

“THE HERO AS MAN OF LETTERS”:  
INTELLECTUAL POLITICS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROMANTIC EPIC

By  
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Eric S. Hood

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Chairperson: Ann Rowland

Committee Members: \_\_\_\_\_  
Philip Barnard

---

Anna Neill

---

Dorice Elliott

---

Leslie Tuttle

Date Defended: 08/30/2013

The Dissertation Committee for Eric S. Hood certifies  
that this is the approved version of the following thesis/dissertation:

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Ann Rowland

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Date Approved

## Abstract

Although the thirty years from 1794 to 1824 saw the production of more epic poetry than any other period in British literary history, the epic's function within the culture of Romanticism remains largely misunderstood and neglected. The problem in theorizing the Romantic epic stems from the uncommon diversity of epic performances during this period and from the epic's sudden reappearance after a long period of apparent dormancy in the eighteenth century. When the Romantic epic is defined, however, not as poetic form but as a repeated political act, the epic's eighteenth-century history now appears as a continuous process of generic transformation and its formal diversity no longer threatens its generic categorization. In place of understanding the epic as literary genre, I define the Romantic epic as a recurring and highly stylized rhetorical intervention by the intellectual community beginning in the mid-eighteenth century with the primary function of expanding the power of the intellectual "class."

Investigating the epic's eighteenth-century transformation, I examine the relationship between classical epics and William Collins and Thomas Gray's Pindaric odes, James Macpherson's *Ossian* "translations," and James Beattie's *Minstrel*. I argue that these so-called pre-Romantic poems reveal both a Romantic rejection of the Augustan epic and a Romantic desire to repurpose the epic's structures toward the emerging interests of the intellectual community. The conscious task was to develop a new epic mode, one that would make a hero of the man of letters, to write the kind of epic performance found in Robert Southey's *Joan of Arc*.

Focusing on the Romantic epic's function, I demonstrate that the Romantic epic provided a pattern through which intellectuals began to see themselves and the world. In order to change society Romantic intellectuals were modifying the genre which, in turn, was reshaping

intellectual consciousness. Thus, acting reciprocally, I show that the epic was at the center of the larger Romantic project: an intellectual effort to deliver humanity from commercial society.

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## Chapter One

### Coming to Terms with the Romantic Epic

#### I. Epic Questions

John Thelwall God help him! is writing an epic poem – & Samuel Rogers who is a banker & contrives to make his rhymes pass current for poetry, as his paper goes for cash, is also writing an epic poem . . . . George Dyer also hath similar thoughts. I laughed at all this when George told me so & said they would make a supplement to my obscure epic writers of these days. (*C.L.R.S.* Letter 405)<sup>1</sup>

—Robert Southey, May 1799

In literature . . . there are the ins and outs of fashion. Sonnets and satires and essays have their day—and my *Joan of Arc* has revived the epomania that Boileau cured the French of 120 years ago; but it is not everyone who can shoot with the bow of Ulysses, and the gentlemen who think they can bend the bow because I made the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, the text of Robert Southey's letters is taken from *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey: A Romantic Circles Electronic Edition*. Ed. Bolton, Carol and W.A. Speck. 8 vols. <[http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey\\_letters/](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/)>. This recent electronic edition is the most complete catalog of Robert Southey's correspondences through 1803, publishing in full previously unavailable and truncated manuscripts. In place of page numbers, the appropriate letter number has been used for in-text citation.

string twang, will find themselves somewhat disappointed.

(*C.L.R.S.* Letter 554)

—Robert Southey, October 1800

It is easy to forget that the Romantic century saw an epic revival that eclipses any other. The period is more often written as the rise of the novel, or as the zenith of the lyric, or as the revival of the ballad. Yet there, amid the emerging marketplace of middle-class readers, we find this “*epomania*,” a renewed interest in an outmoded genre that was immensely labor intensive and highly exclusionary. Stuart Curran points out that the resurgence of the epic was a uniquely British phenomenon (158), yet this seems not to have been any kind of limit on its varied productivity. There were national epics: James Ogden’s *The Revolution* (1790), Cottle’s *Alfred* (1800) Pye’s *Alfred* (1800), Olgivie’s *Britannia* (1801), and Thelwall’s *Hope of Albion* (1801); revolutionary epics: Thomas Northmore’s *Washington, or Liberty Restored* (1809), the American Joel Barlow’s *Columbiad* (1807), Percy Shelley’s *Queen Mab* (1813) and *The Revolt of Islam* (1818); religious epics: Jame’s Montgomery’s *The World Before the Flood* (1812), Richard Cumberland’s *Calvary—or the Death of Christ* (1792), Ogden’s *Emanuel* (1797), and George Townsend’s *Armageddon* (1815); medieval epics: Mary Linwood’s *The Anglo-Cambrian* (1818), William Herbert’s *Helga* (1815), Henry Hart Milman’s *Samor* (1818), and Scott’s *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805); quasi-biographical or personal epics: James Beattie’s *Minstrel* (1771), Cowper’s *The Task* (1785), and Wordsworth’s *Prelude* (1805) and *The Excursion* (1814); mock-epics: Byron’s *Don Juan* (1819-1824) and Shelley’s *Peter Bell, the Third* (1819); epic fragments: Anne Yearsley’s *Brutus* (1796), and Keats’ two *Hyperions*; then there are Blake’s half-a-dozen epic prophecies; and, of course, Southey’s own contributions to “*epomania*”: *Joan of Arc* (1796),

*Thalaba, the Destroyer* (1801), *Madoc* (1805), *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), and *Roderick Last of the Goth's* (1814)—to name only those epics that he completed. This expansive catalog, which is by no means exhaustive, is a reminder that discussions of Romantic era epics are always in danger of collapsing under their own diversity. After all, what defining features might be said to link all these texts together as belonging to the same genre?

Indeed, what qualifies as an epic during the Romantic period continues to be a source of scholarly contention. For Franco Moretti, in *Modern Epic* (1994), the epic is less a kind of poetic form than a work of some greatness and scope. Thus, in his study of the epic since the mid-eighteenth century, he counts Goethe's *Faust* (drama), Melville's *Moby Dick* (novel), and even Wagner's *The Neibelung's Ring* (operatic cycle) as proper epics. "These are not just any old books," Moretti tells us, "they are monuments" (*Modern* 1), and it is this stature as grand artistic achievements, along with their reactionary impulse to capture the fractured totality of capitalist society, that makes an epic. Interestingly, Moretti does not confer the status of epic on a single British work of the Romantic period.<sup>2</sup>

Stuart Curran, in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986), by contrast, is less adventurous with his definition. For Curran the foundation of epic rests not on critical reception or thematic content but on purity of form. Thus, he opens up the genre to dozens of relatively minor works by minor poets, while excluding works contaminated by romance, such as Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Byron's *Don Juan*. There is a sense when reading the latter chapters of *Poetic Form* that Curran is quietly struggling to reconcile what passed for epic during the Romantic period with some transcendental, or at least transhistorical, conception of the epic. It

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<sup>2</sup> Moretti does pull the first line from Byron's *Don Juan*, but it remains unclear as to whether or not he considers *Don Juan* or any other British work of the period a proper epic (*Modern* 11).

is a tension that allows him to discuss Southey's *Madoc* as an example of epic at length, even while admitting that, "we might draw so fine a distinction as to conceive of *Joan of Arc* as Southey's only *true* venture in the form" (Curran 159, emphasis added).

More recently Herbert Tucker, in *Epic: Britain's Historical Muse 1790-1910* (2008), has been a good deal more liberal and historically attuned than either Moretti or Curran in deciding what qualifies as an epic during the nineteenth century. Still, Tucker's initial definition—"to put it flatly, length; to put it roundly, scope" (11)—is woefully under theorized and is left to develop organically while he grasps about its edges. Beginning with length, Tucker makes the point that, "'A Poem, in Twelve Book' does not just log a bibliographic inventory but makes a clear promise of large and general reference" (16). Tucker's definition is a conjunction of length [form] and scope [content] that produces something of "epic scale" (17). As it is with Moretti, "epic scale" for Tucker is an attempt to represent the social totality. But Tucker extends this argument beyond the inclusion of encyclopedic paratexts, and finds an attempt to produce a full accounting of the world in every aspect of epic form. Thus, "the poetic line should be long and the page full," so that "[t]he promise of epic scale is also made literally visible along linear and spatial dimensions" (17). Similarly, he finds that the epologist should attend to the "analogous effects of soundspace" (17), embracing the rich auditory dimensions of Keats' *Hyperion* (17). In its sweeping reach, the epic, then, is a genre that seeks to become the universal object of study, a world unto itself; it is also a genre that positions the reader to survey this world's grand multitudes, and, therefore, it is a genre bound to the Enlightenment project of history (23-24).

Like Moretti, Tucker opens up epic's possibilities beyond the traditional poetic forms. He avoids a clear demarcation between some prose works and the epic poem, saying that the "historical novel and the extended prose history are the genuine and challenging highlands of

epic territory whose nineteenth-century summits we sight at times but do not attempt” (19). He celebrates the epic’s gift for “genre-absorption” (17), and he rejects claims that *The Prelude* should not be considered an epic because it is highly subjective, or that *Don Juan* should be excluded because it fails to be representative (16 n.22).

But even as Tucker seems about to admit into the category of epic a range of debatable and unorthodox inclusions, he offers two additional epic criteria: narrativity and a civic purpose. Despite both their length and scope, Tucker excludes Percy Shelley’s *Queen Mab* (1813), Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851), Thompson’s *Seasons* (1730) and Cowper’s *Task* (1785) from the category of epic because they are works that adopt “some form other than story” (21-22). Conversely, he disqualifies Christina Rossetti’s long poem *Goblin Market* (1862) as overly “domestic and familial” (18) and not “multiple and civic” (18). Considering that Tucker finds the “extended prose history” belonged to the same “territory” as the epic (as its “genuine and challenging highlands”), his move to debar some works because they have more in common with either the non-narrative “discursive modes” (22) of the eighteenth century or the novelistic scenes of the nineteenth century is perplexing. A more nuanced approach might see these works in a productive tension with one or more of the generic expectations of the epic, but Tucker simply points to a handful of transgressions on one ground or the other without coming to terms with the relationship between his understanding of the epic and these near genres. Thus, having started out from length and scope and arrived at narrativity and civic purpose (all while taking in the summit of the historical novel along the way), Tucker fails to take stock of his journey and bring together his parallel (and potentially competing) definitions. Without a more conscious attempt to theorize the limits of the epic, Tucker’s claims

appear subjective and his definition of epic ends as merely descriptive of some unapprehended test.

I have given over several pages to discussion of Tucker, Curran, and Moretti's definitions of epic not because they are particularly poor, but the opposite, of course, is true, and I will repeatedly return to all three of these important studies, which I have found to be an invaluable aid in my own thinking about the Romantic epic. In fact, not only do they make visible the range of scholarly disagreement over how to define epic in the Romantic period, all three remain attentive to the unique problems posed by the Romantic epic's generic diversity.

Where Tucker, Curran and Moretti have struggled to reconcile the difficulties posed by the Romantic epic, others have turned away. The most common response to the problem posed by the Romantic epic's diversity has been to identify the issue as belonging to Romanticism itself, to say that, perhaps in its elevation of the creative act or possibly in its democratic zeal, Romanticism was simply no respecter of genres. This, for example, is György Lukács' line in *Goethe and His Age* when he makes the claim that "Romanticism pushed the dialectic of the interpenetrations of forms to the point of dissolution, almost to the point of complete mixture and annihilation of genres" (*Goethe* 82). This argument is an old one that goes back at least as far as the Schlegels and continues to be popular (Duff *Romanticism* 160-61).<sup>3</sup> Even Stuart Curran, who goes out of his way to debunk this myth, finds himself at the end of *Poetic Form and British*

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<sup>3</sup> A. W. Schlegel writes, "[t]he antique art and poetry separate, in a strict manner, things which are dissimilar; the romantic delights in indissoluble mixtures; all contraries: nature and art, poetry and prose, seriousness and mirth, recollection and anticipation, spirituality and sensuality, terrestrial and celestial, life and death, are blended together by them in the most intimate manner" (*Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black; qtd. in Duff *Romanticism* 60); F. Schlegel: "every poem is a genre unto itself" (*Fragments on Literature and Poetry*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn; qtd. in Duff *Modern* 5). In their explication of the writing of the Jena group, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean Nancy reveal that this Romantic rejection of generic categories by the Schlegels was part and parcel of a larger philosophical (even democratic) commitment to the sanctity of the particular, the individual, as an instance of the totality (90-92).

*Romanticism* describing both *The Prelude* and *Don Juan* as unclassifiable generic hybrids, as “composite orders” (180, 182-198).

In the pages that follow I contend that the Romantic epic’s diversity is better understood not as the breakdown of genre in the Romantic period or as the site of difference between the successful writer and the obscure but as a condition of the Romantic epic’s rhetorical purpose. Shifting away from a theory of genre that depends on formal consistency to one that is founded in rhetorical function within a defined social and historical context allows the analyst-critic to organize the Romantic century’s “epomania” around questions of agency, audience, and alternative orders.

## II. The Romantic Epic as a Rhetorical Genre

The issues of variation and definition that I just sketched for the Romantic epic are largely mitigated, and to some degree resolved, by making a switch from thinking in terms of literary genres to rhetorical genres. Put succinctly, rhetorical genre theory conceptualizes genres not as “patterns of form” but as “patterns of action” (Devitt 12). Instead of focusing on formal textual elements to define genres, rhetorical genres are organized according to their community of users and their social purpose, aware that “[p]art of what all readers and writers recognize when they recognize genres are the roles they are to play, the roles being played by other people, what they can gain from the discourse, and what discourses are about” (12). It is my view that the turn away from the self-referential textuality of literary genres and towards the embedded social discourse of rhetorical genres repositions the literary scholar to better understand not only the textual product but also the context in which it was produced and which it was simultaneously producing.

Therefore, although what follows is a genre study on the Romantic epic, the choice to engage with a rhetorical theory of genre has led to a work that is significantly dissimilar to many other genre studies in Romanticism. While the study of literary genres poses key questions about genre identification, antecedent works, and (in the current scholarly climate) the immediate social context, a rhetorical theory of genre refocuses a study of the Romantic epic in several new and intriguing directions: (1) a rhetorical genre study demands a more careful and full account of the contexts of the Romantic epic, including not only the immediate social context but also the genre's positioning against deep historical forces—*the mode of production*; (2) it challenges the analyst-critic to concretely define the Romantic epic's community of users by clarifying the community's economic and social status within the society; (3) it seeks to establish the relationship between the Romantic epic and other significant genres, including not only previous incarnations of the epic but also the genres with which the Romantic epic was defined against, such as the novel, the political pamphlet, or ballad; (4) it provokes a dialectical analysis of the Romantic epic's ideological functioning, both how its form, content, and rhetorical purpose predisposed its practitioners toward certain patterns of thought and how it operated as a tool for social change. Other key questions will arise as well, including issues of periodization, class, social hegemony, and democracy—questions which are unavoidable when the analyst-critic engages not only with the page but with reciprocal relationship between the page and the world.

### Literary Genres

In contrast, it might be said that traditional literary genre makes a world of the page. Stripped to its essentials, literary genre could be explained simply as “a classification system of texts based on shared formal characteristics” (Devitt 6). Elements of this system might be traced

back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, but modern ideas about literary genres are more heavily embedded in the neoclassical definition elaborated by David Duff:

There are a finite number of genres, each of which has its own 'laws' or 'rules', adherence to which is necessary for a successful performance of that genre. The rules specify permissible subject matter, external form (including meter), and type of language. These features must be internally consistent . . . . The rules, codified by critics, are derived from the practice of specified authors (usually ancient Greek or Roman) whose achievements are regarded as an ideal standard against which subsequent performances in that genre are measured. Genres are separate entities and should not be mixed except in special cases (or not at all, in strictest versions of the theory) . . . . The genres are hierarchically ranked, a genre's status reflecting the social class of the characters represented, the seriousness of the subject matter, and the scale and complexity of the form. (Duff *Romanticism* 31-32)

This conception of genre is by no means uncontested—in fact, serious challenges have been issued from the mid-eighteenth century on—yet these core assumptions remain hegemonic in literary studies. The Greek and Roman models might have slipped into obscurity (even among many critics) or might not be sought (in the case of the novel), and the general hierarchy has now been turned on its head, so that the novel is king attended by a quotidian court of letters, diaries, and magazine announcements, but the literary genre's neoclassical foundation still holds.

The obvious tension between the neoclassical values embedded in the notion of literary genre and the values associated with Romanticism has led to a retreat from genre study in general and from Romantic genre studies in particular. Romanticism's emphasis on the qualities of "imagination," "genius," and "creativity," are simply at odds with literary genre's grounding in form, prescription, and tradition, and have forced genre scholars to remain in the greener fields

of the late Renaissance and the Augustan period. The “greatness” of Romantic writers is often established on their innovation of new elements and forms, not their ability to follow the old: Austen’s free-indirect discourse; Scott’s *Waverley* hero; Wordsworth’s insistent subjectivity and those species he co-parented—the “lyrical ballad,” the conversation poem, the greater romantic lyric; Blake’s entire *oeuvre*. In comparison, as David Duff has said,

[to] the modern ear, the word genre—in the sphere of literature at least—carries unmistakable associations of authority and pedantry. Even where there is no mention of ‘rules’ or ‘conventions’ (its usual corollary), the term seems almost by definition to deny autonomy of the author, deny the uniqueness of the text, deny spontaneity, originality and self-expression. (*Modern 1*)

Thus, many Romantic critics seem to have taken to heart that a great writer “must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's” (Blake *Blake's* 316).

Yet beyond their friction with Romantic sensibilities, traditional literary genres have several critical drawbacks, not the least of which is that formal elements turn out to be poor indicators of genre. In the case of the Romantic epic there are an overwhelming number of possible formal features where a critic might focus. Should one consider a work’s length; its critical reception; the degree to which it is nationalist, simply civic purposed, or just a work of high moral seriousness; its use of narrativity, or subjectivity, or the lack of subjectivity; the presence of meter, or the type of meter; the use of traditional structures like an invocation to a muse, a parade of heroes, an epic council, or epic similes? In the words of Amy Devitt, a leading theorist of rhetorical genres,

[t]hough interesting in particular contexts, such classificatory questions reflect the particular purpose underlying particular classification schemes rather than the nature of

genre itself. Groupings of complex items like texts are more like metaphors than equations: how texts are grouped depends on which features the classifier has selected to observe. (7)

Even where there might be some agreement about a particular formal element, take length for example, then how long would be long enough? Six books? Eight? Ten? Twelve, or more? Would a fragment like Keats *Hyperion* make the cut? And just who is qualified to answer? The problem is that each new example of any given genre forces us to contend with ever more variations, until, as we have seen with the Romantic epic, the internal inconstancies accumulate enough weight so as to bring the whole generic category tumbling down about our ears. Moretti calls this problem “divergence” (“Graphs-3” 46), and it is so severe that it has forced some critics into indefensible positions, declaring the novel or the essay not to be genres at all (Devitt 10-11).

This, of course, is patently absurd. Readers know a “novel” when they see one. This issue of definition is not a problem in our daily lives, in part, because we do not attempt to differentiate many things by their formal features. The difference between a “cup” and a “bowl” has less to do with its size, shape, or whether or not it has a handle, than its use: we drink from a cup; we eat from a bowl (11). The attempt to categorize literary genres by the convergence of formal elements and features is “divorced from contemporary understandings of how language works” (5). To the contrary, “[t]he rhetorical and linguistic scholarship argues that formal features physically mark some genres, act as traces, and hence may be quite revealing. But those formal traces do not *define* or *constitute* the genre. The fact that genre is reflected in formal features does not mean that genre *is* those formal features” (11, original emphasis).

In addition to the problems formal features pose to classification, traditional literary genres are static. They operate as Platonic forms that ask us to compare a real historical product to a timeless, idealized model. Thus, as Bruce Rosenberg observes,

the epic illustrates several of the problems we face in classifying genres analytically. Our sense of the form comes from Aristotle; but he meant by it something like 'the uttered word' and then went on to define the genre with the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* in mind. Most of the heroic poems which have been recorded in native traditions and which we commonly call 'epic' bear little resemblance to Aristotle's description. (155)

Or, in the words of Moretti, “[t]heories of form are usually blind to history” (“Graphs-3” 43).

We know, however, that genres are cultural products whose definitions change with time. What was immediately recognizable as an epic in the nineteenth century would likely not have been considered so in the seventeenth, or early-eighteenth century. Despite neoclassical attempts to define prescriptive generic limits, it is an unavoidable reality that the “formal characteristics of genres change over time,” even when, “the users' labels of the genres do not necessarily change” (Devitt 11). The point is so obvious to anyone who surveys a genre’s development over even a few decades (let alone centuries) and so in accord with our understanding of textuality and language, that few, if any, serious-minded critics would still take the hard Augustan line.

#### Attempts at Rescuing Literary Genres: The Historicist Approach

Modern critics working with traditional literary genres have, therefore, adjusted its use so that each period produces small standalone genres (e.g., “British epics of the 1790s”), each with their own set of properties, that might be strung together across time like a string of pearls. I call this modification to traditional literary genre the *historicist approach*. This is the tack taken by

Herbert Tucker, who uses it to rather strong effect in his bibliographic tome on the nineteenth-century epic, and agreed to by Elisa Beshero-Bondar (Beshero-Bondar 19-36). The clear advantages of the historicist approach are that [1] each new incarnation of the epic can be placed within its immediate social context, and [2] it was an approach that was shared to some degree by many genre critics from the late-eighteenth century onward (Duff *Romanticism* 19). Both of these points situate the historicist approach well within the current critical mainstream.<sup>4</sup>

There remain, however, at least two great disadvantages to the historicist approach. The first is that even if genres are not timeless prescriptive categories, there is still the problem of justifying the selection of formal elements as definitive for any given historical version of the epic. The second is that although the epic is placed into its immediate social context, there is no compulsion to account for deep historical forces, or mode of production. I will discuss the critical importance of deep history in more detail at a later point, but for now I will simply point out that such a narrow view of history leads to grossly simplified ideological conditions for each period. For example, while Tucker provides a detailed account of the influence of eighteenth-century philosophical debates on the Romantic epic, the sole material cause behind the 1790s epic revival is identified as that ethereal "whiff of smoke on the wind from Paris around the middle of 1789" (48). Certainly, the French Revolution was an important factor in the determining the shape of the Romantic epic, but, as I hope to show later, it was neither the sole cause nor even the most important. Beshero-Bondar perhaps comes closer to grasping the broad scope of the deep historical forces at play in the period of the Romantic epic when she discusses the Romantic epic's historical context as part of that "momentous crisis, an unstable moment

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<sup>4</sup> Noting certain similarities between the interests and concerns of the Romantic writers and contemporary scholarly practices, Beshero-Bondar goes so far as to suggest that the Romantic epic, itself, may have been an early form of "cultural studies" (26).

when old foundations crumble and new realities take shape” (35), but again the narrow historical view of the historicist approach limits her ability to clarify the full nature of this “transition” (22) beyond something of a “cultural conflict” (216) that is related to the “drastic failures of the French Revolution” (29).

#### Attempts at Rescuing Literary Genres: The Evolutionary Approach

It is only a short move from the historicist approach to an “evolutionary” theory of literary genres that operates in deep history. As genre theory and biology both made use of the term “species” during the early-nineteenth century, perhaps “it was inevitable that the Darwinian theory of evolution would commend itself as a model for the development of literary forms” (Duff *Modern* 4). Ferdinand Brunetière, in *L’evolution des genres* (1890), was among the first to apply the terminology of Darwinian evolution to literary history (Duff *Modern* 4), and recent pressure to bring the humanities more in line with the sciences has prompted some contemporary critics to gesture towards the metaphor. Herbert Tucker, for example, claims that his approach to epic is “evolutionary” (22), but he is clearly not drawing on the biological model in any significant way. While Tucker draws clusters of epics together within particular periods (decades), these periods exist as isolated monads and take no account of deep history.

A truly evolutionary look at genre comes from Franco Moretti who develops the approach across a series of articles and books beginning with the second edition of *Signs Taken as Wonders* published in 1988. Seeking to develop a “materialistic history of literature” (“Literary” 265-66), Moretti’s evolutionary approach demands more attention to changing historical contexts, including capitalism’s deep history. He recognizes long-term, structural economic forces, like incorporation (a process I will discuss in more detail later), behind major literary

trends (*Modern* 44-45). Like Tucker, Moretti considers multiple texts within the same period, but Moretti also calls for distant reading—reading a genre across periods. In Moretti’s view, “the individual text is never enough to characterize a *historical tendency*: you have to move away from it, and bring other works into play. It is a bit like geometry: to draw a line you need at least two points” (*Modern* 74, emphasis added). This “line” Moretti has in mind is the record of the genre’s development where each point represents not only a single text but also a spot of time.

Moretti’s alignment of literary history with biological evolution leads to many useful new concepts and solves several key problems for critics undertaking genre studies. Abandoning the “creationist faith” (*Modern* 22, n.16) that is the hallmark of many literary historians, Moretti takes from the example of biological evolution an unusual comfort with the accidental. Adaptation does not mean design. Many literary elements, Moretti contends, developed as “non-aptive [or non-adaptive] structures” (“Literary” 274) that were produced “with nothing deliberate in [their] genesis” (274) and without any adaptive value, or with a different adaptive value, in their originating context. This means that the process of “selection” often functions through “odd arrangements and funny solutions” (278), a process Moretti sometimes calls *refunctionalization*, recuperating the term from Russian Formalism (*Modern* 20), or *literary exaptation*, a phrase from evolutionary biology (“Literary” 273-278).<sup>5</sup> In the end, all texts are thus, “[w]orks of bricolage, like our bodies are, and our brains—not of engineering. The products of chance, not of design [*sic*]” (“Literary” 278). Moretti’s accidental literary history is therefore simultaneously “freed from [the] teleology” (“Literary” 274) of literary histories that

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<sup>5</sup> Moretti is heavily influenced in this line of thought by the work of Stephen Jay Gould, an evolutionary biologist who has stressed the importance of random, non-adaptive variation in evolutionary biology. Both the terms *nonaptive* and *exaptation* are borrowed from Gould’s work in this area. See, for example: Gould, Stephen Jay, and Elizabeth S. Vrba. “Exaptation—a Missing Term in the Science of Form.” *Paleobiology* 8.1 (Winter 1982): 4-15.

imagine genres progressively working out their tensions and the reflection theories that imagine textual features and content as always aligned with the values of the broader culture.

The most important of Moretti's conclusions, however, may be the evolutionary model's answer to the problem of divergence. While the traditional literary concept of genre is organized around similarities, or "typological thinking" ("Graphs-3" 51), and plagued by the proliferation of variety that is found in the Romantic epic, the argument for the literary evolution of genres is actually strengthened by diversity.<sup>6</sup> For Moretti, there is in literature a "*system of differences* at the microscopic level [that] adds up to something that is much *larger* than any individual text,... which . . . is of course the genre—or the tree" ("Graphs-3" 50, emphasis added). The tree Moretti alludes to here is the figure of the "tree of life" from Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, where the tree's height represents the passage of time, and the tree's breadth represents the diversification of formal elements (Moretti "Graphs-3" 45). It is this ability to account for diversity both across time and within a select period that sets Moretti's model of literary evolution apart from either traditional literary genres or the historicist approach. As Moretti explains, when we work within the traditional methodology of genre study,

we choose a 'representative individual', and through it define the genre as a whole. . . . [F]or typological thinking there is really no gap between the real object and the object of knowledge. But once a genre is visualized *as a tree*, the continuity between the [actual text and the idealized model] inevitably disappears: the genre becomes an abstract 'diversity spectrum' . . . , whose internal multiplicity no individual text will ever be able to represent. (52)

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<sup>6</sup> Moretti borrows the phrases 'typological thinking,' and 'diversity spectrum' from the biologist Ernst Mayr in *Populations, Species and Evolution* (1970); *Evolution and the Diversity of Life* (1976); and *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology* (1988).

Although Moretti's interests lie more with the novel and the short story, his treatment of genre as diverse and evolving is equally liberating for the study of the Romantic epic.

Moretti's literary evolution is therefore a marked improvement over traditional theories of literary genre, and I am unwilling to abandon it completely. What is best about Moretti's model (the recovery of refunctionalization, the model of the diversity spectrum) not only appear compatible with a rhetorical theory of genre they may enrich it. Yet, literary evolution fails to account for any significant level of agency by authors or audiences. For Moretti, authors produce only "random variations" ("Literary" 265) and audiences are replaced by the "selective" (265) force and "external pressure" (265) imposed by the "dominant bloc" (266). New formal or plot elements "are totally *random* attempts at innovation, in the [same] sense in which evolutionary theory uses the term: they show no foreknowledge—no idea, really—of what may be good for literary survival. In making writers branch out in every direction, then, the market also pushes them into all sorts of crazy blind alleys" ("Graphs-3" 52). It becomes clear in reading Moretti's conception of literary evolution that by bringing biological science to bear on literary history the assumptions of bourgeois economism have snuck in through the back—acts of communication are made subject to the market, competition, and scarcity; literature has been seized by the "invisible hand."<sup>7</sup>

To a significant degree, then, literary evolution eschews the dialectic, so that works and genres are the products of history, but not of people making that history, even "if not how they

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<sup>7</sup> I do not mean to indicate that theories of biological evolution are false, but only that, in the capitalist world-economy, evolutionary biology has been enlisted to justify the patriarchal, aggressive, and competitive world-view of the bourgeoisie. It is no accident that while Soviet scientists were studying the evolutionary advantages found in certain cooperative insect communities or within the relatively peaceful and matriarchal bonobo chimp, scientists in the West remained focused on the territorial and violent common chimpanzee in order to study the hidden nature of the so-called selfish gene.

please” (Marx "Eighteenth" 19). Despite Moretti’s gains, the model of literary evolutionary remains vulnerable to the severe determinism and political resignation that characterize bourgeois society, a point that is not lost on Moretti:

the real content of the controversy, not technical at all, is our very idea of culture.

Because if the basic mechanism of change is that of divergence, then cultural history is bound to be random, full of false starts, and profoundly path-dependent: a direction, once taken, can seldom be reversed, and culture hardens into a true ‘second nature’—hardly a benign metaphor ("Graphs-3" 55-56).

Moretti’s view of history and culture are terrifyingly fatalistic, and although Moretti recognizes the threat, the borrowed tools of the evolutionary model cannot answer it, leaving him to simply suggest that a different model is necessary for each level of analysis ("Graphs-3" 62-63).

However, what Moretti fails to take into account (and what rhetorical genre theory does) is that different texts and genres belong to different communities, that they may be selected not only by the dominant bloc but also in opposition to it, and that the relationship between text and ideology is reciprocal.

### Rhetorical Genres

In what follows I hope to show that a rhetorical theory of genre answers the inability of traditional literary genres, the historicist approach, and Moretti’s model for literary evolution to account for variety and explain the cultural operation of the Romantic epic. Although many literary critics may not be familiar with rhetorical theories of genre, its conceptual elements have a long and storied lineage stretching back to Russian Formalism (M. M. Bakhtin, Valentin Volosinov, Yury Tynyanov, and Lev Vygotsky), while drawing on a variety of fields from

literature, philosophy, sociology, linguistics, and composition and rhetoric. Carolyn Miller's article, "Genre as Social Action" (1984), became a seminal moment for the approach and sparked a wave of interests and the infusion of new theoretic perspectives (Devitt 2). As Devitt writes of rhetorical genre theory's gaining influence:

In recent years . . . views of genre have changed, shifting from a formalistic study of critics' classifications to a rhetorical study of generic actions of everyday readers and writers. This shift is possible in part, of course, because of the work done by previous genre critics and theorists, but it represents a substantial change in what is considered interesting and significant about genre. (1-2)

If rhetorical theories of genre still remain relatively obscure in literary studies, it certainly has more to do with the subordinate position of composition and rhetoric within English departments and a general disregard for genre as trivial, than rhetorical genre theory's potential for period scholarship.

The rhetorical nature of genres has been clarified and elaborated since Miller's definition of genre as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (159; qtd. in Devitt 13). What has come out of this investigative process has been a more complete, even if more complicated, understanding of what Devitt terms the "context of situation." To think about genres not as repeated forms but as repeated actions requires that we look more closely at the actors and their relationship to the world. Who are they? What community do they belong to? What is their purpose? What kind of language and tropes do they use to relate what is happening? (13). Furthermore, we must be attentive to the immediate social context: what is this situation that calls for a response? To what extent does this situation recur? To what extent does the genre make the situation appear as though it is recurring? How is the situation affected by this action?

These questions ask us to look at the genres like the Romantic epic as more than a form or even a social product. A rhetorical theory of genre challenges the analyst-critic to comprehend the Romantic epic as a recurring social intervention within an identifiable community, both bound by ideological conditions and (re)producing them.

While many scholars have contributed to this robust understanding of genre, I am most heavily indebted to the work of Amy Devitt in this field, in particular Devitt's recognition of [1] a genre's embeddedness within the deep ideological structures of culture and [2] a genre's interrelationship with other genres. The first point Devitt calls the "context of culture." In her own words: "[w]hat I wish to capture by adding the concept of culture to our genre definition are the ways that existing ideological and material contexts, contexts beyond the more immediate context of situation of a particular genre, partially construct what genres are and are in turn constructed (reproduced) by people performing genre actions" (26-27). By "beyond the more immediate context of situation" I have taken her to mean that the "context of culture" is that ensemble of period defining conditions (both "ideological and material") that are only visible through the analysis of deep history.

The second point Devitt calls the "context of genres." According to Devitt, "[a]dding a context of genres to genre theory acknowledges that the existence of genres influences people's uses of genres, that writers and speakers do not create genres in a generic void, that people's knowledge and experience of genres in the past shape their experience with any particular discourse and any particular genre at any particular time" (28). When coupled with the understanding that genres are not bags of formal elements, Devitt's "context of genre" is a superior conceptual tool to understanding the *uses* of genre than the familiar Romanticist standby of genre mixing or hybridization.

The “context of culture” and the “context of genre,” when combined with the “context of situation,” direct the analyst-critic toward three different types of broad social influence. In the last part of this chapter and in the next, I will use these categories to establish the overriding historical and social conditions impacting the Romantic epic. My decision to approach this discussion according to these three conceptual categories should not be taken to suggest that these three cultural dimensions stand wholly separate from one another. They are, instead, fluid, as Devitt explains:

[t]he contexts of situation, culture, and genres interact among themselves, with the context of situation in part specified by the contexts of culture and genre, the context of culture in part specified by the contexts of situation and genre, and the contexts of genres in part specified by the contexts of situation and culture, all operating simultaneously and dynamically. (Devitt 31)

Together they attempt to organize and make visible what might be thought of as the macro levels of the ensemble of relations, the realms of culture and ideology in their broadest scope.

In turn, to the extent that the contexts of situation, culture, and genre might be thought to form an ideological vessel that contains writers, rhetorical genre theory balances this potentially determinative view by its emphasis on rhetorical action. The writer of each text is recognized as responding to local, or micro, conditions in an effort to change those conditions (even where the change that is sought is merely ideological stabilization). Each writer’s circumstance is in some way unique, but the use of genres helps to link writers together into a community of shared values and concerns. Thus genre is part of that intermediate level that mediates between the concrete subject and culture/history; genres operate as a “nexus between an individual's actions and a socially defined context” (Devitt 31).

Rhetorical genre theory transforms a study of the Romantic epic from a series of claims about the patterns of formal elements into an investigation into the dialectics of hegemony. By occupying that zone between culture and the subject, whereby the subject must articulate concerns using the patterns of discourse generated within a larger community and framed by the even larger historical culture, genre, in its variations and transformations, operates as a record of the movements of history and what was once possible. Thus, it is at the level of genre that the analyst-critic grasps the reciprocal nature of human society—that, in fact, “[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it as they please” (Marx "Eighteenth" 19).

### III. Romanticism and the Men of Letters

A rhetorical view of the Romantic epic will require that when we identify our specimens we do not simply lay them out on some procrustean bed constructed out of the cold meters passed down from the ancients. The Romantic writers themselves refused the comparison. “We do not want either Greek or Roman models if we are but just and true to our own Imaginations,” Blake tells us (*Milton* plate 2); “The national vanity of a Greek or a Roman might have been gratified by the renown of Achilles, or Aeneas, but to engage the unprejudiced, there must be more of human feelings than is generally to be found in the character of Warriors,” observes Southey (*Joan* vi). If the Romantic authors did not wholly reject the old masters, they at least recognized they had to be at the work of something quite different—not only something that looked differently but something that *functioned* differently, as well.

To catch a glimpse of this new epic purpose we might look at the “Preface” to Blake’s epic, *Milton* (1804):

Rouse up, O Young Men of the New Age! Set your foreheads against the ignorant hirelings! For we have hirelings in the Camp, the Court, and the University, who would, if they could, for ever depress mental, and prolong corporeal war. Painters! on you I call. Sculptors! Architects! suffer not the fashionable fools to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works, or the expensive advertising boasts that they make of such works: believe Christ and His Apostles that there is a class of men whose whole delight is in destroying. (*Milton* plate 2)

Here, Blake frames his profoundly unorthodox illuminated epic as a call against a mercenary army of “ignorant hirelings,” the foot-soldiers of commercial society, and that “class of men whose whole delight is in destroying.” He characterizes this struggle as those armed with the force of the market (“prices,” “expensive advertising,” and the foolish dictates of fashion) against those equipped with the power of imagination. “[O]n you I call,” Blake proclaims.

*Milton* is a call to arms, but it is also a call to community, an effort to organize the varied strata of cultural producers and intellectual laborers (“Painters . . . Sculptors Architects,” as well as writers) into a unified political power, an intellectual bloc, that might beat back a philistine empire which had already infiltrated “the Camp, the Court, and the University.”

We should notice, then, that before Blake even issues the obligatory epic tropes, like the invocation to the Muse, he adopts a certain rhetorical position as an intellectual calling out to the Men of Letters, the artists, the geniuses—Blake names them the “inspired Men” (plate 2)—to stand heroically against the arrayed forces of commercial society. Although Blake’s work was admittedly unconventional in terms of form, I will argue that this speech act, which sought to consciously unify, legitimize, and direct a transnational community of educated readers, was actually the routine *function* of the epic during the Romantic period. In the chapters that follow I

will describe how the Romantic epic was shaped by this particular rhetorical stance, but before I do I want to address the motivation for this change in the epic's function. In other words, I find it necessary to define just what was "Romantic" about the Romantic epic by clarifying the context of the Romantic epic's community of users: Romantic intellectuals.

### Voltaire and "Men of Letters"

By the mid-eighteenth century a profound change within the intellectual stratum was readily apparent. A major epic performance in the traditional epic forms had not been produced in decades and it would be several more decades before the "epomania" (Southey "Letter 554") of the 1790s would occur.<sup>8</sup> I will argue in chapter two that this generic eclipse is an indicator of something more than changing tastes, but if we hope to discover the full scale of what was happening, it is necessary to look within other genres, to modes that were on the rise even as the epic continued to decline.

As the epic's energies continued to wane, the encyclopedia was undergoing an unprecedented renaissance, and Voltaire's entry on "Men of Letters" (1757), in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, is a signpost to the radical transformations of intellectual life already occurring inside the capitalist world-system. As Voltaire recognized, the expansion of the European world-economy and the rapid growth of its institutions had dramatically altered the practice of "our men of letters today" (Voltaire "Men" par. 1):

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<sup>8</sup> James Thomson's *Liberty* (1734) and Richard Glover's *Leonidas* (1737) are perhaps the best of what the period between 1730 and 1750 had to offer in terms of epics, if we do not count the republication or completion of projects that were begun earlier, such as Thomson's *Seasons* or Pope's *Dunciad*, both of which had their initial success in the 1720s.

The Greeks contented themselves with their own language; the Romans learned only Greek; today, the man of letters often adds to the study of Greek and Latin that of Italian, Spanish, and above all English. The course of History is a hundred times more vast than it was for the ancients; and natural History has grown to the proportions of that of peoples. Men of letters are not expected to study all of these subjects in depth; universal knowledge is no longer within the reach of man. But true men of letters put themselves in a position to explore these different terrains, even if they cannot cultivate all of them. ("Men" par. 1)

In one sense, then, the change Voltaire points to was brought on by an increase in scale.

“History [was now] a hundred times more vast,” the number of languages required to participate in intellectual discourse had grown from two to half-a-dozen or more, and entire new fields of knowledge had been developed. To be a “man of letters” in the mid-eighteenth century required a form of scholarly discipline that was unnecessary only one or two generations before and which now separated him from others of intelligence and some learning. To this last point Voltaire remarks,

[a] man of letters is not what is called a ‘wit.’ Wit alone assumes less culture, less study, and requires no philosophy; it consists primarily of a brilliant imagination, pleasant conversation, assisted by general reading. A wit can easily not deserve the title of man of letters at all; and the man of letters may not at all claim the brilliance of the wit ("Men" par. 5).

Moreover, these changes had only recently accelerated to the degree that the total “character” of intellectual life had been revolutionized (Voltaire "Men" par. 2). “Previously, in the sixteenth century, and well before the seventeenth,” Voltaire explains, “literary scholars spent a lot of their

time on grammatical criticism of Greek and Latin authors. . . . Today this criticism is less necessary, and the philosophical spirit has succeeded it. It is this philosophical spirit that seems to constitute the character of men of letters” (“Men” par. 2). It was “philosophy” that served as one of the markers of distinction between the “wits” and the “men of letters” (“Men” par. 5) and, according to Voltaire, it was the appearance of a new “philosophical spirit” that made eighteenth-century men of letters “superior to those of previous centuries” (“Men” par. 3).

The *Encyclopédie*, under the entry for “*philosophes*,” defines the “philosophic spirit” as “a spirit of observation and of precision, which relates all things to their true principles,” but then adds, “it is not the philosophic spirit alone which the philosopher cultivates, he carries his attention and his concerns further” (Du Marsais par. 9). It was this latter sense of a so-called philosophic worldview that extended beyond the private technical practice that Voltaire has in mind when he discusses the “character of men of letters.” To have adopted a “philosophic spirit” was to be made, “for the most part[,] as suitable for society as for the study” (Voltaire “Men” par. 3). Indeed, a “love of society,” we read in the *Encyclopédie*, is “essential to the philosopher” (Du Marsais par. 14); “[f]or [the philosopher], civil society is . . . a divinity on earth; he flatters it, he honors it by his probity, by an exact attention to his duties, and by a sincere desire not to be a useless or embarrassing member of it” (par. 13).

This is the language of love, but it was not love at first sight. The intellectual had only recently become infatuated with civil society. As Voltaire notes, “[u]p until the times of [Guez de] Balzac [1597-1694] and [Vincent] Voiture [1597-1648] [educated men] were kept out of society; since then they have become a necessary part of it” (“Men” par. 3). This historical change in the intellectual’s social position and function is a key subject in Voltaire’s discussion of “our men of letters. . . today” (“Men” par. 1), a theme to which he keeps returning:

The deep and purified reason that several of them have spread through their writings and in their conversation, has contributed significantly to the instruction and polish of the nation. Their critical reason is no longer wasted on Greek and Latin words; rather, supported by a reasonable philosophy, it has destroyed the prejudices with which society was infected: the predictions of astrologers, divinations of magicians, spells of all sorts, false prodigies, false marvels, superstitious usages; it has relegated to the schools a thousand puerile disputes that were dangerous in the past and made them contemptible. . . . It is sometimes astonishing that what in the past upset the world, no longer troubles it today; for this we are indebted to the true men of letters. ("Men" par. 3)

Unlike the "grammarians" ("Men" par. 1) of the past, the intellectual of the mid-eighteenth century takes on an unambiguous gloss of heroism as the steadfast redeemer of civilization. The entry on *philosophes* raises these messianic tones another half-step and declares the intellectual to be beyond either "ambition" (Du Marsais par. 17) or "sin" (par. 14), adding that "[t]he people will be happy. . . when philosophers are kings" (par. 14).<sup>9</sup> After crawling out of the system of patronage and cloisters, "[our men of letters today] have more intellectual independence than other men," Voltaire asserts, so that "unlike in the past, one never sees these dedicatory epistles that interest and humility offered to vanity" ("Men" par. 4). In short, where intellectuals had once served propertied men, they now, "served the state" ("Men" par. 3).

Voltaire's article on "Men of Letters" is more than a simple description; it is among the first attempts at providing a historical account of the developing intellectual bloc. And as such, it

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<sup>9</sup> Similarly, we find in the entry on *philosophes*: "The philosopher is thus an honorable man who acts in everything according to reason, and who joins to a spirit of reflection and precision, morals and sociable qualities. Graft a sovereign onto a philosopher of whatever stripe and you will have a perfect sovereign" (Du Marsais par. 15).

might be seen to inaugurate a long period marked by an emerging, although limited, form of intellectual class-consciousness. Here, the intellectual appears not only as himself but as belonging to a historically contingent class within the broader division of labor, as one of the “Men of Letters,” a workgroup of cultural producers known by their particular mode of thought and with a particular historical role.

### Disraeli and *The Literary Character*

By the 1790s the epic was reemerging from decades of apparent disuse and disrepute and on its climb back to the top of the generic hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> Soon, Southey would claim a general “epomania” had seized Britain (Letter 554). Meanwhile, the encyclopedia continued to play its important role in the expansive reorganization of knowledge production.<sup>11</sup> In 1795, Isaac Disraeli was clearly using the same broad outlines put forward by the *Encyclopédie* almost forty years earlier as a foundation for his book on the habits and lifestyle of intellectuals, *The Literary Character*. Again, there is an emphasis placed on the relatively recent arrival of the “Men of Letters” into society. “Scarcely two centuries has elapsed” (2), Disraeli remarks, since the conditions necessary to form a “literary community” arose:

It was in the intercourse of the wealth, the power, and the novel arts of the nations of Europe, that they [the literary community] learnt each others' languages; and they discovered, that however their manners varied as they arose from their different customs, they participated in the same intellectual faculties, suffered from the same wants, and

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<sup>10</sup>It is my position that the energies of the epic never truly disappeared but were redirected into other mode. For a more complete account see chapter two.

<sup>11</sup>In 1796 the German language *Konversationslexikon* [The Conversational Encyclopedia] appeared. By 1801, the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was into its fourth edition and was expanded to twenty volumes from its initial three.

were alive to the same pleasures; they perceived that there were no conventional fashions, nor national distinctions in abstract truths and fundamental knowledge. A new spirit seems to bring them nearer to each other; and as if literary Europe were intent to form but one people out of the populace of mankind, they offer their reciprocal labours; they pledge to each other the same opinions; and that knowledge which, like a small river, takes its source from one spot, at length mingles with that 'ocean-stream' common to them all. (3)

As Voltaire had, Disraeli, here, identifies the expansion of the European economy as a cause for development of an intellectual "society" (4).

There is, however, a striking difference between the two accounts. Disraeli suggests that trade enabled the intellectuals of different nations to find that each of them "despite [their] different customs . . . participated in the same intellectual faculties." For Disraeli the historical process at work is not one of transformation but of ongoing recognition. To this point he writes, "every man of genius will *discover*, soon or late, that he belongs to *the brotherhood of his class*, and cannot escape from certain habits, and feelings, and disorders arising from the same sympathies, occupying the same situation, and passing through the same moral existence" (Disraeli ix, emphasis added). In essence, in Disraeli's account, the union of intellectuals (the Republic of Letters) is historical, but the intellectual subject is both universal and timeless.

Thus, it should be noted that in Disraeli's account there has been no late adoption of the "spirit of philosophy" by intellectuals as there was in Voltaire's, but it is not because Disraeli denies the intellectual's public interest. To the contrary, Disraeli implies that intellectuals have always served the broader public. Disraeli's *Literary Character*, which is largely a subcultural ethnographic survey of the habits and attitudes of intellectuals, naturalizes the Romantic

intellectual's social position and function while working to further establish the stereotypes that are still associated with intellectualism today.<sup>12</sup>

In abandoning what could be seen as the project of a materialist sociology of intellectuals that sat nascent in Voltaire's "Men of Letters," *The Literary Character* represents a step backwards in the development of intellectual class-consciousness. However, *The Literary Character* might also be seen as indicating the great advancement occurring in the consolidation of the intellectual bloc into a political counter-force. Take, for example, what is largely another statement about the coming together of "the kindred alliance" of intellectuals (Disraeli 3-4):

Diffused over enlightened Europe, an order of men has arisen, who, uninfluenced by the interests or the passions which give an impulse to the other classes of society, are connected by the secret links of congenial pursuits, and, insensibly to themselves, are combining in the same common labours, and participating in the same divided glory. In the metropolitan cities of Europe the same authors are now read, and the same opinions become established. (1)

There is an easily recognizable element of "class making" happening here, of highlighting what are meant to be the meaningful commonalities of kind in "the secret links of congenial pursuits," "common labours," a shared "glory" in a particular social achievements, the participation in a homogeneous reading culture and an increasingly urban existence. What is also here (and again,

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<sup>12</sup> Although predating both, Disraeli's use of class within *The Literary Character* is more in tune with Max Weber's concept of class than with Marx's. Intellectualism for Disraeli exists as another of Weberian lifestyle, and even if the intellectual's natural predilections make this lifestyle something less than a free choice, buying into the intellectual subculture can be experienced by intellectuals as the recognition of their inviolable selfhood. Thus, not only do Weberian uses of class turn causality on its head so that the forces of culture precede (or are independent from) the forces of production, as Teresa Ebert notes, these explanations "[deploy] culture to obscure class differences, which are the effects of exploitation, by spiritualizing social life so that material differences are translated into cultural differences, lifestyles, and matters of personal choice" (136).

what is not found in Voltaire's article forty years earlier) is a positioning of the intellectual in contradistinction to all other classes: the intellectual is "uninfluenced by the interests or the passions which give an impulse to the other classes of society" (1). Considering the discourse surrounding class in the late-1790s, it seems fair to say that by "interests" Disraeli means bourgeois self-interest, and by "passions" he intends the volatile passions of the mob. And if so, then the intellectual class, by comparison, is intended, here, to stand above all others, displaying a sense of altruism not found in the bourgeoisie and a commitment to rationality beyond "the People."

This dual effort at positioning the intellectual "class" and the naturalizing of the intellectual function may develop from the same cause. In the decades since Voltaire's article on "Men of Letters" the intellectual stratum had become more united and had exerted considerable political force, playing key roles in the revolutionary movements that were sweeping across Europe and the Americas. As Jonathan Israel notes, "radical thought burst into the open in the 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s during the revolutionary era in America, France, Britain, Ireland, and the Netherlands, as well as in underground democratic opposition circles in Germany, Scandinavia, Latin America, and elsewhere" (vii). For reasons I will address shortly, the moderate Enlightenment had unexpectedly turned radical in the late eighteenth century (see J. Israel). Not only had the heterogeneous intellectual strata been organized into a political bloc they had consciously inserted themselves into class-struggle. Under these conditions intellectualism now had to be aggressively re-theorized and defended. Disraeli's two-pronged approach, which naturalized the intellectual as a kind of eternal personality (the "genius") and promoted intellectualism not as contributing to heightened class antagonisms but as the timely mediator of these tensions,

became typical of what might be thought of as the high-Romantic stance prevalent from the late-1780s to the mid-1820s.

### Carlyle and “The Hero as Man of Letters”

By the time we arrive at Thomas Carlyle’s lecture on “The Hero as Man of Letters” (1840), the epic is already receding into literary history, again. And although the encyclopedia is, at this point, no longer a space for dramatic generic innovations, its considerable cultural weight has not only provided formal stability but has exerted a noticeable force on nearby genres like the public lecture, which had fallen into its orbit.<sup>13</sup> In “The Hero as Man of Letters,” Carlyle, like Voltaire and Disraeli before him, seeks to place the intellectual “class” within the broader social context. We should notice, however, that the necessity to argue for an eternal intellectual essence is not felt as keenly here as it is in Disraeli’s *Literary Character*, and Carlyle is able to return more clearly to the historical observation found in Voltaire’s article:

The Hero as Man of Letters, again, of which class we are to speak to-day, is altogether a product of these new ages; and so long as the wondrous art of Writing, or of Ready-writing which we call Printing, subsists, he may be expected to continue, as one of the main forms of Heroism for all future ages. He is, in various respects, a very singular phenomenon.

He is new, I say; he has hardly lasted above a century in the world yet. Never, till about a hundred years ago, was there seen any figure of a Great Soul living apart in that anomalous manner; endeavoring to speak forth the inspiration that was in him by Printed

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<sup>13</sup> There is a need for a more disciplined and historical account of the “public lecture,” which not only becomes a key genre during the Romantic period but appears, during this time, to shed many of the tropes and structures that it had inherited from the “sermon.”

Books, and find place and subsistence by what the world would please to give him for doing that. (Carlyle "Hero" 377-78)

But while the modern intellectual's historical contingency is again readily admitted, there is a noticeable shift away from the declared sociability of the public intellectual discussed in the *Encyclopédie*, in both the "Men of Letters" and the "*philosophes*" articles. Even if we recognize that the union between the intellectual and "the People" described in the *Encyclopédie* was much less a reality than an aspiration, Carlyle's "Great Soul living apart in that anomalous manner" must represent a retreat from an earlier, more populist, mode of intellectualism.

Yet, what is most striking about Carlyle's lecture is his oscillation between asserting the basic heroic posture of the intellectual class and the impossibility of heroic actions in the modern world. On the one hand, Carlyle's intellectual "class" is every bit as heroic as Voltaire's, perhaps even more as they are more ready to completely remake the society in their own image and not simply correct its errors and superstitions. Carlyle is, at moments, unapologetic when it comes to intellectual class-interests: "The man of intellect at the top of affairs: this is the aim of all constitutions and revolutions, if they have any aim. For the man of true intellect . . . is the noble-hearted man withal, the true, just, humane and valiant man. Get him for governor, all is got" (Carlyle "Hero" 392). And even at other places in the lecture where the intellectual revolution becomes tinged with an air of violent tragedy, still, there is no retreat from the intellectual's role in the progress of history.<sup>14</sup>

Reading, one gets the sense Carlyle regarded the intellectual "class" with the same messianic faith that Marx found in the proletariat:

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<sup>14</sup> In one such moment Carlyle reflects, "What could the world, the governors of the world, do with such a man [Rousseau]? Difficult to say what the governors of the world could do with him! What he could do with them is unhappily clear enough, — *guillotine* a great many of them!"

Men of Letters will not always wander like unrecognized unregulated Ishmaelites among us! Whatsoever thing . . . has virtual unnoticed power will cast off its wrappings, bandages, and step forth one day with palpably articulated, universally visible power. That one man wear the clothes, and take the wages, of a function which is done by quite another: there can be no profit in this; this is not right, it is wrong. And yet, alas, the making of it right, — what a business, for long times to come! Sure enough, this that we call Organization of the Literary Guild is still a great way off, encumbered with all manner of complexities. (Carlyle "Hero" 388)

We see here one of the most troubling images Romanticism has given us of class-struggle—the “thing” of *Frankenstein* shedding his “wrappings”—and yet, Carlyle clearly shares with Marx a vision of the world yet to come, of a morally necessary, apocalyptic rupture from the current state of affairs under capitalism. The difference, however, is Marx insisted that this break would occur not because it was “right” but because the structure of existing relations made it unavoidable. Democrats, like Marx, are made secure in the combined strength of the masses, of knowing that, as Shelley put it, that “we are many” and “they are few,” while paternalists, like Carlyle, are left to rely on the teetering force of goodwill within a small (intellectual) patron-class. Carlyle could see the world needed changing, but he had no confidence in “the People.” A year earlier he had published his pamphlet on Chartism in a panic over the dangers of a popular revolt. If neither the dominant strata or “the People” were capable of governing a more moral order, it would be up to the intellectuals.

With nowhere else to turn, Carlyle opts for the “Man of Letters” to wear the mantle of heroism, continuing to perform what had become since the time of Voltaire the most Romantic of Romantic gestures. But what has changed by the time Carlyle writes “The Hero as Man of

Letters,” is that this recital already rings false. The belief in the intellectual class (and “the People,” for the two are always joined to some degree) in the proclamations of Voltaire or Disraeli, or in Blake or Shelley, has been shaken. Intellectual heroism is becoming more personal, more individualist. It is losing its class character—from the “Men of Letters” to the “Man of Letters.” Where only collective action can reasonably succeed, the isolated hero appears terribly frail. And so Carlyle laments: “[t]he world's heart is palsied, sick: how can any limb of it be whole? Genuine Acting ceases in all departments of the world's work; dexterous Similitude of Acting begins. The world's wages are pocketed, the world's work is not done. Heroes have gone out; Quacks have come in” (Carlyle “Hero” 397). The heroic desire that once animated the poetry of Blake and Shelley is still apparent in Carlyle but it has become distorted. Once the intellectual hero lives in a world where “heroes have gone out” we are left with the hopelessly alienated Manfred, the misguided sincerity of Waverley, or the mock-heroics of Juan. “He, with his copy-rights and copy-wrongs,” Carlyle seems forced to admit of the hero as man of letters, “in his squalid garret, in his rusty coat; ruling (for this is what he does), from his grave, after death, whole nations and generations who would, or would not, give him bread while living is a rather curious spectacle! Few shapes of Heroism can be more unexpected.” (“Hero” 378).

I would like to use Voltaire’s article on “Men of Letters,” Disraeli’s book on *The Literary Character*, and Carlyle’s lecture on “The Hero as Man of Letters” as landmarks to suggest the structure of what might reasonably be called the Romantic period. Stretching from roughly the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, Romanticism, in the sense I am using it, does not describe an aesthetic movement or a relatively short period of general political turmoil (for example, from the start of the French Revolution to the passage of the Six Acts) but a political movement located within the intellectual bloc that emerges out of a particular set of

historical conditions and in turn seeks to influence those same conditions. When I say “Romantic” I will be referring, then, to a particular group of acts (mostly rhetorical), within a particular community (almost exclusively intellectual), at a particular period of capitalist class-struggle (the period of European capitalist reorganization from mid-eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century). Thus, to utter the word “Romantic” is to invoke a specific era of *intellectual* history—not as the history of ideas but as the material history of the intellectual stratum.

These three texts suggest the general shape of a political crisis within the intellectual community occurring from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century over the proper role of the intellectual in the modern state. But in order to grasp the full complexity of this engagement it is necessary to go beyond the analyses provided by Romantic intellectuals themselves and add to those analyses what we have come to understand about the transformation of intellectual life under the developing capitalist world-system. In short, if we are to understand Romanticism we must begin to grasp the social *totality* from which it emerged and then participated. Therefore, I have dedicated the remaining portion of this chapter to providing a brief account of Romanticism’s foundational conditions. If in doing so I appear to be needlessly fussy about defining “Romanticism,” it is not only because I count myself in that long line of analyst-critics operating within a basic Marxist framework who have insisted upon the careful explication of key terms but also because an acceptance of the rhetorical basis of genres ceaselessly returns one back to the scene of writing as a social and historical location. Once we recognize that “genre is predicated on . . . multiple people acting repeatedly, thus creating the perception of recurrence” (Devitt 33), genre becomes inseparable from the community that creates it and is reproduced through it (36). In other words, a study of the Romantic epic would

be incomplete without an analysis of the genre's community and their contexts—that is to say their own group history, social position, and ideological commitments; or more to the point, it is crucial that we understand just what makes the Romantic epic “Romantic.”

#### IV. The Romantic Intellectual in the *Longue Durée*

The Romantic epic *belonged* to the community of intellectuals, for not only did intellectuals produce epic poetry, the “Man of Letters” was the genre’s primary audience as well.<sup>15</sup> And, as intellectualism is not an eternal essence but a historically shifting construct whose shape is determined by the larger social organization, we must begin by recognizing that a transformation of intellectual life preceded the emergence of Romantic intellectuals. The intellectuals of the European court or the Church held very different social positions than the intellectuals developed in bourgeois society. Although the older intellectual stratum also functioned as the ideologists of the ruling class, it remained under the tight control of the old regime. For the tutors of princes, the dangers of the court led to dependent and relatively slavish positions. For intellectuals in the Church, the regulated existence of the monastery ensured the near seamless reproduction of ideology. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, intellectual life had changed substantially through a long historical process which can be shown to have at least three distinct aspects. First, there was an increasing sense of autonomy among intellectuals brought on by the decline of traditional authorities that controlled intellectual labor. Second, there was the advent of the public sphere, a proliferation and swarming of new institutions that brought intellectuals together

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<sup>15</sup> To say that a community owns a genre is not to say that the genre could not be attempted or read by someone outside of the community. Community boundaries are permeable and continuously contested, and one of the fascinating realities captured in diversity of the Romantic epic is the way in which the genre was used as a gateway into the intellectual community.

into a distinct political unit. Third and finally, the limited possibilities for social advancement, coupled with increased contact with the dispossessed multitudes, led the alienated community of intellectuals to re-examine their historical role and shift their political alignment away from dominant stratum and towards “the People.”

### The Development of Intellectual Autonomy

The decline of the traditional forces that controlled intellectual labor began with the long process of secularization, which was among the most important developments in the transformation of intellectual life. Beginning before the Reformation and continuing beyond the Enlightenment, secularization undermined many of the authoritative institutions that had functioned to limit intellectual power. It was secularization that both “[de-sacralized] authority-claims and [facilitated] challenges to definitions of social reality made by authorities linked to the church” (Gouldner 1). Secularization worked to de-ritualize language, as the vernacular replaced the use of Latin among intellectuals, eventually allowing for the development of the specialized critical discourse adopted by the community of intellectuals (1-2). The new critical discourse led to the additional undermining of textual authority so that by the late-eighteenth century, even sacred texts like the Bible, were opened to the intellectual’s technical skills of figurative reading and contextualization (Tucker 35-37).

Furthermore, the process of secularization was accelerated and reinforced by the growth of the university system and eventually state sponsored public education, as both created new possibilities for intellectual independence. In light of the major protest movements of the last half of the twentieth century (the American Civil Rights movement, May ’68, or Occupy) it might now appear self-evident that “[t]he university operates as a bastion of autonomy for

intellectuals, even where it is under siege” (R. Collins 145); however, not enough attention has been given to the *long* historical impact of the university on the bourgeois social transformation. Seymour Lipset and Asoke Basu provide only the barest indication of the university’s centrality as a breeding ground for intellectual dissent since the sixteenth century:

Luther’s revolt against the church found its initial support from the faculty and students of his University of Wittenberg and elsewhere in Germany. . . . Hobbes, writing of the causes of the English Revolution in *Behemoth* concluded that the universities were the principal source of the rebellion . . . . In Russia the various revolutionary movements were intellectual and student based until the Revolution of 1905. That revolt began with a student strike which subsequently spread to workers and sections of the peasantry. (112-13; qtd. in Gouldner 58)

While it is certainly misleading to see the university as kind of dissident camp in the heart of bourgeois society, the university can be a location where the counter-hegemonic discourses of the intellectual bloc can root. First, universities provided the institutional basis for the reproduction of intellectual workers not only through education but by offering dependable employment opportunities for intellectuals. These opportunities greatly expanded during the period of the Romantic epic with both the advent of secularized, multiclass, public education along the French model (Gouldner 3) and creation of the modern research university along the German model (R. Collins 142).<sup>16</sup> The universities and public schools came to constitute a growing space where intellectual labor might be experienced as more or less free from coercion from either the family or, within bounds, the State (Gouldner 3). Second, beyond the freedoms

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<sup>16</sup> Collins identifies the German University model as, “the movement . . . of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Humboldt (and indeed, led by just these people) to free the university from dominance by the church, and to make professors’ careers dependent upon their innovative publications” (142).

allocated to the faculty, students often traveled to universities from areas out in the periphery to the core where they were removed from the daily authority of the family patriarch (Collins 145; Gouldner 3). Even those students who were not taken up into the core's intellectual labor pool tasted enough of the new intellectual life that they converted and returned "home with a combination of cosmopolitan reflexivity and localistic resentment" (Collins 145).

In addition to secularization and the university, the shift from the extended patriarchal kin networks to the bourgeois nuclear family as the basic unit of economic life also provided a new degree of freedom for intellectuals. As Habermas notes, the appearance of this private domestic space was linked to the idealized workings of the autonomous marketplace:

To the autonomy of property owners in the market corresponded a self-presentation of human beings in the family. The latter's intimacy, apparently set free from the constraint of society, was the seal on the truth of a private autonomy exercised [*sic*] in competition. . . . It seemed to be established voluntarily and by free individuals and to be maintained without coercion; it seemed to rest on the lasting community of love on the part of the two spouses; it seemed to permit that non-instrumental development of all faculties that marks the cultivated personality. (46-47)

Operating in tandem, the intellectual's private home and the university acted as idealized spaces, at once reflecting both the so-called freedoms of the market and a stable alternative to the market's fluctuations.

Moreover, as Freud recognized, the contradiction of private/public life inherent in the relations of the bourgeois nuclear family interiorized patriarchal authority even as it required a break from patriarchal domination (Habermas 47). The structure of the (Freudian) family romance prevented the patriarch of the bourgeois nuclear family from transmitting his ideology

as dependably as the extended kin networks had. The maternal, grounded in domestic affection, became a naturalized counter-power to patriarchal authority associated with market competition, and the adolescent break could serve as a rehearsal for disaffected intellectuals (often young) who looked to challenge cultural conventions and the state (Gouldner 3). By the Romantic period, the now familiar culture of alienated youth already existed. The great innovations and achievements in the arts were made by youth in rebellion:

the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) were the work of men in their twenties, Byron became famous at twenty four, an age at which Shelley was famous and Keats was almost in his grave. Hugo's poetic career began when he was twenty, Musset's as twenty-three. Schubert wrote *Erlkoenig* at the age of twenty eight and was dead at thirty one, Delacroix painted the *Massacre at Chios* at twenty-five, Petoefi published his *Poems* at twenty one. An unmade reputation or an unproduced masterpiece by thirty is a rarity among Romantics. (Hobsbawm 314)

And the same can be said of politics in the era. Nearly all of the period's great revolutionaries were in their thirties when they took the world stage: Wollstonecraft, Paine, Jefferson, Robespierre, Godwin, Thelwall. Saint-Just was only twenty-six when he ascended the scaffold with Robespierre. Napoleon was barely thirty when he seized the Directorate. "There is of course," as Eric Hobsbawm reminds, "nothing universal in this revolt of the young against their elders. It was a reflection of the society created by [although I would argue in anticipation of] the [French and Industrial Revolutions]" (315).

Finally, one of the last of the old authoritative practices to fall was that of patronage in the arts (Gouldner 2). Even though patronage continued in some cases into the nineteenth century, the well-documented battles between cultural producers and patrons (such as Anne Yearsley and

Hannah Moore, or William Blake and William Hayley) demonstrate that patronage was not only in decline by the late-eighteenth century, but ideologically untenable. The expanding cultural marketplace struck at both sides of the exchange. Cultural producers were able to place themselves beyond the control and supervision of patrons, who were viewed by cultural producers as increasingly meddling. The anonymous marketplace liberated the cultural producer and increased the desire for artistic freedom by fostering the spirit of creative genius. Meanwhile, wealthy patrons, who had “kept men of letters as [they] kept servants” (Habermas 38), were delighted to cut their needy charges loose in order to become active consumers—connoisseurs.<sup>17</sup> The “connoisseur” (the esteemed cultural consumer) was the eighteenth-century twin of “genius” (the esteemed cultural producer) and served as a defense against the charge of philistinism leveled by intellectuals against the layers of the dominant strata. A well-stocked library promised to convert the volatility of wealth into transcendent and ennobling taste, and placed forms of consumption on par with forms of production. By the mid-eighteenth century it could be said, as William Hogarth did in *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753) that, in the fields of cultural production, “Painters and connoisseurs” were now “the only competent judges” (qtd. in “Connoisseur, 2a”). The contract between artist and patron was broken and their relationship handed over to the market.

### Changes in Intellectual Institutions

Taken as a whole, secularization, the university, the breakdown of the extended patriarchal family, and the end of patronage in the arts, all functioned to create distance between the ruling

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<sup>17</sup> The earliest entries for ‘connoisseur’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary* date to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

class and the rapidly growing number of intellectuals. This distance, however, did not, in and of itself, offer intellectuals an opportunity for sustained political resistance. Like the emerging class of “capitalists,” scholars still belonged to the stratum of educated bourgeois, who were unable to pursue their own economic interests as a bloc until the advent of the bourgeois public sphere (Habermas 23). As Habermas notes from Percy Ernst Schramm’s *Hamburg, Deutschland und die Welt* (1943):

These others, who were not ‘citizens’ but ‘bourgeois,’ served their masters, their church, and their employers or were ‘free’ as members of a liberal profession; but *they had nothing more in common among themselves than that they belonged to the ‘bourgeoisie’*—which did not mean a whole lot more than this label distinguished them from nobility, peasantry, and the lower strata of the town. (37, qtd. in Habermas 23 n.54, emphasis added)

Thus, we should note that secularization and the other process that contributed to the weakening of the structures which supported the dominant stratum’s authority were a necessary condition for the development of the intellectual community of the Romantic period, but, in and of themselves, they were also insufficient.

It was that cluster of institutions, practices, and values that Jürgen Habermas refers to as the “bourgeois public sphere” that allowed the scattered intellectuals of the European world-system to join together as a political bloc. As the phrase “*bourgeois* public sphere” indicates, the development of these cultural sites was requisite for Europe’s economic expansion to move forward. Many of the institutions (coffee houses, news journals, stock companies) originated in the seventeenth-century merchant economy of the towns where they operated as closed guilds. But by the mid-eighteenth century the nationalization of the economy run by a modern state

required dependable and unceasing flows of information from across the far reaching world-system. The resulting network of trade, commercial information, and publication allowed intellectuals to found their own “Republic of Letters” within the institutions of the bourgeois state:

Two years after *Pamela* [1740] appeared on the literary scene the first public library was founded; book clubs, reading circles, and subscription libraries shot up. In an age in which the sale of monthly and weekly journals doubled within a quarter century, as happened in England after 1750, they made it possible for the reading of novels to become customary in the bourgeois strata. These constituted the public that had long grown out of early institutions like the coffee houses, *salons*, and *Tischgesellschaften* and was now held together through the medium of the press and its professional criticism.

(Habermas 51)

The swarming of institutions necessary for a nationalized economy in a global world-system led directly to the formation of the bourgeois public sphere and the consolidation of a transnational intellectual community.

Intellectuals and the reading public “formed the public sphere of a rational-critical debate in the world of letters,” and “by communicating with itself, attained clarity about itself” (Habermas 51). This “clarity about itself” was a form of “collective political consciousness” (Gramsci *Prison* 181) among intellectuals that extended beyond crude guild or economic interests (181). Relatively freed from the domination of aristocratic and bourgeois masters, and brought together by the institutional structure of the bourgeois public sphere, the intellectual ranks experienced themselves more and more as an independent historical force.

At this moment it may be useful to pause in order to consider whether or not intellectuals in their unusual social and economic position became more than a community and actually began to constitute an autonomous class. While many intellectuals have attempted to position themselves as simply above or beyond the petty grievances of class or the influence of material life, a more persuasive argument for intellectual autonomy is made by Alvin Gouldner, who claims that intellectuals are, in fact, a third party (“the New Class”) to the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working-class.<sup>18</sup> Gouldner points out that the intellectual community shares a common culture in the language of “Careful Critical Discourse” and a common economic interests in the expansion of state institutions, which distinguish intellectuals from the two other classes (8).<sup>19</sup>

Yet against these claims for intellectual autonomy, Marx is famously dismissive.

Throughout most of Marx’s work the intellectual is little more than a stooge of the bourgeoisie.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Mannheim, in *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), presents intellectuals as a “floating class” able to transcend class limits through their specialized education and “[a]ttach themselves to classes to which they originally did not belong. . . [so that] they and they alone were in a position to choose their affiliation” (158; qtd in Greaves 182). Similarly, Benedetto Croce writes: “[w]e must trust the class of intellectuals, as Hegel acknowledge by calling them the ‘universal class’ or ‘the unclassed’” (90; qtd in Greaves 189). Even Jürgen Habermas, in his idealized account of the workings of the by-gone era of the bourgeois public sphere where disinterested intellectuals came together to discuss the “public good,” is not far from this claim.

<sup>19</sup> For Gouldner, “the New Class” (he borrows the term from the anarchist philosophy of Maximoff Bakunin) is the likely successor of bourgeois hegemony and is unlikely to pursue true egalitarianism (83). Alan Kahan (2010) might also be said to view intellectuals in much the same way, although from the bourgeois perspective. Kahan denies that the interests of the bourgeoisie and the working-class are intrinsically opposed, or that, despite their long historical battle, the interests of “Mind” [the intellectual class] and “Money” [the bourgeoisie] need be at war either. For Kahan, “an intellectual class that has come to a mature state of class consciousness” (287) could more comfortably serve the interests of commercial society twofold: by “[helping to] reconcile all social classes to capitalism” (282), and by providing a “moral culture” that would smooth over capitalism’s rough edges (279-287). His conclusion is the symptomatic response of the dominant class, who, in the analysis of Gramsci, must present itself not *as a class* seeking its own narrow interest but as the universal “motor of progress” (Greaves 153).

<sup>20</sup> In *The German Ideology* (1845) Marx writes, “[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force” (67); or in the “Preface” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), “[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being

There are a few rare exceptions. For example, in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) the intellectual is a late recruit to the proletariat revolution:

[f]inally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour . . . a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole. (74-75)<sup>21</sup>

But even here, at perhaps their most idealized moment, Marx's characterization of intellectuals as opportunistic class-traitors can hardly be said to lift intellectuals to even the self-interested class that is claimed by Gouldner.<sup>22</sup> Despite occasional breaks, the whole of Marx's writings takes a dependably materialist, and often non-dialectical course when approaching questions of

that determines their consciousness" (425); or in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (1852) where the "intellectual authorities" stand alongside "the finance aristocracy, the industrial bourgeoisie, the middle class, the petty bourgeois, . . . the army, the *lumpenproletariat*. . . , the church, and the land owners" (26) as the militant defenders of the bourgeois republic.

<sup>21</sup> Also in *The German Ideology*, the door seems open for an elect sect of bourgeois intellectuals for whom, "the communist consciousness . . . may . . . arise . . . through the contemplation of the situation of [the working] class" (60)

<sup>22</sup> Gouldner finds in the gap between Marx's assertion of the absolute material foundation of ideology and his sparse comments concerning the "communist consciousness" or intellectual realignment evidence that the historical role of the intellectual class is Marxism's ideological blind spot. Thus, it is at the point of the intellectual that Marxism, which Gouldner represents as the false-consciousness of the intellectual class, "abruptly [reaches] the limits of its self-understanding" (58). Although Gouldner is correct to emphasize that, "Marx and Marxism are the creations of a library-hunting, book-store-browsing, museum-loving--and hence leisure possessing--academic intelligentsia" (57), and that "[t]hey are unthinkable without the panoply of libraries, bookstores, journals, newspapers, publishing houses, even party schools, whose cadre and culture constitute a dense infrastructure at whose center there is the Western University" (57), the prominent political role afforded to intellectuals in the Marxism of Antonio Gramsci, among others (Lenin, Lukács, Bourdieu, etc.), make clear that Gouldner's criticism of Marxism as a field is grossly overstated.

ideology and the ideologists.<sup>23</sup> The irony is of course that arguably the most important intellectual of the nineteenth century not only rejected intellectual independence but failed to afford intellectuals any meaningful role in the progress of history.<sup>24</sup>

Somewhere between the position of intellectual idealism and the pessimism of Marx lies Antonio Gramsci's portrayal of the intellectual community. Like Marx, Gramsci, too, rejects the idea of an autonomous intellectual class, insisting that, "[t]here does not exist any independent class of intellectuals" (*Prison* 60) and that any notion of a class bond between intellectuals, who actually develop from within all classes, is purely, "of a psychological nature . . . and often of a caste character" (*Prison* 60). Yet for Gramsci, even though the apparent bond of class solidarity is a form of false-consciousness among intellectuals, it is nonetheless authentically felt and produces meaningful historic effects:

[s]ince these various categories of traditional intellectuals experience through an '*esprit de corps*' their uninterrupted historical continuity and their special qualification, they thus put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group. This self-assessment is not without consequences in the ideological and political field, consequences of wide-ranging import. The whole of idealist philosophy can easily be connected with this position assumed by the social complex of intellectuals and can be defined as the expression of that social utopia by which the intellectuals think of

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<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most important exception can be found in the "Theses on Feuerbach" where the relationship between ideology and material conditions is quite clearly dialectical. In the third thesis, Marx critiques the static materialism of the Young Hegelians by reminding that, "[t]he materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself" (172). A similar assertion of the dialectical interaction between ideology and history can be found in "The Eighteenth Brumaire" where Marx writes, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please in circumstances they choose for themselves" (19).

<sup>24</sup> This has been pointed to as a sign of Marx's own ideological struggle, a materialist overreaction to the hegemonic force of Hegelian idealism in Marx's lifetime (Greaves 212)

themselves as ‘independent’, autonomous, endowed with a character of their own, etc.

(Gramsci *Prison* 7-8)

Gramsci’s analysis allows for a productive compromise between the hard Marxian position on intellectuals and the soft intellectual autonomists, allowing that modern intellectuals often experience themselves as a class (or as “unclassed”), even if this is always something of a misrecognition.

### Intellectuals and “the People”

Returning to the historical circumstances at work on the intellectual community, although a certain set of historical trajectories created a sense of (and desire for) intellectual autonomy and another set worked to ring intellectuals together so that they began to feel themselves to be a “class,” this joint array of circumstances, alone, cannot explain why Romantic intellectuals suddenly began to seek a relationship with “the People.” In the *Prison Notebooks* of Antonio Gramsci offers one intriguing possibility to this problem when he observes that for a class to achieve hegemonic status they must first reorganize and reformulate their own values so that they appear in the interest of the broader society. Thus, hegemony is the point where a single economic class,

tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society—bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a ‘universal’ plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups. (Gramsci *Prison* 181-82)

Hegemonic control, then, requires the interests of a particular class to be articulated as being in the interests of all of society. But hegemony is also the point where there is a need that an “account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed—in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind” (*Prison* 161). Thus, in Gramsci’s analysis, hegemony operates in both directions, altering the values of both the dominating class and the dominated (although the violence of this operation is in no way equal in either direction). In a limited sense, then, a hegemonic ideology is always an ideology of compromises—compromises that work in favor of the dominant class. This must have also been the case for the bourgeoisie, who had to establish and continually renew their legitimacy as the dominant class, during the period of the Romantic epic.

Therefore, it should be no surprise if some number of intellectuals, whose function it was to develop this hegemonic compromise, were peeled away from the dominant strata and identified with “the People.” In fact, despite being the beneficiaries of the existing order, a sympathetic alignment with subordinated groups might even be something of an occupational hazard among intellectuals, who in order to fulfill their social function must come to understand the desires of the exploited. However, even if we admit that the intellectual’s role in the production of hegemony puts her at a risk for enacting a sort of class “treachery” it should be recognized that until the eighteenth century “fifth column” acts by intellectuals against the dominant strata’s interests were actually quite rare.

Whereas Gramsci’s analysis of hegemony provides a theoretical framework for understanding the intellectual bloc’s potential for political realignment, György Lukács notes an actual political shift caused by a cultural divide between the bourgeoisie and intellectuals. In

"The Ideal of the Harmonious Man in Bourgeois Aesthetics" (1938) and *Goethe and His Age* (1946), Lukács sketches the political history of the intellectual bloc that begins with the Renaissance:

the great men of the Renaissance strove to develop all the productive forces of society. Their lofty aim was to shatter the narrow localized restrictions of medieval social life and to create a social order in which all human capacities and potentialities would be liberated for an understanding of nature for the benefit of mankind. And these great men recognized that the development of the productive forces meant simultaneously the development of man's own productive capacities. The mastery of nature by free men in a free society—such was the Renaissance ideal of the harmonious man. ("Ideal" 91)

These “great men of the Renaissance” were, of course, the forefathers of the intellectual bloc, but they had not yet formed a cohesive political power. Their “great[ness],” therefore, was not the product of their political force, but the breadth of their thought. Quoting Engels, Lukács adds that these Renaissance thinkers were not the intellectuals of the “narrow bourgeoisie” (qtd. in "Ideal" 91), but instead exhibited “an impressive, many-sided development of individual capacities, [which among] even the most outstanding men, was possible only while capitalism was still undeveloped” (“Ideal" 91). And while capitalism was still young, having not yet revealed its one-dimensional character, the Renaissance Humanists stood alongside the bourgeoisie against feudal interests, in the hope of unlocking humanity’s full productive power.

But as the forces of the market began to steadily penetrate every aspect of daily life, the reality of social relations under capitalism became increasingly unavoidable and stood in direct opposition to the goals of the Humanist intellectuals:

With the development of the productive forces of capitalism, the subjugation inherent in the capitalist division of labour became more pronounced. By the manufacturing stage, the worker had already become a narrow specialist in a single operation, and the state apparatus had already begun to transform its civil servants into mindless and soulless bureaucrats. (Lukács "Ideal" 91)

Instead of ushering in an age of idealized harmony, bourgeois society was producing stunted and shallow creatures whose passions became bifurcated from their calculating intellect.

The first to confront this aspect of capitalist society, Lukács tells us, were the “leading thinkers of the Enlightenment” (“Ideal” 91). Although they still fought against feudal interests, they also clearly, “saw symptoms of the contradictions within the emerging forces of production, within the very progress for which they were vanguard fighters” (“Ideal” 91). For Lukács, this tension between the ideals of the Humanist intellectuals and the practices of advancing capitalism produced a great and difficult historical moment, “the bourgeois revolutionary period” (“Ideal” 906). The variety of intellectual responses this cultural conflict engendered is an indication of its deep ideological divisions, and Lukács spends most of the essay drawing the various reactions together under this single cause. Many of the thinkers of this period, unable to resolve the contradiction surrounding “the ideal of harmonious man in bourgeois society,” resorted to simplified solutions by either acting as apologists for violent aspects of capitalist progress, or rejecting progress altogether by promoting a restitution of feudal society (“Ideal” 92).

However, Lukács notes that,

[t]he great poets and aestheticians of the Enlightenment and of the first half of the nineteenth century did not succumb to this dilemma. But neither were they capable of

resolving the contradictions in capitalist society. Undaunted by the conditions that confined them, they exhibited greatness and brilliance in maintaining an unrelenting critique of bourgeois society without abandoning their affirmation of progress. ("Ideal" 92-93)

In the essay "Harmonious Man," Schiller, Goethe, Fourier, and Balzac all belong to this late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Humanist intellectual community, and Lukács is clear that their "unrelenting critique" was representative of the best ideas of their age ("Ideal" 93-96). And while there is a noticeable absence of British intellectuals in this (his earliest) account, in *Goethe and His Age*, Lukács notes the important contributions of British writers such as Percy Shelley and Walter Scott. He writes of Shelley: "Shelley has already glimpsed the rising new sun, the sun of the proletarian revolution. He was able to celebrate the liberation of Prometheus because already he could summon the men of England to revolt against capitalist exploitation" (*Goethe* 153); and to Scott he gives credit to opening the doors to "a great social realism" (*Goethe* 82). For Lukács, the political realignment of Humanist intellectuals during the Romantic period was the opening of a "historic struggle" ("Ideal" 96) against the stultifying effects of bourgeois society—a struggle that could only conclude with the advent of Socialism.

The schism between intellectuals and the bourgeoisie that Lukács describes is a compelling and productive narrative for scholars of Romanticism., especially when it is coupled with Lukács' recognition that this split was also accompanied by a "human and artistic bond of the writer with the great progressive popular movement. . . seeking its way and struggling for the liberation of the people" (qtd. in Löwy and Sayre 112). In fact, Gramsci recognizes this same political realignment as the meaning of "Romanticism":

Among its other meanings romanticism has assumed that of a special relationship or bond between the intellectuals and the people, the nation. In other words, it is a particular reflection of 'democracy' (in the broad sense) in literature (in the broad sense, so at this level Catholicism could have been 'democratic', while 'liberalism' might not). . . .

Therefore, in the endless literature on romanticism one must isolate this aspect and study it theoretically and practically as a historic fact, as a general tendency that can give rise to a current movement, a current problem to resolve. In this sense romanticism precedes, accompanies, sanctions and develops that entire European movement which took its name from the French Revolution. Romanticism is the literary aspect of the feeling of this movement; it is more a question of feeling than of literature, since the literary aspect was only part of the expression of a current of feeling that pervaded all of life and only a miniscule portion of this life managed to find its expression in literature. (Gramsci *Cultural* 205)

This “bond between the intellectuals and the people” has often been missing from our understanding of Romanticism. In an effort to tease out the historical minutia we have lost track of the context of the historical situation—Romanticism’s macro political structure. Romanticism was not the French Revolution, nor was it caused by it, but instead it was that “current of feeling” that “precedes, accompanies, sanctions and develops that entire European movement which took its name from the French Revolution.” Romanticism, in this sense, marks a historical period (a “historic fact” a little longer than a century) when the intellectual bloc shifted their political allegiance from the bourgeoisie to “the People.”

Gramsci is careful not to overstate the revolutionary aspect of this moment. Romanticism, he cautions, might be either democratic in its aspect or “reactionary” (*Cultural* 206); “[w]hat

matters is that a bond is being sought with the people, the nation, and that one considers necessary not a servile unity resulting from passive obedience, but an active unity, a life-unity, whatever the content of this life might be" (Gramsci *Cultural* 206). In its openness to a range of local political identifications (Löwy and Sayre 57-83) and, to a lesser degree, in its historic specificity, Gramsci's Romanticism is similar to the definition proffered by Löwy and Sayre in *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (2001), that "Romanticism represents a critique of modernity, that is, of modern capitalist civilization, in the name of values and ideas drawn from the past (the precapitalist, premodern past)" (17). The important difference in Gramsci's understanding of Romanticism, however, is that he locates this critique specifically within the intellectual community and thereby discovers Romanticism's place within the long history of class-struggle.

### Economic Incorporation

In order to better understand the context of the Romantic epic I have so far been examining the special set of historical circumstance surrounding the intellectual community, but to fully understand these conditions I will need to shift the focus to a broader horizon, to the large scale social and economic transformation that the intellectual community was shaped by and participated in. From an economic perspective, the period from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century was one of tremendous structural expansion for the capitalist world-system. During this time, "the European world-economy broke the bounds it had created in the long sixteenth century and began to incorporate vast new zones into the effective division of labor it encompassed . . . most particularly and most importantly, the Indian subcontinent, the Ottoman empire, the Russian Empire, and West Africa" (Wallerstein 129). This process of bringing

external economies under the dominance of the European world-system, which Wallerstein calls “incorporation” (127-89), marks a fundamentally different pattern of exchange than the period that preceded it. The older economic system of long sixteenth century traded largely in luxury goods (131-37), but the new system brought these formerly external zones fully into the European world-economy’s process of necessary production—both food and clothing. For this to happen, though, the practices of the European capitalist economy, including the division of labor between the agricultural country and manufacturing city, had to be established in the formerly external arenas. As Wallerstein explains:

The new pattern of ‘exports’ and ‘imports’ was to be one that replicated the core-periphery dichotomy that constituted the axial division of labour in the capitalist world-economy. This meant essentially at that time the exchange of peripheral raw materials against core manufacturers. In order that the [incorporated] zones concentrate on raw materials exports, there had to be changes in their productive process in two directions: in the creation or significant expansion of cash-crop agriculture (and analogous forms of primary sector production) destined for sale on the market of the capitalist world-economy; and in the reduction or elimination of local manufacturing activities.

(Wallerstein 137-38)

To be clear, there remained a large trade imbalance between the economic core and the incorporating zones well into the nineteenth century, as more raw materials (such as cotton and indigo) were imported into European manufacturing centers than necessary consumer goods (such as linen) were exported back to the incorporating zones. But deindustrialization made certain that the incorporating zones would become dependable and dependent consumers of core manufacturing (138). In Russia, for example, manufacturing exports dropped to 2.5%, while the

export of primary goods expanded to 95% (141, n61); India, which was “probably the world’s greatest producer of cotton textiles” (qtd. in Wallerstein 149) in 1800, discovered its leading industry had “practically disappeared” (qtd. in Wallerstein 149) after just two decades of competition with British manufacturing (149). It was this “new pattern of ‘imports’ and ‘exports’” (137) that ensured that the formerly external arenas were transformed into the “integrated links that constituted the commodity chains of the capitalist world-economy” (137).

Beyond simply establishing new trading patterns, the process of incorporation also reproduced in incorporating zones the social relations that already existed in the capitalist core at nearly every level. For one, this meant “a significant increase in the coercion of the labor force” (Wallerstein 137). Workers in incorporating zones, like their European brethren before them, had to be forced into the rhythms of capitalist production. The available time for subsistence labor was greatly reduced while at the same time wage-labor was intensified, standardized, and regimented. These systems were then reinforced by juridical frameworks (replicated from those already existing in the core zones) that restricted workers’ opportunities to work outside the capitalist economy (157-66).

Moreover, the process of incorporation also required the establishment of new institutions that were large enough to manage the rapid fluctuations of the capitalist market. At the site of production, this meant the establishment of the plantation system that was fed by the expanding slave trade. At the site of exchange, capitalized merchant-bankers inserted themselves in order to control the flows of goods to their favor (Wallerstein 152-53).

But most importantly for scholars of Romanticism, incorporation also significantly transformed the core’s domestic economy and social organization. The power of the state expanded and the town-based economy of mercantilism was rapidly nationalized and located in

urban trading zones. The state developed an increasingly dependable tax base and juridical system. All this of course meant that,

the contradictions linked to the development of market relations and of capitalism were accentuated. These were contradictions of colonial domination, with wars between France and England and the independence of the North American colonies; contradictions between the nobility and the bourgeoisie in France, which exploded in the revolution of 1789; and contradictions between the development of market exchange and the limits of manufacturing production, from which came the first spark of the industrial revolution in England. (Beaud 44)

The result was that the Romantic period was one of unprecedented economic and social upheaval, while the need for intellectuals was increasing both at home and abroad.

At this point we have returned to our understanding of Romanticism as a political crisis occurring within the intellectual bloc, but now we may notice the inseparability of the cultural and economic conflict. Romantic intellectuals organized against the intensified violence of “extractive economies involving deforestation, mining, and the setting up of plantation agriculture, what we today call ‘agribusiness’” (Bilgrami 544); against the rapid extension of “the capitalist division of labour, . . . [which] subjugates the human being and fragments his personality into lifeless specialization” (Lukács *Goethe* 40); and even “against *the way of life* in capitalist societies” (Löwy and Sayre 17, emphasis added). Romanticism was not an intellectual reaction against “progress” *per se* (which served the interests of the intellectual community and was roundly accepted as a historical necessity) but it was a sharp attack against the shape of commercial modernity, which had penetrated nearly every aspect of social life. Since the target

of this protest was so broad and the intellectual coalition remained relatively heterogeneous, Romanticism could take many directions. As Löwy and Sayre note:

[A Romantic] critique may focus on any one of several major facets of the system: first of all, anything having to do with relations of production (relations centered in a capitalist regime, on exchange value, quantitative monetary relations); next, the means of production (technological means) with scientific underpinnings; finally the state and the modern political apparatus that governs (and is governed by) the social system. Although some Romantic critics concentrate on a single one of these facets (or even on less secondary and superficial aspects), it must be said that those who display the Romantic worldview most fully bring their critique to bear on the key features of several or all of them. (20)

There is, then, an explainable, yet admittedly unusual, diversity within the Romantic reaction, which can appear, with its many divergent strands, to lack any strong political direction, particularly when the analyst-critic remains within the narrow cultural horizon of the intellectual community, which was plagued (as all coalitions are) with its own infighting, hierarchies, and guild jealousies. But once the intellectual community is placed within the broader context of the expanding capitalist world-economy the core of Romanticism takes shape. As Jacque Barzun argues, "Romanticism . . . must be regarded first as a response to political desire" (Barzun xxii), to which Löwy and Sayre add, "Romanticism is anticapitalist by its very nature" (15).

Perhaps the most interesting symptom of the intellectual break with market society was that it necessitated a rejection of the previous modes of intellectualism. This is among the most neglected and misrepresented aspects of Romanticism within Romantic studies which has so often placed a primary emphasis on so-called generational conflicts, particularly between Byron

and the “Lake School.” The crucial divisions, however, are not within the Romantic camp but between Romantic intellectuals and the intellectuals of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century. Blake inveighs against the philosophy of “Bacon, Locke, & Newton” (plate 43), all of whom were in their graves before 1730. Wordsworth mocked the diction of the Augustans: Dryden, Pope, and Gray’s early poetry.<sup>25</sup> In all quarters of the intellectual community there emerged a denunciation of scholarly monasticism, the priesthood, and the artist who served wealthy patrons. Only the early Romantics like Collins and Gray were tilting with their artistic fathers; by the 1790s, the foe was already several generations in the past. As Akeel Bilgrami points out, instead of a sudden shift in cultural fashions or an anxiety of influence, the rebellion against the Augustans had much more to do with a refusal to endorse the seventeenth-century political alliance with the dominant strata that was now undeniably responsible for the exploitation of the land and labor (543-44).<sup>26</sup> Perhaps Marilyn Butler best captures the actual spirit of the age: “so general a shift in aesthetic principle is not to be explained solely within the arts; eighteenth-century culture was reflecting a deep and widespread change of feeling, a pervasive mood of rejection of current society. The artefacts and styles which went out of fashion were those that reflected unacceptable aspects of contemporary life—luxury, formality, hierarchy” (Butler 22).

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<sup>25</sup> Wordsworth wrote in the margins of his copy of Hazlitt’s *Spirit of the Age* (1836): “if the beautiful, the pathetic, and the sublime be what a poet should chiefly aim at, how absurd it is to place these men [Dryden and Pope] amongst the first poets of their country! Admirable are they in treading their way, but that way lies almost at the foot of Parnassus” (*Letters* 3:122). Wordsworth also famously attacks Gray’s “Sonnet [on the Death of Richard West],” composed in 1741 or 1742 (fifteen years before he published his Pindarics—see chapter 2), in the preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the role Augustan intellectuals played in the developing the ideological support for the expanding capitalist economy, see Margaret Jacobs’ *The Newtonians and the English Revolution: 1689-1720* (1976).

## Conclusions

The rise of the intellectual bloc occurred concomitantly with the rise of the bourgeoisie. At some points the same historical forces pushed both parties forward; at others one side generated the conditions necessary for the other to take the next great leap. To a large extent their relationship could be adversarial only in the most superficial domains of culture, for they shared too many of the same economic interests to be divided. But by the mid-eighteenth century the situation on the ground had changed. There occurred within the newly cohesive intellectual community a realignment of values in favor of aiding “the People.”

The cause of this realignment should be of great concern for scholars of the period. The preconditions which I have attempted to lay out include the long historical forces that promoted a culture of intellectual autonomy (secularization, universities, the nuclear family, and the breakdown of the patronage system), and the swarming and expansion of the institutions that comprised the “world of letters” forming the public sphere, the rising number of intellectuals and the increasingly visible violence associated with the process of incorporation. To this already long list, still other elements in the story of intellectual realignment might be added, such as the switch to the vernacular among intellectuals, which brought them closer to “the people” (Gouldner 1-2), and even class resentment against the crass maneuvering of the bourgeoisie to commodify (read: expose to the fluctuations of the market) both cultural capital and land.<sup>27</sup> And still there are other factors which will have to remain unstated here, for my goal cannot be to tease apart all the elements that are in play but only to establish Romanticism as a thick historical description, as the necessarily abstract locus where a multitude of parallel sequences of differing

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<sup>27</sup> Previously land and cultural capital had been stable sources of wealth and income for members of the intellectual community that included not only the ranks of the petit-bourgeoisie but also more than a few members of aristocratic families (Habermas 30).

historical lengths come together and inform not only each other but also each related synchronic fact (each particular text or event) within its terms of periodization. I am seeking to describe a Romanticism that not only appears as a layered, heterogeneous, and dynamic movement when examined up close but that can also appear as a stable social and historical point of fact once we zoom out to grasp the *totality*, or the horizon of class-struggle.

Today, Romanticists are comfortable thinking about the period in terms of transitions and revolutions, but only a few consider the social totality contextualizing the changes they glimpse. In its place there has developed a set of clichés that obscure what is missing from these accounts. Sometimes this transformation is given an idealist tint and called the “Enlightenment” or “counter-Enlightenment.” Other times it is written as a cataclysmic history, a sudden eruption that cast the stable social foundations of Europe into upheaval, and goes by the name of the “French Revolution” and “The Terror.” And it is not uncommon to see it simply named “capitalism,” as though the economic order that has characterized the better portion of the last six-hundred years was either invented at the turn of the nineteenth century or that it is not subject to its own shifts and transformations. In place of these worn-out evasions what is needed is a renewed sense of Romanticism that is not only rich in its historic detail but is also historically located—that is, placed within the long trajectory of human history (or class-struggle).

In this chapter I have attempted to generate the basic terms of inquiry for a study on the Romantic epic.<sup>28</sup> I began by attempting to define “epic” but because of the rhetorical nature of

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<sup>28</sup> As Jameson remarks, “For a genuinely dialectical criticism . . . there can be no preestablished categories for analysis: to the degree that each work is the end result of a kind of inner logic or development of its own content, it evolves its own categories and dictates the specific terms of its own interpretation” (333); and also, “[Marx’s economic research shows that] content through its own inner logic, generates those categories in terms of which it organizes itself in a formal structure, and in terms of which it is best studied” (335).

genres, any given “epic” performance gains structure and meaning only within the particular context of its community of users, the broader context of culture, and even its genre’s history as a functioning form. In short, the word “epic” in the phrase “Romantic epic,” could not stand alone without being robbed of its historical specificity. Therefore, I turned to the essential modifier, “Romantic,” and found that its unpacking required additional investigations into the interrelationship between “intellectuals,” “class,” “hegemony,” and “capitalism,” as well as the dynamic character of each of these terms.

So, what is the Romantic epic? We have not come far enough yet to say. We know that its diversity cannot be accounted for by the concept of traditional literary genre and that, as a rhetorical genre, it is not a timeless set of formal literary elements or themes. However, we know that what makes an epic Romantic is that it was produced during that era when the intellectual bloc experienced a political crisis of identity and sought out a bond with “the People,” and that this situation was tied to the *longue durée* cultural processes that made possible bourgeois hegemony and the structural expansion of the world-system (incorporation). In other words, so far we have gained a sense of the general rhetorical situation in which each epic performance of the Romantic period was immersed, the “context of culture” and the “context of situation.” We have seen that by the first decade of the nineteenth century, Blake was employing the epic to organize and direct the intellectual community, but we do not yet know how the epic, as a form, came to this purpose. To see what makes an epic “epic” in the Romantic context it will be necessary to shift the horizon of inquiry from the generalities of culture and community back to the particularities of specific texts. This is the task I have set for myself in the next chapter, to use the study of particular texts in order to generate new terms of inquiry that might again allow for the construction of a general model which explains the common functionality of

epic performances within the Romantic context as well as establish the epic's record of diachronic transformations, as they occur both inside Romanticism and across the *longue durée*.

## Chapter Two

### Reconstructing the Epic:

#### Intellectual Mythologies and the Writing of Class

##### I. Pindarics

Now for the Epic! It appears to me that all great works that formed an epoch in the history of the human intellect have been an embodiment of the spirit of their age. An heroic age produced in the *Illiad* an *heroic* poem. The foundations of the Empire of the Caesars produced in the *Aeneid* a *political* poem. The revival of letters produced in the *Divine Comedy* a *national* poem. The Reformation & its consequences produced in *Paradise Lost* a *religious* poem. Since the revolt of America a new principle has been at work in the world to which I trace all that occurs. This is the *Revolutionary* principle, and this is what I wish to embody in *The Revolutionary Epic*.<sup>29</sup>

Genres work in the world. By this I mean to say two things. First, I mean that genres work *in the world*: genres are grounded within a particular time and place. As I argued in the previous chapter, attempts to define genres as true forms, as timeless ideals or literary continuities, are bound to be disrupted by history. This is not to discount the role of influence, but to recognize,

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<sup>29</sup> Benjamin Disraeli *Letters Volume I: 1815-1834* (1982) 380; qtd. in Flavin 45.

as Benjamin Disraeli suggests in the epigraph to this chapter, that authors of each age must encounter and mediate their literary tradition in the modes that are appropriate to the character of their historical moment. In the last chapter I laid out how the economic force of market *incorporation* and the cultural force of intellectual “autonomy” determined the Romantic moment, and in this chapter I will show how even long standing forms, such as the epic, are made to move in a moving world.

Second, I mean that genres *work* in the world: genres seek to change the realities that have produced their moment. Genres have ambitions. They have both conscious intentions conferred to them by their users and unconscious drives springing from their cultural loam, rich with history. Genres are tools used for constructing ideological façades. They build communities and organize relationship between them. Sometimes genres do this work quietly, but it was during the Romantic period that intellectuals became strongly aware of literature’s social utility, its ideological functioning (Duff *Romanticism* 117). Genres, it was discovered, are never innocent.

Thus, it is in both these senses that I say that *genres work in the world*, and, in this chapter, I will be looking at the Romantic epic in the light of both meanings. I will show how the Augustan epic was transformed by the historical forces of the Romantic age and became something that was unwritable before: an epic with “the hero as [the] man of letters.” This was more than a change in the epic’s thematic content; it was a change in its purpose. But it was a change, I will argue, motivated by the intellectual bloc’s response to the Augustan epic: negatively, as a received and socially backward literary form, and positively, as a genre with the potential for self-conscious world-making. On one hand, the epic tradition was a recurring reminder of the intellectual bloc’s embarrassing foundation in the service of the dominant classes. On the other, the epic appeared uniquely receptive to the intellectual bloc’s grand

political ambitions. Together, these conflicting impulses, both away from epic production and towards its revival, constituted a dialectical tension pressuring the growth of the Romantic epic, two cultural-historical energies at work in the intellectual community which I will refer to in this chapter as *epic disinheritance* and *epic desire*.

To speak of epic desire is to come very near the latter meaning of genres *work* in the world, for the epic was desired (and also refused) because the intellectual community recognized that it did something. I will be looking at the Romantic epic, then, not only as a genre influenced by history but also as a genre that was making history. All genres, as acts of address, define and reenact their community of users, but by taking the man of letters as its hero, the Romantic epic became directly involved in the organization of the intellectual stratum. The Romantic epic presented the intellectual to himself in an idealized form and in the process altered the ideological framework upon which intellectual identity was pegged. The proliferation of intellectual life-writings in the mid- to late-Romantic period was made possible by these developing cultural tropes, which were essential to establishing a pattern of collective experience (often located in childhood) to which individuating details of each artist's life might be added.<sup>30</sup>

In short, one function of the Romantic epic was to support the internal cohesion of the intellectual bloc by making the experience of intellectual life generalizable.

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<sup>30</sup> An even grossly abbreviated list of life-writings about intellectuals (biography, autobiography, memoir, etc.) appearing during the Romantic period might include canonical pieces such as Rousseau's *Confessions* (1770/1782), Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-81), Mary Wollstonecraft's *Memoir* (1798), William Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1798/1805/1850), Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), and Goethe's *Aus meinem Leben: Dictum und Wahrheit* [*From my Life: Poetry and Truth*] (1811-1833), to name only a few. Indeed, it was during the Romantic period that, for the first time in the history of letters, writers of distinction (and many without) routinely felt called upon to produce an account of their own lives, and when they could not or would not produce these narratives others filled the void by writing their literary biographies. For more on the rise of intellectual life-writing in the Romantic period, see *Romantic Autobiography in England*, Eugene Stelzig, ed. (2009).

By recognizing the communal operations of the Romantic epic, functions that went far beyond the genre's often limited commercial role, the analyst-critic gains a greater sense of just how deeply the Romantic epic was involved in the production of intellectual mythologies. Roland Barthes, in his now classic treatment of the mythological sign-system, explains that what constitutes a myth is not its content but its mode. "Myth is not defined by the object of its message," Barthes tells us, "but by the way in which it utters this message" (109). For Barthes, myth-making is always an effort towards mystification. It is the production of ideology: "[m]yth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (Barthes 142), and, to a remarkably strong degree, what stands out in the Romantic epic is this effort towards masking the material foundation of intellectual life. Genres, as I have said, are tools, and the Romantic epic was a tool used to organize the intellectual community for the hard labor of class-struggle. But epic also organized the intellectual stratum in such a way as to obscure the Romantic intellectual's own historical contingency.

By making what is actually historical appear eternal, myths, in Barthes' understanding of the term, are always claims about origins. This, of course, brings us very close to another sense of myth, one given by Claude Levi-Strauss, who explains that there is:

a fundamental character of the material [of myth]—that each type of story belongs to a given group, a given family name, a given lineage, or to a given clan, and is trying to explain its fate, which can be a successful one or a disastrous one, or be intended to account for rights and privileges as they exist in the present, or be attempting to validate claims for rights which have since disappeared. (41)

Again, the account of myth's function might easily be a description of the Romantic epic's purpose. As early as the late-seventeenth century, critics began to focus on the ancient epic's

role in nation building, in developing a shared narrative of origin and purpose. This was a theory of the epic that was never entirely surrendered, but by the late-eighteenth century it lived alongside an epic practice that redrew the limits of the epic from the nation to that international Republic of Letters. As the epic moved from Augustan forms to Romantic ones, it retained its commitment to a “given group,” but the “family name” was increasingly less national than cosmopolitan and intellectual.

I will argue that literary historians should think of the Romantic epic, then, as a myth of one community’s origins—the intellectual community. Levi-Strauss compares the role of myth to history, noting that “in our own societies, history has replaced mythology and fulfills the same function” (42-43). The Romantic epic appears hopelessly entangled in the similarly directed yet competing modes of myth and history. Of course, epics are not histories, at least not in the modern sense of the word “history.” Epics are more clearly myths than histories, but it is useful to recall that the Romantic epic grew up alongside history as a modern discipline. It also acted as a rehearsal for new genres like the personal history (the confession and the autobiography) and the historical novel. In its mythic function the Romantic epic appears out of character for the Enlightenment, at odds with a growing emphasis on materiality and scientific examination. But it is exactly this refusal of the man of letters to understand himself, at the very moment he is seeking to understand the world, that Romantic epics reveal.

The sociologist Alvin Gouldner accuses intellectuals of obscuring their own role in the production of history. Gouldner slyly remarks, “[o]ne is not supposed to ask the television audience, 'where does the camera man fit in?'"(9). In the same vein, Pierre Macherey calls the field of Literature “the mythology of its own myths” (60). My task in this chapter is to place the intellectual, as an intellectual (that is a historical subject with a shared set of commitments and

values that arise out of a shared experience), back at the center of literary history. It is to consider the evolution of epic poetry within the context of the intellectual stratum's material and social transformation. It is to challenge our "Romanticisms" everywhere they seek to claim their origins are *sui generis*: whether as the product of genius, or taste, or transcendence. It is to insist that genres, like the communities that use them, do not suddenly appear but are, in fact, constructed. In short, the task I hope to accomplish in this chapter is to replace the mythology of "Literature" with literary history.

#### Augustan Epics and Pindaric Odes

A survey of the Anglo-French epic at the end of the seventeenth century and the start of the eighteenth century indicates just how far the epic had to travel to become Romantic. At the core of the Romantic epic, for all of its diversity of structure and themes, is a protagonist that stands in for the intellectual. Yet, the surprising fact is that this intellectual hero is almost completely unheard of in epic before the mid-eighteenth century. The epics of Richard Blackmore provide superb examples. His first epic, *Prince Arthur* (1695), was a thinly veiled allegory celebrating the monarchy of William of Orange, which established Blackmore as a court favorite and saw him knighted. He followed this success with a second epic that returned William of Orange as Arthur (*King Arthur, an Heroic Poem in Twelve Books*, 1697), a third which recast Queen Anne as Queen Elizabeth (*Eliza, an Epic Poem in Ten Books*, 1705), and then yet another epic that imagined the adolescent prince Frederick as Alfred the Great (*Alfred*, 1723). In addition to these gross displays of self-interest, Blackmore wrote three innocuous epic defenses of Protestantism (*A Paraphrase on the Book of Job*, 1700; *Creation, a Philosophic Poem*, 1712; *Redemption*, 1722) and a theosophical long-poem on the superiority of the English climate (*The Nature of*

*Man*, 1711), all of which were burdened by heavy political overtones in support of imperial expansion. Blackmore was famously attacked by Alexander Pope and his wit allies as a hack, but these aspersions point more to guild jealousies and to Whig/Tory hostilities than to any difference in kind concerning the social function of the poet-intellectual.<sup>31</sup> For even as Pope would stake some claim to artistic independence, that he was “Indebted to no prince or peer alive” (Pope II.69), his translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which made him wealthy by repurposing Homer’s epics as foundation myths for the British empire, and his use of the mock heroic to smooth over ruling class social tensions in *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), showed that he, too, looked on the epic as the literati’s tool for personal gain within the existing social order.

Marilyn Butler cautions that the terminology of literary history seeking to describe the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, words like “neo-classical” and “Augustan,” connote a rigid cultural stability that too often obscures the actual ideological underpinning of the artistic production of this period. Instead, she explains, the literary historian might do better to borrow terms from the history of visual arts, terms like “baroque” and “rococo,” to describe the political and artistic commitments of writers like Pope or Dryden (Butler 18-19), recalling:

[Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*] conveys the same refined if discriminating delight in a world of exclusivity and elegance as the similarly exquisite scenes of the French painter Watteau, the great master of rococo. In literary matters both Dryden and Pope legislated for a society which they saw as arrived at a cultural high tide; behind them were the crudities of the Elizabethans and Goths, and perhaps the mob. This cultural superiority,

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<sup>31</sup> As Jacques Barzun explains, “in the classical epoch. . . artistic hostility is as individual as the rivalry of courtiers: Dryden attacks Shadwell, Racine is egged on to compete with Corneille, and Pradon set up to undo Racine” (84)

the explicit appeal to a refined élite, ceased not long after Pope's death to be the fashionable orthodoxy. (19)

Although I have continued to use the term "Augustan" to describe the early-eighteenth century, I fully agree with Butler's understanding that the differences between the Augustan and the Romantic are much less about the artist's relationship with tradition than the artist's relationship with the "refined élite." There is a shift from the "meretriciously flattering" (19) cultural productions of the early-eighteenth century to the "simple, serious and grand" (19) works of the Romantics, a shift which was only the literary aspect of a broader "radical reaction" (19) taking place in "the middle of the [eighteenth] century" (19), as intellectuals distanced themselves from the well-heeled patron class.<sup>32</sup>

By and large, when Restoration and Augustan epics were philosophical they supported a further expansion of the status quo; and when they were heroic they dressed the ruling elite in historical drag. Only with the advantage of hindsight are there to be found the traces of what the epic would become in the Romantic period. Voltaire's *Henriade* (1723), which celebrated the tolerant monarchy of Henry IV, is similar to English poems of the same period and earned Voltaire a position as a court poet, but his *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (1756), it might be argued, signaled a change on the horizon when he scandalized a revered symbol of French nationalism. Voltaire's Joan is a far cry from the intellectual heroine she would become by the pen of Southey (see Chapter Three), but to a considerable degree Voltaire's second (and last) epic at least abandons the slavish posturing of a court ideologist and espouses the values of the intellectual

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<sup>32</sup> Although she does not cite him, Butler's sense of the tensions between the two periods has much in common with Jacques Barzun's evaluation that "[t]he classical Age of Reason has in mind an aristocracy even when the new Enlightenment reaches down to the middle class, as it did in the French Revolution. Romanticism is populist (not to use the ambiguous word 'democratic') even when the Romanticist, like Scott or Carlyle, preaches a feudal order" (xxi).

community. Less convincing cases might be made for Daniel Defoe's *Jure Divino* (1706) and Richard Glover's *Leonidas* (1737). Both were later embraced by radical intellectuals in the late-nineteenth century as forerunners to their own epic projects, but, notwithstanding the layers of nascent Republicanism that were excavated from these epics, Defoe and Glover were actually casting their lot in with a faction of ruling elites—not standing in opposition to the whole of the ruling-class.

Instead of in the epic, the first unwavering poetic expressions of the intellectual bloc's political realignment occurred within the Pindaric ode. "Ode to Liberty" and "Ode on the Poetical Character," from William Collins' *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects* (1746), are among the earliest poems to anticipate the posturing and thematic development later undertaken in Romantic epic. Collins' "Ode to Liberty" enacts a substantial break with the poem's model, James Thomson's epic, *Liberty* (1734). Thomson, the late-Augustan poet, is better remembered today for his so-called pre-Romantic works, *The Seasons* (1726-30) and *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), but his sensibilities resided with the early age. Samuel Johnson tells us that Thomson threw some lines to the London stage for money, but he was at heart a kept man, a tutor to the solicitor general's son and the lyricist of "Rule Britannia," written to commemorate the ascension of George I and the birthday of Princess Augusta.

In a letter to George Bubb Doddington (a close friend and ally to Prince Frederick who would become the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Melcombe), Thomson wrote of his plans for an "Epic performance" (qtd. in Sambrook 39) regarding the "poetical landscape of countries, mixed with moral observations of their governments and people" (qtd. in Sambrook 31). And in the Augustan epic, Thomson found a genre well fit for the task of *Liberty*: "[unapologetic]... jingoism" (Levine 564). Thomson offers full-throated support for Britain's commercial expansion and the violent

economic incorporation of its trading partners. Assuming a naturalized voice he calls the “Genius of the Deep” (Thomson 4.396), Thomson writes of Britain’s colonial project:

“  
 Theirs the Triumph be,  
 “By deep *Invention's* keen pervading Eye,  
 “The Heart of *Courage*, and the Hand of *Toil*,  
 “Each conquer'd Ocean staining with their Blood,  
 “Instead of Treasure robb'd by ruffian War,  
 “Round social Earth to circle fair Exchange,  
 “And bind the Nations in a golden Chain. (4.432-38; qtd. in Levine 564)

Thomson’s willingness to celebrate the role of commerce as a colonial “golden Chain,” even while he turns away from the violent realities of conquering foreign peoples (here the “Ocean” is “conquer’d” instead of people) or the broken bodies of colonial subjects (we see, instead, only the “Blood” of heroic British merchants) is now strikingly peculiar. But, true to its Augustan taste, Thomson’s epic is a nationalist dream of absolute commercial dominance, where “The Winds and Seas are Britain’s wide Domain; / And not a Sail but by Permission spreads” (5.636-37; qtd. in Levine 564), where Liberty is defined as the achievement of British global economic hegemony.

William Collins’ “Ode to Liberty,” as William Levine shows, owes a great deal to Thomson’s *Liberty* in both its structure and language, and, for readers of both poems, Collins’ effort to radically condense Thomson’s “Epic performance” of five books into a relatively terse 144-line Pindaric ode is easily recognizable. Both poems chart the progress of the goddess Liberty from her ancient haunts in Greece and Rome to her modern British temple. However, key differences in thematic development between Thomson’s *Liberty* and Collins’ “Ode to

Liberty” reveal Collins’ break from Thomson. The most startling of these divergences occurs at the close of “Ode to Liberty,” where Collins drops his invocation to the commercialized goddess, Liberty, and turns instead to the allegorical figure of Concord. In the scene, the “divine...Laureate Band” (“Liberty” 129) attending the presumptive alter of Liberty conjures the spirit of Concord:

Her let our Sires and Matrons hoar  
 Welcome to *Britain’s* ravag’d shore  
 Our Youths, enamour’d of the Fair,  
 Play with the Tangles of her Hair,  
 Till in one loud applauding Sound  
 The Nations shout to Her around,  
 O how supremely art thou blest,  
 Thou, Lady, Thou shalt rule the West! (“Liberty” 137-44)

This unexpected replacement of Liberty with Concord fits into a larger pattern within the “Ode to Liberty” that calls into question the values of Thomson’s epic. As Levine notes of the two poems:

Collin’s ode borrows and transforms substantial parts of *Liberty* as its most important recent influence, especially as a model of patriotic poetry whose progressive Whig ideology is no longer tenable. The “Ode to Liberty” redirects pivotal themes, settings, and language in Thomson, resulting in a progress poem that fully responds to new crises in international politics and redefines the poet’s role as spokesman for the English national conscience. (553-54)

If Thomson's *Liberty* is recognized as an Augustan effort to recruit the privileged classes, including intellectuals, into the project of aggressive mercantile expansion, then Collins' "Ode to Liberty" must be seen as Romantic refusal of this calling.

Levine's analysis of these poems' shifting values and themes in "[response] to new crises," corresponds with the great realignment in intellectual politics that Gramsci, Lukács, and (to a lesser degree) Löwy and Sayre, have recognized as Romanticism. Moreover, Collins' redirections reveal two important impulses within the Romantic epic's emerging rhetorical structure. First, the "Ode to Liberty" provides us with one of the earliest examples of a poet-intellectual at work, "redefin[ing] the poet's role as spokesman for the English national conscience," to use Levine's language, or, in Carlyle's phrasing, to consider "the hero as [the] man of letters." Even if Prince Frederick is not the hero of Thomson's *Liberty*, then its epic hero "can only be something as vague as the disembodied idea of public virtue" (Sambrook 39), or, perhaps, the genius of commerce. Whatever the case, in the Augustan epic, it was standard to place the cultural-capital of epic poetry in the service of the ruling-elite. However, Collins' depiction of a "divine...Laureate Band" that might renew the British nation in the absence of *Liberty* anticipates the direct role of *intellectual* heroes that mark the Romantic epic.

Second, in choosing the form of the Pindaric ode, Collins appears to not only be consciously avoiding the Augustan epic but to be commenting on the genre's insufficiency for his political task. There is in Collins' refusal to match Thomson's epic with one of his own the sense that the epic form had become damaged goods, that its association with the intellectual practices of Augustan poets like Thomson and Blackmore had tainted the genre. As we will see, among the early Romantic intellectuals this distrust of the modern epic appears to be both intense and widespread, forming a pattern of response I call *epic disinheritance*. It is as though the Romantic

intellectual felt doubly estranged from the epic. The genre served as an index to an imagined intellectual history, a long tradition of intellectual practice from Homer to Milton, but the heroic intellectual life that it seemed to point to had no place in the commercialized world of the eighteenth century. Moreover, the proliferation of epic performances during the Augustan period, nearly all of which were so clearly out of step with the dominant values of the Romantic intellectual stratum (chiefly, intellectual autonomy), erected yet another barrier to the epic form. By the mid-eighteenth century, epic poetry, as it had been written in the Augustan period, had fallen out of favor. Today, there is a temptation when confronted with the publishing record to conclude that the entire genre of epic simply disappeared only to inexplicably re-emerge in the mid-1790s. Herbert Tucker tells us, for example, that, “during the eighteenth century the theory rather than practice of epic was where the genre lived” (43). However, if we define the Romantic epic not as a literary form but as a rhetorical genre, as certain a kind of motivated address to the man of letters about his place in the world, then looking back we find that the epic is not so much missing from the eighteenth century as submerged or redirected—but not gone.

Epic disinheritance and epic desire are, therefore, linked. Epic disinheritance is more than a refusal to participate in the discourse of the Augustan epic; it is a melancholic response to what is perceived to be the ancient epic’s foreclosure. Collins’ Pindarics must continually announce their failure to become epics, just as Macpherson’s *Ossian* was made to insistently perform historicity. Epic disinheritance places epic discourse in a double game, as poetry that must speak its own impossibility.

In response, Collins begins the work of constructing a new kind of epic by imagining a new social position for poet-intellectual as the true interpreter of history in the “Ode to Liberty,” but it was in another poem, the “Ode to the Poetical Character,” that he began to produce the set of

mythological tropes that sought to legitimize this claim. Read within the context of the transition to the Romantic epic, Collins' "Ode to the Poetical Character" reveals the complex negotiations of message and form which are necessary in order to produce large generic shifts. Like the later Romantic epic, "Ode to the Poetical Character" takes the poet-intellectual as its heroic subject; however, just as he does in the "Ode to Liberty," Collins again turns away from the epic structure. Instead, he models the "Ode to the Poetical Character" on Pindar's *epinikia* (victory odes). The Pindaric ode allowed Collins to avoid the Augustan epic's habit for sloganeering while still "sharing the public concerns of the epic" and its "appreciably high-cultural tone" (Kaul 201). It was also to Collins' purpose that the *epinikion* had traditionally allowed a more forward and heroic presence for the narrating voice of the poet, as Carol Maddison explains:

The Pindaric ode was characterized by passages of gnomic wisdom, and by what may seem strange at first, considering its public performance and semi-sacred character, by references to the poet's private feelings, to his inspiration, his artistic intent, his poetic rivals, and the jealousy he rouses. These personal references are not so strange, however, if we recollect the particular function of the *epinician*, which was to celebrate the glorious achievements of the Greek race recalled through this latest example of prowess, beauty, and divine grace. . . . [The poet], too, was god-inspired and as much a part of the great deed as the victorious athlete. Therefore, it is not inappropriate that he should comment on his inspiration and how it is working, that he should celebrate his triumph too. (8; qtd. in Kaul 201)

In redeploying the raw materials of the Pindaric ode to its new political purpose, Collins adapted the Pindaric's "external structure" (Kirk 38) and its pattern of thematic development by

swapping the idealized Greek athletic champion of Pindar with the figure of the heroic poet, which he abstracted as “the poetical character” (Kirk 38-39).

In keeping with the Pindaric formula, Collins divides the ode into three movements. In the first movement, he introduces the power of “the poetical character,” symbolized by the Spenserian image of the cest. In the second movement, there is a mythological development of that power that establishes a link between the secular and the religious. And finally, in the third, there is a closing eulogy for the “victor-poet—Milton—one of those few to whom the cest, or now the trump, has been given” (39). Working within this triadic structure, Collins uncovers both the modern potentialities of the *epinikion* and its ideological limitations.

The juxtaposition of the classical with neo-classical allows Collins to weave a dense layer of obscure and difficult allusions which signal the poem’s audience as *litterati* and anticipates the exclusionary position of the Romantic epic. Indeed, the poem’s obscurity has been a continuous aspect of its reception. Critics for more than two centuries, from Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1797) to Richard Wendorf (1981), have faulted Collins’s for being unnecessarily abstruse (Kirk 32). The minor Romantic poet, Edward Smedley, commented, “[Collins] wants the power of unfolding his own conceptions to others” (306). But, like Gray who “inserts, as the epigraph to 'The Progress of Poesy' and 'The Bard,' a phrase from Pindar: 'Vocal to the Intelligent Alone'” (Kaul 201), Collins’ high degree of exclusionary intertextuality belongs to the same fundamental stance of the Romantic epic, which sought that ideal and narrow readership recorded by Wordsworth (recalling Milton) as a “fit audience...though few” (*Recluse* I.776).

In the “Ode to the Poetical Character,” Collins legitimizes the claim for the “poet’s role as spokesman for the English national conscious” made in the “Ode to Liberty” by drawing the ancient epic tradition together with the English epic writers (Spenser and Milton), thereby

establishing an intellectual authority based on an imagined “prophetic” (W. Collins “Poetical” 21) line stretching back to antiquity. Collins then extends this argument through the central section of the poem, which mythologizes the origins of poetic practice, by drawing together elements of ancient Greek and Christian mythology and fusing them with epic scenes from Homer, Spenser, and Milton. In doing so, Collins’ “poetical character” is imbued with a divine right whose origins appear to transcend any single mythological system. Moreover, the “poetical character” is actually generated through the realization of its own constructedness, so that the poetic power is most visible in the act of manufacturing mythologies, particularly mythologies about the poet-intellectual.

Perhaps the artist has always been a mythmaker—an ideologist. But the distance between the epics of Blackmore, which mythologized the ruling class, and a poem like Collins’ “Ode to the Poetical Character,” which mythologized the intellectual, measures the unprecedented degree of transformation in European intellectual life and consciousness that occurred during the first half of the eighteenth century. Even as a work that anticipates the later Romantic epic, the “Ode to the Poetical Character” is remarkable for its rehearsal of the iconic images of the Romantic intellectual mythology.

Among the most important of these mythic constructions is the poet’s trump of prophecy. The trump and its less brash twin, the Aeolian harp, became important stock images of the power of the Romantic intellectual. Collins’ trump, it should be noted, is unusually layered. It first appears in the poem as a prize awarded to Fancy, a “magic Girdle” (“Poetic” 6), or the Cest:

The Cest of amplest Pow'r is giv'n:  
 To few the God-like Gift assigns,  
 To gird their blest prophetic Loins,

And gaze her Visions wild, and feel unmix'd her Flame! (19-22).

The allusions are drawn both from girdle of Florimel in Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and cestus of Aphrodite in the *Iliad* (Kirk 33-34), but placement of the Girdle/Cest at the start of the Pindaric ode also implies that it is also a stand-in for the athletic prize, the laurel-wreath (39). Thus, the "victory" that is the subject of this victory ode is nothing less than the intellectual achievement recorded as a "vision[ary]" (22), "prophetic" (21), and "God-like Gift" (20). The central section of the ode lends the Girdle/Cest—now referred to as "The Band" (23)—even more mythological heft by describing how it was woven on the seventh day of creation. And the third and final grouping of stanzas presents Milton (presumably the last to receive this mantle and at the very instant of his poetic inspiration) beneath the tree of poetry with the trump of prophecy hanging high in its branches. As Gerald Kirk explains, in this final scene, "[a]lthough the girdle seems to have changed somehow into the trump, and the cest has apparently dropped from view in the process, it is clear that girdle, cest, and trump are signs of special power and also of divine recognition of that power" (Kirk 38).

As a symbol, the trump, existing not only as itself but also as the girdle, the cest, and the band, might appear needlessly muddled, but as Barthes explains this kind of proliferation of signifiers is standard in the language of myth. "A signified can have several signifiers," Barthes tells us, "this is indeed the case in linguistics and psycho-analysis. It is also the case in the mythical concept: it has at its disposal an unlimited mass of signifiers" (Barthes 120). To understand why, it must be recalled that the "mythic concept," or the signified that these many signifiers point to, according to Barthes, is "determined, . . . at once historical and intentional; it is the motivation which causes the myth to be uttered" (118). In short, the concept, itself, is situated—socially, historically, politically. What is striking about the mythic sign system,

however, is that the mythic concept seeks to remove itself from its context, to escape from history and disappear behind the meaning of the more established signifiers it appropriates to represent itself. Each of the signifiers (trump, girdle, cest, band) that Collins calls on to represent the divine right of the intellectual has a meaning; each exists as a sign with a context of its own. But the structure of the mythic sign-system that Collins encodes evacuates these meanings and fills them with the contents of the mythic concept. A ghost of their original meaning may remain, to be drawn on in defense of the mythic concept, but the intention of Collins' language, of all mythic language, is to turn the allusive into the elusive.

Thus, returning to Kirk's description of the mythic concept in Collins' ode as a "special power and also a recognition of that power," the reluctance of the mythic concept to speak of its own contingency is readily apparent. This so-called "special power" is, of course, one that issues from and seeks to legitimize an elite status for the intellectual bloc. It is a demand that is neither timeless nor universal. Yet, it is presented in just that way. Collins is writing at a key transition period in the history of the intellectual community, a time when the identity and direction of the intellectual community underwent a radical realignment. The function of his writing is to redefine the intellectual task, even while masking the very shift he seeks to enact behind a screen of tradition. The poem intends to justify this change in intellectual activity on the grounds that the artist was always-already a divine prophet and a social visionary, in effect, to claim that this change is actually no change at all. And to accomplish this work, Collins grants the trump a legitimizing depth, a cultural backstory, acquired through the constellations of allusions and images that meet in it that support the authority of the poet-intellectual.

Another less developed but immediately recognizable example of myth-making by Collins in the ode is the familiar trope of the prophetic poet-intellectual on the sublime mountain top:

High on some Cliff, to Heaven up-pil'd,  
 Of rude Access, of Prospect wild,  
 Where, tangled round the jealous Steep,  
 Strange Shades o'erbrow the Valleys deep,  
 And holy Genii guard the Rock,  
 Its Gloomes embrown, its Springs unlock,  
 While on its rich ambitious Head,  
 An Eden, like his own, lies spread. ("Poetical" 55-62)

If the rhythms cause us to recall the cant of Coleridge, how much more does the image remind of us of Gray's "Bard," Beattie's *Minstrel*, Wordsworth on Mt. Snowdon, or Shelley atop Mont Blanc? My point is not that Collins invented this mythic image, or that his use inspired the others, for the raw materials were readily accessible and can be shown to lie, among other places, in the prospect poem, or *Paradise Lost*, or even Moses atop Sinai. In fact, a thorough unpacking of these lines would, I think, require an eye to each. My point is that from the mid-eighteenth century on the solitary figure atop the mountain increasingly functions as a mythological narrative about the origins and social position/function of the intellectual stratum.

I have been arguing that Collins' Pindaric odes are indicative of an emerging discourse arising out of the growing intellectual stratum; yet it is curious that the closing of the "Ode to Poetic Character" should speak so forcefully about the decline of the poet. The speaker, who has been a witness to the glory of Milton's moment of divine inspiration, laments:

My trembling Feet his [Milton's] guiding Steps pursue;  
 In vain — Such Bliss to One alone,  
 Of all the Sons of Soul was known,

And Heav'n and Fancy, kindred Pow'rs,

Have now o'erturned th' inspiring Bow'rs,

Or curtain'd close such Scene from ev'ry future View. ("Poetical" 71-76).

We might ask ourselves why, in a poem that seeks to glorify the poet-intellectual, is the speaker's effort to follow in Milton's footsteps said to be "in vain." One explanation might be that the values of neo-classicism had already established a narrative of poetic loss with the progress of civilization. To some degree, in the "Ode to the Poetical Character" Collins must be seen as alluding to, or working with, the raw materials of this tradition, although it should be noted that he is certainly redirecting its ideological purpose by replacing the far removed sanctity of Homer with the near-modern Milton. If Collins is entering the early-eighteenth century debate between the superiority of the ancients or the modern poets, he appears to side with Milton and the moderns, although he also figures himself several generations past the pinnacle and, ultimately, the end of poetry.

However, this unexpected move sets up the reader to grasp what I believe to be the deeper, and more important, message of the ode's conclusion: that the present, the immediate "now" (75), is grossly out of step not with some remote and idealized savage past but with the progressive and recent past. Read in the context of the challenge to Whig ideology found in the "Ode to Liberty," the concluding lines of Collins' "Ode to the Poetical Character" construct the present moment as a point of historical rupture, a location where futurity, stagnating, becomes forever divided from its own past. Moreover, when read against the history of the intellectual bloc, the ode marks an early point of departure for the bourgeois intellectual, who was losing faith in his bourgeois masters, perhaps even the whole of the capitalist project. Thus, the "poetical character," who is embodied first in that heavenly witness (the "rich-hair'd Youth of

Morn” (39)) and then later in the inspired figure of Milton (63-71), in both its divinity and its passing, also stands for the unrealized aspirations of the intellectual community.

Yet, there remains one last thread to follow. The ode’s pessimistic conclusion must also be tied to the structure of the *epinikion* (which, as I have already indicated, terminates in eulogy). There is a productive fit, then, between the expectations of loss engendered by the Pindaric ode’s traditional generic form and the disillusionment that this poem seeks to convey. Even had the epic not become the instrument of bourgeois apologists and yea-sayers, its unassailable confidence made it an impossible location for Collins’ theme, and the move away from epic to a culturally high-toned but “lesser” genre in the “Ode to Liberty,” reinforces the meaning of the phrase “inspiring Bow’rs now o’erturned.” Still, the form of the victory ode also pressures Collins’ message into an unexpected turn. The shift in subject matter from a single protagonist (the athletic champion) to a collective one (the community of intellectuals) threatens to turn the genre’s traditional memorial to a single athlete into an accusation of “class” genocide—a theme more directly encountered in Thomas Gray’s poem, “The Bard.” In “Ode to the Poetical Character,” some of this tension in these final lines is alleviated with the introduction of Milton as the poet *par excellence*, restoring at least the appearance of the single protagonist, which, I think, must be read as a compromise between the poem’s message and its form. However, this compromise comes at the cost of opening the possibility of a hagiographic misreading, a reading that would take the historical Milton as the ode’s focus instead of recognizing Milton as simply a stand-in of the idealized intellectual bloc.

Gray—"The Progress of Poesy"

Thomas Gray was already working through the shifting cultural anxieties that attended eighteenth-century intellectual life, even before Collins' volume of *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects* (1746), as early as the four poems written in 1742 (Kaul 111-12).<sup>33</sup> As Suvir Kaul asserts, to review Gray's poetic corpus is to be reminded that,

there is little verse that Gray wrote that is not explicitly concerned with the figure of the poet, either represented as such or as a clearly identifiable surrogate . . . , and . . . very often, the specific details of the poem (setting, occasion, incorporated myths, apostrophic invocations) are, as it were, glosses on the central questions: what is the role of the poet and of his poetry, what are the roles the poet must play in order to ensure a role for himself and his poetry, what are the sources of authority that a poet might claim for himself, and what is the authority that contemporary society will allow the poet? (58)

Gray was meticulous and slow to compose, and due, in part, to his comparatively limited output there are many excellent book length studies available that engage with the full body of his poetic production, including important readings by Kaul, Roger Lonsdale, and B. E. McCarthy. As Kaul makes clear, any one of Gray's poems might be taken for the purpose of demonstrating aspects of the cultural and political crisis arising in the intellectual stratum discussed as "the role of the poet." Again, however, two Pinadrics stand out: "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard." Both poems were first published in 1757 by Horace Walpole in a small volume of only nineteen pages simply titled, *Odes, by Mr. Gray*.

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<sup>33</sup> "Ode on Spring," "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," "Sonnet [on the Death of Mr. Richard West]," and "Ode to Adversity"

Just as with Collins' "Ode to Liberty" and "Ode to the Poetical Character," Gray's "Progress of Poesy" is yet another "attempt to resolve the problematic of literary authority, to find a position and discourse from which the poet can speak with power" (Kaul 189). And like the Pindarics of Collins, Gray can be seen working within the structural movements of the *epinikion*, although, in Gray's poems, each of the three movements is expanded into its own triadic verse structure, creating a repeating pattern of strophe, antistrophe, and epode that thematically progresses, even as the metrical order recurs. Each triad, then, takes up the central "problematic of literary authority" in its different aspects: the first establishes the nature of poetic power; the second sacralizes and universalizes that power; while the third embodies poetic power through the use of eulogy. Together, this thematic triad operates to create a totalizing mythology about the role of poetry that legitimizes the intellectual bloc.

The first triad establishes intellectual power as "harmonious" (3):

Awake, Aeolian lyre, awake	I.1
And give to rapture all thy trembling strings.	
From Helicon's harmonious springs	
A thousand rills their mazy progress take:	
The laughing flowers, that round them blow,	
Drink life and fragrance as they flow.	
Now the rich stream of music winds along,	
Through verdant vales and Cere's golden reign:	
Now rolling down the seep amain,	
Headlong, impetuous, see it pour:	
The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar.	

Oh! Sovereign of the willing soul, I.2  
 Parent of the sweet and solemn-breathing airs,  
 Enchanting shell! The sullen Cares  
 And frantic passions hear thy soft control.  
 On Thracia's hills the Lord of War,  
 Has curbed the fury of his car,  
 And dropped his thirsty lance at thy command.  
 Perching on the sceptred hand  
 Of Jove, thy magic lulls the feathered king  
 With ruffled plumes and flagging wing:  
 Quenched in dark clouds of slumber lie  
 The terror of his beak, and lightning of his eye.

Thee the voice, the dance, obey, I.3  
 Tempered to thy warbled lay.  
 O'er Idalia's velvet green  
 Thy rosy-crowned Loves are seen  
 On Cytherea's day  
 With antic Sports and blue-eyed Pleasures,  
 Frisking light in frolic measures;  
 Now pursuing, now retreating,  
 Now in circling troops they meet:

To brisk notes in cadence beating  
 Glance their many-twinkling feet.  
 Slow melting strains their queen's approach declare:  
 Where'er she turns the Graces homage pay.  
 With arms sublime, that float upon the air,  
 In gliding state she wins her easy way:  
 O'er her warm cheek and rising bosom move  
 The bloom of young desire and purple light of love. (1-40)

In the first strophe, the force of poesy, presented as "Aeolian" (1) music, is likened to the gathering waters of a river, whose "thousand rills their mazy progress take" (4) through lush landscape, each tiny rivulet combining into a "rich stream" (7) that ends in a "roar[ing]" (11) cataract. The antistrophe then follows with an image of social discord resolved into harmony, as Mars, "the Lord of War" (17), is compelled to drop his arms at the soothing sounds of "solemn-breathing airs" (14). The epode then closes the first triad with the picture of Poesy leading a sort of Brueghelian dance:

Now pursuing, now retreating  
 Now in circling troops they meet  
 To brisk notes in cadence beating  
 Glance their many-twinkling feat. (32-35).

Just as in Collins' Pindarics, Gray's first three stanzas do not construct a narrative, but develop a composite image of intellectual power by way of a technique that is akin to advanced methods of

cinematic montage.<sup>34</sup> Through the layering of vignettes, the harmonizing power of poesy emerges in the first triad as both all-pervasive and naturalized. Its reach extends not only across the landscape, “Thro’ verdant vales, and Ceres’ golden reign” (9), but within the water, air, and earth, as each elemental locale is highlighted in turn, within its own stanza. Embedded within Gray’s depiction of poetic power as all-encompassing and ahistorical (thus, self-legitimizing) is a vision of the poet-intellectual as the mediator of class-struggle, the binding agent of social concord that organizes noise into a chorus and the mob’s actions into a dance. This depiction of poetic-power produces a double-movement that at once reveals the social function of the working ideologist to manufacture hegemony, while at the same time obscuring the ideologist’s origins and the social foundation of his power.

The second triad secures this vision of intellectual power by answering any imagined doubts:

Man’s feeble race what ills await,

II.1

Labour, and penury, the racks of pain,

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<sup>34</sup> I have in mind here not the simple rhythmic editing that denotes an advancement in the narrative action while providing an opportunity for the audience to relax their attention (i.e., the audience is shown shots in rapid succession of Rocky Balboa training for an upcoming bout. It does not matter if push-ups follow jogging or jumping rope, what matters is that the audience recognizes the cumulative meaning of the sequence—Rocky progressively is able to train harder and faster—and once that pattern is established the audience is then free to go on cognitive recess for the remainder of three and a half minutes, until which time the narrative action picks up again. The intent here is only to convey that our hero is, as the song says, “getting strong now” and that his hard work has produced in our minds the expectation of moral force—that he deserves to succeed—that supports the narrative). No, what I have in mind is a process that works very much like Sergei Eisenstein’s description of “intellectual montage,” where complex meaning is constructed not through *the succession of images* but by *the juxtaposition of shots* that become cognitively layered upon each other to create a composite understanding not available in the use of a single image. Eisenstein believed that this essentially non-narrative form of structuring in film was the artistic realization of the dialectical practice of Hegel and Marx. There is, however, in my view, a similarity between the cognitive demands of dialectical inquiry, the viewing of advanced montage, and the reading (or hearing) of Pindaric odes, as “[t]he Pindaric ode does not build chiefly on narrative but is an incremental structure—characteristic of its oral heritage—which, while adding information, increases images whose interrelation may be only juxtaposed.... The Pindaric is not anxious to answer questions about narrative” (McCarthy 175)

Disease, and sorrow's weeping train,  
 And death, sad refuge from the storms of fate!  
 The fond complaint, my song disprove,  
 And justify the laws of Jove.  
 Say, has he given in vain the heavenly Muse?  
 Night, and all her sickly dews,  
 Her spectres wan, and birds of boding cry,  
 He gives to range the dreary sky:  
 Till down the eastern cliffs afar  
 Hyperion's march they spy, and glittering shafts of war.

In climes beyond the solar road, II.2  
 Where shaggy forms o'er ice-built mountains roam,  
 To cheer the shivering native's dull aboad.  
 And oft, beneath the odorous shade  
 Of Chile's boundless forest laid,  
 She deigns to hear the savage youth repeat  
 In loose numbers sweet  
 Their feather-cinctured chiefs, and dusky loves.  
 Her track, where'er the goddess roves,  
 Glory pursue, and generous Shame,  
 The unconquerable Mind, and Freedom's holy flame

II.3

Woods that wave o'er Delphi's steep,  
 Isles that crown the Aegean deep,  
 Fields that cool Ilissus laves,  
 Or where Maeander's ambers waves  
 In lingering lab'rinth creep,  
 How do your tuneful echoes languish,  
 Mute, but to the voice of anguish?  
 Where each old poetic mountain  
 Inspiration breathed around:  
 Every shade and hallowed fountain  
 Murmured deep a solemn sound:  
 Till the sad Nine in Greece's evil hour  
 Left their Parnassus for the Latian plains.  
 Alike they scorn the pomp of tyrant-power,  
 And coward Vice that revels in her chains.  
 When Latium had her lofty spirit lost,  
 They sought, oh Albion! next the sea-encircled coast. (42-82)

Here, the strophe asserts the ultimate triumph of poetic harmony even in the presence of the allegorical figures of life's ills:

Labour, and Penury, the racks of Pain  
 Disease, and Sorrow's weeping train,  
 And Death, sad refuge from the storm of Fate! (42-44)

The speaker maintains that such obstacles are like night: only temporary. If life's miseries are like the night and poesy is like daylight, then intellectual force is, by its nature, not only balancing but literally enlightening. Thus, the stanza takes what first appears to be the countervailing evidence of misery which seems to speak against a world organized by poetic power and transforms it into further proof of Poesy's role in establishing a harmonious order. The antistrophe continues and extends this logic, as the reader is shown how "[t]he Muse has broke the twilight gloom" (56) of "Chile's boundless forests" (59) to teach the savage bard "[i]n loose numbers wildly sweet" of "Freedom's holy flame" (65). Here the role of the poet-intellectual is again universalized across space; Chile has its freedom seeking poets as does England. Finally, the concluding epode further advances this line, as Poesy is shown amid the rise and fall of empires—Greek, Roman, and English. Where the previous stanza diffused Gray's view of Poesy across the globe, Poesy is now sent hurtling through time.

The cumulative effect of these stanzas is to author a vision of Poesy without limits, neither national nor cultural, neither spatial nor temporal. This is the mythologizing of intellectual power, made ubiquitous and embedded so firmly in the natural order as to be unassailable. It is also securely ahistorical, divorced from the social relations and material order that has made modern intellectualism possible.

It is this last point that becomes remarkably apparent in the final triad. The last three stanzas present three great English poets (Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden) and, presumably, Gray in the eulogizing mode of the traditional Pindaric:

Far from the sun and summer-gale,

III.1

In thy green lap was Nature's darling laid,

What time, where lucid Avon strayed,

To him the mighty Mother did unveil  
 Her awful face: the dauntless child  
 Stretched forth his little arms and smiled.  
 “this pencil take,” (she said) “whose colours clear  
 Richly paint the vernal year:  
 Thine too these golden keys, immortal boy!  
 This can unlock the gates of joy;  
 Of horror that, and thrilling fears,  
 Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears.”

Nor second he, that rode sublime III.2  
 Upon the seraph-wings of Ecstasy,  
 The secrets of the abyss to spy.  
 He passed the flaming bounds of place and time:  
 The living throne, the sapphire-blaze,  
 Where angels tremble while they gaze,  
 He saw; but blasted with excess of light,  
 Closed his eyes in endless night.  
 Behold, where Dryden’s less presumptuous car,  
 Wide o’er the fields of glory bear  
 Two coursers of ethereal race,  
 With necks in thunder clothed, and long-resounding pace.

III.3

Hark, his hands the lyre explore!  
 Bright-eyed Fancy hovering o'er  
 Scatters from her pictured urn  
 Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.  
 But ah! 'tis heard no more—  
 Oh! lyre divine, what daring sprit  
 Wakes thee now? Though he inherit  
 Nor the pride, nor ample pinion,  
 That Theban eagle bear  
 Sailing with supreme dominion  
 Through the azure deep of air:  
 Yet oft before his infant eyes would run  
 Such forms, as glitter in the Muse's ray  
 With oriental hues, unborrowed of the sun:  
 Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way  
 Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,  
 Beneath the Good how far—but far above the Great. (83-123)

Shakespeare is depicted as a natural genius. He is “Nature’s Darling” (84) and the picture that the reader is shown is of a small, untaught, “immortal Boy” (92) who is granted access to the full range of human sympathetic responses. This portrait is then followed by that of Milton:

He that rode sublime  
 Upon the seraph-wings of Extasy  
 The secrets of th' Abyss to spy. (95-97)

As it was in the first triad, Poesy is equated with light, which, now in its “excess” (101), is responsible for “blast[ing]” (101) the vision of the epic poet. Then, midway through the antistrophe the speaker unexpectedly shifts to Dryden, whose verse is referred to as “less presumptuous” (103)—Dryden’s career is marked by a careful avoidance of the epic—but still receives a full apotheosis. The lines on Dryden, which uncharacteristically span across the antistrophe and epode, depict him as an Apollonian figure confidently playing on the lyre of poetry while he is wheeled across the sky in a chariot pulled by two horses representing his mastery of the couplet.

This “parade of heroes” (a traditional epic structure adapted by Gray and redeployed in this Pindaric) ends with the figure of the living poet: Gray. Just as it was with speaker in Collin’s “Ode to the Poetic Character” who finds contemporary poetic life to be “in vain,” so it is, too, with the speaker here. Although Dryden possesses “Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn” (110), the speaker can only sigh: “But ah! ‘tis heard no more” (111). McCarthy has suggested that this silence “need only elegize Dryden’s death” (183), but I agreed with Hartman that the movement actually points, instead, to a rather “pessimistic ending” for the poem (197; qtd. in McCarthy 183).

As I have already said of Collins’ use of this same theme in closing “Ode to the Poetical Character,” the lament of the end of poetry, although it is a novel development in the Pindarics of mid-eighteenth century, is more or less consistent with the Pindaric’s traditional conclusion in eulogy. What is more important for this analysis, however, is the way this recurring depiction of loss points to a structure of feeling within the intellectual community informing both poems. For, even with all of its effort to construct a mythology of intellectual power, Gray’s “Progress”

also operates as a social critique issuing from the intellectual stratum. At the close of the poem the poet-intellectual is forced outside of society, to:

keep his distant way

Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,

Beneath the Good how far—but far above the Great. (121-123)

Here, in “keeping his distant way,” it is not that the speaker has chosen some form of scholarly isolation but that he stands removed the structure of the social fabric: somewhere below “the Good,” and yet “above the Great.” It is an image of profound cultural and political dislocation. McCarthy, in his reading of Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” finds that the language of Gray’s poet-speaker “reveals the increasing separation of himself from his urban associates and simultaneously from these idealized rural folks, as if he is encountering increased difficulty in understanding his own emotions, beliefs, and allegiances” (135). In the conclusion to Gray’s “Progress” we might see this formula as restated and essentially unchanged, especially if we take “the Good,” whom the speaker is humbled by, to mean those same “idealized rural folks” and “the Great,” whom the speaker surpasses, to mean those same philistine urban elites discussed in the “Elegy” (McCarthy 183). Such a reading sees Gray’s work as constructing the ideological basis for a new social identity for the intellectual stratum in articulating the very crisis of identification that provokes the poem’s necessity.

Finally, it is worth noticing how shift in tone in the last stanza opens a vantage from which the reader might witness the intellectual critique of modernity that has lain dormant throughout the poem’s landscape. For example, the unorthodox structure of the last triad, which awkwardly wedges four poets into the space of three stanzas, seems to suggest an unnatural constraint upon cultural progress. Similarly, returning to the second epode (II.3) with the pessimism of the

poem's last stanza in mind, the reader may be more apt to notice that what at first appears to be an "orthodox progress piece" (Kaul 193) uniting the cultural histories of Greece, Rome, and England looks more like a narrative of cyclical social collapse. The sigh for the loss of poetry that is heard in the final epode (111) now appears to have been anticipated in the cry, "oh Albion!" (81)—a lament for the lost glory of England. Thus, reading back, the tone of the poem shifts, so that a new elegiac thread now appears within its total fabric. Even the dancing peasants of the first epode become a sight for mourning amid the pressures placed on the happy picture by [1] the Pindaric's impulse for eulogy in the epode, [2] the kind of cultural loss articulated in the second and third triad, [3] the opposition articulated between the rural "Good" and the urban "Great" found in the last stanza, and [4] the reality of expropriation which was rapidly dismantling the forms of rural life that are being celebrated here.

If Gray's poem is to be read as a progress piece, as the title indicates, it can only be a kind of progression that is achieved in spite of profound losses. As Kaul remarks, "Gray could no more write an unqualified national panegyric that he could locate himself (as a poet) within an enabling socio-cultural consensus or community" (202). Gray's image of the poet-intellectual as a harmonizer, as a timeless and natural prophet of "The unconquerable Mind, and Freedom's holy flame" (65), is ultimately that of a phoenix rising from the darkness of a commercial society that has ruined the nation, disappeared "the Good," and left no room for the voice of the conscientious intellectual.

#### Gray—"The Bard"

It is against this backdrop of deep cultural pessimism that readers should approach "The Bard," perhaps the most daring of the mid-eighteenth-century Pindarics to anticipate the

Romantic epic. Like “The Progress,” “The Bard” is also organized as Pindaric triads, but here Gray incorporates more elements from the traditional epic. The most noticeable is a plainly articulated narrative, as a draft of the poem’s argument found in Gray’s common-place book makes clear:

The army of Edward I as they march through a deep valley, are suddenly stopped by the appearance of a venerable figure seated on the summit of an inaccessible rock, who, with a voice more than human, reproaches the King with all the misery and desolation which he had brought on his country; foretells the misfortunes of the Norman race, and with prophetic spirit declares, that all his cruelty shall never extinguish the noble ardour of poetic genius in this island; and that men shall never be wanting to celebrate true virtue and valour in immortal strains, to expose vice and infamous pleasure, and boldly censure tyranny and oppression. His song ended, he precipitates himself from the mountain, and is swallowed up by the river that rolls at its feet. (Gray *Poems* [1775] 91)

Unlike the Pindarics of Collins and Gray’s “Progress,” the meaning of “The Bard,” like nearly all epics, derives from an understanding of its basic plot.

In addition to the Pindaric’s relatively straight forward story, the poem also makes use of several other elements of the traditional epic. The first triad begins *in media res*, with the voice of the bard cursing the approaching monarch: ““Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!”” (1); and it ends with an epic catalog of the names of fallen bards, “a grisly band” (44), who “died amidst your dying country’s cries” (42). The second triad operates within an epic scale spanning several centuries of history and forming another catalog, this time relating the prophetic vision concerning the fate of Edward and his accursed line. And the third triad, which completes the narrative by contrasting the English Edward’s “doom” (96) with the victory of the Welsh through

the Tudor line, contains a lesser catalog of greater English poets (Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton) that is told before the bard leaps to his death. Once permitted to impose an artificial, but in this case critically productive, distinction between poetic form and poetic content, Gray's "Bard" is revealed to be a sort of Pindaric shell that has been evacuated in order to make room for the meat of an epic performance that was no longer (or not yet) possible.

Gray's transformation of the traditional epic catalog, which runs across the first antistrophe an epode, is a fine example of the type of generic innovation of which Gray was capable:

'Vocal no more, since Cambria's fatal day,  
'To high-born Hoël's harp, or soft Llewellyn's Lay.

I.3

'Cold is Cadwallo's tongue,  
'That hush'd the stormy main:  
'Brave Urien sleeps upon his craggy bed:  
'Mountains, ye morn in vain  
'Modred, whose magic song  
'Made huge Plinlimmon bow his cloud-top'ed head.  
'On dreary Arvon's shore they lie,  
'Smear'd with gore, and ghastly pale. (Gray "Bard" 27-36)

There is a doubling of the epic catalog here, as the names of Welsh bards (Hoël, Llewellyn, Cadwallo, Urien, and Modred) are associated with names from the Welsh landscape (Cambria, Plinlimmon, and Arvon, to which Gray's 1768 footnote to these lines also adds Caernarvonshire and Anglesey). These interweaving lists accomplish some of the same work that was expected of the traditional epic catalog. First, they fulfill what might be thought of as the catalog's

primary purpose within the context of the traditional epic: to enhance the sense of epic scale, or the poem's mimetic totality. In fact, the fusing of these two minor catalogs actually produces a greater sense of scope than would have otherwise been possible within the limits of the Pindaric's length; how many names of fallen bards, how many more lines of poetic elaboration, would have been necessary to achieve the same sense of a national bardic community that Gray achieves here? Second, Gray uses a "parade of heroes" to develop a nationalist theme, an important, even if only occasional, function of the traditional epic catalog.

But while preserving these traditional functions, Gray also expands the range of the epic catalog's purpose. Just as he had done in the final triad of the "The Progress of Poesy," Gray also uses this "parade of heroes" to establish a transhistoric, poetic/intellectual community. Certainly the list of Hoël, Llewellyn, Cadwallo, Urien, and Modred appears quite localized, specific to Wales of the thirteenth century. But when the reader adds to this list the other intellectuals that that are also part of the poem—the sixth-century bard, Taliessin (121), the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poets alluded to in the epode of the third triad (Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton), and the contemporary (eighteenth-century) poetic speaker, along with, presumably, the poem's intended audience—then the epic catalog becomes radically extended, losing both its ancient and nationalist flavor. In what is a remarkable act of formal and conceptual innovation this epic catalog seems to spill not only across the poem but also outside of it, overflowing the banks of the epic's nationalist heritage and historical *milieu*.

This innovative deployment of the epic catalog works at another level, as well. In establishing this long intellectual lineage the catalog reads as an allusive elaboration of the traditional epic device known as an epic genealogy, whereby an epic hero is referred to by his patronymic (as the "son of"). Reading the epic catalog as an epic genealogy, however, has the

effect of shifting the identity of the poem's epic hero from the thirteenth-century Bard of the narrative to the modern bard who acts as the narrator. After all, the names from the roll call of the dead are not the Bard's ancestors (this is not his genealogy; they are his companions) but the modern bard's, whom through this poetic performance traces his patrilineal heritage past the giants of the English Renaissance back to the ancient bards of Wales. The ambiguity that develops between these lines acting both as catalog and genealogy introduces a dramatic turn in the poem's political messaging. In the 1768 edition, Gray affixed the poem's title, which, following the accepted practice for epic poetry, uses the epic hero's name: "The Bard." But which bard is named by this title, the ancient martyr or the modern poet who re-embodies his spirit of opposition? By taking on and alluding to other traditional epic devices (namely, the parade of heroes and the epic genealogy) Gray modifies the function of the epic catalog so that it again directs the reader beyond the category of the hero or the nation, appropriating epic scale in order to manufacture an identification that is more properly thought of as "class." Returning to the question of which Bard is the poem's epic hero, the ancient Bard or the modern one, the answer is simply yes. For, the poem is not a celebration of any single poet but of an imagined transhistoric bardism, a "lost tradition and a dispersed community" (Fairer and Gerrard 363) of protesters with pre-capitalist origins, who, at the current moment of poetic production and consumption, are being recruited by the poem back to their legendary ancient service.

There is, then, a political urgency, a call to action, in "The Bard" that is often neglected, because, in its myth-making, it wears historical drag. Eighteenth-century class politics are given a historical cover in the poem and with good reason. Just as Marx writes that history is not made by people "in circumstances they choose for themselves; rather they make it in present circumstances, given and inherited" ("Eighteenth" 19), so it must be said of the formulation of

political ideas and the generic forms which are tasked with conveying those ideas. While “The Bard” takes the thirteenth-century conquest of Wales as its direct subject, its political roots are, more immediate, “in present circumstances,” and at the same time received, or “given, and inherited.” Thus, in order to express the current political crisis of the intellectual stratum Gray draws on the existing English fable of the Norman Yoke, a political discourse that stretched back to Cromwell’s Great Rebellion. Similarly, unable to work from any authentic, surviving thirteenth-century bardic tradition of intellectual opposition, Gray’s artistic direction was necessarily borrowed from the epist Abraham Cowley’s Pindaric “Ode to Brutus” (1656), whose titular subject also chose to “kill himself rather than serve” (18; Johnston 60-61).<sup>35</sup> Thus, “The Bard” presents an imagined encounter from the thirteenth century in order to deliver a political fable for the eighteenth, but it is fable that must be mediated by the already outmoded class-tropes of language and form that had been handed down from the seventeenth century. The point is that in performing this historicism, the poem is less concerned with the actual history of Norman conquests, or even the function of its own seventeenth-century political and artistic sources, than the network of contemporary social relations burdening the intellectual community. In short, both the figures of Edward I and the Bard must be read abstractly, allegorically rather than concretely and historically, each as the avatars of what is imagined to be a long conflict

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<sup>35</sup> Cowley’s “Ode to Brutus” is an interesting example of just far intellectuals had moved from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth. Cowley was a court poet and a committed Royalist at the outbreak of the English Civil War. Despite the fact that that the tyrannicide, Brutus, was easily misread as Cromwell, a reading that made Cowley suspect after the restoration, T. R. Langley has convincingly shown that Cowley’s Brutus was intended to point to Cowley, himself, as a figure who also had his career cut short by a chance fall of the State and as a negative example of one who did not have the fortitude to remain obedient to God’s divine will after his party had been temporarily defeated. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, Brutus was being redeployed as a martyred symbol of native English freedom, not only as the silent inspiration behind Gray’s “Bard” but also later at that unusual intersection of political thought where English Norman Yoke mythology met sympathetically with radical elements of the French Revolution. The clearest examples of such sentiments may be found in Anne Yeasley’s radical drama, *Earl Goodwin* (1789), and her epic fragment, *Brutus* (1796).

between class interests separating the intellectual from the dominant bloc. As Arthur Johnson notes, "[t]he Army of Edward represents political oppression, in which the arts cannot flourish, the arts Gray had defined, in notes prepared for his poem on 'The Alliance of Education and Government,' as 'eloquence, policy, morality, poetry, sculpture, painting, architecture'" (59).

Therefore, the poem's historical dress is, to a substantial degree, the result of the pressures produced by received forms and tropes that invariably plague emergent discourses, frequently turning them about, so that they are forced to witness the present moment from over their own shoulders, as if their todays were already behind them. Thus, even as the long critical tradition of Marxist-materialism demonstrates (and this study is no exception), insight must necessarily be written as hindsight. Yet, how much more difficult is it for those speech acts that seek to not only witness to the present hegemonic compromise but begin constructing alternatives to it? In such cases, foresight often has no other credible domain than the past.

Gray's "Bard" attempts both. It is statement of its present political crisis and, at the same time, a vision of the intellectual bloc's potential, coded not as the fulfillment of history but as history's collapse, as the inevitable return of the past. This sort of backward futurism is, of course, the very definition of reactionary conservatism, and Romanticism, by its nature as an emergent discourse that is often shunted into antiquarianism, is frequently labeled as such. But labeling Romanticism as essentially a conservative reaction only obscures the complexity of the period's class antagonisms, particularly in relation to the intellectual bloc. Gray's "Bard," for example, does not celebrate Elizabeth I in order to champion absolutism (or even English nationalism) but to point to a time of supposed intellectual co-governance, which is imagined in the poem as a return of a more democratic social order previously found in pre-Norman Wales. The historicity of the poem's claims was not really important to either Gray or his readers. The

footnotes to “The Bard” provide only the barest ideological cover for the poem’s project, and when Gray later realized that the English crackdown on Welsh bardism was not nearly as severe as he originally believed, he chose not to alter the poem. Here, history only serves as a half-empty canvas where an alternative socio-political order to the present hegemony can be painted in. Unlike the political nostalgia of Burke or Austen, Gray’s backward glance is the last refuge of a “class” desire that finds no way forward. In turning to the past, “The Bard” suggests something of the foreclosure of intellectual power and not, as the poem may have us believe, its arrival, since, as Suvir Kaul explains, “[f]or the powers of the Bard to be credible, he has to shrouded in the sublime obscurities of a historically earlier and less well known period, and represented as not so much *within* this period, as transcendent of it, rising above it” (Kaul 202, emphasis retained)

The unpacking of complex political interventions like “The Bard” requires that the analyst-critic put aside the current intellectual ideologies that obscure the work as an apolitical *Arty*-fact, or limit the critical horizon to the play of a supposedly sensual and isolated textual surface, and begin to account for the text’s social and historical production. An awareness of the genre’s rhetorical dimensions directs the careful reader back to the text’s community of users, both as producers and consumers. We should recall, as David Fairer and Christine Gerrard do, that “Gray’s widely admired ode offered its early readers an image of the poet as prophet and persecuted outsider” (363), that the poem performed a political function in addition to circulating as a commodity. For even more clearly than Collins and Gray’s other Pindarics, “The Bard” establishes the figure of the poet/bard as an oppositional force standing against the long-historical march of expropriating violence and philistinism associated with the advance of commercial society.

Certainly, among the Pindarics of Collins and Gray, “The Bard” most strongly articulates the oppositional locus of Romantic intellectualism, paving the way for the mature Romantic epic. As Arthur Johnston notes, the active stance of the intellectual in “The Bard” is indicative of an important shift in the characterization of the intellectual crisis (61-63). Gray’s earliest depictions of poets represented intellectuals as “withdrawn, inactive, luxuriating figures” (61), the product of an idealized union of the country gentry and the cloistered scholar, sympathetically articulated a century earlier by Milton in *Il Penseroso* (1645). With “The Bard,” however, Gray replaced this passive intellectual figure with “the defiant, involved poet, for whom poetry is a kind of action, superior to that of a warrior” (61). From this point on, “[g]one is the self-indulgent poet who imagines himself dead and being remembered by patron or friend. Gone is the poet of *memento mori*, longing to warn men of the inevitability of suffering and death. Now the poet is a kind of warrior” (61). Reading across Gray’s poetic corpus, as Johnston does, it becomes clear that beginning in 1752 Gray transforms the image of the intellectual:

from the poet as hidden and remembered only as a kindred spirit, to the poet as the sole surviving voice of liberty and virtue, from the poet as *memento mori* [“Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”], to the poet as celebrator of the noble dead, from the poet ‘at ease reclined in rustic state’ [“Ode on the Spring”], to the anguished poet ‘With haggard eyes’ on a rock ‘o’er old Conway’s foaming flood,’ from the poet as a ‘silken son of dalliance’ [*Agrippina*], to the poet as mental warrior. (Johnston 63)

It is my claim that the evolution Johnston records in Gray’s depiction of the poet-intellectual is less the consequence of a single person’s artistic genius, a spontaneous breaking with the aesthetic order, than the expression of developing economic antagonisms between the dominant and intellectual strata as they were filtered through the intellectual subculture. After all, it was

not only Gray who was shifting but other poets, like Collins, their reading public, and the genres they all shared as a community. To grasp such widespread cultural changes we need to look beyond the single work, the single author, or even the single genre. A dialectical understanding of literary history seeks to grasp the object of its inquiry not as a monad or an isolateable commodity but relationally, as it exists within the structure of totality.

The epic, in its Romantic reorganization, then, should be considered less a thing than an intellectual position. The advantage of a dialectical reading is that it dissolves, instead of reifying, the conceptual categories that organize the division of intellectual labor. So, to be clear, my point is not that readers should consider “The Bard” to be an epic, at least not in the literary sense of the term. As I have already argued in the first chapter, genre classifications based on formal elements are bound to be unsatisfying. A point to be made, however, is that the heavy borrowing of traditional epic elements for use in the Pindaric odes of Gray and Collins provides evidence for what I am calling the dialectic of epic desire and disinheritance that points to a broad political crisis in the intellectual community. There is a desire by poet-intellectuals to engage in certain rhetorical modes associated with epic poetry, even though, at that historical moment, the genre of epic was deemed by these same authors to be undesirable for ideological reasons. Thus, poems like “The Bard” function as transitional pieces that locate available space inside the Pindaric ode, unburdened by the panegyrics of the late-eighteenth-century epic, to work out new directions for what would later appear as the Romantic epic. These hybrid Pindarics and the Romantic epic would share certain themes: disillusionment with modern commercial society, the victimization of the dispossessed (most often rural peoples), and a vision of the man of letters as society’s redeemer. Just as importantly, Pindarics and Romantic epics would also share a rhetorical stance: these were work written by the high-cultural elite (and those

that aspired to join their ranks) to the community of intellectuals for the purpose of redefining the social role of intellectuals. While at the level of form, a Pindaric ode of less than one-hundred and fifty lines, like “The Bard,” is quite obviously not an epic, from a rhetorical position, which asks what work was this poem meant to do within its intended community, the distinguishing line between the Pindaric odes of Collins and Gray and pieces like Southey’s *Joan of Arc* or Wordsworth’s *Prelude* becomes much less certain.

One of the central arguments of this study is that Romanticism, as Gramsci suggested, might be thought of as that set of first reactions against life in a commercialized society by a newly cohesive and politically independent intellectual bloc. Epic poetry during this period, even in its early shunted and redirected expressions, not only records this political realignment but primarily functioned as a rhetorical intervention that sought to shape the social role of the poet-intellectual. And while Collins and Gray did not write long-poems, their Pindarics, when approached dialectically, appear to be the first forays into the thematic content and rhetorical purpose that would become the foundation of Romantic epic poetry.

## II. The *Ossian* Project

Such were the words of the bards in the days of song: when the king heard the music of harps, the tales of other times! The chiefs gathered from all their hills, and heard the lovely sound. . . . I hear, at times, the ghosts of bards, and learn their pleasant Song. . . . Roll on, ye dark-brown years; ye bring no joy on your course! Let the tomb open to Ossian, for his strength has failed. The sons of song are gone to rest. My voice remains, like a blast, that roars, lonely,

on a sea-surrounded rock, after the winds are laid. The dark moss  
whistles there; the distant mariner sees the waving trees!<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing example of the dialectical tension of epic desire and epic disinheritance that constituted the mid-eighteenth-century epic is found in the improbable rise of the Highland clergyman and amateur historian, James Macpherson. Macpherson's three *Ossian* epics—*Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (1760), *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books* (1761), and *Temora: an Ancient Epic Poem* (1763)—were, in the words of Herbert Tucker, nothing short of “a multiplex publishing event” (39). At the time, the *Ossian* epics, which were collected and republished in 1765, launched a decades-long international controversy over the authenticity of the Macpherson's “translations” that revealed deep intellectual anxieties over the direction of history and the purpose of literature. In recent years, there has been a renewed critical interest in the *Ossian* epics. They have been read in the terms of both an emergent Scottish nationalism and the structuring of English identity through the manufacturing of the wild Highland other (Trumpener); they have been said to represent an extension of the spirit of capitalist abstraction, on the one hand (Duncan), and a return to a precapitalist, egalitarian society, on the other (Bold). There appears to be, at the center of the *Ossian* epics, an unresolvable ideological contradiction that continues to speak to the interests of today's humanist intellectual strata.

What remains largely neglected, however, are the intellectual “class” interests which the *Ossian* project represented and advanced, and the *Ossian* epics' relationship to both those epics that preceded them in the early-eighteenth century and those that followed—both the way the works of *Ossian* fulfilled a desire for the rhetorical stance that became dominant in the Romantic

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<sup>36</sup> Macpherson, James. “The Songs of Selma,” *The Poems of Ossian* (291-92).

epic even as they avoided the ideological baggage of the Augustan epic. In short, the *Ossian* project needs to be understood within the totality of its social and literary context.

Macpherson's Epic Desire—*The Hunter* and *The Highlander*

To fully appreciate the transformation that the *Ossian* epics embody, one needs only to consider Macpherson's two premature epic misfires, *The Hunter* (1758) and *The Highlander* (1758). The poems are so alike that they are often treated as separate attempts at what is largely viewed as the same production. Each at approximately 1700 lines, both *The Hunter* (appearing in ten cantos) and *The Highlander* (appearing in six) are written in heroic couplets in the manner of the Augustans. Although genre was not clearly specified by Macpherson (in fact, *The Hunter* remained unpolished and was published by Macpherson's detractors), it is clear that he was diving headlong into the epic tradition (Stafford *Sublime* 72). The first few lines of *The Highlander* are likely sufficient to get a sense of the shape and tone of Macpherson's projects:

The youth I sing, who, to himself unknown,  
 Lost to the world and CALEDONIA'S throne,  
 Sprung o'er his mountains to the arms of Fame,  
 And, winged by Fate, his sire's avenger, came;  
 That knowledge learn'd so long deny'd by Fate,  
 And found that blood, as merit, made him great.                    ("The Highlander" 1-6)

As Fiona Stafford points out, just in these first six lines Macpherson makes passing allusions to epics by Homer, Virgil, and Milton (Stafford *Sublime* 72). And throughout, Macpherson's use of language displays a heavy influence from the classical epic translations of Pope and Dryden (72). Although the Macpherson's *Ossian* epics would appear to have arrived in eighteenth-century

Britain untouched by seventeen-hundred years of Western epic tradition, his first epic efforts were firmly rooted in the epic's recent past.

Yet, it would be misleading to characterize *The Hunter* and *The Highlander* as strictly derivative of the Augustan tradition. Even in these early poems there is evidence that Macpherson was striving to attempt something different with the epic. Some of Macpherson's experiments sought to adapt the epic's received form to developing intellectual taste. One clear example was Macpherson's appropriation of the epic simile to allow for long digressions that featured the untamed Scottish landscape and the kind of gothic night scenes made fashionable by Edward Young more than a decade earlier (Stafford *Sublime* 72):

The night her sable car through half the plain  
Of heaven drove, and spread her silent reign;  
Her twinkling eyes the gloomy goddess shrouds  
With a dark veil of rain-condensed clouds;  
When, lo! before the sleeping hunter's eyes  
His father Malcolm's phantom seem'd to rise.  
Thin are the snowy honours of his head;

An half-worn shroud waves round the long since dead. ("The Hunter" II.83-90)

In these lines Macpherson could be said to be advancing the dictates of fashion, even if not taste.

Other alterations in Macpherson's early epics, however, point to deeper changes in the intellectual community and presage Macpherson's ability to eventually find a form and language to address them. Perhaps the best example of this kind of progress is noted by Fiona Stafford who explains that in *The Highlander*, Macpherson brings traditional epic images and devices in accord with the humanist values of the Romantic intellectual community:

When the image of scales were used by Homer, Virgil, or Milton, they are always a divine instrument, exerting power over the lesser beings. In Macpherson's poem, however, they are 'mental scales,' suggesting that the course of events is man's responsibility rather than the result of Fate or God's will. This idea is typical of the poem, where there is no divine machinery, but the heroes themselves are described as 'godlike' and inspiration comes from the example of their forefathers. (*Sublime* 73)

In secularizing the epic, Macpherson anticipates the other great epoists of the Romantic era: poets like Southey, Blake, and Shelley. Stafford explains that "Macpherson was glorifying man[,] and allusion to great epic poems were part of his purpose" (*Sublime* 73). Of course, celebrating humanity by honoring the epic is a project fraught with the ideological distortions of class. Even while *The Hunter* and *The Highlander* neglect the traditional epic protagonists (the gods and the ruling-elite), they do not advance "the People" as their hero. After all, the glories of the epic were never thought to have been the achievements of "the People," in any age; if Macpherson was "glorifying man" through celebrating the epic, he was doing so by recasting all of humanity in the image of "the great man" of the intellectual stratum, the epoist.

*The Hunter* and *The Highlander* make some limited progress in updating the epic form, but, in essence, they remain throwbacks to the epics of the early-eighteenth century. Even where they appear in-step with the emerging subcultural current, they only flatly reproduce its images and diction, without grasping the troubling social contradictions that these tropes might represent. They show us a young, aspiring intellectual, fresh from the universities at Aberdeen, not yet twenty-two, experiencing the epic desire that marked the intellectual strata but not yet able to resolve the generic difficulties that the Augustan epic presented for the Romantic intellectual. Robert Fitzgerald remarks:

His epic *The Highlander* (1758) had no success. It and some juvenilia that have survived show Macpherson to have been a mediocre poet. Conventional in style, using clumsy blank verse or heroic couplets, too strongly influenced by Blair's *Grave* and Thomson's *Seasons*, his poems are of a kind that any young Scot with moderate talents might have written. (26)

Fitzgerald, here, focuses on the deficiencies of form; Macpherson uses “clumsy blank verse or heroic couplets;” his verse is derivative: “too strongly influenced.” I would suggest, however, that failure of Macpherson’s epics (and his attempt at suppression and complete reworking of *The Hunter* suggest that Macpherson was well aware of its deficiencies) is ideological as well as formal, or, more to the point, that the problems of ideology and form are linked. If Macpherson responded to what I am calling an epic desire, he failed to recognize the necessity for epic disinheritance. Both *The Hunter* and *The Highlander* are too reminiscent of the Augustan epic and the slavish role it gave to the indentured intellectual. Unlike the later *Ossian* poems, the mature Romantic epics of Beattie, Southey, Wordsworth and Blake, or even the Pindarics of Collins and Gray, Macpherson’s early epics do not overtly make the intellectual their hero. Instead, they return to what Daffyd Moore has appropriately called plots of “Stuart wish fulfillment” (27). More precisely, these epic poems, where the hero “found that blood, as merit, made him great” (Macpherson, “The Highlander” 5), were outmoded panegyrics that celebrated the old aristocracy as they were becoming the new bourgeoisie.

#### Macpherson and the Scot literati

The changes between Macpherson’s early epic attempts and the *Ossian* epics that began to follow only two years later (*Fragments* was published in 1760) exhibit a generic reformation that

is as impressive as any in literary history. The language handed down from the period frames this achievement in the terms of individual artistic genius. But genres are not individual; genres are social—even new ones. Perhaps then it should be no surprise that the works attributed to Ossian were actually the result of an Edinburgh academic and artistic collective, an intellectual co-production. In terms of his poetry, the greatest change in Macpherson's circumstances occurring between the production of his two failed epics and the celebrated *Ossian* works was that he had fallen into the orbit of the high Scottish literati at Edinburgh. With a letter of introduction from Adam Ferguson, Macpherson showed a few poetic fragments which he claimed derived from Gaelic sources to the Jacobite playwright, John Home. Intrigued, Home brought Macpherson into Edinburgh's intellectual inner-circle and under the care of John Hume and, most importantly, Hugh Blair. By the summer of 1760, Macpherson published his *Fragment of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland*, to which Blair added an introduction to the second edition, and funds were quickly raised to send Macpherson, with a team of assistants, on two quasi-anthropological tours of the Scottish Highlands in an effort to recover the lost epic of Ossian, the great warrior-bard. Upon returning to Edinburgh's Old Town, Macpherson got straight to work in a small room located directly beneath Blair's on *Fingal, an Ancient Poem in Six Books* (1761), which appeared in a scholarly quarto edition with footnotes. He followed it a year later with *Temora: An Ancient Epic Poem in Eight Books* (1762), expanding the place of notes, which were becoming increasingly philosophical and discursive. Blair supported Macpherson with his favorable "Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian" in 1763, and the entire apparatus was published together as two volumes in 1765 under *The Works of Ossian* (Moore 22-25; Stafford Introduction xii-xiii)

Dafydd Moore confirms that “[t]he weight of responsibility for *Ossian* indubitably lies with Macpherson. Yet it is equally indubitable that his influential patrons in Edinburgh provided the essential wherewithal for the *Ossian* project, contributing not only the contacts and the finances needed but also the intellectual underpinning of the project” (23-24). The *Ossian* project, it appears, was from its inception a collaborative effort of high intellectual stratum, and so much so that, as one literary historian put it, there is enough “reason to be pessimistic about the possibility of ever untwisting the aesthetic principles of Hume and Blair from Macpherson’s fancy” (Raynor 161; qtd. in Moore 24). From afar, Horace Walpole and Thomas Gray were also of some assistance to Macpherson. The *Ossian* project brought together intellectuals of all stripes, but it also revealed the internal fault lines of the intellectual bloc’s developing hierarchies and priorities. Gray, who thought Macpherson to be a very good poet—perhaps the very “daemon of poetry” (Gray *Correspondence* 704; qtd. in Moore 24) worried aloud that Macpherson’s scholarly and “*learned* friends” (his emphasis) would “pervert, or over-rule his taste” in matters of poetics (Gray *Correspondence* 767; qtd. in Moore 24). Gray’s remarks anticipate the eventual controversy that surrounded the *Ossian* epics, as Samuel Johnson (an intriguing transition figure seemingly caught between a desire to raise the status of the poet-intellectual while at the same time preserving the intellectual’s social position as a ward of the ruling-elite) led an effort to drive a wedge not only between the interests of Edinburgh and London but between knowledge and cultural producers. Each would be called upon to pit their specialized expertise against the other—an all too familiar process to anyone who has been a witness to the row of disciplinary rivalries. Yet for a time, the compromise embodied in the *Ossian* project, a union that joined together antiquarians, social philosophers, and poets, held.

### Epic Re-formations—The Making of *Ossian*

In the development of the Romantic epic, the *Ossian* works mark a breakthrough in the evolving balance between epic desire and epic disinheritance. The *Ossian* works were some of the first texts of the mid-eighteenth century that not only could gesture toward the epic tradition as Collins and Gray had done but that could also make some claim to being true to the epic's traditional form. But the intellectual groundwork for the reformation of the epic, in which the *Ossian* project played a key role, actually began decades earlier.

To start, it would be difficult to overstate the formative impact of René Le Bossu's *Traité du poème épique* (1675), which was made available to readers in London in an English translation in 1695. Alexander Pope commended Le Bossu in his preface to the *Iliad*, and added an essay on the epic to the *Odyssey* that was, in his words, "extracted from Bossu." Pope, however, also lampooned the emerging culture of journeyman authorship that Le Bossu became associated with in his preface to the *Dunciad* and, especially, the "Receipt to Make an Epic Poem" (1713), a task that found support in Voltaire's "Essay on Epic Poetry" (1727). Throughout the eighteenth century Le Bossu's treatise would become entangled in internecine quarrels concerning proscriptive epic form and the license granted to the innovations of genius. It was often sneered at as a foundational text of the "French School" of poetry (Joseph Warton and Walter Scott were particularly harsh in this arena), and even today it is pointed to as an *exemplum* of the formal rigidity we imagine for the neoclassical Augustans.

By attempting a grammar for the epic, Le Bossu's *Traité du poème épique* was easily (mis)characterized as an effort to reduce high-poetry into a kind of recipe, but it was a more complex statement than that, a conflicted product of a severe cultural ambivalence and read by different audiences with quite different concerns. On one hand, like much of the poetry of the

late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century it speaks to the fears about the emerging commodification of the arts and the professionalization of the court poet. Herbert Tucker remarks, “the streamlined system of Le Bossu [reducing to rules for executive procedure what was formerly learned by the slow imitation of examples]. . . expressed the insecurity with which the eighteenth century Neoclassicism possessed its traditions” (32). In this sense, then, the *Traité* can be seen as a kind of guild manual, responding to the unique historical pressures facing the relatively small stratum of cultural producers. On the other hand, in its uncompromising attempt to define and delineate just what constituted a proper epic performance, Le Bossu’s *Traité* also points to a much broader cultural anxiety within the whole of the reading public over the apparent breakdown of Europe’s social order:

One can scarcely miss the point; nor can one help speculating that a theory so monist spoke to concerns that, while differently felt in the France of Louis XIV and in England of Charles II to Queen Anne, defined an era in which new philosophy, sectarian divisiveness, and socio-political experiment fed a strong appetite among the reading classes for stability, clarity, and rule. (Tucker 31-32)

The epic was becoming the contested ground for cultured elite.

Le Bossu became best known for his claim that epic poetry demanded a singular unity of action. It was a charge that had little lasting influence throughout the eighteenth century and was adopted and challenged in nearly equal measure by epoists and critics alike. However, the rest of what he had to say about the epic in the *Traité* provided the solid foundation on which the Romantic epic was largely constructed. Le Bossu claims the epic is hero centered. This, of course, would have appeared as quite a revelation to Dante and Milton, but for late-seventeenth-century epoists like Richard Blackmore, to whom Le Bossu’s English translation was dedicated,

the point likely seemed rather obvious—even if they had to look past Le Bossu’s injunction against “panegyrick” (Le Bossu 31).<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, it is Le Bossu who ordains the epic as the highest form of literary expression. Following Aristotle’s lead, he holds that, “the true Poems. . . are the *Epopéa*, the *Tragedy*, and the *Comedy*” (11), but, exceeding his classical source, Le Bossu adds that “[i]f we compare them together, the *Epopéa* will excel the other two by that great Liberty it takes of using Metaphors and perpetual Allusions in the Fables” (12). It was this last point about the epic’s connection to the moral fable that proved most important for the epic’s later development. According to Le Bossu, “The *End* of the *Epick Poem* is to lay down *Moral Instructions* for all sorts of people both in *general* and *particular*” (Le Bossu 8); “the *Epick Poem* was invented to form the Manners of Men” (18). For the intellectual community that increasingly became committed to the purpose of educating the public throughout the eighteenth century, this final assertion about the epic’s generic purpose was Le Bossu’s chief influence on the development of the Romantic epic.

After Le Bossu, Blackwell’s *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735), which flatly rejected the Augustan epic, acted as a pivot point in the epic’s shifting focus. Epic unity, according to Blackwell, was not achieved by the adherence to single conception in the mind of the author, *à la* Le Bossu, but by the special circumstances of cultural unity—a conjunction of an age’s “*Manners* and. . . *publick Character*” (Blackwell 72)—that marked primitive societies. Daffyd Moore writes that the views of the forward thinking Blackwell were fully “historicist” (30), and Herbert Tucker credits Blackwell with “inventing the sociology of literature” (34). It may be enough, however, to simply say that Blackwell’s advance was in linking cultural

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<sup>37</sup> Blackmore would later credit Le Bossu’s principles with providing the aesthetic force for *Prince Arthur*.

production to the emerging stadial theories of historical development. "A certain kind of Science is peculiar to every Age," writes Blackwell, "and a particular way of treating it" (73). Epics, therefore, were not a pattern of rules to be followed for all time but the organic expression of primitive cultures. A modern could no more write an epic than an ancient might write a novel. The modern must accept that the epic age is over, that "[a] Language throughly [*sic*] polished in the modern Sense, will not descend to the *Simplicity* of Manners absolutely necessary in *Epic-Poetry*" (59). But this was an issue that went beyond a question of language (which, of course, might be feigned); the epic style was connected to what we may anachronistically, but without too great abuse, refer to as a whole *structure of feeling*:

[i]n common Life, no doubt, the witty facetious Man is now the preferable Character: But he is only a *middling* Person, and no *Hero*, bearing a Personage for which there is hardly an Inch of room in an *Epic Poem*. To be witty in a Matter of Consequence, where the Risque is high, and the Execution requires *Caution* or *Boldness*, is *Impertinence* and *Buffoonry*. (56).

The epic belonged to the twilight of a violent and simplistic age, to the time of Homer and Virgil, and the Augustan epics of Richard Blackmore were necessarily little more than pale and misguided imitations.

Blackwell's theory of the epic clarified the tensions behind the later *Ossian* project. It was paradoxically a powerful statement of epic desire (the classical epics retained their position atop the hierarchy of genres as the most virtuous and heroic form of writing) and of disinheritance (the Augustan epic was dismissed as a cultural fraud). Furthermore, it drew an image of the ancient epoist that matched the Romantic intellectual's experience and political aspirations. Blackwell's ancient poets, like his modern intellectual readers, were a diasporic tribe of

wandering Bards marked by their dislocation: “much *Travelling*, and wide *personal Observation*, has been the Lot of the greatest *Epic Poets*” (71). But the mark of Cain that they bore was also the mark of rarified greatness, for, as Blackwell noted, “there are many subsequent Circumstances of Life, many Advantages of Education, and Opportunities of knowing Mankind in general, and feeling particular Subjects fit for Poesy, which can hardly meet in one and the same Person” (71). These are the seeds of the poet-intellectual who wears his alienation as both a blessing and a curse that would bloom within the fertile egos of Byron and Wordsworth. For Blackwell, the epoist was neither a servant of the ruling-elite nor a well-trained artisan; the epoist was nothing less than a prophet made capable of his public role by a life in the wilderness.

But even as Blackwell sanctioned an independent and more active role for the poet, while anticipating the alienated Romantic intellectual persona, his pronouncement that the poet-intellectual’s most powerful social vehicle, the epic, was forever locked in the primitive past might have solved the problem of disinheriting the Augustan epic but at the cost of closing the epic from future intellectual endeavors. There was, however, space left for the *Ossian* project to exploit. Blackwell insisted that although the epic was historically sealed within the localized time of the savage past, primitivism (and its poetic expression: the epic) was as a universal stage of social development, at home across the entire expanse of the globe. In fact, an imagined intercultural similarity between all primitive epic pieces acted as a proof of Blackwell’s stadial underpinnings:

there [can] be [no] greater Proof of the Power that *Manners*, and the *Publick Character* have over poetry, than the surprising Resemblance of the oldest Writings. Two things cannot be liker one another, than the *old Oracles*, the *Fragments of Orpheus* so called, and the *ancient Hymns*, are to *Hesiod's* and *Homer's* verses. Not to say in general, that

they have the same *Turn*; but in the same Epithets of *Gods* and *Men*, the same *Sentiments* and *Allusions*, the same *Cadence* and *Structure*; nay, sometimes the very same

*Expressions* and *Phrases* are to be met with in them all. (72-73)

Blackwell, thus, drew the path for Macpherson and his intellectual brothers-in-arms. If there was no hope in writing a modern epic, there must still be countless numbers of yet discovered *Iliads* in those wild places along the edges of the empire. To the Edinburgh literati, the Scottish Highlands had been a place just as wild and violently passionate as Homer's Greece only decades before. If by this time the thinking was that the Western Isles had indeed been made "safe for tourists" (Stafford *Sublime* 62), then even more reason to send a team there immediately in order to catalog those fading passions before their dying embers blinked off into eternity. Macpherson had, in all likelihood, absorbed Blackwell's *Enquiry* under the tutelage of one of Blackwell's students at Marischal College in Aberdeen during the time that he was struggling with *The Hunter* and *The Highlander* (Moore 43 n.25; Stafford *Sublime* 28). And who better to send, it might be added, than this aspiring poet, a native Gaelic speaker, and a Highland prince, who might have been chief to a Clan, himself, had the '45 gone differently.

There is good reason to continue to marvel at what Macpherson was able to accomplish upon his return to Edinburgh, for the balance that he strikes between the competing desires of finding a high-poetic form that could exemplify the leadership role intellectuals imagined for themselves (epic desire) and for erasing the traces of the subservient and enabling cultural productions of the Augustan age (epic disinheritance) is truly remarkable. *Ossian* strained the boundaries of generic form. If the *Ossian* epics *were* epics, then they were unlike any British epic ever seen before. Gone were the crisp heroic couplets of the Augustan age, the blank verse of Milton, or the Spenserian stanzas of the *Faerie Queen*. Macpherson, likely directed by the preferences of

the Edinburgh literati, chose to translate according to the French model which, out of a concern for accuracy, demanded that poetry from a foreign tongue be rendered only in prose (Fitzgerald 33).<sup>38</sup> The recoding of the epic performance into prose was a move that was similar to the generic evasions of Collins and Gray, who wrote their epics as Pindarics. However, Macpherson's prose form had the distinct advantage of reopening the possibilities of epic's length. Length provided an opportunity to return to grandiosity of epic scale and a literary structure that could evoke some sense of the social totality. Following the success of the *Ossian* epics, Evan Evans' *Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* (1764) and Bishop Percy's *Song of Solomon* (1764) likewise "translated" so-called primitive verse into English prose (33). Blake's prose epic prophesies, I think, owe something to *Ossian* in this regard, and perhaps even fully novelized epics like Melville's *Moby Dick*. And although Macpherson had to toss-out the verse structures of the Augustan epic, he discovered that by incorporating the rhythms, inversions, and parallelisms of his Gaelic ballad sources, he produced what he called "a measured sort of prose" (Macpherson *Poems* 492, n.50) that had an aural quality that would today be associated with short line free-verse (Fitzgerald 22-33).

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Batteux makes the clearest such statement in *Cours de Belles Lettres*, the last section of which was translated and published in Edinburgh as *Principles of Translation*, in 1760, a few months before Macpherson's *Fragments* appeared. In the English supplied by Batteux's anonymous translator:

The painter who copies, has the same specific colours as the original painter; he needs only intelligent eyes and a good hand. But should we suppose the poetic translator had both, he has still got nothing. The words of his language first resist in all ways, in their syllable, in their sounds, in the arrangement which they require. The ear expostulates, the rhyme is refractory, the measure is always too long or too short for the thought. This is true with respect to all languages....It is a known saying of Virgil, that it is more difficult to borrow a line from Homer, than to take from Hercules his club....There are more Virgils in our days who have more courage....They have ventured to wrestle with a whole army of Herculeses, and to turn into verse the whole *Iliad*, with a success which may, probably, excuse lovers of poetry from seeking after that author in his native tongue.

If the poets cannot be translated to perfection in verse, there is a way of doing it in prose, at least with some success. (62-63)

I would suggest, however, that the reasons the *Ossian* works were embraced as epics had less to do with the operation of their form and more to do with their thematic content and rhetorical stance, both of which were in line with the mature Romantic epics.<sup>39</sup> At the heart of Macpherson's *Ossian* was the juxtaposition of primitive settings and characters against the reader's knowledge of the current degenerate state of bourgeois society, so that *Ossian* delivers:

a sentimental compound strain, in which the prominent note is a yearning after the glory days that are, while not yet gone, felt even by the heroes to be on the wane. This sentimental supplement to the primitive was Macpherson's most brilliant innovation, and its diachronic invitation to historical fancy was the key to his poems' enormous popularity. (Tucker 40)

Macpherson's vision of Celtic society offered an alternative to the corruptions of modern English life. A similar move can be seen in Tobias Smollett's novel, *Humphrey Clinker* (1771), where Scotland's cultural simplicity serves as a welcome escape from the absurdities of English urbanity (Stafford *Sublime* 62).

In recent years, critics have become especially attuned to this conflict's nationalist strain, but focusing on the tensions between London and Edinburgh as competing political centers often

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Fitzgerald emphasizes how the transformation of the poetic form from the ballad to the epic entailed an even more central transformation of the thematic style according to the priorities of taste associated with the mid-eighteenth century intellectual community:

The [original Scottish] ballads are primarily heroic, not romantic. They contain details of daily life, sometimes have a satiric or comic tone, and often simply narrate the deeds of the warriors. In contrast, the fifteen *Fragments* are all elegiac and thirteen of them are concerned with unhappy love. Macpherson must have approached Gaelic poetry with a taste already formed, a taste like that of many young men of his time. The elegiac tone of those ballads attributed to Oiséan and the occasional romantic love stories told in the ballads are what must have appealed to him. His juvenilia and the sources he plagiarized from show a fondness for the graveyard school of poetry, a practice of the kind of poetic diction used by Gray, a passion for sentiment, and an appreciation of striking images, whether found in the Bible, Homer, Virgil, or Milton. The process of selection that such a taste would impose upon his originals and the proviso that the translation be in prose give the simplest explanation of the origin of his style. (32)

obscures the degree to which these texts represent the “universal” interests of the transnational intellectual community. Against solely nationalist readings, I would argue that the Ossianic alternative is not about the spatial relocation of hegemonic control, but about a completely different organization of social relations.

*Ossian* was part of a growing eighteenth-century intellectual discourse about the uncorrupted societies that supposedly existed before the modern divisions of labor and class. Perhaps thinking of *Ossian*, Adam Ferguson conjectured in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767),

In rude ages men are not separated by distinctions of rank or profession. They live in one manner, and speak one dialect. The bard is not to chuse [*sic*] his expression among the singular accents of different conditions. He has not to guard his language from the peculiar errors of the mechanic, the peasant, the scholar, or the courtier. (174; qtd. in Trumpener 64)

The power of the ancient bardic imagination was thought to be related to the fullness of primitive life. Bards were strong because “in rude ages” society was as unified as “the people” were whole. And although this theory of premodern peoples could be put in the service of nationalist causes, it was not parochial at its root. Despite claims made for an originating bardism in Wales (Gray), Scotland (Macpherson), or even Greece (Collins), the authority of ancient bardism was accepted as universal—the natural order of a society not splintered by the modern organization of production. As David Hume recalled, “Mr. Macpherson told me that the heroes of this Highland epic were not only, like Homer’s heroes, their own butchers, bakers, and cooks, but also their own shoemakers, carpenters, and smiths” (Hume I.330; qtd. in Trumpener 64). The

ancient world became increasingly important in the intellectual imagination as a space marked by the “absence of the modern separation of between hand and head” (Trumpener 64).

Fiona Stafford recognizes the extent to which *Ossian* tapped into what was a broad intellectual critique of the modern world:

Macpherson's vision of Celtic society accorded well with the ideals of Rousseau and his followers. In Ossian's age of heroes, men were free from the burden of property and unrepressed by Church or State. There were no class barriers: Fingal was a leader through merit rather than privilege, while his army was tied by bonds of affection rather than self interest [*sic*] or obligation. For readers with radical sympathies, such as William Blake, the appeal of Ossian was not merely stylistic and indeed, the free style of the verse seemed a reflection of the free society in Ancient Britain. (Stafford *Sublime* 178)

Stafford's phrase, “readers with radical sympathies,” is, I think, too coy, replacing the larger class dimensions at work here with an illusion of political taste. Rousseau, Macpherson, and Blake surely provide a broad outline of the intellectual strata across three generations and from different national traditions. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that to whatever degree *Ossian* depicts a “free society” without “class barriers,” or, to use the Valencia Bold's phrase, a “prototypical democracy with much wider implications” (475), Macpherson's Celtic society is also firmly structured along the interests of the intellectual strata. For it can only be within the limits of intellectual interests that Macpherson's Celtic society could be said to provide not only the nostalgic picture of a “Rousseauan [*sic*] creature from a golden age” (Bold 472) but also “an aspirational image” (Bold 469) of a society where the intellectual acts as a free and full partner alongside other elements of the ruling elite.

Thus, by drawing from the vision of the pre-modern cultural unity espoused in Blackwell's *Enquiry*, *Ossian* imagined a re-invigorated purpose for the poet-intellectual. The Scottish Bards of Ossian's world held no truck with either the commercialized or patronized models of eighteenth-century "private art" (Stafford *Sublime* 135). Instead of as a commodity or as a token of status, poetry was seen as "a vital element" (156) in a social structure where "Bards played an important role in their society" (155). "[T]he Celtic tribes," declared Hugh Blair, "clearly appear to have been addicted...to poetry" (Blair 351). In Ossian's world, "poetry [depended] on the reciprocal inspiration of the Bards and their society" (Stafford *Sublime* 156). In place of a market society where all production, whether material or cultural, were placed under the thumb of the ruling elite, "[i]n this culture, responsibility was shared between leaders, society lived in cooperation, and bards celebrated the achievements of their warlike leaders very much as equals" (Bold 469).

But Macpherson's unified Celtic society is not so much harmonious as it is homogenous. It appears as a civil society comprised only of idealized men cast in the idealized self-image of intellectuals—primitive harmonious men, men of feeling in a wholly imaginary pre-modern (even pre-literate) "Republic of Letters."<sup>40</sup> *Ossian* achieves epic unity through such a cultural single-mindedness that it can be said:

Little beyond warfare and poetry claims the attention of Macpherson's ancient clansmen, who tend to be warriors, bards, or better yet warrior-bards, of a uniformly high-minded integrity whose social analog is a structure in which chieftains conduct themselves as first among equals. So conversably egalitarian a society, engaged in folk practices so simple

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<sup>40</sup> For it must be admitted that the free and whole subject of *Ossian*, like the imagined subject of the bourgeois public sphere, is always masculine. Women exist in the Ossianic world only as objects that motivate male desire—both to heroism and violence.

and few, make up the picture—the diagram, really—of a most homogenous culture.

(Tucker 40)

It is easy to detect the linkage Blackwell supplied between epic unity and a primitive, unified society, in Macpherson's depiction of a "homogenous culture." But lingering on this point can lead to a rather narrow reading of *Ossian's* rhetorical purpose by suggesting the *Ossian* project was little more than a well-crafted and self-interested fraud designed to prey upon the expectations of the Edinburgh literati. While this sort of reading is perhaps impossible to completely dismiss, it is important to note that it locates the *Ossian* project within the limited range of motivations available inside market exchanges, and thereby levies a judgment on the work as a false commodity—a forgery or a junk bond.

There is, however, from a rhetorical consideration, a more compelling reading to be made from *Ossian's* cultural unity if the analyst-critic recognizes not only the how *Ossian* meets the expectations set by Blackwell's *Enquiry*, but goes beyond Blackwell's theory and extends the meaning of cultural homogeneity in order to develop a theory of intellectual praxis. Blackwell theorized that epic unity was the result of the primitive and unified social structure from which the epic emerged. Anachronistically, Blackwell's one-way "sociology of literature" might be labeled without gross distortion a version of crude Marxist reflection theory, where the literary work simply reflects its motivating social relations through passive mimesis. In the dissertations of Macpherson and Blair, however, the Celtic Bards did not simply reflect the cultural homogeneity of *Ossian's* imagined community but were responsible for producing it. Both argued that it was by the creative efforts of the Bards that Celtic society was elevated above faction and party, producing an intellectual cultural hegemony based on the values espoused in their poetry. For example, Macpherson writes:

The bards, who were originally the disciples of the Druids, had their minds opened, and their ideas enlarged. . . . They could form a perfect hero in their own minds, and ascribe that character to their prince. The inferior chiefs made this ideal character the model of their conduct; and, by degrees, brought their minds to that generous spirit which breathes in all the poetry of the times. The prince, flattered by his bards, and rivalled [*sic*] by his own heroes, who imitated his character as described in the eulogies of his poets, endeavored to excel his people in merit, as he was above them in station. This emulation continuing, formed at last the general character of the nation. ("Dissertation" 48)

Where Blackwell imagines that primitive simplicity flows only towards modernity (by which he means hierarchical complexity and the increasing disintegration of social bonds into various factions and parties), Macpherson writes a social history that begins with social divisions and ends, by the efforts of the Celtic Bards, in social unity. A similar, if less concise, narrative is found in Blair's *Dissertation*:

Now when we consider a college or order of men, who, cultivating poetry throughout a long series of ages, had their imaginations continually employed on the ideas of heroism. . . , is it not natural to think, that at length the character of a hero would appear in their songs with the highest lustre, and be adorned with qualities truly noble? . . . [N]o sooner had such ideas begun to dawn on the minds of poets, than, as the human mind easily opens to the native representations of human perfection, they would be seized and embraced; . . . they would contribute not a little to exalt the public manners. For such songs as these, familiar to the Celtic warriors from their childhood, and, throughout their whole life, both in war and in peace, their principal entertainment, must have had a very

considerable influence in propagating among them real manners, nearly approaching to the poetical; and in forming even such a hero as Fingal. (Blair 351)

In the accounts of both Blair and Macpherson, the Celtic bards begin as small “college or order of men” with little status but through their skill as ideologists alter “the general character of the nation.” Importantly, it is the Bards’ values (and not their masters’) that become the values of the broader social order. In Blair’s telling, the heroic subjectivity of the warrior, Fingal, is the material product of the bard’s (that is Ossian, Fingal’s son) poetic labors. This ancient intellectual hegemony, despite the historical cover that Macpherson and Blair seek to provide, is surely a fantasy; however, it is also the entrance into a theory of social transformation and intellectual leadership.

### *Ossian as Romantic Epic*

Directed towards social intervention, *Ossian* contains all the elements of more mature Romantic epics, even if many of these elements in *Ossian* appear only in an embryonic state. There, of course, were many formal hold-overs that now functioned only as *epic effects*.<sup>41</sup> Macpherson cited some of these in one of the footnotes appended to *Temora*:

[*Ossian*] has all the grand essentials of the epopoea. Unity of time, place, and action is preserved throughout. The poem opens in the midst of things; what is necessary of

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<sup>41</sup> I have borrowed the basic idea for what I am calling epic effects from Brian Moon who discusses “poetry effects” in *Studying Poetry: Activities, Resources, and Texts* (2001). Responding to the difficulty of defining “poetry,” Moon suggests that, “it can be helpful. . . to think about poetry as being, in part, a way of reading—one that involves responding to words, sounds, typefaces, and other features in particular ways, as well as adopting a particular ‘approaches’ to the text, such as using the poem to reflect on your experiences and beliefs” (28). Similarly, in this study one of my core arguments is that the epic is more than just a form (a way of writing); the epic is also a “way of reading. . . [an approach] to the text.” Thus, one of the key functions of the features we associate with any particular genre is to affect a certain kind of reading that is appropriate to the genre’s discourse.

proceeding transactions to be known, is introduced by episodes afterwards; not formally brought in, but seemingly rising immediately from the situation of affairs. The circumstances are grand, and the diction animated. (*Poems* 479, n.2)

To this list could be added the use of catalogs and the natural variation of the epic simile that Macpherson carried over from his premature epics, *The Hunter* and *The Highlander*.

What was important in the use of epic effects was not how many or which of the many epic effects made available by the epic tradition were used but that enough of these devices were employed so that the reader understood and accepted the author's invitation to enter into the specialized mode of symbolic reading characterizing the Romantic epic. In essence, epic effects acted as sign posts to a standing contract between the epist and the reader. As Devitt explains, "[p]art of what all readers and writers recognize when they recognize genres are the roles they are to play, the roles being played by other people, what they can gain from the discourse, and what discourses are about" (12). In just this way, Macpherson's use of epic effects demonstrates his knowledge of the literary tradition and proves his right as an intellectual to address an intellectual audience on matters of philosophical and political importance. In turn, the intellectual reader, upon recognizing the appropriateness Macpherson's use of this specialized language, is implicitly bound to treat the text with a certain care and reverence, to perform the task of "the few...though fit," regarding the work as a motivated intellectual discourse on society, while putting aside the work's status as a commodity. In short, among the many things the Romantics meant by the term "epic" was that the work was to be read openly as political endeavor but never as a commercial one.

In considering just what constitutes the Romantic epic, it must be remembered that it is their rhetorical functioning that sets genres apart and defines their roles within the social discourse.

Formal features, like epic effects, point to the author's adoption of a genre, but they do not constitute it. In the same way, the Romantic epic developed patterns of typified thematic content that served the genre's two-fold rhetorical purpose: (1) to organize a coherent intellectual bloc, and (2) to offer praxis-driven solutions to social issues concerning the intellectual bloc. To address the former, the Romantic epic turned repeatedly to images that suggested an intellectual tradition that stretched deep into the past or was even eternal. These images, that served as a means of intellectual self-identification, included the natural genius, the uncompromising enthusiast, the alienated subject (the hermit, the outcast, and the wanderer), and perhaps most often, as in *Ossian*, the primitive Bard. Part of the goal was to establish an intellectual lineage, and in Britain the imagined intellectual genealogy developed a sort of aristocratic branch that went through Milton to Shakespeare and Spenser and, in Macpherson's hands, all the way back to Ossian and beyond.

A related strategy for creating bloc cohesion was to define the intellectual community against the one-dimensional Others of commercial society—the cruel aristocrat, the soulless bourgeois, and the often gullible and superstitious “people.” These characters from bourgeois life are missing, however, from the *Ossian*. Instead, *Ossian* relies on the reader to supply these foils, to juxtapose the epic's grand warrior-poets against the fallen characters that populated the readers' quotidian lives. In this regard, *Ossian* is either uniquely sophisticated or, perhaps, lags in its development among Romantic epics. But to the Romantic epic's latter purpose (to offer praxis-driven solutions), *Ossian*'s “aspirational image” and the theory of intellectual praxis supplied by Macpherson and Blair—an account of intellectual practice that might lead to an intellectual hegemony—was well ahead of its moment.

When the Romantic epic's other elements (i.e., both epic effects and thematic content) are seen to be subservient to its rhetorical purpose, the epic's position within the field of active Romantic genres is significantly altered. For example, although it has become common-place for literary critics to blur the lines between the Romantic epic and the romance,<sup>42</sup> these comparisons only hold at the superficial levels of form, where both might be species of something called "the long poem." Similarly, there has been a tendency to view the Romantic epic in the terms of the autobiography. Although many canonical Romantic epics contain autobiographical content (critics often linger on these details in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Blake's *Milton*, and Byron's *Don Juan*, for example), the relationship between the epic and the autobiography is only occasional. Indeed, it would take a stretch to locate autobiographical elements in most Romantic epics, whether in Macpherson's *Ossian*, Southey's *Joan of Arc*, or Shelley's *Laon and Cythna*. While generic comparisons based on formal features or thematic content are not without merit, comparisons developed through an analysis of rhetorical purpose reveal more about a genre's function within its constitutive community and throughout the broader social order. In the case of the Romantic epic, as an overtly political (and at times even didactic) genre comparisons might be drawn between the rhetorical function of the epic and the cheap tract, the sermon, the pamphlet, the social/political essay, the literary review, and the manifesto. In its effort to develop group identity through mythologizing community origins, the epic is perhaps most like the cheap tract or the sermon. However, to the degree that the epic's authorial persona addresses the reader as an equal (as an intellectual addressing another intellectual), the epic is perhaps even more like the manifesto. Finally, when we take into

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Stuart Curran's discussion of epic and romance in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986), or Daffyd Moore's reading of *Ossian* as a romance.

account the special status given to the epic as the “king” of genres we begin to grasp the Romantic epic’s unparalleled position in the *genre system* of the intellectual bloc.

Of course, approaching *Ossian* as a praxis-driven genre, like the manifesto, radically changes what the reader takes away from the work. Furthermore, it challenges the bright lines that have come to define literary history. That the ideologically charged *Ossian* project emerged out of what is sometimes called either the “moderate Enlightenment” (see Jonathan Israel) or, more often, the “Scottish Enlightenment,” which regardless of its name is discussed (and not unfairly) as a movement that provided ideological cover for the bourgeoisie, offers some insight about what basic principles united the various factions and parties within the intellectual bloc. While intellectual radicals were in many cases eager to overturn civic institutions in order to set up temples of Reason where the various layers of intellectual strata could legitimate their authority based on their special expertise and take the reins of governance, even conservative intellectuals felt the need for a program of social reform grounded in those shared values of the intellectual community. It is impossible to think of the so-called Scottish Enlightenment without the intellectual leadership academies of the Select Society and the Speculative Society, or, even in its later stages, without the educational programs of Henry Brougham’s Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and the moralizing of Francis Jeffery and Thomas Carlyle in the pages of *The Edinburgh Review* (Benchimol 52-64; 99-148). As Alex Benchimol notes, even for the more conservative intellectual strata in Edinburgh, “[g]eneral cultural improvement became a means both for realizing their historically derived moral mission as the rightful social leaders of their country, as well as helping to emphasize the essential role that the traditional virtues of learning could play in guiding the development of their materially transforming society” (Benchimol 61-62). It is to this same point that Daffyd Moore writes:

*Ossian* would stand for [Hugh] Blair, [Adam] Ferguson, [Adam] Smith, [John] Home, [Henry Home, Lord] Kames, [Alexander] Carlyle and [David] Hume as it would for Macpherson, as evidence of Scottish culture, though not necessary the same Scottish culture. In doing so *Ossian's* band of poets and warriors would also reflect, synthesize and mythologize the cultural values they sought to promote in their writing, teaching and preaching: polite sensibility and religion, a cultured caste of letters, [and] the literary values of primitivism and the sublime. (Moore 26)

To whatever degree the *Ossian* project served Scottish nationalism by providing “evidence of Scottish culture,” it even more certainly promoted the values of an intellectual society. For no matter how much we (the analyst-critics who remain *Ossian's* audience) might still side with “literary values” and “a cultured caste of letters” these values are not, and never were, uninterested.<sup>43</sup>

### III. Beattie's *Minstrel*

‘Ah, what have I to do with conquering kings,

‘Hands drenched in blood, and breasts begirt with steel!

‘To those, whom Nature taught to think and feel,

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<sup>43</sup> Fiona Stafford comments on the limits of nationalist readings of *Ossian*, which fail to explain its broad international success: “neither the nationalistic dimensions of the dispute, nor the intrinsic antiquarian interest of Macpherson's claims, can entirely account for the way in which *The Poems of Ossian* were read, reprinted and translated into Italian, French, German, Polish, Russian, Danish, Spanish, Dutch, Bohemian and Hungarian” (xv-xvi).

‘Heroes, alas! are things of small concern.’<sup>44</sup>

### The Whole Character of Edwin

While it was *Ossian* that consolidated many of the elements associated with the traditional epic form with the rhetorical purposes emerging in the intellectual bloc’s Romantic epic, it was James Beattie’s *Minstrel* that largely provided the scaffolding for the Romantic epic’s formal and thematic development. It is in *The Minstrel* that the man of letters finally arrives as the hero of the Romantic epic. Gray’s Bard was a striking figure, but he remained contained within the cramped structures of the Pindaric ode, and Macpherson’s warrior-bard, Ossian, had to share the text with his larger-than-life chieftain, Fingal. Beattie, however, gives over his unfinished, two-book epic narrative entirely to the story of his poet-hero.

Sadly, *The Minstrel* is seldom read today, but in order to get a sense of the power of its mythological encoding, one need only look to its impact of the self-imagining of the more renowned generation of poet-intellectuals that appeared in its wake. Dorothy Wordsworth, when asked to provide some details about her older brother William in his youth, responded with lines from *The Minstrel*:

In truth he was a strange and wayward wight,  
 Fond of each gentle, and each dreadful scene  
 In darkness, and in storm, he found delight:  
 Nor less than when on ocean-wave serene

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<sup>44</sup> James Beattie, *The Minstrel* (ll.35.3-6). Unless otherwise specified lines quoted from *The Minstrel* are from the 1784 edition, which was the second combined edition that was printed in London. Beattie began work on *The Minstrel* in 1768, publishing the first book in 1771 and the second in 1774. A combined and revised edition appeared in 1779.

The southern Sun diffused his dazzling shene.

Even sad vacissitude amused his soul;

And if a sigh would sometimes intervene,

And down his cheek a tear of pity roll,

A sigh, a tear, so sweet, he wish'd not to control. (I.22.1-9)

"That verse of Beattie's," Dorothy wrote, "always reminds me of him; and indeed the whole character of Edwin resembles much that William was when I first knew him—after my leaving Halifax" (qtd. in King 61). She then appended a portion of another verse:

And oft he traced the uplands, to survey,  
 When o'er the sky advanced the kindling dawn,  
 The crimson cloud, blue main, and mountain grey,  
 And lake, dim-gleaming on the smoky lawn:  
 Far to the west the long long vale withdrawn,  
 Where twilight loves to linger for a while:  
 And now he faintly kens the bounding fawn,  
 And villager abroad at early toil.

But lo! the Sun appears! and heaven, earth, ocean smile! (I.20.1-9)

Dorothy had missed most of William's formative years—the two were separated soon after their mother's death in 1778. But, *The Minstrel* becomes a kind of "sourcebook of poetic adventures" (King 62), by which the siblings (and the reading public) could understand and share the poet's childhood (62-63).

The young William Wordsworth read *The Minstrel* in his teens. He shared a fondness for the poem with his younger brother Christopher and can be found quoting from it, particularly when

describing encounters with scenes of natural beauty (Robinson 1-2). He certainly saw something of the character of Edwin in himself, and possibly encouraged Dorothy to think so, as well.

Everard King notes that while Wordsworth struggled to exorcise Beattie's heavy influence from his early poetry, in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth would ultimately record the "memories" of his childhood in strains reminiscent of *The Minstrel*.

King, in *James Beattie's The Minstrel and the Origins of Romantic Autobiography* (1992), ferrets out *The Minstrel's* status as a sort of Romantic *urtext*, but his conclusions about the nature of the similarities he finds fail to account for the role of genre in manufacturing this appearance of recurrence. Confusing poetic characters that represent the intellectual bloc for instances of actual autobiography, King locates an uncanny semblance in the lives of the major Romantic poets. For example, King notes that the "similar autobiographical aspects of [*The Prelude* and *The Minstrel*] indicate not only how very much alike in attitudes, ideas, and talent Beattie and Wordsworth were but also the extent to which the similar settings of Scotland and Cumberland fostered their poetic abilities" (64), and, furthermore, that in reading *The Minstrel* "Wordsworth must have felt that art was mocking the facts of his own life" (64). In a similar moment King explains that, "[t]he self portraits [*sic*] to be found in [Walter] Scott's journal . . . are sometimes strikingly similar to the Beattian minstrel," and that "such personal experiences . . . indicate how much Scott himself was like Beattie and Wordsworth in his experience of nature, character and poetic inclination during his formative years" (King 153-54). Finally, King then finds that Byron's uncanny encounter with *The Minstrel* provoked the poet's lifelong quest for self-identity: "[a]s with Wordsworth, Byron's discovery of *The Minstrel* presented him with such a striking likeness of himself as a boy and as a youth that it became part of the persistent pattern of the poet's search for individual identity in all of his autobiographical compositions" (King 167).

King, in drawing together Beattie, Wordsworth, Scott, and Byron, appears to be developing a cluster of northern British poets, whom he imagines share a set of common boyhood encounters with the sublime border landscape: thundering cataracts and rocky crags. But when considering the relationship between Beattie's *Minstrel* and Keats or Percy Shelley's poetry, King is forced to drop this fantasy and asserts only artistic influence—not shared childhood experience. For King, *The Minstrel* is personally autobiographical, and, as ridiculous as this assumption might seem when we consider the text's complement of pastoral stock figures (shepherd-swains and hermits), the move, I would argue, is no more egregious a reach than the one made by a great number of critics who routinely scour Wordsworth's *Prelude* or Byron's *Don Juan* for details about the poets' lives. What King forgets is that as much as William Wordsworth identified with "the whole character of Edwin" so too did Robert Southey, despite the fact that Southey's childhood adventures—confined to the urban centers of Bristol and Bath—must, of course, have had little in common with those wild and natural "settings of Scotland and Cumberland."<sup>45</sup>

My point is that *The Prelude* and *The Minstrel*, as do all Romantic epics, have less to do with relating authentic autobiographical details of the poet's life or temperament than with establishing a shared sense of history and social location among members of the intellectual bloc. Instead of reading the "progress of Poetical Genius" (xi), to use Beattie's phrase (or the "Growth of the Poet's Mind" to use Wordsworth's), as personal autobiography, we should read these narratives as the literary expression of a collective experience. The experiences related in *The Minstrel* are *collective* in that no matter how closely they may be related to the actual events of Beattie's childhood (and I will readily admit my doubts to the nearness of this relation) these

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<sup>45</sup> Southey identifies himself and other aspiring poets with the character of Edwin in "Letter 95," "Letter 159," and "Letter 160" (*C.L.R.S.*).

events have been abstracted so that they can be understood as the common experience of the intellectual bloc. Thus, these recorded moments (spots of time) are reflections not of a single life but the structure of feeling generated by intellectual life-world within the historical context of the Romantic period. Moreover, these related experiences are necessarily *literary* in that the direction of this abstraction has been guided by residual, dominant, and emergent aspects of the culture of letters. In other words, when Beattie took up the project of relating something of himself, he was called upon to express that thing (whatever it might be) in ways that evoked some recognizable experience in the reader; and that furthermore, he was confined in his range of possible representations by an already established and yet constantly shifting network of cultural signifiers. Jean-Paul Sartre, in *What is Literature?*, describes this tension between the author, who seeks to become an agent through the act of writing, and the social field, which shapes not only the author's actions but molds the self:

I am an author, first of all, by my free intention to write. But at once it follows that I become a man whom other men consider as a writer, that is, who has to respond to a certain demand and who has been invested with a certain social function. Whatever game he may want to play, he must play it on the basis of the representations which others have of him. He may want to modify the character that one attributes to the man of letters in a given society; but in order to change it, he must first slip into it. Hence, the public intervenes, with its customs, its vision of the world, and its conception of the society and of literature within that society. It surrounds the writer, it hems him in, and its imperious or sly demands, its refusals and its flights, are the given facts on whose basis a work can be constructed. (Sartre 77-78; qtd. in Said 74-75)

The persistent return of the details associated with Beattie's epic hero, Edwin, which show up not only in the works of literature that followed *The Minstrel* but also in the narrativized lives of Wordsworth, Byron, and Scott, reveals the ideological operation of the genre within its community—not an actual similarity of childhood experience. Thus, the Romantic epic was more than just a set of literary conventions and patterns; it was a form (and I mean form not reduced to its literary meaning but expanded in the sense that the Romantic epic was molding or *formative*) by which intellectuals learned to recognize themselves.

#### An Intellectual Origin Myth

*The Minstrel's* influence depended upon Beattie's ability to develop the fictitious Edwin into a radically condensed symbol that represented the aspirations of the intellectual bloc. Early expressions of the Romantic epic's spirit had been building towards evermore powerful images of intellectual authority: Collin's gives us Milton sleeping at the moment of creative energy; Gray's Bard stands up to the English king; and Macpherson's Ossian is a true warrior-bard, as capable with a weapon as with his words. Each represented a certain strengthening of the intellectual imagination but all these early-bardic images remained static. They did not yet express any sense of intellectual life, only intellectual interests. With the character of Edwin, however, Beattie linked the individual intellectual's felt-sense of the apparent "rightness" of intellectual life with a naturalizing narrative about intellectual history.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> I have borrowed "felt-sense" from Marcia Moen who uses the term to point to a Subject's *bodily experience* of just "knowing" that something is either correct or not. Moen uses the example, well-suited to our purpose, of a poet who, upon writing a line of verse, just knows that something about it is not right. Turning to the socially proscribed rules of poetic diction will be of no help in this case; the poet must tune into to her bodily experience of the verse, reworking the line until it feels right (438-440). I take Moen's description of this well-known part of our lives as embodied Subjects as the

The political task of *The Minstrel* was, thus, to join together *the personal* with a justifying version of *the historical*. Speaking to union of these two concerns Beattie writes in the preface:

My design was, to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude and illiterate age, from the first dawning of fancy and reason, till that period at which he may be supposed capable of supporting the character of a Minstrel, that is, as an itinerant poet and musician;—a character, which, according to the notions of our forefathers, was not only respectable, but sacred. (*M.* [1771] v)

In “[tracing] the progress of a Poetical Genius,” the narrative of Edwin, a shepherd-boy turned minstrel, is, in one sense, a poetic *Künstlerroman*. The first book establishes the character of Edwin as a poet, following his development from an infant to a young man, while the second focuses on what might be thought of as Edwin’s crisis of intellectual purpose.

In another sense, *The Minstrel* is also a mythological origin story. As Beattie’s simple setting (“born in a rude and illiterate age”) suggests, there is within *The Minstrel* no effort to establish the narrative within the flow of known time. Instead, the poem is set in a liminal moment at the borders of the historical and the mythic:

There lived in Gothic days, as legends tell,

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expression, at the level of the embodied Subject, of what Pierre Bourdieu calls “habitus” at the level of class and community, and Raymond Williams refers to as the “structure of feeling” at the broadest social level of culture. Within the tradition of Marxist discourse, Moen’s “felt-sense” must be viewed dialectically. On one hand, “felt-sense” should be seen as a key part in the naturalizing mechanism of “false-consciousness”, which reinforces our everyday intuition that the way things now are the way they should be. On the other hand, “felt-sense” is central to revolutionary energy behind “alienation,” which must be seen as more than the separation of the worker from her product or humanity from its history (her “species-being”) but also as the felt difference between the Subject’s caged existence within bourgeois society and the human animal’s potentiality for free and full development (in the language of the young Marx, her “species-essence”). The character of “felt-sense” is often ideological; however, when it comes to questions of human necessity, I agree with Moen, that the “body will not be deceived” (442).

A shepherd-swain, a man of low degree;  
 Whose sires, perchance, in Fairyland might dwell,  
 Sicilian groves, or vales of Arcady. ( I.11.1-4)

Unlike Gray's thirteenth-century Bard or Macpherson's bard of the third century, both of whom are grounded by a mass of historical footnotes, Edwin, whose father is the Arcadian shepherd-swain described in this passage, exists outside of history, in the temporality of fables that might well be thought of as "once upon a time."

A great deal of the success of *The Minstrel* lies in its ability to conflate the possible meanings of the phrase "born in a rude and illiterate age," so that "age" refers to both the "rude and illiterate" historical epoch of the poem's setting and the youth of the "rude and illiterate" boy who has not yet grown into a Minstrel. The process of Edwin's maturation is therefore meant to suggest the parallel development of the intellectual in society. Edwin is representative of the intellectual stratum: his youth stands in for the youth of all poet-intellectuals, and his story is that of the founding of the intellectual "class." In Beattie's *Minstrel*, the reader finds not just the hero of secularist modernity ("the great man") but the hero of mythological magnitudes, a first man or a whole man.

#### Naturalizing the Intellectual

In need of a hero, Beattie wove together the vital aspects of the intellectual's mythic self-image into the enduring character of Edwin. A pastiche of the Virgilian shepherd, Joseph Warton's *Enthusiast*, Macpherson's *Ossian*, and perhaps just a touch of Gray's *Bard*, Edwin's allusive generating energy seems to point everywhere and yet nowhere at once (King 27-39). And perhaps the most mediated and difficult of these depictions to unravel is that of the

intellectual as a rustic or common man. Despite a startling disconnect from the material realities of intellectual life—a life for which the barriers to entry include the expenses of travel to the continent, an education, a modest library, and the freedom from labor to allow for time to read and write—the hero as the man of letters is most often portrayed, as is Edwin, as something of a son of a “shepherd-swain, a man of low degree.” In the literature of the period there are, of course, some few examples of heroes made from the sons of country lawyers and the children of dispossessed branches of the low, rural gentry, but the predominant picture is that of the swain. Even Londoners, such as Blake and Keats, gave their poet-heroes a “rural pen” (Blake 17).

There is now no way to map the all underlying motivations and cultural pathways that contributed to this grossly overdetermined sign of the intellectual-as-rustic, but there are some threads that might still be pulled at. There is an emerging literary antagonism between the country and the city during the period, as the land-based, agrarian economy increasingly fell into the orbit of a speculative financial economy based in London. It should be no surprise that intellectuals, whose notions of genteel humanism historically developed in connection with the mercantile economy of the towns, were still drawn to a pastoral vision of the country-house study. Moreover, by the late eighteenth-century, this sympathetic alliance with the figures of the shepherd-swain and the milk maid had acquired a philosophic and moral gloss in the wake of Rousseau primitivism. Yet, in terms of forming the intellectual self-identity, a key input remained the residual mythological trope of “Christ, the good shepherd.” The image was one of rural heroism, both of leadership and moral authority, and the fact that intellectuals by-and-large overlooked its previous deployment to buttress the figure of the prince and the parson only reinforces Weber’s analysis that intellectuals (even to this day) remain all too prone to the same structures of elitism, to dreaming of themselves as a “salvation aristocracy” (Kahan 178).

But the Christ metaphor also supported one of the most surprising and influential paradoxes in the intellectual ideology: the uncommon commoner; for although Edwin is “a man of low degree” (or to borrow the Christian phraseology “fully human”), he is at the same time “a visionary boy” (I.30.2), “[i]n truth... a strange and wayward wight” (I.22.1), perhaps a creature only just short of being fully divine. This is a peculiar contradiction, but one that the speaker is quick to play on: for example, when he tells the reader that “poor Edwin was no vulgar boy” (I.16.1).

Indeed, from his very birth, the poet-intellectual portrayed through Edwin is different, special:

Deep thought oft seemed to fix his infant eye.  
 Dainties he heeded not, nor gaude, nor toy,  
 Save one short pipe of rudest minstrelsy. (I.16.2-4)

This is a moment of uncanny recognition: Edwin seems born to be poet. It is a scene of “class” identification that is echoed when Edwin becomes a young man:

Responsive to the sprightly pipe, when all  
 In sprightly dance the village-youth were joined,  
 Edwin, of melody aye held in thrall,  
 From the rude gambol far remote reclined,  
 Soothed with the soft notes warbling in the wind.  
 Ah then, all jollity seem'd noise and folly.  
 To the pure soul by Fancy's fire refined,  
 Ah, what is mirth but turbulence unholy,  
 When with the charm compared of heavenly melancholy! (I.55.1-9)

Juxtaposed against the depiction of Edwin as a rustic, these scenes of dawning consciousness provide a powerful ideological cover for intellectual readers, who find in the mythology of *The Minstrel* that one does not become a poet but discovers oneself to have always been one.

To help establish this misrecognition, Beattie is also drawing on the dominant trope of the natural genius, an intellectual subcultural fable with roots permeating down to the early eighteenth century. But it is Beattie's treatment of this received myth that represents an advance from Collins' use of the same trope. Beattie fleshes out the trope of natural genius by providing it the narrative strength of life-writing so that Edwin's innate affiliation with poetry and song become tied to a naturalized sensibility that uniquely belongs to the intellectual "class":

Silent when glad; affectionate, though shy;

And now his look was most demurely sad,

And now he laughed aloud, yet none knew why.

The neighbours stared and sighed, yet blessed the lad:

Some deemed him wondrous wise, and some believed him mad. (I.16.5-9)

Although Edwin's emotional states present themselves ambiguously to the village community (is he "wise" or "mad"?), for the poet speaker and the intellectual reader these are the distinguishing marks of the caste of poet-intellectuals to which the reader is being recruited. Similarly, we read that Edwin loves his village community but from a distance. Even as a child:

Concourse, and noise, and toil, he [Edwin] ever fled;

Nor cared to mingle in the clamorous fray

Of squabbling imps; but to the forest sped,

Or roamed at large the lonely mountain's head;

Or, where the maze of some bewildered stream

To deep untrodden groves his footsteps led,  
 There would he wander wild [.] (I.17.2-8)

One need not be a critic to recognize that it is Edwin who is “lonely” in this passage and not the mountain. The effect of lines like these is that readers are asked to rewrite the details of their own experiences into the mold of Edwin’s alienation. It is an identification that operates like a horoscope, asking “Did you feel misunderstood, too? Then you were born a poet.”

Of course no one is born a poet, but for the intellectual reader there is a value in buying into this “shared” experience when the same uncommon passions that alienate Edwin from his rural community come to serve as the base of his moral foundation:

His heart, from cruel sport estranged, would bleed  
 To work the wo of any living thing,  
 By trap, or net; by arrow, or by sling;  
 These he detested, those he scorned to wield:  
 He wished to be the guardian, not the king,  
 Tyrant, far less, or traitor, of the field. (I.18.3-8)

Thus, in the character of Edwin there develops a triad of moral integrity, special sympathy, and poetic ability: each of which acts to signify the other two. Beattie’s expansion of the natural genius develops the picture of a naturally occurring and meritocratic intellectual leadership class that, in an echo of Collins, is purposed with organizing a new social harmony.

### The Hermit’s Task

It is this insistent plea for a new social harmony that marks *The Minstrel* as a true Romantic performance, and it is through the character of the Hermit that *The Minstrel* developed an anti-

capitalist message. Although Edwin remains in his rural haunt, the Hermit, who appears in the second book, has been a man of the world. He has not only served the dominant strata, he has immersed himself in their values and their culture:

‘Like them, abandoned to Ambition’s sway,  
 ‘I sought for glory in the paths of guile;  
 ‘And fawned and smiled, to plunder and betray,  
 ‘Myself betrayed and plundered all the while [.] (II.14.1-4)

In short, the Hermit has lived the previous mode of intellectual life—kissing up to “tyrants” (II.53.5) and spoiling his poetic gifts. Nearly ruined by what he has seen and done, the Hermit has returned to a simple, rural life—like Edwin, watching the country villagers from afar.

The Hermit’s critique of modernity is all encompassing. The destruction waged in the name of “progress” has so deformed the world that the passionate Hermit cries out:

‘O Man! creation’s pride, heaven’s darling child,  
 ‘Whom Nature’s best, divinest, gifts adorn,  
 ‘Why from thy home are truth and joy exiled,  
 ‘And all thy favourite haunts with blood and tears defiled! (II.19.6-9)

Furthermore, the destruction of nature and society by the forces of greed are matched in the modern mind:

‘          in the mental world, what chaos drear!  
 ‘What forms of mournful, loathsome, furious mien!  
 ‘O when shall that Eternal Morn appear,  
 ‘These dreadful forms to chase, this chaos dark to clear! (II.20.6-9)

The Hermit recounts that progress should have improved upon the primitive harmony—where,

To all an equal lot Heaven's bounty gave:

No vassal feared his lord, no tyrant feared his slave. (II. 38.8-9)

But in the modern world, where “no pang of pity [can] pierce / That heart by lust of lucre seared to stone!” (I.45.5-6), there is only the union of social, environmental, and psychological discord.

The Hermit, like Edwin, lives in a state of wilderness exile. Both have been driven to isolation because their unique intellectual sympathy sets them apart. But the tone of the Hermit's confrontation with the modern world's gross immorality is certainly darker than Edwin's distance from the simple goodness of his rural community. Indeed, there are moments when the Hermit appears resigned to give up on minstrelsy:

‘Ah, what have I to do with conquering kings,

‘Hands drenched in blood, and breasts begirt with steel!

‘To those, whom Nature taught to think and feel,

‘Heroes, alas! Are things of small concern [.] (II.35.3-6)

These lines not only indicate the Hermit's retreat from society but, within the context of the epic's transformation in the eighteenth century, they also point to an outright refusal of the traditional epic mode. It is a moment of crisis in a poem which threatens to foreclose its own performance. The Hermit seems ready to quit his socio-intellectual task which, here, is directly aligned with the production of epic poetry.

But while the Hermit has retreated from society, the poem is disengaged from neither the world nor the Romantic intellectual task. The Hermit's dismissal of epic heroism is immediately followed by an affirmation of History and human progress:

‘To those, whom Nature taught to think and feel,

‘Heroes, alas! Are things of small concern.

‘Could History man’s secret heart reveal. (II.35.5-7)

Even as the fictions of epic heroism, of “conquering kings” (II.35.3), are revealed to be intellectual productions intended to cover the gory realities of heartless violence, of “hands drenched in blood, and breasts begirt with steel” (II.35.4), a new intellectual mode—History—is offered as a replacement. Distinguishing it from epic, History’s function is not to cover over the dominant strata’s brutalities but to “reveal” humanity’s true nature, “man’s secret heart” (II.35.7). As the Hermit relates shortly after:

‘What charms the Historic Muse adorn, from spoils,

‘And blood, and tyrants, when she wings her flight,

‘To hail the patriot Prince, whose pious toils

‘Sacred to science, liberty, and right,

‘And peace, through every age divinely bright,

‘Shall shine the boast and wonder of mankind!

.....

‘. . . . and man with man for mutual aid combine!<sup>47</sup> (II.43.1-9)

The rhetoric in lines like these is nearly millenarian, and despite the pessimistic tone of much of Book II, the view of humanity in *The Minstrel* is never short of full perfectibility. As the Hermit asks:

‘What cannot Art and Industry perform,

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<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that Beattie seems to have no actual person in mind when he uses the phrase “patriot Prince” which both acts as a contrasting alliterative echo against “conquering Kings” and suggests a refunctionalization of the epic hero who no longer serves as a symbolic covering for the actions of an actual human monarch he did in the Augustan epics. Furthermore, like many Romantic intellectuals, who held fast to the promise of the philosopher king, Beattie shows himself as no Republican.

‘When Science plans the progress of their toil! (II.54.1-2)

The poem’s commitment to social engineering has important implications for Beattie’s construction of a new intellectual purpose. Instead of arguing for a retreat away from the political and toward the aesthetic and the sublime, Beattie defines the intellectual’s role as a mediator in the struggle between classes:

‘When tyrants scourge, or demagogues embroil

‘A land, or when the rabble’s headlong rage

‘Order transforms to anarchy and spoil,

‘Deep-versed in man, the philosophic Sage

‘Prepares, with lenient hand, their phrenzy to assuage. (II.53.5-9)

To be a true Minstrel, the poem argues, is to belong to a chosen caste (Coleridge would later refer to it as a clerisy). And although the gifts of intellectualism come at a price (Edwin is one of those who “mystic transports felt,” but he is also “[o]f solitude and melancholy born” [I.56.3-4]), here, fulfilling the mythic political role as a harmonizing force between the “tyrants” and “the rabble” requires that the intellectual stand outside of the class relation; he must exist as a creature of permanent exile.

Chiefly then, *The Minstrel*’s epic theme is the experience of intellectual exile, and it seeks to give meaning to the sense of alienation felt by Romantic intellectuals. In the first book, Edwin’s solitary encounters with the sublime idealize and naturalize his social dislocation, and, in the second book, the Hermit’s oppressive isolation operates as a sign of intellectual’s exclusive moral authority. The Hermit’s position in this depiction of exile is crucial to understanding Beattie’s thematics. Everard King, noting the shift in tone from the essentially optimistic first book to the dispirited second, reads into Edwin’s story an unresolved vocational crisis. The

Hermit, in King's reading, functions as Edwin's disillusioned double. Privileging the Hermit's critique over Edwin's poetic enthusiasm, King reads *The Minstrel* as "a poem of unfulfilled promise" (King 78), an epic that is cut short by an ideological impasse that Beattie's imperfect poetic genius could not transcend.

I am arguing, however, that *The Minstrel* is a more ideologically resolute than King recognizes. The two views of intellectual exile presented through the characters of Edwin and the Hermit operate as Blakean corollaries in order to present a productive and seemingly holistic view of alienation. Neither the young Edwin's naïve innocence nor the mature Hermit's cynical experience should be taken as the last word on the nature of poetic life. Far from being frustrated in the gap between these two visions, the new Romantic epic (with its portrayal of the hero as the man of letters) actually emerges from their interplay. The fact that neither character emerges from their wilderness exile is precisely the political point. The work of social intervention is not to be done by characters within a poem, but by readers in the world—literary "Heroes, alas! are things of small concern" (II.35.6). The poem reimagines the epic as a genre meant to inspire and direct the intellectual community. By linking together heightened sympathy with the intellectual's felt experience of cultural dislocation Beattie offers his community a mythology of intellectual alienation which appears as a natural and self-contained truth and that reinforces notions of intellectual independence and authority.

#### Dispelling the Ghost of the Augustan Epic

Beattie's *Minstrel* offered a clear way forward for the frustrated epic desire within the intellectual bloc, and the number of major epics from the canonical Romantic poets that relied heavily on *The Minstrel* as an epic sourcebook witness to the power of its ideological resolution:

Wordsworth's *Prelude* and *Excursion*, Keats' *Endymion*, Shelley's *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam*, Scott's *Marmion*, and Byron's *Childe Harold* (see King 61-184). While the Pindarics of Collins and Gray, and the epic recoveries in the mode of *Ossian* made essential progress toward the new epic's function, it was *The Minstrel* that became the solid foundation for future epic performances. Its success was so absolute that, in its aftermath, expressions of epic disinheritor loss their strength of purpose and became only residual tropes, vestiges that pointed only to a hard-fought victory over the pressures of a deeper generic past.

When *The Minstrel* first appeared, however, the force of epic disinheritor was still keenly felt, and one indication of the continued impulse towards epic disinheritor was Beattie's choice to avoid the heroic couplets of the Augustan epists and adopt the long-neglected Spenserian stanza. Beattie wrote that he preferred the Spenserian because it offered more range than the couplet; it was able to

give full scope to my inclinations, and be either more droll or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical, as the humor strikes me; for . . . the manner . . . admits equally of all these kinds of composition. . . . I think it the most harmonious ever contrived. It admits more variety of pauses than either the couplet or the alternate rhyme; and it concludes with a pomp and majesty of sound, which to my ear, is wonderfully delightful. It seems also very well adapted to our language, which, from its irregularity of inflexion and number of monosyllables, abounds in diversified terminations, and consequently renders our poetry susceptible of an endless variety of legitimate rhymes. (qtd. in King 39-40)

Beattie would repeat the basics of this assessment of the Spenserian stanza in *The Minstrel's* "Preface," talking of the Spenserian's propensity for "harmony, simplicity, and variety" (xi).

Outside of the context of the Romantic epic's eighteenth-century transformation, it would be easy to miss the political implications of Beattie's aesthetic preference, but we should notice that just as Collins, Gray, and Macpherson had done, Beattie consciously avoided the couplet. And just like Collins had in "Ode on the Poetical Character," Beattie constructed a revised British epic tradition that, starting with Spenser, bypasses the Augustan epists. Moreover, in language of "harmony, simplicity, and variety," Beattie recited the new values of the Romantic intellectual bloc, values that were antithetical to the Augustan world of "fixed grandeur, dignity, authority, and high polish" (Barzun 36).

The drive toward epic disinheritance also influenced Edwin's character, who first appears in the poem as the negation of the Augustan intellectual. Even before Edwin's natural genius is described or his solitary soul is revealed, Beattie's *Minstrel* and its protagonist are set-off against their opposite. The opening twelve stanzas make use of the traditional invocation to the muse to draw these distinctions along several lines. There are, of course, the familiar eighteenth-century protestant invectives against luxury; Edwin appears righteous and "homely in array" (I.3.4) against "the rich attire" (I.9.4), "lust of wealth" (I.10.3), and "the dull couch of Luxury" (I.8.3) that marks his foil. But moreover, there is a layering of the emerging codes used to delineate the Romantic intellectual identity. *The natural in opposition to the artificial*: Edwin belongs to "the woodland scene remote" (I.5.5), his harp "to the whistling wind responsive rung" (I.3.7), his tale "simple" (I.2.8) and his lines "artless" (I.2.8), which are to be contrasted against those who "renounce the boundless store / of charms which nature to her votary yields" (I.9.1-2), and sing with an "artificial note" (I.5.6). *The value of harmony against disharmony*: true poets and minstrels are the "sons of harmony" (I.5.3), yet from this Other, "horror screams from his discordant throat" (I.5.2). *The ancient over the modern*: the speaker admires those tales of

“classic lore” (*M.* [1771] I.3.1), like the epics of “Dan Homer” (*M.* [1771] I.4.3), lamenting, “[w]hen shall modern bard like him be fired!” (*M.* [1771] I.4.5), particularly in contrast to the “the silken bards of this illustrious age” (*M.* [1771] I.6.8), or the “modern man of song” (*M.* [1771] I.5.1) of “[t]his sapient age” (*M.* [1771] I.3.1).

In the first edition of *The Minstrel* it is this last difference between the heroic ancient and the fallen modern bard that forms the central contrast upon which Edwin’s character is developed. For example, in the fifth stanza the foppish modern is elaborated against the “poor old-fashioned pilgrim” (*M.* [1771] I.5.7):

Fret not thyself, thou man of modern song,

Nor violate the plaister [*sic*] of thy hair;

Nor to that dainty coat do aught of wrong;

Else how shalt thou to Caser's hall repair?

(For, ah! no damaged coat can enter there).

Of thee, and thy trim brethren, take no care,

But of a poor old-fashioned pilgrim write,

Whom thou wouldst shun, I ween, as most unseemly sight. (*M.* [1771] I.5.1-8)

The description here is characteristic of the contrasting qualities divided between the figures of modernity and antiquity in the poem. The modern poet is a frequent guest at “Caser’s Hall” (*M.* [1771] I.5.4) or at “th’ Imperial banquet” (*M.* [1771] I.9.4), a friend to “courts or kings” (*M.* [1771] I.4.8). He is a “parasite” (*M.* [1771] I.6.7), a member of “Ambition’s groveling crew” (*M.* [1771] I.9.8), whose “mad Ambition” (*M.* [1771] I.2.5) for “pensions, posts and Praise” (*M.* [1771] I.4.8) lead him “[t]o please a tyrant” (*M.* [1771] I.7.7). However, the bard of “Gothic

days" (*M.* [1771] I.13.1) is independent, "alone / . . . unpitied and unknown" (*M.* [1771] I.1.8-9).

He is a nomadic and heroic figure, a romantic wanderer:

His waving locks and beard all hoary grey:

And from his bending shoulder, decent hung

His harp, the sole companion of his way,

Which to the whistling wind responsive rung. (*M.* [1771] I.3.4-7)

He does not play on the "obstreperous trump of Fame" (*M.* [1771] 1.2.6), or seek the "voice of praise" (*M.* [1771] 1.2.3), but nature is his muse and he sings his songs only to that "sweeter joy" (*M.* [1771] I.4.7). Today these are clichés, and their familiar character encourages the reader to neither consider their rhetorical function nor their historicity. But these words do have a purpose: they seek to establish a recognizable communal identity. And we should remember that they are historically determined, that Shakespeare could not have imagined that serving a "court or king" was somehow beneath the office of poet.

Perhaps even more confusing for twenty-first-century readers, the object of the poet's ire, the "modern man of song" and the "bards of this illustrious age," were no longer contemporary when Beattie wrote *The Minstrel*. The description of the modern poet's "plaister[ed]... hair" and "dainty coat," as well as his commitment to his well-heeled patrons is actually a mocking portrayal of Beattie's early-eighteenth-century predecessors, cultural producers like Blackmore. It is this Augustan reader/writer (a figure whose courtly pretensions and worldly ambitions exclude him from the new epic mode which Beattie intends to model) who is rejected by the speaker.

Although in the first edition the framing is in opposition to the previous generation of intellectuals, as Beattie revised *The Minstrel* the contrast between the ancient and modern

intellectual disappears. Beginning in the 1779 edition (which saw the publication of both books in a single volume), the phrase “man of modern song” is replaced with “glittering child of pride” (I.4.1). Gone are “the silken bards of this illustrious age,” the “modern bard,” and all talk of “this sapient age.” Gone too is the stanza on “classic lore” and “Dan Homer.” On the whole, the Augustan poet fades from view in the latter editions along with his “plaister[ed] . . . hair,” his “dainty coat,” and his “pensions, posts and praise.” What remains is less clearly defined. The contrast is no longer between intellectual generations, or competing visions of intellectual life, but between the dominant social class who is seen to have narrowly economic and selfish ambitions and the poet-intellectuals who combine a radical connection to the world with an even more radical autonomy.

This shift in *The Minstrel*'s framing, which overtime releases the Augustan poet (and by association the Augustan epic) and turns its critical eye toward the dominant stratum, is indicative of the changes in intellectual attitudes reflected in the Romantic epic. From the formal exclusions of the Pindaric odes of Collins and Gray, through the stance of recovery with loss in Macpherson's so-called translations, and finally to the full renewal of the Spenserian mode offered in Beattie's *Minstrel*, the tacit rejection of the epic form associated with the Augustan appears to gradually lessen throughout the early Romantic period. It was this general trend away from outright epic disinheritance that set the foundation for the eruption of “epomania” in the late 1790s.

In the Pindarics of Collins and Gray, and the epic rehearsals of Macpherson and Beattie, the development of the Romantic epic was shaped both by a desire for a communal narrative that gave the intellectual bloc a sense of purpose and moral authority and by a need to disavow the Augustan epic and the intellectual life of the subservient poet that produced it. The first of these

impulses I have labelled epic desire, and Beattie's invaluable contribution to the development of the Romantic epic was the realization that epic desire might be organized within the scope of the *Bildungs* and the narrative bounds of the fable in order to generate a deeply affective political mythology. The second impulse I have labelled epic disinheritance, and it was only by Beattie's working through of this conflicted relationship with the early eighteenth-century intellectual that the late eighteenth-century intellectual was able to develop a fully coherent and oppositional "class" identity. By conjuring Edwin, the embodied spirit of intellectual epic desire, Beattie proves himself to be an unsurpassed ideologist. But in confronting the ghosts of the Augustan epic, Beattie proves he is nothing short of a cultural exorcist.

### Conclusions

In this chapter I have attempted to recover the quiet history of the epic in the eighteenth century, countering the position that "during the eighteenth century the theory rather than practice of epic was where the genre lived" by uncovering the political forces behind the epic's dramatic transformation from a mode of Augustan chauvinism to a form of intellectual revolt (Tucker 43). At the bottom of this slow generic evolution, I have argued, is a political realignment within the community of writers and readers of epic poetry. I have argued that as the coalition joining intellectuals to the various layers of the dominant stratum began to fail by the mid-eighteenth century, intellectuals felt compelled to renounce not only earlier forms of intellectual life but also those rhetorical modes which were associated with the poetry of the court and colonial expansion. Epic, which had functioned to lavish praise on crown and the imperialist state in the seventeenth century, was therefore avoided by early Romantic intellectuals who increasingly thought of themselves as the leaders of a more equitable and more

humane social order. The epic, therefore, seems to disappear by mid-century because its key function under the dissolving political alliance that joined intellectuals to layers of the dominant strata had become ideologically untenable. However, within the intellectual community the epic retained favorable associations, too, and the literary record of the last half of the eighteenth century demonstrates that intellectuals longed to return to the genre. My claim is that the evolution of epic discourse in the eighteenth century is particularly difficult to track because the energies of the epic were necessarily diverted away from Augustan modes of epic presentations, like the heroic couplet. Instead, near forms, like the Pindaric ode, the newly fashionable prose translation, and the outmoded Spenserian stanza, had to be redeployed to take up the function of an emerging epic impulse—a desire to see “the hero as the man of letters.” The history of the epic, therefore, is not only the history of a form but a record of the intellectual bloc’s struggle to recognize itself and its role within the long process of class-struggle.

## Chapter Three

*Joan of Arc:*

## Robert Southey's Vision of the Maid

[M]y Joan is a great democrat or rather will be.

--Robert Southey, July 1793 (*C.L.R.S.*, "Letter 53")

## I. An "Entire Man of Letters"

As I have so far tried to show, Southey's claim that he quite single-handedly "revived the epomania that Boileau had cured the French of" was certainly a gross overestimate of his own poetic powers. Yet, it cannot be denied that Robert Southey was among the most successful and committed epists of his era. If his five completed epics, including his first, *Joan of Arc* (1796), which he drafted while he was still eighteen, are seldom read today, it has less to do with Southey's comprehension of his own age than ours of his. In his time, Southey's name was so synonymous with epic that Byron was able to jest in *Don Juan* about Southey's prolific output of epic tedium to a growing market of non-intellectual readers:

I know that what our neighbours call '*longueurs*'

(We 've not so good a word, but have the thing

In that complete perfection which ensures

An epic from Bob Southey every spring). (III.97.1-4)

The joke was simply a symptom of the Southey's success. Blake, who wrote even more epics which were arguably only half as accessible, had difficulty even getting reviews. But Southey

was something of a party brand. Reviews of Southey's epics were opportunities to weigh in the broader intellectual political project. The best example is probably Francis Jeffrey's 1802 review of Southey's *Thalaba, the Destroyer*, which he used as an occasion to attack Southey as "one of the chief champions and apostles" (7) of what he labeled a "*sect* of poets" (7, emphasis retained):

A splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society seems to be at the bottom of all their serious and peculiar sentiments. Instead of contemplating the wonders and the pleasures which civilization has created for mankind, they are perpetually brooding over the disorders by which its progress has been attended. They are filled with horror and compassion at the sight of poor men spending their blood in the quarrels of princes, and brutifying their sublime capabilities in the drudgery of unremitting labour.

(15)

If Southey was the "chief champion and apostle" of a "*sect*" it was the *sect* of the discontented intellectual bloc. After Southey was made Laureate in 1813, Byron met him for the first time and recorded in his journal: "[Southey's] *appearance* is epic, and he is the only existing entire man of letters. All the others have some pursuit annexed to their authorship" (Byron *The Works* 2.331, emphasis added). Even if Southey had not revived the epic as he claimed, he certainly became the embodiment of all it represented.

Southey may at first seem like an odd choice to have been one of the "chief champions" of both the epic and the intellectual bloc. His father was a failed Bristol shopkeeper who sent his son to live with the boy's widowed maternal aunt in Bath. She fancied herself a bluestocking and often took young Southey to the theater, but any advantage he gained by this exposure to the arts was countered by his aunt's reclusive domestic existence, stemming from a sharp phobic reaction to dirt. By the time Southey's paternal uncle involved himself in the boy's

management, his education was so far neglected that it took a year of tutoring before he could enter Westminster. Less than four years later he managed to get himself expelled for publishing a tract against the flogging of students, so angering the headmaster that he personally saw to it that Southey was denied admission to the prestigious college of Christ's Church at Oxford. Southey settled for Balliol. He did not even make it two years at Balliol, before mounting debts and doubts over his potential as a churchman or a physician ended his formal education. Shortly thereafter, he made a brief attempt at Law, but it too amounted to nothing.

Southey was neither cosmopolitan nor a bohemian. When he wrote *Joan of Arc*, he had never travelled outside of a narrow circuit confining Bath, Bristol, Oxford, and London. His work-habit was puritan, and he had an unqualified fondness for domestic life. He was, perhaps, an adequate public speaker, but he lacked the oratory gifts of men like Coleridge. He published too often to be respectable, and he looked to profit by nearly everything he sent to press.<sup>48</sup> Even worse, he had habit of writing light verse and pieces for children that were a drag on his literary reputation.<sup>49</sup>

But Southey's position as "the only existing man of letters," to return to Byron's description, was tied less to his intellectual credentials than his radical ambitions. None of the major writers of the Romantic period could be said to have exceeded the revolutionary fervor Southey possessed in the 1790s. The Pantisocratic scheme, which is often credited to the mind of

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<sup>48</sup> Coleridge once joked at Southey's expense that, "he certainly would make literature more *profitable to him* from the fluency with which he writes" (qtd. in Trott 79).

<sup>49</sup> To this day, Southey's most popular work remains the short fairy tale he wrote for his children, "The Story of the Three Bears" (1837). For more on the negative impact of Southey's minor poems on his literary career see Nicola Trott's "Poemets and Poemlings: Robert Southey's Minority Interest" (2006).

Coleridge, was actually Southey's (Butler 77), and it is worth recalling Thomas Poole's lengthy description of the plan:

Twelve gentlemen of good education and liberal principles are to embark with twelve ladies in April next. . . . The produce of their industry is to be laid up in common for the use of all and a good library of books is to be collected, and their leisure hours to be spent in study, liberal discussions, and the education of their children. A system for the education of their children is laid down, for which, if this plan at all suits you, I must refer you to the authors of it. The regulations relating to the females strike them as the most difficult; whether the marriage contract shall be dissolved if agreeable to one or both parties, and many other circumstances, are not yet determined. The employments of the women are to be the care of infant children, and other occupations suited to their strength at the same time the greatest attention is to be paid to the cultivation of their minds. Every one [*sic*] is to enjoy his own religious and political opinions, provided they do not encroach on the rules previously made, which rules, it is unnecessary to add, must in some measure be regulated by the laws of the state which includes the district in which they settle. They calculate that each gentleman providing £ 125 will be sufficient to carry the scheme into execution. Finally, every individual is at liberty, whenever he pleases, to withdraw from the society. (rpt. in Sandford 97-98)

The Pantisocracy was to be a radical experiment in democracy. The word itself meant "the equal rule of all," and, superadded to this, the prospective Pantisocrats had determined on the principle of "Aspheterism," or the communal ownership of all property (Bernhardt-Kabisch 23-24). The dissolution of private property, the provision for a system of education for every child, the emancipation of women from ignorance and marriage, and the enfranchisement of all—the

Pantisocratic scheme was a plan for social engineering that far exceeded the reach of even the most radical phase of the French Revolution.<sup>50</sup>

The plan, however, came to nothing, and when Southey left for Portugal, Coleridge was left with Sara Fricker, a bride he never really wanted. Coleridge charged Southey with turning bourgeois, of corrupting the virtues of Pantisocracy by turning it into a “petty farming trade” (Coleridge I.140). “O selfish money-loving man!” Coleridge closed his letter that dissolved his friendship with Southey for a year, “[w]hat principle have you not given up? . . . O God! that such a mind should fall in love with that low, dirty, gutter-grubbing trull, *Worldly Prudence!*” (I.148). Southey had insisted on several changes from the original design of the Pantisocratic community. He determined to include his widowed mother, his mother-in-law, and the Weeks family, aware that they were not committed to the same ideals. Moreover, when the cost of the £2000 trip to America proved too much for the aspiring Pantisocrats, he decided that the same goals might be accomplished more frugally in Wales, at least for a time. Coleridge paints these alterations as evidence that Southey was less committed, less radical, less the true intellectual. However, a more generous understanding of Southey’s positions might point to his more radical trust in the persuasiveness of the Pantisocratic system and in the intellectual abilities of common people to be elevated by it. Where Coleridge thought the prospects for success were limited to small community of like-minded intellectuals completely separated from the world-economy (perhaps the closest he could come to a social blank-slate and reminiscent of the enclosed

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<sup>50</sup> On the issue of marriage among the Pantisocrats, Bernhardt-Kabisch is more cynical in his view of the arrangement: “matrimony was a key element in the mythus underlying Pantisocracy. All of the twelve patriarchal peers were to be married to intelligent and liberal but withal docile and decorous young women who would tend the kitchen and the nursery before joining the men in the rustic parlor for joint study and conversation” (24).

utopian community of the academic cloister), Southey, like his idols in France, was interested in nothing less than “regenerating mankind” (Southey *C.L.R.S.* "Letter 99").<sup>51</sup>

Southey’s commitment to social engineering is most visible during his early years as an epic writer, but it remained with him throughout his career. As a young man he was drawn to the social theories of Rousseau and Godwin. Even before he went to Oxford he imagined it possible that, “if France models a republic [and] enjoys tranquillity [*sic*] who knows but Europe may become one great republic [and] Man be free of the whole?” (*C.L.R.S.* "Letter 28"). He held to the constructedness of human vice and misery as an article of reason:

we are born in sin [and] the children of wrath says the catechism. [I]t is absolutely false. [S]in is artificial — it is the monstrous offspring of government [and] property. [T]he origin of both was in injustice. I cannot seek to avoid my own distresses by looking on mankind in general, without feeling for general calamity. [And] yet Man is capable of happiness. (*C.L.R.S.* "Letter 72")

Even after Napoleon was crowned Emperor, and he lost his faith in France, he never lost his belief in the perfectibility of society. Upon being made Laureate and taking a position at the Tory *Quarterly Review*, his opponents attempted to embarrass him by accusing him of shifting his political opinions with the winds, but at the height of the *Wat Tyler* affair he could still write honestly of his career that,<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Contrary to the current opinion of many scholars, it was the impression of Thomas Poole when he met Coleridge and Southey for the first time that Southey was the more radical of the two: “Southey, who was with [Coleridge], is of the University of Oxford, a younger man, without the splendid abilities of Coleridge [of speech?], though possessing much information, particularly metaphysical, and is more violent in his principles than even Coleridge himself. In Religion, shocking to say in a mere Boy as he is, I fear he wavers between Deism and Atheism” (Sandford 97).

<sup>52</sup> In 1817 Southey’s political opponents sought to diminish his credibility by republishing a forgotten manuscript written during his days at Oxford, “Wat Tyler.” The poem, based on the fourteenth century Wat Tyler Rebellion, was an expression of Southey’s radical democratic sentiments and clear Jacobin

[t]he one object to which I have ever been desirous of contributing according to my power, is the removal of those obstacles by which the improvement of mankind is impeded; and to this the whole tenour of my writings, whether in prose or in verse, bears witness. This has been the pole star of my course; the needle has shifted according to the state vessel wherein I am embarked, but the direction has always been the same. ("A Letter" 27).

As if to prove the point, Southey followed his defense by applauding the intentions (although not the methods) of the utopian socialist Robert Owen before going on to propose his own program of social and economic government interventions, including poor relief and a massive public works program (32-41).

It was this grand impulse towards "the improvement of mankind" that drew Southey repeatedly back to the epic. No other genre at that time was more capable of grappling with universal truths, the total organization of society, or the expansive arc of human history.<sup>53</sup> Southey embraced all the opportunities allotted by the epic form. He refunctionalized the received tradition of the epic simile not to puff up the stature of his epic heroes and heroines with mythological glory but to collapse the distinctions between civilization and savagery, conflating

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sympathies. Southey, whether embarrassed by the poem's incendiary politics or by its rough poetics (as he later claimed) attempted to have the unauthorized publication halted by appealing to the Lord Chancellor (Eldon) to enforce copyright law. Apparently reacting to Southey's supposed youthful apostasy, the Lord Chancellor surprisingly declared the work seditious and therefore beyond the protection of law, allowing more than 60,000 copies to be printed and sold.

<sup>53</sup> It was Hegel that seems to first to have recognized the totalizing impulse of the epic: "The rounding-off and the finished shape of the epic lies not only in the particular content of the specific action but just as much in the entirety of the world-view, the object realization of which the epic undertakes to describe; and the unity of the epic is in fact only perfect when there is brought before us in all their entirety not only the particular action as a closed whole in itself but also, in the course of the action, the total world within the entire circumference of which it moves" (2.1090; qtd in Tucker 24, n. 34).

the superstitions of the world (whether Christian, Muslim, or pagan) and drawing a direct comparison between the war with France and the barbarity of human sacrifice (Beshero-Bondar 59-60).<sup>54</sup> In his hands, the epic catalog became a mass of footnotes that took on such a radical authority that they overmatched the narrative engine itself, sometimes casting the reader into a sea of source material that expanded and confirmed the narrative point with such immense weight that the story itself begins to appear puny by comparison, while at other times washing away the foundations of the epic machinery, rescuing the reader from the narrative riptides of imagination and returning him back to the solid ground of reason (Tucker 90). Even the history, upon which the epic narrative was to be built, was made an instrument for Southey's instructional project:

Southey found in history stories of action which came ready-made for his poetic purpose. . . . [T]he protagonists of his poems are usually those who have fought for freedom against tyrants and who not infrequently suffer death as the consequence. These subjects are found everywhere: in the Bible, in Greek and Roman history, and especially in the history of Britain. . . . The lesson of these poems is very simple: tyranny and the tyrant must be overcome; the tyrant meets his just doom often after a violent end in which he is tormented by the pangs of conscience. . . . The hero or heroine dies with the reassurance that the cause will triumph and that the sacrifice has been worthwhile. . . . Behind all these events there is implied a belief that a Providence rules the events of man and that the just and righteous man will be rewarded, if not in this world, then the next. (Curry 155)

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<sup>54</sup> Perhaps Southey's experiments with epic simile find their closest analog in Sergei Eisenstein's totem montage in his 1927 cinematic adaptation of John Reed's *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*.

This “next [world]” in Southey, no matter which religious tradition he employed in his plots, is always a screen for a better tomorrow, a time when “the whole human race / . . . shall form ONE BROTHERHOOD. ONE UNIVERSAL FAMILY OF LOVE” (Southey *Joan* IX. 741-744). It is a future Southey was seeking to build one epic at a time.<sup>55</sup>

Communities are seldom defined by their moderates. Any claim Southey had to the position of “the only existing entire man of letters” was earned not by the typicality of his intellectual life, which in many ways went against type, but through the extremity of his intellectual stance. Although nearly all intellectuals of the Romantic period viewed themselves to some degree as the defenders of “the People,” the qualified interpreters of history, and the “unacknowledged legislators of the world,” few had shown themselves to be more committed and certain of the intellectual social project than Robert Southey. In fact, for many intellectuals Southey and his epics were something of an embarrassment. Unsettled by Southey’s display, Wordsworth complained, “[Southey] is certainly a coxcomb and has proved it by the preface to his *Joan of Arc*, an *epic* poem. . . . The preface is indeed a very conceited performance” (Wordsworth *T.L.O.W.W.* 24, original emphasis). Moreover, Southey’s stature as the embodiment of the epic—so much so that even “his appearance is epic”—provides some indication of the ambivalence with which the epic was viewed, even by intellectuals. Although the epic was the key genre used by the intellectual bloc to theorize and communicate their collective goals, values, and methods of praxis, it was also prone to criticisms of hubris. Epics that flaunted their totalizing approach, that were seen to disregard the self-reflexive, self-deprecating humility of

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<sup>55</sup> Addressing the Romantic epic’s penchant for futurism, Thomas A. Vogler writes: “The epic leads up to the anticipation of a future state; we are not now in that state, but we can share in the anticipation of it generated by the epic poem. It is when an epic can no longer achieve this effect that it becomes an historical document rather than a contemporary poem” (198; qtd. in Tucker 24, n.34).

the culture of critical discourse, could easily become associated with the political overreach of intellectuals and particularly with what were said to be the vices of revolutionary France.

## II. Joan, as a Symbol of Intellectual Authority

### A “Democratic Beast”

Southey’s *Joan of Arc* is as ambitious as any text produced by a modern intellectual, an “act of political bravado” (Tucker 73). It is “a stunning achievement of precocity” (Curran 167), rapidly composed during the summer ahead of Southey’s nineteenth birthday, in the weeks just following the passage of the French Jacobin Constitution of 1793. The Maid of Orleans’s exploits provide only the thinnest veneer for a moral attack against the War of the First Coalition, and the profligate English prince is only too easily glimpsed from behind the image of the Dauphin (167), prompting John Aikin, in the *Monthly Review*, to write, “we know not where the ingenuity of a crown lawyer would stop were he employed to make out a list of innuendos” (Aikin 42; qtd. in Curran 167). The poem’s premise, in Southey’s words, was to simply “allot the Genius of Liberty to defend the French from Ambition — Hatred — Slaughter [and] England” (*C.L.R.S.* “Letter 53”), but its virtuosity was in the way it served as a vehicle to discuss the new social role of the intellectual bloc, including issues of intellectual independence, the nature of intellectual life, and the basis for identification with “the People.”

Southey’s career as an epoist emerged out of these considerations, and his work never wandered far. He rehearsed these questions in preparation for *Joan*, while still at Oxford. In the same year that he drafted his epic *Joan of Arc*, Southey condensed his ideas about the function of the intellectual and his vision of popular democracy into a playfully shocking apostrophe, “To a

College Cat.” The poem, which has been called *Joan’s* “humble sister” (Bernhardt-Kabisch 32), begins with the speaker refusing to attend chapel prayers:

Toll on, toll on, old Bell! I’ll neither pray  
 Nor sleep away the hour. The fire burns bright,  
 And, bless the maker of this great-arm’d chair,  
 This is the throne of comfort!<sup>56</sup> (1-4)

In these lines, the claim to intellectual autonomy is boldly stated. The speaker not only ignores but mocks the institutional demands of the “old Bell” (1), just as he, in later lines, rejects his assigned study of mathematics (5) and the intellectual labor of composing a poem for the new chancellor (21-22). Together, these three tasks represent services beneath the intellectual: to go to chapel is to “[either] pray / [or] sleep away the hour” (1-2); to study “my Euclid” (5) is to “discompose / that spider’s excellent geometry” (6-7); to write “a single rhyme” (22) in praise of the chancellor’s appointment is to celebrate “an old Fur Gown / ... that made a Duke a Chancellor” (18-19), after all the Chancellor’s gown,

‘Twas an old turn-coat Fur, that would sit easy  
 And wrap round any man, so it were tied  
 With a blue ribband. (22-24)

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<sup>56</sup> The text quoted here is taken from Southey’s *Annual Anthology* (1799), appearing on pages 115-117. Only slight changes from earlier drafts were made for this edition and can be seen by a comparison to the manuscript copy contained in Southey’s letter to Charles Wynn dated October 1796 (see *C.L.R.S.* “Letter 181”). More extensive revisions were later made for the 1837 volume of Southey’s *Poetical Works, Collected by Himself*. Despite the general opinion that Southey tamed his youthful political radicalism for posterity, the 1837 edition of “To a College Cat,” re-titled “Written the Winter After the Instillation at Oxford, 1793,” actually extends the critique of hierarchy and obeisance in the arts, while clarifying the final image of intellectual leadership.

Like Wordsworth and Shelley, Southey, too, was profoundly disappointed by his experiences at the university, proclaiming that surely “Friar Bacons [*sic*] brazen head had more brains than all the Doctors at present in Oxford” (*C.L.R.S.* “Letter 108”).

Instead of the unworthy tasks set out for him by his instructors, like writing a poem in praise of the new Chancellor, the speaker has written lines in praise of a common cat. This cat poem, however, is not a turn to nature or an opportunity to pursue a gentleman’s whimsy, like the inanity of T. S. Eliot’s much later *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* (1939). In Southey’s poem, the speaker insists,

I’ll study thee Puss: not to make a picture —

I hate your canvass cats and dogs and fools

Themes that pollute the pencil! (8-10)

The role of the intellectual poet is not to “pollute the pencil” (10) by drawing pretty images, but to rouse the mind to freedom:

let me see

The Patriot’s actions start again to life

And I will bless the artist who awakes

The throb of emulation. (9-12)

The cat, then, is considered a proper subject of poetry because of its “independence [*sic*]” (29). It flagrantly disregards the Oxford “statute” (27) that forbids it on school grounds, mirroring the speaker’s revolt against hollow prayers and worthless studies. And, just as importantly, the cat’s unauthorized presence inspires “the Fellow” (26) to ignore the school’s foolish codes (24-27). Thus, in its display of uncompromising autonomy which provokes thoughts of freedom in others,

the college cat becomes an object for the intellectual's true discipline and a symbol of the poet's proper role.

As Southey extends the metaphor of the cat, it takes on contradictory shades, however.

Addressing the cat, the speaker enlarges its symbolic register:

Swell thy tail

And stretch thy claws, most democratic beast,

I like thine independence! treat thee well,

Thou art as playful as young Innocence;

But if we play the Governor, and break

The social compact, God has given thee claws

And thou hast sense to use them. (27-33)

Southey's cat is a proud "democratic beast" (28) that answers (without negating) the threatening images of monstrous multitudes and violent mobs that dated back at least as far as the late sixteenth century and had, in Southey's time, been recently been reinvigorated by reactionaries like Edmund Burke.<sup>57</sup> Southey delighted in playing with Burke's images and turning them around. Speaking of the prince's debts, and recalling Burke's pathetic narrative of Marie Antoinette's treatment at the rough hands of the mob, Southey wrote to a friend: the "good people begin to croak — [and] I wish that some of the croakers would go into *his* [the prince's] bed chamber" (*C.L.R.S.* "Letter 159", emphasis added). And in "The Pig," a poem that first appeared in the *Annual Anthology* (1799), Southey returns to the phrase "democratic beast" in response to Burke's attacks on the "swinish multitude:"

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<sup>57</sup> For more on "the people" depicted as monsters see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

A poor, mistreated, democratic beast  
 He knows that his unmerciful drivers seek  
 Their profit, and not his. He hath not learnt  
 That Pigs were made for Man,.. [sic] born to be brawn'd  
 And baconized . . . .<sup>58</sup> (15-19)

In “To a College Cat” the “democratic beast” and its “God . . . given . . . claws” naturalize revolutionary violence, replacing the false authority represented by the chapel bell with a divinely armed inversion of the golden rule: a sort of *return unto your oppressors what they have done to you*. Where the college cat’s “indepedance” (29) had, at the start of the poem, been aligned with the rebellious scholar, it now also appears to allude to, and sanction, the outbreak of *popular* revolutionary violence in France (and elsewhere).

As we will see in *Joan*, the conflation of the intellectual and “the People” is a recurring element in Southey’s poetry. In *Joan*, this unity between intellectuals and “the People” will hold and allow for the fulfillment of the martyred intellectual’s quest through the just rebellion of the masses, but in “To a College Cat” the jointure pulls apart, leaving the poet-speaker to position himself between “man” (33) and his “drivers” (41):

Oh! that man  
 Would copy this thy wisdom! spaniel fool  
 He crouches down and licks his tyrant’s hand  
 And courts oppression. Wiser animal  
 I gaze on thee, familiar not enslaved,

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<sup>58</sup> The text presented here is taken from the revision appearing in *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey, Collected by Himself*. vol. 3 (1853) 65-67.

And thinking how Affection's gentle hand  
 Leads by a hair the large-limb'd elephant,  
 With mingled pity & contempt behold  
 His drivers goad the patient biped beast. (33-41)

In these lines, the metaphor of the cat (now praised for its "wisdom") no longer operates to bridge the gap between the intellectual and the masses. Here, the college cat represents only the independent intellectual. The cat's combination of "wisdom" and "Affection" signal the contrast between the intellectual bloc and both the "spaniel fool" of the masses and the "tyrant's hand" of the ruling-class. "The People" who were described earlier in the poem as a dangerous "democratic beast" have become the "patient biped beast," whom, like the elephant unaware of its own power, must be directed, whether "driven" or "[led]." The final image of the poem imagines the intellectual bloc not so much as the revolutionary co-conspirators of "the People" but as a preferable, benevolent master, a "gentle hand" to replace the hand of a tyrant.

Alvin Gouldner calls this recurring desire by the intellectual bloc to reposition themselves as the master-class, instead of participating in a revolution to end class-struggle, the "Platonic Complex, the dream of the philosopher king" (65). From the Romantic period forward, the "dream of the philosopher king" is a political mythology that has been difficult for the intellectual bloc to surrender. It is both an expression of their fear of "the People" and a product of their fixation on the values that commercial society has given over to the intellectual "class," namely efficiency, ethics, and science (65). Southey's portrayal of this "democratic beast," as a creature that symbolizes the radical liberty which is natural to both "the People" and the poet-intellectual, comes close to escaping this ideological canard, but the shortness of the poem, and lightness of the subject, is simply unable to sustain its political optimism. "To a College Cat,"

ultimately, resolves in an attitude of “mingled pity & contempt” for the masses, but Southey would discover more arable pastures for democratic sentiments in the heady spaces of epic.

### *Joan of Arc*

*Joan of Arc* returns to the same issues of intellectual politics found in “To a College Cat.” But before I continue, it may be best to summarize as briefly as possible the poem’s action, since it is seldom read today. The epic, in ten books, begins with the knight, Dunois, who has been seriously wounded at the battle of Herrings. Collapsing from his injuries, he is revived by Joan who asks to be taken to the dauphin.

Along the way Joan relates to Dunois tales of her humble childhood near Harfluer. Her father, Albert, was killed by English invaders when she was only four, and she was taken in by the “holy hermit” (I.193), Bizardo. Under Bizardo’s guidance she grew into adolescence in the natural serenity of the forest. She recounts that one day, she discovered the near lifeless body of a young soldier, Theodore, in the woods and with the aid of the hermit they saved the young man’s life. For a short time the three of them lived together in peace, but after Bizardo passes peacefully of old age, Joan returned with Theodore to his former home. There, Joan says that she enjoyed the simple life of a country village, until Conrade, a recruiter for the war, tells them of the horrors being committed by the English in France. Joan tells that shortly thereafter she received a vision of the future and was lead to the place where she found Dunois lying wounded.

The second book opens with a long allegorical and philosophical vision contributed by Coleridge, but the narrative then picks back up as Dunois and Joan rest for the evening at a rural cottage where their host, an aging war veteran, tells them about the treachery of the English at Azincour and Henry V’s siege of Rouen. The next day they arrive at the corrupted court of

Charles in Chinon. Joan sees past the court's deception, recognizes Charles for the true king, and is then handed over to the examination of the doctors, a dreadful pack of superstitious and cruel old men who plan to torture the girl. Threatened with destruction, Joan suddenly calls out that the "The sword of God is here" (III.488). Noises then are heard within one of tombs. A sword for Joan is found within, and the priests are amazed.

Joan leads a procession to the cathedral and miraculously collects the rest of her arms and armor from the tombs before attending a feast with the dauphin. These services are interrupted by an unseen messenger who cries out, "Ill-omen'd Maid, I pity thee" (IV.159). This messenger then abuses the court minstrel for singing songs of praise to Charles, revealing that Charles has stolen his lover, Agnes, to be his mistress. The messenger is discovered to be Conrade, and Joan is reunited with Theodore who has come with him, vowing to protect Joan in battle with his shield. When Charles orders that the court should make a show of supporting the war effort by fasting before Joan leaves, Joan responds by chastising the dauphin for callousness:

Believe me, King,

If thou didst know the untold misery

When from the bosom of domestic Love

But one---one victim goes! if that thine heart

Be human, it would bleed! (IV.500-503)

Joan departs and begins her mission to drive the English out of France, arriving near Orleans supported by twelve hundred men who have rallied to her standard. Awaiting the coming battle she wanders through the woods and stumbles upon Conrade in the arms of a poor, dispossessed peasant girl, Isabel. Joan invites Isabel to stay with her before the battle, and Isabel gives Joan a gruesome account of the siege of Rouen.

That night Conrade rescues a local man from two English soldiers and with his aid slips into siege-worn city. Conrade informs the city guard that fresh troops have arrived to lift the siege, led by the “delegated maid.” The next day, Joan’s army prepares to attack at noon, but Joan insists that the English first be given the chance to withdraw. The English captains respond with insults and threats. Soon after, the battle ensues and the English forces are routed and fall into a disorganized retreat to their forts. Joan orders her men not to pursue, and she victoriously enters the gates of Orleans at midnight amid the pyrotechnics of a thunderstorm.

The next morning Joan leads the attack against the ring of English forts that surround the city of Orleans. Conrade’s heroism and ferocity is remarkable and by noon the French have captured more than one of the English forts. Resting, Joan and Conrade discuss their sad fates, separated from their lovers, before launching a fresh assault on the English. Salisbury attempts to rally the English but fails. Then, marking Joan in the field of combat, Talbot and Salisbury single her out and attack her with a squad of six men. Talbot and Joan are both wounded. Salisbury is slain but so is Theodore, whom the reader discovers has been fighting alongside Joan without her knowledge.

The French force encamps outside the walls of Orleans for the night, as the English have retreated to the Tourelles. Joan searches the moon-lit battle field for Theodore’s corpse and discovers Conrade attempting to bear it away. Together, they take Theodore’s body to a church in Orleans where it will be prepared for burial. The next morning the French forces attack the strongest of the English forts. The battle is gory and chaotic, but, led by Joan and Conrade, the French forces take the outer walls. A large number of English are cut off and sacrificed by their comrades to the French, but Joan, risking the lives of her own men and reversing the English precedent at Azincourt, has them taken prisoner, instead of slaughtered. She then draws a

portion of the remaining English forces out into the open by feigning a retreat and collapsing on their rear flank. Challenged by one of her own commanders for risking too much by showing mercy, she declares:

I am to spare the fallen: that gracious God  
 Sends me the minister of mercy forth,  
 Sends me to save this ravaged realm of France.  
 To England friendly as to all the world,  
 Foe only to the great blood-guilty ones,  
 The masters and the murderers of mankind. (VIII.635-644)

As if proving her point that she has been sent by God, at that very moment, the bridge and tower defended by the English collapse into the Loire. The surviving English despair and retreat, while Talbot plots his vengeance.

That evening, Joan, attended by Conrade and Isabel, returns to the convent to inter Theodore's corpse. Joan remains stoic even as she sees her own ghastly future flash before her eyes. The convent's priest attempts to persuade her to enter into the convent, but she chastises him for his isolation from the world.

That same night Joan has her final and longest allegorical vision. Carried beyond the battlefield she is ferried into the gothic realms of Despair where she is tempted to suicide three times. Overcoming this temptation, Theodore comes to her in the form of an angel and leads her on a Dantean tour of the underworld. There she sees the punishments of the wicked, the greedy and the gluttonous. She is then brought to see the tortures of hypocrites, masochists (slavers, bad husbands, and the torturers of animals), church authorities, bards who profane their gifts, and, finally, monarchs. Arriving at the oracle of Futurity, Joan refuses to hear Futurity's shadowy

speculations. Theodore then whisks her off to a garden paradise where she sees how love is corrupted and how humanity's social harmony is destroyed by the forces of money. The vision ends with Theodore's assurance that someday social harmony will be restored.

The allegorical vision ended, Joan awakes at the start of Book X. The French forces are eager to pursue their enemy, but Joan again prevents them from attacking a retreating foe and commands that they bury the dead, both French and English alike. A prolonged discussion follows on the morality of violence. Talbot, meanwhile, is reinforced by his son. The final battle begins. Joan slays Young Talbot in combat. The English are vanquished but not before Conrade and Talbot kill each other. The closing image is of Joan crowning Charles not king but the "chief servant of the people" (X.710) and issuing a warning to him that,

hireling guards,

Tho' flesh'd in slaughter, would be weak to save

A tyrant on the blood-cemented Throne

That totters underneath him. (X.743-746)

#### A "Delegated Maid"

Southey was among the first to realize the full political potential of Joan of Arc's legend for the intellectual bloc. From the eighteenth century onward, Joan's literary image underwent a remarkable transformation from a comedic symbol of French corruption and religious fanaticism into a figure that came to represent the virtues of intellectual bloc and a critique of the capitalist world-economy from a universalist perspective. She became, in the words of Thomas Carlyle, "the most singular personage of modern times, . . . a character capable of being viewed under a great variety of aspects, and with a corresponding variety of emotions" (*Schiller* 236). But Joan

began the modern period as symbol of error. Shakespeare made use of Joan's legend in *Henry VI, part 1*. In Shakespeare's treatment, Joan represents a threatening reversal of proper masculine order, a parallel to the temporary condition of French victories over the English. Her ability to lord over Charles is not a sign of her strength or skill but of his weakness, just as it is a sign of the English court's disarray that a woman can, even for a short while, defeat them on the field of battle. To make the point clear, once Talbot has restored order, Joan's power melts before the English and she is discovered to be more a fraud than a witch. In *Henry VI, part 1*, Joan is, "adorn[ed]...with all the crimes imputed to her in Hall and Hollinshed's accounts, augmented with all the failings supposedly typical of the French, wiliness, mendacity, bragging" (Goy-Blanquet 2).

Voltaire's *La Pucelle*, which "broke all publishing records in the eighteenth century" (23), was a mock heroic epic that, despite the maid's titular presence, takes little interest in the character of Joan. Where Joan appears, she is a simple dupe caught up in the lascivious folly of court politics and religious fervor. As George Bernard Shaw would later say, "its purpose was not to depict Joan, but to kill with ridicule everything that Voltaire hated in the institutions and fashions of his own day" (Shaw 40-41; qtd. in Goy-Blanquet 24).

However by 1774 Joan's cultural value was beginning to shift. The editors of the second volume of Voltaire's final edition of *La Pucelle* began "seeing in [Joan] the means by which Voltaire reaches down to plumb the darker depths of the human psyche in any age, not just his own" (West 9):

The present poem ought to be regarded in the light of a work destined to inculcate lessons of wisdom and common sense, under the mask of folly and voluptuousness. . . . When we behold, upon throwing an attentive glance at human nature, that the rights of man and the

sacred duties of humanity are violated and attacked with impunity; that human wisdom is brutalized by error; that the rage of fanaticism, conquest, or plunder, secretly actuates so many potentates; that a thirst for ambition and avarice exerts its ravages with impunity in every direction; while a preacher gravely thunders his anathemas against the error of voluptuousness; it would be just like a physician, when called upon to administer to a man with the plague, who should very gravely begin by occupying himself with the cure of a corn. (Voltaire *Maid* 10-11; qtd. in West 9-10)

Thus, caught somewhere between the comic symbol of irrational error and intellectual martyr, this satirical version of Joan was seen by the editors as an appropriate *vehicle* to “inculcate lessons of wisdom and common sense” against the “amalgam of devotion, libertinism, and warlike ferocity” (Voltaire *Maid* 10), even though she was not yet a *symbol* of intellectual powers.

Southey, however, would complete the transformation and activate all the symbolic force that sat dormant in Joan’s image. Charles Brockden Brown, the American novelist and historian, was among the first to realize to the potential Southey had unleashed. Reviewing the second edition of *Joan*, he wrote:

No incident is more adapted to the purposes of moral and political instruction than the revolution produced, in the fifteenth century, in France, by the enthusiasm of Joan of Arc . . . .

No where [*sic*] is taught a more powerful lesson on the principles of human nature, the tendency of the feudal system, the evils of ambition and war, and the operations of religious enthusiasm. No tale strikes the imagination with greater wonder, more frequently eludes and defeats foresight, and produces stronger emotions of surprise,

without, at the same time, shocking our belief: Hence [*sic*] no tale is more fitted for loft and poetic narrative.

Mr. Southey is the first poet who appeared to be sensible of the excellence of this theme. (227)

Brown's analysis of the power of Joan's story was prescient. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Joan would become a key stock image for the intellectual bloc. Inspired by Southey's *Joan*, John Daly Burk, the Irish dramatist living in America wrote *Female Patriotism or the Death of Joan of Arc* in 1798 (Grimal 125). Schiller completed his own drama, *Die Jungfrau von Orleans: Eine Romantische Tragödie*, in 1801. The nineteenth century saw operas about Joan of Arc from Verdi and Tchaikovsky, and a novel by Mark Twain.<sup>59</sup> The twentieth century expanded the catalog with important dramatic pieces by Shaw, Paul Claudel and Arthur Honegger, and three plays by Brecht.<sup>60</sup> In 1825, Carlyle spoke of Joan's attraction:

This peasant girl, who felt within her such fiery vehemence of resolution, that she could subdue the minds of kings and captains to her will, and lead armies on to battle, conquering, till her country was cleared of its invaders, must evidently have possessed the elements of a majestic character. Benevolent feelings, sublime ideas, and above all an overpowering will, are here indubitably marked. . . . Jeanne d'Arc must have been a

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<sup>59</sup> In the nineteenth century see Giuseppe Verdi, *Giovanna d'Arco* (1845); Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *The Maid of Orleans* (1881); Mark Twain, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, by the Sieur Louis de Conte* (1895-96); Jules Michelet's important historical study of Joan that appeared in volume six of the *Historie de France* (1840); as well as important essays by Thomas Carlyle (1825) and Thomas de Quincy (1847).

<sup>60</sup> In the twentieth century see George Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan* (1924); Paul Claudel and Arthur Honegger, *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* (1934-35); Bertolt Brecht, *The Visions of Simone Machard* (1942), *The Trial of Joan of Arc at Rouen, 1431* (1952), *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1959); along with Anatole France's influential historical study, *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc* (1908).

creature of shadowy yet far-glancing dreams, of unutterable feelings, of 'thoughts that wandered through Eternity.' (Carlyle *Schiller* 238)

As Carlyle makes clear in this passage, Joan's "majestic character" develops from her abundance of what Milton refers to in *Paradise Lost* as "intellectual being / Those thoughts that wander through Eternity" (II.147-48). As we will see in Southey's Joan, and in nearly all of the characterizations of Joan that followed during the next two centuries, the mythological power of the Joan of Arc narrative for the intellectual bloc is precisely this claim to authority over "kings and captains" by the force of "[b]enevolent feelings, sublime ideas, and above all an overpowering will."

The key to the modern depiction of Joan became this celebration of soft power—rhetorical force. Although Joan had previously been a useful image for depicting the outrages of superstition and fanaticism in Voltaire, or deceitfulness in Shakespeare, both of which questioned the authority of words in the world, Joan's emerging virtue was based on her ability to articulate political desires. "Yes Joanna," Thomas de Quincy invokes Joan in 1847 as if she were some presaging revolutionary spirit, "[your words] are rising even now in Paris, and for far more than [personal] justification" (1122). What we find in the character of Joan, from Southey onward, is not the thematization of different traits in Joan but the refunctionalizing of the same traits that had, in another period, made her both a "whore" and "witch." Joan's new meaning met perfectly with the project of redefining power and authority in terms that served the interests of the intellectual bloc. Although it is often recognized that Southey used the story of Joan of Arc to directly address the events of the French Revolution, here, and in later works, she also becomes a symbol of the much larger revolution in the structure of class-politics under capitalism—the rise of the intellectual bloc. Joan's image was recuperated by those same

historical forces of the Romantic period that also allowed Milton's Satan, the consummate politician and grand orator, to be read as the epic's tragic hero, standing against the brute force of heaven.<sup>61</sup> Joan's strength is (and remains) located in the power of ideas, the same authority that was claimed to govern the Republic of Letters, the public sphere.

### The "Martial Maiden"

The use of a female protagonist to represent the soft power of the intellectual community was, for all of its brilliance, so heavily overdetermined that it is, perhaps, difficult not to think it the obvious choice. While Southey's Joan is the descendant of a "long line of literary Amazons—Virgil's Camilla, Tasso's Clorinda, Spenser's Britomart," until *Joan of Arc*, "the theory that a woman could be the hero of an epic had not hitherto been put to a test" (Bernhardt-Kabisch 31). Joan was among the first epic heroines of the Romantic era, but she was soon joined by others. Mary Tighe's *Psyche* (1805), Ololon in Blake's *Milton* (1808), Francis Hodgson's *Lady Jane Grey* (1809), Sotheby's *Constance de Castile* (1810), Margaret Holford's *Margaret of Anjou* (1816), Mary Russell Mitford's *Blanch* (1813), and Cythna in Percy Shelley's

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<sup>61</sup> Although Percy Shelley famously called Satan the "the Hero of *Paradise Lost*" (207), an opinion that was shared by Blake, there is no strong reason to doubt Northrop Frye on the matter of Milton's intentions:

Heroism for [Milton] consists in obedience, fidelity and perseverance through ridicule or persecution, and is exemplified by Abdiel, the faithful angel. Action for him means positive or creative act, exemplified by Christ in the creation of the world and the recreation of man. Satan thus takes over the traditional qualities of martial heroism: he is the wrathful Achilles, the cunning Ulysses, the knight-errant who achieves the perilous quest of chaos; but he is from God's point of view a mock-hero, what man in his fallen state naturally turns to with admiration as the idolatrous form of the kingdom, the power, and the glory. (319)

It seems clear that this gross disagreement over the meaning of the text is neither the fault of the author nor the reader, but the result of a shift in the intellectual community's values. It also stands as evidence in favor of Gramsci's observation that "[o]ne of the most important characteristics of any group . . . developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals" (PN 10). Thus, we see the community of Romantic intellectuals seeking to read classic works in the light of contemporary values.

*Revolt of Islam* (1818) all appeared many decades before Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Although epic heroines were still vastly outnumbered by epic heroes during the Romantic period, as Elisa Beshero-Bondar has shown, the gender dynamics within Milton's *Paradise Lost* had already provided the basis for Romantic epists to celebrate forms of female counter-power that were founded in the intellectual domains of "conversation and transaction" (57).

Many (perhaps even most) Romantic epic heroines fulfilled a special counter-hegemonic function. In opposition to the masculinist economic order, they were "motivated by dreams and their own observations" (Beshero-Bondar 57). Excluded from the sphere of rational critical debate, they, like Eve, found the freedom to "transgress the boundaries enforced upon them, opening gates between warring cultures, and risking condemnation for treason and heresy" (57). And keeping with this pattern, Southey's Joan was both traitor and heretic, positions the strident young scholar revealed in. As he wrote in *Joan's* preface:

[i]t has been established as a necessary rule for the Epic, that the subject be national. To this rule I have acted in direct opposition, and chosen for the subject of my poem the defeat of my country. If among my readers there be one who can wish success to injustice, because his countrymen supported it, I desire not that man's approbation.

(Southey *Joan* vii)

Writing epics became a counter-hegemonic strategy, and *Joan* was certainly part of Southey's intellectual privileging of the soft-power of "conversation and transaction" (Beshero-Bondar 57). But, as the tone of the preface indicates, Southey (and his Joan) was also looking for a fight.

Even while operating within a tradition of female-counter power, what makes Southey's Joan so unusual among epic heroines is her violence. A passage from tenth book might serve here as an example:

High on her stately steed the Martial Maid  
 Rode foremost of the War: her burnish'd arms  
 Shone like the brook that o'er its pebbled course  
 Runs glittering gayly to the noon-tide sun.  
 Her foaming courser, of the guiding hand  
 Impatient, smote the earth, and toss'd his mane,  
 And rear'd aloft with many a froward bound,  
 As tho' the Maiden's skill, and his own- strength  
 Proud to display. The light gale with her plumes  
 Wantoned. . . . a fair and warlike form. . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . . she mark'd the coming foe,  
 And fix'd her lance in rest, and rush'd along.  
 . . . . .  
 Rode thro' the thickest battle: fast they fell,  
 Pierced by her forceful spear. Amid the troops  
 Plunged her strong war-horse, by the noise of arms  
 Elate, and rous'd to rage, he tramples o'er,  
 Or with the lance protended from his front,  
 Thrusts down the thronging squadrons. Where she turns

The foe tremble and die. (X.332-372)

The glorification of arms appears out of place in a work dedicated from its opening phrases to singing of “War's varied horrors” (I.1). And while the poem gestures towards protecting Joan, and Southey, from accusation of bloodlust, the focus of the reader’s gaze is repeatedly returned to the androgynous sublimity of the maiden in mail:

SCARCE had the earliest ray from Chinon's towers  
 Made visible the mists that curl'd along  
 The winding waves of Vienne, when from her couch  
 Started the martial Maid. She mail'd her limbs;  
 The white plumes nodded o'er her helmed head;  
 She girt the temper'd falchion by her side,  
 And, like some youth that from his mother's arms,  
 For his first field impatient, breaks away,  
 Poising the lance went forth. (V.1-9)

History had already put Joan in armor, but in this image Southey found a potential cluster of meanings, beyond the Miltonic tradition of female counter-power, that he meant to deploy.

During the climatic series of battles that make up all of Book VII, the narrative returns again to this picture of the “martial maiden”: “Lifting up her shield / Prepar'd she stood, and pois'd her sparkling spear” (VII.207-08).<sup>62</sup> Here, standing at the center of England’s greatest defeat, Joan appears almost statuesque. In these moments of battlefield sublimity our attention is directed to Joan’s arms—to her white plumed helm, her shield, her spear. These are more than echoes of

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<sup>62</sup> Joan is referred to as the “martial maiden” six times (IV.149, V.46, VII.107, VII.167, VII.591, X.68) and the “martial maid” three (V.4, VII.41, X.332).

other epic battle scenes, they are indications that part of what made Joan Southey's choice to represent the intellectual bloc was her ability to imply the figure of Athena. To suggest Athena was of course to allude to the Homeric epic tradition, and Southey was, therefore, positioning his epic within the lineage of the classical epic, even as he asserted that "all rules of epic are inapplicable" (Southey *Joan* vii). And it is to foster this same connection to epic's past that the grammar of Southey's verse is so heavily Latinate, evoking both the memory of his earliest Roman models and the style of his English literary heroes, particularly Milton and Richard Glover.<sup>63</sup>

But more importantly, an association with the goddess Athena, who, like Joan, was "typically depicted as warrior, helmeted and carrying a shield and a spear" (Deacy 7), imbued Southey's heroine with all the symbolic heft that Christian Europe had heaped upon the Greek goddess over centuries. As a Greek deity, Athena was already saturated with an unusually broad array of qualities.<sup>64</sup> Among her many associations, which included that of the patroness of Athens (the so-called birthplace of democracy) and as the savior of cities (did Southey have Paris in mind?), her primary roles were established as the embodiments of both wisdom and warfare, particularly where they met to suggest martial strategy (5-6). In the *Homeric Hymns* she was associated with *polymetis*, or cunning in many ways, and, thus, she was like Milton's Eve, a "situation inverter" (6).

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Glover (1712-1785) wrote the epic poem *Leonidas* (1737) which was especially beloved by Southey for its depiction of a hero who fought for the cause of liberty. Southey writes of Glover in his common-place book, "I know no poet so accurate" (IV.11).

<sup>64</sup> Susan Deacy lists among Athena's attributes not only "warfare and skilled activities such as metalwork and horsemanship, but also the patronage of woman's work... [and] other fields of activity [which] included health, music...and various activities connected with the sea including navigation and shipbuilding." (Deacy 5-6).

During the middle-ages Athena became increasingly “represented as the defender of virtue and wisdom” (Deacy and Villing 4), and she acquired, in the Christian system, a purity that was associated with the Virgin Mary (Deacy 144-45). By the Renaissance “her role as patron of the arts and human endeavor came to the fore, with the renewed interest in the arts, and developments in the sciences” (Deacy and Villing 5). Moreover, the peculiar narrative surrounding her origin (she sprang fully formed from the forehead of Zeus) began to be read as a metaphor for the divinity of the intellect.<sup>65</sup>

On their own, these traits would have made Athena a compelling icon for Romantic intellectuals, but by the late-eighteenth century Athena had come to carry even more meaning:

the image of Athena . . . continued to thrive as the patron of institutions devoted to art and learning. Her ancient role as friend and supporter of heroes and kings was revitalized, and she functioned as the patroness of states and their rulers or governments, being depicted in the company of rulers, variously teaching them, and offering advice and protection. . . . [S]o adaptable was she that she was able to thrive during, and in the aftermath of, the French Revolution, where she was re-politicized and re-interpreted as a personification of freedom and republic. (Deacy and Villing 5)

In revolutionary France, the National Convention placed a woman holding a spear with a Phrygian cap on the seal of the Republic, and a statue of Athena, in her new guise as Liberty, stood in the Place de la Révolution, overlooking the guillotine (Deacy 148; Deacy and Villing 5).

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<sup>65</sup> In the mythological system deployed by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, the classical deities were depicted as fallen angels. Athena, thus, appears in the poem as Sin, “a goddess arm’d / And out thy [Satan’s] head I sprung” (ll.757-58). As John Shawcross explains, Milton, in his Arianism, appears to have in mind a parody of the Trinity (290 n.38), yet there is reason to suspect that Southey may have read *Paradise Lost* with the same interest in Satan as a revolutionary hero as many of his Romantic contemporaries [see note 13], a reading which might suggest Sin/Athena as the offspring of a just rebellion, as an intellectual goddess of Liberty.

Athena's makeover from a Renaissance counselor of kings to the eighteenth-century "personification of freedom" closely paralleled the historical progress of the intellectual strata, and Southey exploited this connection by returning his modern intellectual heroine, armed with a full complement of eighteenth-century Republican philosophy, back to medieval France. "Liberty," Southey wrote to his Westminster companion Grosvenor Bedford is, "a French Goddess for whom I profess veneration" (*C.L.R.S.* "Letter 159"). In her armor and with her lance, Southey's Joan is Athena recast for a secular and revolutionary age.

By folding Athena into his depiction of Joan of Arc, Southey indicates that, together, they function as stand-ins for the idealized subject of the intellectual community. In this sense, they are very much like the titan Prometheus whom the intellectual bloc also appropriated as a symbol of their "class" identity. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, intellectuals, still patronized by the ruling classes, used the image of Athena/Minerva to legitimize the leadership of several European female rulers and regents, in what became known as the androgynous compromise: a propagandist expansion of the Athenian mythos that claimed the masculine powers of warfare and feminine powers of statecraft could be joined in one ruler (Deacy 147-48). Responding to the different circumstances of intellectuals in the late-eighteenth century, Southey redirects the androgynous compromise so that it no longer buttresses the positions of the ruling elite (Charles becomes an androgynous figure of a different sort) but the modern Ossian, the warrior-poets of the intellectual stratum. Despite the mass of footnotes that masks the poem's status as a class fiction, Southey's Joan is not a historical person but an idealized representation of the intellectual bloc. She is another variation of the intellectual self-image—the "Harmonious Man."<sup>66</sup> The

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<sup>66</sup> See chapter one for an overview of Lukács' discussion of the bourgeois ideal, "the Harmonious Man," and its relation to the self-identity of the Romantic intellectual bloc.

unified gender binary in Athena/Joan operates as a metaphor for the joining together of the bifurcated subjects of commercial society that Henry Mackenzie named in his two novels, *The Man of Feeling* (1771) and *The Man of the World* (1773).<sup>67</sup> Southey's Joan is a figure that anticipates the fully developed self of the intellectual ideal. Her analogs are the goddess, and the comic-book heroine.<sup>68</sup>

Through its heroes, the Romantic epic would seek to portray the full development of humanity (created in the image of the intellectual bloc), but Southey recognized that the military hero of the traditional epic was not rounded enough to represent the ideal subject of the humanist intellectual community.<sup>69</sup> In the preface to *Joan* he explains that, "there must be more of human feelings than is generally to be found in the character of Warriors" (vi). Rummaging through the classics, Southey had discovered heroic models. Although he thought Achilles was suitable to inspire only "the national vanity of the Greeks" (vi), he found Eumreus, "[t]he good herdsman" of the *Odyssey*, to be "worth a thousand heroes" (vi). His favorite protagonists, however, were uncovered in epics that were generally thought to be lacking in heroes. He adored the failed revolutionaries of the Roman poet Lucan's *Pharsalia*, particularly the orator turned freedom

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<sup>67</sup> Southey had just read Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* when he started *Joan*. Southey recommended the novel to Grosvenor Bedford, proclaiming, "[f]ew works have pleased me so painfully or so much" (C.L.R.S. "Letter 47"; qtd. in Craig 21).

<sup>68</sup> Wonder Woman, the Amazonian champion against injustice and the Nazis, springs instantly to mind. For more on the enduring cultural value of archetypal characters see Grant Morrison's *Supergods: Our World in the Age of the Superhero* (2011).

<sup>69</sup> Southey's dismissal of military heroes, here, is related to (but not completely aligned) with a recognizable trend to oppose or qualify epic violence beginning as early as the seventeenth century. Mori Masaki, in *Epic Grandeur* (1997), understands this shift as part of a growing commitment to pacifism among intellectuals. Edward Adams, in *Liberal Epic* (2011), however, explains this shift as part of the global liberal order that masked economic violence and imperial domination behind the values of international peace. Despite routinely being misidentified as pacifist, *Joan of Arc* is more accurately described as being deeply critical of the effects of war on common people, while providing a justification for violent resistance to tyranny so long as it does not descend into vengeance.

fighter, Cato.<sup>70</sup> Similarly in politics, he preferred the silver tongue of Robespierre to the strong arm of Napoleon. For Southey and other Romantic epoists, the epic hero's strength was now to be found in his ability to conduct what Gramsci would later term a "war of position," an intellectual and cultural struggle by which the necessary conditions for social change are developed. This "war of position" narrative (even though it had not yet been named) allowed Romantic intellectuals, like Southey, to recuperate history's losers—Cato, Brutus, Leonidas, and Joan—as tragic figures of the intellectual vanguard. To some degree it could be said that the Romantic epic celebrated "right" over "might," but, more to the point, it sought to redefine "power" in terms that were more favorable to the social position of the intellectual bloc. Where they existed, the traditions of feminine counter-power provided opportunities in this direction.

#### The "Lowly Shepherdess"

Teasing apart the many layers of meaning activated in the character of Joan is particularly difficult because these layers can often appear contradictory. Even as Southey's Joan is the new Athena, an eighteenth-century French goddess of Liberty, she is, at the same time, "Mindless of her high call / . . . the lowly shepardess of Arc" (4.356-57). The historical Joan was already a peasant girl, of course, but Southey's augments that aspect of her character, crafting long passages of remembrances of her rural upbringing and the addition of a woodland hermit tutor. It is easy to comprehend why intellectuals might choose Athena to symbolize their "class"

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<sup>70</sup> Southey spoke of Lucan as "the poet of Liberty" (*Joan* vi) and "the republican Bard" (*C.L.R.S.* "Letter 72"). "Lucan," he wrote to Horace Walpole Bedford, "pleases me more than any author in despite of his numerous faults. His ninth book is wonderful [and] when I say that he has not fallen short of Cato in his character of that illustrious stoic panegyric can go no farther. . . . I will venture to assert that had he finish[e]d his *Pharsalia* — it would have been the noblest monument of human genius" (*C.L.R.S.* "Letter 72").

identity. After all, the governing stratum's authority is generally only enhanced by a whiff of divinity. However, a connection between the urbane man of letters and a rural shepherdess may be less clear.

To begin, it should be recognized that by drawing on Rousseauvian notions of primitive man, Joan's low birth only further establishes her status as an idealized figure, a "Harmonious [Wo]man." To some degree the Rousseauvian details Southey adds to Joan's childhood redirects the legend's religious overtones and counteracts the Roman Catholic slant inherent in the narrative, tasks the nearly atheist and strongly anti-Catholic Southey must have thought quite necessary.<sup>71</sup> But beyond shunting these unwanted registers, Joan's rural childhood allows Southey to present Joan as a kind of noble savage, a peculiar analog of the Enlightenment scholar, with a spirituality drawn not from another world but from experience and nature (Craig 21-25). It also permits Southey to depict a radically new kind of epic protagonist, one who was "not only one of the people (unlike the feudal barons of traditional epics) but a child and pupil of nature . . . , uncorrupted by civilization" (Bernhardt-Kabisch 31). Thus, as a shepherdess, Joan brings together the purity of heart in Athena-as-the-holy-virgin and the Rousseauvian natural [wo]man.

Moreover, the goodness of Joan's humble simplicity provides a space from which Southey launches a critique on commercial society. As Elisa Beshero-Bondar observes,

Throughout his epic poetry, Southey portrayed encounters between complex and simple cultures as a Rousseauvian conflict between corrupted civilized experience and primeval innocence. . . . Friction between local farming villages and invasive monarch-driven warfare generates the sublime energy of Southey's Joan, whose rustic origins and close

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<sup>71</sup> See note 51.

affiliation with nature are connected with a purity of will and action against England's invasion of France. (Beshero-Bondar 61)

Beshero-Bondar is correct in noting that, in one sense, the violence in *Joan of Arc* is "monarch-driven." The poem is true to its Republican impulse, and Joan will encounter the penitent spirit of Henry V in what amounts to hell (*Joan* IX.714-744). Yet the conflict's Rousseauvian slant points to the degree to which the violence depicted in *Joan of Arc* goes beyond a simple attack on the throne and seeks to highlight the ongoing clashes "between complex and simple cultures," a response to the development of the capitalist world-system as it incorporated its external trading partners and expropriated both rural land and rural labor at home. Southey recognized that evils he saw were not the result of a few selfish monarchs, no matter how powerful, but the symptom of an emerging social organization. He wrote to John May:

I . . . pity the mob of mankind, the oppressors as well as the oppressed. . . . [M]ental anguish can punish but a very small part of the wicked, because that acuteness of feeling . . . is blunted in them, [and] because 'they know not what they do.' [L]ook at the plunderers of Hindostan, [and] the Sugar merchants of our West India islands; these men have no consciences. (*C.L.R.S.* "Letter 232")

A society where "men have no consciences," where both "oppressors" and "oppressed" alike are enslaved, is the product of an economic structure whereby one man's sugar is invisibly procured through the exploitation of others. Against such a system personal morality is rendered meaningless; or as Southey remarked, "the efforts of an individual can do nothing" (*C.L.R.S.* "Letter 290"). By not only focusing on Joan's village life near Harfluer but in also providing her a hermit tutor and in obsessively returning to scenes of rural destruction, *Joan of Arc's*

Rousseauvian coding complicates its more obvious Republicanism and prevents it from degenerating into a naïve tale of monarchs behaving badly.

Yet as much Joan's depiction can be tied to eighteenth-century natural philosophy, a fair part of Joan's depiction as a rustic is also immersed in the Beattian subculture of intellectual self-depiction. Passages describing Joan's rural childhood, her "hamlet haunts of Innocence" (*Joan* I.120), sound as though they might have been lifted directly from *The Minstrel*, although many readers today will likely think of Beattie's more popular apostle, Wordsworth:

even now mine eye  
 Darts thro' the past its retrospective glance,  
 And calls to view each haunt of sportive youth,  
 Each long-lost haunt I love'd: the woodbin'd wall,  
 The jasmine that around the straw-roof'd cot  
 Its fragrant branches wreathe'd, beneath whose shade  
 I wont to sit and mark the setting sun  
 And hear the redbreast's lay. (Southey *Joan* I.99-106)<sup>72</sup>

Or, perhaps in lines like these:

shunning every eye,  
 I lov'd to wander where the forest shade  
 Frown'd deepest; there in mightiest deeds to brood  
 Of Shadowy vastness, such as made my heart  
 Throb fast [.] (*Joan* I.477-482)

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<sup>72</sup> Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch, for example, remarks of lines like these that "Southey's account of Joan's childhood...strikingly anticipate Wordsworth's own natural mysticism" (31).

Joan is another re-vision of Edwin, a “lowly shepherdess” (*Joan* IV.357) to match Beattie’s “shepherd-swain, a man of low degree” (*Minstrel* [1784] I.11.2), both of whom reflect the attributes of their countries:

Zealous, yet modest; innocent, though free;

Patient of toil; serene amidst alarms;

Inflexible in faith; invincible in arms. (Beattie *Minstrel* [1784] I.11.7-9)

In its Beattian echoes, *Joan of Arc* provides an opportunity to recognize just how stubborn were some of *The Minstrel*’s rural tropes. Grounding his symbol of the intellectual bloc in the same pattern of rural scenes and experiences, Southey repeats Beattie’s move to obscure the intellectual bloc’s historical and material origins. In the characters of Edwin and Joan, intellectual consciousness and life are not the products of universities, books, coffee houses, and dislocation, but of visionary encounters with the sublime and the tutelage of hermits. Similarly, the calling of these common characters into their intellectual role, their vatic otherness, idealizes the alienation of intellectual life and divorces it from the structures of labor within the capitalist system. Thus, in *Joan of Arc* we are confronted by just how clearly Beattie’s *Minstrel* set the pattern for intellectual false-consciousness during the Romantic period.

At the same time, however, it is just as useful to mark the extent to which Edwin’s character is altered as Southey translates Edwin into Joan. In the image of Joan, the intellectual protagonist gains not only a profound strength of purpose and a new martial force but also a remarkably unambivalent, even democratic, identification with the rural poor. Although on many points *Joan of Arc* can be said to repeat many of the intellectual motifs and themes established during the mid-eighteenth century, it does so within the new context of the intellectual bloc’s optimism over the French Revolution.

### III. Joan's Intellectual Trials

#### The "God Within"

As a rearticulation of Athena, the Rousseauvian noble savage, and the intellectual cult of minstrelsy Joan's symbolic character is radically overdetermined by a common set of eighteenth-century cultural motifs. Symbolically, she functions as a nodal point where these figures are drawn together, so, in this sense, Southey's characterization might be thought of as less innovative than thick. For all the novelty of making a French heroine the protagonist of an English epic during the Wars of the First Coalition, what is revolutionary, from a generic standpoint, about Southey's *Joan of Arc* is its attempt to narrate not only intellectual opposition to wars of conquest and bourgeois culture but also the process of intellectual class transformation.

Joan's true tests are not trials of combat against the English who fall all too easily before her falchion but temptations to submit or identify with the previous modes of intellectual life. Her first test of this order comes in Book III. After Joan has initially proven herself through the discovery of Charles, she is sent to be examined by

Doctors, men acute and deep,  
Grown grey in study; Priests and Bishops . . .  
. . . Teachers wise and with high names,  
Seraphic, Subtile, or Irrefragable,  
By their admiring pupils dignified. (Southey *Joan* III.242-46)

Their exalted status, however, only masks their errors for they are in league with allegorical figures of Superstition, Ignorance, and Cruelty (III.247-59). These "Doctors of Theology" (III.219) are a representation of intellectuals at an earlier historical stage. They are severely

irrational, wielding the accoutrements of the church as a sorcerer would spells. They believe in the “Mysterious power” (III.278) of a “half-heard prayer” (III.277); they worship before a “mystic lamp” (III.275); they engage in “magic rites” (III.306); they throw holy water in Joan’s face to see if she is possessed of demons (III.308-20). Ultimately, their function is to perform a kind of “splendid confusion” (III.273) that aims to legitimate hierarchical power.

Joan’s test is to declare herself independent of the institutions and the dogmas that contain this feudal intellectual community, to see through these false authorities and to recognize her own. At first, she is deferential. She “obeys / Their summons” (III.288-89) and stands before them “In reverend silence waiting their sage will, / With half averted eye” (III.295-96). She is, in her own words, “[a] poor weak woman” (III.326), “mean” (III.327), a “simple virgin” (III.338), and “How far unworthy conscious” (III.327). In contrast, these churchmen come from,

studies wise and deep,

Not to be fathom’d by the weaker sense

Of man profane. (III.339-41)

They are, in her eyes,

Most holy Sires,

. . . reverend Fathers of the Christian church

Most catholic! (III.323-325)

The examination, however, reveals that these men are not interested in determining the truth about Joan’s inspiration but in preserving their authority as ideologists:

Of the points

Abstruse of nice religion, and the bounds

Subtile and narrow which confine the path

Of orthodox belief [.] (III.385-88)

When Joan reveals that she has never confessed to a priest, attended a mass, or “touch’d the mystic wafer” (III.423), the priests declare her authority, which she grounds in her own experience, to be “heretical” (III.399) and her actions “impious” (III.400).

Joan is at first bewildered by their response, and the poem shows her reasoning through their claims. Her veneration of the priests and the institutions they serve is, for that initial moment, an obstacle. “Fathers of the holy church” (III.416), she begins,

If on these points abstruse a simple maid  
Like me, should err, impute not you the crime  
To self-will’d wisdom, vaunting its own strength  
Above omnipotence. (III.417-20)

But she then begins to test their logic with the evidence of her personal experience. She knows that although the priests declare nature to be of the world, not of the spirit, and therefore not of God, she has heard the spontaneous outpourings of the woodland birds in songs that far exceed the church’s hymns. And although she has never been taught the church’s doctrines she knows herself to be naturally good (III.423-32). Her language in these lines is the language of awakening consciousness: “[y]et” (III.423; III.429), she thinks aloud; “methought” (III.425), she struggles to comprehend. But as the counter evidence begins to mount, her tone shifts, becoming more confrontational:

Ye have told me, Sires,  
That Nature only teaches man to sin!  
If it be sin to seek the wounded lamb,  
To bind its wounds, and bathe them with my tears,

This is what nature taught! (III.432-436)

She now challenges the priests to answer her experience. During this trial Joan learns to trust her reason without referring to traditional authority, whether it is doctrinal or embodied in a figure such as the “holy father of the church / Most blessed Pope” (III.470-71), and her repeated exclamations signal her self-realization. Once she is settled, her confrontation is direct: “No, Reverends! no” (III.436). She now lectures the priests for their “blasphemy against the Holy One” (III.447) that allows them to be contented while the poor mother starves. She presages a revolution “against the mighty” (III.446) and recognizes the full power of her own intellect, which she names “the God / Within me” (III.334-35).<sup>73</sup>

Joan’s victory over the “Doctors” is nothing less than a declaration of the Romantic intellectual’s political independence, a separation from old modes of life and former masters. After this scene, the text repeatedly demonstrates that the “God / Within” is Joan’s only guide. She rejects the advice given to her by veteran military commanders; she refuses the legitimacy of oracles; and she rebukes the King every time he attempts to assert the power of his throne. Even when she crowns Charles at Rheims she anoints him with the less than authoritative title of “Chief Servant of the People” (X.710).

Joan’s struggle for independence from the institutions of feudalism, however, should not be taken as an endorsement of bourgeois individualism. Just as the King’s will is replaced by a

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<sup>73</sup> The class character of Southey’s epic becomes abundantly clear when it is placed alongside the philosophical writings of the German romantics, for which there is no evidence of either direct or indirect influence. For example, in Friedrich Schlegel’s essay on “Ideas” (1800) there is, again, the “absolute figure” of the artist/intellectual, acting as an “absolute mediator, who ‘perceives divinity within himself’—who perceives himself as divine or as ‘the god within us’—and who is charged with ‘revealing,’ ‘communicating,’ and ‘presenting this divinity to all mankind in his conduct and action, in his words and works’” (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 70). Not only is there this same phrase, “the god within” at work, but it carries the same overall function by supporting a vision of intellectual heroism. For more on the Romantic theory of intellectual leadership contained by the phrase “the god within,” see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (68-71).

“charge” (X.710), a “duty” (X.719), to become the “Chief Servant of the People,” the moral force of the “God / Within” is not a liberal all-abiding faith in self-interest. The text makes clear that Joan is not free to act however she pleases. Although she does not serve a king or church, Joan remains “devoted for the realm of France” (IV.399). In his development of the intellectual bloc’s self-mythology Southey converts a nationalist legend about an enthusiast who hears otherworldly voices into the story of a heroine who is empowered by her recognition of earthly injustice and who embodies leadership when she stands with the victimized against “the masters and murderers of mankind” (VIII.644). Joan’s inspiration comes not in a beam of light but in the suffering of the dispossessed, thus, shifting the legitimate basis for authority in *Joan of Arc* from “The Almighty” to “The Almighty People” (IX.30).

Is Joan a revolutionary? Certainly, Southey invests Joan with a radical Jacobin sympathy that is far too communitarian to be properly bourgeois. However, during her labor against the “Doctors of Theology” it also becomes clear that Joan’s ability to tap into this de-centered form of inspiration is dependent only on her willingness to break away from the institutions of ideological replication. This is an intellectual “class” fantasy. Here, Southey mythologizes the historical transformation of the intellectual bloc, rewriting centuries of material developments that led to an intellectual culture that prized autonomy as a heroic confrontation between a humble child of nature and entrenched institutional powers. Joan’s personal recognition of the “God / Within” not only denies that intellectual autonomy has a bloc history or interest, it formulates perhaps the most dominant and sacred of the intellectual bloc’s values as a clear and universal test of morality.

### The “Awakened Maid”

After the death of Theodore, Joan faces a second test, a trial of her intellectual faith. Having placed Theodore’s body in the care of Orleans’ priests, Joan temporarily puts mourning aside in order to complete her military task. Once the battle is won, however, she returns to the convent with Conrade and Isabel to bury her lover. The scene is emotionally ambiguous. While Conrade and Isabel weep bitterly, Joan appears stoic, “absorbed in contemplation” (VIII.795). The reader is told that she is, in fact, “gazing the vision’d scene of her last hour” (VIII.794), but the register of her interiority remains a mystery. Joan’s endurance of a vision of her own violent death carries overtones of the “agony in the garden” and point to her as a Christ-like figure. However, this relationship is undermined when Joan swoons and her femininity, which has been so often thrust aside by the text, is now suddenly brought to the fore to suggest that she might be too weak for martyrdom.

It is at this moment, when Joan’s determination appears to waver, that the convent’s priest tempts Joan with a life of quiet reflection as a nun. For the priest, who again represents the feudal intellectual, the secluded cloister is the appropriate place for one who is now “weary of the world and sick with woe” (VIII.811). His plea is meant to appeal to the disillusioned intellectual activist who has learned that,

in this vain world,  
 . . . happiness provokes the traveler’s chase,  
 And like the midnight meteor of the marsh,  
 Allures his long and perilous pursuit,  
 Then leaves him comfortless. (VIII.819-23)

As a metaphor for political engagement, the folkloric will-o-the-wisp is not only defeatist but threatening. The intellectual who seeks the “active virtue” (VIII.838) of interventionist politics risks her life with each step into the swampy morass.

The priest augments the seductive power of reactionary escapism by adding to this warning an idealized depiction of the life of disengagement. Spinning apathy into heroism, he refers to cloistered isolation as “a sacred trial” (VIII.851). He poses a rhetorical question: is there any more difficult task than

to burst the cords

That grapple to society the heart

Of social man? (VIII.844-846)

His siren song attempts to lure the intellectual to those places where she might live at ease, to the universities and the monasteries where her power is already consolidated. “Die to the world,” he says “and live espous’d to Heaven!” (VIII.836) The call is to turn the ambition for liberty inward; “Thou hast delivered Orleans: now perfect / Thyself; accomplish all” (VIII.826-27).

As much as Joan’s previous confrontation with the priests established the value of intellectual independence, this second trial is about making clear the necessity of public life. In the face of heart-breaking adversity, Joan rises to proclaim her continuing connection with humanity: “my heart / Must never grow to stone” (VIII.862-63); against the priest’s invitation to “die to the world,” she retorts, “sepulchre thyself alive” (VIII.867); and to the suggestion that improving the world does not improve the self as well as solitary study, she asserts,

far more valued is the vine that bends

Beneath its swelling clusters, than the dark

And joyless ivy, round the cloister’s wall

Wreathing its barren arms. (VIII.867-71)

Joan's response to the convent's priest is a full-throated defense of the new intellectual life organized around social reformation, against the residual ideologies of the intellectual community that were also capable of elevating disillusionment into "songs of experience."<sup>74</sup>

The placement of this test of political commitment towards the end of *Joan* suggests that Southey may have found it to be the most difficult of his heroine's trials. Indeed, as soon as she completes this trial at the end of book VIII, she immediately re-encounters it at the start of book IX. In this echo of the second test, Despair, as an allegorical figure, comes to her in a vision and attempts three times to get her to end her own life. The first time he challenges Joan with the argument that life is meaningless, as though,

amid the heap

Some monument's defaced legend spake,

All human glory vain. (IX.86-88)

As the reader would expect, Joan, the "missioned Maid," is not susceptible to this nihilism, and she unceremoniously casts Despair's dagger aside.

In his second attempt Despair tries to make Joan feel responsible for Theodore's death by arguing that Theodore would still be alive today if not for Joan's meddling in public affairs.

Theodore was "murdered by thee!" (IX.166), Despair charges,

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<sup>74</sup> M. H. Abrams argued that a disappointed political maturity was the central impulse of Romanticism, that "[t]he great Romantic poems were written...in the later mood of revolutionary disillusionment or despair" (53). However, although it cannot be denied that certainly "sadder and wiser" became a recurring trope of Romanticism, particularly in Wordsworth's work, when we consider the long account of political setbacks experienced by the intellectual community throughout the Romantic period, what seems even more striking is just how often we encounter rebukes to this poetry of hopelessness. *Joan of Arc's* criticism of defeatism joins Blake's masterful satires of despair from *Songs of Experience*, and P. B. Shelley's continuing promise of revolutionary change even against impossible odds [*Prometheus Unbound*, "Ode to the West Wind," and "The Mask of Anarchy"] are just a few of the many canonical Romantic works that refuse to back away from social activism.

for thou

Didst lead him to the battle from his home,

Else living there in peace to good old age. (IX.166-168)

Her sympathies, which have served her as a leader of men until this moment, now nearly undo Joan, and the reader is told that “[i]n trembling doubt she stood” (IX.232), “her soul / Struggling within” (IX.231-32). But against the charge that even a single tragic death should compromise her mission, she counters with a reversal of this absolute morality, a variation of the answer first found in *The Minstrel*: “if I but save / A drowning fly, I shall not have lived in vain” (*Joan*, IX.253-54).<sup>75</sup>

Despair’s third and final test confronts Joan with the fearsome details of her own destruction:

in that last hour,

When thy bruis’d breast shall heave beneath the chains

That link thee to the stake; when o’er thy form,

Exposed unmantled, the brute multitude

Shall gaze, and thou shalt hear the ribald taunt,

More painful that the circling flames that scorch

Each quivering member; wilt thou not in vain

Then wish . . .

.....

..... that thy hand

Had grasp’d the dagger, and in death preserved

Insulted modesty? (IX.271-81)

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<sup>75</sup> Compare to *The Minstrel*: “If I one soul improve, I have not liv’d in vain” (II.32.9)

Undeterred by the knowledge of her own martyrdom, Despair now ratchets up the pressure on Joan by adding to the horror of burning alive the elements of exposure and shame.

This last encounter against Despair operates on at least two levels. Certainly, part of what is happening here—the abuse of Joan’s “exposed” body, the penetrating “gaze” of the “brute multitude,” the attack on her virgin “modesty”—is a deployment of Joan’s sexual vulnerability as a woman. Yet this image also serves to remind the reader of the precarious nature of the intellectual position. While the categories of class are usually so strongly naturalized that it takes historical analyses like E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working-Class* to reveal their constructedness, the intellectual “class” (in the sense that it perceives itself to be a class) is much less ideologically secure. Since the membership in the intellectual community is largely contingent on the possession of the proper forms of cultural capital and the mastery of careful critical discourse, and since both categories are routinely contested, modern intellectuals are never safe in their social position as intellectuals.<sup>76</sup> Joan’s violent exposure before the crowd, therefore, also functions as a metaphor for the public sphere’s ever present threat to dissolve one’s intellectual identity.

Therefore, Joan’s refusal to end her own life must be read in several ways. First, it marks her strength of will and the purity of her character. Second, it presents her eventual execution at the hands of the English as something that is politically unavoidable and wholly necessary, as an act

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<sup>76</sup> In comparison to the insecure status of the intellectual, it is useful to remember that the Bourgeoisie is seldom asked to defend capital—all forms of which are broadly seen as both equivalents and self-legitimizing—and only the most degraded and impoverished workers are forced to defend their mode of labor as a legitimate commodity to be brought to the labor market. One clear example of the unquestionable legitimacy of capital might be taken from the recent American presidential campaign where attempts to qualify financial capital as tainted in comparison to capital acquired through investments in manufacturing found few supporters outside of what remained of the American “Left.” Similarly among the working-class, labor power only loses its status as a legitimate commodity when it is performed by “undocumented workers” or in the home.

of true intellectual martyrdom and not the result of an irrational mind. Finally, it is a dramatization of the dangers of exposure that loom over intellectual life, even as her choice to live must be read as a refusal to retreat from the intellectual function of social critique.

#### IV. “Finders” and “Makers”

Having safely navigated the pitfalls of intellectual life—both achieving intellectual autonomy and choosing to pursue a social revolution fully aware of the dangers of her task—Joan is at last the “awakened Maid” (VIII.861). Proven, Southey rewards her (and his intellectual readers) with a glimpse of the perfected world that will be ushered in by the intellectual project. The coming of this “blest age” (IX.871) is painted in the tones of millenarianism:

For by experience rouse'd shall man at length  
 Dash down his Moloch-gods, Sampson-like  
 And burst his fetters—only strong whilst strong  
 Believed; then in the bottomless abyss  
 OPPRESSION shall be chain, and POVERTY  
 Die, and with her, her Brood of Miseries;  
 And VIRTUE and EQUALITY preserve  
 The reign of LOVE, and Earth shall once again  
 Be Paradise, whilst WISDOM shall secure  
 The state of bliss which IGNORANCE betrayed. (IX.860-869)

It is, as Joan exclaims, simply an “age of happiness” (IX.870).

In a way, the utopian futurism of this move feels like an odd betrayal coming just after Joan has been praised for refusing to “read the book of Fate” (IX.785). In Southey’s defense, he

provides a contrast between these two scenes in an attempt to paper over the dissonance:

“read[ing] the book of Fate” is a passive act of acceptance that dissolves faith in progress, while Joan’s vision of the future is an imaginative (read: active and rational) abstraction developing from her interpretation of the pattern of history. It is a formula perfectly consistent with the so-called teleology of Marx, but I am less interested in what this passage says about the process of divining the future than the rhetorical urgency it marks. To the extent that this futurism is a capitulation, it demonstrates that, of the two tests, the second trial (that of intellectual social engagement) was seen by Southey to be not only the most difficult but the most pressing.

Speaking of his own battle with Despair, Southey wrote:

The future presents a dreary prospect—but all will end in good [and] I can contemplate it calmly without suffering it to cloud the present. I may not live to do good to mankind personally—but I will at least leave something behind me to strengthen those feelings [and] excite those reflections in others, from whence virtue must spring. [I]n writing poetry with this end I hope I am not uselessly employing my leisure hours. (*C.L.R.S.* "Letter 228")

Joan’s vision of the future in Book IX speaks to the epic’s purpose: “to strengthen those feelings [and] excite those reflections in others.” It reminds us that as much as the poem is a reflection of the author’s personal views or the historic cultural moment, it also is defined by and seeks to define its own community; it is an occasion for the work of genre.

As a generic work, *Joan of Arc* has been widely misunderstood. The character of Joan is routinely criticized for her “lack of character” (Bernhardt-Kabisch 44), as are nearly all of Southey’s epic heroes and heroines. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch’s opinion is typical:

[*Joan of Arc*'s] protagonists are permitted only those feelings which the poet himself feels and approves. All lower impulses are filtered out or else relegated to the enemy. . . .

[T]he heroine is impervious to vice and superior to weakness. . . . Psychological realism is foreign to Southey's narrative, and internal conflict is virtually nonexistent. . . .

[Southey's] characters are psychologically underdeveloped, without attaining a compensatory symbolic stature. (44-45)

William West calls Joan a "symbolic lightweight" (11), and Herbert Tucker describes Southey's characters as the precursors to "the likes of James Bond and Rambo . . . , a forerunner of the video-[game] perspective" (86).<sup>77</sup> It is no surprise, then, that the critical opinion of Southey's poetic powers, which was once quite high, is now quite fallen.<sup>78</sup> The distinguished Victorian Romanticist, Edward Dowden felt that, "Southey is . . . rather a *finder* than a *maker*" (190), that "[o]n the whole, judged by the highest standards, Southey's poetry takes a midmost rank" (194). Dowden's view has held. Ninety years later, Kenneth Curry seems only an echo: "Southey's

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<sup>77</sup> Among Southey's contemporaries only the American novelist Charles Brockden Brown leveled this criticism against Southey's Joan. Reviewing the second edition he writes, "Characters, strictly speaking, are not to be found in this poem. Names are introduced, and actions recounted, but no distinct images of the habits and motives connected with them are produced. Joan is feebly and vaguely portrayed" (228).

<sup>78</sup> Although *Joan of Arc* was dismissed by Wordsworth as "on the whole of very inferior execution" (Wordsworth *Letters* 24), it was well received by the *Analytical, Critical, and Monthly Reviews* (Madden 4). John Aikin for the *Monthly Review* wrote, "[we] do not hesitate to declare our opinion that the poetical powers displayed in *Joan of Arc* are of a very superior kind, and...promise a rich harvest of future excellence. Conceptions more lofty and daring, sentiments more commanding, and language more energetic, than some of the best passages in this poem afford, will not easily be found...as the glow of feeling and genius animates the whole. The language...not unfrequently...has a strong relish of Shakspeare [*sic*]" (Madden 41); Charles Lamb wrote to Coleridge on the basis of *Joan's* poetic merits, "on the whole, I expect Southey one day to rival Milton; I already deem him equal to Cowper, and superior to all living poets besides" (Lamb 41); and, even in what must be considered on the whole to be a negative review, Charles Brockton Brown wrote that "[a]mong the serious and pathetic poets of our own time, the author of *Joan of Arc* must, perhaps, be assigned the highest place. None other possesses a fancy equally vigorous and sprightly, a strain more equable, melodious, moral, and pathetic" (Brown 229).

rank as a poet must be below that of the highest rank and below that of his contemporaries Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats" (174); as does Herbert Tucker: "[Southey] was a writer of talent . . . eclipsed . . . by writers of genius" (72), a "perennial journeyman" (115).

Without arguing their accuracy, these assessments of the poet and his work simply miss this point. The genre of the Romantic epic, I have been arguing, was much less interested in depicting the consciousness of intellectuals or the minutia of intellectual life (topics that were increasingly given over to the novel and would have to wait to achieve their consistent and full development in high-modernism) than representing the abstracted aspirations and philosophical perspectives of the intellectual bloc. Tucker points out that Blake and Wordsworth found ways to "fulfill the epic's comprehensive purposes" by working through "a narrative pivoting on second thoughts and changes of mind" (104). This narrative of interiority, however, was by no means typical of Romantic epists, nor did it eclipse Blake or Wordsworth's "comprehensive purposes," a phrase which I would rewrite as "collective purposes." *Joan*, too, exhibits an interior struggle, although it is not as easy to deny the "class" implications in Southey's work as it may be in Wordsworth's and Blake's. I would argue that to read Blake's *Milton* or Wordsworth's *Prelude* as exclusively, or even primarily, about a poet's personal psychological development is to risk neglecting the poem's broader collective purposes, the function it served for its community of users. Simply put, a reader who approaches *Joan* looking for a narrative of fractured consciousness, which for the literary critic has come to denote psychological depth, is bound to be disappointed.

But both in her form and in her actions, Southey's *Joan* was poised to do the rhetorical work of the Romantic intellectual bloc. As an image, she was a glorifying mirror that presented to the

intellectual community as totalizing image of themselves. As a heroine, her struggle endorsed the dominant values of intellectual life. And it is in this combination of symbolic richness and simplicity of purpose that *Joan of Arc* reveals the degree to which the heroes and heroines of the Romantic epic are idealized and communal figures, representatives not only of a single consciousness but “delegated maid[s]” of the larger intellectual community.

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