

THEORIES OF THE LITERARY AUTHOR, LITERARY HISTORY AND CANONICITY TO c.1900

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THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

Perhaps the earliest theorist to address the author per se is **PLATO (c.427 - c.347 BCE)** in his dialogue the Ion which presents an image of the poet as possessed by something of a mad frenzy and as a result of which he is not entirely control of himself as he writes.

ARISTOTLE (c.384 - c.322 BCE) has little, if anything, to say on what he would call the 'efficient cause' of literature, though he does touch briefly on the social origin of literature and the evolution of literary genres in the Poetics.

The first important treatise to emphasise the relationship between a literary work and its author is "On the Sublime" written sometime during the first century BCE by a rhetorician and literary theorist nicknamed '**LONGINUS**' (a sobriquet designed, in the absence of knowledge of his real name, to stress his long-windedness) about whom little, including the dates of his life, is known. He defines "sublimity" (76) (or the 'sublime') in both oratory and poetry as a "certain distinction and excellence in expression" (76) or "elevated language" (76). He argues that "it is from no other source than this that the greatest poets and writers have derived their eminence and gained an immortality of renown" (76). The sublime is a mark of distinction among orators and poets. He distinguishes, on the one hand, between "skill in invention, and due order and arrangement of matter" (76) which are the "hard-won result . . . of the whole texture of the composition" (76) – the product, in other words, of hard work and careful craftsmanship, and, on the other, sublimity per se which, "flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt" (76) and thereby "displays the power of the orator in its plenitude" (76).

'Longinus' contends that the sublime is the product in part of nature, in part of nurture. Some are of the view that a "lofty tone" (76) is "innate, and does not come by teaching; nature is the only art that can compass it" (76). 'Longinus' argues, however, that

while nature as a rule is free and independent of matters of passion and elevation, yet is she wont not to act at random and utterly without system. Further, nature is the original and vital underlying principle in all cases, but system can define limits and fitting seasons, and can also contribute the safest rules for use and practice. Moreover, the expression of the sublime is more exposed to danger when it goes its own way without the guidance of knowledge. (76)

Indeed, he argues, the "very fact that there are some elements of expression which are in the hands of nature alone, can be learnt from no other source than art" (77). In other words, nature must be supplemented by nurture.

'Longinus' identifies the "five principal sources of elevated language" (79), the "common foundation" (79) of all five being the "gift of discourse" (79), that is, a love for and an ability to express oneself. The first two "two components of the sublime are for the most part innate" (79) in that they are something with which the orator / poet is born (i.e. they are a product of *nature*). The "first and most important" (79) source of the sublime is what 'Longinus' describes as the orator's / poet's "power of forming great conceptions" (79) (this would be his *logos*). Sublimity is, he writes, the "echo of a great soul" (79) as a result of which a "bare idea, by itself and without a spoken word, sometimes excites admiration just because of the greatness of soul implied" (79).

The second source is the orator's / poet's "vehement and inspired passion" (79), that is, a great emotional capacity (*pathos*) which he is able to transfer to his audience.' 'Longinus' is at pains to argue that "sublimity and passion" (79) are not a "unity" (79) because "some passions are found which are far removed from sublimity and are of a low order, such as pity, grief and fear" (79). However, it would be wrong, he argues, to believe that "passion never contributes at all to sublimity" (79): "there is no tone so lofty as that of genuine passion, in its right place, when it bursts out in a mad enthusiasm and as it were fills the speaker's words with frenzy" (79).

The remaining three sources of the sublime are at least "partly the product of art" (79) in that they are learned by the poet in the course of his general education and, in particular, through his exposure to prior examples of sublime writing offered by great precursors (i.e. they are a function of *nurture*). The first two of these fall under the rubric of what rhetoricians term 'style.' The third source of the sublime consists in the "due formation of figures" (79) of which there are "two sorts" (79): "first those of thought and secondly those of expression" (79). The fourth source of the sublime is the use of "noble diction" (79) which "comprises choice of words, and use of metaphors, and elaboration of language" (79). The fifth source of the sublime is the use of "dignified and elevated composition" (79) which is, he asserts, the "fitting conclusion of all that have preceded it" (79). This falls under the rubric of what rhetoricians term 'arrangement.'

THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE RENAISSANCE

Little, if anything, of noteworthy significance with regard to the author per se was produced during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

THE NEO-CLASSICAL PERIOD (17th AND 18th CENTURIES)

Perhaps the first significant statements since 'Longinus' on the topic of authorship were made during the Neo-Classical period by **JOSEPH ADDISON (1672 - 1719)**. Influenced by the empiricism of John Locke and company, he attempts in various contributions to his *The Spectator* between 1711 and 1712 to offer some insights into the nature of the mind and, in particular, what makes for a literary genius. He distinguishes between the mental faculties of wit, judgement and imagination. *Wit* is synonymous with "prompt memories" (134) and consists in the "assemblage of ideas, and putting them together with quickness and variety" (134). Wit is that faculty of mind made possible by the "fancy" (134) which seeks out "any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures, and agreeable visions" (134). The "entertainment and pleasantries" (134) of wit, which "strikes so lively on" (134) or appeals to people's fancy, proceeds by way of the use of "metaphor and allusion" (134). Later, Addison provides a long list of the key devices and techniques made use of by wit: "metaphors, similitudes, allegories, enigmas, mottos, parables, fables, dreams, visions, dramatic writings, burlesque, and all the methods of allusion" (134). Addison points out that "every resemblance of ideas is not that which we call wit, unless it be such that it gives delight and surprise to the reader" (134). For this reason, "it is necessary that the ideas should not lie too near one another in the nature of things; for where the likeness is obvious, it gives no surprise" (134). Addison has in mind such familiar clichés as comparing a white woman's bosom to that of snow or the tiresome similes to be found in epics. There are three kinds of wit: true, false, and mixt. The first "consists in the resemblance of ideas" (135), the second in the mere "resemblance of words" (135), while the third "partly in the resemblance of ideas, and partly in the resemblance of words" (135). The *judgement* is, Addison tells us, synonymous with "deepest reason" (134) and consists in the opposing ability to make distinctions, rather than comparisons: it consists in "separating carefully one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another"

(134). Wit is much less effective if it is not counterbalanced by judgement.

In Addison's schema, wit (the capacity to compare things) and judgment (the ability to both compare and contrast) are both part of the *imagination*, that part of the mind which is responsible for colouring the physical impressions of objects received by the senses. "Things" (135), he writes, "would make but a poor appearance to the eye, if we saw them only in their proper figures and motions" (135). It is the imagination which excites within our minds ideas "which are different from any thing that exists in the objects themselves" (135):

we are everywhere entertained with pleasing shows and apparitions; we discover imaginary glories in the heavens, and in the earth, and see some of this visionary beauty poured out on the whole creation: but what a rough unsightly sketch of nature should we be entertained with, did all her colouring disappear, and the several distinctions of light and shade vanish? (135)

It is the "soul" (135) which adds colouring to the "images" (135) which it receives "from matter" (135), the "light and colours . . . apprehended by the imagination" (135) being only "ideas in the mind, and not qualities that have any existence in matter" (136).

The key instrument of the imagination is the *words* by which the objects perceived by the senses is embellished: a "description often gives us more lively ideas than the sight of the things themselves" (136):

the images which flow from the object themselves appear weak and faint, in comparison with those that come from the expressions. The reason, probably, may be, because, in the survey of any object, we have only so much of it painted on the imagination as comes in at the eye; but in its description, the poet gives us as free a view of it as he pleases, and discovers to us several parts, that either we did not attend to, or that lay out of our sight when we first beheld it. As we look on any object, our idea of it is, perhaps, made up of two or three simple ideas; but when the poet represents it, he may either give us a more complex idea of it, or only raise in us such ideas as are most apt to affect the imagination. (136-137)

Addison theorises that different readers are differently affected by the same words (using culinary metaphors, he argues that various readers "have a different *relish* of the same description" [my emphasis; 137] or a "different *taste*" [my emphasis; 137]). The reason for this is that the "perfection of imagination in one more than in another or from the different ideas that several readers affix to the same words" (137).

Addison also argues that it is possible for one to develop a "true relish" (137) and "right judgment" (137). However, although nurture is as important as nature, the former is useless if there is nothing innate there in the first place to be cultivated:

a man should be born with a good imagination, and must have well weighed the force and energy that lie in the several words of a language, so as to be able to distinguish which are most significant and expressive of their proper ideas, and what additional strength and beauty they are capable of receiving from conjunction with others. The fancy must be warm to retain the print of those images it hath received from outward objects, and the *judgment* discerning, to know what expressions are most proper to clothe and adorn them to the best advantage. (my emphasis; 137)

Having established how the mind works in making sense of the external world, Addison then attempts to "consider what is properly a great genius" (155). Geniuses, he argues, are the "prodigies of mankind, who by the mere strength of natural parts, and without any assistance of art or learning, have produced works that are the delight of their own times, and the wonder of posterity" (155). There is, he argues,

something nobly wild and extravagant in these great natural geniuses that

is infinitely more beautiful than all the turn and polishing of what the French call a *bel esprit*, by which they would express a genius refined by conversation, reflection, and the reading of the most polite authors. (155)
Even the greatest genius, Addison writes, "takes a kind of tincture" (155) from such influences and "falls unavoidably into imitation" (155).

Addison identifies several geniuses who, however, were "never disciplined and broken by rules of art" (155): these include Homer and many of the writers who composed the Old Testament. Such geniuses were, he contends, "very much above the nicety and correctness of the moderns" (156) even though in their "similitudes" (156) or images (metaphors / similes), they often neglected to pay attention to the "decency of the comparison" (156), that is, "what the French call the *bienséance*" (156), coming up with the occasional outrageous comparison which opened them up to the censure of the "little wits" (156) who would ignore the "sublime" (156) quality of their writings.

There are two kinds of geniuses, Addison contends. The first group includes *original* writers like Pindar and Shakespeare, writers who are "hurried on by a natural fire and impetuosity to vast conceptions of things and noble sallies of imagination" (156). The second group includes writers like Virgil and Milton and is made up of geniuses, not inferior but of a different kind, who "have formed themselves by rules, and submitted the greatness of their natural talents to the corrections and restraints of art" (157). The genius of each kind of writer "may be equally great, but shows itself after a different manner" (157). Addison compares genius of the first kind to a "rich soil in a happy climate, that produces a whole wilderness of noble plants rising in a thousand beautiful landscapes, without any certain order or regularity" (157). In the second kind, he writes, it is the "same rich soil under the same happy climate, that has been laid out in walks and parterres, and cut into shape and beauty by the skill of the gardener" (157). The danger where the second group is concerned is that such writers might "cramp their own abilities too much by imitation, and form themselves altogether upon models, without giving the full play to their own natural parts" (157).

There is a third group of writers which consists of mere imitators of predecessors like Pindar, writers who are guilty of "following irregularities by rule, and by the little tricks of art straining after the most unbounded flights of nature" (156). Addison's point, one that clearly reflects the influence of both Plato's *Ion* and Longinus, is that it is an uncertain state of mind responsible for poetic creation which is akin to a divine madness: in imitators, he writes, "there is the distortion, grimace, and outward figure, but nothing of that divine impulse which raises the mind above itself" (157).

Addison's point is that an "imitation of the best authors is not to compare with a good original" (157) and that "very few writers make an extraordinary figure in the world, who have not something in their way of thinking or expressing themselves, that is peculiar to them, and entirely their own" (157).

ALEXANDER POPE (1688 - 1744) does not have that much to say about the author per se, though he does warn the aspiring critic to not let the fame of an author colour his assessment of his work. Though he advocates conformity to the rules and emulation of the ancients, he also touches briefly on the question of originality: acknowledging that some esteemed Modern writers such as Shakespeare have not followed the rules laid down by the Ancients, Pope contends that there are

Some beauties yet, no precepts can declare

For there's a happiness as well as care. (141)

In other words, there are certain "nameless graces which no methods can teach" (144) which a "master-hand alone can reach" (158). However, his point is that such exceptions justify the rules. In some case, they were sometimes necessitated, at least at first, in the case of Ancient writers blazing a new path where there were no rules to guide them and who had no choice, accordingly, but to rely solely on "lucky licence" (148):

If, where the rules not far enough extend,

(Since rules were made but to promote their end)
 Some lucky license answer to the full
 Th'intent proposed, that license is a rule.
 Thus Pegasus a nearer way to take,
 May boldly deviate from the common track,
 Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend
 And rise to faults true critics dare not mend
 Which without passing through the judgment, gains
 The heart, and all its end at once attains. (150-157).

In such cases, Pope argues, what matters is the goal ultimately reached, even though by unconventional means. This is why he warns:

Moderns, beware! or if you must offend
 Against the precept, ne'er transgress its end;
 Let it be seldom, and compelled by need;
 And have, at least, their precedent to plead. . . (163-166)

Pope compares such artistic deviations to nature where, he points out, "in prospects . . . some objects please our eyes, / Which out of nature's common order rise, / The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice" (158-160). It is precisely such innovative exceptions to the rules, whether in the natural world or the world of art, which the Romantics (1785-1830) would later admire so.

SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709 - 1784) begins his Preface to his edition of the collected works of Shakespeare (1765) by noting that we often seem to cherish the works of the past and to neglect the present. Praises, he writes, are often "without reason lavished on the dead" (320) as a result of which it sometimes seems that the "honours due only to excellence are paid to antiquity" (320). Everyone, Johnson suggests, is "perhaps . . . more willing to honour past than present excellence; and the mind contemplates genius through the shades of age" (320). Time is the test of genius, Johnson contends:

To works . . . of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientific, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind have long possessed they have often examined and compared; and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour. . . . [I]n the productions of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind. (320)

With this test in mind, Johnson suggests that Shakespeare meets these criteria and "may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and earn the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration" (321) because he has "long outlived his century, the term commonly used as the test of literary merit" (321). That he deserves such acclaim can be verified by "comparing him with other authors" (321). The question which arises, given the fallibility of "human judgment" (321), is "by what peculiarities of excellence Shakespeare has gained and kept the favour of his countrymen?" (321). Arguing that Shakespeare's greatest virtue as a writer is his verisimilitude, especially his ability to depict realistic characters, he acknowledges his flaws: a tendency to blur the genres of tragedy and comedy which, ideally, ought to be distinct and his failure to respect the unities of action, time and place.

Expressive or author-oriented criticism really takes off in the late eighteenth century with the work of **EDWARD YOUNG (1683 - 1765)**. In "Conjectures on Original Composition" (1759), a shift in emphasis can be detected away from conventional Neo-Classical concerns with what a work represents and its impact on the reader and towards the author responsible for the work, his/her social and historical location and, thus, unique vantage-point on reality; there is a move away from a concern

with the author’s conformity to given formal rules and standards and towards an emphasis on the originality and uniqueness of his/her perspective on things. Young begins by sounding the usual Neo-Classical notes concerning the many moral and spiritual benefits which literature bestows on writers and readers alike (329-330). Young’s real concern here, however, is with understanding what a genius is and, by extension, with the supremacy of *originality* over *imitation* (in the sense of emulation or mimicry of other writers). He turns his attention, firstly, to the question of imitation. Arguing that all literary works are “imitations” (330), he contends that there are two kinds of imitation: “one of Nature, one of Authors” (330). He uses the terms ‘originals’ for the first kind of literary work and ‘imitations’ for the second. Using a series of vegetative and agricultural metaphors, he compares the “mind of a man of Genius” (330) to a “fertile and pleasant field” (330) that “enjoys a perpetual Spring” (330). He proposes that the greatest works are “glorious fruits where genius prevails” (330). “Of that Spring” (330), he writes, “*Originals* are the fairest flowers: *Imitations* are of quicker growth, but fainter bloom” (330). There is a number of important differences between originals and imitations, according to Young:

ORIGINALS	IMITATIONS
The “great benefactors” (330) who “extend the Republic of Letters, and add a new province to its dominion” (330)	They “only give us a sort of Duplicates of what we had, possibly much better, before” (330) and in which “ <i>Knowledge</i> and <i>Genius</i> are at a stand” (330)
The “pen of an <i>Original</i> writer . . . out of a barren waste calls a blooming spring” (330)	“Out of that blooming spring an imitator is a transplanter of Laurels, which sometimes die on removal, always languish on foreign soil” (330)
Even when inferior in excellence, “yet has something to boast” (330)	An imitator “but nobly builds on another’s foundation; his debt is, at least, equal to his Glory” (330)
An original “enjoys an undivided applause” (330)	An imitator “shares his crown, if he has one, with the chosen Object of his Imitation” (330)
An original “may be said to be of a <i>vegetable</i> nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it <i>grows</i> , it is not <i>made</i> ” (330)	Imitations are “often a sort of <i>Manufacture</i> wrought up by these <i>Mechanics, Art, and Labour</i> , out of pre-existent materials not their own” (330)
Our “spirits rouse at an original; that is a perfect stranger, and all throng to learn what news from a foreign land. . . . we are at the writer’s mercy; on the strong wing of his imagination, we are snatched from Britain to Italy, from climate to climate, from pleasure to pleasure; we have no home, no thought” (330)	Readers “read imitation with somewhat of his languor who listens to a twice-told tale” (330)

Young then turns his attention to the Ancients versus Moderns debate. He deals, firstly, with the charge that many classic writers were themselves imitators. He is of the view that they are mostly “accidental originals” (330) in that the “works they imitated, few excepted, are lost” (330). He also laments that among the Moderns, there are so few

originals. This is "not because the writer's harvest is over, the great reapers of antiquity having left nothing to be gleaned after them" (331). It is because, rather, "illustrious examples engross, prejudice, and intimidate" (331) and so "engross our attention, and so prevent a due inspection of ourselves; they prejudice our judgment in favour of their abilities, and so lessen the sense of our own" (331). He hastens to emphasise that in this debate he is not on the side of the Moderns whose "great inferiority" (331) he does not deny. He stresses that this is "no necessary inferiority" (331), however. With nothing to imitate, the first writers had no choice but to be original. Modern writers, however, "have a choice to make, and therefore have a merit in their power" (331) and may choose to "soar in the regions of liberty, or move in the soft fetters of easy imitation" (331).

Young offers a different view to that expressed by Pope and others that to imitate Homer is tantamount to imitating nature. He advises us to "drink where he drank, . . . that is, at the breast of nature; imitate, but imitate not the composition, but the man" (331). He argues that one should aim to "write naturally" (331) in the sense above, that is, by imitating the same nature which Homer did. By not imitating Homer, one is not departing from nature:

suppose You was to change place, in time, with Homer, then, if you write naturally, you might as well charge *Homer* with an imitation of You. Can you be said to imitate *Homer* for writing so, as you would have written, if *Homer* had never been? (331)

He advises writers to depart from their literary precursors as far as a "regard to nature, and sound sense, will permit a departure from your great predecessors; so far, ambitiously, depart from them" (331):

the farther from them in *Similitude*, the nearer are you to them in *Excellence*, you rise by it into an *Original*; become a noble Collateral, not an humble descendant from them. Let us build our Compositions with the Spirit, and in the Taste, of the Ancients; but not with their Materials. . . . All eminence, and distinction, lies out of the beaten road; excursion and deviation, are necessary to find it. (331-332)

This emphasis on originality above all else would become very influential upon the Romantics.

Referring to Shakespeare as his prime example of modern genius, Young then turns his attention to the question of genius. He contends that there is a number of important differences between genius and mere learning:

GENIUS	LEARNING
Genius is a "masterworkman" (332)	Learning is "but an instrument" (332)
Genius is the "power of accomplishing great things without the means generally reputed necessary to that end" (332)	A "good understanding" (332) is the product merely of "Learning" (332)
Having genius is like being something akin to a "magician . . . that raises his structure by means invisible" (332)	Having only learning is like being something akin to a "good Architect" (332) who builds by means of the "skillful use of common tools" (332)
"Genius has ever been supposed to partake of something divine" (332)	Learning is of this world and is "destitute of this superior Aid" (332)

<p>Genius produces "unprescribed beauties, and unexampled excellence, which are characteristics of genius, lie without the pale of learning's authorities, and laws; which Pale, Genius must leap to come at them; but by that leap, if Genius is wanting, we break our Necks; we lose that little credit, which possibly we might have enjoyed before" (332)</p>	<p>Learning is a "great lover of rules, and boaster of famed examples; . . . learning inveighs against natural unstudied graces, and small harmless inaccuracies, and sets rigid boundaries to that liberty" (332)</p>
<p>Rules are an "Impediment to the Strong" (332). "Liberty" (332) is that "to which Genius often owes its supreme Glory" (332)</p>	<p>Rules, "like crutches, are a needful Aid to the Lame" (332). Learning "sets rigid bounds to that Liberty" (332)</p>
<p>"There is something in Poetry beyond Prose-reason; there are Mysteries in it not be explained, but admired" (332)</p>	<p>These 'Mysteries' "render mere Prose-men Infidels to their Divinity" (332)</p>
<p>The genius is a "divinely-inspired Enthusiast" (336) who is comparable to the "rising sun" (336)</p>	<p>The non-Genius is merely a "well-accomplished Scholar" (336) who is comparable at best to the "bright morning star" (336)</p>
<p>The "true genius" (336) is "crossing all publick roads into fresh untrodden ground" (336). He "conceives . . . the least embryo of new thought; opens . . . [a] vista thro' the gloom of ordinary writers, into the bright walks of rare Imagination, and singular Design" (336)</p>	<p>The merely learned "thinks in wretched unanimity with the throng; Incumbered with the notions of others, and impoverished by their abundance" (336). The non-genius "up to the knees in Antiquity, is treading the sacred footsteps of great examples" (336)</p>

All in all, Young argues, learning "we thank, genius we revere; that gives us pleasure, this gives us rapture; that informs, this inspires, and is itself inspired; for genius is from heaven, learning from man. . . . Learning is borrowed knowledge; genius is knowledge innate, and quite our own" (333).

Young stresses that genius is rare and imitation much more likely, whatever the historical period in question. Moreover, what is at stake is not achievements but innate capacity: "[q]uite clear of the dispute concerning ancient and modern learning, we speak not of performance, but powers. The modern powers are equal to those before them; modern performance in general is deplorably poor" (335). Great writers can emerge in the future, however, given the right conditions:

Reasons there are why talents may not appear, none why they may not exist, as much in one period as another. An evocation of vegetable fruits depends on rain, air, and sun; an evocation of the fruits of genius no less depends on externals. What a marvellous crop bore it in Greece and Rome? And what a marvellous sunshine did it there enjoy? What encouragement from the nature of their environments, and the spirit of their people. . . . The sun as much exists on a cloudy day, as in a clear; it is outward, accidental circumstances that with regard to genius either in nation, or age, '*Collectus fugat nubes, solemque reducit*' [drives away the gathered clouds and brings back the sun--Virgil's *Aeneid*]. (335)

Young stresses that we are not only "ignorant of the dimensions of the human mind in general, but even of our own" (335). That man is "scarce less ignorant of his own

powers, than an oyster of its pearl, or a rock of its diamond; that he may possess dormant, unsuspected abilities . . . is evident from the sudden eruption of some men, out of perfect obscurity, into public admiration" (335). Because men are often "strangers to their own abilities" (335), Young wants to borrow "two golden rules from ethics" (335): 1. Know thyself; 2ndly, Reverence thyself" (336). He advises us to dive deep into thy bosom; learn the depth, extent, bias, and full forte of thy mind; contract full intimacy with the stranger within thee; excite and cherish every spark of intellectual light and hear, however smothered under former negligence, or scattered through the dull, dark mass of common thoughts; and collecting them into a body, let thy genius rise (if a genius thou hast) as the sun from chaos; and if I should then say, like an Indian, worship it, (though too bold) yet should I say little more than my second rule enjoins, (viz.) reverence thyself. . . . [L]et not great examples, or authorities, browbeat thy reason into too great a diffidence of thyself: thyself so reverence, as to prefer the native growth of thy own mind to richest import from abroad; such borrowed riches make us poor. The mind who thus reverences himself, will soon find the world's reverence to follow his own. (336)

The alternative is "meanness of mind" (336) and "prostration of our own powers" (336) resulting from "too great admiration of others" (336). Imitators are akin to "translators" (336) who often "rather raise their original's reputation, by showing him to be by them inimitable, than their own" (336). A good example of this is the translation of Homer into what Young terms 'Indian' languages:

Aelian tells us, that the Indians, (hopeful tutors!) have taught him to speak their tongue. What expect we from them? Not Homer's Achilles, but something, which like Patroclus, assumes his name, and, at its peril, appears in his stead; nor expect we Homer's Ulysses, gloriously bursting out of his own cloud into royal grandeur, but an Ulysses under disguise, and a beggar to the last. (336)

The result is an unsatisfactory mimicry of a great original and, in so doing, the failure to express the 'powers' (genius) unique to the Indian people, a view that resonates even today in the Postcolonial critique of colonialism and imperialism.

The founder, arguably, of Romanticism as well as political and cultural nationalism, **JOHANN GOTTFRIED VON HERDER (1744 - 1803)**, was perhaps not the first to write a work of literary criticism that focused less on what the literary work is about or its impact on the reader and more on its writer. Samuel Johnson may very well have been first to do so in his preface to his edition of the collected works of Shakespeare. However, Herder is at the very least one of the first, if not the first, to practice *literary history* per se, that is, to link the writer to the unique socially- and historically-specific context in which s/he lived. In "Shakespeare" (1773), he notes the praises and criticisms directed at the famous playwright, in particular the frequent accusation that he broke the rules inherited from the ancients. He argues that many of these criticisms are misplaced because the drama produced in ancient Greece was pertinent to that place and time and that geographical, social and temporal differences mean that the theories and practices inherited from the Greeks have necessarily mutated in the course of their transplantation. He argues that tradition is unavoidable: the "lettered culture of the human race has . . . made its way only through *tradition*, so a certain stock of rules which seemed inseparable from its teaching, has naturally accompanied it everywhere in its womb and its language" (292).

However, as "everything in the world changes, so Nature, the true creator of Greek drama, was bound to change also" (294), Herder argues. The *Greek worldview, manners, the state of the republics, the tradition of the heroic age, religion, even music, expression, and the degrees of illusion* changed. And so naturally enough the material for plots disappeared,

too, as well as the opportunity to adapt it and the motive for doing so. To be sure, the poets could draw on older or foreign material and dress it up in the tried-and-tested manner, but that had no effect. Consequently, it was devoid of soul. Consequently . . . it was no longer the thing it once was. It was effigy, imitation, ape, statue, in which only the most devoted lover could still detect the demon that had once brought the statue to life. (294)

The "new Athenians of Europe" (294), he asserts, responsible for this "effigy of Greek theatre" (294) were centred in particular in France. Herder has in mind in particular Corneille and his attempt to make the three unities of time, place and action inherited from Aristotle's *Poetics* universally and eternally binding. Herder questions, in short, whether a "half-truthful copying of foreign ages, manners, and actions, with the exquisite aim of adapting it to a two-hour performance on our stage, can be thought the equal or indeed the superior of an *imitation* that in a certain respect was the highest expression of a people's national character" (296).

Herder at this point seeks to identify a nation that "did not care to ape the Greeks and settle for the mere walnut shell but preferred instead to *invent its own drama*" (297).

If its *history, tradition, and domestic, political, and religious relations* have no such simple character, then naturally its drama cannot partake of this quality either. Where possible, it will *create* its drama out of its history, out of the spirit of the age, manners, opinions, language, national prejudices, traditions, and pastimes. . . . And what it creates will be drama if it achieves its purpose among this people. (297)

The country in Northern Europe which Herder believes has accomplished this is Britain and the writer Shakespeare. Arguing that to "demand that Greek drama arise then, and in England, and therefore to demand that it develop *naturally* (we are not speaking here of mere apery) is worse than asking a sheep to give birth to lion cubs" (297). The key questions are:

'What is the soil like? How has it been prepared? What has been sown in it? What should it be able to produce?' And heavens, how far we are from Greece! History, tradition, manners, religion, the spirit of the age, of the people, of emotion, and of language, – how far all these things are from Greece! . . . And if now in this changed time, changed for good or ill, there arose an age, a genius who created dramatic works from this raw material as naturally, sublimely, and originally as the Greeks did from theirs; and if these works reached the same goal by very different paths; and if they were essentially a far more multiformly simple and uniformly complex entity, and thus . . . a perfect whole – what manner of fool would compare and even condemn the two things because the latter was not the former? (297)

Rather, he argues, the "very essence of the latter, its virtue and perfection, resides in the fact that it is not the former, that from the soil of the age a different plant grew" (297-298).

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

FRIEDRICH VON SCHLEIERMACHER (1768 - 1834), one of the key figures in the development of Hermeneutics (the field devoted to the study of interpretation), seeks to provide, in his "Compendium of 1819," a method for correctly determining the meaning intended by an author. It is the author's intention, he emphasises, which the reader must strive to identify. There are two factors, one linguistic and the other psychological, indispensable to correctly interpreting both oral and written texts and, thus, avoiding misunderstanding. All utterances, he contends, are "related to both the totality of

language and the totality of the speaker's thoughts" (74). For this reason, "understanding a speech always involves two moments: to understand what is said in the context of the language with its possibilities, and to understand it as a fact in the thinking of a speaker" (74), that is, a grasping of a speech as it derives from the language as a whole and from the mind of the speaker in question. Every speech "presupposes a given language" (74), every communication "presupposes a shared language and therefore some knowledge of the language" (75). Moreover, "every act of speaking is based on something having been thought" (75) in the mind of a particular speaker. In short,

each person represents one locus where a given language takes shape in a particular way, and his speech can be understood only in the context of the totality of the language. But then too he is a person who is a constantly developing spirit, and his speaking can be understood as only one moment in his development in relation to all others. (75)

For this reason, understanding "takes place only in the coinherence of these two moments" (75): a speech "cannot even be understood as a moment in a person's development unless it is also understood in relation to the language" (75) because the "linguistic heritage modifies our mind" (75). By the same token, a speech "cannot be understood as a modification of the language unless it is understood as a moment in the development of the person" (75) because an "individual is able to influence a language by speaking, which is how a language develops" (75).

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770 - 1850), in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1800), attempts to define the poet and the relationship of his consciousness to the world around him, offering a conception of the poet which, like Addison before him, is largely Lockean in outlook. "What is a Poet?" (441), Wordsworth asks. His answer: the poet is a "man speaking to men" (441). However, the poet is certainly different in two important ways from other men. He feels things more keenly and thinks more deeply and expansively than others: poetry "to which any value can be attached" (438) is produced by men who "being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply" (438). The poet is *naturally*

endowed with a more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe. . . . To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet . . . do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events. (441)

Wordsworth stresses that although the poet feels things more keenly than other people, the nature of his passions and feelings is not different from those of others: they are the "general passions and thoughts and feelings of men" (443). The poet is "nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree" (443), that is, the poet is different from others only in his sensitivity and intellect.

Poets are also distinguished from other men, Wordsworth argues, not only because he is someone who naturally possesses a "greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels" (441), but because he is naturally endowed with the gift of expressing "those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without *external* excitement" (my emphasis; 441). To put this another way, the poet is "chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without *external* excitement; and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings are produced in him in that manner" (my

emphasis; 443). In other words, poets are both brighter and more emotional than others (in that their emotions are aroused even when they are not directly exposed to particular situations) and have greater powers of self-expression.

If poets mostly resemble other men (the difference being quantitative rather than qualitative in nature), the key to understanding both the nature of the poet and the impact of poetry on the reader, therefore, is to seek to comprehend human nature. To this end, Wordsworth draws heavily on Locke's empiricist philosophy of mind and, more precisely, his view that ideas in the mind are formed by the absorption through the senses of impressions stimulated by objects external to us. Our thought, in other words, is the product of sensations and feelings inspired by our intercourse with the world around us. In a Lockean vein, Wordsworth contends that the "mind of man" (442) is the "mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature" (442) and reflective of "certain powers in the great and permanent objects" (439) around him in the natural world. Wordsworth lists some of these objects and experiences that impinge upon the mind as the

operations of the elements, and the appearances of the visible universe; . . .
 . storm and sunshine, . . . the revolutions of the seasons, . . . cold and
 heat, . . . loss of friends and kindred, . . . injuries and resentments,
 gratitude and hope, . . . fear and sorrow. (443)

Wordsworth is at pains to stress here that both the physical and the social environment has an impact upon us. Whether natural or artificial, there are numerous "causes which excite" (443) in us "moral feelings and animal sensations" (443) which, in turn, produce relevant thoughts. These, in turn, have an effect upon our feelings: "our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings" (438), modify and direct "our continued influxes of feeling" (438). There is, in other words, a certain reciprocity between our feelings and our thoughts.

However, due to his acquaintance with Coleridge, and the latter's dalliance with the 'transcendental idealism' of Immanuel Kant as well as the 'absolute idealism' of his successors, the so-called 'German Idealists,' J. G. Fichte, F. W. J. Schelling and G. W. F. Hegel, Wordsworth also flirts with the idea that the poet's thoughts and feelings may be not only shaped by external experiences (a view that philosophers label 'externalism') but may also derive from sources within ('internalism'). For Wordsworth, in other words, the mind may be more than a mere sponge that absorbs sense-impressions acquired from without and turns them into thoughts and feelings. Consciousness may accordingly be more than a passive mirror of the external world. Earlier proto-Rationalists and Rationalists such as Plato and Descartes had argued that at least some of our ideas (especially those of a mathematical nature) precede our experiences. Kant argued later that though the Empiricists were correct that the *content* of our ideas arise *a posteriori* in the wake of specific sensual interactions with the world around us (in other words, for example, we would never know what sweetness was unless we tasted a mango), the Rationalists were at least tending in the right direction when they claimed that some ideas existed in the mind prior to experience. Kant argued specifically that the mind imposes certain *forms* on the content of our ideas by means of certain inherent *a priori* modes of intuition (humans understand the world, divided into objects and events, in terms of space and time) as well conceptual categories (e.g. cause and effect) that we inevitably apply to and through which we necessarily filter all our experiences. To some degree, in other words, a human being does in fact actively impose his consciousness on the external world. The German Idealists would take Kant's suggestions to an extreme, arguing something to the effect that the world we encounter is our oyster, our plaything, the product entirely of our mental operations.

Where Coleridge seems to adopt wholesale and to identify with the views of the Idealists, Wordsworth appears to sit on the fence and to oscillate between the extremes of empiricism, on the one hand, and rationalism (and, by extension, Kant's transcendental idealism), on the other. He posits, arguably, the existence of something

of a two-way relationship between the poet's consciousness and the world outside of it, the mind being both affected by and in turn acting upon things outside the self. Hence, his contention that there exists "certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind" (439) and his claim that the poet

considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure. . . . He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other. (442)

The poet's thoughts and feelings are, in short, seemingly partly acquired and partly innate, a posteriori in part and a priori in part, to some degree the passive reflection of and capable of actively imposing itself on the world outside. His consciousness is, in short, in part formed by the external world which is in turn, at least in part, also 'fashioned' by the consciousness of the poet. The result is that the poet gives as good as he gets.

Whatever the source, external or internal, of consciousness, Wordsworth argues that the foregoing evidently applies as much to poets as it does to other men, the only difference being that the former are naturally more sensitive and deeper thinkers. He offers a famous definition of the source of poetry: "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" (438). However, it should be noted that poetry is rarely, if ever, crafted even as the emotions are being aroused. Rather, he stresses, poetry "takes its origin from emotion *recollected in tranquillity*" (my emphasis; 177). He describes the precise process of poetic creation in this way:

emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on. . . . (444)

In other words, long after the initial stimulation, the poet pauses retroactively to cognitively assimilate the emotions experienced earlier, turning feelings into thoughts, and records them by putting pen to paper.

Where Wordsworth flirts with Kant's 'transcendental idealism,' **SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772 - 1834)** fully embraces the views of the German Idealists, not least those of G. W. F. Hegel (1770 - 1831) and, especially, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775 - 1854) who viewed, rightly or wrongly, their own work as building on Kant's legacy. It was on their so-called 'absolute idealism' that Coleridge predicated his own theory of literature.

The German Idealists argued that what they termed Spirit or Universal Mind or Consciousness (*Geist*) – something akin to God – expresses or manifests itself in and through the physical universe (nature). The universe is, thus, something of an 'expressive totality': it forms a whole (or, in mathematical terms, universal set) every part (or sub-set) of which expresses the whole of which it is part. Moreover, the relationship which exists between God and nature is analogous to that which exists between the artist and his artwork: just as the artist creates and, in so doing, expresses himself in and through his art, so too does God, in creating the universe (an ongoing process, never a *fait accompli*), express himself. Just as the artist's most important faculty is the imagination, so too is God's. In so arguing, the German Idealists offered an 'aesthetic ontology,' that is, a universe conceived for the first time perhaps in specifically artistic terms. The German Idealists believed, in short, that the entire physical universe is ultimately informed by and expressive of a substance that is non-physical in nature. This substance is Geist. Our individual mind, consciousness or spirit (*geist*) is a part or subset of that Universal Mind, Consciousness Spirit (*Geist*) discussed above. This applies to human beings and, by extension, all living, organic creatures who may be said to possess consciousness. One consequence of this, what Charles Taylor calls 'expressivist' metaphysics, is that our conventional sense of the boundaries

separating subject from object, self from other, etc. are dissolved, with tremendous consequences for Coleridge's conception of literature.¹

In Chapters XII to XIV of *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge articulates an account of the mind and self (what he calls the "*I am*" [478]) and knowledge that betrays the influence of the ontological and epistemological idealism of Kant and, by extension, the German Idealists. He argues that "all knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject" (476), that is, to know anything requires two elements: a knower and an object known. Coleridge rejects, firstly, epistemological objectivism. He calls this combination "natural philosophy" (477) or sometimes "mechanical philosophy" (478). This is the view whereby the "objective is taken as the first" (477) and most important thing and the role of the knower is downplayed. As a result, he argues, we must still "account for the supervenience of the Subjective, which coalesces with" (477) the object known. In focusing on the object, in other words, the natural philosopher "avoids above all the intermixture of the subjective in his knowledge" (477), i.e. the creative role played by the mind.

Coleridge also rejects the views of the epistemological subjectivist who is "equally anxious to preclude the interpolation of the objective into the subjective principles of his science" (477). In other words, the idealist would like to view the world in solipsistic terms and to deny that "there exists things without us" (477). This is an untenable position, for Coleridge: it is the "table itself, which the man of common sense believes himself to see, not the phantom of a table [Plato's notion of the table's essence], from which he may argumentatively deduce the reality of a table, which he does not see" (478). Such subjective idealism, he says, "banishes us to a land of shadows, surrounds us with apparitions, and distinguishes truth from illusion only by the majority of those who dream the same dream" (478).

Coleridge postulates that there is a third option, what he calls "transcendental philosophy" (478). This is a view which derives from Kant and his successors, the German Idealists. Transcendental philosophy, in synthesising both objectivism and subjectivism, leads to the "truest and most binding realism" (478). His basic argument is that there is no distinction between subject and object: the "existence of things without us" (478) is "unconsciously involved" (478) in the "existence of our own being" (478). The external world is "one and the same thing with our own immediate self-consciousness" (478). In other words, the external world is not separable from the perceiving consciousness. Subject and object, self and other, mind and matter, indeed, all polar or binary opposites, are only seemingly distinct from each other. When rightly viewed, rather, they are understood to belong to and partake of a larger whole, described variously as Geist / Spirit / Reason / Universal Mind / God, for which reason all such apparent distinctions are illusory. As a result, paradoxically, to study the external world (the object) is to simultaneously study the mind (subject), and vice versa. To know something external to the self, one must start with the self, and vice versa.

In Chapter XIII, Coleridge tells us that the human psyche is tripartite in nature, as is the case with Plato's model of the soul. It consists of:

- the 'Understanding' (what he calls elsewhere the 'mechanical understanding'): this is that part of our minds which deals with and assimilates the sense-impressions received from intercourse with the external world, the part of the mind with which Locke contented himself but beyond which he did not look;
- "Fancy" (478): this is nothing more than a "mode of memory emancipated from time and space" (478), and ruled by the "will" (478) or "choice" (478), which receives "its materials ready made from the law of association" (478). Fancy is what many of us today might call 'fantasy' and by means of which we order the real world in our minds according to our whims; and

¹Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), chapter one.

- the "imagination" (478): Coleridge terms this the "secondary imagination" (478) because it is the "echo" (478) in a human being (the finite 'I am') of what Coleridge calls the divine or "primary imagination" (478) found in the "infinite *I am*" (478) and which is the "living power and prime agent of all human perception" (478). In other words, the human mind or reason (*geist / animus*) is a microcosmic image ('echo') of the macrocosmic Universal Mind or Reason (*Geist / Animus Mundi*) and the secondary imagination is a "repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation of the infinite *I am*" (478). The creativity of our imagination mirrors that of God / Spirit on a larger scale: it is "identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation" (478). Like the 'primary imagination' of God / Spirit, the secondary imagination of humans "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" (478); even "where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and unify" (478).

It is the imagination which is equipped with the insight to intuit order and unity where only chaos, diversity and even downright contradiction appear to exist, which intuits beauty where only ugliness seem to be, and which intuits *symbols* of the divine or universal mind manifesting itself in and through physical objects. The poet is particularly blessed in this regard, equipped with abundant imagination (and not just 'fancy'), hence, the exalted role ascribed to him by the Romantics.

In Essay the Third of On the Principles of Genial Criticism (1814), Coleridge's point is that beauty is to be found in art which captures the unity inherent in seeming diversity. Coleridge begins by distinguishing the *beautiful* from the merely *agreeable*. The latter is that which inspires pleasure: it is "whatever agrees with our nature, . . . That which is congruous with the primary constitution of our senses. Thus green is naturally agreeable to the eye" (472). The agreeable is that quality of an object which produces pleasure by "connection or association with some other thing, separate or separable from it" (474) as a result of which green soothes the eye because it recalls the colour of vegetation.

Coleridge defines beauty, by contrast, as "[s]o far . . . from depending wholly on association, that it is frequently produced by the mere removal of associations" (472). Beauty is, rather, "that in which the many, still seen as many, becomes one" (472): "[o]f all 'the many,' which I actually see, each and all are really reconciled into unity: while the effulgence from the whole coincides with, and seems to represent, the effulgence of delight from my own mind in the intuition of it" (472). This is Coleridge's way of arguing that beauty consists in the recognition of the organic unity that exists in the midst of apparent diversity: beauty is the "reduction of many to one" (474) and "subsists in simultaneous intuition of the relation of parts, and of all to a whole" (475).

Moreover, beauty is inextricably bound up with symbolism. Beauty, he writes, is the "subjection of matter to spirit so as to be transformed into a symbol, in and through which the spirit reveals itself" (475). An appreciation of the beautiful accordingly does not originate "in the sensations" (475) but "must belong to the intellect" (475) and "arises from the perceived harmony of an object, whether sight or sound, with the inborn and constitutive rules of the judgment and imagination: and it is always intuitive" (476). In other words, beauty of the sort described by Coleridge cannot be perceived via the senses but can only intuited by a combination of the reason ('judgment') and the imagination.

In a brief but important section of The Statesman's Manual (1816), which is otherwise largely devoted to socio-political speculations, Coleridge's question is this: how exactly does the poet capture the unity in diversity which makes for beauty in a work of art? To this end, Coleridge draws an important distinction between the literary devices which he terms 'allegory' and 'symbol' respectively. The former, allegory, is, in short, his term for the use of what we might term today 'imagery' or 'figurative language' (e.g. metaphors, similes, etc.) by means of which one object reported by the senses is

compared to or represents or imitates or is suggestive of another. He specifically defines allegory as "a translation of abstract notions into a picture language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses" (476). He means by this that abstract or intangible ideas (such as 'sacrifice' or 'love' or, as is the case in one of his poems, a woman's verbal protests directed at her would-be lover) are represented by means of images (hence, "picture language") of tangible, concrete objects (e.g. a 'cross' or a 'rose' or an 'aeolian harp') to which the physical senses can relate (i.e. via the sense of sight in the case of the cross, a combination of sight and smell in the case of the rose, and the sense of hearing in the case of the harp). It should be noted that each example of allegory implies the drawing of a comparison between the two items in question which is entirely arbitrary for the simple reason that the 'abstract notion' could be represented by any number of concrete objects perceptible by the senses. It should also be noted that allegory is a function of two components of the psyche: that which he calls the "mechanical understanding" (476) which turns sense impressions into empirical knowledge as well as what he elsewhere calls the 'Fancy' which whimsically and arbitrarily draws connections between things. (Coleridge outlines his model of the psyche and its component elements in Chapter XIII of his *Biographia Literaria*.)

Of course, some objects such as a cross or a rose are often described as *symbols* of sacrifice or love, respectively, in that they have come to be associated by convention with these qualities. However, Coleridge uses the term 'symbol' in a significantly different way. He offers a celebrated and often cited definition of the symbol: it is, he argues,

characterised by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative. (476)

A number of important implications to this quotation need to be carefully unpacked. For Coleridge, a symbol involves a comparison that is neither whimsical nor arbitrary but, rather, necessary or 'motivated,' as linguists sometimes put it. This relationship is, to be precise, one of part to whole and whole to part. Where he associates allegory with the tropes of metaphor and simile, he seems to link symbol with that of 'synecdoche' where, for example, one uses a part of an object (e.g. the hand) to denote the whole of which it is part (i.e. a man). Hence, for example, one might refer to the hiring of three 'hands' to complete a job (when one really means three men), or viewing three sails on the horizon (i.e. three ships). From this perspective, one object does not merely stand for or in place of another object. Rather, much like the relationship of concentric circles to each other or that of universal sets (e.g. all cars) to its various subsets (e.g. Toyotas) in mathematical Venn diagrams, the object in question is considered to be part of a larger whole which it may be said to 'manifest' or 'express' in itself. Hence, for example, what Coleridge terms the "individual" is part of the "special" (this term, as he uses it here, is derived from the term 'species,' rather than implying something unique), the "special" is in turn part of what he calls the "general" (derived from 'genus'), and the "general" is in turn part of the "universal." Hence, a diagram of the following sort is possible: the 'individual' <- 'species' <- 'genus' <- the 'universal.' The whole may be said to 'shine through' (hence, Coleridge's use of the term "translucence") each of its parts in a manner similar to light emanating from a lamp. The 'part' in question, according to Coleridge, "partakes of the reality" and, thus, is a "living part" of that "unity" of which it is part and of which it is the "representative". The part accordingly "enunciates" (i.e. articulates in symbolic form) the "whole" of which it is part and which it accordingly "renders intelligible" (i.e. meaningful, comprehensible).

Perhaps most importantly, for Coleridge, the "temporal" world (the physical world subject to time) is part of the "eternal" world (which transcends the limitations of time

and space). He derives from Kant and the German Idealists the view that all the diverse elements that comprise the here and now are unified or connected in the sense that they form part of or belong to or 're-present' or express a non-physical, timeless reality (he has in mind what Hegel and company term 'Geist' [Spirit, Reason, or even Idea, depending on the translation in question]) which 'shines through' or manifests or expresses itself in every aspect of the former. From this point of view, each object, when rightly viewed, is thus a 'symbol' of the non-physical world. Accordingly, for the Romantics, a majestic and awe-inspiring mountain range may function as a wonderful symbol of God's unfathomable presence; a harp as a symbol of the human mind (*geist*), which is accordingly deemed an "organic harp"; the wind as a symbol of the universal mind (*Geist*) (which Coleridge terms a "vast intellectual breeze") which is said to 'blow through' all rational creatures with minds (these are, hence, the 'animated' part of nature); and so on.

Symbols are not the function of those parts of our psyche which Coleridge terms the 'Understanding' or the 'Fancy.' Symbols are, rather, 'intuited' (i.e. grasped or recognised intellectually) by the 'Imagination' (which accordingly should not be confused with mere 'Fancy'). Although Coleridge does not explicitly discuss this here, it is the Imagination which allows us to see beyond the apparent diversity of things which seem to be distinct from and sometimes in direct opposition to each other (hence, in a relationship of 'thesis' versus 'antithesis') and to realise that they ultimately all form part of a greater unity (a 'synthesis') which ultimately binds all things together. The influence on Coleridge of the German Idealists and in particular of Hegel's notion of the dialectic – thesis, antithesis, synthesis – ought to be evident.

Coleridge's views on the poet's unifying power (i.e. the power to synthesise seemingly contradictory notions) and to produce thereby beautiful works (i.e. works in which the 'one' is made out of the 'many,' unity out of diversity) leads to a form of criticism which he describes as *genial*: to be precise, genial criticism involves looking at a writer's literary works for what he calls *symptoms* of that power. In Chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge's question is: what is 'beautiful' in a work of art or literature? Coleridge argues that the faculty within the poet which is responsible for capturing the unity synonymous with beauty is the imagination. He offers the celebrated view that to answer the question "what is poetry?" (480) is in effect to answer the question "what is a poet?" (480). In a famous formula, he opines that:

the poet . . . brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put into action by the will and understanding, . . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound and vehement; and while it blends and harmonises the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature. (480)

The poet's imagination is a synthesising power that reconciles apparent binary opposites with each other. This creation of a "harmonious whole" (480) out of diversity and disparity is possible because of the imagination which humans possess.

It is in Chapter XV of *Biographia Literaria*, that Coleridge sets out to apply the basic principles of a genial criticism which he lays out in the previous chapter by examining the "specific symptoms of poetic power elucidated in a critical analysis of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*" (283), works that "give at once strong

promises of the strength, and yet obvious immaturity, of his genius" (284). Shakespeare is, he asserts, the "greatest genius, that perhaps human nature has yet produced" (284). Coleridge's goal is to "discover what the qualities in a poem are, which may be deemed promises and specific symptoms of poetic power, as distinguished from general talent determined to poetic composition by accidental motives, by an act of the will, rather than by the inspiration of a genial and productive nature" (284).

Coleridge lists the "characteristics of original poetic genius in general" (284) as follows (I have numbered them slightly differently from his own classification):

1. The "perfect sweetness of versification; its adaptation to the subject; and the power displayed in varying the march of the words without passing into a loftier and more majestic rhythm than was demanded by the thoughts, or permitted by the propriety of preserving a sense of melody predominant" (284). Coleridge prefers that this "delight in richness and sweetness of sound" (284) be "original" (284), rather than the "result of an easily imitable mechanism" (284). Imagery, "affecting incidents; just thoughts; interesting personal or domestic feelings; and with these the art of their combination or intertexture in the form of a poem" (284), he points out, "by incessant effort may be acquired as a trade by a man of talents and much reading" (284). However, the "sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination" (284) that "may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learned" (284). '*Poeta nascitur, non fit.*'
2. The "power of reducing multitude into unity of effect" (284).
3. The power of "modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling" (284).
4. The "choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself" (284). In the case of Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," it is as if a
 - superior spirit more intuitive, more intimately conscious, even than the characters themselves, not only of every outward look and act, but of the flux and reflux of the mind in all its subtlest thoughts and feelings, were placing the whole before our view; himself meanwhile unparticipating in the passions, and actuated only by that pleasureable excitement, which had resulted from the energetic fervor of his own spirit in so vividly exhibiting, what it had so accurately and profoundly contemplated. (285)
 It is Shakespeare's "alienation" (285) and "aloofness" (285) from his subject matter, his impersonality, which Coleridge admires.
5. A "series and never broken chain of imagery, often minute; by the highest effort of the picturesque in words, of which words are capable" (285). Shakespeare's poetry is a "substitute for that visual language" (285) which drama makes possible on stage and as a result of which "you seem to be told nothing, but to see and hear everything" (285).
6. The "perpetual activity of attention required on the part of the reader" (285) due to the "rapid flow, the quick change, and the playful nature of the thoughts and images" (285). It is precisely this rapidity of thought which helps to divert our attention from morally questionable activities presented on stage: the reader is "forced into too much action to sympathise" (285).
7. The presence of images that "become proofs of original passion" (286)
 - only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion;
 - or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion;
 - or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity, or succession to an instant; or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit. (286)

The image that is "characteristic of poetic genius" (287) is that which "moulds and colors itself to the circumstances, passion, or character, present and foremost in the mind" (287) of the person speaking or a character represented in a work. All such images give a "dignity and passion to the objects" (286) represented by a poet with the result that they "burst upon us at once in life and power" (286).

8. "DEPTH, and ENERGY OF THOUGHT" (288): "No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and fragrantcy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, motions, language" (288)

In short, Shakespeare's later, like his earlier, work reflects the following qualities, ones that can be found, hopefully, in any work produced by a genius:

the same minute and faithful imagery, . . . the same vivid colours, inspirited by the same impetuous vigor of thought, and diverging and contracting with the same activity of the assimilative and of the modifying faculties; and with a yet larger display, a yet wider range of knowledge and reflection; and lastly with the same perfect dominion, often *domination*, over the whole world of language. (288)

Coleridge concludes that Shakespeare is

no mere child of nature; no automaton of genius; no passive vehicle of inspiration possessed by the spirit, not possessing it; [he] first studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood minutely, till knowledge, become habitual and intuitive, wedded itself to his habitual feelings, and at length gave birth to that stupendous power, by which he stands alone, with no equal or second in his own class. (288)

It is in "On Poesy or Art" (1818) that Coleridge, in line with the metaphysics, philosophy of mind and epistemology outlined above, accordingly rejects literary realism. To this end, he distinguishes between what he calls 'poesy' (the "generic or common term" [24] for art in general or the 'fine arts') from both "*muta poesis*" (24) (literally, 'mute poetry,' by which he means the visual and plastic arts which utilise media of representation other than words) and poetry proper (which uses words and, hence, is not 'mute' per se). Offering an expressive view of art, Coleridge contends that all the fine arts have in common the fact that they "express intellectual purposes, thoughts, conceptions, and sentiments which have their origin in the human mind" (24). However, Coleridge here is very much concerned with what poetry represents or is about, in other words, with the process itself and the object ('nature') of 'imitation.'

Coleridge begins by offering a number of important definitions of poetry. It "commences" (24), he writes, when the "human mind is intelligibly addressed by an outward image exclusively of articulate speech" (24). It is the "effect produced by the congruity of the animal impression [reception of a verbal image via the physical senses, not least the eyes] with the reflective powers of the mind; so that not the thing presented [a work of art], but that which is represented by the thing [the real object for which it stands], shall be the source of pleasure" (24). It is "of a middle quality between a thought and a thing" (24). Poetry is, accordingly, the "union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human" (24). He points out that "nature itself is to a religious observer the art of God" (24) if only "we could see the thought which is present at once in the whole and in every part" (24).

Coleridge then examines the precise meaning of the terms 'imitation' and 'nature.' In all imitations, he argues, two elements must coexist: "likeness and unlikeness, or sameness and difference" (25). There must be "likeness in the difference, difference in the likeness" (25). He contends, without explaining why, that if "there be likeness to nature without any check of difference, the result is disgusting" (25). It is therefore preferable to "begin with an acknowledged total difference" (25) as a result of which "every touch of nature gives you the pleasure of approximation to truth" (25). With regard to 'nature,' Coleridge argues that we must not seek to imitate

"all and everything" (25) in nature but the "beautiful" (25). This he defines as, at an abstract level, the "unity of the manifold, the coalescence of the diverse" (25) and, at a concrete level, the "union of the shapely with the vital" (25). Distinguishing between the 'beautiful' and the merely "agreeable" (26) or pleasant to the senses, as Kant did, he writes that the "sense of beauty is intuitive, and beauty itself is all that inspires pleasure without, and aloof from, and even contrarily to, interest" (26). Coleridge advocates that the artist should not copy "mere nature, the *natura naturata*" (26) which "proceeds only from a given form" (26) and which is only an "emptiness, . . . an unreality" (26). The goal ought, rather, to be to "master the essence, the *natura naturans*, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man" (26). (He puts it all this way later: the "idea which puts the form together cannot itself be the form. It is above form, and is its essence, the universal in the individual . . . the glance and the exponent of the indwelling power" [27].)

Coleridge's point is that the "wisdom in nature [the mind of God which manifests itself in material form, i.e. nature] is distinguished from that in man by the co-instantaneity of the plan and the execution; the thought and the product are one" (26). There is "no reflex act, and hence there is no moral responsibility" (26). In man, by contrast, "there is reflexion, freedom, and choice" (26) as a result of which "he is, therefore, the head of the visible creation" (26). Therefore, Coleridge argues, when it comes to the fine arts, in the

objects of nature are presented, as in a mirror, all the possible elements, steps, and processes of intellect antecedent to consciousness, and therefore to the full development of the intelligential act; and man's mind is the very focus of all the rays of the intellect which are scattered throughout the images of nature. Now so to place these images, totalised, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature – that is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts. (26)

In short, in every work of art, "there is reconciliation of the external with the internal" (26). Mere "copying" (27) produces "masks only, not forms breathing life" (27). The artist must imitate "that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure, and discourses to us by symbols--the *Natur-geist*, or spirit of nature" (27).

Coleridge contends that the artist must temporarily distance himself from nature in order to realise the bond which ultimately unites him with nature. Man and nature are one, united by the fact that God manifests or expresses itself through all that is in the physical universe. Accordingly, "of all we see, hear, feel and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves" (27). To put this another way, the belief that "everything around us is a but a phantom" (27) is in effect to say that the "life which is in us is in them likewise" (27). Accordingly, "to know is to resemble, when we speak of objects out of ourselves, even as within ourselves to learn is, according to Plato, only to recollect" (27). The artist's "own spirit, which has the same ground with nature" (27) must "learn her unspoken language" (27).

One of the key questions which **PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792 - 1822)**, in his "A Defence of Poetry" (1821), believes he must address is, "who are poets?" (519). In a famous definition, Shelley argues that poetry is the "expression of the imagination" (516) (of the poet, evidently). To put this another way, the mental faculty called the imagination manifests itself in and through poetry. Near the end of the essay, Shelley concludes, for reasons which he will advance in the course of the essay, that poets are "compelled to serve" (529) that regal "power which is seated on the throne of their own soul" (529). Accordingly, Shelley believes that to understand poetry, one must seek to understand the poet for which reason, in turn, one must first seek to understand the nature of the human mind.

Alluding almost certainly to Coleridge's poem "The Aeolian Harp," Shelley begins by comparing man's mind to an aeolian lyre (or harp), a musical instrument which, like chimes, makes sounds in response to the wind which blows over its strings. In Coleridge's poem, the influence of German Idealism in general and Schelling in particular is obvious: the mind (*geist*) is compared to a harp, thought to the sounds made by the harp as the wind blows over its strings, and the wind, appropriately deemed an 'intellectual breeze,' to the workings of the universal mind (*Geist*). The implication here is that the thoughts which our minds think emanate from that collective consciousness which inhabits, 'in-forms' and, thus, grants rational purpose to the universe of things. In this essay, Shelley contends that the mind is an "instrument over which a series of *external* and *internal* impressions are driven, like the alternation of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever changing melody" (my emphasis; 516). In other words, Shelley argues that the mind (compared to a lyre) produces a sequence of ideas which, in its ideal state, would take a logical form (this is compared to the melody, which is a sequence of musical notes). This occurs partly in response to external forces (the wind blowing on the strings) and partly in response to internal factors (the very existence, for example, of the strings themselves which is indispensable if sounds are to be produced at all). Shelley's model of the mind stands in stark contrast to Coleridge's: his claim is, simply, that human consciousness is shaped partly by *extrinsic* forces (that is, the impact thereon of the 'universe of things') and partly by the existence of certain features *intrinsic* to the constitution of the mind. He may have in mind those transcendental faculties which Kant posits, or he may be thinking simply of those biological features of the organ we call the brain and without which thought would not be possible. (If the latter, Shelley anticipates modern efforts by philosophers of mind, cognitive scientists and psychologists to ground our grasp of the mind in an understanding of the biology of the brain.) Shelley, appropriately enough, calls that part of the mind responsible for producing sequences of ideas our "reason" (516).

However, Shelley goes on to argue that there is also a principle within the human being, and perhaps all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them. (516)

Here, Shelley seems to suggest (rightly or wrongly) that harps are limited to producing mere melodies, that is, sequences of individual notes. (Is it not possible, one might ask, for the wind to make more than one string sound at the same time?) However, the human mind is capable of much more: it can also produce the mental equivalent of musical 'chords,' that is, a group of notes, hopefully in harmony with each other, which are played simultaneously rather than one after the other (if these are not in harmony, one would have a 'dischord'). To put this another way, each note comprising a musical melody may be played simultaneously with other, hopefully harmonious notes. By the same token, the human mind has the capacity to simultaneously link, connect, combine or associate one idea with another appropriate idea. If it is the reason which produces sequences of ideas, Shelley contends that it is the "imagination" (516) which associates ideas with each other.

In all this, Shelley seems once more to be gesturing to and perhaps undermining Coleridge's distinction between 'allegory' (where the 'Fancy' is capable of conceiving willy nilly of comparisons between simply any two objects, resulting in metaphors and similes and the like) and 'symbol' (where it is the 'Imagination' that intuits a relationship of part to whole between two objects and, thus, unity and togetherness where there appears to be only distinction and separation). Where Coleridge credits the Imagination with the power of what seems to be an almost spiritual insight that allows one to glimpse how the physical world is part of as well as expressive of a larger spiritual substance that seems to permeate the universe of things, Shelley seems content to think of the imagination as

restricted to the Fancy, that is, capable of drawing appropriate comparisons between any two objects.

Shelley seeks to differentiate in some detail the reason from the imagination. He categorises them both as "classes of mental action" (516). He defines the former, reason, as the "mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced" (516). The reason is, in other words, responsible for reasoning, that is, producing thoughts in some sort (hopefully) of logical order. It is concerned with "analysis" (516), that is, seeking to understand worldly phenomena by dissecting them, splitting them apart into their constitutive elements. By contrast, the imagination is another part of the "mind acting upon those thoughts [produced by the reason] so as to colour them *with its own light*, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts" (my emphasis; 516). In other words, the imagination associates the thoughts utilised by reason with other thoughts, thereby colouring and illuminating them in ways peculiar to the workings of the imagination of the mind in question. The imagination "has for its objects those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself" (516). There is no suggestion here, à la Coleridge, of the existence of some capacity to 'see' beyond the surface appearance of physical things and glimpse some non-physical, spiritual world. It is concerned with "synthesis" (516): where the reason "respects the differences" (516) between things, the Imagination perceives the "similitudes of things" (516). Last but not least, the Imagination is superior to reason, making use of and building upon but also exceeding it: "[r]eason is to the imagination, as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance" (516). In other words, the reason is a tool used by the imagination; it is the body through which the spirit lives, moves and has its being; it is merely the shadow cast by the imagination.

Towards the end of the essay, Shelley attempts to describe the creative process which, he stresses, remains difficult to fathom. He says that we are conscious only of "evanescent visitations of thought and feeling" (526). These are "sometimes associated with place or person" (526), that is, they are derived from and, thus, a reflection of the external natural and social worlds, and "sometimes regarding our own mind alone" (526), that is, they originate within. Whatever their source, he contends, our thoughts and feelings are "always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden" (526). He stresses that creativity is not something that may be summoned at will: it is "not like the reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will" (527). One cannot simply say that "I will compose poetry" (527). Rather, inspiration has to 'hit you,' as it were. He uses several interesting similes to describe the "mind in creation" (527): it is

as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. (527)

He reiterates here that creativity is the effect partly of external influences (hence, the image of the wind from time to time causing a piece of coal in a fire to glow more brightly, albeit temporarily) and partly of little understood internal impetuses. Moreover, the conscious portion of our mind (our reason) cannot predict either its coming or going. He concludes that it is accordingly an error to assert that the "finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study" (527). He contends that the creative process is comparable to being haunted or possessed by a beneficent supernatural entity or power (as opposed to demonic possession): it is "*as it were* the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own" (my emphasis; 527). However, the process remains mysterious and little understood: "its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the morning calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it" (527).

HIPPOLYTE TAINÉ (1828 - 1893), in the introduction to his monumental History of English Literature (1863-1864), perhaps the first history of a body of literature to be worth its name, argues that the goal of both history and literary criticism is to uncover the man behind the work. Literature is

but a mould, like a fossil shell, an imprint, like one of those shapes embossed in stone by an animal which lived and perished. Under the shell there was an animal, and behind the document there was a man. Why do you study the shell, except to represent to yourself the animal? So do you study the document only in order to know the man. The shell and the document are lifeless wrecks, valuable only as a clue to the entire and living existence. We must reach back to this existence, endeavour to recreate it. It is a mistake to study the document, as if it were isolated. . . . Nothing exists except through some individual man; it is this individual man with whom we must become acquainted. . . . [G]enuine history is brought into existence only when the historian begins to unravel, across the lapse of time, the living man, toiling, impassioned, entrenched in his customs, with his voice and features, his gestures and dress, distinct and complete as he from whom we have just parted in the street. Let us endeavour, then, to annihilate as far as possible this great interval of time, which prevents us from seeing man with our eyes. (609)

The goal in studying literature (which is an "abstract thing" [610]) is to discover the man responsible for it, the man who "acts, the man corporeal and visible, who eats, walks, fights, labours" (610). The same goal is true of studying history: we must strive to "see men in their workshops, in their offices, in their fields, with their sky and earth, their houses, their dress, cultivations, meals" (610). Our greatest care should be devoted to supplying the "want of present, personal, direct, and sensible observation which we can no longer practice; for it is the only means of knowing men. Let us make the past present: in order to judge a thing, it must be before us; there is no experience in respect of what is absent" (610).

Tainé argues that a "book of observations is no psychology" (612) because the "search for causes must come after the collection of facts" (612). In other words, it is the "man invisible" (610) that is hidden behind the "visible man" (610) which is the objective in both anthropology (the study of human culture) and history (the study of the past): the

words which enter your ears, the gestures, the motions of his head, the clothes he wears, visible acts and deeds of every kind, are expressions merely; somewhat is revealed beneath them, and that is a soul. An inner man is concealed beneath the outer man, the second does but reveal the first. You look at his house, furniture, dress; and that in order to discover in them the mark of his habits and tastes, the degree of his refinement or rusticity, his extravagance or his economy, his stupidity or his cunning. You listen to his conversation, and you note the inflections of his voice, the changes in his attitudes; and this in order to judge of his intensity, his self-forgetfulness or his gaiety, his energy or his constraint. You consider his writings, his artistic productions, his business transactions or political ventures; and that in order to measure the scope and limits of his intelligence, his inventiveness, his coolness, to find out the order, the description, the general force of his ideas, the mode in which he thinks and resolves. All these externals are but avenues converging to a centre; you enter them simply in order to reach that centre; and that centre is the genuine man, I mean that mass of faculties and feelings which are produced by the inner man. (610-611)

Every "action which we see" (611) derives from an "infinite association of reasonings, emotions, sensations new and old, which have served to bring it to light" (611). This

"underworld" (611) is the "new subject matter, proper to the historian" (611) and, needless to say, the critic.

Taine argues that it is the critic's goal, as much as the historian's, to seek the man behind the artefact, to

lay bare, under every detail of architecture, every stroke in a picture, every phrase in a writing, the special sensation whence detail, stroke, or phrase had issue; he is present at the drama which was enacted in the soul of the artist or writer; the choice of a word, the brevity or length of a sentence, the nature of a metaphor, the accent of a verse, the development of an argument – everything is a symbol to him; while his eyes read the text, his soul and mind pursue the continuous development and the ever changing succession of the emotions and conceptions out of which the text has sprung: in short, he unveils a psychology. (611)

Taine stresses that it is no matter

if the causes be physical or moral, they all have their causes; there is a cause for ambition, for courage, for truth, as there is for digestion, for muscular movement, for animal heat. Vice and virtue are products, like vitriol and sugar; and every complex phenomenon has its springs from other more simple phenomena on which it hangs. (612)

Every human artefact, and not just literature, can be explained in this way. For example, the rather mournful religious music of the Protestant church, he argues, is an artefact that derives from the "general idea of the true, external worship which man owes to God" (612). This in turn "comes from another more general cause, the idea of human conduct . . . by which man is kept face to face with God" (612). This is itself derived in turn from a "third still more general idea, that of moral perfection" (612) embodied in our conception of God. This is the "master idea, which consists in erecting duty into an absolute king of human life, and in prostrating all ideals before a moral model" (612).

It is at this point, Taine argues, that we reach the "root of man; for to explain this conception it is necessary to consider race itself" (612) which is, in the case of English literature, that of the Anglo-Saxon. It is the "structure of his character and intelligence, his general processes of thought and feeling" (612) which is responsible for this ideal of behaviour. Here, the search for causes is at an end:

we have arrived at a primitive disposition, at a trait proper to all sensations, to all the conceptions of a century or a race. . . . Here lie the grand causes for they are universal and permanent causes, present at every moment and in every case. . . . In such a manner . . . the general structure of things and the grand features of events, are their work; and religions, philosophies, poetries, industries, the framework of society and of families, are in fact only the imprints stamped by their seal. (612)

There is, in short, a "system in human sentiments and ideas" (612) which has for its "motive power certain general traits, certain marks of the intellect and the heart common to men of one race, age, or country" (612).

For Taine, all humans have in common the fact that they possess conscious awareness and, thus, a mind. In that sense, there is a universal human nature. Taine admits that, to some degree at least, all humans have certain basic features in common with each other. In history, "civilisations, however diverse, are derived from certain simple spiritual forms" (612) which are explained by a "primitive psychological element" (612). To comprehend the "historical varieties" (612), it is necessary first to consider the nature of the "human soul generally, with its two or three fundamental faculties" (612). It is in this "compendium" (612) that one will perceive the "principal forms" (612) which humanity can take, that is, the "limits of the outline in which civilisations . . . are constrained to exist" (612). The fundamental feature common to all humans consists in the capacity for conscious thought, those "[i]mages or representations of

things" (612) derived from "looking upon a tree, an animal, any sensible object" (612). Consciousness can be either "speculative or practical, according as the representations resolve themselves into a general conception or an active resolution" (612-613). In this, Taine argues, "we have the whole of man in an abridgment; and in this limited circle human diversities meet" (613). It should be clear that Taine does not believe that there is some putative pre-given, transcendental essence possessed by and uniting all human beings. Consciousness has, rather, a physiological basis.

However, deeply influenced (by his own admission) by Herder's historicism and nationalism, Taine is of the view that our consciousness is also shaped by both socio-historical and genetic determinants. From this perspective, human identity is socially, historically and biologically specific, that is, we have certain characteristics in common with others similar to ourselves (e.g. the inhabitants of a particular time and/or place, and/or the members of a given race), while we are differentiated from others who possess alternative traits. Taine is at pains to point out that hitherto it was widely but wrongly believed that all humans everywhere and at all times were alike (the existence of a so-called universal human nature):

They thought men of every race and century were all but identical; the Greek, the barbarian, the Hindu, the man of the Restoration, and the man of the eighteenth century, as if they had been turned out of a common mould; and all in conformity to a certain conception, which served for the whole human race. They knew man, but not men; they had not penetrated to the soul; they had not seen the infinite diversity and marvellous complexity of souls; they did not know that the moral constitution of a people or an age is as particular and as distinct as the physical structure of a family of plants or an order of animals. Nowadays history, like zoology, has found its own anatomy. (611)

In other words, the consciousness of humans is also determined as much by nurture (culture) as it is by nature, which explains why humans differ from one another. The proof of this may be found in the effect which events like emigration or conquest has had on specific nations: the

race emigrates, like the Aryan, and the change of climate has altered . . . the whole economy, intelligence, and organisation of society. The people has been conquered, like the Saxon nation, and a new political structure has been imposed on its customs, capacities, and inclinations which it had not. (613)

In every case, the "mechanism of history is the same" (613): one "continually finds, as the original mainspring, some very general disposition of mind and soul, innate and appended by nature to the race, or acquired and produced by circumstance acting upon the race" (613).

Taine argues that there are three determinants which shape human identity: "the race, the surroundings, and the epoch" (613), that is, biology, place (both society and the physical or natural environment), and time (the period of history in which one lives). "What we call the *race* are the innate and hereditary dispositions which man brings with him" (613-614) and derived from "marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body" (614). These "vary with various peoples" (614). There is a "natural variety of men" (614) but "amidst the vast deviations" (614) one can always recognise the underlying racial characteristics of a particular group, Taine argues:

a race, like the old Aryans, scattered from the Ganges as far as the Hebrides, settled in every clime, spread over every grade of civilisation, transformed by thirty centuries of revolutions, nevertheless manifests in its tongues, religions, literatures, philosophies, the community of blood and of intellect which to this day binds its offshoots together. Different as they are, their parentage is not obliterated; barbarism, culture and grafting, differences of sky and soil, fortunes good and bad, have laboured

in vain: the great marks of the original model have remained, and we find again the two or three marks of the primitive lineaments of the primitive imprint underneath the secondary imprints which time has stamped above them. (614)

The "primordial marks" (614) of race demonstrate, Taine argues, an "extraordinary tenacity" (614) and "immovable steadfastness" (614) because race is something "anterior to history" (614).

The second major determinant upon human identity is what Taine terms the 'surroundings' (that is, the physical and social environment in which one lives). Man, he writes, is not alone in the world:

nature surrounds him, and his fellow men surround him; accidental and secondary tendencies come to place themselves on his primitive tendencies, and physical or social circumstances confirm or disturb the character committed to their charge. In course of time character has had its effect. (614)

As soon as an animal begins to exist, Taine argues, he must come to terms with his surroundings:

it breathes after a new fashion, renews itself, is differently affected according to the new changes in air, food, temperature. Different climate and situation bring it various needs, and consequently a different course of actions; and this, again, a different set of habits, and still again, a different set of aptitudes and instincts. Man, forced to accommodate himself to circumstances, contracts a temperament and a character corresponding to them. (614)

The "regulating instincts and faculties implanted in a race" (615), that is, the "mood of intelligence in which it thinks and acts at the present time" (615), are inevitably "moulded and modelled" (615) by the action of "persistent and gigantic pressures" (615) external to men. This is why, Taine argues, the "profound differences which are manifest between the German races on the one side, and the Greek and Latin on the other arise for the most part from the difference between the countries in which they are settled" (614).

The third important determinant of human identity is what Taine calls the 'epoch' (that is, time, history). He defines 'epoch' as "one of those wide intervals which embrace one or more centuries" (615). "Beside the permanent impulse [race] and the given surroundings [locale], there is the acquired momentum [history]" (615):

When the national character and the surrounding circumstances operate, it is not upon a *tabula rasa*, but on a ground on which marks are already impressed. According as one takes the ground at one moment or another, the imprint is different; and this is the cause that the total effect is different. (615)

Like Herder, Taine compares humans to plants: "[s]o it is with people as it is with a plant; the same sap, under the same temperature, and in the same soil, produces, at different steps of its progressive development, different formations, buds, flowers, fruits, seed vessels" (615). Humans, in short, are fashioned by the times in which they live.

KEY THEORISTS AND WORKS ON THE AUTHOR

The Classical Period
Plato ©.427 - c.347 BCE): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Ion</u>
'Longinus' ©.100 CE): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "On the Sublime"
The Middle Ages
The Renaissance
The Early Modern Period (Neo-Classicism)
Joseph Addison (1672 - 1719): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The Spectator</u> (1711-1712)
Edward Young (1683 - 1765): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Conjectures on Original Composition" (1759)
Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>An Essay on Criticism</u> (1711)
Samuel Johnson (1709-1784): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preface to <u>Shakespeare</u> (1765)
Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744 - 1803): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Shakespeare" (1773) • "The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry" (1782-1783)
Germain Necker de Stael (1766 - 1817): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Essay on Fictions" (1795) • "Literature Considered in its Relation to Social Institutions" (1800)
The Nineteenth Century
Friedrich von Schleiermacher (1768 - 1834): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Compendium of 1819" (1819)
William Wordsworth (1770 - 1850): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Preface to <u>Lyrical Ballads</u>" (1800)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 - 1834): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>On the Principles of Genial Criticism</u> (1814): Essay Third • "From <u>The Statesman's Manual</u>" (1816) • <u>Biographia Literaria</u> (1817): chapters XII, XIII, XIV and XV • "On Poesy or Art" (1818) • "Shakespeare's Judgement Equal to his Genius" (1836)
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 - 1822): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A Defence of Poetry" (1821)

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882):

- "The Poet" (1842-1843)

Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804 - 1869):

- "What is a Classic?" (1850)

John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873):

- "What is Poetry?" (1833)

Hippolyte Taine (1828 - 1893):

- History of English Literature (1863-1864)

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SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

For a general overview of the topic of literary authorship, see also **LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM: THE FOUR 'POLES.'**

For a discussion of the philosophical concepts and frameworks which inform literary theory and criticism, see also **THE PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS OF LITERARY THEORY: RELEVANT BRANCHES OF PHILOSOPHY AND THEIR ADJACENT DISCIPLINES.**

This article mainly addresses developments in the history of literary theory and criticism up to about 1900. For information on more recent developments since then in the field, see the entries on the following schools of criticism:

- **AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **ANGLO-AMERICAN FORMALIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **DECONSTRUCTIVE LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **DIALOGICAL LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **FEMINIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **FOUCAULDIAN DISCURSIVE LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **MARXIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **PHENOMENOLOGICAL, EXISTENTIALIST AND HERMENEUTICAL LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **POST-COLONIAL LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM:**
 - **AFRICAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
 - **EAST ASIAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
 - **SOUTH ASIAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
 - **CARIBBEAN LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **STRUCTURALIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **STRUCTURALIST MARXIST LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**
- **STRUCTURALIST PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**

REFERENCES

All references in the article above, unless otherwise stated, are documented in one or the other of the following bibliographies:

- **THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED PRIMARY SOURCES IN PHILOSOPHY AND 'THEORY'**
- **THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED PRIMARY SOURCES IN RHETORIC**
- **THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED PRIMARY SOURCES IN LITERARY THEORY**