Literary Branding in the Romantic Period

by

Christopher Laxer

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Department of English
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Christopher Laxer 2013
Abstract

This thesis argues that, unlike the study of commodity branding, the study of literary branding should not focus solely upon book advertising, but rather investigate all of the processes of attribution that connect conceptual domains with literary labels, enabling their common use in the perception and navigation of the cultural world. Such processes should not be understood exclusively by analogy with the forms of commodity branding that originated in the consumer revolutions of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, but rather as the inherent consequences of more ancient and fundamental practices of naming and poetry. Rather than interpret the reactions of historical readers to Byron, for instance, largely in terms of the author as subject – as has been the tendency with earlier approaches to the question – this thesis seeks to explore historical readers’ reactions to the author’s name as label. The readers of Don Juan in 1819 knew Byron, not as we do after two centuries of biographical research, scholarly inquiry, and literary criticism, but as a literary label with relatively few associations. Arguing that the recent vogue for celebrity studies risks reifying elements of what Jerome McGann has called the Romantic Ideology, this thesis attempts to begin to redress this critical imbalance by examining the deployment of a number of interconnected literary labels in a series of case studies. If we wish to know more about what “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,” “Byron,” or “Wordsworthian” might have meant to readers in the Romantic period, we must examine the uses of those labels in situ.
List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHP</td>
<td><em>Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBSR</td>
<td><em>English Bards and Scotch Reviewers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OED</td>
<td><em>Oxford English Dictionary</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRM</td>
<td><em>A Vindication of the Rights of Men</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRW</td>
<td><em>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

**List of Abbreviations**

**Table of Contents**

**List of Figures**

## 1 Introduction
1.1 What is literary branding? 1
1.2 Literary branding, celebrity, and reception studies 10
1.3 A brief history of eighteenth-century newspaper advertising 15
1.4 The case for studying Romantic newspapers 19

## 2 A vindication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s influence 1787-1800
2.1 How influential was *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*? 25
2.2 Degrees of non-reading 34
2.3 Book titles as literary experience 36
2.4 “Wollstonecraft” and “the Rights of Woman” in the newspapers 1787-1800 39
2.5 Godwin’s *Memoirs* 54
2.6 Conclusion 62

## 3 The branding of Byron 1812-24
3.1 How was Byron branded? 64
3.2 The limits of advertising and marketing 65
3.3 Advertising Childe Harold 1812-1814 73
3.4 Advertising the Turkish Tales 1813-14 85
3.5 Consolidation and controversy 1814-16 88
3.6 John Murray’s attempts to control literary branding 100
3.7 Advertising *Don Juan* Cantos I and II 114
3.8 Conclusion 123

## 4 “Wordsworth, where he is indeed Wordsworth”: authorial adjectives, metaphors, and semantic attribution
4.1 What does “Wordsworthian” mean? 126
4.2 Author names as adjectives, metaphors, and superordinate categories 130
4.3 Early uses of Wordsworth as a metaphor 1801-1819 141
4.4 The case of *Peter Bell* and *The River Duddon* 1819-1820 155
4.5 “Wordsworthian” in the newspapers 1838-1850 168
4.6 “Wordsworthian” as a noun 1812-1897
4.7 “William Wordsworth” as an aptronym
4.8 Conclusion

5 Conclusion
  5.1 Arguments from book history and cognitive science
  5.2 A literary labels database
  5.3 Literary branding and literary criticism

Works Consulted
**List of Figures**

| Fig. 1 | Post Boy (London, England), Tuesday, July 19, 1698. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 2 | Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer (London, England), December 25, 1755 - December 27, 1755; Issue 1535. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 3 | Literary branding/criticism continuum |
| Fig. 4 | General Evening Post (London, England), August 21, 1787 - August 23, 1787; Issue 8386. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 5 | World (1787) (London, England), Wednesday, April 16, 1788; Issue 405. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 6 | Whitehall Evening Post (1770) (London, England), November 25, 1790 - November 27, 1790; Issue 6596. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 7 | Whitehall Evening Post (1770) (London, England), Tuesday, December 14, 1790; Issue 6603. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 8 | Public Advertiser (London, England), Monday, December 27, 1790; Issue 17620. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 9 | Public Advertiser (London, England), Monday, December 27, 1790; Issue 17620. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 10 | General Evening Post (London, England), March 15, 1791 - March 17, 1791; Issue 8965. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 11 | Morning Herald (London, England), Tuesday, June 28, 1791; Issue 3344. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 12 | Star (London, England), Wednesday, March 16, 1796; Issue 2365. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 13 | World (1787) (London, England), Wednesday, August 3, 1791; Issue 1432. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 14 | World (1787) (London, England), Friday, September 9, 1791; Issue 1464. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 15 | World (1787) (London, England), Monday, October 10, 1791; Issue 1490. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 16 | St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England), Thursday, December 22, 1791; Issue 4797. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 17 | General Evening Post (London, England), Saturday, January 14, 1792; Issue 9096. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
| Fig. 18 | Public Advertiser (London, England), Tuesday, January 31, 1792; Issue 17963. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013 |
Fig. 57 The Morning Chronicle (London, England), Tuesday, October 12, 1819; Issue 15741. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 58 The Morning Chronicle (London, England), Thursday, October 21, 1819; Issue 15749. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 59 A diagram of John Ruskin’s use of “Wordsworthian.”

Fig. 60 The Morning Post (London, England), Monday, April 12, 1819; pg. [1]; Issue 15047. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 61 The Morning Post (London, England), Tuesday, April 20, 1819; pg. [1]; Issue 15054. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 62 The Examiner (London, England), Sunday, April 25, 1819; Issue 591©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 63 The Bristol Mercury (Bristol, England), Monday, May 10, 1819; Issue 1519. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 64 Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland), Saturday, May 22, 1819; Issue 15244. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 65 Edinburgh Magazine (Edinburgh, Scotland) 1819; Page 427. Google Books

Fig. 66 The Blackburn Standard (Blackburn, England), Wednesday, July 11, 1838; Issue 184. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 67 The Morning Post (London, England), Tuesday, June 09, 1840; pg. 5; Issue 21644. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 68 The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser, for Lancashire, Westmorland, &c. (Lancaster, England), Saturday, May 15, 1841; pg. [1]; Issue 2059. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 69 The Morning Post (London, England), Friday, June 24, 1842; pg. 6; Issue 22288. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 70 The Examiner (London, England), Saturday, October 17, 1846; Issue 2020. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 71 The Morning Post (London, England), Monday, July 29, 1850; pg. 6; Issue 23910. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Fig. 72 Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine (Edinburgh, Scotland) Vol. 26, July – December, 1829. Google Books

Fig. 73 “Wordsworth’s Poems” Methodist Review (New York) Vol. 21, 1839; Page 457. Google Books

Fig. 74 Poems of Wordsworth (London, England) 1879; pg. xix. Google Books

Fig. 75 The Pall Mall Gazette (London, England), Wednesday, January 2, 1889; Issue 7424. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013
1 Introduction

Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand.
Pity me then, and wish I were renewed

William Shakespeare, Sonnet 111 (82)

1.1 What is literary branding?

In the literature of the Romantic period, the word “brand” is used in a number of ways that now seem archaic. Employed as a concrete noun, it often signifies a sword or a burning torch. For example, in his poetic works William Wordsworth uses the word only three times, twice in his Ecclesiastical Sonnets (“Dissensions” and “Saints”) and once in his Effusion “In the Pleasure-Ground on the Banks of the Bran, Near Dunkeld.” In each case, the word appears as a concrete noun, conveniently located (for the purposes of rhyming, anyway) at the end of a poetic line.

Lo! Discord at the altar dares to stand
Uplifting toward high Heaven her fiery brand (Poetical Works 3: 346)

Michael, and thou, St. George, whose flaming brand
The Dragon quelled; and valiant Margaret
Whose rival sword a like Opponent slew (3: 373)

There where you see his Image stand
Bare to the sky, with threatening brand (3: 104)

This pattern recurs in the writing of other Romantic writers, most noticeably Walter Scott, for whom the word appears to have been something of a favourite. Scott uses the word most often to
refer to swords, as one might expect from a writer of historical romances. As was the case with Wordsworth, Scott usually placed it at the end of a line, often rhyming it with “hand,” “stand,” “land,” or “band.” The word appears twenty-eight times in *The Lady of the Lake* alone (this includes six appearances of the character name “Alice Brand”, and one appearance of her brother, “Ethart Brand”). A characteristic example appears when James Fitz-James laments at the end of Canto I: “Can I not view a Highland brand,/But it must match the Douglas hand?” (44).

The use of the word as a concrete noun seems to have been less common among the novelists of the period. Jane Austen, for example, uses “brand” only once, in Chapter VI of *Persuasion*, where it appears as the name of a minor admiral (364).

It is perhaps surprising to modern readers that the verb “brand” was also frequently used figuratively during the period, in ways that seem analogous to our modern uses of the word. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* records at least two figurative senses of the verb, both of which appear to derive from the ancient practice of branding livestock (or criminals) with a hot iron: the first is “to set a mental mark of ownership upon; also, to impress (a fact, an event) indelibly on one’s memory” and second is “to mark or stamp with infamy, stigmatize” (“brand” def. 2b, 3). There are numerous examples of the word being used in these ways in the literature of the Romantic period, most often in conjunction with the word “name.” For example, in a letter dated 13 March 1799, an eleven-year-old Lord Byron urges his mother to hire him a tutor: “I recommend this to you because if some plan of this kind is not adopted I shall be called or rather branded with the name of a dunce which you know I could never bear” (*Byron’s Letters and Journals* 1: 40). In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* William Blake writes: “With nets found under thy night pillow to catch virgin joy,/And brand it with the name of whore, and sell it in the night” (*Complete Poems* 190). In *Maria; or The Wrongs of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft writes of an unfaithful husband who “enjoys the smiles of a world, that would brand [his wife] with infamy, did she, seeking consolation, venture to retaliate” (245). In her *Monody to the Memory of the Late Queen of France* Mary Robinson writes “Shunned be the Fiend, who, in these dreadful times/Would brand her memory with infernal crimes” (244). In his Preface to *Hellas* Percy Shelley writes: “The English permit their own oppressors to act according to their natural sympathy with the Turkish tyrant, and to brand upon their name the indelible blot of an alliance
with the enemies of domestic happiness, of Christianity and civilization” (409). In Act V of The Cenci, Shelley links the noun with the verb, the concrete use with the figurative, when Giacomo threatens “Let the sword speak what the indignant tongue/Disdains to brand thee with” (287).

Taken together, these examples suggest that some of our modern conceptions of branding may be usefully applicable to the literature of the Romantic period. Although the OED dates the first figurative uses of the verb “brand” in the English language to William Warner’s Albion’s England (1596) and Francis Bacon’s Essays (1625), the phenomenon this figurative use captures seems to be much older. For example, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian wrote in 95 C.E. “apud posteros vero id consecutus, ut Cicero iam non hominis nomen, sed eloquentiae habeatur” (21), which Vicesimus Knox’s Elegant Extracts translates as “Cicero is not reckoned so much the name of a man, as of eloquence itself” (620). Literary labels, particularly authors’ names, can come to seem synonymous with certain concepts.

Branding is now so commonly associated with modern advertising that we are liable to assume they are the same thing. For this reason, the term is liable to cause some confusion, or to seem unduly anachronistic, especially when applied to literary history. However, many of the elements we now associate with branding are implicit in the quotations above. All of the figurative uses of “brand” above suggest the action of changing a name, or changing the popular associations with a name, or both. Many of our modern uses of the word signify these same processes. Branding has something to do with what people call something, and thereafter, what they think of that thing. It has something to do with names or labels, and with associations that, once made, will tend to stick around for a while, or become something that one may have to bear.

__________________________

1 The word Byron uses in his letter, “dunce,” derives from the name of John Duns Scotus, the Scholastic theologian and philosopher, who came to be so associated with being wrong during the early modern period that his name ceased to denote him at all, and devolved into a term of common abuse.

2 Branding is closely related to figurative devices like metonymy: the act of changing or substituting the name for something with one of its properties or connotations.

3 One can have a brand without advertising, a brand without a logo, even a brand without a product. But one cannot have a brand without a name. According to Michel Chevalier “the name
The *OED* offers us several clues as to when “brand” acquired its current associations with advertising and commodities. We can see one of them in the first recorded use of the word as a noun referring to a trademark (def 4c), which appeared in the following advertisement placed in the Welsh newspaper the *Cambrian* on 1 December 1827, in the midst of a public dispute over the labelling of tin plates.

*M.C.* Tin Plates,

Established for their good quality, since the year 1807 and 1808, are exclusively manufactured by *Robert Smith* and Co., at their Margam iron and tin plate works, where they have been made for the last three years under the same superintendence as formerly; and, to prevent fraud, the proprietors have added the brand mark “*Margam*” on each box. (qtd. in Mylne, 4)

Crucially, this advertisement was placed immediately underneath another, which announced that the “*Carmarthen* Tin and Iron Works, where the tin plates bearing the mark ’*M.C.*’ (to which so decided a preference has been given in every market in *Europe*) have been made for nearly a century” (3) was available to be let. This second advertisement was placed by Charles Morgan, a descendant of Robert Morgan, the eighteenth-century tin manufacturer who had owned the tinworks in Carmarthen and had originally started marking the boxes of tin plates with the letters “*M.C.*”, which seem to have originally stood for Morgan, Carmarthen (7). The dispute arose after Robert Smith and his partners had leased the Carmarthen tinworks, producing tin plates with the M.C. brand for some years before moving production to the nearby town of Margam remains the first sign of recognition of a brand” (28). John Simmons asserts “in the context of a brand […] the name is undoubtedly first thing and it is the face to all the world” (6). Tom Blackett writes that “the name is the most important element of the brand as its use in language provides a universal reference point” (16).

4 The taxonomic classification offered by the *OED*’s Historical Thesaurus for both of these figurative senses of “brand” is evocative. They are 1, “the mind » mental capacity » faculty of memory » retention in the mind » retain in the memory » fix in the mind” and 2, “the mind » mental capacity » contempt » disrepute » infamy or notoriety » make infamous [verb (transitive)] » brand with infamy.”
just before their lease expired. The legal dispute essentially boiled down to the question of who
had the right to use the trademark, the owners of the tinworks where the plates had traditionally
been manufactured, or the owner of the business that had most recently produced and sold them. A
summary of the full incident of the tin plates can be found in *Reports of Cases Argued and
Determined in the High Court of Chancery During the Time of Lord Chancellor Cottenham*
(1839), which summarizes the details of Motley v. Downman, the legal case that eventually
followed from the dispute. The legal question revolved around a particularly intangible concept:
what did the public think “M. C.” signified? Whose use of the label was more likely to mislead
the consumer? The exact details of the case need not concern us here, except to point out that the
figurative use of the verb “brand” to capture the idea of marking an object with mental
associations came to suggest a new noun (a brand) over the course of the nineteenth century
through disputes such as this. According to Stefan Schwarzkopf “From the mid-nineteenth
century, advertising agencies performed the role of charging and loading trademarked goods
with meaningful and often purely symbolic connotations to aid consumer decision-making in the
marketplace” (166). Over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this sort of
thinking about popular associations with trademarks slowly developed into our modern
conception of brands and branding more generally, to the extent that the concept is now a more
broadly cultural than exclusively legal one. According to Schwarzkopf “whereas a trademark is a
purely legal entity operating in a commercial context, the brand is a ‘cross-over’ concept […] a
brand is much more than merely a ‘legally defensible proprietary name’ and it serves more than
as a differentiating device, indicating source: brands are essentially identity systems,
encompassing a personality, a relationship, and an image in consumers’ minds” (165-66).

As we shall see when we turn to examine the literary branding of Byron in Chapter 3, it seems
somehow fitting that the first recorded use of “brand” as a noun in this sense would appear in a
series of contradictory advertisements placed side by side in Romantic-era newspapers, disputing

---

5 Around 1900, John Stuart, the chairman of Quaker, reportedly said: “If this business were split
up, I would give you the land and bricks and mortar, and I would take the brands and trade
marks, and I would fare better than you” (qtd. in Lindemann, 27).
the authenticity and ownership of a label of some celebrity. A decade before the incident of the M.C. tin plates, Byron’s publisher John Murray was placing similar advertisements in major London newspapers, trying to assert control over his star author’s literary labels in the face of pressure from piratical publishers trying to cash in on public interest in the poet and his works. Does this suggest that literary branding is itself a child of the Romantic period, as Nicholas Mason has suggested in “Building Brand Byron: Early-Nineteenth-Century Advertising and the Marketing of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*”? I don’t believe so, though certainly the period saw the rise to dominance of discourses like the myth of the solitary and original Romantic genius and publishing practices such as the “puff” or positive review in the periodical press, both of which could be seen as attempts to guarantee the quality of new printed texts entering the literary marketplace, and thus accomplish one of the principal aims of branding: to convince consumers of the quality of a particular product in a particularly competitive market. Paul Duguid traces the history of branding in the book trade back to the mid sixteenth century, when booksellers began to displace printers as the economic winners within an increasingly complex supply chain for printed texts (141-46). For Duguid, semi-autonomous links within a supply chain (in the case of the book trade authors, printers, and booksellers all represent different and competing nodes or links within the system) tend to fight “to become the name by which the chain, as a whole, [is] recognized and its quality guaranteed” (151). These battles occur particularly in the aftermath of “the disruption of a settled system of provision” (151) such as occurred in the British book trade with the Statute of Anne in 1710 or the case of Donaldson v. Beckett in 1774. Duguid connects these historical struggles to the rise of Romanticism and the emergence of the modern concept of the author. Such struggles persist to this day:

Even today, the struggle between author and publisher remains one that is resolved differently in different chains. Publishers are still instrumental in the achievement of celebrity, making names; though, in most cases, once that is achieved, the author takes over the signifying power. (145)

---

6 By Mason’s account *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* “marks the instance when branding extended from the industrial to the cultural sector of the British economy” (415).
While Duguid suggests that literary branding arose earlier than Mason does, he too suggests that the author has quite a lot of control over the process, an argument that this thesis will attempt to qualify.

So is the study of literary branding, then, the study of literary advertising, or the study of the commodification of literature? The answer is yes, and no. This thesis is in part an attempt to show how literary branding may be a subject of much broader interest for literary historians, common readers, and critics alike. As I will argue, it turns out literary branding has less to do with the branding of poetry than with the poetry of branding. Poetry and branding bear many similarities, a fact that has long been appreciated by advertisers. Jean Praninskas, arguing for “the kinship of poetry and advertising” (89), points out that while the brand names of many modern commodities often seem plebeian, the good ones are chosen with great care. The best perform exceptional feats of association:

In its simplest form, the trade name is a descriptive statement – true or false – about a product or service to be marketed, which has been disguised or altered in some way, such as a re-spelling or a new compounding, to make it distinctive. In its most profound form, it is a work of fine art – an eloquent one-word poem.

(101)

Such a statement corresponds to Thomas Carlyle’s assertion that “giving a name is a poetic art” (qtd. in Basil Cottle 212). Giving a factory-produced commodity a proper name brings it into the

7 In 1961, the marketing consultants Lippincott and Margulies outlined the increasing importance of brand names in an increasingly cluttered marketplace:

The number of available names is shrinking […] At the same time, the importance of the name is increasing as products become increasingly similar in function, in ingredients, and even in their advertising and promotion. In some cases the product name is rapidly becoming the product’s sole claim to identity, one of the tangible elements on which the product image is built, and without which it could not exist. Change the advertising, change the distribution, change the packaging, change the promotion, change even the product itself, and you may have lost nothing but instead gained in sales appeal. But change the product name, and you are starting all over again. If joy were called by another name, it might not cease to smell so sweet, but it would cease to be itself. (qtd. in Praninskas, 11)
realm of human imagination and language. When a car becomes a Mustang, or a bar of soap becomes Ivory, we can see the poetry that branding can bring to a commodity. As Praninskas argues:

Some of the name-makers are truly masters of many of the techniques used by our greatest literary artists. A random sampling of trade names amply illustrates their effective use of rhyme and rhythm, figure, imagery, symbolism, and the intentional ambiguity and multiple meaning which characterize the vivid, intense, and terribly concentrated kind of shorthand we call poetry. (99)

Clearly, advertisers invented neither naming nor poetry. What we now think of as commodity branding is the self-conscious attempt to manipulate more ancient and fundamental processes of human language, culture, and cognition for profit. Instead of viewing literary branding as the application of the logic of commodities to poetry, we should view commodity branding as the application of the logic of poetry to commodities. After all, the poet in ancient times was considered the maker of mental objects, just as the advertiser is today. As Shakespeare writes in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a poet “turns to shapes” the “forms of things unknown […] and gives to airy nothing/A local habitation and a name” (419). Similarly, Northrop Frye writes:

an object that has received a name is more real by virtue of it than an object without one. A thing’s name is its numen, its imaginative reality in the eternal world of the human mind. That is another reason why Jesus is called the Word of God. Reality is intelligibility, and a poet who has put things into words has lifted “things” from the barren chaos of nature into the created order of thought. (*Fearful Symmetry* 118)

Understood in this way, it would seem that the phenomenon of branding did not originate with the rise of modern consumer capitalism, public relations, or advertising. It is the case, rather, that branding, defined as those processes by which popular associations attach to names or labels, has long been a vital aspect of human culture, and spread to the realm of commodities when the labels attached to the manufactured products of the industrial era switched from general nouns to proper ones.

____________________________

8 In Greek the word poet (ποιητής) derives from the verb make (ποιεῖν).
For these reasons, I contend that literary branding should not be understood exclusively by analogy with the forms of commodity branding that originated in the consumer revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Manipulating the processes of association or connotation is a much more complicated endeavour in the literary sphere in part because literary productions are much more complex semantic objects than other commodities. While a study of literary branding in the Romantic period (or any other) must of course deal with the role of advertisement, our strong modern association of commodity branding with advertising likely leads us to overestimate the latter’s importance. While factory-produced commodities require the application of distinctive names or labels in order to set them apart from other, virtually identical products, literary productions are of necessity heterogeneous in style and quality, and routinely labelled with distinctive titles and the names of particular authors or publishers. While most mass-produced commodities cannot speak for themselves, and thus require advertising campaigns to brand them with associations, literary productions can speak for themselves, in the sense that they can be read, interpreted, and talked about, and thus do not. Finally, and most importantly, literary labels have a much wider range of possible associations and functions than trade names for other sorts of products, because they invoke complex texts, and the complex lives and literary cultures of the people who wrote and published them. For these reasons, interpretations by common readers, literary criticism, satires, forgeries, and imitations are probably more important for determining which associations attach to literary labels than advertisements ever could be.

We do not know who first mapped a burning stick’s ability to mark objects or people onto the abstract tendency for names or labels to become similarly marked by mental associations, but whoever they were, they turned a diffuse phenomenon that was previously too abstract, too difficult to see or remember, into a concept of some use, just as poets are said to do in Percy Shelley’s *Defense of Poetry*. From this viewpoint, then, the figurative use of “brand” and its related concepts can help us examine certain abstract processes that would be difficult to understand and examine without it. I contend that the study of the operation of these processes in the literary sphere constitutes the study of literary branding.
1.2 Literary branding, celebrity, and reception studies

If the subject of literary branding has been treated at all in recent scholarship, it has tended to appear in studies of literary celebrity, where it is usually associated with the “commodification” and/or “consumption” of authorial identities. In recent years, there has been much interest in the study of literary celebrity, traceable in part back to Leo Braudy’s *The Frenzy of Renown* (1986), and more generally to a rise in popular interest about the condition of celebrity in the modern age. The recent October 2011 edition of *PMLA*, subtitled “Celebrity, Fame, Notoriety,” featured eighteen essays on the topic by scholars such as Marjorie Garber, Joseph Roach, and Jennifer Wicke. The cover image, of dozens of paparazzi with zoom lenses pointed at a celebrity (who isn’t in the frame) offers a visual representation of celebrity studies’ focus upon the interest in denoted subjects as subjects. In *Celebrity*, Chris Rojek offers a paradigmatic definition of the condition of celebrity: one in which “the body [of the celebrity] becomes a commodity […] an object of consumption, designed and packaged to generate desire in others and achieve impact in public” (106). Isn’t a celebrity a brand? In other words, isn’t the study of literary branding the study of how literary celebrities are created and sold?

While acknowledging the role of the author and the publisher in the processes of literary branding, this thesis will seek to reframe the debate in terms of the philosophic or linguistic notions of denotation and connotation, moving it away from exclusively commercial associations and towards the attribution of semantic content to particular literary labels. There are a number of good reasons for doing so. For one, Romantic-era readers of Mary Wollstonecraft, Lord Byron, and William Wordsworth did not have unmediated access to the subjects denoted by those names. One might, of course, point out that we can never have unmediated access to the subjects denoted by subjects. But if celebrity is, as Sharon Marcus has recently argued, some combination of “presence and representation” (1005), then what does it mean that the vast majority of Romantic readers had no genuine access to the presence of the celebrity author, ever? Or that those few
who did routinely confused the representation with the presence? In *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature*, John Mullan writes:

> Barthes observes, as if it were a complaint, that “explanation of the work is still sought in the person of its producer.” An author, in other words, is a kind of short cut to interpretation. The long history of anonymity shows how variously the appetite for such explanation works among readers. Any interesting or controversial work that appears without its true author’s name, and marks that absence, sends not just critics but ordinary readers off in search of the author. (297)

The question is: can they ever really find the author? The theoretical or philosophical problems of biography suggest that they cannot, in any ultimate or transcendent sense. In a 1943 essay on William Beckford’s *Vathek*, Jorge Luis Borges summed up the problem neatly:

> So complex is reality, and so fragmentary and simplified is history, that an omniscient observer could write an indefinite, almost infinite, number of biographies of a man, each emphasizing different facts; we would have to read many of them before we realized that the protagonist was the same. (*Selected Non-Fictions* 236)

If readers cannot find the author in any ultimate or non-mediated way, what image do they settle upon? At what level of detail is this image? Where are its semantic boundaries and what

---

9 See Chapter 3 for a discussion of how Byron was frequently frustrated by readers who mistook him for the Byronic hero.

10 Anonymity is as much a product of literary labelling as literary branding, if only in its withholding of labels. Mullan writes:

> From the mid-sixteenth century, title pages became common. The absence of an author’s name was now marked, a decisive omission. With the possibility of this omission came an interest in attribution. For much of the history of English literature, this interest shaped readers’ interpretations. (296)

11 One might ask what the difference is between reputation and an author’s literary brand? Both are, in some sense, representations of someone that circulate in their absence. The substantive difference, however, may be this: reputation is continually buttressed and checked by personal witnesses, by people who have a chance to interact with, or see others interact with, the person in question. A literary brand is quite different: it describes the sum total of the discrete elements (the name, the image, the epithets) that are picked up and transmitted through a culture, often
cultural work does it do when it is employed? How did it come to be formed? Does it evolve? If so, how, and by what mechanisms? If it is true that readers cannot ever know an author in any ultimate sense, then what are they using as their shortcuts to interpretation?

After two centuries of work by biographers, book historians, and librarians we now understand (or think we do) far more about Wollstonecraft, Byron, Wordsworth, and Coleridge than their contemporaries ever could. The easy availability of such detailed scholarly resources risks reifying Romantic conceptions of genius: the lives of the literary celebrities of the Romantic period have been among the most studied in history, and the wealth of books and information we have accumulated around them tends to draw our attention towards the sublime subjects denoted by their names, regardless of our oft-stated opposition to what Jerome McGann identified as Romantic ideology, “an uncritical absorption in Romanticism’s own self-representations” (1). The celebrity subject is sublime in the sense that one can never have enough information about it. Just as one can imagine the scholarly or monetary value of discovering a new letter written by Byron, one can intuit that such a discovery would not exhaust or even satiate our appetite for knowledge about him. The appetite is bottomless, the subject, sublime. When a question arises about the interpretation of Byron, there is a temptation to try to answer it in terms of our accumulated knowledge about the denoted subject, the poet himself. Even careful contemporary critics schooled in post-structuralism and critiques of the intentional fallacy will tend to go to the archives or critical editions in search of an authoritative way of answering the question. Of course this is important work, and it needs to be done. But some of the implications and hidden assumptions of this work can be misleading. Attributing all or even most of the power and control over Byron’s “brand” to Byron and his publisher is problematic, as I will aim to show in Chapter 3. Substituting a network of relationships between author, publisher, and audience for the solitary Romantic genius of earlier scholarship (as Tom Mole and Jack Stillinger try, each in

independently of the actions of the person they purportedly describe, and independently of any one person’s authority, whether that person be publisher, fan, or rival of the author.
their own way) is a step forward, but it remains too easy to lapse into old patterns of thought. Perhaps the very fact of the celebrity individual’s visibility suggested or triggered the popular attribution of the associative elements of the brand to the proper name, in ways that further boosted the celebrity’s visibility. Such a chaotic and unpredictable process may have benefitted Byron and Murray, or it may have hurt them: indeed, upon closer inspection both seemed to have had mixed feelings about it, and for good reason.

If we are to practice a responsible historicism we must try to reconstruct the possible reactions of historical readers without the benefits or distortions of hindsight. Such an approach should not, I believe, overemphasize authorial agency in the processes of literary branding, but should rather take seriously the role of misrepresentations, misattributions and misreadings in the attribution of semantic content to literary labels. In this thesis, I want to begin to explore and examine how the historical readers of the Romantic period interacted with literary labels as labels. When literary critics dismissed the poetry of young poets in the 1820s and 30s for being too Byronic, it is difficult to see what the application of that label had to do with the subject originally denoted by that label (i.e. with Byron himself). When Goethe referred to John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* as Byron’s “masterpiece”, it isn’t entirely clear from the perspective of the readers of 1819 that he was wrong.12 Readers interacted with Wollstonecraft, Byron, and Wordsworth not only as denoted subjects, but also as connotative labels. Framed in this way, it becomes clear that the study of literary branding has as much in common with reception theory as with the history of literary commodification or the study of literary celebrity. Just as was the case with the dispute over the “M. C.” brand in the 1820s and 30s, the literary brands of the Romantic period are much more intangible than the individual literary label that suggests them, because they existed in the minds of readers. Compared with the paradigm of reception offered by Routledge’s Critical Heritage series, which collect together major periodical reviews of authors like Wordsworth or Byron in an attempt to gauge contemporary reception of Romantic-era texts, the three case

12 See MacDonald 190 and Butler 55 for discussions of Goethe’s appraisal.
studies in this thesis collect together and analyze a sequence of minor, simple, or brief uses of literary labels in newspapers.

Because literary branding as I have framed it is such a broad and interdisciplinary subject of inquiry, it would be fruitless (and perhaps damaging) to attempt to systematize or overly determine its study at this stage. For this reason each of the chapters of this thesis offers a different approach to the problems of literary branding and labelling; each is framed around a single question about the reception of an author. Chapter 2 asks how influential Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was between 1787 and 1800, examining in some detail the assertion William St Clair makes that Wollstonecraft scholars have over-estimated its impact by not taking into account its relatively limited print runs and circulation. Chapter 3 asks how Lord Byron’s literary labels were branded and proceeds to track the deployment of his literary labels in newspapers between the publication of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* in 1812 and Byron’s death in 1824. Chapter 4 asks what “Wordsworthian” means, and explores the use of authorial names as adjectives, metaphors, and superordinate categories. Each of the three chapters offers a careful chronological analysis of a sequence of appearances of literary labels in Romantic-era newspapers. I have included images where I could easily do so; most are drawn from the 17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers and the 19th Century British Library Newspapers databases, though there are a few images taken from out-of-copyright texts on Google Books. As these latter are few in number and fully available on Full View settings in the Google browser, they do not need special permissions to appear in the thesis. The images taken from the databases have been used with permission from the British Library. In the thesis’s conclusion, I suggest two arguments, one from book history and one from cognitive science, that point to the significance of literary branding for readers of the Romantic period and for all readers more generally, and suggest the possibility of a literary labels database to analyze and study the phenomenon of literary branding further. It is my hope that this thesis will make inroads upon this new field of inquiry and open up the possibility of new

For a critique of the underlying assumptions and critical problems of the series, see A. P. Robson.
methodologies and critical problems, or at least hint at what such methodologies and problems might look like.

1.3 A brief history of eighteenth-century newspaper advertising

In *Textual Structures in Eighteenth-Century Newspaper Advertising*, Caren auf dem Keller estimates that approximately 40% of all advertisements in eighteenth-century newspapers were for books (48). Book advertisements were “the most numerous and obvious form of printed announcement in early English newspapers” (23), because “publishers were also booksellers themselves” (23). Jennifer Wicke argues that advertising “was a concomitant of the early printing industry, and needed literature for its first appearances” (3) because “initially it sprang from the emergence of printed literature, and was at home within the book” (3). Wicke traces the origin of the term to “avertissement,” which originally referred to “a note placed in the colophon (back) page of a scribal manuscript to indicate that copying had been done during the holy days, meaning that it should not be sold” (3). An avertissement, therefore, originated as “the antitype of advertisement, because it put a manuscript off limits for commercial purposes” (3). Eventually, however, the avertissement “became the term for the page printers placed first, announcing their work, describing it, and giving their emblem and shop address” (3-4). By the “late seventeenth century […] publicity techniques called ‘advertising’ had slipped out from the covers of literary works and had helped create the newspaper” (6). According to this account advertisements and title pages originate from the same source. The birth of book advertising began to “realign the literary scene” (5), as “the advertising material at the front of the printed text became a complex site for the celebration of individual authors” (5), with the result that “it is impossible to place modern literature, conceived as a set of great works by individual authors, outside the advertising context which supplied these boundaries” (5). For this reason, among others, Wicke argues advertising should be studied as “a language and a literature in its own right” (1).

The following two advertisements, for “Harbin’s Japan Cake Ink” and a translation of Longinus’s “On the Sublime,” illustrate some of the typical features of late seventeenth-century advertisements:
One can immediately see how the column is crowded with text, and how visually differentiating the first advertisement from the second is somewhat difficult. Large capitals signal a break of the column into two advertisements, the first for “Harbins Japan Cake Ink,” a brand-name product that the advertisement claims is one-of-a-kind, and the second for a translation of Longinus’s “On the Sublime.” This labelling of Longinus is obviously anachronistic: Michel de Montaigne only popularized the term “essai” in the previous century. Other notable features of this latter advertisement: the translator’s name is absent, and it gives relatively detailed directions to the reader since street numbers in London did not appear until the 1760’s, and did not appear in book advertisements before 1771 (134-35). Interestingly, the first sentence of the second advertisement is not so much the title of the work as a description of its genre and contents.\footnote{As Keller explains, titles “as we understand them today were not yet developed in the eighteenth century. The titles were more key words and short explanations of the text” (135). While it is difficult to see how Keller might explain the non-descriptive titles of such famous eighteenth-century novels as Tom Jones, Robinson Crusoe, or Pamela, it is worth noting the general tendency nonetheless.}

---

\textit{Fig. 1} Post Boy (London, England), Tuesday, July 19, 1698. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013
Whatever the purpose of the advertisement, one could be sure that some artifice would be employed to grab a reader’s attention. “The great Art in writing Advertisements,” according to The Tatler’s Isaac Bickerstaff, “is finding out a proper Method to catch the Reader’s Eye” (148). Because, according to Keller, “advertisements [were] often not easy to recognize in eighteenth-century English newspapers” (129), various eye-catching typographical devices evolved. As Bickerstaff recorded:

Asterisks and Hands were formerly of great Use for this Purpose. Of late Years the N. B. has been much in Fashion, as also little Cuts and Figures, the invention of which we must ascribe to the Author of Spring Trusses. I must not here omit the blind Italian Character, which being scarce legible, always fixes and detains the Eye, and gives the curious Reader something like the Satisfaction of prying into a Secret. (148)

While these devices required ingenuity, “the great Skill of an Advertiser is chiefly seen in the Style which he makes use of. He is to mention the universal Esteem, or general Reputation, of Things that were never heard of” (148). Although Bickerstaff is (as usual) being satiric, it is now considered self-evident that an advertisement of a forthcoming product seeks to establish a general reputation for something that the public has no prior knowledge or experience of.

By the time of Samuel Johnson, book advertisements had changed somewhat. Johnson implied that an increasingly hard-to-please public spurred an arms race for reader attention. He writes:

Advertisements are now so numerous that they are very negligently perused, and it is therefore become necessary to gain attention by magnificence of promises, and by eloquence sometimes sublime and sometimes pathetic. […] Promise, large promise is the soul of an advertisement. (qtd. in Sampson, 200)

Johnson is likely referring to the spectacular promises that routinely appeared in advertisements for medical treatments and cure-alls throughout the eighteenth century, rather than to advertisements for books. But the following advertisement for Johnson’s dictionary made large promises of its own:
This advertisement is separated from others in the column by a border of rules, and increases its visual appeal by centering lines and employing words and phrases in capitals or italics. It features the standard eighteenth-century headline for a book advertisement: an announcement of when a book was, or would be, published (Keller 121). The title, “A Dictionary of the English Language,” appears to function equally well as a description of the contents and as a title proper, as is suggested by the use of capitals, but it doesn’t quite have a stable unity; it carries over to a second line, and is not uniformly set. The advertisement does not give an address or street name, but rather takes it for granted that readers would know where they could find the book’s printers. If its readers did not automatically associate the names Longman, Hitch and Hawes, etc. with Paternoster-Row, the advertisement would be a failure.15

Keller notes that after 1751 “the length of the body copy text decreases over time, whereas the length of headlines slightly increases” (126). This, along with other typographical and visual developments, resulted in more visibly discrete and distinct advertisements. Titles seem to have solidified into discrete labels over the course of the century, perhaps developing alongside the rise of the discourse of Romantic authorship or genius, which came to imply that each literary text arose as the perfect and spontaneous product of inspiration and was therefore a unity deserving of its own name or title. These names and titles all had to compete for attention in an increasingly crowded marketplace.16 A stable title presumably became more important as the market became increasingly crowded, and to be distinct was to be remembered.

1.4 The case for studying Romantic newspapers

It seems likely that, during the Romantic period, Britain most often named its famous authors in its newspapers. Because newspapers had wide circulation, the number of times an author’s name appeared in newspapers was much greater than in books. For this reason, a careful chronological and comparative reconstruction of the deployment of literary labels in book advertisements and news columns can offer us an indication of the meaning such labels had for historical readers. While Samuel Chew’s Byron in England: His Fame and After-Fame (1924), Andrew Rutherford’s Byron: the Critical Heritage (1970), and William St Clair’s The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period [hereafter RNRP] gather together and comment upon much of the textual evidence relevant to the literary branding of Byron, they do not, by and large, deal with his many brief appearances in the daily papers, nor do they focus upon the role of advertising in determining his fame or influence. Chew examines the responses to Byron offered by literary journals, satires, and imitations; Rutherford collects together the primary texts of important Byron criticism from literary periodicals such as the Quarterly or Blackwood’s; St Clair makes a case for the study of quantitative indicators of literary influence, and uses the example of Byron’s career to illustrate aspects of what he refers to as “the radical canon.” While I do not

16 Mole argues that “As more published writers became known to their readers by name, writers could know the names of a smaller fraction of their readership. The audience became anonymous and unknowable, creating a new alienation between writer and reader” (Romantic Celebrity 16).
have adequate space or time in this thesis to treat my subject as thoroughly as Chew, Rutherford, or St Clair, I hope to illustrate some of the broad patterns that such a study might uncover. Until recently newspapers have been a very difficult medium for scholars to search through efficiently, especially for seemingly minor or passing references. This difficulty, coupled with the lack of an accepted theoretical justification for studying such references, have left this area much understudied. However, with the introduction of databases such as the 17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers or 19th Century British Library Newspapers, scholars and historians can now word search a large corpus of Romantic-era newspapers. Renewed interest in using new technologies to record and analyze the reactions of readers, as evidenced by such digital humanities projects as the Reading Experience Database, suggest that this area of inquiry has much research potential. But much theoretical work needs to be done in order to develop new ways of analyzing and interpreting such information. As I hope to show, studies of the deployment of an author’s literary labels in newspapers or other high-print-run textual mediums may present us with useful indicators of the mentalities of Romantic readers.

In his Preface to Hellas, Percy Shelley writes: “Common fame is the only authority which I can alledge for the details which form the basis of the poem, and I must trespass upon the forgiveness of my readers for the display of newspaper erudition to which I have been reduced” (408). What can it mean to be reduced to “newspaper erudition?” Why must one apologize for displaying it? One of the implications of Shelley’s statement is that there are various kinds of fame that may be peculiar to their own textual medium or literary genre. According to Shelley “common fame” is likely to be found in newspapers, and is reductive and inferior: the kind of knowledge one might apologize for displaying. We shouldn’t adopt Shelley’s dismissive attitude. After all, one needs to know what the common associations with a name or label are in order to challenge or move beyond them. However inferior the common fame found in newspapers may be, it is nonetheless a form of erudition, a particularly shallow kind perhaps, without much nuance and complexity,

17 I have tried to include images of these deployments wherever possible, but occasionally this has led to formatting issues or large empty spaces on the page where an image cannot be accommodated.
but one nonetheless important for understanding the casual or simple responses of readers. For most Romantic-era readers, exposure to book advertisements in the papers was their entry into the system of literary texts. Advertisements informed them which texts their peers were reading and where to get them. We might even say the ballooning sphere of newspaper print contained within it the smaller sphere of the periodical reviews, as well as references to most of the books published in the period. For this reason, newspapers make for an interesting entry point when considering the mentalities of the period’s readers.

What did Romantic-era newspapers feel like for contemporary readers? Likely different from the experience of reading individual books like *Lyrical Ballads*, which, with its beautiful margins and carefully-chosen words, was likely to be kept and re-read, or at least not thrown away. Then, as now, newspapers were more ephemeral than books of poetry: individual issues likely blurred together in the minds of readers, seeming more like a continuous stream of reading experiences, rather than a succession of discrete ones. How often does one think of a particular edition of *The New York Times* or *The Globe and Mail* rather than the abstract aggregate of their many editions? Hester Piozzi wrote that “the News Papers tantalize one with extracts which increase one’s Appetite without gratifying it” (2: 319). According to Byron in the first canto of *Don Juan*, the zeitgeist of the age was encapsulated in the experience of the newspapers, which was connected in some fundamental way with the experience of the great names of the age:

> Vernon, the butcher Cumberland, Wolfe, Hawke, Prince Ferdinand, Granby, Burgoyne, Keppel, Howe, Evil and good, have had their tithe of talk, And fill’d their sign-posts then, like Wellesley now; Each in their turn like Banquo’s monarchs stalk,

> Followers of fame, “nine farrow” of that sow: France, too, had Buonaparté and Dumourier Recorded in the Moniteur and Courier. (*BCPW* 5: 9)

The popular “meanings” of proper nouns (or names) seem to change at a different rate from those of common ones. Evidence for this comes from modern editorial practice: the second stanza of *Don Juan* requires more editorializing than the first, because editors need to supply
modern readers with encyclopedic knowledge about the names in it. Such knowledge is supposedly analogous to what Romantic-era readers might have had about such names.

Of course, the main thrust of Byron’s argument at the beginning of his unconventional epic is that there is something false about these heroes. This is expressed by the revolutionary desire for one of these names to be able to live up to its own promise:

    I WANT a hero: an uncommon want,
    When every year and month sends forth a new one,
    Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
    The age discovers he is not the true one; (BCPW 5: 9).

According to Byron, newspapers did not just create and multiply the heroes of the age, they also exposed and destroyed them, leaving the age adrift with no guidance at all.

We should take both Shelley’s and Byron’s distrust and suspicion of newspapers to heart. But there are good reasons for advocating an in-depth literary study of them in order to unlock this form of knowledge. Coleridge, in his analysis of the state of criticism in the Biographia Literaria, laments a “curious fact”:

    But what gives an additional and more ludicrous absurdity to these lamentations is the curious fact, that if in a volume of poetry the critic should find a poem or passage which he deems more especially worthless, he is sure to select and reprint it in the review; by which, on his own grounds, he wastes as much more paper than the author, as the copies of a fashionable review are more numerous than those of the original book; in some, and those the most prominent instances, as ten thousand to five hundred. (CWC 7.1: 61)

A standard print run of 500 copies for a volume of poetry compared to a standard periodical print run of 10,000 yields a ratio of approximately 20:1. But just as the print runs of literary journals were larger by an order of magnitude than that of the publications they reviewed, so the print

18 For detailed scholarship on the Romantics’ attitudes towards mass media and the mass reading audience, see Jon Klancher’s The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832, Paul Keen’s The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere, and Lucy Newlyn’s Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception.
runs of newspapers were larger by an order of magnitude than those of the journals. William St Clair estimates that by 1833, *The Morning Chronicle* had a circulation of 772, 000 (RNRP 577). Murray’s *Quarterly Review*, on the other hand, appeared in 9-10 000 copies quarterly (573), also yielding a ratio of approximately 20:1. The appearance of an author’s name in a popular newspaper like the *Morning Chronicle* or the *Morning Post* therefore probably represents the circulation of that name at its broadest extent within the system of printed texts.

Of course, the difference between the appearance of an author’s name in a newspaper and its appearance in a periodical review is not just quantitative. The reading experience was also quite different. A literary review, even a bad one, usually delves into more complex and explicit associations with an author than an advertisement or a passing reference in a newspaper does, where it seems the associations are largely implicit. In addition, certain genres, like advertisements and satires, tend to engage with simpler associations with an author’s name, while imitations or reviews often engage with more sustained and detailed associations. Keeping such caveats in mind, I propose that we think of literary branding and criticism as being on the same continuum. Whereas certain genres, such as the periodical review or critical essay, deal with more complex and subtle associations with a particular label, other genres, like book advertisements or satires, deal with more simple versions of the same. Representations like Byron’s caricatures of Wordsworth in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* or *Don Juan* fall on the literary branding side of the continuum, while William Hazlitt’s complex definitions of Wordsworth’s essence in *The Spirit of the Age* fall closer towards the literary criticism side.

![Fig. 3 Literary branding/criticism continuum](image)

19 In any case, the appearance of satire is evidence that common or popular associations have been made with an author’s name or literary label. As Richard Steele pointed out in 1713, “no man can be deceived or delighted with the imitation of what he is ignorant” (qtd. in Mazzeo 12).
In general, we might expect that an encounter with a name or literary label in a newspaper was a simpler, more compressed, and probably more frequent kind of literary encounter for most readers. Yet such numerous shallow encounters had real effects upon how an author was perceived and interpreted. Coleridge describes the effect the distribution of an author’s name in high-print-run publications had in the *Biographia Literaria*:

> For when the name of an individual has occurred so frequently, in so many works, for so great a length of time, the readers of these works (which with a shelf or two of *Beauties, Elegant Extracts* and *Anas*, form nine-tenths of the reading of the reading public) cannot but be familiar with the name, without distinctly remembering whether it was introduced for an eulogy or for censure. (CWC 7.1: 48-49)

As we shall see, the main role of book advertising seems to be the circulation of literary names and labels. If there was an economy of reputation at work during the Romantic period, then newspapers, by distributing literary labels, helped supply the bills of exchange. Ultimately, however, it was up to the collective efforts of readers to determine a label’s common associations within the system.

The vast majority of the literary names and labels in the papers made little impact upon the public because the vast majority of authors lived in penury or obscurity and in any case died forgotten. J. R. de J. Jackson points out that from 1780 to 1830 there were approximately 5000 books of original verse and 10,000 new editions of poetry published, the output of two to three thousand living poets. Out of these perhaps fifty made money, and only three, Scott, Byron, and Moore, could be said to have made fortunes. Likewise, as I hope to suggest, only a handful of authors were branded with common or popular associations during the Romantic period because only a small number of names became well distributed and distinctive enough to pass the threshold and find themselves useful to the cultural needs of the reading nation. The investment

---

20 In *The Long Tail* Chris Anderson describes a reputation economy as a system whereby reputation “can be converted into other things of value: jobs, tenure, audiences, and lucrative offers of all sorts” (74).

readers made in memorizing a famous name paid off by allowing them the possibility of a new literary category or concept. Once established in such a way, a well-known literary name or label could self-perpetuate within the system. If we could somehow develop methods to infer what these labels may have meant for Romantic readers, then theoretically we might take one step closer towards what H. J. Jackson has called the “ever-elusive holy grail of the historian of reading, the mental experience of the individual reader” (Romantic Readers 251). The three case studies that follow are attempts to do just that.

2 A vindication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s influence 1787-1800

2.1 How influential was A Vindication of the Rights of Woman?

In the fourteenth chapter of RNRP William St Clair argues that Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* [hereafter *VRW*] cannot have been as “immediately influential” as scholars and literary historians have tended to assume, due to its relatively limited circulation and textual ephemerality (277-79). He suggests that Robert Woof, Stephen Hebron, and Claire Tomalin, the editors of *Hyenas in Petticoats, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley* (1997), rely too heavily upon anecdotal evidence when they assume that *VRW* was “read and discussed all over Europe and North America” after its publication in January 1792, and that it had been “steadily reprinted ever since” (277n). Drawing upon the methods and arguments of economic and book history, St Clair argues that the material records of Wollstonecraft’s publisher Joseph Johnson and archival information from various circulating libraries, book clubs, and reading societies suggest otherwise:

> With only a few thousand copies of *VRW* manufactured during the whole of the first century after first publication, a figure often surpassed by Scott and Byron on the day of publication, it would have been difficult, and unusual, for anyone, woman or man, to find and read the book. (278)

---

22 For a publisher, the end goal of advertising was to do away with the need for it: as St Clair explains, “If a book no longer needed to be advertised, the gross margins quickly reached several hundred and even thousands per cent” (RNRP 169).
Rather than a watershed moment of the Revolution Controversy, St Clair suggests *VRW* was merely “one of the many replies to Burke” (278) which circulated in the early 1790’s. Because *VRW* was “not so much a book as a long pamphlet” (277) belonging to “an essentially ephemeral type of print,” (278) and because there were “few if any reprints in smaller format and cheaper prices” (132) and few circulating libraries had it or kept it in their catalogues for very long, St Clair concludes “Wollstonecraft’s book made little or no difference to general attitudes to women and scarcely dented the mainstream ideology of femininity prevalent through most of society” (279). Its feminist message was simply overwhelmed by the enormous “material production of conduct books for women” (278). In other words, despite appearing in a couple of editions in London between 1792 and 1796, *VRW* disappeared relatively quickly from the literary marketplace after publication. Even when we factor in various multipliers of readership, such as the fact that an ephemeral pamphlet could circulate more cheaply and easily than a book, and could thus be re-read many times in an individual household, coffee shop or book club, or the appearance of a half-dozen periodical reviews of *VRW* in 1792 complete with excerpts and summaries of the text, mainstream access to Wollstonecraft’s treatise appears to have been much more limited than has often been assumed. With the exception of a stereotyped third edition disseminated in the 1840s in Chartist circles by radical London booksellers like John Cleave, and two centenary editions published in New York and London between 1890 and 1891, *VRW* may not have circulated in any significant way until it was recovered and reprinted by feminist scholars in the late twentieth century (659-60). St Clair considers the case of *VRW* to be particularly good for illustrating how his quantitative methods for analyzing the political economy of reading can act as a corrective to traditionally anecdotal reconstructions of literary history. An extreme version of St Clair’s argument might contend that *VRW* could not have been very influential because few readers had access to it until relatively recently.

---

23 St Clair notes that *VRW* “was available in Everyman’s Library, but otherwise was not easily available until the latter part of the twentieth century” (660).

24 See *RNRP*, 400. See also St Clair, “The Political Economy of Reading.” For a number of reviews and critiques of St Clair’s project, see the reviews by Andrew Elfenbein; H. J. Jackson,
By contrast, in *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (2003), Barbara Taylor paints a very different picture of the reception of *VRW*:

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was an immediate success. Booksellers hurried to supply impatient customers while subscribers to circulating libraries complained that the book was so much in demand that “there is no keeping it long enough to read it leisurely.” […] Reviews appeared in all the major magazines while across the country men and women of influence absorbed and discussed the book’s message (25).

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that *VRW* was widely discussed in literary circles after its publication in January 1792. Some of that evidence suggests full access to or a close reading of the text. For example, in a letter to her friend Thomas Whalley in February of that year, the poet Anna Seward recommended Wollstonecraft’s treatise, inquiring “Have you read that wonderful book, *The Rights of Woman*”? (117). There are a number of such references in the literature of the day. And we know that *VRW* was available throughout the English-speaking world and in America in the years after 1792. William Blake drew upon *VRW* in his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Mary Hays concluded, somewhat ironically, that “the rights of woman, and the name of Wollstonecraft, will go down to posterity with reverence.” Godwin wrote “perhaps no female writer ever obtained so great a degree of celebrity throughout Europe” (36). Even its opponents were influenced by *VRW*, if only in formulating their own rejections of it. Hannah Cowley wrote “[W]ill Miss Wolstonecraft forgive me… if I say that politics are

“Sales figures”; Timothy Larsen, “Reading Habits”; Michelle Levy; Deidre Lynch; Nicholas Mason; Robert Morrison, “Archival economies”; Diego Saglia.

25 For other representations of Wollstonecraft’s immediate influence see Taylor, Kelly, and Sapiro.

26 For the early reception of *VRW* in America, see Branson (35-50).

27 This is perhaps doubly ironic: not only is the name misspelt, but both “Wollstonecraft” and “the Rights of Woman” were to be largely forgotten (or vilified) in the century after her death. Quoted in Anne Mellor, “Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the Women Writers of Her Day” (143).
unfeminine?” (qtd. in Taylor 27). Maria Edgeworth “insisted that she was not “a champion for the rights of woman” and devoted the seventeenth chapter of her novel Belinda to caricaturing Wollstonecraft through the figure of Harriet Freke (155).

R. M. Janes notes that, with the exception of the English Review, which “attacked [VRW] in two passionate installments,” only periodicals with broadly radical or liberal sympathies reviewed the work.28 Contrary to the popular assumption that VRW was initially greeted with the same “shock, horror, and derision” that it would later attract from conservative critics after the publication of William Godwin’s Memoir of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman in 1798, Janes points out that the initial reviews in the Analytical Review, the Literature Magazine, the General Magazine, the New York Magazine, the Monthly Review, and the New Annual Register were largely favourable. “[M]ost reviewers took [VRW] to be a sensible treatise on female education,” while choosing to ignore “those recommendations in the work that might unsettle the relations between the sexes” (293-4). From the appearance of a comic opera titled The Rights of Woman in April 1792, we can be confident VRW (or the concept it vindicated) was at least well known enough to warrant satire.29

However, upon close inspection, much of the anecdotal evidence of the reading of VRW comes decades later. Although often quoted in accounts of VRW’s reception, Lady Palmerston’s playful warning to her second husband, “I have been reading the Rights of Woman, so you must in future expect me to be very tenacious of my rights and privileges” (qtd. in Tomalin), cannot really be counted as evidence of initial readership as she was born in 1787, and was thus a young child when VRW first appeared.30 Similarly, Lady Caroline Lamb recorded “I have read the rights of Woman, [and] am become a convert” in a letter to the Marquis of Hartington dated 29


29 See Chapter 5 for a discussion of how the appearance of satire both suggests and shapes common associations with literary labels.

30 Quoted in Claire Tomalin, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft (110-1) and Anne Mellor, Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters (3).
September 1809 (46). Jacqueline Pearson records that Percy Shelley encouraged Harriet Westbrook to read *VRW* in the course of their short relationship, which began in January 1811 (99). On 6 December 1816 Mary Godwin recorded reading *VRW* in her journal (149). In an 1844 letter to Mary Russell Mitford, Elizabeth Barrett Browning claimed to have read it many times as a twelve-year-old girl in the year 1818: “I used to read Mary Wolstonecraft [sic] …when I was twelve years old [...] Her eloquence & her doctrine were equally dear to me at that time, when I was inconsoleable [sic] for not being born a man” (292). Such accounts, informative as they are, don’t really clarify the question of how widely read *VRW* was.

While some literary critics and historians have emphasized the short-term impact of *VRW*, others have argued that the reception and impact of Wollstonecraft’s treatise was necessarily a complex and drawn-out affair. Anne Mellor has argued that the influence of *VRW* upon “the women writers of her day was incalculably profound” although not necessarily immediate, extending through subsequent generations of female writers such as Jane Austen, whose novels repeatedly demonstrate “that the best woman is a rational woman.” Lyndall Gordon makes a similar argument about the impact of Wollstonecraft upon Austen, suggesting that “Wollstonecraft’s voice sounds once more when Elizabeth Bennet will not grovel to imperious Lady Catherine de Burgh in *Pride and Prejudice,*” that Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* is described as “a legatee of *The Vindication,*” and that Anne Elliot’s strong opinions on the differences of male and female education in *Persuasion* can all be traced to *VRW.* In addition to these anecdotal accounts of *VRW*’s reception, there are a number of illuminating poetic responses to Wollstonecraft’s text that appeared between 1792 and 1794. Perhaps these are an indication of readership? For example, in a prologue read before performances of Elizabeth Inchbald’s 1793 comedy *Everyone Has His Fault* at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden, the Anglican clergyman Reverend Robert Nares proclaimed:

---

31 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Brownings’ Correspondence* (9: 292).
The rights of women, says a female pen,
Are to do every thing as well as men.
And since the sex at length has been inclin’d
To cultivate that useful part the mind;
Since they have learnt to read, to write, to spell;
Since some of them have writ, and use it well;
Let us not force them back with brow severe,
Within the pale of ignorance and fear,
Confin’d entirely to domestic arts,
Producing only children, pies and tarts. (qtd. in Lackington, 425)\(^{34}\)

Similarly, John Henry Colls’ *Poetical Epistle Addressed to Miss Wollstonecraft, Occasioned by Reading her Celebrated Essay on the Rights of Woman* (1794) proclaimed a sympathetic reading of Wollstonecraft’s “celebrated essay” in its title and offered one of the first personifications of its author in print:

Thus WOLLSTONECRAFT, by fiery genius led,
Entwines the laurel round the female’s head;
Contends with man for equal strength of mind,
And claims the rights estrang’d from womankind;
Dives to the depths of science and of art,
And leaves to fools the conquest of the heart;
Or mounts exulting through the fields of space,
On faith’s strong pinions, to the throne of grace. (qtd. in Franklin, 83)\(^{35}\)

Evidence of this sort certainly qualifies as proof of influence, though not necessarily as proof of reading. While some poetic responses to *VRW* appear to capture Wollstonecraft’s specific arguments with some degree of complexity, others merely personify the doctrine of gender equality in the figure of its author, first as an Amazonian “Champion of the Rights of Woman,” and later as ruinous proof of that doctrine’s supposedly inherent dangers. It isn’t clear whether

\(^{34}\) The first two lines of this quotation weren’t originally contiguous with the final eight. For the original prologue in its entirety see Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer (eds.), *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama* (40-1). See also Arianne Chernock, *Men and the Making of Modern British Feminism* (54).

\(^{35}\) See also Susan Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action* (96).
such poetic responses represent a direct engagement with Wollstonecraft’s text or an indirect engagement with its labels and the popular (mis)conceptions about them. Do these responses indicate that *VRW* was a book everybody had seen and read, or merely one that many might have heard of?

In the new edition of his *Memoirs* in 1793, the bookseller James Lackington directly quoted *VRW* in his discussion of the impact of circulating libraries upon female readership, suggesting his personal access to and knowledge of Wollstonecraft’s text:

> by far the greatest part of ladies have now a taste for books. […] It is true, that I do not, with Miss Mary Wolstonecraft, “earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society,” not even with her exception, “unless where love animates the behaviour.” And yet I differ widely from those gentlemen, who would prevent the ladies from acquiring a taste for books. (422-3)\(^{36}\)

Like many contemporary commentators on *VRW*, Lackington insists he disagrees with Wollstonecraft, but the effort causes him to advocate an argument that seems sympathetic to her own. Obviously the education of women was vital: circulating libraries and lending societies were necessary to contribute “towards the amusement and cultivation of the other sex,” something that could only benefit the nation. What good would it do anyone to keep women, the companions of men and the teachers of children, unfeeling and unthinking? Why would a man “of sense […] desire the company of his wife” if she did not “polish both [her] heart and head” by reading? Despite his avowed opposition to Wollstonecraft, Lackington quotes *VRW* sympathetically, and is prompted to advocate some degree of gender equality in education.

Like Lackington, Daniel Isaac Eaton associated Wollstonecraft with the question of female readership; like Lackington, Eaton’s literary response suggests that *VRW* was having an impact. His satirical *The Pernicious Effects of the Art of Printing Upon Society, Exposed* (1793) parodied conservative arguments about the dangers inherent in the extension of reading among the lower

\(^{36}\) Located at Finsbury Park, Lackington’s multi-story bookstore, nicknamed the “Temple of the Muses,” was a physical manifestation of his lifelong dedication to providing widespread access to texts.
classes, arguing that printing spread the discourse of “the rights of man” around, and that such radical ideas infected women too:

With similar mistaken notions of liberty, even many women are infatuated; and the press, that grand prolific source of evil, that fruitful mother of mischief, has already favoured the public with several female productions on this very popular subject – one in particular, called Rights of Women, and in which, as one of their rights, a share in legislation is claimed and asserted – gracious heaven!  

Crucially, however, whereas Lackington directly quotes from VRW, signalling that he had indeed read Wollstonecraft’s text, Eaton merely mentions its title and parodies the reactions it invokes. This may be indicative of a more profound truth about VRW’s initial reception: the most hostile and critical readers tended to pass judgment upon Wollstonecraft’s treatise based solely upon their associations with its title, without bothering to read the text at all.

Perhaps St Clair and Taylor are both right. Perhaps VRW became both well known and influential despite remaining unread by most readers. Such a conclusion would agree with St Clair’s evidence about VRW’s limited circulation and with Taylor’s anecdotal evidence of its wide influence. Wollstonecraft may have been mostly unread, and largely disagreed with when she was, but she may have been hugely important and influential nonetheless. VRW provoked responses from across the political spectrum: from the literary productions of more moderate voices, to the criticisms and exaggerations of her harshest critics. Many of the important literary and political figures in both Britain and America knew of the book’s existence and felt obliged to take a stand on it, regardless of whether they had read it or not.

This chapter aims to help reconcile these two seemingly contradictory accounts by tracking the deployment of the literary labels “Wollstonecraft” and “the Rights of Woman” between 1787 and 1800, and exploring the broader questions of the interactions between texts, their associated

literary labels, and Romantic-era reader response. Upon closer examination, the discrepancy between the two positions seems to arise from the implication that influence derives from, and is evidence for, full access to the text. For example, when Tom Furniss writes that “Wollstonecraft’s Second Vindication became a best-seller and its author one of the most famous, and infamous, women in Europe” or Caroline Franklin writes the “Rights of Woman was a cause célèbre and became known throughout Europe,” it isn’t exactly clear if either is claiming that Wollstonecraft’s text was widely read throughout Europe, or what their evidence for such a claim might be. In any case, we will never be able to fully recover or quantify all acts of readership. However, we can be fairly certain that many more readers knew of the notorious treatise than had read it personally; many, in fact, have left behind written records of their non-reading of VRW. Tomalin points out that Hannah More “boasted that the title of A Vindication alone was enough to prevent her from reading it,” and that “there were others who discussed A Vindication without ever seeing a copy.” Tomalin argues the prevalence of jokes attributing authorship of the text to Thomas Paine reveal that VRW was much more widely known about than read. In her 1884 Life of Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Robins Pennell wrote that VRW “is now seldom read. Others of later date have supplanted it. Conservative readers are prejudiced against it because of its title” (138). Like Frankenstein and other notorious works of the radical canon, it seems that VRW was far more often mentioned or talked about than read, a fact that subtly affected its broader cultural reception and significance. Readers most often encountered its title or author’s name in the private conversation or correspondence of their contemporaries, or in news columns, advertising pages, or book catalogue of high print run publications like the Morning Chronicle, the Whitehall Evening Post, or St. James’s Chronicle. This wide deployment of literary labels is one of the reasons that VRW was far more influential than St Clair allows, despite the fact that it was not as widely read as Taylor implies.

---

38 Tom Furniss, “Mary Wollstonecraft’s French Revolution,” The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft (63); Caroline Franklin, Mary Wollstonecraft: A Literary Life (101).
2.2 Degrees of non-reading

Determining the scale and scope of *VRW*’s influence is not as simple as determining who read it and who did not. St Clair’s critique is based on the assumption that reading *VRW* was the only way to access or be influenced by it. But what does it mean to say someone has *read* a book? This thorny theoretical problem seems to lie at the root of the discrepancy between his position and Taylor’s. In order to understand this problem, it is worthwhile to consider a recent book by Pierre Bayard, who argues that we engage in four basic relationships with books (xvi-xvii). Our first relationship is with books we haven’t read and never will. Because “even a prodigious reader never has access to more than an infinitesimal fraction of the books that exist” (3), this is, by far, any particular reader’s most likely relationship with any particular book. It is worth noting that, over the course of the late Eighteenth century, the proportion of read to unread books fell steadily, as the print explosion or print boom greatly increased the number of titles available to the average reader. This process brought its own anxieties: in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* Byron warned of the overloaded and creaking bookshelves, fearing the displacement of Pope and Dryden by the likes of Southey, Scott, or worse. Genius seemed in danger of drowning.

Our second relationship is with books we have skimmed. As Bayard argues:

> Being culturally literate means being able to get your bearings quickly in a book, which does not require reading the book in its entirety – quite the opposite, in fact. […] Skimming books without actually reading them does not in any way prevent you from commenting on them. It’s even possible that this is the most efficient way to absorb books, respecting their inherent depth and richness without getting lost in the details. (14-15)

In historical terms, skimming might be said to correspond roughly with the practice of reading reviews in the periodical press, which more often than not included exemplary portions of the work being reviewed, as well as critical judgments that – whether agreed with or not – helped

---

40 According to Bayard “reading any particular book is a waste of time compared with keeping our perspective about books overall” (vii).
readers find their bearings with regard to the importance of the work being reviewed. Perhaps the practice of writing marginalia provides a material record of the way in which readers skim texts: after all, the presence of marginalia suggests the highlighting of certain passages at the expense of others. However, at a more fundamental level, skimming may also be the only form of reading possible. Readers start reading books or they stop; they lose their way or start over; even their closest readings pay closer attention to certain passages than to others. Perhaps there is no such thing as reading a text in the full or ultimate sense of the phrase; perhaps there can only ever be various exercises in skimming texts.

Our third relationship is with books we have heard of. If cultural literacy “involves the dual capacity to situate books in the collective library and to situate yourself within each book” (32) then “it is ultimately unnecessary to have handled a book to have a sense of it and to express your thoughts on the subject” (32). Such cultural literacy was immensely important as a mark of social distinction in Romantic-era Britain; literary knowledge and opinions were spreading into every demographic, bringing with them important signals of class, education, leisure, intelligence, and sympathy. One of the most important ways to acquire such cultural literacy was through an exposure to the “reactions [a particular book] has provoked” (40). Bayard argues that “a book is not limited to itself, but from the moment of dissemination also encompasses the exchanges it inspires. To observe these exchanges, then, is tantamount to gaining access to the book, if not actually reading it” (40-41). In historical terms, it seems likely the two most common ways for Romantic readers to hear about a book, and of various reactions to it, was orally through their peers or through exposure to newspapers, periodicals, or other printed sources.

Our fourth relationship is with books we have read and largely forgotten. According to Bayard “what we preserve of the books we read – whether we take notes or not, and even if we sincerely believe we remember them faithfully – is in truth no more than a few fragments afloat, like so many islands, on an ocean of oblivion” (53). Bayard points out that this fear of forgetfulness

41 For a detailed study of the practice, see H. J. Jackson’s *Marginalia and Romantic Readers.*
consumed Montaigne, who complained in his *Essays* of having “more than once [picked] up again, as recent and unknown to me, books which I had read carefully a few years before and scribbled over with my notes” (qtd. in Bayard, 50). This fundamental fact of human cognition means that “saying we have read a book becomes essentially a form of metonymy” (48); we can only ever read a portion of text “and that portion is, in the longer or shorter term, condemned to disappear” (48). Rather than continue with the illusion, supported by our common notions and definitions of the process, that to have read a text is to have full possession of it, Bayard suggests “when we talk about books, then, to ourselves and others, it would be more accurate to say that we are talking about our approximate recollections of books, rearranged as a function of current circumstances” (48). My question is this: are such approximate recollections open to social influence, the opinions of peers, to caricature and parody, to criticism, to advertising? In what follows, I will examine the argument that the title of a work could impact a great many more readers than the work itself.

2.3 Book titles as literary experience

During the Romantic period the most common relationship any particular reader had with any particular book was not to have heard of it. Perhaps the next most common relationship was to have heard of, but not read it. We have evidence that this was in fact a common experience, especially for readers among the lower classes. The poet John Clare, poor country labourer and avid reader, described how advertisements and catalogues of books were among the most prized “texts” available to him:

> I usd to be uncommonly fond of looking over catalogues of books and am so still [...] they [are] some of the earliest readings that opportuniteys alowd me to come at [...] if ever I bought a penny worth of slate pencils or Wafers or a few sheets of paper at Drakards they were sure to be lapt in a catalogue and I considered them as the most va[l]uable parts of my purchase and greedily lookd over their contents and now in cutting open a new book or Magazine I always naturaly turn to the end first to read the book list and take the rest as a secondary pleasure [...] Anticipation is the sweetest of earthly pleasures (56-57)

The pleasure of anticipation Clare felt reading the names and titles of the books in these catalogues necessarily preceded or, in the vast majority of cases, superseded the pleasure of
reading the books themselves. Even if he could have afforded to buy or borrow these volumes, he wouldn’t have had time to read them all.

Clare isn’t talking about newspaper advertisements here; he is talking about book catalogues that were used to wrap books, or book catalogues printed at the back of books, magazines, or periodicals. According to St Clair:

As for the paperback editions, every spare space inside and out was taken up with advertisements for other products. Most were the heavily branded and patented products of the pharmaceutical industry, the book industry’s traditional partner. […] If, at the top of the market for romantic poetry, readers were offered the illusion that texts were autonomous and ethereal, those at the lowest tranches could not escape insistent reminders of the disasters, perils, unpleasantness, and banality of everyday life. (423-24)

St Clair assumes these advertisements were an oppression, and, of course, they may well have been. But they were also windows into a wider world. Through advertisements for books and exposure to the literary labels of the day, readers like Clare found a chance to dream. Those at the lowest tranches of the reading nation might not be able to read a book but they could very well imagine it.

The variety of literary pleasure Clare describes hasn’t been interrogated much: the experience of anticipating the content of a text from its title or its author’s name alone. This experience was likely a central one to a reader’s engagement with literary culture. A glimpse of an advertisement for a poem like Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage [hereafter CHP] in The Morning Chronicle might have been the closest readers of Clare’s class got to Byron’s poetry for several years after its appearance, until the poem tranched down into cheaper editions. What impact might the title of a work alone have? Titles are not without content; they can suggest a horizon of expectations without a text. After all, a good title may express the essence of a work, the core association or

42 But the difference between these types may not matter all that much. The principal difference between book catalogues and newspaper book advertisements seems to be their context: in terms of structure or wording, the entries for books in catalogues were often very similar to those in newspaper advertisements, and often identical to the title-pages of the books they described.
premise around which what Roland Barthes described as the “tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (146) could accumulate. If it is indeed true that VRW was both disproportionately influential and disproportionately unread, could the title itself have been responsible for spreading its influence? If so, how would this different medium of transmission affect it? After all, it would stand to reason that the experience of merely having heard of VRW would be different from the experience of reading the text. However, both types of experience would likely have influenced each other. That is to say, groups of readers who had merely heard of Wollstonecraft’s book, and had not read it, could (and did) form opinions about it. And these opinions could (and did) come to affect how many interpreted and remembered the work after its appearance. Perhaps a notorious book always has a disproportionate influence that outstrips its readership.

It seems probable that humans tend to think and store cultural information in binaries. This is one reason why VRW was not, as St Clair argues, just one of the many replies to Burke. It could be seen as the female response to Burke, a response made more memorable and influential because it was so contrary to the conservative message of the plethora of conduct books for women. The very fact there was a book entitled “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” suggested both the possibility of those rights and the possibility of taking them seriously. The title single-handedly suggests the whole discourse surrounding the rights of man, and nicely echoes both the title of Wollstonecraft’s earlier Vindication of the Rights of Men, and the title of Thomas Paine’s much more well-known Rights of Man. By the substitution of “woman” for “man,” Wollstonecraft’s title reframed the popular debate in terms that both challenged and resonated with the zeitgeist. This challenge was revolutionary not only because VRW was a hybrid of political treatise and conduct-book, a generic revolution that bridged and perforated the boundaries of the masculine public sphere with its discourses on the rights of man, and the feminine private sphere with its discourses on female education and morality. It was also revolutionary by the fact that VRW’s

43 Many of Wollstonecraft’s critics appear to miss the “vindication” part of VRW, getting stuck at the phrase or concept of “the Rights of Woman” and everything the phrase implied. Arguably this implies a lack of familiarity with her arguments.
influence seemed to be transmitted so easily through the circulation of its title. Perhaps Wollstonecraft’s text really could have a revolutionary effect even outside the circle of its readers; perhaps it did not have to be read but merely heard of, or known about, to plant its subversive seed in the culture of the day. Knowing of a book’s existence can change the world.

2.4 “Wollstonecraft” and “the Rights of Woman” in the newspapers 1787-1800

“Wollstonecraft” makes its first appearance in the 17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers Database in the following advertisement for Thoughts on the Education of Daughters.44

As was common with unknown writers, the advertisement provides a detailed description of the book’s contents in its long and descriptive title and in the listing of the book’s topics. As was not necessarily common, Wollstonecraft’s name spans a whole line, claiming almost as much

44 It is important to note the almost complete absence of other “Wollstonecrafts” in the newspapers. The lack of namesakes makes this name a distinctive label.
attention from the eye as her variegated and line-broken title. Between August 1787 and June 1788 “Wollstonecraft” appeared another half dozen times in advertisements for *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* or *Original Stories from Real Life*, such as in the following:

![Fig. 5 World (1787) (London, England), Wednesday, April 16, 1788; Issue 405. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013]

This advertisement describes the genre and purpose of the publication: a set of fictional didactic stories “calculated to regulate the Affections.” The titles aren’t italicized, capitalized or otherwise set apart from the text of advertisement. For the next two years, “Wollstonecraft” disappears from the Burney collection.

*A Vindication of the Rights of Men* [hereafter *VRM*] was originally published anonymously. On 25 November 1790 an advertisement for the first edition of *VRM* appeared:

![Fig. 6 Whitehall Evening Post (1770) (London, England), November 25, 1790 - November 27, 1790; Issue 6596. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013]
VRM is explicitly associated with Burke’s Reflections, which it is clearly identified as a response to. The advertisement for the book was anonymous in terms of its author but not in terms of its target, whose name is mentioned twice. The advertisement also names J. Johnson and the dissenting clergyman Joseph Priestley. The first part of the title is “A Vindication of the Rights of Men,” which supplies a description of the book’s main argument; the second part of the title is recursive in the sense that it identifies VRM as a response to a work that many readers already knew. Compared to the earlier Wollstonecraft advertisements, this advertisement doesn’t describe the content of the text nearly as much. There is no indication or list of its arguments, no explicit declaration of the book’s purpose other than that it is a “vindication”; instead the advertisement draws upon the associations that readers may have had with an already well-known text, Burke’s Reflections, in order to describe or define itself. Wollstonecraft and J. Johnson have seemingly created a new genre here: the response or refutation of Burke in the form of a letter; indeed, the advertisement advertises Joseph Priestley’s forthcoming letter in identical terms.

It wasn’t until December 1790 that “Wollstonecraft” appeared again in the classified advertisements of the London papers, this time for the second edition of VRM.

---

Fig. 7 Whitehall Evening Post (1770) (London, England), Tuesday, December 14, 1790; Issue 6603.©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

45 St Clair records VRM’s price at 1.5 shillings.
Wollstonecraft’s name is prominent and centered. How did this change the perception of *VRW*? Franklin points out that “anonymity allowed Wollstonecraft to write robustly as a man, and gained her views a fair hearing without prejudice; while revealing her identity later allowed her book to be re-read in the light of her sex” (94). Between 14 and 18 December, this advertisement appeared six times in the pages of the *Whitehall Evening Post*, *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, and *World* (1787).

Two weeks later “Wollstonecraft” reappears in the Burney collection, for the first time (to my knowledge) outside of an advertisement placed by Johnson. In the case of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *Original Stories from Real Life*, “Wollstonecraft” remained confined to the advertisements for her books and the titles pages of them. But with the revelation that the Author of *VRM*, one of the first responses to Burke, was a woman, “Wollstonecraft” bridges over to the news columns from the advertisements. On 27 December 1790, the front page of the *Public Advertiser* printed a letter addressed to “Mrs. Mary Wollstonecraft”:

![Public Advertiser](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Full-Blade-view/05/02/2013.png)

**Fig. 8** *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Monday, December 27, 1790; Issue 17620. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

---

46 Franklin points out “The first reply of all, by Major John Scott, the friend of Warren Hastings, appeared within a fortnight of *Reflections*” (219).
The author, who signs the letter as “A. B.,” asserts he cannot understand why Burke, the “Sublime and Beautiful” orator should have written against the Rights of Men, in such a manner as to call for a Lady’s vindication of them.” The author goes on to criticize and ridicule Wollstonecraft’s response to Burke before concluding “by expressing the great happiness I derive from seeing some of my fair countrywomen become masculine Machiavellian politicians; and my hopes that I shall soon see you a nation of Amazons.” This interpretation of a woman’s trespass into the discourse of “the rights of men” is exactly the sort of criticism that would be raised against Wollstonecraft again and again thereafter: when women discuss the rights of men they become as men; Franklin points out that even Godwin “felt obliged to concede that many of the sentiments of this “very bold and original production” were “of a rather masculine description” (107).

On the same front page of the Public Advertiser, in the adjacent column, appeared a public letter to “the Printer of the Public Advertiser” signed by “Jenny Sarcasm.” The letter is a satiric call for the “rights of women”:

\[
\text{To the Printer of the Public Advertiser.}
\]

\[
P_{S}H_{A}W_{,} \text{ says I, Mr. Printer—rights of a fiddletick! rights of Men, indeed! I should not have thought of the be creatures talking so much about their rights—while the rights of women lie neglected—This indeed would be a subject—were not, as my friend Mr. Burke says, the “age of chivalry gone!”}
\]

Fig. 9 Public Advertiser (London, England), Monday, December 27, 1790; Issue 17620. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

\[47\] Such views have had a long history: Richard Cobb, writing a review of Claire Tomalin’s The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft in TLS in the early 1970’s, declared that “Mary’s very surname has about it an unmistakable ring of crankiness, ungainliness, and discomfort, a promise of Puritanism and serious intent” (qtd. in Wolfson, 163).
Here we have, on the same page as a public letter addressed to Wollstonecraft, a suggestion of the title and topic for her next work a full year before it was published. The letter asks: “Have not We RIGHTS, Mr. Printer, rights indisputable, natural, abstract, and social, and civil, and municipal?” There follows a mounting series of exaggerated questions asking if “they” (interestingly the female narrator’s voice fades in and out) do not have rights: “Among their civil rights, are we not to reckon the right of scolding, crying, falling into fits, going to watering places, and running up bills? Shall the haughty aristocracy of men deny us these rights?” It seems likely that Wollstonecraft would have read the letter addressed to her, and, in all probability, the satiric attack next to it. It is significant that “the rights of women” first enter the newspapers as an exaggeration or caricature of “the rights of men.” This is, in the terms of the cognitive linguists, a metaphoric projection of “the rights of” domain further down the Great Chain of Being, which is a distinctly different conception of women’s place in the hierarchy of being. Equality is closely related metaphorically to sameness. The assumption of sameness could in turn lead to a conceptual blend of the domains MAN and WOMAN and hence all the reactions of disgust against masculine females.

“Wollstonecraft” appears in a number of Johnson advertisements for Priestley’s Letters to the Right Hon. Edmund Burke in late January and early February 1791. On 15 March 1791 Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man appeared:

Fig. 10 General Evening Post (London, England), March 15, 1791 - March 17, 1791; Issue 8965. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

This advertisement differs from the advertisement for VRM in a couple of crucial ways. First, the
publisher is J. S. Jordan rather than J. Johnson. Second, the advertisement informs readers of the author’s official role during “the American War.” Third, the advertisement reminds readers of Paine’s *Common Sense*, a text that many may have heard of or even read. Fourth, it tries to rebrand Burke’s *Reflections* as an “ATTACK.”

By June 1791, seven months since the publication of *VRM*, the “Answer to Burke” had become common enough to acquire the features of a genre.

\[
\text{RECIPE, FOR MAKING AN ANSWER TO BURKE.}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Take of scurrilous abuse of the present Ministry.} \\
\text{Clumsy ridicule of Kings and Nobles, equal parts.} \\
\text{Distorted epithets, and strange comparisons, quant., supp.} \\
\text{Sneers at religion, order, and regularity, manufactured by a disturbed imagination, as much as will serve to tinge the whole.} \\
\text{Sprinkle it over with organization, equal rights and imperceptible laws, and send the whole to press.}
\end{align*}
\]

This lies somewhere between criticism and caricature. The *OED* defines “caricature” as the “grotesque or ludicrous representation of persons or things by exaggeration of their most characteristic and striking features” or as “an exaggerated or debased likeness, imitation, or copy, naturally or unintentionally ludicrous.” This “Recipe” is not a parody, but a satiric genre definition, the identification of certain features common to many “Answers to Burke.” Such a picture, even if exaggerated, probably gives us an insight into contemporary perceptions of the genre, especially its more extreme examples, such as John Thelwall’s “Answer to Burke”:

---

**Fig. 11** *Morning Herald* (London, England), Tuesday, June 28, 1791; Issue 3344. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013
Notice the adjectives set in capitals: “SEDITIOUS,” and “INFLAMMATORY.” It is unusual for a title to apply so many labels to another work. Thelwall’s title attempts to rebrand Burke’s Reflections as seditious rather than patriotic in character, and as inflammatory rather than calming in effect; the two adjectives describing Burke’s text are balanced by the two describing Thelwall’s: “sober” and “serious.” The poetic quotation is taken from William Collins’s ode “The Passions.” If the title did not immediately suggest radical politics, references to tracts “on the present scarcity of Bread” and the Magna Charta likely would have.

After Paine’s success with Rights of Man, “The Rights of Woman” begins to be referred to almost as if it were the sequel, as can be seen in this gossip column in World (1787).48

48 According to John Keane, Thomas Paine’s biographer, “one out of every ten literate Britons bought [Paine’s Rights of Man], without taking pirated copies into account” (Franklin 100).
This is an extension of the discourse of the rights of men into the feminine realm, where its internal logic was revealed to be both amusing and ridiculous. Satire seems, in this instance, to have sided with the conservatives: the subject was too much fun to be taken seriously in print. At this point “the rights of woman” was still caricature, still a tool in the hands of those who opposed radical politics. Satire in gossip columns also predicted that Paine would write Rights of Woman:

Mad Tom’s second Bedlamite production, is, avowedly, to be in favour of the “Rights of Woman.” It is to be inscribed to The Fish-women of Paris, and principally applied to Old Maids, who, the Patriot observes, so long as they remain free from the control of husbands, are intitled to all the immunities of citizens.

In October 1791 comes the first indication in the Burney collection that “the rights of woman” were being seriously discussed in France. There had been some recent French publications on the subject, such as the Marquis de Condorcet’s Sur l’Admission des femmes au droit de Cité, published in July 1790, or Olympe de Gouges’s more recent Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne, published in September 1791, and perhaps alluded to in the following excerpt:
The first advertisement for VRW appeared in late December 1791:

This same advertisement also appeared in the Whitehall Evening Post on the same day and in The Morning Chronicle and the St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post two days later. It reappeared in the latter paper on the 27th and 29th of December. The title is not Rights of Woman, but rather a “vindication” of them; this subtle difference hints at the fact that
Wollstonecraft wanted to change the public’s reaction to the phrase/concept: it needed vindicating.

The advertisement subtly signals the difference between *VRM* and *VRW*: whereas *VRM*, as an answer to Burke, was recursive in both title and genre, *VRW* was recursive only to Wollstonecraft’s earlier work. As usual, Burke’s name stands in metonymically for his *Reflections*. Of all the Wollstonecraft advertisements examined thus far, this one presents the least in the way of describing the book’s contents. The literary labels are the briefest, the boldest, and the most stable; perhaps a sign of Wollstonecraft’s growing fame. After all, if readers already had certain associations about an author or the genre in their heads, then a publisher had less describing to do and could place a cleaner, more eye-catching advertisement.

A second, enlarged advertisement for *VRW* appeared in the new year:

![Advertisement](image)

*Fig. 17 General Evening Post* (London, England), Saturday, January 14, 1792; Issue 9096. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

This same advertisement appeared three days later in both the *London Chronicle* and *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, before reappearing in the *General Evening Post* on January 19, 1792. This advertisement might be described as the advertisement for a more mature author with several publications of note and a growing readership: perhaps Johnson could smell
the possibility of cross sales. The publication and widespread advertisement of Wollstonecraft’s text in December 1791 and January 1792 seem to have had two effects: first, to associate her name ever after with “the Rights of Woman” in the English-speaking world, and second, to popularize use of the phrase, by both its supporters and its critics. “Wollstonecraft” and “the Rights of Woman” became both the trigger and the anchor for a thousand conversations upon the subject.

The phrase reappeared in satire in the weeks and months ahead, as can be seen in the following description of the battle of the sexes in Hyde Park:

\[ \text{’tis one of the Rights of Woman to set fashions—} \\
\text{they enjoy the privilege—men never interfere, except they forget themselves—} \\
\text{then the Rights of Man take place as guardian and friend.} \]

**Fig. 18** *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, January 31, 1792; Issue 17963.©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Or in the following excerpt:

\[ \text{Amidst all the boasted delicacy of our present masculine writers, which in some instances is carried to a ridiculous excess, the Ladies keep to their old right of calling a spade a spade. This, we suppose is one of the Rights of Woman.} \]

**Fig. 19** *Star* (London, England), Friday, March 9, 1792; Issue 1 206. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

---

49 This comment comes in a column titled “Elopement.”
In late April and early May 1792, nine advertisements for a comic opera titled “The Rights of Woman” appeared in the *Morning Herald, World (1787), Public Advertiser, and the Morning Chronicle*, capitalizing on the infamy of *VRW* in particular, and the concept in general:

![Advertisement for "The Rights of Woman"](image)

Fig. 20 *Morning Herald* (London, England), Tuesday, April 24, 1792; Issue 4102. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

It is important to note that when “the Rights of Woman” appears it is almost always capitalized, italicized, or set in quotation marks. This may either suggest its relation to, and possible derivation from, Wollstonecraft’s title. One might argue that these typographic markers act to keep the phrase alien to common use, emphasizing its foreignness or strangeness as a concept; the same is not true for “the rights of men” which often appears in the newspapers unmarked.

“Wollstonecraft” again made it into the news columns in late August 1792:

![Advertisement for "Two of the fairest advocates of Democracy"](image)

Fig. 21 *Diary or Woodfall’s Register* (London, England), Saturday, August 25, 1792; Issue 1070. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

This reference is sympathetic in tone: “Wollstonecraft,” though here misspelled, is described as one of “the fairest advocates of Democracy,” a woman of “principles” who is sensitive to their

---

50 In December 1790, Wollstonecraft wrote a review of Helen Maria Williams’s *Letters Written in France*. Furniss points out that Wollstonecraft “used her work as a reviewer as a means of filling in her education about the French Revolution and its prehistory” (62).
“perversion.” The historical moment was particularly tense: two weeks earlier, the Tuileries Palace in Paris had been stormed and Louis XVI and the Royal family narrowly escaped the general massacre of Swiss guards and servants that followed. This reference presents a very sympathetic portrayal of Wollstonecraft; it represents a rare moment when readers are asked to imagine Wollstonecraft’s feelings.

Between August 1792 and October 1794, “Wollstonecraft” doesn’t appear in any of the newspapers preserved in the Burney collection. The name reappears in an advertisement for *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*:

![Advertisement](image)

**Fig. 22** *London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post* (London, England), October 13, 1794 - October 15, 1794; Issue 3926. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Identical advertisements appeared in *Star* on 14 Oct, the *Morning Chronicle* on 18 Oct, and the *General Evening Post* on 13 Nov. A similar advertisement with a slightly modified format appeared on 17 April 1795 in the *Morning Chronicle*. As Godwin will do in his *Memoirs*, this advertisement calls *VRM* “An Answer to Mr. Burke’s Reflections,” and *VRW* “Rights of
Woman.” This advertisement suggests that Wollstonecraft was finally a mature author, with name recognition and a sizable list of available publications. “Wollstonecraft” already sprang to mind in conjunction with the French Revolution, so it was only natural that readers might want to read her “historical and moral view” of it. Richard Holmes points out that the titles of The Rights of Woman and Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman, “cleverly called attention to each other” (x); just as Wollstonecraft’s Rights of Woman is a kind of inverse of Paine’s Rights of Man, her Wrongs of Woman is a kind of inverse of Rights of Woman. In these ways, Wollstonecraft’s titles demonstrate a surprising degree of both recursivity and aptness. That is to say, they cunningly echo the titles of popular texts by Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine, as well as each other.

In late January 1797 an advertisement for the Monthly Mirror included a list of portraits of literary figures that included Wollstonecraft’s name:

Fig. 23 True Briton (1793) (London, England), Tuesday, January 31, 1797; Issue 1280. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Identical advertisements appeared in the Oracle or Public Advertiser on 1 and 3 Feb 1797. A modified, shortened advertisement appeared in the Observer on 2 April 1797. There are a series of substitutions at play here: Wollstonecraft is substituted for her beliefs; the “Champion of the Rights of Woman” is substituted for the details of “the Rights of Woman.” This moment perhaps represents the high-water mark in Wollstonecraft’s literary reputation until the late twentieth century: the idealized portrait of a Champion. This personification of the tenets of VRW was soon to be joined by another one: by “Mary,” the passionate and doomed protagonist of Godwin’s biography.
2.5 Godwin’s Memoirs

Three and a half months after Wollstonecraft’s death, an advertisement appeared for Godwin’s Memoirs:

```
Mrs. GODWIN.
In the press, and speedily will be published,
In Four Vols. Small 8vo. Price 14s. in Boards,
THE POSTHUMOUS WORKS OF THE
AUTHOR of a VINDICATION of the RIGHTS
of WOMAN; containing, the Wrongs of Woman, or Malice,
a Fragment; Letters, and Miscellaneous Pieces.
To which will be added,
In One Volume of the same size, price 2s. 6d. in boards,
With a portrait engraved by Heath, from a picture by Opie,
painted a few Weeks before her Death,
MEMOIRS of the AUTHOR of a VINDICATION of
the RIGHTS of WOMAN.
By WILLIAM GODWIN.
Printed for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul’s Church-Yard; and
```

Fig. 24 St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England), Thursday, December 28, 1797; Issue 6245. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

“Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman” is here repeated twice, once to name the author herself, and once in the title of the memoirs of that author; “Godwin” also appears twice, once for “Mrs. Godwin” and once for William. “Wollstonecraft” does not appear at all. This is curious: “Wollstonecraft” was a recognized literary label; all of Wollstonecraft’s works had eventually been advertised under that name. Why would Godwin and Johnson leave it out of this advertisement? It is interesting that this hesitancy to employ “Wollstonecraft” is also evident in the text of the Memoirs.

The name “Wollstonecraft” appears seven times in the text of the Memoirs, and once in the name caption for the frontispiece portrait. Of the textual uses, three refer to Mary’s father “Mr. Wollstonecraft.” Of the four that refer to Mary, the first is to be found in the first sentence of the first chapter: “Mary Wollstonecraft was born on the twenty-seventh of April 1759” (5). The
name appears here as part of the standard, one might even say formulaic, opening for a biography. Godwin uses “Mary” to refer to his subject hereafter, with three interesting exceptions that we will turn to shortly. Godwin’s choice of label for his subject can be defended, of course. “Wollstonecraft” is longer and more cumbersome than “Mary.” Mary changed her last name, first to Imlay, then to Godwin. Whatever the rationale, conscious or unconscious, behind Godwin’s decision, the choice likely had a subtle effect on the perception of readers. From the perspective of literary branding, the use of a first name to refer to an author may have a number of effects. First, it may encourage a sense of closeness or familiarity with the author, for good or ill. Second, because first names tend to be more common and therefore less distinctive than last names, they are less memorable, and thus less useful for the indexical function. Perhaps this is the reason why women don’t seem to receive authorial adjectives in the way men do until the twentieth century. During the nineteenth century “Wordsworthian” appears in the newspapers with some regularity, “Wollstonecraftian” does not.

The second use of “Wollstonecraft” in the Memoirs comes at a critical moment when Godwin offers his notably short description of VRW:

The Vindication of the Rights of Woman is undoubtedly a very unequal performance, and eminently deficient in method and arrangement. When tried by the hoary and long-established laws of literary composition, it can scarcely maintain its claim to be placed in the first class of human productions. But when we consider the importance of its doctrines, and the eminence of genius it displays, it seems not very improbable that it will be read as long as the English language endures. The publication of this book forms an epocha in the subject to which it belongs; and Mary Wollstonecraft will perhaps hereafter be found to have performed more substantial service for the cause of her sex, than all the other writers, male or female, that ever felt themselves animated in the behalf of oppressed and injured beauty. (40-41)

Godwin’s claim that the book itself “forms an epocha” seems to be borne out. Mary Hays and her sister Elizabeth “produced together a volume of Letters and Essays larded with respectful

51 For a description of Mary’s decisions to take and keep Imlay’s name, see Godwin 51, 66.
52 The OED defines “epocha” as “a fixed point in the reckoning of time.”
references to Miss Wollstonecraft and urging other women to “unite in intention” now that they had been shown the way to claim their rights” (Tomalin 111). It would seem, for the Hays sisters, the publication of VRW called for the start of a social movement: what would become feminism.

That Godwin should give VRW such short shrift in the Memoirs is perhaps surprising. Consider this: though “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” makes up the majority of the title “Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” VRW is only referred to in passing in a couple of paragraphs, and its arguments are not mentioned or addressed in any depth; Godwin’s curiously refuses to deal with the book’s contents. His focus shifts quickly back to Mary’s personal life and passions, particularly her affairs with Henry Fuseli and Gilbert Imlay.

The third use of “Wollstonecraft” comes when Godwin describes his own first encounter with the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman. He relates how in November 1791 he dined with Thomas Paine and Wollstonecraft.

The interview was not fortunate. Mary and myself parted, mutually displeased with each other. I had not read her Rights of Woman. I had barely looked into her Answer to Burke, and been displeased, as literary men are apt to be, with a few offences against grammar and other minute points of composition. I had therefore little curiosity to see Mrs Wollstonecraft, and a very great curiosity to see Thomas Paine. (45)

“Wollstonecraft” appears shortly after a reference to VRW, which may suggest Godwin’s association of the name with her literary productions. Under the theory that short titles make critical choices and affect critical opinions, it is telling that Godwin refers to Paine as “the author of The Rights of Man” (45) and refers to VRM as Answer to Burke’s Reflections (37) and Answer to Burke (45). On this early occasion, VRW and Wollstonecraft are judged by appearances, and dismissed without being read.

53 Burke is becoming author-function here: his name is substituted by this metonymic shift for his Reflections.
The final use of “Wollstonecraft” in the Memoirs appears in her epitaph, bound between “Mary” and “Godwin”:

**Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin,**  
Author of  
**A Vindication of the Rights of Woman:**  
Born 27 April, 1759:  
Died 10 September, 1797.  

In the ninth chapter of the Memoirs, Godwin writes: “there are no circumstances of her life, that, in the judgment of honour and reason, could brand her with disgrace” (69). In this he was mistaken: his Memoirs, and the negative critical reaction they inspired, associated Wollstonecraft’s literary labels, and, by implication, women’s rights, with an unconventional and tragic caricature of her life and death. Godwin did not intend caricature, of course, but critics were only too eager to further simplify and exaggerate his portrait of a female Werther, and use it to tarnish both Godwin and Wollstonecraft’s politics.

This is ironic considering Wollstonecraft’s concern for the labelling of women in *VRW*, a text so concerned with the language applied to women. As Susan Wolfson argues, *VRW* offers “a critical analysis of the artifice of names and terms” (161) applied to women; for example, Wollstonecraft argues that when women have been trained “to cherish or affect weakness under the name of delicacy” (116) they “act contrary to their real interest on an enlarged scale” (116). Why, Wollstonecraft asks, “should [women] be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence?” (88).

Wollstonecraft knew the power of a name. Godwin relates how she adopted Imlay’s name only when all English residents of France were suddenly “ordered into prison” (51) by the French

---

54 As Jennifer Lorch has pointed out, it is telling that Wollstonecraft’s epitaph explicitly linked her “with the work which rendered her famous in her lifetime” (1).
Convention. And when she finally gives up the name upon marrying Godwin, she is shunned by members of her social circle, such as “Mrs Inchbald and Mrs Siddons” (75), because they were forced by Mary’s name change “to confess their belief of what they had carefully been told; and this they could never forgive” (75): she had never married Imlay. Godwin argues that Mary kept the name which had first been assumed from necessity in France; but its being retained thus long, was purely from the awkwardness that attends the introduction of a change, and not from an apprehension of consequences of this sort. Her scrupulous explicitness as to the nature of her situation, surely sufficed to make the name she bore perfectly immaterial. (75)

But the names she bore did matter, despite Godwin’s utopian naiveté, as the vexed history of Wollstonecraft’s various literary labels, as deployed in advertisements, reviews, and Godwin’s Memoirs, shows. This history is one way of illuminating the role of gender in the literary branding of the Romantic period.

Godwin refers to Wollstonecraft’s Wrongs of Woman twice in the Memoirs. It is both the first and the last of Wollstonecraft’s texts to be mentioned. The first mention of “Wrongs of Woman” in the Burney collection appears in a gossip column in mid April 1797:

![Ad from 1797](https://www.british-library.ac.uk/collection/05/02/2013)

Fig. 25 Oracle and Public Advertiser (London, England), Tuesday, April 18, 1797; Issue 19 600. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Perhaps a more fitting epitaph for Wollstonecraft than the one in Godwin’s Memoirs is this advertisement placed in the Courier and Evening Gazette on 9 February 1798:

---

55 VRW is mentioned earlier, but not in reference to the text, rather as part of the formula the “Author of VRW.”
This advertisement is large and dignified; Wollstonecraft’s titles are presented in their entirety. Though “Godwin” appears twice, and “Wollstonecraft” remains trapped between “Mrs” and “Godwin,” the advertisement remains an impressive testament to Wollstonecraft’s literary life.
But the *Memoirs* were beginning to have their disastrous effect: Godwin’s recasting of the Author of *VRW* as “a female Werter” (53) was beginning to shift the focus of the discussion from Wollstonecraft’s literary output to the scandalous details of her personal life:

*Fig. 27* *Morning Post and Gazetteer* (London, England), Monday, February 12, 1798; Issue 9078. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

These scandalous details, in turn, altered the meaning of her example in *VRW*. The champion of “the Rights of Woman” was beginning to be recast as the victim of the pursuit of them, a dangerous woman who would lead others to folly and early death.

*Fig. 28* *Observer* (London, England), Sunday, April 22, 1798; Issue 332. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

The “adherents of the late Mrs. Woolstonecroft,” according to this account, favour “writing Histories, Plays, Romances, &c.—and pursuing the Attainment of those Masculine Functions” rather than “confining themselves to the Domestic Duties of the Wife and the Mother.” The
unfortunate facts of Wollstonecraft’s biography – the suicide attempts, the betrayals by Imlay, even her death – began to be seen as connected with her radical lifestyle and beliefs.

Sequin Henry Jackson M. D., representing the masculine discourses of medicine and science, soon weighed in on the tragedy.

For many, Wollstonecraft had become the exemplar of the moral and medical dangers of her own radical doctrines.

Critics have attacked Godwin for producing this effect. Roxanne Eberle writes “it has become a critical commonplace that Mary Wollstonecraft’s death in 1797 and William Godwin’s subsequent account of her life in the Memoirs of theAuthor of the Rights of Woman (1798) marks the end of revolutionary feminism” (55). Helen Buss argues that Godwin’s “ethical failure” (122) consisted in transferring a reader’s interest from the public and universal arguments of VRW to the private and personal experiences of the author of that work (122). Gary Kelly argues that “the dominant discursive mode of the Revolution debate was autobiographical” (21); it is safe to say that the Memoirs offered a portrait of Wollstonecraft that easily collapsed into a passionate Romantic heroine, or victim. Certainly, the publication of Godwin’s Memoirs helped shift the focus of the critical debate over VRW from the philosophical or political to the personal. Before the publication of Godwin’s Memoirs, debate centered upon whether or not “the Rights of Woman” should be seriously considered or not; afterwards, it focused upon the character of the author of VRW. The public could read the effects of Wollstonecraft’s arguments
in the facts of her life, or at least thought they could. *VRW* – and therefore both the phrase and concept of “the Rights of Woman” – was to be remembered through the schematic outlines of Godwin’s sentimental and scandalous portrait of its Author. Wollstonecraft’s legacy, in the words of Clarissa Orr, “was a linkage of feminism with moral and political radicalism in the popular perception of the ‘woman question,’ when it was discussed in the nineteenth century” (1). As Holmes points out, when George Canning published his satiric “The Vision of Liberty” in August 1801 “it was not even necessary for Canning to give Godwin and Wollstonecraft’s surnames” (xxii) when mocking them. A general feeling against the labels “Wollstonecraft” and “the Rights of Woman” had begun to solidify. In 1855 Marian Evans wrote there was “in some quarters a vague prejudice against the Rights of Woman as in some way a reprehensible book” (qtd. in Hirsch 43). In 1870 Harriet Martineau’s *Autobiography* concluded that Wollstonecraft was neither “a safe example, nor a successful champion of Woman and her Rights” (qtd. in Holmes, xxiv).

2.6 Conclusion

St Clair is not alone in his suggestion that Wollstonecraft was merely putting to paper a subject much discussed at the time: Tomalin argues that “the subject was in the air and needed an outspoken champion in England” (102). The impact of *VRW* was to shift this subject into the public realm and change the context and thus the seriousness of the debate. Something joked about or playfully discussed in the domestic sphere takes on a whole new aspect when presented as a serious philosophical and political treatise in the public sphere. This transition, and the intense reactions it provoked, constituted a large part of the impact of the work, especially for those who could not or did not read it.

---

56 When the feminist movement of the 1960’s and 70’s, with its own discourses of “the Rights of Woman,” resuscitated Wollstonecraft, it is telling they did so through biography.  
57 For a detailed account of how Wollstonecraft “acquired a bad reputation” (43) see Hirsch 43-60.
St Clair has argued that the abundance of conduct books for women suggests that they represent the mainstream view (277). But these same numbers can be interpreted rather differently: perhaps the conduct books for women were a symptom of the anxiety over the fact that women of all classes were beginning to read and write in greater numbers. That is to say, perhaps the orthodoxies expressed in the conduct books were counterbalanced by a general resistance to them; perhaps there were so many precisely because they were ignored. This is not as paradoxical as it sounds: it is clear that Romantic-era parents or other guardian figures worried about what their daughters were reading; perhaps they bought more conduct books because they had more to worry about.

Another weakness of St Clair’s revisionist claim about the influence of *VRW* lies in its assumption that reading the book was the only way to access it. As this chapter has suggested, tracking the influence of *VRW* is not an uncomplicated process: readers could read it alone or together, critically or sympathetically, deeply or shallowly. Titles of books in newspaper advertisements and book catalogues, or on title pages could trigger literary experiences of the sort John Clare describes: the anticipation of unread books. Readers during the period would have read the titles of, or merely have heard about, many more books than they would have the opportunity to read. As Godwin did upon first meeting Wollstonecraft, readers often formed opinions about books and their authors without even looking at their texts. And even if they had read deeply, the social nature of literary culture suggests that their memories of texts were susceptible to the influence of literary branding.58

A great strength of St Clair’s study as a whole is its identification of staggered and historically contingent processes by which various texts tranch downwards and outwards through an interconnected system. To illustrate such contingencies, St Clair offers Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” as a model of dissemination that takes into account “that the spread of ideas is not uniform, but scattered, lagged, and unpredictable, sometimes even apparently random” (403).

58 According to St Clair: “If a visitor made a social call when the family was at home, the book was the natural starting point for conversation, and it had to be selected with that purpose in mind” (395).
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind! (223)

Donald Reiman points out that these lines echo “the traditional epic simile found in Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton, in which souls of the dead are compared to fallen leaves driven by the wind” (221). As Milton does in *Areopagitica*, Shelley suggests that a book stores up what is best in a man and makes it immortal. Shelley’s “dead thoughts” are the words of his poems, his “withered leaves” the pages of his books. This image makes an attractive model of literary influence, as it can account for the fact that books may lie unread for years, and even when picked up they may be skimmed, misunderstood, or rejected. Either they spark an old fire in a new reader, or they do not. It is my contention that if we could track the circulation of the literary labels (which are both the trigger and anchor for semantic content), then we could track literary influence more closely than has been hitherto possible.

3 The branding of Byron 1812-24

3.1 How was Byron branded?

And how is it that they, the Sons of Fame,
Whose inspiration seems to them to shine
From high, they whom the nations oftest name,
Must pass their days in penury or pain,
Or step to grandeur through the paths of shame,
And wear a deeper brand and gaudier chain?

Lord Byron, *The Prophecy of Dante* (BCPW 4:237)

This chapter will take seriously the question Byron poses above. Why is it that famous authors, the ones most often named by their nations, so often must “step to grandeur through the paths of shame?” What is the nature of the deep “brand” or gaudy “chain” they are so often forced to “wear?” And what is its effect upon their life and their work? I believe such questions lie at the heart of the phenomenon of literary branding, and are perhaps best explored in the example of Byron’s career and in the logic of his verse. Byron was both the best practitioner and the best
critic of literary branding in the Romantic period. No one else was quite so good at branding his competitors with associations, no one else experienced the ups and downs of literary branding to the same degree Byron did, and no one else wrote about the phenomenon so brilliantly.\textsuperscript{59} If one wishes to find a theory of literary branding that is historically appropriate to the period, one could do worse than look for it in the advertising and reception histories of Byron’s poetry.

While Byron obviously had some control over his association with the Byronic hero, that perspective has been over emphasized in the past and needs to be balanced with a sense that Byron was also alienated by his name. In this chapter, I will examine the extent to which Byron and his publisher John Murray could be said to have branded the poet’s literary labels with associations by way of newspaper advertising during the years 1812-1824. This amounts to a subtle change of approach: though I analyzed book advertisements in general in chapter 2, I will discuss them from a different angle here, offering a caveat about the limits of literary advertising in branding an author before examining a series of advertisements that illustrate how Byron was branded.

3.2 \textbf{The limits of advertising and marketing}

Romantic-era publishers certainly understood the necessity and value of advertising. In \textit{RNRP} William St Clair records that Longman, in 1818, spent 25\% of his overhead costs on advertising a quarto edition of 250 copies, which amounted to slightly more than the paper itself cost; the proportion he spent on advertising an octavo edition of a new title of 750 copies was even greater, jumping to 57\% of his overhead costs, more than the entire manufacturing costs of the paper, the setting of the type, and the pressing combined (506). When \textit{Frankenstein} was published in 1818, approximately 30\% of its overhead costs went to advertising, including 6.5\% for advertising in Scotland (509).

\textsuperscript{59} Literary branding means the association of impressions or ideas with literary labels, names, or titles, as discussed in the Introduction.
But how much could advertising affect readers? And what was the nature of that effect, exactly? How did literary advertising affect literature, and vice versa? Did publishers have as much control over the reputations of their brand-name authors and titles as modern corporations have over their commodity brands? Nicholas Mason, elaborating upon earlier work on the commodification of Byron by Peter J. Manning and Jerome Christensen, seems to suggest so. According to Mason branding has to do with the act of distinctively labelling commodities and is primarily accomplished through advertising or other forms of publicity. He argues that in order for the first edition of CHP to have sold out in three days, a brand-like image of the author – as carefully constructed by both the poet and his publisher in the months leading up to publication – had to have already been present in the public consciousness.

Samuel Chew, summarizing nineteenth-century opinion, wrote that “[w]ith the morning on which Byron ‘awoke famous’ the history of his fame and after-fame commences” (Chew 5). This story of the overnight success of CHP persists to this day, perpetuated by critics, biographers, and fans. However, as Mason points out, in order for it to be true “[t]he few readers who stumbled on the poem on the morning of its release would have had to take it home immediately, read it at once, and persuade all their friends that the relatively slim quarto was worth the exorbitant sum of thirty shillings unbound or fifty shillings bound” (424-25). Such an occurrence seems unlikely. In short, Mason argues that the initial spectacular success of the poem could not have been due to its inherent properties, as three days could not possibly allow for success by

60 Many of the previous approaches to discussing this issue have been top-down exercises, where some a priori understanding of advertising or “commodity culture” in the abstract has been applied to particular examples. Such an approach, like any, brings its own biases with its insights. I will endeavor a more inductive, empirical approach, no doubt with its own strengths and weaknesses.

61 Mason argues:

Even if producers had been inclined to develop distinctive brands, the high cost of paper and other packaging materials, combined with the lack of technology for mass-producing unique containers, would have limited their ability to do so. Only with the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century inventions of transfer printing, the lithograph, and the papermaking machine was the large-scale production of distinctively labeled products possible. (417)
word of mouth alone. To explain it, it is necessary “to look beyond the poem itself” (425), paying particular attention to the efforts of Byron and Murray. Mason rejects the story of Byron’s instant and unconscious fame: “[t]he notion of becoming famous overnight carries with it the sense that a book sells itself, independent of the promotional efforts of the author, publisher, and retailer” (424), and finally concludes:

given Byron’s aristocratic conceit and Murray’s professional dignity, it is unlikely that, even if they had consciously decided to make Byron the ‘Packwood of poetry,’ either would have talked openly of doing so. But everything about the prepublication marketing campaign suggests that both had internalized the rules and methods of the new advertising system in general and of branding in particular […] they made] the Byron name widely recognized prior to the poem’s release. (425)

After his return to London from his travels in the East, Byron worked on the final drafts of *CHP*. In the meantime, he started appearing in society again, where his singular appearance and strange mannerisms quickly attracted attention. In November 1811, Byron attended a dinner party at which he refused all meat, soup, and wine – everything but biscuits and soda water. Samuel Rogers, a guest at the party, questioned Byron’s good friend and erstwhile traveling companion, John Cam Hobhouse, about it a few days later, asking “‘how long will Lord Byron persevere in his present diet?’ [Hobhouse] replied, ‘Just as long as you continue to notice it’” (Lovell 41). In addition to such theatrical behaviour, Byron had traveled to places that had until very recently been off-limits to the vast majority of his countrymen due to the Napoleonic wars, naturally inciting interest. To top it all off, Byron was young, handsome, and a Lord; of the five “major” Romantic poets, Byron’s is the only aristocratic name, a factor that helped the association of himself with his heroes, by suggesting that he “had access to a world closed off to most of his readers” (Elfenbein 51). A mere two weeks before the 10 March publication of *CHP* Byron succeeded in getting his name into the newspapers. On 27 February in the House of Lords, he gave his first political speech, opposing Tory efforts to pass a frame-breaking bill. The speech was by all accounts eloquent, impassioned, and radical, and by some accounts a bit bewildering to more experienced members of the House. Byron later admitted to his literary agent, Robert Charles Dallas – the distant relative who had originally approached Murray with Byron’s poem – that he had “by his speech, given… the best advertisement for *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*”
Mason argues that this theatrical speech functioned as a form of marketing, suggesting that Murray and Byron intuitively grasped “what is now recognized as a central tenet of branding theory[…] that publicity is much more effective than direct advertising for establishing a brand name” (426). All this contributed to the fact that

Two weeks before he supposedly awoke one morning and found himself famous […] Byron was in fact one of the most talked-about figures in London. Between *English Bards*, his quirky public behavior, and the frame-breaking speech, Byron had made himself a distinctive figure on the social scene well in advance of the 10 March publication of *Childe Harold I and II* (431).

While an intriguing hypothesis, there are a few problems with this argument. In fact, we lack evidence of the immediate word-of-mouth effect because it is, by and large, not part of the written record. We do have a written account from two months later: in a letter dated 12 May 1812, the Duchess of Devonshire wrote that Byron

is on every table, and himself courted, visited, flattered, and praised whenever he appears. He has a pale, sickly, but handsome countenance, a bad figure, animated and amusing conversation, and, in short, he is really the only topic of conversation – the men jealous of him, the women of each other. (qtd. in Chew 5)

But when did that conversation start? Was it the result of Murray’s and Byron’s genius for promotion? It is true that *CHP* was placed into influential hands early on. Lady Caroline Lamb, an extremely well-connected reader and tastemaker, received an advance copy of the poem. She wrote to Byron on 9 March 1812, addressing the letter to “Childe Harold”: “I have read your Book & cannot refrain from telling you that I think it & that all those I live with & whose opinions are far more worth having – think it beautiful” (77). It seems reasonable to assume that certain readers (those with more influence? those with more credibility in literary matters within their social network?) likely functioned as particularly important initial advocates for publications. It is important that Lamb says she cannot “refrain” from telling others that she

62 Byron’s *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* was in its fourth edition in 1811.
63 She was, in the language of our modern information society, an “early adopter” of *CHP*. 
thinks *CHP* beautiful. However, it remains a problem that we lack an understanding of the scale, importance, and internal dynamics of the word-of-mouth factor.

Perhaps the more troubling suggestion is that the publicity campaign for *CHP* was both intentional and prescient:

What Murray and Byron seem to have grasped in 1812, and what is now recognized as a central tenet of branding theory, is that publicity is much more effective than direct advertising for establishing a brand name. In an age when advertising columns were increasingly crowded, simply running a series of conventional advertisements did little to get a product noticed. The successful product launch combined direct advertisements with publicity stunts, newspaper puffs, and endorsements from the well-to-do. (Mason 426)

While Murray undoubtedly grasped the value of “publicity stunts, newspaper puffs, and endorsements from the well-to-do,” to suggest that there is a science to predicting or producing literary success is foolhardy. Plenty of books – perhaps the majority – lose money. Such was the case during the Romantic period; such is the case now. A publisher relies upon a few bestsellers to outweigh the majority of his disappointments. If Murray were a branding genius, or if all it took were stunts, puffs, and endorsements, then why wouldn’t all his books be as successful as Byron’s was? The truth is that Murray was taking his chances with all sorts of books, advertising *Narrative Respecting a Case of Confirmed Cancer, Peace With France, and Travels in the Islands of Iceland* in January 1812, just months before advertisements began appearing for *CHP*. In this regard Mason’s argument is perhaps guilty of hindsight bias, whereby we explain an event after the fact as if it had to have happened:

———

64 The Irish revolutionaries in her first novel, *Glenarvon*, offer us some idea of what social message mentioning the name “Byron” sent:

Why name Glenarvon? It is like raising a spirit from the grave; or giving life again to the heart that is dead; it is as if a ray of the sun’s glorious light shone upon these cold senseless rocks; or as if a garden of paradise were raised in the midst of a desert: birds of prey and sea-fowl alone inhabit here. They should be something like Glenarvon who dare to name him. (309)
On the heels of *English Bards*, Byron's parliamentary speech, and the advance reviews of *Childe Harold*, readers expected a text bearing the Byron name to juxtapose sensibility and volatility, eloquence and eccentricity, genius and heterodoxy. The sales figures of 10-12 March show that they flocked to bookstores to buy not a generic volume of poetry but a product they had been trained to ask for by name. (438)

Perhaps some readers knew what to expect, perhaps not. Either way, there is little chance they could be so trained. Again, if so, why couldn’t Murray train them to purchase all of his titles in such a manner?

What do we do with the fact that Byron’s manuscript was turned down by Longman and William Miller, and that Murray only took a chance on it after William Gifford’s recommendation? While Jerome McGann suggests that Miller turned down the poem because he was the publisher of Lord Elgin, whom Byron criticized in *CHP*, it seems clear that Miller, like Murray, had little idea of the spectacular future success the poem would enjoy. What does it mean that one of most influential poems in literary history was almost never published at all? In narrating about causes and effects in literary history, we tend to ignore or downplay the role of the complex, the arbitrary, and the accidental. A responsible historicism must guard against the hindsight bias as rigorously as possible.

The arbitrary and the accidental may even play a much larger role in literary history than we have previously thought. Duncan Watts suggests that “reliable hit prediction is impossible no matter how much you know” (22) due to the feedback of cumulative advantage. Consumers of cultural products are social beings who like to share their experiences; a novel or poem that is well known has more value precisely because it is an experience shared by more readers. Cumulative advantage means that slight differences in the initial popularity of cultural products can quickly snowball into “potentially enormous long-run differences among even

---

65 See McGann *BCPW* 2:268-69. Graham points out “ironically, the profits from *Childe Harold* enabled Murray’s purchase of Miller’s copyrights, book stock, and fashionably located publishing house at 50 Albemarle Street” (30). For an account of “How Murray became Byron’s Publisher” see *LJM*, “Appendix A,” 471-75.
indistinguishable competitors” (22) in a way that is impossible to predict because the process is nonlinear and so sensitive to initial variations in conditions. In a number of intriguing experiments, Watts has found that the introduction of “social influence into human decision making […] didn’t just make the hits bigger; it also made them more unpredictable” (24). He suggests that social influence “played as large a role in determining the market share of successful songs as differences in quality” (24). These surprising findings suggest that “we should treat both the predictions and the explanations we are served – whether about the next hit single, the next great company or even the next war – with the scepticism they deserve” (25).

Perhaps it is too much to hope that a new understanding of cumulative advantage will help strip the teleological arguments and hindsight biases out of our understanding of literary history, but it should warn us of the danger of creating “just-so” stories. The assertion that Byron “woke up and found himself famous” has been repeated so often his spectacular fame has come to seem inevitable.

In addition, Mason makes no distinction between commodity and literary branding, or between the branding of books and other kinds of manufactured products. Commodity branding is generally recognized to have arisen with the mass production of identical goods in factories over the course of the nineteenth century. Why do the branded products from company X sell for more money than the identical, though generic, products from company Y? Because X has spent money on “raising brand awareness” through advertising, labelling their product with a name that has mental associations for consumers. This model doesn’t easily apply in the literary sphere. While one may argue that anonymous publications are akin to generic products (i.e. in that they lack a name, and therefore the paratextual associations that a name can bring), upon closer inspection it turns out that most literary publications, even anonymous ones, are connected with distinctive labels of some sort. Anonymous texts still appear in named publications or are

66 Cumulative advantage is clearly one of the main reasons why we still read the “big six” poets, and why they have the most scholarship published about them. Though it is obviously one of the major reasons why the canon exists, and why it is so difficult to change, it is virtually ignored in most debates about canonicity.
connected with named publishers. Keller points out that printers and booksellers names appeared much more often in eighteenth-century book advertisements than authors’ names. A publisher’s name was often a more likely indicator of subject matter or quality than that of an unknown author. It did not seem strange for James Lackington to publish *Frankenstein* after it had been turned down by Ollier precisely because he “specialised in magic, the illegitimate supernatural, and horror, a fact emphasised by [his] advertisements” (St Clair 359). John Murray the first was known for publishing “specialist medical books” (95), while Murray the second became known as a publisher of travel narratives. Readers did not only make associations with publishers’ names, they also made associations with the place names that appeared in book advertisements. Different areas of the London book trade had different connotations. In short, unique book titles and publisher and place names mean that books have been “distinctively labeled products” for far longer than other commodities have. The printing press was one of the first technologies of mass production; it stands to reason that literary branding preceded commodity branding by several centuries.

Jerome Christensen defines “Byronism” as “that systematically elaborated, commercially triumphant version of [Byron] devised and promoted by his publisher, celebrated and denounced by his reviewers and readers” (88). This point of view likely overstates Byron and Murray’s control over the process. There are indications that Byron’s readers had a pivotal role in the initial identification of the Byronic elements of *CHP*, which they then attributed to the poet through fan mail, criticism, or parody, influencing the poet’s conception of himself and helping to shape his future poetic productions. As I hope to suggest in the following analysis of Byron’s book advertisements, literary advertising in Romantic-era newspapers is a more modest venture than has previously been suggested. It was primarily concerned with the distribution of literary

---

67 Keller writes: “in comparison to today’s expectations when books are often bought on the strength of the author, authors of the eighteenth century were not as well-known as they are today. Otherwise their names would have been mentioned more often in advertisements” (134-35).
labels, and operated almost exclusively by implicit association, with a few important exceptions, as we shall see.

3.3 Advertising Childe Harold 1812-1814

The first advertisement for CHP in the 19th Century British Library Newspapers database appears in The Morning Chronicle on 10 March 1812, the day the poem was published. It appeared directly below another Murray advertisement, for John Wilson Croker’s The Battles of Talavera. Because associations can spread by contiguity and proximity, it is vital to consider the immediate context of an advertisement. Much of the logic of branding or advertising could be said to operate by contiguity, contact, and proximity, as if it were some modern form of the contagious magic that Sir James George Frazer documents in The Golden Bough. Names and objects pass associations to one another by being set side by side too often, or for too long: a Nike advertisement places the corporate name (or logo) next to a gold-medal winning runner, and lets each infect the other with meaning. Nike gains associations of athleticism and victory, and the athlete gains the (often negative) associations of commercialism that such sponsored advertisements inevitably produce. In the terms of Pierre Bourdieu, economic capital is exchanged for symbolic capital.

Below we see an advertisement for a new publication appearing directly below an advertisement for Talavera, a poem that had already run through multiple editions. This was not an accidental placement: at least three advertisements for CHP appeared in the Chronicle prior to the poem’s publication, and all of them were placed either immediately before or after an advertisement for Talavera.

---

68 As Hazlitt pointed out, the advertisements in The Morning Chronicle were arranged into groups, so that these two advertisements appeared in a column under the headline: “BOOKS PUBLISHED THIS DAY.”

69 The advertisements appeared on the 7th and 10th of February and the 5th of March 1812. There are some striking similarities in these two publications (or at least in the advertisements for them), both of which suggest the associations of the developing Murray brand: foreign places and events, lords, handsome quartos. But there are also some striking differences: the Talavera
advertisement lacks a headline (perhaps because, being in its ninth edition, it was well known enough not to require one?).

70 Hazlitt offers a long description of The Morning Chronicle in his essay “The Periodical Press”:

This paper we have been long used to think the best, both for amusement and instruction, that issued from the daily press. It is full, but not crowded; and we have breathing-spaces and openings left to pause upon each subject. We have plenty and variety. The reader of a morning paper ought not to be crammed to satiety. He ought to rise from the perusal light and refreshed. Attention is paid to every topic, but none is overdone. There is a liberality and decorum. Every class of readers is accommodated with its favourite articles, served up with taste, and without sparing for the sharpest sauces. […] An appearance of conscious dignity is kept up, even in the Advertisements, where a principle of proportion and separate grouping is observed; the announcement of a new work is kept distinct from the hiring of a servant of all-work, or the sailing of a steam-yacht. (Edinburgh Review, vol. 38 1823 360-61).
In order to analyze the advertisement above, it is useful to consider the anatomy of book advertisements. Keller uses George Leech’s taxonomy of advertisements in her study. Leech proposes five basic parts of an advertisement: “headline, illustration, body copy, signature line, and standing details” (qtd. in Keller 51). In terms of literary advertising, their individual functions can be summarized as follows: the headline interests the reader in the advertisement, the body copy describes the book to the reader, the signature line attributes the book to an author or publisher, and the standing details direct the reader to the book. In the paragraphs that follow, I will examine each line of this first CHP advertisement in some detail, with reference to this taxonomy.

“LORD BYRON’S NEW POEM.” This line functions as the headline of the advertisement; it appears at the top in eye-catching capitals. Keller points out that, typically, headlines in eighteenth-century book advertisements “did not summarise the topic of the text” (122). Instead they usually announced “this day is published” X, Y, or Z. It is interesting that here Byron’s name, and the fact that he has written a new poem, functions as the headline. Part of the reason for this has to do with what Hazlitt referred to as the Chronicle’s “principle of proportion and separate grouping” for advertisements. By moving the traditional eighteenth-century headline from the individual book advertisement to the top of a whole column of advertisements, space was freed for individual headlines. But the fact that the CHP advertisement has its own headline at all is significant, and the content of that headline puts further doubt upon the myth, perpetuated by biographers and critics, that Byron “awoke famous” on the day of CHP’s publication. If this were the case, then why would the advertisement need to point out that it was Lord Byron’s new poem?

The story of overnight success also downplays the role that Byron’s earlier poems had in laying the groundwork for the commercial triumph of CHP. English Bards and Scotch Reviewers

71 Illustrations generally did not appear in book advertisements until well after the Romantic period.
[hereafter EBSR] was in its fourth edition in 1811, as can be seen in the following advertisement, which appeared almost exactly a year before in the *Chronicle*:

![Advertisement](https://example.com/advertisement.png)

**Fig. 31** *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Wednesday, March 6, 1811; Issue 13049. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

*EBSR* had been favourably compared by some to the works of Pope, and had managed to run through four editions following its publication in March 1809; it might well have gone into a fifth if not for Byron’s suppression of the satire for fear of further alienating the political and literary establishment. Certainly, *CHP* made Byron famous on a scale vastly greater from his earlier, limited notoriety, but the myth of Byron’s sudden fame exaggerates this difference. At this point, Byron’s name is not yet linked with Murray’s, and Byron’s publication is advertised along with another author’s.

“Handsomely printed in quarto, price Il. 10s.” One of the implicit messages of this line is that *CHP* was exclusive to a certain class of readers. Most readers in 1812 could not easily afford “handsome quartos.” If nothing else, readers of this advertisement would have some conception

---

72 In “The Impact of Byron’s Writings” St Clair calls this class of elite, wealthy, and conservative readers “the romantic respectful” and distinguishes them from the lower class, poor, and radical readers of *Don Juan* in the 1820’s, whom he refers to as “the realistic subversive.”

73 Significantly, after this first advertisement for the quarto edition of *CHP*, subsequent Byron advertisements are for octavo editions because Murray did not publish the poet’s works in quarto again until the first two cantos of *Don Juan* in 1819. McGann writes “the poem was […] published on 10 Mar. 1812 in an edition of 500 quarto copies and was sold out in three days. […]"
of its target market before opening the volume; they would have an inkling of who was also reading the poem. It is significant that the advertisement emphasizes the poem’s exclusivity.

“CHILDE HAROLD’S PILGRIMAGE: a Poem:” This line supplies the title and the genre of the publication. With the archaic spelling of “Childe” and the mention of a “Pilgrimage” the title carries clear medieval associations, which, in conjunction with the inclusion of detailed notes, suggests antiquarian or scholarly interest – culturally marked habits and interests, by and large, of the leisured classes. The publication is here described as “a Poem,” which interestingly differs from the other generic labels attached to it. Murray’s Quarterly Review for March 1812 describes CHP as “a Romaunt” in the table of contents at the beginning of the volume, and as “a Romance” in the list of new publications at the end. By the end of the year, Murray’s advertisements for CHP had changed the designation from Poem to Romaunt in the book’s advertisements. These very broad generic definitions could not but shape the horizon of expectations about the work, but why they are subtly different is an open question.

“[W]ritten during the Author’s Travels in Portugal, Spain, Albania, and some of the most interesting Parts of Greece; with Notes. To which are added, a few miscellaneous Poems, and Translations of modern Greek Songs, written chiefly abroad: and a short Appendix, containing Observations on modern Greek Literature, with a short Catalogue of Romaic Authors.” This is the body copy of the advertisement, the place where the description of the contents of the volume takes place. It is revealing: not the poem’s contents so much as the manner of its production is highlighted. That is to say, it is biographical in focus, when it could have easily been topographical. Portugal, Spain, Albania and some of the most interesting parts of Greece are mentioned, but specifically as locations for the author’s production of the poem, rather than as

On 17 Apr. a second edition (octavo) was issued” (Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works [hereafter BCPW] 2: 269n).

74 On 12 December 1812 the Morning Chronicle printed an advertisement identical to that in Fig. 30 except that it replaced “a Poem” with “Romaunt.”
primary topics of interest in and of themselves. This tension between the topographical and the autobiographical could be described as a central one in the first two cantos of the poem, so it is interesting to see it repeated in microcosm in this advertisement. But, in the context of advertising Byron, the most interesting thing to note about the body copy in this advertisement is that there is one at all. As we will see, later Byron advertisements will not include much in the way of body copy, suggesting that it was no longer necessary to describe the content of Byron’s work. Whatever had to be made explicit in March 1812 had become implicit shortly thereafter, suggested by the name alone. This body copy also suggests an audience for the poem. After all, what sort of people were interested in reading notes about “some of the most interesting Parts of Greece”? What exactly was the demographic for readers wanting “a short Catalogue of Romaic Authors”? Not a large one, surely: classically educated people with enough time and money to read Romaic Authors, or at least catalogues of them.

It seems odd that more space is devoted to describing what has been added to the poem than to describing the poem itself. How might we account for this? A number of possible arguments might be made in this regard. Like cultural consumers today, certain groups of Romantic readers likely wanted to be the early adopters of the next big thing. But the rareness of books can be appealing, just as the popularity of them can be. Hazlitt, in “On Reading New Books,” questioned the logic of readers who first courted and then rejected works because of their popularity.\textsuperscript{75} Just as some readers wanted to distinguish themselves by being among the first to read and critique new works, others wanted to be distinguished from the common taste by their

\textsuperscript{75} Hazlitt writes:

What is it to me that another – that hundreds or thousands have in all ages read a work? Is it on this account the less likely to give me pleasure, because it has delighted so many others? Or can I taste this pleasure by proxy? Or am I in any degree the wiser for their knowledge? Yet this might appear to be the inference. Their having read the work may be said to act upon us by sympathy, and the knowledge which so many other persons have of its contents deadens our curiosity and interest altogether. We set aside the subject as one on which others have made up their minds for us (as if we really could have ideas in their heads), and are quite on the alert for the next new work, teeming hot from the press, which we shall be the first to read, to criticise, and pass an opinion on. (9:141-42).
appreciation of the complex, the difficult, or the rare. Perhaps the body copy of the CHP advertisement in Fig. 30 helped appeal to such readers because it deals so much with the esoteric.

Murray was known as a publisher of travel books and the deployment of so many exotic place names – Portugal, Spain, Albania, Greece – in this advertisement places CHP into that context. But compared to Murray’s other books, CHP was something of an oddity: an autobiographical/topographical poem written by a young lord known for his biting satire. Murray certainly hoped for the poem’s success, but perhaps this focus on the notes is a sign that he was hedging his bets. If the poem itself didn’t please, then perhaps the notes would. A modest success would be better than no success at all.

“By LORD BYRON.” This is the signature line of the advertisement. This line confirms that the topic of interest (i.e. the focus of the headline) is also the author of the poem. This is interesting, particularly when compared with the Talavera advertisement; perhaps because the poem had already run through multiple editions, the Talavera advertisement in Fig. 30 is shorter, and offers less in the way of a description of the poem’s content. Wellington and the battle of Talavera are the primary topics of interest, and their names are sufficient to evoke it. But in the CHP advertisement the topic of interest and the author are the same: “Lord Byron” appears in both the headline and the signature line. That Byron was a poet who was also a lord could never be far from a reader’s thoughts, and the early Byron advertisements consistently draw attention to the fact. Hazlitt believed Byron’s name was predisposed to spread because it was aristocratic: “His name […] becomes the mouth well: it is repeated thousands of times, instead of hundreds, because the reader in being familiar with the Poet’s works seems to claim acquaintance with the Lord” (Selected Writings 6: 187). Certainly, after CHP’s success, Byron’s aristocratic name appeared in advertisements more and more, at least until the publication of The Corsair.

“Printed for John Murray, 32, Fleet-street.” This line offers the standing details of the advertisement. The upper class or aristocratic associations imparted by the rest of the

76 Graham writes: “The evolving reputation of the house of Murray would be based in great part on travel literature” (31).
advertisement are perhaps diminished a little by the mention of Fleet Street. A major centre of printing since William Caxton’s apprentice, Wynkyn de Worde, set up a print-shop there at the start of the sixteenth century, by 1812 Fleet Street was already being used as a metonym for London publishing, particularly newspaper publishing. While not particularly negative, like the much-maligned Grub Street, neither the name nor the location suited Murray’s ambitions. Shortly after the publication of this advertisement, and funded partly by the surprising success of CHP, the house of Murray moved to Albemarle Street in upscale Mayfair, thus distinguishing the Murray brand, both geographically and symbolically, from his former competitors.77

A month and a half after the first appearance of CHP we can see that a number of things have changed in the advertisements for it.

Fig. 23 The Morning Chronicle (London, England), Thursday, April 23, 1812; Issue 13404.78 ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

77 On 5 December 1812 The Morning Chronicle announced that “MR. MURRAY, Publisher of the QUARTERLY REVIEW, acquaints his Friends, that he has removed from Fleet-street, to No. 50, Albemarle-street (lately Mr. Miller’s)” (qtd. in The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron [hereafter LJM] 28). Andrew Nicholson argues that the opening of Murray’s drawing-room gave [Murray’s] business a distinct and homogeneous identity, rather like a club, and soon “Albemarle Street” and “John Murray” became synonymous and interchangeable terms not only for each other, but also for a standard of book production and publishing practice that Murray himself had set and represented – and was expected to live up to. (LJM xviii)

Significantly, Albemarle Street was home to the Royal Institution, founded in 1799 for the diffusion of scientific and philosophic knowledge. Coleridge gave a series of lectures there in 1808. See Richard Holmes, Darker Reflections, 107-44.

78 An identical advertisement appeared the next day.
In the terms favoured by St Clair, the poem was tranching downwards, shifting from expensive quarto to more affordable octavo, and this shift is reflected in the advertisements for it.\textsuperscript{79} This advertisement has cut out the body copy altogether: there is no longer any description of the volume at all beyond its price, format, and edition. The headline is still for “Lord Byron’s New Poem”: all that has been added is notice of the poem’s appearance in a new edition and format.

One of the principal ways newspapers could brand a literary label was by printing poems or letters about such labels; it seems clear that such productions both revealed as well as helped to create such associations.

\begin{center}
\textbf{VERSES ON LORD BYRON}
\end{center}

\begin{verbatim}
A new Roscommon rises to our sight;
Nature revives, and Error wings her flight;
While critics blasted by the voice of truth,
Smart, for malignant censures cast on youth;
While rich description lives in glowing trains;
Upheld by Time, great Byron’s genius reigns.
Oh, early wise! with native talents blest;
Champion in states of the poor distress;
High though in rank, with nobler honours shine,
The son of science, favour’d by the Nine.

* Alluding to his Lordship’s maiden speech.
\end{verbatim}

\textbf{Fig. 24} \textit{The Morning Chronicle} (London, England), Wednesday, April 29, 1812; Issue 13409. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

This early comparison of Byron to Wentworth Dillon, 4th Earl of Roscommon, is interesting because it does not present the kind of image of Byron we have come to expect. It was commonplace to compare unknown writers to famous ones; the practice continues among readers and publishers to this day. Roscommon was a noble poet, known for his carefully balanced

\textsuperscript{79} See St Clair, “The Political Economy of Reading.”
diction. Pope, in his *Essay on Criticism*, writes that Roscommon is “not more learn’d than good./With manners generous as his noble blood”; Addison in his *Account of the Greatest English Poets* writes that Roscommon made “even rules a noble poetry”; Lord Lansdowne, in his *Essay Upon Unnatural Flights in Poetry*, wrote “First MUSGRAVE rose, ROSCOMMON next, like light,/To clear our darkness, and to guide our flight.” The implication, no doubt in reference as much to the legacy of *EBSR* as *CHP*, is that Byron was another noble poet who could help to “correct” the taste of the literary scene. Contrary to Mason’s argument that Murray and Byron created a distinctive brand identity prior to the publication of *CHP*, these verses suggest that the attribution of Byronic associations to Byron came somewhat later. The *OED* traces the first use of “Byronic” to *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1823: “His Byronic muse procured for him the hand of one of our fair countrywomen.” However, I believe I have found antedating evidence that appears to confirm (insofar as a single appearance can confirm anything) that Byron’s brand hadn’t set into predictable associations until the 1820s. In an 1815 review of Walter Scott’s *Rokeby* in *The Critical Review: Or, Annals of Literature*, it is asserted: “The judicious employment of antithesis and invention has given it increased energy, and very much was gained by the Byronic adoption of alliterative words, and the repercussive effects of transposition.” This strange early sense of *Byronic* is one that essentially fails to reappear in the written record.

If the advertisements for *CHP* through the spring and summer of 1812 record the tranching down of the poem in the London book trade, they also record the tranching outward of the poem from London. Two and half months after the poem’s publication, advertisements started appearing in the newspapers of various smaller towns and cities. Significantly, by this point neither Murray nor Byron had anything to do with their placement.
Such advertisements demonstrate that Murray was no longer the only one profiting from the popularity of the poem. Circulating libraries and literary journals routinely advertised *CHP* in order to advertise themselves.

---

80 This advertisement appears to include a telling typo, whereby the aristocratic association of the author appears to become visible in the name of his character, in the form of Childe “De” Harold.
Byron’s name comes first in both the journal and in the advertisement for it, which is a strong indication of public interest in him and his poem. Again, it is significant that these latter two advertisements were not placed in the papers by Murray. The advertising of Byron was becoming self-perpetuating.

Like the poem itself, the late advertisements for *CHP I* and *II* tend to blur the line between the poet and his hero.
By 1814, the poem’s title had been shortened again, moving it steadily in the direction of how it would come to appear in book lists or catalogues, where characters’ names often stood in for longer titles. This resulted in a subtle shift in emphasis from the literary to the biographical; *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* suggested the poem, but *Childe Harold* suggested the poet.

3.4 Advertising the Turkish Tales 1813-14

On 15 June 1813 Gifford wrote Byron advising him: “you may choose your station in the temple of Fame; but it must be, in some measure, by concentrating your powers on one point. If I might venture to advise, this point should be, in the first instance, Child Harold” (*LJM* 34). He suggested that Byron play with reforming Harold, letting “glimpses of delight break in occasionally upon his habitual gloom” (34). This advice corresponds with what we might call brand management: the careful supervision of the public’s associations with the brand name.

Byron would return to Harold eventually, but first he turned his pen to the series of “Turkish Tales” which would secure his immediate success in the literary marketplace, cement the associations of the Byronic hero, and confirm the popular attribution of that hero to Byron. Advertisements for *The Giaour* began appearing in June 1813.

![Advertisement for The Giaour](image)

**Fig. 28** *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Tuesday, June 8, 1813; Issue 13758. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Significantly, there is no body copy to speak of, other than the subtitle, which described the content of the volume as a “Fragment of a Turkish Tale,” which, considering the erratic composition and structure of that poem, was perhaps necessary to preclude complaints over its

---

81 This advertisement reappeared in the *Morning Chronicle* on the 10th and 18th of June.
state of incompletion. There are some parallels to the initial CHP advertisement in Fig. 30, however. Byron’s name was again connected with an exotic place to which he had personally traveled and the poet’s aristocratic status was again highlighted. But the differences are also significant: the advertisement of an octavo edition rather than a quarto, the relocation of Murray from “Fleet-street” to “Albemarle-street,” and the simultaneous advertisement of an earlier Byron text published by Murray all hint at Byron’s market dominance.

Throughout 1813, Byron’s literary labels were widely deployed in the advertising and news columns of the newspapers. By the following September advertisements for the fifth edition of the *Giaour* were appearing, promising “considerable Additions.” In October James Cawthorn, publisher of John Cam Hobhouse’s *A Journey through Albania and Other Provinces of Turkey*, placed book advertisements that employed Byron’s name to point out the close friendship between the two young travellers.\(^82\) And in late November advertisements for *The Bride of Abydos* began appearing.

![Image](Fig. 29 The Morning Chronicle (London, England), Monday, November 29, 1813; Issue 13905. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013)

Advertisements for *Bride* emphasized its generic connection to the *Giaour* through a repetition of the label “Turkish Tale,” which may hint at Murray’s intention to market Byron’s Eastern romances as a coherent series. Jerome Christensen has written that “[s]eriality was the engine driving Byronomania as that cultural and commercial phenomenon was collaboratively managed by Byron and his publisher, John Murray” (5). The sense that the Tales formed a series was

---

\(^{82}\) An advertisement for *A Journey* appeared in *The Morning Chronicle* on 14 October 1813.  
\(^{83}\) The advertisement reappears the following day and on 3 December.
strengthened by the rapidity of Byron’s composition of similar poems, and by their popularity with readers. By 24 December Murray was advertising a “new” edition of *Bride*, and by 25 January 1814 he was advertising the sixth edition *Bride* in an advertisement for *The Corsair*.

![Advertisement for *The Corsair*](image)

**Fig. 30** *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Tuesday, January 25, 1814; Issue 13954. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

This advertisement, appearing at the height of Byron’s fame and success, is interesting in several respects. First, it is almost certainly guilty of “lifting” Byron’s books by inflating their edition numbers. A list of Byron’s other titles, all visually distinct and stable labels in small capitals, appear at the end of this advertisement, which defined the poet at the very height of his

---

84 This advertisement reappeared in *The Morning Post* on 29 Jan and in *The Morning Chronicle* on 31 Jan; it appeared in Scotland in *The Caledonian Mercury* on 7 February and *The Aberdeen Journal* on 9 February.

85 St Clair writes:

Murray too liked to give the public the impression that no sooner was a new book by Byron put on sale, than the edition was sold out. In April 1814, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, A Romaunt, was already in its eighth edition, The Giaour in its eleventh, The Bride of Abydos in its seventh. […] In many cases, the publishers pretended to editions which had never actually existed. With Byron’s Lara, for example, there is a first edition and a fourth, but nobody has found a copy of the second or the third. […] These ancient selling practices, to be found throughout the era of moveable type, were known as “lifting a book.” Some time about 1816, Murray and the other leading publishers stopped advertising in this way. *(RNRP 181)*
popularity, exactly as Murray wished to brand him.\textsuperscript{86} The young lord: the genius, the traveler, the poet of the age.

3.5 \textbf{Consolidation and controversy 1814-16}

But a backlash began shortly after the publication of \textit{The Corsair} on 1 February. Byron’s decision, against the advice of Gifford and Murray, to include the blatantly Whiggish “Lines to a Lady Weeping” with \textit{The Corsair} led to the opening salvo of the conservative attacks that were to strengthen and intensify with Byron’s separation scandal two years later.\textsuperscript{87} Between 1 February and 15 March 1814 a number of attacks upon Byron appeared in the \textit{Courier}, the \textit{Morning Post}, and the \textit{Sun}. The conservatives used Byron’s own words to discredit the poet’s politics, ironically quoting from \textit{EBSR}. But the attacks were not only political in nature. They were also directed against “Byronism” in general and helped solidify some of the negative

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{86} On 2 February 1814 Murray wrote Byron: “I sold on the Day of Publication, a thing perfectly unprecedented, 10,000 Copies” (\textit{LJM} 72).
\textsuperscript{87} On 20 Jan 1814 Murray wrote Byron:

I called upon Mr Gifford today & he expresses himself quite delighted with the annexed Poems most particularly with – the Song from the Portuguese & the Stanzas to a “Lady weeping” the latter however he thinks you ought to slip quietly amonst the Poems in Childe Harold for <this is> the present work is to be read by women & the lines would disturb the political feeling - & as it has been already published in a Newspaper it does not accord with your character to appear to think much of it… (\textit{LJM} 70).

Of these lines, McGann writes:

The lines were written after a famous incident at Carleton House, where the Prince Regent gave a banquet on 22 February. 1812 and caused his young daughter, the Princess Charlotte, to weep when he openly abused his former Whig supporters. A furore arose when it became known, with the publication of Corsair, that B[yon] was the author of the lines. (\textit{BCPW} 3: 391-92)

See also “Appendix B” in \textit{LJM} (476-505) for an excellent summary of the controversy by Andrew Nicholson, along with reprints of the Courier’s attacks upon Byron’s character and politics, and \textit{The Morning Chronicle}’s rebuttals.
\end{flushleft}
associations that had cropped up in earlier periodical reviews of Byron’s poetry. The Post printed two hostile poems about Byron on 16 February. The second of the two concludes:

![Image](image.png)

*Fig. 31* The Morning Post (London, England), Wednesday, February 16, 1814; Issue 13439. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Byron is here associated with the fascination of the “wonder-seeking age”; the sarcastic reference to his “classic page” only reinforces the suggestion that the current mania for Byron is the result of mere “fashion.” Finally, his three Turkish Tales are suggested to derive from the same formulaic recipe: a sardonic combination of aggrandizing self-promotion and “Turkomania.” Much of the appeal of Byron’s Turkish Tales came from their depictions of an exotic East. Thomas Moore, already at work on *Lalla Rookh*, dreaded being considered a “Byronian” (*LJM* 44) for publishing an Eastern poem so soon after the appearance of the Turkish Tales.88

Two days later, the Post resumed the attack, making a hostile pronouncement on Byron’s triumphant ubiquity. Such a pronouncement seemed strangely appropriate at a time when advertisements for engravings of Thomas Phillips’ portrait of the poet were proliferating, and Byron’s name was being included among the names of such famous explorers as Mungo Park

88 Moore worried that the public would attribute the East exclusively to Byron:

I confess I feel rather down-hearted about it. Never was anything more unlucky for me than Byron’s invasion of this region, which when I entered it, was as yet untrodden, and whose chief charm consisted in the gloss and novelty of its features; but it will now be over-run with clumsy adventurers, and when I make my appearance, instead of being a leader as I looked to be, I must dwindle into a humble follower – a Byronian. (qtd. in *LJM* 44)
and George Vancouver in advertisements for *Cooke’s Modern and Complete System of Universal Geography*.\(^8\) The threat of overexposure may have played into Byron’s decision to hold off on further publication for a while.\(^9\)

But Byron did not stay out of the public’s notice for long. Fast-moving events on the continent stirred his pen, and his continuing ability to sell poems encouraged Murray and Blackwood to publish his *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*, albeit anonymously, in June 1814.

---

\(^8\) Simultaneous advertisements appeared in *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* and *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser* on 19 February 1814.

\(^9\) In his dedication to the *Corsair* Byron wrote: “I have written much, and published more than enough to demand a longer silence than I now meditate; but for some years to come it is my intention to tempt no further the award of ‘Gods, men, nor columns’” (*BCPW* 3:149).

\(^9\) John Clubbe writes:

Ironically, of Byron's several Napoleon poems only “Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte”--which depicts the deposed Emperor largely in negative terms and which John Murray published at first anonymously--could appear bearing Byron’s name on the title page (which with the 10th edition it did) without causing public outcry. (“Between Emperor and Exile” n. pag.)
began the series of poetic comparisons between the poet and the former emperor, encouraging the sense that both figures stood at the forefront of the age, that both figures were somehow alike in grandeur and importance.\footnote{John Clubbe argues that Byron’s “obsession with Napoleon was in essence a lover’s quarrel, one of many he had with his idol. Napoleon's failure to fulfill his destiny, in politics and as a human being, upset the poet so greatly that it forced him, over the next two years, to reassess his own destiny” (“Between Emperor and Exile” n. pag.)}

Despite the mounting Tory backlash against him, Byron appeared to be at the height of his commercial power; in the summer of 1814 Murray and Blackwood released editions of his poetry complete with portraits and plates.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{fig33.jpg}
\caption{\textit{Caledonian Mercury} (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday, August 1, 1814; Issue 14453. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013}
\end{figure}

On 6 August \textit{Lara} was published together with Rogers’s \textit{Jacqueline}. Compared to the advertising strategy for the first three Turkish Tales, the marketing of this volume differed somewhat. The \textit{Post} printed a notice of the poem a couple of weeks prior to its appearance:

\begin{quote}
The lovers of poetry may expect a high treat in a few days, as we understand Mr Murray of Albemarle Street is about to publish two tales, the one by Lord Byron, the other by S. Rogers, Esq. author of “The Pleasures of Memory.”
\end{quote}
The *Chronicle* printed an advertisement for *Lara* on 3 August without Byron’s or Rogers’ names. The *Caledonian Mercury* printed an advertisement on 11 August that used the “Author of” formula for both Byron and Rogers:

![Advertisement](image)

This withholding of Byron’s name from the advertisements was mirrored by its absence from title pages. The first three editions of *Lara* were prefixed with a notice that read:

> The reader of *Lara* may probably regard it as a sequel to a poem that recently appeared: whether the cast of the hero’s character, the turn of his adventures, and the general outline and colouring of the story, may not encourage such a supposition, shall be left to his determination. To his conjecture is also referred the name of the writer, the knowledge of which would be of no service in assisting his decision on the failure or success of the attempt. (*CPW* 3: 453)

The reader is here being asked to guess the author’s name from the “cast of the hero’s character” or the “colouring of the story.” By August 1814 the popular attribution of the Byronic hero to Byron was complete.
While 1815 proved to be a busy year for Byron’s personal life, it was a somewhat quiet one in terms of new publications. The only new Byron work advertised was *Hebrew Melodies*.

Many of the advertisements for *Hebrew Melodies* appeared in the *Morning Post*, one of Byron’s major antagonists during the “Lines to a Lady Weeping” controversy of February 1814. The Nathan advertisements are unique in that they represent some of the only legitimate appearances of the label “Lord Byron” outside of its placement in Murray advertisements. In comparison with Murray’s spare, label-heavy advertisements, Nathan’s advertisements have a lot of body copy or description of the text. The poet’s aristocratic name isn’t exploited by repetition or typographic trickery. It only appears once, and is not set in capitals like “Mr. Braham and Mr. Nathan,” making it relatively hard to see.

Continuing the pattern of withholding Byron’s name from title pages and book advertisements that began two years earlier with *Lara*, Murray advertisements for the *Siege of Corinth* in 1816 also appeared without the poet’s name, suggesting a critical shift in the marketing of Byron.

---

93 Byron married Anne Isabella Milbanke on January 2, and their daughter was born on 10 December. In between, he faced intense financial and marital distress.

94 Murray also advertised a four-volume collected edition of Lord Byron’s works in the *Morning Chronicle* on 30 May 1815.

95 *The Post* would adopt a virulently antagonistic stance towards Byron during his separation scandal in April 1816.

96 See Murray’s first edition (Byron, *The Siege of Corinth*). Advertisements for *Lara* and *The Siege of Corinth* are the first to print the name “Murray” without “Byron.” When Byron’s minor
This advertisement represents Murray’s brand much more than Byron’s. Uncluttered and elegant with wide empty margins, this advertisement resembles the appearance of Murray’s books. There is no mention of edition numbers, nor advertising of other Byron texts. Curiously, this advertisement does not even direct the reader to Albemarle Street. This recalls an interesting pattern, one that we have seen before: as a literary label becomes more well-known it requires less explanation and can therefore appear in shorter and shorter forms. “John Murray, 32, Fleet-street” of early 1812 becomes “John Murray, 50, Albemarle-street” by late 1812 and thereafter is compressed into “John Murray, Albemarle-street” or even, occasionally, just “John Murray.”

The disappearance of certain details from a series of advertisements is some indication of the distribution of those details in the minds of readers. In other words Albemarle Street’s disappearance from some of Murray’s advertisements in 1816 is evidence of the publisher’s confidence that his readers already associated his name with the street.

Other booksellers continued to deploy “Byron” in advertisements for Siege, as can be seen in the following:

97 On 14 February 1816, one day after Siege was published, an advertisement appeared in the Chronicle that was identical in all details except that it changed the genre description of both texts from “Poem” to “Tale.” It too lacked Byron’s name.
Upham’s advertisement employs “Lord Byron” twice, suggesting that the name still excited interest and attention in the marketplace. But if this was the case, how are we to interpret its absence from the official Murray advertisements for Siege? Byron’s authorship was no secret. A romantic poem about Greece and Turkey, published by Murray, and dedicated to the poet’s close friend Hobhouse, could not conceivably be attributed to anyone else. When the Caledonian Mercury printed excerpts of the poem on 19 February they clearly identified Byron as the author, and an advertisement in the same paper on 24 February advertised Siege with Byron’s name. So why was Byron’s name left off the official Murray advertisements in the Chronicle? The most obvious explanation is that the poem itself appeared without Byron’s name. According to McGann, Byron “did not think highly of either Siege or Parisina” (CPW 3: 481). But that only shifts the mystery a little. If it was already well-known that Byron was the author, why not employ his eye-catching name in its advertisements? If Byron did not think the poem worthy of his name, why publish it at all? It is possible that rumours about Byron’s private life might have factored into the decision.98 On 25 March Byron wrote Annabella:

98 MacCarthy writes:

As it happened, the week in which the fearful rumours [about Byron’s possible incest and sodomy] surfaced was the week in which John Murray was publishing Byron’s Siege of Corinth, dedicated to Hobhouse, and Parisina, dedicated to Scrope Davies. Naturally [Murray] was anxious about the possible effects of all this bad publicity, fearing he might have printed too many copies of the poems. (267)
my name has been as completely blasted as if it were branded on my forehead: - this may appear to you exaggeration – it is not so – there are reports which once circulated not even falsehood – or their most admitted & acknowledged falsehood – can neutralize – which no contradiction can obliterate – nor conduct cancel: - such have since your separation been busy with my name – (BLJ 5:54)

Whatever the reason, the marketing of Siege without Byron’s name illustrates a broader pattern. Throughout the first half of 1816 Byron’s name was employed less often by Murray, and more often by other publishers. Ironically, Byron’s literary labels were becoming increasingly associated with the unauthorized products of commercialized Byronism rather than with the poet’s authentic productions.

This process appears to have been greatly sped up by the separation scandal which eventually drove Byron from England.99 On 14 April the Champion published “Fare Thee Well” and “A Sketch from Private Life,” triggering an avalanche of negative attention in the papers. Byron’s aristocratic status, the earliest and most fundamental association with his name, was used to attack his character. On 17 April the Post declared that the spectacle of a selfish and powerful lord blaming his domestic woes upon a poor and honest servant seemed “base and unmanly.” This judgment was preceded by a short paragraph pointing out the ease with which one could imitate Byronic sincerity: “Lord Byron. – A Correspondent observes, that it was never more necessary to prove how easy it is to write artful verses, to parody sentiment, and affect feeling.” This type of suggestion, that perhaps Byron was doing nothing more than imitating Byronic sincerity and passion, would prove long-lasting and especially damaging to his fame. Equally damaging were the number of editions of “Lord Byron’s New Poems” on his “Domestic Circumstances” that appeared with astonishing rapidity:

99 See McGann, BCPW 3: 493-95.
The appearance of these advertisements represented a major challenge to Murray on at least three fronts. First, they appeared in the Chronicle, Murray’s usual newspaper for advertising Byron’s works; second, they mimicked Murray’s brand, by asserting their “handsome” or “elegant” printing “uniform with Lord Byron’s other Works”; third, they associated “Lord Byron” with the booksellers on Fleet Street and Paternoster Row, locations and reading constituencies that Murray had done so much to distance his publications from. The final insult was the price. At one shilling, these publications both undercut Murray’s prices by a substantial margin and placed his star author’s poems in the hands of a different class of readers, one that his regular customers likely would not have cared to be associated with. Byron as a luxury brand was under threat.

100 According to St Clair “no copyright was enforceable” (RNRP 181) on Byron’s Poems on his Domestic Circumstances because of its initial publication in a newspaper: “[t]he law was unclear on how far it was legal for others to reprint texts which had appeared in print in newspapers” (221).
To make matters worse, William Hone and other radical booksellers began insisting in their advertisements that they were selling the “genuine” edition of the poems.

The repetition of the word “genuine,” the warning against “substitutions,” and the suggestion that readers place their orders “expressly” and ask for “Hone’s Genuine Edition” by name, all suggest a concern for literary branding. It remains a curious fact that Hone utilized such techniques in “Byron” advertisements half a year before Murray did.

On the 25 April, the day Byron sailed from England, the following advertisement appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*:

---

101 An identical advertisement appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* the next day. On 25 April Hone placed a similar advertisement.
The reappearance of body copy, or descriptions of the book’s contents, and statements of its exclusivity or “genuineness,” characterize this advertisement; “Lord Byron” appears three times, “Lady Byron,” once. The inclusion of a facsimile of Byron’s handwriting was particularly disturbing, coming as it did with “a PORTRAIT and LIFE” of the author. The brand was becoming uncanny; the more it incorporated Byron’s reflected images the less it resembled the man himself, the one hinted at in his letters. The inclusion of “&c. &c.” is perhaps the most interesting detail of all. It is a critical commonplace that Byron’s heroes have a dark and unnameable secret that invites prurient speculation about the poet’s life and provides a dark screen upon which his readers could project their desires. The inclusion of such a suggestive typographical device in this advertisement suggests the extent to which the logic of Byronism could be deployed, in microcosm, in order to sell books. No matter which rumour one had heard about Byron’s domestic difficulties, or which fantasy one might want to indulge about the poet, it could be invoked by “&c.”
3.6 John Murray’s attempts to control literary branding

As early as March 1812, the month of CHP’s initial publication, we have an example of an attempt to control literary branding in the following notice in Murray’s Quarterly Review: ¹⁰²

Fig. 42 The Quarterly Review (London, England), Vol. 13, March 1812. Google Books

The raison d’être of the note is to distinguish legitimate uses of “THE CHEAP REPOSITORY” label from illegitimate ones. It shows a concern for branding, for “the recollection left upon [the] minds” of readers by Hannah More’s texts. It suggests that unscrupulous inroads on the “fair

¹⁰² For a study of Murray’s advertising methods see Mackerness 57-9.
fame” of well-known authors and literary names and titles are “dangerous” to the public, and “cruel” to authors. Finally, it suggests that authors can be implicated or diminished by the success of spurious texts that employed or approximated their literary labels.

Byron’s literary brand underwent just such an assault in the newspapers during 1816. Not only was the poet’s sincerity openly questioned and his aristocratic attitude criticized in news and gossip columns, but his literary labels were appropriated and used by pirate publishers in advertisements for self-described “genuine” editions of his poetry. This practice seems to coincide with Byron’s increasingly political stance. In “The Impact of Byron’s Writings,” St Clair argues that “prior to 1816 Byron’s poetry was not much associated with liberal causes” (10). In any case, the appearance of illegitimate uses of literary labels associated with Byron in the newspapers became increasingly common after his separation scandal in 1816. Many seem to have been triggered by the rumour of new Byron poems in September, and by Murray’s announcement of The Prisoner of Chillon and CHP III in late October 1816. On 21 September the Post reported “Lord Byron has not been idle under his afflictions, but has occupied his time abroad in completing a Second Part of Childe Harold, which he has sent to this country for publication.”

Byron had known that spurious poems were being advertised as early as 22 July, when he wrote to Murray from the Villa Diodati:

I enclose you an advertisement – which was copied by Dr. P[olidori] - & which appears to be about the most impudent imposition that ever issued from Grub Street. –I need hardly say that I know nothing of all this trash […] “Odes to St. Helena – Farewells to England – &c. &c.” – and if it can be disavowed – or is worth disavowing you have full authority to do so […] and as to the “Lily of France” I should as soon think of celebrating a turnip. - - On the “morning of my Daughter’s birth” I had other things to think than of verses – and should never have dreamed of such an invention – till Mr. Johnston [sic] and his pamphlet’s advertisement broke in upon me with a new light on the Crafts & subtleties of the
Demon of printing – or rather publishing. [...] I hope you will beat the Row – (BLJ 5: 84-85).¹⁰³

Although Murray was on the defensive for much of the year, he undertook steps to protect his prize author’s reputation, revealing the same canny understanding of literary branding as appeared in the warning about the “THE ENTHUSIASTIC CHEAP REPOSITORY” in Fig. 42. In November 1816 he engaged in a running advertising battle with J. Johnson, who advertised as follows in the pages of the Chronicle:

---

**LORD BYRON.**

On the 16th instant will be published, uniform with the Noble Author’s former Works,

THE Right Honourable LORD BYRON’S PILGRIMAGE to the HOLY LAND. To which is added, the *Tempest*.

Printed for J. Johnson, Cheapside, and 335, Oxford-street, and sold by all Booksellers. Of whom may be had, by the same Author, a new edition (the third), price 25. 6d.

Farewell to England; with three other Poems, viz. Ode to St. Helena, To My Daughter on the Morning of her Birth, and to the Lily of France.

---

**Fig. 43** The Morning Chronicle (London, England), Wednesday, November 6, 1816; Issue 14825.¹⁰⁴ ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

This advertisement was particularly galling to the associations Murray had tried so hard to develop. It all sounded so plausible: Byron making another pilgrimage to the East, writing another Ode to Napoleon, this time upon St. Helena, and addressing lines to his infant daughter.

Murray was forced to take action in November 1816, when advertisements for Johnson’s text began appearing in the Chronicle. He quickly placed counter advertisements of his own, warning

---

¹⁰³ Byron often referred to Murray’s competitors on the “Row.” On 17 June 1817 he threatened that, unless offered more money, “I will put [any continuation of *CHP*] to market to the best bidder – or will desert at once to the ‘Row’” (BLJ 5: 240).

¹⁰⁴ This advertisement first appeared on 2 November in the Morning Chronicle. For analysis of “Lord Byron’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land,” see Chew 172-73.
readers of the spurious edition. Remarkably, on 15 November the advertisements appeared side by side:

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 44** The Morning Chronicle (London, England), Friday, November 15, 1816; Issue 14833. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

These two advertisements make an interesting counterpoint. Both begin abruptly, with the name of the poet alone; both make an argument for the exclusivity of the publisher’s relations with Byron; both warn the reader against each other. Here we can see the bifurcation of Murray’s Byron and Cheapside’s Byron, the beginning of the death of “Byron” as a luxury brand and the birth of “Byron” as a staple of radical or piratical publishers. “Lord Byron” appears eight times between these two advertisements. Byron’s literary labels were beginning to slip out of the control of poet and publisher, a fact that would have negative effects for both of their reputations.

---

105 Murray’s advertisement also appeared the day before, and the day after. Johnson placed an identical advertisement in the Post on 16 November.
Murray’s advertisement attempts to reaffirm the connection between poet and publisher, explicitly drawing reader attention to the special access Murray has to Byron. The publisher is literally “authorized” by the author. Why would Murray spend money to advertise this to the public? Advertisements for Byron’s publications could be expected to increase sales, and thus profits, for Murray. But why spend money on lines in an advertisement that could not do so? The answer is that these lines are defensive, employed in order to protect the brand. Imitations and forgeries were beginning to appear, and it was in Murray’s interest to keep this quotient as low as possible. Such works were often of poor quality and, as they were produced and consumed at lower tranches of the literary marketplace, they could not help but reflect badly upon Murray’s own brand, inexorably linked as it now was with Byron’s. Murray desperately wanted to keep the name of his star poet out of grubby editions of shoddy poetry.

Johnson’s advertisement claims that Byron was given “FIVE HUNDRED GUINEAS” for the “Copyright” of his poems. Reference to a Copyright transaction, especially a fictitious one, is highly unusual for a book advertisement. Both Byron and Murray routinely worked to downplay and eliminate the suggestion of commercial interest in their productions: Byron, by being dismissive of other poets writing for money, and Murray, by limiting the appearance of advertisements or book catalogues within his publications and by streamlining the appearance of his newspaper advertisements to single titles and authors.

Byron, who had attacked Southey and Scott in EBSR for their mercenary motives and had refused to accept payment for many of his poems hitherto, took Johnson’s offensive remarkably well. On 9 December Byron wrote to Murray from Venice:

106 Like many publishers, Murray cultivated connections with lionized authors. After a series of negative reviews of *Christabel, Kubla Khan, and the Pains of Sleep* in the fall of 1816, Murray cut his dealings with Coleridge for just this reason. According to Coleridge:

The Sale of the *Christabel* sadly disappointed Mr Murray. It was abused & ridiculed by the Edinburgh Review; & the Quarterly refused even to notice it . . . In this mood Mr Murray expressed himself in such words, as led me, nervous and imperfectly recovered as I was, to suppose that he had no pleasure in this connection (qtd. in *Critical Heritage*, 439).
Nothing surprises me – or this perhaps would & most things amuse me – or this probably would not. – With regard to myself – the man has merely lied – that’s natural – his betters have set him the example. – But with regard to you – his assertion may perhaps injure you in your publications – and I desire that it may receive the most public and unqualified contradiction. – I do not know if there is any punishment for a thing of this kind – (BLJ 5:138-39)

Murray evidently believed that Johnson’s assertions would “injure [him] in [his] publications” and he had already pursued legal action. In a letter to Byron on 13 December he wrote:

I have had a tremendous fight with a dirty Villain who availing himself of the announcement of some New Poems advertised vehemently that he would Publish “Lord Byron’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land” and the “Tempest” – to which I ventured to announce the falsity – that mine was the real Simon Pure – the very next day the fellow inserted an advertisement, cautiously worded, but insinuating stoutly – the [sic] He had received these Poems from the Noble Author & had paid for them Five Hundred Pounds!! (LJM 181)

By this time, the matter had been settled, at least from a legal point of view. On November 30, 1816 the Chronicle printed an account of the case of Lord Byron vs. J. Johnson, informing the public that Sir Samuel Romilly had issued an injunction against Johnson’s “spurious edition” of the noble author’s verse. The Examiner published a similar note on 1 December:

* By the way, we are authorised to mention, that the person in Cheapside who announces some new publications by his Lordship, and says he has given five hundred guineas for them, has no warrant whatsoever for so stating. We are sorry to hurt the man’s sale, as far as some other booksellers are concerned, who are just as money-getting and impudent in different ways; but truth must be told of one, as it will also be told of others.— (Since writing this note, we find the business noticed in Chancery, and some of the verses quoted, which will certainly satisfy the public that the Noble Poet was not the author.)

Fig. 45 The Examiner (London, England), Sunday, December 1, 1816; Issue 466. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

In all likelihood, most of Byron’s readers would not have consciously associated Lord Byron’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the poet after learning of the legal injunction; unconsciously,
However, they may have begun associating him with Cheapside. Regardless, Johnson was soon back at it again. In December he placed another advertisement, this time without Byron’s name.

---

**SUPPRESSED POEM.**

Second Edition, price 5s. 6d.

PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND; in Two Cantos. To which is added, The Tempest.—Also on Wednesday, the 4th edition, price 2s. 6d. Farewell to England, Ode to St. Helena, To my Daughter on the morning of her Birth, and to the Lily of France.

Published by J. Johnston, Cheapside; and 335, Oxford-street.

‘“The versification of the Pilgrimage, &c. is generally easy, and we might, would our space allow, extract several quotations of a pretty descriptive kind.”—Critical Review, Nov.

---

**Fig. 46** The Morning Chronicle (London, England), Wednesday, December 4, 1816; Issue 14849. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

This advertisement is fascinating because it attempts to turn the legal injunction to its advantage, hoping to garner attention for the “SUPPRESSED POEM.” “Pilgrimage,” a term obviously associated with Byron and *CHP*, appears twice.¹⁰⁷ This is the opposite of what we saw with Murray’s advertisements for *CHP* during the years 1812–16, which over time tended to eliminate common nouns in favour of proper ones. As the Johnson sequence reveals, advertisements placed by pirates tended to eliminate proper nouns in favour of common ones. So Murray’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* became compressed over time into *Childe Harold*, but Johnson’s *Lord Byron’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* became compressed into *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*.¹⁰⁸

This pattern is important: official Byron advertisements tended over time towards denotation or the indexical function, while spurious or derivative advertisements tended towards connotation or the descriptive function.

---

¹⁰⁷ On 9 December Byron complained to Murray: “A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem”! how the devil should I write about Jerusalem – never having yet been there?” (BLJ 5:139).

¹⁰⁸ Byron’s decision to abandon the rigid distinction between himself and the character of Childe Harold in the dedication to *CHP IV* is perhaps already hinted at in the advertisements for *CHP III* by the shortening of its title.
Byron was obviously troubled by the appropriation of his literary labels, taking great care to mention the Johnson incident in most of his private letters throughout December 1816 and January 1817. On 19 December Byron wrote to Hobhouse:

By the way – what think ye? – a bookseller – a villain – an imposter – in Cheapside – publishes a set of damned things calling them mine – Murray says & very truly they are not mine – when what does this fellow – why – publishes a counter-advertisement saying they are mine and “that he paid to me 500 guineas for the copyright!” (BLJ 5:143)

In a letter to Augusta Leigh written the same day, Byron declared “I have heard of Murray’s squabble with one of his brethren – who is an impudent impostor – and should be trounced” (5:145). On 24 December Byron wrote Moore “I heard the other day of a pretty trick of a bookseller, who has published some damned nonsense, swearing the bastards to me, and saying he gave me five hundred guineas for them” (5:150). Byron’s labelling of Johnson himself is

109 Byron was particularly sensitive to the connotations of literary labels, and not merely his own. On 25 March 1817 Byron wrote both Murray and Moore about the title of Lalla Rookh. To Murray he wrote:

“Lalla Rookh” – you must recollect that in the way of title – the “Giaour” has never been pronounced to this day & both it & Childe Harold sounded very formidable & facetious to the blue-bottles of wit & honour about town – till they were taught & started into a proper deportment - & therefore Lalla Rookh which is very orthodox and oriental – is as good a title as need be – if not better. – I could wish rather that he had not called it “a Persian tale” firstly because we have had “Turkish tales” and Hindoo tales - & Assyrian tales – already - & tale is a word of which it repents me to have nicknamed poesy – fable would be better; - and secondly – “Persian tale” reminds one of the lines of Pope – on Ambrose Phillips – though no one can say to be sure that this tale has been “turned for half a crown” still it is as well to avoid such clashings. –Persian story” why not? – or romance? (BLJ 5:192)

To Moore Byron wrote:

“your Poem is announced by the name of Lalla Rookh. I am glad of it, - first that we are to have it at last, and next, I like a tough title myself – witness The Giaour and Childe Harold, which choked half the Blues at starting” (BLJ 5:186). On 9 April 1817 Byron wrote Murray, saying of Manfred “You must call it ‘a poem,’ for it is no drama (& I do not choose it to be called by so Sothebyish a name) a ‘poem in dialogue’ or - pantomime if you will – anything – but a Green room Synonime” (BLJ 5:209).
revealing: on 27 December he refers to “that Cheapside impostor” (5:151); on 2 January he
refers to “the Cheapside man” (5:158), which is perhaps surprising, considering he referred to
Johnson by name in his letter to Murray the previous summer. Perhaps this hints that Byron felt
mentioning the impostor’s name was below his aristocratic dignity, or perhaps it suggests that it
was the association of his literary labels with “Cheapside” that really bothered him.

The Johnson controversy in 1816 allowed publishers other than Murray to profit from the
defense of Byron’s literary labels.

![Advertisement for Lord Byron's poems]

Fig. 47 The Morning Chronicle (London, England), Saturday, December 7, 1816; Issue 14852.©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

The quoted lines, taken from an anonymous poem entitled “Effectual Malice” in Vicesimus
Knox’s Elegant Extracts, have been applied in reference to Johnson’s “scoundrel verses.” But

110 A similar advertisement appeared in the Morning Chronicle on 29 November. On 9
December an advertisement appeared, identical in all respects to it except that it did not contain
the phrase “containing a Review of all the pretended poems of Lord Byron” but rather
“containing Remarks on the State of the Country – Proofs that the Prisoner of Chillon was not
written by Lord Byron, &c. &c.” I have not found any other advertisements in the sequence.

111 The inclusion of lines of poetry within book advertisements seems to have been a trend during
the winter of 1816-17, proving particularly popular with radical booksellers. Advertisements for
Southey’s Wat Tyler in the winter of 1817 employed the Poet Laureate’s own lines against him.
a review of the “pretended Poems of Lord Byron,” even if in the defense of the poet, couldn’t help but draw more attention to the spurious works. Similarly, advertisements for *A Poetical Epistle to Lord Byron* offered a body copy description of itself, in the way of lines drawn from William Mason’s “Musaeus: A Monody to the Memory of Mr. Pope” (325):

![Advertisement for A Poetical Epistle to Lord Byron](image)

**Fig. 48 The Morning Chronicle** (London, England), Wednesday, December 25, 1816; Issue 14867.©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

These lines echoed one of the most common criticisms of Byron’s work. They urged Byron to use “sobriety” and “reason” in order to temper his “mad passion.” The desire to see Byron reform his youthful ways had been part of his appeal since the first publication of *CHP* in 1812, if not earlier, when Henry Brougham’s unsigned review of *Hours of Idleness* in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1808 suggested the young poet should exercise his talents and ambitions elsewhere.

The battle over the use of Byron’s literary labels continued into 1818, when still more imitative and spurious works were advertised in the *Chronicle*:

![Advertisement for Childe Harold's Pilgrimage](image)

112 This advertisement appeared adjacent to a Murray advertisement for *Prisoner of Chillon* and *CHP III*. It reappeared in the *Chronicle* on 8 and 28 January 1817.
Not long after, in his advertisements for CHP IV, Murray attempted to defend his publication against Baldwin and all other unauthorized continuations of Childe Harold:

By informing the public that this was the “LAST CANTO” of CHP, Murray was attempting to delegitimize and forestall imitations; by requesting his customers to order the book especially and “immediately” from booksellers, he attempted to tighten his control over his customers’ access to texts bearing Byron’s labels.

But spurious works kept appearing. The following advertisement from the publisher Effingham Wilson cleverly picks up on two of Murray’s defensive phrases, “last Canto” and “not […] by Lord Byron,” and employs them in a surprisingly subversive way.

According to Chew, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage to the Dead Sea makes “no attempt […] to palm the work off as Byron’s, for there is a dedication to the author’s father and the memory of his mother, and an introductory poem, “To My Forsaken Harp,” tells of the death of the author’s wife […] nonetheless] some people evidently believed the book to be by Byron” (174).

This advertisement reappeared in the Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser the next day, the Liverpool Mercury on 10 April, and Jackson's Oxford Journal on 11 April.
This advertisement is thick with Byron’s literary labels. It repeats “Harold” three times, “Childe” twice, and “Lord Byron” once, ironically allowing Wilson to draw reader attention with the famous labels while publicly disavowing Byron’s authorship. Crucially, this advertisement includes body copy, one that explicitly suggests “Byronic” associations, through an interesting mishmash of lines from CHP I and III. The first line of Canto III stanza 16 is inserted above the final couplet of Canto I stanza 6, though with the misprint of “dragged” instead of “drugged.” That the effect of this linking is to emphasize the “Byronic” associations of the work can be clearly seen when considered in the context of Byron’s original line: “Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again,/With nought of hope left, but with less of gloom” (BCPW 2: 82). By way of selective quotation Wilson’s advertisement encourages readers to think of the return of an unchanged, and eternally brooding, Harold. The Byronic pose was something the reading public could by now easily recognize, and, as the poet’s ever-more stylized portraits revealed, misanthropy and gloominess were vital to it.

Shortly after the publication of John Polidori’s The Vampyre in the April 1819 issue of Colburn’s New Monthly Magazine, Johann Wolfgang Goethe rather curiously declared it to be Lord Byron’s “masterpiece.” Goethe wasn’t alone in attributing the tale to Byron; the public,

---

115 See BCPW 2: 10.
116 See MacDonald 190 and Butler 55. Interestingly, Polidori’s gothic tale borrowed the name of its villain – the vampire Lord Ruthven – from an earlier Byronic work: Lady Caroline Lamb’s
encouraged by the advertising of the magazine’s publishers, believed it to be the work of the exiled poet. Even Murray was fooled; he wrote Byron “to ask for reassurance that he had not published the work with another publisher” (McDayter “Conjuring” 55). That such a mistaken attribution was not merely possible but convincing requires some explanation. Though at the time of publication *The Vampyre* bore Byron’s name, it bore little similarity to any of the poet’s previous works. After all, it was a work in prose and was, in the words of Polidori biographer D. L. MacDonald, “brief and mediocre” (iv). How could it possibly have been mistaken for Byron’s? Part of the reason had to do with the advertising for *Colburn’s*:

![Image](https://example.com/image.jpg)

**Fig. 52** *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Saturday, March 20, 1819; Issue 15565. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

On 29 March, the *Chronicle* printed another description of the *Vampyre*, and of the “curious” circumstances of its production:

[i]t was proposed in a literary circle, that each of the company present should write a tale depending upon some supernatural agency, which was undertaken by Lord Byron, the daughter of the celebrated Mr. Godwin, and a certain physician. The tale of Miss Godwin has already appeared under the title of Frankenstein.

---

novel *Glenarvon* (McDayter 55). Arguably, Ruthven was nearly identical to the popular image of Byron; this resemblance must have been one of the main reasons for the attribution. This episode demonstrates how an increasingly autonomous Byronism “had come to take precedence over Byron, the creation over the creator” (56). In a sense, Goethe was right; though Byron did not write *The Vampyre*, it was an authentic Byronic work.
On 1 April a note in the news column of the Chronicle announcing that the Vampyre, published that day, would “be perused with an extraordinary degree of interest.” Not long thereafter advertisements for an octavo edition of Vampyre, printed for Sherwood, Neeley and Jones appeared, which similarly attributed the tale to Byron.

Fig. 53 Liverpool Mercury etc (Liverpool, England), Friday, April 9, 1819; Issue 407.¹¹⁷

©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

It wasn’t until the Chronicle and the Post printed John Polidori’s letter to the Editor of the New Monthly Magazine on May 1 that an indication that Byron wasn’t the author of the Vampyre entered the papers.

One wonders to what extent the publication of Polidori’s letter could refute the dozen or so advertisements that had already connected Byron’s name to the tale, or the seemingly irresistible desire upon the part of the reading public to attribute anything Byronic to Byron. In the public imagination of 1819 there seemed to be little difference between a work by Byron and a work about him. Byron was acutely aware of the spurious works that bore his literary labels between 1816 and 1820; in his 1820 “Some Observations Upon an Article in Blackwood’s Magazine” he wrote:

All the things attributed to me within the last five years – Pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Deaths upon Pale Horses, Odes to the Land of the Gaul, Adieus to

¹¹⁷ A nearly identical advertisement appeared in the Morning Chronicle on the same day, and Jackson’s Oxford Journal the following day.
England, Songs to Madame La Valette, Odes to St. Helena, Vampires, and what not – of which, God knows, I never composed nor read a syllable beyond their titles in advertisements. (qtd. in Chew, 174-75).

The reply wasn’t published until the appearance of Moore’s *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* in 1830.118 Byron’s name, initially guaranteed by the imprint of his aristocratic title and the supposedly singular life and soul depicted in his poetry, was more and more appropriated and used independently of his efforts, a process that would eventually culminate in the Victorian-era backlash against Byron and Byronism described by Andrew Elfenbein and others.119

### 3.7 Advertising *Don Juan* Cantos I and II

Compared with Byron’s earlier works, *Don Juan* was very curiously advertised. Following a prolonged period of hesitation and deliberation during the winter of 1818-19, Hobhouse, voicing the opinion of many of Byron’s friends and literary advisors, advocated the total suppression of the poem.120 On 25 January 1819 Byron wrote to both Hobhouse and Murray, acquiescing to its “nan-publication” (*BLJ* 6: 95), but insisting that fifty copies be printed for private circulation, in the manner of “Fare Thee Well” in 1816. But evidently Byron soon changed his mind, and on 6 March he wrote Douglas Kinnaird saying he had “determined to have Don Juan published (anonymously)” (*BLJ* 6: 101).121 Despite the deep misgivings about the possible reception of the poem, *Don Juan* appeared without the names of author or publisher in July 1819. In any case, the names weren’t needed, as it was generally clear whose poem it was. For example, a satiric letter from Morgan Odoherty in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in June 1819 declared “if Lord Byron does not publish Don Juan speedily, I will” (286). Many in the London literary establishment had heard of

---

118 See Daghlian 124.

119 According to Elfenbein, towards the end of the nineteenth century writers emphatically “abandoned Byron as a way of marking a perceived transition from artistic adolescence to maturity” (171). See 90-250.

120 See *LJM* 268 and *BCPW* 5: 665-66.

121 For a chronology of Byron’s writing of *Don Juan*, see Norman Page 55-87.
Byron’s *Don Juan* long before it appeared in Murray’s elegant quarto edition, which despite its anonymity, was in itself a dead giveaway of its publisher. As Hugh J. Luke has argued:

That Murray chose to clothe his unacknowledged offspring in large quarto sheets has a significance which is not generally recognized. None of Byron’s writings had appeared in such ample and expensive garb – the volume sold for £1 11s. 6d. – since the publication of the first two Cantos of *Childe Harold* seven years earlier. All his other works, even those appearing at the height of his popularity when rapid sale was assured, had been published in the standard octavo. (200)

According to Luke, Murray published *Don Juan* in quarto in part to avoid problems with the authorities, who were really only worried about the circulation of radical poems like *Don Juan* in the cheaper formats available to the lower classes (200-1). In 1822 Southey would concur, writing in the *Quarterly Review* that *Don Juan* “in quarto and on hot-pressed paper would have been almost innocent – in a whity-brown duodecimo it was one of the worst of the mischievous publications that have made the press a snare” (qtd. in Luke 202). Whatever misgivings he might have harboured about the poem, Murray still evidently expected to turn a profit on his investment. Forecasting strong sales among his wealthy customers, Murray printed 1,500 copies on quality paper and only later, in response to the competition from various London pirates, ordered another 2,250 printed in various demy, crown, and post octavo editions (*BCPW* 5: 666-67n).

The unorthodox poem called for an unorthodox advertising campaign. A series of cryptic advertisements for *Don Juan* began appearing in the major papers in early July, in what Hadley J. Mozer has called “the most sensational advertising campaign and marketing blitz for a volume of poetry in the annals of the trade to that date” (*Don Juan* 68). As Andrew Nicholson writes:

[Murray] had certainly done his best to vamp the sales. Over the three days prior to publication tantalizing advertisements had appeared in, for instance, *The Times*, front page, centre column, top, announcing successively: “ON THURSDAY, DON JUAN. – Sold by all Booksellers” (Monday 12 July); “DON JUAN, the day after To-morrow” (Tuesday 13 July); “TO-MORROW, DON JUAN. – To be had

---

122 Chew remarks that “[f]ew books have had a stranger history than *Don Juan*” (27).
of all Booksellers” (Wednesday 14 July); and on the day itself, “THIS DAY, DON JUAN” (Thursday 15 July). (LJM 277n; see also Mozer, Don Juan, 221)

Whereas advertisements for Childe Harold highlighted the names of Byron and Murray and thus emphasized their connection, advertisements for Don Juan hid them both, resulting in a very mysterious-looking advertisement. The curious appearance of these newspaper advertisements evidently attracted no small degree of attention in literary circles in London. The Chronicle printed the following note on the day of Don Juan’s publication:

![Image of The Morning Chronicle advertisement for Don Juan]

**Fig. 54 The Morning Chronicle** (London, England), Thursday, July 15, 1819; Issue 15665. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Mozer suggests that this advertising campaign was all part of the plan, arguing that Murray “hoped by remaining anonymous to make Don Juan a succès de scandale” (Don Juan 228) and that he was engaging in a form of “negative publicity” to “stimulate sales” (229). Mozer also points out the “resemblance of Murray’s advertisements to a specific kind of advertisement known collectively as mysteries” (222), secret personal messages placed among the advertisement columns of newspapers like the Times or the Post. Consider the following:
As Mozer points out, the “stylistic and rhetorical affinity” (223) between the personal advertisements and the advertisements for \textit{Don Juan} is striking, suggesting an incarnation of the “hermeneutic of intimacy” Tom Mole describes as intrinsic to Byron’s celebrity.\textsuperscript{124} It was all part of a calculated and daring advertising campaign, orchestrated by Murray for maximum effect.

Or was it? One might take a more sober view, arguing that Murray didn’t have much of a choice. After all advertisements are versions of title pages, and, as the title page of \textit{Don Juan} appeared without names, it naturally followed that the advertisements for it would as well. While circumstantial and anecdotal evidence for Murray’s placement of the cryptic \textit{Don Juan} advertisements is fairly strong, careful consideration of the placement and wording of the advertisements suggests complications. Why, for instance, would Murray advertise that \textit{Don Juan} was “sold by all Booksellers” in Fig. 56? The phrase does not appear in any of his other advertisements. In fact, the trend between 1816 and 1819 had been for Murray to emphasize exclusive access to the poet and his texts through his imprimatur. Certainly the advertisements for \textit{Don Juan} do not resemble any of Murray’s others, and more strangely still, many seem to have been deliberately placed next to parodic advertisements for Hone’s \textit{Don John; or, Don Juan Unmasked}:

![Fig. 55 The Morning Post (London, England), Friday, July 09, 1819; Issue 15123.©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013](image)

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{123} The same notice appeared in the \textit{Post} the following day.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} See Tom Mole’s \textit{Byron’s Romantic Celebrity}, especially 1-27 and 44-59.
\end{itemize}
On three separate occasions in the Chronicle (17, 19, and 21 July), and upon its first appearance in the Times on 12 July, a mysterious advertisement for Don Juan was immediately followed by an advertisement for Don John. It stretches credulity to call this pattern of placement coincidental, and I believe we should entertain the possibility that Hone placed some of the mysterious Don Juan advertisements himself. Consider that the Don Juan advertisement in Fig. 56 claims the poem had been published “This day.” But 19 July was the day of Don John’s publication, not Don Juan’s, which had been published four days earlier, on 15 July. While it wasn’t all that unusual during the period for a book advertisement to announce a book’s publication a few days late, when considered in the light of the other evidence, primarily the consistent placement of Don John advertisements immediately after Don Juan ones, and the likely impact upon potential readers of seeing them side by side, we should grant that Hone had the motive, means, and opportunity to ensure their appearance together.

In any case, Hone’s Don John begins with reference to the mysterious advertisement campaign:

“In a few days, DON JUAN.” These words alone, neither preceded or followed by explanation, appearing in the advertising columns of our newspapers, were more novel in their form than the first appearance of the new comet; and in their import, certainly not the less mysterious. The curiosity of the town was raised to the highest pitch to know the meaning of the enigmatical line. (5)

Two years earlier Hone had been put on trial for publishing three parodies deemed blasphemous: The Late John Wilkes’s Catechism, The Sinecure’s Creed, and The Political Litany. He was
acquitted, but the double standard offered by the publication of *Don Juan*, with its poetic commandments on Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, was too rich to pass up.\textsuperscript{125} Seeing an opportunity to score points against his political enemies, Hone complained: “[w]hat we blame in Mr. Murray is the *partial* concealment of the fact, that he published *Don Juan* […] There is great credit due to Mr. Murray for his *contrivance*, in getting the booksellers to sell the book *openly*, which he did not choose to publish openly” (33-34).\textsuperscript{126} By labelling his book “Don John,” Hone furthered both his political agenda and his economic interest, “unmasking” Murray as the publisher of *Don Juan*, and thus calling attention to the double standard of the authorities vis-à-vis the blasphemy charges he had faced, while simultaneously encouraging sales of his piratical book of “extracts.” Priced at only two shillings *Don John* undersold *Don Juan* by a healthy margin.

In early October 1819 Murray was prompted to place a new set of advertisements for the same quarto edition he had printed in July, an indication that sales were being hurt by piracy, the growing controversy over the poem’s supposed immorality, or both. He also advertised a new octavo edition. These new advertisements were typical in almost every particular, except for the replacement of Murray’s name with the printer Thomas Davison’s, whose name appeared on the title page of *Don Juan*, and for the addition of a warning against Hone’s “Third Canto of Don Juan” as can be seen in this advertisement in the *Chronicle* on 12 July.

\textsuperscript{125} Hone compares the authorities’ treatment of Murray’s indiscretion with that of Mr. Russell, the Birmingham printer who was indicted and taken into custody for publishing Hone’s *Political Litany*:

Mr. Murray who is known to be the most loyal, and reported to be the most opulent bookseller in the United Kingdom […] actually publishes a Parody on the Ten Commandments of God, whilst this prosecution [against Mr. Russell] is pending […] it remains to be seen, whether the maxim so much vaunted in our Law Courts, that “Justice is even handed, and deals with all alike,” be true or not” (37n). Hone asks “Why did not Mr. Murray suppress Lord Byron’s Parody on the Ten Commandments? […] Because it contains nothing in ridicule of Ministers, and therefore nothing that they could suppose, would be to the displeasure of Almighty God. (33)

\textsuperscript{126} Also quoted in Chew 33.
Ever sensitive to the possibilities of using advertisements as a literary medium for satire, political or otherwise, Hone quickly responded with a new advertisement for his third canto of *Don Juan* that wryly repeated Murray’s warning nearly verbatim.

By resorting to such playful tricks, it might be argued that Hone’s spurious advertisements captured the subversive wit of Byron’s poem much better than Murray’s official advertisements.
Certainly, Hone’s third canto attempts to ventriloquize the voice of Don Juan/Byron, and succeeds rather well, as can be seen in its first stanza:

Miss Haidee and Don Juan pleaded well;  
At least my publisher of late so tells me,  
Although the world he does not chuse to tell,  
Yet, every body knows ’tis he who sells me:  
To sing what furthermore the pair befell,  
(As he declines my book and thus compels me,  
Because my “guinea trash” he will not own,)  
I send this Canto into Mr. Hone. (1)

Part of the reason for Hone’s success in capturing the irreverent spirit of Don Juan in his advertisements and in his spurious continuation of Don Juan is that both he and Byron are so engaged with parodying the idioms and rhetoric of newspaper advertising. As Mozer has argued, the first line of Don Juan – “I WANT a hero” – can be read as a parody of “several types of early advertising and advertising-related discourse: namely, the newspaper want advertisement” (“I WANT,” 240). While Murray’s advertisements attempt to state that Hone’s book is spurious (a dubious proposition considering they lack the authority of Murray’s own name), Hone’s advertisements attempt to demonstrate they are “authentic” by more successfully mimicking Byron’s genius, or voice. This, I would argue, is merely an extension of the pattern we have seen developing all along: while Murray’s advertisements attempt to derive their authority from the denotative strength of his literary labels, Hone’s advertisements attempt to derive theirs from the connotative strength of those same labels, leading to confusion between the two.

Ultimately, such repeated defeats began to wear on Murray, even threatening the associations of his own name and literary brand, and his personal and professional relationship with Byron.

---

127 In Radical Satire and Print Culture: 1790-1822 Marcus Wood argues:

Advertising popularized, appropriated, and imitated different writing styles and systems of iconography. It had the effect of loosening and challenging established linguistic divisions and notions of social empowerment. It established a range of models which were taken up and developed in political satire but it was shunned in polite literature as the most visible manifestation of the corruption of the book trade. (4)
began to sour. Although he would continue to publish and advertise Byron’s works for another three years, it is clear that the repeated association of Byron’s literary labels with radical publishers and politics was a crucial element of their falling out. On 29 October 1822 Murray wrote Byron of:

the universal disappointment and condemnation which has followed publication of the first number of the “Liberal” […] really Lord Byron it is dreadful to think upon your association with such outcasts from Society, it is impossible, I am sure, that you can conceive any thing like the horrid sensation created in the mind of the public by this connexion, unless you were here to feel it. (LJM 455)

The use of “association” and “connexion” here again illustrate Murray’s understanding of literary branding: the right class of readers ensured a publication’s success. This was a primary concern for John Murray, as is revealed in his very first letter to Byron, which urged some minor changes in CHP I and II; after gently pointing out his concern over “some expressions […] concerning Spain & Portugal” and “some religious feelings which may deprive me of some customers amongst the Orthodox,” Murray urges Byron to consider that he is “raising a Monument that will outlive [his] present feelings, and it should therefore be so constructed as to excite no other associations than those of respect and admiration for your Lordships Character and Genius” (LJM 3). This scrupulous approach to managing the associations of his author’s literary labels exemplifies Murray’s attempts to protect his star poet’s fame.

Murray goes on to describe his reading of Don Juan cantos VI-IX, which he had received from Kinnaird, in similar terms of the connections and associations for names and labels:

I declare to you, these were so outrageously shocking that I would not publish them – if you would give me your estate – Title - & Genius – For heavens sake revise them, they are equal in talent to any thing you have written, & it is therefore well worth while to extract what would shock the feeling of every man in the Country - & do your name everlasting injury. My Company used to be courted for the pleasure of talking about you – it is totally the reverse now - & by a re-action, even your former works are considerably deteriorated in Sale – It is impossible for you to have a more purely attached friend than I am, my name is connected with your fame – and I beseech you to take care of it […] (LJM 455-56)
How different this was in tone, if not in argument, from the start of their professional relationship. On 18 November 1813 Murray had written to Byron “I do assure your Lordship that I am truly proud of being distinguished as your publisher” (*LJM* 48). In a letter to Blackwood on 5 January 1816 Murray had admitted “I have, according to our respective situations, as much to resign in my property in [Byron’s] name and fame as he has” (qtd. in *LJM* 152n). If the newspaper advertisements during the “Years of Fame” 1811-16 reveal the association of the names Murray and Byron in the public imagination, those placed during the years 1817-22 reveal a growing disjunction between the connotations of those names, and the destructive influence this process had.

3.8 Conclusion

To return to the problem posed by Byron in the *Prophecy of Dante*, if we grant that the “Sons of Fame” were indeed named most often in the nation’s newspapers, what was the cumulative effect of all these mentions upon their reception and interpretation? First, it must be asserted outright that we can draw no easy equivalencies between modern commodity branding and literary branding, let alone Romantic-era literary branding. Second, we must not assume that publishers or authors exercised all-powerful or prescient brand-management over the use or meaning of their literary labels. Especially in extreme cases like that of Byron, the control and meaning of an author’s literary labels could be contested in the daily newspapers.128

What then was the effect of literary advertising during the Romantic period? In 1806 Murray wrote to Constable, explaining his belief that advertising could increase sales and help fix the reputation of a book during the critical period *between* its first publication and first review.

> It is inconceivable how effectually the continued advertising of a book long previous to publication operates upon people in the country, and upon the booksellers, who, having heard the book mentioned, and having received orders for it, subscribe voraciously; and, indeed, it occasions many people to order or buy the book immediately, who would otherwise have waited for the opinion of

128 Unfortunately, we cannot extrapolate too much from Byron’s case to all authors during the era, precisely because his fame was so exceptional.
their Review, and, had this proved cold or unfavourable, would not have been purchasers. (qtd. in Mozer Don Juan 220)

In Murray’s own account literary advertising operates by making readers familiar with literary labels before they can be subjected to framing by periodical criticism.

While the critical tradition has often equated periodical criticism with the contemporary reception of a publication, in RNR P St Clair downplays the influence of reviews, pointing out the often-lengthy time lag between publication and review during the period.

In general […] the influence of the reviews appears to have been greatly exaggerated both at the time and by subsequent writers. Given the time differences between the publication, selling, and reading of a book and the appearance and circulation of the review notices in the literary reviews, it would be misleading to regard them as normally intermediating in the market like the book pages of modern newspapers. During the romantic period many newly published books were bought, read, and opinions formed on them weeks before the literary reviews appeared.129 (188)

Romantic-era literary advertisements likely do hold some clues to how books were thought of before the reviews had time to influence things; indeed, it is conceivable that influence might have flowed in the other direction, and that Romantic-era periodical criticism reflected or at least acknowledged the initial reactions of readers to literary labels to a far greater extent than has been previously acknowledged.

In any case, the notion of a critical delay between advertising and review in turn raises the spectre of a much more serious issue: that of simplification. In the first chapter of Public Opinion, Walter Lippman points out that there must always be a time lag between the world as it really is and the image of it in our minds. Modern man does not adapt to his environment

129 This might well hold true for the advertising of unknown authors or books, but, as this preliminary case study of Byron’s advertising has hinted at, the situation with famous authors was rather different. Famous authors accumulated literary labels and associations as they published new works, and a confluence of interpretation, parody, imitation and criticism aggregated around them. In other words, Don Juan’s reception was invariably shaped by Childe Harold’s.
directly, but rather to the “pseudo-environment” (15) provided to him by his media. Because the world is infinitely complex, and time and attention are limited, out of necessity we simplify events and public personages into stereotypes and symbols that obscure the true state of the world as much as they illuminate it. More often than not in such a simplifying process judgment precedes evidence, and decisions are seemingly made by the crudest of caricatures in our minds, or the vague preference for one metaphor over another. In Byron’s case such a process may have been crucial. As Bertrand Russell points out in his History of Western Philosophy:

The world insisted on simplifying [Byron], and omitting the element of pose in his cosmic despair and professed contempt for mankind. Like many other prominent men, he was more important as a myth than as he really was. As a myth, his importance, especially on the Continent, was enormous. (752)

The building blocks of this myth circulated and were triggered by the various deployments or uses of Byron’s literary labels, most frequently in Romantic-era newspapers. Although literary advertising, whether legitimate or illegitimate, played an important role in this process, it wasn’t the only way in which Byron was branded with common or popular associations. Misreadings and misattributions may have had as much to do with the meaning of Byron’s labels as the official Byron advertisements did. And this is where the secondary figurative sense of the term brand comes into play. Recall that the OED records the one figurative use of brand as “to set a mental mark of ownership upon; also, to impress (a fact, an event) indelibly on one’s memory” and another as “to mark or stamp with infamy, stigmatize.” Perhaps one cannot have the one without the other? To impress Byron indelibly on one’s memory may have required branding him with the very same associations which were later to stigmatize him, to turn him into a disease, Byronism. We are conditioned by the mental habits of Romantic ideology to attribute to Byron a power and an agency he did not have. In any case, it is worth recalling that Byron died young, in exile from his country, questioning the purpose of his poetry and his life.
“Wordsworth, where he is indeed Wordsworth”: authorial adjectives, metaphors, and semantic attribution

4.1 What does “Wordsworthian” mean?

WORDSWORTH, where he is indeed Wordsworth, may be mimicked by Copyists, he may be plundered by Plagiarists, but he can not be imitated, except by those who are not born to be imitators. (141-42)

In his analysis of Wordsworth’s poetry in *Biographia Literaria* Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggests an interesting paradox at the heart of our understanding of authorship: authors are not always themselves. How can this be? Where is Wordsworth really Wordsworth? How do we know where he is and where he isn’t? For the purposes of this chapter let us assume that Coleridge is employing metonymy or synecdoche, either substituting a cause for an effect, or a whole for a part. In other words, he is using some abstract concept of *Wordsworth* to read Wordsworth’s poetry and implying that Wordsworth, where he is not *Wordsworth*, is less worthy of our consideration than where he is, indeed, *Wordsworth*.

Coleridge’s troubling logic is still quite common to our habits of language and thought, despite the interventions of New Critics or poststructuralists. We still say we read Wordsworth over the summer, or that we love Keats – by which we mean, of course, their work. But this slip of grammar indicates a slip of thought. Wordsworth the celebrity subject is too often conceived of as some kind of personification of a characteristic subset of his poetry; his biographies are invariably *Wordsworthian*. Despite a century of revision and criticism, Romantic notions of genius stubbornly persist in our thinking about authorship in general, and about Wordsworth in particular. Criticism has all too often unconsciously sided with Wordsworth’s 1807 assertion that “every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen” (*Letters* 150).

If it has been too easy to attribute the creation of the *Wordsworthian* to Wordsworth alone, it is not without cause. Modern discourses as diverse as biography, literary criticism, and modern

---

130 As Northrop Frye puts it “we read the poem, not the poet, except by a figure of speech” (*Fearful Symmetry* 117).
copyright law seem foundationally and perhaps inextricably built upon the Romantic conception of genius. As Christine Haynes argues in “Reassessing ‘Genius’ in Studies of Authorship,” the Romantic conception of the original genius remains our dominant model of authorship despite the careful efforts of scholars to subvert or avoid it. Even the most careful scholarship can reify the Romantic cult if only through evidence of that care.

The process of defining what “Wordsworthian” means is very much complicated by the fact that few authors have received as much sustained attention as Wordsworth has. Readers now have a bewildering array of scholarly resources for reading Wordsworth, all of which can (and should) influence their associations with Wordsworth’s literary labels in various ways. From the perspective of literary branding as this thesis has defined it, the long history of Wordsworth criticism could be viewed as a debate over the popular associations with the poet’s literary labels. For Keith Hanley (and presumably for most other scholars and educators doing scholarship within the modern university system) a serious reader of Wordsworth is one who reads Wordsworth’s poetry with critical sophistication and nuance, in light of the findings of textual criticism and book history. Such a reader must be choosy, particularly when it comes to selecting primary texts:

Students of Wordsworth are confronted with an unusual array of different editions, especially of the poetry, which represent much more than commercial competition. Some of the leading issues in contemporary textual criticism have been pioneered in the conception of these editions as they have progressively sought to redefine the poet’s works. So much is this so that an informed choice of texts must nowadays be the basis of any serious engagement with Wordsworth’s writings. (246)

The implication here is that the history of Wordsworth criticism has “progressively” redefined “the poet’s works,” while textual scholarship or biographic studies have come closer and closer to a true understanding of the poet and his poetry. There is a lot to be said in favour of such an argument. Some of the most important resources include the standard multi-volume complete editions such as The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (5 vols.), edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbyshire; or William Wordsworth: The Poems (2 vols.), edited by John O. Hayden; or The Cornell Wordsworth Edition (21 vols.), edited by Stephen Parrish et al.
Serious readers can also consult individual poems in collections such as *The Music of Humanity: A Critical Study of Wordsworth’s ‘Ruined Cottage’ incorporating Texts from a Manuscript of 1799-1800* (1969), or *William Wordsworth: The Prelude, The Four Texts* (1995) edited by Jonathan Wordsworth. Of course there are the collections of the standard complete letters too, such as *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* (6 vols.), edited by Ernest de Selincourt, or the 2nd edition of the same under the general editorship of Alan G. Hill (8 vols.). Then there are the numerous bibliographies, concordances, chronologies, and biographies. In addition to all this, Hanley estimates that “over 120 full-length critical studies [of Wordsworth’s poetry] were written during the twentieth century” (252) alone. It should be obvious from this long and complex critical history that the meaning of such literary labels as “the Lyrical Ballads,” “Wordsworth,” or “Wordsworthian” can by no means be considered unitary, unchanging, or undisputed.\(^{131}\)

Yet it must be admitted that this wealth of scholarship tends to skew our understanding of the reception of those labels in certain ways, tending to encourage the study of complex literary engagements and tending to ignore passing references or uses of them in more ephemeral mediums like periodicals, newspapers, or conversation. In other words, modern readers can read Wordsworth in a way that his contemporaries never could, and serious readers of Wordsworth have tended to privilege certain mediums of transmission for his literary labels over others. Most of the aforementioned acts of scholarly interpretation and reinterpretation are printed on high-quality paper in high-prestige scholarly genres, and reside in multiple copies throughout the libraries of the world. For the most part, these sources encourage us to consider complex, time-consuming, and often idiosyncratic responses to Wordsworth’s literary labels. There is of course nothing wrong with this, as the complexity of good literary scholarship quite obviously

\(^{131}\) Indeed, Hanley emphasizes that certain critical works have changed our notions of these labels more than others. For example, according to Hanley Geoffrey Hartman’s *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814* changed scholars’ reading of Wordsworth by offering a “broadly phenomenological approach to Wordsworth’s developing self-consciousness, or ‘consciousness of consciousness’” as well as the useful formulation that “‘a [Wordsworth] poem is… a reaction to… [an unusual state of] consciousness as well as its expression’” (qtd. in Hanley 252).
contributes to its pleasure and usefulness. However, what about more simple interactions with the labels, or their employment in more compressed and ephemeral genres of transmission? Are these too not to be considered as important indicators of Wordsworth’s reception?

Some attempts have been made to investigate the reactions of common (or at least not well-known) readers of Wordsworth. If readers are interested in studying contemporary or nineteenth-century responses to Wordsworth’s literary labels, they may usefully consult scholarly works like Elsie Smith’s *An Estimate of William Wordsworth by His Contemporaries 1793-1822* (1932), Katherine M. Peek’s *Wordsworth in England: Studies in the History of his Fame* (1943), Peter Swaab’s *Wordsworth, Lives of the Great Romantics by their Contemporaries*, vol. 3 (1996), Stephen Gill’s *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (1998), or Robert Woof’s *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage* (2001). But again, we must acknowledge that the bulk of the primary material recorded in these works favours certain mediums of transmission (i.e. letters, periodical reviews, journals, memoirs, etc.) rather than others. Stephen Gill, in particular, has made a determined attempt to examine or at least to acknowledge that there must have been a much larger debate about the meaning of Wordsworth’s labels going on in mediums of transmission that we now have few records of.

The preacher who invokes *Tintern Abbey* from the pulpit; the publisher who spots a niche in the gift-book market; the critic whose visibility is enhanced by a full-dress reappraisal of Wordsworth’s contemporary significance; novelists and poets who draw on Wordsworth; environmental activists who summon Wordsworth to their cause; and solitary readers whose motions of heart and imagination are recorded only in a diary entry or a letter – all are involved in constructing and diffusing “Wordsworth,” and it is their acts that are the substance of this study. (*Victorians* 3)

This chapter, arguing along similar lines, will argue that in order to begin to answer what *Wordsworthian* as a concept means we should interrogate what “Wordsworthian” as a word means. Before studying the concept in the abstract we should begin with an interrogation of what the authorial adjective signifies and how it operates. In Gill’s terms, we should interrogate the concept’s “construction” and “diffusion.”
Ultimately, this chapter argues that one interesting way of determining historical responses to literary labels is to investigate how those labels are deployed metaphorically. Like the other chapters in this thesis, this will involve tracking and analyzing a cluster of interrelated literary labels through the newspapers and periodicals of the period. In addition to examining a number of passing references that have seldom (if ever) been considered worthy of investigation before, it will consider some of the most famous uses of the term “Wordsworthian” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Ruskin, and Matthew Arnold. All of this is done in hopes that such an investigation can shed some light upon the meaning and deployment of the concept during the Romantic period, and further explore some of the critical problems raised by literary branding.

4.2 Author names as adjectives, metaphors, and superordinate categories

Is the formation of authorial adjectives like “Wordsworthian” evidence of a sort of linguistic canonization, as David Crystal has recently suggested with reference to Henry Fowler?

No book had more influence on twentieth-century attitudes to the English language in Britain than Henry Fowler’s *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*. Within a few years, people no longer felt it necessary even to mention the title and talked simply of “Fowler.” Adjectives soon followed – Fowlerian, Fowlerish, Fowleresque – and he eventually received the ultimate linguistic accolade, of being turned into a common noun. (vii)

As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, having his name turned into a common noun could hardly be said to have been the ultimate accolade for John Duns Scotus. Indeed, the process by which “Fowler” became “Fowlerian” seems troublingly similar to that which turned “John Duns Scotus” into “dunce.” Perhaps authorial adjectives operate as something more akin to caricature or burlesque, whereby certain elements of an author’s work are exaggerated and are thereby made more memorable. Certainly some abstract and transferable notion of the *Wordsworthian* was routinely used by his critics and enemies to denigrate Wordsworth’s poetics or to identify (often inferior) resemblances with his typical subject matter, tone, or style. As David A. Kent and D. R. Ewen illustrate in their collection of *Romantic Parodies 1797-1831*, Wordsworth was “the Romantic poet most widely parodied” (17). Wordsworth was parodied in Robert Southey’s “Inscriptions Under an Oak” (1799); in the *European Magazine*’s “Barham Downs; or Goody
Grizzle and Her Ass” (1801); in the Satirist’s “Lines originally intended to have been inserted in the last Edition of Wordsworth’s Poems” (1811); in James and Horace Smith’s Rejected Addresses (1812); in James Hogg’s “The Flying Tailor” (1816); in John Keats’ “The Gothic Looks Solemn” (1817), and in The Letter-Box’s “The Old Tolbooth” (1818). The publication of Peter Bell in 1819 was accompanied by a number of well-known parodies, one of which appeared before the public in the days before the original was published. All of these parodies might be said to be Wordsworthian insofar as they are recognizable as imitations of Wordsworth’s poetry. When we examine the deployment of the concept of the Wordsworthian during the Romantic period, such complex and well-known literary parodies turn out to be merely the tip of the iceberg. The concept appeared in any number of shorter ad hoc comparisons during the period, as this chapter will briefly attempt to demonstrate by analyzing historical uses of “Wordsworthian” both as adjective and noun, as well as by examining instances of the derivatives “Wordsworthianism” and “Wordsworthy.”

But first we must turn our attention to what an authorial adjective is and how it operates. In “Proper Names and the Theory of Metaphor,” the linguist Lionel Wee outlines an argument that can help us understand the use of authorial names as adjectives, metaphors, and superordinate categories. According to Wee,

Metaphorically used proper names have not generally been recognized as worthy of special attention. However, precisely because proper names have been regarded as raising interesting philosophical and cognitive questions, it is worth asking if they might also raise interesting questions when used in metaphors. (369)

Wee outlines two models that have been used by linguists to explain the use of MPNs, or “metaphorically used proper name[s]” (356). The first is a “correspondence-based model of metaphor [which] assumes that metaphors are essentially analogical in character” (359). The correspondence-based model assumes that the metaphoric comparison between the source and

---

132 The precise historical number of such comparisons is unknown and, in an ultimate sense, unknowable. However, as I will suggest in the conclusion of this thesis, a Literary Labels Database (LLD) might begin to collect such references together in one place and begin to analyze them collectively (and possibly even quantitatively).
the target domains is systematic and sustained.\textsuperscript{133} In other words, the reason why we recognize something to be \textit{Wordsworthian} is because there is a sufficient set of correspondences or resemblances between Wordsworth’s poetry and the thing in question to sustain the comparison. This is the logic behind pastiche and parody.\textsuperscript{134} Once such a connection is made we can then use the source domain (Wordsworth and his poetry) to interpret the target domain (the \textit{Wordsworthian} thing). Or, as Wee puts it: “once an optimally aligned set of correspondences has been created, predicates that are part of the source-domain knowledge are projected onto the target in order to allow for inferences about the target to be generated” (360).

The second model Wee puts forth to explain MPNs is a “class-inclusion model [where] the source is treated as a prototypical instantiation of a larger, newly-created superordinate category, which is then seen as encompassing both source and target domains” (360). The class-inclusion model does not assume a systematic or sustained comparison based upon a set of correspondences or resemblances, but rather assumes that each MPN constructs “an ad hoc nonce superordinate category” (361) of which the source is seen as a prototypical member. In other words, when Wordsworth’s name is used metaphorically, Wordsworth (or his poetry by metonymic substitution) is invoked as the prototypical member of an ad hoc category (i.e. the \textit{Wordsworthian}) constructed upon the occasion of the comparison.

Wee concludes that most MPN uses are better explained by the class inclusion model than the correspondence model, because many uses of MPNs are not part of systematic and sustained analogies, but rather ad hoc comparisons that highlight only a couple of the popular associations with the source name. According to Wee: “because a name identifies a particular entity, and given that any entity can be described in any number of ways, the name simply creates an ad hoc

\textsuperscript{133} This is perhaps the traditional model employed for the understanding of metaphor. For example, W. K. Wimsatt defines metaphor as a comparison where “two clearly and substantially named objects (denotation) are brought into such a context that they face each other with fullest relevance and illumination (connotation)” (149).

\textsuperscript{134} As Linda Hutcheon points out, “the vehicle or parodied text has to be recognized by readers for the parody to be perceived, first of all, and then fully understood” (9-10).
category, whose precise nature will vary depending on the particular description the entity happens to be associated with” (369). For this reason, a theory of literary branding would render every appearance of an MPN uniquely interesting. Interestingly for the purposes of this chapter, this second model suggests that there is a connection between the use of authorial adjectives and other metaphorical or analogical uses of an author’s name. Both the application of the adjective “Wordsworthian” and the use of “Wordsworth” as a metaphor involve the creation of a superordinate category, of which Wordsworth is perhaps the finest example, and/or some sort of conceptual blend of the characteristics of this category with the target domain employed in the comparison.

Rather than accept one model and reject the other, it is useful to consider that either could be usefully applied in different situations, at different levels of complexity. To illustrate, let me provide an example of my own creation:

(1) Che Guevara was a twentieth-century Byron.
(2) Byron was a nineteenth-century Che Guevara.

The precise meaning of these names is different in each assertion. In other words, different elements of each domain are activated or highlighted in each comparison. In (1) the domain Byron presumably highlights the poetic elements of the domain Che Guevara because Byron is a famous poet. In (2) the domain Che Guevara presumably highlights the revolutionary elements of the domain Byron because Che Guevara is a famous revolutionary.135 One could imagine that either of these ad hoc comparisons could be turned into a more systematic analogy in a medium of greater length and complexity such as in an essay or a book. For these reasons, when considering the use of an author’s name as a metaphor, we need to acknowledge that differences

135 A fictional character’s name or a book title can be equally as evocative and useful for these sorts of comparison as an author’s name. Consider the following assertion: “The history of Romanticism is little more than the appearance of one Frankenstein after another.” Rather than being merely nonsensical, surely this statement is interesting from some critical point of view. It may not be apt, but it does some cultural work. Arguably, it is precisely in the looseness and abstraction of this statement that its strength and interest reside. Which particular authors, and which of their works, might be invoked by it? What is the meaning of “Frankenstein” exactly and how does it map onto our literary memories of other Romantic authors?
of medium and complexity matter, and that the concept of an author, while invariably loose, is always to some degree metaphoric. The evocative looseness of the *Wordsworthian* may be responsible for the endurance and usefulness of the concept (and others like it) in literary history.\(^{136}\)

As this chapter will attempt to demonstrate, the simplification, abstraction, and extension of Wordsworth and his poetry into the *Wordsworthian* creates a mental schema useful to the broader cultural needs of the day. But in the process Wordsworth’s attributed essence is caricatured and exposed to ridicule and imitation, which can lead to a critical backlash. As Wimsatt points out, the semantic traffic in a metaphoric comparison flows both ways. Yes, when readers encounter an MPN they necessarily use their understanding of the source domain to better understand the target domain of the comparison. But we can also reverse engineer the MPN and use the target domain to get an indication of the reader’s understanding of the source. In other words, the ad hoc nature of each comparison activates specific parts of the source domain, giving us an indication of a reader’s mentality by giving us a specific target domain with which the author is compared.\(^{137}\)

Consider the following example. In *Modern Painters* (1856), John Ruskin praised the French dramatist Molière by describing one of his poems as “*Wordsworthian.*”

\(^{136}\) The *OED* has entries for Blakeian, Browningese, Browningesque, Browningite, Burnsonian, Byronic, Byronian, Byronical, Byronish, Chaucerian, Chattertonian, Coleridgian, Darwinian, Keatsian, Miltonian, Miltonic, Patmorial, Patmorean, Poundian, Popean, Praedian, Praedesque, Rossettian, Shakesperian, Shelleyan, Southeyan, Spencerian, Spenserian, Swinburnian, Tennysonian, Thomsonian, Thompsonian, Whitmanesque, Whitmanish, Whitmanian, Whitmannic, Wordsworthy, and Wordsworthian.

\(^{137}\) Through this device perhaps we could perhaps begin to quantify the history of reception in new and exciting ways, keeping in mind, of course, the caveat that quantification destroys information (by ignoring some degree of context) and thus biases our models of the world towards those things that are easiest to count. If we wish to wisely apply the power of quantification to the study of literature and literary history, we should always seek to find more difficult and interesting things to count, and never mistake our quantifications for truth. A number is a categorization and representation of something; it is not the thing itself.
Living in the blindest period of the world's history, in the most luxurious city, and the most corrupted court, of the time, he yet manifests through all his writings an exquisite natural wisdom; a capacity for the most simple enjoyment; a high sense of all nobleness, honour, and purity, variously marked throughout his slighter work, but distinctly made the theme of his two perfect plays—the Tartuffe and Misanthrope; and in all that he says of art or science he has an unerring instinct for what is useful and sincere, and uses his whole power to defend it, with as keen a hatred of everything affected and vain. And, singular as it may seem, the first definite lesson read to Europe in that school of simplicity of which Wordsworth was the supposed originator among the mountains of Westmorland, was, in fact, given in the midst of the court of Louis XIV, and by Molière. The little canzonet “J’aime mieux ma mie,” is, I believe, the first Wordsworthian poem brought forward on philosophical principles, to oppose the schools of art and affectation.

This brief clarification of Molière’s essence also clarifies Wordsworth’s essence. The use of Wordsworth as a metaphor for reading Molière creates a certain mapping between them, a blended space where a reader’s memories of Wordsworth’s poetry are recalled (and perhaps altered) by their interactions with their memories of Molière. Because these two authorial concepts can be conceived of in terms of overlapping sets of associations, we can use a Venn diagram to visualize their metaphoric interaction.
Fig. 59 A diagram of John Ruskin’s use of “Wordsworthian.”

The overlapping space between the domain *Molière* and the domain *Wordsworth* is what is being referred to here as “Wordsworthian.” By the implication of this passage, Wordsworth too manifests “exquisite natural wisdom; a capacity for the most simple enjoyment; a high sense of all nobleness, honour, and purity.” Not only is he, like Molière, a practitioner of a creed of simplicity in his works, he is a vocal and passionate defender of it: “in all that he says of art or science he has an unerring instinct for what is useful and sincere, and uses his whole power to defend it, with as keen a hatred of everything affected and vain.” But Ruskin is too subtle to mistake the caricature of Wordsworth invoked in this comparison for the poet himself. Indeed, Ruskin suggests “Wordsworth” is merely a cliché, just a popular association with a poetic “school of simplicity” that in truth predates him. And so he writes that Wordsworth is merely “the supposed originator [of the school] among the mountains of Westmorland.”138 In other words, a useful literary schema has been attributed (perhaps wrongly) to Wordsworth.

Any metaphoric use of a literary label is interesting therefore insofar as it illustrates the tendency to divide the literary imagination into distinct categories associated with specific literary labels. Under this system, knowledge about literary tropes, methods, genres, authorial voices, etc. attach to the most basic mnemonic devices: names. If we knew which associations readers commonly made with certain literary labels at specific historical moments, we would have a detailed and variegated indication of reader reception. Perhaps the ultimate meaning of the *Wordsworthian* is identical with the set of all the things that Wordsworth has ever been compared with.139 If

---

138 The specific geographical reference to “Westmorland” here may have invoked an assorted set of popular literary labels (i.e. “Lake School,” “Lakers,” “Lake Poets,” etc.) that circulated during the period, constellating the literary conversations of the day.

139 Could we begin to quantify or automate such a process, perhaps aided by a statistical analysis of the collocations of words surrounding each MPN? Perhaps we could determine which elements were most central to Wordsworth’s fame. Although a French Wordsworth would presumably advocate the healing power and holiness of nature, use simple diction, and prefer rustic characters, he would *necessarily* not be English. Wouldn’t the appearance of the statement “a French Wordsworth” suggest that, for this particular speaker in this particular moment, the
observations like this are interesting enough for further scholarly investigation, then it is worth asking if there could be a way of systematically counting similar instances or otherwise comparing uses, so as to come to an understanding of the meaning of a literary label in aggregate.

There are a couple of theoretical problems with this sort of approach that need to be addressed right away. First, metaphors are notoriously slippery and hard-to-define. We cannot be certain that any conception of the Wordsworthian, however configured, is a stable or clearly defined one. And yet, while we need to bear in mind that the concept is a loose one, and that it can be deployed in a myriad of ways, it also seems clear that it is unlikely that it triggered radically divergent or incommensurably idiosyncratic interpretations from readers, or such demonstrably common concepts as the Wordsworthian would be incomprehensible.

The wide range of cultural schemas and associations that can be named, remembered, and used in conjunction with literary labels in this manner is intriguing. So is the somewhat arbitrary nature of the attribution, which limits author’s essences to a subset of their writing while simultaneously giving them too much credit, often for things that have been attributed to them against their will. Suppose, for instance, one were asked to select a poem that is most characteristic of Wordsworth, and one chose “A slumber did my spirit seal.”

concept of Englishness isn’t as central to the category Wordsworthian as the concepts of simplicity or nature?

Despite these difficulties with this approach, there are a couple of legitimate and well-respected scholarly ventures which follow similar methodologies: the Oxford English Dictionary, which derives generalized definitions assumed to have some wider correspondence among communities of English speakers from individual historical uses, and the Reading Experience Database, which records ephemeral records of reading experiences.

As Peter Thorslev has pointed out, all the elements of the Byronic hero predated Byron. And as Chapter 3 has shown, the sheer mass of criticism, copying, and parodying of Byron’s supposedly characteristic qualities was instrumental in the branding of the poet’s literary labels with semantic content.
A slumber did my spirit seal,
I had no human fears:
She seem’d a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force
She neither hears nor sees
Roll’d round in earth’s diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees!

Of course one could make an argument for why and how these lines are particularly Wordsworthian. But isn’t the selection of them already committing us to a particular version of Wordsworth? Why not derive a sense of the Wordsworthian from his Ecclesiastical Sonnets or from any of the other poems he wrote in the 1830s? Of course, careful readers and critics will be sure to discriminate between the young Wordsworth of the Lyrical Ballads and the later, more conservative Wordsworth. But where are such lines to be drawn? How can we be sure, as many readers are, that the earlier Wordsworth is the more authentic or the more Wordsworthian Wordsworth? These synecdochic tendencies of criticism and interpretation present rather tricky philosophical problems. Which elements of an author’s voice, tone, or imagery should we consider most essential to them? Which of their texts are their most characteristic, and why? Can we reasonably expect that every line Wordsworth writes is equally Wordsworthian?

The second theoretical problem is this: while the use of the term “Wordsworthian” can provide us with some evidence of what certain readers thought of the concept of the Wordsworthian, it is by no means the only construction that we would need to consider in order to uncover popular associations with Wordsworth’s literary labels. For example, a July 1819 review in The European Magazine asserted the following:

It would be well for the sons and daughters of the present age, if such poetry, as that which [the Musae Biblicae, or Poetry of the Bible] contains, were suffered to have more influence over their minds than the prurient imagery of a Byron, the morbid sensibility of a Wordsworth, and the fabled inanities of a Scott. (76:157)
This quotation offers us a glimpse of certain popular associations with the concepts of the *Byronic*, the *Wordsworthian*, and the coordinate concept for Walter Scott, at this particular moment in literary history. That such descriptions seem little better than simplistic caricatures or exaggerations of certain tendencies in these authors should not lead us to dismiss them out of hand. The association of Byron with “prurient imagery,” Wordsworth with “morbid sensibility,” and Scott with “fabled inanities” seems appropriate at some limited level of analysis. Each of these references offers a short-hand description of the semantic content often associated with their authors’ literary labels and used to remember or interpret their works. Such fleeting references are not just indications of contemporary reception but, arguably, indications of the most basic semantic structures at the heart of each author’s fame. It is not difficult to imagine that these same schemas underlie the more sophisticated and nuanced readings of these authors by the best literary critics. One of the principal reasons for the simplicity of the former and the nuance of the latter seems to lie with the complexity of the representations that their medium of transmission allows for. The representation of Wordsworth in the *European Magazine* quotation above is much more compressed and simplistic than the representations of Wordsworth in either Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* or Hazlitt’s *Spirit of the Age*, and yet it is arguably no less *Wordsworthian*. Such an observation correlates with one of the broad arguments of this thesis:

---

142 While Scott’s name is difficult to turn into an authorial adjective and seldom (if ever) appears as such, it seems peculiarly apt that his name coincides so closely with the semantic content that his writing is associated with: Scotland. For many readers in the nineteenth century Scotland was known as “Scott’s land.” This formulation has reappeared with regularity. For example, the June 1902 edition of Harper’s magazine featured an article by William Sharp entitled “Walter Scott’s land.” More recently, Stuart Kelly has written a book entitled *Scott-land: The Man Who Invented a Nation* (2010).

143 Thomas Barnes used the phrase “morbid sensibility” to describe Wordsworth in an essay signed “Strada” in *Champion* on 28 May 1814:

> Another fault, ascribed to Mr. Wordsworth, belongs rather to his habits of life than to his system of opinions: he has a morbid sensibility which extracts melancholy out of every object, and impresses itself so deeply on the minds of his careful readers, as might unhinge them for the common business of life. Such, at least, is the opinion even of some who admire him. (*Critical Heritage* 343)
that literary branding is best understood as a form of criticism that abandons the advantages of complexity for the advantages of compression.

Just as an indefinite article abstracts Wordsworth and his work to the point where it can be applied to other objects in the cultural field, pluralizing an authorial name also abstracts a heuristic device from the denoted subject. Consider the case of the *Vindications of the Rights of Woman* discussed in Chapter 2. As argued there, if readers read Wollstonecraft’s work at all, they tended to read it only after encountering her literary labels in contexts that associated them with various arguments, sentiments, and reading constituencies. To what degree were such readers’ readings of *VRW* shaped by their previous encounter with elements of her literary brand? Can we determine with any precision what these elements consisted of or how widely they were distributed? If the objects in the cultural field that are typically compared or associated with a literary label help determine the meaning of that label, it stands to reason that a careful examination of every instance of an MPN could help build an aggregate picture of the meaning of that label. We have an example of an early use of an MPN in Mary Robinson’s *Letter to the Women of England*.

The same subject may be argued in a variety of ways; and though this letter may not display the philosophical reasoning with which “The Rights of Woman” abounded; it is not less suited to the purpose. For it requires a legion of Wollstonecrafts to undermine the poisons of prejudice and malevolence. (41)

Robinson here separates the connotative from the denotative: “a Wollstonecraft” is, by inference, any woman who can and will display some degree of philosophical reasoning in the defense of the rights of women. Such a reference does not necessarily activate the caricature of Wollstonecraft’s biography so frequently invoked by her political opponents. By turning Wollstonecraft’s name into a superordinate category, Robinson reclaims the associated literary label, “The Rights of Woman,” decoupling it from an automatic association with Wollstonecraft as celebrity subject. The biographical focus is lost, and with it, the automatic association of the subject of the rights of women with Wollstonecraft’s tragic personal history. Through a process of abstraction and compression Robinson distills a particular quintessence of the author from the work, the essence of *Wollstonecraft* from Wollstonecraft. In other words, the *Wollstonecraftian*
becomes a category or mental schema of its own, separate from either Wollstonecraft or her texts, though naturally applicable to them.

Similarly, the concept of the Wordsworthy is more simple and abstract than either Wordsworth or his poetry, and is thus transferable, at least for the purposes of comparison or analogy. From examples like these, it would seem our search for the historical meaning of concepts such as Wordsworthian should be broad enough to encompass a plenitude of linguistic formulations. What follows is a brief attempt to trace metaphoric uses of Wordsworth’s literary labels through the early history of Wordsworth’s reception.

4.3 Early uses of Wordsworth as a metaphor 1801-1819

The slow-building popular success of the *Lyrical Ballads* was evidently somewhat surprising to the people most closely involved in its production. Much as was the case with Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* in 1812, the publication that did the most to fix Wordsworth’s literary labels with associations had a very uncertain birth and could just have easily disappeared without a trace. As with *Childe Harold*, it is worth noting that it is only by virtue of the hindsight bias that the volume has come to seem so inevitable. Elsie Smith points out that in 1798 Joseph Cottle, the first publisher, “transferred the impression ‘at a loss’ to J. & A. Arch of Gracechurch Street, London” (29) because of the initially slow sales of the work, and perhaps because of Robert Southey’s largely negative critical assessment of it in the *Critical Review* in October 1798 (29-30). Indeed, until the appearance of a couple of positive reviews in the spring of 1799, it initially appeared as though the publication would be both a critical and popular failure, in which case Wordsworth might well have continued searching to find his poetic voice.\textsuperscript{144} In any case, after a fair amount of critical interest and encouragement from members of his coterie,

\textsuperscript{144} On 17 May 1792, Wordsworth wrote “The field of Letters is very extensive, and it is astonishing if we cannot find some little corner which with a little tillage will produce us enough for the necessities, nay even the comforts of life” (qtd in Elsie Smith 5).
Wordsworth decided to continue with the poetic experiment. On 10 September 1800, Dorothy Wordsworth wrote

William is going to publish a second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, with a second volume. He intends to give them the title of *Poems by W. Wordsworth*… The first volume sold much better than we expected, and was liked by a much greater number of people; not that we had ever much doubt of its finally making its way; but we knew that poems, so different from what have in general become popular immediately after their publication, were not likely to be admired all at once. The first volume, I have no doubt has prepared a number of purchasers for the second; and, independently of that, I think the second is much more likely to please the generality of readers. (qtd. in Elsie Smith 41)

As Dorothy points out, the sensibility and style of the *Lyrical Ballads* evidently seemed rather distinctive from other works of poetry, appearing “so different from what have in general become popular immediately after their publication.” This sense that there was a distinct difference begged for the invention of words to describe it, and the process of finding such words, over the course of the next few years, called forth a cluster of interrelated literary labels. One of the most obvious of these is “Wordsworthian.”

As an adjective “Wordsworthian” is defined by the *OED* as “Of, relating to, or characteristic of William Wordsworth or his style, language, or imagery; (of a poem) composed by, or in the style of, Wordsworth.” There is an inherent ambiguity in this definition about exactly who has created the *Wordsworthian* thing being described. To label a poem “Wordsworthian” is either to say that Wordsworth wrote it, or to say that someone writing like Wordsworth did. Many of the uses of the term seem to destabilize the boundaries between an authentic Wordsworth poem and an imitation. For example, one of the earliest uses of the term appears in a letter dated 14 March 1801, when Thomas Manning wrote to Charles Lamb,

---

145 It would be interesting to know which proportion of uses of “Wordsworthian” as an adjective refer to works written by Wordsworth, and which proportion to the exertions of other authors. Again, if we assembled a database of uses of the term, we could begin to interrogate such questions in a more systematic way.
I perused the Coleridgian & Wordsworthian letters. Sheer nonsense, by God. I wonder Coleridge (who I know is a poet – I don’t know that W. is not, but I’ll be damned if that be poetry he has passed upon us in the 2d Vol.) [...] To gravely, mind that, gravely tell us of a sheep drawn out of a hole, & chronicle the beggar’s two penny mishap – who is it, Pope or Swift that ridicules the poets who chronicle small beer? (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:104)  

Manning had been in correspondence with Lamb, who had encouraged him to read the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* and give his opinion of them. Here “Wordsworthian letters” clearly signifies the poems written by Wordsworth. But the very use of the term, coupled with the follow-up description of the grave tone with which Wordsworth treats lowly subjects, offers us an early definition of the characteristic tone and subject matter of the *Wordsworthian*.

If by 1800 the typical tone and subject matter of Wordsworth’s poetry was becoming recognizable among his admirers and detractors, so too was the simple diction of his verse. In his *British Critic* review of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in February 1801, John Stoddart deploys the authorial adjective “Darwinian” to distinguish Wordsworth’s simplicity of phrase from the elaborate “phraseology” of contemporary poets, thus suggesting by contrast a recognizably *Wordsworthian* diction.

A great part of this argument [Wordsworth’s Preface] would appear useless, had we not unhappily witnessed, in some striking instances, how much the public taste may be misled by affected pomp and false glitter of language. We cannot too often repeat, that the frippery and fustian of the Darwinian phraseology, is no more compatible with a just classical taste, than the heterogenous mixture of science and fancy is allowable in a poetical subject. (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:140)

Although Stoddart does not use the term “Wordsworthian” here, he does imply it by turning Darwin to “Darwinian” in the midst of distinguishing the characteristically simple “phraseology” of Wordsworth’s poetry.

---

146 This precedes the first use recorded in the *OED* by nine years.
There were three different senses of the concept of *Wordsworth* operating in the early years of Wordsworth’s fame (1798-1819). The first might be called the *Jeffreyan Wordsworth* after Francis Jeffrey’s popular negative portrayal of Wordsworth’s poems. According to Jeffrey the *Wordsworthian* mode was exemplified by simple ballads like “The Idiot Boy,” which seemingly combined rural characters (with funny uncouth names) with humdrum stories that gravely belaboured the pathos of rural occupations without the virtues of irony or levity. Many of the early reviews of Wordsworth rehash such a view, and it can probably be called the most common early critical opinion circulating in conjunction with Wordsworth’s literary labels. A second, and much rarer sense of the *Wordsworthian* emphasized the excessive self-preoccupation of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” and his poems and pronouncements like it. We might term this second sense the *Keatsian Wordsworth*, after John Keats’ now-famous description of the “wordsworthian or egotistical sublime.” The third and final sense of the *Wordsworthian* – what we might term the *Coleridgian Wordsworth* – argued for the utter originality and exclusivity of Wordsworth’s genius.

We have a large amount of anecdotal evidence that seems to suggest that the *Jeffreyan Wordsworth* was the understanding most likely to be taken by those readers who had the least exposure to Wordsworth’s poems, or by those who first encountered his poetry through either parodies or negative reviews. For much of the reading public during the first two decades of Wordsworth’s reception, the name of the poet was synonymous with the worst excesses of his imitators. John Taylor Coleridge would recall in 1839

> I went up to Oxford to the Commemoration, for the first time for twenty-one years, to see Wordsworth and Bunsen receive their degrees; and to me, remembering how old Coleridge inoculated a little knot of us with the love of Wordsworth, when his name was in general a bye-word, it was striking to witness the thunders of applause, repeated over and over again, with which he was greeted.

147 In terms of William St Clair’s argument about the correlation of print runs and access to texts with readers’ “mentalities,” it does seem significant that, at least for the first two decades of Wordsworth’s fame, common readers were much more likely to encounter Wordsworth in newspapers, periodicals, or parodies than in his own volumes.
in the theatre by Under-graduates and Masters of Arts alike. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:239)

There was a sense among Wordsworth’s admirers that these early harsh reviews and parodies were not based upon a reader’s experience of reading Wordsworth, but were instead a replacement for it. Indeed, Robert Southey went so far as to describe Peter Bayley’s satiric Poems in 1803 as an attempt to prevent readers from reading Wordsworth directly. In response to the particularly harsh critiques of Poems (1807), on 21 May 1807 Wordsworth wrote to Lady Beaumont

be assured that the decision of these persons has nothing to do with the Question; they are altogether incompetent judges. These people in the senseless hurry of their idle lives do not read books, they merely snatch a glance at them that they may talk about them. (247)

Wordsworth here represents those inspired by the views of Jeffrey as people who do not read his books but “merely snatch a glimpse at them that they may talk about them.” This distinction is significant, and suggests the formulation of literary branding proposed in this thesis. Wordsworth suggests that most of his critics have not actually read his poetry, but have merely formed opinions about it from other sources, particularly by the view put forth by Jeffrey in the Edinburgh Review.

Of course, Jeffrey’s critique itself cannot be considered the result of his not having carefully read or considered Wordsworth’s poems. However, it does seem to have been generally true that Jeffrey’s critique (or a caricature of it) seemed to agree with those readers who had only a brief acquaintance with Wordsworth’s works, or with those who came to them by way of periodical

148 A “bye-word” is defined by the OED as “A person or thing who becomes proverbial, as a type of specified characteristics; an object of scorn or contempt.”
149 “After having made up his own poems by scraps from Mr. Wordsworth’s, [Bayley] has had the baseness to attempt to ridicule Mr. Wordsworth, and has sneered at him by name; in the hope, that those of his readers who have never read the Lyrical Ballads, may be prevented from reading them by the contempt which he has thus expressed” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:165)
review. In 1881 William Whewell recounts his negative first assessment of Wordsworth in or around the year 1817: “My tastes were the common vulgar tastes of that day, the tastes to which the ‘Rejected Addresses’ so successfully appealed. I began our intercourse by ridiculing some passages, and especially the ‘solemnn bleat’ of the ‘Excursion.’” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:983).

In an unsigned review in *British Lady’s Magazine* Josiah Conder asserted that

> the name of no living poet is perhaps better known than that of Mr. Wordsworth, but there is no man whose works, if read, are less understood, or as to the merits or defects so many persons, capable of forming a judgment of their own, have taken their opinions upon trust. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:528)

It remains an interesting historical fact that many of the most famous parodies of Wordsworth were executed by authors who had not read Wordsworth or the particular Wordsworth poem they were parodying. For example, in his *Critical Memoir* (1839) Barron Field notes that James Smith, the author of “The Baby’s Debut” in the popular satire *Rejected Addresses* (1812) “like hundreds of others, knew nothing of Mr. Wordsworth’s poetry then, but what he had read in the Edinburgh Review itself” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:326). Neither John Hamilton Reynolds nor Percy Shelley actually read Wordsworth’s *Peter Bell* before writing their parodies of it (Critical Heritage 1:987n). In the latter half of the 1810s, this peculiar fact itself began to attract notice, which helped prepare for the popular critical reappraisal of Wordsworth and his poetry that this chapter will trace to the discussions about *Peter Bell* and *The River Duddon* in 1819-20. C. H. Terrot gave voice to this new understanding of Wordsworth when he wrote in the *Monthly Review* in May 1820 “Few poets have been more reviewed, or less read, than Wordsworth” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:1022).

One of the characteristic ways in which Jeffrey undermined Wordsworth is connected to the theory of metaphor discussed earlier, particularly to the suggestion that a literary label or name used as a metaphor creates a superordinate category of which the target is only one example. Interestingly, the *Jeffreyan* view of Wordsworth tends to express itself rhetorically by pluralizing
“Wordsworth” into “Wordsworths,” “Wordsworth & Co.,” or “the Lake poets.” For example, in a review of Crabbe’s Poems (1807), Jeffrey writes:

> There is one set of writers, indeed, from whose works those of Mr Crabbe might receive all that elucidation which results from contrast, and from an entire opposition in all points of taste and opinion. We allude now to the Wordsworths, and the Southeys, and Coleridges, and all that misguided fraternity, that, with good intentions and extraordinary talents, are laboring to bring back our poetry to the fantastical oddity and puling childishness of Withers, Quarles, or Marvel. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:224)

These sorts of constructions suggested that Wordsworth was a prototypical member of a crowded superordinate category of which he was only one – and perhaps not even the best – example. This view was supported by the popular idea that Wordsworth’s poems were written strictly to justify the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads as a revolutionary new “theory” or “system” of poetry.

---

150 Others recognized this line of attack in Jeffrey. In a letter to Jeffrey dated 13 August 1804, Francis Horner wrote: “I cannot forgive your expression, Wordsworth & Co.; he merits criticism, but surely not contempt; to class him with his imitators is the greatest of all contempt” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:128)

151 In an 1810 unsigned essay titled “The Living Poets of Great Britain” Walter Scott directly referenced Jeffrey’s review when he wrote

> With the name of Southey those of Coleridge and of Wordsworth are naturally and habitually associated. We do not hold, with the vulgar, that these ingenious and accomplished men are combined to overthrow the ancient land marks of our poetry, and bring back the days of Withers and of Quarles. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:295)

152 In an essay published in the New Monthly Magazine on 1 November 1820, Talfourd writes:

> Yet this is the mode by which popular Reviewers have attempted to depreciate Wordsworth – they have argued from his theories to his poetry, instead of examining the poetry itself – as if their reasoning was better than the fact in question, or as if one eternal image set up in the stateliest region of poesy, had not value to outweigh all the truths of criticism, or to atone for all its errors! (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:856).
This tendency to pluralize and abstract Wordsworth and his poetry can and did lead to the suggestion that Wordsworth was artfully imitating, parodying, or even plagiarizing himself. One of Jeffrey’s harshest critiques of Wordsworth came after the publication of *Poems* (1807):

> 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; nor can any thing give us a more melancholy view of the debasing effects of this miserable theory, than that it has given ordinary men a right to wonder at the folly and presumption of a man gifted like Mr. Wordsworth, and made him appear, in his second avowed publication, like a bad imitator of the worst of his former productions (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:200-1)

Sometimes this implication was more subtly handled, as in Jeffrey’s review of James and Horace Smith’s *Rejected Addresses* five years later in 1812:

> The next, in the name of Mr W Wordsworth, is entitled “The Baby’s Debut,” and is characteristically announced as intended to have been “spoken in the character of Nancy Lake, a girl eight years of age, who is drawn upon the stage in a child’s chaise, by Samuel Hughes, her uncle’s porter.” The author does not, in this instance, attempt to copy any of the higher attributes of Mr Wordsworth’s poetry; but has succeeded perfectly in the imitation of his mawkish affectations of childish simplicity and nursery stammering. We hope it will make him ashamed of his Alice Fell, and the greater part of his last volumes – of which it is by no means a parody, but a very fair, and indeed we think a flattering imitation (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:324).

Although Jeffrey takes care to note that Wordsworth is a talented poet whose work is capable of “higher attributes,” his poetry is rightly parodied for its “mawkish affectations of childish simplicity and nursery stammering.” Even more disastrously for Wordsworth, Jeffrey suggests that “The Baby’s Debut” is no mere parody, but that it could be considered a “flattering imitation” of the poet’s characteristic genius. Likewise, in October 1815, Jeffrey asserts: “*[The White Doe of Rylstone]* is just such a work, in short, as some wicked enemy of that school might

---

153 Thomas Noon Talfourd’s “An Attempt to Estimate the Poetical Talent of the Present Age” (1815) records that “Yet Mr. Wordsworth is regarded, by the great majority of readers, as an affected and childish rhymer, who vents a mawkish sensibility in miserable verses” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:847).
be supposed to have devised, on purpose to make it ridiculous” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:539). The suggestion that Wordsworth’s style was easy was particularly damaging. As an unsigned review in the Literary Gazette on 12 June 1819 asserted,

We confess without hesitation our general contempt for the Lake school, and for the powers that minister to it withal. What credit can be given for verses which any boy of ten years old could write? [30 lines parodying Wordsworth follow] But there is nothing to prevent this jingle of rhyme from going on to any extent: this poetry is as good (or as bad) as Mr. Wordsworth’s, and it was written by a friend in the few minutes that we were writing these observations. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:716-17)

This repeated and insidious attribution of the Wordsworthian to other poets and to imitations or parodies of his most famous works worked retroactively, seeming to call the naturalness of the originals themselves into question. Under such withering assault, it could seem as if Wordsworth’s originals were derivative.

Perhaps every author is judged and ultimately damned by their own metaphors, or by those most popularly attributed to them. One could certainly make such a case for Wordsworth. Certainly, once the literary label “Lake poet” or “Laker” and its variants were popularly associated with him, they could be metaphorically extended to suggest the smallness, banality, or provincialism of Wordsworth’s poetry. Byron’s dedication to Don Juan (1818) included just such a metaphoric extension of the Lake poets’ label:

You – Gentlemen! by dint of long seclusion
From better company, have kept your own
At Keswick, and, through still continued fusion
Of one another’s minds, at last have grown
To deem as a most logical conclusion,
That Poesy has wreaths for you alone:
There is a narrowness in such a notion,
Which makes me wish you’d change your lakes for Ocean. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:901-2)

154 John Williams points out that James Russell Lowell described The White Doe of Rylstone as the most “‘Wordsworthian’ of Wordsworth’s poems” (Critical Issues 120) in the 1870s.
Byron likewise refers to the Lake poets in a letter to John Murray on 23 April 1820 “I love Scott and Moore – and all the better brethren – but I hate & abhor that puddle of water-worms” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:907). Although these are particularly clever engagements with one of the unofficial Wordsworthian literary labels, they are not particularly uncommon. In 1820, Conder extrapolates from the metaphor of the Lake poets with reference to the river: “The River Duddon flows through a series of thirty-three sonnets which are for the most part of no ordinary beauty. Here and there, a little metaphysical mud, or a Lakish tincture, mingles with the stream, and it occasionally runs somewhat shallow” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:773). In fact, many of Wordsworth’s harshest critics made similar rhetorical gestures, echoing Jeffrey. In each case, the metaphoric extension of the associated label provides a quick and memorable form of literary criticism.

The second sense of the Wordsworthian circulating in the period was perhaps most famously illustrated by John Keats in a letter to Richard Woodhouse on 27 October 1818. Keats describes himself as the sort of poet that could be “distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime,” thus distinguishing his own anonymous poetics (“a poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence”) from the self-obsession and self-importance of Wordsworth’s approach, particularly in his most “lofty” blank verse meditations upon the formation of his own mind. I do not mean to imply that this negative version of Wordsworth corresponds to what Keats actually thought of the poet, only that his famous use of “Wordsworthian” here captures a distinct sense of the term in circulation during the period. This distinct yet less common use of the concept had surfaced from time to time in critiques of Wordsworth before Keats’ use of the term. For example, John Wilson, writing anonymously in Blackwood’s in June 1817, offered a similar definition of “Wordsworthian” as a characteristically out-of-place solemnity and self-importance:

The second part of the [Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns] contains Mr Wordsworth’s notions on biography, and these, we think, if modified and qualified, tolerably rational and judicious, though delivered with a most laughable solemnity and true Wordsworthian self-importance…” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:610)
It is worth pointing out that the *Jeffreyan* and the *Keatsian* senses of the *Wordsworthian* loosely correlate to Wordsworth’s various poetic modes. Whereas the *Jeffreyan* Wordsworth writes “*The Idiot Boy*” and over-sentimentalizes plebeian things most readers presumably found fundamentally unpoetic, the *Keatsian* Wordsworth writes “*Tintern Abbey*,” coolly overthrowing centuries of poetic practice, and good sense, and confidently compares himself to Milton; the first writes silly ballads belabouring the pathos of rural lives and occupations; the second writes self-indulgent and obscurantist blank verse obsessed with its own authorship. If the *Jeffreyan* Wordsworth was often referred to in conjunction with the words “system,” “philosophy,” or “school,” the *Keatsian* Wordsworth was often referred to in conjunction with the word “obscure” or “sensibility.”

The third sense of the *Wordsworthian* circulating in the period might be referred to as *Coleridgian*. This view was championed by Coleridge first in his conversation, letters, and notebooks, and then later publicly in his *Biographia Literaria*.155 This might be defined as the notion that Wordsworth is most *Wordsworthian* where he is at his best and cannot be imitated.156 Wordsworth’s greatest literary ally and critic often wrote of the distinctive qualities of his verse and tirelessly explained and attempted to define Wordsworth’s characteristic genius to others. For example, in a letter to Richard Sharp dated 15 January 1804, Coleridge wrote

> Wordsworth is a Poet, a most original Poet – he no more resembles Milton than Milton resembles Shakespere – no more resembles Shakespere than Shakespere resembles Milton – he is himself: and I dare affirm that he will hereafter be admitted as the first & greatest philosophical Poet – the only man who has effected a compleat and constant synthesis of Thought & Feeling and combined them with Poetic Forms” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:125)

---

155 Elsie Smith writes that “It was not until [Coleridge’s] Biographia Literaria that Wordsworth was understood” (42).

156 Coleridge defines Wordsworth’s characteristics in a number of different ways in *Biographia Literaria*. In Chapter XIV he writes that, in addition to Wordsworth’s ballads concerning rustic characters and situations, “Mr. Wordsworth added two or three poems written in his own character, in the impassioned, lofty, and sustained diction, which is characteristic of his genius” (qtd. in Elsie Smith 23). The phrase “lofty, and sustained diction” must refer to the blank verse of “*Tintern Abbey*” and not the simple diction of “*The Idiot Boy*.”
This relatively early description of Wordsworth’s poetry as immediately recognizable in both “Thought & Feeling” and “Poetic Form” is interesting insofar as it provides us with an indication of how for Coleridge the tone, subject matter, and simple diction of Wordsworth’s poetry formed a unique whole, a “compleat and constant synthesis.” Coleridge’s understanding of this synthesis combines Manning’s representation of Wordsworth’s characteristic tone and subject matter and Stoddart’s representation of Wordsworth’s characteristic style. And yet, unlike those critical opinions, which were liable to allow that the true essence of the Wordsworthian could be found in Wordsworth’s satirists or imitators, Coleridge argues that Wordsworth’s distinctive genius is something that cannot be imitated or exceeded. Wordsworth, where he is Wordsworth, cannot be imitated. Coleridge’s view slowly spread among the poet’s admirers, who may have had an interest in publicly defining and defending his poems.157

According to the OED, “Wordsworthian” first appears as an adjective in Coleridge’s notebooks in 1810.

Further, illustrate this damnable rage of judging by the faults, imprimis, instead as of yore by his excellences – (the School of Rafael – what did that mean? --The Flemish School – the Venetian School – the School of Milan &c – but now! The Southeian School, the Wordsworthian/ &c!! – O the spirit of envy & baseness & more than all, indolence of heart & mind amounting to & manifesting itself in an impotence of intelligent admiration) – & 2nd in pointing out as faults the conditio sine quâ non of the acknowledged beauties! (Notebooks 3: 3952).

One of the fascinating implications of this passage is that the “Wordsworthian” and “the School of Wordsworth” amount to the same thing: a damaging derivation from Wordsworth’s genius. Here Coleridge associates the use of the concept of the Wordsworthian with critics who focus upon the faults of Wordsworth rather than upon his “excellences.” Coleridge hints at the inherent

157 As I have suggested elsewhere, the transition from parlor performance to publication could be attended by a host of fears and insecurities, ranging from suspicions about mercenary motives to fears about the insincerity of writing for mass publication. But this literary environment also encouraged those with exclusive access to the poet or his poems to jealously guard their privileges, as well as predisposing them towards a positive reception. See “The Lantern of Typography: Christabel, Kubla Khan, and Poetic Mediation.”
ambiguity of all such formulations (i.e. “what did [the School of Rafael] mean?”), but he does not hesitate to defend his own similarly selective version of Wordsworth. It isn’t entirely clear how Coleridge’s preference for Wordsworth’s beauties is any more true to Wordsworth’s essence than a preference for his faults. In either case, only a part of the poet’s work has been selected to stand in for the whole.¹⁵⁸

Much of Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is devoted to a critique of the simplistic distortions of Wordsworth’s genius exhibited by Jeffrey and others in periodical journals such as the *Edinburgh Review*. In order to dispute the numerous parodies and caricatures of Wordsworth’s poetry, Coleridge is forced to detail and explain his own version of the *Wordsworthian*.

A person of any taste, who had but studied three or four of Shakspeare’s (sic) principal plays, would without the name affixed scarcely fail to recognize as Shakspeare’s (sic) a quotation from any other play, though but of a few lines. A similar peculiarity, though in a less degree, attends Mr. Wordsworth’s style, whenever he speaks in his own person; or whenever, though under a feigned name, it is clear that he himself is still speaking, as in the different dramatis personae of *The Recluse*. […] (105)

Again we see the tautological circularity of Coleridge’s argument. Wordsworth’s peculiar style is recognizable and true insofar as it is his own. This discussion and definition of Wordsworth’s genius seems to call forth the use of the construction “*Wordsworthian*” to signify the superordinate category *Wordsworthian*. Indeed, on the next page, Coleridge uses the term and begins to list a number of characteristically *Wordsworthian* passages and poems:

> Who, having been previously acquainted with any considerable portion of Mr. Wordsworth’s publications, and having studied them with a full feeling of the

---

¹⁵⁸ Such criticism becomes subject to a philosophical problem not unlike the problem of induction identified by David Hume. The *OED* defines *induction* as “the process of inferring a general law or principle from the observation of particular instances.” But how do we infer the generality of the *Wordsworthian* from the particularity of Wordsworth’s individual lines? Just as with induction, we can never be certain that our generalized law will not be suddenly overthrown by some new pattern in the particulars.
author’s genius, would not at once claim as Wordsworthian the little poem on the rainbow?

“The Child is father of the man,” &c. (106)\(^{159}\)

Coleridge goes on to argue that Wordsworth’s harshest critics do not seem to read his poetry at all, or if they do, they only do so to confirm their own preconceived caricature of him. They accomplish such a critique by combining a process of selective reading for *Wordsworthian* faults, coupled with assertions, demonstrations, or exaggerations of those faults.

I have met with such extracts from Mr. Wordsworth’s poems, annexed to such assertions, as led me to imagine, that the reviewer, having written his critique before he had read the work, had then pricked with a pin for passages, wherewith to illustrate the various branches of his preconceived opinions. (123-24)

Coleridge’s critique of Wordsworth’s most venomous critics is largely concerned with the selections they choose to illustrate the *Wordsworthian* style, not with the fact that they must be selective. Like such critics, Coleridge explicitly draws his understanding of the *Wordsworthian* from certain passages or lines rather than others.

And since it would be unfair to conclude with an extract, which, though highly characteristic, must yet, from the nature of the thoughts and the subject, be interesting, or perhaps intelligible, to but a limited number of readers; I will add, from the poet’s last published work, a passage equally Wordsworthian; of the beauty of which, and of the imaginative power displayed therein, there can be but one opinion, and one feeling. (176)

However, unlike such critics, Coleridge is unwilling to extend the category to the exertions of satirists and imitators.

William Whewell may have picked up the term “Wordsworthian” from reading *Biographia* in 1817. In a letter to Hugh James Rose dated 30 August 1817, Whewell writes about his reading of Coleridge’s criticism:

\[^{159}\text{By which he means “My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold.” It is interesting that Coleridge substitutes the line of the poem which arguably most clearly captures its theme for the title.}\]
I was much astonished to find that Coleridge takes his critical grounds so low. It is not so much the absolute extent of his disapprobation of Wordsworth which made me consider it as indicating a revolution in Lake criticism, as the principles on which he founds it and those are obviously such that they will irresistibly extend themselves much farther than he has carried them; his critique on the Daffodils, for instance might serve as a model for similar strictures on all Wordsworth’s Wordsworthian poems. It pleases me to find that it is in consequence of his theory that Wordsworth has got wrong. What has a poet to do with a theory? (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:985)

The suggestion that Wordsworth has particularly *Wordsworthian* poems implies, of course, that he has other poems that are less so. Such a distinction separates Wordsworth from the superordinate category routinely attributed to him. This use of “Wordsworthian” would seem to indicate a rejection of the Jeffreyan Wordsworth and the assertion of the Coleridgian one.\(^{160}\) As the next section will attempt to argue, this shift in critical opinion seems to have become comparatively widespread after the publication of *Peter Bell* in 1819. In any case, the term “Wordsworthian” does not seem to have been much used outside of coterie circles before the publication of Wordsworth’s *Peter Bell* in 1819.\(^{161}\)

### 4.4 The case of *Peter Bell* and *The River Duddon* 1819-1820

1819 seems to have marked a watershed moment in the history of Wordsworth’s reception. On 1 February 1819, an unsigned biographical sketch of the author’s life appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*, in what Woof calls “the earliest attempt at a detailed life” (*Critical Heritage* 1:1025n) of the author. While the previous two decades had been dominated by Jeffrey’s popular conception of the poet, Wordsworth’s poems had become increasingly popular among a group of enthusiastic admirers sometimes referred to disparagingly as “Wordsworthians.” But perhaps the best indication of Wordsworth’s growing fame and appreciation can be seen in the contest over his literary labels in the London newspapers in April 1819, when Wordsworth’s *Peter Bell: A

---

160 Whewell uses the term “Lake criticism” to denote the theory popularly attributed to Wordsworth.

161 The 19th *Century British Library Newspapers* database records the first use of the term “Wordsworthian” in 1838.
Tale in Verse and John Hamilton Reynolds’s satirical Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad were advertised and published within days of each other. The first advertisements for the former in the 19th Century British Library Newspapers database appeared on 12 April 1819.

![Advertisement for Mr. Wordsworth's New Poem](image)

**Fig. 60** The Morning Post (London, England), Monday, April 12, 1819; pg. [1]; Issue 15047. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

This advertisement is a fairly typical one for a well-known author with a number of publications during the period. Like the similar advertisements for Wollstonecraft and Byron we examined in chapters 2 and 3, this advertisement lists the titles, prices, and formats of a number of other Wordsworth poems: *Lyrical Ballads and other poems, The Excursion, The White Doe of Rylstone, Thanksgiving Ode, and A Letter on the Life, &c. of Burns*. As with those earlier advertisements, this is an indication of a mature author in mid-career. So is the inclusion of a dedicated first line announcing “Mr. Wordsworth’s New Poem.”

Eight days after the appearance of the above advertisement, the Morning Post printed the following advertisement for John Hamilton Reynolds’s satiric Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad, a poem that beat Wordsworth’s own to market.163

---

162 A similar advertisement appeared in the same paper on 26 April.

163 On 10 February 1866 *Notes & Queries* published the following anecdote about Reynolds’s composition of the parody:

I knew Reynolds, and often talked to him about *Peter Bell*. Wordsworth’s poem had been advertised, but its publication was from time to time put off. Some literary men were
If the timing of the publication encouraged comparison with Wordsworth, so too did its deployment of his literary labels. While lacking Wordsworth’s most important label (his name), this advertisement signaled its connection to Wordsworth by the appropriation of the labels “Peter Bell” and “Lyrical Ballad.” These well-known labels, coupled with the assertion “I do affirm that I am the real Simon Pure” openly contested Wordsworth’s own poem for the popular definition of the *Wordsworthian*. Like Jeffrey’s critiques, Reynolds’s parody destabilizes the notion of the *Wordsworthian* by separating the connotations of the label from the denotation, and by attempting to demonstrate that Wordsworth is not the sole author capable of the style. Impersonating Wordsworth in a footnote to the Preface of his *Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad*, Reynolds writes

> The White Doe of Rylstone is not of my writing. If it be a serious imitation of my style, I venerate the author; but if it be meant as a joke against me, - I cannot but

---

164 A very similar advertisement appeared the following day and on 29 April and 28 May in the *Morning Chronicle.*

165 In Susanna Centlivre’s satirical play *Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1717), Simon Pure is a Quaker preacher who gets impersonated. The inclusion of such a line in the advertisement is quite clearly a hint at the satirical nature of this second *Peter Bell.*
weep at its remorseless cruelty. I neither know the tragic Doe, nor am I acquainted with the tragic Buck, - though both these poetical creatures have of late piteously moaned over their buffetings of fortune (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:938)

By implying that *White Doe* itself is a *Wordsworthian* parody written by a hack, Reynolds takes aim squarely at the suggestion offered most publicly by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* that Wordsworth, where he is *Wordsworth*, is inimitable. Many critics agreed with Reynolds on this line of attack, and the appearance of the two *Peter Bells* side by side provided an opportunity to prove it. For example, an anonymous reviewer of *Peter Bell* in the *Monthly Review* in August 1819 asserted:

Some well-meaning, and, in one case, witty individuals have published parodies of *Peter Bell* […] We shall be required briefly to notice these parodies, as well as their originals: but in fact the originals themselves are the parodies, or rather the gross burlesques of all that is good in poetry. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:688)

Abstracted from Wordsworth, the *Wordsworthian* mode could seem artificial, a stammering and crude attempt at poetic feeling, an intolerable exaggeration of certain tendencies of good poetry. For some readers the Reynolds’s parody of Wordsworth made Wordsworth appear a parody of himself.

Reynolds’s parody did not only appropriate Wordsworth’s literary labels in its title page and thus in its advertisements, it also drew heavily upon them in its lines, as can be seen in the sample below.

Betty Foy – My Betty Foy,
Is the aunt of Peter Bell;
And credit me, as I would have you
Simon Lee was once his nephew,
And his niece is Alice Fell.

He is rurally related;
Peter Bell hath country cousins,
(He had once a worthy mother)
Bells and Peters by the dozens,
But Peter Bell he hath no brother.

Not a brother owneth he,
Peter Bell he hath no brother;
His mother had no other son,
No other son e’er call’d her mother;
Peter Bell hath brother none. (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:940)

The repetition of rustic names, the pluralizing of Peter Bell into “Bells and Peters by the dozens,” and the ridiculous belabouring of the point that Peter Bell has no brother in five separate lines suggest the Jeffreyan caricature of Wordsworth. Throughout his parody, Reynolds seemingly inserts as many labels as readers might associate with Wordsworth: “Lucy Gray,” “Susan Harvey,” “Peter Bell,” “Harry Gill,” “Betty Foy,” “Simon Lee,” “Alice Fell,” “the Recluse,” “Lyric Ballads,” “Idiot Boy,” “Keswick Town,” “Martha Ray,” “the Excursion,” “Matthew,” “Goody Blake,” “Susan Gale,” etc. The fact that he does so suggests the widespread knowledge of Wordsworth’s poems, or at least of his literary labels.

One of the first rebuttals of Reynolds appeared in the *Examiner* on 25 April 1819, in an unsigned notice written by Keats.

![Fig. 62 The Examiner (London, England), Sunday, April 25, 1819; Issue 591 ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013](image)

It is interesting that Keats’s description of the parody is phrased in terms of literary labelling. By stealing and then advertising the name “Peter Bell,” Reynolds’s “false Florimel” has “obtruded
herself into public notice” to the extent that Wordsworth’s poem will now have to compete for the “right” to claim the *Wordsworthian* style.\(^{166}\)

For some critics the title “Peter Bell” was unfortunate for a Wordsworth poem because – as a label – it recalled the Jeffreyan caricature. After all, one of the faults most associated with Wordsworth prior to 1819 was the commonness or crudeness of his simple characters. By selecting the name of just such a rustic character for the title of the volume (“Peter Bell”) and the name of a rustic occupation for the other (“Benjamin the Waggoner”), the title page of Wordsworth’s new volume reminded readers of the anti-Wordsworthian argument. In July 1819 Josiah Conder wrote in the *Eclectic Review*

> it is not the titles of these poems, the mere names of Peter Bell and the Waggoner, which are ridiculous. That effect, so far as it preceded the publication of the poems themselves, arose from the pompous annoncé of these tales, which seemed like the ushering of a washer-woman into a drawing room. (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:697)

Despite Conder’s insistence that these titles are not wholly responsible for the ridiculous “effect” of the poems, it does appear that they negatively affected the reception of the poems. On 9 May, in a review of Percy Shelley’s *Rosalind and Helen* in the Literary Notices column in the *Examiner*, the name “Peter Bell” was singled out for censure: “[Rosalind and Helen] is in as finer a moral taste, as Rosalind and Helen are pleasanter names than Peter Bell.”

---

\(^{166}\)Keats goes on to assert:

this Simon Pure is in points the very man: there is such a pernicious likeness in the scenery, such a pestilent humour in the rhymes, and such an inveterate cadence in some of the stanzas. If we are one part amused with this, we are three parts sorry that any one who has any appearance of appreciating WORDSWORTH, should show so much temper at this really provoking name of Peter Bell.” See *Critical Heritage* 1:980-1 for a slightly different version of this notice in a letter to George and Georgiana Keats dated 21 April 1819.
This critical discussion of the prosaic quality of Wordsworth’s literary labels continued after the publication of *The River Duddon*. An anonymous reviewer in the *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* in July 1820 asserted:

Nothing is more natural than that the Lake poet should select a river for the subject of his muse; but what a name and what a river for inspiring a poet’s imagination, Duddon! – And yet the sonnets Mr. Wordsworth has written on it will make the name, obscure and uncouth as it is, pretty widely known. […] We will not quarrel with a poem on account of the name; but there is really something in it. Walter Scott, (we love to call him by the familiar name he has ennobled beyond the honours a sovereign can confer,) has been particularly happy, not only in the titles of his works, but also in the quaint and significant names he has given to his personages, “Marmion,” “The Lady of the Lake,” “the Lay of the Last Minstrel.” How harmonious! why they are in themselves almost poetical. Mr. Wordsworth, on the contrary, has scarcely even chosen a good title for any of his works; witness his “Peter Bell,” and “Benjamin the Waggoner.” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:767)

According to this, both authors’ literary labels reflect their essence. Scott’s literary labels, like his poetry, are “quaint and significant” while Wordsworth’s are “obscure and uncouth.” And yet in the end, presumably by virtue of Wordsworth’s poetic power and/or its enthusiastic promulgation by Wordsworthians, the name “the River Duddon” will become something “pretty widely known.”

In August 1820, Conder noted in an unsigned review in the *Eclectic Review* that although Wordsworth had learned his lesson and appeared to take public opinion to heart when choosing the literary labels for the *River Duddon*, their rough sound and plebian denotations still evoked “ludicrous associations.”

---

167 In an unsigned review of *The River Duddon* in the *Literary Gazette* on 25 March 1820 it is asserted:

to those who are familiar with our sentiments respecting the mis-called simplicities of Peter Bells, Waggoners, Daffodils, &c., it will not seem a slight recommendation of the forthcoming work, that it is almost entirely unstained with similar puerilities (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:751-52)
the public were diverted at the title of Peter Bell [...] We take it, however as a good sign, that Mr. Wordsworth has been made sensible of the fact, that the public do not wish for any more Peter Bells. How depraved soever their taste, how unjust soever their ridicule, the thing will not do again. And he seems determined to please the lovers of euphony this time by at least half of his titlepage, by the melodious names of Vaudracour and Julia. “The River Duddon” stands boldly forward, indeed, in defiance of all ludicrous associations; but it has had this name given it, and cannot help itself. We question whether Mr. W. does not think it the most sweetly sounding title of the two. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:771-72).

Titles here are represented as reflecting the content of the poem as a whole, like some form of synecdoche. But Conder gives a fascinating illustration of the power of literary branding when he suggests that Wordsworth’s sonnets will have to be read “in defiance of all ludicrous associations.” Presumably, Conder is referring to the associations triggered by Wordsworth’s literary labels in the minds of readers, and suggesting that, in order to succeed, Wordsworth’s poems will have to subvert these strong associations or habits of thought.

In any case, both the title and the contents of Peter Bell were generally seen as a critical setback by Wordsworth’s supporters. Henry Crabb Robinson wrote in his diary on 3 May 1819 that he had been “attacked” about Wordsworth’s poem:

Calling on Walter (I dined also with Walter, Fraser, and Barnes there), Fraser and I attacked on a trimming article in yesterday’s Times about Catholic Emancipation, and Barnes attacked me about Peter Bell. But this is a storm I must yield to. Wordsworth has set himself back ten years by the publication of this unfortunate work. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:655)

168 Similarly, on 29 May 1819, Sir George Beaumont wrote

Our friend Wordsworth has just published his “Peter Bell,” which has brought all the minor wits about his ears, and although he seems insensible to the hum and venom of these gnats, I own I wish he would reserve these small poems, which afford such scope for ridicule and misrepresentation to injure and traduce him, for future publication, whatever their merits and beauties may be [...] (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:1041-42)
Robinson’s journals provide interesting suggestions about the most ephemeral medium of transmission of all: conversation. To what degree literary conversations and debates branded Wordsworth’s literary labels with associations is an interesting and vexing question, because of the paucity of evidence.

Reynolds’s parody proved popular, and parts of it were published in the papers. On 10 May the “Poet’s Corner” column of the *Bristol Mercury* quoted from Reynolds’s satiric *Peter Bell*, reproducing for a wider readership Reynolds’s impersonation of Wordsworth’s voice.

**Poets’ Corner.**

*Extract from “Peter Bell, a Lyrical Ballad.”*

“*It is now a period of one-and-twenty years since I first wrote some of the most perfect compositions (except certain pieces I have written in my latter days) that ever dropped from poetical pen. My heart hath been right and powerful all its years. I never thought an evil or a weak thought in my life.”*

“*My Ballads are the noblest pieces of verse in the whole range of English poetry; and I take this opportunity of telling the world I am a great man. Milton was also a great man. Ossian was a blind old fool. Copies of my previous works may be had in any numbers, by application at my publisher.”*

**Fig. 63** *The Bristol Mercury* (Bristol, England), Monday, May 10, 1819; Issue 1519. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

There are a number of elements here which could be easily associated with Wordsworth. There is the generic label “Lyrical ballads” for the poems. There is the acknowledgement that Wordsworth had indeed written some early masterpieces, but had published a dud or two in the years since. The idea that there is a difference in the calibre of the genius between the early and the late Wordsworth remains to this day a critical commonplace. Finally, there is a sense of the self-righteous and stubbornly sincere Wordsworth making boasts of his own status as a poet.
Evidently there was some popular confusion over the near simultaneous release of the two *Peter Bells* in April 1819. The *Edinburgh Magazine* made much of their mutual appearance, playfully engaging with this ambiguity in its review the following month. The advertisements for the magazine in the *Caledonian Mercury* promised reviews of “Peter Bell – Another Peter Bell.”

![Image of The Edinburgh Magazine](https://example.com/image)

*Fig. 64 Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Saturday, May 22, 1819; Issue 15244. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013
As seems to have been the case with Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*, the comparison between Wordsworth and his imitators called forth the notion of a superordinate category that might describe both (i.e. the *Wordsworthian*), and in consequence, the construction “Wordsworthian” appears in the *Edinburgh Magazine* review in order to signify it.

![Image](Fig. 65 Edinburgh Magazine (Edinburgh, Scotland) 1819; Page 427. Google Books)

The suggestion that neither of the *Peter Bells* was written by Wordsworth here is damaging to Wordsworth’s reputation, in the same way that Reynolds’s assertion that *White Doe of Rylstone* was a Wordsworthian parody or imitation was. But, crucially, the review in the *Edinburgh Magazine* does not leave the argument there. It goes on to reiterate a version of Coleridge’s argument that Wordsworth is *Wordsworth* where he is inimitable.

But before our next number, we shall make a point of discovering the truth, and, if this is really a poem of Mr Wordsworth, we pledge ourselves to make our readers acquainted with its beauties, for many beauties, in that case, it must have. It requires no mighty effort of wit, in truth, to turn this singular poet into ridicule, and there are times in which it is scarcely possible, even for his best friends, to avoid doing so; but still when he is in the vein, who can write like William Wordsworth?
While this passage can certainly be read as betraying a hint of irony (i.e. why wouldn’t the beauties of the poem be self-evident?), it does give expression to the Coleridgian argument that not all elements of Wordsworth’s most characteristic poetry were capable of being copied. Reynolds’s parody was not just clever and amusing, it was an opportunity for critics and readers to play at differentiating the real Wordsworth from the Jeffreyan version.

If 1819 started a popular discussion about the unpopularity of Wordsworth in the periodicals, 1820 seems to have continued and solidified it. John Williams writes that “It was not until 1820, when Wordsworth published the sonnet sequences, *The River Duddon*, that he could begin to consider himself as having achieved commercial success as a poet” (102). Paradoxically, one of the reasons for this renewed commercial and critical success seems to have been the appearance of the parodic *Peter Bell* itself, and the interest it provoked.

The audacity of Reynolds’s pre-emptive strike worked in Wordsworth’s favour; the reading public was sufficiently entertained and therefore sufficiently intrigued to see if the Lake Poet’s *Peter Bell* was as crassly amusing as the anonymous parodist’s *Peter*. The consequence was that *Peter Bell* became Wordsworth’s best-selling poem to date (103).

One of the effects of the publication of Reynolds’s parody was that it popularized the notion that Wordsworth was unfairly maligned or unpopular. This may have been a result of the repeated public comparison of Wordsworth’s essence with Reynolds’s parody. Such a positive outcome could hardly have been expected. Yet at least one among Wordsworth’s coterie was convinced the attention was itself a sign of greatness. As Hans Busk, in a letter to Wordsworth dated 25 May 1819, wrote:

Great men are only caricatured – A work must be excellent in itself or it cannot be parodied with any effect – If the parody be worth nothing, it drops stillborn – if it be good it is proof of the merit of the original – these things stamp an Author’s importance more decidedly than direct praise (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:1038)

To be parodied well was an honour that could not but help “stamp an Author’s importance.” From the perspective of literary branding, the strong association of Wordsworth with natural language and feelings was largely the result of negative reviews and the caricatures of his verse.
But this strong association was memorable, and as time went on it seems to have become more popular to defend.

By the spring of the following year, it was becoming fashionable to speak of Wordsworth’s unpopularity just at a time when the poet’s works had never been more widely read. A review of *The River Duddon* in *Blackwood’s* in May 1820 asserted:

> Nothing is more common than to talk about the unpopularity of Wordsworth; – but, after all, we are inclined, to doubt very much, whether at any moment for many years past, he can, with any propriety, be said to have lain under the reproach of unpopularity. The true Acceptation of a Poet does not surely consist in the wideness to which his name is blown on the four winds of heaven. […] Nay, more, we doubt, whether the writings of Spencer, or of Dryden, or even of Milton himself, be at this instant truly familiar to a larger portion of the Reading Public of England than those of Wordsworth. (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:755-56)

The suggestion that Wordsworth was so thoroughly parodied and misunderstood because he was unread (or not read very well) also seems to have entered the popular discussion of his works and reception around this time. For example, in a review of *The River Duddon* in *European Magazine* in June 1820, it was asserted:

> It has been peculiarly unfortunate for Wordsworth, that poetry is not always read in the disposition of mind which ought to accompany such an occupation. Fashionable readers open the last new Poem of any popular author, in much the same frivolous temper as they would take up a newspaper; they read only to be on a par with their neighbours, and, if capable of feeling, reserve the exercise of that capacity for such authors as the taste or fashion of the day may point out as most fitting to awaken it. (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:764-65)

It has to be acknowledged that this shift in the debate surrounding the meaning of his literary labels is indicative of Wordsworth’s increasing popularity. Perhaps we can say that the very fact that readers who had read both Wordsworth and his imitators could (and wanted to) read a difference between them attests to this popularity. On 1 December 1820, Talfourd remarks upon the different experiences of reading Wordsworth and reading about Wordsworth:

> [Intimations Ode] was the first poem of its author which we read, and never shall we forget the sensations which it excited within us. We had heard the cold sneers attached to his name – we had glanced over criticisms, “lighter than vanity,”
which represented him as an object for scorn “to point its slow unmoving finger at” – and here – in the works of this derided poet – we found a new vein of imaginative sentiment opened to us. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:870)

Despite the “cold sneers attached to his name” Talfourd is willing to attribute a “new vein of imaginative sentiment” to Wordsworth. This process, repeated often and by others in the years that followed, solidified Wordsworth’s reputation and the meaning of his literary labels in the history of the language.

4.5 “Wordsworthian” in the newspapers 1838-1850

The early history of Wordsworth’s fame is not a clear progression towards universal adulation and a wide readership. In fact, upon close examination it seems to have gone through distinct phases. As Stephen Gill writes

Contrary to belief, which the older Wordsworth and his disciples did little to dispel, his career did not follow a single trajectory from neglect to acclaim. *Lyrical Ballads* went through four editions between 1798 and 1805, establishing at least the beginnings of a reputation which *Poems, in Two Volumes* of 1807 ought to have consolidated. The unsparing attack on most of the 1807 poems, however, voiced most tellingly by the *Edinburgh Review* but disseminated, even down to the ad hominem tone, by most other reviews, silenced Wordsworth. No further volume of poetry appeared for seven years. (Victorians 7)

Gill notes that “most reviewers up to the 1820s still came to scoff and they did not remain to pray” (Victorians 17). It wasn’t until the 1830s that Wordsworth became widely venerated. In 1835, De Quincey asserted in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* that “Up to 1820, the name of Wordsworth was trampled under foot; from 1820 to 1830 it was militant; from 1830 to 1835 it has been triumphant” (qtd. in Swaab, 3:xi). While this assertion may be somewhat of a simplification or an exaggeration, it does indicate that – in De Quincey’s estimation, at least – the name was widely in use in the period before 1820, and that it had proven itself capable of being deployed in a number of different ways, or in the service of different ends. It could appear
trampled, militant, or triumphant.\(^\text{169}\) De Quincey’s representation does seem to be corroborated by the findings of this chapter. As we saw with the case of Peter Bell and the River Duddon, 1820 did seem to be an important turning point in Wordsworth’s reception.

1835 is as good a year as any to pick as the moment of Wordsworth’s widespread critical acceptance. It was the year that Yarrow Revisited, described by Gill as “the first of Wordsworth’s publications to sell widely” (Victorians 19), appeared in print. In fact, the widespread adulation of Wordsworth by 1835 had tilted his reception in the other direction. If before 1820 he had often been ridiculed and dismissed, by 1835 he was often extolled and venerated, perhaps just as unfairly. Indeed, some of the same figures who had initially thought that Wordsworth was undervalued before were wary of this adulation. Henry Crabb Robinson records Samuel Rogers’s opinion of Wordsworth’s fame in 1835: “[Rogers] spoke very highly of Wordsworth, but with qualifications which would not satisfy Wordsworth’s admirers. He thinks he is likely, now, to be overlauded as before he was underrated” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:948).

Of course, there were still imitations and parodies of Wordsworth’s style. Peter Swaab begins his introduction to the Wordsworth volume of Lives of the Great Romantics by their Contemporaries with Hallam Tennyson’s anecdote:

My father and FitzGerald then had a contest as to who could invent the weakest Wordsworthian line imaginable. Although FitzGerald claimed this line, my father declared he had composed it –

A Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman (qtd. in Swaab 3:xi)

The anecdote is telling, and not just because it hints at the existence of a private form of literary criticism. “Wordsworthian” is being deployed as an adjective, quite clearly meaning “in the style or manner of Wordsworth.” And yet there is more of interest here upon closer examination. The name does not modify just any abstract noun; it modifies “line.” It takes for granted that “Wordsworthian” is a category or subspecies of poetic line that may be identified in the writings

\(^{169}\) Swaab writes that “De Quincey was exaggerating the abjectness of Wordsworth’s early reputation in order to illuminate the merits of his loyal and prescient early admirers” (xi-xii).
of authors other than Wordsworth (i.e. Tennyson and FitzGerald). As for the parody itself: it conveys the associations of commonness and simplicity, by following an indefinite article with the plain title “Mr.” and the common last name “Wilkinson.” Then it echoes itself, dumbly, presenting another indefinite article and another common object, this time a local clergyman.\footnote{This association of Wordsworth with a simple country preacher or clergyman reminds one of the reference to Simon Pure in the Peter Bell advertisements of 1819.} The weakest Wordsworthian line imaginable to Tennyson seemed identical to the pattern established in Peter Bell in 1819: an uncouth name, coupled with a humble and rustic profession. The association of the Wordsworthian with humble and rustic professions is also suggested in the first instance of the term “Wordsworthian” in the 19th Century British Library Newspapers database, in an appearance in the Blackburn Standard in 1838, where a review of The Sexton’s Daughter in the “Literary Notices” column of the newspaper used the term to quickly distinguish its style, tone, and sentiment.

\textbf{Fig. 66} The Blackburn Standard (Blackburn, England), Wednesday, July 11, 1838; Issue 184. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

Here, along with a description of the simple plot and the existence of many poetic beauties, the title of a poem “The Sexton’s Daughter” associates simple characters and the church with the
“Wordsworthian style.” One might expect that this association of Wordsworth arose first with the publication of the *Excursion* in 1814. Indeed, Charles Lamb, in his unsigned review of *The Excursion* in the *Quarterly Review* in October 1814, goes so far as to refer to Wordsworth’s sentiments as a “sort of liberal Quakerism” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:411) explicitly linking the *Wordsworthian* with a form of natural religious feeling. In any case, it is significant to note that, in contrast with the years 1819-20 when the term was called forth by the appearance of parodies, in the 1830s it could just as readily be called forth by the appearance of sincere poetic works.

The triumph of the *Coleridgian* Wordsworth is also attested to in the database in entries like the following, which quotes from the poet’s 1805 “Ode to Duty” in order to defend the author from unfair criticisms:

> Thou who art victory, and law
> When empty terrors overawe;
> From vain temptations dost set free,
> And calm’st the weary strife of frail humanity!”

The last line is one of the most beautiful and touching in the whole range of English poetry. To have written such a line is quite sufficient to atone for all the *Wordsworthian* crotchets and peculiarities which have caused the poet to be so greatly misunderstood by the superficial. Let, then, the account be fairly struck, and all the rest that is excellent in Wordsworth be allowed its full credit, without any discount.

---

Some had made the association even earlier. In his *Portraiture of Quakerism* (1806), Thomas Clarkson had compared Wordsworth’s poetry with Quaker thought, noting

William Wordsworth, in his instructive Poems, has described this teaching by external objects in consequence of impressions from a higher power, as differing from any teaching by books or by the human understanding, and as arising without any motion of the will of man, in so beautiful and simple a manner, that I cannot do otherwise than make an extract from them in this place (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:95)
Again we see the pattern first popularized in 1819-1820 repeated. Despite the “crotchets and peculiarities which have caused the poet to be so greatly misunderstood by the superficial” this line is sincerely “beautiful and touching” in a way that alters the popular “account” of him.

In May 1841, an advertisement for *Verses by a Poor Man* advertised the fact that the poem was “almost Wordsworthian both in sentiment and style”:

---

172 The column uses this argument to defend and explicate Wordsworth’s “Ode to Enterprise.”
On first glance, it seems odd that the first two quotations from the *Durham Advertiser* and the *Newcastle Journal* mention the originality of the poem, while the *Brighton Gazette* seems to associate its essence with Wordsworth’s. It is not clear how the same poem could be both original and Wordsworthian. However, we have already seen how the assertion of Wordsworth’s originality became increasingly popular after the publication of *Peter Bell* and *The River Duddon* in 1819-20. The popular association of “Wordsworth” with the concepts *original* or *distinct* might help to explain this paradox. *Verses by a Poor Man* could be both original and Wordsworthian, just as Wordsworth’s own poems could be.

There were rare appearances of the term “Wordsworthian” in the strictly denotative sense of the word, as in the following review of Edward Moxon’s *Poems, by William Wordsworth* in 1842.

![Fig. 69 The Morning Post (London, England), Friday, June 24, 1842; pg. 6; Issue 22288. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013](image)

This use, referring to the “Wordsworthian” series, or complete writings of the poet himself, is perhaps surprisingly rare given the definition of the term in the *OED*, which seems to suggest that the term equally applies to the exertions of Wordsworth or his imitators. The evidence examined here would seem to suggest this sense of the term is very rarely employed.
Uses in the papers could also seem quite idiosyncratic. For example, in a review for *The Gastronomic Regenerator: a simplified and entirely New System of Cookery* in 1846 a chef is compared to Wordsworth via the term “Wordsworthian.”

> With all these faculties M. Soyer is equally endowed. The kitchens of the Reform Club bespeak his power of combination; the *Economic Regenerator*, his myriad resources; and, for his sympathetic and imaginative taste, try his dinners.

Some folks are prejudiced so far as to have a taste in cookery purely and sillily Wordsworthian; and to lean to those artists who eschew garlic and the pepper-box. M. Soyer is, on the other hand, of the garlic and pepper school. But even those who class the school to which he belongs as second in merit must admit that his genius is supreme.

M. Soyer is an artist in other departments as well as the kitchen. And, like all great men, whether in sculpture, poetry, or cookery, he is always Soyer.

**Fig. 70** *The Examiner* (London, England), Saturday, October 17, 1846; Issue 2020. ©The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 05/02/2013

We can see how this comparison allows us to use the target of the comparison (M. Soyer) to understand what popular associations are associated with the source (Wordsworth). Soyer is associated with a simplified system of cookery, much as Wordsworth is associated with a simplified system of poetry. It is interesting that even this brief comic use of the concept echoes Coleridge’s assertion that Wordsworth, where he is Wordsworth, cannot be imitated: “Like all great men, whether in sculpture, poetry, or cookery, [Soyer] is always Soyer.”

The epitome of Wordsworth’s fame can perhaps be seen in the following reference to the poet’s *Prelude*, which was held back to be published after his death.
Here, the different strains of the *Wordsworthian*, both Jeffreyan and Coleridgian, meet and co-exist, even if Jeffrey’s view eventually yields to Coleridge’s. Wordsworth, where he is at his best and most characteristic, is unable to be imitated. That is to say, in this account the “true Wordsworthian” is a superordinate category that is in some sense strictly denotative, in that it can only legitimately be used to refer to the exertions that are both *Wordsworthian* and written by Wordsworth. The idea that the true *Wordsworthian* cannot be used as superordinate category for classifying other cultural objects protects the poet’s essence from the parodies, imitations, or other derivations from that genius.
4.6 “Wordsworthian” as a noun 1812-1897

As hinted at above, with its use as an adjective the denotation of “Wordsworthian” could be ambiguous and was frequently used negatively or in a way damaging to Wordsworth’s reputation. However, with its use as a noun, the term was almost always used negatively, perhaps because “a Wordsworthian” clearly does not refer to Wordsworth himself. As a noun “Wordsworthian” is defined as “An admirer, imitator, or student of William Wordsworth or his poetry.” The OED records the first clear use of the term in this sense in the diary of Henry Crabb Robinson, when, on 13 December 1812, he writes “Godwin… is now… a Wordsworthian in politics.” The concept of Wordsworth is still being used metaphorically, of course, but we are to interpret what it means from its context and the ad hoc superordinate category implied by the comparison of the domains Wordsworth and Godwin. But with its use as a noun the denotative element of the concept is firmly connected to others rather than to Wordsworth. A typical example of this sort of use might be seen in John Gibson Lockhart’s 1825 assertion that “Miss Hume is an ecstatic Wordsworthian, and is to go to see him one of these days in the flesh” (OED).

This sort of use, to denote admirers or preachers of Wordsworth, could bring forth the use of the noun “Wordsworthianism.” If a “Wordsworthian” is a systematiser of Wordsworth, then “Wordsworthianism” is his doctrine. One of the first appearances of this term appears in Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine in 1829 in the second part of “An Essay on the Theory and the Writings of Wordsworth” by C. H. Townsend.

But the very essence of Wordsworthianism is the belief that its king can do no wrong. It is the very poyery of poetry; and one doubt of its Hierarch’s infallibility would be fatal to its empire.

Fig. 72 Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine (Edinburgh, Scotland) Vol. 26, July – December, 1829. Google Books
Here, Townsend offers a derivative of Wordsworth when he describes the cultural movement that attempts to turn elements of Wordsworth’s poetry into a comprehensive system or an ideology. According to this description “Wordsworthianism” defends Wordsworth’s every line as characteristic, and equally advocating the same system.

In 1839 the Methodist Review reviewed The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by Henry Reed and published in Philadelphia in 1837. The reviewer asserts that Wordsworth has an essence that is both “pure and elevated,” and in the “spirit of genuine poetry.” He is more than “the peculiarities of his style.” His “earnest” voice “cannot be mistaken.”

Fig. 73 “Wordsworth’s Poems” Methodist Review (New York) Vol. 21, 1839; Page 457.

Google Books

The reviewer continues by asserting that there is much more to appreciate about Wordsworth than the system advocated in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. This is an unusual positive use of the term, explained perhaps by the fact that it is used to describe Wordsworth’s own works.

Had Wordsworth remained true to his own theory of poetic diction, and carried it out in all his writings with as much fidelity as in a few of his earlier productions, we should consider it necessary to point out a few of its errors; but he has not done so. He has built up his fame, not by means of his theory, but in spite of it; or rather, by rising above it. (457)
This is an example of Coleridge trumping both Jeffrey and Keats. For many religiously-minded readers, Wordsworth’s growing conservatism and faith seemed a transcendent extension of the asceticism of his earlier poetry.

While “Wordsworthian” as an adjective starts out negative but comes by mid-century to be positive, its use as a noun, in conjunction with “Wordsworthianism” continues to evoke negative associations throughout the nineteenth century. In his 1879 preface to *Poems of Wordsworth*, Matthew Arnold uses *Wordsworthian* seven times, to refer to the followers or admirers of Wordsworth. More specifically, he uses the term to characterize those who extract from Wordsworth’s poetry a “scientific system of thought” (xxi). That is to say, Arnold uses *Wordsworthian* to refer to the people who find the wrong sort of thing in Wordsworth’s poetry. Arnold does battle with the Wordsworthians who would systematize Wordsworth and make his poetic creed into a cult. Consider the following statement:

> The *Excursion* abounds with philosophy, and therefore the *Excursion* is to the Wordsworthian what it never can be to the disinterested lover of poetry,—a satisfactory work.

*Fig. 74 Poems of Wordsworth* (London, England) 1879; pg. xix. *Google Books*

Arnold suggests, in a way not unlike Coleridge, that Wordsworth is best where he is incapable of being imitated.

The term “Wordsworthianism” was also used in the 1880s and 90’s. In January 1889 the *Fortnightly Review* published an Oscar Wilde essay about the poet and poisoner Thomas Griffiths Wainewright entitled “Pen, Pencil and Poison.” Wilde wrote that Wainewright was “peculiarly susceptible to the spiritual influences of Wordsworth’s poetry”, and warned “we

---

173 Gill notes “Thirty or so years after his death Wordsworth is a marketable name” (*Victorians* I).
must not forget that the cultivated young man who penned these lines, and who was so susceptible to Wordsworthian influences, was also, as I said at the beginning of this memoir, one of the most subtle and secret poisoners of this or any age.” The *Pall Mall Gazette* picked up upon this discussion of Wordsworth in its review of Wilde’s essay, writing of Wainewright’s poetry is here associated with a “calming” or “soothing” influence, thus aligning *Wordsworthianism* closely with a belief in the curative or restorative power of Wordsworth’s poetry.

The final use of the term we will examine appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 10 February 1897 in a review of Arthur Christopher Benson’s *Lord Vyet, and Other Poems*.

**MR. A. C. BENSON’S POEMS.†**

“*Lord Vyet, and Other Poems*” supplies fresh proof that Mr. A. C. Benson is a true Wordsworthian, so far as Wordsworthianism lies in aiming at simplicity rather than stateliness, subordinating passion to thought, or linking observation with imagination. If he may seem at times a little inclined to take small deer too seriously, and not to go far enough afield in search of problems to interpret, the fault is the fault of the school to which he belongs.

Benson’s faults are identical with the faults of “the school to which he belongs.” Wordworthianism is here an attempt at poetic simplicity, the subordination of passion to
thought, and the linking of observation with imagination. The withering detail that Benson “may seem at times a little inclined to take small deer too seriously” confirms that Jeffrey’s assessment of the characteristic faults of Wordsworth and his imitators were still central to the meaning of “Wordsworthianism” by the end of the nineteenth century. The essential difference between the use of “Wordsworthian” as an adjective and its use as a noun is that, on the whole, its use as a noun is almost exclusively negative, while its use as an adjective was more mixed.

4.7 “William Wordsworth” as an aptronym

When considering the impact of Wordsworth’s literary labels upon common readers, it is worth pointing out that “William Wordsworth” is perhaps the best example of an aptronym in English literary history. One can hardly imagine a better or more apt literary label for a poet. Its alliteration is perfect, its echoes musical; favourable associations are seemingly built right into the name. It does not hurt that the first name can easily associate with that other William, the greatest English poet of all: Shakespeare. Indeed, these accidental components of the name seem to have played a disproportionate role in Wordsworth’s fame and reception right up to the present day. Such satiric play upon the elements of Wordsworth’s name occurs early in the poet’s reception. Charles Lamb, in a letter of February 1801 writes to Thomas Manning: “So, you don’t think there’s a Word’s-worth of good poetry in the treat L.B! I daren’t put the dreaded syllables at their just length, for my back tingles from the northern castigation” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:102). Such a use employs what we might term the accidental semantic elements of Wordsworth’s name in a way akin to Byron’s satiric invocations or inversions of the same (“Turdsworth,” “poet Wordy”, and “Wordswords”) by targeting the common nouns (i.e. “words” and “worth”) that can be recognized in the name. It is precisely the aptness of the accidental

174 According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, “the word aptronym was allegedly coined by the American newspaper columnist Franklin P. Adams, by an anagrammatic reordering of the first letters of patronym (to suggest apt) to denote surnames that suit the occupation of the name’s bearer (such as Baker for a baker).”

175 Byron referred to Wordsworth as “Turdsworth” in a number of letters written to John Murray, Douglas Kinnaird, and Francis Hodgson in late 1820. See Critical Heritage 1:907.
components of Wordsworth’s name that allows Byron to satirize it so successfully. An anonymous reviewer of Peter Bell in the Monthly Review in August 1819 wrote: “We really waste words, however, on what is scarcely Word’s-worth; and, suffering this infatuated poetaster to condemn himself out of his own mouth, we shall intersperse very few farther remarks with his modicums of matchless vanity” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:688). The importance of such word play is also evident in later uses of the term “Wordsworthy.” According to the OED, this derivation first appears in J. G. Dalton’s Lyra Bicyclica (1880) in the following sentence: “A Wordworthy variation by a Rydal bard.” Dalton implies that the “Rydal bard” is not merely Wordsworthian, but is also worthy.¹⁷⁶

How much could the associations built into his name influence the reading of Wordsworth’s poetry? This is a difficult question to answer. Certainly these elements have been the source of many jokes and puns, but they have also shown they can be taken more seriously, as in the title of Hugh Sykes Davies’ posthumous Wordsworth and the Worth of Words (1986), which took the fortuitous components of Wordsworth’s particularly apt name and turned them to the purposes of criticism. On the one hand, it seems like “words” and “worth” are but trivial accidents of the name, and no more.¹⁷⁷ Even if the accidental components of Wordsworth’s name did influence his readers in some limited way, it is also likely that this effect dissipated with time.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Other examples of “Wordworthy” recorded by the OED lack this emphasis. For example, in Murphy (1938), Samuel Beckett asserts “They [sheep] seemed in rather better form, less Wordworthy.” Similarly, on 18 August 1996 the Sunday Times wrote “In daffodil time, when the banks of the beck are a Wordworthy blaze of colour.”

¹⁷⁷ Surely it would be a mistake to read too much into them, just as it is a mistake to read too much significance into the etymology of a word. After all, most people are not aware of a word’s long history when they use it, nor do they mean to imply it.

¹⁷⁸ A modern equivalent of this might be the case of the twentieth-century rock band the Rolling Stones. During the first encounter with this label, before the band was famous, one could either associate the band’s name with the lyrics of the Bob Dylan song from which it was drawn, or from some understanding of the components of the name (i.e. rolling stones), or both. Later, over time, these associations begin to fade, or at least to compete with more details and knowledge of the band and its music, and with the label’s increasing denotative use in conversation or printed media.
On the other hand, modern advertisers seem to think the aptness of a label very important. Indeed, they spend many millions of dollars to ensure that their apt product names evoke the right associations. This represents a rather large vote of confidence by some of the most powerful institutions and corporations in the modern world. If names or labels do not subconsciously affect our interpretations and perceptions then all this money and energy is presumably wasted. Given the possibility of using the accidental components of “Wordsworth” in clever and illuminating ways like Byron or Davies, it seems clear that we need to acknowledge that such superficial and seemingly accidental elements of a literary label can be important to its reception.

4.8 Conclusion

The use of authorial adjectives and MPNs seems to have been relatively rare during the Romantic period. The vast majority of authors did not get them, and those that did were invariably well known. Out of the six major English Romantic poets, only Blake’s name does not seem to be used as an authorial adjective in the newspapers during the nineteenth century. For the other five, uses of their name as an adjective or a metaphor tend to appear late in their career (Byron and Wordsworth) or posthumously (Coleridge, Shelley, Keats). Perhaps the most interesting thing about the appearance of authorial adjectives is that, unlike the case with the literary labels deployed in newspaper advertisements, their use is almost exclusively negative. That is to say, they are almost exclusively applied to things that the author had no hand in, by people other than himself or his publisher, in a way that could undermine the sense that they were the originator or sole executor of their genius.

Authorial adjectives and metaphors tend to function as inexact comparisons that typically identify a principal association with each author. So *Byronic* generally signifies rebelliousness, *Wordsworthian* simplicity, *Coleridgian* mysteriousness, *Keatsian* sumptuousness, etc. In addition to these essences, each of these terms tends to modify different nouns, or the same nouns in different proportions. For example, in the examples in this chapter alone

---

179 At the current moment, that is. As more and more primary sources come online, more uses of “Blakean” may turn up.
“Wordsworthian” has been used to modify “poem,” “series,” “passage,” “line,” “language,” “taste,” “sentiment,” “style,” “crotchets,” “peculiarities,” “faults,” “beauties,” “character,” and “spectacles.” Without a doubt, we can be sure that the term more often modified “poem” than “spectacles.” But are there any other patterns in its use that could help us track reader reception in a more detailed or quantitative way?

It should be pointed out that unusual or distinctive authorial names are critical to the construction of such uses. For example, Thomas Moore does not seem to have often had the misfortune of seeing his name used as an adjective, probably because its commonness would denote too many other entities to be an efficient comparison. It was not impossible to assign him an authorial adjective, just rare. We have the following example, a metaphoric extension of “Anacreon” in the Table Talk column of the *Morning Post* on 19 February 1842. The reviewer asserts “perhaps it is in those passages which are called Anacreontic that Moore is most strikingly original. We have as good love songs as his, but we have nothing in English to be compared with the classic fervor of his convivial melodies.” This particular example offers another point we have seen time and again in this chapter. The act of comparing two authors could call forth or imply an authorial adjective, as we saw in the earlier case when a reviewer invoked the concept of a distinctively Darwinian phraseology to make a case for distinctively Wordsworthian diction. After invoking the notion of the Anacreontic, the same reviewer invokes Wordsworth’s name, and quotes from the Intimations ode:
To return to the problem posed by the Coleridge quotation at the start of this chapter, there are times when Wordsworth isn’t *Wordsworth*. But was Coleridge right when he asserts that Wordsworth “may be plundered by Plagiarists, but he can not be imitated”?

Although satirists could identify resemblances with Wordsworth’s poetry or ridicule him with parodies, they could not capture the effect of reading Wordsworth at his *Wordsworthian* best. That is to say, the experience of reading Wordsworth’s best poems often feels quite different from reading a *Wordsworthian* parody or from contemplating a *Wordsworthian* metaphor. For Coleridge, Wordsworth is *Wordsworth* where he is incapable of being imitated or parodied.

---

180 In his eighth lecture, “On the Living Poets” (1818) William Hazlitt provides another example of this, when he compares Wordsworth to Walter Scott:

Mr. Wordsworth is the most original poet now living. He is the reverse of Walter Scott in his defects and excellences. He has nearly all that the other wants, and wants all the other possesses. His poetry is not external, but internal; it does not depend upon tradition, or story, or old song; he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject. (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 1:891).
where there is no superordinate category wherein he is an example, where his genius cannot be compared or applied to anything but its own perfect expression. And yet, as I hope to have shown in this chapter, the imitation of Wordsworth was also central to fixing the popular associations with his literary labels. Such a process may well have been understood by Wordsworth himself; as Woof notes

Wordsworth knew that the attackers, the parodists and the plagiarists could be useful as well as dangerous. There must have been some core of significant truth in Wordsworth’s advice in 1817 to his friend Samuel Rogers: “Why don’t you hire somebody to abuse you? …For myself, I begin to fear that I should soon be forgotten if it were not for my enemies.” (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:6)

To conclude, it is worth examining the notion that authors are not utterly distinctive or original, only themselves where they are separate from the tradition. Instead, they grow out of it: Percy Shelley asserts that a “great poet is masterpiece of nature” (134), a leaf or branch sprouting from one continuous tree of poetry. Their essence is therefore permeable to the influence of the past and the present, to literary tradition and the literary zeitgeist. As Shelley and Emerson were to assert, all the poems ever written are somehow parts of the same vast poem, offshoots of the same tree.

There is a similarity between Homer and Hesiod, between Aeschylus and Euripides, between Virgil and Horace, between Dante and Petrarch, between Shakespeare and Fletcher, between Dryden and Pope; each has a generic resemblance under which their specific distinctions are arranged. (135)

181 Likewise, Shelley, in a letter to Charles Ollier dated 15 October 1819, writes:

The only remark worth notice in this piece is the assertion that I imitate Wordsworth. It may as well be said that Lord Byron imitates Wordsworth, or that Wordsworth imitates Lord Byron, both being great poets, and deriving from the new springs of thought and feeling, which the great events of our age have exposed to view, a similar tone of sentiment, imagery, and expression. A certain similarity all the best writers of any particular age inevitably are marked with, from the spirit of that age acting on all. (qtd. in Critical Heritage 1:987)
From the perspective of literary branding, a literary name comes to stand in for these “specific distinctions” within an intertextual web of “generic resemblance.” It is an obvious point, but it is worth recalling that in order to remember an argument, or an anecdote, or any other particular part or element of literary culture, one must use literary labels in order to retrieve it. There were in the Romantic period (as there are now) many different constituencies who had little or no knowledge of Wordsworth, and for whom the term “Wordsworthian” was incomprehensible or could only be interpreted from the context of its use. What did the label mean to them and why does it matter? If there is a connection between the popular associations with the label and the meaning of that label, then it is worth investigating. The fact that certain names are capable of being made into an authorial adjective and others are not is a problem with this form of reception history. Also, female authors generally did not see their names used as authorial adjectives until the twentieth century, with the exception of Mary Wollstonecraft. And unfortunately, the number of occurrences of MPNs does not seem high enough to conduct complex statistical analysis. Yet, as I hoped to have shown, the deployment of MPNs in newly accessible online databases can offer us interesting, if necessarily partial, case studies of reader reception.

Did Wordsworth, as he claimed all great poets must do, create the taste by which he was to be relished? Did Wordsworth invent the *Wordsworthian*? Or was the identification and attribution of the *Wordsworthian* to Wordsworth a more communal process, more the creation of his readers or audiences than himself? And to what degree did these “altogether incompetent judges” who glanced at books so that they could talk of them influence the reception and interpretation of Wordsworth and his literary works? As suggested in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, the latter argument can and should be explored, with a view to balancing our tendency to attribute all authoritative agency to the Romantic genius. Literary criticism has tended to side with Wordsworth, and assumed that great authors create the taste by which they are to be relished. In other words, it has tended to assume that the semantic traffic at the heart of literary influence flows from source to

---

182 Mary Hays was described as a “Wollstonecraftian” in a review of “The Unsexed Females” in *The Anti-Jacobin Review* in 1799.
target, from author to reader. But, as this thesis has illustrated, semantic traffic could flow in the other direction too, from target to source. Such a process disrupts and undermines the Romantic conception of the lone genius who invents his essence, ex nihilo, in a vacuum, even while it affirms the value to readers of believing just that.

There is a tendency for a phenomenon to be associated with or named after the person who first brought it to widespread public attention. This often happens with scientific discoveries, inventions, and diseases. Gaussian distribution, Halley’s comet, and Alzheimer’s disease were all named in this way. Although the public tends to assume that these people were the first discoverers of these phenomena, this isn’t necessarily true. In fact, Gaussian distribution was introduced by Abraham de Moivre in 1733, sixty years before Carl Friedrich Gauss began to use it; Halley’s comet had been noted by astronomers numerous times since 240 B.C.; and Alzheimer’s disease had been described several times in writing before Alois Alzheimer’s famous 1906 report on the condition. The naming of such phenomena has more to do with the popular processes of attribution than with the discovery or invention of them, per se. If two or more names are possible contenders in the naming process, the more famous (or distinctive) name may tend to win out, regardless if the fame is logically related to the phenomenon or not.

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig’s disease, provides a good example of this last point. Its scientific name is difficult to use and remember, which encouraged the popular use of the eponymous designation, especially in the United States in the decades after Lou Gehrig’s famous farewell speech on 4 July 1939 at Yankee Stadium. However, unlike most eponymous diseases, which tend to be named after the doctors who first brought them to public attention, this disease is named after a person who contracted it – in part because Gehrig was more widely known than Jean-Martin Charcot, the French neurologist who first published a description of the illness in 1869. It doesn’t matter that Gehrig’s fame was of a different sort: it was greater, and his name won out. One of the more interesting aspects of this particular designation is how it yokes two very different sets of associations together. At one time, Lou Gehrig’s baseball fame made the disease itself famous; now the disease perpetuates Lou Gehrig’s baseball fame. That is to say, along with information logically related to a phenomenon, eponymous designations can preserve
accidental or biographical information. This information doesn’t disappear, though in most contexts or discussions about the phenomenon it lies inert. But it is always there, in some sense, always contiguous with the name. Occasionally, it can enter into discussion. Because the naming or attribution of the phenomenon is the product of historical accident, one cannot generalize about it too much – the accidental information may sometimes prove influential to interpretation, and it matters what kind of information it is, and which name or label it is attached to.

The point, of course, is that the process of literary fame also has some element of the arbitrary about it. Biographical information about authors is often yoked to the metaphors considered central to their perceived essence and merit, to an even greater degree than is the case with scientific discoveries or inventions. In the Dictionary of National Biography Leslie Stephen, explaining the shift of opinion against the poet during the separation scandal in 1816, writes “when Lara [i.e. Byron] passed from the regions of fancy to 13 Piccadilly Terrace, matters became more serious.” As the history of Byron criticism and reception suggests, where the details of Byron’s life do not conform to the popular understanding of the Byronic, they have tended to be ignored, misunderstood, or even altered.\textsuperscript{183} The attribution of certain literary images, phrases, or styles to certain literary names does not only capture an author’s originality and input, or poetic voice, as is generally assumed, it also serves a mnemonic and indexical function useful to a literary culture: a striation of the literary commons into discrete units. It is a way of storing and retrieving cultural information. This secondary function, the attribution of semantic content to literary labels, is often ignored or confused with the primary denotative function of a name, in a way that perpetuates the Romantic conception of authorship. Perhaps every great author creates the central metaphors through which (and into which) they will be read. But no author can control the critical overflow, the metaphoric misapplication of their attributed essence upon the facts of their biography, or the meaning of their work, or any number of other objects in the cultural field that their fans or critics may compare them to. In any case,

\textsuperscript{183} Borges writes “Fame is a form – perhaps the worst form – of incomprehension” (Fictions 94).
such processes of literary branding enrich our critical vocabulary and give coherence to specific ways of reading and perceiving literary history that we would not care to do without.

Finally, one of the most important things about literary branding is that for readers literary labels are referential, while literary texts are experiential. Of necessity, one must use one or more of a cluster of interrelated literary labels to speak and think about Wordsworth’s texts in their absence. Encountering the label “The Prelude” in conversation or in a newspaper or periodical is not the same thing as reading the poem itself. These encounters occur at different times in different contexts, and it is in the discrepancy between the experience of the label and the experience of the labelled that much of the critical interest in literary branding may be said to lie. This is perhaps the lesson of the case of Peter Bell. The cognitive dissonance triggered by a popular parody of the Wordsworthian style was jutting up against the collective experience of more and more readers actually reading Wordsworth’s poetry. Ridiculing Wordsworthianism and reading Wordsworth’s poetry are qualitatively different activities, though not mutually exclusive ones, as Hallam Tennyson’s anecdote seems to show. In any case the two experiences seemed different to readers, and this difference may have gone some way in helping Wordsworth’s rise to critical pre-eminence by 1835.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Arguments from book history and cognitive science

As this thesis has argued, literary branding should be understood as arising from various processes of compression, whereby the complexity of authors and texts can be reduced to the use of a label with a few common associations. This argument in turn raises an important question about how we can know whether specific associations are held in common. Perhaps all readers compress texts and authors differently, and there are no meaningful patterns in their collective responses. Perhaps the mental states of readers are too fluid or complex for us ever to infer with

---

184 To some extent this discrepancy appears in the case of all authors and texts, for the reason that it is a variation of the age-old philosophical problem of the relationship of names to the things they describe.
any certainty what they might have thought when they encountered a literary label. And yet we seem to have evidence, not only that associations with popular literary labels like “Scott” or “Byron” existed, but that they were common.\textsuperscript{185}

We can see one particularly illuminating instance of this in Jane Austen’s \textit{Persuasion}, when Anne Elliot speaks of poetry with Captain Benwick.

For, though shy, he did not seem reserved: it had rather the appearance of feelings glad to burst their usual restraints; and having talked of poetry, the richness of the present age, and gone through a brief comparison of opinion as to the first-rate poets, trying to ascertain whether \textit{Marmion} or \textit{The Lady of the Lake} were to be preferred, and how ranked the \textit{Giaour} and \textit{The Bride of Abydos}, and, moreover, how the \textit{Giaour} was to be pronounced, he showed himself so intimately acquainted with all the tenderest songs of the one poet, and all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other; he repeated, with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness, and looked so entirely as if he meant to be understood, that she ventured to hope he did not always read only poetry; and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly. (302)

From the perspective of literary branding, the most fascinating thing about this passage is the fact that Scott and Byron’s names do not appear in it.\textsuperscript{186} Readers must infer their names from the appearance of related literary labels, “Marmion” and “The Lady of the Lake” for Scott, and “Giaour” and “The Bride of Abydos” for Byron. Readers must then decide which poet Austen refers to when she writes about “the tenderest songs of the one poet” and which she means when

\textsuperscript{185} Thomas Macaulay, in a review of Thomas Moore’s \textit{Life of Byron}, referred to Scott and Byron as “the ‘great names’ of the age” (qtd. in Thorslev 15). William Hazlitt’s \textit{The Spirit of the Age} is another good example of the Romantic period’s tendency to read various aspects of the zeitgeist through the lens of great names.

\textsuperscript{186} Scott and Byron are first referred to by name several pages later when Anne and Captain Benwick again speak of poetry: “they walked together some time, talking as before of Mr. Scott and Lord Byron, and still as unable as before, and as unable as any other two readers, to think exactly alike of the merits of either” (308). Just before Louisa falls and injures herself, Byron is referenced again: “Anne found Captain Benwick again drawing near her. Lord Byron’s ‘dark blue seas’ could not fail of being brought forward by their present view” (310).
she writes about “the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other.” Austen is gambling that her readers can and will do this with ease, which suggests we have an indicator that one Romantic writer and reader at least (i.e. Austen) believes these associations with these labels to be common.

What rapid impressions did literary labels like “Byron” or “Wordsworthian” or “the Rights of Woman” make upon the readers of the day? Each of the case studies in this thesis has attempted to offer a different approach to this question. There are a number of reasons to believe that the popular attribution of relatively stable sets of associations to a handful of names or labels became increasingly important for readers during the Romantic period. I will briefly raise two of the more interesting ones here. The first might be called the argument from book history. In recent years, book historians have debated the existence, scope, and internal mechanics of what has been called “the print explosion” of the eighteenth century. John Feather offers a good summary description of the major elements of the phenomenon:

> The market for books in Britain was […] increasing in every dimension during the eighteenth century. There were more people; they were richer; many of them had more leisure time; more of them could read; there were more bookshops; there were better communications; and there were, partly as a consequence, more books and other printed matter than ever before. (239)

H. J. Jackson similarly argues for a “reading boom, activated not so much by social, political, or technological changes […] as by competitive commercial activity, especially advertising and reviewing” (Romantic Readers 9). St Clair’s RNR offers a similar depiction, albeit with more emphasis upon the role of legal decisions about copyright. While the Eighteenth-Century Short-Title Catalogue and the Nineteenth-Century Short-Title Catalogue do seem to reveal an increase in the number of titles published annually, the “print explosion” hypothesis, drawing as it does upon conceptions of “print culture” more broadly, is not universally accepted or free from possible criticism.  

187

187 See Joseph Dane’s The Myth of Print Culture for a critique of Elizabeth Eisenstein’s The Printing Press as an Agent of Change.
However, the fact that the period seemed to many contemporary readers to be flooded with new texts cannot be much in doubt. Byron’s poem *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* depends upon this awareness for its satiric effect, arguing “No dearth of Bards can be complained of now/The loaded Press beneath her labour groans” (9). There was a widespread sense that new authors competed with the ever-mounting generations of dead ones for a reader’s attention, perhaps drowning out real genius in the process.188 The enormous number of new titles and authors presented Romantic readers with a serious problem. What were they to read, and why? As Tom Mole has pointed out, “it was not simply a surge in the amount of printed matter that assailed Romantic readers; it was also a deluge of proper names” (*Byron’s Romantic Celebrity* 11). These names all had to compete for attention in an increasingly crowded marketplace. Horace Walpole associated the age with a “herd of idle readers” who read and passed quick judgments upon literary works, which had to “make rapid impression” or else disappear without a trace (188). And yet perhaps such readers were merely adopting a sensible response to a difficult situation. Given the importance of the social signals of class, education, and character that displays of literary knowledge communicated during the Romantic period, it is not surprising that most readers wanted to keep up with the books that others were reading, to read them themselves, or at the very least, to know something about them.

Thus, despite the antipathy they often inspired among authors and readers alike, literary critics were considered a necessary evil, helping readers navigate through the vast amounts of print. Writing in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1823, William Hazlitt described the situation.

> To dig to the bottom of a subject through so many generations of authors is now impossible: the concrete mass is too voluminous and vast to be contained in any single head; and therefore, we must have essences and samples as substitutes for it. We have collected a super-abundance of raw materials: the grand desideratum now is, to fashion and render them portable. Knowledge is no longer confined to the few: the object therefore is, to make it accessible and attractive to the many. (279)

---

188 “Behold! in various throngs the scribbling crew/For notice eager, pass in long review” (143-44).
The “essences and samples” that Hazlitt calls for here closely relate to processes of branding discussed elsewhere in this thesis. The essences associated with a literary label are often the semantic domains observed in its use as a metaphor, and the samples imply—via the logic of synecdoche—an abstract and idealized whole; the author as schema, Wordsworth, where he is indeed Wordsworth. According to Hazlitt, it is the duty of the critic to derive something abstract and transferable from a text, to produce a rapid and memorable impression for busy readers, to contaminate an “uncontaminated name” with the proper associations. As Leah Price explains in The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel, anthologies like Vicesimus Knox’s Elegant Extracts represented a different method of dealing with the same problem, attempting to cut through the excess of printed text through reductive processes of “abridgement, expurgation, [and] compilation” (1). Knox argued that part of the usefulness of his extracts stemmed from cumulative utility, in the ability for pupils to access uniform copies of the same texts cheaply and conveniently. The more popular the Elegant Extracts became, the more useful they were. In any case, according to Knox, the times demanded such compression. In his words, “the art of printing has multiplied books to such a degree, that … it becomes necessary to read in the classical sense of the word, LÉGERE, that is, to pick out … the best parts of books” (qtd. in Price, 4). Perhaps the

189 Scott used this phrase in his introduction to Waverley, where he discussed his choice of title in some detail.

The title of this work has not been chosen without the grave and solid deliberation, which matters of importance demand from the prudent. Even its first, or general denomination, was the result of no common research or selection, although, according to the example of my predecessors, I had only to seize upon the most sounding and euphonic surname that English history or topography affords, and elect it at once as the title of my work, and the name of my hero. […] I must modestly admit I am too diffident of my own merit to place it in unnecessary opposition to preconceived associations: I have therefore, like a maiden knight with his white shield, assumed for my hero, WAVERLEY, an uncontaminated name, bearing with its sound little of good or evil, excepting what the reader shall hereafter be pleased to affix to it.

190 Price points out that literary criticism (particularly of novels) is necessarily partial, “given that no argument about Clarissa or Middlemarch can appeal to more than synecdochal evidence.” Because “extracts underwrite the discipline of literary criticism as we know it,” most varieties of criticism cannot be undertaken without “a gentleman’s agreement to take the parts of a work for the whole” (2).
dramatic increase in the number of titles and authors led to the elevation of a few labels at the expense of the majority, through a process analogous to that described by Robert K. Merton as “the Matthew effect” in the sciences. Merton described how more famous scientists tended to be given credit for discoveries, even if some of the work should be credited to lesser-known researchers. This effect magnifies over time, so that initial frontrunners leave the pack behind. There may have been a similar dynamic at work during the Romantic period, for the reason that the sheer volume of literary publications eliminated the possibility of anyone reading or keeping track of them all. 191 The vast majority of poets and novelists writing during the Romantic period evidently did not make much of an impression. Only a handful of authors were branded with the relatively narrow and stable sets of associations suggested by the use of their names, thereby helping readers navigate a cultural landscape flooded with too much information. The more famous they became, the more cumulative utility their names presumably acquired, making the popular associations with them both more and more useful to know, and harder and harder to dislodge. 192

Another interesting argument for literary branding comes from cognitive science. For more than a century, scientists have studied the complex processes of memory in the human brain. In that period, two basic paradigms have developed and competed. The older paradigm coincides with our language habits and with many of our common-sense notions about memory. It suggests that memory is somehow a record of past experience, in the way that a photograph is a record of a past moment. In this paradigm, we remember everything we have ever experienced, even if we cannot always retrieve that memory. Newer schools of thought on human memory are sometimes called constructivist. They insist that memories are constructed or re-constructed according to various mental schema, cognitive or cultural. While these schema help us re-construct the past

191 Merton argues “There is reason to assume that the communication function of the Matthew effect is increasing in frequency and intensity with the exponential increase in the volume of scientific publications, which makes it increasingly difficult for scientists to keep up with work in their field” (449).

192 See Duncan Watts for a summary of a recent study concerning cumulative utility, social networks, and fame.
they can also distort our memories of it. The implications of constructivism on our notions of reading are profound and much too complex to be done any justice here. However, it is not unreasonable to suggest an argument that follows from it. The most complex understanding of a literary text comes while reading it, or in the days immediately after doing so. Over time, however, if you do not continually re-read the text, you are liable to forget more and more of the specific details. When you are called upon to recall the text a month, a year, or a decade later, you will have to reconstruct your memories of the text just as you reconstruct all your memories: with the help of various schema. This argument would seem to suggest that our memories of a text or author can be actively changed by contact with elements of literary branding in the culture, especially if these elements are themselves highly memorable and schematic. In fact, it might even be that the further we get away from the initial experience of reading, the more our memories of the text are susceptible to influence by literary labels and their common associations. This argument for the importance of literary branding from cognitive science may lie beyond the purview of literary history, at least for the moment, yet it remains intriguing.

While each reading act may be individual and utterly unique, because we are complex beings and texts are complex objects, literary brands seem to be collective and shared. For this reason, they may be of some use in a study of the relation of texts and mentalities.

5.2 A literary labels database

This thesis has explored critical problems of literary labelling, semantic attribution, and mnemonic compression in the reception histories of Mary Wollstonecraft, Lord Byron, and William Wordsworth. These case studies suggest that the study of literary branding is a complex and compelling scholarly endeavour, one that can supplement and help correct some of the biases of traditional historicist approaches and contemporary studies of literary celebrity by focusing upon readers’ interactions with literary labels, rather than getting distracted by sublime and personified celebrity subjects. In order to study the complex processes of attribution that bind distinct conceptual domains with such labels, enabling their common use in the perception and navigation of the cultural world, I would like to suggest the possibility of a literary labels database, dedicated to collecting and categorizing historical uses of literary labels in situ. One of the best ways to move forward would be to collect the primary evidence together in one spot, so
that any patterns that might exist may appear. Fortunately, literary names and labels like “Wordsworthian” or “Byron” are relatively stable units that can be tracked through a number of different yet interconnected print mediums: newspapers, periodicals, and books. As I hope to have shown, a close examination of the chronological deployment of these labels could yield a mixture of quantitative indicators as well as opportunities for qualitative analysis and close reading. A large database collection of such literary labels might help us reconstruct a sense of how historical readers perceived their literary environment. It is even possible to imagine a label-based model of literary history, rather than a text-based model. In such a model a text like *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* demands to be seen operating at various levels of complexity in various mediums: at its most complex in the full-length text itself, at a more simplified level in criticism and reviews, at a still more simple level in caricature or parody, and finally at the most schematic level of all – the title. All of these appearances could be thought of as different ways of accessing the same mental object. If we see the repeated association of a particular domain or semantic field with a particular label, perhaps we can conduct quantitative analysis on the collocations of words around each appearance, and pose some interesting questions. For example, is “Wordsworth” universally associated with simplicity? If not, which other concepts is he associated with? Can we categorize and quantify the target domains in all the metaphors for which “Wordsworth” is the source?

*A Literary Labels Database (LLD)* would bear similarities to the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Reading Experience Database*, from which it could derive much of its methodology. Whereas the *OED* records a couple of uses of a word in the particular sense that it defines, the *LLD* would ideally record all uses of a particular literary label, ultimately aiming to collect together all of the references ever written. This is by no means impossible because literary labels make up only a very small fraction of all printed words. Like the *Reading Experience Database*, entries in the *LLD* would ideally be uploaded by a community of users, who would preserve as much contextual information as possible about the use of the label; the full quotation, genre, publication medium, print run, and price of the text in which the label appears would all need to be carefully recorded. With such a wealth of information, we might begin to develop new ways of inferring which popular associations particular labels may have had, and how popular they
might have been. We could examine collocations of keywords surrounding the appearance of literary labels in all their various manifestations, looking for clues as to their meanings, or patterns in their use. Book titles would provide another interesting challenge, as the compression of titles in book advertisements or catalogues can affect how they are perceived and remembered. As suggested in Chapter 3, there are subtle differences between referring to *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and *Childe Harold*: while both labels refer to Byron’s poem, the former emphasizes the narrative or thematic aspects of the poem, while the latter highlights the autobiographical link with the author.

As we saw in chapter 2, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* may have had a more limited circulation than one might assume. There is evidence that many readers came into contact with the title of the work or the excerpted or caricatured versions of it without reading it, a fact not insignificant for the work’s subsequent reception and interpretation. When we consider how lower-class readers like John Clare could devour book titles themselves as a literary genre, giving them limited but nevertheless important access to texts that they could not afford and likely would never read, it becomes clear that we should develop theories that deal with the social remediation of a text at various levels of complexity, stretching on the one hand from what Hazlitt called the “essences and samples” provided by periodical reviews or anthologies, to the full complexity of the text itself. We could examine satires, forgeries, or caricatures to ascertain which conceptual domains are most often associated with specific labels, and the mode or method of their association. By carefully coupling this form of analysis with a careful book-historical approach to the material production and circulation of the various textual mediums or genres in which the labels appear (newspapers, periodicals, anthologies, monographs, manuscripts, broadsheets, advertisements, etc.), we could begin to track the impact of literature upon historical mentalities in a more detailed way than has been possible before. Under earlier models of literary history, references to Wordsworth were not considered as important as references by Wordsworth, because they were not written by the poet himself. Denotation almost always trumps connotation. It is one of the goals of this thesis to argue that such references, in their own way, may be as important and rich to our understanding of the history of reading as the hypothetical discovery of any new Wordsworth poem. Such references
are fossils of thought buried within our newly searchable and expanding corpus of literary texts. To collect and examine such fossils would be the aim of the LLD.

5.3 **Literary branding and literary criticism**

Branding is a fundamentally reductive process; I believe it has to be understood as such. What does this mean for literary criticism? In “How Should One Read a Book,” Virginia Woolf argues that good reading calls for “the rarest qualities of imagination, insight, and judgment.” Good reading proves, as Woolf says, “that literature is a very complex art,” and that even a lifetime of reading is not always enough to prepare a critic to contribute to it. This idea of criticism, as an activity that expands and improves literature, demands good reading for good writing. It is and always should be the highest aim of literary studies. But Woolf is also undoubtedly correct when she argues that we live in an age when books often pass in a bewildering rush before readers, who have “only one second” in which to judge them. If we take Hazlitt and a score of other Romantic-era critics at their word, such was also very nearly the situation during the Romantic period. Just because literary branding is fundamentally reductive does not mean that the study or interpretation of it needs to be. It is true that common readers wield enormous collective power. In Woolf’s words, the standards and judgments they make “steal into the air and become part of the atmosphere.” We should always study the criticism of individuals, but does this mean that we cannot also study the criticism of the collective? I propose that the study of literary branding is just that: an attempt to see what collective associations are floating in the atmosphere, and an examination of the mechanisms that put them there. As we have seen, the branding of a writer can often seem like a bad misreading – but such misreadings can be powerful things, things that a writer and audiences must thereafter bear. For this reason they sometimes bring a kind of death, a diminishment that destroys an author by freezing him at a certain level of his development, or in only one of his masks, trapping him in a mirrored cage of his own making. Good writers frequently become caricatures of themselves, at which point they cease to be good (at least according to Romantic notions of originality). But such misreadings are not always bad or destructive: sometimes they become useful tools that literature bequeaths to thought. More rarely they are a correction or a perfection of the author’s art by the world, or an agon, a spur that an
author may use to drive himself beyond himself, as Byron did when he attempted to publicly 
demolish the Byronic mode in *Don Juan*.

The fact that so many critics, from Hazlitt until the present day, could continually read and 
usefully reinterpret the works of Wordsworth or Coleridge, writing hundreds of monographs and 
thousands of articles upon the same texts, proves that criticism is anything but reductive. The 
fact that so many writers have had complex artistic reactions to figures like Byron proves that 
their reading of him was, in each case, idiosyncratic. Consider the Brontë sisters, who, in the 
figures of Rochester and Heathcliff, offer responses to the cult of Byron. Each of these characters 
is recognizably Byronic, yet is complex and individual and goes beyond Byron in its own way. 
As I suggested, we should take into account the notion of complexity itself, and conceive of 
criticism and branding to be opposite tendencies, because one tends to sophistication while the 
other tends to simplicity. A literary culture surely has need for both. What criticism gains in 
nuance and complexity it loses in ease of use and ubiquity. There are now, as there were in the 
Romantic period, many readers whose interactions with literature are extensive rather than 
intensive, shallow rather than deep. Perhaps these are the people for whom literary branding is 
the order of the day, people who talk about books more often than they read them; people for 
whom split-second judgments and associations are their only interaction with literary culture. 
And yet even the most subtle literary critics must of necessity invoke the common associations, 
if only in an attempt to demolish them. In a world of countless distractions, literary branding 
might have the edge on literary criticism, because time and attention are limited. Yet neither 
operates in a vacuum. They are part of the same system; they influence each other. It is not a 
question of either/or. It is a question of how. How does branding work in a literary culture? How 
does it influence criticism, and how does criticism influence it?

In his influential 1982 essay “What is the History of Books?” Robert Darnton defined one of the 
ultimate goals of book history as the attempt “to understand how ideas were transmitted through 
print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behavior of mankind during 
the last five hundred years” (65). While this ambitious goal has, in the decades since, often given 
way to more humble (and achievable) aims in the individual studies of book historians, literary
critics, and other interdisciplinary scholars, it has remained one of the principal goals of book history. At times, it has seemed an impossible dream. Darnton himself has lamented that “we hardly know what it [reading] is when it takes place under our nose” (*Forbidden* 85). Sceptical arguments abound, for good reason, and unfortunately the mental states of readers do not leave unmediated records, when they leave records at all. And yet this seemingly impossible goal has inspired many important studies. It is to be hoped that the study of literary branding might add in its own way to our understanding of the history of reading in the Romantic period, and beyond.
Works Consulted


---. “Christobell; or, the Case of the Sequel Pre-emptive.” *Wordsworth Circle* 6 (1975): 283-89. Print.


