827, shortly after moving with Mary to the neighbouring township of Enfield, he wrote to his friend and fellow poet Bernard Barton, venting his frustration with the persistence of such requests:

Adieu to Albums – for a great while, I said when I came here, and had not been fixed two days but my Landlord’s daughter ... requested me to write in her female friend’s, and in her own; [wherever] I go to thou art there also, O all pervading ALBUM! All over the Leeward Islands, in Newfoundland, and the Back Settlements, I understand there is no other reading. They haunt me. I die of Albo-phobia! (*LCML* 3: 148)

Such testimony is consistent with Lamb’s dismissive attitude towards these poems in his dedication and, as we will see, his irritation with the brazen nature of such requests often informs the resulting poems. His irritation with their ubiquity reflects a widespread unease and derision directed towards albums and their influence upon the taste and sensibility of young women.

According to Samantha Matthews, the popularity of albums was perceived as a threat to the authority of serious men of letters: “the majority of critics perceived annuals and albums as symptoms of and agents in a process of declining literary and intellectual seriousness, the inexorable feminizing and commercializing of poetry production and consumption” (146). By the 1820s, critics held an unprecedented degree of influence over the taste and the opinions of the reading public, but the remarkable success of critically derided annuals indicated a growing sector of the reading public that did not feel compelled to defer to the critical press. Albums presented a further challenge to the critics’ authority by providing young women with a private

space in which to define and compile their own personalized literary canon.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the critical press may have had ulterior motives in perpetuating the belief that young lady's albums were largely wasted on transcriptions and imitations of mawkish verse. William Jerdan draws upon this stigma in his review in the *Literary Gazette*, where he attacks Lamb outright for having the "egotism" to publish such poems: "What exaggerated notion must that man entertain of his talents, who believes their slightest efforts worthy of remembrance; one who keeps a copy of the verses he write in young ladies' albums, the proverbial receptacles of trash" (441). By categorically dismissing the work as not only inferior but wholly unsuited for preserving, collecting, and releasing for public consumption, Jerdan reinforces a binary between the professional domain of legitimate print literature and the domestic domain of amateur manuscripts. It is this critical bias that Lamb seeks to address when he prefaces his collection with the epithet "Trifles." Yet, his exact intentions in doing so remain uncertain. Does his statement of disinterest in the dedication indicate that he shared in Jerdan's critical elitism, or is it a defensive tactic, meant to preempt the critical drubbing he was sure to receive?

In her recent article, Matthews contends that Lamb decided to entitle the collection *Album Verses and a few others*, despite the fact that the majority of the volume consisted of other forms of verse, because he was actually courting this controversy (147). For Matthews, Lamb's decision to publish the collection was an attempt to engage in the debate surrounding the reading habits of female readers by demonstrating the craft of composing short, personalized verse. In part, Lamb's regard for album verse is made explicit in his defence of his work. In the initial aftermath to Jerdan's review, Leigh Hunt and Robert Southey jumped to Lamb's defence,

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<sup>3</sup> Insofar as albums share an association with commonplace books, blank volumes used by students and scholars to record and organize research, this application may be considered part of a traditional form of personalized critical response. David Allan explains that eighteenth-century readers frequently used their commonplace books to cite and respond to critics when recording their own responses to literature (117).

publishing vehement responses. Lamb appeared grateful but untroubled. In a letter to Southey, he expresses sincere affection for the poet's kind words but claims, "They found few scars to heal, for I was untouch'd" (*LCML* III: 293). His passivity would seem to indicate that, as stated in the dedication, he held little stake in the reception of the poems. However, as Matthews points out, Lamb eventually published his own response in an unsigned article for the *Englishman's Magazine*. In this article, Lamb describes how a skillful poet will rise above tired motifs to create a poem suited to a particular recipient, presenting album verse as a distinct form of literature and making "a serious claim for his own authority and skill in this ostensibly non-serious area of poetic activity" (Matthews 149). The mere fact that Lamb felt compelled to write a formalized response suggests he considered the poems to be more than trifles and took some pride in their production.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, his assertion that these poems should be enjoyed and assessed on their own terms presents a challenge to the overriding, qualitative judgments enacted by critics.

There is therefore reason to question the cynical tone of Lamb's dedication and to believe he undertook the publication of these verses as more than just a favour to a friend. It would be a step too far, however, to assert that Lamb intended to outright endorse albums as an ideal or even constructive medium for composing poetry and conveying personal sentiments. While Matthews is careful to note Lamb's continued reservations regarding the poetry found in annuals and albums in general, her study focuses on how Lamb utilizes the particular textuality of the album to collapse distinctions between author and reader, and to sustain private interpretations across print mediums. This chapter is greatly informed by Matthews' observations, but rather than focusing on the ways Lamb explores the intimate potential of album verse, I shall consider how he outlines its limitations. Discussing Matthews' reading of "What is an Album?" against the

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<sup>4</sup> To this evidence of Lamb's genuine displeasure with Jerdan's reviews we can add a rejected epigram discovered amongst his papers, lambasting the "block-heads" who read the *Literary Gazette* (*WCML* 5, 109).

context of other verses from the collection, I will examine how the more biting elements of these poems reflect Lamb's misgivings regarding albums as a medium of expression and a site of socialization. In doing so, my intention is not to prove that Lamb disapproved of albums. Rather than assert that Lamb was primarily interested in either promoting or critiquing album culture, this section views the publication of *Album Verses* as an experiment. These poems illustrate how Lamb's late writing continues to explore the pervasive influence of mediation upon textual meaning as it moves from the private realm of the manuscript poem to the public world of professional print. Whereas Elia allowed Lamb to play with public mediation, acting as a disembodied voice in the space created by authorial ambiguity and the suppositions of a mass readership, *Album Verses* sees Lamb examine the plasticity of meaning within a notably private medium.

#### Complying with the Age: Albums and Degrees of Familiarity

Lamb's mixed feelings towards albums can perhaps be best illustrated with another reference to his letters. In January of 1829, some time after writing to Barton regarding his Albophobia, he found occasion to repeat his anecdote in a letter to the poet Bryan Waller Procter. Again, Lamb colourfully describes his exasperation with the requests for autograph poems, figuring his move to Enfield as an attempt "to escape Albumeen persecution" (*LCML* 3: 200). Considering the object of this letter, however, Lamb's outspoken distaste carries an air of self-conscious bluster: he was writing to Procter to request just such a poem for the album of his adopted daughter, Emma Isola. Clearly uncomfortable harassing a fellow poet, Lamb describes his request as "the beggarliest of beggings" and assures Procter that he will be "seriously obliged by any refuse scrap" he can provide (*LCML* 3: 200). Just as he did in his dedication to Moxon,

Lamb represents album verse as a trivial task for the serious poet, one that should be satisfied with a minimum of effort. Lamb ends his request by resignedly claiming that the vogue of albums is a cross poets must bear, insofar as “the age is to be complied with” (*LCML* 3: 201). However, this nonchalance is less evident in a second letter to Procter, following a few days after the first, in which he thoroughly expands on his directions:

Don’t trouble yourself about the verses. Take ‘em coolly as they come. Any day between this and Midsummer will do. Ten lines the extreme. There is not mystery in my incognito. She has often seen you, though you may not have observed a silent brown girl, who for the last twelve years has run wild about our house in her Christmas holidays. She is Italian by name and extraction. Ten lines about the blue sky of her country will do, as it’s her foible to be proud of it. But they must not be over courtly or Lady-fied... Item, I have made her a tolerable Latinist. The verses should be moral too, as for a Clergyman’s family. She is called Emma Isola. (*LCML* 3: 202)

Lamb’s initial attempts to downplay the importance of his request are contradicted by the increasing specificity of the instructions. The careful attention paid to Emma’s tastes and character not only conveys a clear impression of Lamb’s affection for his young ward, it indicates his genuine concern that her poem be treated as more than an afterthought and follow the correct conventions.<sup>5</sup> As a personal exchange between the author and the subject, the poem

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<sup>5</sup> Both Charles and Mary Lamb cared greatly for Emma, whose presence in their household helped fill a desire for family that was never realized by the unmarried siblings. The depth of Charles’s affection is perhaps best illustrated in the poem he wrote for Emma’s album, “What is an Album?”, which shall be examined in the following sections.

demands a degree of familiarity. By providing Procter with the requisite details, Lamb's letter illustrates his concern with the conventions of writing proper album verse.<sup>6</sup>

The thematic characteristics of album poetry are derived from the format's particular textuality, as each act of inscription takes place against a particular social context. Such poems often involve an adult poet writing for a young woman, just entering into adult life. In such cases, the poet is expected to take on a paternal role, imparting encouraging words, protective regard, or sage advice throughout the poem. Such poems were often intended to mark social occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, or first encounters, in which case the situation prompting its composition tended to influence its content. In sharp contrast to the widely disseminated poetry found in print publications, an album verse is a unique manuscript contained within the exclusive bounds of the album. As such, the material conditions of the text itself entail a personal tone. Throughout his album verses, Lamb consistently adheres to these conventions, creating fond inscriptions characterized by clever instances of praise, advice, and solicitude. In these poems, one can observe Lamb's regard for the ideals of cordiality and sociability that motivate such requests.

A strong example of Lamb's proficiency in wielding these conventions is "In the Album of Lucy Barton," which was written in 1826 for the daughter of Lamb's friend, Bernard Barton. Taking the role of a guardian, Lamb presents the poem as a lesson regarding the proper care of a young woman's album and her morals. From the outset, he establishes a clear analogy between the two, as the condition of one's album is made to reflect one's state of mind:

Never disproportion'd scrawl;

Ugly blot, that's worse than all;

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<sup>6</sup> To some degree, this may be construed as concern for Procter. Well aware of the difficulty of writing an album verse with little to no knowledge of its subject, Lamb clearly wished to provide his peer with sufficient material. Nonetheless, his concern for his fellow poet and his concern for the quality of the poem are not mutually exclusive.

On thy maiden clearness fall

In each letter, here design'd,

Let the reader emblem'd find

Neatness of the owner's mind. (*WCML* 5: 44, 4 – 9)

Drawing a connection between the empty pages of the album, “clean as yet, and fair to sight,” and the virgin purity of the young woman, and between the encroaching blemish of ink and the influence of the larger world she is entering, Lamb is able to conflate cleanliness of one's penmanship and of one's principles. This passage nicely illustrates how the album could serve as both a means of regulating the young woman's burgeoning social life and as an outlet for paternal concern. As the album allows its owner to record her thoughts and track her acquaintances, maintaining the order and propriety of its content could help ensure the decorum of its owner. Continuing this metaphor, Lamb explains which texts are proper for recording in a young woman's album. The proscriptive implications of his fatherly advice intensify as he instructs her to focus on “Sayings fetch'd from sages old; / Laws which Holy Writ unfold” (*WCML* 5: 44, 13 – 14). Yet, these lines suddenly give way to a more lenient approach:

Lighter fancies not excluding;

Blameless wit, with nothing rude in,

Sometimes mildly interluding

Amid strains of graver measure:

Virtue's self hath oft her pleasure

In sweet Muses' groves of leisure. (*WCML* 5: 44, 16 – 21)

In contrast to the earlier passages, Lamb's allowance for wit and fancy alludes to his leniency towards the young Quaker's daughter. Coming from a friend of her father who was well known for his ironic wit and his descriptions of simple indulgences, the admission appears to wink at the severity of the preceding lines. In addition to its significance as a literary allusion to Hellenic texts, his suggestion that pleasure can be found "in sweet Muses' groves of leisure" could even be said to carry a transgressive note, acknowledging Lucy's burgeoning sexuality without censoring it.<sup>7</sup> Lamb's protective tone returns in the final passages, as the poem concludes by reaffirming that "Candid meanings, best express / Mind of quiet Quakeress" (*WCML* 5: 44, 27). Nonetheless, his ability to play the roles of both preacher and confidant in a single poem illustrates his insight into the album's function and appeal. His verses to Lucy mimic the album's manifold nature, secreting candid irreverence between the more conservative references to "whitest thoughts" that bookend the poem.

While Lamb's poem to Lucy may serve as a model of polite album etiquette, not every entry from *Album Verses* is as earnest. Different album verses entailed different degrees of familiarity and in many cases the connection between poet and subject was tenuous at best.<sup>8</sup> Such situations presented an added challenge for the poet commissioned to write a personal address and Lamb had no qualms alluding to this fact. For example, the sonnet "In the Album of Mrs. Jane Towers" sees Lamb undertake the task of describing a young woman whom he has never met. The poem begins, not by engaging in social niceties, but by foregrounding the awkwardness of the position he finds himself in. Unable to employ the finely attuned voice evident in his poem to Lucy, Lamb can only ask, "with what face / Address a face that ne'er to

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<sup>7</sup> The poem was originally written in 1824, at which time Lucy Barton was 16 years old.

<sup>8</sup> While "In the Album of Lucy Barton" stands as one of the more sincere examples of Lamb's album verse, there is reason to question Lamb's familiarity with its subject. In the letter to Bernard Barton in which Lamb originally transcribed the poem, he addressed Barton's daughter as Hannah, suggesting that while the two poets may have been good friends, he only had limited contact with the Barton family.

me was shown?" (*WCML* 5: 47, 3 – 4). At a loss as to how to proceed, he resorts to addressing her by proxy, praising her brother Charles Clarke, who *was* a personal acquaintance. His conjecture that, like her brother, she must be "Warm, laughter-loving, with a touch of madness, / Wild, glee-provoking, pouring oil of gladness / From frank heart without guile" provides the poem with the requisite gallantry (*WCML* 5: 47, 10 – 12). Nonetheless, his initial admission of ignorance renders the sentiment behind this personal dedication comically spurious and draws attention to the impersonal circumstances surrounding its composition. Considering Lamb's description of his Albophobia, his complaints of the ceaseless unsolicited requests for signatures, it seems natural to attribute a note of sarcasm to his candour. Lamb's ability to honour social etiquette while simultaneously exposing its absurdity is nicely illustrated in the poem's concluding lines: declaring that, even if she is nothing like her brother, "I will like thee for his sake," Lamb confirms Mrs. Towers' character to be ultimately immaterial to her poem's sentiments (*WCML* 5: 47, 14).

Even in this instance, when Lamb is at his most wry, the poem maintains an inclusive, playful tone intended to nurture the spirit of sociability behind the young woman's request.<sup>9</sup> As a typical example of Lamb's irony, the poem's sentiments can be read as both genuine and satiric. By extending his regard for the brother to encompass the sister, Lamb encourages the social branching out that albums could potentially foster. However, this illustrates two problematic aspects of the album's social function. The first is the central position held by the male relation that serves as the intermediary between poet and subject. As the poem's second quatrain signals

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<sup>9</sup> I would like to emphasize that Lamb's humour may well have been *inclusive*. While the poem carries a clear note of ridicule towards albums, it would be a mistake to assume that Lamb's jests were also made at the expense of the women requesting these poems or that Mrs. Jane Towers could not share in Lamb's quips at the foibles of albums. This shared humour is especially evident in his poem to Emma Isola.

the transition from addressing the sister to the brother, it becomes clear that the true subject of the poem is the male friendship between Lamb and Clarke:

Thy looks, tones, gestures, manners, and what not,

Conjecturing, I wander in the dark.

I know thee only Sister to Charles Clarke!

But at that name my cold Muse waxes hot. (*WCML* 5: 47, 5 – 8)

The rhyme scheme emphasizes the sharp contrast between Lamb's opening impartiality for Jane's "what not" and his closing regard for Clarke, which "waxes hot" and inspires the remainder of the poem. From this point forward, the poem is essentially dedicated to Clarke. In this particular case, the importance of male friendship is rendered explicit as it overpowers the role of the female subject. While the role of male friendship is less pronounced in other album verses, its influence can still be felt. It can be traced in the tacit influence that Lamb's regard for Bernard Barton has upon his poem for Lucy, who is figured primarily as the daughter of a Quaker throughout the poem, as well as the guidance Lamb provides Procter in his requests for Emma Isola's poem. The influence of male friendship upon the content and context of such poems raises questions regarding the album's empowering potential. The presence of the intermediary not only contradicts the supposed exclusivity joining poet and subject, it implies the owner's opportunities for social exploration through the collection of autographs may be curtailed by the existing male relationships that facilitate such exchanges.<sup>10</sup>

A second aspect of album verse exposed in "In the Album of Mrs. Jane Towers" is its tendency to perpetuate social pretense with potentially antisocial implications. As Lamb's strained efforts to draft a purely speculative sketch of Mrs. Tower's character make plain, the

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<sup>10</sup> To clarify, it is not my intention to dismiss or disprove the album's potential to serve as a means of social agency for young women during this period. Certainly not all interactions occasioned by albums took place under the influence of male guardians, as indicated by the many unsolicited requests sent to poets by complete strangers.

conventions of album verse required the poet to posit a familiarity that was often nonexistent. By asking, “How shall I find fit matter? with what face / Address a face that ne’er to me was shown?”, Lamb alludes to the artificial quality such poems assumed under normal conditions. Although it requires the poet to don a false face, Mrs. Tower’s request is not especially impersonal. Some degree of dissimulation was typical to such transactions. Rather, her request is awkward because Lamb finds himself unable to do so with his usual subtlety. Lamb’s solution of directly addressing this awkwardness allows him to shift focus away from Mrs. Tower to his own thoughts. As the closing reference to Clarke reminds the reader, “In the Album of Mrs. Jane Towers” is not grounded in Lamb’s regard for his friend’s sister, but his commitment to the attenuated social thread that joins them. In this sense, the poem actually highlights the prevailing distance separating the author from his subject, an issue that albums were supposed to help minimize. Far from constituting an intimate exchange, the text serves as a markedly tentative connection, capable of bringing together two individuals without necessarily having to bring them into direct contact. In this regard, the album poem may even pose a barrier to familiarity, insofar as the conjectural associations enacted by the collection and inscription of autographs serves as an alternative to developing actual acquaintances.

This concern is more acutely addressed in another of Lamb’s album verses. “In the Autograph Book of Mrs. Sergeant W\_\_\_” presents a subtle example of how Lamb can accentuate his detachment from the subject, even as he affects a familiar tone. The poem focuses upon Mrs. Sergeant W’s love of autographs and the author’s gracious but impractical desire to fill her book with the signatures of “Knights and Squires of old, and courtly Dames, / Kings, Emperors and Popes.” Once again, the explicit courtesy of his wish can be taken at face value, but there is also a clear ironic edge to this fantastic indulgence. As Lamb goes on to detail his

inability to supply the scrawls of classic chivalric figures such as Rosamund Clifford, he identifies the woman's desire for exciting autographs with an infantilizing romanticism. Rather than acting as a gateway into the public sphere, the search for signatures has led to a regressive form of escapism. His final lines express his hesitancy to commit his own name to her album as humble self-deprecation. He "wants the courage to subscribe [his] own name" because it is a poor substitution for such romantic figures. More than just a statement of modesty however, this closing line indicates Lamb's apprehension of being turned into such a stock romantic figure. In requesting Lamb's signature, Mrs. Sergeant W. is not seeking to foster a meaningful social bond. Rather, her request objectifies Lamb, transforming him into one of the fictive figures of the poem he so deftly distances himself from. The personal act of the individual's hand-written words is drained of any real intimacy, rendering the signatory a remote abstraction. In this case, the text of the album verse still serves as a connective body for author and reader, but now more than ever it forms a barrier to meaningful contact.

Thus, while Lamb's careful attention to the conventions of album verse indicates his regard for the mode, the resulting poems often convey a note of criticism directed at young women making impersonal requests for personalized verse. That being said, it is important to note that while the act of signing an album was thought to signify a private gesture, the album itself was rarely intended to be an entirely private text. In her study of album culture, Patrizia Di Bello makes an important distinction between albums and diaries, describing the former as occupying "an ambiguous space, both domestic and private (the home) and partially in the public domain" (42). Shared with visitors in the drawing room of a home, the album "publicizes the interiority of the woman of the house by making it visible" to select acquaintances entering into the family's private world (41). The careful selection and arrangement of images and verse, both

collected and original, act as a personal expression of the collector to a semi-exclusive audience. In this sense, the album also presented a very self-conscious image of the owner's gentility and refinement. Originally an aristocratic practice, the increasingly wealthy middle-classes began keeping albums in an attempt to validate their social rank (Di Bello 33). To display a tastefully compiled album, with a fashionable collection of images and contributions from important poets, was to make a publicly inflected statement. Rather than acting as a highly intimate text, the album served to mediate between the fluctuating borders of the private and the public. In this context, Lamb's gentle barbs should not be seen as directed solely at the young women, whose desire to fill their albums are also "complying with the age." Instead, his jests address album culture itself, particularly this custom of setting forth a public image as a simulacrum of one's private identity. For the former Elia, an author who delighted in demonstrating the inconstant nature of public identity, this trend must have appeared rather gauche, if not disturbingly naïve. After all, where the Elia essays taught the reader to accept uncertainty and prolong contemplation of the unfamiliar subject, the album attempts to halt uncertainty by presenting the curious reader with a fixed portrait, "framed to pattern, so stiff, and so dainty" (*WCML* 5: 92, 16). This last line is taken from Lamb's "What is an Album?," the poem that most explicitly conveys both his regard for and aversion to the social function of albums. Examining how this poem outlines the proper application of album verse will help contextualize his genuine interest in the medium and his decision to publish his collected verses.

#### "What is an Album?"

Given his unique sense of irony, it seems appropriate that Lamb's most explicit criticism of albums appears in what is likely his most heartfelt piece of album verse. Excluded from

publication in the 1830 collection, “What is an Album?” was originally written for Charles and Mary’s foster child, Emma Isola.<sup>11</sup> During a trip to Cambridge in 1820, the Lambs met Emma, a young girl of 11 living with her ill-tempered aunt. As a favour to both the young girl and her aunt, they invited her to stay with them during the holidays (Burton 316). Emma would continue to spend her holidays with the Lambs over the following years and, upon the death of her father in 1823, the Lambs took it upon themselves to fund her education. Emma became a fixture in their lives, spending an entire year living with them in 1828 as they trained her for work as a governess. The aging pair of childless siblings welcomed her youthful presence in their household. As noted earlier, Lamb’s doting description of Emma to Procter gives a clear example of his affectionate attention towards her.<sup>12</sup> This affection informs the sentiments and concerns underlining “What is an Album?,” which stands as the strongest example of Lamb using albums as a medium for an intimate exchange.

That being said, these sentiments lurk at the heart of a poem that presents itself as an comically acerbic send up of albums. The opening stanza, which comprises the first three-quarters of the poem, contains a high number of quips, so I will quote it at length here:

’Tis a Book kept by modern Young Ladies for show,  
Of which their plain grandmothers nothing did know.  
’Tis a medley of scraps, fine verse, and fine prose,  
And some things not very like either, God knows.

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<sup>11</sup> According to Lamb’s letter to Moxon, the poem was left out of the collection due to Emma’s objections to it being published (LCML 3, 156). The exact reason for her objections is not stated.

<sup>12</sup> The full extent of Lamb’s affection is subject to debate. The possibility that Lamb developed a romantic attraction towards Emma in her later years with them has been asserted and refuted by various scholars for decades. Sarah Burton provides a useful synopsis of the respective arguments in her biography of Charles and Mary. Burton concludes that Lamb’s true feelings will never be determined, as it is extremely unlikely that he would have ever committed such scandalous sentiments to writing. For the purposes of this dissertation, I shall avoid speculation and limit my discussion to the sentiments expressed in “What is an Album?”

The soft First Effusions of Beaux and of Belles,  
 Of future LORD BYRONS, and sweet L. E. L.'s;  
 Where wise folk and simple both equally shine,  
 And you write your nonsense, that I may write mine.  
 Stick in a fine landscape, to make a display,  
 A flower-piece, a foreground, all tinted so gay,  
 As NATURE herself (could she see them) would strike  
 With envy, to think that she ne'er did the like:  
 And since some LAVATERS, with head-pieces comical,  
 Have pronounced people's hands to be physiognomical,  
 Be sure that you stuff it with AUTOGRAPHS plenty,  
 All framed to pattern, so stiff, and so dainty.  
 They no more resemble folks' every-day writing,  
 Than lines penn'd with pains do extemp'rel enditing;  
 Or the natural countenance (pardon the stricture)  
 The faces we make when we sit for our picture. (*WCML* 5: 92, 1 – 20)

Across these twenty lines of verse, Lamb finds opportunity to mock nearly every aspect of album culture. His description of the album's collected verse as "a medley of scraps" of inconsistent quality establishes his dismissive tone towards the supposed taste of the young collectors. The following description of original verse as the amateur efforts "Of Future LORD BYRONS, and sweet L. E. L.'s" is no less derisive, considering Lamb's low opinion of these poets.<sup>13</sup> By

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<sup>13</sup> In a letter to Joseph Cottle, Lamb shares his low opinion of Byron: "I have a thorough aversion to his character, and a very moderate admiration of his genius - he is great in so little a way - To be a Poet is to be The Man, the Whole Man - not a petty portion of occasional low passion worked up into a permanent form of Humanity" (*LCML*

identifying the “modern Young Ladies” with what he felt to be the shallow appeal of popular poets of sensibility, Lamb charges them with a lack of refinement. As Matthews points out, the passage implies that “there is too much concern for appearance and surface, so the suspicion of pretension and hypocrisy affects the whole” (151). This lack of depth is further emphasized in the description of the landscape collages composed of pressed flowers and watercolours. Lamb’s remark that Nature herself would wish to emulate such beauty is of course a ridiculous exaggeration, yet this flattery nicely describes the young artist’s desire to embellish upon reality.

In the closing lines of this stanza, Lamb’s insinuation that albums cultivate superficial taste is joined with his concern, identified in the previous section, that the album signature transforms the signer into a hollow abstraction. Figuring autographs as an exercise in physiognomy, the art of judging inner character based upon outer appearance, Lamb alludes to their hollow nature. There is something disingenuous about these contributions that “no more resemble folks every-day writing, / Than lines penn’d with pains do extemp’rel enditing.” The significance of such autographs does not lie in their literal meaning as expressions of personal sentiment. Rather, they convey meaning visually, as carefully arranged emblems constituting the façade of the owner’s social relations. Likened to the self-conscious posing of subjects in portraiture art, albums form part of a middle-class material culture that had grown greatly concerned with the outward trappings of rank. By citing the mistaken physiognomical value of autographs as the primary motivation for “stuffing” albums full of them, Lamb implies the entire social endeavour is fundamentally misguided.

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2, 279). The emphasis placed upon Byron’s “occasional low passions” indicates Lamb’s distaste for the popular appeal of histrionic verse imitated by young poets.

Lamb’s friend Thomas Allsop recounts a dinner party discussion during which Lamb expressed his feelings regarding female poets and Letitia Elizabeth Landon in particular: “If she belonged to me I would lock her up and feed her on bread and water till she left off writing poetry. A female poet, or female author of any kind, ranks below an actress I think” (Lucas 433). While such extemporaneous remarks may have been exaggerated for the sake of humour, this general disapproval of young, ambitious poetesses clearly colours his album verses.

Thus, Lamb's poem to Emma provides a thorough account of his distaste for albums. Nonetheless, a thorough reading reveals that, beyond its flippant tone, the poem constitutes an affectionate exchange between the poet and his adopted daughter. In her interpretation of the poem, Matthews reveals how Lamb leverages the album's potential as a medium for personal expression. Matthews raises two compelling observations in the process. First, despite his cynical treatment of albums' social function, in his poem to Emma he ultimately figures the album itself as a shared text capable of cementing the relation between poet and owner. This is principally expressed in the poem's second, shorter stanza, in which Lamb addresses Emma directly:

Thus you have, dearest EMMA, an ALBUM complete –  
Which may *you* live to finish, and *I* live to see't;  
And, since you began it for innocent ends,  
May it swell, and grow bigger each day with new friends,  
Who shall set down kind names, as a token and test,  
As I my poor *autograph* sign with the rest. (*WCML* 5: 92, 21 – 26)

In this passage we find many of the tropes of album verse seen in Lamb's poem to Lucy Barton: the analogies of the empty album representing the young girl's purity and the filling of the album as her imminent accumulation of experiences. In this context, Lamb's wish that her album will swell and grow large serves as a metaphor for pregnancy, wishing Emma future happiness as she reaches the age to marry and begin a family of her own. However, as Matthews explains, Lamb's allusions to his own mortality give these sentiments a rather morbid undertone: "extending [the metaphor] to the album as a memento mori dramatizes Lamb's reluctance to face the probability that Emma (then aged 19) would outlive him (aged 57)" (152). His hopes for her future conflict

with his fear of being replaced by a husband, as well as the new friends whose names will fill her album. In the final lines, it is the album that provides solace, as Lamb's initial autograph promises to stand as a lasting reminder of their lives together.

Therefore, despite Lamb's disparaging description, the album proves capable of conveying and preserving intimate feelings. This function is made possible by the album's enduring presence as a material text. His "poor autograph" may be an inadequate substitute for his actual presence, but so long as Emma holds on to the album, she will retain a piece of his affection. Moreover, the album's status as a shared object, passed between Lamb and Emma, allows it to serve as an outlet for creative interaction. Matthews notes how Lamb's interest in the album as a shared text informs the first stanza of the poem. Lamb's description of the album as a text "Where wise folk and simple alike do combine, / And you write *your* nonsense, that I may write *mine*" counteracts his judgemental tone regarding the owner's "First Effusions." Set apart from the public standards of taste enforced in the print market, the album provides a space where existing hierarchies between the young amateur and the wise adult no longer apply. As Matthews explains, the equivocation of their respective writing as nonsense allows for "a reciprocal exchange, a mutual dropping of reservations and dignities which conforms to the affective ethos of album verses" (152). Thus, Lamb reveals the true connective function of the album to be the joining of two writers in an open interchange, unaffected by concerns of rank and sophistication. This notion stands in sharp contrast to Lamb's censorious reflections upon the alienating practice of autograph collection. Whereas the relation between the poet and the unfamiliar fan is shaped by public influence, by concerns of taste and reputation, as mutual authors contributing to a

manuscript, the poet and owner may experience a creative commingling that remains uninhibited by such strictures.<sup>14</sup>

Matthews' second observation concerns Lamb's careful deployment of this poem in different media. While Lamb did not include "What is an Album?" in his 1830 collection, he would often quote excerpts from it in varying contexts, including the collection's dedication, his anonymous defence of albums in *Englishman's Magazine*, and numerous letters. These excerpts often left out key passages, such as the poem's sentimental conclusion, effectively altering the poem's meaning. Thus, in his article in the *Englishman's Magazine* he includes only the opening stanza to illustrate that he is "no friend to albums" (*LCML*, 1: 396). Matthews observes how such selective editing allowed Lamb to maintain the exclusive status of the original version, permitting only the privileged few readers familiar with the manuscript to appreciate the broader significance of such excerpts (151 – 152). Nonetheless, it is important to note that the alterations that resulted when transplanting his album verses from manuscript to print did not always privilege the original, private reader. This certainly does not seem to have been Lamb's primary concern when he decided to present the opening nine poems of *Album Verses* to a print readership. The concluding section of this chapter will examine how these poems take on a new significance when read in conjunction with this public context. As a result, it will challenge the

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<sup>14</sup> This preference could be seen as evidence linking Lamb to contemporary concerns regarding the negative influence of albums upon the middle-class. Criticism regarding the modish obsession with collecting art and autographs led to "anxieties about women's neglect of their domestic duties" (Di Bello 38). Di Bello notes that the creative aspects of album culture served as a defence against such charges: "Making, decorating and arranging beautiful objects, drawing in albums, cutting out frames for prints, or copying verses in beautiful calligraphy, sheltered women from the charge of an extravagant and potentially corrupting interest in purely commercialized forms of culture" (40).

Thus, Lamb's anxiety regarding albums as an outlet for collecting may reflect a conservative resistance to the market's influence upon young women. However, such a hypothesis is contradicted by the fact that Lamb often espoused the pleasures of indulging in consumer culture. For example, Karen Fang effectively shows how Elia's "capacity for aesthetic delight" when purchasing a new teacup in the essay "Old China" is indicative of a new, unencumbered consumer ethic (819 – 820).

Similar to other aspects of his commentary upon album culture, it seems most reasonable to conclude that Lamb held a mixed view of the consumption of collectibles. That is to say, his desires to indulge and censure such habits were not mutually exclusive.

dichotomy by which Matthews views Lamb as drawn between the sincerity of the manuscript and the regularity of print (153 – 154). The publication of *Album Verses, with a few others* served a number of purposes: it was a commercial endeavour, a favour to Moxon, and a showcase for Lamb to demonstrate the art of composing album verse. However, by recasting these works in a new medium, the collection also provided an opportunity for Lamb to extend his commentary upon album culture and popular reading/writing habits in general.

### Publication, Mediation, and Meaning

The transition of the poems from ladies' albums to the premier publication of Moxon's new press presents a dramatic change in context. In manuscript form, each poem is designed as a personal address to a singular reader. Its exclusive status as a unique poem, written by hand and distributed at the owner's discretion, is reflected in its idiosyncratic content, shaped by the particular relation between poet and the album's owner. As such it represents a markedly private text, but one that exists in sensitive relation to the public world of print culture. As noted earlier, the album is shared in the social enclosure of the family drawing room, sitting upon the threshold of private and public spheres. While the album shields the author from the scrutiny of a critical public, creating a space "where wise folk and simple both equally shine," its content is nonetheless influenced by the public standards of taste it frequently emulates. By contrast, once collected and printed as *Album Verses*, the poems are aimed directly at that public. Within this new context, the poems lose both their unique status and their particular meaning, as private allusions are lost upon an unfamiliar mass readership. The change in connotative meaning is accompanied by a change in modality as the poems come to serve, in Lamb's own words, as advertisements, intended to draw the public's attention to Moxon's new imprint. This represents

a radical reversal in how the poems address their readers, shifting from a confidential exchange skirting public regard to a promotional broadcast intended to attract it. Lamb's sensitivity to this shift is illustrated in his framing of the collection and his lax attitude regarding its reception.

The opening section of this chapter considered two possible interpretations of Lamb's reaction to Jerdan's scathing review. In the first, his dismissive description of the poems as "Trifles" and his claim of being "untouch'd" by the harsh review indicate his genuine indifference to the collection of spare poems he had quickly assembled for a friend. In the second, this indifference represents a bluff, diverting attention from the genuine investment in the poems that Lamb would express in his anonymous rebuttals. However, a third explanation exists that accounts for both possibilities: Lamb was indifferent to any critic's opinions regarding the poems' quality because the critics were intended to experience the poems as printed advertisements. Their reactions had no bearing upon the merit of the poems as they were originally written because, insofar as textual meaning is a product of mediation, the transition to print rendered them wholly separate texts. In this regard, Jerdan's insults could not touch Lamb or the poems because his criticism could not speak to their value as album verse. Meanwhile, as advertisements, the poems benefitted greatly from Jerdan's attention. His invective-laden review and the subsequent responses from Southey and Hunt generated publicity for Moxon's press in multiple periodicals. Jerdan's review even closed by admitting "it is but justice to remark on the neat manner in which they are produced: the title is especially pretty" (442). As a ploy to attract public attention, the decision to publish controversially trivial pieces was a great success, lending weight to Matthews' assertion that Lamb intentionally courted controversy by titling the volume *Album Verses*. Lamb's passive attitude regarding the critical reputation of his work speaks to his ability to dissociate two separately mediated instances of a single text.

This is not to say that Lamb was indifferent to the public reception of the collection. His anonymous article in the *London Gazette* is evidence of his desire to defend these poems. By asking, “where was the harm, if Mr. L. first taught us how [album verses] might be best, and most characteristically written,” Lamb prompts the reader to read over his poems with a distinguishing eye (*WCML* 1: 396). This effort to justify his work to the reading public would seem to contradict his indifference towards critics, but these stances are hardly irreconcilable. Like many of his contemporaries, Lamb is more than willing to discount the relevance of the critical press while still investing in the public reception of his work. Moreover, I would assert that his ability to do so in this case is further evidence of his inclination to draw distinctions in a text’s meaning based upon the particular conditions mediating its reception. While both the critic and the consumer experience the poems in the form of a printed volume, their situations are markedly different. As an intrinsic component of the print industry, one that plays a key role in shaping standards of taste, the critical press manifests the exact form of public scrutiny albums are meant to deflect. Incapable of reading the volume independent of this public function, the critic is denied relevancy. The average consumer, however, occupies a middle ground between the critic’s impersonal scrutiny and the album owner’s highly personal understanding. As such, his or her reception would be distinct from either. It is this third reading that Lamb was curious to elicit by printing the poems in *Album Verses and a few others*, where the individual poems could be read in conjunction.

The shift from manuscript to print brought about the transition of the nine poems from isolated works into a series joined under a common header. Poetic collections that display “intelligible sequentiality and continuousness” in their ordering may be said to constitute what Earl Miner describes as a narrative without a plot (26). Such a narrative arises in the opening

section of *Album Verses*, presenting the public with a distinct reading experience and casting many of Lamb's well-mannered lines in a new light. The public reader's comprehension of the individual poems is limited by a lack of familiarity with the subjects that renders private references indecipherable.<sup>15</sup> Instead, the print volume allows the reader to detect the recurring devices and thematic patterns that join the poems together. For example, Lamb's cautionary advice to Lucy Barton regarding the proper maintenance of an album and its impact upon the morals of the owner echo the volume's opening poem, "In The Album of a Clergyman's Lady." In this poem, Lamb's initial description of an album as "a Garden, not for show / Planted, but use; where wholesome herbs should grow" serves as a touchstone for the entire section (*WCML* 5: 43, 1 – 2). By leading with a poem in which he confirms the proper application of an album for a mature woman identified in the title by her respectable station, Lamb establishes a moral precedence that colours the following poems to young maidens. When reading his didactic poem to Lucy Barton, Lamb's warnings against gilded margins and dark riddles take on the added weight of edicts appropriate to a clergyman's lady. While the leading position of "In The Album of a Clergyman's Lady" speaks to its priority within the collection, it is not immune to the amending influence of its companion pieces. As the reader advances through the collection, the teasing, flattering tone of the later poems calls into question the first's earnest descriptions of the album as "A Chapel, where mere ornamental things / Are pure as crowns of saints, or angels' wings" (*WCML* 5: 43, 5 – 6). Both "Lucy Barton" and "Clergyman's Lady" are affected by the other's presence, prompting the public reader to examine the poems not as singular sentiments but as variations on a motif.

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<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that these limitations continue to apply to modern readers. While Lamb scholars can claim some knowledge of Lucy Barton and Emma Isola, Lamb's relationships with the majority of the women who commissioned these poems is largely unknown.

Indeed, variations upon a number of themes discussed thus far can be seen throughout the collection, frequently emphasized by the order of the poems. “In the Album of Mrs. Jane Towers,” in which Lamb reflects on the difficulty of complimenting a stranger, is preceded by “In the Album of Miss Daubeney,” another poem dedicated to a young woman he has never met, this one a friend of Emma Isola. Again, Lamb tactfully pieces together compliments based on what little evidence he has available (her name, her album, her love of Emma). “In The Album of a French Teacher” sees Lamb adopt a posture of humble apology similar to “In The Autograph Book of Mrs. Sergeant W\_\_\_,” except that he now regrets a lack of French lyricism rather than chivalric autographs. Meanwhile, the poem to Lucy Barton is immediately followed by “In the Album of Miss \_\_\_,” which sees Lamb resume the didactic tone of the doting elder. In this latter poem, he shrewdly presents a lesson on modesty couched in praise: “But stop, rash verse! And don’t abuse / A bashful Maiden’s ear with news / Of her own virtues. She’ll refuse / Praise sung so loudly” (*LCML* 5: 45, 9 – 12). As with the former poem, Lamb blends indulgence with propriety, flattering the pure maiden even as he warns against albums’ tendency to encourage vanity. In each case, the juxtaposition between poems greatly alters the reading experience from their original context. The presence of the similar poem dispels the spontaneity and singularity central to album verse, revealing the supposedly tailored poems to be crafted with replicable techniques.

While this juxtaposition diminishes each poem’s unique status, it does not render them homogenous. It is important to note that each poem remains distinct, as Lamb wields these techniques to varying effect. Thus, even though Lamb’s poem for Miss Daubeney mimics “In The Album of Mrs. Jane Towers” insofar as his praise for the subject is grounded in his relationship

to the intermediary, its tone is quite different. This is perhaps most evident in the poem's closing passage:

Thus far I have taken on believing;  
 But well I know without deceiving,  
 That in her heart she keeps alive still  
 Old school-day liking, which survive still  
 In spite of absence - worldly coldness -  
 And thereon can my Muse take boldness  
 To crown her other praises three  
 With praise of - *friendly* Daubeny. (*LCML* 5: 46, 25 – 32)

Whereas the focus of Lamb's poem to Mrs. Jane Towers shifts to his own friendship with Charles Clarke, here the subject is Emma's attachment to Daubeny, which remains so evident that it allows the poet to shift from a speculative tone to a certain one. While the former poem emphasizes the strained nature of the poet's connection to the subject, the latter focuses upon the young women's enduring friendship.

By aligning these poems so as to emphasize their similarities, Lamb demonstrates for his readers the imitable techniques that can be utilized in their composition. As he would later state in the *Englishman's Magazine*, he is effectively teaching the public how to write album verse. This rote approach seems to further contradict the notion that these were deeply personal, extemporal poems. Yet, in that same article, he defines the essential quality of such poems to be "that they are not vague verses—to the Moon, or to the Nightingale—that will fit any place—but strictly appropriate to the person that they were intended to gratify; or to the species of chronicle which they were destined to be recorded in" (*WCML* 1: 395). As the poems to Daubeny and

Towers nicely illustrate, album verse could follow patterns and abide conventions while still serving as personalized messages. Indeed, Lamb's call for "strictly appropriate" verse posits this duality as the poet's principal task, and it is this duality that Lamb reveals to the reader by collecting the poems. In their print incarnation, the poems' appeal rests not in their sentimental import, but in the poet's versatility in adapting each new social situation to the album's modal conventions. After the manuscript and the advertisement, the poems take on a third function as a demonstration of social etiquette and literary proficiency.

Lamb's decision was therefore motivated by a desire to breathe new life into these poems, to see how remediating them for a new audience could produce new meaning. I concur with Matthews' conclusion that, in doing so, Lamb prompts his readers to reconsider the album's potential as a literary medium. However, his advocacy carries with it a critical subtext. Lamb's censure of album culture, noted earlier in the individual poems, is accentuated through the act of publication. By teasing out the conflation of private sentiments with public image enacted by albums, these poems question the static notion of subjecthood they foster. How better to remind readers that these poems are public constructs, that their meaning is contingent rather than essential, than to expose them to the public's gaze? Recast as products within the larger print culture that incited their commission, the poems cannot maintain the fixed state they assume within the bounds of the private album.

Lamb's concern regarding the representative logic of albums is rendered explicit through a final significant change brought about by the collection's publication: the addition of an autobiographical poem at the conclusion of the series. "In My Own Album," the ninth poem in the opening section of *Album Verses*, is the only one that was not originally composed for a

female acquaintance. Instead, it is a poem in which Lamb uses the metaphor of the album's virginal purity to reflect upon the failures and difficulties of his own life:

Fresh clad from heaven in robes of white,  
A young probationer of light,  
Thou wert my soul, an Album bright,

A spotless leaf; but thought, and care,  
And friend and foe, in foul or fair,  
Have "written strange defeatures" there;

And Time with heaviest hand of all,  
Like that fierce writing on the wall,  
Hath stamp'd sad dates - he can't recal;

And error gilding worst designs -  
Like speckled snake that strays and shines -  
Betrays his path by crooked lines;

And vice hath left his ugly blot;  
And good resolves, a moment hot,  
Fairly began - but finished not;

And fruitless, late remorse doth trace -

Like Hebrew lore a backward pace -  
 Her irrecoverable race.

Disjointed numbers; sense unknit;  
 Huge reams of folly, shreds of wit;  
 Compose the mingled mass of it.

My scalded eyes no longer brook  
 Upon this ink-blurr'd thing to look -  
 Go, shut the leaves, and clasp the book. (*WCML* 5, 47 – 48)

The poem's remarkably dark tone creates a striking contrast to the good natured advice and praise of the previous poems. The portrait of Lamb in his declining years, reflecting on a messy life of soured relations and failed projects, adds a final emphasis to his advice to young Lucy that she maintain an orderly album (and accordingly an orderly life). In addition to lending a cynical edge to the collection, the poem's central conceit of a life too complex to be recorded contradicts the positivistic model of identity acted out in albums and practiced by Lamb's Lake School peers. Whereas Wordsworth figures poetry as the product of the poet's experiences, going so far as to describe his oeuvre as a cohesive monument founded upon his autobiographical *Prelude*, in Lamb's aborted attempt at autobiography the poet's experiences only obscure the tale. Far from generating physiognomic lines, they manifest as blots and scribbles. Rather than creating a finely structured work, the poem is so confused that one hardly knows if it is to be read forwards or "Like Hebrew lore a backward pace." In the end, instead of rendering the poet's life legible to the curious reader, the text figures the poet as a closed book.

The poem's self-deprecating tone suggests Lamb is describing his own inability to make sense of his life, rather than asserting the impossibility of self-reflective writing in general. Indeed, Lamb greatly admired Wordsworth's ability to render his memories in verse. Nonetheless, "In My Own Album" does convey a broader commentary upon this mode of writing, specifically as it applies to the isolated author. Accepting that Lamb understood textual meaning to be a product of mediation, dependent upon the situation and conditions of its reception by the reader, it is only natural that an entirely private poem should prove meaningless. For Lamb, whose work was always shaped by surrounding agents, be they his friends from Christ's Hospitals, his peers in the *London Magazine*, or the petitioners of his album verse, the concept of the solitary poet is a contradiction in terms. Much like that of Wordsworth, Lamb's approach to representing subjects and the communicative function of the text were informed by his experiences in the marketplace. As a writer who consistently experienced agency through a network, who encouraged his readers to reexamine subjects in new lights, Lamb was skeptical of the album's appeal as a private refuge, accommodating truly intimate exchanges between author and reader. Rather than treat album verse as an innately personal literary form, he outlined the influence of the larger print culture upon such exchanges.

Whereas Elia's essays present public identity as a product of mediation, Lamb's album verses extend this notion into the private sphere. These poems demonstrate that textual representation was not just a concern for published authors. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the ubiquity of print media meant that identity was increasingly mediated via text, whether it was between intimates in a drawing room or between strangers in London's crowded strand. For Wordsworth, the writer's market served as a way of reaching beyond the circle of friends and family who read his manuscripts, to address a distinctly public readership. In doing

so, he sought to preserve the fidelity of textual meaning as initially determined in the context of his more intimate audience. According to his critical prose, the meaning of a given poem did not change between public print and private manuscript. The only difference was the increased risk that meaning be remediated and misinterpreted by the public. By contrast, Lamb was an author who experienced the market as a range of modes and collaborations, and who appreciated the myriad factors that can mediate textual meaning in both private and public. For Lamb, meaning is not embedded within a text for the reader to recover. He understood that a few lines of verse possess one meaning amongst the autographs and watercolors of an album and take on another meaning in a published collection of verse. His different writing projects experimented with mediation, teaching readers to contemplate the contingent nature of identity in a culture increasingly engrossed by print.

## Chapter 3 - The Celebrities: Lord Byron and Letitia Elizabeth Landon

### 3.1 - Nineteenth-Century Fame: Critical Context

Before examining the works of Lord Byron and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, it is important to situate this chapter within the current critical discourse regarding the figure of the celebrity. There has been a great deal of recent scholarship examining the importance of the Romantic period in the development of our modern celebrity culture.<sup>1</sup> While Leo Braudy describes the celebrity as a consistent presence throughout the history of Western civilization, tracing its roots back to classical antiquity, Tom Mole argues that celebrity culture does not begin to take its modern form until the end of the eighteenth century. For Mole, any discussion of celebrity culture must address the existence of an industry apparatus that is responsible for the mass distribution and promotion of the celebrity's work and image (*Byron's* 3). The development of the print industry during the turn of the nineteenth century made it possible for authors in the Romantic period to sell their works in record numbers. This increased circulation, in turn, allowed authors like Walter Scott, Thomas Moore, and Lord Byron to reach new heights of popularity. Of course, celebrity status is not simply a matter of popularity; it requires that an audience regard the celebrity with a degree of fascination and familiarity. The public's interest in the celebrity goes beyond admiration and takes on a personal dimension, generating a desire to gain intimate insight into the celebrity's life. As Braudy explains, repeated exposure to the image of the celebrity feeds into an impression of underlying authenticity, so that "the essential lure of the famous is that they are somehow more real than we" (6). Thus, the lure of the celebrity seems

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<sup>1</sup> Examples include Tom Mole's *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutics of Intimacy* (2007); Mole's anthology *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750 – 1850* (2009); Eric Eisner's *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity* (2013); David Higgins' *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (2005); and Ann R. Hawkins and Maura Ives' anthology *Women Writers and the Artifacts of Celebrity in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2012).

naturally suited to the Romantic period's emphasis upon authentic self-expression. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the most commonly cited examples of celebrity poets from this period, including Mary Robinson, Lord Byron, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, were all masters of sentimental verse whose works were frequently scrutinized for autobiographical details. According to Mole, identification with a celebrity helped ease the sense of alienation raised in readers by the crowded literary marketplace (*Byron's* 22). As the market became flooded with an excess of publications, audiences became more selective in their reading and sought familiarity with the authors they chose. The ability of these poets "to construct an impression of unmediated contact" through their verse, allowing the readers to feel as if they have been taken into the poet's confidence, is central to their success (*Byron's* 22). In this sense, a modernized print industry was a pre-requisite for the development of celebrity culture because it allowed authors to achieve the cultural ubiquity necessary to foster readerly fascination.

The public's sense of familiarity with these figures was derived in part from their exposure to public images of the author, which were themselves often staged. A reader who had watched Mary Robinson perform at Drury Lane, seen the famous portrait of Countess Blessington on exhibition at the Royal Academy or reproduced in *The Amulet*, or purchased a print of Lord Byron in miniature could not help but identify the voice of the author with the highly mediated visage.<sup>2</sup> As Mole's use of the terms "construct" and "impression" implies, the sense of authentic insight into the author's thoughts and feelings these poems afford is often delusive. While these authors derived success from the intimate tone of their writing, the actual communicative potential of their writing is subject to debate. In contrast to Wordsworth's

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<sup>2</sup> The lasting renown of Mary Robinson's performance is discussed by Mole in his chapter of *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750 – 1850*. The influence of Lady Blessington's portrait is discussed by Ann R. Hawkins in her chapter of *Women Writers and the Artifacts of Celebrity in the Long Nineteenth Century*. For a detailed account on the public circulation of Byron's various portraits and miniatures, see Robert Beevers's *The Byronic Image*.

conviction that the reader should comprehend the author's sentiments through his work, the poets discussed in this chapter blur the line that divides personal confession and dramatic invention.

Both Lord Byron and Letitia Elizabeth Landon encouraged audiences to read self-referential elements into their writing, even as they disassociated themselves from the characters they spoke through and the public personae they cultivated. Moreover, the uncertainty surrounding the autobiographical basis of their work accounts for part of their appeal. The readers' inclination to conflate Lord Byron with the protagonist of his first great success, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, to read Harold's reflective musings in Byron's voice, sparked the public's fascination with the poet and launched his rise to fame. Yet, as his career progressed, the correlation between his own life and his protagonists became increasingly convoluted. The poet's partial resemblance to the violent, jaded heroes of his Oriental tales excited curiosity regarding Byron's past travels and transgressions, while denying genuine insight into the poet's life, constituting what Jerome McGann has called Byron's "mythologized account[s] of his own person" (*Fiery Dust* 16). From the drowning of Leila in *The Giaour*, to the notes of incest in *Manfred*, to the sexual scandals of the first canto of *Don Juan*, Byron makes an art of provoking biographical associations without ever confessing to anything. Similarly, the ambiguity surrounding L.E.L., the emblematic initials with which Landon signed her poems in the *Literary Gazette*, provoked speculation regarding the author's identity. Landon's editor, William Jerdan, encouraged this curiosity, adding fuel to this fire by leaking a few provocative details about the author's identity. As Serena Baisei notes, Landon's poems "encouraged readers to speculate on the association between the mysterious writer, known to be a young woman, and the main characters of her poems, who were female and talked about love" (22). During the early years of her career, Landon's identity was wrapped in mystery. Those readers who did meet Landon in the flesh were more likely to note how little the

spirited young woman resembled the melancholy heroines of her poetry.<sup>3</sup> Much like Byron's haunted heroes, the series of doomed lovers and forsaken poetesses that populate Landon's poems invoke the author without actually representing her. These poems do not directly channel their author's sentiments so much as they embellish them to varying degrees.

This ambiguity presents a continuing challenge for contemporary scholars attempting to discuss the sense of sentimental authenticity that is so central to the appeal of Byron's and Landon's poetry. As a result, a number of these scholars have come to reexamine "authenticity" as a critical concept. To posit an authentic message within a poem requires the reader to distinguish between an underlying meaning that adheres to the poet's private voice and secondary interpretations that result from public mediation. Yet, the celebrity poet occupies a nebulous social position that defies clear division into private and public spheres. Unlike Wordsworth, whose relative isolation in the Lake District allowed him to separate his private affairs from the public world of London publishing houses, both Byron and Landon led private lives shaped by the speculations of the prying public. Moreover, many of their most intimate relationships were with business associates. When reading their correspondence, it is often difficult to distinguish the line separating personal regard from professional concern.<sup>4</sup> Even amongst intimates, Byron and Landon could not shed their public status as celebrity poets.

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<sup>3</sup> Landon's friend Katherine Thomson described the difference between the public's perception of Landon and their impression upon meeting her in person: "the instant L.E.L. was known, the circle surrounding her was disenchanted. She pleaded guilty to no sentiment; she abjured the idea of writing from her own feelings. She was so lively, so girlish; so fond of a dance, or a play or a gay walk; so full of pleasantry, so ready with her shafts of wit, that one felt half angry with her for being so blithe and so real" (qtd. in Stephenson 7).

<sup>4</sup> As Andrew Nicholson notes in his preface to *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, their correspondence demonstrates an "overlap between private and business relations went much deeper for both of them [than other members of Murray's circle]" (xviii). An example from this collection of Murray's heated language will be discussed in chapter 3.2.

Meanwhile, Landon's business correspondence could sometimes lead to accusations of flirting. Reacting to such charges from William Maginn's wife, Landon once wrote to a friend, "I have often written notes, as pretty and flattering as I could make them, to Dr. Maginn, upon different literary matters, and one or two on business. But how any construction but their own could be put upon them I do not understand" (*LLEL* 140).

Consequently, rather than attempting to distinguish personal authenticity from public artifice, scholars have begun to examine their interdependence: the degree to which a poem's personal import is constituted by the poet's engagement with the public. In his recent study on celebrity and nineteenth-century poetry, Eric Eisner describes the relationship joining the celebrity author and his or her audience as occupying a hybrid space: "At once individual and collective, the feelings incited by celebrity are properly neither public nor private, but help organize through a sense of shared emotional experience a new kind of public space in which deeply private meanings find display" (5). For Eisner, the celebrity poet leverages the market, playing upon popular associations and predictable responses, to consolidate a public image and foster a sense of familiarity with readers that is in reality a "mere system-effect" (13). Rather than imply that the resulting personal tone is somehow false or hollow, however, Eisner's observation simply recognizes that the public influenced the poet's self-conception as articulated in his or her writing. For the celebrity poet, who lives under the multitude's constant scrutiny, it is impossible to wholly divorce personal identity from public perception. As a result, textual representations of the authorial subject are not abstractions of a more substantial inner selfhood; they are exercises in actualization.

By observing the various ways celebrity poets used public performance as a means of self-reflection, Eisner contributes to a line of scholarship that examines ironic and performative modes of identity in the poetry of Landon and Byron. Frederick Garber provides a useful foundation for discussing Byron's identity as a textual effect. According to Garber, even before achieving celebrity status with the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron viewed his poetry as an act of "self-reflexive artifice" (8). Insofar as composing Harold's journey provides Byron with a means of exploring and understanding his own experiences, serving as a discursive

act by which he can fashion a self-image, the resulting concept of identity is that of an author before his audience. Thus, “the establishment of Harold’s selfhood is bound up with that... inevitable awareness of the poet as maker” (Garber 8). The poem serves as an open-ended experiment in self-fashioning as each new locale provides the poet with a new context through which to articulate his identity (Garber 15). More recent studies have built upon Garber’s emphasis on the textual nature of identity in Byron’s poetry by examining Romanticism through the critical lens of performance theory. Nicole Frey Büchel describes Byron’s articulation of selfhood as an act of continuous performativity, positioning him as an antithesis to other major Romantic figures who attempted to define identity (Wordsworth) and art (Shelley) in terms of stable metaphysical ideals. Büchel traces a progression throughout Byron’s canon, beginning with *Childe Harold*, in which the quest for self-knowledge is perpetually prolonged and unfinished, to the cosmopolitan worldview of *Don Juan*, in which the very idea of a stable identity is repeatedly revealed to be delusory. Whereas Byron begins his career viewing writing as a creative act that allows him to develop a stronger sense of identity, by the end of his career he views identity as purely performative, constituted entirely by the act of writing. With this progression Büchel illustrates that, rather than offer readers a depiction of the poet/protagonist to comprehend, Byron’s poetry enacts identity, creating a fluid concept of subjecthood that is constituted by the text.

Judith Pascoe applies this performative approach more broadly by asserting that theatrical self-fashioning is a pervasive element of Romanticism itself. Pascoe’s research identifies Landon within a tradition of public women who carefully infused elements of their private lives when constructing their public personae. Struggling for expressive freedom in a patriarchal print industry, female poets “made a virtue out of the necessity of gender constraints and used

performative strategies to bridge the gap between private woman and publishing author” (Pascoe 10). Nor are these strategies exclusive to the female poet. By identifying similar strategies employed by male poets, Pascoe hopes to subvert a traditional gender binary commonly employed in modern scholarship that identifies female authors with theatricality and males with more substantial models of subjecthood. For Pascoe, every Romantic poet employed theatrical modes of identity, creating an authorial persona that combined personal voice with public image. Garber, Büchel, and Pascoe provide a representative (though not exhaustive) cross-section of scholars who figure Romantic selfhood as a self-reflexive textual effect.<sup>5</sup> Following this approach, one does not define the personal significance of a poem by identifying instances of sincerity. Rather, one must consider how a given poem constitutes a dramatization of selfhood, providing the poet with a medium for reflecting upon and redefining identity as it intersects with public image.<sup>6</sup>

Eisner provides another useful guideline for distinguishing performative models of identity. By linking reflexive strategies of self-representation to the phenomenon of literary celebrity, Eisner emphasizes the critical importance of the audience’s ubiquitous gaze. For Eisner, Byron’s tendency to figure himself as a fluctuating, public construct is a response to the

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<sup>5</sup> For more examples, see Baiesi’s *Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Metrical Romance*; Esterhammer’s “The Scandal of Sincerity: Wordsworth, Byron, Landon”; and Peter W. Graham’s “His Grand Show: Byron and the Myth of Mythmaking.”

<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, these studies are not without conflict. For example, while Büchel presents Wordsworth’s metaphysical idealism in contrast to Byron’s protean performativity, Pascoe claims that even Wordsworth employed theatrical strategies of self-representation. This conflict raises interesting questions. If Wordsworth can also be said to have developed his authorial voice in response to public perceptions of his work as an author, is the difference between his method of representation and Byron’s a matter of degree rather than type?

Angela Esterhammer indicates as much in her essay “The Scandal of Sincerity: Wordsworth, Byron, Landon”. Referring to “Essays upon Epitaphs”, she notes that Wordsworth explicitly defines sincerity as the opposite of performance, being rooted in the speaker’s personal sentiments. Yet, Esterhammer also indicates that there are elements of performance in Wordsworth’s poetry. The careful tone and formal symmetry of his writing indicates his concern with the social coding of his sentiments and its influence upon their reception. Meanwhile, Byron and Landon both locate the basis of sincerity outside of the speaker, as a pose struck in reaction to others. In this sense, their work presents sincerity as a product of the social circumstances that mediate expression. For Esterhammer, the performative basis of expression in Byron and Landon is simply an extension of the social dimension of sincerity that is latent in Wordsworth’s poetry.

constant attention of a curious public. While it may be argued that Wordsworth was responsive to the reception of specific critics, he was not subject to the kind of mass speculation that prompted Byron's particular brand of ironic performativity. This approach to representation can be considered a characteristic strategy of the celebrity, whose image is perpetually being rendered and recast by the public. Indeed, Braudy identifies the influence of the audience's gaze as the key aspect that distinguishes the sociological impact of fame at the turn of the nineteenth-century from previous time periods:

The audience no longer merely seems to watch and passively take in the self-constructions of its society's great men. Its gaze now creates and shapes those who move before it, forcing greatness to occupy a certain space in its eyes. It is an audience, perhaps the first such in modern history, sophisticated enough to be titillated by a refusal of its most obvious applause. It is no longer willing to accept public figures who merely fill their roles, but is intent instead on those who play them with a passion generated by self-consciousness. (398)

It is only with the advent of consumer culture that the audience gains the agency necessary to actively shape public figures with its expectations. Despite the social detachment of their characters, Byron and Landon were all too vulnerable to a public that forced "greatness to occupy a certain space in its eyes."

Both poets experienced this pressure upon their personal lives and addressed it through their poetry. The public's perception of Byron as a passionate lover, disillusioned dreamer, and transgressive dissident may have originally been derived from his poetry, but it would quickly begin to exert pressure upon the poet. Following the publication of the first cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, this Byronic image would colour the imagination of Byron's new

acquaintances. Lady Caroline Lamb is often presented as an exemplar of one immediately enchanted by the Byronic myth, but even the more pragmatic Annabella Milbanke searched for signs of Childe Harold upon first meeting him. Her initial description of Byron in her diary illustrates a desire to interpret the poet's expressions as signs of his inner sentiments: "I saw Lord Byron for the first time... His mouth continually betrays the acrimony of his spirit. I should judge him sincere and independent - sincere at least in society as far as he can be, whilst dissimulating the violence of his scorn" (qtd. in Eisler 355).<sup>7</sup> Byron's sensitivity to his public image is evident in the deft manner his poetry continually experiments with this persona. As Frances Wilson observes, "Byron tried hard to control the image of himself being produced but he also identified with it, feeling his reflection to be more finished and complete than the fragmented figure he experienced himself to be" (6). Even as Byron repeatedly employed his heroic trope, utilizing its popular appeal and expressive potential, his characters often did as much to complicate or deny the public's perception, reminding readers that their vision of the author was partial at best.

Similarly, Landon's depictions of forsaken women and doomed artists reflect her own precarious position as a female poet in the public eye. For the poetess, the reader's desire to identify the author with her characters raises the risk of being associated with narratives of fallen women. Landon would eventually become a victim of such associations, with periodicals publishing rumours of extramarital affairs with her male colleagues, including her publisher William Jerdan and her peer Edward Bulwer-Lytton.<sup>8</sup> Not only would this gossip have a

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<sup>7</sup> In her biography of Byron, Benita Eisler provides a concise assessment of the Annabella's description: "Gestures and expressions that to an impartial observer might suggest irritation, impatience, or simply boredom became, for Annabella, revelations of a kindred spirit... She had transformed the poet, sulking on the sidelines, into a social critic" (355).

<sup>8</sup> Cynthia Lawford's research into these rumours has led to convincing evidence that Landon may well have had a protracted love affair with Jerdan. Lawford's findings will be discussed further in chapter 3.3.

disastrous effect on Landon's personal life, leading her to hastily enter into a doomed marriage, it exerted influence upon her poetry as well. Serena Baiesi points out that Landon's shifting application of fictional masks was a defensive strategy, which allowed her to employ "the dramatic form as a disguise and a protection against a dangerous self-exposure of her personal subjectivity" (58). While the reader's desire to connect the author with her characters and their sentiments was an important condition for commercial success, the ambiguity that clouded such connections was a necessary safeguard against losing control over one's public identity. As a result, her characters are more than autobiographical analogues: they serve as vehicles for addressing the tension between the poetess and her audience. Landon's first successful long-form publication, the romantic narrative poem *The Improvisatrice*, nicely illustrates her ability to elude positive identification. On the surface, the connection between Landon's authorial persona and her protagonist is readily apparent. Both are talented poets, lovelorn beauties, and figures of public renown. Yet, as an idyllic figure of Italian culture, the *Improvisatrice* also has a clear fictional basis, which readers could readily trace back to the titular heroine of Madame de Staël's popular novel *Corrine, Or Italy*.<sup>9</sup> While Landon invites the comparison between author and character, the *Improvisatrice* is presented as an idealized image rather than a proxy. Moreover, the *Improvisatrice* herself lacks a stable identity, as her tale repeatedly digresses into her own supplemental verses depicting the fates of other poetesses and heroines. In this sense, the most striking similarity between the poetess known as L.E.L. and her protagonist is that their identities are related through a series of fictional analogues, whose tales reflect but do not represent the storyteller.

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<sup>9</sup> Glennis Stephenson argues that Corrine was a central inspiration for Landon's entire authorial persona, inspiring "a type [of female character] that will dominate her subsequent works" (54).

Thus, to return to Braudy's observation, nineteenth-century celebrity culture is defined in part by the influence of the public's gaze, but also by the contentious relationship between celebrity and audience. For a public "sophisticated enough to be titillated by a refusal of its most obvious applause," the celebrity's resistant attitude is part of his or her appeal (Braudy 398). According to Braudy, the public's fascination arises from watching these poets react to their fame, self-consciously adapting their personae. It is in this regard that the celebrity poet's relationship to the market reveals its complex layers of attraction and aversion. The reactive interaction between audience and celebrity that this chapter has described thus far can be schematized as follows:

- 1) The reader is attracted to the celebrity author's sincere tone and the personal insight it appears to afford.
- 2) The public forms a conception of the celebrity's identity. This conception is only a partial abstraction, being based upon the publicized image and semi-fictional characterizations that constitute the authorial persona.
- 3) While the public comes to impose an identity (and the restrictive consequences that come with it), the celebrity denies its validation by continually alternating and adapting personae.
- 4) The resulting uncertainty regarding the celebrity's persona provokes the curiosity of the public, strengthening the intensity of speculation.

This feedback loop carries forward into a fifth step, in which the celebrity author continues to elicit and evade the reader's gaze. This compulsion to perpetuate the public's interest is due in part to the various ways market society rewards this attention. This market influence can be understood in economic terms. Towards the end of their respective careers, both Landon and

Byron were increasingly dependent upon the income they gained through their writing: Byron to fund his travels across the continent and Landon to support her family following the death of her father.<sup>10</sup> This financial motive takes on greater weight when we consider that both authors represented large investments for their publishers and professional affiliates. In addition to being individuals, these authors came to constitute brand names whose continued success helped support entire networks of publishers and authors within the print industry.

Beyond monetary concerns, market society also instills the individual with a more fundamental compulsion to redefine identity in order to attract and subvert the public's gaze. To use the terms of Eric Gans' theory of generative anthropology, this compulsion arises from the individual's efforts to achieve centrality as a model of mimetic desire. For Gans, the ability of the individual to claim a position of central importance as a model of public emulation is a development brought about by the rise of free-market society. Prior to the Romantic period, competitive desire was focused upon and mitigated by an external object that occupied a central position within the public scene. This object's unobtainable status ensured that the public's imitative desires were deferred before violent competition could occur, as all gestures towards the object were equally abortive. With the development of the free market, however, the individual achieves sufficient autonomy to reject the communal centre and demonstrate a degree of independence from the imitative modelling that shaped others' desires. By assuming a posture that rejects whatever popular tastes currently dominate the marketplace, the individual denies the current model's central appeal. Doing so requires the individual to assume a position apart from

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to suggest that Byron was solely dependent upon the profits of his poetry. The payments he came to accept from Murray after 1816 were relatively minor in comparison to the £94,500 he gained from the sale of his ancestral home, Newstead Abbey (Moore 224). Nonetheless, the costs of his indulgent lifestyle in Italy did lead Byron to hound Murray for payments in his correspondence. Some of these letters will be examined in chapter 3.2.

the crowd. Situated along the periphery of the cultural centre, the Romantic individual denies that centre's relevance and, in doing so, reorients the public around a new centre: him or herself.

This process of attracting the crowd's attention brings with it a paradox. As Gans explains, "it is naive to suppose that the emanation of language from the periphery can take place without the conversion of its place of emission into a new centre" (169). The individual who achieves centrality through rejection of the public centre must become a new centre and inevitably be rejected in turn, serving as the standard by which another individual will define the periphery. As a result, the mimetic desire evoked by any given aesthetic posture in free-market culture is transient and, as Gans says, can only prove effective once. This transience forms the basis for Gans' distinction between high culture and popular culture: whereas classical art defers the audience's resentment through the communal contemplation of the central object, popular entertainment gratifies competitive desire by ceaselessly drawing attention to a proliferation of new centres. As avatars of this new popular culture, celebrity poets are enmeshed in the public's search for new centres. The public's impulse to rigidly define the celebrity's identity stems from this process by which the central model of desire is fixed, emulated, and ultimately displaced. In order to maintain centrality, the model must resist determination and reiterate difference. In this sense, Gans' theory not only helps explain the appeal of these celebrity poets, it accounts for their continual pursuit and rejection of the public's gaze, for it is only by denying the influence of that gaze that the poet can continue to attract it. These duelling urges, to attract and to deny, are interconnected and mutually sustaining, both part of the same process of mediating mimetic desire within the market.

Through this critical lens, the celebrity poet's performative mode of identity thus takes on new significance. In addition to avoiding the limitations of the public's perception, the mercurial

nature of these textual personae allow the celebrity poet to occupy the centre of the public's gaze while defying abstraction and mimesis. In this regard, the example of the celebrity poet supports this study's central assertion: Romantic conceptions of authorial subjecthood are formed in response to each author's specific position within the writers' market. While the model presented by the celebrity poet differs substantially from those examined in the previous chapter, it also combines many of their qualities. Similar to Wordsworth's professional poet, the celebrity addresses the public as an individual and identifiable voice expressing the poet's true thoughts and feelings. However, whereas Wordsworth promotes the legitimacy of this reading strategy, the celebrity's dynamic methods of representation belie such confessional transparency. As the following sections will illustrate, this difference is due in part to the complex networks of professional and personal relationships connecting the celebrity to the writers' market.

Wordsworth maintains a professional distance from his business associates and exercises strict control over his published work. By contrast, both Byron and Landon work with an assortment of publishers, editors, and peers who were capable of influencing their work. While Wordsworth takes his claims to creative autonomy seriously, figuring his authorial voice as the distillation of his own thoughts and feelings, the celebrity's individualistic pose has a reflexive basis. Though seemingly alone in the public spotlight, the celebrity self-consciously bears the imprint of the publisher's stricture, the critic's censure, and the reader's desire. In this regard, the celebrity poet's professional situation more closely resembles that of Lamb's casual contributor, whose authorial voice is figured as a product of collaboration and mediation. It is only appropriate that the resulting depictions of the celebrity's authorial identity prove as unreliable and inconstant as Lamb's Elia. Yet, the celebrity poet leverages the resulting characterization to wholly different effect. Far from disappearing within the ambiguity of these performances and discouraging

autographical interpretations, the celebrity encourages the reader to look ever closer into the author's identity. Occupying a position of particular prominence within the market, the celebrity poet demonstrates the extent of its influence upon authorial subjecthood.

In addition to using the celebrity poet to further supplement the range of market positions surveyed by this study, this chapter also seeks to contribute to the current discussion of nineteenth-century celebrity culture. It will do so by contrasting the representative strategies of Landon and Byron, not only to those of the previously discussed writers, but to one another. While this section has already addressed many similarities that make it possible to examine these two poets together under the common heading of "celebrity," their lives and careers are also distinguished by a number of key factors. A discussion that seeks to place these authors within a common category must be careful not to conflate their positions or ignore their differences. Thus, the following discussions will be informed by such distinguishing factors as the authors' socio-economic position, professional practices, and gender. Both poets were interested in making a profit through the sale of their work, but Byron's resources, connections, and aristocratic status place him in a position of privilege that is worlds apart from Landon's precarious situation as the principal breadwinner for her family. Moreover, as scholars such as Jerome Christensen and Philip Martin have shown, the social autonomy that came with Byron's lordship allowed him to exercise a degree of hauteur in responding to the demands of the market, which in turn informed his relationship with his audience.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Landon was under much greater pressure to conform to popular tastes. This distinction is reflected in their particular professional practices within the print industry. While both authors are principally remembered as poets producing a similar style of expressive, autobiographical poetry, their interactions with the print industry took

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<sup>11</sup> Martin claims that Byron viewed his commercial publishing with a level of aristocratic disdain (7). Christensen argues that Byron's aristocratic rank is central to his success insofar as it facilitates the disregard for social mores that made his poetry enticing to the public (72).

very different forms. Whereas Byron exercised a degree of autonomy in selecting his writing endeavours according to his own inclinations, working with Murray and his other publishers to market his poems directly to the public, Landon was deeply involved in the periodical press. As a result, she often wrote poetry under the duress of deadlines or the stipulations of a particular publication. Moreover, this involvement saw her take on a wider variety of positions within the print industry, including those of editor and reviewer. In this sense, she occupied a more complex, composite position within the market, placing her at the intersection of varying professional and artistic concerns. However, while these concerns of socio-economic class and publishing practices are important distinctions to note, they must be addressed as subsets of a third distinction: gender. As a poetess, Landon was confronted with an entirely different set of expectations and limitations regarding her writing and her public identity.

A comparison of Byron and Landon must consider the additional restrictions that public scrutiny carried for the female celebrity. As Susan Wolfson succinctly explains, “the transgression of an audience upon the self plays differently for men and women in the contexts of a dominant literary culture that sustains an ideal fraternity (often troped with female antagonists) and of a dominant social orthodoxy that treats a famous female writer at best as an anomaly, at worst a scandal” (2 – 3). This chapter has already touched on the dangers posed to the female poet’s reputation when publishing sensational content. In response to the constant threat of censure posed by the male-dominated critical press, the poetess was often limited to addressing domestic, sentimental subject matter and adopting an authorial voice characterized by demure modesty. Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s withdrawal from poetry following the critical abuse leveled at her political satire *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* is perhaps the most illustrative example of how these restrictions stifled the poetess’s voice and limited her creative potential.

Since the proliferation of Romantic feminist scholarship in the late 1980s, a number of studies have focused on the extent to which female authors either conformed to or strained against these restrictions. In many of these accounts, Landon is held up as a troubling example of the former. Anne Mellor in her foundational study *Romanticism and Gender* frames Landon as an example of “a Romantic woman writer [who] chooses to inhabit rather than reject the hegemonic construction of the ideal woman” (107). Representing herself and her characters as conventional models of femininity, Landon reaffirms the Burkean concept of female beauty as the gentle, submissive object that is acted upon by a masculine sublime. As such, she comes to serve as the antithesis to Mellor’s examples of “feminine Romanticism”: authors such as Barbauld and Charlotte Smith, who stressed the equality of genders and raised explicit criticism of patriarchal oppression. In a related vein, Angela Leighton describes the Victorian poetess as rebelling against a tradition of “strongly prescriptive, gender-specific values of sincerity and purity” established by their Romantic forerunners, specifically Landon and Felicia Hemans (3). Whereas Hemans’ poetry consciously promotes the importance of domestic virtues, Landon comes to represent the dangerous and self-destructive side of female creativity. Landon’s poetry revels in the overflow of female creative passions, but any celebration of this creativity is suppressed by the poem’s inevitable tragic ending, which ultimately serves to aestheticize the image of a poetess doomed by her own emotions. Leighton criticizes Landon as lacking what would become a Victorian ethic of womanhood: an emphasis upon representing women as thoughtful, confrontational writers, rather than passive victims (64). Lacking the confrontational audacity of her bluestocking predecessors or the confident self-assertion of her Victorian successors, Landon seems to present a troubling instance of a poetess complicit in her own exploitation during a period of progress for strong-minded female authors.

However, it is not the object of this study to evaluate Landon's contributions to the growing autonomy of female authors in the nineteenth century. Instead, by focusing on her success in adapting to and thriving within the restrictions placed upon female authors, this study will consider how Landon leveraged the marketplace to develop alternative forms of expressive freedom. In doing so, it will draw upon other feminist scholars who have been more forgiving of Landon. For example, while Glennis Stephenson admits that Landon's poetry reinforces gender binaries, identifying men with reason and women with emotion, she also notes how Landon vilifies the male's cold logic and insensitivity by making it the source of the poetess's suffering in works such as *The History of the Lyre* (111). Moreover, Stephenson suggests that this critique of male reason doubles as a critique of the male-dominated critical press, satirizing critics for their lack of sensibility (and contradicting Mellor's description of Landon as a passive adherent of patriarchy). Baiesi notes a similar distinction between male and female protagonists in her reading of *The Improvisatrice*, noting that male characters must validate their sense of identity by imposing their point of view on others, while female characters prove receptive and responsive to the feelings of others: "the hero will always affirm his own personality in every encounter with others, especially when struck by a beautiful woman of talent. In contrast, the Improvisatrice will share her happiness and sorrows with her public and fail to impose her gaze on the one she loves" (87). Thus, while Landon does adhere to gender tropes, in doing so she extols the value of distinctly feminine traits. For Landon, susceptibility to emotions is not a weakness but a strength, one that indicates women's superior potential as artists: "The particular sensitivity traditionally ascribed to women, the gift for feeling rather than thinking, Landon suggests, makes the woman, in this respect, the only 'true' and 'natural' poet" (Stephenson 104). Indeed, discussing authorial agency in Landon's work requires a new concept of poetic genius

distinct from masculine ideals of self-assertion.

In Landon's poetry, this concept of female poetic genius is embodied by the figure of the improvisatrice, the Italian poetess whose improvisational poems are acts of response and adaptation.<sup>12</sup> Landon's frequent use of the improvisatrice as protagonists in her poetry helped cultivate an association with her own authorial identity. Indeed, as a female poet selling her work through a competitive marketplace, Landon's professional practices required her to remain as adaptive and responsive as any improvisatrice: "She was aware of what critics and audiences wanted to read from a poetess, and she skillfully adjusted her talent, her taste, and her own poetic inspiration to contemporary literary requirements" (Baiesi 40). Landon proved adept at writing in a variety of mediums, from short-form verse for periodicals to narrative romances for her own publications, from writing anonymous reviews to editing periodicals. One such periodical was *Fisher's Drawing Room*, for which Landon single-handedly produced vast amounts of original poetry under tight deadlines, having to devise verse to match the miscellany of pre-selected images that filled each volume. When the market for poetry declined in the 1830s, Landon tried her hand at prose and proved a capable novelist, publishing four works over the last seven years of her life. This aptitude for adapting to different modal conventions is reflected in the fluidity and versatility of her work. While Landon may be accused of dealing in repetitive sentiments and subject matter, her genius lies in her ability to consistently adapt these conventions to new ends, reworking familiar concepts with novel expression and varied contexts.

Landon's ability to adapt to the conditions of the market stems from her singular talent for rapid invention and composition, but it is also a result of her situation as a female poet. As

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<sup>12</sup> The figure of the Italian improvisatrice had fascinated the British imagination since the early eighteenth century. As Esterhammer describes in her study *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850*, the improvisatrice would perform in theatres for audiences, composing poetry on the spot in response to themes and motifs suggested by the audience.

celebrity authors, Byron and Landon both adapt their authorial personae in response to the expectations of the public. However, as a male aristocrat, driven to compete within the market but never dependent upon his earnings, Byron exercises a degree of autonomy from the public that Landon is denied. The rumours of incest and abuse surrounding Byron's failed marriage to Annabella Milbanke drove him from England, but his rank and wealth preserved him throughout. Despite his friends' reservations, Byron was free to address and even jest at his scandal from the security of his Italian retreat. Landon could not explicitly address the rumours of extramarital affairs that hounded her in the press. These accusations were met with silence, even as they ruined her engagement to John Forster. The public's perception of Byron informs his writing, but it does not determine what he can and cannot write. By contrast, Landon's writing is always circumscribed by the demands of the market. Her financial situation requires her to consistently produce poetry and prose that would prove profitable, while her personal situation precludes her from writing explicitly self-referential works. By comparing these two authors, this chapter will attempt to show that, Landon's poetry models a more evanescent concept of identity. Whereas Byron can be said to reinvent his public image in a progressive series of iterations, Landon's authorial presence is even more transient: a continually shifting performance carried out across different works, formats, and mediums that never coalesces into a fixed subject.<sup>13</sup> The following

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<sup>13</sup> By figuring Landon's authorial identity as an implicit quality of her writing, this study enters into an ongoing critical discussion surrounding public representations of poetesses during this period. The most relevant precedent for this approach is presented by Catherine Gallagher in her study *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670 – 1820*. Gallagher shows how women authors figured authorial personae in terms of market exchange. Specifically, she relates the female authorial presence to the non-presence of the commodity: an inconstant value that shifts with context. Gallagher's description of their authorial personae "as the partly disembodied entities required by the specific exchanges that constituted their careers" provides a useful precedent for my own discussion of Landon (xix).

Gallagher is careful to present these authors not as helpless products of market conditions, but rather as authors who used the market to help articulate their own experiences of dispossession. Nonetheless, there are critics who have taken exception to this approach. More recent studies, such as Claire Brock's *The Feminization of Fame* and Stephen C. Behrendt's *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community*, have argued that Romantic scholarship has traditionally overstated the passivity of female authors during this period. Brock and Behrendt dispute the notion of an intrinsic division of genders that excluded female authors from certain forms of writing,

sections will examine how each celebrity's distinct method of representation results from their particular position within the market.

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respectively foregrounding examples of female authors that enthusiastically promoted their own careers or engaged in ongoing political discourse. For these scholars, Gallagher's notion of female authors expressing agency by obscuring their own presence within the market perpetuates a problematic commonplace. It is therefore important to acknowledge the variety of positions occupied by female authors within the market and to clarify that this chapter's discussion of Landon is not intended to present her as a representative example of female poets in general. Indeed, Landon was selected for this study because the singular nature of her situation helps demonstrate the range of representational strategies employed across the writer's market.

### 3.2 - Byronic Withdrawal and Market Resistance

Be neither name nor emblem spread

By prying stranger to be read

- *The Giaour*

In *Byron: A Poet Before His Public*, Philip Martin asserts that Byron's poetic output following the initial success of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was driven by supply and demand rather than artistic vision. As evidence of this commercial approach, Martin points to the Turkish Tales, the series of Oriental adventures published between 1812 and 1815, which he describes as sloppy, haphazard productions (44 – 46). He supports this harsh assessment by explaining that the majority of the Turkish Tales were hastily composed: Byron wrote *The Bride of Abydos* in four days, *The Corsair* in ten days, and *Lara* in a month. As Peter Manning has noted, "such productivity was... what the market required" of Byron in order to meet audiences' expectations and capitalize upon the success of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* ("Marketplace" 183). Building upon the public's fascination with the Childe Harold persona and spurred on by his business-savvy publisher John Murray, Byron deftly rehashed settings, characters, and themes to produce a sensational and profitable series of poems. Manning describes the series of poems in terms of a commodified line of products: "the ceaseless mechanical reduplication of the Byronic hero in the sphere of commodities, the seemingly unique, sublime experience transmogrified into the desires and gratifications of a carefully manipulated mass market" ("Marketplace" 182). The Turkish Tales were clearly motivated by commercial concerns, but it is problematic to dismiss them as shallow products churned out for the market.

Even if their quick production and recurring themes were indicative of a lack of literary merit, which is debatable, Martin's argument that the poems were haphazardly composed fails to account for the first Turkish Tale, *The Giaour*. Examining the prolonged process of composition behind this poem reveals the caution with which Byron approached the market during this critical time in his poetic career.

A cursory overview of *The Giaour*'s production shows it to be one of Byron's most painstaking endeavours. Starting in the autumn of 1812, the poem was repeatedly amended, steadily growing in increments over the span of a year (Marchand 1: 387). The earliest manuscript of the poem contained 344 lines of verse. By March 1813, the poem had grown to 453 lines, at which point Byron authorized fifteen copies to be printed for private circulation amongst his friends. Their reactions clearly had some influence, as Byron continued to revise the poem over the coming months. By the time the poem was published in June, *The Giaour* had reached 684 lines (*CPW* 3, 413). The poem was a commercial success, but Byron was not yet satisfied. The process of reiteration and expansion persisted, with each subsequent edition growing by an average of roughly a hundred lines.<sup>1</sup> The seventh edition was published in December 1813, by which time the poem had reached its final length of 1334 lines. While *The Giaour* may have been motivated by the demands of an expectant marketplace, it was certainly not a hasty, careless production. Indeed, its composition was meticulous, developed in stages, and tested upon audiences, with each new iteration adding to the poem's complexity (Sundell 589). To understand the disparity between this very deliberate (some might say overwrought) approach and the casual ease with which Byron wrote the later Turkish

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<sup>1</sup> The exact average would be an increase of 103.6 lines per edition. This figure is assuming that the two different version of the third edition be counted separately.

Tales, we must consider Byron's position in relation to the writer's market in 1812.

### Byron's Productive Opposition to the Market

The heightened anticipation created by *Childe Harold* can help account for the time and energy that went into *The Giaour*'s composition. Byron wrote *The Giaour* knowing that it would be highly scrutinized and that its reception would have a determinate impact on his literary reputation. As Caroline Franklin has pointed out, composing and publishing the poem in iterations allowed Byron to test the public's reactions and may very well have been an extension of the feedback he had already solicited through private circulation of the manuscript (51). It could be argued that Byron's refusal to let the poem rest was prompted by a concern to meet the standard set by *Childe Harold*. Yet, the idea that Byron would be driven to revise his work in response to his readers' reception raises complicated questions regarding his concern for the commercial reception of his poetry.

Scholars have drawn a variety of conclusions in their efforts to define Byron's regard for his reading public and the literary marketplace. According to Martin, Byron viewed his writing as a commercial product, "not to be vaguely defined in terms of a consecrated wider concept, but in terms of the demands that elicited it into being, the demands of popular consumption" (7). Martin figures Byron as a disinterested aristocrat, condescending to participate in the marketplace, while disregarding the artistic merit of the work he produced. Similarly, Ghislaine McDayter describes Byron's misgivings towards the reading public in emphatic terms, claiming he viewed them as "insatiable beings who fed upon his literary corpus to satisfy their taste" ("Conjuring" 43).

Identifying audiences as a threat that could alienate a poet from his work, McDayter's account implies that Byron possessed a healthy amount of contempt for the writer's market.

It is true that Byron's status as a lord led him to maintain a conspicuous detachment from the commercial concerns of publishing. As many scholars have pointed out, at the outset of his working relationship with Murray, Byron was careful to assert his high social standing by refusing to accept money from his publisher and bequeathing earnings and copyrights to friends.<sup>2</sup> Jerome Christensen observes that Byron's social stature as an aristocrat is central to the oppositional, self-reliant outlook of his poetry. Describing how Byron demonstrated his aristocratic superiority via gestures of disdain for social mores, Christensen places special emphasis upon his resistance to the image the print industry had built for him:

Lord Byron may have been "born for opposition," but from the morning (or, more probably, the afternoon) of that mythical day when he awoke to find himself famous, for Lord Byron to write in opposition meant to write against himself, or at least against "Byronism," that systematically elaborated, commercially triumphant version of himself devised and promoted by his publisher, celebrated and denounced by his reviewers and readers. (88)

Insofar as Byron reaffirms his status, both as an aristocrat and as a public spectacle, through his defiance of the popular, the public's very conception of his fame became the

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Manning and Caroline Franklin are two scholars that have made note of this strategy. Both have also pointed out that this became a point of contention between Byron and Murray. Franklin notes that Murray was irritated by Byron's requests to confer his money on friends (48). Manning explains that this reflected the two men's incompatibility, based as it was in Murray's belief that "the relations of author and publisher are governed by the rules of commerce and the pressure of profits" ("Marketplace" 181).

target of his opposition. To a degree, Christensen's point supports Martin's description of Byron's disdain for his audience and his own work. Yet, by noting that Byron was driven to "write in opposition," Christensen indicates that Byron was not entirely disinterested in the plebeian matters of the marketplace. Insofar as Byron's method of representation was inherently oppositional to popular opinion, the poet remained sensitive to the public's perception of him, and this method of representation was likewise reinforced by the market's fascination with oppositional figures. For Christensen, the serialization of the Oriental tales represents a perpetual enactment of Byron's seeming rejection of the market, as the Giaour's initially distinct expression of inner turmoil became a signature for reproducing copies of the Byronic hero (109 – 110). Christensen posits an antagonistic relationship between Byron and the consumer public, but it is not one characterized by disdainful disregard, as Martin would have it. Rather, as "the transitional figure between aristocratic honour and middle-class commerce," Byron enacts an aristocratic heterodoxy that rebuffs the consumer public so that he can maintain their fascination and, in doing so, attend to their expectations (Christensen 72).

Ian Dennis builds upon Christensen's notion of Byron's productive resistance towards the market, emphasizing the poet's keen understanding of this interplay of opposition and attraction. Whereas Christensen often presents Byron as a reflexive contrarian, driven to assert his aristocratic individualism in defiance of an increasingly regulated market culture, Dennis indicates that such displays of indifference are in fact a self-conscious posture. Drawing on Gans' concept of the competitive modelling of identity, Dennis describes how the subject's hostility towards market culture becomes a means of attracting others' desires: "Since the self now feels itself besieged by desires

from all sides, rather than being drawn to a singular centre, it typically expresses its struggle for existence as a hostility to the market - even if every such expression, every defiance of the desires of others, works to obtain the distinction, the power that is the basic desideratum of the market” (Dennis 22). In a cultural scene with no fixed centre, nothing provokes attention and imitation more than the subject who flagrantly disregards the existing models of behaviour. This concept of resentment towards the market as a method of deriving centrality within the market nicely encapsulates the cyclical nature of the celebrity’s appeal and resistance to the public gaze, as discussed in the previous section. According to Dennis, Byron’s poetry is distinguished by an acute awareness of the position he held within a network of mediated desire, “as he watches himself capture the centre from the ostensibly tormented periphery, mediate by rejecting all mediators, and end up modelling modelling itself” (27). More than a haughty response or defiant impulse, Byron’s resistance to the market is a studied posture by which he directs the imitative desires of his audience. In this sense, even when Byron rejects the popular taste that he helps to define, he implicitly draws upon and utilizes the logic of the market, demonstrating its potential for mediating the public’s gaze.

This opposition and coordination with the marketplace is further reflected in Byron’s complex relationship with publishers and editors. In this regard, it is useful to draw some comparisons between Byron and Wordsworth. While Wordsworth drew a thick line between personal and professional relationships, keeping business partners at a distance and looking only to the feedback of close friends and family, Byron’s business relationships thoroughly blurred this line. Despite Byron’s initial aristocratic disinterest in matters of business (or perhaps because this aristocratic mien ran contrary to

professional detachment), he formed close friendships with many of his publishers and editors. Like Wordsworth, many of Byron's most trusted advisors were drawn from his personal life, such as his closest friend and travelling companion Thomas Hobhouse. However, the reverse was also true, as business associates such as John Murray would grow to become his most intimate correspondents. In addition to Murray, Byron's editor, the satirist William Gifford, was tied to the poet on both a professional and personal level. Before Murray assigned Gifford the task of editing *Childe Harold*, Byron was already an admirer of the older poet. While their relationship was never as informal or intimate as the one Byron shared with Murray, the younger poet looked to Gifford as a mentor throughout his career. Even after his business ties with the publishing firm had soured, Byron claimed there was no one else he implicitly trusted to revise his work (Franklin 54). To these figures we can add literary agents, such as Byron's cousin Robert Charles Dallas, who played a key role in arranging for the publication of *Childe Harold*, and Douglas Kinnaird, his longtime friend who represented his publishing interests following his departure from England in 1816. Nearly all of Byron's business contacts were involved in his personal life to some degree. It was the task of these friends and advisors to consider the reactions of the reading public and impose strictures upon the poet's work, ordering revisions so that his poetry would appeal to the consumer's sensibilities. In this sense, they manifested the agency of the marketplace, acting as the mediums by which commercial interests and systemic concerns applied pressure upon the poet's voice. The first chapter of this study showed how Wordsworth's preoccupation with a singular authorial vision correlated with his distant, overbearing relationships with publishers. By contrast, Byron's respect and affection for his business associates meant

that he was more keenly aware of the commercial realities of the marketplace and more receptive to others' advice. In turn, this interest in commercial concerns speaks to his desire to address a reading audience that he did not entirely understand or respect. As Franklin points out, Byron was mindful of Gifford and Murray's opinions because they "gave [him] an indication of how his poetry would be received by the respectable middle class: those whose views he wished to challenge yet who formed an important section of the reading public" (19). That being said, Byron was far from a complaisant collaborator.

Indeed, as much as he depended upon Murray's business acumen, from the outset of their working relationship he was frequently combative. When Murray recommended that Byron revise the first cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, fearing that passages sympathetic to the plight of Spain would offend the public's political sensibilities, Byron resisted, reasoning that risqué material would only help attract attention and drive sales: "as for the 'Orthodox', let us hope they will buy on purpose to abuse, you will forgive the one if they will do the other" (*BLJ* 2: 91). Byron told Murray that he would be willing to consider making any changes based on technical criticisms, but would admit no revisions on political or religious content (*BLJ* 2: 90). Throughout their working relationship, Murray and Byron would frequently dispute the inclusion of provocative subject matter, with Murray's desire to appease conservative, middle-class consumers conflicting with Byron's penchant for subversive material. Murray's politics were flexible and he was willing to publish material that conflicted with his Tory loyalties if there was profit to be made (O'Connell, "Natural Antipathy" 163). Nonetheless, this conflict would eventually prove to be a key factor to the termination of their partnership following Byron's exile from England, as shall be discussed further in the following sections.

Beyond matters of content, Byron often challenged Murray on matters of production and marketing. Byron was wary of any contrived attempts to generate critical praise for his work. When he learned that Murray intended to show the poem to Gifford, Byron was immediately suspicious that the editor would be instructed to write a positive review for the *Quarterly Review*. Deceptive acts of market manipulation, such as puffery (positive reviews written at the behest of publishers), were offensive to Byron, both as a poet and an aristocrat. As Byron vents his frustration with Murray in a letter to Dallas, his disdain for the plebeian business of publishing is clear:

It is bad enough to be a scribbler, without having recourse to such shifts to extort praise, or deprecate censure. It is anticipating, it is begging, kneeling, adulating - the devil! The devil! The devil! And all without my wish, and contrary to my desire. I wish Murray had been tied to *Payne's* neck when he jumped into the Paddington canal, and so tell him - *that* is the proper receptacle for publishers. (*BLJ* 2: 101)

Byron's concern that his associating with the unscrupulous workings of the market might taint his dignity is evident in his conflation of marketing with begging and his indignation at having his wishes defied by a tradesman. The classist overtones of these remarks, coupled with his stated belief that the poem must stand on its own merit, that "if the poem is a *poem*, it will surmount these obstacles, and if *not*, it deserves its fate", speak to a sense of aristocratic honour at odds with an egalitarian marketplace (*BLJ* 2: 92).

Ironically, Byron would later learn that Dallas himself had written a glowing review of *Childe Harold* for the *Literary Panorama* the week prior to its publication (Mason 79). He was no less furious with his cousin than he had been with his publisher.

As a result, many scholars have come to identify Murray as a conservative capitalist foil, attempting to reign in the audacity of Byron's poetic voice.<sup>3</sup> However, more recent scholarship has argued against drawing a binary between Murray as the greedy publisher and Byron as the high-minded poet. Franklin points out that, while Byron refused to omit lines that would sterilize *Childe Harold* of its radical politics, he was amenable to making changes that would soften the censure of critics and outrage of politicians (45). Nicholas Mason describes Byron as a contentious but compromising collaborator, who made the most of his associates' feedback to acclimate his work for the masses: "Working closely with both Dallas and Murray, he thoroughly revised the poem, usually with an eye toward its reception" (70). Mason provides perhaps the most thorough account of the marketing strategy Murray employed to ensure *Childe Harold's* success, detailing the inroads Murray made with booksellers and influential social circles prior to its publication. Mason argues that the poem's instant popularity was not so much a result of its content "as one of a marketing-savvy publisher, an ambitious agent, and a poet with a penchant for self-promotion converging at an ideal moment in literary and advertising history" (65).<sup>4</sup> As Mason's description indicates, a certain synergy existed between Byron, Murray, and Dallas. Despite his aversion to direct involvement in mercantile matters, Byron took part in the promotion of the poem. He disputed with

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<sup>3</sup> Mary O'Connell provides an overview of this popular critical opinion of Murray, listing Peter Cochran, Tom Mole, and Jerome Christensen among those who have typically viewed Murray's concern for profits and conservative politics as a stumbling block in Byron's career ("Natural Antipathy" 163). O'Connell does admit that Christensen's analogy of Murray playing Colonel Parker to Byron's Elvis accurately identifies the publisher as chiefly concerned with profits, not politics. However, she also argues that such dismissive assessments undervalue the influence Murray had upon Byron's literary development. This chapter will examine the tensions that arose as a result of Murray's mercantilism following Byron's departure for the continent in 1816, but also seeks to appreciate the degree to which Byron depended on Murray's insight into the market.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that Mason is dismissive of the poem's merit. Rather, he quite reasonably argues that audiences could not have learned of the poem's quality through word of mouth fast enough to motivate the poem's initial sales (65).

Murray over the impact including his name would have on sales and made efforts to broaden his social circle in the months prior to publication to assist the poem's reception (Mason 72). Indeed, according to Dallas, Byron even went so far as to refer to his first political speech before the House of Lords, a sensationalistic harangue regarding proposed laws against framebreakers, as "the best advertisement for *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*" (Dallas 1:132). This quip not only indicates Byron's understanding of marketing as public spectacle, but also sees the proud Lord conflate his duties as an aristocrat and politician with his business as a poet, even if only in jest. For all his outspoken distaste for the uncouth concerns of the publishing industry, he was always mindful of such matters. Thus, while it is useful to discuss Byron's productive resistance to the marketplace in abstract terms, as a rhetorical quality of his poetry that both defies and attracts the reader's gaze, this conflicted relationship with the market also manifests in more literal terms. Byron worked closely with the businessmen responsible for mediating his voice to the public, presenting an air of detached superiority that belied his genuine concern with engaging the market.

This conflicted status is perhaps best encapsulated by the working relationship that grew between Byron and Murray. Their friendship was exceedingly complex: at once personal and professional, complementary and oppositional. For Murray's part, his fondness for the poet did not waver throughout the years, even following the dissolution of their business relationship. Murray was not afraid to contradict Byron and remind him of his own superior experience as a publisher, but he always maintained a respectful tone, especially when requesting revisions (O'Connell, "Natural Antipathy" 165). While it is possible to interpret Murray's deference as little more than a businessman seeking to

appease his most important client, paying him the respect due a lord, Humphrey Carpenter points out that his affection cannot be wholly explained as a matter of courtesy. In one particularly passionate response to an angry letter from Byron, Murray exclaimed, “If you really meant to give the Stab you gave to my feelings, may God harden my heart against man, for never, never will I attach myself to another” (Murray 15). As Carpenter observes, such language seems more appropriate to a letter between lovers rather than business associates undergoing a dispute (75). The publisher clearly had strong feelings for his noble poet. He considered him a close friend and was anxious to secure not just his business but also his respect. Byron’s regard for Murray seems to have vacillated with his mood. He would often become irritated by the publisher and deride him as little more than an upstart tradesman. Mary O’Connell explains that Byron was easily exasperated by Murray’s cautious, conservative nature, describing him as timorous and shuffling (“Natural Antipathy” 163). Nonetheless, as O’Connell concludes, Byron’s letters to Murray could be warm and confiding, ultimately reciprocating Murray’s gestures of friendship.

Much like his poetry, Byron’s professional relationships blur the line that separates his public identity as an author from his private life. His involvement in both the material concerns of publishing and the personal lives of his associates speaks to his willingness to immerse himself within the collaborative environment of the print industry. Byron’s relative investment in the reception of readers and opinions of tradesmen seems to contradict his reputation for fierce autonomy and noble condescension. It seems inconsistent with his deprecating remarks regarding publishers and McDayter’s account of his distaste for his own readership. However, it is important

to recognize that while Byron was weary of the literary marketplace, not wanting to be perceived as a scribbler churning out poetry for profit, he believed the market could sustain a more reputable model of authorship. By combining professional and personal relationships Byron sought to counteract the associations of authorship with trade labour, cultivating a publishing environment closer to the social authorship of his favourite eighteenth-century satirists. Indeed, O'Connell notes that Murray also sought to cultivate just such a relationship, making efforts to distance himself from the image of the mercantile bookseller and instead presenting himself as a gentleman publisher, one who acted as a "liberal patron of the arts" ("Natural Antipathy" 162). Murray's home and office at 50 Albemarle Street served as a clubhouse for his authors and colleagues (both literary and political), allowing him to recast the print industry as a proper setting for gentleman authors. Even as they worked to address the mass market, both Byron and Murray felt that the business of writing and publishing should maintain the dignified social rapport of the patronage system.

Similarly, scholars have shown how Byron attempted to combat the detachment of the marketplace in relation to his audience. Franklin attributes Byron's appeal to his ability to mask the commercial nature of his work, "substituting the rhetoric of intimacy for the contractual roles of producer/consumer" (55). Tom Mole thoroughly examines this aspect of Byron's work, outlining the ways he established a familiar tone with his mass readership, which allowed individuals to imagine themselves as confidants rather than part of a consumerist mob (*Byron's* 25). Mole shows how Byron encoded poems with layers of meaning that spoke to different strata of readers, whether through hidden references that could only be detected by close friends or personalized addresses, such as

*Childe Harold's* dedication to Lord Oxford's young daughter Lady Charlotte Harley.

These strategies allowed Byron to dispel the remote detachment of the market and reframe his poetry from a commercial product to an interpersonal exchange. To a degree, these references rebuff the wider readership, alluding to a hidden message intended for an exclusive audience. Yet, in doing so, such obscure references helped evoke the intimate tone of the poem, prompting readers to presume they were not only reading Byron's innermost thoughts and feelings, but were also privy to a private exchange. By offering evidence of a hidden, pre-textual identity that can be accessed through a careful reading of the text, Byron was able to convey a seemingly unmediated connection with his readership.

In this manner, Byron sought to counteract what he considered to be the uncouth, uncivil conditions of professional authorship, as it related to both the production and reception of his poetry. Yet, it would be wrong to confuse his maneuvering within the writer's market as an outright rejection of market culture. Indeed, by dealing with tradesman as gentleman and addressing readers as confidantes, Byron was acclimatizing to market conditions as much as he was reshaping them. As Christensen rightly argues, Byron draws strength from his opposition to market forces that would exert influence over his writing, but this opposition is informed by a careful contemplation of these factors rather than their brusque dismissal. Thus, even as he chides Murray for his constant concern for appeasing the middle-class, he depends upon his publisher's insight into the opinions and tastes of the public. Byron may have been the most distinctive, idiosyncratic poet of the period but he still relied upon the feedback of a coterie of editors to refine his work for consumption.

While he resisted the influence of the market and infused his published work with the familiarity of a personal monologue, Byron understood publishing to be a process of mediation. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* distinguished itself by bringing the reader into the author's confidence, seeming to convey thoughts and feelings with perfect immediacy. Yet, even before this success would thrust him into the focus of the public eye, Byron did not conceive of the published text as the expression of distilled private sentiments. Rather, he understood that its interpretation would be framed by the conditions of the market, affected by the speculation and reception surrounding its release, and so he took part in its staging. It is from this position that Byron enters into celebrity, already practicing what Eisner describes as the celebrity's "forms of presence that are at once compelling and ephemeral, and that exercise power by virtue of being, in fact, mere system-effects" (13). Byron's poetry fascinates because it presents a kernel of personal sentiment with every facet polished and fashioned in anticipation of the public's scrutiny. Exactly what this fashioning involves varies throughout his career, but one factor remains constant: an authorial presence that simultaneously elicits and denies the audience's gaze.

The range and persistence of this strategy can be illustrated through a comparison of two very distinct periods in Byron's career: the composition of *The Giaour* in 1812-13 and the composition of the first canto of *Don Juan* in 1818-19. As noted earlier, the prolonged development of *The Giaour* speaks to the care with which Byron developed this approach. Written on the heels of his rise to fame, the first of the Oriental Tales sees him negotiate the shifting public-private divide that was transforming his life. In doing so, the poem builds upon the public persona created by *Childe Harold*, arousing consumers' curiosity regarding the identity of the author, while also denying the

possibility of authentic insight. At this early stage in his career, Byron works with the market, provoking the audience's desire for a legible textual subject and then perpetuating their interest by denying them satisfaction. When scandal drove Byron from England in 1816, his hostility towards the print market and those who enforced its demands increased. As a result, *Don Juan* presents a more subversive treatment of the audience's expectations. However, as I will argue, the influence of the market can still be traced in Byron's heterodox opus.

#### Early Celebrity and *The Giaour*

When Byron began composing *The Giaour* in November of 1812, he was involved in a dalliance with Jane Elizabeth Harley, the Countess of Oxford. Lady Oxford and her husband Edward Harley, the Earl of Oxford, were an influential couple in Whig social circles. Earlier that year they had attempted to induct Byron into the Hampden Club, a campaigning society for radical politicians (Eisler 376). While Byron's declining interest in Whig politics spoiled this plan, a romance kindled between Byron and Lady Oxford that would continue for months. In October, Byron joined the family at their country retreat in Eywood, staying with them into the new year. It seems an extraordinary situation, to be staying on as a houseguest of an illicit lover, carrying on an affair while sharing a roof with her husband and children. However, in her biography of Byron, Benita Eisler describes his time in Eywood as a relief from the financial debts and social complications surrounding his life in London (386). As Eisler points out, Byron's letters from this period describe his romance with Lady Oxford through analogies to Tasso's *Jerusalem Liberated*. Byron casts himself as Rinaldo, the crusader who is seduced and

dominated by the pagan princess Armida, emphasizing his submissive position in relation to his more mature lover (381). This was not Lady Oxford's first affair. She was an experienced, sophisticated woman and, while her affection was passionate, it was far from all-consuming. Following the scandal surrounding his affair with Lady Caroline Lamb earlier that year and its very public fallout, Byron's relationship with Lady Oxford and his time spent with her family was a calm, restorative period. Indeed, Byron was escaping from more than Lady Caroline.

When Byron departed for Eywood, he had been in England for a little more than a year, having returned the previous summer from his grand tour of the Levant. Byron's return to England promised to be the beginning of a transformative period in his life. His travels had broadened his horizons and instilled the cosmopolitan worldview that would come to characterize his writing. He returned to England with a long list of social and financial matters to attend to, brimming with ambitions for his political and literary future. However, Byron could not have predicted the ceaseless course of dramatic changes his life would undergo in the interceding year. A concise overview of the events of this year will help provide the necessary context for understanding Byron's apprehensions regarding his public life at the time that he began composing *The Giaour*.

Shortly after returning to England in July 1811, Byron's life was shaken by a series of personal losses: the deaths of his mother Catherine and his childhood friend Charles Skinner Matthews. The two deaths took place within days of each other, compounding Byron's grief. Moreover, his mother's passing occurred so suddenly that he was unable to arrive in time to be by her bedside. Although Byron's relationship with his mother was fraught with tension, it was also characterized by the great intimacy that

forms between a lonesome mother and her only son. After her death, he became mired in feelings of isolation, lamenting, “I had but one friend in the world and she is gone” (qtd. in Marchand 1: 287). In the months that followed, Byron occupied himself by preparing *Childe Harold* for Murray and setting out to launch his political career. In addition to the conflicts he would have with Murray over this time, Byron had to navigate a number of turbulent social relationships, including an ongoing feud with fellow poet Thomas Moore that nearly ended in a duel. As the publication of *Childe Harold* approached, Byron began to fear that certain passages would prove offensive to some of the influential figures that he was now coming into contact with (Eisler 313).<sup>5</sup> The world of London’s social circles was a complex network joining figures of varying political stripes and Byron was only beginning to determine his place (if any) amongst them. This concern was heightened by his desire to make his mark in politics. In February 1812, he delivered the first of three speeches in the House of Lords that, while rousing a strong reaction, were deemed ineffective. Even his political mentor, the elder statesman Lord Holland, who had advised and supported him in the preparation of the first speech, judged Byron’s fiery bombast to be ill suited to modern political rhetoric (Marchand 1: 322). Byron would abandon his aspirations of statesmanship in the coming months. However, his hopes were still riding high following the sensation caused by his first speeches when the release of *Childe Harold* opened a new avenue, launching him into literary celebrity and making him the most sought-after guest of the London aristocracy.

Dinner invitations arrived daily, beckoning Byron to join a myriad of social

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Byron had to tactfully decline an invitation to meet with Lord Elgin shortly following his return to England (Eisler 291). *Childe Harold* includes passages critical of Elgin’s controversial decision to remove the Parthenon Marbles (thereafter known as the Elgin Marbles) from Greece and transport them to England. Byron was hesitant to forge relationships with powerful figures he might soon alienate.

circles. In addition to the invitations to dine came missives from readers, many of them unknown or anonymous, many of them female admirers. Some of these letters sought to engage Byron in a dialogue, asserting an empathic understanding of the poet's soul gleaned from his poem. A number of them offered to provide companionship (sometimes romantic, sometimes platonic) to help ease his lonesomeness (Throsby 117).<sup>6</sup> It was at this point that Byron became involved in the affair with another avid fan, Caroline Lamb, the wife of Lord Melbourne. An ardent young woman who had become enamoured with the poet upon reading *Childe Harold*, Lady Caroline's vivacious and unpredictable behaviour captivated Byron's attention. The two became consumed by one another's passion and, for a time, saw each other on a daily basis. However, it was not long before the same qualities that Byron had initially found bewitching began to vex him. Lady Caroline was not given to discretion. When she began to brazenly carry out their amour in public, Byron feared their private affair would become a scandal and took steps to disengage. Four months after first meeting Lady Caroline, Byron had to call upon the assistance of Hobhouse to stop him from eloping and to remove her from his lodgings. This would prove a turning point: Byron avoided future contact, despite Caroline's increasingly erratic behavior.<sup>7</sup> In the midst of romantic intrigue, political ambition, and literary fame, Byron's expensive lifestyle caused him to spiral into debt. As a solution, he began the long process of selling Newstead Abbey, the ancestral home of the Byrons

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<sup>6</sup> As Corin Throsby points out, many of these offers were platonic in nature, inviting Byron to engage in a correspondence that would provide intellectual and emotional succour. However, there were other more extreme cases that sought to enter directly into Byron's life, such as Lady Christina Falkland, who believed *Childe Harold*'s romantic sentiments had been addressed specifically to her, or the pseudonymous Echo, who was the only correspondent bold enough to propose meeting in person (Marchand 1: 346; Throsby 121).

<sup>7</sup> This brief description does not do justice to the complexity of Byron's relationship with Lady Caroline, which is a topic that has been debated in great detail. It is worth noting that the image of Lady Caroline as a hysterical fan, stalking Lord Byron, has been contested for overlooking the extent of her own victimization in the affair and the subsequent scapegoating of responsibility.

since the fourteenth century, which he had inherited along with his lordship. Originally, Byron was adamantly opposed to selling the property, realizing that for an aristocrat to sell his landed estate was a social failing that would jeopardize his social standing as a member of the gentry (Beckett and Aley 17, 160). Yet, by the summer of 1812, he was impatient to secure a buyer that could fund his life in London and eventual travels abroad. As his life in the public eye became increasingly complex, Byron began to sever the last remaining tie to his lost family.

In order to understand his position as a celebrity at the time he wrote *The Giaour*, it is worth considering the cumulative effect brought about by the sheer quantity and close proximity of these life changes. Each one brings about another shift in Byron's social equilibrium, as the foundations of his private world begin to dissolve and his rapidly changing public prospects take hold of his life. By the time Lady Caroline threatened to entirely erase the line between private affair and public spectacle, Byron was still adjusting to a life spread across diverse social circles but bereft of a familial core. Following these events, Byron retreats to Eywood and the seclusion of the Oxfords' domestic sphere, where he begins work on *The Giaour*. This moment in Byron's career presents an illustrative example of a celebrity coming to apply a reflexive method of representation that anticipates public scrutiny. As readings of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in Dennis, Garber, and Büchel have all shown, Byron had already demonstrated his ability to create a dynamic model of selfhood designed to mediate the audience's reaction. Even before *Childe Harold*, Byron demonstrates a capacity for adapting his authorial presence in response to readers in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. However, the closing months of 1812 mark the first time that Byron would do

so from the position of celebrity, confronted with a ubiquitous gaze that “creates and shapes those who move before it” (Braudy 398). *The Giaour*’s long incubation, fragmented structure, and iterated publication all reflect this responsive adjustment, as he gradually fashioned a protagonist that would reinforce the persona held in the public’s imagination, even while denying it veracity. *The Giaour* alludes to the subjective presence made explicit in *Childe Harold*, but ultimately denies its legibility, depicting instead the process by which others project meaning upon the subject, rendering it a spectacle.

Like many of Byron’s most popular poems, *The Giaour*’s immediate appeal lies in the enticing figure of its protagonist. As a character, the Giaour serves as a typical example of the Byronic hero: a brooding and isolated adventurer in a foreign land, characterized by grief over past loss and an indomitable individualism, who refuses to submit to any authority beyond his own passions. In returning to this character type, Byron was taking advantage of the popularity of *Childe Harold*, drawing upon an identifiable trope that had proven popular and strengthening his association with it. The association between the protagonist and the author is not as direct it had been in *Childe Harold*, however. While the earlier poem had made half-hearted attempts to disassociate the two, it was clear to readers that Harold’s reflections on the different locales were derived from Byron’s recent travels. *The Giaour*, on the other hand, told a more fantastic tale based in a historical setting, discouraging readers from viewing the poem as biography. Nonetheless, Byron found ways to provoke the public into associating the story with events from his own life. Byron’s own footnote from the conclusion of the poem relates the tale to his travels, citing its inspiration in historical cases he had heard

recounted during his time in the Levant. However, this explicit connection only serves to supplement more personal, implicit ones.

Indeed, the poem was also based in Byron's own firsthand experiences. In *The Giaour*, Leila is drowned by her husband, the Muslim noble Hassan, as punishment for having an affair with a foreigner, the titular Giaour. While Byron was visiting Athens in 1811, he encountered a group of men carrying out just such an honour killing. A young woman had been caught with an illicit lover and had been sentenced to death by the governor. She had been sewn into a sack and was being carried to the sea to be drowned when Byron encountered the procession and intervened, going so far as to draw his pistols on the guards carrying out the execution. In the end, he was able to save the young woman's life through a combination of threats and bribes (Marchand 1: 257). This anecdote became public knowledge and was understood to be the inspiration for the poem. As Tom Mole notes, Byron helped spread this anecdote, attaching copies of a letter recounting the tale from his friend Lord Sligo with early drafts of *The Giaour* he shared with acquaintances (*Byron's* 63). In doing so, he planted the seeds for an association between the real life encounter with the fictional poem. Once the basis of the poem became common knowledge, people began to question which details were fictional and which were based in fact. Specifically, one popular rumour claimed that Byron was actually the young woman's lover and had come to her aid because he was responsible for her fate (Mole, *Byron's* 63). Byron was careful to avoid specifying his relationship with the young woman, but he did nothing to quash public speculation.

Byron clearly understood the advantages of his reputation and used it to appeal to existing fans and spark the public's imagination. The poem is compelling because it

presents the promise of insight into the mind and heart of its enigmatic protagonist-cum-author. As Mole notes, this desire for insight is further provoked by the poem's fractured structure, prompting curious readers to view the poem as a puzzle to be unravelled: "Byron's reference in the Advertisement to 'the story, when entire' suggests an un-narrative which a sufficiently imaginative or perspicacious reader could discern behind the 'disjointed fragments'" (*Byron's* 62). Moreover, the prospect of the poem serving as an authentic depiction of inner selfhood complements the romantic depiction of individualism and autonomy that is central to the Byronic figure. The notion that the poem can serve as a private link joining author and reader appeals to the reader because it prioritizes the personal over the societal. In terms of a Habermasian communicative ideal, it posits an individual who maintains the integrity of his Lifeworld in spite of the mediating Systems of market society. Such a model of expression would have seemed naive to Byron, a public figure who understood all acts of self-representation to be mediated. Yet, nothing could be more Byronic than the image of the self-contained individual defying systems of control.

In *The Giaour*, this conflict of intrusive public order and uncompromising private sentiment defines the protagonist's struggle. This can be seen in the protagonist's rivalry with Hassan who, as a Muslim noble, represents the dominant social order of the Ottoman Turks in Greece. Hassan's relationship to Leila is presented in the impersonal terms of property ownership, as he dispatches an unfaithful lover and immediately goes about pursuing her replacement. While his actions strike the reader as morally reprehensible, they are validated by the cultural milieu that serves as backdrop. Byron's shifting narrative perspective helps the reader understand this milieu by describing

Hassan's actions in the voice of sympathetic Muslim onlookers: "'Tis said he goes to woo a bride / More true than her who left his side; / The faithless slave that broke her bower, / And, worse than faithless, for a Giaour!" (533 – 536). Byron leads the reader to understand that such actions are warranted and even praised under the Ottoman's patriarchal system. This sentiment is echoed repeatedly throughout the first half of the poem, as similar narrative voices mourn Hassan's death and curse the Giaour to an Islamic vision of damnation: "thou false Infidel! shalt writhe / Beneath avenging Monkir's scythe; And from its torment 'scape alone / To wander round lost Belies' throne" (747 – 750). Mohammed Sharafuddin has argued that the care and accuracy of such detailed allusions are indicative of Byron's respect for Muslim culture, which the poet often represents as a liberating alternative to repressive English mores (228). The Muslim fragments of *The Giaour* opens the reader to a pluralist view, providing insight into a foreign society that legitimately views the triumph of the hero as a tragedy. Indeed, the passages that lament the ruin of Hassan's household following his death illustrate the destructive consequences of the Giaour's actions, not just towards his rival, but to the larger community he represents. This raises the intriguing possibility of interpreting the events of the poem through multiple perspectives, one Muslim and another Christian, neither one more authoritative than the other.

However, such pluralism is undermined by the primacy of the hero's sentiments. For example, another passage, which provides a more compassionate description of Leila, offsets those quoted above: "Oh! Who young Leila's glance could read / And keep that portion of his creed / Which saith, that woman is but dust, / a soulless toy for tyrant's lust?" (487 – 490). The speaker of this passage is left ambiguous, but given his or her

knowledge of Leila's mysterious fate, it is logical to associate these sentiments with the Giaour or an omniscient narrator. In any case, he or she cannot conceive of a world in which moral judgement is determined by external factors, inherited from religion or culture, rather than intuited from personal sentiment. This emphasis upon the reigning influence of emotion is manifested by the Giaour, whose every action is driven by desire, anger, and grief. As such, he stands in contrast to the remorseless Hassan, who appears cruel and inhumane. Thus, despite the poem's cosmopolitan view of Islamic culture, readers are led to invest in the romantic image of the Byronic hero and his doomed love and, in doing so, to condemn the social order that enables and condones Hassan's actions. The conflict between the Giaour and Hassan is a clash between the purity of private sentiments and the corruption of public authority.

Throughout the poem, each depiction of the Giaour is visually coded to reinforce this valorization of personal sentiment. From the Fisherman's first glimpse of him raising his fist defiantly on horseback to his refusal of the Friar's prayers on his behalf in the poem's final sections, the Giaour presents a sublime image of isolation and self-determination. Throughout the poem, the intensity of his feelings consistently claim priority over the authority of others, whether they be secular or divine, as illustrated in his account of Hassan's death:

[Leila's] spirit pointed well the steel  
 Which taught that felon heart to feel.  
 He call'd the Prophet, but his power  
 Was vain against the vengeful Giaour:  
 He call'd on Alla - but the word

Arose unheeded or unheard. (682)

Authorized by the martyrdom of his lost love and frustrated desire, the potency of the Giaour's outrage overwhelms not only his foe, but his foe's faith. This belief that personal sentiment renders all other factors irrelevant is perhaps best articulated when the Giaour conveys his resignation to grief and misery to the Friar: "Alas! The breast that inly bleeds / Hath nought to dread from outward blow - / Who falls from all he knows of bliss, / Cares little into what abyss" (1155 – 1158). Even as it gestures towards a dangerous underlying nihilism, this passage captures the allure of the Giaour, evoking the dedication of the lover who will never love again and the boldness of the hero who has nothing left to fear. Such dramatic displays of autonomy, defined by conflict with social forces, contribute to perceptions of the protagonist as a substantive model of selfhood. As Garber explains, *The Giaour* constitutes an important step in the process of canonization of the Byronic identity that began in *Childe Harold* (49). The earlier poem rejects closure, serving an open-ended exercise in self-exploration, a continuous dialectic of reflection as Harold travels from location to location. *The Giaour* seeks to resolve that dialectic and form a stable selfhood, a goal that is realized through the hero's rivalry with Hassan. In many regards, Hassan acts as a mirror, reflecting a number of the hero's traits, including his anger, bravery, and desire. Despite their similarities however, Hassan remains distinct, serving as an alien Other against which the hero can define himself. As Garber observes, "the gesture of doubling, of putting something out there which is and is not the self, is a gesture towards the making of self, towards giving it that density and substance it has needed" (49 – 50). Hassan is similar enough to serve as a potential rival, modelling an identity like that of the hero, but he is also dissimilar enough to allow the

hero to define himself by differentiation. The Giaour is every bit the fearless warrior as Hassan, but he is distinguished by his depth of feeling. Together, these two figures exist in constant tension, struggling for primacy over Leila, the shared object of their competition. As the Giaour delivers the killing blow, pronouncing his autonomy in the same instant that he destroys his rival, he resolves difference and secures his own identity as whole and complete. At least, that is the intent.

Insofar as fans of *Childe Harold* anticipated a poem that would bring them into closer contact with the author, Byron responded to market demand by framing the poem with reference to his own exploits and creating a hero derived from his public persona. Beyond provoking speculation as to the autobiographical nature of the poem, *The Giaour* appealed to readers' desires by romanticizing the very concept of the legible subject. For readers to interpret a text or character as a representation of the author, they must first conceptualize the author as a fixed subject who can be accurately rendered within the static medium of the text. As a hero, the Giaour constantly attests to this possibility and extols the achievement of such constancy. By the poem's final scene, the hero has become utterly ironclad, bearing the memory of his lover with a melancholy so unwavering that it intimidates the Friar:

Not oft to smile descendeth he,  
 And when he doth 'tis sad to see  
 That he but mocks at Misery.  
 How that pale lip will curl and quiver!  
 Then fix once more as if for ever -  
 As if his sorrow or disdain

Forbade him e'er to smile again. (850 – 856)

The Friar's description of the hero's unalterable state is itself an exercise in physiognomy, as facial expressions provide a direct insight into the character's emotional state. The poem is full of similar examples of characters divining the Giaour's thoughts and feelings by examining his appearance, beginning with the Fisherman, who observes that "o'er his soul / Winters of Memory seemed to roll, / And gather in the drop of time / A life of pain, an age of crime" (261 – 264). All this is gleaned from a glimpse that lasts "but an instant" (257). Passages such as this assure the reader that Byronic passion is so potent that it can be accurately read upon the surface (either of a face or a text).

However, while the Byronic figure presents an enticing subject for readers' empathy, it would be inaccurate to conclude that the poem glorifies, or even validates, his self-destructive heroism. As Daniel P. Watkins observes, the Giaour is a tragic figure, driven into exile by his own solipsistic passions:

His extreme aloofness, however much it is celebrated by the narrators of his story, is a reflection of completely privatized reality, and his defiance and criminal activities, as well as his commitment to Leila and withdrawal into the monastery, represent the horizon of possibility within a given social framework rather than the sheer imposition of his powerful will.

(40)

Despite his victory over Hassan and outspoken rejection of others' authority, the hero concludes the poem trapped in isolation, fleeing into the socially prescribed space of the monastery where he will remain cut off from the outside world. In this sense, Watkins views the Giaour's combative autonomy as a retreat from the complexity of social

relations, rather than a confrontation with their inequities. This retreat leaves him powerless, as his commitment to his own ideals only prevents him from engaging with society, tightening the control of external factors over his life (Watkins 42). To extol the Giaour's commitment to personal sentiment is to overlook the poem's true complexity. Just as interpreting the hero as an endorsement of masculine self-sufficiency is an oversimplification, so too is the belief that he represents a fixed, fully realized portrait of selfhood. To return to the mirroring of identity that takes place through Hassan, Garber concludes his analysis by observing that the hero's attempt to achieve wholeness by destroying the Other is delusional. Echoing Watkins' conclusion, Garber asserts that any such attempt can never truly be realized and instead becomes a trap (50). It is not the subject who receives closure with the destruction of his competitor, but rather the destroyed Other who becomes static and whole, as illustrated by Hassan's immortalization as a hero in the annals of his people. The Giaour, by contrast, falls victim to his competitive self-assertions. In the poem's conclusion, he is left behind to be perpetually haunted by the conflict, anticipating joining Leila in death, waiting for her to "pass thy dewy fingers o'er / This brow that then will burn no more" (1312 – 1313). Ian Dennis develops this argument further, identifying the competitive relationship between the Giaour and Hassan to be more intimate and central to the formation of the former's identity than his romance with Leila. For Dennis, the Giaour's insistent declarations of his own autonomy gesture towards the inherent lie of such claims by perpetually enacting comparisons to Hassan (75). Even after the death of his rival, the hero continues to depend upon him as a means of defining himself. In the end, it is not desire for the love of Leila that takes hold and consumes the Byronic hero, but rather the desire to compete

for her (Dennis 82).

If it is a fallacy to interpret the Giaour as a figure who demonstrates the heroic nature of self-sufficiency, then it is also problematic to conclude that the text serves as a reliable portrait of the subject's identity. As previously noted, the poem is filled with physiognomic judgements, as the hero's features and expressions render his violent emotions visible to onlookers such as the Friar and Fisherman. Even Hassan reads the hero's identity through his visage:

'Tis he - 'tis he - I know him now,  
 I know him by his pallid brow;  
 I know him by the evil eye  
 That aids his envious treachery;  
 I know him by his jet-black barb,  
 Though now array'd in Arnaut garb (610 – 615)

His face is such an accurate indicator of his true self that unusual clothes and surroundings cannot obscure it. It seems only logical for the reader to adopt a similar approach. However, it is worth noting that, as often as the poem encourages the reader to conflate the hero's exterior with his interior, it also dramatizes the act of looking, carefully depicting the process by which the gaze of the curious spectator transforms subject into object. As the Giaour first appears in the poem charging along the shore, the resulting image is carefully framed through the Fisherman's gaze:

On - on he hastened - and he drew  
 My gaze of wonder as he flew  
 Though like a demon of the night

He passed and vanished from my sight

...

He spurs his steed - he nears the steep,

That jutting shadows o'er the deep -

He winds around - he hurries by -

The rock relieves him from mine eye

...

The crag is won - no more is seen

His Christian crest and haughty mien. (200 – 203, 208 – 211, 255 – 256)

As Dennis notes, *The Giaour* is a very cinematic poem due to Byron's use of shifting perspectives and attention to framing (88). Whenever the Giaour is described, the reader is made aware of the particular angle, distance, and lighting by which the narrator views him. While the hero is the focus of the passage, the reader more readily identifies with the position of the spectator, drawn into the Fisherman's point of view as he (we) strain to see this dramatic figure on the horizon drifting in and out of sight. The passage does not describe the Giaour's anguish so much as the impression of anguish his appearance inspires in the spectator's imagination.

Similarly, once the Giaour enters the monastery, the monks are quick to speculate regarding his past based on the traces of "what once were feelings in that face" (860). It is telling that their initial impressions of the reclusive guest are based largely upon his silent presence. His status as a lost sinner is gleaned, not from his eventual confession to the narrator, but from glimpses snatched as he lurks through the monastery and skirts their religious services. Once again, the intensity with which his appearance conveys his inner

turmoil is overpowering, such that the monks fear to look at him directly:

The flash of that dilating eye  
Reveals too much of times gone by -  
Though varying - indistinct its hue,  
Oft will his glance the gazer rue -  
For in it lurks that nameless spell  
Which speaks - itself unspeakable -  
A spirit yet unequalled and high  
That claims and keeps ascendancy (834 – 839).

This passage once again cultivates the physiognomic approach to reading, as the Giaour's visage conveys his sublime spirit more clearly than words ever could. However, it also indicates the power possessed by the subject's gaze. The Giaour can only be safely viewed in passing, where the spectator is free to project an identity upon him. To fall under his gaze is to glimpse a less assuring, more ominous truth and risk falling into his power, to be rendered the object of another's speculation, "as if that eye and bitter smile / Transferred to others fear and guile" (848 – 849). Thus, the Friar encourages the reader to steal a glance of the Giaour in another carefully framed depiction: "See - by the half-illumin'd wall / His hood fly back - his dark hair fall" (893 – 894). Yet in doing so, he alludes to the danger of having the situation reversed if subjected to his reifying gaze: "That pale brow wildly wreathing round, / As if the Gorgon there had bound / The sablest of the serpent-braid" (895 – 897).

*The Giaour* is a poem about appearances and spectacle. On an immediate level, it is a poem that indulges in these themes, plying readers with a series of captivating

tableaus that urge them to read the hero's soul writ large upon his every expression, just as they attempt to discern the author's life by reading the text. However, beyond the immediate drama of romance and rivalry, it is a poem that dramatizes the relationship between the spectacle and its audience. As a result, it draws attention to the dubious motivations and partial conclusions inherent to the onlooker's curiosity. Both Fisherman and Friar condemn the Giaour even as they fixate upon him, impelled by a defensive desire to judge that which intimidates them. Despite the fact that this stranger is clearly an infidel "Whom Othman's sons should slay or shun," the Fisherman cannot help but speculate upon his true identity (199). Yet, his question, "but who and what art thou / Of foreign garb and fearful brow?" is asked in vain (232 - 233). For all the conclusions that readers derived (and continue to derive) from Byron's poetry, *The Giaour* regularly denies curiosity, instead calling attention to the limits of insight. In one section of the poem, narrated from the perspective of gossips and bookended by unanswered questions regarding Leila's affair, Byron reminds the reader that sometimes only those personally involved in a matter can truly understand it:

Not thus was Hassan wont to fly

When Leila dwelt in his Serai.

Doth Leila there no longer dwell?

That tale can only Hassan tell.

...

Her heart as tender to her mate -

Her mate - stern Hassan, who was he?

Alas! That name was not for thee! (443 - 446, 516 - 518)

This last line might as well be addressed directly to those readers who traded rumours regarding Byron's own love life. Indeed, this association is confirmed by a passing reference to Lady Caroline Lamb, who, like Leila, was known to have fled to her illicit lover while disguised as a Georgian page (Marchand 1: 356). Byron's admonishment dispels the notion that personal truths can be extracted from his verse or deducted from a passing glance. In the poem's concluding passage, the Giaour's final wish is to be granted privacy in death, buried in anonymity, free from the public's intrusive gaze: "And save the cross above my head, / Be neither name nor emblem spread / By prying stranger to be read, / Or stay the passing pilgrim's tread" (1225 - 1228). In the end, the spectacle only gains relief once he has escaped his audience.

It is possible to interpret *The Giaour* as an attempt on Byron's part to establish control over his own identity by illustrating the limits of the reader's understanding. There is a combative quality to this denial of authentic insight, as the author resists the public's potentially stultifying gaze, which would conflate him with his heroes. As Frances Wilson notes, such a struggle for control may well have been motivated by a resentment towards consumers, an opposition to the notion that he "belonged to his readers, as if by being read the writer were literally purchased" (6). McDayter takes this argument further, describing the Giaour as a parody of audiences' absurd image of Byron, exaggerated into a monstrous form. Such an interpretation would indicate Byron was adverse to the influence of the literary market and hostile towards his own readership, intimating a connection between *The Giaour* and his own life only to goad the public's credulity. However, this conclusion exaggerates Byron's antagonism, oversimplifying the interplay between celebrity and audience.

As discussed at the outset of this chapter, when a celebrity evades the audience's gaze, it only serves to perpetuate curiosity and intensify scrutiny. The rejection of the centre and movement to the periphery is one step in a process by which the celebrity avoids stagnation and maintains attention in the market. *The Giaour* enacts this movement to the periphery, both in terms of its plot and its publication. As the Giaour recedes into the shadows of the monastery, he becomes ever more provocative. Every passage that obstructs and undercuts a clear image of the protagonist is an invitation to the reader to look closer. Corin Throsby describes this quality of Byron's writing as "a process of 'flirtation' with the reader," noting that it was especially appealing to his female readership as it encouraged imaginative engagement with the text (116). As Throsby explains, Byron's tendency to create ambiguity did not frustrate curious readers so much as entice them to form their own interpretations: "It is precisely this ambiguity which eighteenth-century readers may have found so appealing, largely because it gave the readers themselves an opportunity to construct their own ideas about the text" (117). While it is a fallacy to overlook the complex process of mediation separating a static text from a living subject, there is also a pleasure in speculating upon their correlation, which Byron supplies to his readers. As Dennis argues, rather than examining Byron's relationship with his reader in terms of either rejection or acceptance, it is more productive to consider how he sought to mediate and direct their gaze. For Byron, opposition to market influence in the form of withdrawal from the audience and resistance to his own public image actually becomes a means of engaging with the market.

Beyond the Giaour's literal lurking in the shadows, the creation and publication of

the poem sees Byron move to the periphery in order to both escape and sustain the public's gaze. Let us return briefly to Byron in November 1812, sequestered at Eywood. In the wake of a year of overwhelming public attention and transformative change, Byron begins work on a poem about the primacy of private sentiment in the face of an intrusive public. It is a poem that dramatically captures the hounded celebrity turning away from the public, eschewing the explicitly confessional mode of *Childe Harold* for a more oblique posture. However, it is also a poem carefully planned to secure the public's interest following the former's success. Michael Sundell, one of the first scholars to seriously examine *The Giaour's* growth across its many iterations, concludes that each new stage in the poem's development added to the complexity of the characters and relationships: "The completed poem, far richer and more complex, is the projection of a type of personality, in which the plot is simply one of several means by which Byron impresses on us that personality's nature and importance" (590). It is possible that no other poem sees Byron more engaged with the market, as he trades letters with Murray and Gifford, seeking feedback and reactions, spending months developing a carefully framed depiction of the elusive Byronic figure. At this early stage of his celebrity, Byron understands that opposition can be productive, as he simultaneously satisfies and frustrates the market's expectations. While this drive to perpetuate the public's interest remains constant throughout his career, his methods would change as his antagonism grew.

#### Redefining the Market in *Don Juan*

Byron's final work, the unfinished epic *Don Juan*, sees him writing in an entirely

new poetic mode.<sup>8</sup> Shedding the self-serious dramatics that had defined his most popular works and shaped his celebrity persona, Byron began to write in the fashion of his literary idols: English satirists such as Butler, Pope, and Swift. He had already demonstrated his talent for biting wit in earlier works such as *English Bards and Scottish Critics*, but *Don Juan* reflected a new stage in his development, inspired by changes in his celebrity status and surroundings.

Between the publication of *The Giaour* and the time Byron began work on *Don Juan* in 1818, his social situation had changed drastically. In 1816, rumours and speculation regarding the cruel treatment of his wife, Lady Annabella Byron (formerly Annabella Milbanke), and an incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta led to Byron's departure for the continent. After summering in Switzerland with the Shelleys, Byron settled in Venice, where he stayed for the next three years, indulging in a life of leisure. He spent his time in Venice entertaining guests, swimming in the Adriatic, riding his horses, studying Armenian, and carrying on countless romantic trysts with a series of married women. The influence of his new environment upon his writing, and *Don Juan* in particular, can be traced in any number of ways. Peter Vassallo has examined the impact Italian literary tradition had upon *Don Juan*, particularly the situational irony and sexual humour of Giovanni Casti's *novella galanti* (74). As Peter Cochran has noted, Byron's increasingly fluid notion of social identity was inspired by the Venetian Carnival, a month-long celebration of "non-stop partying, with all partners masked, and thus not just identity and class hidden, but even gender" (*Byron and Italy* 87). In turn, this informed

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that Byron had been exercising the same representative strategies since *The Giaour*. In comparing *The Giaour* and *Don Juan*, this chapter bypasses a number of other poems that saw Byron continue to experiment with strategies of representation and public engagement. For examples, see Eric Eisner's discussion of the quasi-private nature of "Fare Thee Well" or Tom Mole's discussion of the removal of the audience in *Childe Harold III* (Eisner 25; Mole, *Byron's* 120).

the humour *Don Juan* derived from matters of mistaken identity and disguise. His immersion in Italian culture had a formative influence on his work, but his distance from British culture was equally important.

If *The Giaour* was the product of a newly minted celebrity, confronted on all sides by the attention of an enamoured public, *Don Juan* was the result of a more severe withdrawal from British society. This is not to say that Byron was no longer the focus of public speculation, nor unconcerned with his reputation in London. Indeed, the opposite could be said to be true. The scandal surrounding his departure from England and the rumours of wicked vice that had prompted it only heightened the scrutiny with which his work was read for confessional admissions. Upon the publication of *Manfred* in June of 1817, London critics were quick to connect the intimations of incest and self-exile to his personal life and were all the more outraged by his publishing it (Marchand 2: 699). Byron also remained sensitive to such scandals. As Jane Blumberg notes, Byron was initially hopeful that he would one day be able to “weather the scandal of the separation and return to London, if not to his wife” (76). When he heard that Robert Southey had begun spreading rumours that he and Percy Shelley were involved in a “League of Incest” with Mary Shelley and her half-sister Claire Clairmont, he was “incensed by the injustice done” to both his reputation and that of his friends (Blumberg 80). Byron remained tuned to the proceedings of British culture, dependent upon his correspondents to update him on the latest news, including the reception of his latest poems.

It is in this regard that his relationship with the public truly changed. His dependence upon letters from his closest associates (principally Murray, Kinnaid, and Hobhouse) transformed the way Byron perceived and engaged with the British public by

transforming the way he interacted with the writer's market. As Mary O'Connell has shown, Murray's offices on Albemarle Street served as a kind of social focal point. The Albemarle Street office was meant to represent the affluence of the publishing firm, establishing a clubhouse atmosphere that confirmed Murray's status as a respectable publisher of gentlemen authors (O'Connell, "Albemarle" 72). From here, Murray gathered the coterie of writers and editors that comprised his publishing empire. By bringing authors into contact with one another (such as the meeting he arranged between Byron and Sir Walter Scott), he created a literary network built around his firm. For an author to be a part of this network also meant being part of Murray's market image. While living in England, Byron was a member of this coterie and, though always combative over the finer matters of publishing, he was generally amenable to the commercial direction Murray plotted for his publications. For example, Byron disagreed with Murray's intention to market *Childe Harold* mainly to wealthy readers, but ultimately complied with his decision to publish its first edition as an expensive quarto volume (O'Connell, "Albemarle" 79 – 80). No longer in direct contact with Murray, Byron now communicated with his publisher via frustratingly infrequent letters that drew out their business proceedings. This changed the dynamic of their working relationship. Differences in opinion that might have been settled in discussion or moderated by Gifford became exasperated by drawn out exchanges of letters. Byron became suspicious whenever Murray failed to write back in a timely manner (which he often did), and their disputes over payments and creative differences escalated. By 1818, he was already beginning to threaten to take his future works to Murray's competitor Longman (Marchand 2: 743). Once Byron gained distance from Murray's sphere of influence, he

became less complacent. As O'Connell concludes, "while a combination of issues hastened the separation, the ultimate cause of Byron's division from his publisher was his realization of what being part of the Albemarle Street circle had meant to him, and his determination to move away from it" ("Albemarle" 85).

*Don Juan* helped realize that movement. If Byron's distance formed a crack between himself and Murray, *Don Juan* became the spike that was driven into it. At first, Murray had been eager to publish it. *Beppo*, Byron's first Italian satire, had proven a success and Murray requested another poem in its style. Despite his conservative politics, Murray was not one to shy away from publishing subversive material, so long as it was shocking in a manner that improved sales. However, he grew concerned at anything that threatened to alienate his customer base of middle- and upper-class readers, and this deference to public taste became another point of contention for Byron (O'Connell, "Natural Antipathy" 167). The first objections levelled against *Don Juan* arose not from Murray, but from Hobhouse, who feared its attacks on contemporary writers, religious quips, and transparent allusions to Lady Byron would further damage Byron's reputation. Overall, Hobhouse feared the poem was simply too immoral and convinced Murray and Kinnaird to oppose its publication. Together, they urged Byron to remove offensive passages and discontinue the project, but he rigidly refused (O'Connell, *Murray* 177 – 178). Murray lavished praise on the quality of verse, but advised Byron that the first cantos would sell better if he just excised the most offensive passages. He published the first five cantos but was clearly not committed to the project. He continued to request revisions, repeatedly delayed publication of new cantos, and chose not to include his company's name in the first edition, which Byron viewed as Murray "disowning the

poem” (O’Connell, *Murray* 181). Eventually, exhausted by Murray’s vacillating commitment and preoccupation with the opinions of advisors and consumers, Byron ended their partnership and released the published cantos through the radical publisher John Hunt.

Byron’s removal from London altered his relationship with his business partners, but it also signalled a structural change in his connection to the public. No longer immersed in the myriad spheres of London life, Byron’s correspondence with his peers became the channel through which he read the temper of British society. In their concern for Byron’s reputation and success, Murray, Hobhouse, Gifford, and the rest of the Albemarle contingent came to represent the voice of a sanctimonious middle-/upper-class consumer base that had condemned Byron to exile, but continued to obsess over him. In this regard, his increasing opposition to the concerns of his friends signalled a more focused opposition to the sensibilities that had previously informed his position within the market. As Byron began to view the disapproval of his advisors as a form of validation, *Don Juan* came to serve as an antithesis to his earlier works. In a letter from 1822, he writes,

[A]s long as I wrote in the false exaggerated style of youth and the time in which we live, they applaud me to the very echo; and within these few years, when I have endeavoured at better things and written what I suspect to have the principle of duration in it, the Church, the Chancellor, and all men - even to my grand-patron Francis Jeffrey Esqre. Of the E[dinburgh] R[evue] - have risen up against me and my later publications. Such is Truth! (*BLJ* 9: 173)

As Byron's description of his "false exaggerated style" indicates, essential to his new work was the subversion of his popular persona as the Byronic hero.

A number of scholars have examined *Don Juan* from this perspective. Charlotte May provides a useful description of Don Juan as not an anti-Byronic hero, but rather a mock-Byronic hero who parodies the protagonists of his earlier poems. As May points out, Juan is the opposite of the Byronic archetype in a number of regards. Where the Giaour must inevitably establish his dominance in competition, asserting the primacy of his feelings above all others, Juan is routinely passive, allowing his feelings to be determined by the situations and relationships he passes through. While the Giaour is defined by stasis, caught in the paralytic grip of his unfulfilled desire for Leila, Juan is defined by the transient nature of his feelings. Byron highlights this contrast to comedic effect when he observes Juan's having "quite forgotten Julia" by the end of canto II. The narrator parodies *The Giaour*'s romantic tone as he claims to "loathe, detest, / Abhor, condemn, abjure the mortal made / Of such quicksilver clay that in his breast / No permanent foundation can be laid" (II, 1665 – 1668) before quickly confessing himself as inconstant. As May concisely observes, "Juan goes forward, whereas the earlier heroes cease, dead" (259). This inconstancy of feeling is joined by an inconstancy of identity. The Giaour's emotions are so intense that they are rendered legible upon his features, observable even when he is dressed in foreign garb. By contrast, Juan's identity is malleable, changing to fit each new circumstance and change in clothes, whether it be a concubine in a harem or a soldier on a battlefield. Thus, "Juan is a vehicle for a more mobile identity, and the perfect experiment for Byron to explore satirically the role of his heroes in the literary market in which he had been a main player" (May 256).

Both Büchel and Mole describe *Don Juan* as rejecting essentialist concepts of selfhood. For Büchel, this latest remodeling is a realization Byron had been building towards since *Childe Harold*. Whereas the earlier poem presented the protagonist as changing and evolving throughout a journey towards greater self-understanding and completion, *Don Juan* denies the hero any such progress as he moves through a world where identities are always negotiable and performative. For Mole, *Don Juan* sees Byron confront two concepts of modern identity that he had always found problematic: the developmental subject and the legible subject. Since the unprecedented success of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, developmental narratives following the growth of a subject who learns from mistakes and ascends the social ladder continued to increase in popularity, reaching a point of cultural saturation in the Romantic period. Much like Fielding before him, Byron subverts this trope by creating a picaresque tale where the hero travels through a world of characters who never learn from their mistakes or break their cycles. In *Don Juan*, there is change and transformation, but it cannot be characterized as growth, and while Juan moves constantly forward, there is no final destination in sight. Moreover, Mole argues that *Don Juan* exposes the privileged bias of developmental narratives by drawing attention to marginal figures who do not fit into such self-affirming tales. Juan's adventure brings him into contact with queens, lords, and generals, but also impregnated country girls, war orphans, and concubines, presenting a world in which "some people get to forge their own path, [but] those less fortunate are constrained to run on tracks (or treadmills) made by others" (*Byron's* 134). By framing *Don Juan* as a response to the popular myth of individualism, Mole's reading emphasizes the subversive critique of market culture inherent to the poem. Earlier poems complicated

simplistic notions of legible subjects, but they did so while feeding into this trend, coyly hinting at the hidden depths of the hero's heart. *Don Juan*, on the other hand, presents a malleable hero, lacking direction or depth, wandering in a world of characters who never truly progress.

In a number of regards, *Don Juan*'s opposition to the market was more aggressive than Byron's earlier works. First, it was written against the advice of his most trusted editors. With the exception of some potentially slanderous passages, Byron roundly rejected their cautionary edits, proclaiming he would "have none of your damned cutting & slashing" (*BLJ* 6: 105). Moreover, the poem defied market trends by undermining the popular traits of his earlier works, parodying the Byronic hero and upsetting audience expectations. When Murray continued to fret in the weeks following the publication of the first canto, Byron's response emphasized the futility of attempting to please the masses and his outright disregard for the public: "I never will flatter the Million's canting in any shape - circumstances may or may not have placed me at times in a situation to lead the public opinion - but the public opinion - never led nor ever shall lead me" (*BLJ* 6: 192). In this regard, *Don Juan* represents Byron's most drastic renunciation of centrality yet. Now literally relocated to a remote position, Byron's removal from the publishing world of Albemarle Street leads him to radically alter his approach to engaging his audience and, consequently, to authorial representation. *Don Juan* contains no Byronic hero serving as an obvious surrogate for the poet, tantalizing readers with an apparent window into his mind. Instead, it features a protagonist who is everything non-Byronic: naive, impressionable, and resilient. Whereas *The Giaour* playfully obscures the readers' view of the author, *Don Juan* completely shuts them out. Therefore, it could be

argued that Byron's detachment from Murray resulted in a greater resistance to the market's influence.

This line of reasoning nicely illustrates the impact that an author's position in the literary market can have on strategies of representation. However, before drawing any final conclusions, it is important to note another principle regarding market position: no commercial author, and certainly no celebrity author, can be entirely divorced from the market. It would be inaccurate to assert that *Don Juan* was written without regard for the market or that it is a poem that refrains from self-reference. Despite Byron's stated indifference to public opinion, he was concerned with the success of his poem. His initial intention was to continue the project only so long as it proved sufficiently popular, reassuring Murray that "if like Tony Lumpkins - I am "to be snubbed so when I am in spirits" the poem will be naught - and the poet turn serious again. - If it don't take I will leave it off where it is with all due respect to the Public - but if continued it must be in my own way" (*BLJ* 6: 207). Whether or not Byron held by this conviction is subject to debate.<sup>9</sup> However, even if Byron overstated his interest in the poem's popularity, he was certainly concerned with its commercial success. When addressing his peers' concerns (this time Hobhouse and Kinnaird), Byron makes it clear that any concern with his reputation as a poet has become secondary to the actual sale of the poems: "I have been cloyed with applause & sickened with abuse; - at present - I care for little but the

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<sup>9</sup> It could be argued that Byron's insistence on continuing the poem contradicts this statement of concern for its success, considering the underwhelming sales of the first canto. Murray reported to Byron that only 1200 of the initial run of 1500 had sold after the first few months, which was far below Byron's typical sales figures. However, this number is partially due to Murray's decision to withhold his name from the publication, which led to the circulation of a number of pirated editions. While Byron was initially angered by the pirating of his poem, Caroline Franklin has pointed out that the success of these cheaper editions indicated *Don Juan*'s substantial popularity with the lower classes, which was brought to his attention by Leigh Hunt (149). That being said, it can only be speculated to what degree these matters influenced his decision to keep writing new cantos.

Copyright, - I have imbibed a great love for money – let me have it” (*BLJ* 6: 91).

Whether this love of money was stirred by the high cost of his lavish lifestyle in Venice or was simply a reflection of his souring relationship with Murray, Byron’s aristocratic pride no longer prevented him from demanding prompt payment for his work.<sup>10</sup> While his new situation in Italy granted him distance from the concerns of the British writer’s market, he remained connected and invested to that public sphere.

Accordingly, *Don Juan* continues to make reference to Byron’s public reputation in order to engage the audience’s attention. While the protagonist does not represent the poet, the first canto establishes that the poem is still very much about the author. The canto’s transparent references to Byron’s life were exactly what unnerved Hobhouse. Juan’s mother, Donna Inez, is an obvious analogue for Lady Annabella Byron, whose religious nature and famed dedication to math and science are satirized to comedic effect. The poem begins by recounting her failed marriage to Don Jóse, casting Byron and Lady Byron as a mismatched pair, doomed from the start. Neither figure is painted in a flattering light (Don Jóse is a negligent philanderer, Donna Inez a self-righteous prude), but considerably more attention is paid to Inez/Annabella’s faults. As their marriage crumbles, Don Jóse appears as the victim of Inez’s scheming, as she sets about gathering evidence of his poor character and cultivating public censure:

For Inez call’d some druggists and physicians,

And tried to prove her loving lord was *mad*,

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<sup>10</sup> In her exhaustive study of Byron’s finances, Doris Langley Moore argues that this change reflects a general shift in his attitude towards money and the business of publishing: “he came to recognize how often he had been duped, how quixotic had been his conduct in respect of his literary earnings, and how little deserving were most of those who had sponged on him. He then began to set a value on money” (226). This seems to imply a breakdown of Byron’s earlier conviction that one can publish in the market while maintaining an air of gentility.

But as he had some lucid intermissions,  
     She next decided he was only *bad*;  
 Yet when they ask'd her for her depositions,  
     No sort of explanation could be had,  
 Save that her duty both to man and God  
 Required this conduct - which seem'd very odd.

She kept a journal, where his faults were noted,  
     And open'd certain trunks of books and letters,  
 All which might if occasion served, be quoted;  
     And then she had all Seville for abettors,  
 Besides her good old grandmother (who doted);  
     The hearers of her case became repeaters,  
 Then advocates, inquisitors, and judges,  
     Some for amusement, others for old grudges. (I, 209 - 224)

Considering the obvious implications of such passages, with their emphatic allusions to Byron's reputation as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know," it is hard to believe that Murray should have gone to the trouble of convincing Byron to publish anonymously. The poem's opening stanzas depend heavily upon the readers' familiarity with Byron's failed marriage. Clara Tuite argues that the most scandalous quality of the poem is this candid approach. The flippant tone with which he describes their "unhappy sort of life, / Wishing each other, not divorced, but dead" showed a disregard for the seriousness of the entire affair and the charges against his reputation (I, 202 - 203). However, when his

friends cautioned that his allusions to Lady Byron were too blatant and provoking, he dismissed their fears, stating that not every reference to a “tiresome woman” was by necessity a reference to his wife (Tuite 173). Considering his hatred of cant, it seems odd that Byron was not bothered by the irony of his publicly lampooning Lady Byron for having publicly defamed him, but this apparent contradiction actually says a great deal about *Don Juan*’s method of textual representation.

For Tuite, Byron’s ability to separate Donna Inez from the very clear allusion to Lady Byron reflects his refusal to make one-dimensional allusions or, more fundamentally, “to reduce a figure to a referent” with a single, concrete meaning (173). The preceding discussion of *The Giaour* illustrated Byron’s tendency to blur the connection between his fictional characters and his real life. However, *Don Juan* deals less in ambiguity than it does in outright contradiction, whereby a figure may serve to represent a specific referent in one stanza, and then have that allusion contradicted or flatly denied in another. Juan’s malleable character and inconstant heart serves as a perfect representation for the poem as a whole. Just as Juan can protest undying love for Julia at the conclusion of the first canto only to have quite forgotten her by the end of canto II, any reference or statement can be contradicted and altered according to Byron’s whims. As a result, Donna Inez is modeled after Lady Byron, but her character is in no way limited to this specific referent. A humorous allusion to Byron’s failed marriage is simply one possible application for her character. Indeed, by the middle of the canto she has taken on an entirely new significance as Juan’s doting but naive mother, whose platonic mindset blinds her to her son’s sexual maturation and love affair for Julia, suggesting she was also inspired by Byron’s mother.

This multivalent quality of dramatic figures in *Don Juan* is best exemplified in the figure of the narrator, whose identity repeatedly shifts. At the outset of the poem, the narrator is identified as an actual character existing within *Don Juan*'s fictional world, a friend of Juan's parents who attempts to mediate their marital dispute and instead falls victim to a prank by young Juan. However, throughout the poem the narrator frequently reverts to a transparently self-referential mode, speaking in Byron's own voice, relating opinions and anecdotes that can definitively be identified with the poet. Perhaps the most brazen example comes in Canto V, when Byron digresses from the poem's narrative to relate a recent experience from his own life: tending to a man who was shot outside his home in Ravenna. As *Don Juan* moves back and forth between Byron's own voice and that of a fictive narrator, the reader is left with a lingering uncertainty as to how closely the storyteller can be linked to the author at any given point. In one stanza he will go to great lengths outlining the limits of his knowledge as a fictional character, and in the next he will present the omniscient insight of the author. He repeatedly serves as Byron's mouthpiece for remarking on any number of topics, but never completely drops the pretense of his fictional persona.

As a result, Byron is able to write a poem that continues to capitalize and comment upon his celebrity status, while denying the readers' attempts to fix his identity. Whereas *The Giaour* provided readers with a potential dramatic proxy upon whom they could project their perception of the author, *Don Juan* sees Byron withdraw even further from the reader's gaze, becoming completely subsumed within the text. Authorial presence is no longer figured in terms of Byron's actual self as a private individual. Instead, "Byron" exists as a textual effect of the poem itself. Allusions to Byron's own

life become opportunities to create ambiguity and further displace the author within the narrator's voice, so that "the production of extra-textual reference heightens rather than diminishes textual mediation" (Tuite 182). As Eisner points out, this notion of an authorial identity that exists solely within the mediation of the text is not limited to the narration of *Don Juan*, but extends to Byron's conception of public identity in the world of England's print culture: "Byron makes his authority coextensive with the text's ability to function as a medium for representing, without necessarily resolving, the complex shifting, intensely gendered and always compromised conditions of identity in Byron's world, the conditions of Byronic celebrity" (45). The narrator is a mercurial presence, presiding over a world of shifting figures whose identities are contingent upon the meaning of a given passage. Identity has no substance; it is simply the product of mediation. This is the reality of public identity as Byron experienced it from across a continent. Byron's identity in England existed entirely within the realm of print, the product of his poems and his imitators, the reviews and the rumours, all of which was filtered to him through the mediation of his friends' letters. This was Byronic celebrity as he experienced it in Italy. *Don Juan* not only exposes the mediated nature of identity, it allows Byron to reassert control over it, bending meaning to whatever clever point he feels like making, regardless of the concerns of editors, audiences, or continuity.

In this context, *Don Juan* can be read as a rejection of the market and critique of popular trends. Byron no longer indulged readers by acting out his Byronic persona or offering even the illusion of confessional transparency. He created a world of disposable and inconstant characters, defying the popular trend of developmental subjects and

potentially alienating his substantial female readership.<sup>11</sup> And yet, despite this antagonism, *Don Juan* continues to draw the audience's attention to Byron's distinctive presence within the poem, perpetuating interest in his celebrity and sustaining his standing within the writer's market. His withdrawal into the ambiguous voice of *Don Juan*'s narrator responds to market pressure by satisfying in a single stroke the celebrity's dual compulsions to remain the focus of the public gaze while avoiding its controlling influence. The identification of the narrator with Byron is established by his knowing ironic tone and many self-referential allusions, but the narrator's constant oscillation between self-referencing author, imbedded character, and omniscient storyteller renders him too slippery to define. Garber offers an excellent description of the resulting freedom this grants Byron:

No one, it seems, will ever be able to hold this narrator, to say he is thus and so and that is the truth about him. His purpose is to make certain that we can never really define him, that we can say only that he is capable of any act at any time. He abhors that totalization which offers the completeness of anything, arguing, by his actions and his attitude toward us, that we shall never have *him* completely. (206)

The result is a new kind of Byronic persona that exists purely in mediation, capable of eliciting the reader's gaze without committing to a form that could be defined, bound, or duplicated.

One way in which the narrator strikes this ambiguous posture is by playfully

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<sup>11</sup> A number of scholars have drawn a connection between female readers' interest in novels and the predominance of developmental subjects, including Nancy Armstrong and Deidre Lynch. As Charles Donelan notes, *Don Juan* disrupted the logic of novels by denying the reader closure. Whereas novels presented narrative with consistent logic and clear endings, *Don Juan*'s perpetually serialized format eliminated the structural need for plot resolution and character growth.

gesturing to the limits of his own insight, while also indicating his omniscience. Consider the terms in which he describes Juan and Julia's first romantic encounter:

And Julia sat with Juan, half embraced  
 And half retiring from the glowing arm,  
 Which trembled like the bosom where 'twas placed.  
 Yet still she must have thought there was no harm,  
 Or else 'twere easy to withdraw her waist.  
 But then the situation had its charm,  
 And then – God knows what next – I can't go on;  
 I'm almost sorry that I e'er begun. (I, 115)

So much of the charm of this scene comes from the narrator's false modesty: his playful confusion over the extent of Julia's innocence in not withdrawing is humorous insofar as the reality of the situation is easy to deduce. The appeal rests in jesting at the simplicity of the tableau, while refusing to explain it. By frustrating readers' expectations for full disclosure, Byron is able to highlight their craving for exposed, digestible subjects. Although the narrator avoids flaunting an omniscient viewpoint, his tongue-in-cheek approach suggests that he does in fact possess a complete knowledge of everything that transpires. His sudden unwillingness to relate the details of the lovers' affair effectively mocks the curious reader exactly because his reservations are so clearly false. "God knows what next" indeed; clearly Byron is fully aware of what happens next, even if he is not willing to share all the titillating details. It is this ironic tone that implies the true extent of Byron's privileged vantage point. The humour of the situation depends upon the reader accepting that Byron fully comprehends the situation at hand, that he is in on each

jest, jab and insinuation. This is what makes his ongoing confession of ignorance throughout the whole of *Don Juan* so provocative: the fact that it is such a blatant lie. By creating ambiguity regarding the extent of his insight, while also implying an exhaustive awareness, the narrator gestures towards the Byronic presence that pervades the text.

*Don Juan* continues to engage with readers by piquing their curiosity regarding the author's presence. It stands as testimony to the persistence of the market that, once again, the celebrity's withdrawal from both the focus of his own writing and the demands of the market only serves to attract the public's attention. Even when operating from a remote distance, deriding public taste, and opposing the advice of Murray and company (ever agents of the market's influence), Byron is not detached from the market. If anything, he is engaging it with greater nuance than ever before, mitigating its influence upon his work while continuing to draw its attention. Operating from this new position along the periphery allows Byron to develop a more robust method of mediating the relationship between the public's gaze and his authorial self. Speaking with the elusive voice of the narrator, he can avoid a position that could be fixed as a new central model to be imitated to exhaustion. The effectiveness of this tactic can be demonstrated with reference to another fairly transparent reference to Byron's celebrity in a passage describing a Turkish landscape:

As they were plodding on their winding way  
 Through orange bowers and jasmine and so forth  
 (Of which I might have a good deal to say,  
 There being no such profusion in the North  
 Of oriental plants et cetera,

But that of late your scribblers think it worth

Their while to rear whole hotbeds in *their* works

Because one poet traveled ‘mongst the Turks). (V, 329 - 336)

The reference to Byron’s reputation as the author of the *Oriental Tales* and his role in popularizing romantic descriptions of the Near East is easy to identify. Yet, the narrator is effectively defining himself through reference to what he is not, or in this case what he is no longer. The exotic appeal that was Byron’s distinction and that made him a model worthy of emulation is now identified with his imitators. Rather than adapt a new persona in response, which would inevitably lead to more pretenders, he defines himself in negative terms. In doing so, he is still able to distinguish himself from the crowd: he is the originator of fashion while they are the followers; he is the knowing satirist while they are the butt of his joke. While *Don Juan* inspired its share of imitators and forgeries, unlike Byron’s earlier poetic modes, it proved an inexhaustible source of interest and innovation for the poet during the last six years of his life.

Examining Byron’s approach to representation reveals a certain provincialism in Wordsworth’s attempts to control his reception and voice within the writer’s market. Wordsworth’s description of his autobiographical *Prelude*, serving as the introduction to the philosophical epic *Recluse* “as the Ante-chapel has to the body of a Gothic church” speaks to the singular design and permanence he sought to imbue in his work (*CPW* 415). Wordsworth wished to create a perfect final product of his poetic vision, exactly measured in the sublime dimensions of a cathedral. Such a vision of authorial clarity speaks to the remote detachment with which he interacted with the market from his home in the Lake District. Wordsworth engaged with but never truly appreciated the workings

of a print culture that ceaselessly digested, debated, and reinterpreted the words of authors. Byron, by contrast, wrote from within this system. At the time that he wrote *The Giaour*, he was very much at the centre of a social matrix that connected him to the concerns of readers, critics, editors, aristocrats, politicians, and lovers, each reflecting a different image of the poet for him to consider. The result was quite the opposite of Wordsworth's *Prelude*: a poem that blurred lines rather than measured them, depicting the poet from the public's perspective, rather than his own. By 1818, Byron had severed many of those connections and began to view the market from without. The result was a satirical depiction of its inconstancy. *Don Juan* did away with the idea of dividing lines altogether, imagining a selfhood that fluctuated with each passing stanza. Where Wordsworth built great works made of stone, Byron fashioned works made of fire. However, there were many similarities between the two poets' interactions with the market. Both published works principally in expensive prestige formats, presenting their works as the product of a singular voice contained in a definitive volume. Both poets cultivated the public's perception of that voice in order to establish their identity within the market (albeit in very different manners). Byron was a poet driven by opposition, who understood that the best way to secure his audience's interest was to upset their expectations. But he never failed to promote an idea of a distinctly Byronic subjecthood. In this regard, his approach to representation shares with Wordsworth the influence of a particular mode of publishing within the market, one characterized by prestige editions of the singular poet's works. This study will conclude by examining the career of Letitia Elizabeth Landon, a poet similar to Byron in regards to her celebrity and immersion in the writer's market, but whose approach to representation is shaped by more diverse

publishing practices.

### 3.3 - Landon's Multimodal Authorship

But I have often seen thine eye

Look as it loved to look on me

- "Untitled lines" from the *Literary Gazette*, May 1, 1824

Letitia Elizabeth Landon's identity and reputation have always been a subject of speculation for her readers and critics, including modern scholars. This speculation was first sparked by her use of the initials L.E.L., with which she signed her poems for William Jerdan's *Literary Gazette*. Readers who wished to assign a face to the romantic sentiments of her poetry found their curiosity both frustrated and provoked by this ambiguous signature. This effect was intentional, and Jerdan would further stoke the public's interest by periodically alluding to details of Landon's identity: while no one could match a name to the initials, editorial notes ensured that everyone knew she was a young woman (Stephenson 25).<sup>1</sup> As Landon's celebrity grew and her identity became common knowledge within London's literary circles, her initials began to lose their mystique. However, this curiosity was quickly replaced with an interest in her personal life. Rumours circulated regarding her relationships with various literary figures, including the critic William Maginn, the writer Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and Jerdan himself. In 1824, one periodical, *The Wasp*, described Landon's trips to the countryside, insinuating that she was attempting to hide an illicit pregnancy (Stephenson 36). In 1826,

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Mason has argued that scholars have overstated the mystery created by her initials, noting that the use of initials as a signature was fairly common in the periodical press at the time (90). As Mason rightly points out, most evidence of the public's curiosity regarding her initials comes from accounts by her personal friends, such as an oft-quoted recollection of Edward Bulwer-Lytton. While the mystery surrounding her identity may have been inflated, it remains an important aspect of Jerdan's strategy to provoke public interest in Landon.

the *Sunday Times* glibly reported that “a well-known English Sappho [had been] detected in a *faux pas* with a literary man” and had borne him a child (qtd in Mason 110). Then, in 1831, gossip began to circulate regarding her relationship with Maginn, with accusatory letters sent to the homes of her family and friends (Stephenson 39). Landon and Jerdan reacted to the growing scandal by attempting to alter her image in the press.<sup>2</sup> However, the public’s conjectures continued to hound her, eventually resulting in the dissolution of her engagement to critic and biographer John Forster. In 1838, after a hurried courtship, Landon married George Maclean, the British administrator on the Gold Coast, and departed for Africa. If her marriage to Maclean was intended to finally put the scandals to rest, then its success was short-lived. Two months after they had left England, Landon was discovered dead with an empty bottle of prussic acid in her hand. And so a new mystery took hold of the public’s imagination. Various theories contested that Landon had accidentally overdosed, succumbed to a tropical disease, or been murdered by Maclean’s African mistress (Lawford, “Diary”). The obvious possibility of suicide went unstated out of respect. Different biographies published in the immediate aftermath of Landon’s death competed to control the narrative of her legacy. Some of her friends wrote biographies that cast Landon as the mistreated wife of a cold husband, cementing her association with the doomed lovers of her poems, while other accounts attempted to absolve Maclean of suspicion (Stephenson 179, 190). The story of Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s life continued to be written and debated by the public, even following her death.

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars have identified a number of market strategies intended to alter Landon’s public image later in her career. Mason observes that publicized portraits of Landon began to depict her in a more demure light after the rumours began (111). Stephenson argues Landon’s turn to novels in the final years of her life was motivated in part by an effort to distance her from the image of the passionate lover associated with her poetry (40).

Over the past few decades, revived critical interest in Landon's work has generated a new wave of speculation regarding her personal life. The desire to read her identity into the figures of her poetry continues to colour our reception of her work. This compulsion towards biographical interpretations has only been strengthened in recent years following Cynthia Lawford's discovery that the rumours regarding Landon's extramarital affair with Jerdan were most probably true (Lawford, "Diary").<sup>3</sup> These findings have led Lawford and other scholars to re-examine Landon's love poems under the assumption that their sentiments were inspired by her secret love for her editor. Lawford asserts that these poems can now be read in a confessional mode: "Knowing that Landon carried on an extended affair at the risk of her reputation, and thus career, income, and social acceptance, lends the love poetry a sense not only of authenticity but of dangerous vulnerability and often of urgency, that elevates the reader to the position of most treasured confidante" ("Thou Shalt Bid"). Lawford effectively reasons that Landon's artistry in describing the pains of unsatisfied desire were informed by her own frustrated relationship with a married man. However, her arguments tend to overreach into unfounded conjectures, such as her assertions that Landon loved Jerdan more than he loved her or that Jerdan "kept coming back to Landon for the sake of her poetry as much as his lust and love" ("Thou Shalt Bid").

Once again, the elucidation of one mystery regarding the author's life only provokes more questions and theories. Germaine Greer's colourful description in *Slip-*

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<sup>3</sup> Lawford's assertion is based on her finding baptismal and burial records that appear to belong to their children: Ella Stuart, Fred Stuart, and Laura Stuart. The oldest of these children was born in 1823, shortly before the rumours surrounding Landon's love life and trips to the country began. These three are recorded as being the children of William and Laetitia Stuart, though no marriage record for this couple can be located. The surname Stuart was the maiden name of Jerdan's mother, the use of which was conventional for naming illegitimate children (Lawford, "Diary").

*shod Sibyls* nicely illustrates the degree to which contemporary readers continue to narrativize Landon's life:

As long as she was a young poetic female she was a marketable commodity; because she was marketed she became conspicuous; because she believed in the freedom and spontaneity of the artist she behaved indiscreetly; because taste changed and she aged and the men who manipulated her had enemies, she became the target of vicious gossip and enduring contempt. The reality of her life was daily work, endless deadlines, poor pay and no power whatsoever, even to express what she really believed. Grub Street destroyed her personal integrity, worked her to exhaustion and then turned on her. The poetry so cynically puffed is nowadays unread. Her story illustrates in a concise and appalling way the complex of causes that have excluded women from a full participation in literary culture... The factors that worked first to create and then to destroy the 'poetess' were never deployed in more spectacular fashion than in the story of L.E.L. (59)

Greer's account highlights some critical aspects of Landon's career. The stress caused by her constant deadlines reflects the difficulty facing any female author who wished to support herself and her family through her pen at this time. Moreover, Greer's description of exploitative control in the male-dominated print industry is crucial to any discussion of her career. Nonetheless, this portrait of a naive and helpless girl distorts Landon's standing as a professional writer and only perpetuates problematic assumptions surrounding her legacy.

In reality, Landon's position within the market is too complex to typify in such a narrow fashion. Her engagement with the professional and social networks of publishing was intricate and multifaceted. Much like her poetry, Landon's position within the market was characterized by both constraints and fluidity. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, she was confronted by the limitations and restrictions that faced many female authors. Landon's brand of romantic verse was intrinsically bound to her public persona as a young woman of fine sentiment and beauty. Her commitment to reusing generic tropes could be viewed as a sign of the creative limitations resulting from Jerdan's vested interest in perpetuating her image as an English Sappho.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Lawford's assertions regarding Jerdan's relationship with Landon suggest his influence may have been more profound than that of a typical editor. Even without speculating as to their personal relationship, it is safe to say that he had a greater impact on her career than any other professional connection. Landon was still a teenager in 1820 when Jerdan, a neighbour and friend of her family, first took an interest and published her earliest poems in the *Literary Gazette*. Over the following years, he provided her with encouragement, guidance, and a reliable outlet for publishing her work. Nicholas Mason has outlined the key ways Jerdan secured her fame and defined a place for her within the market. According to Mason, Jerdan's primary strategy was to convince the reading public that Landon was famous and celebrated from the outset of her career. He took every opportunity afforded him as editor of the *Gazette* to construct a narrative of L.E.L.'s renown, puffing her reputation through footnotes, glowing reviews, and advertisements

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<sup>4</sup> Sappho, the ancient Grecian lyricist, was a identifiable symbol of passionate female creativity and one of many dramatic personae that frequently narrated Landon's poems. Jerdan's lavish review of *The Improvisatrice* described Landon as the English Sappho in order to help reinforce her literary stature (Mason 83).

for upcoming publications. Mason convincingly argues that even poems dedicated to her, such as Bernard Barton's "To L.E.L., On his or her Poetic Sketches in the Literary Gazette," were likely commissioned by Jerdan to help substantiate Landon's talent (94). Later, when Landon's identity became common knowledge, he commissioned a series of sketches and portraits, transforming her "from the mysterious poetess perpetually hidden behind her initials into a bona fide icon whose likeness was scattered far and wide throughout the empire" (Mason 102). Mainly produced in the 1830s, these portraits emphasized Landon's chaste beauty and youthful charm (despite the fact that she was now an adult), feeding into the audience's identification of the poet with her romantic subjects. While her poetry cultivated her authorial persona as a lovelorn poet, the resulting public image was also a product of Jerdan's design.

As an older man who introduced her to the profession from a young age, helped design her public image, and controlled the magazine that launched her writing career, Jerdan exerted a considerable amount of control over Landon. The extent of his control could be construed as evidence of a predatory power dynamic, as is often the case in accounts that frame Landon as a casualty of the publishing industry: a young woman whose trust and talent was exploited by a patriarchal authority figure and whose prolific poetic output helped sustain a major periodical, while securing her only a modest living. However, this narrative of victimhood remains far too reductive. The tendency to frame Landon as a quintessential victim, an exemplar of the passive female author who internalizes and perpetuates her culture's hierarchical gender roles, denies the possibility that she exercised control over her own career. As Stephen C. Behrendt has argued, this is a common problem in scholarship addressing female poets in the long eighteenth century:

the emphasis placed on the barriers women faced leads scholars to overlook their agency, creative range, and engagement in social discourse (9). Mason is careful to avoid this fallacy: even as he outlines the extent of Jerdan's influence, he characterizes the relationship of poet and editor as more collaborative than exploitive, observing that Landon was an eager participant who took an active role in determining and promoting her authorial persona (84). As such, he joins a number of scholars combatting Landon's critical legacy as a naive pawn of her publishers.

Glennis Stephenson and Serena Baiesi both represent Landon as an adept and influential participant in the market. Baiesi's description of Landon's work ethic provides a useful counterpoint to Greer's character sketch:

Landon was very keen to accept every offer she received from publishers in London, in order to increase her earnings. She was a very fast composer, she knew the taste of her public, and she was a practical businesswoman able to sell her work to the highest bidder... Although in her letters Landon described her predilection for composing metrical romances, she knew that she had to make her literary inspiration conform to a consumerist audience if she wanted to maintain her fame and her profits. (108)

Landon's eagerness to sell her work for profit and willingness to adapt to consumer demand alludes to her dependence upon the market. However, Baiesi represents this eagerness and conformity as evidence of her ability to navigate and manipulate the market to her own advantage. Her description emphasizes Landon's agency in managing her own career. Similarly, Stephenson notes that Landon's work as a critic made her one

of the most influential voices in the periodical press of the 1820s. By this time the *Literary Gazette* was displacing the authority of older, established reviews, such as the *Edinburgh Review* and *Quarterly Review*. The *Gazette* was able to attract a broader middle-class audience due to a number of factors, including its low price and weekly publication rate. However, its most important innovation was forgoing the high-minded political essays of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* in favour of accessible, descriptive reviews of contemporary art and literature (Riess 809). Landon contributed a significant number of these reviews and general-interest articles, establishing herself as the periodical's chief art critic. As a result, her opinion carried considerable weight, enough to substantially impact the commercial success of her peers. Indeed, a number of authors objected to the damage caused by her harsh treatment of their work (Stephenson 28). As F. J. Sypher observes, the *Gazette*'s popular focus meant that its reviews influenced the major channels of the book trade: "Not only did the selections and comments guide the taste of private purchasers of books; but the numerous lending libraries, which were commercially important purchasers, were correspondingly alert to the suggestions offered by the *Gazette*, as were booksellers and their agents" (*PLG* viii). To say that Landon was a poet who had "no power whatsoever, even to express what she truly believed" is hardly accurate (Greer 59). Landon not only exerted control over her own work, she also affected public standards of taste, promoting her own aesthetic through her critical writing.

Despite the creative and economic constraints she faced as a female poet, Landon's position within the writer's market is characterized by a fluid mobility. Rather than being restricted to writing poetry for Jerdan's *Gazette*, she continually branched out

into new outlets and mediums. Landon was a prolific poet, producing verse for multiple periodicals and annuals, as well as publishing her own collected volumes. Moreover, her poetry was only one aspect of her career: she also worked as a critic, a novelist, and an editor. In addition to her position as the *Gazette's* art critic, Landon frequently contributed articles to the *New Monthly Magazine* and *Court Journal*, producing a substantial body of critical prose that, by her own account, exceeded the quantity of her verse (*CW* 14 - 15). Together with the critical prefaces attached to her collected poems, these essays express a refined aesthetic philosophy that addresses contemporary debates waged in the critical press. Later in her career, when demand for poetry began to decline, Landon shifted her creative focus to novels, producing three well-received works in the last decade of her life: *Romance and Reality* (1831), *Francesca Carrata* (1834), and *Ethel Churchill* (1837). As recent scholarship has illustrated, a robust understanding of Landon's career and creative outlook can only be achieved if more attention is paid to her prose works.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond working as a writer, however, Landon also engaged with the market from the position of an editor, thereby experiencing different forms of agency. In addition to serving with Jerdan as a "*de facto* co-editor" of the *Gazette*, Landon was asked to edit a number of annuals and gift-books, including *The Easter Gift* (1832), *Heath's Book of Beauty* (1833), *Flower of Loveliness* (1837), *The Pictorial Album; or, Cabinet of Paintings* (1837), and *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrapbook* (1832 - 1838) (*PLG* vii). These popular annuals featured series of engravings that were paired with descriptive fragments

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<sup>5</sup> Mary A. Waters and Jonas Cope have each generated useful insights into Landon's poetry by examining her critical prose, including her periodical essays and the prose supplements of her collected volumes. Meanwhile, Tricia Lootens has shown how established interpretation of her romantic poetry can be challenged by comparative readings of her novels, which see Landon experiment with and subvert many of the tropes common to her verse.

of prose or verse inspired by the image. They often followed a particular theme, such as the focus on female portraiture in *Heath's Book of Beauty* or the religious devotions of *The Easter Gift*. In truth, the task of editing these annuals involved a great deal of writing. For instance, Landon composed the vast majority of poetry that appeared in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrapbook* during her tenure as editor. However, the work also required Landon to consider factors related to the organization, formatting, and production of the publication. Landon solicited and organized contributions from her peers, including Thomas Crofton Croker and William Maginn. Her letters provide a record of the work involved in coordinating such a publication: transmitting proofs and images, sharing opinions, and recommending authors to her publishers. One letter to Robert Fisher regarding the layout of the 1838 volume of the *Drawing Room Scrapbook* sees her discussing concerns regarding the selection and ordering of images and sharing ideas for that year's dedication (*LLEL* 169). Landon's authority as an editor was far from absolute. She repeatedly defers to Fisher's preferences as publisher, and while she would sometimes complain of the selection of images when they failed to inspire her, she did not have the power to reject them. Moreover, Landon did not relish the prospect of sharing these publication with her peers, confessing to Fisher, "I do not like my poetry mixed up with others" (*LLEL* 177). Nonetheless, Landon's experience as an editor speaks to her understanding of the inner working of the writer's market. She was sensitive to the logistical concerns of publishing and interested in expanding her creative agency beyond the role of a writer. Even as she was preparing to depart London for her new life in Africa, Landon wrote to Charles Heath, publisher of *The Keepsake* and *Heath's Book of Beauty*, to pitch her own concept for a periodical that would pair prose sketches with

engravings of heroines from modern literature (*LLEL* 180).

In chapter 2.1, I compared the modality of Lamb's voice as a hack essayist with that of Jeffries as a chief editor of an influential review, stressing that the contrast between them illustrates the diversity of authorial positions/voices within the periodical press. In many ways Landon further demonstrates this point by illustrating how a single author can occupy multiple positions at once, both author and editor, forming what Mark Parker might term one of the "elusive hybrids" of the periodical press (5). By acknowledging Landon's multi-faceted career and role in the production culture of the periodical press, we can form a more thorough understanding of her position within the market than is typically generated by her image as the gifted but tragic poetess. By doing so we can better contextualize her strategies of representation and distinguish them from those of her male precursors.

Landon was more intricately involved and invested in the business of publishing and the production of print culture than any other author previously discussed in this study. As we have seen, Wordsworth and Byron maintained a degree of detachment in their interactions with the writer's market, mitigating the influence of editors and readers alike. Publishing the majority of their poetry as collected volumes, both poets engaged with the market through a mode that emphasized individual authorship and ensured a high degree of control over their work. Landon also published individual volumes of her poetry, amongst them *The Improvisatrice* (1824), *The Troubadour* (1825), and *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829). Combining original poems with previous publications, these collections consolidated her body of work into a more lasting and prestigious format, reinforcing her status as a major poet. However, Landon's collected volumes only

represent a fraction of her work within the publishing industry. Readers would more readily associate Landon with the periodicals that established her reputation and published the vast majority of her poetic canon. Indeed, the primacy of the periodical to Landon's career is evident in the influence it has upon the fragmented structure of her collections.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this publishing mode, Landon exercised a radically different form of authorial agency than either Wordsworth or Byron. Rather than gradually refining works for eventual publication, Landon wrote rapidly and published frequently. Rather than presenting her work to the public as a carefully curated volume that distilled the poet's singular voice, Landon's work appeared in the collective, multimedia context of magazines and annuals. Rather than exercising creativity solely through acts of original composition, she shaped texts through decisions pertaining to selection, revision, and production. Rather than contesting the demands of a publishing system that threatened to compromise her vision, Landon became a part of that system, incorporating the labour of editor and critic into her work as a writer. These differences in Landon's engagement with the publishing industry influenced her approach to representing subjectivity, leading her to embrace the mediation of the public text.

### Subjective Depths and Object Surfaces

If Byron can be distinguished from Wordsworth on the grounds that he accepted the inevitability of textual mediation, the process by which authorial intent is severed from the text and recast by the reader's interpretation, then Landon can be distinguished

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<sup>6</sup> For example, *The Improvisatrice* demonstrates Landon's preference for writing shorter, disconnected poems. Not only is the collection comprised of a number of poems previously published in periodicals, but its titular long-form poem is broken up into fragments, as the central narrative of the improvisatrice repeatedly digresses into her performances of short verse works.

from both by her tendency to foreground this mediation. As the preceding chapter discussed, Byron had a canny ability to tease at the potential for immediacy. He understood that the version of “Byron” that existed in his writing and in the public’s imagination was a textual effect, but he consistently hinted at the personal truths hidden within his work. Even within *Don Juan*’s layered irony, readers can detect the author’s presence, winking to them through the narrator’s quips, inviting them to distinguish the authentic Byron from the posture. Landon does not labour to maintain this pretense. As Baiesi notes, readers were “driven to associate Letitia Landon (the author), and L.E.L. (the fictional narrator), together with the sequence of her female characters” (22). Her frequent use of beautiful, love-lorn narrators exploited the audience’s desire to conflate the sentiments of the poem with the heart of the poet. Nonetheless, Baiesi may be overstating the significance of this ploy when she claims that Landon “challenged her readers... to discover and unmask, if and when possible, the authentic voice of the author veiled under several other voices she constantly adopted in her poems” (22).

Landon provides none of the connective tissue that Byron used to join biography and fiction within an overarching narrative of celebrity. Despite her reputation as Byron’s female counterpart, her poetry avoids the self-referential allusions and extensive introspection that facilitated what Tom Mole terms a “hermeneutic of intimacy.” Instead, her poems consist of a series of dramatic performances and painted scenes. Rather than assembling a coherent impression of the author, these narrators and heroines comprise a series of discrete renditions of a general archetype. Each poem serves as an aesthetic exercise, as Landon demonstrates her lyrical dexterity, remixing details and applying new flourishes to each iteration of her plaintive lover. Her poetry does not aspire or pretend to

be a window through which readers can gain a sympathetic understanding of the author. Instead, each text is a new facade, which the reader experiences as a sensuous impression rather than an intimate confession. The reader develops an impression of Landon, but only through the gradual accumulation of familiar images and devices that comes from regularly reading the *Literary Gazette*. The resulting sense of authorial identity is as much a product of serialization as it is derived from the content of her poems.

Jonas Cope characterizes this approach as an antithesis to the organic holism typically associated with Romantic selfhood: “For Landon, the self is little more than a sewn-together construct (fondly imagined as an organism) whose stitched fissures are conveniently and perennially ignored” (363). This constructed quality is evident in the many inconsistencies that characterize her works, including matters of identity (domestic or exotic, empathetic or skeptical), political temper (pro-imperialist or anti-imperialist, nationalistic or unpatriotic), and philosophical outlook (Neoplatonist or materialist, Protestant or Pagan) (Cope 366). Landon’s willingness to incorporate contradictory opinions and temperaments across her oeuvre shows a distinct lack of concern for cultivating the consistent perspective necessary for an individualistic authorial voice. In many ways, Cope’s interpretation predicts the central thesis of this chapter: Landon’s hybrid position within the writer’s market informs her fluid approach to authorial identity, where each new poem enacts a new performative identity. Read as a series, these individual performances do coalesce into an impression of an underlying subject that readers can associate with L.E.L., but it is a subject that is never rendered explicit and that can always be reimagined to fit a new dramatic persona. Curious readers were free to conflate the sentiments of a given poem with the mysterious young woman described by

the editor (indeed, they were encouraged to), but any attempt to scrutinize Landon through a careful study of her poems would be frustrated by their inconsistencies.

In this regard, Landon's writing challenges the epistemological assumptions of Wordsworth's unified conception of the authorial "I." As Cope notes, "as an essayist, novelist, and dramatist, she is often more than a poet writing about what it means to be a poet" (372). Similarly, Daniel Reiss identifies Landon's work as part of a Post-Romantic movement of the 1830s that "preserves the Romantic style of writing while simultaneously rejecting the Romantic artist's claim that art transcends the ills of the social environment into which it is born" (813). Both Cope and Reiss emphasize that Landon's willingness to accept the commercial nature of writing, rather than view it as an imposition to be transcended by artistic vision, situates her work as a critical response to the solipsism of early Romantic idealism. In order to combat Landon's reputation as a slave to market demand, as advanced by scholars such as Mellor, we must consider how her appeal to popular taste accommodates an alternative model of creative agency that conflicts with Romantic notions of original genius. Thus, Cope argues that her commitment to the market be viewed as "a complicity that emancipates her from the Wordsworthian slavery of individual taste-making" (367). Despite this emphasis upon the market as a formative, liberating influence upon Landon, Cope downplays the significance of the material conditions that define her relationship with that market. In order to change the critical dialogue regarding Landon's literary merit, he feels that it is necessary to "shift the focus away from her role as a market-savvy entrepreneur" and cautions that scholars must "stop associating Landon (and some of her female contemporaries) almost exclusively with print culture" (368). While this attempt to

broaden the critical discourse surrounding Landon is well-intentioned, discussing her work in purely abstract terms, divorced from the conditions of its creation, limits our ability to adequately differentiate her posture from previous models of authorship. Cope's assessment that a fuller appreciation of her work demands that we read "Landon's poetry against the background of her prose... and vice-versa" is accurate, but her work within the market can be placed in an even wider context than that of a poet who also wrote novels and reviews (366). In order to broaden discussion of her work beyond a binary opposition to Wordsworth, it is necessary to observe the many ways her participation in print culture, not just as an author, but also as an editor and a consumer, informs her distinct approach to the textual subject.

Building upon Cope's notion of the sewn-together subject, it is important to observe that Landon's subjects derive their fragmentary, performative nature from more than just an inconsistency of character across different texts. She also subverts the substantive model of Romantic selfhood by creating what I shall refer to as "flattened subjects," who are conveyed to the reader largely through superficial details and visual metaphors. Landon's poetry made heavy use of a characteristic set of visual motifs from which she composed romantic tableaux of love and loss. The most common images that she draws upon can be divided into seven categories: flowers/vegetation, celestial bodies, light/shadow, facial features, graves, boats/vessels, and musical instruments. A survey of Landon's most productive years writing for the *Literary Gazette* reveals that nearly every poem consisted of some combination of these types of imagery. For example, out of the 53 poems that Landon published in the *Gazette* in 1824, only one does not contain an example of the above devices. Despite the varying identities and outlooks observed by

Cope, these motifs render Landon's poems noticeably similar, compounding the existing sense of redundancy that results from the recurring themes of love, yearning, restraint, loss, rejection, disillusionment, and death. This imagery serves as a visual shorthand that Landon employs to communicate dramatic gestures and sentiments. To briefly examine a representative example, "Song ('Take back your wreath, your sunny wreath')"

demonstrates a typical application of her flower, grave, and facial imagery.<sup>7</sup> As the narrator protests the offer of a wreath of flowers as unbefitting one who has never known true love, the wreath serves as the medium for conveying the narrator's emotional state and woeful history:

For though those flowers may fade and fall,  
                   How very sweet their life has been!  
 And fragrant still the coronal,  
                   Though dead the blush and sear the green.

They are perhaps an offering  
to scatter on my funeral stone;  
For flowers are not made for the Spring,  
Which only blight and blast has known.

But take some veil in darkness wove,  
                     And fling its shadow o'er my brow,  
 It will be like the cloud which love

<sup>7</sup> Originally published in the *Literary Gazette* No. 366, January 24, 1824.

Has thrown around my past and now! (*PLG*, 236, 5 - 16)

The image of the flowers in bloom alludes to the beauty and zest of young love, providing a ready contrast to the withered and dead state of the narrator's heart, which is instead identified with the cold, unfeeling state of the grave or, similarly, a barren and blighted Spring. Thus, the affectionate overture of the lover is wasted upon a narrator who has only known disappointment. The poem demonstrates typical conventions of Landon's imagery: the connection of the narrator with the grave to convey loss, the contrast of the blooming flowers of young love against the withered flowers of aged disillusionment, the shaded brow as symbol of hopeless stasis.

Taken by itself, this poem's visual metaphor is fairly straightforward and does not necessarily require exhaustive analysis. However, when read within the larger context of her body of work, Landon's use of imagery points to an alternative mode of poetry that conceptualizes authorial presence as textual effect. First, note how these motifs allow Landon to flatten the subject. While the poem establishes the profundity of the narrator's sentiments, the decision to communicate them solely through visual metaphor elides any detailed articulation of these emotions or their cause. The result is a deceptively superficial impression of the poem's subject, which I shall refer to as a figure, substituting the empathetic insights characteristic of earlier Romantic poets with a series of coded cues. The evocative impression of one who envies the remnant of life held by dying flowers alludes to the narrator's traumatic past. Only someone who has felt deeply and experienced heartbreak, who has had love cast a cloud about her past, could express such a stark sensation of loss. Yet, this clouded past is merely alluded to. Whereas Byron's poetry draws its appeal from the fine articulation of complex emotions, Landon's

appeal rests in her ability to condense such emotion to an aesthetic impression. Byron's reader contemplates, for example, the bitter-sweet memories suffered by a hero whose dissatisfying revenge upon his lover's husband/killer has left him haunted by existential ennui. Landon's reader perceives loss in a veiled face. In this sense, the textual subject is revealed to the reader, not in terms of subjective depth, but rather in the terms of a visual object. Read in isolation, the metaphor of the veiled face expresses a rather simple notion of melancholy, expressing none of the nuanced sentiments of Byron's introspective verse. However, such an image takes on added dimensions for the reader who is capable of interpreting it in its proper context within Landon's body of work.

In order to appreciate Landon's flattened subject it is important to consider how poems like this one would be experienced as part of a weekly periodical. As noted previously, Landon published dozens of poems a year through the *Literary Gazette*. During the first five years of her career, the vast majority of her work appeared in weekly and monthly periodicals. Even after diversifying to collected volumes and annuals, she continued to publish works in the *Literary Gazette* until the end of her life. Readers originally experienced poems like the one cited above as part of an ongoing series, each separated by discontinuities in time and text, yet joined by their characteristic similarities and the regularity of their intervals. Just as her readers looked to the initials that marked each new poem as a work by L.E.L., they also came to expect the thematic and stylistic signatures that created a sense of continuity between her works. While poems published within a single volume may be read continuously and experienced as a cohesive collection within the bounds of the physical text, periodical poems possess a different kind of cohesion, one that requires the reader to maintain a level of dedication and

familiarity. Experienced as a series of poems enjoyed on a regular basis by the dedicated reader, Landon's visual shorthand takes on new meaning. Consider the following poem published one week after the previous example:

The wreath of green leaves that was bound  
Amid your chestnut hair,  
Is scattered, - look upon the ground,  
The leaves are lying there.  
And some are faded, some are stained,  
Some crushed, and not one has retained  
Its sweet and summer share.  
Of graceful shape and fresh green hue,  
Such as they were when given you.

Around thy heart there is a wreath  
Of fair hopes fresh and green,  
Breathed on by young Love's summer breath,  
A little while, I ween,  
The green hopes will have died away,  
As utterly gone to decay  
As they had never been.  
The wreath that bound your heart and hair,  
Were made the self-same fate to share.

Your shining curls flow wild on air,  
 Their braiding wreath undone;  
 Your heart lies desolate and bare,  
 Its hope's glad foliage gone.  
 And such the destiny that clings  
 To all earth's fair and fragrant things;  
 And such will be thine own;  
 The wasted heart, the withered tree,  
 Are emblems of thy fate and Thee. (*PLG* 239 - 240)<sup>8</sup>

Landon uses the same imagery and a similar central conceit as the previous poem: the wreath of flowers signifying love, the conflation of the green leaves with the figure's youth and passion, the process of decay signaling the descent into a fate of disappointment. This calls back to the previous week's poem, providing readers with a familiar performance of spectacular melancholy.

Yet, the new instalment also sees Landon vary her application of these devices to create new expressions. Where the former poem begins with the narrator envying the lingering beauty of the dying flower before contrasting it to her own desolate state, the latter reverses this order, beginning from a state of decay which the narrator ascribes to a second person. The crushed leaves of the opening stanza are already desolate, prognosticating the figure's fall in the second stanza. The more complex line structure of the latter poem draws these reflections out, trading the concise, exclamatory quatrains of the former poem to create a more languid, reflective tone. Whereas the former poem

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<sup>8</sup> "Song (The wreath of green leaves that was bound)" was originally published in the *Literary Gazette* No. 367, January 31, 1824.

depicts the narrator as she responds to a lover's overture, building to a dramatic renunciation of love for the grave, the latter presents the narrator predicting another's ruin with measured despair. The extended rhyme scheme allows the portents of disappointment (the wild hair, the desolate heart, the dead foliage) in the final stanza to accumulate, building to the assignation of "Thine own" and contributing to the prophetic gravity of the closing couplet. Admittedly, the general import of each poem is very much the same: love is without hope and the young heart will wither as inevitably as summer flowers. However, the dramatic impact these sentiments have on the reader is markedly distinct in each poem: one a passionate avowal, the other a dark pronouncement.

Each week the *Literary Gazette's* subscribers looked forward to the inventive lyricism with which L.E.L. refigured her characteristic motifs to a new effect. For devotees of her aesthetic, the novelty lay in the execution, rather than the content. Accordingly, Landon's visual shorthand was crucial to both the reception and production of her poetry in the periodical press. The readers' ability to appreciate these poems was grounded upon their anticipation and familiarity with these motifs. One needed to understand the significance of a shadowed brow or a small vessel, not just in order to comprehend a given poem, but to appreciate the nuanced variations between them. For example, "The Poet's Retreat," another poem from the *Literary Gazette* that makes heavy use of flower imagery, takes on added significance to dedicated fans.<sup>9</sup> This poem is a rare example of Landon refraining from dark imagery and dejection, instead describing a pastoral scene of domestic bliss: a cottage surrounded by countless flowers. The many flowers described throughout the poem are in bloom, serving only to embellish our sense

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<sup>9</sup> Originally published in the *Literary Gazette* No. 381, May 8, 1824.

of the lovers' lasting contentment: "Our crocuses / (Those golden promisers of April's wealth) / Should be the first in Spring, and ours the rose / That bloomed the last in autumn" (*PLG*, 268, 23 - 26). There is a notable lack of fading colours, scattered leaves, or dead bouquets. Even the brief reference to the rose's last bloom in autumn does not result in melancholia, instead giving way to further descriptions of purple violets, green meadows, and azure bird's-eye. An unfamiliar reader might consider this to be a rather banal poem, indulging in a simple fantasy. When read within the larger context of Landon's work however, this variation upon her visual motifs becomes more involved. Not only does the poem's apparent optimism take on greater emphasis when juxtaposed to more typical examples, but a subtle note of fatalism can be detected. While there are no explicit indications that the narrator's love is doomed, Landon's use of future-in-the-past tense implies that this happy fantasy will never become a reality. Conditional verbs fill every passage, so that their "garden *should* be beautiful" and they "*would* be proud of it," but the poem never applies a simple-present tense (21, 23, my emphasis). Instead, the poem ends with a wistful conjecture: "I could be happy any where with thee! / But this, dear love! - This would be Paradise!" (43 - 44). If written by another author, these lines might simply be taken at face value, but from Landon they implicitly gesture towards the absence of Paradise and the unspoken reality this narrator must occupy. In order to perceive such connotations, the reader must be acquainted with L.E.L.'s conventions. This familiarity and expectancy with which readers come to anticipate her poetry is fostered by the regularity with which it is published in the *Literary Gazette*.

Similarly, Landon's visual shorthand is specifically suited to the working conditions of the periodical press. Renowned for the speed with which she composed

verse, Landon wrote in a fashion that can be likened to the oral tradition of improvisational poetry. Much like the Italian improvisatrice that often served as her protagonist, she uses a ready stock of conventions in order to extemporize verse. This method lends itself naturally to the periodical, with its constant demands for new content, written under tight deadlines, designed to be reassuringly familiar without being tedious. The fast pace of the periodical press contributed to the literary magazine's status as an ephemeral print product, meant to be consumed and then replaced with each subsequent issue. As David Stewart has observed, this association led many nineteenth-century poets and critics to dismiss periodical poetry as a lower order of literature, destined to be disposed and forgotten (162). Nonetheless, its ephemeral nature could also prove liberating. In Landon's case, the periodical provided an outlet that rewarded her fast, fluid, referential lyricism. Much like the public spaces where the improvisatrice would perform her oral lyrics, the periodical is a transient medium, where poetry is meant to be experienced for its immediate aesthetic enjoyment. In this context of weekly consumption, repetition is an asset rather than a problem, as separate poems are more likely to be blended in the reader's memory than directly juxtaposed on the page. As a result, each new issue provides a new opportunity for the poet to improvise and remix familiar content into a new performance.

This method of repetition and extemporization facilitated by the periodical mode contributes to the flattening of the textual subject by obscuring the distinctions between the different protagonists and narrators. Landon drew these figures from a wide variety of sources, including the works of other authors, classical mythology, and travel writing. Amongst her heroines are historical figures such as Sappho, fictional characters like

Madame de Stael's Corrine, and heroines taken from Mediterranean and Asian folklore. These figures can be distinguished by a number of characteristics: some are modern, some are ancient, some are real, some are mythical, some are widows, some are young maidens, many are poets or musicians. Despite any such distinctions however, the different figures are blended together by the common aesthetic that defines Landon's poetry.

A quick comparison of two more poems from the *Literary Gazette* can illustrate this blending. "Indian Song" is a poem that features an Indian maiden as she observes a "species of Divination," cultivating a single rose that is set adrift in a grass boat; "Untitled lines (A small clear fountain)" begins with a tableau of a Grecian nymph reposing in a forest grove before transitioning into a lament for the loss of classical beauty.<sup>10</sup> Each poem features distinct subject matter and conveys different sentiments. In "Indian Song," the maiden's "lonely rosebud," symbol of youth and love, is placed into the vessel (an image that often signifies transition and escape in Landon's work) and given to the stream. The result is a figure of youthful innocence surrendered to the fate of an unpredictable world. By contrast, "Untitled lines (A small clear fountain)" serves as a celebration of Hellenic ideals of beauty, providing a sumptuous description of an Arcadian scene. While the narrator laments that such ideals have become lost to time, the poem ends by reassuring the reader that "those / Beautiful though dethroned Deities" can still be found in nature and poetry, including her own verse (*PLG* 236, 36 - 37).

These two poems are quite different in content, structure, and tone. The former is an Orientalist sketch reflecting on the bittersweet fragility of youth, the latter a paean to

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<sup>10</sup> "Indian Song" was originally published in *Literary Gazette* No. 365, January 17, 1824. "Untitled lines (A small clear fountain)" was originally published the following week in *Literary Gazette* No. 366, January 24, 1824.

the enduring influence of ancient models of art and beauty. Yet, both poems also share common themes and motifs. In both cases, the female figure primarily serves as a romanticized symbol of inevitable loss. Both bear the signature blushing cheek that marks innocence and vivacity in Landon's poetry. Both figures can only be expressed through metaphorical imagery, whether that be a "lovely rose / [that] Sat like a fairy queen" or "marble pillars... laid in the dust" (235; 236). In neither case does the account extend beyond descriptions of appearances and actions. This repetition diminishes the distinction between each figure, rendering them separate but interchangeable representations of the same essential archetype. Read in tandem, their similarities allude to the presence of a vague underlying subject, which serves as a common thread joining these figures together. This common subject might be identified with Landon herself, as Lawford implies when she asserts these poems of doomed love were directed at Jerdan. Or it could be interpreted as the public persona she cultivated as L.E.L. or as some essential model of the female artist. Regardless, this composite subject is only ever presented via various facades, where each new poem is a new performance conveyed wholly through dying roses and shadowed brows. In this regard, the subject is only observable through the accumulation of superficial details, and the Romantic model of depth is flattened, observable upon the surface of objects. Each week, L.E.L. presents another facet, revealing nothing beyond the immediate impression of the text. Yet, when read together, these various facets begin to convey an accretive impression of the author. To once again borrow Cope's term, the result is a sewn-together subject, comprised of discordant parts, creating a product that, while familiar to readers, never fully coalesces, "problematiz[ing] the very idea of the valuing subject" (371). By embracing the

ephemeral nature of the periodical press, Landon presents a textual subject that is reconstituted with the mediation of each new text. In doing so, she rejects a model of subjecthood characterized by internal depth in favour of one realized through external breadth: to perceive this subject one must not read into the individual text, but rather read across multiple texts. Grounded upon the dedication of readers who return each week, it is a model of authorship particularly suited to the periodical medium.

### Transmedia and the Author as Consumer

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to consider that this line of analysis risks trivializing Landon's poetry. Typically, to describe a piece of writing as being superficial and repetitive is to reject its literary merit. Indeed, until recently critics and scholars have used these exact criticisms to dismiss Landon's work and classify her as a lesser Romantic poet. This was true of Landon's earliest critics, as seen in the *Literary Magnet's* 1824 review of *The Improvisatrice*. After listing some of the volume's finer points, the anonymous reviewer takes Landon to task for the monotony of her verse:

The volume, which is neatly got up, and prettily embellished, in addition to the principal Poem, is filled up with a number of Miscellaneous Pieces, of which we shall merely remark, that they are all in the same strain of sad monotony... In fact, the chief fault which pervades the poetry of L.E.L. is its unbroken sameness. Her Muse is always in mourning, and sighs and tears are the food on which she loves to banquet. Her harp has but one note, and that wakes to sorrow only. (McGann and Riess 296)

There is a condescending note to the critic's description of the volume as "neatly got up,

and prettily embellished,” suggesting an association between the dressed up volume and the author’s reputation as a young beauty. This style of qualifying praise and censure to conform to gender norms was a common rhetorical tactic used by nineteenth-century male critics to place limits upon female poets and reinforce their own authority (Behrendt 15). The fact that these comments immediately precede the critic’s complaints regarding the volume’s monotony implies a connection between a preoccupation with appearances and a problematic dearth of substance within. These kinds of criticisms have carried forward into modern scholarship. In the introduction to Broadview’s *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess’ measured praise resembles the *Literary Magnet*’s patronizing tone:

[Landon’s poetry] is cold and sentimental at the same time, flat and intense... [F]or all her romantic materials, Landon is a notably unspectacular writer, easily - too easily - forgotten. But for those who like poets writing under the sign “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” Landon ought to have a special attraction. (29)

This is remarkably faint praise for a publication specifically intended to perpetuate her work as a subject for academic study: a preface that informs curious students that Landon wrote pretty good poetry (if you like that sort of stuff). While this does not carry the *Literary Magnet*’s misogynistic undertones, it does display the same reservations that her poetry is too hollow and unvarying to be memorable. Glennis Stephenson was one of the first modern scholars to seriously examine Landon’s literary career. Yet, even as Stephenson describes the liberating, radical potential of Landon’s tendency “to pile image on top of image, to push everything to the extreme, to squeeze every idea dry,” she

qualifies this praise by noting that her dependence upon clichés remains her greatest flaw (121). This may be a valid criticism, but the merit of repetition and tropes depends upon the metric by which we judge literature. The history of Landon's reception indicates a metric defined by the standards of her male predecessors.

Landon's repetitive, referential poetry shows little regard for the qualities of originality, idiosyncratic vision, and personal revelation that are central to many of the canonical Romantic poets. The priority given to these qualities is built into the foundations of twentieth-century Romantic scholarship. Harold Bloom begins his seminal study *The Anxiety of Influence* by clarifying, "My concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death. Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves" (5). Described in rather phallogentric terms, the creation of great literature is imagined here as a physical struggle, where the truly great poet asserts his creative vision overtop of his predecessors. It is important that the individual poet clearly distinguish his work from others. Of course, Bloom does not suggest that great poetry must be (or even can be) entirely original or that instances of derivation inherently degrade the quality of poetry. Rather, identifying Freud's concept of sublimation as a sign of maturation, he argues that strong poets draw upon sources of inspiration and adapt them to their own purpose, moving from imitation to revision. For Bloom, the defining quality of Romanticism is that struggle with the influence of predecessors, an ultimately failed attempt to fully absorb and grow beyond the shadow of Shakespeare and Milton: "a vast visionary tragedy, the self-baffled enterprise not of Prometheus but of blinded Oedipus, who did not know that the Sphinx was his Muse" (10). By positing originality as the

central metric for distinguishing “strong” literature and the struggle for originality as the defining quality of the Romantic period, Bloom further instilled an institutional bias against authors from this period that revel in acts of reference.

Landon is one of those authors. Bloom would likely classify Landon as weak because, not only does she engage in derivation, she embraces it, showing none of the anxiety towards influence that constitutes the strong author’s struggle for greatness. Rather than attempt to assert a creative vision that displaces and overwrites the influence of others, Landon consistently foregrounds the sources of her inspiration. In addition to liberally borrowing characters and stories from various historical and literary sources, many of her poems are presented as responses to existing cultural objects, including paintings, sketches, engravings, and curios. One of the projects she worked on for the *Literary Gazette* was an ongoing series of poems entitled “Poetical Catalogue of Pictures.” The poems in this series were inspired by specific paintings and consisted of Landon translating the images into verse. Focusing on the details that draw her eye and expressing the associations that form in her mind, these poems render Landon’s experience of the artwork as a public act to be shared with her readers. As such, these poems were essentially referential: their titles typically announced the names of the artists and directed her readers to the exhibits where the works could be seen. Rather than distinguishing her poetry from other forms of contemporary culture and prioritizing her position as an author, poems like these position Landon as a fellow consumer of media and a participant within mass culture.

That is not to say that Landon’s voice is absent from these works. By their very nature, these poems comprise acts of artistic appropriation, as Landon filters the art

through her own interpretive framework. For example, “Vandyke consulting his Mistress on a Picture in Cooke’s Exhibition” begins by interpreting the expressions and posture of the painting’s subjects in the distinct fashion of an L.E.L. poem.<sup>11</sup> Landon’s description of Vandyke’s “dark cheek, and darker eye / Where lightning-gleams of genius lie, / And that so haughty lip’s proud curl, / [which] Are mild before that fair young girl” draws upon her characteristic visual shorthand, which readers would necessarily associate with her body of work (*PLG*, 126, 7 - 10). The unfolding description of an artist inspired by a young woman, whose soft beauty is “A rosebud, ere the sun has set / Which saw it bloom,” presents one of her characteristic tableaux of romantic love, in which fiery passion both enlivens and threatens tender innocence (17 - 18). Similar examples can be found in “Portrait of a Girl, in the British Gallery, by T. Stewardson” and “On the Picture of a Young Girl,” both of which project stories of romantic disenchantment upon the expressions of the young women. Thus, the images that result from Landon’s versification of these paintings clearly bear her signature.

Inasmuch as the poem is an act of appropriation, however, it is also an act of reception. In addition to describing the scene depicted in the painting, Landon’s poem captures her reaction to viewing the painting. Her account of the rapt attention with which the artist gazes upon his mistress as she views his work, “seeking in those eyes / His light, his fame,” conveys the distinct impression that Cooke’s depiction of Vandyke made upon her own imagination. In “On the Picture of a Young Girl,” her observation that “there is malice in her smile, / As if she felt her woman’s power” is the kind of reactive interpretation one might expect to overhear from a gallery patron. One function

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<sup>11</sup> Originally published in the *Literary Gazette* No. 321, March 15, 1823.

of these poems seems to be to draw the reader into a discussion of the art itself. Moreover, when read within the broader context of the “Poetical Catalogue of Pictures,” each poem is interpreted as part of an ongoing project of art appreciation. As products of the pleasure and inspiration derived from particular modern works of art, these poems break down the distinction between author and audience by situating Landon in both positions. As indicated by titles such as “Different Thoughts; Suggested by a Picture by G.S. Newton, No. 16, in the British Gallery, and representing a Girl looking at her Lover’s Miniature” and “[Sketched from Sir John Leicester’s Gallery.] The Hours, by Howard,” Landon’s verse conflates acts of reception with acts of composition, blurring the distinction between consumption and creativity. In this regard, Landon shows that creative agency does not have to be realized through acts of original genius. It can also be expressed through acts of appropriation, adaptation, and iteration. Just as the majority of her poetry remixes familiar tropes to create variations upon her favourite themes, her “Poetical Catalogue of Pictures” reframes the artists’ paintings, applying existing material to a new aesthetic experience. A poem is not meant to be a wholly original concept, but instead serves as an extension of the original artwork, converted into a new mode for a new audience.

By incorporating these gallery paintings into her poetry and thereby disseminating them through the *Literary Gazette*’s extensive circulation, Landon engages in a precursory form of media convergence and participatory culture. Henry Jenkins defines convergence as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experience they want”

(2). Convergence is considered to be a primarily twenty-first-century development, as media franchises increasingly engage in transmedia storytelling spread across print, television, film, and digital media. As the proliferation of media increasingly brings together creators from different modes, collaborative partnerships prove important for increasing circulation and broadening audiences. As a result, the borders separating the creative communities within a particular media become more porous, as does the line between authors and audiences, giving rise to a participatory culture in which consumers are no longer merely passive spectators. Jenkins argues that the “circulation of media content – across different media systems, competing media economies, and national borders – depends heavily on consumers’ active participation” (3). He illustrates this with contemporary examples of fan communities influencing the creative direction of their favourite shows and appropriating intellectual property through the creation of fan fiction. For Jenkins, the passion of audiences is now a driving force behind the dissemination and direction of creative properties across media.

Obviously, the *Literary Gazette* predates the communication networks that facilitate the kind of interaction between fan communities and creative communities described by Jenkins. In the early nineteenth century, creators still operated in a detached position of authority removed from audiences. Nonetheless, the proliferation of print and visual media during this period predicts this modern process of convergence. As a weekly journal that provided coverage of the latest developments in books, theatre, art, and sciences, the *Literary Gazette* existed at the intersection of London’s overlapping cultural spheres. Accordingly, as a critic and a poet, Landon’s work for the publication blended creative and journalistic modes. She wrote to express herself and to promote the work of

others, and these two aims repeatedly converged. While it might be inexact to describe the “Poetical Catalogue of Pictures” as fan fiction, these poems can only exist within a transmedia context, as the poems themselves facilitate the circulation of content across different media. Moreover, these poems demonstrate how the rapid dissemination of content throughout mass media negates the priority given to acts of original authorship. By framing these poems as accounts of other artists’ work, Landon abnegates her primacy as the sole authorial voice responsible for the text. Instead, as an active participant within the periodical press, Landon focuses as much on sharing her experiences as a consumer and critic as she does on distinguishing herself as a creator. Compared to Keats’ “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” which shares the poet’s experience of ancient art in order to transcend modern print culture, Landon’s focus on contemporary art draws her readers deeper into the network of artists that she participates in as a creator and a consumer.

This participatory position presents an antithesis to the autonomous authorial stance set out by Wordsworth in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, where he describes his work as an attempt to counteract the “deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse” and the “craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies” (599). Wordsworth is concerned that mainstream culture is debased by the sheer pace and magnitude of its output. His concern that this excess of media will “blunt the discriminating power of the mind” implies that readers are in danger of losing the ability to exercise critical judgment and becoming passive consumers of news and culture (599). Wordsworth laments the state of “torpor” the public has fallen into, where the “uniformity of their occupations” has produced a homogenous standard of

taste to which “the literature and theatrical companies of the country have conformed” (599). This description of cultural homogeneity is couched in the qualitative terms of strong, original genius and weak, derivative imitation that Bloom would go on to develop and parse. In addition to standing apart from other writers, the strong author must occupy a discrete position of priority in relation to his readers. As Daniela Garofalo has observed of the “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface,” Wordsworth’s prose frequently utilizes a rhetoric of masculine authority, defining the author’s position as one of mastery over the reader: “The people [as opposed to the commodity-addicted public] have submitted to the right master and are, therefore, connected to something, however vaguely defined, that is greater and better than the vanities of the latest vogue” (*Manly Leaders* 28).

Wordsworth’s antagonism towards contemporary print culture is informed in part by this “anxiety of influence” as the publishing industry’s excess threatens to transform the reading experience from a meaningful exchange between author and reader into the arbitrary consumption of the latest publications.

Of course, to reduce Wordsworth’s concern for authorial primacy to a competitive desire to dominate readers and peers would be inaccurate. As the first chapter of this study has already discussed, his prose supplements seek to establish a complex relationship between author and reader that is conducive to sympathetic identification. His poetry serves as a part of a communicative exchange, which depends upon readers exerting the “discriminating power of their mind” in order to accurately fathom the author’s meaning. As I have argued, the priority Wordsworth places upon authorial intent is informed by his position within the writing market and the mode by which he publishes and distributes his poetry. From the selection and arrangement of poems to production

matters of pricing and binding, the autonomy that Wordsworth exercises over every aspect of his collected volumes renders each publication a product of his singular vision. For Wordsworth, the wider print market is a source of potential interference, as the opinions of critics and the work of peers threaten to distract the reader from purchasing, experiencing, and understanding his highly polished, gradually reissued collections of poetry. His criticism of the proliferation of print media and his prose supplements regarding the primacy of the author's voice are strategies developed in response to the challenges of competing in the marketplace as a solitary poet.

As an author who took part in the rapid production of sensationalistic entertainment, Landon contributed to the cultural climate that Wordsworth was objecting to. Though not gratifying her readers on an hourly basis, her poetry appeared with great regularity in weekly, monthly, and annual publications. Rather than requiring her readers to exert their utmost imagination to interpret each poem's particular meaning, her verse conveyed its meaning with the ease and immediacy of a familiar image. To dismiss Landon's work as monotonous, flat, or redundant is to remove her from the context in which she was originally read and evaluate her by a Wordsworthian standard of poetry. Instead, it is more productive to consider how the differences between these two poets result from Landon occupying a wholly different position within the market: one defined by rapid deadlines for diverse publications operating across different levels of the publishing industry. Whereas Wordsworth conceptualized his poetry as part of a singular canon that readers would experience within a collected volume, Landon worked with various media, exercising creative agency in a variety of ways. Her poetry is not solely informed by authorial intent, but derives meaning from the wider network of media that it

participates within.

Various scholars have called attention to different ways in which Landon's writing shifts in response to contextual factors of mode and market. Daniel Reiss discusses another series of poems that appeared in the *Literary Gazette* entitled "Medallion Wafers." Similar to the "Poetical Catalogue of Pictures," this series drew direct inspiration from contemporary artwork. In this case, however, the art in question was also a consumer product: a series of medallions that reproduce in miniature the works of celebrated sculptors Antonio Canova and Bertel Thorvaldsen, which were advertised in the *Literary Gazette* as "the cheapest mode of obtaining exquisite copies of the finest works of ancient and modern Art" (qtd in Reiss 808). Understanding Landon's "Medallion Wafers" poems requires the modern scholar to consider not only how they draw inspiration from the commodified art objects themselves, but how they participate in the *Gazette*'s promotion of these products. It is difficult to say whether her original audience would have been expected to perform such intertextual reading, but Jerdan and the merchants of "Medallion Wafers" certainly counted on these poems and adverts having a cumulative effect upon the reader. According to Reiss, while these poems can be classified as "commodity-poems" that appeal to the desire of bourgeois consumers, they also address the spirit of art that originally informed Canova and Thorvaldsen's work, commenting upon the potential for commercial products to constitute legitimate art. As such, "they function as an endorsement of an advertisement for inexpensive copies of art, while simultaneously demanding acceptance themselves as a genuine artistic achievement" (812). Once again, Landon situates herself in the place of the reader, drawing direct inspiration from her own experiences as a consumer of cultural objects.

These experiences then serve as the material for her own work. In order to understand these poems, both as referential endorsements and commentary on the nature of art, the modern scholar must consider how they receive meaning from the broader context of the surrounding commercial culture.

We need to be sensitive to commercial context when assessing her work in other mediums as well. One of Landon's most profitable ventures was her work as a contributor and editor for various annuals and gift-books. Expanding on her earlier work versifying visual art, Landon wrote companion poems inspired by a series of etchings that would be featured in each new volume of these publications. Jill Rappoport argues that Landon's poetry for these volumes posits her relationship with readers using the logic of commercial transaction and gift exchange, both of which were inherent to the medium. Gift-books employed a rhetoric of charity, presenting the images and verse as generous donations gathered for the readers' enjoyment. As such, they presented "contradictory messages: they were 'gifts,' but they were also material objects for sale" (446). According to Rappoport, Landon utilizes a similar rhetoric in her contributions, masking the commercial nature of her work by presenting it in the guise of a gift to her reader. This has the empowering effect of rendering Landon as "not only the object exchanged but also the agent behind the exchange" (456).

Finally, returning to the "Poetical Catalogue of Pictures," Michele Martinez notes that the selection of paintings that Landon chose as subjects for her poetry was informed by the periodical's coverage of modern English artists. While it is not clear whether this project was Jerdan's idea or Landon's, the series of poems was clearly connected to the reviews of local galleries and exhibitions appearing in the *Gazette's* fine art column.

Martinez observes that the “Poetical Catalogue of Pictures” seems to respond to complaints made one year prior in an article that charged the Royal Academy for failing to adequately promote the work of British artists. While the regular arts column focused on providing coverage for local artists, Landon supplemented its efforts by writing poetry intended “to motivate readers to visit British exhibitions, appealing to an English viewer’s curiosity as well as sympathy” (43). In this regard, her poetry is not only informed by her experiences as a connoisseur of contemporary British art, but also by its role within the broader context of the *Literary Gazette* and, by extension, the print media’s interaction with the London art world.

As each of these scholars shows, Landon’s different poems are shaped by the particular conditions of the print market that mediate each work, including its mode of publication, its relationship to peripheral products and media, and its relevance to editorial mandates. In addition to occupying diverse positions as a writer, Landon’s relationship to the market is characterized by a state of hybridity. That is to say, her position is a composite, defined by the multiplicity and simultaneity of her work within the market. Moreover, this state of hybridity is not just a result of her varied experiences as an author, but is born of her work as a critic and editor, positions that prompted Landon to view culture from a macrocosmic perspective. Rather than experiencing creative agency simply as a writer expressing herself through the composition of a poem, Landon’s work required her to consider how a given text’s meaning would be influenced by its relationship to other textual elements within a publication, to works from other media, and to broader cultural trends. Thus, as Martinez notes, Landon wrote the “Poetical Catalogue of Pictures” not just as a poet, but as an art critic commenting upon

modern British painters and coordinating with the *Literary Gazette*'s promotion thereof. Her experience in these roles led her to view the crowded marketplace as a network of creative agents interacting throughout converging media, rather than simply as an intermediate joining authors to their readers. Whereas Wordsworth's interactions with the market were motivated by his desire to obtain sympathetic understanding, preserving what Jenkins might describe as "passive media spectatorship," Landon's hybrid position in the market would have prompted her to view the market in less binary terms. For Landon, the author was also the consumer and was also the editor. As a result, her work is not simply designed to convey her voice and aesthetic, but also to facilitate the ongoing proliferation and consumption of diverse media.

#### Constant Consumption, Copious Objects, and the Elusive Subject

Daniella Garofalo has noted this potential for Landon's poetry to perpetuate the consumption of commercial culture. Garofalo examines how the modernization of British consumer culture placed contradictory demands upon women, requiring them to serve as models of both robust commerce and tempered self-discipline. Women's magazines encouraged readers to conserve their desire by publishing moralistic tales that eroticized restraint. In these tales, the frustration and deferral of romantic desire led to a more profound ecstasy: "The lovers in these stories live only for love and when that is gone, they inevitably lose their reason and then their lives. They suffer from a passion that overwhelms them, that remains unfulfilled and brings on a kind of orgasmic death in which 'reason' has 'fall'n beneath an excess of agony'" (*Women* 43). Such stories of melancholy love instill in readers a consumer mindset of continuous desire that can only

be momentarily gratified; the desire of an object that will never be the object that one really desires. Landon's verse tales of dissatisfied love and doomed heroines serve as a primary example of this dynamic. Her heroines eroticize the state of desire and in death transform the experience of desire into a higher romantic ideal than the theoretical satisfaction of that desire. Garofalo aligns this consumer ideology with Landon's emphasis upon aesthetic objects and artificial surfaces, relating her accumulation of images and ideas to a general fixation on material accumulation: "every tragic love is framed as a poem or painted image - every love story is part of a collection whose purpose is not to offer completion of the set, final satisfaction, but, instead, to repeat the delicious pain of dissatisfaction" (*Women* 49). Thus, in addition to explicitly promoting particular consumer objects like the medallion wafers, Landon's poetry implicitly encourages a state of constant consumption by idealizing the process by which desire is simultaneously indulged and deferred.

Returning to the terms of Eric Gans' theory of desire and representation, Landon's poetry performs this process by which desire of the object is sublimated into an act of symbolic consumption that can be perpetuated over and over, continually deferring competitive violence, if not resolving it. Landon realizes what Gans describes as the Romantic period's potential for the co-existence of popular entertainment and high art, a fusion that was impossible within the neoclassical period (172). According to Gans, the distinction between art and entertainment lies in the way each form treats the central object of desire: "the moment of art looks back to the renunciation of appetite implicit in the sign, whereas that of entertainment looks forward to the appetitive satisfaction of the communal feast that will follow" (171). As Garofalo indicates, Landon's poetry

transforms the deferral of desire into an aesthetic experience, rendering the act of abstention as a performance for the reader's enjoyment. While they explicitly abandon the hope of fulfillment, her poems continue to stimulate consumer demand, with each new poem reiterating her signature tropes, familiarizing readers with her visual shorthand, and enticing expectation for the next performance. The desire that can never be satisfied can be repeatedly indulged.

As I argued at the outset of this chapter, Byron and Landon both demonstrate the celebrity's tendency to attract and subvert the controlling gaze of his or her public. In both cases, the intimate tone and emotional nature of their writing led readers to conflate the sentiments described in verse with the personal lives of the author. Each poet responded by denying the audience's ability to impose an authorial identity. However, the means by which their respective poetry denies the reader personal insight differs, reflecting the different positions each poet occupied in market society. Byron's poetry draws the reader's gaze by consistently gesturing towards the presence of the poet within the verse, while also inventing new layers of ironic detachment to frustrate confessional interpretations. In this manner, he maintains his status as a central model of mimetic desire within the market, drawing the public's attention as a kind of protean subject, impossible to reify but always unmistakably himself. As a celebrity and an aristocrat, one who was both immersed within and superior to the concerns of the public, Byron demonstrated how the individual can maintain an autonomous voice within the marketplace.

Eric Eisner interprets Landon's poetry as a public response to the kind of celebrity fandom that Byron had experienced, arguing that her writing both "idealizes and pulls

away from a model of poetic expression that construes the reader-writer relationship in terms of a desire for sympathetic understanding” (125). Reviews of her poetry often denote a desire to possess Landon, emphasizing her charms of a female beauty and figuring the reader as a suitor to her affections (Eisner 120). The public’s ability to impose an identity upon her carries with it the threat of ownership by an appropriative gaze. According to Eisner, Landon responded by writing verse that places a heavy emphasis upon exteriority, “spinning loose of subjectivity, interrupting the circuit of sympathetic feeling that supposedly links reader, poem, and poet” (127). In other words, the flattening of the textual subject into the code of images and objects that convey each poem’s sentiments limits the connection of reader and author, denying the former any genuine insight into the latter’s life. Landon cannot be fixed within the context of a given poem because each new poem is another painting of wan cheeks, dying roses, and silent graves. As stated earlier, the only subject to be gleamed from these details is a vague composite sketch that may be compiled over time by the dedicated reader. Whereas Byron repeatedly redefines himself as a subject to attract the reader, Landon’s poetry repeatedly transforms the subject into a new object for the reader to consume. The reader who attempts to grasp the unique subject responsible for the verse can only seize upon a surface impression. In this fashion, as Garofalo indicates, each new poem perpetuates a desire that can be repeatedly indulged but never wholly satisfied. Yet herein lies the appeal for the consumer of periodical literature: to have a desire stoked, gratified, and renewed in a cycle that perpetuates enjoyment and commerce. In this respect, such a reader may desire the act of postulating more than actually achieving an authentic understanding of the author.

An examination of one final poem from the *Literary Gazette* will help illustrate how the focus upon exterior details at once indulges and prolongs the audience's desire for genuine insight into the subject. While Landon's poetry often focuses entirely on superficial details, many of her poems allude to the tension that exists between surface impressions and subjective truths. One such poem, "Untitled lines (Farewell! for I have schooled my heart)," depicts the discord that exists between public appearances and private truths.<sup>12</sup> The poem features a narrator describing her alienation from the man she loves, drawing upon Landon's typical imagery to express her heartbreak: "The faded brow, the pallid lip, / Proclaim what soon my fate will be" (*PLG* 265, 5 - 6). As usual, the character's internal sentiments are communicated through outward signs. While the poem focuses on external details, however, it also alludes to the way appearances function as a mask obscuring true emotions. Thus, when the narrator is separated from the object of her affection, her facade belies her sense of loss:

We then were parting, others wept,  
 But I let not one teardrop fall;  
 And when each kind Farewell was said,  
 Mine was the coldest of them all.

But mine the ear that strained to hear  
 Thy latest step; and mine the eye  
 That watched thy distant shape, when none  
 But me its shadow could descry.

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<sup>12</sup> Originally published in the *Literary Gazette* No. 380, May 1, 1824.

And when the circle in its mirth  
 Had quite forgot Farewell and Thee,  
 I went to my own room, and wept  
 The tears I would not let thee see. (*PLG* 265, 21 - 32)

This final line emphasizes the importance of appearance in determining identity and the subject's tendency to control that identity by determining what others perceive.

Moreover, the narrator's attention to these perceptual signs when her beloved's fading presence, her straining to hear his last footstep and tracing even his shadow as he walks away, speaks to the viewer's reliance upon external matters in order to feed a desire for another subject. When the object of her affection returns betrothed to another, Landon once again focuses upon this tension:

I knew the day, the very hour,  
     That you were wed, and heard your vow;  
 I heard the wedding bells - oh, GOD!  
     Mine ear rings with them even now!

I may not say that you were false,  
     I never had one vow from thee;  
 But I have often seen thine eye  
     Look as it loved to look on me.

And when you spoke to me, your voice

Would always take a softer tone;  
 And surely that last night your cheek

Was almost pallid as my own. (*PLG* 265, 53 - 64)

The narrator is frustrated by the apparent discrepancy between his true feelings and his appearance, as the empirical evidence of his vows and bells contradict her certainty regarding his love. And yet, the only indication that she has of his “true” affections must be inferred from enigmatic signs, such as the softness of his voice or the look in his eye.

As is the case in all of Landon’s poetry, the subject’s sentiments can only be perceived upon the surface. Yet, in this particular poem, a conflict arises between explicit and implicit signs. If the pallid cheek is a truer indicator of his feelings than his words and actions, her unrequited love is a tragic result of each one’s respective pretense. The confusion that must inevitably result when divining the subject’s true feelings from her outward appearance is emphasized by the strained syntax of the lines, “But I have often seen thine eye / Look as it loved to look on me” (59 - 60). Each of the subjects, narrator and beloved, is an object in the other’s eyes as they share a look, simultaneously imparting and imposing meaning through their gaze. Any hope of sympathetic identification (and subsequently romantic bliss) is lost in the resulting uncertainty. And yet, there is a bittersweet moment of possibility held within the exchange of glances. As a poet who weekly presents a new aestheticized facade for readers’ to look upon and interpret, Landon is keenly aware of the limits of such inferences. As a celebrity driven to both attract and frustrate the public’s attention, Landon flattens the subject into an object, foregrounding the limits of the readers’ insight while indulging their desire to gaze upon her. In each *Literary Gazette*, L.E.L. is rendered as a new object for the reader’s

consumption, sublimating the desire for a more intimate knowledge of the author into a symbolic act of appropriation. The process allows the reader to mitigate her relationship with her audience, while sustaining their interest.

I will end this chapter by considering two possible conclusions that can be drawn from this interpretation of Landon's poetry. On the one hand, this emphasis upon the flattening of the subject could be seen as diminishing Landon's agency as an author and perpetuating a problematic notion of the self-effacing female author. Claire Brock argues that these kinds of interpretations are part of a larger trend that overlook the ways women authors from this period were actively marketing their identities and "embracing new forms of public self-representation" (2). It could certainly be considered reductive to argue that Landon objectifies herself within her own poems, cautiously abstaining from the kind of public engagement associated with the male authors discussed previously. Moreover, such an interpretation could lend credence to Greer's description of Landon as a victim of a patriarchal publishing industry, pouring herself into creating poetry that merely served as a series of commodified objects to profit her domineering publisher. To assert that Landon abandons the position of a distinct subject in order to render herself as a consumable object for the readers' continued pleasure aligns with Mellor's view of Landon as a female author who adopted "the hegemonic construction of the ideal woman" (107).

While these are valid concerns, I would argue that Landon's objectification of the textual subject is indicative of her empowered position within the publishing industry. Alternative narratives of Landon's life, such as those offered by Baiesi or Stephenson, tend to emphasize her business savvy and independent life style. It is true that she had to

work constantly in order to earn a living, but as a result she was able to achieve a rare degree of autonomy for her time period. In addition to supporting her family with her earnings, Landon was able to afford a separate room of her own to live in (Leighton 48). The tragic nature of her death and the attacks against her character in the press established Landon's legacy as a fallen woman, but her life of constant creative labour and illicit romances could just as easily be construed as remarkably progressive. She was not simply a poet struggling to survive in the market; she was a prominent member of London's literary world, influencing critical tastes, attending literary salons, and participating in the editorial process of various periodicals.

When her complex position within the market is taken into account, Landon's strategies of representation take on added dimensions. To interpret her flattening of the subject position as indicative of a lack of agency is to assume that the proper function of poetry is to distill the authors' subjective perspectives and distinguish their voice within the crowded market. Such was the goal of Wordsworth and Byron as poets seeking to assert their creative primacy in standalone volumes of poetry, published from positions of relative geographical/social detachment from the writer's market. As a creator who viewed publishing from a macrocosmic perspective within the industry, Landon seems to have been less concerned with distinguishing and asserting her personal voice and more concerned with perpetuating the creation, dissemination, and consumption of cultural media throughout the market. Her focus upon the superficial elements of the subject, the rendering of emotion and sentiment through surface impressions, facilitated the rapid production and ongoing consumption of her poetry. Her methods of repetition, reference, appropriation, and adaptation allowed her poetry to interact with other creators across

print and visual media. As a result, her poetry conveys more than the isolated perspective of a British Sappho; it responds to and embellishes upon the work of contemporary artists and writers, and it shares in the enjoyment of fellow consumers and patrons of the arts. In this regard, Landon's career looks forward to the increasingly complex networks of interacting media that would evolve over the following centuries, predicting modern developments of participatory culture and convergence.

## Conclusion – Authorship Then and Now

I would like to conclude this dissertation by briefly discussing the relevance of this research to current scholarship of British Romantic literature, but also to studies of authorship in twenty-first-century culture.

Romantic scholarship seems to be haunted by questions of authorship. The influence of the canonical Romantic poets upon twentieth-century scholarship continues to inform the direction of current research, even as we attempt to bring marginal authors into focus. One could liken their continued influence to Roland Barthes' description of the non-presence of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, which quietly informs everything around it through its mute aura. In his work on the classification of literature, Paul Keen questions the efficacy of modern attempts to redirect Romantic scholarship:

This revisionary challenge has taken several important and often theoretically sophisticated forms, from the deconstruction of Romantic poetry's mediations on self-presence, to the recuperation of non-canonical authors and genres, to the attempt to historicize the Romantic poets' insistence on a spiritual focus that transcends the particularities of history. None of these strategies is unimportant, but neither are they without their own risks. The effort to recuperate 'new' authors supplements rather than undermines the notion of a Romantic canon. Deconstructive and New Historicist approaches to canonical texts inevitably monumentalize the very 'Romantic ideology' they are attempting to displace. (*Crisis* 16)

As Keen indicates, attempts to question or challenge the prevalence of traditional definitions of Romanticism tend to loop back to matters of canonicity and renew

questions of authorship. While Keen is interested in moving away from topics like the self-determining subject, I would argue that it will prove productive to steer into these recurring discourses.

This dissertation was inspired in part by recent scholarship that has resuscitated discussion of marginal authors and provided much-needed historical context for studying quotidian print mediums.<sup>1</sup> One goal of this dissertation was to contribute to this movement by seeking out relatively obscure forms of literature and present them within the context of nineteenth-century print culture. However, in addition to studying these recovered works in their own right, it would prove beneficial to discuss them within the context of longstanding themes of Romanticism. The enduring legacies of Wordsworth and Byron are due in part to the profound impressions made by their models of authorship during a period when textual identity was increasingly vital to public life. As new dimensions of early nineteenth-century print culture continue to be recovered and historically contextualized, we gain increasingly diverse examples of authorship to juxtapose with these longstanding models.

This aspect of Romantic literature is of particular relevance now that twenty-first-century culture is in the midst of its own media revolution. The status of authorship in digital media and contemporary pop culture is undergoing radical transformation. It is worth considering what lessons can be learned from the Romantics' methods of textual representation. In his historical overview of authorship, John Hartley mapped out a progression that moved through three stages, from the author as god in early modern

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of this form of scholarship include Mark Parker's examination of periodical literature within the context of the publication's print runs and Stephen C. Berendt's survey of politically engaged women poets. These works make invaluable contributions to our understanding of the period by broadening the scope of accessible material.

culture, to the author as no-one in post-structuralist theory, and finally to the author as everyone in modern media theory. As Hartley explains, the predominance of collaborative, multimedia storytelling is rendering the concept of the author increasingly obsolete: “even though it is recognized that [modern media] rely on the talents of writers, the concept of authorship dwindles to the point of meaninglessness. In the most prolific, popular, and pervasive media of the press and broadcasting, no-one is an author” (30). Countering the concerns of cultural critics who lament the dilution of our culture, he looks forward to the rise of participatory culture, where the influx of amateur creators will help give rise to new voices and break down old hierarchies and outdated cultural narratives. While Hartley’s optimism is admirable, it leads him to overlook many complex questions created by this leveling of authorship. What value is given to the creative labour of the individual artist obscured by corporate authorship? What becomes of the artist’s vision when decisions are increasingly made by committee? What becomes of the artist’s ability to establish a meaningful connection with their audience when they cannot distinguish their voice?

While the level of corporation and variety of media were not as extensive in the early nineteenth century, these are the same concerns that were confronted and addressed by authors of the Romantic period. Wordsworth illustrates the challenges and limitations of preserving the individual subject’s voice from the process of mediation. Lamb shows how coming to terms with identity within the polyvalent context of public media requires viewing subjects as a product of context and mode. Landon demonstrates the potential for adaptation and collaboration that comes with embracing hybrid positions of authorship. In the future, I would like to continue to broaden the scope of this research, to incorporate

creators who operated in other modes and struggled to effectively address their audiences: novelists, publishers, and illustrators. Each new mode of engagement with the market generates a new set of concerns and a new method of conceptualizing authorial agency and subjecthood. A robust understanding of the representational strategies used to adapt to the rise of print media could lend valuable historical context for understanding the shifting significance of subjecthood in the age of multimedia.

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