Principles and Perspective in Jeffrey's Criticism

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Principles and Perspective in Jeffrey's Criticism

It is the contention of this paper that critical principles underlie Francis Jeffrey's career as literary contributor to the *Edinburgh Review* in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, and that these principles remain constant. An attempt is made to identify them, but at the same time to show the superficial fluctuations which take place in them. Furthermore, Jeffrey's view of the English literary tradition and of contemporary poetry in relation to it seems to change about 1811, and I hope to indicate this change which I denominate as being from "simple" to "complex." In this survey I occupy a middle ground between the arguments of Russell Noyes who champions Wordsworth as faultless bard against Jeffrey the malevolent critic (*Wordsworth and Jeffrey in Controversy*, Bloomington, 1941), and the views of James A. Greig who unquestioningly adopts Jeffrey's positions (*Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review*, Edinburgh, 1948). I hope that I am occupying the same judicious middle ground as René Wellek (*A History of Modern Criticism... The Romantic Age*, New Haven, 1955), amplifying my discussion with quotations which illustrate the skill of Jeffrey's critical thought and expression.

Jeffrey is concerned with principles. At all times he believes that the principles of literature were established irrevocably a long time ago. He declares in the *Edinburgh Review* that "Poetry has this much... in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question." (I, October 1802, 63). And again, "In matters of taste... there are no discoveries to be made, any more than in matters of morality... the elements of poetical interest are necessarily obvious and universal—they are within and about all men; and the topics by which they are suggested are proved to have been the same in every age, and every country of the world," (VII, October 1805,

1 Figures in parentheses indicate volume number of the *Edinburgh Review*, date of publication, and page number.
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2, 3). Jeffrey states that Wordsworth in particular is ignorant of "the few settled and permanent maxims, which form the canon of general taste in all large and polished societies," (XXIV, November 1814, 3).

Thus Jeffrey appeals to principles, but in the period before 1811 he emphasizes that these principles have been adhered to by great writers through the succeeding centuries; to the English tradition belong Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Johnson and Crabbe. Now Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Lamb with hardly credible presumption expend their admittedly remarkable talents in setting themselves against the whole tradition. Jeffrey even goes so far as to set Wordsworth and his school against "all existing authority," (XI, October 1807, 228).

In the early years of the Edinburgh Review Jeffrey usually rests content with setting the new school against the great English writers. Their inspiration comes not from the main tradition but from the byways represented by the "old ballads," Wither and Henry More, the quaintness of Marvell and Quarles, the cold ingenuity of Donne, the naïveté of Ambrose Philips, the homeliness and harshness of Cowper. This statement, originating in the review of October 1802 (I.64), can be illustrated from at least two further places:

... the Wordsworths, and the Southey's, and Coleridges, and all that misguided fraternity, ... with good intentions and extraordinary talents, are labouring to bring back our poetry to the fantastical oddity and puling childishness of Withers, Quarles, or Marvel (XII, April 1808, 133).

While gravely preferring the tame vulgarity of our old ballads, to the nervous and refined verses of Pope or Johnson, they lay claim, not to indulgence, but to admiration; and treat almost the whole of our classical poets with the most supercilious neglect; while they speak in an authoritative tone of the beauties of George Wither and Henry More. With such ludicrous auxiliaries, they wage a desperate war on the established system of public taste and judgment (XVII, February 1811, 434).

In Jeffrey's view the main inspiration of this group, however, is not to be found in unimportant English writers, but abroad, in French and German writers, the anti-social principles and sick sensibility of Rousseau, the irregularity of "the German dramatists" (XVII, February, 1811, 437), especially Kotzebue and Schiller.

* * *

In the years before 1811 Jeffrey thus derives from universal principles a long literary tradition which he believes has been flagrantly
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violated by some modern poets. What are these principles as Jeffrey sees them at the various stages of his critical career? They are principles underlying his discussions of the language, emotional tone, and subject of poetry. Jeffrey seems to be most upset by the language employed in the poetry of Southey and Wordsworth which he sees as affectedly naive as well as affectedly enthusiastic. His attention is of course drawn to this aspect of their work by Wordsworth's intensely irritating theory, uncompromisingly set forth in the Preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads (1800). Jeffrey asserts that the low language supposedly advocated by Wordsworth is unsuitable to all poetic occasions. However, he objects to it not only on grounds of aesthetic but also, more basically, of social propriety. There are, after all, two classes of society, the vulgar and the refined. Whose sentiments are "the most proper object for poetical imitation?" There can be no doubt:

It is needless for us to answer a question, which the practice of all the world has long ago decided irrevocably. The poor and vulgar may interest us, in poetry, by their situation; but never, we apprehend, by any sentiments that are peculiar to their condition, and still less by any language that is characteristic of it. The truth is, that it is impossible to copy their diction or their sentiments correctly, in a serious composition; and this, not merely because poverty makes men ridiculous, but because just taste and refined sentiment are rarely to be met with among the uncultivated part of mankind; and a language, fitted for their expression, can still more rarely form any part of their 'ordinary conversation' (I, October 1802, 66-67).

Jeffrey here clearly presents poetry as not being merely socially orientated, but also as having a class basis. However, his position changes. What appears to bring about this change is the effect on him of thinking anew about the poetry of Burns and Crabbe. The former depicts humble life with "that delicacy, as well as justness of conception, by which alone the fastidiousness of an ordinary reader can be reconciled to such representations," (XIII, January 1809, 260). Crabbe also deals with the poor, but unlike Wordsworth he writes "in the good old taste of Pope and Dryden," (XII, April 1808, 146). Jeffrey vindicates "The Village Register" in the following terms:

there is a justness and force in the representation which is entitled to something more than indulgence; and though several of the groups are confessedly composed of low and disagreeable subjects, still, we think that some allowance is to be made for the author's plan of giving a full and exact view of village life, which could not possibly be accomplished without including those baser varieties. He aims at an important moral effect by this exhibition;

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and must not be defrauded either of that, or of the praise which
is due to the coarser efforts of his pen, out of deference to the
sickly delicacy of his more fastidious readers (XII, April 1808,
141).

Grabbe objectively shows the poor, but he does not use their language,
nor does he show their sentiments except for an acceptable moral
purpose.

Two years later Jeffrey goes further still in admitting subjects from
humble life more easily into the realm of poetic acceptability:

where subjects taken from humble life can be made sufficiently
interesting to overcome the distaste and the prejudices with which
the usages of polite society too generally lead us to regard them,
the interest which they excite will commonly be more profound
and more lasting than any that can be raised upon loftier themes;
and the poet of the Village and the Borough be oftener, and
longer, read, than the poet of the Court or the Camp. The most
popular passages of Shakespeare and Cowper, we think, are of this
description (XVI, April 1810, 34).

The only persons from humble life whom Jeffrey now excludes from
poetic treatment are the disgusting: "The only sufferers, then, upon
whom we cannot bear to look, are those that excite pain by their
wretchedness, while they are too depraved to be the objects of affec-
tion, and too weak and insignificant to be the causes of misery to others,
or, consequently, of indignation to the spectators," (XVI, April 1810,
38). Evidently, the range of Wordsworth's poetic compassion is still
too great for our critic. Jeffrey always prefers a refined, cultivated
language, though he now admits that a remarkable poet can extend
it beyond the boundaries of the refined and cultivated classes. He al-
lows these boundaries to be extended, but not to be destroyed.

The discussion of Jeffrey's attitude towards Wordsworth's language
has led us to a discussion of his attitude towards Wordsworth's human
subject matter. The emotional tone which Jeffrey deplores in the new
school he deplores especially because he believes that poetry is pri-
marily emotional rather than intellectual: "It is the business of poetry
to delineate Feeling," (I, January 1803, 399), as all beautiful objects
"please upon the same great principle of sympathy with human feel-
ings," (XVIII, May 1811, 30-31). Further, "The end of poetry . . . is
to please . . . without any laborious exercise of the understanding,"
(XI, October 1807, 216). Indeed, "Poetry . . . deals only in obvious
and glancing views," (XXXVI, February 1822, 438). Here is another
difficulty that Wordsworth presents, particularly in such a poem as
"Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Child-

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hood," which lacked its helpful full title when Jeffrey dismissed it as "illegible and unintelligible," (XI, October, 1807, 227). In an extravagant mood on one occasion Jeffrey even goes so far as to suggest that poets in general "ought fairly to be confined to the established creed and morality of their country, or to the actual passions and sentiments of mankind; and that poetical dreamers and sophists who pretend to theorize according to their feverish fancies, without a warrant from authority or reason, ought to be banished the commonwealth of letters," (XXXVI, February 1822, 438).

The feeling which Wordsworth and his fellows express when their "meddling intellect" is at rest Jeffrey finds to be not only vulgar as opposed to refined, but also babyish and feeble as opposed to manly and strong. Wordsworth in particular furnishes himself "from vulgar ballads and plebeian nurseries," (XI, October 1807, 218): "Even in the worst of these productions, there are, no doubt, occasional little traits of delicate feeling and original fancy; but these are quite lost and obscured in the mass of childishness and insipidity with which they are incorporated," (XI, October 1807, 231). Indeed, the authors of Rejected Addresses have caught perfectly Wordsworth’s "maukish affectations of childish simplicity and nursery stammering," (XX, November 1812, 438). These are characteristics of "Alice Fell" which its author "in policy" withdrew from the 1820 edition of his poems on account of the ridicule of "the small critics."² Wordsworth himself of course came to feel the need for "more elegance and dignity."³

Jeffrey turns with relief from Wordsworth’s "childish and absurd affectations . . . to the manly sense . . . of Mr Crabbe," (XII, April 1808, 137). Manliness is also a virtue in Burns, like his unaffected adherence to nature and the tradition (XIII, January 1809, 276). Further, manliness is the most appealing quality of Byron, as Jeffrey declares in his review of the first two cantos of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage in February 1812. "There is, indeed, a tone of self-willed independence and originality about the whole composition—a certain plain manliness and strength of manner, which is infinitely refreshing after the sickly affectations of so many modern writers; and reconciles us not only to the asperity into which it sometimes degenerates, but even in some degree to the unamiableness upon which it constantly borders," (XIX, February 1812, 467). In spite of the generally favourable tone, a hint can be detected here of the moral objection which

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Jeffrey makes more strenuously to Byron after the publication of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Canto IV (1818). With regard to Wordsworth’s feeling, Jeffrey at last finds “Laodamia” admirable because it possesses the “classical and manly” qualities inculcated by the *Edinburgh Review* (XL, March 1824, 81).

Jeffrey is concerned not merely with feeling but also with the decorous relationship between feeling and subject, a topic already touched upon in connection with the poet’s language and the people he deals with. Naturally Wordsworth offends in the general field of feeling and subject. He courts “literary martyrdom” by connecting his most lofty, tender, or impassioned conceptions, with objects and incidents, which the greater part of his readers will probably persist in thinking low, silly, or uninteresting. Whether this is done from affection and conceit alone, or whether it may not arise, in some measure, from the self-illusion of a mind of extraordinary sensibility, habituated to solitary meditation, we cannot undertake to determine (XI, October 1807, 218).

When not discussing Wordsworth, as we have seen, Jeffrey can take a positive approach to the question of the sensitive relation between poetic feeling and subject. A theoretical basis for his views, in this as in other respects, is to be found in his review of Alison on Taste, dated May 1811. Here Jeffrey states that the language of poetry is largely founded on the analogy between our internal feelings and external objects (XVIII, 23): “The great charm, indeed, and the great secret of poetical diction, consists in thus lending life and emotion to all the objects it embraces; and the enchanting beauty which we sometimes recognize in descriptions of very ordinary phenomena, will be found to arise from the force of imagination, by which the poet has connected with human emotions, a variety of objects, to which common minds could not discover their relation,” (XVIII, May 1811, 24).

This theoretical basis is elaborated upon in Jeffrey’s review of Hazlitt’s *Characters from Shakespeare’s Plays*, dated August 1817. Here Jeffrey ponders Shakespeare’s unique contribution, and his musings receive complex expression. Jeffrey is grateful to Hazlitt for indicating that familiarity with beautiful forms and images—that eternal recurrence to what is sweet or majestic in the simple aspects of nature—that indestructible love of flowers and odors, and dews and clear waters—and soft airs and sounds, and bright skies, and

*John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor* (1869), II, 90, attributes to Jeffrey this phrase inserted into a review by Hazlitt.*
woodland solitudes, and moonlight bowers, which are the material elements of Poetry—and that fine sense of their undefinable relation to mental emotion, which is its essence and vivifying soul—and which, in the midst of Shakespeare's most busy and atrocious scenes, falls, like gleams of sunshine on rocks and rivers—contrasting with all that is rugged and repulsive, and reminding us of the existence of purer and brighter elements—which HE ALONE has poured out from the richness of his own mind, without effort or restraint. (XXVIII, August 1817, 473.)

Reviewing John Wilson's Poems five years before, Jeffrey had stated that "the very essence of poetry [is] to be enraptured with such things [as] a sleeping child, or a lovely cataract . . . female purity and moonlight landscapes, and fine dreams, and flowers, and singing birds," (XIX, February 1812, 374). As we have just seen, Jeffrey finds such an essence distilled in the work of Shakespeare; now he notices its absence from the work of Wilson's supposed mentor Wordsworth.

This view of the essence of poetry, however limited, is precious to Jeffrey as a critic and indeed as a man. In 1831 he wrote to Jane Carlyle in semi-Wordsworthian vein:

If it were not for my love of nature, I think I should die. . . . It is an especial mercy of Providence, I think, that our House of bondage [i.e., Commons] is placed among objects of grandeur and beauty. . . . I rush out, and walk on the bridge, or place myself at a window in our calm library, and look out on the white moonlight, and the shadows of the massive trees pencilled so sharp and dark on the turf below, and then muse and start, and back to that hot, glaring tumultuous room again, where I pass for a gay, sarcastic, patient, acute sort of person—and so I am.6

Two years later Jeffrey wrote again, "If it were not for my love of beautiful nature and poetry, my heart would have died within me long ago."6 And towards the end of his life, in 1846, "My affections and my enjoyment of beautiful nature [are] as fresh and lively, as in the first poetical days of my youth."7

As a critic Jeffrey applies this enthusiasm to a reading of Shakespeare, but he does not bring himself to do so with Wordsworth. However, where among Jeffrey's contemporaries Wordsworth loses, Keats gains. Keats does not possess the artistic balance which Jeffrey had

6 David Alec Wilson, Carlyle to "The French Revolution" (1924), p. 212.
7 Henry Cockburn, Life of Jeffrey (Edinburgh, 1852), I, 350.
8 The same, p. 400.
admired, but the imbalance in his work is in favour of imagination and pure poetry. In his
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—and
just beg leave, on the contrary, to say, that any one who, on this
account, would represent the whole poem as despicable, must either
have no notion of poetry, or no regard to truth. (XXXIV, August
1820, 205.)

When Jeffrey enthuses over Keats, he uses the phrase “pure poetry,” a phrase which he probably derived from Joseph Warcon’s
Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope (1756).* What does
Jeffrey mean by the phrase? For him, in line with the view expressed
in the article on Alison, pure poetry occurs when “a fine feeling [is]
expressed of those mysterious relations by which visible external
things are assimilated with inward thoughts and emotions, and be-
come the images and exponents of all passions and affections,”
(XXXIV, August 1820, 206). Jeffrey holds to this view through the
succeeding years. He repeats it in his last literary contribution to the
Edinburgh Review, the article on Mrs. Hemans in October 1829, where
he yields the palm of contemporary poetic fame to the taste and ecle-
gance of Rogers and Campbell. In this valedictory critical article
Jeffrey nevertheless affirms:

It has always been our opinion, that the very essence of poetry,
apart from the pathos, the wit, or the brilliant description which
may be embodied in it, but may exist equally in prose, consists in
the fine perception and vivid expression of that subtle and mys-
terious analogy which exists between the physical and the moral
world—which makes outward things and qualities the natural types
and emblems of inward gifts and emotions, and leads us to ascribe
life and sentiment to every thing that interests us in the aspects of
external nature. (L, October 1829, 35.)

Thus Jeffrey refers the feelings of the poet to nature; but he also
refers them to the feelings of the public. This enables him to appeal
to the public always as able to decide with the help of the critic’s
pleadings, but occasionally as having decided without such help. Even
though “the diligent readers of poetry, in this country, are by no means
instructed. They consist chiefly of young, half-educated women, sickly
tradesmen, and enamoured apprentices,” (IX, January 1807, 348)—

*5th. ed. (1806), p. ii, Jeffrey had referred to Warcon and put forward a
cruder view of “pure poetry” in reviewing Hogg’s Queen’s Wake in November
1814 (XXIV, 163-164).
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despite this sobering view, Jeffrey can affirm elsewhere, "The fame of a poet is popular, or nothing," (XXXI, March 1819, 470). "Present popularity . . . is . . . the only safe prefiguration of future glory," (XXXI, March 1819, 466). In the case of Scott, as well as the Byron of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (XXVII, December 1816, 292), "A popularity so universal is a pretty sure proof of extraordinary merit," (XVI, August 1810, 263). Southey having failed popularly, may be assumed to have failed artistically (XVII, February 1811, 451). In reviewing Scott Jeffrey does discriminate between the multitude and cultivated judges, but only to look forward to their ultimate coalescence, (XVI, August 1810, 266). He sums up his position concerning Scott himself with a characteristic image:

He will always be a poet, we fear, to whom the fastidious will make great objections; but he may easily find, in his popularity, a compensation for their scruples. He has the jury hollow in his favour; and though the court may think that his directions have not been sufficiently attended to, it will not quarrel with the verdict. (XVI, August 1810, 293.)

Jeffrey's public reference leads him into difficulties in the treatment of poetic originality. The originality of Lyrical Ballads is admired (XI, October 1807, 214), but elsewhere Jeffrey objects to a "poor ambition of originality" in Wordsworth because this sets him against "ordinary minds" (XIX, February 1812, 374). This is where Crabbe, for example, has the advantage. He appeals to the "common sympathies of our nature. . . . Mr Crabbe, in short, shows us something which we have all seen, or may see, in real life; and draws from it such feelings and such reflections as every human being must acknowledge that it is calculated to excite," (XII, April 1808, 133). His characters, unlike the eccentricities of Wordsworth, especially the protagonist of The Excursion, "are drawn from that eternal and universal standard of truth and nature, which every one is knowing enough to recognize," (XII, April 1808, 136). Byron comes to fail by the same standard as Wordsworth: "He has too little sympathy with the ordinary feelings and frailties of humanity, to succeed well in their representation—'His soul is like a star, and dwells apart,'" (XXXVI, February 1822, 420). Jeffrey generalises this view when he writes, "the most powerful and enchanting poetry is that which depends for its effect upon the just representation of common feelings and common situations," (XIV, April 1809, 3).

Indeed, Jeffrey trusts the public experience in many ways: not only public judgment and public feeling but also the public way of life.
Wordsworth has done wrong to seclude himself from society and to scorn the "inhabitants of towns . . . and most of those who are engaged in the ordinary business or pleasures of society," (XIX, February 1812, 375). In personal terms, Jeffrey later feels that this is a danger for Carlyle, whom he adjures, "you must begin by tolerating the ordinary specimens of our common nature a little more than you now do." What is needed is an "habitual and general knowledge of the few settled and permanent maxims, which form the canon of general taste in all large and polished societies. . . . If Mr Wordsworth, instead of confining himself almost entirely to the society of the dalesmen and cottagers, and little children, who form the subjects of his book, had condescended to mingle a little more with the people that were to read and judge of it, we cannot help thinking, that its texture would have been considerably improved," (XXIV, November 1814, 3-4). As opposed to Byron Jeffrey believes that men "of truly great powers of mind have generally been cheerful, social, and indulgent," (XXVII, December 1816, 299). By contrast, Southey is monastic (XXVI, June 1816, 482), and Coleridge's habits of thinking out of touch "with the general mass of intelligence," (LXII, October 1835, 244). In a letter to Carlyle of 1831 Jeffrey even goes so far as to declare that "the more I see of philosophers and men of genius the more I am inclined to hold that the ordinary run of sensible, kind people, who fill the world, are after all the best specimens of humanity, and that the others are, like our cultivated flowers, but splendid monsters, and cases of showy disease."  

* * * *

In trying to uncover Jeffrey's principles from his brilliantly free-flowing critical discussions of poetry, I have identified amongst them a demand for cultured language with its appropriate subject-matter, and an insistence upon the primacy of feeling, feeling which is both refined and virile, and which like language has an appropriate subject-matter. The appropriate subject-matter for feeling embraces external nature and society. Society is furthermore important not only as poetic subject but also as the judge of poetry, in possession of the standards to which the poet should refer. Beyond these principles, Jeffrey adheres to a group of values which can, I hope not misleadingly,  

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10 Ibid., p. 204.
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be clustered around the term "decadence." He believes not only that the principles of literature were laid down a long time ago, but also that the great writers came first: "almost all the great poets of every country have appeared in an early stage of their history, and in a period comparatively rude and unlettered," (XIII, January 1809, 251). "The age of original genius . . . seems to be over," (XXI, February 1813, 20).

Not only did the great writers come first, but education, highly developed with the advance of civilisation, and the sophistication of civilised society itself are unfavourable to genius. Hence Burns's relative lack of education and obscurity could be seen as a positive advantage to him. On the poetic disadvantages of education and refined society Jeffrey writes fully in a review of Franklin's Works (VIII, July 1806, 329). He elaborates upon the same point of view in discussing Burns two and a half years later:

We ventured, on a former occasion, to say something of the effects of regular education, and of the general diffusion of literature, in repressing the vigour and originality of all kinds of mental exertion. That speculation was perhaps carried somewhat too far; but if the paradox have proof anywhere, it is in its application to poetry. Among well educated people, the standard writers of this description are at once so venerated and so familiar, that it is thought equally impossible to rival them, and to write verses without attempting it. If there be one degree of fame which excites emulation, there is another which leads to despair; nor can we conceive any one less likely to add one to the short list of original poets, than a young man of fine fancy and delicate taste, who has acquired a high relish for poetry, by perusing the most celebrated writers, and conversing with the most intelligent judges. The head of such a person is filled, of course, with all the splendid passages of antient and modern authors, and with the fine and fastidious remarks which have been made even on these passages. When he turns his eyes, therefore, on his own conceptions, they can scarcely fail to appear rude and contemptible. He is perpetually haunted and depressed by the ideal presence of those great masters and their exacting critics. He is aware to what comparisons his productions will be subjected among his own friends and associates; and recollects the derision with which so many rash adventurers have been chased back to their obscurity. Thus, the merit of his great predecessors chills, instead of encouraging his ardent; and the illustrious names which have already reached to the summit of excellence, act like the tall and spreading trees of the forest, which overshadow and strangle the saplings which have struck root in the soil below,—and afford shelter to nothing but creepers and parasites. (XIII, January 1809, 250.)

Jeffrey admits in this eloquent passage that he has written extravagant
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gantly, yet one is struck by the tendency of these thoughts, which goes against the value elsewhere placed upon education and a sophisticated social order, and also against the tendency of Jeffrey's literary criticism at large. Jeffrey did not have these generally tolerant views in mind when attacking Wordsworth, though they may have underlain his comments on Keats.

Unfortunately, Jeffrey fears that modern writing as a whole is inevitably inferior to the old:

Modern poetry has both been enriched with more exquisite pictures, and deeper and more sustained strains of pathetic, than were known to the less elaborate artists of antiquity; at the same time that it has been defaced with more affectation, and loaded with far more intricacy. . . . the later poets, we conceive, must be admitted to have almost always written in a more constrained and narrow manner than their originals, and to have departed farther from what was obvious, easy and natural. . . . Whatever may be gained or lost, however, by this change of manner, it is obvious, that poetry must become less popular by means of it. (XVI, August 1810, 268-269.)

The particular problems which Jeffrey sees facing the modern writer in his generally difficult situation include problems of originality and problems of style. The situation presents a grave handicap to the modern writer both in his unobjectionable desire to imitate and in his praiseworthy desire to achieve originality. Thus imitation is admired in general terms in November 1817: "All poets . . . are great imitators," (XXIX, 33). Jeffrey especially admires Keats because he has imitated "our older dramatists," (XXXIV, August 1820, 203). On the other hand, Cowper is highly praised for the originality which makes him an initiator of the new era of poetry which Jeffrey comes to recognize:

The first man who broke the numbing spell was Cowper. . . . He is entitled, in our estimation, to a still greater praise; and that is, to the praise of absolute and entire originality. (XLVIII, September 1828, 49.)

Perhaps for Jeffrey the best, because central, position is that occupied by Scott who "took only what he would have given if he had been born in an earlier generation," (XVI, August 1810, 270).

On the difficulty of naturalness of writing in modern sophisticated and complex times Jeffrey comments:

In an advanced state of society, the expression of simple emotion is so obstructed by ceremony, or so distorted by affectation, that though the sentiment itself be still familiar to the greater part of mankind, the verbal representation of it is a task of the utmost difficulty. One set of writers, accordingly, finding the whole
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language of men and women too sophisticated for this purpose, have been obliged to go to the nursery for a phraseology; another has adopted the style of courtly Arcadians; and a third, that of mere Bedlamites. (XIV, April 1809, 3.)

Thus Jeffrey's view of English literary history as on the whole a process of decline leads him to take a gloomy view of the various attempts of his contemporaries.

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Jeffrey's second, "complex" view of English literary history, which finds expression after 1811, allows his view of his literary contemporaries to brighten to a certain extent. In his first, "simple" view, as we have seen, Jeffrey sees the modern rebels, perniciously influenced from abroad, against the long tradition of great English writing. In his second view Jeffrey discovers a break in the tradition which takes place at the time of the Restoration. The foreign influence is thrust back from the end of the eighteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, and part of the modern achievement, which gains better recognition in this more complex view, is in throwing off foreign, particularly French, domination and regaining contact with the old English tradition. Jeffrey purs forward this historical view when he welcomes the revival of interest in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in reviewing Weber's edition of Ford's Dramatic Works in August 1811: "All true lovers of English poetry have been long in love with the dramatists of the time of Elizabeth and James; and must have been sensibly comforted by their late restoration to some degree of favour and notoriety," (XVIII, August 1811, 275). Jeffrey goes on to eulogise the Elizabethan and Jacobean age and to declare that "the Restoration brought in a French taste upon us, and what was called a classical and a polite taste; and the wings of our English Muses were clipped and trimmed, and their flights regulated, at the expense of all that was peculiar, and much of what was brightest in their beauty," (XVIII, August 1811, 278). This view is not merely echoed by Keats in "Sleep and Poetry," but by later Edinburgh Reviewers, for example, Procter (XLII, April 1825, 58), Macaulay (XLVII, January 1828, 19), and Aubrey De Vere (XC, October 1849, 415).

Now, in August 1811, Jeffrey can set Shakespeare and Milton high above Dryden and Pope, though not yet with the assurance of Macaulay, who asserts, "The public voice has assigned to Dryden the first place in the second rank of our poets," (XLVII, January 1828, 1). Jeffrey
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himself, reviewing Scott's edition of Swift in September 1816 finds the "sprightly... good sense" of "the wits of Queen Anne's time" not enough. In Dryden "the evil [French] principle prevailed." Darkness fell, until the emergence of Gray who at least "had the merit of not being in any degree French" and Cowper, "with a style of complete originality," who "for the first time, made it apparent to readers of all descriptions, that Pope and Addison were no longer to be the models of English poetry" (XXVII, September 1816, 1, 5, 5, 7).

Now, in August 1811, Jeffrey can see the new writers as being on the side of Shakespeare and Milton against Dryden and his immediate successors:

Southey, and Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and Miss Baillie, have all of them copied the manner of our older poets; and, along with this indication of good taste, have given great proofs of original genius. The misfortune is, that these copies of those great originals, are all liable to the charge of extreme affectation... But we have said enough elsewhere of the faults of these authors; and shall only add, at present, that, notwithstanding all these faults, there is a fertility and a force, a warmth of feeling and an exaltation of imagination, about them, which classes them, in our estimation, with a much higher order of poets than the followers of Dryden and Addison; and justifies an anxiety for their fame, in all the admirers of Milton and Shakespeare (XVIII, August 1811, 283).

Macaulay again follows Jeffrey after the necessary time-lag (XLVII, January 1828, 13).

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In this discussion I have touched upon Jeffrey's views of English literary history, his principles and their relation to the problems of contemporary poetry. Jeffrey believes that the greatest works of literary art were created and the basic critical principles were laid down in the past. In his first view of English literary history, he sees the critical principles and creativity interacting fruitfully until the appearance of the shocking poets of the present age. Jeffrey's principles concern language, feeling and society; and Wordsworth offends against them all. The language of poetry should be aesthetically appropriate and socially acceptable: here Jeffrey makes a distinction between Wordsworth and Crabbe to the advantage of the latter. Poetry, being essentially unintellectual, expresses feeling, but the feeling is manly and strong, and relates to an appropriate subject-matter. The most
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appropriate subject-matter is provided by the beauty of external nature and the common sympathies of mankind. On all counts, according to Jeffrey, Wordsworth fails. Furthermore, the poet to understand and to communicate the common sympathies of mankind does well to mingle with mankind. After all, mankind provides not only much of his subject-matter but also his audience, by whose judgment—exercised as that of the critic, the exponent of "the silent, practical judgment of the public" (XVII, February 1811, 429), or the educated few, or even the mass—he will succeed or fail. As the heir of the ages, a mere follower in the great creative and critical footsteps of the past, and a dweller in a changing, complex, artificial society, the modern writer considered in the abstract has Jeffrey's sympathy: but he does not extend this sympathy very liberally to Wordsworth, Southey or Coleridge. However, Jeffrey's general sympathy is broadened as he comes to consider English literary history as a more complex development. Now the present is not merely set against the past, but the present beside the distant past against the more recent past. That is, the English tradition was interrupted at the Restoration and the interruption lasted until the appearance of Cowper. In this historical vein, Jeffrey sympathises, again in the abstract, with the new poets, in their efforts to revive the past tradition and to achieve originality at the same time. Unfortunately, Jeffrey cannot bring himself to apply this generality wholeheartedly to Wordsworth and his contemporaries, but he does apply it in Keats's favour. After all, Keats, despite the views of Blackwood's Magazine, is not flagrantly political, he shares Jeffrey's view of English literary history, and he falls in with the association dear to Jeffrey's heart, between poetic feeling and beautiful nature.

If this analysis of some tendencies in Jeffrey's thought is correct, he shows himself to be a lively, if at times slippery, critic, a lover of both argument and poetry, yet careless of the effect of his writing on the sensitive poet or the sensitive poet's livelihood and influence. As a critic he is a conservative intellectual, yet he shares in and leads the reaction against the neo-classical elements of the eighteenth century; positively, he shares in and leads the revival for his generation of the older writers, the admiration of the beauties of external nature, and the exaltation of feeling.

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