

1-1-1973

Jeffrey's Keats Criticism

John H. Peters

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Peters, John H. (2014) "Jeffrey's Keats Criticism," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 10: Iss. 3, 175–185.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol10/iss3/5>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in Scottish Literature* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

JOHN U. PETERS

JEFFREY'S KEATS CRITICISM

Recent scholarship indicates the need for further examination of both intrinsic and extrinsic issues concerning Francis Jeffrey's Keats review.¹ This study is limited to intrinsic issues. At the same time, my intention is to avoid usual points of departure for dealing with the text of the review: underscoring political motivation as the source of Jeffrey's alleged indifference, or stressing the review's moments of praise as evidence of the Scottish editor's ken.² The objective of this study is not censure of, or apology for, Jeffrey — but rather clarification of his methodology. What are the bases of his didactics? To what extent is his essay an attempt to convey an estimate of Keats's place in the history of poetry? How far does Jeffrey's commentary pursue a personal appreciation of the poetry itself?

I shall undertake to show by citations from the Keats review and by certain relevant quotes from Jeffrey's other essays that, in fact, Jeffrey's critical reception of Keats displays a bifurcation of method reflecting what Jeffrey calls "two tastes." I shall try to demonstrate as well that many of Jeffrey's points of stricture or praise accord to one or the other of these "tastes," and that the resultant pattern, once perceived, clarifies the issues of didacticism, contextual viewpoint, and personal responsiveness.

I

The final paragraph of Jeffrey's "Alison on Taste" (1811) casts valuable light on the rhetoric he employs later in dealing with Keats:

All men must have some peculiar associations, all men must have some peculiar notions of beauty, and, of course, to a certain

1. Jeffrey's only notice of Keats appears in the *Edinburgh Review*, 34 (August, 1820), 203-213. Subsequent references to this and other *Edinburgh* articles by Jeffrey are parenthetically noted by volume (Roman numerals) and page numbers corresponding to the original edition.

2. Critics who regard Jeffrey as politically motivated or otherwise negligent of Keats include John O. Hayden, *The Romantic Reviewers: 1802-1824* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 195; and René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), II, 119. Recent defenders of Jeffrey include Aileen Ward, *John Keats: The Making of a Poet* (New York: Viking, 1963), pp. 141-144; and James A. Greig, *Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review* (Edinburgh: Oliver, 1948), esp. pp. 259-286.

extent, a taste that the public would be entitled to consider as false or vitiated. For those who make no demands on public admiration, however, it is hard to be obliged to sacrifice this source of enjoyment; and, even for those who labour for applause, the wisest course, perhaps, if only it were practicable, would be to have *two tastes*,—one to enjoy, and one to work by,—one founded upon *universal* associations, according to which they finished those performances for which they challenged *universal* praise,—and another guided by all casual and *individual* associations, through which they looked fondly upon nature, and upon objects of their secret admiration (XVIII, 47, italics mine).

While no critic has yet made a detailed examination of this passage, it perhaps contains a key to Jeffrey's methodology more useful than what C. T. Winchester calls his "dogmatic" style; what Merritt Y. Hughes cites as Jeffrey's "Platonism"; what James A. Greig praises as his "ethical" thought; or what Peter F. Morgan recently defines as his "constant" principles.³ For in order to locate the bases of his didactics, one should recognize at the center of Jeffrey's mind a presupposed distinction between objective and subjective critical modes: a disparity, that is, between what I amend to call respectively the "universal" taste and the "individual" taste.

Many modern critics have regarded Jeffrey as exclusively a universalist. Terms employed such as "dogmatic," "Platonic," "ethical," or "constant," each call attention to his predominantly categorical literary style. Yet, the most satisfying generalization to date about Jeffrey surely remains the following by George Saintsbury: "In short, although we cannot support the conclusion further, the very word 'limitation' suggests the name of Jeffrey in the sphere of criticism. He seems constantly 'pulled up' by some mysterious check-rein, turned back by some half-invisible obstacle. Sometimes — by no means quite always — we can concatenate the limiting causes — deduce them from something known and anterior, but they are almost always present or impending. As Leigh Hunt is the most catholic of critics, so Jeffrey is the most sectarian: the very shibboleths of his sectarianism being arbitrarily combined, and to a great extent peculiar to himself."⁴

3. See C. T. Winchester, *A Group of English Essayists of the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 13; Merritt Y. Hughes, "The Humanism of Francis Jeffrey," *Modern Language Review*, 16 (1921), 243-251; James A. Greig, loc. cit.; and Peter F. Morgan, "Principles and Perspectives in Jeffrey's Criticism," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 4 (1967), 179-193.

4. *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* (London: Blackwood, 1904), III, 293. See also Saintsbury's early study of Jeffrey in *Essays in English Literature: 1780-1860* (New York: Scribner, 1893), pp. 100-134.

Saintsbury, ironically employing the same term Jeffrey uses to disparage a private associational perspective, indicates a more complex origin for Jeffrey's typical approach as critic: "a sectarianism arbitrarily combined" and "to a great extent *peculiar* to himself." Moreover, Saintsbury perceives a ubiquitous "obstacle" — a "check-rein." In other words, even if Jeffrey is a dogmatic Platonist, he is a critic in difficulty with his idealism, and troubled by his dogma. Presumably, the very predicament Saintsbury intuits is distilled by Jeffrey himself in his early essay on esthetics. Alison is normally recognized as Jeffrey's *miglior fabbro*; and the division of "tastes" is a major problem haunting Alisonian philosophy. It is a problem summarized in recent works dealing with eighteenth-century associationism. Walter Jackson Bate, for example, shows how Alison's school of thought comprises an awkward shift from the Scottish Common Sense School toward what Bate terms a growth of individualism.⁵ Occupying a halfway position, Alison and his followers seek to promote a quasi-Romantic regard for private responsiveness while retaining their formalist background from the eighteenth century. Space does not permit a full exploration of the obvious difficulties the Alisonian position entails, but Carl Woodring summarizes the predicament effectively: "Alison represents both the intellectual pettiness against which the Romantics rebelled and at the same time the movement from objective observation of general nature toward subjective reporting of personal impression."⁶

Jeffrey's "two tastes" reflect this separation between what one often thinks of as rationalist dogma and Romantic individualism respectively. Earlier in the 1811 essay, Jeffrey distinguishes "natural signs and perpetual concomitants of pleasurable sensations" from the actual perception of them by men of feeling "whose affections are the warmest and most exercised" (XVIII, 9, 44). Using what amounts to an epistemological criterion, he also separates associations "common to whole classes of persons" from those which are "peculiar to each individual" (XVIII, 22); or, in short, the realm of universal interest from the exclusive perspective of a given mind. In general, Alison's theory of associations tries to relate both lines of the dichotomy by establishing a graduated scale of value, in which universal associations outweigh the personal in matters of morals or conduct. But Jeffrey is unable as a critic to apply conveniently a ready-made value system for every author, especially when confronted with poets whose appeal is essentially

5. *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Harper, 1961), esp. pp. 105-106. Bate does not discuss Alison's effect on Jeffrey.

6. *Prose of the Romantic Period* (Boston: Riverside, 1961), p. 554n.

individualist. So Jeffrey, one finds, must sometimes compromise between public and private perspectives in evaluating literary works.

As critics repeatedly notice, Jeffrey does side preponderantly with his public, or "universal," taste. In aiming at public approval, he is not necessarily acting from political motives, but simply conforming to his Alisonian precept, recommending associations "common to whole classes of persons." Even before 1811, Jeffrey praises Crabbe for selecting what is "most fit" for description and "scattering over the whole such traits of moral sensibility, of sarcasm, and of useful reflection as *everyone* must feel to be natural and own to be powerful" (XII, 133, italics mine). Conversely, since as Jeffrey writes in 1811, "All men must have some peculiar notions of beauty . . . which, if expressed, the public would have a right to consider as false or vitiated," Wordsworth later becomes a logical example of a poet who fails because of his "peculiar system" (XXIV, 1). The Lake Poets, one finds, generally cross Jeffrey's line to the annoyance of Jeffrey as public spokesman; the Elizabethans do not — nor do Crabbe and Rogers (see XII, 131-151; XXXI, 321-336).

As Saintsbury indicates, however, Jeffrey is not consistent in his criteria. He is subject to that mysterious check-rein, which others besides Saintsbury have noticed. Merritt Hughes, for example, finds that Jeffrey's remarks censuring Wordsworth appear less severe when read in full context; while René Wellek points out that he may present us with strict neoclassical formalism in one place, but elsewhere stress vaguely the spirit of Shakespeare and other Elizabethans.⁷ Indeed, since "peculiar" is a Jeffreyan word connoting a very subjective mode of association, it may in fact be ironically reapplied to describe the arbitrary sectarianism Saintsbury mentions. Jeffrey is not without his own "peculiar system" in criticism; and the radical departure into "individual" taste he often condemns in poetry is present, one discovers, in his own exposition. With Keats, as elsewhere, Jeffrey is by no means consistent in his approach; although, as Saintsbury suggests of his entire canon, "He looks backward [toward the eighteenth century] more than forward."⁸

But what of Keats? One might expect to find Jeffrey's "universal" taste operating in his 1820 treatment of this innovative poet; and, indeed, one does find it, predictably working to the detriment of Keats. Let us, therefore, first review his strictures, and examine the applied public perspective for which Jeffrey is chiefly remembered.

7. See Hughes, *passim*; and Wellek, II, 118.

8. *A History of Criticism*, III, 290.

II

Jeffrey's immediate ploy is to mention Keats's youth. Keats is "still a very young man; and his whole works, indeed, bear evidence of that fact. They are full of extravagance and irregularity, rash attempts at originality, interminable wanderings, and excessive obscurity" (XXXIV, 203-204). Turning at once to *Endymion*, which will receive the major portion of his discussion, Jeffrey develops the charge of "extravagance":

The thin and scanty tissue of the story is merely the light frame work on which his florid wreaths are suspended; and while his imaginations go rambling and entangling themselves everywhere, like wild honeysuckles, all idea of sober reason, and plan, and consistency, is utterly forgotten, and 'strangled in their waste fertility.' A great part of the work, indeed, is written in the most fantastical manner that can be imagined. It seems as if the author had ventured everything that occurred to him in the shape of a glittering image or striking expression—taken the first word that presented itself to make up a rhyme, and then made that word the germ of a new cluster of images—a hint for a new excursion of the fancy—and so wandered on, equally forgetful whence he came, and heedless whither he was going, till he had covered his pages with an interminable arabesque of connected and incongruous figures, that multiplied as they extended, and were only harmonized by the brightness of their tints, and the graces of their forms. In this rash and headlong career he has, of course, many lapses and failures. There is no work, accordingly, from which a malicious critic could cull more matter for ridicule, or select more obscure, unnatural, or absurd passages. But we do not take *that* to be our office (XXXIV, 204-205, italics Jeffrey's).

This catalogue of errors is apparently meant to serve as a hyperbolic summary of what is wrong with *Endymion* owing to Keats's immaturity. Yet who is speaking here and to whom? One answer has been that a Whig editor is granting points to his Tory opponent. A second view is that Jeffrey is correctly, if harshly, perceiving the loss of narrative control which Keats himself confesses in the famous Preface to *Endymion*. A deeper explanation, however, is that Jeffrey is here speaking as a public spokesman, and so asserting a universalist position as his Alisonian principles dictate he should. Why must this be so?

Firstly, Jeffrey conforms properly to his theory of tastes by directing his remarks to the measure of his readership. Unlike critics of, say, the Coleridgean tradition, who cultivate rhetorical systems requiring specialized awareness, Jeffrey deliberately seeks to place Keats in a category recognizable to whole classes of persons. Thus Keats's technical or stylistic obscurities are translated analogically into foibles of youth: forgetfulness, fantasy, wandering, and rashness. These characteristics are

universally appreciable, and therefore serve as convenient means for introducing Keats's "strangeness" to the public. Secondly, Jeffrey summarily emphasizes his "office," and by so doing stresses his responsibility to the general readership, whose taste he aspires to represent. Thirdly, it is clear that Jeffrey is reacting not simply to Keats's difficulties as a fledgling narrator, but also to the poet's insistence on a range of individual associations which the public may have a right to consider as false or vitiated. It is Keats's privateness, his drift toward emotional reverie, which is at the heart of Jeffrey's concern, and which later accounts for the severest comment in the essay:

. . . besides the riot and extravagance of his fancy, the scope and substance of Mr Keats' poetry is rather too dreamy and abstracted to excite the strongest interest, or to sustain the attention through a work of any great compass or extent. He deals too much with shadowy and incomprehensible beings, and is *too constantly rapt into an extramundane Elysium, to command a lasting interest with ordinary mortals—and must employ the agency of the more varied and coarser emotions*, if he wishes to rank with the seducing poets of this or of former generations (XXXIV, 206, italics mine).

Jeffrey's fundamental distinction between "too dreamy and abstracted" substance and the "more varied and coarser emotions" marks the all-important border of "extramundane Elysium." This is an Alisonian frontier, separating personal from public; rarefied sensibility from "ordinary mortals"; the vitiated from the necessary; the individual from the universal. And this frontier, Jeffrey concludes, has been violated consistently throughout Keats's volumes. He finds *Lamia*, for example, "in the measure and taste of Endymion"; while *Hyperion* is again "too far removed from the sources of human interest" (XXXIV, 211, 213).

Since Jeffrey has claimed that "casual or individual associations" exhibited publicly are likely to appear vitiated, one might expect that his Keats essay would provide only examples in both stricture and praise where Keats either violates or upholds Jeffrey's "universal" taste. In fact, Jeffrey does make several abortive efforts to praise Keats in keeping with a strictly public perspective. These again involve analogizing Keatsian characteristics by means of universalized prototypes. For example, he tries to link Keats to an Elizabethan poetic tradition:

The models upon which he has formed himself, in the Endymion, the earliest and by much the most considerable of his poems, are obviously [sic] the Faithful Shepherdess of Fletcher, and the Sad Shepherd of Ben Jonson;—the exquisite metres and inspired diction of which he has copied with great boldness and fidelity—and, like his great originals, has also contrived to impart to the

whole piece that true rural and poetical air—which breathes only in them and in Theocritus—which is at once homely and majestic, luxurious and rude, and sets before us the genuine sights and sounds and smells of the country, with all the magic and grace of Elysium (XXXIV, 204).

Usually sympathetic to evidence of "genuine" sense impressions, Jeffrey does praise Keats for appealing to both universal associations from nature and a poetic tradition extending to the classics. As we have seen, however, Jeffrey has second thoughts, for he later disqualifies Keats's Elysium for being "extramundane." It is therefore clear that the effort to associate the Keats of *Endymion* with the universally praiseworthy Jonson and Fletcher (source identifications which betray Jeffrey's easy reach), is not enough to excuse Keats on universalist grounds.

Still another, more subtle defense based on "universal" taste occurs as follows:

Except the love-song of the Cyclops to his Sea Nymph in Theocritus—and the Lamentation of Venus for Adonis in Moschus—and the more recent Legend of Apuleius, we scarcely recollect a passage in all the writings of antiquity in which the passions of an immortal are fairly disclosed to the scrutiny and observation of men. The author before us, however, and some of his contemporaries [Barry Cornwall and Leigh Hunt?], have dealt differently with the subject;—and, sheltering the violence of the fiction under the ancient traditionary fable, have created and imagined an entire new set of characters, and brought closely and minutely before us the loves and sorrows and perplexities of beings with whose names and attributes we had all been familiar, without any sense of their personal character. We have more than doubts of the fitness of such personages to maintain a permanent interest with the modern public;—but the way in which they are here managed, certainly gives them the best chance that now remains for them; and, at all events, it cannot be denied that the effect is striking and graceful (XXXIV, 206-207).

Here, Jeffrey fits Keats into a specifically classical tradition and credits him with exploring the perplexities of gods whose names and attributes are familiar to "all." Aileen Ward finds this passage acutely perceptive, and praises Jeffrey for its content.⁹ Yet it is obvious that Jeffrey's "doubts of the fitness of such personages to maintain a permanent interest with the modern public" preclude a thorough elaboration of the point, for the passage quickly retreats into a vague tribute recalling merely the graceful effect of Keats's innovation. Clearly, Jeffrey must employ other means of recommending Keats if he is to avoid rendering the review a harsh attack — a function he does not, after all, take to

9. See *John Keats*, p. 144.

be his "office." But his ultimate vehicle for praise is no longer to be the rhetoric of "universal" taste. Rather, it is to be personal rhetoric of a kind which Lord Houghton later called "hazardous" to Jeffrey's well-founded reputation.¹⁰

III

It should be evident from the preceding discussion that Jeffrey's Alisonian principles do in large measure determine the bases of his didactics, as well as his contextual viewpoint, in dealing with Keats. It is not enough to call Jeffrey simply a dogmatic, Platonic, or ethical critic, without recognizing the basic application of his "universal" taste, which in turn reflects Jeffrey's public consciousness. As we have seen, his immediate emphasis on Keats's "extravagance" entails an analogical comparison of stylistic oddities and emotional immaturity in order to clarify a public discussion of an unknown poet; beyond this, a universalist criterion further prescribes his introduction of historical contexts to mollify the "wandering" and "excessive obscurity" which would otherwise suggest formlessness. Fletcher and Jonson are not used for comparative analysis, but rather for the simple purpose of relating Keats to a universally acknowledged tradition. Since, however, this tradition provides an ultimately unsatisfactory justification for Keats's "extramundane Elysium," Jeffrey is forced to choose between a summary dismissal of Keats as an awkward novice, or a radical expression of personal responsiveness as a basis for praise.

In the 1820 Keats essay, Jeffrey makes an effort to apply consistently his Alisonian precepts; yet he is incapable of defending Keats strictly according to "universal" taste. Nine extraordinary years in the history of literature had largely undermined the associationism upon which Jeffrey had based his career. Still, it is important to recognize that Jeffrey does deal early with the problem of subjectivity in criticism; that he knows he is caught in a dilemma of "taste" esthetics; that he does defend, as early as 1811, the nearly-Wordsworthian premise that one will always see the most beauty "whose affections are the warmest and most exercised." It is only Jeffrey's contention that these are considerations which, if regarded exclusively, pertain to a "peculiar" associational perspective — the "individual" taste — and as such are not properly relevant to public value judgment. Accordingly, he requires a double circumspection: avoidance of "peculiar" or consciously "individual" taste by authors he seeks to praise, as well as a corresponding avoidance in his own role as critic. In Jeffrey's conservative view, a radically personal range of

10. See Richard Monckton Milnes, *The Life and Letters of John Keats* (1848; rpt. London: Dent, 1927), dedication page.

associations could be appreciated only by a personal, coincident response from a critic, and neither the reviewed nor the reviewer has a right to exceed public bounds.

Such, at least, is the 1811 position that marks the critical temper for which Jeffrey is usually remembered. Yet by postulating the "individual" taste at all — and by further suggesting its validity with respect to objects of "secret admiration" — Jeffrey discloses his ambivalence toward a subjective mode of criticism. It is a mode not inconsistent with his reading of Alison, but one which he tries on principle to exclude from his role as public spokesman. The Keats review, however, provides a major example of circumstances in which Jeffrey finds himself unable to avoid this secondary method.

For example, having considered Jeffrey's universalist strictures, one finds jarring the following passage on *Endymion*:

It is, in truth, at least as full of genius as of absurdity; and he who does not find a great deal in it to admire and to give delight, cannot in his heart . . . find any great pleasure in some of the finest creations of Milton and Shakespeare. There are very many persons, we verily believe, even among the judicious part of the community,— correct scholars, we have no doubt many of them, and, it may be, very classical composers in prose and verse—but utterly ignorant, on our view of the matter, of the true genius of English poetry, and incapable of estimating its appropriate and most exquisite beauties. With that spirit we have no hesitation in saying that Mr K. is deeply imbued—and of those beauties he has presented us with many striking examples (XXXIV, 205).

Only a paragraph earlier, Jeffrey has accused Keats of the wandering, obscurity, lapses, and failures that betray youthful "extravagance." Now he recommends Keats as a poet imbued with a spirit of poetry before which even a sophisticated readership is likely to be blind. In *his* view of the matter, even "correct scholars" may not understand Shakespeare or Milton — or Keats, in whom only a few may find "striking examples" of "beauties" forbidden to so many. There may still be a subtle universalist appeal in Jeffrey's invocation of the "spirit" or "native genius" of English poetry — a concept he probably derives from Joseph Warton.¹¹ But what of the taste "founded upon universal associations" according

11. Critics variously explain Jeffrey's concept of the "spirit" of poetry, or "pure poetry." Peter F. Morgan attributes Jeffrey's usage to Joseph Warton's *On the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756): see "Principles and Perspectives," p. 186. Wellek suggests that "pure poetry" is a "dangerous species for Jeffrey, since it is apt to run into more mysticism and extravagance." See *A History of Modern Criticism*, II, 119. But it would appear from the use of the term in the Keats essay that Jeffrey has either changed his mind—or, as I suggest, has "tastes."

to which authors who make demands on public admiration finish performances for which they challenge universal praise? Apparently, Jeffrey now regards the "universal" taste as a fallible criterion for determining the value of a poem. Moreover, Jeffrey continues, "We are very much inclined to add, that we do not know any book [besides *Endymion*] which we would sooner employ as a test to ascertain whether any one had in him a native relish for poetry, and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm" (XXXIV, 205).

In the same tone, Jeffrey continues to develop his distinction between a public mode of poetry appreciation (by which Keats may be condemned) and the exclusive sensibility he has just assigned to Keats — and, by implication, to himself:

The greater and more distinguished poets of our country have so much else in them to gratify other tastes and propensities, that they are pretty sure to captivate and amuse those to whom their poetry is but an hindrance and obstruction, as well as those to whom it constitutes their chief attraction. The interest of the stories they tell—the vivacity of the characters they delineate—the weight and force of the maxims and sentiments in which they abound—the very pathos, and wit, and humour they display, which may all and each of them exist *apart* from the poetry and independent of it, are quite sufficient to account for their popularity, without referring much to that *still higher gift*, by which they subdue to their enchantments *those whose souls are truly attuned to the finer impulses of poetry* (XXXIV, 205, italics mine).

Here Jeffrey reaffirms the Alisonian disparity. The first portion of the passage clearly isolates perpetual concomitants — humor, wit, pathos, etc. — common to whole classes of persons; while the final clause echoes his designation of men whose affections are the warmest and most exercised. But Jeffrey has now assumed the "individual" taste in order to defend Keats; for, as he continues,

It is only where those other recommendations are wanting, or exist in a weaker degree, that the true force of the attraction, so often combined, can be fairly appreciated — where, without much incident or many characters, and with little wit, wisdom, or arrangement, *a number of bright pictures are presented to the imagination, and a fine feeling expressed of those mysterious relations by which visible external things are assimilated with inward thoughts and emotions, and become the images and exponents of all passions and affections.* To an unpoetical reader, such passages always appear mere raving and absurdity — and to this censure a very great part of the volumes before us will certainly be exposed (XXXIV, 205-206, italics mine).

A critic not otherwise kind to Jeffrey likens the italicized portion above to T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative" — but adds that the passage is strangely "uncharacteristic" of Jeffrey.¹² I would argue that it is, more precisely, uncharacteristic of Jeffrey's public persona, and that it reflects a mode of criticism which the *Edinburgh's* editor normally refused, on principle, to exhibit. Jeffrey is surely not an Eliot or a Coleridge, and when he attempts to theorize apart from analogical conventions appropriate to his "universal" taste, he is likely to become, as here, vague. For while Jeffrey does not find his office requiring him to attack a poet merely for wandering and obscurity, neither does he view as his duty any extended discussion of a response based on "individual" taste. His remarkable passage attempting to justify appreciation of immature poetry dissolves abruptly into a universalist qualification cited earlier: "Even in the judgement of a fitter audience, however, it must, we fear, be admitted that besides the riot and extravagance of his fancy, the scope and substance of Mr Keats' poetry is rather too dreamy to excite the strongest interest, or to sustain the attention through a work of any great compass or extent" (XXXIV, 206).

But it is the opening sentence of the review which best provides both a summation of the methodological difficulty Jeffrey confronts in dealing with Keats and a key to his chosen solution:

We had never happened to see either of these volumes till very lately—and have been exceedingly struck with the genius they display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagance (XXXIV, 203).

As we have seen, Keats's "extravagance" prompts a number of strictures in which Jeffrey explains technical awkwardness in common terms of youthful folly. At the same time, the "spirit of poetry" is regarded as a phenomenon before which a judicious public may be blind. Therefore, since Jeffrey finds this spirit penetrating so much extravagance, it is evident that his "individual" taste has overcome his "universal" taste in order to defend Mr. Keats.

Madison, Wisconsin

12. See Hayden, *Romantic Reviewers*, p. 206.