

THE NEWGATE NOVELS AND DRAMA OF THE 1830s

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the issues raised by the Newgate novels of the 1830s, and the dramatic adaptations which stemmed from the most notorious of these, *Jack Sheppard*. It suggests that they contained a unique mixture of political, social and cultural registers, which, at this particular historical moment, provoked a controversy unrivalled in 19th-century literary history.

Chapter 1 focuses upon the novels of Edward Bulwer, the first of the Newgate novelists. It examines his books as novels of ideas whose demands for radical social and legal reform seemed threatening at a time of profound instability. It also, however, notes the ambiguous nature of these texts which reflected deep uncertainty within the author himself about the contemporary transition from the Romantic to the Victorian.

Chapter 2 considers the Newgate novels as acts of literary radicalism. It argues that they were simultaneously catalysts for, and products of, changes taking place within the field of cultural production. For these writers, the criminal became a figure for self-identification, symbolic both of their own positions as unestablished authors striving to achieve recognition, and of the new role of the professional author catering for a vastly expanded readership.

Chapter 3 concentrates upon the theatrical versions of *Jack Sheppard*, and the different ways in which the tale became politicised through its transferral from the novel to the stage. Reaching a more solidly lower-class audience, and frequently beyond the eye of the censor, the plays were radical not because they presented a sophisticated political philosophy, but because of the immediacy of their form, and their susceptibility to varied and unpredictable interpretations both from spectators and managers.

NOTE ON THE TEXTS

The references to the Newgate novels in this thesis are all to first editions, with the exception of *Rookwood*, where I have used a second edition. The success of *Rookwood* meant that five editions were published within three years. The popularity of the flash songs in the novel led Ainsworth to increase their number from twenty-three to thirty in the fourth edition of 1837. However, there were no major changes in the second edition. Where I refer to later prefaces of Ainsworth's novels, I use The Original Illustrated Edition of his works published by Routledge in the 1890s. Similarly, where I refer to the prefaces of later editions of Bulwer's novels, I use The New Knebworth Edition of his works which contains all the prefaces to these subsequent editions. However, neither these editions, nor the recent collection of Newgate novels edited by Juliet John, use first editions in reproducing the main body of the texts.

In referring to J. B. Buckstone's dramatic adaptation of *Jack Sheppard*, I use the text printed in Webster's *Acting National Drama*, probably in 1840, which claimed to be taken from the original prompter's copy at the Theatre Royal Adelphi. References to all other versions are taken from the original manuscripts submitted to the Lord Chamberlain and held in the Manuscript Students' Room of the British Library.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Newgate', fastened to novels of the 1830s and 1840s which featured criminals prominently among their characters, referred at its most basic level to the formidable prison in London which survived despite being razed to the ground during the Gordon Riots in 1780.¹ More specifically, it echoed the immensely popular collection of criminal biographies entitled *The Newgate Calendar; or, The Malefactors' Bloody Register*, first published in 1773.² In fact, the books which became embroiled in the considerably heated Newgate controversy bore only a passing resemblance to *The Newgate Calendar*, which, while titillating its readers with the lives of notorious criminals, was generally severe in condemning its subjects. Although the Newgate novelists often used genuine criminals in their tales, frequently drawing information from *The Newgate Calendar*, a lack of pronounced moral stricture was one of the many charges levelled against them. Furthermore, the books grouped within this 'school' - primarily consisting of works by Edward Bulwer, William Harrison Ainsworth, and Charles Dickens - varied considerably in their aims and methods.³ For

¹ Dickens focused upon the dramatic events surrounding the destruction of Newgate in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841). The prison had also been damaged by fire on several other occasions. See *Early Victorian England 1830-1865*, ed. by G. M. Young, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), I, 198.

² For a discussion of the origins of *The Newgate Calendar*, see Keith Hollingsworth, *The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens and Thackeray* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), p.6. Hollingsworth notes that during the 1830s, *The Newgate Calendar* usually meant the collection by two attorneys, Andrew Knapp and William Baldwin, which appeared in 1809 and 1810.

³ Although by the end of his career his full name was Edward George Earl Lytton Bulwer-Lytton, the first of the Newgate novelists was usually known as Edward Bulwer during the years with which this study is predominantly concerned. He received a baronetcy in 1838, and inherited Knebworth, the ancestral home, in 1843,

contemporaries, the 'Newgate' label was one of derogation, and in the broadest sense the controversy was a struggle between those attempting to attach the tag and those attempting to avoid it.⁴ However, to view it in such an arbitrary way is to miss the complex mix of issues involved. The battle was fought upon grounds of politics, law, morality, class, literary theory, and personality, and the term 'Newgate' encompasses them all. As Juliet John has observed, the reception of these books was 'marked by extreme moral, aesthetic and ideological confusion'.⁵

It can be difficult for the modern reader to understand the depth of hostility which the Newgate novels attracted. Novels of the 18th century which had taken crime for their subject, like Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), Henry Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* (1743) and William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), had been accorded a mild reception by comparison. This must be accounted for by changes both in the circumstances of the period in which the Newgate novels appeared, and in the declarations that the authors were making for their texts. The rise of evangelical and respectable consensus among the middle classes brought a fresh set of sensibilities made especially sensitive by a determination to retain and consolidate their new social and political influence. Developments in the publishing trade and the growth of literacy meant that the tales could reach a considerably broader and less predictable public. And the Newgate novels, especially those of Bulwer, 'made serious claims for the novel as *the high art genre*' in a way that the earlier versions did not. Defoe's novel, for example, packaged itself as '(ironic) spiritual autobiography'.⁶ *Caleb Williams* could be regarded as political or philosophical (fictional) autobiography. By contrast, Bulwer

when he rather pompously hyphenated the patronymic.

⁴ The term was first used in a deeply critical review of Bulwer's works following the publication of *Paul Clifford* in 1830. See 'Mr Edward Lytton Bulwer's Novels; and Remarks on Novel-Writing', *Fraser's Magazine*, I (June 1830), 509-32 (p.530).

⁵ *Cult Criminals: The Newgate Novels 1830-1847*, ed. by Juliet John, 7 vols (London: Routledge, 1998), I, p.v.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p.x.

argued that the novel in general, and his brand of novel in particular, had a unique capacity to represent and analyse reality. This could be seen as dangerous, especially when the criminal or outcast was the focal point. The Newgate novels and the consequent controversy are historical constructs; contemporary social, political, and cultural factors shaped both the novels themselves and the manner in which they were received.

The 1830s mark a period of transition in literature, taste, morals and social thinking between the 'Romantic' and the 'Victorian', an imprecise definition which endeavours to convey a process of change in the collective social 'spirit' or 'psyche' as much as in class relations, cultural output, and political and legal legislature. It was symbolised in part by the figure of the monarch. George IV's reign had been characterised by 'Regency gaiety and profligacy'.⁷ The cult of the self was imperious, manifested in the dandy's obsession with appearance and contempt for social duty, and the gloomy introspection of the Byronic male. The influence of the aristocracy was dominant, in the sphere of politics as well as that of fashion and manners. Agitation for electoral reform in the late 18th century had been stifled by the French Revolution and England's war with France, which reinforced the obstructionist resolve of conservatives and suited George's instinctive resistance to change. But in the last few years of the 1820s, liberal and radical sentiment began to resurface with real force, and the death of George in 1830 stoked the reformists' fire. The Whigs wanted greater representation for manufacturing and commercial interests; the Radicals wanted universal suffrage.⁸ High food prices and unemployment, and uprisings among rural workers as a result of a poor harvest, added weight to the demands for reform. The ruling classes feared that further resistance to change could result in a repeat of the

⁷ Elliot Engel and Margaret F. King, *The Victorian Novel before Victoria: British Fiction during the Reign of William IV, 1830-37* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), p.5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.2.

July Revolution. It had been a similarly discontented middle class, joining forces with the mob in Paris, that had recently knocked Charles X from his throne.⁹ Lord Grey told William IV that 'it was the spirit of the age which was triumphing; that to resist it was certain destruction.'¹⁰ Within two years the Whigs had replaced the Tories, and the Reform Act had been passed.¹¹

The extent of the Reform Act's effect on democracy should not be overestimated: the proportion of those now eligible to vote was just one-thirtieth of the population, and landed families continued to occupy a larger number of seats than the commercial and industrial middle classes. The poor had gained little, because the newly enfranchised '£10 householder' was usually middle-class. Nevertheless, it represented an enormously significant break with the past. The old system had gone, and 'to many the destruction of the Houses of Parliament by fire in October 1834 must have seemed symbolic of the end of an era that could never return.'¹² William IV had been made to recognise the necessity of conceding some of his powers, and his Court came to reflect the spirit of the newly powerful middle classes. As evangelicalism and the middle-class ethic of success through hard work began to shape social attitudes, William IV became the very personification of such values. The respectability and sobriety of his Court physically signified the shift from the Romantic towards the Victorian.

G. M. Young has suggested that England avoided the revolution witnessed among its Continental neighbours because of the better example set at Court, the rising

⁹ Anthony Wood, *Nineteenth Century Britain 1815-1914* (Harlow: Longman, 1982), p.80.

¹⁰ Quoted in Wood, p.81.

¹¹ The Reform Act effectively redistributed the seats of the House of Commons to eradicate the old pocket and rotten boroughs, and extended the franchise in the counties and, more particularly, the boroughs, so that it included the new industrial classes.

¹² Wood, p.87.

moneyed class, led by the Quakers, which demanded a new standard of religious and philanthropic endeavour, and parliamentary reform. However, he acknowledges the 'great risk' present in a period largely untouched by general education, adequate leisure, and the tide of prosperity which developed after 1850.¹³ William IV's astute reading of, and relatively swift response to, the social climate should not disguise the undercurrent of dissatisfaction and threat of armed disturbance which lasted throughout the 1830s, as well as the 1840s. The first two years of the decade were marked by sporadic violence and the spectre of revolution as the pressure for reform intensified. Afterwards, disillusionment at the very real limitations of the Reform Bill, economic recession, and poor harvests between 1838 and 1841 ensured that domestic politics were rarely anything but volatile.¹⁴ While it is difficult to use the term 'working class' with any precision, the rise of the middle classes was accompanied by an active attempt to create a unified working class geared towards receiving a rightful share of the rewards of labour. A number of large national unions were created between 1831 and 1834, including the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. During 1834 there were strikes throughout the country as friction grew between employers and unions.¹⁵ In 1838 the National Charter was drafted by the London Working Men's Association in consultation with a number of radical politicians, and provided a new symbol of concerted radical intent.¹⁶ Victoria's accession in 1837 coincided with the beginning of 'the most harrowing ten years of social unrest in the nineteenth century.'¹⁷

¹³ *Early Victorian England 1830-1865*, I, 201.

¹⁴ Young stresses the importance of the harvest in shaping the political atmosphere of the country. A small change in the cost of bread could mean that a poor worker was comfortably within the margin or pushed suddenly over it. He says, '[t]he vital point in the domestic economy of the period, what made all the difference, what gave significance to the Chartist and free-trade movements, was the price of bread.' *Early Victorian England 1830-1865*, I, 134.

¹⁵ Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867* (London: Longmans, 1959), pp.287-93.

¹⁶ The Charter made six demands: universal manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, voting by ballot, equal electoral districts, the abolition of property qualifications for members of parliament, and the payment of such members.

¹⁷ Engel and King, p.3.

Alongside parliamentary and electoral reform, the law had been a prominent target for those seeking change. It stood as a symbol of an antiquated, repressive and often brutal system desperately in want of modernisation to cater for a more civilised society. The 18th-century 'Bloody Code' was marked by severity and uncertainty. The huge number of offences punishable by death led either to a reluctance on the part of juries to convict, or the execution of criminals found guilty of crimes as trivial as draining a fishpond or stealing from an orchard.¹⁸ The persistence of the leaders of the reform group - Sir Samuel Romilly between 1808 and 1818 and Sir James Mackintosh from 1820 until 1823 - had resulted in the repeal of only a few rarely used capital statutes. Robert Peel's efforts as Home Secretary led to a series of measures in the late 1820s known as 'Peel's Acts' which dispensed with obsolete capital offences, but had little effect on the real incidence of capital punishment. As Keith Hollingsworth says, the system of criminal justice was retained because of its place in the psychological structure of the governing power.¹⁹ Only when political power shifted could the rigorously punitive legislature be altered. Thus it was not until the death of George IV, and the appointment of Lord Grey's ministry, that real change was effected. In 1832 the death penalty was withdrawn from many offences such as the theft of cattle, and subsequent legislation in 1833 and 1834 removed it from crimes that involved property only. By 1841 only eight crimes were punishable by death, and 'in practice executions were only carried out for murder'.²⁰

One of the loudest calls for reform had come from the Utilitarians, with Jeremy Bentham at their head. During the 1830s, 'Benthamites were to be met with everywhere'.²¹ In 1838, Henry Brougham was to say that 'the age of Law Reform and

¹⁸ Hollingsworth, p.20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.23.

²⁰ *Cult Criminals*, I, p.ix.

²¹ Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, trans. by Mary Morris (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p.513.

the age of Jeremy Bentham are one and the same.²² As this implies, utilitarianism proved to be a major force in the political and social thought of the 19th century. Initially inspired and driven by a wish to reform the legal system, Benthamite thought came to consider government and economics, and developed into a neo-scientific and bluntly materialist theory. At its core was the doctrine that the actions of governments should be judged simply by the extent to which they promoted the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The exponents of utilitarianism were radicals - they believed in representative democracy and universal suffrage, and, indeed, were known as the 'Philosophical Radicals'. Yet they were by no means revolutionaries operating beyond the establishment. The laissez-faire economics and political economy which formed a part of their doctrine, stemming from the tradition of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus, was widely accepted. Utilitarians were closely involved in the implementation of reform.²³ In University College, London, founded in 1827 with a secular constitution, they had their own centre of learning; in the *Westminster Review*, established in 1824 by Bentham and his friends, they had their own review and the most significant vehicle of orthodox radicalism. Indeed, Brougham, who was 'almost' a Philosophical Radical, reached the Chancellorship in 1830.²⁴ Bulwer's *Paul Clifford* (1830), the first of the Newgate novels, was heavily influenced by Benthamite theory, and had a strong reformist flavour. Yet this cannot account for the intensity of the controversy which his works provoked; in Chapter 1 I will suggest that *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram* (1832) contained a more inflammatory strand of Godwinian philosophy.

²² Quoted in Halévy, p.510.

²³ Bentham was himself consulted on several occasions during the 1820s. When in 1833 a Commission was nominated to complete the revision of the penal system, the first name on the list of members was that of John Austin, the utilitarian jurist of University College. Southwood Smith and Edwin Chadwick were members of the Commission of 1833 which organised a central board of factory inspectors. In 1836, three out of the five radicals who composed a commission to prepare reform of the municipal electorate were Benthamites. See Halévy, pp.509-13.

²⁴ Halévy, p.510.

In *Discipline and Punish*, his hugely influential study of the social and cultural forces at work in the making of the 'modern' period, Michel Foucault has persuasively argued that the decline of the 'festival of punishment' - of public acts of violence upon the body of the criminal - did not represent the transition from a barbarous to a civilised society.²⁵ Instead, he portrays it as the product of transition from a society of relative freedom to one in which discipline and punishment were internalised, and the individual coerced into self-imposed restrictions. He points to Bentham's model, the 'panopticon', as the architectural manifestation of this transformation.²⁶ By making power invisible and unverifiable, the State forced the individual to assume responsibility for the constraints of power, and he or she was compelled to put the constraints upon himself or herself. The mark of shame now became the public conviction at trial rather than the spectacle of punishment itself, which had always run the risk of undermining, rather than reinforcing, the strength of the State by heroising or sanctifying the criminal. Foucault links this change of emphasis to historical processes, to the growth of capitalism and a new 'political anatomy' whose object and end were not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline.²⁷

According to this interpretation, then, the rejection of aristocratic pomp and ceremony, and the purge of institutional mechanisms in the name of civilised 'improvement', was actually a process whereby individuals were more effectively forced into submission by apologists for a new, economic social order. While this

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), p.8.

²⁶ The panopticon was envisaged as a series of visible and separate cells arranged around a central tower. The occupant of the tower could see into every cell; the inmate would never know whether or not he or she was being observed, but would be certain that he or she could be observed at any time. It was a model which Bentham regarded as applicable to many institutions, including the school, the hospital, and the factory, as well as the prison.

²⁷ Foucault, p.208.

analysis is convincing, I disagree with a Foucauldian interpretation of Newgate fiction's position in relation to this process. Foucault believes that it represented a cultural appropriation of broadside literature which had traditionally re-enacted the 'disturbances around the scaffold', and challenged authority's ritualised discourse of power by glorifying the defiance of the criminal.²⁸ As reformers of the penal system worked to suppress such narratives, newspapers took over the task of recounting the grey details of everyday crime and punishment. At the same time, a new literature developed in which crime was admired as a fine art, as a privilege of the great, and the spectacle of crime was transposed to another class. The 'people' - by which Foucault implies those of the lower classes - were robbed of the old pride in their crimes, and extraordinary crime became the 'quiet game of the well behaved.'²⁹ It is an analysis with which Hollingsworth appears to agree. He believes that the success of the Newgate novels - they were, as John Sutherland says, 'sensationally popular' - was due to the fact that 'the crudest terrors of Newgate, well enough remembered, could be thought of as safely in the past'.³⁰ For him, the setting of these tales in an era before reform meant that they were celebrated as 'a paean to the end of the bad old days, and the arrival of a time like morning.'

Yet it is equally plausible, particularly at a time of significant alterations in the structures of power and the relations between classes, to oppose this Foucauldian image of cultural 'containment' with an image of cultural 'infiltration', of the upward mobility of subversive discourses of social defiance. These texts can be regarded as riddled with anti-authoritarian sentiment, suggested either overtly or through associative imagery. The frequent tavern scenes which are to be found in almost every novel are good examples. Iain McCalman has shown how a number of artisan ultra-

²⁸ Ibid., p.68.

²⁹ Ibid., p.69.

³⁰ John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Harlow: Longman, 1988), p.462; Hollingsworth, p.141.

radicals in the metropolitan underworld kept alive a tradition of 'plebeian unrespectability and irreverence' which, he insists, 'should be added to the popular radical tradition, along with the sober, strenuous and heroic aspects more customarily described.'³¹ These were men of 'seedy alehouses' who 'uttered bloody toasts, sung rousing hymns, [...] performed drunken rituals and irreverent burlesques'. As Jack Sheppard or Paul Clifford indulge in drunken excess and bawdy song, it is difficult not to feel that they, like the ultra-radicals McCalman describes, were 'carr[ying] into Victorian society a ribald, saturnalian, anti-establishment culture'.³² Similarly, while the novels follow the lives of criminals originally subject to a harsher penal code, one that Hollingsworth feels could be enjoyed for being 'safely in the past', there is little to prevent the reader drawing parallels with contemporary penal mechanisms. John points out that reform 'had made the hangman less real and hence more open to fictional treatment', but the truth is that these novels rarely treated the hangman.³³ Jack Sheppard's notoriety rested upon his escapes not from the scaffold, but from prison, the cornerstone of the reformed system of punishment. *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram* depict their heroes confronting authority at the point of trial, the point at which Foucault says the state now attempted to inflict its 'mark of shame', rather than at the point of execution. And, while the policeman had replaced the hangman as the visible representative of the law, as Ainsworth's Dick Turpin is pursued by the chief constable of Westminster and the clerk of the peace on his ride to York, it does not take an enormous leap of imagination to equate his pursuers with the Metropolitan police force established by Robert Peel in 1829.³⁴ The theme of 'excarceration' in reaction to social

³¹ Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.234. The 'sober' form of radicalism refers to the drive by artisans and the lower middle classes for intellectual, social and moral improvement during the 1820s, commonly labelled the 'march of mind'.

³² *Radical Underworld*, p.237.

³³ *Cult Criminals*, 1, p.xli.

³⁴ Wood, p.91.

'incarceration' remained, and was as relevant to the victims of such incarceration in the years after reform as it was to those before.

Furthermore, while Nigel Cross has written that '[i]n practice, the writing, production and reading of books was a middle-class monopoly', there is no doubt that the reaction against the novel did emanate in part from fears about its direct political influence upon readers, particularly at the height of the Chartist threat.³⁵ Such books were accessible to those of a lower class through lending libraries, and in coffee-houses and taverns. The Courvoisier case might appear to prove the novel's potential to reach members of the lower classes, to induce individual acts of anarchy, and to have linked these specifically to class tensions.³⁶ Certainly Kathryn Chittick feels that to many of the reviewers, at least during the latter part of the decade, the craze surrounding *Jack Sheppard* (1839) was an ominous one, and that fear of Chartism was a genuine force in the reaction against the novel:

The perspective of the late 1830s on democracy was significantly different from that of the early 1830s. Chartism did not evoke the same hopefulness as the call to Reform had done, and there was no cachet attached to the title of Chartist.³⁷

This was heightened by the swift adaptation of the novels by dramatists for the minor theatres - an added obstacle to theories of hegemonic 'containment'. During the autumn of 1839, there were eight different versions of *Jack Sheppard* being shown in London.³⁸ These theatres catered for a largely lower-class, and potentially explosive, audience. They were also immensely difficult to regulate, and the many unlicensed

³⁵ Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer. Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.2.

³⁶ In 1840, Lord William Russell was murdered by his valet, B. F. Courvoisier, who was alleged to have claimed that the motivation for his crime came from reading *Jack Sheppard*.

³⁷ Kathryn Chittick, *Dickens and the 1830s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 156.

³⁸ Hollingsworth, p.139.

productions, operating beyond the agents of state 'surveillance', were sources of great anxiety for the ruling classes. The threat is expressed by Mary Russell Mitford:

I have been reading *Jack Sheppard*, and have been struck by the great danger, in these times, of representing authorities so constantly and fearfully in the wrong; so tyrannous, so devilish, as the author has been pleased to portray it in *Jack Sheppard*, for he does not seem so much a man or even an incarnate fiend, as a representation of power - government or law, call it as you may - the ruling power. Of course, Mr Ainsworth had no such design, but such is the effect; and as the millions who see it represented at the minor theatres will not distinguish between now and a hundred years back, all the Chartists in the land are less dangerous than this nightmare of a book, and I, Radical as I am, lament any additional temptations to outbreak, with all its train of horrors.³⁹

Perhaps, therefore, the dissemination of Newgate material is more accurately described as one of simultaneous movement up and down the 'cultural escalator'.⁴⁰ Either way, it is clearly the case that tales of 18th-century crime could appear to carry subversive registers that were still pertinent to post-reform society; that the novels themselves could theoretically reach dissatisfied members of the lower classes; and that they were definitely reaching such members via adaptations at minor theatres.

The novels could also appear transgressive by preserving elements of a Georgian discourse against which the middle-class ethic had firmly set itself in opposition. Scenes of excess contained concomitant registers not only of lower-class radicalism, but fashionable hedonism and social irresponsibility. It is true that the Newgate novelists might be seen to have diluted the proud lower-class origins of defiant criminality, but they had not substituted these for a straightforward and uncomplicated background of the respectable or 'well behaved'.⁴¹ Instead there are

³⁹ S. M. Ellis, *William Harrison Ainsworth and his Friends*, 2 vols (London: John Lane, 1911), I, 376.

⁴⁰ For this image of the cultural movement of popular forms see Stuart Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular', in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. by Raphael Samuel (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp.205-40 (p.234).

⁴¹ Although, as I will suggest in the first chapter, aspects of Victorian 'gentility' do reside in the protean characters of heroes like Paul Clifford.

elements of anti-social figures of Regency days, like the dandy and the buck, elements which reveal a generic debt to 'silver-fork' fiction, and the scenes of urban low-life to be found in the works of Pierce Egan. Egan's *Life in London*, whose first monthly number appeared in September 1820, and was dedicated to George IV, immersed itself in the colour of the metropolis. Little place was given to the middle classes. It alternated between East End drinking dens like All-Max and fashionable clubs like Almack's, enjoying each equally, and revelling in the paradoxical sense in which, despite their differences, they were very much the same. As J. C. Reid observes, the whole world presented by Egan was 'at odds with the nascent world of bourgeois respectability, propriety and decorum.'⁴² As such, it forged an alliance between the upper and lower classes in implied opposition to those of the middle. It was an alliance which William Maginn, the editor of the aggressively middle-class *Fraser's Magazine*, was to find in *Paul Clifford*:

It is a favourite notion with our fashionable novelists, to sacrifice the middle classes equally to the lowest and highest [...]. There is a sort of instinct in this. The one class esteem themselves above law, and the other are too frequently below it. They are attracted, then, by a sympathy with their mutual lawlessness. They recognise a likeness in their libertinism.⁴³

The drinking den or the boxing match were arenas in which the wealthy and the poor were genuinely brought together.⁴⁴ They were places which the middle classes avoided. Gary Kelly notes how the Newgate novels were attacked for promulgating a 'contempt for the "merely" middle class' by spreading both 'false values of social

⁴² J. C. Reid, *Bucks and Bruisers. Pierce Egan and Regency England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p.71.

⁴³ Quoted in Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960), p.173. Egan once presented Bulwer with the 'genuine caul of Thurtell the Murderer', and looked upon him 'with the sort of mild approbation that a retired prize-fighter would bestow upon a promising young student'. See Victor Alexander George Robert Bulwer Lytton, Second Earl of Lytton, *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by his Grandson*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1913), 1, p.389, hereafter referred to as '2nd Earl of Lytton'.

⁴⁴ Boxing had been illegal since 1750, but the presence of aristocracy meant that matches were largely overlooked by magistrates. See Reid, p.14.

emulation of the aristocracy' and 'false glamorisation of the lower classes.'⁴⁵ There was a sense, then, in which the site of crime was one, both metaphorically and literally, occupied exclusively by the upper and lower orders. Law and lawlessness became split along lines of class. The consequence was that narratives which treated crime without overt moral stricture implicitly subverted the middle-class discourse of law.

As so often with the Newgate novel, however, the social and political messages stemming from this implied division are open to alternative critical interpretations. Jon Klancher has shown how, as the age of self-publishing - where the entire production of a periodical was effected largely by a single person - came to an end, each journal began to absorb its many contributors into its own specific discursive mode.⁴⁶ The role of journal writers became important in forging a collective middle-class sense of identity, in forming a representation in which the middle class could become acutely conscious of itself, and of its hegemonic cultural power. This was especially the case when, as I have suggested, there were distinct rumblings of an attempt to fashion a unified 'working-class' identity, and when the expansion of the publishing trade meant that readers were no longer so readily classified. At stake was the very identity of a new middle-class audience, and the question of whether it could 'cohere as a cultural formation or simply disperse'.⁴⁷ One way of creating such an identity was by defining it against what it was not - in other words, by the critical portrayal of other classes. By reading 'signs' in the aristocracy and the lower orders, the reader was encouraged to adopt a detached position as observer and develop a sense of self by doing so.⁴⁸ This is, of course, a classic example of social 'surveillance', and one which, it could be argued, is a feature of the Newgates novels' use of criminality. By attaching the signs

⁴⁵ Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (London: Longman, 1989), p.221.

⁴⁶ Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p.48.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.60.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.68.

of lawlessness and raucous misbehaviour to the upper and lower sections of society, the Newgate novels could be seen to associate the alternative signs of virtue and control with the middle class, thus reinforcing its sensibilities while justifying its claim to social power.

Yet at times these very sensibilities are themselves foregrounded, so that the middle-class reader becomes not an observer, abstracted from socio-economic rank, but part of the textualised fabric of society. The criminal, a literal outcast from society, becomes the ideal witness to its faults, and displaces the reader from his or her privileged position of surveillance. Middle-class signs, like 'respectability' and 'creditworthiness', are dragged under the spotlight, and frequently shown to be hollow masks. Of course, this could be a self-critical, yet simultaneously self-confirming, process in the consolidation of identity, a 'mooring and unmooring of the sign'.⁴⁹ However, aggressively middle-class journals like *Fraser's* attacked this process in the novels; indeed, their reaction against the dandiacal and the criminal in Newgate literature is itself indicative of the attempt to encourage middle-class self-identification which Klancher describes. Is it possible that both sides of the savage controversy were fighting for the same cause? It seems incredible, but reveals the very real difficulty at times of defining the 'containing' and the 'subversive' during the period, and the contemporary uncertainty about the dynamics of fictional representation, particularly in the novel.

The relative youth of the novel, and the consequent instability of its form, was an important factor in the Newgate controversy. In many ways it embodied a struggle over the 'soul' of the genre, and one inextricably entangled with broader social philosophies. Edwin Eigner implies that, in simple terms, it represented the clash between two competing literary theories and views of how best to represent and

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.75.

analyse reality.⁵⁰ On one side were exponents of what we would now label 'realism', an increasingly popular mode committed to Lockean empiricism and faith in a cause-and-effect view of the universe, and comprising the 'mainstream' of Victorian fiction. Its positivism necessitated a starting point in ignorance, and its imitative method aimed at a truth derived from experience. As a result, authors like Scott and Thackeray felt that they were restricted by any adherence to tradition; where they acknowledged predecessors at all, they would look no further back than Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. By definition, they also rejected idealism or metaphysical speculation which ran contrary to the experiential world. Eigner writes that during the 1830s (and afterwards) it was 'the only genre of fiction which both readers and critics would surely accept.'⁵¹

On the other were authors responding to a strong romantic strain which remained from the Regency period, one not only of amorality, but of individualism and idealism, heroes and rebellion. In places they would reject the 'moral seriousness, middle-class perspective, and deflation of the heroic and ideal associated with Victorian realism.'⁵² These novelists were reacting against the materialism and empiricism of their counterparts, and attempting to substitute the visionary and intuitive for the experiential. Bulwer would name this subgenre of the romance tradition the 'metaphysical novel'.⁵³ It was not, like realist fiction, to be regarded as 'the mere portraiture of outward society'; instead, it wandered 'from the exact probability of effects, in order to bring more strikingly before us the truth of causes'. It often 'invest[ed] itself in a dim and shadowy allegory', and was therefore rooted not in

⁵⁰ Edwin M. Eigner, *The Metaphysical Novel in England and America. Dickens, Bulwer, Melville, and Hawthorne* (London: University of California Press, 1978), pp.2-13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

⁵² Engel and King, p.6.

⁵³ E. L. Bulwer, 'On the Different Kinds of Prose Fiction with some Apology for the Fiction of the Author', in *The Disowned*, 2 vols (New York: Harper, 1835), I, pp.i-xiv (p.vii).

a process of unravelled experience but in a preconceived vision.⁵⁴ The metaphysical novelist justified his stance by repeatedly pointing to a long heritage of tradition, one which would survive the current 'fashion' for realism, and which included visionaries like Shakespeare. His intention was to bring about the 'spiritual salvation of his contemporaries', and 'expose materialism and its consequences, so that metaphysics [...] might be restored as a legitimate province for human inquiry.'⁵⁵

However, it is misleading either to consider the division between the two camps as absolutely clear, or to believe that this division was the sole cause of the Newgate controversy. The realistic impulse was far from settled or consistent, and was very different from our modern notions of realism. While Eigner locates Scott firmly within the realist strain, and it is true that he brought mimetic realism to the historical novel, his picturesque settings, colourful adventures, accounts of ancient customs and superstitions, and celebration of chivalry were features of romanticism. And reviewers and authors struggled at times to reconcile the central principles of their literary theory. Carolyn Washburn notes that 'the criteria which dominated the consideration of narrative prose fiction' in England were that 'a novel be true to life, probable, based on experience; and that it be moral. Both requisites characterised the opinions of [...] the whole period, 1832-1860.'⁵⁶ While to romanticise crime was bad, the notion of treating it realistically provoked deep moral anxieties. Thus, as we will see in Chapter 2, Thackeray could attack Newgate authors not only for depicting crime unrealistically, but for depicting crime at all. A theory which claimed to dismantle methodological barriers to truth came to impose its own restrictions upon content.

⁵⁴ Ibid., I, p.ix.

⁵⁵ Eigner, p.7.

⁵⁶ Carolyn Washburn, 'The History, from 1832 to 1860, of British Criticism of Narrative Prose Fiction' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illinois, 1937), p.20, quoted in Eigner, p.6.

Similarly, the metaphysical novel was by no means thoroughly consistent or homogeneous. I have suggested that Bulwer's *Paul Clifford* called for practical and recognisably Benthamite reform of the penal system. Both Bulwer and Dickens would at times defend their portrayals as 'realistic', and distance themselves from romantic or glamorised tales of crime. Dickens, the author who claimed to evoke 'the romantic side of familiar things', nevertheless famously stressed the fidelity of his representation of low life in opposition to 'Romance' in his preface to the third edition of *Oliver Twist* (1837).⁵⁷ The characters of these novels are 'sometimes presented on one page as ideal types and on another as realistic portraits.'⁵⁸ In part this can be seen as a reflection of the transitory nature of the period, as authors sought to reconcile the Romantic with the Victorian, to merge the ideals of the alienated Romantic with the contemporary demand for practical improvement and social action. More generally, the apparent discrepancies, even paradoxes, to be found in both 'realist' and 'metaphysical' fiction reflect an instability of form stemming from uncertainties not only about the representation of reality, but the very nature of reality itself, and one which can be found in debates beyond the sphere of literature.⁵⁹ The result is that 'few novels of the period are not hybrids created from the coalescence of both strains.'⁶⁰

In literary terms, the controversy is not only a struggle between competing theories of the novel, but between individual authors and magazines striving to make their marks within a cultural sphere which was witnessing its own 'revolution'. Advances in technology made the production of books cheaper, and, as literature's commercial potential became obvious, the publishing industry shifted its target from the wealthy élite to a new and broader reading public. The Newgate novels were

⁵⁷ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.xiv.

⁵⁸ Eigner, p.5.

⁵⁹ For example, in legal debates about the provision of testimonial evidence in court. See Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.1-21.

⁶⁰ Engel and King, p.6.

arguably laying the foundations for the modern mass media. As Sutherland observes, 'legend has it that *Paul Clifford* cleared the largest impression ever of a novel on the first day of publication.'⁶¹ Prose came to challenge poetry's position at the apex of the literary generic hierarchy, and the periodical was the dominant form of the 1820s and 1830s. These changes provoked fresh debates about the nature of writing and of cultural production, and I believe that the work of the Newgate novelists reflect these debates and demonstrate a self-consciousness of the new status of the author. They are not only stories of lawlessness and social rebellion, but statements of radical, literary rebellion. They participate in and portray contemporary cultural developments, and express allegorically their authors' roles, and senses of place, as fledglings within the literary field. Their writers draw parallels between themselves and the criminal. Furthermore, the loudest voices in the Newgate debate - be it the authors or contributors to magazines like *Fraser's* - were relative newcomers to the realm of English letters. Within the context of the sudden expansion of the literary marketplace, the novels and the accompanying controversy were also manifestations of intense literary competition, shaped by the determined and often extravagant attempts by writers and editors to attract attention and cement their places within the literary arena. As such, the Newgate controversy reveals much both about the changing face of cultural production during the period, and about the dynamics involved in contemporary authorship.

The Newgate novels, their dramatic adaptations and the controversy they provoked were simultaneously the products and vehicles of a varied and immensely complex mix of factors unique to the period in which they appeared. They are not always ideologically stable or even coherent. *Paul Clifford* contains a blend of confusing and often paradoxical discourses; radical rhetoric, for instance, exists alongside a competing strain of bourgeois domesticity. Nor are their politics restricted

⁶¹ *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, p.389.

to that of class or party. Indeed, *Paul Clifford* seems unable to decide whether it is concerned with political philosophy or the politics of authorship and representation. It is this oscillating relationship towards different forms of 'the political' which is both so intriguing and frustrating, and which has shaped the approach and structure of the thesis which follows. The Newgate 'phenomenon', for want of a better definition, reveals the various ways in which texts and genres might be political, the various areas in which the political might reside. While the novels can engage, to a greater or lesser degree, in the politicised realm of ideas, they are also participants in the politicised realm of letters, in the competitive fight between authors and contemporary notions of authorship and literature. Similarly, as they move from the novel to the theatre their radicalism manifests itself in a new way, as ideological or philosophical threads are replaced by the more visible and immediate image of the individual's clash with authority. The Newgate novels and drama occupy a range of sites of political struggle; they are melting-pots for a variety of forms of political debate. Their messages are subtly transformed by the backgrounds of their authors or their audiences, and by the genres in which they are expressed. Ultimately they are about the politics of representation and reception.

It is with the aim of separating these entwined strands that I have departed from those critics of the past who have primarily approached the subject from one of two directions. Some critics have chosen to locate it within the specific sphere of literary genre and theories of the novel, and ignored the theatrical versions altogether, as in the work of Eigner and Allan Conrad Christensen.⁶² Others, like Hollingsworth, Nancy Jane Tyson, and, to a lesser extent, Juliet John, have elected to conduct chronological, and largely historical, surveys.⁶³ I have avoided conducting an

⁶² Allan Conrad Christensen, *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976).

⁶³ Nancy Jane Tyson, *Eugene Aram: Literary History and Typology of the Scholar-Criminal* (Connecticut: Archon, 1983).

exhaustive survey. I touch only lightly upon the novels of the 1840s because, while Bulwer's *Night and Morning* (1841) and *Lucretia* (1846) attracted criticism, they were in reality unlike the earlier novels, and only briefly stirred the embers of a dying controversy. Engel and King have described this literature as 'a very different kind of fiction.'⁶⁴ Novels about crime no longer inflamed the concerns and fears of commentators in the way that they had in the previous decade. I also dwell for only a short time upon *Oliver Twist*, a novel which, while drawn into the controversy by Thackeray, was never truly considered to number among the Newgate novels by the majority of critics. It has, in any case, received a great deal of attention from modern scholars.⁶⁵ Instead, I have thought it more important to look at the issues these novels raise rather than conducting a thorough inventory. In Chapter 1, I treat Bulwer's books as novels of ideas, examining the ways in which they respond to the reformatory spirit of the day. I suggest that his texts proved threatening not only because they contained Godwinian radicalism, but because they also contained bourgeois and aristocratic discourses, which contributed to a political vision that frightened through its very elusiveness. In Chapter 2, I explore the Newgate debate as one of literary, rather than moral or political, debate. I argue that the nature of the novels themselves, and the surrounding controversy, resulted from the relative youth of the novel and the professional author, and reflected the savage conflict between established and avant-garde writers. And, in Chapter 3, I consider the transformed dynamics of *Jack Sheppard* as it was performed on stage. While it may not have expressed a sustained political philosophy or critique, it was in some ways more political than the novels because of its generic availability to altered, and unpredictable, interpretations by both theatre managers and audiences.

⁶⁴ Engel and King, p.40.

⁶⁵ For an excellent study of Dickens and the criminal theme, see Philip Collins, *Dickens and Crime* (London: Macmillan, 1965). For a discussion of *Oliver Twist* specifically in relation to Newgate literature, see Juliet John, 'Twisting the Newgate Tale: Dickens, Popular Culture and the Politics of Genre', in *Rethinking Victorian Culture*, ed. by Juliet John and others (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), pp.126-45.

CHAPTER 1

BULWER'S NEWGATE NOVELS AND THE REFORMATORY SPIRIT

Literary honours are not [...] so desirable as political rank; but they must not for that reason be despised; they are the great stepping stones to our ultimate object. To get power I must be in the House of Commons. To obtain my seat there, I must pay a certain sum of money [...]. I shall therefore, directly the winter begins, commence regular author [...]. If my works succeed, in the course of the winter, I expect before the end of that spring to be in the House.¹

It is sometimes easy to forget, when studying his novels, that Edward Bulwer was a man driven by intense political, as well as literary, ambition. It is an interest which is important to this chapter, and its consideration of his works as novels of ideas. He was passionate, and his views unsteady, and these qualities impact significantly upon his novels. As the letter above suggests, written in 1826 to his future wife, at times during his early career he would consider writing simply as a means to political ends. While he could never claim to have been as successful within the field of politics as that of literature, he nevertheless sat in Parliament for much of his adult life. He served as an independent Radical between the years of 1831 and 1841, and as a Conservative from 1851 until 1866, when he moved to the House of Lords.² He received a baronetcy in 1838, and was Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1858.³

¹ Edward Bulwer to Rosina Wheeler, September 1826, quoted in *Letters of the Late Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton to His Wife*, ed. by Louisa Devey (New York: G. W. Dillingham, 1889), pp.63-67.

² Bulwer held the seats of St Ives (1831-32), Lincoln (1832-41) and Hertfordshire (1852-66). See T. H. S. Escott, *Edward Bulwer, First Baron Lytton of Knebworth* (London: George Routledge, 1910), p.205.

³ *Ibid.*, p.295.

As an independent Radical, Bulwer had an uneasy relationship with the Whigs, who held government throughout the 1830s. While, unlike many Whigs, he regarded the Reform Bill as the first step in the process of reform, rather than as a final measure, he also realised that the Whigs represented the best means of securing this first step.⁴ He urged those with more radical inclinations to support Lord Grey's government not because they should believe in Whiggism, but because 'before we throw the Whigs away we must use them first.'⁵ He also recognised in the Whigs his main hopes of honour and office, and a solid bulwark against the return of the detested Tories. It would not have required a significant sacrifice of principle for Bulwer to join them - he admired legislation like the Reform Act of 1832, the Factory Act of 1833, and the New Poor Law of 1834.⁶ However, until 1837, when he was drawn into their camp by the example of his mentor, Lord Durham, and the kindness of the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, he largely kept his distance.⁷ This was in part because he sensed that the Whig aristocracy did not accept him as one of their own. Despite ancient pedigrees on both sides of his family, neither the Bulwers nor the Lyttons had enjoyed a particularly high standing in recent generations. To contemporary patricians, Bulwer was an abrasive upstart who wrote impudent novels for a living, a 'low fellow' not to be taken seriously.⁸ In *England and the English*, Bulwer bitterly attacked the Whigs for having 'only their grand seigneurs to put into office'.⁹ The result of this, and his youthful

⁴ The division between Whig and Tory was a complicated one during the early 19th century. Broadly, however, Toryism was traditionally identified with Anglicanism and the squirearchy and Whiggism with aristocratic families and the wealthy middle classes. The Tories were generally obstructionist and anti-reform. The Whigs wanted democratic reform up to a point, had a heightened social consciousness, and were committed to an oligarchic system and a political class comprising an amalgamation of aristocratic and commercial interests.

⁵ Escott, p. 189.

⁶ As I suggested in the Introduction, utilitarians were prominent in the implementation of all these measures. See Halévy, pp. 512-13.

⁷ Charles W. Snyder, *Liberty and Morality: A Political Biography of Edward Bulwer-Lytton* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 60-61.

⁸ Michael Sadleir, *Bulwer: A Panorama. I. Edward and Rosina, 1803-1836* (Boston: Little Brown, 1931), pp. 193-95.

⁹ Edward Bulwer, *England and the English*, 2 vols (Shannon, Ireland: Irish

idealism, was that he found a common cause with the Radicals. In 1831, those in the Midland Dukeries would bracket him with Thomas Paine. He was for a time the favoured political pupil of Joseph Hume, 'the father of English Radicalism'.¹⁰ However, it was in the Philosophical Radicals, with Jeremy Bentham at their head, that Bulwer saw the real pioneers of reform. Until he realised the impracticality of bringing together the disparate cliques and factions of radicalism, he was actively involved in supporting John Stuart Mill's attempts to form a united Radical party.¹¹ But his landed background, and support for the Established Church and the monarchy as guarantors of social stability, were perpetual barriers to a proper identification with, and acceptance by, the Radicals. On the fringes of both the Whigs and the Radicals, but fully trusted by neither, Bulwer was in a very real sense 'independent'.

As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that Bulwer's world view was complex, and frequently contradictory. This was especially the case because of the inherent conflict within him of Romantic and Victorian sensibilities. He gave expression to the feelings which the age induced in him, the simultaneous tug of both the old and the new, in *England and the English* (1833):

[W]e live in an age of visible transition - an age of disquietude and doubt - of the removal of time-worn landmarks, and the breaking up of the hereditary elements of society - old opinions, feelings - ancestral customs and institutions are crumbling away, and both the spiritual and temporal worlds are darkened by the shadow of change [...]. The age then is one of destruction [...]. [M]iserable would be our lot were it not also an age of preparation for reconstructing.¹²

At the forefront of the reformatory rallying cry, he nevertheless held a nostalgic attachment to a passing era. Prone to bouts of depression, he was attracted by the gloomy introspection of Byronic romanticism. A shy man, cripplingly so in large

University Press, 1971), I, 23.

¹⁰ Escott, p.202.

¹¹ Snyder, pp.59-60.

¹² *England and the English*, II, 166-67.

groups, he adopted the extravagant dress of the Regency dandy. His debilitating self-consciousness made him a poor orator, and, in truth, he was ill-equipped for a role as Victorian man of public action.¹³ However, the life and death of his scholarly grandfather, Richard Warburton Lytton, had both instilled in him a love of study, and fostered a fear of in consequence.¹⁴ He wondered at the waste of a wealth of knowledge which had brought neither renown for the man nor benefit to society. From an early age he regarded reading as a means either to personal pleasure or practical effect:

As I read with pleasure, so I studied with ease. But at all times I was no less fond of sport than of study: and, throughout my life, books have been to me either incentives to action, or stimulants to the pleasures, the interests, and the emotions, connected with personal experiences and relations, rather than that all-sufficient society or occupation which is found in them by the habitual student.¹⁵

It was an impression which could only be reinforced by his 'passion' for the writings of Bentham and James Mill during the 1820s, and the effect of these contemporary utilitarian theorists upon the eponymous hero of *Pelham* might be regarded as loosely autobiographical.¹⁶ Bentham had shaped the spirit of the age; he 'reconstructed while he destroyed'. The country would 'owe much' to him if it were to pass more smoothly through the crisis of transition than other nations on the Continent, and 'lose less of the good it already enjoys in working itself free from the evil.'¹⁷

However, while such utilitarianism satisfied the wish of the politician for practical and legislative action, it increasingly conflicted with the craving of the inner

¹³ His speech was characterised by a drawl which frequently made his words utterly incomprehensible. See Escott, p.286.

¹⁴ 2nd Earl of Lytton, I, 31.

¹⁵ Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, First Earl of Lytton, *The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, by his Son*, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1883), I, 251, hereafter referred to as '1st Earl of Lytton'.

¹⁶ Snyder, p. 14.

¹⁷ *England and the English*, II, 167.

man for spiritual satisfaction. Bulwer was intrigued by the occult, and investigated subjects like '[a]strology, alchemy, mesmerism, clairvoyance, hypnotism, spiritualism, and magic', subjects implicitly at odds with the rigid empiricism of Benthamite stricture.¹⁸ It was an interest reflecting an instinctive distaste for the materialism of Locke, which Bulwer felt had impeded the advance of metaphysical knowledge, and a reaction against the absolute faith in experience.¹⁹ The more idealistic strand of Godwinian utilitarianism was also to prove immensely influential in Bulwer's thinking, with its call for a 'natural' framework of law, and its attack upon the belief that the multifarious 'facts' of individual human existence could properly be comprehended and legislated for. As Gregory Dart has commented, Godwinian reason 'possessed a metaphysical rather than mathematical soul.'²⁰ It also meant that while praising the industry of the middle classes, and furthering their claims to social power, he was deeply wary of their association with the market and with the economic and materialist values on which their ethic was grounded. He could yearn for a 'sense of identity and integrity' which, at times, he felt was being lost during the rise of the 'middle-class industrial-commercial society of the 1830s.'²¹ This immaterialism not only complicated and confused his political and social theory, but influenced his literary views. He privileged the form of 'the metaphysical novel' over the increasingly popular realist novel, which he linked with such pervasive materialism. As such, his novels of the 1830s, for all his belief in change, could look back to an older tradition more readily associated with the Romantic and the aristocratic, and in places reject the 'moral seriousness, middle-class perspective, and deflation of the heroic and ideal associated with Victorian realism.'²²

¹⁸ Robert Lee Wolff, *Strange Stories: Explorations in Victorian Fiction - The Occult and the Neurotic* (Boston: Gambit, 1971), pp.148-49.

¹⁹ *England and the English*, I, 350.

²⁰ Gregory Dart, 'Chivalry, justice and the law in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*' in *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.76-96 (p.87).

²¹ Engel and King, pp.12-13.

²² *Ibid.*, p.6.

This chapter will examine Bulwer's reaction to contemporary social problems, primarily in the legal system, in his early Newgate fiction. It will suggest that these novels expressed a message that was at once strongly radical and yet also riven with ambivalence. *Paul Clifford* attacks the process by which prisoners are classified and punished, and includes a Benthamite call for more adequate legislature. However, it also engages with contemporary debates about legal representation, revealing the prejudiced and class-based assumptions about truthful testimony. In doing so, it contains echoes of Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), and a call for judgement based not on Benthamite 'effect' but on a broader consideration of circumstance. It also invites comparison between different modes of representation, and implies that the metaphysical novelist recreates a fuller 'truth' than either the lawyer or the realist author. *Eugene Aram* highlights the dangers of a private and misguided application of utilitarian philosophy. It shows how an individual can be forced into a dangerous moral relativism by strict adherence to philosophical principle. Despite this, it condemns the legal system which punishes such an individual without considering both his intention and his subsequent actions, calling instead for an intuitive and 'natural' form of legal framework. I will also stress the difference between Bulwer's protagonists and the more traditional heroes of Newgate. Bulwer divorces them from their working-class roots, and introduces characteristics of the Regency dandy and the Victorian gentleman, characteristics which contribute to the mixed political registers of his novels. Finally I will highlight the metaphysical current of these novels, one which emphasises the importance of individual, as well as institutional, influences upon character, and which appears to express the author's hope that spiritual workings will compensate for the failings of social mechanisms.

1. Respectability, Truth, and the Workings of Justice: *Paul Clifford* and *Caleb Williams*

Paul Clifford told the tale of a boy, apparently parentless, brought up in a poor area of London by the hostess of an inn. With ambitions 'beyond his station', he falls in with a group of disreputable young men, and lives the careless life of the buck before being wrongly convicted of theft. The prosecution lawyer, Brandon, it later transpires, is his father. Escaping from the House of Correction, he is convinced by a strong sense of injustice, and the persuasions of a philosophising criminal called Augustus Tomlinson, to join a gang of highwaymen. He rapidly rises in this company to become the gang's leader. While mixing in fashionable society, however, with the intention of preying on a rich heiress, he falls in love with Lucy Brandon (the lawyer's niece). He determines to reform in order to be worthy of her affections, but, before being able to do so, is betrayed by a treacherous literary critic called MacGrawler. Despite being sentenced to death by Brandon, who is by now a judge, his sentence is commuted to transportation for life. Escaping from the penal colony, he ends his years with Lucy, living in America as a respectable and able gentleman.

During the 1840 preface to *Paul Clifford*, Bulwer laid out his supposed aims for the novel. In large part these were directed towards reform of the penal system. He wished, he wrote, 'to draw attention to two errors in our penal institutions; viz., a vicious Prison discipline, and a sanguinary Criminal Code, - the habit of corrupting the boy by the very punishment that ought to redeem him, and then hanging the man, at the first occasion, as the easiest way of getting rid of our own blunders.'²³ We must, of course, be wary of a preface appearing ten years after the publication of the original novel; it would be easy, and advantageous, for an author retrospectively to exaggerate his influence in the cause of social reform. Nevertheless, the novel did appear at a

²³ E. L. Bulwer, *Paul Clifford*, The New Knebworth Edition (London: George Routledge, 1896), p.7.

formative moment, on the eve of the Reform Bill, and from the pen of a man deeply interested in the politics of his time. Bulwer had made three unsuccessful attempts to win a seat in the House of Commons as an independent Radical in 1826, and a further two in 1830, the year that *Paul Clifford* was published. His ambition was finally realised in 1831 when he was elected as parliamentary member for St Ives. It is also certainly the case that the novel ultimately blamed Paul's incarceration in the House of Correction early in his life for his subsequent criminality. The 'errors' of this penal institution can be seen to reside primarily in the inadequacies of its methods of classifying both prisoners and their punishments. In this, Bulwer was echoing contemporary criticisms of the penal system from utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. Paul, ostensibly a first offender (although in reality an innocent man), is thrust into the company of hardened felons by the hopelessly broad nature of the categories into which the convicted are grouped:

The next morning, as soon as he had been examined by the surgeon, and clothed in the customary uniform, he was ushered, according to his classification, among the good company who had been considered guilty of that compendious offence, 'a misdemeanour.'²⁴

Paul had been conducted to prison in the company of 'a very old "*file*", who was sentenced for getting money under false pretences' and a 'little boy who had been found guilty of sleeping under a colonnade: it being the especial beauty of the English law, to make no fine-drawn and nonsensical shades of difference between vice and misfortune' (*PC*, I, 147). The segregation of the aged from the youthful, and the corrupted from the corruptible, was an essential part of utilitarian proposals for prison

²⁴ E. L. Bulwer, *Paul Clifford*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), I, 148-49. Subsequent page references will be to this edition, unless otherwise indicated, and included in the main body of the text.

reform and their architectural model of the ideal penal institution, the 'panopticon'. James Mill had written in his essay, *Prisons and Prison Discipline*,

A much more complete and desirable separation, than that which is aimed at as the utmost in [...] prisons, is [...] the ordinary separation of young offenders from old, of the greatly corrupted from those who are presumed to be less deeply infected.²⁵

Furthermore, the infliction of punishment is itself tarnished by the failure to suit the penalty to the individual, a deficiency in the classificatory procedure which renders the system of State correction, and its inflexibility, cruel in some instances and laughable in others. Mill wrote of the tread-mill, one of the primary methods of forcing hard labour upon prisoners at this time, that,

[i]t operates with more inequality than almost any other instrument of punishment that ever has been invented. The same degree of punishment would kill one man, that to another would be only a pastime. From this source we may apprehend the most horrid abuses, in the continuance of those tread-mills. We may be very sure that the most atrocious cruelty will often be inflicted upon those who, with strength below the average standard, are placed in those penal engines; while, in the case of those whose strength is much above that standard, they will hardly operate as a punishment at all.²⁶

In remarkably similar language, Bulwer describes Paul's early introduction to the House of Correction and its punitive measures:

This scene over, the company returned to picking oakum, - the tread-mill, that admirably just invention, by which a strong man suffers no fatigue, and a weak one loses his health for life, not having been then introduced into our excellent establishments for correcting crime. (*PC*, I, 151)

The result is that the very instrument by which the State controls, punishes and reforms its individuals becomes the tool of their corruption and, most significantly, of

²⁵ James Mill, *Political Writings*, ed. by Terence Ball (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.221. This essay was originally published in the Supplement to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London, 1819-23).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.205.

their feelings of disillusionment towards the State itself:

Bitterly, and with many dark and wrathful feelings, in which the sense of injustice at punishment alone bore him up against the humiliations to which he was subjected - bitterly, and with a swelling heart, in which the thoughts that lead to crime were already forcing their way through a soil suddenly warmed for their growth, did Paul bend over his employment. (*PC*, I, 151)

The State is neither respected nor feared because it provokes anger through its inability to differentiate between its citizens and their actions, and the punishments it metes out to them. And yet, while these problems may appear to be largely legislative ones that require greater refinement within the system as it already exists, a Benthamite call for further accuracy in its categorisations and an increase in classificatory groupings to establish 'fine-drawn [...] shades of difference', the novel can be seen to contain a more sweeping and radical attitude towards the workings of social institutions and social justice.

Central to such an interpretation are the two trial scenes, the first in which Paul is accused wrongly, but nevertheless convicted, of stealing a watch, and the second in which he faces judgement for his subsequent crimes during the following seven years. In the first instance Brandon, a lawyer who, as I have said, is later revealed to be Paul's father, is his accuser; in the second he is his judge. Here is dramatically enacted the collision between the individual and the legal framework of the State which is shown to be failing in its paternal or patriarchal duties by positively ignoring the nature of individuality, and demonstrating an institutionalised class prejudice. One of the sinister impacts that such prejudice has upon the workings of justice is the assumptions it makes about acts of representation within the court of law. Jan-Melissa Schramm has noted that the role of personal testimony had been of great significance to the development in England of the history of ideas.²⁷ After the Reformation, with its challenge to the infallibility of the Church's biblical interpretations, Protestants came to

²⁷ Schramm, p.28.

place faith in the testimony of enlightened individuals in direct communion with God. Christian faith, which underpinned Victorian ideas of civilisation and culture, depended upon the reliability of testimonial evidence. In the courtroom, personal testimony thereby became one of the prime tools in the reconstruction of events and the revelation of truth. Closely allied to this was the conception that the facts of a case would 'speak for themselves'; at this point a defendant charged with a felony was not permitted to receive legal representation, as the law placed its faith in the notion of an 'accused speaks' model as a means of most accurately ascertaining guilt or innocence.²⁸ It was a theory which was increasingly coming under scrutiny, and in 1836 was finally rejected when the Prisoners' Counsel Act removed the prohibition against full representation for felons. Nevertheless, in 1830 the accused had to conduct his own defence, and Bulwer's portrayals of Paul's trials are steeped in the problematic issue of the representation and evaluation of fact.

At the commencement of his first trial, Paul has a healthy faith in the workings of the court, and an 'elasticity of spirit' and 'wonderful courage' which stems, no doubt, from a belief in the prevailing epistemology - that the very fact of his innocence will be simply and directly communicated (*PC*, I, 136). He is entirely ignorant of the workings of the court, and yet is expected to conduct his own defence. Despite this, he places absolute trust in the security of his innocence. Indeed, there is no solid proof to contradict his version of events. He, after all, was not found to be in possession of the stolen watch. But as the trial progresses - indeed even before the opening evidence has been heard - it becomes obvious that the law is heavily weighted on the side of the accuser rather than the accused. It also becomes clear that representations of events are not assessed objectively; on the contrary, they are bound up with a set of assumptions that accord greater veracity to the testimony of some than to that of others. Social background becomes the primary gauge of 'truth'.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.101, 122.

Intrinsic to this assessment of truth, and those whose words can and cannot be trusted, are certain social associations based upon class. Truth-telling had been a quality traditionally associated with the gentle classes in medieval and early modern England. It was an important element in the distinction, and justification for the distinction, between classes. Michael McKeon has defined the idea of honour during this earlier period as

a unity of outward circumstance and inward essence [which] is the most fundamental justification for the hierarchical stratification of society by status, and [...which] is so fundamental as to be largely tacit [...]. What it asserts is that the social order is not circumstantial and arbitrary, but corresponds to and expresses an analogous, intrinsic moral order.²⁹

The movement towards a market society generated an alteration in the foundations of the notion of honour. Changing social relations, which gave a new prominence to, for example, the relationship between the merchant and the stockbroker, resulted in 'creditworthiness' replacing the coat of arms as the basis for honour:

The supernatural sanction backing the oath of loyalty and the judicial oath - God the supreme overlord - was succeeded in capitalist society by the discovery that it paid a man to make his word his bond because of the rise in social importance of credit, reputation, and respectability.³⁰

Nevertheless, despite the difference in construction, the characteristics of reliability and truthfulness remained allied with the dominant classes. Reputation and respectability continued to be the signs of, and support for, social superiority. As Steven Shapin observes,

[W]hile conceptions of gentility changed, and while the honour culture underwent substantial alterations in early modern Europe, [...] the outcome was recognisably

²⁹ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.131.

³⁰ Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964), p.418.

the same: the distribution of imputed credit and reliability followed the contours of authority and power.³¹

The economic independence of gentlemen meant that their testimony was considered more reliable. Thus the presentation of truth remained a class issue in which 'sincerity' and 'freedom from bias' were determined by economic criteria.³² It is with this definition in mind, with the trappings of the dominant class such as reputation and credit, and the associative link in the social mind between such trappings and the weight of truth, that I will be using the terms 'respectability' and the 'respectable' during the course of this chapter. It follows that such a definition of veracity meant that character and reputation became of inherent probative importance; and that the circumstances of the economically weak, the 'disrespectable', made their testimony far less readily accepted.

From the outset, Brandon's appearance, conduct, and background, and that of Paul, are inherently bound up with the evaluation by the court of their respective versions of events.

Mr. Brandon was, indeed, a barrister of considerable reputation, and in high esteem in the world, not only for talent, but also for a great austerity of manners, which, though a little mingled with sternness and acerbity for the errors of other men, was naturally thought the more praiseworthy on that account. (*PC*, I, 137)

It is acknowledged before any part of the case has been heard that the very appearance of Brandon will affect the course that justice takes. One bystander notes the influence that his presence is certain to have upon the final judgement of the court:

'Hush,' said someone near him, 'tis Lawyer Brandon. Ah, he's a 'cute fellow! It will go hard with the person he complains of.' (*PC*, I, 136)

³¹ Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.69.

³² Schramm, p.68.

Because no evidence has yet been presented, Brandon's 'acuteness' presumably has to do with his intimacy with the workings of the law, and his ability to ensure that his grievance is avenged - that it will 'go hard' for the defendant - irrespective of guilt or innocence. The contrast with Paul is stark. Not only does the prosecuting lawyer have the advantage of absolute familiarity with the legal framework in presenting his case, but he has a distinct influence over the judgement itself. Bearing and reputation come to pre-empt and dictate the outcome. Justice Burnflat shapes 'his decision according to the well-known acuteness of the celebrated lawyer' because 'not by any means willing to displease Mr. Brandon' (*PC*, I, 145-46). The codes governing the social hierarchy, and the related workings of the court, require that the justice must 'credit' Brandon's words. To doubt them would not only 'displease' Brandon - by questioning in him the notion of truth on which his entire claim to social status and identity rests - but it would by the same token dismantle the basis on which the workings of justice are founded. More significant still, the language of the unnamed speaker above is suggestive of a member of the lower classes. However, in referring to Brandon as 'a 'cute fellow', he unconsciously adopts a variation of the term used by the justice, thereby submitting to an official discourse which justifies the prevailing assumptions. The very classes being harmed by prejudice within the legal system are shown themselves to be complicit in the process.

This impression is reinforced by the reaction of onlookers around the court who greet the suggestion that Mrs Lobkins, the landlady of a public house, could be a valid witness to Paul's 'respectability' with derisive laughter. The value of a person's opinion, the importance with which an individual's evidence is regarded by the court, and even by those 'vulgar' spectators of court proceedings, depends upon the status and appearance of that individual. In a related sense, she also lacks economic credit, and this means that her words are denied evidential credit within the court. As if to further emphasise this message, two associates of Paul, themselves aware of this judicial bias and the aid which 'the favourable testimony of two *well-dressed persons*

[...] might confer' [my italics], attempt to use it to influence the outcome by appearing in disguise (*PC*, I, 145). While their deception is eventually uncovered, and they quickly disappear, it is significant that the initial appearance of persons 'so aristocratic produced a general sensation' within the courtroom, that the importance of signs of economic prosperity to the construction of truthful reality are tacitly acknowledged by all, and that consequently the frantic enquiries revolve around the truth of their declared backgrounds rather than the truth of their observations about Paul.

'Respectability' is everything, and becomes something of a touchstone during this scene. Most poignant is the case of the 'poor woman [who] had been committed for seven days to the House of Correction on a charge of *disrespectability*' (*PC*, I, 142). Although her husband comes forward successfully to prove her innocent of the charge, his background ensures that the weight attached to his testimony is insufficient to overturn the original pronouncement of the court; the judge rules that, as she only has another five days of her sentence to serve, it 'will be scarcely worth while to release her now.' Based upon an actual case which Bulwer claims occurred in January 1830, the association of economic disadvantage with 'disrespectability', and the failure of the law to protect the interests of the poor, underlines the extent to which intrinsic class prejudice renders the judiciary cruel as well as unfair. The proper categories of innocence and guilt, truth and falsehood, or even, more contentiously, vice and misfortune, are lost in a process of thinking which sorts people into the respectable and the disrespected, those 'dressed in the height of the fashion' and those with 'the Old-Bailey-cut of countenance', and which accords to the former a monopoly on truth and virtue (*PC*, I, 140, 146).

Of considerable interest in Bulwer's treatment of testimonial evidence in this passage is the way in which he allows his protagonist very little chance to declare his own innocence. While Paul states his name - the most basic label of identity, self and character, and one which the Justice significantly refuses to believe - the main denial of

guilt is described by the author. It is as if the court, supposedly motivated by the 'accused speaks' model of justice, in reality attaches such little relevance to the narrative of the lower-class defendant that it neglects to listen to his first-person testimony at all.³³ What it could similarly represent is a conscious attempt by the author to fill the space afforded by the absence of a defence counsel. Schramm's book suggests that debates during the early 19th century over the nature of representation and reconstruction of reality in law, debates which hinged upon competing claims for the simplicity or complexity of fact, inevitably came to draw the attention of authors. Like lawyers, writers 'placed rhetoric in the service of profit'.³⁴ By attacking the legal notion of represented reality, in other words, and the agents of such representation, authors were actively staking a claim for the value of their own representations. In my view, this can be regarded as an act of literary avant-gardism in the quest for status and respectability. In the next chapter I will suggest that the Newgate novelists' identification with the criminal embodied a process of self-conscious avant-gardism within the literary field, a provocative process of position-taking by new authors in competition with established authors. The specific identification with criminality on the part of authors constitutes a deliberate challenge to the representations of lawyers, who, because of the lack of defence counsels at this stage, would always be acting in opposition to criminals. Thus their attempts to establish themselves as successful authors involved confrontation not only within the field of literary production, but with modes of representation to be found in other spheres such as that of the law. Bulwer's attacks on legal processes, therefore, and those to be found in the work of other aspiring authors like Dickens, can be regarded as acts of literary strategy, plays for cultural respectability, as well as direct examples of social commentary.

³³ The lack of a real opportunity for the accused to mount a thorough defence is indicated by one contemporary record, the *Old Bailey Experience* (1830), which estimated the average length of a criminal trial at under nine minutes. See Hollingsworth, p.22.

³⁴ Schramm, p.11.

There is, however, one major difference between Bulwer's use of the criminal trial and that identified by Schramm in the novels of other contemporary authors. She notes that the representation of testimony in 19th-century realist English fiction is usually closely allied to the proof of innocence rather than guilt. Just as the administration of justice in court frequently required a declaration of innocence on the part of the accused if he or she wished to escape condemnation, fictional testimony primarily centred around the innocent.³⁵ It was a feature reminiscent of the Benthamite maxim that 'innocence claims the right of speaking, as guilt invokes the privilege of silence.'³⁶ In Bulwer's trial scenes this convention is complicated and disrupted. As we have seen, despite being an innocent at his first trial, Paul is largely denied 'the right of speaking'. It is at his subsequent trial, that at which he is avowedly guilty of the charges he faces, that he is allowed an extended opportunity to present his personal testimony. In *Eugene Aram* the courtroom provides the same forum for the speech of the guilty, rather than the innocent, defendant.³⁷ The 'privilege of silence' is utterly disregarded.

The motivation behind, and effect of, this inversion of narrative convention in the novel and the court is twofold. Firstly, it can be seen to embody a rejection of the realist school of fiction. As I suggested in the Introduction, one of the causes and characteristics of the Newgate controversy was the conflict it represented between the growing influence of the realist novel, and those apologists for romance or, as Bulwer conceived it, the 'metaphysical novel'. By silencing the innocent and giving a voice to the guilty, Bulwer was challenging the realist narrative model. And secondly, while the denial of the opportunity for the innocent to speak struck at the existing legal

³⁵ Ibid., p.6.

³⁶ Jeremy Bentham, *Treatise on Judicial Evidence* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1825), p.241.

³⁷ In doing so, Bulwer preserves the defiant registers of lower-class mediums of expression like the 'last confessions' of convicted criminals, which similarly privileged the discourses of the guilty.

framework by demonstrating its preference for official discourse over that of the individual, the speech of the guilty implied support for a radically different system of justice. It suggested that although guilty by the definitions of the prevailing system, the defendant was somehow innocent according to the standards of an alternative and fairer one. The reader is invited, through the associative link between fictional testimony and innocence, to question the judgement of the court. In effect, by thrusting his narrative into the space of the court and thereby silencing for a moment the language of official discourse, Paul deflects the guilt that such silence implies on to the workings of the law. His testimony is used to prove the guilt of the legal system rather than to prove his innocence in the traditional sense by submitting to its procedures and conventions.

The altered attitude of Paul towards the process of human justice during the second trial is striking. The nature of his defence is vastly different; no longer is his a submissive and largely neglected voice, nor one which places faith in the workings of justice. His chosen form of address consciously and contemptuously rejects that usually followed by prisoners:

It is the usual policy of prisoners in my situation, to address the feelings, and flatter the prejudices of the Jury; to descant on the excellence of our laws, while they endeavour to disarm them; to praise justice, yet demand mercy; to talk of expecting acquittal, yet boasting of submitting without a murmur to condemnation. For me, to whom all earthly interests are dead, this policy is idle and superfluous. I hesitate to tell you, my Lord Judge - to proclaim to you, Gentlemen of the Jury, that the laws which I have broken through my life I despise in death. (*PC*, III, 277)

This opening of his defence expresses distaste at the hypocrisy and cowardly urge towards self-preservation of those who submit to the process by which they are probably to be hung. But it is a tactic in large part forced upon them. In 'flatter[ing] the prejudices of the jury', in 'descant[ing] on the excellence of our laws', in 'prais[ing] justice', and in claiming a readiness to offer themselves 'without a murmur to condemnation', they are submitting to a system which demands that its mechanisms are

cleared of any guilt and that the prisoner sanctions his own dissolution by the State. This is a feature which Dickens was to highlight in 'A Visit to Newgate', included in *Sketches by Boz* (1836-37).³⁸ Describing the final days of condemned prisoners, he observes how they are made to 'hear prayers for their own souls, to join in the responses of their own burial service', thereby legitimising the judgement against them and the penalty they are to receive.³⁹ Before being silenced for ever, the condemned must join in, and thus validate, the official mechanisms by which they are to be silenced.

The consequence of the State's absorption in reinforcing the legitimacy of its own dynamic is that it encourages deceit. Far from allowing facts to speak for themselves, it insists instead that the prisoner submerges himself in its own discourse. Paul recognises that the true representation and evaluation of fact, and the consequent workings of true justice, are impossible within such a framework. His escape from the House of Correction seven years earlier constituted such an acknowledgement. By rejecting the usual form of a prisoner's defence, particularly the cringing submissiveness and recourse to untruths, by openly declaring his guilt in the crimes of which he is accused, he adopts a position beyond the traditional theatre of the courtroom. He attempts a verbal version of his earlier literal breach of the institutional barriers containing the individual, and appears to urge the cause of a very different form of legal judgement and justice. Paul effectively elects to take up an alternative stance, refuses to accept the defendant's assigned script in the drama of the trial, and bids for an eloquent breakout from the cycle of condemnation of the lower by the respectable classes. His defence is an effort to dismantle the fabric of the law as it stands, even if it means his own sacrifice in the process.

³⁸ For a discussion of the inhuman penal practices criticised in this sketch, see Schramm, p.111.

³⁹ Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp.198-99.

He goes about this means of deconstruction with three clearly defined observations on the laws and their implementation; and it is his refusal to conceal his guilt, to deny the crimes for which he is brought before the court, that ensures these observations are powerful, and controversial, ones. First he accuses the laws themselves of creating and fuelling the criminal impulse within him. We have seen how he blames the practical deficiencies of a punitive rather than corrective regime that fails to differentiate between types of criminality and degrees of punishment, and thereby breeds vice in the innocent, or cripples the weak, while making no impression on the confirmed criminal or the physically strong. Here he broadens his attack to imply the breaking of a contract between society and its citizens that inevitably creates crime through neglecting to cater for need:

'Let those whom the law protects consider it a protector: when did it ever protect *me*? When did it ever protect the poor man? The government of a state, the institutions of law, profess to provide for all those who "obey." Mark! a man hungers! - do you feed him? He is naked! - do you clothe him? If not, you break your covenant, you drive him back to the first law of Nature, and you hang him, not because he is guilty, but because you have *left* him naked and starving!' (PC, III, 279-80)

In suggesting that all individuals should be abundantly provided with the subsistence which they need, this passage is far more reminiscent of Godwinian utilitarianism than the utilitarianism of Malthus which was to become the orthodox doctrine of Benthamites.⁴⁰ Its image of a social contract, and one dishonoured by society's leaders, contains a volatile and revolutionary sentiment which runs contrary to Benthamite thinking, which supported private property and dismissed the notion of an

⁴⁰ Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) was written in response to Godwin's *Political Justice* (1793). Godwin had hoped for the advent of a state of society in which individual property should disappear, and everyone was equally provided for. Malthus argued that population growth would soon increase beyond the means of subsistence, and that checks in the form of poverty, disease, and starvation were necessary. In other words, the individual did not have the 'right' to subsistence; the pain of some was necessary for the happiness of the greatest number.

individual's 'rights' to subsistence. It would have proved alarming at a time of social dissatisfaction. Paul suggests that the neglect of duty towards society's members on the part of society's leaders frees them from their obligation to 'obey', and makes inevitable the return to a more urgent law of nature which precedes those artificial, man-made laws of society.

The symbolic purpose of criminal trials and hangings by the ruling class was in some ways to reaffirm and renew the notion of a 'social contract', although one based very much around the sanctity of private property. If the contract was dishonoured, and therefore invalid, then its symbolic reaffirmation through ceremonial execution, the ultimate foundation of the entire system of the English punitive legal system of justice, was no longer justified. As Peter Linebaugh has commented, because most of those who were hanged had offended against laws of property, as well as renewing the power of sovereignty each hanging repeated the lesson at the heart of the social contract: 'Respect Private Property.' This meant that the conflict that hangings came to represent was the 'conflict of the Powerful and the Propertied against the Weak and the Poor - a futile, unchanging conflict whose lesson, it seemed, was never learned.'⁴¹ As such, by emphasising the failure to fulfil public duty, to honour the notion of collective 'public property' and responsibility, Paul challenges the long-established sanctity of private property. But what makes this challenge even more threatening is the way in which it is implemented by the outlaws themselves. They steal only from the rich, and pointedly refuse to take the possessions of the poorer, servant classes. Their rejection of the social contract and its defence of private property is not therefore a complete one, but one which rejects the rules only as they apply to the ruling and economically dominant classes, those who have themselves broken their side of the

⁴¹ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1991), p.xx. The presence of pickpockets plying their trade at the executions of other pickpockets testified to the fact that the lesson was not being learned.

bargain.⁴² And in emphasising this difference, the author goes some way towards condoning the theft from certain classes of citizen; the theft of luxuries from the rich is less despicable than the theft of wages from the needy. By having an implied sliding scale of condemnation of criminality dependent not only on the action but on the background of the victim, morality becomes flexible and linked to class politics. In effect, crime becomes not only an understandable reaction caused by necessity, but a justified class-based political response to patriarchal failure. Natural law, he warns, is ultimately more powerful than social law.

This opposition between nature and human law is one which runs strongly throughout. The daring nocturnal activities of Paul and his fellow outlaws are frequently conducted against a romantic, and at times almost sublime, backdrop which is vividly evocative of a harmonious relationship with their natural surroundings. For them, nature is a friend, and their comfortable attitude to the broad landscape of the field and moor contrasts tellingly with that of their fashionable and powerful victims, people who travel from one private space to another in enclosed coaches. On several occasions Bulwer describes Brandon and Mauleverer choosing to close the windows or shutters of the rooms in which they meet or the carriages in which they travel. It is indicative not only of their distaste and rejection of the public space, and their hidden private intrigues, but the 'unnatural' codes by which they live. Paul, by comparison, prefers to shoot his horse rather than let this symbol of natural liberty become stifled by contact with institutional artificiality and cruelty.⁴³ The strength of his body, the nobility of his manner, the polished character of his intelligence, are qualities which belie the circumstances of his upbringing and thereby seem conferred by some force of

⁴² There is, of course, little reward in stealing from the poor and weak in any case, but the tale is explicit in showing Paul and his comrades refusing to take property from servants when they have it.

⁴³ The association of 'the horse' with liberty was to find most explicit expression in Turpin's legendary 'ride to York'. See W. Harrison Ainsworth, *Rookwood: A Romance*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: John Macrone, 1834), III, 155-236. Subsequent references will be to this edition, unless otherwise indicated, and included in the text.

nature. In a novel whose avowed aim was to highlight the importance of social circumstance in shaping the individual, the influence of nurture in moulding nature, this seems anomalous, and certainly disconnects *Paul Clifford* from any uncritical identification with the category of Victorian 'social novel'.⁴⁴

Instead it creates a paradoxical dual role for criminals like Paul, making them both victims of, and instruments of resistance towards, society and its mechanisms, both unnatural constructs and forces of nature. Paul becomes the champion of freedom, a defiant antagonist towards institutional barriers, and, like Jack Sheppard, his ability to evade authority's attempts at containment endow him with a spirit of the natural, even of the supernatural. While on one hand the tale depicts penal law and class-based prejudice creating, and subsequently executing, criminals, on another it depicts such criminality as a natural embodiment of the irrepressible libertarian impulse, a carnivalesque celebration of the open public space. On one hand it portrays the corruption, and the premature murder, of the individual, in an unnatural cycle forced by social mechanisms; on another it portrays the criminal as part of a natural cycle of death and rebirth, an almost metaphysical force immune to the man-made legal processes. The ostler of an inn observes that "'there never was the gemman of the road, great or small, knowing or stupid, as outlived his seventh year. And this will be the Captain's seventh, come the 21st of next month.'" He had 'seen nine generations of highwaymen rise and vanish' (*PC*, III, 116). The death of a criminal would here, therefore, seem to have to do with his having reached the end of his natural span, so that, like any other organism, he gives way to new life. This evolutionary process is reflected in the fact that Paul is named by Mrs Lobkins after her grandfather, who was

⁴⁴ This paradox is representative of the competing metaphysical strain to be found in Bulwer's novels. It served to combat the general urge towards the realist novel. It is also indicative of Bulwer's uncomfortable relationship with the strident empiricism of Benthamite utilitarianism. *Paul Clifford* has, however, been labelled as the first 'social novel'. See Louis Cazamian, *The Social Novel in England, 1830-1850*, trans. by Martin Fido (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p.65.

three times transported and finally hanged.⁴⁵ As such, Clifford's eventual capture has nothing to do with the inescapable power of society's laws, but instead to the fact that he is approaching the natural conclusion of his inevitable criminal life:

'[T]he weakness of my body destroys me, not the strength of your malice. Had I [...] but my wonted health, my wonted command over these limbs, and these veins, I would have asked no friend, no ally, to favour my escape. I tell you, engines and guardians of the law, that I would have mocked your chains, and defied your walls, as ye know that I have mocked and defied them before.' (*PC*, III, 282)

It is vitally important for Paul to make clear that his weakened state has rendered him susceptible to human law, and not human law that has brought about his weakened state. He is deteriorating as he approaches the end of his seven years of crime, as the '21st of next month' draws ever closer. And in this way he shows that the penal laws are not only unnatural, but feeble in the face of a defiant who brims with individual human spirit.

Second, he explicitly states what had become clear from the procedures of the initial trial: that the laws of society are controlled and manipulated by a particular section of people. The 'respectable', personified by Brandon, are demonstrably protected not only by the legal framework, but able to dictate the manner of the law's operations, and even directly profit from it. While ignoring the *needs* of one portion of the public and driving them to criminality, they corruptly favour the *wants* of another. This observation is given vivid colour through Brandon's intention to conclude Paul's

⁴⁵ The very way in which the criminals naturalise this cycle of birth and death, of crime and punishment, could be seen within a Foucauldian interpretation as symptomatic of the hold that the powerful have over the minds of the lower classes. By accepting their own executions as inevitable and natural, they are simultaneously exonerating society of blame, and thereby failing to recognise the need for change; in this sense, far from becoming forceful political rebels against institutional power, they testify to the success of the respectable in 'brainwashing' the lower classes, and making them complicit in their own victimisation. The conscious choice of a name associated with a previous life of crime and eventual execution would seem to support this. Again this potential reading underlines the ambiguities and complexities at the heart of Bulwer's novel.

trial swiftly, to '[m]ake haste and hang this poor fellow', so that he might attend Mauleverer's feast (*PC*, III, 274). The lower-class body is to be sacrificed to the appetites of the respectable. Yet again, Paul's defence speech links this image of corruption, commerce and desire in the courtroom to the broader operations of society. He contrasts the 'vice' of the disrespectable with a criminality which he sees inherent in the legal and everyday actions of the 'polite':

'The canting and prejudging part of the press has affected to set before you the merits of "honest ability," or "laborious trade," in opposition to my offences. What, I beseech you, are the props of your "honest" exertion, - the profits of "trade"? Are there no bribes to menials? Is there no adulteration of goods? Are the rich never duped in the price they pay, - are the poor never wronged in the quality they receive?' (*PC*, III, 279)

It is of immense significance that Paul chooses to compare himself with those involved in trade. It demonstrates the level of his perception in recognising that, as we have seen, the definition of truth had become attached to a notion of 'creditworthiness'. It depended upon economic criteria which unquestioningly equated 'trade' with 'honesty', and thereby followed the contours of the dominant, professional classes. Paul strikes at the very heart of this assumption by refusing to accept that trade is so blamelessly virtuous. On the contrary, he argues that it is frequently characterised by bribery, adulteration, and deceit, brutal impulses which stem from the self-interested quest for profit. Far from embracing and elevating qualities of good, it is actually a powerful tool in the service of greed and abuse. The central feature of the ruling class's claim to, and justification for, social hegemony is therefore shown to be a linguistic contortion, a strategic invention, with no real validity. It is a misconception promulgated by the respectable to retain control of social, political and legal power.

Furthermore, this control of power allows them to prey upon the other classes of society - 'the rich' who are 'duped', as well as 'the poor' who are 'wronged'. While Bulwer was to launch a savage attack upon the pernicious influence of the aristocracy in the pages of *England and the English*, there is little doubt that Paul's target here is

the middle class. Maginn, the first editor of *Fraser's Magazine* which appeared in the same year as *Paul Clifford*, similarly noticed the alliance between the high and the low in the novel:

It is a favourite notion with our fashionable novelists, to sacrifice the middle classes equally to the lowest and highest [...]. There is a sort of instinct in this. The one class esteem themselves above law, and the other are too frequently below it. They are attracted, then, by a sympathy with their mutual lawlessness. They recognise a likeness in their libertinism.⁴⁶

For Maginn, this attack on the middle-class code was symptomatic of a residual aristocratic disdain and snobbery of the Regency period. It became a personal obsession for him to purge English literature of its pervasive influence.⁴⁷ I would argue that this reading fails to credit a deeper ambivalence in the text - that ultimately, as we will see, Paul's reformation is one which embodies the middle-class ideal,⁴⁸ that Bulwer can be equally scathing of corrupt notions of aristocratic conduct and virtue, and that the criticism of talent wasted or abused, visible in both Brandon and Paul, was one of which *Fraser's* would usually have approved. Nevertheless, at this point, as Paul strips away the veils concealing the true face of social power, and suggests that his form of vice, untainted by oppression or killing, is infinitely preferable to the

⁴⁶ Quoted in Moers, p. 173. As I suggested in the Introduction, the alliance of the upper and lower classes in social 'lawlessness' was found in texts of the 1820s like Egan's *Life in London*. Maginn's response can be seen as an attempt to consolidate a sense of middle-class identity. Bulwer's text, on the other hand, at this point appears to subvert the class relationships between law and lawlessness by making the upper and lower classes innocent victims of middle-class criminality.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of *Fraser's* campaign against Regency dandyism in general, and Bulwer in particular, see Moers, pp. 167-92.

⁴⁸ It is interesting that Paul begins his new life, as a useful and worthy member of society, in America. Many contemporary commentators saw America as prophetic for European developments. From Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1830s to Freud in the early 20th century, critics considered America to be the quintessential bourgeois society and the incarnation of middle-class culture, towards which European societies appeared to be moving. This would suggest that Bulwer actually looked to a middle-class model as the ideal for society. See Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), I, 5.

heartless damage caused by such a hypocritical code of conduct, there is little doubt that that code is a middle-class one:

'From the grinding of the poor, the habitual overreaching, or the systematic pilfering of my neighbours, my conscience is as free as it is from the charge of cruelty and bloodshed. Those *errors* I leave to honest mediocrity or virtuous exertion!' (*PC*, III, 280)

The final, and perhaps most radical, call from Paul, emerging logically from the preceding observations, is for a system of judgement and sentencing which allows both for the consideration of the circumstances which surround an individual's crimes and the opportunity for those crimes to be atoned for. Only in this way can the law respect individuality by differentiating between inherent vice and vice forced by situation, and be effective by aligning the interests of society in reforming the criminal, with the interests of the individual in being rewarded for such reformation:

'Life may be sweet to all of us, my Lord; and were it possible that mine could be spared yet a while, that continued life might make a better atonement for past actions than a death which, abrupt and premature, calls for repentance while it forbids redress.' (*PC*, III, 277)

This plea stems from a belief in a system founded upon man's perfectibility rather than his innate depravity.⁴⁹ It firmly contrasts the established emphasis upon coercing the criminal into admitting, and atoning for, his wrongs, before nevertheless executing him. In calling for a system aimed at correction and reformation, one which guides the actions of the individual through a form of artificial identification of interests, Paul's outlook can be seen as utilitarian or, more specifically, Benthamite in tone. Bentham, a disciple of the continental philosophers Helvétius and Beccaria, had come to apply the principle of utility to juridical and penal issues.⁵⁰ For him, greater legislative

⁴⁹ See *Fiction of New Regions*, p.72. Christensen traces this view of man's nature elsewhere in the novel where Lucy, the representative of that 'germ of perfectibility', sees only the innocence in Paul and redeems him from the oppressive old law when she helps him to escape the penal colony.

⁵⁰ For an account of the influence of Helvétius and Beccaria on Bentham, and the

refinement, and more effective and appropriate punishment, was vital to the prevention of criminality and the reformation of criminals. As Beccaria had observed, punishment should be,

in due proportion to the crime, so as to make the most efficacious and most lasting impression on the minds of men, and the least painful impressions on the body of the criminal.⁵¹

The degree to which Bulwer agrees with such a view of criminal punishment is reflected not only in Paul's mockery of a system which demands his repentance without allowing him to prove it, but with the highlighted sentence with which he chooses to close the novel: "THE VERY WORST USE TO WHICH YOU CAN PUT A MAN IS TO HANG HIM!" (*PC*, III, 329). Bulwer's implied argument in favour of more tailored categorisation in the early chapters of the novel, the need for 'fine-drawn [...] shades of difference', seems to echo Bentham's belief in an ideology of legislation, the power of carefully codified laws to allow a precise, almost scientific application of penalties.⁵² Such a belief relies upon regarding man primarily as a sensitive being, guided by the sensations of pain and pleasure.

Another, even more radical, utilitarian theorist was William Godwin. He believed that individuals were primarily 'rational' rather than 'sensitive' beings, and that the reform of criminals should be governed by appeals to their reason rather than through the infliction of pain. The use of punishment, of any kind, was inherently unjust, and thereby stripped the legal system of dignity and effect:

Let us consider the effect that coercion produces upon the mind of him against whom it is employed. It cannot begin with convincing: it is no argument. It begins with producing the sensation of pain, and the sentiment of distaste. It begins with violently alienating the mind from the truth with which we wish it to be impressed.

foundations of Benthamite utilitarianism as a whole, see Halévy, pp.5-34.

⁵¹ Cesare Beccaria, *Of Crimes and Punishments* (1764), trans. by Jane Grigson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp.42-43.

⁵² Halévy, p.202.

It includes in it a tacit confession of imbecility. If he who employs coercion against me could mould me to his purposes by argument, no doubt he would. He pretends to punish me, because his argument is strong; but he really punishes me, because his argument is weak.⁵³

More than this, the very concept of a strict and codified set of laws, however apparently subtle, was anathema to a social philosophy which accorded primacy to the notion of reason. It was futile to try to foresee, and legislate for, the individual circumstances of a criminal case. An 'enlightened and reasonable judicature [...] would feel the absurdity of bringing every offence to be compared with a certain number of measures previously invented, and compelling it to agree with one of them'.⁵⁴ Godwin refused to allow the judgement of offences purely on their effects. Yet while the consideration of motive, circumstance and intention was vital, he also strongly sensed the impossibility of accurately comprehending the absolute reality of another's life experience. Another man's existence was an 'inscrutable mystery'. The attempt to fully understand the influences at work on a person's actions 'would be iniquitous and absurd, even though the individual who was to judge me, had made the longest observation of my character, and been most intimately acquainted with the series of my actions.'⁵⁵

At issue here was the nature of representation. Bentham put considerable emphasis upon the importance of testimonial evidence in reaching truth and argued that nobody should be excluded from offering his or her version of events. He wrote,

in principle there is but one mode of searching out the truth [...] - see everything that there is to be seen; hear everybody who is likely to know anything about the matter: hear everybody, but most attentively of all, and first of all, those who are likely to know most about it, the parties.⁵⁶

⁵³ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), ed. by K. Codell Carter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp.248-49.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.255.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.255-56.

⁵⁶ Jeremy Bentham, *A Rationale of Judicial Evidence, Specially Applied to English Practice*, 5 vols (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1827), V, 743.

By contrast, Godwin felt that the limits of the human condition, both in adopting a position of absolute objectivity, and in expressing and interpreting meaning, were perpetual barriers to perception. The belief in the direct communication of fact, and the infallibility of judgement, was illusory, and consequently immensely treacherous when a person's very being was at stake. Reality was irrecoverable because of the restrictions inherent in language and understanding:

The veracity of witnesses will, to an impartial spectator, be a subject of continual doubt. Their competence, so far as relates to just observation and accuracy of understanding, will be still more doubtful. Absolute impartiality it would be absurd to expect from them. How much will every word and every action come distorted, by the medium through which it is transmitted?

But, supposing the external action, the first part of the question to be ascertained, we have next to discover through the same garbled and confused medium the intention. How few men should I choose to entrust with the drawing up a narrative of some delicate and interesting transaction of my life? How few, though, corporally speaking they were witnesses of what was done, would justly describe my motives, and properly report and interpret my words? Yet, in an affair, that involves my life, my fame and future usefulness, I am obliged to trust to any vulgar and casual observer.⁵⁷

The nature of Paul's defence - its apparent attempt to move outside the very workings of the legal process, its criticism of a dishonoured social 'contract', its apparent call for the avoidance of all punishment of the defendant so that he might prove that he has learnt (as a 'rational' rather than a 'sensitive' being), the perennial criticism of assumptions about representation, and in particular its hinting at a form of spontaneous justice which prefers circumstance and motivation to effect - is more suggestive of a Godwinian view of society.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Political Justice*, p.258.

⁵⁸ For the central theories of Godwin, and those which set him apart from Bentham, see Halévy, pp.192-203. Bentham could not have agreed either with a system which rejected the need for punishment, nor one which based judgement upon the motivations of the criminal rather than simply the effects of the crime.

It thereby becomes unclear whether Bulwer, like Bentham, regards man as a feeling being, subject to egoistic passions, and who therefore requires a more precise system which accurately suits punishment to crime; or whether, like Godwin, he regards man as a rational being who can only be convinced of truth through reason and not restraint, and for whom, therefore, punishment can only be counter-productive.⁵⁹ We should not be too surprised at any suggestion of Godwinian influence - it was, after all, on his recommendation that Bulwer embarked on a novel comparing the vice of the high with the vice of the low.⁶⁰ But neither is it necessary to try to explain away the apparent contradictions in *Paul Clifford* in an attempt to see its philosophy as exclusively Benthamite or exclusively Godwinian. As this chapter, and this thesis, aim to demonstrate, the Newgate novel was characterised by ambivalence. Bulwer was affected by many different lines of thought, several of which, including a strong aristocratic impulse which I will come to later, were seemingly antagonistic to both these philosophies, and these ambiguities reflect the author's uneasy attitude to his time. They also contributed to the similar unease with which the novel was received in several quarters. I will return to Bulwer's treatment of utilitarianism, in relation to *Eugene Aram*, in due course. But a consideration of the apparent Godwinian influences in these trial scenes make the parallels with *Caleb Williams* interesting.

In his chapter on *Caleb Williams*, Dart interprets Godwin's book as a critique of the defence of the aristocratic principle in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), an exposure of the 'poison of chivalry' which Burke had pleaded for as a form of social glue to unite a society becoming increasingly fragmented by the forces of the market.⁶¹ While in this Godwin was in tune with the sentiments of other contemporary radicals such as Thomas Paine, Dart argues that he nevertheless departed from them in

⁵⁹ Halévy, pp.202-203.

⁶⁰ Godwin, who read 'parts of the book [...] with transport', had suggested the title 'Masks and Faces.' See 1st Earl of Lytton, II, 247, 258 and 2nd Earl of Lytton, I, 364.

⁶¹ Dart, pp.76-96.

refusing to underestimate aristocratic prejudice, and undertaking to explore the dynamics at work behind the strength of its hold over the people. Ultimately the aristocratic principle had become so powerfully associated with notions of moral superiority that to believe Falkland, a justice of the peace, to be guilty of murder would be to undermine the entire foundations of the English legal system. According to Godwin, people would rather live in an illusory world, disregard the word of an innocent member of the working class, than face up to the social consequences of believing his accusations. Prejudice seems preferable to chaos.⁶² Such an analysis is helpful in unpicking the image of a people complicit in their own servility in *Paul Clifford*.

There is, in the immediate aftermath, a point at which the effect of Paul's speech on those present in the courtroom appears to hang in the balance, when for the first time the hold of the judicial spell seems to have been relaxed. The very originality of the tone, and the force with which the abuses of the present system are insisted upon, strike a dull chord through the layers of social assumptions:

The Prisoner ceased; but the same heavy silence [...] still continued even for several moments after that deep and firm voice had died on the ear. So different had been the defence of the Prisoner, from that which had been expected [...]. The Jurors looked confusedly at each other, but not one of them spoke even by a whisper; their feelings, which had been aroused by the speech of the Prisoner, had not, from its shortness, its singularity, and the haughty impolicy of its tone, been so far guided by its course, as to settle into any state of mind clearly favourable to him, or the reverse: so that each man waited for his neighbour to speak first, in order that he might find, as it were, in another, a kind of clue to the indistinct and excited feelings which wanted utterance in himself. (*PC*, III, 284-85)

There can be little doubt that the reaction of the jurors revolves as much around their awakening to a vague sense of the inadequacies of the whole judicial process in which they are involved as their considerations for Paul's individual case. It is an awakening

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 79-81.

which is mirrored among some of the spectators, who demonstrate that, for them, this stems from specific class-based feelings of empathy with the prisoner, and to whom the opinions of Paul, 'though but imperfectly understood, came more immediately home, than they did to the better and richer classes of the audience' (*PC*, III, 286). And it is an awakening brought about by a speech which conflicts with the prevailing basis of legal procedure by arousing and exciting 'feelings'. This style of testimonial representation directly contradicts that which the Attorney-General, John Copley, had espoused in 1826 during debates about the nature of testimony and its interpretation. Rejecting reform in favour of the established epistemology, he argued that a trial should consist of 'dry statements' that 'ought to have no influence upon the verdict of a jury' and in which evidence is 'heard dispassionately and calmly, unaccompanied by any excitement or appeal to the feelings.'⁶³

While Paul purposefully rejects this form of address, the confusion that his speech induces in the jury indicates the strength of the hold that the traditional, institutional process of law has upon the people. The very rigidity which Paul criticises in the established system, the rigidity which lies at the heart of its inherent unfairness, is also the quality which provides a clear scale of reference for judgement of the individual. Without it the jurors look to each other for guidance, reveal how reliant they have become upon such solidity, and the confusion that emotional engagement and spontaneous judgement can cause in a group accustomed to follow rather than lead. And it is into this pause, this crucial moment of hesitation, that Brandon upholds the words of Copley and thrusts again the uncompromising empiricism of the law as it stands, decisively stamping authority's grip upon the minds of the jurors once more:

'All you have to consider is the evidence before you. All on which you have to decide is, whether the Prisoner be or be not guilty of the robbery of which he is charged. You must not waste a thought on what redeems or heightens a supposed

⁶³ From his speech of 25 April 1826, recorded in *Parliamentary Debates, 20 March 1826 - 31 May 1826* (London: Hansard, 1827), 15, cols 598-99.

crime - you must only decide on the crime itself. Put away from your minds, I beseech you, all that interferes with the main case.' (*PC*, III, 288)

It is a moment in which the plea for a new and radical form of justice, one which embraces flexibility, and consequently a greater spirit of humanity and individuality, confronts the colder and resolutely inflexible judicial form in place.

As such, it echoes the opposition which Dart has commented upon in *Caleb Williams* (1794), in which the insistence by Forester, the arbiter at the private trial of the eponymous hero, upon the validity only of 'plain and incontrovertible facts', effectively condemns Caleb to silence by failing to appreciate the circumstances of a case which 'transcends the machinery of the law.'⁶⁴ And while the people are made aware of the present injustices and prejudices, they are also shown to be unready to embrace the alternative. They associate the working of justice with such coldness, and ultimately are reassured by it. The very visage of the judge embodies the law's firm and steely hand:

Brandon's face, never long indicative of his feelings, had now settled into its usual gravity, and the severe loftiness of his look chilled, while it satisfied the curiosity of the vulgar. (*PC*, III, 264)

As this observation suggests, the 'vulgar', those demonstrably suffering by society's laws, are also those who are 'satisfied' by its 'chilling' aspect. It is an aspect synonymous with sober, ruling-class respectability, and one which is cynically cultivated by Brandon, who invests it with a religious air of infallibility:

There was in the majestic aspect and thrilling voice of Brandon, something which made the commonest form of words solemn and impressive; and the hypocrite, aware of this felicity of manner, generally, as now, added weight to his concluding words, by a religious allusion, or a scriptural phraseology. (*PC*, III, 289)

⁶⁴ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 174; Dart, p. 90.

As I have said, Schramm has noted the importance of Christianity in the workings of the law. It was at the heart of faith in the power of testimony and the truth of judgement. Historically, the provision of evidence on oath elevated it to a position of privilege, giving the narrative veracity and verisimilitude.⁶⁵ However, the privilege of the divine pledge was not open to everyone; at this stage, it was a right prohibited to, among others, the accused. Thus Brandon's words are given a value through 'religious allusion' and 'scriptural phraseology' which is denied to Paul. Brandon's advantage is strengthened through social assumptions which accord primacy to the discourse of the respectable on religious, as well as economic, grounds.

As with Paul's attack upon the association of trade with truth, Bulwer forcefully questions the claims of the ruling class to spiritual authority. Brandon is a 'hypocrite'. The true extent of such hypocrisy, the real discrepancy between the public and the private faces of religious virtue, is further emphasised by the comments behind closed doors of a bishop whose dinner is delayed as he awaits the return of Brandon from the trial of Paul:

'Our august friend tarries!' quoth the Bishop of _____, with his hands folded across his capacious stomach. 'I fear the turbot your Lordship spoke of may not be the better for the length of the trial.' (*PC*, III, 303)

There is no clearer example of the needs of one section of the public being ignored by, even selfishly sacrificed to, the greedy wants of another. The rumblings of the stomach have come to replace the workings of the soul. The tight hold that the respectable classes exercise over the workings of judicial and social power is, therefore, one which hinges both upon the careful manipulation of image by those in power, and on the submission to this image by those of a lower social status. It relies upon the strong association of justice, virtue, objective wisdom and religiosity with the mask of sobriety and gravity which the respectable don in public. To question the working of

⁶⁵ Schramm, pp.62-64.

the legal system, to value the words of a working-class criminal over those of a middle-class judge or lawyer, is to question a spiritual, as well as legal, framework. Bulwer shows, and Paul learns, that the leap into the unknown that this embodies, the rejection of the very foundation on which the institutions of society are based, is one that people are not yet prepared to take. For Paul the only option is a new life abroad, and exile from a society whose faults he had been successful in highlighting but unsuccessful in changing.⁶⁶

While the similarities between *Paul Clifford* and *Caleb Williams* suggest Godwin's influence upon Bulwer, there are two prime differences which are equally instructive. The first is the changed character of the ruling class under fire. Godwin was responding to a notion of aristocratic virtue expounded by Burke, himself concerned at the increasing influence of the market upon society's fabric. While *England and the English* shows that Bulwer was also vividly conscious of the dangers of aristocratic prejudice, his portrayal of the insidious influences at work on society in *Paul Clifford* - the use of false veils of evangelical sobriety, the association of commerce with the virtues of honesty and integrity, and so on - are coloured by characteristics of the middle classes. This is indicative of the swift shift in power relations that had taken place during the three decades following the publication of *Caleb Williams* so that the pervasive intrusion of the market was no longer an impending threat, as for Burke, but a contemporary reality.⁶⁷ The result, as we will

⁶⁶ For the ways in which the beliefs of the criminals themselves can be interpreted as part of this general spirit of complicity see above, p.47 (n.45).

⁶⁷ This is not to suggest that the notion of honour in *Caleb Williams* fails to recognise changes in social relations which were very much under way by the time the novel was written. While Falkland's respectability rests upon an older form of aristocratic nobility than that of Brandon - it is Falkland's familial lineage rather than his professional status which guarantees the reliability of his word - it nevertheless includes the concept of 'creditworthiness' which reflects the growing dominance of the market. In the first part of the book, for example, Falkland is 'discharged with every circumstance of credit' from suspicions surrounding his part in the murder of Tyrrel. See *Caleb Williams*, p.102.

see, is that at times Bulwer could look back almost nostalgically to an alternative notion of aristocratic nobility and manner in a way that would have made Godwin distinctly uncomfortable. And the second is in the nature of their respective heroes. While both Caleb and Paul are presented as victims of an unjust system in need of reform, the former is a genuinely innocent victim whose sacrifice to institutionalised prejudice could be uncontroversially condemned. Caleb's is the traditional voice of the maligned innocent that Schramm has identified in later realist fiction. Paul, by contrast, at least during his second trial, is guilty not only of the offences with which he is charged, but of more besides. The suggestion of injustice in connection with incontrovertible guilt is altogether more daring, and, particularly in the context of the times in which it appeared, potentially very radical. It was a radical quality which Bulwer was to repeat and magnify two years later by making his protagonist guilty of the ultimate crime of murder.

2. Natural Law versus Human Law: *Eugene Aram* and Utilitarianism

We have seen, therefore, how Bulwer engaged with contemporary issues of legal and social reform in *Paul Clifford*. He condemned the inadequacy of the classificatory procedures at the point of punishment, and the broader prejudices which impacted upon considerations of representation, interpretation and judgement at the point of trial. It is at times difficult to determine the exact ideology behind Bulwer's reformist urge - indeed, we will later see ways in which it is complicated even further. However, it is fair to say that in both his calls for a more precise classificatory process, and for the evaluation of cause as well as effect, he was displaying the influence of utilitarianism on his thinking, whether Benthamite or Godwinian. Yet despite his belief in its powers for good, he also harboured deep reservations about its potential for misuse. They are hinted at in *Augustus Tomlinson*, a man whose criminality is grounded in a professed system of recognisably utilitarian philosophy. His is a largely

comical role, envisaged as a light-hearted satire upon politicians and the ruling classes and their attempts to justify selfish acts. But there are moments when his utilitarianism leads him to darker conclusions. One such occasion comes when Tomlinson contemplates escape from the House of Correction:

'I have been thinking, Paul, whether it would be consistent with virtue, and that strict code of morals by which all my actions are regulated, to - slay the watchman!' 'Good heavens!' cried Paul, horror-stricken.

'And I have decided,' continued Augustus solemnly, without regard to the exclamation, 'that the action would be perfectly justifiable! [...]. [B]ut opinion does not always influence conduct; and although it may be virtuous to murder the watchman, I have not the heart to do it. I trust, in my future history I shall not, by discerning moralists, be too severely censured for a weakness, for which my physical temperament is alone to blame!' (*PC*, I, 191)

In this case the dangerous deductions that can result from an unquestioning submission to utilitarian philosophy are not acted upon. However, the episode provides a clue to the subject of Bulwer's next Newgate novel.

Eugene Aram was published in 1832. It followed the life of a poor scholar who, initially devoted to 'knowledge solely for itself', gradually comes to recognise the value of such knowledge in improving mankind and is 'haunted with the ambition of enlightening [his] race.'⁶⁸ However, his poverty denies him access to the books and implements necessary to force 'openings into new heavens of science' and offer the chance of 'illuminating mankind' (*EA*, III, 237). At this point he encounters Houseman, an individual who makes a decent living through criminal activity and who invites Aram to assist him in relieving the worthless Clarke of some jewellery in his possession. He implies that the robbery may necessitate murder. Aram eventually agrees to participate in the crime, convincing himself that it is done for the greater good. He spends the following fourteen years blamelessly, but the prospect of

⁶⁸ E. L. Bulwer, *Eugene Aram: A Tale*, 3 vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832), III, 236. Subsequent references will be to this edition, unless otherwise indicated, and included in the text.

detection is a perennial and crippling fear. During the latter stages his gloom is temporarily lifted by his love for, and betrothal to, Madeline Lester. On the eve of their wedding, however, Madeline's cousin, Walter, reveals that Aram is the murderer of his long lost father. Aram is tried and executed. Madeline dies of a broken heart.

Although based upon a genuine case of 1759 from the *Newgate Calendar*, Bulwer made significant alterations for his fictional version.⁶⁹ The original Aram, for instance, was alleged to have admitted his guilt orally, and to have claimed he was motivated by a suspicion that Clarke had seduced his wife.⁷⁰ Bulwer removed such jealous emotion from the equation. He also omitted some unpleasant truths which muddied Aram's character, like the desertion of his wife and seven children shortly after the crime.⁷¹ And while the victim of the historical Aram was not particularly honest or intelligent, he was a young married man, and far from the callous and predatory rapist that Bulwer painted him.⁷² By portraying Aram as a man of impeccable character, and his victim as utterly reprehensible, Bulwer reshaped the crime as one of philosophical principle rather than human passion.

As the opportunity to fund his research presents itself to Aram, it provokes a battle within him between the competing claims of the laws of society and the laws of reason:

'I might wrest from society, to which I owed nothing, the means to be wise and great. Was it not better and nobler to do this, even at my life's hazard, than lie down in a ditch and die the dog's death? Was it not better than such a doom - ay better for mankind - that I should commit one bold wrong, and by that wrong purchase the power of good? I asked myself that question. It is a fearful

⁶⁹ For a full account of the original trial, see [Anon.], *The Genuine Account of the Life and Trial of Eugene Aram for the Murder of Daniel Clark, Late of Knaresbrough in the County of York* (London: [n. pub.], 1759).

⁷⁰ Eric R. Watson, *Eugene Aram: His Life and Trial* (Philadelphia: [n. pub.], 1913), p. 119.

⁷¹ Hollingsworth, p. 86.

⁷² Tyson, p. 79.

question; it opens a labyrinth of reasonings, in which the soul may walk and lose itself for ever.' (*EA*, III, 240)

As this struggle develops, the depth of Clarke's depravity becomes increasingly relevant to Aram. He specifically differentiates between the criminality of Clarke and that of Houseman:

'There was that in this man's vices which revolted me far more than the villainy of Houseman. The latter had possessed no advantages of education; he descended to no minutiae of sin, he was a plain, blunt, coarse wretch, and his sense threw something respectable around his vices. But in Clarke you saw the traces of happier opportunities of better education; it was in him not the coarseness of manner so much as the sickening, universal canker of vulgarity of mind [...]. [T]here was a pitiful and debasing weakness in his nature, which made him regard the lowest meanness as the subtlest wit. His mind too was not only degraded, but broken by his habits of life; a strange, idiotic folly, that made him love laughing at his own littleness, ran through his character. Houseman was young; he might amend; but Clarke had grey hairs and dim eyes; was old in constitution, if not years; and every thing in him was hopeless and confirmed: the leprosy was in the system.'
(*EA*, III, 244-45)

Such reasoning reflects a mind which calculates humanity qualitatively, and which consequently comes to assess actions quantitatively. Houseman's life is justified by the potential to reform and his crime is in part excused by circumstance; Clarke has squandered opportunity and is beyond repentance, and his life is thereby rendered not only useless but harmful. Within such a framework, Aram convinces himself that murder is not only necessary in order to effect broader good, but is in itself virtuous as a service to society. Utility comes to supersede morality in Aram's system of thinking:

'What was the deed - that I should rid the earth of a thing at once base and venomous? Was it a crime? Was it justice? Within myself I felt the will - the spirit that might bless mankind [...]. [H]ere was one whose steps stumbled on no good act - whose heart beat to no generous emotion; - there was a blot - a foulness on creation, - nothing but death could wash it out and leave the world fair.'
(*EA*, III, 251-52)

Bulwer imparts certain biblical resonances to this struggle within Aram's self so that we are reminded of the temptation of Christ by the Devil. Houseman becomes the 'tempter', the physical manifestation of the dark conclusions which flow from Aram's

reason. As such, Aram's ultimate submission to temptation makes him a symbol of Fallen Man. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the real site of struggle, the source of temptation, is the utilitarian mantra which states that the only viable motive in the choice of any action is the attainment of 'the greatest good for the greatest number'.

Critics have tended to decide that *Eugene Aram* expresses Bulwer's departure from a flirtation with the utilitarian ethic in earlier works like *Pelham* and *Paul Clifford*. Nancy Jane Tyson believes that the novel 'marks the ideological defection of Godwin's last admirer', and that Bulwer's 'disenchantment' with philosophic radicalism 'appeared for the first time in Aram's misguided justification.'⁷³ Keith Hollingsworth interprets in the treatment an 'element of the author's reaction against Godwin, as well as against Bentham.'⁷⁴ However, in my opinion such conclusions are too simplistic. They forget that, as late as 1836, Bulwer's views were compatible enough with those of John Stuart Mill to contemplate seriously working with him to organise a new Radical party.⁷⁵ They also forget that it was at the behest of Godwin that Bulwer wrote the novel in the first place.⁷⁶ Indeed, in the mental torture arising from an undiscovered murder, the opposition of a gentlemanly criminal and a despicable victim, the length of time between crime and resolution, and, as I will suggest later, the inflexibility of institutional reaction to individuals regardless of genius or potential, *Eugene Aram* owes even more than *Paul Clifford* to *Caleb Williams*. In the preface to the edition of 1840, Bulwer not only pays tribute to Godwin but expresses the view that he would have been more 'capable of treating [the subject] as it deserves.'⁷⁷

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp.67, 74.

⁷⁴ Hollingsworth, p.91.

⁷⁵ Snyder, pp.59-60.

⁷⁶ Escott, p.176.

⁷⁷ E. L. Bulwer, *Eugene Aram*, The New Knebworth Edition (London: Routledge, 1895), p.11.

Engel and King have come closer, in suggesting that the novel can be read as 'both a vindication of, and an attack on, Utilitarianism.'⁷⁸ It is more accurate to say that Bulwer is concerned with demonstrating the practical fallacy of treating utilitarianism as a personal philosophy rather than as a tool of social analysis and institutional change. Aram is undoubtedly shown to have been wrong in disregarding the moral absolute and replacing it with a calculating moral scheme to guide his own actions. If nothing else, the means comes to defeat the object of the end. While he retains his appetite for knowledge after the crime is committed, it now serves as a private solace rather than a benevolent channel for improving humanity:

'I occupied my thoughts - I laid up new hoards within my mind - I looked around, and I saw few whose stores were like my own. - but where, with the passion for wisdom still alive within me - where was that once more ardent desire which had cheated me across so dark a chasm between youth and manhood - between past and present life - the desire of applying that wisdom to the service of mankind? Gone - dead - buried for ever in my bosom, with the thousand dreams that had perished before it! When the deed was done, mankind seemed suddenly to have grown my foes. I looked upon them with other eyes.' (*EA*, III, 262)

His noble aims, the very noble aims which had formed the basis for his calculated justification of crime, have disappeared; the prevailing moral order is vindicated. And yet he is unable to release himself from the principle of utility which has so clearly destroyed him. His sense of regret stems not from any recognition of moral wrong, but from the fear of discovery and the base lies and bribery - acts similar to those which weighed so heavily against Clarke - to which the crime has reduced him:

'The thought that had I waited but three days I might have been saved, not from guilt, but from the chance of shame, - from the degradation of sinking to Houseman's equal - of feeling that man had the power to hurt me, [that at any moment] I might be dragged forth and proclaimed a murderer.' (*EA*, III, 261)

By the same token, his ultimate written confession is steeped in utilitarian ethics. He fails to deny the right of the individual to kill. Instead he laments that the victim of his

⁷⁸ Engel and King, p. 16.

crime was not the inconsequential blot that he had imagined, but a man inextricably entangled with Aram's own future destiny and happiness:

'But oh! what now was my horror! It had not been a mere worthless, isolated unit in creation that I had blotted out of the sum of life. I had shed the blood of his brother whose child was my betrothed! Mysterious avenger - weird and relentless fate! How, when I deemed myself the farthest from her, had I been sinking into her grasp! [...]. How incalculable - how measureless - how viewless the consequences of one crime, even when we think we have weighed them all with scales that would have turned with a hair's weight!' (*EA*, III, 272-73)

The caution against crime therefore remains calculating and practical, rather than formulated on ethical grounds, and ultimately rests upon the absolute impossibility of foreseeing all the consequences of one's actions.

As such, during the early editions of the novel Aram not only refuses to express sorrow, but positively forswears it, defiantly professing, 'I did not feel what men call remorse!' (*EA*, III, 260). It may have been that Bulwer intended the reader to see in this a further example of the blindness and self-interest which resulted from absolute submission to a utilitarian philosophy. It is equally possible that he intended to reveal and dismiss the misguided application of such a philosophy in the very terms in which it was itself framed - in other words, to show how Aram's actions actually undermined the premise by which he justified them. Whatever his intention, the failure to include a repentant murderer caused considerable controversy. In a revised version of 1849, Bulwer made changes to the original which substantially altered the tone of the novel. He softened Aram's unrepentance by adding the declaration, '[t]he ambition died in remorse'.⁷⁹ Of most importance was that, while retaining Aram's implication in the robbery of Clarke, he categorically excluded him from guilt either in the premeditated design or deed of murder. He claimed that this resulted from a fresh examination of the 'evidences on which Aram was condemned' and, with the benefit of

⁷⁹ *Eugene Aram*, The New Knebworth Edition, p.468.

a 'maturer judgement', deciding that he was innocent of this charge.⁸⁰ In reality, as I will suggest in the next chapter, it was the act of an established author who no longer wished to court critical controversy. But during the years between 1832 and 1849 Bulwer's hero was guilty of premeditated murder, and a moral relativism from which, in ways I will come to, his author never adequately distanced himself.

Bulwer's ambiguous stance towards Aram's guilt stems from a continued sense of the inadequacies of the legal process which we have charted in *Paul Clifford*. It relies on the paradoxical feeling that despite Aram's guilt, the law was culpable in pronouncing him guilty. It is a feeling which relies upon recognising the dangers of applying the principle of utility to private actions, while simultaneously recognising the importance of such principles, at least in their Godwinian form, to public reform. Among Godwin's loose papers was a page written between 1828 and 1830 which referred to the history of Eugene Aram, and which included the following remarks:

Let there be an Act of Parliament that, after a lapse of ten years, whoever shall be found to have spent that period blamelessly, and in labours conducive to the welfare of mankind, shall be absolved.

No man shall die respecting whom it can reasonably be concluded that if his life were spared, it would be spent blamelessly, honourably, and usefully.⁸¹

The greater part of *Eugene Aram* covers the fourteen years between the murder and its discovery, and Bulwer takes pains to demonstrate that they are 'spent blamelessly, honourably, and usefully', and would thereby satisfy a Godwinian legal model. Aram's malevolence towards humanity as a whole, and his new disbelief in the power of 'individual wisdom' to 'enlighten mankind', does not extend to his personal encounters with individuals (*EA*, III, 263). While he 'would not have sacrificed a momentary gratification for his race', he 'would have sacrificed himself for an individual' (*EA*, I,

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁸¹ Charles Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols (London: [n. pub.], 1876), II, 304-305.

70). In such instances he frequently has a drastic and life-changing impact. The landlord of an inn describes the pleasures of time spent with Aram, and attests to his considerable influence within the sphere of individual, rather than collective, humanity:

[O]f all the men that ever I saw, I never met one that wound round your heart like this same Eugene Aram [...]. [W]e talked much about gardening [...]. I was struck by all he said, and could not rest till I took to gardening myself, and ever since I have gone on, more pleased with it every day of my life. Indeed, Sir, I think these harmless pursuits make a man's heart better and kinder to his fellow-creatures; and I always take more pleasure in reading the Bible, specially the New Testament, after having spent the day in the garden.' (*EA*, III, 40-42)

It is an influence which has profound implications not only for the quality of the landlord's life, in changing his outlook on spiritual and earthly matters, but upon the lives of his 'fellow-creatures'. His house 'was equally hospitable to the poor', and his heart 'equally tender [...] to error' and 'open [...] to distress' (*EA*, III, 36). Aram effects change not by framing law or political creed, but by influencing the thinking of those around him in a direct and personal manner, and sparking a ripple which extends considerably beyond his own small circle of acquaintance.

It becomes difficult to avoid drawing parallels with the story of Christ in the manner of Aram's 'teaching', which comes through personal contact and direct example rather than through legislature, and spreads via individuals akin to disciples. I have already suggested that Aram's temptation bears comparison with that of the Devil's temptation of Christ in the wilderness. There are numerous other examples throughout the novel. At the scene of Aram's arrest, for example, the officers of justice inextricably 'drew back for a moment', just as at Christ's arrest the officers of the chief priests and Pharisees 'went backward, and fell to the ground.'⁸² Even the name of Madeline, Aram's utterly faithful intended bride, echoes that of Christ's unswerving servant, Mary Magdalene. I am not suggesting that Bulwer intends an absolute

⁸² *EA*, III, 116; John 18. 6.

identification between Aram and Christ - after all, as a scholar, Aram equally carries echoes of Faust and is a potent symbol of Fallen Man. Nor was he conveying a specifically Christian message.⁸³ However, I would argue that such parallels are intended to impact upon the reader's assessment of the legal framework. The ultimate conviction of Aram in spite of his potential for great good is suggestive of the self-defeating blindness which manifested itself on a much grander scale in the crucifixion of Christ. If Aram's utilitarian philosophy is shown ultimately to damage the very cause by which it is justified, the social mechanisms which destroy him show a comparable lack of foresight in failing to recognise the usefulness which remains.

This interpretation is strengthened by the intimation that Aram has been acquitted by an alternative framework of justice in the novel before he ever reaches trial. It is a framework which seeks a reconciliation between the mind of man and the natural world in which man must live; it relies upon a psychology very different from that of material effect, which has divorced man from nature. I have stressed the importance in *Paul Clifford* of the contrast between the natural and the artificial, the open moor and the private carriage. It is preserved here. Aram's affinity with his natural surroundings conflicts with 'the sound, and stench, and unholy perturbation' of 'the reeking town' - the structural embodiment of artificial and self-imposed order (*EA*, I, 162). This opposition between the natural and the human comes to include the workings of law. Nature provides the blueprint for an alternative, spontaneous form of judgement, one ungoverned by preconception or predetermined structure, and one which the reader is encouraged to consider when reaching his verdict on Aram. It relies upon a tradition established in opposition to materialism by the great

⁸³ Bulwer was attached to the Established Church by upbringing, and political and religious instinct. He felt that it was a bulwark against religious tyranny and anarchy. However, he was deeply attracted to metaphysics, and to him the universe was full of a divine significance which frequently makes itself felt in his novels without ever being associated with a specific system of religious belief. While Bulwer appears to echo traces of Godwinian thought, he was a theist, whereas Godwin was an atheist. For details of Bulwer's religious orientation, see 1st Earl of Lytton, II, 13-18.

philosophers of the age which assumes intuition to be the highest faculty of the mind. It proposes a Kantian immaterialism which 'wished to re-establish primitive truths and spontaneous activity to the soul', in response to the pervasive materialist philosophy stemming from John Locke, which 'gave up the human understanding to the empire of external objects', and which Madame de Staël perceived as Europe's debilitating illness.⁸⁴ Thus we are told, for instance, that even 'the wild birds seemed to feel, by a sort of instinct, that in him there was no cause for fear' (*EA*, I, 104). Such instinctive assessment disregards an individual's past, and considers only his potential threat in the present. It therefore corresponds with Godwin's belief that the only other justified consideration of a court was 'the chance of his offending again.'⁸⁵ It is clear that Aram had proved himself honourable and useful in the years following his solitary crime; his harmonious relationship with nature is in itself a guarantee that he will not reoffend. His acquittal by natural, or Godwinian, or immaterialist, law thereby indicates the failings of the correspondingly unnatural, material law of human society which, we fear, will judge him very differently.

By recognising the author's purposeful cultivation of this fear we can more readily make sense of Aram's curious speech in court and his later written confession. It is a defence which fails to satisfy both Lester, his prospective father-in-law, and the judge - although it provokes a species of awakening in many of the onlookers which is reminiscent of that inspired by Paul Clifford at his second trial.⁸⁶ He avoids entirely any specific engagement with the facts of his own case. He failed to dwell on 'the improbable and contradictory evidence of Houseman'; he 'glanced over the immediate evidence of the witnesses against him'; and 'as if disdainingly to rely on aught save his

⁸⁴ Anne Louise Germaine de Staël-Holstein, *Germany* (1813), 2 vols (Boston: [n. pub.], 1879), II, 159, quoted in Eigner, p.142.

⁸⁵ *Political Justice*, p.257.

⁸⁶ It is a similarity intensified by the effect of the judge's summing up, which, by insisting on the importance of fact over emotion, changes 'the jury's mind [...] like magic' (*EA*, III, 218).

own genius or his own innocence, [he] had called no witnesses' at all (*EA*, III, 215-18). He chooses rather to demonstrate the fallacy of believing that fact will make itself simply and plainly known, and the consequent instability of the foundations on which the legal system is based:

'Have we forgotten how difficult [...] it has been sometimes to identify the living; and shall we now assign personality to bones - bones which may belong to either sex? How know you that this is even the skeleton of a man? But another skeleton was discovered by some labourer! Was not that skeleton averred to be Clarke's full as confidently as this? [...]. The skull that has been produced, has been declared fractured. But who can surely tell whether it was the cause or the consequence of death [...]. How impotent such evidence as this! and how poor, how precarious, even the strongest of mere circumstantial evidence invariably is! Let it rise to probability, to the strongest degree of probability; it is but probability still.'
(*EA*, III, 209-13)

Facts do *not* necessarily speak for themselves, and circumstantial evidence *can* lie.⁸⁷ Complicit in this unreliability is the refusal to consider other, equally important, factors like intention, circumstance and character. The legislature will not permit a differentiation between types of criminal, and, in the name of 'justice', will couple Aram with a man like Houseman without accounting for the very obvious differences both in motivation and subsequent conduct. Godwin had marvelled at the deficiency of such a framework, a deficiency which in part stemmed from the very impossibility of fully comprehending the inner workings of another man within the theatre of the law court:

What a vast train of actual and possible motives enter into the history of a man, who has been incited to destroy the life of another? Can you tell me how much in these there was of apprehended justice, and how much of inordinate selfishness? how much of sudden passion, and how much of rooted depravity? how much of intolerable provocation, and how much of spontaneous wrong? how much of that sudden insanity which hurries the mind into a certain action by a sort of incontinence of nature, almost without any assignable motive, and how much of incurable habit? [...]. [R]ecollect the narratives that have been published by

⁸⁷ Bulwer remains largely faithful to the tone of the original Aram's defence, which similarly questioned the certainty of the facts on which he was being tried. See *The Genuine Account of the Life and Trial of Eugene Aram*, pp.21-30.

condemned criminals. In how different a light do they place the transactions that proved fatal to them, from the construction that was put upon them by their judges? And yet these narratives were written under the most awful circumstances, and many of them without the least hope of mitigating their fate, and with marks of the deepest sincerity.⁸⁸

Godwin feels that judgements can be more accurately made upon the personal narratives of condemned criminals from outside the court. In electing to tell his story only after his sentence is decided, Aram appears to feel the same.⁸⁹ He recognises that the case 'transcends the machinery of the law.'

In releasing his narrative in the shape of a written confession to Walter, the son of his victim, Aram constructs a form of autobiography which Schramm frequently associates with people expelled from their own communities by those who hold control and wield privilege. She points, in the 20th century, to the written testimony of holocaust witnesses which tend to undermine the authoritative testimony of those in power.⁹⁰ Aram thereby presents himself both as the exiled victim of society's official discourse, and as the proud defiant determined to circumvent the mechanisms of social justice and prevent their suppression of the full truth of his narrative. By effectively delivering his testimony from outside court, Aram aims to ensure both that his words bear the weight of veracity, and that they are judged as fairly as possible. His autobiographical account promises this in several ways. First, as Godwin suggests, the word of the condemned criminal is accorded a respect that it is not during the trial. It is a supreme irony that restrictions imposed upon the defendant in court - like the denial of his right to testify on oath - mean that his representation is only given genuine value, and the significance of spiritual sanction, after he has been condemned to death. Thus Walter trusts that, 'at this dread moment', Aram's words can be relied upon (*EA*,

⁸⁸ *Political Justice*, pp.256-57.

⁸⁹ Bulwer's decision to include a written confession departs from the original history. While Aram had promised to give a full account on the day of his execution, he never did so. It is, therefore, a conscious narrative ploy on the part of the author, and of consequent significance. *The Genuine Account of the Life and Trial of Eugene*, p.40.

⁹⁰ Schramm, pp.3-4.

III, 225). Indeed, this need on the part of Walter to hear Aram's statement outside court suggests a similar lack of faith in the court's ability to arrive at truth. Aram remains silent until he is sure that his testimony is guaranteed the weight it deserves. Second, he has the freedom to present his narrative unhindered by the scale of worth imposed upon different types of 'evidence' by the court. His confession does include the facts of the murder; but it also includes the circumstances, the personal emotions and the intentions which accompanied them. And third, it ensures a personal and spontaneous judgement from an individual similarly unencumbered by legal dogma. It directly enacts Godwin's theory of even-handed judgement, that '[t]he only principle which can be substituted in the room of law, is that of reason exercising an uncontrolled jurisdiction upon the circumstances of the case.'⁹¹ However, while this relationship between testimony and judgement dismantles many of the barriers to truth constructed by the legal system, it can never attain absolute justice, relying as it does upon the mediation of language and human subjectivity. True justice can only come from an unmediated knowledge of 'reality'. It was this recognition that spurred Godwin's argument for a society ungoverned by man-made law. And it is this recognition which leads Aram to await judgement from one free from man's limited and imperfect perception. As he says, '[p]erhaps I am not without a hope that the Great and Unseen Spirit [...] may see in his fallen creature one bewildered by his reason rather than yielding to his vices' (*EA*, III, 275-76).

The claims of this alternative judicial system frame not only Aram's mode of narrative presentation, but Bulwer's too. Not until the concluding pages of the book do we learn the circumstances of the case; as a result, our opinion of Aram is influenced entirely by his actions in the present rather than the guilt of his actions in the past. In essence, Bulwer becomes the defence counsel and the reader the juror in the novel's Godwinian 'court'. Bulwer's representation claims an ideal and absolute

⁹¹ *Political Justice*, p.275.

truth which reaches beyond that available to lawyers, restricted both by the limits of practicality and an emphasis purely on factual evidence. It is able to reconstruct a man's life, his character and potential, and invite a fairer judgement based upon this fuller truth. This opposition between the ideal and the practical reflects Bulwer's stance towards utilitarianism in the novel. In suggesting the inadequacy of a fact-based, multi-narrative trial to properly represent circumstance, he pours scorn upon Benthamite utilitarianism, with its insistence on empirical fact and effect over cause. However, in claiming to construct an ideal reality based upon circumstance, and the subsequent merit of an individual, his reformatory urge is immersed in a Godwinian strand of utilitarianism. And thus he simultaneously condemns Benthamite philosophy and the representations of lawyers (and realist authors) as unnatural, while linking Godwinian utilitarianism and the representations of (metaphysical) authors with the natural and the ideal. He attempts to substitute the visionary and intuitive for the material and experiential not only in the process of legal judgement, but in the methodology of fictional representation. In an age increasingly swayed by the security of solid structure and empirical fact, the consequences of such a substitution would have seemed unforeseeable, and thus deeply threatening.

3. Working-Class Defiance, Victorian Gentility, and Regency Dandyism: *Paul Clifford* and *Pelham*

While I have suggested ways in which Bulwer's *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram* can be interpreted as reformist and radical, their radicalism varies from that which can be observed elsewhere in the Newgate tradition. The history of Jack Sheppard provides a good opportunity of demonstrating this. I will suggest in Chapter 3 that those dramatic adaptations appearing in the minor theatres were open to interpretation as specifically lower-class expressions of radical sentiment. They depicted a recognisably lower-class hero, before a large proportion of lower-class spectators, and tapped into a radical

tradition of lawless behaviour that stemmed from lower-class origins. This characteristic was not unique to 19th-century Newgate dramas. While these dramas were adaptations of the Newgate novels, they reenacted the radical and identifiably lower-class gestures of defiance to be found in the ballads and last confessions of broadside literature from which the tales ultimately derived. The alteration in the politicised registers of these tales as they moved between genres is one of the features which makes the Newgate controversy so interesting, and so threatening to contemporaries.

Peter Linebaugh has shown how 18th-century interest in the crimes and escapes of Jack Sheppard was particularly strong among the working classes of London. It stemmed from Sheppard's exemplification of what Linebaugh calls 'excarceration': a spirit counter to the historiographical trend described by Foucault, that stressed incarceration and made society's leaders seem all-powerful, and which was imposed through social institutions like the workhouse, the factory, the school, the hospital and the ship.⁹² Jack's symbolic championing of freedom stirred passions in the working classes because he was very much of his class and time. He was born and raised in Spitalfields - the artisanal hub of London and one of the major centres of silk production in the world - among a community which was traditionally politically radical and volatile, and at a time when silk had become representative of idleness and privilege, symbolic of the gulf between the luxuries of the upper classes and the needs of the lower classes. He had direct experience of the workhouse, 'the fastest growing innovation of social control', and, as such, his amazing feats of escapology served as examples of 'resourcefulness and freedom to the London weavers and the labouring poor that answered to the slavish designs of the workhouse'.⁹³ Sheppard's actions served as symbols of defiance towards repressive legislation brought in to consolidate

⁹² See Linebaugh, pp.7-41.

⁹³ Ibid., pp.9, 14.

the new Hanoverian dynasty of 1714 like the Riot Act, the Transportation Act, the Combination Act, the Workhouse Act and the Black Act, and towards the damage caused by finance capitalism. They were entirely in tune with the character of the population among which he grew up; the weavers had publicly and actively expressed their dissatisfaction at, and contempt for, those in authority when rebelling as recently as 1719 and 1720 in defence of a perceived threat to their interests.⁹⁴ Jack Sheppard was, therefore, both representative of an urban labour force which was characteristically resistant to subordination, and an added source of inspiration and interest for this social group.

In one sense the 'spirit of nature' embraced by Paul Clifford and his comrades - their rejection of containment and their carnivalesque celebration of the public space in opposition to the cultivation of the private sphere among those in power - preserves and continues this characteristic of the Newgate tradition. In this we witness, as in the historical Jack Sheppard's popularity, the tendency towards 'excarceration' in reaction to a broader process of social 'incarceration'. *Paul Clifford* is about the struggle against enclosed structures of discipline and coercion, ultimately about 'freedom' - whether enacted physically through Paul's escape from the House of Correction, or verbally through the call in his defence speech for an alternative form of penal justice. The same can be said of Eugene Aram's determination to usurp the constraints of official judicial procedure by presenting his own, autobiographical form of testimony. In this eternal human urge resided the continuing attraction of Newgate heroes and the ability of such tales to transcend historical change. Perceived symbols of restriction and repression were as much a part of 19th- as 18th-century life. But, unlike the original Jack Sheppard, Bulwer's creations are far less clearly a focus of specifically working-class identity or interest. It is true that there are similarities between Paul Clifford and Jack: both are criminals, both enact daring escapes, both don at times the

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.16-19.

apparel of 'the fashionable'. Yet Jack was more obviously a product of the urban working-class group to whom his actions most appealed. Physically, he was small and certainly far from the traditional image of the hero; it is documented that visitors were astonished at his undernourished and youthful appearance. His rebellion was based, and entirely depended, upon the mastery of his craft, upon his practical aptitude and his manual skills as a carpenter.⁹⁵ His form of defiance was marked out by those qualities which would have immediately associated him with the skilled urban workforce of Spitalfields. As such, his escapes, and the damage he inflicted upon authority's cultivated air of invincibility, could be seen as blows on behalf not just of himself, but of his whole social class.

Paul's working-class credentials are less clearly or specifically linked either to him as a person or to his particular form of crime and rebellion. In appearance, he closely fits the image of the archetypal hero, the Samson-like figure, a

man in whom a much larger share of sinews and muscle than is usually the lot even of the strong, had been hardened [...] into a union scarcely less remarkable than that immortalized in the glorious beauty of the sculptured gladiator. (*PC*, III, 76)

Furthermore, while there is no doubt that he is meant to be a member of the urban lower class, being brought up as an orphan in a seedy public house, there is no sustained attempt to identify him with the experiences or traits recognisable to this class. His education is not as an apprentice but as a scholar (albeit as the pupil of the inadequate MacGrawler), and his first job is as a journalist rather than a carpenter at a time when such work was being increasingly, though reluctantly, accepted as a 'professional' and almost 'respectable' vocation. His early interest in daring criminality is not flamed by flash songs, oral ballads about criminals which allowed the working classes to preserve their own historiography when other representational means were

⁹⁵ These characteristics were retained in the Adelphi's dramatic production, where a woman played the lead role, and Jack's carpentry skills were prominently displayed.

closed to them, and which we see inspiring Buckstone's Jack Sheppard.⁹⁶ Instead he immerses himself in a novel detailing the life of Dick Turpin, a form more readily associated with the upper and middle classes.⁹⁷ Paul is as much a man of words as of action. His eloquence in his defence speech is at least as important in his defiant stance towards authority as his bodily escapes from confinement. And where Jack Sheppard's acts of housebreaking or escape relied upon silence, perhaps symptomatic of the lack of a working-class voice in the political process, either as politician or voter, and the need therefore to resort to action, Paul Clifford's crimes often rely upon speech.⁹⁸ His instances of highway robbery are frequently memorable for their verbal exchanges; and a major portion of his criminal life is spent in society, attempting to obtain the riches of eligible women through the power of eloquent persuasion rather than physical force.

Indeed it is his bearing within the society of 'the fashionable' that provides the most striking departure from the 'traditional' role of the Newgate hero. He possesses a natural taste and grace which makes easy his transition from highwayman to well-bred gentleman, and which becomes immediately clear from his first appearance at a ball with Long Ned and Augustus Tomlinson:

[He] was many years younger than his companions, strikingly handsome in face and figure, altogether of a better taste in dress, and possessing a manner that, though it had equal ease, was not equally noticeable for impudence and swagger.
(*PC*, II, 68-69)

⁹⁶ J. B. Buckstone, 'Jack Sheppard' in *Acting National Drama*, vol. 7 (London: Chapman and Hall, [1840?]), Act II, sc. 1, p. 18. Subsequent references will be to this edition, unless otherwise indicated, and included in the text.

⁹⁷ This engagement with the novel is symbolic of a cultural challenge which we will examine in the next chapter.

⁹⁸ One critic has noted that during the late 18th century and the early 19th century, while the English working class was 'making itself', it 'couldn't generate its own discourse' (Klancher, p. 101). Another has argued that for both earlier Regency radicalism and Chartism of the 1830s and 1840s, the dividing line was 'between the represented and the unrepresented' (Gareth Stedman Jones, *The Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 106-107).

Equally instructive is the image that his comrades present. They are magnificently conspicuous within such a circle. Consider, for instance, the following image, stark in its contrast with that of Paul:

Leaning with his left hand on Tomlinson's arm, and employing the right in fanning himself furiously with his huge *chapeau bras*, the lengthy adventurer stalked slowly along - now setting out one leg jauntily - now the other - and ogling 'the ladies' with a kind of Irish look, viz. a look between a wink and a stare.

Released from the presence of Clifford, who kept a certain check on his companions, the apparition of Ned became glaringly conspicuous; and wherever he passed, a universal whisper succeeded.

'Who can he be?' said the widow Matemore: 'tis a droll creature, but what a head of hair!'

'For my part,' answered the Spinster Sneerall, 'I think he is a linen-draper in disguise: for I heard him talk to his companion of "tape".' (*PC*, II, 88-89)

Ned and Tomlinson more closely adhere to the expected type of the Newgate hero. Not only do they fail to blend with those of a higher social class, preserving a sense of class distinction, but there is the impression that they do not mean to. Their very presence at the ball, the airs with which they don the clothes of the fashionable and socially powerful, has a mocking aspect in its ridiculous spectacle. It mirrors Jack Sheppard's intent in wearing the ill-fitting and stolen clothes of a gentleman and parading through the streets of London, a purposeful and visible taunting of the authorities and their attempts to contain him. The dynamic of such an action relies upon the reversal of expected type, of carnivalesque inversion, of the blatant intrusion of the ridiculous into the austere space of the powerful, the invasion of the private by the public. Elsewhere Bulwer refers to 'the boisterous "ha, ha!" of Long Ned', and labels him 'Rabelais' (*PC*, III, 55). In every sense - in his love of eating and drinking and drunkenness, and his cheerful laughter in the face of the ever-present spectre of death - Long Ned parallels Jack Sheppard in personifying 'the Rabelaisian'.⁹⁹ And this

⁹⁹ For a discussion of these features in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, see M. M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), pp.84-258 (pp.178-88).

similarity is consolidated by Ned's retention of an unmistakable flavour of working-class identity which I have suggested is notably absent from Paul. Despite its primary purpose as comic *double entendre*, the reference to Ned as 'a linendraper in disguise' also allies him firmly with a specific group of a specific class. This is reinforced by an earlier play on words in which Mauleverer labels the two 'haberdashers'. Like Jack Sheppard, Ned recognisably represents a defined class interest.

There is, however, a sense in which the mocking tone of these episodes is double-edged in a manner that we do not find in the original life of Jack Sheppard nor in the 19th-century dramatic adaptations of his tale. Despite the revelation of sniping prejudice and petty gossip in the fashionable set's reactions towards Ned and Tomlinson, Bulwer seems reluctant entirely to distance himself from them. Ned's conspicuity merits some disapprobation. He may be mocking, but equally he is mocked, and this draws the sting of any potential satire on his part; he can never represent the true Newgate hero. It is extremely significant that Paul attempts to maintain a hold upon the behaviour of his comrades, that he keeps 'a certain check on his companions'. It is apparent during other episodes, most obviously when he restrains Ned during the robbery of Lucy's carriage and when he prevents him shooting Mauleverer during another hold-up. Paul has consciously renounced such excess, and, to the dismay of his compatriots, rejects the Rabelaisian role:

'There is only one thing I regret,' cried Ned, with his mouth full, 'about the old lord [Mauleverer], - it was a thousand pities we did not make him dance! I remember the day, Captain, when you would have insisted on it. What a merry fellow you were once! Do you recollect, one bright moonlight night, just like the present, for instance, when we were doing duty near Staines, how you swore every person we stopped, above fifty years old, should dance a minuet with you?'

'Ay!' added Augustus, 'and the first was a Bishop in a white wig. Faith, how stiffly his Lordship jigged it!' (*PC*, III, 56)

The carnivalesque jig, the dance of anti-authority, is a prominent part of the radical rejection of containment. Buckstone's Jack Sheppard dances within his cell before his

escape, theatrically enacting the process of incarceration and signifying his role as slippery whirling dervish. Paul's earlier choice of victims for such humiliating treatment had been the old and the religious, firm symbols of authority which the dance stripped of the sobriety and ritual on which the subjection of others relies. But in renouncing these actions Paul has partially turned from this form of anti-authoritarianism. He now, at times, becomes a figure of containment, one who places restrictions upon the excesses of those around him, refuses to participate wholeheartedly in the dance of life. As such, he simultaneously and paradoxically fills a position as figure both of rebellion and restriction, of radical and authoritarian. His form of social radicalism now takes a very different shape, and, in the pose he adopts among the fashionable, with significant alterations that I will come to, he bears far closer resemblance to the aristocratic dandy than the working-class defiant.

Ellen Moers' extensive study of 'the dandy' has detailed its place as a social and literary phenomenon which developed during the hedonistic days of the Regency period. It stemmed in part both from a reaction against, and justification for, the increasing stratification of society. As the values of birth and inherited wealth, which had traditionally served as markers of social distinction, were upset by the intrusion of the market and the new middle-class virtues of hard work, self-made talent and moral purity, style and pose became the means by which the aristocratic attempted to justify and maintain their place at the apex of the social pyramid. It embodied a last-ditch struggle against the enveloping bourgeois spirit: where the rising majority were calling loudly for equality and social-consciousness, the dandy flaunted superiority and irresponsibility.¹⁰⁰ Indifference to duty became a badge of breeding and distinction. The opening to Bulwer's *Pelham* (1828) reveals that the eponymous character's uncle was 'thought a fool by some, and a madman by others' among the fashionable because

¹⁰⁰ See Moers, pp. 12-13.

he 'built schools for peasants, forgave poachers, and diminished his farmers' rents'.¹⁰¹ The popularity of the dandiacal figure among the higher echelons was exploited by the publisher Colburn who, from 1825, promoted the fashionable novel, recognising that books about such exclusives - books which described, and often glamorised, the world of society balls, gambling, political gossip, élite clubs, and ritualised hunting for eligible heiresses - would be popular both with the members of such a circle themselves, and with those who aspired to membership of such a circle.¹⁰²

In many aspects, particularly in its sustained examination and portrayal of high society, *Paul Clifford* owes far more to this genre of 'silver-fork' novels than to the more stringently philosophical *Caleb Williams*. It is interesting that the novel for the fashionable about the fashionable, itself spawned from the desire of the exclusives to remain distanced from the vulgar in their reading matter as in everything else, should be used for a tale about the infiltration of the higher by the criminal class. It was typical of the manifold paradoxes of this period that the dandy could be detested as a representative of all that needed changing while remaining fascinating even to those who detested him most. After the Reform Bill of 1832, the dandy was effectively dead. But, in *Pelham* and *Paul Clifford*, Bulwer was to use this thriving figure for political and social satire. It is indicative of the ambiguities still very much inherent in the attitude of people (including Bulwer) toward this pose that these novels could be confused with the countless other unsophisticated, and largely plotless, works which simply capitalised on the fascination. *Pelham*, who we will see was intended as a vehicle for lampooning such a pose and the genre of the fashionable novel itself, and with him Bulwer, who was linked with his own fictional creation, became for *Fraser's Magazine* a prime symbol of Regency excess during its campaign against such frivolity

¹⁰¹ E. L. Bulwer, *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), I, 5. Subsequent references will be to this edition, unless otherwise indicated, and included in the text.

¹⁰² Moers, pp.52-53.

and in defence of the middle classes.¹⁰³ In its third issue, of April 1830, its intended targets for attack included 'Lytton-Bulwerism, Colburn and - Bentleyism, Pelhamites and Exclusivites'.¹⁰⁴ Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, serialised in *Fraser's* between November 1833 and August 1834, used several passages from *Pelham* in its savage offensive against the ritualised cult of dandyism.¹⁰⁵ It is worth briefly examining Bulwer's 'fashionable' novel as a means of assessing more accurately the eponymous hero's role in *Paul Clifford*.

Pelham graphically illustrates that the dandiacal pose, despite its own symbolic associations with the evils of the aristocratic class, could be used for satirical commentary upon this very class. But it also reveals the ambiguities at the heart of a text which attacked a corrupt and irresponsible system using the apparent embodiment of irresponsibility as its mouthpiece, and at the heart of an author forever struggling to reconcile his radical inclinations with his life as an aristocratic man of fashion. The novel recounts the adventures of Henry Pelham, a young dandy, wit and aspiring politician, who falls in love with Ellen, sister of his old school friend, Reginald Glanville. The latter is accused of a murder of which Pelham eventually plays a significant part in proving him innocent, tracking down the true culprit, a low and callous character called Thornton, whose crime is drawn from the notorious

¹⁰³ Bulwer's own ambiguous stance towards the dandy is representative of the deeply paradoxical feelings which this period of transition from Romantic egotism to Victorian social-consciousness could provoke in him. He vehemently rejected comparisons of Pelham with himself. Nevertheless, there is the sense that while Bulwer was broadly attacking the shallow excesses of dandyism, he also intended to suggest that there were exceptions; such exceptions were perhaps offered as a defence against attacks on his own dandiacal dress and pose. He said, for instance, that it was 'a new as well as a useful moral to show that we may be both men of the world, and yet something wiser, nobler, and better' than *mere* men of the world. 1st Earl of Lytton, II, 187.

¹⁰⁴ Moers, p. 170.

¹⁰⁵ For further discussion of this serialisation, in particular the idea that Carlyle may not actually have read *Pelham* in its entirety and consequently could have been unaware of Bulwer's evident intention to dissect rather than simply glorify the dandy's pose, see Moers, pp. 178-83.

contemporary case of Thurtell.¹⁰⁶ But the main interest of the story is in the portrayal of fashionable life, and, in particular, Pelham's manipulation of the dandiacal pose and his personal development, and the reader's shifting assessment of his character, during the course of the narrative. From an early stage we are shown that true self, inner character, counts for little in a society ruled by outward appearance and exterior bearing. Everything becomes subject to the fickle changes of fashion, so that, in most cases, characters are literally empty shells. Pelham's mother, Lady Frances, advises her son to study metaphysics not for its spiritual and immaterial benefits, but because 'that sort of thing is a good deal talked about just at present' (*Pel.*, I, 28). Everything is geared towards the furthering of private interest; others are only there to be used. Lady Frances sums up this world view:

'[You] must appear wholly engrossed with those about you, and yet never have a single idea which does not terminate in yourself: a fool, my dear Henry, flatters himself - a wise man flatters the fool.' (*Pel.*, I, 76)

The result is that the original inner self, the very character of the individual, is literally replaced by the artificiality demanded by high society. Pelham observes,

How few there are in the world who retain, after a certain age, the character originally natural to them! We all get, as it were, a second skin; the little foibles, propensities, eccentricities, we first indulged through affectation, conglomerate and encrust till the artificiality grows into nature. (*Pel.*, III, 38-39)

The primacy of appearance, indeed, the idea that image is literally all, is comically demonstrated during an episode involving Monsieur Margot, a tutor that Pelham had employed on arrival in Paris to aid him with his pronunciation. This man has an ardent admiration for the codes of chivalry and love of which he fondly imagines himself the master. But an English woman, Mrs Green, asks him to prove that his courage is genuine by descending from her third-floor window in a basket attached to a rope

¹⁰⁶ For details of this case, see Pierce Egan, *Pierce Egan's Account of the Trial of John Thurtell and Joseph Hunt* (London: [n. pub.], 1824).

while clothed only in his dressing-gown.¹⁰⁷ This is, of course, a trick; Mrs Green suspends the poor, unsuspecting man fifteen feet above the ground, a pitiful spectacle for all to see. It is in vain that Margot attempts to offer an explanation for his predicament; words are useless in the face of the visual image - as one witness cried, in dismissing the tutor's protests, 'we saw you - we saw you' (*Pel.*, I, 132). And, Pelham wryly comments, '[f]rom that day to this I have never once beheld him' (*Pel.*, I, 133). Once Margot has lost control of the false image that he had constructed and carefully cultivated, once there are spectators to this comical appearance, he must disappear from sight. The Duchesse de Perpignan adopts a more drastic solution when Pelham finds himself in a small room containing her wig and set of teeth, the grotesque 'manufactory of a beauty' (*Pel.*, I, 184). She attempts first to poison Pelham, and then to stab him with a paper-cutter, to restore the sum of her fabricated self by eliminating the witness to her cosmetic parts. So it is that, while the story is intended to be one which enacts the enjoyment of semblance for its own sake, demonstrating the inadequacy of life in which all value exists on the surface, the cult of the fashionable is shown to be potentially deadly as well as comical. Its exponents will kill in order to sustain the pretence. Ultimately, in the circle of the seen, either the witnessed or the witness must disappear when the veils become dislodged.

Initially it appears that Pelham is very much of this social type - a sophisticated dandy, an accomplished manager of his represented self, adept at appropriating a variety of appearances which ultimately cover a shell containing little more than self-interest and personal vanity. From an early stage he is shown consciously adopting a disguise that can best serve personal and private interest:

On entering Paris I had resolved to set up '*a character*'; for I was always of an ambitious nature, and desirous of being distinguished from the ordinary herd. After

¹⁰⁷ The request for proof is an affront to a real man of honour whose status, as we have seen, was anchored in a notion of inherent truth. Margot's willingness to submit to such a test confirms the spurious nature of his claims to such status.

various cogitations as to the particular one I should assume, I thought nothing appeared more likely to be remarkable among men, and therefore pleasing to women, than an egregious coxcomb: accordingly I arranged my hair into ringlets, dressed myself with singular plainness and simplicity (a low person, by the by, would have done just the contrary), and putting on an air of exceeding languour, made my maiden appearance at Lord Bennington's. (*Pel.*, I, 61-62)

The detail, and particularly the bracketed aside about 'a low person', has all the characteristics of a manual for those who aspire to the fashionable set; it could be to the reader what Lady Frances's advice was to her son. For such people any venture into the public sphere is motivated similarly by private desire, the wish to garner personal distinction, rather than from any positive wish to promote social good. Principled or moralistic feelings are handicaps because they stifle flexibility and interfere with the cultivation of the most appropriate appearance. Pelham is encouraged by his mother to become involved in politics precisely because he lacks altruism - his declaration of intent to stand is a masterpiece of oratory because it "espoused no principle, and yet professed what all parties would allow was the best" (*Pel.*, I, 302). While the hypocrisies of the fashionable class are revealed to us, they come through the eyes of one who seems very much of that class.

As the novel progresses, however, we are shown that Pelham, along with a few other characters, has an underlying depth that the dandiacal pose has kept hidden. The catalyst for his altered attitude to the world around him comes through the advice of his uncle, advice that differs significantly from that of his mother. He urges Pelham to garner knowledge as well as fact, develop principle in his learning, and by awakening him to the work of Mill, Bentham and Ricardo, effects a change in his thinking so that he 'no longer divorced the interests of other men from my own' (*Pel.*, I, 326).¹⁰⁸ It

¹⁰⁸ While in *Pelham* Bulwer shows no sign of his distaste for the empiricism of Benthamite utilitarianism so obvious in *Eugene Aram*, he does hint at his awareness of the dangers of compromising personal morals in the name of utility. A prominent mark of Pelham's growth is his refusal to join Vincent in a bid for power which involves allying himself with others with whom he profoundly disagrees. While Vincent believes "we must make use of bad tools for good purposes", Pelham insists that he will not

leads to a new awareness of the purpose of learning, not simply for stylised society display, but for practical effect. He pities his old friend Clutterbuck's lonely devotion to the study of the ancients:

Miserable delusion (thought I), that encourages the ruin of health and the perversion of intellect by studies that are as unprofitable to the world as they are destructive to the possessor - that incapacitate him for public, and unfit him for private life - and that, while they expose him to the ridicule of strangers, render him the victim of his wife, and the prey of his domestic. (*Pel.*, II, 301-302)

While outward appearance remains important to a man who has known nothing else, it is no longer the predominant guiding influence. He instructs his tailor 'to leave me as much after the fashion in which God made me as you possibly can', symbolically throwing off the fabricated disguises which have formed his existence thus far (*Pel.*, II, 61). Lady Roseville comes to recognise the rare depth to Pelham's character, sees that he is very much more than the superficial dandy he likes to project:

'While you seem frivolous to the superficial, I know you to have a mind not only capable of the most solid and important affairs, but habituated by reflection to consider them. You appear effeminate, I know that none are more daring - indolent, none are more actively ambitious - utterly selfish, and I know that no earthly interest could bribe you into meanness or injustice - no, not even into a venial dereliction of principle.' (*Pel.*, III, 106-107)

This is, of course, a call to respect individuality, to recognise not only the futility of a devotion to outward appearance, but that appearance is not always all, that amidst the many shallow dandies there are some who conceal a very real depth of character. It is, perhaps, a plea stemming very much from the author's heart; and we have seen how the need for an awareness of individuality is extended to observations on the penal system in *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram*.

betray private conscience for public ends (*Pel.*, II, 153).

The alteration in Pelham, the shift from the absorbed egoist of the private sphere to the man who is at least awakened to the value of utility and public responsibility, is accompanied by a move from the traditionally anti-heroic and inactive stance of the dandy to a demonstrably more active and selfless role as he sets about trying to prove the innocence of his friend Glanville. Now he dons disguise not for the purpose of private interest in the comfortable world of the ball or the dinner, but in order to risk his own life in entering a den of thieves and coming to the aid of another person. He even, however unintentionally, stabs one of the rogues (*Pel.*, III, 333). By the conclusion he is settled in domestic, marital bliss, and his transformation is complete. He says of himself,

Matrimony found me ambitious; it has not cured me of the passion: but it has concentrated what was scattered, and determined what was vague. If I am less anxious than formerly for the reputation to be acquired in society, I am more eager for honour in the world; and instead of amusing my enemies, and the saloon, I trust yet to be useful to my friends and to mankind. (*Pel.*, III, 359)

The culmination of the novel is, in some ways like *Paul Clifford*, an unsatisfactory one. Despite the clear moment of enlightenment represented by Pelham's introduction to the theories of utility, when he discovers the key to unlock a previously dormant depth of character, there is no practical sense in which his stance has procured any change. As Christensen has observed, while the story implies the existence of deeper levels, it does not go on to define the 'useful interaction between superficial vestments and profounder truths.' While Pelham's true character is proved to be of far greater worth than those of other men of the world around him, his 'better nature remains hidden and somewhat irrelevant to the world.'¹⁰⁹ Like Paul, who ends up living a worthy life abroad, we last see Pelham retired in the countryside with his wife, personifying the ideal of bourgeois domesticity, and waiting patiently for some unspecified point in the future when 'time [...] shall again bring me before the world' (*Pel.*, III, 358). He is, in other words, entirely passive once more, relying on external

¹⁰⁹ *Fiction of New Regions*, p.42.

forces to spur him into an undefined form of social action. One may ask how this stance is any more 'useful' than that of the dandy. As Christensen summarises,

To judge from his experiences, the world does not offer adequate or productive channels for the hidden energies or ambitions of individuals. Those who have had deep passions have ended up broken and destroyed like Glanville and Lady Roseville, corrupted like Vince, or touchingly pathetic like Guloseton. The strength of Pelham has come not from the ability to convert hidden energy into useful actions but from the ability to live with the tension. He has merely accepted the absolute necessity for a fragmented existence and enjoyed the irrelevant costumes while somehow maintaining an impalpable integrity.¹¹⁰

Both Long Ned and Pelham, therefore, are used by Bulwer as vehicles for social satire: one an outsider, brashly invading the sphere of the fashionable and stripping the incumbents of their fabricated veils with mockery; the other an insider, wryly observing the shallow and self-destructive quality of such codes of behaviour while nevertheless participating in the game himself. It should be clear that, while Paul certainly retains elements of Ned's brand of radical commentary, his stance is more closely allied to that of Pelham. There are suggestions, for all his athleticism, that he has a delicacy of feature, even a faint effeminacy, that is characteristic of the Regency exclusive. His elegance of taste and bearing in fashionable company, his skilled control of his represented self, also strongly parallel the dandy. In part, then, it is the very effortless nature with which he appears to carry the codes of the fashionable that serves to ridicule the claims of the dandy to exclusivity and inherent superiority based upon breeding. Paul's satirical blows come not through carnivalesque mimicry of the fashionable, but through displaying their manners more comfortably than they can themselves.

A prime demonstration of this comes in a tense confrontation between Paul and Mauleverer. Paul, having decided that he is unworthy of Lucy's affections, seeks

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp.52-53.

one last meeting with her in the grounds of a mansion owned by Mauleverer, who is holding a party there. The host challenges his uninvited presence, seeking to humiliate the man whom he regards as blighting his own chances of marriage to Lucy. Paul, who 'knew tolerably well the theories of society', responds:

'My Lord, I shall leave it to the judgment of your guests to decide whether you have acted the part of a nobleman and a gentleman in [...] insulting one who has given you such explanation of his trespass [...]. But I shall take it upon *myself*, my lord, to demand from *you* an immediate explanation of your last speech.'

'Insolent!' cried Mauleverer, colouring with indignation, and almost for the first time in his life losing absolute command over his temper; 'do you bandy words with me?'

[...] 'Poor pretender to breeding and to sense!' said [Paul], disdainfully turning to Mauleverer; 'with one touch of this whip I could shame you for ever, or compel you to descend from the level of your rank to that of mine, and the action would be but a mild return to your language. But I love rather to teach you than to correct. According to my creed, my lord, he conquers most in good breeding who forbears the most - *scorn* enables *me* to forbear! - Adieu!' (PC, II, 258-61)

This is an excellent example of how Paul's conduct is unique among the criminals, and is significant within the overall concept of the novel in several ways. We see Paul, despite his obvious physical advantages and muscular presence, consciously choosing to confront his opponent with language rather than violence, and within the specific mores of society. This would be unthinkable to a criminal in the mould of Jack Sheppard or Long Ned. While he suggests that his rank is of a lower level than Mauleverer's, his dexterous use of words and his consummate handling of the highly stylised nature of confrontation between men of the fashionable world, show that this is far from the case. His conduct dismantles any claims to natural supremacy on the part of those occupying this exclusive circle. Furthermore, in a ritual which relies upon the preservation of 'face', on maintaining exterior calm, a key element of the dandy's pose, Paul very clearly emerges the victor. Not only is Mauleverer unable to control his temper, but his face colours, strongly symbolic in a world of 'masks and faces'. And, of course, in a novel which urges the teaching and reforming, rather than the brutal 'correcting', of criminals, Paul's choice is equally symbolic.

And yet the criticism stemming from Paul's presence among those of high society does not rely simply on his superior mastery of their social codes. He is not a character purely in Pelham's mould, one who excels at the shallow intrigues of the fashionable, and whom, while concealing a true depth of character and revealing the inadequacies of such an outlook on life, is nevertheless apparently very much of this type. Despite Paul's initial motivation in adopting disguise as a means of participating in the greedy workings of the marital market-place, and despite the fact that he is always hiding his criminal identity, there is, paradoxically, a genuine harmony between his inner and outer selves. His bearing is that of the chivalrous, noble and self-controlled man: through his self-sacrificing intentions towards Lucy, through his loyalty in risking his own freedom in order to rescue his captured colleagues, and through his firm restraint of their more outrageous excesses, he shows that this is not merely a mask, but an accurate portrait of the real man. He appears to promote an ideal form of aristocratic or gentlemanly conduct, one in which the nobility of manner is far more than an exterior pose because it is allied to a genuine nobility of inner self. He retains the underlying values of honour, chivalry and loyalty that had originally been at the heart of the aristocratic identity, but which had been jettisoned by a group infected by the forces of the market, and in whom such values had simply become veils for more selfish intentions. As Christensen observes, the noble conduct of other characters are entirely divorced from their inner carnal desires:

Although capable of gallant speeches and theoretically devoted to high, aristocratic principles, the ageing Mauleverer really cares only for the pleasures of the table. His 'digestive organs [...] stood proxy for a heart,' and all conceivable evils are as nothing to the horrors of dyspepsia. He represents, moreover, an entire society that has effectively confused the soul [...] with the stomach.¹¹¹

By contrast, while Paul conceals his identity, he never conceals his character. In this sense he differs starkly from the more definitively dandiacal figure of Pelham and,

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp.69-70.

indeed, Brandon and Mauleverer, each of whose presented self, for better or for worse, is vastly different from his true character. Indeed, there is the sense that, as the novel progresses, it is Paul's criminal persona which becomes a forced pose rather than his role as society gentleman. He finds himself having to feign enthusiasm for criminal activity, to act a part during his revelries with the band of robbers. The following description becomes increasingly typical:

Clifford had sat gloomily looking on, during the operations of the robbers; he now, assuming a correspondent cheerfulness of manner, made a suitable reply, and after some general conversation, the work of division took place. (*PC*, III, 52)

His athleticism, his physical presence, even when he chooses to rely instead upon eloquence, also distances him from the effeminacy, the lethargy, the inactivity and anti-heroism that more typically serve as badges of the dandy. And in all these aspects he embodies the ideal not of the Regency dandy but the Victorian gentleman. Maginn's attack on the foppery and effeminacy of Pelham had led Bulwer to remove many such instances of Regency dandyism in later editions of that novel. Men of William IV's day, led by the writers at *Fraser's*, came to feel that England's salvation from the degeneracy of the Regency aristocracy, lay in the espousal of old-fashioned values of manliness.¹¹² During a period when 'the very fabric of society - the threads of tradition, duty and respect which had bound man to man - seemed to be unravelling, the chivalric and communal values discernible in past eras were especially appealing.'¹¹³ In many ways, in the figure of Paul, Bulwer appears to be responding to such a feeling by providing a more muscular and 'Victorian' version of Pelham. But, although Paul possesses the manliness, and lacks the more overt effeminacies and covert dissembling of the traditional dandy, he is nevertheless a criminal, and can, therefore, never fully represent the Victorian gentleman any more than he fully represents the Regency exclusive.

¹¹² See Moers, pp.174, 176.

¹¹³ Engel and King, p.11.

4. Corruption or Correction: Romantic Love and the Shaping of Self

I have concentrated in this chapter upon Bulwer's engagement in his novels with the impact of social institutions, theories and class assumptions upon the individual. I have charted the damage caused by the court and the prison, the hypocrisy of the respectable and the shallowness of the fashionable, the impersonal empiricism and moral relativism of misapplied Benthamite doctrine. And I have followed Bulwer's attempts to find solutions to such damage, whether it is the proper application of Benthamism, the urge towards Godwinian idealism, bourgeois domesticity or aristocratic chivalry. As this list suggests, Bulwer's notions both of what was wrong and how to put it right were jumbled, vacillatory, and frequently paradoxical. This was the result not only of his evolving thought from novel to novel, but his discomfort at a period whose changes genuinely provoked confusion within him. But there is a simultaneous current of influence ever-present in these novels - that of personal interaction with other individuals, and, in particular, romantic love.

In *Eugene Aram*, the power of the scholar's love for Madeline begins to draw him from his strict adherence to philosophical principle. It is a love which runs very much against his theories; but, as Bulwer observes, 'what theories ever resist love?' (*EA*, I, 251). Until the process of law cuts it short by effectively destroying both lovers, the gloomy pessimism of his world view is briefly replaced by a rekindled innocence and pleasure. Madeline's 'fairy hand' excites a 'sensation of delight [...] for the first time in his sterile and solitary life' (*EA*, I, 63). And, in doing so, it ignites a fresh awareness of his fellow man, a new optimism in the future, a benevolent awakening which suggests that theory is not the only path to human improvement and happiness:

He seemed to have resigned himself with confidence to the prospects of the future, and to have forsworn the haggard recollections of the past; he moved, and looked, and smiled like other men; he was alive to the little circumstances around him, and

no longer absorbed in the contemplation of a separate and strange existence within himself. (*EA*, III, 6)

Bulwer's belief in the potency of such an influence to effect happiness is evident from the penultimate page of the novel, in which he concludes that 'on those who do so love, I sometimes think, that, barring physical pain and extreme poverty, the ills of life fall with but idle malice' (*EA*, III, 305).

In *Paul Clifford*, it is ultimately not theory or philosophy which instil in Paul a sense of moral and social duty, but the random workings of the heart. The catalyst that triggers the change in the eponymous hero from carnivalesque criminal to noble and moral gentleman is his encounter with, and love for, Lucy Brandon. While an inherent nobility resides latent within him, it is his feeling for Lucy which brings such nobility fully to the fore:

He was one whom a real love was peculiarly calculated to soften and to redeem. The boldness, the candour, the unselfishness of his temper, were components of nature upon which affection invariably takes a strong and deep hold. Besides, Clifford was of an eager and aspiring turn; and the same temper and abilities which had in a very few years raised him in influence and popularity far above all the Chivalric band with whom he was connected, when once inflamed and elevated by a higher passion, were likely to arouse his ambition from the level of his present pursuits, and reform him, ere too late, into a useful, nay, even an honourable member of society. (*PC*, II, 188-89)

At the centre of this process is an authorial acceptance of the Godwinian faith in the perfectibility of man. It reflects a frequent feature of Bulwer's main male characters that, in varying degrees, they contain elements of both good and bad. Aram, Pelham and Clifford are obvious examples. But even a character like Houseman in *Eugene Aram* possesses a few redeeming qualities, and therefore the germ of perfectibility. And Brandon was not always such a demonic figure. Despite the belief in man's innate depravity which dictates the merciless nature of his judgements in court, we learn that his own sin was not original. In him was the potential, nearly realised, for good:

'I saw you, loved you, and life became to me a new object. Even now, as I write to you, all my bitterness, my pride, vanish; every thing I have longed for disappears: my very ambition is gone; I have no hope but for you, Julia, - beautiful, adored Julia; - when I love you, I love even my kind. Oh, you know not the power you possess over me. Do not betray it; you can yet make me all that my boyhood once dreamt; or you can harden every thought, feeling, sensation, into stone.'
(*PC*, II, 175-76)

The passage above demonstrates the importance of emotional attachments and personal relationships, in addition to institutional mechanisms, in shaping self. It implies too that there is a delicate balance between the germ of perfectibility and a coexistent germ of corruptibility. Paul and his father embody these competing potentialities; they signify the two possible selves of the same person. Throughout the novel, Brandon is presented as the anti-hero, the evil double of Paul. The judge recognised in his son 'elements of mind remarkably congenial to his own' (*PC*, III, 285). Where romance provokes moral reform in Paul, romance turned sour provokes a corresponding bitterness in Brandon:

'I cannot but mock myself when I think of the arch gull that this boy's madness, love, - love, indeed! - the very word turns me sick with loathing, - made of me. Had that woman, silly, weak, automatal as she is, really loved me, - had she been sensible of the unspeakable sacrifice I had made to her - (Anthony's was nothing to it - he lost a real world only; mine was the world of imagination.) - had she but condescended to learn my nature, to subdue the woman's devil at her own, I could have lived on in this babbling hermitage for ever, and fancied myself happy and resigned - I could have become a different being. I fancy I could have become what your moralists - (quacks!) - call "good."' (*PC*, III, 195-96)

Madeline and Lucy are able to exert an almost mystical influence over men staunch in their hostility to society and mankind. They represent 'a radical innocence and loving mercy, [...] a heavenly light and hope of pardon.'¹¹⁴ It is a purity which Eigner has identified as a regular feature of 'the metaphysical novel'. They each represent 'the household Virgin, the hearthside Madonna, the domestic angel', symbols of redeeming woman which carried spiritual connotations from periods of history and movements of

¹¹⁴ *Fiction of New Regions*, p.65.

thought which conflicted with modern rationalist thinking.¹¹⁵ In the same way, the woman of Brandon's past is the personification of Eve, the temptress whose betrayal brings about the young man's corruption. Love blighted can debase just as love reciprocated can elevate. Either way, Bulwer is keen to emphasise the importance of the immaterial, the metaphysical, in guiding character and action. Society and its institutions do not have a monopoly of influence. And perhaps, while he stumbled for a practical answer to the ills of society's systems of class and justice, Bulwer placed faith in the redemptive and benevolent influence of more personal and spiritual workings. In doing so, he was promoting a complex world view, which included the visionary, in opposition to a conception of the everyday promulgated by Locke and the materialists. And by extension, he was also promoting, at the expense of the increasingly popular realist strand of fiction, the fuller truth of the metaphysical novel's 'reality'.

As a novel of ideas, then, *Paul Clifford* is deeply ambiguous, unsatisfying, and frequently paradoxical. It has been described as the first of a type of fiction which took as its subject 'the grave problems which concerned the whole of society, discussed them in their entirety, and proposed formulas or vague aspirations for the total reform of human relations.'¹¹⁶ It is very clearly, and purposefully, reformist in aim and tone. It is critical of the inadequacies of the classification of prisoners, and of the law's emphasis upon silencing the prisoners' discourse. In this sense Bulwer appears a disciple of Bentham. And yet, in rejecting a reliance on 'fact', and Malthusian notions of social dynamics, like *Eugene Aram* it simultaneously undercuts the premises on which Benthamite theory is based. It foregrounds a parallel, ultimately irreconcilable, and considerably more threatening, theory of Godwinian utilitarianism. Its 'proposed formulas' for the 'reform of human relations' are confusing and contradictory. It appears at times strongly critical of the restrictive and prejudiced middle-class code,

¹¹⁵ Eigner, p. 120.

¹¹⁶ Cazamian, p. 65.

and yet concludes with its hero embracing an idealised form of bourgeois domesticity. It attacks the ways of the aristocratic and the fashionable while making Paul eminently fashionable himself and aristocratic of birth. It claims to represent the powerless poor, yet avoids giving Paul any recognisable working-class identity. It creates a character who embodies characteristics of the lower-class criminal, the Regency dandy, and the Victorian gentleman, and one who somehow straddles carnivalesque radicalism and Foucauldian restraint. Its plea for 'freedom' could as easily be that of the Whig aristocrat as the urban worker. It stresses the importance of social mechanisms in shaping character while showing the pervasive influence of personal and emotional encounters in doing the same. Generically it defies definitive categorisation, embracing elements of the silver-fork, the philosophical, the political, the social, the Romantic and the Victorian novel.

It is unsurprising that it was to prove contentious. Its ambiguities firmly reflected the ambiguities of the age. They were ambiguities which meant that the very stability of fact was under scrutiny. Bulwer's authorship was drawn into debates about factual representation in literature as well as law. More broadly it encompassed the friction between materialist and metaphysical philosophies, and the difficulties inherent in reconciling a practical legislature with the emotional and spiritual needs of the individual. It can also be seen to reflect the profound insecurities of the author himself, a man struggling to reconcile his own aristocratic sensibilities with his radical inclinations and his vocation as commercial writer. There was a very real sense in which his authorship and his radicalism were 'lawless' acts for a man of his background. The classless and protean characteristics of his criminal hero mirror a deep crisis of personal identity in Bulwer himself. Nevertheless, there are some features of the novel which simply cannot be explained in terms of social, political, philosophical, aesthetic or personal uncertainties. The presence of a literary critic, for instance, among a gang of robbers seems utterly nonsensical in a novel of social realism, regardless of its ambiguities or its metaphysical leanings. It is only by

recognising *Paul Clifford* as a site of simultaneous politicised struggle of a very different sort - between professional authors in the sphere of literary production - that such outstanding anomalies can be properly explained.

CHAPTER TWO

THIEVES AND THIEF-TAKERS: THE NEWGATE NOVEL, LITERARY SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE FIELD OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

During the opening chapter of *Paul Clifford*, Dummie Dunnaker is dispatched to find a bible with which to bless Paul's dying mother. He tries several houses in the neighbourhood, unsuccessfully, before returning from the butcher's with a bound book of plays which, because it looks like a bible, is regarded as eminently suitable. As with the legal framework challenged elsewhere in the novel, this episode shows the poor accepting symbolic imagery without considering its substance or content. The book itself is associated with sanctity and power in the minds of the lower-class occupants of the district. Why should this be the case? Very simply because, during the early 19th century, and certainly during the Regency period when *Paul Clifford* was set, books were still expensive luxuries.¹ A private library was a sign of significant wealth and, consequently, social power. Furthermore, because it was more profitable for publishers to target a small, wealthy readership, books were very much subject to the tastes of the fashionable. When the moneyed and elegant of 'society' discuss their opinions of literature in *Pelham*, they are, in a real sense, dictating the direction of literary output. The sphere of cultural production is shown to provide not only classificatory markers of economic prosperity for the upper classes, but sanctified symbols of social power. The monopoly of culture is, in the same way as the control of the political and spiritual spheres, intrinsic to the preservation of the hierarchical status quo.

¹ It was more profitable for publishers to target a small number of fashionable and wealthy readers than to endeavour to sell to a larger number of less affluent readers. 2,000 copies of a three-decker novel by Bulwer, costing over 31 shillings, would reap £300 for the publisher; but 200,000 copies of G. W. M. Reynolds' *Mysteries of London* (1845-46), costing a penny each, would garner only £83. See Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form. English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1850* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.4.

However, the vast changes during the period, the revolutions in social and political thinking, and in technology, did not bypass the cultural arena. Technological advances made it both cheaper to produce books, and, as a consequence, possible to consolidate advances in education by shifting from a body of literature written primarily for the wealthy élite, to one written for a new and broader reading public. It resulted, too, in a change in the hierarchy of genres, as the previous economic claims of poetry - a compact form which could be returned to repeatedly, and thereby justified its expense - lost their potency. Prose was no longer at a comparative disadvantage, and the periodical became the dominant literary format of the 1820s and 1830s.² This rapid change excited fresh debates about the nature of writing and of cultural production. While it is true that magazine editors and owners had been slowly eroding the grip of the aristocratic patron upon the author since the early 18th century, for the first time the dictates of the market-place could be seen to be the dominant influence. John has referred to 'what was nothing less than a revolution in publishing in the 1820s and 1830s'.³ Many felt that writing was suffering as it became more voluminous and thus more transient and less finely crafted. Texts like Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34) and Bulwer's *England and the English* gave vent to such concerns about penmanship. This conflict, and the aesthetic difficulties, compromises and pressures of writing for a newly expanded reading public, represents one of the features of the change from the Romantic to the modern. And the Newgate novels appeared at exactly this juncture in literary history, at the point of transfer from a fading system of sponsored production for the few to a system of significant commercial production for the many. They came while the foundations for modern literary output were being laid.

² Erickson, p.4.

³ *Cult Criminals*, I, p.xiii.

The heated discussions which this provoked, the very self-consciousness of the process of writing and the new status of the author, is evident within their pages. *Pelham* is the first book to adopt the 'fashionable' novel as a vehicle for the satirical portrayal of the upper classes, and its tale of pervasive and destructive aristocratic influence includes the upper-class monopoly upon literary production and definition of literary taste. *Paul Clifford*, I believe, can be regarded as the next step in this appraisal of cultural power relations and influence, and cultural change. While, as I have suggested, it demonstrates in the opening chapter the almost mystical grip that 'the book' held upon the minds of those of the lower classes, the unravelling of the plot includes challenges to this perceived sanctity. They are challenges evident in Ainsworth's *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard*, too. In this sense the portrayal of culture is to mirror that of the law; Paul's rebellion is directed as fiercely against the cultural as the legal and political establishments. Furthermore, the novel is not only a *tale* of rebellion against literary conformity. It is itself radical and rebellious, simultaneously a participant in, and product of, the contemporary literary changes taking place beyond the tale. As such, it draws parallels between the criminal hero and his author.

Pierre Bourdieu, in his extensive reappraisal of the forces at work in the production of culture, argues that novels are the result of continual, evolving struggles between the agents of literary production, between established, consecrated authors and their works, and 'young' - by which he means 'new', unestablished - writers attempting to claim a place within the field.⁴ By considering the Newgate novels in this light, we can more completely understand both the complex registers of the novels themselves, and the wider controversy in magazines and periodicals which is inseparable from their history and development. Some of these novels, as we saw in the previous chapter, participated in social debates over penal and legal reform and

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), especially chapters 1 and 2.

political vision. In this chapter we will see that they also reveal much both about the changing face of cultural production during the period and the dynamics involved in contemporary authorship.

The Newgate novels were not just threatening because of their potential to make criminals of apprentices, or revolutionaries of the lower classes. They were threatening because they were radical in a literary sense too. They were significant agents in the process of cultural change which was accompanying changes in the social and political hierarchies, with transformation from a punitive to a 'disciplined' society, the Chartist movement, and the 1832 Reform Bill. Their criminal heroes became instruments for reflecting and commenting upon all these changes, including the status of authorship in general, and of their authors - Bulwer, Ainsworth and Dickens - in particular. It is vital to recognise that the texts of the Newgate novels were not simply the *causes* of a controversy which raged beyond them in the pages of prefaces and periodicals, as critics have tended to suggest. On the contrary, they were lively participants in, and symptoms of, this heated debate about literary form, genre and professionalism. Only then can we see the Newgate novels for what they really were - expressions of keen literary competition, and allegories for authorship as well as essays of social realism.

This chapter will examine the ways in which literary 'issues' and the status of the author manifested themselves in the Newgate novels. It will establish first the justification for considering them in this light and departing from the more familiar critical analyses based upon issues of morality and politics. Next, it will propose that the works of Bulwer, especially, consciously engaged with, and helped to bring about, changes in the sphere of literary production. Finally, it will suggest that the status of 'young' authors at this historical moment led the Newgate authors to sense a peculiar, but very real, sense of kinship with the criminal heroes of their own tales.

1. The Newgate Novels and Literary Controversy

Modern studies of the sustained, and frequently bitter, controversy which accompanied the Newgate novels have typically decided that it was fuelled by politics, fears about the influence of such literature upon susceptible minds, and personal disputes. Bulwer's own son attributed the reaction against his father as a novelist to his liberal opinions and political ambitions.⁵ Hollingsworth noted that the radical and reformist flavour of *Paul Clifford*, the first Newgate novel, was not quickly forgotten, and coloured the reactions to subsequent criminal tales by Bulwer and others. He concluded that besides 'involving individual prejudices, which did much to sharpen controversy from beginning to end, the Newgate novel was opposed on both political and moral grounds.'⁶ John Sutherland has said that the attacks upon Bulwer in *Fraser's Magazine*, which often descended to personal insults and sly references to the author's marital difficulties, were 'ostensibly political'.⁷ Michael Sadleir has referred to the reviews as examples of 'Tory-cum-Grub Street' persecution.⁸ John writes that *Jack Sheppard* 'was seen as directly responsible for corrupting the young', and that it 'raised all sorts of questions about the responsibility of the artist for the moral effect of his/her work'.⁹ Ellis traces criticism by John Forster and Thackeray of Ainsworth's novel to petty jealousies.¹⁰ Wolff sees similar forces at work in the reaction against Bulwer, exacerbated by the author's background and personality:

He irritated them because he was an aristocrat, an extravagant spendthrift in his youth, a Byronic *poseur* who designed his own peculiar clothes, and spoke with his own peculiar brand of haughtiness, elegance and snobbishness, because he

⁵ 1st Earl of Lytton, II, 273.

⁶ Hollingsworth, pp.77, 223.

⁷ John Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1995), p.63.

⁸ Sadleir, I, 258-59.

⁹ *Cult Criminals*, I, pp.xxxix, liv.

¹⁰ Ellis, I, 371. Ellis believes that Forster, as the most intimate friend of Dickens, was unhappy that *Jack Sheppard* had eclipsed the fame of *Oliver Twist*; he believes that Thackeray was annoyed at the relative failure of *Catherine*, a satire of Newgate literature, which appeared at the same time as *Jack Sheppard*.

seemed to think himself better than other men and to be intolerably weary of ordinary life and ordinary people. He irritated them because he put himself into his books, and whatever he wrote was instantly successful, no matter how inferior the critics insisted it was. He irritated them because he was early made a Baronet for services to literature that they did not believe he had rendered, and because political success came easily. He irritated them - let us admit it - because they were jealous.¹¹

As for the authors' choice of crime as a subject for the novel, the broader social interest in the law at a time of reform, as well as the widespread fashion for reports on crime in newspapers during the 1820s, have frequently been cited as powerful motivating forces. Edmund Wilson has famously attributed more individual and personal reasons for Dickens's obsession with the criminal, seeing in it a form of self-identification which stemmed from the trauma of his own childhood.¹²

All these arguments are convincing, and are intrinsic to our understanding of the complex mix of influences which threw up the Newgate novels and the surrounding controversy. But the importance of the very process of literary production to this episode, the struggles between *new* authors and *new* magazines striving to achieve notice and acclamation among the field of established writers and publications, has largely been ignored. At times Hollingsworth hints at this dimension to the controversy; he observes at one point that the stated conviction of contemporary critics that these novels had 'a dangerous tendency' seemed to be the 'least of their motives.'¹³ However, he never satisfactorily suggests what these 'motives' might have been beyond the settling of personal or political scores; nor does he examine how the dynamics at work in the production of literature might have played a significant part. Matthew Whiting Rosa, while typically mentioning Bulwer's reformist tendencies, has also attributed antagonism towards him to his choice of publisher, Henry Colburn.¹⁴

¹¹ Wolff, pp.155-56.

¹² Edmund Wilson, 'Dickens: The Two Scrooges', in *The Wound and the Bow* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1941), pp.8-104 (pp.16-17).

¹³ Hollingsworth, p.98.

¹⁴ Matthew Whiting Rosa, *The Silver-Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding*

John, in her introductory overview of the Newgate novels, has come closer to looking beyond the surface of the dispute and locating the controversy within the contexts of contemporary publishing trends and individual theories of the novel.¹⁵ It is my contention that heightened awareness both of changes in the process of literary production and of the position of the 'young' author within the literary sphere were intrinsic in shaping the Newgate novels. Before examining this feature of the novels, it is vital to demonstrate that literary 'issues' - not just those of morality and politics - were key to the controversy itself.

The social and cultural theory of Bourdieu is useful as a framework for identifying and examining the impact that the dynamics of cultural production had upon the novels and the controversy. It is worth summarising here.¹⁶ Bourdieu's model of society divides it into various categories which he calls 'fields'. Within the broader 'field of power' (ie. the set of dominant power relations in society - in essence, the ruling classes), Bourdieu recognises various subordinate ones - the economic, the political, the educational, the cultural etc. In any given field, the agents occupying the diverse available positions compete for control of the interests or resources specific to that field. In the economic field, for example, agents will compete for economic capital by adopting different investment strategies using accumulated economic capital. However, the interests and resources of a field are not always material. In the cultural field, the power and authority being sought is often based upon recognition, consecration and prestige rather than economic capital. This represents a form of 'symbolic capital'. Bourdieu sees the field of cultural production as an 'economic world reversed', because economic success may actually prove an obstacle to receiving such

Vanity Fair (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p.88. Colburn's advertising methods were notoriously ruthless, and other publishers united in hatred of his innovations.

¹⁵ *Cult Criminals*, I, pp.v-lvii.

¹⁶ The following ideas can be found in Bourdieu, pp.2-122. See also his more recent collection, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (London: Polity Press, 1996).

symbolic power.¹⁷ The demonstration of apparent independence from the economic field is proof of one's adherence to the disinterested values which constitute the specific law of the literary field. Autonomy represents artistic sincerity - although, of course, autonomy is in reality never total because symbolic capital is only valuable, in the end, if it can be translated into real money. As a result, agents will often eschew those markers of success in other fields, and outwardly court low sales and low economic prosperity in order to attain high symbolic capital. Aspiring authors will break with prevailing artistic trends, appear to go against what is popular and profitable, and thereby prove their own authenticity. The accumulation of 'symbolic capital', through disavowing political or economic capital, provides a 'credit' which can guarantee economic prosperity in the long run. It provides the means of deriving profits from disinterestedness.

The cultural field itself consists of various positions occupied not only by producers (ie. writers or artists), but by those involved in the process of consecration and legitimation of the cultural products (ie. the public, publishers, critics, galleries, academies etc). The dynamic of the field is based upon the struggles between those occupying different positions; frequently this embodies a conflict between the orthodoxy of established traditions (represented by the 'old' authors, the consecrated) and heretical challenges to this orthodoxy (from striving, 'young' authors, the avant-garde). Bourdieu explains,

the process that carries works along is the product of the struggle among agents who, as a function of their position in the field, of their specific capital, have a stake in conservation, that is routine and routinization, or in subversion, ie. a return to sources, to an original purity, to heretical criticism, and so forth.¹⁸

At stake in these struggles is the authority to determine the legitimate definition of a literary work - in other words, the power to say with authority who are authorised to

¹⁷ Bourdieu, p.39.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.17.

call themselves writers, the power to consecrate producers or products (with prefaces, favourable reviews, prizes etc). For author, critic or publisher, the only legitimate accumulation of symbolic capital consists in making a name for oneself, a capital of consecration implying the power to consecrate persons or works, and therefore give them value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation. They must establish the worth of their own literary stance and opinion.

In order to make a mark, and get their particular literary stance noticed and accepted, young producers must alter the field so that they may claim places within it. They must gain recognition of their difference from the other producers around them, especially those who are already consecrated; they must push into the past those established authors who have an interest in eternalising the present. Previously dominant novels may, for example, be pushed into the status of outmoded or classic works.¹⁹ This means taking an advanced position ahead of those already occupied, effectively crossing the existing boundaries. It leads to the paradoxical attempt to seek respectability through transgression. Those in dominant positions exercise defensive strategies. They are attracted towards silence, discretion and secrecy. They are only drawn into expressing their orthodox discourse by the need to rectify the heresies of newcomers. The dominated producers must break the silence, challenge the unproblematic, and overturn the hierarchy of the field. But, while declaring their individuality, they cannot be different simply in the name of being different; they must not disturb the principles on which the field is based, and from which they hope ultimately to benefit. The classic strategy for ensuring this is the 'return to sources', which turns against the establishment the arms which they use to justify their

¹⁹ Of course, it is important to keep in mind the relative youth of the novel during the time that I am considering; the controversy was in part fuelled by uncertainty about the nature of the novel's influence. However, we can regard Walter Scott as a 'dominant' novelist, and the notion that novels should be realistic and moral the increasingly dominant theory. As Eigner notes, during the 1830s 'realism' was 'the only genre of fiction which both readers and critics would surely accept.' Eigner, pp.5-6.

domination - in the case of the Newgate novelists, for example, by suggesting that to prohibit crime as subject matter was unjustified, and harmful, when authors like Shakespeare had used crime for moral instruction.

In essence, then, Bourdieu draws attention to the struggles at the heart of cultural production, struggles which pit the established against the aspiring, and which require the 'young' authors to assert their own differences by adopting loud, transgressive stances in order to become established themselves. I believe that this theory has profound implications for a study of the Newgate controversy. And this is particularly the case because Bourdieu allies such acts of successful position-taking and literary rebellion with moments of historical change. He recognises that newcomers who reject the cycle of production as it exists, and bring dispositions and position-takings which challenge the prevailing norms, can only succeed with the help of external changes. These, he says, can be political breaks which change power relations within the cultural field, or deep-seated changes in the audience of consumers who, because of their affinity with the new producers, ensure the success of their products.²⁰ This observation would seem especially pertinent to the period in which the Newgate novels appeared.

Much of what Bourdieu says, of course, is not especially profound and is rooted in common sense. The value of his theory for this study, however, is that its examination of the dynamics at work in the production of culture serves to objectify the relationships of the agents within the cultural field. It allows us to look beyond what might otherwise seem an arbitrary series of personal disputes and personality clashes, and consider the extent to which the state of the literary field at this point contributed to, or even provided the spark for, the controversy. There are two ways in which I would depart from Bourdieu's model. First, he tends at times to exaggerate the

²⁰ Bourdieu, pp.57-58.

autonomy of the literary field - a tendency which is paradoxically both useful and dangerous in contemplating the Newgate novels. It is useful because it strips away some of the more obvious influences like politics and morality which can obscure the influence of the sphere of cultural production. It is dangerous because, in doing so, it can allow us to forget the importance nevertheless of these factors. It is vital to remember that, while the notion of the literary field by definition relies on a certain autonomy from economics and politics, it is never totally divorced from the other fields around it. I suggested in the first chapter, for example, that debates about the representation of reality in literature paralleled and responded to debates about the representation of reality in the law courts. The magazines and authors each had political allegiances which impacted upon their stance - in this sense, the conflict between Thackeray and Bulwer could be defined as Toryism versus liberalism. My argument, however, rests upon recognising that the argument was more complex than this, and that such allegiances did not wholly dictate the direction or nature of the argument (although they played a part).

Second, and in a related sense, the exaggeration of the literary field's autonomy can lead to the assumption that disputes and position-takings of different authors at different historical periods are somehow all the same. I believe that, on the contrary, the Newgate controversy was a unique one, and impelled by a unique set of circumstances. Not only were the 1820s and 1830s years consumed by a fever for reform, particularly of the law and of Parliament, but they witnessed a sudden growth in the literary market-place. The novel was an emerging form, and its influence on a broader and potentially unstable readership unknown. The criminal was a pertinent symbol for addressing socio-political issues; he gave expression to paradoxical feelings both of injustice at an unreformed system, and of discomfort at a reformatory spirit which demanded rejection of Romantic individualism and idealism; he irritated the sensibilities of a middle class anxious to consolidate its new social influence; and he possessed a number of parallels with the transitional free-for-all of English letters, both

in the defiant and 'lawless' stance of a new class of professional authors, and in the status of the 'outsider', the fledgling author, struggling against a system which was weighted against him. The theme of criminality in the novel resonated in a way that it never had before and never could again. I will draw upon Bourdieu's theory and the other ideas detailed above at several points during the course of this chapter. We must first, however, chart the bare bones of the Newgate controversy, establishing the key figures in, and their contributions to, an affair which raged for over a decade.

In broad terms, although the dispute continued throughout the 1830s and early 1840s, it peaked at three main points during these years: following the publication of Bulwer's *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram*, in 1830 and 1832 respectively; on the appearance of *Jack Sheppard* by Ainsworth in 1839, when Dickens's *Oliver Twist* was also dragged into the debate; and in the early 1840s, when, despite the appearance of Bulwer's *Night and Morning* and Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* in 1841, the argument remained primarily concentrated upon the works of the previous decade, and included Dickens's robust defence of *Oliver Twist* in his preface to the third edition of the novel.²¹

The controversy opened in 1830 with an unseemly campaign against *Paul Clifford* in *Fraser's Magazine*. It was sparked by a hastily written 'Dedicatory Epistle' to the novel in which Bulwer railed against the arrogance and jealousy of the Scotch,

²¹ For a comprehensive survey of the controversy, see Hollingsworth, chapters 4, 5 and 6. Although the disputes in the press continued into the middle of the 1840s, they expressed only token objections to the crime novels of this period. *Night and Morning* was a fairly straight romance, and its portrayal of crime occupied only a small portion of the tale. It did not make crime or the criminal the central focus of the story as in *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram*, and excited little concern among reviewers. *Lucretia*, published at the end of 1846, put poisoners in the foreground, but never came close to empathising with these characters. These novels are vastly different from the novels of the 1830s, reflecting the work of a more established and mature author; the criticism they did attract was the result of lingering antagonism to Bulwer's earlier works.

and labelled literary critics as 'the Great Unwashed' (*PC*, I, p.xviii).²² This outburst had come in reaction to an article upon fashionable novels in *Fraser's* which had strongly criticised *Pelham*.²³ However, the unfavourable portrayal of reviews and reviewers also formed a significant part of the tale itself. The character of MacGrawler appeared as a greedy, selfish and inadequate critic writing for a pompous and unsuccessful periodical called the *Asinaeum*. Bulwer had received harsh treatment from the *Athenaeum* in the past, and the name of the fictitious magazine was doubtless his response. MacGrawler represented a vicious caricature of William Maginn, the Irish editor of *Fraser's*, and also aimed a blow at John G. Lockhart and *Blackwood's Magazine*, which had called Bulwer a 'charlatan'.²⁴ Hollingsworth comments that the portrayal of MacGrawler must have originally stemmed from a personal quarrel with Maginn beyond the pages of the reviews because Bulwer would not have had time to insert the character after the first appearance of *Fraser's* in 1830.²⁵ I would argue, of course, that its true nature lay in the logic of the cultural field at a specific historical moment, that ultimately it was impelled by literary, rather than personal, rivalry. Either way, it signalled the beginning of over a decade of attacks upon Bulwer in the magazine which continued even after Maginn had ceased his editorship in 1836.

An article appeared in June 1830 which purported to review all of Bulwer's novels. In reality it was a sustained and intense assault upon his writing style, his literary ambitions, his class (and particularly his supposed condescension towards the

²² The promise of a good salary attracted many young Scottish graduates to journalism in England. There was a perception that Scots were dominating many of the London journals, holding positions from editor downwards. See 1st Earl of Lytton, II, 249.

²³ 'Fashionable Novels: *The Dominie's Legacy*', *Fraser's Magazine*, 1 (April 1830), 318-35.

²⁴ '*The Five Nights of St Albans*', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 26 (October 1829), 561-66 (p.562). For the similarities between MacGrawler and Maginn, see Hollingsworth, p.79.

²⁵ Hollingsworth, p.80.

middle classes), the morality of his works, and even his personality and appearance.²⁶

Of *Paul Clifford*, the reviewer (who was certainly Maginn) said,

[T]his is no Novel - It is not true to life in its *slang* phraseology - being sadly jumbled up with the orthoepy of higher spheres of society. Its moral is reprehensible to even the extremest degree of reprehension, inasmuch as it wants poetical justice; for his principal character, after a life which, fifty times over, should have ended under 'Tyburn tree' is made happy in the end, as though he had been the most virtuous of mankind.²⁷

When *Eugene Aram* emerged, two years later, *Fraser's* continued in a similar vein, attacking the author's class, and crudely linking his own morality with that of his lawless characters:

When the author of *Pelham* affects to describe refined feelings and distinguished society, he forthwith labours and becomes overstrained; but among thieves and blackguards - in the tap, the ken, the hedge-row pot-house - in the purlieus of the Minories and Whitechapel, he writes with an easy felicity of phrase that betokens an intimate acquaintance with the scenes described [...]. [W]e dislike altogether this awakening sympathy with interesting criminals, and wasting sensibilities on the scaffold and the gaol. It is a modern, a depraved, a corrupting taste.²⁸

It is interesting to note that later criticism of Bulwer in the same periodical would equally deny his scenes of low life any authority on the grounds that he was entirely *unfamiliar* with such classes of society.²⁹ It is indicative of a determination on the part of *Fraser's* to strike him at every opportunity, and to pay little regard to consistency in

²⁶ *Fraser's* was fervently Tory in outlook, and one of the professed aims of the magazine was a defence of the middle class, and the destruction of exclusivism and the dandiacal pose. As a liberal, even radical, thinker, and an extravagant aristocrat, Bulwer was a prime target. See Moers, pp.167-76.

²⁷ 'Mr Edward Lytton Bulwer's Novels: and Remarks on Novel-Writing', *Fraser's Magazine*, 1 (June 1830), 509-32 (p.530).

²⁸ 'A Good Tale Badly Told by Mr Edward Lytton Bulwer', *Fraser's Magazine*, 5 (February 1832), 107-13 (p.110).

²⁹ 'Horae Catnachianae: a Dissertation on Ballads', *Fraser's Magazine*, 19 (April 1839), 407-24 (p.407).

the process.³⁰ Later in the year a fictional parody of *Eugene Aram*, probably by Maginn and Lockhart, appeared in two issues of the publication.³¹ It professed to be by an aspiring author who, after being repeatedly rejected by publishers, had determined to glean from Bulwer's work the secret of achieving popular success. Discarding the noble and crafted method he had previously adopted, the anonymous writer learns instead to choose low subject matter, to use a stilted and unrealistic writing style, and to attack society's mechanisms:

I had hitherto sought to give an agreeable view of life, to inspire contented dispositions towards existing institutions of society [...]. [N]othing can be more painful than the recollections that remain after the perusal of your volumes, in which 'whatever is' is sneered at as being wrong, and nothing is eulogised but 'what is *not*.'³²

In the same month the magazine included a portrait of Bulwer as part of its series, a 'Gallery of Literary Characters'. Inevitably the accompanying words were far from complimentary, urging him to 'give up his "affectations"' and 'learn to believe, that to be a Garrick Club dandy is not one of the highest objects of human ambition'.³³

³⁰ This is, of course, also indicative both of the tension between the theory of realist fiction and middle-class notions of morality, and of the struggle by a young author, Thackeray, to draw attention to his own name as well as that of the magazine. I will discuss this in due course.

³¹ 'Elizabeth Brownrigge, a Tale; Dedicated to the Author of *Eugene Aram, a Novel*', *Fraser's Magazine*, 6 (August 1832), 67-88; 6 (September 1832), 131-48. There appears to be some disagreement as to the authorship of this parody. For attributions to Thackeray, see *Fiction of New Regions*, p.227 and Lewis Melville, *The Life of William Makepeace Thackeray* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.62-63. For attributions to Maginn and Lockhart, see Tyson, p.96 and Miriam M. H. Thrall, *Rebellious 'Fraser's': Nol Yorke's Magazine in the Days of Maginn, Thackeray, and Carlyle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), p.64. For attribution to John Hamilton Reynolds, see Michael Clarke, 'A Mystery Solved: Ainsworth's Criminal Romances Censured in *Fraser's* by J. Hamilton Reynolds, not Thackeray', *Victorian Periodical Review*, 23 (1990), 50-54.

³² *Fraser's Magazine*, 6 (August 1832), 67. There is a certain irony in the fact that, according to Bourdieu's theory of the avant-garde, it is indeed necessary for a young author to set himself in opposition to 'whatever is'. This chapter will suggest that this satire, for all its sarcasm, perhaps unconsciously realised the peculiar demands governing the role of the author at this historical moment.

³³ 'Gallery of Literary Characters (No. XXVII): Edward Lytton Bulwer, Esq.',

Reviews in other periodicals were mixed, but, where they were critical, they were not personally insulting. The *Athenaeum* found *Paul Clifford* humourless, and decried the inclusion of characters based upon real people.³⁴ It saw genius in *Eugene Aram*, but found the material unsuitable, and wished that the book had not been written.³⁵ The *Edinburgh Review* found Aram unconvincing as a man who would commit murder for monetary gain.³⁶ Some articles were even favourable. The *Examiner*, for example, said that *Paul Clifford* 'abounds in pointed applications to politics and morals, and the satire is ever in the right direction.'³⁷ It is, of course, quite probable that this magazine enjoyed seeing its rivals ridiculed - its reference to well-directed satire would certainly suggest so. The *Examiner* was a radical journal, and attacks upon the editor of a Tory competitor would have been relished.³⁸ Although I have chosen to focus upon the literary field in this chapter, such a reaction shows the impossibility of wholly divorcing political and literary rivalry. It also highlights the importance of recognising that the Newgate novels were being read allegorically as well as 'realistically'.

In essence, therefore, the outraged and scornful tone which enveloped the early Newgate novels was largely aroused and directed by *Fraser's*. This probably accounts for the comparatively tame reception of Ainsworth's *Rookwood* in 1834. Ainsworth had been associated with *Fraser's* from the periodical's outset - he was present at the

Fraser's Magazine, VI (August 1832), 112.

³⁴ *Athenaeum*, 15 May 1830, pp.289-30. Its review was remarkably temperate considering it had been one of Bulwer's satirical targets.

³⁵ *Athenaeum*, 7 January 1832, pp.3-5.

³⁶ 'Mr Bulwer's Novels - *Eugene Aram*', *Edinburgh Review*, 55 (April 1832), 208-19, (p.213).

³⁷ *Examiner*, 20 June 1830, p.387.

³⁸ For a description of the *Examiner's* radical background - including the imprisonment of Leigh Hunt, its editor until 1821, for an attack upon the Prince Regent - see Josephine Bauer, *The London Magazine 1820-29* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1953), pp.36-37.

very first of the notorious Fraserian dinners - and this ensured that his novel, which included Dick Turpin as a prominent character, was praised in its pages.³⁹ For a magazine with an aggressively middle-class outlook, it probably also helped that Ainsworth was of a solid middle-class background. Unsurprisingly, the reviewer (who Ellis identifies as Thackeray) used the article to condemn Bulwer yet again.⁴⁰ He wrote,

With Mr Ainsworth all is natural, free, and joyous: with Mr Bulwer all is forced, constrained, and cold. Ainsworth is always thinking of - or rather with his hero: Bulwer is always thinking of himself.⁴¹

The *Examiner*, which had so enjoyed the satire in *Paul Clifford*, again adopted a contrary stance by comparing Ainsworth unfavourably with Bulwer. It wrote,

The author has, we suspect, been misled by the example and success of 'Paul Clifford', but in 'Paul Clifford' the thieves and their dialect serve for illustration, while in 'Rookwood' the highwayman and his slang are presented as if in themselves they had some claim to admiration.

The reviewer concluded that there 'are people who may like this sort of thing, but we are not of the number'.⁴² The *Quarterly Review* objected to the novel's 'odious slang', which it felt was 'vulgar' and 'as false as base'.⁴³

But it was five years later, with the notorious tale of a young apprentice's escapes from prison in the 18th century, that Ainsworth was to feel the true sting of reviewers' criticisms.⁴⁴ The *Athenaeum* said that *Jack Sheppard* was 'a bad book, and

³⁹ For an account of Ainsworth's participation at this and subsequent Fraserian dinners, see Ellis, I, 222-28.

⁴⁰ Ellis, I, 259.

⁴¹ 'High-ways and Low-ways; or Ainsworth's Dictionary, with notes by Turpin', *Fraser's Magazine*, 9 (June 1834), 724-38 (p.724).

⁴² *Examiner*, 18 May 1834, p.308.

⁴³ 'Miss Edgeworth's *Helen*, Mr Morier's *Ayesha*', *Quarterly Review*, 51 (June 1834), 481-93 (p.483).

⁴⁴ The furore that this novel provoked was in large part due to its immediate

what is worse, it is one of a class of bad books, got up for a bad public.' It was revolted that the hero

is involved in a melo-dramatic story of motiveless crime and impossible folly, connected with personages of high degree; and an attempt is made to invest Sheppard with good qualities, which are incompatible with his character and position.⁴⁵

The *Standard* referred to its 'almost endless rubbish, balderdash, twaddle, and vulgarity'.⁴⁶ Forster, in the *Examiner*, said that the book was 'in every sense of the word so bad and has been recommended to circulation by such disreputable means' that he felt obliged to speak out against it. He was particularly wary of the novel's ubiquitous character, of the 'adaptations of the "romance" that are alike rife in the low smoking rooms, the common barbers' shops, the cheap reading places, the private booksellers', and the minor theatres.⁴⁷ This concern was revived in 1840 when the murder of Lord William Russell by his servant, Courvoisier, was attributed in some quarters to the influence of Ainsworth's book. Indeed, there were very few prepared to defend it. Even *Bentley's*, the periodical which originally ran *Jack Sheppard*, was to turn against the author of its highly profitable serial.⁴⁸

transferral to the stage, as we will see in the next chapter.

⁴⁵ *Athenaeum*, 26 October 1839, p.803.

⁴⁶ *Standard*, 29 October 1839, p.1. The charge of 'vulgarity' is an interesting one. The aristocratic class of Bulwer, the original Newgate novelist, meant that such insults less readily found their mark. It allowed the Newgate genre to thrive in a way it may not have done if it had originated in the work of an author of a lower social class. It also allowed Bulwer to present his parallel narrative, his allegory of authorial self-identification with the criminal, more overtly - certainly than Dickens.

⁴⁷ *Examiner*, 3 November 1839, p.691. This review must have been especially painful for Ainsworth. He, Forster and Dickens had been inseparable friends for several years before a falling out early in 1839. Ellis believes that Forster was also annoyed that sales of *Jack Sheppard* had exceeded those of *Oliver Twist*. See Ellis, I, 274, 358-59.

⁴⁸ This was mainly due to an earlier quarrel between Richard Bentley and George Cruikshank, one of the illustrators of his magazine. Cruikshank subsequently joined *Ainsworth's Magazine*, which was launched in February 1842, and triggered a venomous feud between the two journals. See Ellis, II, 3-33.

The most vehement and repeated critic of the Newgate novel during 1839 and 1840 was Thackeray. After Maginn's withdrawal from *Fraser's* in 1836, Thackeray took his place as the leading opponent of Newgate literature in general, and Bulwer in particular.⁴⁹ The attacks began with 'Horae Catnachianae: a Dissertation upon Ballads', which derided the presentation of crime to the middle classes by authors like Bulwer, Dickens and Ainsworth who had no experience or knowledge of the world they described. Referring to *Paul Clifford* and *Oliver Twist*, Thackeray wrote that Bulwer

never had half an hour's conversation with the thieves, cut-throats, old clothesmen, prostitutes, or pickpockets, described; nor can the admirable Boz be expected to have had any such experience.⁵⁰

By contrast, he said, Fielding had experienced low-life haunts at firsthand; and Catnach's ballads were more realistically representative of the true vulgarity of vice. In the following month's issue the opening installment of Thackeray's *Catherine* appeared, released to coincide with *Jack Sheppard* which was being serialised in *Bentley's Miscellany*. It was, like 'Elizabeth Brownrigge' had been, a parody of the contemporary taste for crime literature. Its aim, however, was more radical and ambitious - 'to make readers so horribly horrified as to cause them to give up, or rather throw up the book and all of its kind'.⁵¹ With this in mind, Thackeray had chosen Catherine Hayes from the *Newgate Calendar*, a woman executed in 1726 for the callous and brutal murder of her husband. As well as elaborately satirising the various writing styles of the Newgate authors, he interjected at various points to express his objections to specific novels. He insisted that authors had a duty to

⁴⁹ Between 1837 and 1840, approximately a third of Thackeray's contributions to *Fraser's* contained derogatory references to Bulwer. Hollingsworth, p.150.

⁵⁰ *Fraser's Magazine*, 19 (April 1839), 407.

⁵¹ William Makepeace Thackeray, *Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, ed. by Gordon N. Ray, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), I, 432-33.

paint such thieves as they are: not dandy, poetical, rosewater thieves; but real downright scoundrels, leading scoundrelly lives, drunken, profligate, dissolute, low; as scoundrels will be. They don't quote Plato, like Eugene Aram; or live like gentlemen, and sing the pleasantest ballads in the world, like Jolly Dick Turpin; [...] or die white-washed saints, like poor 'Biss Dadsy' in 'Oliver Twist'. No, my dear madam, you and your daughters have no right to admire and sympathise with any such persons, fictitious or real; you ought to be made cordially to detest, scorn, loathe, abhor, and abominate all people of this kidney.⁵²

Thackeray's original aim was unsuccessful; *Jack Sheppard* was enormously popular. And, indeed, the author admitted privately that he had found it more difficult than he had imagined to depict his leading character realistically, that he had nurtured 'a sneaking kindness for his heroine, and did not like to make her utterly worthless.'⁵³ But for the second time he had numbered Dickens among those of the Newgate school.

The immediate reviews of *Oliver Twist* had been almost entirely favourable, and had certainly avoided the sort of criticisms levelled at Bulwer and Ainsworth.⁵⁴ Its morality and fidelity were largely applauded. The *Edinburgh Review*, for example, felt that Dickens

never endeavours to mislead our sympathies - to pervert plain notions of right and wrong - to make vice interesting in our eyes [...]. His vicious characters are just what experience shows the average to be.⁵⁵

The *Quarterly Review* expressed some reservations comparable in tone to those of Thackeray. Praising the natural character of Dickens's novel, it nevertheless felt that the material should not have been written, and that 'youth should not even suspect the

⁵² William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, 13 vols (London: Smith and Elder, 1898-99), IV, 555-56.

⁵³ Thackeray, *Letters and Private Papers*, I, 433.

⁵⁴ Chittick, p.127. See also Kathryn Chittick, *The Critical Reception of Charles Dickens, 1833-1841* (New York: Garland, 1989).

⁵⁵ 'Dickens's Tales', *Edinburgh Review*, 68 (October 1838), 75-97 (pp.77-78). See also *Athenaeum*, 17 November 1838, pp.824-25, and *Examiner*, 18 November 1838, p.723, and 25 November 1838, pp.740-41.

possibility of such hidden depths of guilt.⁵⁶ In his most direct critique of Dickens's method, in an essay of August 1840 describing the execution of Courvoisier entitled 'Going to See a Man Hanged', Thackeray wrote,

Boz, who knows life well, knows that his Miss Nancy is the most unreal fantastical personage possible; no more like a thief's mistress than one of Gessner's shepherdesses resembles a real country wench. He dare not tell the truth concerning such young ladies. They have, no doubt, virtues like other human creatures; nay, their position engenders virtues that are not called into exercise among other women. But on these an honest painter of human nature has no right to dwell; not being able to paint the whole portrait, he has no right to present one or two favourable points as characterising the whole: and therefore, in fact, had better leave the picture alone altogether.⁵⁷

Thackeray's argument rested upon both the unreality of Dickens's portrayal of vice, and upon the simultaneous feeling that the accurate portrayal of vice was unsuitable for fiction. Dickens, therefore, erred on two counts - in depicting crime unrealistically, and in depicting crime at all.⁵⁸

The apparently paradoxical nature of this argument depends upon a friction at the heart of the theory of 'realist' fiction, and is a clue to one of the 'literary' issues which framed the controversy. As I discussed in the Introduction, 'the criteria which dominated the consideration of narrative prose fiction [were that] a novel be true to life, probable, based on experience; and that it be moral.'⁵⁹ Such a theory attempted to reconcile broader moral beliefs and anxieties - becoming increasingly prevalent with the growing influence of the middle classes - and the considerations of literary

⁵⁶ 'Oliver Twist', *Quarterly Review*, 54 (June 1839), 83-102 (p.88).

⁵⁷ *Fraser's Magazine*, 22 (August 1840), 150-58 (p.158).

⁵⁸ Hollingsworth has noted a paradox at the heart of Thackeray's attitude to literature, one in which he struggles to reconcile his instinctive feeling that '[i]f truth is not always pleasant, at any rate truth is best', with his middle-class sense that literature should be subservient to 'incensed public propriety'. The external controversy paralleled an internal debate within Thackeray himself - the question of truth versus the inhibition of truth. See Hollingsworth, pp.161-64.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Eigner, p.6.

aesthetics. Thackeray needed to marry his keen moral sensibilities as a middle-class man with his quest for artistic integrity (and autonomy) as an author. This presented real difficulties when the criminal was the subject, and these difficulties are reflected in Thackeray's criticisms of *Oliver Twist*. The authors of the Newgate school, to a greater or lesser degree, avoided such paradoxes because they were less tied to the realist theory of the novel. As we will see in due course, Ainsworth embraced romance, and aimed at entertainment rather than moral instruction. Bulwer attempted what he termed the 'metaphysical' novel, one which strove for truth and moral elevation, but not through mimetic realism. For him, the novel did not have to be probable; on the contrary, it could wander 'from the exact probability of effects', and invest 'itself in a dim and shadowy allegory'.⁶⁰

Dickens's response to such criticism came in a preface to the third edition of *Oliver Twist* in 1841. In it he was keen to stress the morality of his tale. He wrote that he saw no reason 'why the dregs of life (so long as their speech did not offend the ear) should not serve the purpose of a moral'. He was keen similarly to distance himself from other novelists who he felt merited approbation and the 'Newgate' tag:

I had read of thieves by scores; seductive fellows (amiable for the most part), faultless in dress, plump in pocket, choice in horse-flesh, bold in bearing, fortunate in gallantry, great at a song [...] and fit companions for the bravest [...]. It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really did exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery of their lives [...] would be to attempt a something which was needed, and which would be a service to society.⁶¹

⁶⁰ 'On the Different Kinds of Prose Fiction', pp.viii-ix.

⁶¹ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, intro. by J. Hillis Miller (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p.xxxi. This need to distinguish himself from the more common literature of Newgate is reminiscent of Bulwer's preface to a new edition of *Eugene Aram* the previous year. He stated that his novel was 'wholly distinct' from the 'literature of Newgate and the Hulks.' *Eugene Aram*, The New Knebworth Edition, p.11.

Significantly, he was to applaud Bulwer's 'wider aims'; however, he failed to accord Ainsworth similar praise. Indeed, his reference to criminals 'great at a song' seemed specifically to place *Rookwood* among those lesser novels from which Dickens was distancing himself. Finally, he was keen to stress the 'truth' of his novel:

It has been observed of Nancy that her devotion to the brutal housebreaker does not seem natural [...]. It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE. Every man who has watched these melancholy shades of life, must know it to be so [...]. I am glad to have had it doubted, for in that circumstance I should find a sufficient assurance (if I wanted any) that it needed to be told.⁶²

This concluding passage was deliberately aimed at rejecting the charges of the young Thackeray.

These, then, were the main points of the controversy. Ostensibly they did revolve around issues of the novels' moral influence upon readers, and around political and personal differences. Issues of class also played their part; indeed, they were vital in understanding the peculiar strength of Thackeray's objections to Dickens and Bulwer. Thackeray was to continue his acidic satire against effeminate aristocrats, a regular feature of *Fraser's*, long after he had left the magazine. Sutherland feels that the association of baronets with moral depravity in early works like *The Snobs of England* (1846-47) and *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) was probably directed at Bulwer.⁶³ The backgrounds of the four authors entangled in the controversy are of importance and interest. There is the suggestion that the novelists and the critic were divided from each other in one sense by the emotional attachments of three different classes. Thackeray, Ainsworth and Dickens were all linked in some way with the legal

⁶² *Oliver Twist*, p.xxxiii. It is possible that Dickens's firm assertion that the characters of Sikes and Nancy were 'true' was because they were based upon two people he had met when working for the *Morning Chronicle*, and whom he later included in a sketch called 'The Hospital Patient'. See *Sketches by Boz*, p.243.

⁶³ *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers*, p.63.

profession.⁶⁴ However, Hollingsworth has observed that the solicitor's clerk, Dickens, by birth not far removed from the servant class, and the landowning and aristocratic Bulwer, would have understood each other well.⁶⁵ Ainsworth, too, though himself of the professional classes as a qualified solicitor, enjoyed the trappings and pose of the dandy's lifestyle. Henry Vizetelly wrote that he 'was somewhat of a fop in dress [...] and made an unnecessary display of the many rings he wore'.⁶⁶

Thackeray, on the other hand, was a failed barrister, and to him Bulwer 'seemed an anachronism in the republic of letters and his books an extravagant denial of middle-class taste and judgement'.⁶⁷ It is quite feasible to argue that Bulwer's aristocratic background ensured that the Newgate novel could flourish. His upper-class roots perhaps shielded it from serious accusations of vulgarity, from charges of 'cockneyism', to which it may have been prone had, say, Dickens written *Paul Clifford*. Ellis believed that much of the outcry against *Jack Sheppard* was due to the fact that the hero was a cockney Englishman; one presumes that the outcry would have been far louder and more harmful if the same accusation could have been levelled at the authors themselves.⁶⁸ The fact is that Bulwer's credentials allowed others to follow. They also provided one reason for Thackeray's middle-class sensibilities to revolt against a school of the novel that had its origins in his work. The backgrounds of the authors also affected their starting positions, the melodramatic logic of their cultural challenges, and can account for differences in the tone of their narratives. Why would Bulwer find himself identifying with working-class heroes? Because as well as the

⁶⁴ Sutherland has shown that one in five male Victorian novelists was a lawyer, usually a failed barrister. He suggests that this may have been due to the close proximity of the Inns of Court to Fleet Street - journalism was often a transitional profession between law and novel writing. See *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers*, p. 162.

⁶⁵ Hollingsworth, p. 224.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Ellis, I, 262

⁶⁷ Hollingsworth, p. 224.

⁶⁸ Ellis, I, 380.

feelings of discomfort for one of a naturally Romantic temperament at this transitional historical moment, and his political sense of dislocation which I referred to in Chapter 1 (embraced fully neither by Whigs nor radicals), he was also experiencing 'a very personal sense of alienation'.⁶⁹ His marriage to Rosina Wheeler against the wishes of his mother had meant that for a significant period of his early career he had had to struggle, without an allowance, as a hack writer in order to support himself and his wife financially. His home became a 'manufactory of mere pot-boilers', and the incessant 'industrious slavery' put considerable strains upon his relationship with Rosina, strains which would eventually lead to acrimonious separation.⁷⁰ He could readily identify with the outsider's status. He could also, however, more blatantly play upon this criminal identification because of his background; the less likely the analogy between author and criminal, the more directly the parallel could be drawn. And thus *Paul Clifford* can open up a set of thoughts about criminality as a metaphor for literary endeavour in a way which the works of Ainsworth and Dickens can not. These authors do not have the same social distance from their subjects, and so must be reticent - though still suggestive - to avoid being seen as 'cockney' upstarts.

With Bourdieu's theory in mind, certain characteristics of the controversy suggest a particular justification for an interpretation on literary grounds. The first feature to note is that the loudest voices in the dispute were those of 'young' magazines, editors and authors. *Fraser's*, the main opponent of the Newgate novelists, was in the virgin year of its launch - its opening number appeared in February 1830. Maginn courted controversy from the outset. His early offensive against Grantley Berkeley, and the novel *Berkeley Castle*, led to a violent assault upon James Fraser, the publisher of the magazine, and a duel between Maginn and Berkeley.⁷¹ *Fraser's* was not alone in creating uproar on its appearance. In 1817 the first issue of

⁶⁹ Engel and King, p.41.

⁷⁰ Escott, pp.133-35.

⁷¹ Ellis, I, 226-28.

Blackwood's Magazine, whose waspish methods of criticism Maginn was emulating, had included an allegorical attack upon the *Edinburgh Review* which led to a series of lawsuits.⁷² Josephine Bauer wrote that it made the magazine 'famous throughout the country', and that the early years were marked by 'sensationalism and scurrility'.⁷³ This included a vicious dispute with John Scott, the editor of *Baldwin's London Magazine*, which resulted in a duel, and Scott's death.⁷⁴ However, as Bauer significantly comments, *Blackwood's* was later to become more 'distinguished and respectable'.⁷⁵

Ainsworth's Magazine started in similar mood with a vitriolic attack upon *Bentley's Miscellany* which resulted in a battle between the two magazines lasting several months. Like *Bentley's*, *Ainsworth's* was aimed at those readers who could not afford or enjoy the major reviews, and avoided their seriousness by providing entertainment in the form of fiction, light verse and song. It also, like *Bentley's*, featured illustrations prominently.⁷⁶ While, as I have suggested, the dispute was in part fuelled by differences between Bentley and Cruickshank, it also points up the specifically literary nature of such quarrels. *Ainsworth's* was intruding upon *Bentley's* position within the literary field. It also, however, did neither magazine any harm. Ellis comments that 'all London was interested in the progress of this literary combat'.⁷⁷ Interestingly, Hollingsworth recognises the role of purposeful and shrewd editorial

⁷² Indeed, it was the mellowing of *Blackwood's*, as it became settled, which led to Maginn seeking a journal of his own. He had been a contributor to *Blackwood's* until his articles became too 'bold' and the connection was severed. See Thrall, p.4.

⁷³ Bauer, pp.52-55.

⁷⁴ See John Sutherland, *The Life of Walter Scott* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp.241-43 for an account of this affair. It is interesting to note that the roots of the controversy were in the campaign in *Blackwood's* against Leigh Hunt and the 'Cockney School of Poetry'. There is a difference between the attacks on the Cockney and Newgate schools, however. Bulwer's background, as I have mentioned, negated assaults on the grounds of the 'lowness' of the author. Instead, the controversy was about a more subtle relation between the author and his subject.

⁷⁵ Bauer, p.55.

⁷⁶ *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals 1824-1900*, ed. by Walter E. Houghton, 5 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), III, 5.

⁷⁷ Ellis, II, 23.

sensationalism in this episode although, as I have suggested, he fails to attribute to it a position of prominence in the Newgate controversy as a whole. He writes that 'two great magazine successes, *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's*, had begun with personalities and continued with quarrels - and *Ainsworth's Magazine* by the same means got itself talked about.'⁷⁸ Bulwer himself opened his period as editor of the *New Monthly Magazine* with an essay attacking the quality of literary criticism in the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviews, thereby questioning the legitimacy and authority of these 'old' publications.⁷⁹ There are, therefore, strong reasons for seeing Bourdieu's theory at work in the assault upon Bulwer and the Newgate novels in *Fraser's*. The exaggerated outrage and the biting insults attracted notice; being the first to tag the authors as 'Newgate' novelists represented a bold claim to authority and the right to name (or to shame).⁸⁰ Such a stance maximised the magazine's chances of success. It could become more 'distinguished and respectable', like *Blackwood's*, when it had established itself.

A second, and related, feature was that the 'older' periodicals were, by contrast, frequently conspicuous by their silence. Bulwer was for a long time 'mortified' that the great reviews ignored him and everything from his pen.⁸¹ The *Westminster Review* failed to notice any of his works in the 1830s; nor did the *Quarterly Review* pay them any direct attention during these years. The *Edinburgh Review* did not review them until the year of *Eugene Aram*.⁸² Such 'silence', of course, is seen by Bourdieu as a classic response from the consecrated towards the transgressive author challenging existing literary norms. Where they did deal with the Newgate novels, their opinions were expressed with less flamboyancy and less colour than those magazines anxious to

⁷⁸ Hollingsworth, p.148.

⁷⁹ 'Upon the Spirit of True Criticism', *New Monthly Magazine*, 34 (April 1832), 353-57.

⁸⁰ *Fraser's Magazine*, 1 (June 1830), 530.

⁸¹ Escott, p.138.

⁸² *Edinburgh Review*, 55 (April 1832), 208-19.

ensure a sensation. Often, too, they were flavoured with a clear hint of condescension. The general difference in approach between magazines broadly divided down lines of 'age' is important proof that the method of expressing, if not the motivation behind, objections towards Newgate literature was influenced by position within the literary field as well as by issues of politics and social values.

We will see later in the chapter the extent to which the novels, too, were shaped by the need for their authors to make a literary splash. The writers concerned were young and ambitious, and all were thrust into the limelight by their involvement in the controversy. It is of great significance that, despite issuing a defensive preface to *Eugene Aram* in 1840, Bulwer did not make the major alteration to his story - clearing his eponymous hero of any guilt in murder - until 1849. The noisy controversy of the early years, unpleasant as it was, suited his purposes as a 'young' author. By the end of the next decade, however, he was very much an established author, and it probably suited his new purposes to soften the criminal's guilt. Even Thackeray, the prominent critic of Newgate subject matter, was simultaneously feeding on the attention that such subject matter was attracting. *Catherine*, for all its satirical claims, was itself a Newgate novel; in writing it, Thackeray effectively occupied the moral and literary high ground while harnessing the appetite for sensation that he was supposedly deriding.

The regular inconsistency of Thackeray's criticism can be seen to indicate that, for him, inner literary motives were at least as important as the outwardly expressed social concerns. In 1840, for instance, he claimed that Ainsworth 'dared not paint his hero [Jack Sheppard] as the scoundrel he knew him to be'; the resulting book, he stormed, was 'infinitely more immoral than anything Fielding ever wrote'.⁸³ Yet he felt able to offer high praise for Cruikshank's accompanying illustrations, and actually

⁸³ *The Times*, 2 September 1840, quoted in Ellis, I, 371.

observed that it 'seems to us that Mr Cruikshank really created the tale, and that Mr Ainsworth, as it were, only put words to it'.⁸⁴ Ainsworth was therefore condemned for an 'infinitely immoral story' while Cruikshank was praised for having '*created* the tale' [my italics]. The charge of immorality was levelled only at Ainsworth - a competitor in the struggle for literary position.

In support of this, there is direct evidence that the authors themselves recognised the influence of such literary rivalry within the controversy. In 1850, Ainsworth wrote a letter to Charles Kent thanking him for his favourable review in the *Sun* of a new edition of *Jack Sheppard*. In it he includes a revealing reference to the nature of the original objections of 1839:

I did intend to introduce the republication of this much maligned romance with some prefatory remarks; but I could not have done so without offence to some persons, who, to serve their own purposes, got up a 'cry' against me, but with whom my quarrel is now arranged. I required some forbearance to let the occasion pass, especially as I am sure I could make my case good, for I really believe the romance to be harmless - as harmless at least as *Oliver Twist* and *Paul Clifford* [...]. You have truth and justice on your side, but it is not every one - in these days when literature is divided into cliques, and when if you belong to one party you are run down by another, and if you belong to no party you are run down by all, as I have been, - it is not every one, I say, who would have the manliness and gallantry to speak out as you have done, and I most sincerely thank you.⁸⁵

The image of 'literature [...] divided into cliques' and the cries of people serving 'their own purposes' is explicit acknowledgement that criticism was often dictated by competition within the specifically literary sphere. It reveals the extent of the curious relations between literature and politics. Thackeray himself privately explored and recorded the feelings behind his antagonism towards Bulwer. Writing of *Eugene Aram* in 1832, he said,

⁸⁴ 'George Cruikshank', *Westminster Review*, 34 (June 1840), 1-60 (p.50).

⁸⁵ William Harrison Ainsworth to Charles Kent, 20 November 1850, quoted in Ellis, I, 379.

The book is in fact humbug, when my novel is written it will be something better I trust - One must however allow Bulwer wit and industry [...]. Bulwer has a high reputation for talent and yet I always find myself competing with him.⁸⁶

Thackeray was able later to apologise to Bulwer for the insults he had levelled at him. But he felt able to do this only after *Vanity Fair*, 'my novel', had been written. Looking through Thackeray's papers, we find that the first truly generous words towards Bulwer came at exactly this point. In a letter of 1848, Thackeray wrote, 'I intend to send a Copy of *Vanity Fair* to a gentleman whom I have been admiring and making fun of all my life.'⁸⁷ The timing of this new magnanimity coincided with his successful transition from aspirant to recognised and respected author.

This does not mean that Thackeray's campaign had simply been impelled by envy or jealousy, although these human emotions might have played a part. Rather Thackeray, as a 'young' author, was forced by the dynamics of the literary field to define himself against the work of other authors. It was natural that he should have 'always [found himself] competing'. As he wrote in one letter, 'I suppose we all begin by being too savage.'⁸⁸ On the publication of *Vanity Fair*, he no longer needed to resort to sensationalism, just as Bulwer did not when he reissued a revised *Eugene Aram* in 1849. The altered status of each author brought with it a set of new aims and strategies. Five years later, in a letter of January 1853 to Mrs William Henry Brookfield, Thackeray acknowledged that his attitude to his contemporaries had shifted. With genuine, almost surprised, recognition of this change in himself, he wrote,

The other night some men were talking of Dickens and Bulwer as if they were

⁸⁶ Thackeray, *Letters and Private Papers*, I, 198.

⁸⁷ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray: A Supplement*, ed. by Edgar F. Harden. 2 vols (London: Garland, 1994), I, 263.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Melville, p.77.

equal to Shakespeare, and I was pleased to find myself pleased at hearing them praised.⁸⁹

It is impossible to imagine Thackeray allowing such a comparison during the 1830s, when he spent much time denigrating the methodology of both Dickens and Bulwer, and ridiculing the latter's claims to high art.

Indeed, this provides a clue to the final reason for a 'literary' interpretation of the controversy. Concentration upon the prevalence of attacks on the taste, morality and politics of the Newgate novels has perhaps obscured the attacks on their literary style, methodology and theory. Yet the successful parody of *Catherine* and 'Elizabeth Brownrigge' relied upon effectively targeting the forms of the texts themselves. Critics did not simply deny Bulwer moral or political principles, and discredit him as a *man*; they denied him the very ability to write, and thereby discredited him as an *author*. 'Elizabeth Brownrigge' mocks Bulwer's mannered and high-falutin descriptions, and his forced emotional rhetoric. Elsewhere *Fraser's* was careful to try to dismiss Bulwer's claims to artistic authority, the 'return to sources' strategy which Bourdieu stresses as so important to the literary challenge of a 'young' author. In particular it rejected any comparisons with Shakespeare and his departures from the usual rules of composition:

The fact is, the novel has its rules, as well as the epic and the drama, and, indeed, no work of art is without them [...]. Mr Bulwer will, perhaps, have vanity enough to shield himself under the example of Shakespear, and to excuse his irregularities by those of the great dramatist. Let him be told, in the first place, that Shakespear's departures from customary rules were not irregularities, and that it is not for any departure from these rules that we censure the novelist. Genius is a rule to itself, and being nature, will act according to the laws of nature. It is for an inattention to these laws - an insensibility rather to these laws, which are inherent in the heart, and spontaneous in the act, of genius, that he is arraigned at the bar of philosophical criticism. Not that he has neglected the mechanical rules of art, but that he has recognised no organic principle.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray: A Supplement*, p.521.

⁹⁰ *Fraser's Magazine*, I (June 1830), 514.

The Newgate novelists were frequently compared unfavourably with other 'consecrated' authors like Fielding and Gay.

In this perennial struggle between magazines and authors to assert their own legitimacy and deny legitimacy to their opponents, the Newgate novelists would themselves claim methodological justification for their works. They would justify their challenge to the hierarchy of the literary field by calling into question seemingly unproblematic assumptions within the field as it existed. We have seen how Dickens was to support *Oliver Twist* by asserting its 'truth'. He suggested that such a portrayal of the criminal underworld performed a 'service to society' by confronting it with images from which it had traditionally averted its gaze. Ainsworth defended and legitimised *Jack Sheppard* as 'a sort of Hogarthian novel'.⁹¹ Indeed, even the description of *Rookwood* in the 1837 preface as a tale written for 'my reader's amusement, and my own' was aimed at rejecting the prevailing assumption that romance had to include 'the exposition of a useful truth'.⁹² It represented an alternative and fresh definition of what the romance novel had to be, based upon what John has called the 'pleasure principle'. She argues that Ainsworth's 'commitment to romance and to pleasure' is inevitably bound up with 'a belief in populism: a belief that aesthetic pleasure should not be the preserve of the élite'.⁹³ We could perhaps see in the justifications for this type of novel similarities with Zola, who Bourdieu observes, 'endeavoured to invoke a popular legitimacy to sublimate commercial success by transforming it into popular success'.⁹⁴

We will see later how Bulwer dismissed the claims of hostile critics to literary authority. He would also, like Dickens, argue for the moral benefits of studying crime.

⁹¹ William Harrison Ainsworth to James Crossley, 29 May 1837, quoted in Ellis, I, 328.

⁹² Quoted in *Cult Criminals*, I, p.xxxiv.

⁹³ *Cult Criminals*, I, pp.liv, xxxv.

⁹⁴ Bourdieu, p.50.

In *Pelham*, Vincent expresses the feelings of his author when he comments that there 'never was an imperfection corrected by portraying perfection' (*Pel.*, II, 147). In the concluding pages of *Lucretia*, Bulwer said that 'in the witness of Guilt, Man is thrilled with the whisper of Religion'; his subject had the aim of 'awaken[ing] us from our normal lives' and casting 'light on the darker secrets of the heart.'⁹⁵ He championed what Christensen has termed the 'metaphysical novel'.⁹⁶ Man's inner self, conflicts within 'that internal world', are at their most intense and sublime within the mind of the criminal; in examining evil, one enters the 'recesses' and 'caverns' of the human psyche.⁹⁷ In transcending 'conventional morality' the metaphysical novel would 'instruct not by the avowed moral but by the latent one.'⁹⁸ In answer to charges of heresy, he would point to eminent precedents to support his choice of subject matter. The 1840 preface to *Eugene Aram*, for example, validated the depiction of crime by pointing to characters from the plays of Shakespeare, 'the Macbeths and Richards, the Iagos and Othellos'.⁹⁹ In *England and the English*, he notes that Shakespeare, Byron, Scott, Goethe and Schiller all took popular and 'low' subject matter and 'breathed into it a finished and glorious life.'¹⁰⁰

The heated arguments and counter-arguments in the periodical press and the novels' prefaces did, therefore, have a distinctly literary impetus behind them. They were not solely fuelled by the impact of the Newgate novels upon broader social and political concerns. With this in mind, I wish now to turn to the novels and ask how much of a role this same literary impetus played in the texts themselves. Were they motivated by social realism, or did they too engage self-consciously with

⁹⁵ E. L. Bulwer, *Lucretia*, The New Knebworth Edition (London: Routledge, 1897), p.494.

⁹⁶ *The Fiction of New Regions*, p.xi.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁹⁸ 'On Moral Fictions: Miss Martineau's Illustrations of Political Economy', *New Monthly Magazine*, 37 (February 1833), 146-51 (p.146).

⁹⁹ *Eugene Aram*, The New Knebworth Edition, p.11.

¹⁰⁰ *England and the English*, II, 155.

contemporary literary issues? I will return later to the evidence in their pages of Bourdieu's theory in practice, of authorial struggle, posturing and position-taking. But I will turn first to Bulwer's *Pelham* and *Paul Clifford*, and examine their participation in, and reaction to, changes in literature's generic hierarchy, readership and production processes.

2. *Pelham*, the 1820s, and the Privileged Control of Culture

Pelham is of interest in a consideration of literary self-reference because it contains several episodes in which contemporary cultural output and cultural theory are extensively discussed. As is often the case with Bulwer's writing, assessment of these episodes is complicated by the author's own feelings of ambiguity, and it can be difficult to recognise the authorial viewpoint. At times the reader can struggle to distinguish between authorial satirising of, and authorial support for, a speaker and his views. Nevertheless, Hollingsworth has seen in *Pelham* 'a definite and self-conscious theory of fiction'.¹⁰¹ There is no doubt, particularly when read in conjunction with some of his opinions on the novel in *England and the English*, that Bulwer used these discussions both to express his own view of literature and to denounce the views of others. The nature of a character's reaction to, and opinion on, literature becomes one of the main ways of differentiating those with a rare sincerity of feeling from the generally shallow personalities occupying the fashionable sphere.

This is particularly the case with Vincent, the loquacious wit forever flaunting his mastery of quotation. The passionate expression of his literary views leads to uncommon moments of genuine feeling, moments when his carefully cultivated mask is briefly dropped, and other characters of real depth, like Lady Roseville, are made

¹⁰¹ Hollingsworth, p.40.

aware of his true self. After listening to Vincent espouse his definition of an author's most essential qualities and aims, Lady Roseville says,

'Thank you, my lord [...]. For once you have condescended to give us your own sense, and not other people's; you have scarce made a single quotation.'
(*Pel.*, II, 147)

Indeed, the dramatic instant of mutual revelation between Vincent and Pelham, when each momentarily casts aside his disguise as a man of the world, stems directly from a discussion of the works of Byron and the ancient poets. It leads Vincent excitedly to exclaim,

'it is for the sake of moments like these, when your better nature flashes out, that I have sought your society and your friendship. I, too, am not wholly what I appear: the world may yet see that Halifax was not the only statesman whom the pursuits of literature had only formed the better for the labours of business. Meanwhile, let me pass for the pedant, and the bookworm: like a sturdier adventurer than myself, "I bide my time."' (*Pel.*, II, 53)

Literature, therefore, fulfils a dual purpose in this novel by serving both as a mechanism for disguise and for revelation. Indeed, while we saw in the previous chapter that no character is wholly successful in the transition, it nevertheless comes to represent one of the keys to reconciling the private and the public, the Romantic and the Victorian, the path to personal reformation and resolution. Vincent suggests that the private pursuit of literature can help to create the more accomplished public statesman. Pelham's urge towards public duty, his fresh knowledge of moral principle, comes directly from his uncle's advice that "'a little reading would do you no harm'" (*Pel.*, I, 319).

In this way, 'the book' becomes a touchstone within the novel, a sign of revelation and regeneration. It is a symbol of hope and benevolence - a symbol made only more powerful when shown to be wasted, as by the bookish Clutterbuck, whose studies are 'unprofitable to the world' and 'destructive to the possessor' - the means by

which the empowered might benefit society as a whole and recognise their duty to do so (*Pel.*, II, 301).¹⁰² The importance lies in the way in which literature is approached and used by those who hold power; Pelham and Vincent represent the hope for change.¹⁰³ But, if the book is representative of good that might be, it is also very much a part of the bad that is, an instrument both practical and symbolic in the process of repressive class control. In general it is clear that literature remains a tool used for displaying and retaining, rather than benevolently channelling, aristocratic power.

For most among the fashionable class, literature is, like politics and religion, another means of affectation, another coded element of social interaction between its members. Lady Frances writes to her son,

'They tell me there is a horrid, vulgar, ignorant book come out about _____. As you ought to be well versed in modern literature, I hope you will read it, and give me your opinion.' (*Pel.*, II, 84)

This concern on the part of Lady Frances for her son's learning serves as a direct contrast to the concern and advice offered to Pelham by his uncle. Both urge him to read, and both are eager for his opinion once he has read. However, where his uncle's aim is to instil an awareness of moral principle and social duty in his nephew, Lady Frances' is solely to prepare her son for the balls and dinners of high society and, ultimately, to secure private advantage. The books which attract her recommendation do not have to be improving - indeed, they can be 'horrid, vulgar, ignorant'. The only factor of any import is that they are fashionable and modern.

¹⁰² The character of Clutterbuck was based upon Bulwer's grandfather, Richard Warburton Lytton. He was an avid scholar and considerably influential in introducing Bulwer to study as a child. After his death, however, Bulwer became vividly conscious that this vast wealth of knowledge had been lost for ever, and had been put to no useful purpose at all. See Escott, p.139.

¹⁰³ While the book is a general symbol of hope, more specifically Bulwer appears to sanction utilitarian thinking in the choice of books recommended to Pelham - works by Bentham, Mill and Ricardo.

The direct and detrimental influence of fashion on contemporary literature is made clearer elsewhere in the novel:

'I must confess, for my part,' said Lord Edward Neville (an author of some celebrity and more merit), 'that I am exceedingly weary of those doleful ditties with which we were favoured for so many years. No sooner had Lord Byron declared himself unhappy, than every young gentleman with a pale face and dark hair, used to think himself justified in frowning in the glass and writing Odes to Despair. All persons who could scribble two lines were sure to make them into rhymes of "blight" and "night". Never was there so grand a *penchant* for the *triste*.' (*Pel.*, III, 49-50)

For the fashionable, literature is simply a vehicle for effect, for theatrical posturing. The cult of appearance, the colour of hair or pallour of face, becomes the primary claim on literary merit and ambition. Pose, once again, takes precedent over content. For all its seeming expression of powerful feeling and emotion, the melancholic visage is just another mask to be donned when it is in season and discarded when it is not. The extent to which literature has become entwined with fashion is evident from the reaction towards the departed Vincent after he has stated genuinely felt, rather than fashionably guided, views upon it:

'*Qui est cet homme-là?*' said one, '*comme il est épris de lui-même!*' 'How silly he is,' cried another - 'how *ugly*,' said a third. 'What a taste in literature - such a talker - such shallowness, and such assurance - not worth the answering - could not slip in a word - disagreeable, revolting, awkward, slovenly,' were the most complimentary opinions bestowed upon the unfortunate Vincent. (*Pel.*, I, 205)

It is not the difference of views upon literature that is so revealing in this instance, but the nature of the expression of disagreement. The substance of Vincent's comments is ignored in favour of an attack on his appearance, upon his ugliness and his awkwardness. The reaction does not involve an informed, reasoned and structured refutation of his opinions on literature; rather, it involves the systematic and no less structured denial to him of those traits regarded as indispensable to members of the fashionable circle. By denying to Vincent a mastery of the aesthetic and mannered

codes - the impeccable dress, beautiful features and easy grace - these people also deny to him any claim to a literary opinion of worth. They do not deny the validity of his comments - they deny that his comments deserve a hearing at all. And thus cultural 'truth', indeed cultural participation, becomes the exclusive preserve of the aristocratic.

As I have suggested already, this aristocratic stranglehold both on the content of literary production and on possession of the books themselves was very real during the first two decades of the 19th century, and was only just at the point of widespread change. Paper had been made from cotton and linen rags, from old clothes, and during the Napoleonic Wars these were in short supply. Books were correspondingly expensive. Poetry dominated the sphere of cultural production because of its concise form and its openness to repeated readings.¹⁰⁴ And, because such poetry was easily accessible only to the wealthy and the educated, it is unsurprising that the upper classes should have dominated its possession and, therefore, the nature of its production. As Erickson has observed, it was 'no accident that the most popular poets of the age were Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, the latter born and the former made a member of the aristocracy.'¹⁰⁵ When Pelham inquires after the latest literary news, Lady Roseville informs him,

'Oh, Lady C ___ B ___ is going to write a Commentary on Ude; and Madame de Genlis a Proof of the Apocrypha. The Duke of N ___ e is publishing a Treatise on "Toleration"; and Lord L ___ y an Essay on "Self-knowledge."' (*Pel.*, II, 74)

This vividly evokes an image of books being produced primarily for ostentatious display - as a means of framing and flaunting one's name in society. Southey observed in 1807 that books are 'so inordinately expensive that they are chiefly purchased as furniture by the rich', and that 'they who buy books do not read them, and [...] they

¹⁰⁴ Erickson, pp.20-21.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.23.

who read them do not buy them.¹⁰⁶ Books were signs of prosperity and gentility, and were displayed simply for the purpose of social utility.

Bulwer complains in *England and the English* that the literary man is often forced to be proud of something other than talent - of birth, fortune or connection - in order to avoid being looked down upon.¹⁰⁷ This passage also demonstrates the depth of control which the aristocracy, those of independent means, have over the literary sphere. 'Literary news' equates to self-important texts *by* the landed gentry *for* the landed gentry. This was the case with essays in publications like the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviews, too, periodicals which had been introduced at a time of high paper prices and rising inflation, and which targeted the wealthy by using contributions from gentlemanly writers.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the implication is that, where the aristocracy are not themselves the authors, literary production, on the part either of the author or the publisher, is still dictated by the need to please the taste of the wealthy buyer. All other classes are excluded or controlled.

'The book' itself has become a piece of 'evidence' to support aristocratic superiority in taste, knowledge and wealth. Job Jonson, the rogue who picks Pelham's pocket during their very first meeting, is well aware of this when he impudently declares, 'I have always had a taste for polite literature' (*Pel.*, III, 86). The deep social association of the book (and the novel in particular) with luxury is suggested by the

¹⁰⁶ Manuel Alvarez Espriella [pseud., Robert Southey], *Letters from England*, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1807), I, 349.

¹⁰⁷ Bulwer, *England and the English*, I, 149. I have suggested why Bulwer's sense of alienation, as well as his political radicalism, could lead him to identify with non-aristocrats when he was himself aristocratic.

¹⁰⁸ Indeed, working-class authors were often actively discouraged from submitting manuscripts to fashionable journals mindful of the social standing of their contributors. Gerald Griffin, an Irish short-story writer, was shamed into other lines of writing. See Erickson, pp. 174-75. For a discussion of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviews from the mid-1820s until the early 1840s, see Joanne Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers: The Edinburgh and the Quarterly in the early Victorian Age* (London: Leicester University Press, 1989).

fact that even circulating libraries were dominated by the wealthy. They were to be found in market towns and seaside resorts for the gentry, and became important lounges for the fashionable, places to see and be seen. Indeed, Erickson has noted that subscription books were useful guides to who was in town.¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu observes that demonstrations of cultural taste and literary opinion are classifiers and legitimisers of social difference and class division. The discussions of literature which we see in *Pelham* are themselves, therefore, acts which justify the social exclusivity of the participants in discussion. Like the legal and political structures, 'the book' was embedded among the aristocratic strategies for exercising and retaining power. It served as justification for the aristocracy's place at the apex of the social pyramid.

3. The Criminal as Author: Paul Clifford, Rookwood, and the Changing Literary Order

Pelham, then, targeted what Bulwer regarded at the time of publication as a prime weakness in the production of culture. He shows that literature, as well as religion and politics, and by extension social order as a whole, is vulnerable to the dominance of the aristocracy and its pernicious egotism and obsession with fashion. His novel, in emphasising this aristocratic monopoly, rarely strays beyond the space of the mansion or the ballroom.¹¹⁰ But, while this is the case - indeed because this is the case - *Pelham* reflects and is part of a shift in the nature of literary production. Although many contemporaries unaccountably failed to notice this, it was one of the first significant works of the time to examine the aristocratic sphere critically, to adopt the silver-fork genre for satirical purposes rather than simply to feed a fascinated public and a self-obsessed upper class with illustrations of the high life devoid of any real

¹⁰⁹ Erickson, p. 130.

¹¹⁰ On the rare occasions that it does, it tends to enter the realms of the low tavern or gambling house. We are offered glimpses of scenes which were to become far more prominent in *Paul Clifford*. It is tempting to see in this a visible parallel of the steady encroachment of new literary forms and readerships.

value judgement.¹¹¹ *Paul Clifford*, coming just two years later, shows that some new and very different issues were becoming clear to Bulwer, issues which had arisen both from his own early experiences of authorship and from his perception of a new climate of literary production which he had in part been involved in bringing about.

Until the 1820s, as I have suggested, publishers printed novels in expensive editions aimed either at the wealthy, or at circulating libraries frequented primarily by the wealthy, because it was most profitable for them to do so. However, during the late 1820s, this began to change. The invention and development of stereotyping and the Fourdrinier papermaking machine in the early 1800s paved the way for this alteration in cultural power relations. By 1825 over half of all paper in England was made by machine, and was consequently cheaper.¹¹² But it was not until the economic climate altered that publishers began to deem it necessary to cater for a broader reading public. A crash in the value of stocks in 1826, in particular, forced many among the wealthy to tighten their belts and refrain from purchasing luxury items like books.¹¹³ Publishers sought to profit from a new class of reader by marketing popular novelists in cheaper formats. Robert Cadell started this trend in 1829, reissuing Scott's *Waverley* novels at a third of the original price. The most successful series of cheap reprinted fiction was Colburn and Bentley's *Standard Novels*, which began in 1831.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Among the leading authors of the soporific fashionable novel were Susan Ferrier, Theodore Hook, R. Plumer Ward, Lady Charlotte Bury and Thomas Henry Lister. Lister's *Granby* of 1826 firmly established its form. See Rosa, p.55; see also Alison Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814 to 1840* (London: Constable, 1983).

¹¹² Erickson, p.47.

¹¹³ Booksellers were dramatically affected by this crash. Having speculated wildly in commodities during 1825, many were made bankrupt by the events of 1826. For an account of the crash, and its effects on those in the publishing industry, including Sir Walter Scott, see *The Life of Walter Scott*, pp.272-84.

¹¹⁴ Efforts to sell original fiction cheaply was fairly unsuccessful, however. Serialisation of new works in literary magazines only really began in earnest after the popularity of Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), and even then it was limited to the most popular of the contemporary novelists. See Erickson, pp.159-61.

A few astute observers quickly recognised that fiction would become the overwhelmingly dominant popular literary form. In *England and the English*, Bulwer wrote that 'fiction, with its graphic delineations and its familiar emotions, is adapted to the crowd - for it is the oratory of literature.'¹¹⁵ This acknowledgement, and the increasing change in focus on the part of publishers, marked not just a significant alteration in the form of literature or in the hierarchy of literary genres, but in the class-based ownership of culture.

In a formal sense, *Paul Clifford* directly parallels this process at work. It was the first of the so-called Newgate novels, and its use of subject matter more usually associated with street publications could be seen to represent the dismantling of the class barriers surrounding literary production, and a claim on behalf of other social classes for significant cultural representation.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the tale itself can be seen to contain examples of the challenge to aristocratic cultural hegemony by an ostensibly working-class and socially disenfranchised character. As such, it is concerned not just with the responsibility of ownership, as in *Pelham*, but with the unquestioned monopoly of ownership itself by the ruling classes. John has stated that *Oliver Twist* was 'alone among the Newgate novels in analysing the role of the storyteller, entertainer or purveyor of fictions in the power dynamics of 1830s Britain.'¹¹⁷ I would argue that Bulwer reveals in *Paul Clifford* a very distinct awareness of the importance of cultural output to the dynamics of power at this time.

¹¹⁵ *England and the English*, II, 127.

¹¹⁶ The extent to which this could alternatively be interpreted as cultural assimilation in a Foucauldian sense is discussed elsewhere in this thesis. It is not an interpretation with which I would agree. Nevertheless, even if the Newgate novels were signifiers of the appropriation of material by the ruling class, they would still serve to reflect alterations in social and cultural power relations. Such material could only seem suddenly dangerous in the face of a changed social dynamic, with significant shifts both in the access of lower classes to literature and in the political threat that these classes might appear to represent.

¹¹⁷ 'Twisting the Newgate Tale', p.131.

During our early introductions to the eponymous hero, Paul demonstrates a very different attitude to 'the book' from those around him whom, we have seen, appear to regard it with a deep reverence. For him it is more than an object of symbolic meaning. Because he lacks this respect for its class-based or spiritual associations, he is prepared to move beyond the bound outer cover and to absorb himself in the content; he is thus shown 'diligently employed in reading the life and adventures of the celebrated Richard Turpin' (*PC*, I, 19). The very possession of a book by a young lower-class boy is suggestive of a challenge to the prevailing monopoly on cultural ownership. That he later burns it is representative of the ultimate rejection of the sanctified resonances with which it has been invested, and which have imposed such a hold upon the minds of other lower-class characters like Dummie.¹¹⁸ And, of course, the choice of book into which to immerse himself embodies a further threat to the control of the classes above. If the idea of the lower classes reading was a concern for many, the idea of them reading about criminality was especially so; to worried observers, such an interest truly represented 'an ominous affection' (*PC*, I, 41). Paul's early reading indicates a challenge both to cultural possession and to permitted cultural content, and one which rests firmly upon issues of class.

This issue of class is highlighted by the explicit voicing of opinions on authorship that were implicit, though never so plainly expressed, in *Pelham*. In this case the attack upon a claim to merit comes from literary critics:

Mr Augustus Tomlinson, turning to Mac Grawler, concluded his business with that gentleman, which was of a literary nature, namely, a joint composition against a man who, being under five-and-twenty, and too poor to give dinners, had had the impudence to write a sacred poem. The critics were exceedingly bitter at this; and having very little to say against the poem, the Court journals called the author 'a coxcomb', and the liberal ones 'the son of a pantaloon!' (*PC*, I, 46-47)

¹¹⁸ The destruction of this particular book can also be interpreted in a very different way, as a submission to the discourse of the ruling classes. However, even in turning to more 'socially acceptable' texts, Paul is still involving himself in the cultural sphere which, in *Pelham*, would have been utterly denied to one of his background.

The suggestion here is that those who are not wealthy enough to give dinners are not worthy enough to write sacred poetry. Yet again, culture is allied both with sanctity and with wealth. What is equally noticeable is the way in which the poet is reviewed. As with the treatment of Vincent's views at one point in *Pelham*, the substance of the poem is neglected in favour of an attack upon the author's appearance or background which serves to deny him any claim to literary pretensions.¹¹⁹ It is therefore significant that Paul's interest in literature should extend beyond 'sensationalist' tales, and include a fondness for poetry:

[Paul's] more favourite and cherished studies were scarcely of that nature which a prudent preceptor would have greatly commended. They lay chiefly among novels, plays, and poetry, which last he affected to that degree that he became somewhat of a poet himself. (*PC*, I, 52)¹²⁰

And it is of particular relevance that Paul, a young man under the age of twenty-five and of a poor background, should actually compose poetry himself and thus directly confront this prejudice too. By possessing books, he challenges the upper-class monopoly of cultural ownership; by reading 'subversive' literature, he rejects ruling-class efforts to define appropriate cultural content; and by writing poetry, he defies the

¹¹⁹ There is a subtle variation between the two episodes, however. One imagines that while the attack in *Paul Clifford* takes a similar form, its motives are less concerned with the preservation of class distinctions and more with the manipulation of authors for money or free dinners. Thus it represents a shift from an examination of the damage to literature caused by aristocratic prejudice, to the damage caused by a prejudice similar in expression but motivated instead by the market.

¹²⁰ The reference to 'prudent preceptor[s]' is indicative of the altered focus in this novel. While *Pelham* concentrated almost exclusively on the aristocratic sphere, and the damaging effects of the cult of fashion upon literature, Bulwer broadens his attack in *Paul Clifford* to include a critique of some of the influences of the newly ascendant middle class. Thus the sweeping dismissal of literature and its potential benefits by those of a puritanical disposition is satirised here. Where the aristocracy retained their hold on culture, and power, not only because of their economic and educational advantages, but by establishing a prohibitive link between literature and exclusivity, the middle classes can be seen attempting to establish a comparable hold on culture by tying it to their own prohibitive moral codes.

patriarchal right to dominate cultural production. In essence, his actions represent the dismantling of the class-based barriers erected around culture as a whole.

While this embodies a sustained assault upon the prejudices and restrictions inherent in contemporary literature, it nevertheless operates from within the framework as it already exists. It primarily concerns the right to participate in cultural ownership and production. Paul certainly dallies with the story of Dick Turpin, one on the very margins of 'accepted' culture; but he also commits it to flames on deciding to make something of himself. It is when, despite this, he is wrongfully committed to the House of Correction that his literary rebellion fully manifests itself as part of a broader rejection of social institutions that have failed him. Just as social hegemony is seen to rely upon the creation of a closed circle in law, politics and culture, Paul and his comrades construct an alternative society in which they create their own legal, political and cultural mechanisms. They eject Jack Littlefork for 'ungentlemanlike practices' in picking pockets of handkerchiefs and failing to abide by 'the laws of [their] society' (*PC*, II, 106). They live by their own form of political philosophy, levy their own 'taxes' with impunity, and can consider themselves a 'coterie of cabinet ministers' (*PC*, I, 214). And, in the same vein, they compose and enjoy their own form of 'fine arts' (*PC*, I, 271).

Indeed, Bulwer appears to cultivate a special relationship between criminality and cultural production in *Paul Clifford*. Several characters are associated with literariness of one sort or another. Augustus Tomlinson shows a particular knowledge of poetry, and remarks that 'I was brought up like the captain, to a literary way of life.' Ned observes that Paul 'writes (and sings too) a tolerable song, and is certainly a deuced clever fellow' (*PC*, I, 273). The detestable figure of Mac Grawler is, as we will see in due course, closely involved with literary criticism. And Paul's gang spends a considerable portion of its time indulging a taste for the 'fine arts', sharing in flash songs and drunken ballads at Gentleman George's. Such renditions are associated with

the space of the public house, and encapsulate the Rabelaisian ethos of social defiance. They are frequently original compositions, as characters respond to their comrades in a strange mix of improvised theatre, poetry and song.¹²¹ These are a band of writers as well as criminals. The pieces play an important part in uniting the group as a whole, drawing upon the traditions of folk-song, and perhaps even the gallows speech of the condemned criminal, in forming and consolidating a sense of belonging and identity.¹²²

This is a process which is readily apparent in the Newgate novels of Ainsworth too. Ainsworth did not claim for his art the reformatory ideals of Bulwer. The preface of 1840 to *Paul Clifford*, in which Bulwer informs the reader that he had the grand intention of altering social attitudes by drawing attention to 'errors in our penal institutions' and exposing the similarities between 'vulgar vice and fashionable vice', is vastly different to Ainsworth's preface to *Rookwood* of 1849.¹²³ Here he writes that,

If the design of Romance be, what it has been held, the exposition of a useful truth by means of an interesting story, I fear I have but imperfectly fulfilled the office imposed upon me; having, as I will freely confess, had, throughout, an eye rather to the reader's amusement than his edification.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Songs and ballads were among the oldest vehicles of political expression by the English poor, and could convey anti-establishment sentiments in an appealingly traditionalist form. They served both to entertain and to puncture dominant symbols of social and political authority. As such, the very form itself contained radical connotations. The *Satirist*, for example, noted how many commentators were alarmed that 'song' possessed a special and deeply rooted 'magic power' in English popular culture (1 May 1808, pp.239-45). For a discussion of this, see *Radical Underworld*, pp.113-20.

¹²² This connection of bawdy and lawless ballads with gallows speeches is given substance by an episode during the novel when Paul, considerably drunk and on the point of unconsciousness, imagines that a song in honour of Gentleman George is actually 'a chorus of last dying speeches and confessions' (*PC*, I, 230).

¹²³ *Paul Clifford*, The New Knebworth Edition, pp.7-8.

¹²⁴ William H. Ainsworth, *Rookwood: A Romance*, The Original Illustrated Edition (London: Routledge, 1892), p.xxxviii.

Consequently, it would be wrong to find in Ainsworth's tales a reasoned and developing commentary upon the specifics of contemporary literary production. Unlike Bulwer's criminals, Turpin and his comrades never engage in debates upon society. Indeed, Ainsworth may have intended a mischievous swipe at *Paul Clifford* when he observes that with Turpin 'there was no speechifying - no politics. He left church and state to take care of themselves. Whatever his politics might be, Dick never allowed them to interfere with his pleasures' (*Rwd*, III, 107). His radicalism is less precise - relying more on the anti-authoritarianism of carnivalesque misbehaviour - and, as such, shares a quality with the radicalism of the theatre which we will examine in the next chapter.¹²⁵ Despite this, as I will suggest later, his novels do reveal in their depictions of lawlessness and challenges to 'the establishment' a powerful link between the criminal and the author. They associate the criminal with both cultural subject matter and cultural production. From an early point in *Jack Sheppard*, the eponymous hero is located firmly within a broader tradition of criminals whose exploits are recorded and immortalised in a variety of cultural forms. We are told that Jack's

physiognomy resembled one of those vagabond heads which Murillo delighted to paint, and for which Guzman d'Alfarache, Lazarillo de Tormes, or Estevanillo Gonzalez might have sat:- faces that almost make one in love with roguery, they seem so full of vivacity and enjoyment. There was all the knavery, and more than all the drollery of a Spanish picaroon in the laughing eyes of the English apprentice.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ It is interesting to note that John identifies the 'pleasure principle' with narratives which draw upon the characteristics of theatrical forms like pantomime and melodrama. See 'Twisting the Newgate Tale', pp. 126-45. Ainsworth certainly seemed to see a strong link between his novel and the theatre. The inclusion of so many songs probably signalled an intent to have it dramatised. The preface to the second edition referred with evident anticipation to a forthcoming adaptation at the Adelphi (*Rwd*, I, xvii). And that of 1849 speaks of the characters as actors in a play, and romance as 'the drama of the closet' (*Rookwood*, *The Original Illustrated Edition*, p. xxxv).

¹²⁶ W. Harrison Ainsworth, *Jack Sheppard: A Romance*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), I, 154. Subsequent references will be to this edition, unless otherwise indicated, and included in the text.

He personifies the spirit of Rabelaisian roguery which Ainsworth so frequently attaches to his criminals. And Jack does, indeed, come to be the subject for artist and poet when his portrait is painted by James Thornhill, and his tale used by Gay as material for the 'Beggar's Opera' (*JS*, III, 126-50). Most important, however, is the sense that Jack is an active participant in a process of cultural production. He carves his own name upon a beam while singing a ballad entitled 'The Newgate Stone', which recounts the lives of revered criminals who have scratched their names in the walls of their cells (*JS*, I, 155). It is a symbolic act of intent to position himself within this alternative and celebrated tradition.

It is in *Rookwood* that, of all the Newgate novels, the association between criminality and song is most strongly felt. While Dick Turpin features heavily, his role is actually fairly incidental to the plot itself of a Gothic romance which follows the tragic events befalling successive generations of a great aristocratic family. It abounds in intrigue, birth mystery and murder. The novel is notable, however, for the number of songs which appear in its pages. It is probable that Ainsworth had half an eye on the stage in including these. The novel was dramatised for the Adelphi, and formed the basis for Ducrow's famous equestrian drama, *Turpin's Ride to York*, which appeared at Astley's.¹²⁷ The flash song 'Nix my doll, pals' was to be included in several of the theatrical adaptations of *Jack Sheppard*, and became hugely popular. It was obvious that Dickens had *Rookwood* in mind when he referred to rogues who are 'great at a song'. On the whole, the songs are broadly of two distinct types. On the one hand we have hymns and chanted prophecies which recount the tragedy that has attached itself to the Rookwood family in the past and which foretell further tragedy to come. On the other we have the defiant and upbeat ballads of Dick Turpin and his associates which celebrate the daring of past criminals. The clear contrast is between an exclusive family

¹²⁷ Ellis, I, 258.

who grimly struggle in the face of inevitable death, and a criminal fraternity who face their fate with laughter and high spirit. Death-in-life is opposed by life-in-death.¹²⁸

That Dick Turpin 'could sing a good song' is shown to be as important a feature of his character and his claim to mythical status as the fact that he is an unrivalled horseman, 'a choice companion, and could drink three bottles without feeling the worse for them' (*Rwd*, I, 138). The legendary highwayman, Claude Du-Val, is deeply respected by Turpin, who places significant emphasis on the Frenchman's ability to 'warble like an opera singer, and play the flageolet better than any man of his day', and upon his 'always carr[ying] a pipe in his pocket, along with his snappers' (*Rwd*, I, 152). The musical instrument is as intrinsic to the highwayman's kit as his guns. It is used in part as an extra weapon in the criminal's rejection of authority. One of Turpin's companions sings a ballad which recounts the tales of several convicted villains who face their own executions not with tears of contrition but with defiant song: as Jack Macpherson 'was led to the gallows, he played his own "march to the camp"'; Jemmy Carrick met his end '[b]y dancing a hornpipe at Tyburn'; Billy Delaney was actually known as 'the Songster', and Ainsworth mentions in a footnote that he 'composed several songs [...] and by his skill in music gained the favour of some of the leading musicians in the country, who endeavoured to get him reprieved' (*Rwd*, III, 196-97). The carnivalesque nature of the criminal hero's life is manifested in this love of music. Nevertheless, these songs represent not just a means of displaying defiance, but an alternative canon, one which justifies and legitimises itself by invoking popular tradition, and performs an important function in orally cementing collective aims and ideals, and celebrating achievements.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ This theme is made especially clear when the Rookwoods' sexton, Peter Bradley, sings a song called 'The Old Oak Coffin' which describes the fate of a man who is buried alive (*Rwd*, I, 275-78). It is further significant that the plot mirrors these alternative views of life - Peter Bradley is eventually entombed alive in a vault, while Turpin remains unscathed at the novel's conclusion, having completed his ride to York, and represented the very essence of life in death.

¹²⁹ The sense of continuity with the past, of participation in a popular tradition, is

As such, these compositions fulfil a similar function to hegemonic culture; but where that species of culture promulgated by the ruling classes aims at preserving and underlining the existing class structure, the fine arts of Clifford or Turpin and his band strengthen the fabric of this alternative and subversive 'society beyond society'. But they, like the criminals themselves, are also dynamic, and can move beyond the tavern to infiltrate the private space of the privileged and directly challenge the established literary canon. These ballads are associated with cultural confrontation. Gay envisages his composition tackling the cultural forms of the ruling classes head on. He maintains that it 'shall have no music except the good old ballad tunes', and wagers that it will 'put the Italian opera out of fashion' (*JS*, III, 144). Just as the act of highway robbery by the lower class upon the rich and powerful is a direct image of the economically dominated asserting control over, and reversing their relationship towards, the economically dominant, the act of bringing songs of the tavern into the drawing-room allows the culturally dominated to assert control over the culturally dominant. We first see Turpin, appearing under the alias of Jack Palmer, singing at the ancestral home of the Rookwoods. He sits 'in a snug, old-fashioned apartment', containing 'sundry dusty, unconsulted law tomes, and a light sprinkling of the elder divines', with 'portraits adorn[ing] the walls' (*Rwd*, I, 112). With him are 'the vicar of Rookwood, Dr Polyphemus Polycarp Small; Dr Titus Tyrconnel, [...] empirical professor of medicine; and Mr Codicil Coates, attorney-at-law, bailiff, and receiver' (*Rwd*, I, 115). He is thus surrounded both by the symbols and the living representatives of absolute social and economic power.

important not only for the criminals' own sense of identity, but for the legitimation of their challenge to society. Bourdieu stressed the need for 'young' authors to justify their particular challenge to consecrated texts by attempting to ally themselves with older cultural traditions.

In these cases, the sense of heredity and tradition becomes vital to the strength of the challenges themselves. Turpin's ballad, 'A Chapter of Highwaymen', is sung to a 'good old tune' and describes the histories and exploits of renowned criminals past as well as present (*Rwd*, I 120). It is further justified by Turpin's reminder that the biography of Du-Val, who features in his ballad, was written by the eminent 'Doctor Pope' (*Rwd*, I, 118). And he differentiates the heroes of this ballad (of which, unknown to his listeners, he is one) from the common murderer with the assertion that 'the gentlemen I speak of never maltreated any one, except in self-defence' (*Rwd*, I, 153). In a similar fashion, when Paul is asked by Mrs Slopperton to follow Lucy's performance of 'a song composed somewhat after the old English school', he replies:

'Your command [...] is all-sufficient; and since you, Madam' (turning to Lucy), 'have chosen a song after the old school, may I find pardon if I do the same? My selection is, to be sure, from a lawless song-book, and is supposed to be a ballad by Robin Hood, or, at least, one of his merry men; a very different sort of outlaws from the knaves who attacked you, Sir!' (*PC*, I, 259)

He goes on to sing a song entitled 'The Love of our Profession; or, the Robber's Life.' This, of course, is a deliberate disruption of the literary discourse associated with the drawing-room, a taunting jest at the expense of the more orthodox canon. But Paul's words are carefully chosen, and significant in the manner in which they support and justify his selection. First, he claims an authority for his song, placing it within a canon of 'lawless' literature (just as Turpin sings 'A Chapter [...]' from an extended history of highwaymen), and within a school as 'old' as the more conventional chosen by Lucy. And second, he differentiates between types of lawless character (and lawless literature), separating Robin Hood from more ordinary criminals.

In a species of direct and daring cultural confrontation, the justification of both Paul and Dick for their choices of song can be regarded as an interesting allegory for the struggle of authorship. Bourdieu argues that an aspiring author usually legitimises his stake for a place within the field of cultural production by both allying his writing

to an ancient provenance, and by differentiating it from that of other aspiring and rival authors. The allusion to a lawless folklore, and one of a very different type from that of other outlaws, appears to enact just this process. The extent to which Ainsworth and Bulwer dramatise and actually participate in this process of cultural struggle will be examined more fully later. For now, we must recognise that their heroes are heavily involved in an inventive and active form of authorship, and the production of a cultural canon which is both a focus for self-identification, and a vital feature of their challenge to the established or ruling classes.

The association of artistic creativity with criminal activity was possibly less surprising than it might now appear. De Quincey had presented murder as an aesthetic form, the murderer as artist, in 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' which appeared in *Blackwood's* in 1827.¹³⁰ There was, perhaps, a sense in which the last confession speeches of condemned criminals, sold by hawkers around the sights of executions, represented a form of authorship. But, more generally, there were reasons why an author might experience a particular sense of kinship with the criminal, why Paul and Dick might have been interpreted as representatives of the author's profession. During the 18th century, as a few began to attempt to make their livings as authors, professional writing became strongly associated with a life of misery and tragedy in the mind of the public. As I have said, writing was regarded as the preserve of the financially independent, and there was a strong whiff of unrespectability about choosing to write in order to live. Furthermore, it was immensely difficult to earn a crust when the book was not yet a commercially successful commodity. Before 1756 there were fewer than one hundred new titles registered annually. By 1792, despite the rapid increase that the figure represented, and a sign of the later development of the

¹³⁰ 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts', as now printed, consists of three parts. These were actually published separately - the first in 1827, the second in 1839, and the postscript in 1854.

market for literature, there were still only three hundred and seventy.¹³¹ Samuel Johnson's *Life of Mr Richard Savage* (1744) detailed the suffering and eventual death of an author in debtors' prison, and Savage became synonymous with the extremities of authorship. Smollett's novels portrayed the famished and exploited Grub Street hacks. And, as Cross notes, the image of author as victim was indelibly established with the suicide of Chatterton in 1770.¹³²

The state of literary production, and especially the market for books, was vastly changed by the 1820s, and the Literary Fund, set up in the early 19th century, meant that such appalling cases were less common. Nevertheless, the image of the struggling author remained, and for many a life of writing was immensely difficult. Some of the applications to the Literary Fund for what was usually a meagre amount of money reveal the harsh conditions that some were still having to endure. Dickens attended a meeting in 1839, following his election to the committee, at which thirty-five separate cases were discussed. One applicant had been imprisoned for debt for eight years. Another, the historian and editor John Watkins, had applied for the first time in 1831 on the death of his son, the consumption of his daughter and the lunacy of his wife; he was now making his eighteenth application 'after it had pleased providence to take the last of my three sons.' His sponsor wrote in support, 'these are the appalling facts, and barely to be exceeded in human miseries.'¹³³ William Jerdan's autobiography described the economic reality for the vast majority of authors:

That most have been steeped in poverty; that a few have barely contrived to subsist; that not one in a hundred, who were without private and extrinsic resources to fall back upon, have succeeded to the realisation of a moderate independence; and that, perhaps, one in five hundred, the exception to the rule, has reached a goal almost as

¹³¹ Cross, p.12.

¹³² For a more comprehensive discussion of the roots of the association of authorship with misery, see Cross, pp.11-13.

¹³³ Quoted in Cross, p.31.

satisfactory as he would have done had he been, with a tolerable capacity, a divine, a lawyer, or a physician.¹³⁴

Bulwer and Ainsworth, like Dickens, were acutely aware of such facts. Both served on the committee of the Literary Fund in the early 1830s; Bulwer became one of the founders, in 1850, of the Guild of Literature and Art which awarded pensions and even accommodation to professional authors.¹³⁵ As I have said, during his early career Bulwer himself had struggled desperately for money.¹³⁶ What is most important for us, however, is that authors were not just associated with poverty, but frequently with punished and criminalised poverty. Their profession often brought about a chain of events that led them from the pawnbroker, to the bailiff, to the sheriff's officer, and finally to jail.¹³⁷ Since Savage's death, there had been many literary references to debtors' prisons, and these would culminate most famously in novels by Dickens such as *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37) and *Little Dorrit* (1855-57). Indeed, almost every low-life novel until the 1860s had a scene situated in a debtors' prison.¹³⁸ Jail was a perpetual and recurring image in the mind of the author. There were powerful reasons why he might identify with an imaginative and creative character, unjustly punished and criminalised, and consequently part of a colourful and defiant group, living precariously, and existing beyond the classified and stratified limits of conventional society.

Furthermore, the very lifestyles of the criminal gangs of Ainsworth and Bulwer provide an association with literary characters and, indeed, with a breed of literary character gaining prominence at the time in which *Rookwood* and *Paul Clifford* were written. 'Bohemianism' became synonymous with the 1850s, most famously in the

¹³⁴ William Jerdan, *The Autobiography of William Jerdan*, 4 vols (London: [n. pub.], 1852-53), II, 37-38.

¹³⁵ Cross, p.32.

¹³⁶ Escott, pp.132-34.

¹³⁷ Cross, p.39.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.42.

person of George Augustus Sala.¹³⁹ Thackeray was probably the first to use the term with reference to an unconventional way of life in *Vanity Fair*, in 1845. However, the origins of bohemianism were rooted firmly in the late 1820s and 1830s, particularly through Theodore Hook and William Maginn. Both died in the early 1840s having led lives of cultural and moral anarchy, embracing a lifestyle characterised by bouts of heavy drinking, intemperate gambling, savage criticism, and all-round profligacy. Such genuine examples of bohemianism were self-consciously adopted by succeeding authors. At a time when the Regency period was giving way to the Victorian, and a sober character and healthy bank balance were increasingly the markers of social success, the majority of authors were clearly at a distinct disadvantage. By cultivating an association between authorship and unorthodoxy, the author could flout many of the conventions of Victorian society - including that of being wealthy - without feeling ashamed. Indeed, Bourdieu suggests that such a pose was one particularly suited to the author. The field of cultural production accords primacy to youth - this can be traced to the disavowal of power and of 'economy' which is at the field's heart. It is therefore common for writers and artists to align themselves with youth in dress and behaviour - it signifies indifference to power or money, the 'intellectual' rejection of 'the spirit of seriousness', in opposition to power and 'bourgeois' seriousness.¹⁴⁰ It makes a virtue of necessity.

The bohemians were intensely clubbable, frequently forming dining societies, or taking over tavern rooms. As Vizetelly was to say, it is 'the greatest enjoyment in life to prolong the night until an hour or two before sunrise.'¹⁴¹ This seems to echo Long Ned's statement that 'a nice long night [...] is made on purpose for drinking' (*PC*, I, 271). The parallels with the criminals of Ainsworth and Bulwer are obvious. The

¹³⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the roots of bohemianism, see Cross, pp.90-125.

¹⁴⁰ Bourdieu, p.105.

¹⁴¹ Henry Vizetelly, *Glances Back Through Seventy Years*, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, 1893), II, 45.

associations with literariness, with original composition, with significant and sustained cultural intercourse, with drunken and bawdy ill-behaviour, and with impudent defiance of the established class hierarchy mean that, while these criminals embody Rabelaisian and carnivalesque radicalism in general, they can also be seen more specifically to parallel bohemian authorship. Renato Poggioli notes that the two forms of avant-gardism are the disdainful, like the dandy or the bohemian, and the transgressive, like the criminal.¹⁴² In making their heroes dandyish and bohemian criminals, the authors could not come any closer to creating the ultimate symbols of avant-garde authorship. Ultimately, they are more convincing as bohemian authors than as realistic criminals.

4. *Paul Clifford* and the Literary Critic

Paul Clifford, therefore, shows the connection between cultural ownership and power, and the mystical hold which the book has over the minds of the lower classes, but also includes a sustained challenge to the book's class-based symbolism. It presents an alternative, daring, and defiant form of cultural production stemming from disenfranchised members of society, and embodying one important part of a general challenge to failing social mechanisms. The very portrayal of this challenge is both a reflection and a part of the clamour for social reform at the time, and the atmosphere of change which did not fail to include literature. The signs were, as literacy increased, as the costs of producing literature decreased, and as the economic climate invited publishers to consider expanding their readerships, that the vice-like grip of the élite upon literature was finally being significantly loosened. But this caused its own problems, and *Paul Clifford* confronts the relatively new evils conjured by the altering field of cultural production with no less vigour than it challenges the lingering evils of the ruling-class cultural monopoly.

¹⁴² Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p.32.

The falling cost of printing brought about a rapid rise in the number and variety of publications including, as I have said, some cheaper series of novels which reached further down the social ladder. Another significant feature of this change, however, was the proliferation of periodicals and newspapers.¹⁴³ Between 1815 and 1832, many new journals came into existence, including *Blackwood's*, the *London Magazine*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, and *Fraser's*. These magazines were of a different type from the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviews. They were less intellectual, and offered a varied mix of short stories, essays, reviews and poetry. Most significantly, their popularity directly influenced the literary tastes of the reading public, and brought about an alteration in the established hierarchy of generic status. Short prose fiction became the dominant published form, and narrative verse was almost forgotten. This development was to mark the rise of a new and more recognisably professional category of author. Authorship had been regarded as the exclusive preserve of the leisured and wealthy, or the rare genius; journalism now became a viable occupation for those with literary ambitions. Where a decade earlier young aspirants would have at best hoped for a job toiling as a bookseller's drudge, Dickens and Thackeray were able to channel their talents more directly and profitably into writing for magazines. William Maginn's series in *Fraser's Magazine*, 'A Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters' (1830-38), showed that the vocational writer was at last being recognised as a 'literary character' rather than as a hack and a scribbler. Indeed, contributors to magazines could often expect to receive reasonable remuneration for their efforts. Payments for articles rose steadily during the 1820s, and young men of London and Edinburgh dared to hope to secure a decent living from writing alone. Magazines soon found that they had to hire full-time,

¹⁴³ For a comprehensive analysis of the rise of the periodical, and the accompanying tensions regarding the nature of authorship, see Erickson, pp.71-103. For an interesting collection of essays dealing with a broad range of issues surrounding Victorian periodical publication, see *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, ed. by Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982).

salaried editors, sub-editors and staff writers. Some could even earn enough to live as gentlemen. But for Bulwer and others, this new era of authorship posed its own threats to the future of English literature. In *Paul Clifford* he was to bring these dramatically to the fore.

It is through the portrayal of Peter Mac Grawler, in particular, that Bulwer goes about stripping the veils from the role of the literary critic with as much assiduity as he had those of the fashionable classes. And veils, in a literal sense, there certainly were. In order to attract contributors, to allow them to speak freely, and to permit overall editorial control of printed material, essays were frequently published anonymously.¹⁴⁴ In *England and the English*, Bulwer is vociferous in his damnation of the principle of anonymity, and argues that attributed writing would considerably raise its standard. He says that if the 'mysteries of the craft' were to be revealed, were to leak beyond the inner circle, the public would be astonished and enraged.¹⁴⁵ In *Paul Clifford* he does his best to throw some light upon the darker of these 'mysteries'. From the outset, he is unsparing in the savagery of his characterisation of this 'literary character':

This gentleman was no other than Mr Peter Mac Grawler, the editor of a magnificent periodical, entitled 'The Asinaeum', which was written to prove, that whatever is popular is necessarily bad, - a valuable and recondite truth, which the Asinaeum had satisfactorily demonstrated by ruining three printers, and demolishing a publisher. (*PC*, I, 20)

¹⁴⁴ Sutherland notes that Sir Walter Scott, as patron of *Blackwood's*, had made anonymity in authorship into a 'Scottish cult'. It was the anonymity of the magazine's contributors which allowed the satire to become malicious. *The Life of Walter Scott*, p.243.

¹⁴⁵ *England and the English*, II, 21, 33. It is especially interesting that Bulwer associates this spirit of anonymity with the continuing vestiges of aristocratic influence. He argues that it was a convenient cloak for aristocratic contributors to attack their friends.

The sarcastic reference to this 'gentleman', and his editorship of the 'magnificent periodical', sets the tone for a sustained attempt to prick the pomposity that Bulwer clearly regards as afflicting some who hold the newly prominent position of literary critic. He shows a man who harbours an inflated opinion both of his own social status, condescendingly instructing Paul "never to enter a gentleman's room without knocking" and "never [to] disturb a gentleman in his avocations" (*PC*, I, 85), and of the literary status of his profession, which he refers to as 'a very great science' (*PC*, I, 89). The reality is that Mac Grawler is a man in charge of a failing magazine, who drinks too much and is a regular visitor to that low haunt, the Mug. His source of inspiration, of the 'wonderful spirit which he infused into his critical compositions', is a 'pewter Hippocrene' (*PC*, I, 85). Despite his drinking habits, however, and the fact that he eventually comes to join their gang (albeit as a cook and general dogsbody), there is no sense in which Mac Grawler is a bohemian in the mould of Paul and the other criminals. He is, instead, a despicable and brazen hypocrite.

The evident importance which Bulwer attaches to denying this character a claim to gentlemanly status is perhaps proof again of the tension deep within him that frequently appears to leave its mark upon his writing. Despite the concerted effort in *England and the English*, *Pelham*, and elsewhere in *Paul Clifford* to expose the damaging effects of class prejudice and aristocratic influence upon literature, there is a strong flavour of snobbery in the way in which Bulwer ridicules Mac Grawler's Scottish heritage and pretensions to breeding. Much of the criticism of Leigh Hunt and the 'cockney' school earlier had stemmed from gentlemanly outrage at the presumption of lower-class writers in attempting to rise above hackdom. There is the suspicion that such a feeling lingers here. Elsewhere Bulwer was to remark to Robert Bell of his time as editor of a periodical during the 1830s that 'you hardly ever find a Gentilhomme writes for Magazines - When I undertook the *New Monthly* I was the first gentleman of birth who had done so, more followed my example. I only did it for bread and

cheese and soon threw it up convinced how much it lowered me.'¹⁴⁶ This is, perhaps, typical of much liberal Whig sentiment which pushed for change it knew was necessary, but which could not entirely quash a fondness for what was being pared away and a distaste for what was taking its place. It marked Bulwer's paradoxical attitude to the changes he was himself helping to bring about - a simultaneous welcoming of, and anxiety about, the democratisation of literature.

The primary motivation of the eminent editor, Bulwer reveals, is an insatiable greed. He writes for money, and is ready to use those around him in his lust for profit. When Paul suggests that he might like to become a critic himself, Mac Grawler immediately sees an opportunity not to develop and nurture talent, but to abuse it:

Paul's wish [...] was no sooner expressed, than a vague but golden scheme of future profit illumined the brain of Mac Grawler; in a word, he resolved that Paul should henceforward share the labour of his critiques; and that he, Mac Grawler, should receive the whole profits in return for the honour thereby conferred on his coadjutor. (*PC*, I, 88)

As Ned later observes, in a cannibalistic metaphor that becomes a signature for Mac Grawler's brand of criticism, his intention was to 'live upon [Paul's] brains' (*PC*, I, 117).¹⁴⁷ The lust for money, and its tendency to 'consume', is, of course, a comment upon the corrupting and perfidious influence of commercialism as society becomes increasingly governed by the dictates of the market. But this does not simply mean that young and naïve journalists become the prey of the ruthless. As the pursuit of commercial success takes priority over the pursuit of artistic perfection, the literary

¹⁴⁶ Edward Bulwer to Robert Bell, 15 September 1853, quoted in Cross, p.123. *Paul Clifford* was published before Bulwer's short stint as a periodical editor in 1832 and 1833. It is perhaps significant that he never again so brazenly attacked literary critics and editors in his fiction afterwards.

¹⁴⁷ It is worth noting that food, and the notion of cannibalism in particular, regularly come to represent the overthrow of ideal loyalties for fleshly considerations. Mauleverer, for instance, though espousing noble principles, only really cares for the pleasures of the table. It symbolises a society which has confused the soul for the stomach.

form itself becomes twisted and perverted. The author paradoxically becomes the destroyer of the written word, and Mac Grawler and his colleagues collude in the 'murder of grammar' (*PC*, I, 116). Five years earlier, Thomas Lovell Beddoes had lamented that.

the state of literature now is painful and humiliating enough - every one will write for £15 a sheet; - Who for love of art, who for the purposes of continuing the noble stream of English minds?¹⁴⁸

It appeared that, even as the democratisation of authorship was allowing a greater number to swell the 'noble stream of English minds', the money which made their contribution possible was also the cause of a potentially fatal decline in the quality of English literature.¹⁴⁹

The effect of working within a transient form subject to the forces of the market is evident as Mac Grawler instructs Paul in the ways of magazine writing. When reviewing books, for example, he reveals that there is a formulaic, unsubtle, hugely imprecise and cynical methodology which is dictated largely by the need to produce quickly and to please the different types of reader. Mac Grawler provides a sample of one form of review, the 'advising tickle':

"There is a good deal of merit in these little volumes, although we must regret the evident haste in which they were written. The author might do better - we recommend him a study of the best writers," - then conclude by a Latin quotation, which you may take from one of the mottoes in the Spectator.' (*PC*, I, 91)

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Lovell Beddoes to Thomas Forbes Kelsall, 25 March 1825, *The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p.598.

¹⁴⁹ In related ways, the nature of the periodical form and the audience it was now catering for were also seen as significant dangers to the quality of written prose. The essay had a very short reading life, and it was being aimed at a readership of a more varied educational background than had been the case in the past. In *England and the English*, Bulwer worries that writers have become less fastidious, and more superficially eloquent, than those who previously directed scholarly works at a more limited readership (II, 65, 118-19).

And he goes on to mimic the 'metaphorical tickle':

"We beg this poetical aspirant to remember the fate of Pyrenaeus, who attempting to pursue the Muses, forgot that he had not the wings of the goddesses, flung himself from the loftiest ascent he could reach, and perished."

'This you see, Paul, is a loftier and more erudite sort of tickle, and may be reserved for one of the Quarterly Reviews. Never throw away a simile unnecessarily.' (*PC*, I, 91-92)

Words and phrases become unnatural. They lose their spontaneity and authenticity as they are plagiarised from other sources or stockpiled and categorised for use on a certain type of review and for a certain type of reader. Indeed, 'the great science' can be 'divided into three branches; viz, "to tickle, to slash, and to plaster"' (*PC*, I, 89). Furthermore, Mac Grawler reveals that frequently - in fact as often as is reasonably possible - articles are written without any recourse to the texts being reviewed. He actually prefers to slash and plaster books without wasting any valuable time in reading them first:

'There is another grand difficulty attendant on this class of criticism [tickling], - it is generally requisite to read a few pages of the work [...] but it is not often necessary to extract when you slash or when you plaster; when you slash, it is better in general to conclude with -

"After what we have said, it is unnecessary to add, that we cannot offend the taste of our readers by any quotation from this execrable trash." And when you plaster, you may wind up with, "We regret that our limits will not allow us to give any extracts from this wonderful and unrivalled work. We must refer our readers to the book itself.'" (*PC*, I, 93)

Again, this is a practice which has some basis in reality. We saw, for example, in the last chapter, that attacks from a critic as reputable as Thomas Carlyle in 'Sartor Resartus' upon the dandyism of *Pelham*, appear to have been based upon extracts from the novel which had appeared in previous issues of *Fraser's* rather than from a firsthand reading of the text.¹⁵⁰ And Mac Grawler surrounds this indiscriminate and entirely destructive prose, both to the form in which it is written and to the literature

¹⁵⁰ For evidence in support of this, see Moers, p.183. Carlyle later grudgingly admitted to his error in failing to recognise the earnestness of *Pelham*. Rosa, p.18.

which it addresses, with an aura of authority which impresses Paul. This he achieves by 'speaking grammatically':

"To slash, is, speaking grammatically, to employ the accusative, or accusing case; you must cut up your book right and left, top and bottom, root and branch. To plaster a book, is to employ the dative, or giving case, and you must bestow on the work all the superlatives in the language". (*PC*, I, 90)

The parallels with the portrayal of the legal system become clear yet again. The literary reviewer relies on rigid and wholly inadequate categories to define a varied literature, just as the law relies on inadequate categories to classify criminals. His judgements on books are as arbitrary as the court's judgement of its citizens. Similarly, just as a discourse of 'respectability', and even of religion, underpins the authority of the legal system, the literary critic adopts the equally powerful and irrefutable discourse of 'grammar'. He takes great pains to murder grammar from behind the smokescreen of grammar itself.

The association of the periodical press with murder, dismemberment, cannibalism, and destruction is a recurring and prevalent theme. Paul's first contact with Augustus Tomlinson comes as the philosopher is working on a leading newspaper, and is engaged in "'murder[ing] in effigy", "'assassinat[ing] in type"', "'knock[ing] off"' leading barristers, "'murder[ing] bishops"', afflicting ministers with "'lethiferous diseases"', and sending victims "'tottering to the grave"'. Bishops are his "'proper food"' (*PC*, I, 44-45). And, in a reference significant to a reading of Paul as author, Tomlinson does not doubt that he 'might have the honour to be murdered himself one of these days' (*PC*, I, 44). This attack upon bishops and ministers is, in many ways, a foretaste of the carnivalesque ridiculing of authority by the criminal group later in the novel. It is an amusing episode. And yet at its heart is something more sinister, a serious observation upon the nature of journalism which is shown to include the manipulative and false representation of real people for a ravenous public. This comment upon the dangers of exploitative representations is important to my

consideration of Buckstone's 'Jack Sheppard' in the next chapter.¹⁵¹ Assassination in type equates to the murder of truth, and the metaphorical slaughter of people for public consumption. The parallel made between butchery and contemporary periodical writing was found elsewhere. Carlyle, despairing of the growing dominance of transient publications demanding morsels from authors to satisfy the market, thought in similar terms. He observed that 'you must throw your ware into one of those dog's-meat carts, such as travel the public streets, and get it sold there, be it carrion or not.'¹⁵²

Others complained that authors were not just the providers of meat, but the meat itself. James Hogg, in 'The Flying Tailor', referred to the accursed journals that lived on 'tears, and sighs, and groans, and brains, and blood.'¹⁵³ He was alluding primarily to the practice of destroying the works, and lives, of poets and novelists. This is Mac Grawler's particular speciality. He is a 'butcher' who can 'with all speed cut up and disjoint any work, from the smallest to the greatest, from the most superficial to the most superior' (*PC*, I, 88). He might indulge generally in the 'murder of grammar', in the infliction of damage upon literary output, but more specifically he enjoys the 'mangling of authors' (*PC*, I, 116). His vocation becomes associated with the most despicable forms of criminality - with torture, murder and cannibalism - with all that is taboo and heinous. He conceals his identity, and conducts indiscriminate and frenzied attacks upon the defenceless for money. Carlyle came to regard 'honest Street Sweeping' as infinitely more worthy than periodical authorship.¹⁵⁴ As Paul Clifford is

¹⁵¹ There are, however, important differences. While Bulwer here appears to be outlining the abuses brought about by commercialism, the exploitation of Jack's image in Buckstone's play appears to revolve more around the abuses by the ruling classes and their monopoly of power. It seems to target the politics of class rather than the evils of commerce.

¹⁵² Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 10 January 1832, *Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. by K. J. Fielding and others, 21 vols (London: Duke University Press, 1993), VI, 85.

¹⁵³ James Hogg, *Selected Poems* (Edinburgh: Akros, 1995), p.61.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 26 February 1831, *Collected Letters of*

shown sickened by the abuse he has both had to receive and to dish out as a writer for Mac Grawler's magazine, and choosing instead a life as an outlaw, Bulwer goes even further by suggesting that such periodical authorship is infinitely less honourable than honest crime.¹⁵⁵

In this way the periodical critic becomes inextricably implicated in the complex criminal metaphor which runs throughout Bulwer's novel. Mac Grawler's greed and treachery, traits inseparable from his literary criticism, are shown to be utterly immoral, while Paul's outlawry makes him nothing worse than a "moral rogue" (*PC*, I, 132). The moral distinction between types of criminality is encountered regularly, and controversially, in Bulwer's fiction. Glanville is distinguished from Thornton in *Pelham*; Aram from Houseman in *Eugene Aram*; indeed, we see Robin Hood distinguished from other outlaws in *Paul Clifford*. Here Bulwer goes further in drawing a parallel between Mac Grawler's literary labours and the very worst examples of criminal depravity.

Furthermore, by doing so, Bulwer broadens the associations between Paul and authorship. I have suggested that Paul can be seen as representative of an alternative, defiant cultural discourse. Through his encounters with Mac Grawler, he can also be regarded as representative of the author's status as victim. In *England and the English*, Bulwer offers an anguished plea on behalf of the maligned author. He portrays the author as a tortured victim, abandoned by society, and forced into exile by the cruelties of literary criticism:

[W]hy is the poor author to be singled out from the herd of men (whom he seeks to delight or instruct) for the sole purpose of torture? Is his nature so much less sensitive and gentle than that of others, that the utmost ingenuity is necessary to

Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, V, 237.

¹⁵⁵ It is significant that Paul, before deserting literary criticism, is first shown to be highly adept at it. He therefore challenges and masters this mode of cultural production as well as the others we have discussed already.

wound him? Or why is a system to be invented and encouraged, for the sole sake of persecuting him with the bitterest rancour and the most perfect impunity? [...] Why are all the checks and decencies which moderate the severity of the world's censure upon its other victims, to be removed from censure upon him? Why is he to be thrust out of the pale of ordinary self-defence? - and the decorum and the fear of consequences which make the intercourse of mankind urbane and humanised, to be denied to one, whose very vanity can only be fed - whose very interests can only be promoted, by increasing the pleasures of the society which exiles him from its commonest protection - yes! by furthering the civilisation which rejects him from its safeguards?¹⁵⁶

It is interesting to note that Bulwer's protest amounts to a plea for beneficence which is framed very much in the syntax of social feeling. Similarly, the plight of Paul as author is always allied with the plight of Paul as poor and unrepresented member of society. Nevertheless, he is forced into exile, forced to abandon 'honest' labours, by the abuses of the literary critic no less than by the failure of the system of justice. Ultimately, too, he is 'served up' for execution by the same literary critic, who betrays him for money. This event provides conclusive evidence of Bulwer's intention consciously to associate Paul with authorship. The idea of a literary critic mixing with, and ultimately being in the position to deliver, a wanted outlaw has a distinctly hollow ring if we interpret *Paul Clifford* solely as a novel of social realism. Quite simply, it seems absurd; yet it plays an important part in the plot. Only by recognising that Paul's fate is an allegory of the author's, as well as a portrayal of social division, does the novel's plot make sense. His kinship with Mac Grawler's more literal authorial victims is vital to our understanding. He is a fighter, and his stance beyond society's edges is a defiant one. Despite this, he is an outcast as well as an outlaw; and Bulwer does his utmost to suggest that it is his rejection and abuse at the hands of the country's mechanisms - literary, as well as social - that lead to his lawlessness, and not his lawlessness that leads to society's rejection.

¹⁵⁶ *England and the English*, II, 26-27.

5. The Newgate Novelists and a very Personal Struggle

Bulwer, therefore, expresses severe reservations about the effect upon literature of an increasingly democratic process of cultural production. Because it is allied with commercialism, with the aim of making money rather than fulfilling a higher artistic ideal, it is detrimental to the form in which it appears. Prose is suffering because of this and the wish to increase sales among a less-educated readership. But it is also characterised by a cruel inclination to attack novelists and poets, often from behind the protective screen of anonymity and without having read the texts concerned. The novel's extended metaphor of criminality comes to include the sadistic and murderous literary critic, and the author as victimised exile, as well as bohemian defiant. But it is vital to remember that Bulwer's analysis of the literary field is not made from a position of objectivity. He is commenting as an author, in a novel, and at a time of particular self-consciousness about the process of literary production. He is commenting as one who is himself prey to the whims of the periodicals. He is as heavily involved in the struggles of authorship as the characters he portrays.

As an author, the influence of the periodicals would have been of concern to Bulwer. Literary reviews were the primary point of contact between the public and the field of literary production. They were increasingly used as convenient guides towards books worth spending money upon, and even as substitutes for reading the books themselves. John Banim, a popular Irish novelist, satirised this trend in *Revelations of the Dead-Alive* (1824):

[Y]ou bought ready-made opinion for your money, a few shillings or pence, as it might be, and so were saved the trouble of forming your own. And what man or miss in his or her senses might be expected to pay a great deal for so little, when, with a little, he or she could have the great deal?

'No one did so,' said Mr Drudge: 'the "reading public" rested satisfied with periodicals alone, and the author was left on the publisher's shelf.'¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ John Banim, *Revelations of the Dead-Alive* (London: [n. pub.], 1824), p.114.

As a result, the power wielded by the periodicals was becoming immense. However unsavoury it may have been for authors to accept - and though even the *Spectator* was to admit, while reviewing *Paul Clifford*, that 'the state of criticism at the present day is undoubtedly a disgrace to literature' - the truth was that Mac Grawler's factual equivalent, and what he wrote, was of real significance.¹⁵⁸ It quickly became a common ploy for a publishing house to use its magazine as a vehicle to promote, or puff, those authors and works which were on its own books while attacking those that were not. Whether an article chose to savagely 'slash' or lavishly 'plaster' depended upon the allegiance of the author being reviewed. If Bulwer's son is to be believed, critics preferred to 'slash' wherever possible because they felt that an audience was more entertained by detraction than praise. He quotes an unnamed critic whose favourite saying - "'Give me a book to cut up; the public like anatomy'" - bears a striking resemblance to imagery used in *Paul Clifford*.¹⁵⁹ Wordsworth and Coleridge had already noticed the growing presence and influence of the anonymous critic on a poet's relationship with his public. Coleridge was angry that these 'invisible ministers' were increasingly denying to the poet the right to have his work judged fairly by readers.¹⁶⁰ Accurate assessment of literature was sacrificed in the urge to maximise profits.

Alternatively, and equally effectively, an author could be ignored altogether by a magazine. Hazlitt and Campbell, both independently and without success, suggested to the *Edinburgh Review* that Bulwer be reviewed.¹⁶¹ But it was almost impossible for authors to avoid the sphere of the periodicals. They were affected both by what the reviews printed, and by the need to contribute to their pages themselves. Although one could rarely write something which would please readers while also proving to be of

¹⁵⁸ *Spectator*, 15 May 1830, p.312.

¹⁵⁹ 1st Earl of Lytton, II, 272.

¹⁶⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, 2 vols (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), I, 59.

¹⁶¹ Erickson, p.97.

lasting merit, it was nevertheless vital to cast one's work into the 'dog's meat carts'. And as the writing market became more competitive by the day, magazines fought fiercely to maintain and improve upon their share of the spoils. In the battle to attract readers, to be noticed in the market-place, articles became more vehement and savage. They also provided the platform for individuals to attract notice and make their mark in the literary field. Author was turned against author, and bitter personal duels were played out before the readers. In a further extension to the murderous metaphor which we have seen applied to authorship throughout this chapter, George Darley professed to be deeply affected by being forced, in the *Athenaeum*, to commit 'literary fratricide' upon his fellow authors.¹⁶² It was a dirty business which, we have seen, Thackeray was similarly involved in at *Fraser's*. It is with this in mind that we should consider Bulwer's novel as a vehicle not just for observing and commenting upon the struggles within the literary field, but for participating in them himself.

The notion of 'literary fratricide' may have seemed a particularly pertinent one to Bulwer. As we have seen, the attacks and counter-attacks between him and various periodicals were significant features of the Newgate controversy. At the time of *Paul Clifford*, the reliance of authors upon other agents is particularly clear. As I have said, the first contact that the public had with a new literary work was through the pages of the periodicals. The work of the literary critic, and his success, itself relied upon establishing a legitimate authority for the opinion being expressed. While periodicals recognised the taste of their readers for colourful and confrontational prose, they nevertheless also needed the readers to attach value to the declarations being made. Inherent in the very act of criticism was not only the statement of opinion on a work's value, but the claim of legitimacy for such an opinion. As Bourdieu has written of the critic's role,

¹⁶² George Darley to Mary Russell Mitford, 22 August 1836, quoted in Claude Colleer Abbot, *The Life and Letters of George Darley* (London: Oxford University Press, p. 150).

All critics declare not only their judgement of the work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art.¹⁶³

Similarly, the novelist was not simply writing a story, but claiming legitimacy for his writing, the legitimacy to define what a writer is, to have the power to consecrate, and win assent when doing so.

When considered in the light of Bourdieu's theory, the purpose behind Bulwer's characterisation of literary critics, and the specific methods he employs towards fulfilling that purpose, become significantly clearer. The portrayal, far from being a disinterested observation of a literary character, and a comment on the damage being inflicted upon English literature, actually reflects an urgent personal interest, and both dramatises and is itself part of the struggle between agents within the literary field. Beyond the novel, periodicals had attacked Bulwer and his work, refusing to recognise the legitimacy of his writing. Through *Mac Grawler*, Bulwer responds by denying that source the legitimate claim to an opinion of value. Each detail of his portrayal of *Mac Grawler* and his magazine can be seen as an intrinsic part of a structured and comprehensive rejection of literary criticism's position within the literary field. He opens by stripping the veils from the magazine itself, 'the great *Asinaeum*', the source from which *Mac Grawler* derives his claims to authority. He changes the name of the *Athenaeum*, and, by associating it with a dumb animal, pulls away the vague suggestions of institutional power that the very title seems to confer. He goes on to deride its unpopularity, and ridicules its pompous claims to academic capital on the basis of such unpopularity. Then he turns to the personage of *Mac Grawler*. By undermining his gentlemanly status, Bulwer withdraws the claim to literary authority that, though loosening, was still attached to a higher class status. By showing a young

¹⁶³ Bourdieu, p.36.

boy quickly excelling as a periodical writer, he refutes the assumption that criticism is a complex and refined form of art in its own right. By showing Mac Grawler's avarice he reveals his true motives, and denies the profession the foundations of disinterest on which a balanced and valued judgement would have to rest. Indeed, by revealing that the critic neglects even to read the books he reviews, he suggests that the judgements have no basis in truth at all. Mac Grawler is a slasher, a plasterer, a tickler, a butcher and a murderer, but never a writer; Bulwer refuses to acknowledge that he contributes in any way to the literary field. And by daring to exclude such literary criticism, by denouncing its claim to legitimacy, Bulwer sets out his own definition of the literary field and its boundaries, and thereby simultaneously stakes his own claim to legitimacy.

This notion of redefining the field is key to the Newgate novels. Bourdieu states that 'young' authors must dismantle the boundaries of the field as it exists, take up advanced positions, and push into the past those authors already consecrated in order to stake their own claims for places within it. In this upside-down economic world, they must be transgressive in searching for a symbolic capital which will allow them in turn to become established.¹⁶⁴ They had, effectively, to flout literary convention, and embrace a form of literary criminality and lawlessness. Ainsworth was acutely aware of the need for aspiring authors to distinguish themselves from those already occupying positions within the field. In a letter of 1840 written to J. A. Overs, a poor carpenter who had repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, submitted stories to *Bentley's* for publication, he included the following advice:

I have read your story with great interest, and think very highly of it. But I own I wish you had chosen a different subject. In the present style of writing you must inevitably be contrasted, and I fear disadvantageously, with other and established authors; whereas if you had followed my advice, and selected a subject from your own walk, you would have stood a much greater chance of success.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ See Bourdieu, pp.59-60.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Ellis, I, 392.

He shows that he recognises the need to adopt an avant-garde position; this recognition influenced his own choice of subject matter when writing *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard*. Bulwer was similarly aware of the transgressive position represented by his own writing, and that he was committing what one critic has called 'literary audacities'.¹⁶⁶ In the preface to *Night and Morning* (1845), he was to say that,

Long since, in searching for new regions in the Art to which I am a servant, it seemed to me that they might be found lying far, and rarely trodden, beyond that range of conventional morality in which Novelist after Novelist had entrenched himself.¹⁶⁷

Even Thackeray's *Catherine*, despite its satirical purpose and tone, represents an implicit awareness that the 'young' author, whether he liked it or not, was impelled towards literary rebellion by the nature of his position. He declares,

And here, though we are only in the third chapter of this history, we feel almost sick of the characters that appear in it, and the adventures which they are called on to go through. But how can we help ourselves?¹⁶⁸

The Newgate novels, in a profoundly literal sense, were enacting this transgressive process; they screamed their controversialism. By making the lives of strutting criminals their theme, and refusing to ally this with overt moral stricture, they trampled upon the prevailing literary codes. Just as the criminal characters brought flash song into the drawing-room, Bulwer and Ainsworth brought brazen outlawry into the novel. Just as Paul led daring raids into the houses of the ruling classes, and Dick invaded their luxurious coaches, their authors led raids into the heart of the established literary field. While Bulwer was symbolically dramatising the process of literary change, he

¹⁶⁶ Escott, p. 190.

¹⁶⁷ Edward Bulwer, *Night and Morning*, The New Knebworth Edition (London: George Routledge, 1887), p. viii.

¹⁶⁸ Thackeray, *Works*, IV, 555-56.

was helping to enact that change. While Ainsworth dramatised the creative process of 'young' authorship, he was staking his own claim as a 'young' author.

The young Newgate novelists did not simply choose to use literal crime in a cynical attempt to commit their own brand of literary crime. What becomes abundantly clear is that their choice arose from a particular sense of identification with their criminal heroes which stemmed from their own status as aspiring authors on the fringes of the literary field. In *Rookwood*, Ainsworth shows that, while he may not deal in his fiction with the specifics of contemporary changes in the nature of cultural production, he is nevertheless deeply preoccupied with more general features of an author's status. One sign of this is the depth of his disturbance at watching the daring exploits of criminals fade quickly in society's collective memory. He includes a heartfelt lament for the passing of the highwayman's art, and ponders why, with so many potential candidates, this has been the case:

Turpin was the *Ultimus Romanorum*, the last of a race, which (we were almost about to say we regret) is now altogether extinct. Several successors he had, it is true, but no name worthy to be recorded after his own. With him expired the chivalrous spirit which animated successively the bosoms of so many Knights of the Road [...]. It were a subject well worthy of inquiry, to trace this decline and fall of the empire of the Tobymen, to its remoter causes - to ascertain the why and the wherefore, that with so many half-pay captains; so many poor curates; so many lieutenants, of both services, without hopes of promotion; so many penny-a-liners, and fashionable novelists; so many damned dramatists and damning critics; so many Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviewers [...] - it were worth serious investigation, we repeat, to ascertain why, with the best material imaginable for a new race of highwaymen, we have none, not so much as an amateur. (*Rwd*, II, 157-59)

As for De Quincey in 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts', this decline is a cause for sorrow. The complaint that 'we are now degenerated from the grand tobyman to the cracksman and the sneak, about whom there are no redeeming features' shows criminality being used as a metaphor for a changed society (*Rwd*, II, 162). It suggests regret at the death of a time of excitement and chivalry, and the arrival of a safer but duller world; it suggests that Ainsworth, like Bulwer, was

uncomfortable with the transition from the Romantic to the Victorian. It is significant that Ainsworth regards the literary man as such a prime potential candidate for heroic criminality. He would set out to fulfil this potential.

What Ainsworth finds most disconcerting is not the passing of the highwayman's art, but the fading of his memory. For him, the gradual loss of such tales amounts to historical or cultural vandalism. This feature becomes most obvious in comparing two footnotes from different editions. In that of the second edition, Ainsworth proudly and carefully records that in the stomping ground of one infamous highwayman 'a public-house bearing his name now stands' (*Rwd*, III, 169). It is important to him; it seems, through its very exceptional nature, to draw attention to the more usual fading of such memorials. And in a note to the edition of 1849, he recognises even more keenly the extent to which the highwayman's exploits were disappearing from the collective social memory. Ainsworth's role is to revive and preserve such tales:

The memory of bold Will Davies, the '*Golden Farmer*' (so named from the circumstance of his always paying his rent in gold), is fast declining upon his peculiar domain, Bagshot. The inn, which once bore his name, still remains to point out to the traveller the dangers his forefathers had to encounter in crossing this extensive heath [...]. We are sorry to add that the '*Golden Farmer*' has altered its designation to the '*Jolly Farmer*.' This should be amended; and when next we pass that way, we hope to see the original sign restored.¹⁶⁹

His novel is a concerted attempt to reverse this process of decay. He locates and includes various tales of forgotten criminals, carefully establishing his authority by quoting the sources, be they old ballads or obscure biographies. He even describes his own pilgrimages to sites of legendary crime. His actions in paying respect in this way distinctly parallel those of his character, Dick Turpin. Dick, on several occasions, makes detours to the gibbets of dead comrades. He too determines that they shall not

¹⁶⁹ *Rookwood*, The Original Illustrated Edition, pp.274-75.

be forgotten. His determination stems not only from regard for fellow knights of the road, but from fear that in their fate lies his own. "'Will this be my lot, I marvel?" said Dick, looking upwards, with an involuntary shudder' as he stands on a lonely road with one such executed convict (*Rwd*, III, 204). The prospect of death holds no fear for him - we have seen that this singing criminal laughs at such fear. His worry, instead, is that the death of his body will also mark the death of his legend, the loss of his 'tale' which is so important to the criminal hero's carnivalesque defiance of death. And in this it is impossible not to see a process of self-identification on the part of Ainsworth, whose greatest fear, as a 'young' author, was that he would die unnoticed, that he should fail to make his mark in the literary field, and that his 'tale' should be forgotten.

It is a desperate and personally felt fear of artistic inconsequence. It is a fear that Ainsworth senses he shares with Jack Sheppard as he carves his name on the wooden beam, and with Dick Turpin as he looks up at the bleached bones in the gibbet. Yet, by including a quote from Schiller's *The Robbers* (1792), he shows that he recognises with Jack and Dick that in crime is the path to immortality:

Many a fine fellow with a genius extensive enough to have effected universal reformation has been doomed to perish by the halter. But does not such a man's renown extend through centuries and tens of centuries, while many a prince would be overlooked in history were it not the historian's interest to increase the number of his pages? (*Rwd*, III, 91)

With this in mind, Ainsworth determines to be more than a passive historian of the outlaw's tradition, and to join that tradition himself. He does not just revive and preserve existing tales and ballads - he adds his own to their number. His prefaces, both to the second and subsequent editions, represent concerted efforts to justify his choice of material, not as a moral or educational treatise, but as a neglected form of alternative cultural discourse which deserves expression. As we have seen Paul Clifford, Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin doing, and in the true spirit of Bourdieu's

theory about the 'young' author's 'return to sources', he is careful to emphasise that he is working within an ancient tradition of lawless literature:

[I]t might be worth while to recal [...] Sir John Falstaff and the pleasantness of Gad's Hill - the robbers in the *Beaux Stratagem* - the inimitable Don Raphael and Rolando of *Le Sage* - the hungry rogueries of *Lazarillo de Tormes* - the merry adventures of *Guzman d'Alfarache* - the Saxon Banditti of Schiller, and more recently the predatory heroes of Scott. (*Rwd*, I, xvi)

Furthermore, just as Paul and Dick distance themselves from the common pickpocket and cutthroat, and aware of the competitive nature of the field, he differentiates himself from other authors of the past and present. His demand for recognition and acclaim is considerably more deserving:

[H]ere, as the candidates are so few, and their pretensions so humble, I can't help putting in my claim for praise. I venture to affirm that I have done something more than has been accomplished by my predecessors, or contemporaries, with the significant language under consideration.¹⁷⁰

Finally, and most importantly, he brazenly states of 'Nix my doll, pals' that he has 'written a purely flash song; of which the great and peculiar merit consists in its being utterly incomprehensible to the uninformed understanding, while its meaning must be perfectly clear and perspicuous to the practised *patterer* of *Romany*, or *Pedlar's French*'.¹⁷¹ In adopting a form 'incomprehensible to the uninformed understanding' he deliberately confronts the very readership at which his novel is targeted. Paralleling his fictional characters, he literally invades the private space of the novel-reading public. He informs them from the outset that not only has he chosen lawless subject matter but that he has composed it in language which they will not understand. It is a supreme example of writing 'against' one's audience; it reiterates its transgressive nature, and thereby presents the strongest possible claim for consecration through the utter disavowal of economic interest.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. xxxvi.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. xxxvi.

It is in the description of the 'Ride to York' that the depth of Ainsworth's identification with Turpin, and the reasons for this, most obviously manifest themselves. Dick, in fleeing from an ambush by the chief constable and his men, decides to make an outrageous attempt to ride from London to York in a single night. At the heart of this decision, however, is not an urgent sense of self-preservation, but the feeling that such a feat will cement his fame and ensure that his place in legend is secured:

He thinks only of his mare - his future fame. None are by to see him ride; no stimulating plaudits ring in his ears - no thousand hands are clapping - no thousand voices huzzaing - no handkerchiefs are waved [...]. But it will be renown - everlasting renown: it will be fame, which will not die with him - which will keep his reputation, albeit a tarnished one, still in the mouths of men [...]. He is conscious that he is doing a deed to live by. If not riding for *life*, that he is riding for *immortality*: and as the hero may perchance feel (for even a highwayman may feel like a hero), when he willingly throws away his existence in the hope of earning a glorious name, Turpin cared not what might befall himself, so he could proudly signalise himself as the first of his land, *And witch the world with noble horsemanship!* (*Rwd*, III, 176-77)

His ambition is, of course, achieved. He completes the ride and the act is lauded by all. It ensures that his name will survive well beyond his own death. Acts of lawless daring like this gain for him reputation and status. His arrival in the midst of a gipsy tribe, for example, leads to such sensation as is experienced 'on the sudden arrival of a prince of the blood, a commander-in-chief, or other illustrious and distinguished personage, whose fame has been vaunted abroad amongst his fellow-men' (*Rwd*, II, 154). Even the chief of the crew dons his 'gown of state'. In a very real sense, this criminal's status is equivalent to that of royalty. Transgressive acts have secured fame and distinction.

In the 1849 preface, Ainsworth revealed the extent to which he identified with Turpin when describing the incredible ride to York. At this point, the author genuinely felt that he had become highwayman; the writing is regarded as an extraordinary achievement in itself, taking on a physical quality, as the author suffers bodily

exhaustion in writing with tremendous energy through the night in a self-conscious attempt at renown:

The Ride to York was completed in one day and one night [...]. [A] feat it was, being the composition of a hundred ordinary novel pages in less than twenty-four hours [...]. My pen literally scoured over the pages. So thoroughly did I identify myself with the flying highwayman, that, once started, I found it impossible to halt. Animated by kindred enthusiasm, I cleared every obstacle in my path with as much facility as Turpin disposed of the impediments that beset his flight [...]. With him I shouted, sang, laughed, exulted, wept.¹⁷²

His identification with the criminal comes both in equating his act of penmanship with that of Turpin's horsemanship, and his ambitions with those of Turpin. The ride is a transgressive act which will secure fame and distinction for Ainsworth as well as Turpin. The criminal is not just an allegory for authors in general, but for this author in particular. The words in Ainsworth's later preface simply make explicit what had been startlingly implicit in the text itself. Consider, for instance, the effect of substituting for 'ride' and 'riding' in the passage above the words 'write' and 'writing'. Ainsworth is thinking only of 'his future fame. None are by to see him [write]; no stimulating plaudits ring in his ears [...]. But it will be renown [...]; it will be fame, which will not die with him - which will keep his reputation, albeit a tarnished one, still in the mouths of men.' The parallels are astonishing. The controversy which followed Ainsworth's Newgate novels meant that his reputation was, indeed, a tarnished one; but it certainly also ensured him fame and notice. Ainsworth never pretended to be presenting the real Turpin; his novel was a conscious effort to create a myth of his own. As he said in his preface of 1834, 'Turpin, so far as he goes, is a pure invention of my own' (*Rwd.*, I, x).

The extent to which he had in a real sense committed an act of literary outlawry is evident from the fact that Turpin's ride to York was an invented one - there is no evidence that it ever actually took place - and yet it became accepted as

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

fact. Pubs and inns along the route of the fictional journey were named after the outlaw, and frequently claimed to have served the highwayman refreshment on the way.¹⁷³ E. S. Turner argues that the penny serials which began to appear in 1840 were directly inspired by *Rookwood*.¹⁷⁴ Having lamented that the reputations of criminal heroes were fading in the collective memory, Ainsworth created one, and added his own extraordinary feat to the traditional outlaw's canon. Furthermore, it afforded him instant recognition. Ellis observes that never before did a book by an unknown writer achieve such a rapid success.¹⁷⁵ Just as 'Turpin delighted to hear himself designated as the flying Highwayman', Ainsworth revelled in the nickname 'Turpin Ainsworth' (*Rwd*, II, 165). He was the living embodiment of the literary outlaw. And just as Turpin is shown being treated like royalty, Ainsworth was 'courted and feted by all of the most distinguished members of the literary, artistic and social circles.' He burst on to town as a buck of the first degree; he was even introduced to Lady Blessington and her famous 'salon'.¹⁷⁶ His literary audacity had allowed him access to the most exclusive circles.

As such, *Rookwood* can be regarded as a tale which both dramatises the wishes of a 'young' author, and becomes the means by which these wishes are fulfilled. The nature of the literary field meant that such an author experienced a particular sense of kinship with criminal heroes. Forced by his own position, and by the requirements of the field, to adopt a transgressive stance in order to gain recognition, he identifies a similar process at work in the building of a criminal's legend. Dick's brand of criminality is one which casts a self-conscious eye upon future acclaim, and which secures for this outlaw the fame that he desires. Similarly, Jack Sheppard, in looking to the reputations of folkloric criminals like Du-Val, hopes that his 'name should become

¹⁷³ Ellis, I, 246.

¹⁷⁴ Edward S. Turner, *Boys Will Be Boys* (London: Michael Joseph, 1957), p.46.

¹⁷⁵ Ellis, I, 256.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 256, 266.

as famous as theirs' (*JS*, I, 156). He is courted by leading figures of society as a direct result of his criminal escapades. He even has an author's satisfaction in seeing his tale achieve popularity, witnessing 'a crowd who were collected round a street singer' and learning that 'his own adventures formed the subject of the ballad' (*JS*, III, 230). This process of transition from transgression to social acceptance, even social respectability, is evident in *Paul Clifford*. Paul, after living the life of a wanted highwayman, becomes a powerful and respected gentleman. There is, perhaps, in Bulwer's work a greater sense that criminality is forced rather than deliberately chosen. Christensen has interpreted in Bulwer's criminals the lesson that man must first embark on a journey into the dark 'cavern' of his inner self in order to achieve self-knowledge and spiritual satisfaction.¹⁷⁷ One could equally, however, read in it the recognition that 'young' authors are forced by the literary field into the 'cavern' of lawlessness in a bid to achieve artistic acceptance. *Eugene Aram* could be seen to represent the way in which the authorial genius is forced to embrace crime in the name of his art. Dickens refuses to allow *Oliver Twist* to engage in actual crime, but he nevertheless shows that he, too, must be immersed in the seedy world of the criminal before he can join the ranks of society's 'respectable'. The Newgate novelists saw themselves in their characters. In order to occupy positions within the field of literary production they had to reject the boundaries as they existed, and become literary highwaymen, robbers, and jailbreakers.¹⁷⁸ They accepted this with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Their novels served both as allegories of this transgressive authorship, and as the acts of transgressive authorship themselves. And in the ultimate fame, respectability and success which crime accorded their characters lay the hopes and dreams for their own acts of literary crime.

¹⁷⁷ *Fiction of New Regions*, p.64.

¹⁷⁸ In a related way, Thackeray would use crime to achieve literary notice, but would do so from the other side of the fence. He would gain similar notoriety from his brazen and sensational attacks upon the Newgate novelists. Far from a model figure of just law, perhaps he is better seen as the infamous thief-taker, the 'Jonathan Wild', in opposition to 'Turpin Ainsworth' and his associates.

The Newgate novelists were all aware that they were reacting in some way to the process of authorship in the 1830s. Bulwer, in particular, was deeply conscious of fiction's role in the dynamics of power, and included the state of literature in a broad critique of the social, political, and cultural relations of early 19th-century England. They were especially sensitive to the need to 'transgress' in order to break into the crowded field of literary production. The ways in which this need was expressed varied in large part according to the class of the writer concerned, and the ambitions he had for his art. All associated the 'young' author's status with criminality, and recognised a neat link between the crime in their novels and their own roles as literary criminals. Ainsworth revelled in this role. He saw in it a bid for glory and fame, and was less concerned that his art might be 'tarnished' than that his tale should be remembered. Bulwer, too, enjoyed the antics of his criminal heroes, although they culminated in social respectability and eminence rather than glorious infamy - conclusions which probably reflected his own struggle to reconcile his Romantic impulse with his Victorian social consciousness. The aristocratic Bulwer and the dandyish Ainsworth felt able to embrace the spirit of misrule in their characters. For Dickens and Thackeray this was less easy. In *Oliver Twist* we can see the same process of criminal self-identification. For Dickens, however, a man of lower-class origins with middle-class aspirations, and naturally less secure in his own class status, the notion of absolute self-identification with the criminal was unthinkable. This was magnified by his own sense that he was already 'tainted' by crime; his father's debts had meant that, for a time, Dickens's childhood home had been the Marshalsea prison. The experience was one of which he was deeply ashamed, and would fascinate and repulse him throughout his life.¹⁷⁹ He also shrewdly recognised that critics would find the glamorous portrayal of crime equally unacceptable from his pen. He would push his hero's association with the world of crime as far as possible without ever allowing his

¹⁷⁹ Collins, pp. 15-16.

morality to be compromised. The aggressive middle-class sensibilities of Thackeray forbade his identification with criminality at all. Instead he embraced the role of thief-taker with as much passion and relish as Ainsworth embraced the role of thief.

The division between the 'thieves' and the 'thief-taker' was also brought about by differences of artistic intent, and was part of the aesthetic debate about a powerful new genre, the novel. Changes in communication systems and cultural ownership, and the expansion of literature's readership, caused anxieties in the early Victorian period. As John comments, it 'is worth reminding ourselves [...] that neither the novel nor the middle class was as established when Dickens began *Oliver Twist* as blanket accounts of literary history sometimes lead us to believe.'¹⁸⁰ These 'young' authors were engaged in trying to define and delineate the novel and its boundaries. The writing of Dickens, Bulwer and Ainsworth was 'symbolic and myth-making'.¹⁸¹ While remaining ostensibly within the confines of the visible and 'realistic', it could also include wild plots and extravagant coincidence. Thackeray's effort was realistic. As we have seen, he would have difficulty reconciling this urge for realism with his instinct to protect the public from certain subjects; nevertheless, he insisted that the novel restrict itself to the probable. Furthermore, he 'intruded' as an author and made his opinions clearly known. Bulwer was grasping for a fresh authorial convention, that of the omniscient author. In doing so, he presented his readers with an unfamiliar device which he had far from perfected. The result was that, while willing to intrude at some points, his failure to do so at others exposed him to accusations of sympathising with criminals. The relative lack of controversy over *Lucretia* partly reflects Bulwer's improved handling of his own narrative technique; the honest critic could not argue that the plot in any way sanctioned murder.

¹⁸⁰ 'Twisting the Newgate Tale', p. 130.

¹⁸¹ Hollingsworth, p. 225.

Indeed, the differences in background go some way to explaining the differences of form and artistic intent to be found in the work of the 'thieves'. Eigner has drawn attention to the importance of allegory in the methods of the romancers.¹⁸² Bulwer had himself written that the metaphysical novel 'deserts or resumes' its allegory 'at will', and that Goethe's fiction is neither 'wholly allegory, or wholly matter-of-fact - but both at times.'¹⁸³ The novels of Bulwer, Ainsworth and Dickens constitute just this mixture of allegory and matter-of-fact. Each dabble in the world of crime and draw parallels with the world of authorship. John has pointed to Dickens's examination of narrative power and contemporary artistic trends in *Oliver Twist*, his analysis of 'the role of the story-teller, entertainer or purveyor of fictions in the power dynamics of 1830s Britain', and his 'self-reflexive exploration of both Newgate fiction and the function of the entertainer in social structures of oppression'.¹⁸⁴ We have seen Ainsworth's self-conscious determination to identify with the glorious feats of Dick Turpin. Yet in each case, the tales being told can support themselves without requiring an understanding of the allegory. Fagin is still convincing as a thief even if we ignore his role in purveying and manipulating tales of crime in his attempts to corrupt Oliver. Dick Turpin's ride to York is still remarkable even if we do not equate his achievement with that of his author. Only in Bulwer's *Paul Clifford* is the allegory made explicit. Only here do characters like Mac Grawler seem out of place without being recognised as figures for commentary upon the literary field. Only here does the author make his identification with criminality utterly unmistakable. In reading it one is often unsure of the relative balance between social concerns and literary analysis. Bulwer's aristocracy allowed him to play openly upon the analogy between crime and authorship because his real social distance meant he was in no danger of being interpreted as nakedly autobiographical. While his background also provided a certain shield for those who followed him in the Newgate school, the diminished social distance of Ainsworth and

¹⁸² Eigner, pp.3-5.

¹⁸³ 'On the Different Kinds of Prose Fiction', I, p.ix.

¹⁸⁴ 'Twisting the Newgate Tale', p.131.

Dickens meant that they could never make the allegory as intrusive. They could daringly treat the criminal subject, but they could not make their own process of self-identification with that subject as brazen. To do so would have been to court accusations of vulgarity. And thus it is that the structure of their respective texts were shaped by their positions within the social and literary spheres.

The fading of the controversy during the 1840s cannot simply be attributed to the more accomplished writing skills of the Newgate novelists. It was also a consequence of the altered status of the authors concerned. Each had attracted enormous notice from the criminal subject, either as author or critic. Each had cemented his place within the field of literary producers. After *Jack Sheppard*, Ainsworth was never again to base a novel around crime, concentrating his efforts instead upon historical romance.¹⁸⁵ Bulwer foregrounded crime in *Lucretia*, but used it to portray the psychology of evil rather than the excitement of highwaymanship. He also made major alterations to *Eugene Aram* for the first time, largely defusing any cause for complaint in subsequent editions. Dickens remained intrigued by crime, but never controversially. Thackeray actually found himself taking pleasure in hearing his former targets praised. Their transgressive interventions upon the literary field had been successful bids for respectability. Transgression had brought consecration. They were now established authors, and their altered positions brought altered strategies. It was no longer necessary or desirable to stir angry debate.

Furthermore, the Newgate controversy was historically specific. The blend of recent reform in the political and legal spheres, the rise of a new and, as yet, insecure ruling class, the deep social interest in crime, and an expansion of the publishing industry which brought a change in the hierarchy of genres and provided authors with

¹⁸⁵ It is impossible to say how much the Courvoisier case also played a part in Ainsworth's change of direction. He alone among the Newgate novelists had genuine reason to fear that his fiction had proved a dangerous influence.

a forum for exploring alternative subject matter, all combined both to produce the Newgate novels and to ensure they were controversial. Proof of this can be found in the very different reaction towards Caroline Clive's *Paul Ferroll* in 1855. It followed a husband's murder of his wife, and was accompanied by a tone of absolute amorality. The book met with very little objection; Thackeray remained tellingly silent.¹⁸⁶ In part this was precisely because it was no longer a shocking novelty; it had been done before in the novel. In part it was also because, after the passing of two decades, the fabric of society was more settled. Fears of revolution had died, and the dominance of the middle classes made them more secure in their own identity, and less worried by the extension of low manners and morals. But, as I have stressed throughout, the Newgate controversy was not simply a product of social and legal reform. It was also a specifically literary phenomenon. It reflected a unique moment of authorship in the 1830s and early 1840s, during the period between the rise of the periodicals and the rise of the Victorian novel. As the vehicles for literary output splintered, newspapers became the storehouses for bohemian talent, and the periodicals and magazines offered 'young' authors greater opportunities for literary 'respectability'. The difficulties and paradoxes facing authors lessened considerably. And thus the changing nature of the literary field which had given such sudden birth to the Newgate novels was equally quick to kill them off.

¹⁸⁶ Hollingsworth, pp.223-24.

CHAPTER THREE

THEATRE, POLITICS, AND THE *JACK SHEPPARD* ADAPTATIONS

There is no doubt that the controversy created by the Newgate novels was fuelled and flared by the numerous dramatic adaptations which accompanied them. In turning to these adaptations, it is vital to recognise the very real problems faced by modern critics in attempting to understand them. There is a scarcity of empirical evidence, particularly of plays at many minor theatres which were not submitted for licence by the Lord Chamberlain. Our information about the actors, authors and managers is often based upon anecdotal recollections which can be unreliable and difficult to substantiate. More generally, there is the problem common to much theatre study of reconstructing the characteristics of a performative art form. It can be argued that such reconstruction of a specific performance during a specific historical moment so distant from the present is an impossible task. It is perhaps unsurprising that scholars have tended to treat drama in purely literary terms as a result.

I will certainly be examining closely those relevant play manuscripts still available to us. But, as R. W. Vince has observed, this is in itself not enough, for it can mean that work 'intended to be experienced collectively and in performance is analysed and judged through a process of generalisation from an experience gained individually through reading.'¹ It is important to try to understand Newgate drama in performance in order more fully to arrive at an understanding of the controversy it caused. As well as the nature of the performance itself, one must bear in mind the nature of an audience's interpretation of, and reaction to, that performance. This can be determined

¹ R. W. Vince, 'Theatre History as an Academic Discipline', in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. by Thomas Postlewait and others (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), pp. 1-18 (p. 10).

by various factors, including the background and political viewpoint of individual spectators, their expectations of the play they are to see, and even their specific experiences earlier during the day. Many audiences would expect a certain type of play at a certain theatre, and formed what Stanley Fish has termed 'interpretive communities' which can help us to determine the probable tone of performances.² At the same time, however, audiences are dynamic, and their responses can be dramatic and unpredictable. It is this, in part, which politicised the theatrical adaptations in a way which departed from that of the novels. The tales took on a new elusiveness, not only through the number of different versions on offer, but in the less predictable character of every act of interpretation. Not only can individual spectators be influenced by the body of the audience around them into certain interpretations that they would not have made as solitary readers, but these interpretations may have been wholly unintended by the author or the dramatic company. Essentially, then, we can make an informed interpretation of how an audience might have reacted to a play, and how that play might have been performed, but must always be conscious of an audience's status as an independent animal. The aim of this study is to assess as far as possible, with the aid of extant play manuscripts, playbills, and newspaper reports, the nature of Newgate drama and the fears it aroused in contemporary censors and commentators. It will involve a process of weighing up the available evidence and assessing it against the background of contrasting modern theories of melodrama. It will ask whether the performances were supportive or critical of the prevailing social climate. Yet despite this, as Glynne Wickham observed, the theatrical critic needs to resort not only to logic, but to 'the imagination, to a process of the spirit rather than of the intellect, at its cheapest a guess, at its best a vision.'³

² Quoted in Marvin Carlson, 'Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance', in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, pp.83-97 (p.88).

³ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 3 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), I, 307.

1. The 'Jack Sheppard' Controversy

Of all the tales of the 'Newgate school', that of the twenty-one year old apprentice carpenter, Jack Sheppard, caused the greatest sensation of the 1830s and 1840s. It was dramatised in a variety of minor theatres and therefore makes an ideal model for comparative study. Hollingsworth has seen it as 'not simply a sensation in fiction, but an extra-literary popular phenomenon' and 'at least the equal of anything in popular entertainment in the present century.'⁴ The charges upon which the historical figure was hanged in 1724 were hardly notable for their glamour. *The Newgate Calendar*, that great 18th-century compilation of criminal biography, recorded that he was executed for stealing 'one hundred and eight yards of woollen cloth, two silver spoons, and other things.'⁵ Yet Jack Sheppard's life captured the imagination of the public and made him the subject of even greater heroised attention in his own time and a century later than notorious criminals like Turpin and Du-Val.

Ainsworth's novel, serialised for thirteen months in *Bentley's Miscellany*, running until February 1840, and published as a book in October 1839, revived a fever for the story that had faded but never fully disappeared from public consciousness.⁶ It told of two boys brought up by a benevolent carpenter, Owen Wood, after he had agreed to raise one whose father had been executed and whose mother could no longer afford to keep him, and another whom he had rescued from the river during a violent storm. As a teenager the first, Jack Sheppard, becomes fascinated by the tales of famous criminals, and begins to crave similar fame and notoriety. Taken under the wing of a sinister thief-taker, Jonathan Wild, he embarks upon a crime spree, and ends up in a series of prisons, including the mighty Newgate, but uses his skills as a carpenter and locksmith to escape from each one. And, by doing so, he receives the

⁴ Hollingsworth, p. 140.

⁵ Quoted in Horace Bleackley, *Jack Sheppard, with an Epilogue on Jack Sheppard in Literature and Drama* by S. M. Ellis (London: William Hodge, 1933), p. 65.

⁶ Hollingsworth, p. 138.

public attention and adulation that he had so desired. He is even visited in his cell by those great personages, Thornhill, Gay and Hogarth. The other boy, the orphan from the river whom Wood names Thames, is a model of industry and morality, and repeatedly urges Jack to abandon his destructive way of life. After several adventures, they each discover that they are nobly born, the relations of Sir Rowland Trenchard, an evil aristocrat who has tried throughout, and with any means at his disposal, to prevent this discovery and the rightful claim to part of his estate. Thames receives his deserved inheritance and lives happily ever after with his lifelong sweetheart, Wood's daughter, Winnifred. Jack, on the other hand, falls into dejection and regret after learning that his errant ways had caused such disappointment in his mother that she had died of a broken heart. After being betrayed by the pernicious Wild, he is eventually shot and killed by soldiers after a spectacular attempted escape from the scene of his own execution.

Ainsworth professed that the intentions behind his version of *Jack Sheppard* were honourable, that he had set out to compose 'a sort of Hogarthian novel' with the strong moral fabric that such a form embraced.⁷ Certainly the similarities to *Industry and Idleness* (1747), and the illustrations of Cruikshank, bore testimony to Hogarth's influence. But, unlike Dickens's *Oliver Twist* or Bulwer's *Paul Clifford*, the novel contained no obvious social commentary, and many among the literary press remained far from convinced by his defence of Hogarthian moral instruction. They were inclined to feel that it more closely resembled Ainsworth's model for *Rookwood*, which had been motivated by the desire to entertain rather than improve. The novel appeared at a sensitive time, joining and vastly inflaming the Newgate controversy. As we saw in the previous chapter, Thackeray was a persistent critic of the fashion for Newgate fiction, and condemned the fact that in the 'exploits of Jack Sheppard' we 'are called on [...] to

⁷ William Harrison Ainsworth to James Crossley, 29 May 1837, quoted in Ellis, I, 328.

admire the gallantry of a thief [...]. [I]n the name of common sense, let us not expend our sympathies on cutthroats, and other such prodigies of evil!⁸ An article in the *Examiner* stated, 'we acquit the author of having intended or foreseen the encouragement of cruelty, but the admiration of the criminal is the studied purpose of the book.'⁹ A writer in the *Standard* described it as 'almost endless rubbish, balderdash, twaddle, and vulgarity.'¹⁰ The tale was destined, however, to move beyond the pages of the novel. The sensational nature of crime narratives made them particularly suited to stage melodrama, and playhouse managers were keen to exploit their success. The difficulties of reconstruction for modern critics help to explain the fears about the plays held by contemporary censors and commentators for they faced similar obstructions. The tales were being reworked by different authors, within a different form, and received by a less clearly defined - and less broadly 'respectable' - audience. Theatrical representation brought a fresh set of dynamics to the relationship between the stories and their audience. They offered a greater immediacy, and the opportunity for varied interpretations by dramatists, managers, actors, and spectators. These altered dynamics made them potentially more volatile and dangerous. Furthermore, many of these plays at minor theatres were performed out of sight of the censorial eye. The tales were no longer neatly contained within their novelistic boundaries; their rapid proliferation, in a form which remained almost impossible to regulate and control, in varying theatres catering for varying audiences, could not fail to heighten fears surrounding the theme as a whole.

During the autumn of 1839 there were eight different versions of *Jack Sheppard* being shown in London, a number which Hollingsworth believed was probably unequalled in the history of novel dramatisation, and which shows just how

⁸ 'Catherine', *Fraser's Magazine*, 11 (February 1840), 200-212 (p.211).

⁹ *Examiner*, 12 July 1840, p.434.

¹⁰ *Standard*, 29 October 1839, p.1.

ubiquitous the story would have seemed at the time.¹¹ He goes on to describe the popular fervour which gripped the capital as 'Sheppard-mania' took over, and people sang the songs from Buckstone's version in the streets and the drawing rooms. He interprets the character of this craze as a 'high-spirited extravagance', a celebration of the end to the 'terrors of Newgate in the past', an almost symbolic festival which was embraced by members of all classes.¹² And yet this assessment of the mood of the time is not supported by reactions to the plays from reviewers or commentators, the vast majority of whom seemed to regard them as neither harmless nor classless. An article by John Forster in the *Examiner* condemned the novel, and noted the dangers 'in the dramatic adaptations of the "romance" that are alike rife in the low smoking rooms, the common barbers' shops, the cheap reading places, the private booksellers', and the minor theatres', which he said represented 'the worst passages of the book' served up attractively for the young. They were, he claimed, 'the very worst specimen of rank garbage thus stewed up.'¹³ William Bodham Donne, as Examiner of Plays, told the Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations in 1866 that during the 1840s the Lord Chamberlain had received 'a great many letters from parents and masters requesting that such pieces should not be exhibited because they had such an ill effect on their sons and apprentices.'¹⁴ A pamphlet which aimed at a sturdy defence of the stage from puritanical attacks, and which interestingly included an introduction by J. B. Buckstone, appeared to exclude Newgate drama from its apology. The author wrote, in a direct appeal to theatrical managers,

Be sure you gain nothing by the grossness or immorality of the plays you present. People will go to see great talent, and great dramatic triumphs, in spite of the indecency or viciousness of the plots and incidents, but they would go a great

¹¹ Hollingsworth, p. 139.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹³ *Examiner*, 3 November 1839, p. 691.

¹⁴ *Report from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations* (London: [House of Commons], 1866), p. 2416, quoted in John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 65.

deal more to see genius and power united with purity and truth. I take no narrow, squeamish view of the range of subjects proper for the stage, but plays which make light of moral distinctions, excuse vice, reward crime, or ridicule religion, are essentially mischievous, and cannot be defended anywhere. If managers wish to place themselves on the same catalogue with pimps, they have only to continue to quote the public taste as an apology for producing immoral and depraving plays.¹⁵

There was certainly a healthy respect for the theatre's power of influence, for good or bad, over the behaviour and outlook of members of its audience. In a letter to his mother, Thackeray despaired of the malevolent influence the dramatic adaptations seemed consciously to be courting:

[I]t is acted at *four* theatres, and they say that at the Cobourg [sic] people are waiting about the lobbies, selling Shepherd-bags [sic] - a bag containing a few pick-locks that is, a screw driver, and iron lever, one or two young gentlemen have already confessed how much they were indebted to Jack Sheppard who gave them ideas of pick-pocketing and thieving w[hich] they never would have had but for the play. Such facts must greatly delight an author who aims at popularity.¹⁶

Such fears regarding 'copycat' acts of crime were exacerbated by their apparent justification the following year. It was revealed during the Courvoisier case in 1840 that the murderer of Lord William Russell may have been influenced in his crime by having read or witnessed *Jack Sheppard*.¹⁷ The original confession by Courvoisier suggested that it was the novel which had given him the idea, but there were also strong rumours that the fault lay with one of the dramatic productions. Mrs Keeley, who was playing the lead role in the Adelphi company's tour in Dublin at the time, believed her production was to blame:

¹⁵ Rev. Dr Bellows, *An Address upon the Claims of the Drama* (Melbourne: Charlwood, 1859), pp.23-24.

¹⁶ Thackeray, *Letters and Private Papers*, I, 395.

¹⁷ This murder, at a time of class tension, may have appeared particularly significant and worrying. Courvoisier, as a domestic servant, was a member of the 'largest group of workers in London', a group which was often 'poorly paid and lodged, and treated brutally'. See *Early Victorian England 1830-1865*, I, 32. The assault by servant upon master would have aroused considerable concern both for its class symbolism, and its active example to a potentially very powerful section of London's working class.

The very night we opened, Courvoisier's confession was published. In this he says that the first idea of crime which he ever had came to him while he was witnessing the play of *Jack Sheppard* at the Adelphi, and he had been really led into cutting Lord William Russell's throat through that play. That settled our business, for although we fulfilled every night of our engagement, I remember the houses were very poor.¹⁸

A broadsheet sold in the streets around the gallows at Courvoisier's execution, 'The Lament of Francis Courvoisier', named the version at the Royal Surrey Theatre as the influence:

To the Surrey for to see Jack Sheppard
To beguile the time I went one night,
But I little thought that fatal evening
That it would all my prospects blight.¹⁹

A cartoon from the *Penny Satirist*, which showed a gang of boys being convinced, like Jack Sheppard, of the fame, celebrity and glamour surrounding a lawless life, appears to support such a belief in the power of theatrical representations of criminality to influence the behaviour of the young. It seems that wherever it was played, and however it was treated, the tale itself was felt to be a corrupting one.

This impression is reinforced by the reaction of the censors following the Courvoisier murder. The licensing authorities made the unofficial decision to prohibit performances of further adaptations of *Jack Sheppard* and to discourage the showing of those versions which had already been licensed. As Stephens points out, however, the play did not disappear entirely from the London stage in the 1840s.²⁰ During a series of chance raids on several cheap minor theatres in 1845, for instance, The City of London Theatre was found not only to be staging the play, but to be courting the

¹⁸ Quoted in Bleackley, p. 105.

¹⁹ Bleackley, p. 108.

²⁰ Stephens, p. 66.

very poorest class by admitting two spectators for the price of one. It is safe to guess that many other humble minors were also ignoring the sanctions in the hope that the authorities would fail to notice their practices. These restrictions were clearly loosened in the 1850s when several new adaptations at the cheaper minors were granted licences. *Jack Sheppard* did not return to the West End until 1852, and then only in the shape of Buckstone's version which had been granted a licence in 1839. Donne's appointment as the Examiner of Plays in 1858 signalled the beginning of a determined campaign to clear the theatre of all 'unsuitable' plays. Although his recommendation that all dramas involving burglary and robbery be prohibited was rejected, he was able to convince the Lord Chamberlain to ban all *Jack Sheppard* and *Oliver Twist* adaptations. The ban on *Oliver Twist* was lifted in the late 1860s but that on *Jack Sheppard* remained until 1873 and the play was only then licensed after the title and the names of all the characters had been changed, and certain alterations, like the removal of Jack's 'wives', had been made to the tale itself.²¹

But, as with the reception of the novels, to interpret the outcry solely as one of moral or aesthetic objection is, I think, to simplify the controversy and underestimate the depth of concern. Because melodrama was the dominant dramatic form within the minor theatres, the aristocratic patrons were able to dismiss it as a genre for the tasteless, and as a threat to English culture. However, it can be argued that objection on *aesthetic* grounds could be just as much a veiled defence of the *political* status quo. Barbara Taylor observes that, from 1790 onwards, 'the defense of political and social privilege was justified as a defense of the culture of the English people.'²² Furthermore, it has frequently been noted that there were genuine links, through authors like Thomas Holcroft, between some early melodrama and Jacobinism, and

²¹ For a detailed description of the censorship of adaptations of *Jack Sheppard*, *Oliver Twist* and other Newgate dramas between 1840 and 1873 see Stephens, pp.61-77.

²² Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p.149.

Elaine Hadley believes it quite feasible that plays in unregulated theatres, catering for mainly poor lower-class people, were more overtly revolutionary.²³ And, significantly, many of these feared plays - like M. G. Lewis's *Aldermorn the Outlaw*, William Robert Elliston's *The Venetian Outlaw* (1805), Charles Robert Maturin's *Bertram; or, the Castle of St Aldobrand* (1816), and J. Robinson Planché's *The Brigand* (1830) - were seen to use *criminal* tales and characters as the vehicles for their subversive messages.²⁴ These early links between melodrama and radicalism made the genre as a whole, and Newgate drama in particular, seem threatening during the 1830s when calls for social reforms were becoming more aggressive and organised.

One piece of evidence suggesting that the controversy surrounding Newgate drama awoke more deep-seated social concerns is that attacks were often directed not simply towards its influence on the young, or on society as a whole, but on the lower classes. Donne agreed with the Select Committee of 1866 that 'pieces are particularly popular among the lower classes which are founded on burglaries and robberies'.²⁵ A reviewer in the *Athenaeum* suggested that Newgate drama represented a response to the pressures of urbanisation, and that those members of the lower classes in the audiences were 'brooding over the elementary principles of social existence, and [were] heaving with all the passions incident to the first crude conceptions of the most stirring truths'.²⁶ Hollingsworth's assertion that 'Sheppard mania [...] was an uncalculated, uncalculating paean to the end of the bad old days and the arrival of a

²³ Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.67.

²⁴ See *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, ed. by Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou (New York: St Martin's, 1996), p.125.

²⁵ *Report from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses and Regulations*, p.88, quoted in Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.3.

²⁶ *Athenaeum*, 26 October 1839, pp.803-804, quoted in Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp.265-66.

time like morning' does not explain such quotations.²⁷ First, it mistakenly sees in the popularity of *Jack Sheppard* among all strata of society a spirit of convivial unity, of class fellowship united around a common theme. It fails to recognise that the tale's form and the way it was interpreted and enjoyed could have differed hugely between the drawing-room and the lower-class theatre. And second, it ignores disillusion and disaffection at the broader failures of the 1832 Reform Bill by assuming that plays about crime could only be commenting on crime and welcoming alterations to the criminal law. It forgets that this was a period of significant social instability, a time of economic crisis in Britain which brought widespread unemployment and hunger, and which deepened into depression in 1841; that the early 1830s had witnessed the formation of a series of large national unions; and that, just a year before the appearance of Ainsworth's novel, the National Charter had been drafted, an attempt to gather and symbolise working-class unity. Klancher, in *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832*, has shown that large sections of the audience at productions by the minor playhouses comprised an artisan public that had been heavily involved, as readers and sometimes writers, in the radical discourses of the early 19th century in which Chartism's roots were firmly embedded.²⁸ In the years when initial enthusiasm and hopes surrounding reform had faded, Hollingsworth ignores the possibility that these plays could be feared for playing upon broader social dissatisfactions. Chittick has observed that,

The perspective of the late 1830s on democracy was significantly different from that of the early 1830s. Chartism did not evoke the same hopefulness as the call to Reform had done, and there was no cachet attached to the title of Chartist.²⁹

George Colman, the censor of plays, sensed revolutionary registers concealed behind the 'gallant heroes' and 'hapless lovers' of some melodrama, feeling that they

²⁷ Hollingsworth, p. 141.

²⁸ See Klancher, pp. 98-134.

²⁹ Chittick, p. 156.

also 'preach(ed) up the doctrine that government is Tyranny, that Revolt is Virtue, and that Rebels are Righteous.'³⁰ This would surely have been particularly relevant to Newgate drama. As John has pointed out, to some 'the craze for Sheppard was frighteningly symptomatic of the fanaticism which industrialism and religion had stimulated in the masses.'³¹ That is not to suggest, at this point, that this formed the primary intention behind the dramas; but it does provide a more satisfactory explanation for the strength of the reaction from censors and commentators, as a defence of the dominant culture and an attack on potential threats to the status quo. We must examine Newgate drama within a more considered understanding of the wider social, political and cultural forces at work within its epoch. I will begin by examining some attitudes to the theatre, and its resonances with broader radical sentiment.

2. Deceptions and Disguises: Radical Rhetoric and Early 19th-Century Theatre

There can be little doubt that people in the early 19th century were conscious of the theatre's potential as a site for political commentary, of the importance of its role in guiding society's members, and of its effect on the very fabric and stability of the social hierarchy. This was particularly the case with London's playhouses. Some people were keen simply to ensure that drama was carefully managed so that its beneficial aspects were maximised. An anonymous author in 1809 wrote:

In the present state of society, a great part of the nation imbibes its morals directly from the metropolis: it cannot therefore be a matter of national indifference in what way the London Theatres are directed; because the stage is, and ever must be, in a very emphatic sense, a school of morals.³²

³⁰ George Colman to Covent Garden Theatre, 9 Feb 1824, in *Letters and Documents written as Theatre Censor, 1824-1834*, MSS Huntington Library, San Marino, quoted in *The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, p.ix.

³¹ *Cult Criminals*, I, p.xli.

³² [Anon.], *Considerations on the Past and Present State of the Stage* (London: C. Chapple, 1809), p.1.

But for others, this very power of influence, theatre's effective combination of entertainment and instruction, meant it was fundamentally open to dangerous messages as, perhaps, exemplified in the theatrical flourishes among radicals at the Rotunda or in the infidel chapels. They were staunch in their opposition to all theatre, seeing in it an inherent tendency towards subversiveness. In a letter to a newspaper, one stated his belief that the 'stage has proved, and will ever prove, subversive of all order, peace, and purity of morals, and, consequently, of Christianity itself.'³³ Others expressed their fears about the political influence of the stage specifically upon the lower classes even more explicitly. For them, it undermined the roots of society itself:

Whatever may be the effects of frequenting theatrical exhibitions to the higher orders of society, to the lower, they must be, and are, almost inevitably ruinous [...]. On the lower classes, the higher are built [...]. If you sap or corrupt the foundation, the superstructure must be endangered. Of the lower classes, is the foundation of society formed. Here then, in the theatre, is engendered the dry-rot, which, penetrating to the heart of the English oak, [...] destroys its very nature, and renders it not only useless, but highly insecure and dangerous.³⁴

There were certainly instances of theatres being used as physical sites for overt forms of radical activity. The Rotunda in Blackfriars Road - which had been, among other things, a literary 'Surrey Institute', a music-hall, a circus, and a theatre for panorama - became the headquarters and auditorium for many radical leaders and orators, including the National Union of the Working Classes and the freethinking infidel preacher Robert Taylor. It was also, at times, a location for radical provocation and physical agitation, and was kept under tight government surveillance. On one occasion in 1830, for example, Taylor spoke from under the defiant symbol of a tricolour flag to a crowd of six thousand cheering people gathered outside the Rotunda, and promised that if the 'madman' Wellington blocked reform, 'the trunkless

³³ 'A Layman of the Church of Christ as Established According to the Laws of this Realm', *The Times*, 16 October 1809, p.10.

³⁴ A Layman [pseud.], *'Facts, but not Comments': being Strictures on the Stage: in a Letter to Robert Mansel* (Sheffield: printed for the author, 1819), p.19.

heads' of the king and his ministers would 'Roll on the Ground as Footballs.'³⁵ As McCalman has stated, '(t)he popular agitations of the early 1830s that are said to have put the finishing touches to the making of the English working classes and to have laid the foundations of Chartism were partly masterminded from the Blackfriars Rotunda'.³⁶ And a spy's report suggests that radicals were not only aware of anxieties surrounding the theatre, but willing to exploit them. Arthur Thistlewood, a leading Spencean, conjured an elaborate hoax in 1817 whereby governmental concerns about the theatre would divert attention from a planned coup:

Thistlewood [...] said the Beggar's Opera would be performed tomorrow, and he would get a Paragraph into Bell's Paper stating that Thistlewood and Preston would be there - this would bring a Number of his Friends together - and he would write a Hoax to Lord Sidmouth, and Sir N Conant who would order the Police Officers to the theatre and the scheme at Paddington would not be interrupted.³⁷

It is incredible that such a plan should represent a realistic and reliable way of diverting authority's attention and resources, and this report suggests a genuine concern regarding the theatre not only as a site for radical interpretation of drama but as a meeting place for radicals. It would be interesting to know whether 'The Beggar's Opera' was chosen as a play whose criminal content would make it particularly frightening and convincing to the authorities.

But the major disturbances within a theatre during the early years of the 19th century had been the demonstrations calling for a return to the 'old prices' at Covent Garden in 1809. It was noticeable that the protesters were of varied backgrounds, and were far from exclusive to one class. It did, however, demonstrate how theatrical

³⁵ Public Record Office, Home Office, 40/25 (10 November 1830), quoted in I. D. McCalman, 'Popular Irreligion in Early Victorian England: Infidel Preachers and Radical Theatricality in 1830s London', in *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society: Essays in Honour of R. K. Webb*, ed. by R. W. Davis and others (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 51-64 (p. 56).

³⁶ 'Popular Irreligion', p. 51.

³⁷ PRO, HO 40/7 (20 September 1817).

rights could be linked to broader political rights. And by the late 1830s society had become increasingly stratified, and the growth in the number of theatres had led to a greater stratification of audiences than had been the case in the first decade of the century. The language of class was becoming more prominent. As such, fears regarding the radical content of the Newgate drama revolved most strongly around those disenfranchised members of society, those excluded from the corridors of power, those very much dependent upon the support of others above them and those who, after controversial legislation like the New Poor Law, increasingly felt such support was lacking. On a symbolic level, the division between the theatres provided a prominent and unique metaphor for such social segregation, and it is worth briefly outlining this division.

The term 'major' referred to those theatres which had been awarded a patent monopoly to perform what was known as 'legitimate' drama.³⁸ The Lord Chamberlain was allowed to licence only those theatres within the boundary of Westminster, an area including Drury Lane, Covent Garden, the Haymarket (holding a patent from 1766), and the King's Theatre (with a licence restricted to opera). By the 19th century, however, many other theatres had been built within Westminster as successive holders of the position of Lord Chamberlain, hostile to the principle of such a monopoly, turned a blind eye to their construction, and even awarded restricted licences to some.³⁹ Outside Westminster, supplementary licensing statutes permitted suburban London magistrates to award licences to theatres for limited periods.⁴⁰ But it appears that these theatres were inconsistent in submitting play manuscripts for approval despite these licences. And there was very real confusion over the exact definition of

³⁸ The original patents dated back to the reign of Charles II. Much of the following information on licensing law is drawn from Stephens, pp. 1-16.

³⁹ These included the Adelphi, the Olympic, the English Opera House, St. James's, and the Strand.

⁴⁰ Theatres given such licences included the Surrey, the Coburg, the Grecian, and the Pavilion.

'legitimate' drama. The minors were limited to performing 'burlettas', dramatic pieces containing music and no spoken dialogue, but even the Lord Chamberlain seemed unsure exactly what constituted a burletta.⁴¹ The result was that minor theatres, despite the apparently restrictive monopoly held by the majors, could and often did perform whatever they chose either by manipulating the existing regulations or ignoring them altogether. The monopoly had, however, originally encouraged the minors to adopt melodrama as their primary fare because of its exaggerated acting style and two-dimensional characters which required no dialogue. Once established, it came to be the favourite of the new, uneducated, industrial working class.

Ironically it was increasingly the majors who felt restricted by being obliged to include legitimate drama as they felt the effects of competition from the minors. Their audiences began to yearn for the same types of entertainment, and the legitimate drama gradually yielded to the demand for sensation and spectacle. Both Drury Lane and Covent Garden were very large playhouses, and a flamboyant performative style was actually more suited to their size than the comparatively subtle nature of classical tragedy.⁴² Furthermore, these two theatres found it progressively difficult to fill their seats by offering such drama. It is significant that the much smaller Haymarket became the only major theatre which tried to follow the 18th-century pattern of performance and preserve the traditions of the legitimate drama.⁴³ The Theatre Regulation Act of 1843, which abolished the patent privileges of the major playhouses, therefore made little significant difference to the types of production being staged by the theatres. The majors had no incentive to establish fresh legitimate companies when they had suffered from its decline in interest for the last few decades, and the majority of minors

⁴¹ For a detailed description of the difficulties in defining the burletta see George Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre 1792-1914: A Survey* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 10.

⁴² Drury Lane and Covent Garden were rebuilt in 1808 and 1809 respectively after fires, and each housed over three thousand spectators.

⁴³ George Taylor, *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 12.

recognised the popularity of the melodrama they were already showing.⁴⁴ The Theatre Regulation Act actually placed greater restrictions on the minors by bringing them firmly under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain and thereby subjecting them to his powers of censorship. While it is true that many plays, particularly at the cheapest theatres, were simply performed without being submitted for official licensing, the very fact that those theatres previously beyond the scrutiny of the Lord Chamberlain were now vulnerable to his sanctions meant that the freedom of the minors was compromised. As Taylor points out, the Act was in many ways intended not to change the styles or repertoires of the established majors and minors, but to suppress that third category of theatre, the 'underground' place of entertainment.⁴⁵ By insisting that theatres had to be permanent and purpose-built in order to receive a licence, the Lord Chamberlain had a new and potentially damning hold on the penny-gaffs and booths.

The patent theatres and those minors in and around the West End attracted audiences of fairly mixed backgrounds. Those minors in the outlying districts were usually attended by spectators far more uniform in class.⁴⁶ Many of these grew up on the Surrey side, in the East End and the northern fringes of the West End in response to the dramatic rise in the industrial working class. They catered to a taste for spectacle and melodrama among audiences from such a background. Although the repertoires would vary from theatre to theatre, productions of Shakespeare were hugely outnumbered by melodramas. The plots of much legitimate drama seemed remote and alien to the experiences of the urban lower classes, and its subtleties did

⁴⁴ A few minor playhouses, like Sadler's Wells and the Princess's, did take up the opportunity to stage classic drama. Allardyce Nicoll, 'The Theatre', in *Early Victorian England 1830-1865*, II, 267-82 (pp.268-69).

⁴⁵ *Players and Performances*, p.17.

⁴⁶ I refer here to the minor theatres of the first half of the 19th century, the period with which I am primarily concerned. In the second half, as the middle classes were attracted back to the theatre, many of the minor theatres, including those outside the West End, began to be patronised by the 'respectable'.

not suit the less-educated audiences of these areas. One costermonger, interviewed by Mayhew about the theatrical tastes of himself and his colleagues, said,

'Love and murder suits us best, sir; but within these few years I think there's a great deal more liking for deep tragedies among us. They set men a thinking, but then we all consider them too long. Of *Hamlet* we can make neither end nor side; and nine out of ten of us [...] would like it to be confined to the ghost scenes and the funeral and the killing off at the last. *Macbeth* would be better liked if it was only the witches and the fighting.'⁴⁷

These minors on the Surreyside or in the East End served the inhabitants of the immediate neighbourhood. On occasions people were drawn from further afield by a new production or a particular attraction, but as a rule it was the locals who attended, those of the lower or lower middle classes. Some of the members of these areas would travel to plays at the theatres, minor and major, in the West End, but the more wealthy West End spectators were only occasionally enticed the other way. And alongside such theatres, like the Surrey, the Victoria (renamed in 1833 after being the Royal Coburg), The City of London, The National Standard, the Pavilion, and Astley's Theatre, existed houses of entertainment which never catered for any but the lowest classes. The Grecian Saloon would show 'lurid melodramas viewed amid interludes of contortionists and vocalists', and The Britannia Saloon put on melodramas, burlesques and pantomimes. Elsewhere there were even less expensive shows consisting of panoramas, conjuring acts, and plays performed by infant geniuses.⁴⁸

As such, it is clear that the division between minors and majors was by no means clean-cut, and that there was a diverse range of minor theatres showing entertainment that varied widely in quality and price. Nevertheless, the possession of patents by some theatres constituted an ever-present symbol of division. The following

⁴⁷ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 3 vols (London: [n. pub.], 1851), I, 15.

⁴⁸ For more details of all these forms of lower-class entertainment, see 'The Theatre', pp.277-79.

verse from a street ballad suggests that within the public consciousness the division was a stark one, and that the major and minor theatres were believed to target spectators of very different backgrounds:

There's pretty Sue and lovely Jane,
At Covent Garden or Drury Lane,
While Polly, Nancy, Tom and Dick,
Goes either to the Surrey or Vic.⁴⁹

Furthermore, a tract by Francis Place calling for an end to the monopoly sets up an opposition between the interests of the people and the selfish actions of those in control of the patent theatres that can serve as a clear analogy for broader social complaints. He writes that,

the proprietors have, on all occasions, put the public out of the question, and reasoned only to and for themselves. The changes in manners seem to have been either unknown to or disregarded by them. As little do they appear to have been conscious of the consequences of their own proceedings, in rapidly promoting these changes, and driving away the audiences from their own houses. Even at the present moment they seem to be as ignorant, as infatuated, and as careless of public opinion as ever. In the evidence which they one and all gave before the House of Commons' Committee, they looked merely to what they considered their own pecuniary interest, quite regardless of the public, by whom, and by whom only, they could hope to promote any interest. They talked as they have always talked, as if the public were not in any way concerned, and might be safely left out of the question.⁵⁰

He later accuses the House of Lords of arrogant disinterest in rejecting a bill to permit the building of further playhouses during the previous parliamentary session. He writes,

Play-going is no longer fashionable among the nobility, and it seems to have been too much to expect that the nobles should put themselves out of the way respecting the amusements of the people.⁵¹

⁴⁹ 'Birt's New Christmas Ditty', in Sabine Baring-Gould, *A Collection of Street Ballads*, 9 vols. (London, British Museum, press mark L. R.271a2), I, 24.

⁵⁰ Francis Place, *A Brief Examination of the Dramatic Patents: Extracted from 'The Monthly Magazine' for March 1834* (London: Baylis and Leighton, 1834), pp.10-11.

⁵¹ *A Brief Examination of the Dramatic Patents*, p.12.

For Place, therefore, theatres themselves were highly politicised symbols of broader social failings. The major theatres were governed by self-interest, specifically private and exclusive of the input of 'the public', and aided by a nobility which had abandoned its patriarchal duties to 'the people'. As such, his rhetoric echoes that which characterised the Old Price riots twenty-five years earlier, and which Hadley has termed the 'melodramatic mode'. The following passage demonstrates the similarity both of the lines of attack and the language and imagery adopted:

[T]he Managers, in all this display of taste, seem to have had no eye to the improvement of the public taste, but to have obeyed a certain aristocratic impulse of their pride and consulted little but the accommodation of the higher orders. The people felt this immediately.⁵²

And the stark opposition between truth and falsity, and between the open needs of 'the people' and the veiled actions of the powerful, is also forcefully criticised:

If it is true, that they have made only six percent of their property no reasonable person can deny them the advance of price, but when Mr Kemble talks of *average*, and tells us nothing of the deductions, hazards, crosses, and losses, unconnected with the people's responsibility on these occasions, he must not be surprised that his speeches are treated as so many evasions, and that the people will believe nothing till they can inspect his accounts through an *open and popular medium*.⁵³

The extent to which stage melodrama, specifically, and Newgate drama in particular, could be interpreted as carrying radical messages will be examined in more detail later. For the moment it is enough to say that the Old Price riots and Place's tract against the patent monopoly, both of which attacked increased secrecy and pecuniary greed on the part of managers and patrons, could be seen to be related to a wider radical discourse arising in response to contemporary social change - as products of, and stands against, the emergence of a market culture in place of a deferential, patriarchal society. They

⁵² Leigh Hunt, 'The "OP" Riots at Covent Garden', *The Examiner*, 24 September 1809, in *Victorian Dramatic Criticism*, ed. by George Rowell (London: Methuen, 1971), pp.165-68 (p.166).

⁵³ *Victorian Dramatic Criticism*, p.168.

attack selfish and masked dishonesty on the part of those in power who ignore the interests of the majority in their greed for individual wealth. The division and competition of the two types of theatre made them symbolic of wider social division, and the minors' lack of patents meant they were ready forums for hostile comment, however oblique, on this injustice.

The images of deceit and disguise among the powerful which we have seen in the extracts surrounding the patent monopoly and Old Price riots were common in the minds and texts of political radicals in the early 19th century, and can be traced to the written exchanges between Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine. As Klancher has noted, Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), a response to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), was a seminal text in the construction of early 19th-century writing.⁵⁴ Interestingly, Paine frequently used the inherent artifice of theatrical presentation as a metaphor for ruling-class duplicity, and this may have suggested more readily a parallel between supposed injustices within the theatre and those within society as a whole. Paine developed such a conceit in an attempt to undermine Burke's claim to authority in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*:

As to the tragic paintings by which Mr Burke has outraged his own imagination, and seeks to work upon that of his readers, they are very well calculated for theatrical representation, where facts are manufactured for the sake of show, and accommodated to produce, through the weakness of sympathy, a weeping effect. But Mr Burke should recollect that he is writing History, and not *Plays*; and that his readers will expect truth, and not the spouting rant of high-toned exclamation.⁵⁵

Paine turned established forms of rhetoric against themselves by adopting a fresh form of writing which challenged all claims of authority and domination based upon authorship. He contrasted the 'veils', 'mystery' and 'pantomimical contrivance' of Burke's language with the clear, truthful and representative nature of his own, which

⁵⁴ Klancher, p. 105.

⁵⁵ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 49-50.

'exists not by fraud and mystery; [...] deals not in cant and sophistry; but inspires a language that, passing from heart to heart, is felt and understood.'⁵⁶ Paine's attack is aimed not just at Burke, but at broader authority. Burke, as a politician and 'a part of the English Government', and a prominent defender of the status quo, comes to embody what Paine regards as wrong with society's leaders.⁵⁷ Paine links authority and its texts with a dishonest and deceptive style, with a surplus of signs, that masks social reality from the masses and thereby preserves the surplus of power enjoyed by the ruling classes. It is a means of attacking modes of representation which I will later suggest could be evident in Buckstone's 'Jack Sheppard'.

Hadley, in her convincing analysis of these texts and the subsequent use of theatre as both a social metaphor and physical medium for radical expression, believes that the association of authority with dishonest theatrical discourse came about as a result of alterations in social exchange.⁵⁸ She charts the gradual change during the 18th century from an agrarian society, based upon a hierarchical, and highly visible and 'theatrical', system of deferential exchange between the patriarchal and the humble, to a market culture which stratified and fragmented society. This increasingly led to a separation between the orders of society along horizontal lines, to the emergence of a system of 'class' in which the upper echelons withdrew into the private world of contractual exchange and self-interest. As such, in an interpretation influenced by Foucault, she sees social relationships shift from public and mutually shared experiences, in which all members 'acted', to ones in which the forces of the market blocked this exchange of sympathy as the dominant classes separated themselves from those below. It was a process symbolised by Bentham's panopticon, one in which society was now divided as patriarchal figures became spectators rather than actors. It was also a change physically enacted during the Old Price riots, where the increased

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.182.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.77.

⁵⁸ See Hadley, chaps 1, 2 and 3, pp.14-132.

number of private boxes and the rise in prices could be seen to reflect the increasing stratification of society and the retreat of the upper orders from the public sphere into the private, selfish world of prostitution (sexual-economic exchange) and spectatorship. It is also clearly a concern for Place in the tract on the patent monopoly examined earlier. The following passage by Charles Lamb appears to mirror this altered relationship, as the writer comments upon beggars in the street:

Was a daily spectacle like this to be deemed a nuisance, which called for legal interference to remove? or not rather a salutary and a touching object, to the passers-by in a great city? Among her shows, her museums, and supplies for ever-gaping curiosity (and what else but an accumulation of sights - endless sights - is a great city; or for what else is it desirable?) was there not room for one *Lusus* (not *Naturae*, indeed, but) *Accidentium*? [...] The contributors had enjoyed their sight for their pennies.⁵⁹

Lamb portrays the beggar as an attraction among many others in the metropolis, and thereby constructs a relationship based upon capitalist contractual exchange, one in which the passer-by becomes a spectator. He reinforces this image of social dynamics by suggesting that even fraudulent beggars are worth paying:

When a poor creature (outwardly and visibly such) comes before thee, do not stay to inquire whether the 'seven small children', in whose name he implores thy assistance, have a veritable existence [...]. When they come with their counterfeit looks, and mumping tones, think them players. You pay your money to see a comedian feign these things, which, concerning these poor people, thou canst not certainly tell whether they are feigned or not.⁶⁰

The beggar and the actor are directly linked, and action inspired by sympathy is replaced by action inspired by the wish to enjoy and personally benefit from a form of entertainment. Giving is now a contractual engagement; the active patriarchal figure is now the passive spectating customer. The social theatrical exchange has been corrupted by the intrusion of the principles of the market. And this new relationship

⁵⁹ Charles Lamb, 'A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis', in *The Essays of Elia* (London: J. M. Dent, 1900), pp.228-40 (p.236).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.240.

was epitomised by measures like the New Poor Law of 1834, which was seen by many as 'tranquillizing, soothing, and lulling the consciences of the rich' to prevent them being 'disturbed, even in the midst of their enjoyments' by 'the hideous and revolting spectacle of the wretchedness existing around them.'⁶¹ Opponents felt that it taught the rich to distance themselves from the suffering of the lower orders, to be detached spectators rather than active participants in a traditional exchange of feeling.

While Burke, therefore, portrayed history as a social stage and people as public actors engaged in a proper system of public display, of open and honest exchange of patronage and deference in a mutually beneficial and natural agrarian system, Paine reversed this metaphor by arguing that such outward public display had been corrupted. He suggested that theatrical exchange now camouflaged an absence of sympathetic feeling among those who held power, fostered by the gradual change to a capitalist system, and that the very sign of social cohesion and openness was in fact the means by which those below were repressed. As such, the 'theatrical' formed a complex metaphor for both sides in the battle over a changing social system. Once acting had become a metaphor for aristocratic disguise, deceit and insincerity, conservatives adopted the metaphor in response. Thomas Carlyle, for instance, was to portray the rise of the multitude during the French Revolution as a mad and rabid form of alternative theatre, carnivalesque in the extreme, as 'the whole of the Pit, which was of Twenty-five Millions, not only claps hands, but does itself spring on the boards and passionately set to playing there', and the French National Solemn League and Federation as 'the highest recorded triumph of the Thespian Art,' at 'bottom mainly pasteboard and paint.'⁶² The use of the 'theatrical', and, most importantly, linguistic imagery revolving around disguise, in the broader conflict between radicals and

⁶¹ Marcus [pseud.], *On the Possibility of Limiting Populousness* (London: John Hill, 1838), p. 10.

⁶² Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1902), p. 266.

defenders of the dominant culture is vital to any consideration of contemporary interpretations of Newgate drama, and indeed melodrama as a whole, when disguise and deception were so intrinsic to their plots.

Klancher describes how radical texts were working out 'strategies of quoting, parodying, rewriting or inflicting semantic wounds upon the language of the middle-class and aristocratic readers.' They were attempting to 'bind one reader to another as an audience', as a readership which the writer both 'confronted and spoke for in a complex rhetorical act of "representation."' They attempted to turn 'restive artisans [...] into savage parodists of the dominant culture's ideological texts.'⁶³ Such attacks on the dominant culture also took a physical form, beyond the textual sphere, as more extreme radicals presented themselves as active and living parodies of the discourses, institutions, and political figures which they regarded as central to society's repressive hold on the unrepresented. Inherent in these acts of 'theatre' was the connection which we have already traced in radical discourse between authority's lies and its power. By parodying such deception, the radicals involved aimed to strip away the veils donned by authority to conceal the truth behind its methods and intentions. These parodies were entertaining and, by their very nature, dramatic. There is probably a real debt to melodrama as use of the 'theatrical' became a means of attracting audiences and expounding a message. Radicals were as aware of how effective dramatic entertainment could be in conveying a message as were conservative champions of moral instruction.

Evidence for this can be found in the actions of Thomas Evans and Robert Wedderburn, who, in 1818, took out a joint licence to operate a dissenting chapel in a backroom in Archer Street.⁶⁴ It was relatively simple to get a licence to preach as a

⁶³ Klancher, p.100.

⁶⁴ See *Radical Underworld*, pp.128-51.

dissenting minister, and they hoped to avoid repression by concealing the Spencean society behind this religious cloak. Evans and Wedderburn were to fall out, but the precedent had been set, and Wedderburn established himself in the Hopkins Street chapel in 1819, attracting audiences numbering over two hundred, and of the lowest description. Wedderburn would speak or lead debates on religious and political topics which openly ridiculed the Establishment. He was prosecuted for seditious and blasphemous libel in 1819 and 1820. But especially interesting was his style of lecturing. It attracted the most impoverished and extreme radicals in London by presenting crude and popular radical ideology in a unique form which blended instruction with entertainment. The debates became a form of theatre which functioned to abuse authority and amuse spectators. McCalman has said that Wedderburn's 'speeches and performances echoed the styles, themes and motifs fashionable in contemporary English and French melodrama.'⁶⁵ One man, who perhaps called into the chapel ignorant of its irreligious and bawdy character, wrote an indignant letter to the Home Office in 1819 complaining that the 'language and blasphemy' and Wedderburn's 'ridiculing the Scripture [was] most shocking.' The audience 'consisted of mostly young Men: who kept their Hats on and applauded any thing that he indicated in the Scriptures most violent the same as shewing their approbation at a Theatre.'⁶⁶ In another of these chapels in Pratt Street there was a similar use of the theatrical. A preacher 'acted' in turn the manner of a drunkard, adopted the 'posture of a fighter', directed a 'torrent of abuse' against the clergy, and finished with a number of horrifying prophecies. All this was 'interspersed [...] with humorous anecdotes.'⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Radical Underworld*, p.148.

⁶⁶ PRO, HO 42/198 (14 November 1819), quoted in David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p.180.

⁶⁷ PRO, HO 42/200, J K (19 November 1819), quoted in *Radical Underworld*, p.149.

Samuel Waddington was an ultra-radical and friend of Wedderburn who took the theatricalities even further. Standing at just four-feet tall, his very appearance was that of a figure of pantomime. McCalman notes that he was fashioned in the mould of a long tradition of men who indulged in radical and anti-clerical 'theatrical buffoonery' which included Samuel Fisher, John Wilkes, and the 'Garrat election' radicals, Sam House and 'Sir' Jeffrye Dunstan. He embodied the character of 'imp of mischief' or 'genius of nonsense' as found in pantomimes like Charles Farley's *Harlequin and the Red Dwarf* (1812). Nicknamed 'the Black Dwarf' he even became the personification of the imp in Wooler's radical magazine.⁶⁸ His public persona was one of grotesque burlesque. He printed hoax placards, bills and letters; he paraded through the streets blowing a horn to advertise an ultra-radical meeting in Spitalfields; he disguised himself in women's clothing to spy upon John Stafford's house; he attended a meeting in Smithfield in a white apron and with a huge pistol. His outrageous eccentricities and dramatics during his frequent court appearances had those present reeling with laughter.⁶⁹ And, in the ultimate act of parody, he even envisaged ridiculing the prosecuting societies and the government by building life-size paste dummies of Lord Castlereagh and Sir William Curtis which, as 'but a little man', he would operate from inside.⁷⁰

Another man to adopt parodically the cloak of authority in order to destroy it was the former Anglican clergyman, Robert Taylor. Taylor preached a form of astronomo-theological teaching which purported to prove scientifically the falseness of the Christian gospel and to demonstrate that all religions had a natural and identical origin. He became one of Richard Carlile's star attractions at the Rotunda, which he had leased in May 1830. Taylor was profoundly influenced by the preaching style of Wedderburn, and as such he was to bring excitement and entertainment to the usually

⁶⁸ *Radical Underworld*, p. 149.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149-50.

⁷⁰ *Black Dwarf*, 30 January 1822, p. 12.

sober forum of freethought. His programmes revolved around a specifically theatrical theme and repertoire. He enacted a startling performance of the raising of the Devil in explaining that both the Devil and the Angel had originally been allegorical symbols for the seasons before they were appropriated by the Christian priesthood. He wrote a play called *Swing; or, Who are the Incendiaries?* which contained explicit political references and had an inflammatory and revolutionary ending, and was regularly repeated during 1831 to rapturous audiences. He answered to his self-proclaimed nickname, the 'Devil's Chaplain', which drew upon a contemporary melodramatic interest in diabolism - during 1829-31 the nearby Surrey Theatre showed *The Devil's Walk, or, Pluto in London* (1830), Jerrold's *The Devil's Ducat* (1828), Fitzball's *The Devil's Elixir* (1829), and an adaptation of Delaingne's *Robert le diable*⁷¹ When Carlile was imprisoned for defending the 'Swing' agricultural riots, Taylor staged mock trials in a burlesque of the corrupt and rigged court proceedings. After Carlile terminated his lease of the Rotunda in 1832, Taylor moved to the New Areopagus in Theobalds Street, where he continued to attract large crowds and where his ribaldry and the coarseness of his jokes reached new heights. One spy reported in 1834 that 'during the whole time the place was a complete Theatre.'⁷² In his memoirs, Vizetelly compared Taylor's 'theatrical get-up', 'stagey manner' and 'ranting delivery' to the styles of Malibran, Macready and the Kembles.⁷³ *Bell's Life in London*, a popular sporting and theatrical newspaper, included reports on 'Dandy Bob Taylor' alongside other theatrical commentaries.⁷⁴ Perhaps the strangest but greatest tribute to Taylor's method was that, although his sermons were undoubtedly frequented by those of the 'lowest orders', reports testify to the diversity of his audiences and suggest that a fair proportion of them were 'respectable', were of the 'middling classes', were 'youths and

⁷¹ 'Popular Irreligion', p.56.

⁷² PRO, HO 64/15.

⁷³ Vizetelly, II, 98-99.

⁷⁴ Publications like *Bell's* often included articles on radicals, on theatre, on criminal cases, and sporting news, an associative link between such groups on the fringe of 'respectable' society which I feel is important in a consideration of Newgate drama.

females of decent appearance'. It is difficult to understand why this should have been the case - perhaps Taylor's scholarly background and the impressive furnishings of the Rotunda reassured the spectators and allowed them to relax and enjoy the show. But this respectable presence certainly puzzled and worried the authorities. And, most importantly for this study, it suggests that ultra-radical and infidel sentiment, presented in a dramatic and sensational form, was witnessed by people beyond the narrow confines of hardened radicalism, people who would presumably also attend the theatre, and who may therefore have been influenced in their interpretation of more standard theatrical fare.

The antics of Wedderburn, Waddington, and Taylor, like many of the radical texts alongside them, embodied the tempestuous representation of one social discourse by another, the melodramatic re-enactment of social rituals as a way of stripping away their 'veils' and showing them for what they really were. Thus when Wedderburn staged mocking debates ostensibly about serious government policy; or when Waddington sat in court on the edge of the bar conducting a cocky cross-examination with a bible in his hand and a white top hat on his head; or when Taylor performed the raising of the Devil, or performed his outrageous burlesques of the Anglican service, or suggested that the Israelites had eaten 'manure' rather than 'manna', or described the Virgin Mary as a young woman who had not been as prudent as she ought to have been - in each case they were shocking their audiences into fresh examinations of texts, rituals and institutions which they had come to take for granted.⁷⁵ We can see the same mechanism at work as Buckstone's Jack Sheppard dances in his prison cell or brazenly ridicules his jailers. They were stripping away the veils of what they saw as artificial constructs used by the priestcraft, the aristocracy and the government to retain their hold over the people. They were effectively decoding those hidden mysteries in which radicals saw social power residing, reopening through language and

⁷⁵ PRO, HO 64/13 (13 November 1830), 64/15 (30 March 1834).

theatre that distance between English discourses and their readerships, and English ruling institutions and their publics, which the signs of official power were forever trying to close. Klancher concludes also that the radical writer's audience was 'a potentially riotous mob that could revolt to defend its traditional rights and privileges.'⁷⁶ And it is by considering this that the true power and threat of Wedderburn's debates and Taylor's sermons can be understood. For, like radical newspapers and magazines, they were creating a collective and united audience through ideology and theatrical methodology; but, unlike the press's audience, their's was an immediate and physical one, and one capable of responding on the spot to the dictates of their emotions. They were, in a far more literal sense, 'a potentially riotous mob.' These events frightened the authorities, and, as I will later suggest, both their tone and the radical metaphors and ideology of which they were physical enactments, could perhaps be seen in the Newgate drama of the 1830s.

This spirit of misbehaviour owed much to the plebeian tavern tradition which dated back to the 16th century and which had formed an important part of Jacobin culture in the 1790s and the Spencean free-and-easies and debating clubs afterwards. These tavern meetings were attractive on one level as escapist and sensational entertainment. They represented opportunities to relax, gossip and drink with friends. They were places to sing, chant, toast and cheer. But the 'entertainment' was always political in substance. Priests, aristocrats and contemporary governmental figures were favourite targets for lewd and mocking songs and low burlesques. A loyalist pamphleteer, Thomas Williams, wrote in 1817 that the Spenceans turned religion into 'jest' and 'burlesque' by mixing 'sacred devotions with the revelry of the tavern and the alehouse.'⁷⁷ *The Report from the Committee of Secrecy* cited Spencean 'profane and

⁷⁶ Klancher, p.99.

⁷⁷ Thomas Williams, *Constitutional Politics; or, The British Constitution Vindicated* (London: Parsons, 1817), pp.5, 9.

seditions songs' as one of the main reasons for suppressing the society.⁷⁸ Thomas Frost, a Chartist, later satirised this fear in his novel, *Paul, the Poacher* (1848)⁷⁹ It was an immensely popular vehicle for radical expression. When Thomas Evans tried to impose a more respectable atmosphere upon the Archer Street chapel by outlawing smoking, drinking, and vulgarity, he brought about the end of the society. Members wanted the rough, masculine form of radicalism, and so they followed Wedderburn to Hopkins Street.

The older, traditional face of radical culture made drunkenness, saturnalia, rabelaisian feasting and general ill-behaviour carry political connotations. It refused to be contained, rejected any puritanical appeals for sobriety and hard work, embraced everything apposite to that king of prosecuting societies, the Society for the Suppression of Vice, while linking such behaviour implicitly with radical dissatisfaction. And through figures like Thomas Preston and 'Little Waddy', leading radicals whose careers spanned several decades, its traditions and rituals survived to be as much a part of 1830s radicalism as the more sober and earnest elements. The tavern meetings and the irreligious sermons were parts of a process which tried to keep plebeian unrespectability and defiance alive as vibrant statements against the stifling forces of ruling-class control and the creeping influence of Victorian sobriety. It politicised a particular form of audacious and shameless immorality, not only in the meetings themselves but in the lives of the radicals beyond them. It made the spirit of excess into a political statement - thus Taylor's popularity among his followers was rather enhanced than hindered by his riotous private life which included an open sexual affair with Georgiana Richards, bouts of heavy drinking, and a drunken attempt to stab one of his jailers when imprisoned in 1831 for blasphemous libel. Of course, it would be misguided blindly to associate scenes of tavern coarseness and ribaldry elsewhere

⁷⁸ Quoted in *Radical Underworld*, p.118.

⁷⁹ Thomas Frost, *Paul, the Poacher* (London: G. Purkess, 1848), pp.130-31.

with ultra-radical sentiment. There were other groups, including, for instance, those in the army, who indulged in similar behaviour. But, at the very least, tavern 'misconduct' was usually associated with those groups situated precariously close to the edges of 'respectable' society, with drinking or sporting or acting societies, whose activities were antithetical to the bourgeois ideal. Newgate drama, with its scenes of alcoholic excess, its bawdy 'flash-ken' songs, its insolent heroes flaunting their criminality in the face of authority, with its flavour of plebeian unrespectability, would seem to resonate with such cultures, and ask its audiences to enjoy and participate in them, in a way that no other form of drama at the time did. And it may have been that novels like Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, Bulwer's *Paul Clifford*, and, in 1841, Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, all of which included politically charged scenes of criminal meetings in tavern surroundings, meant that 'flash-ken' scenes in *Jack Sheppard* could have been open to more directly political interpretations.

The final area to touch upon in this section is the relationship between radicals and the conventional theatre which was, without doubt, an ambiguous one. Where all radicals could accept theatricality as a metaphor for excess and deception in written texts, the *actual* use of theatre to expose theatricality represented a paradox which made some deeply uncomfortable. Carlile's position is an interesting example. Much of his writing revolves around language which we have seen as typical of radical rhetoric. He firmly attacks the secrecy of priestcraft, monarchy and government, and calls for society to 'be open, be inquisitive, and be equal in knowledge.'⁸⁰ He regarded the control of words, semantically and economically, as a key to the ruling class's monopoly of power, and became the champion of the unstamped press, providing affordable and comprehensible literature for all. But while he was determined to occupy and open literary and political discourses, he remained profoundly suspicious

⁸⁰ Quoted in Guy A. Aldred, *Richard Carlile, Agitator: His Life and Times* (Glasgow: Strickland Press, 1941), p.105.

of some of these genres, including theatre. His commitment to realism, to absolute clarity and rigid fact, meant that while he was willing to use theatrical tropology as a metaphor for corruption, he could never wholeheartedly embrace it as a medium to be occupied. Holyoake wrote,

[Carlile] was so much a realist, as to still avow his detestation of fiction; and so coherently did he keep to this text, that he never ceased to make war on poetry, theatres, and romance, from the commencement of his career down to the last number of the *Christian Warrior*.⁸¹

Carlile was, therefore, never part of the radical poetic movement which was flowering during the 1830s.⁸² He wrote while in prison but, unlike many others, did not compose poetry. It was because of such an outlook that Carlile's relationship with Taylor was always going to be a strained, and ultimately doomed, one. For while Carlile respected and agreed with Taylor's irreligious discourses, and recognised his talents as an orator who would attract crowds to his cause, he was never going to be easy with a man who welcomed the use of theatre, poetry and romance, who in many ways embraced the spirit of romanticism, and who was thereby in part working against his own brand of zetetic and mechanistic radicalism. It was Taylor, after all, who had stated in 1828, 'I should anticipate the moral regeneration of the world, if we had twenty theatres and twenty thousand Keans and Kembles.'⁸³

Other radicals, like Carlile, regarded poetry, literature and drama as representative of aristocratic luxury and political monopoly. For them, however, they were therefore genres to be targeted, sites to be occupied, so that literature could become a moral force for social change:

⁸¹ Aldred, p. 120.

⁸² This movement included much 'prison poetry', written by convicted Chartists, and frequently employing imagery referring to their own incarceration. Jack Sheppard's escapes from prison may have encouraged interpretations with these Chartists in mind.

⁸³ Quoted in 'Popular Irreligion', p.54.

Ebenezer Eliot, in the preface to one of his poems, says, 'All genuine poets are fervid politicians.' The gentlemen critics complain that the union of poetry with politics is always hurtful. But these great connoisseurs must be wrong, if Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Cowper, and Burns were poets. Why should the sensitive bard take less interest than other men in those things which most nearly concern mankind. The contrary ought to be, and is true. What is poetry but impassioned truth - philosophy in its essence - the spirit of that bright consummate flower, whose root is in our bosoms? [...] We can see no reason why great truths ought not to be read by all, though told in poetical language, or conveyed in poetic metaphor to the understanding.⁸⁴

The extract above suggests that the 'respectable' classes retained their hold upon literature by cultivating a form of aesthetic snobbery to keep it free from political comment and thereby from the sphere of 'the people'. It seems to demonstrate an awareness of the power of aesthetic control, and echoes Barbara Taylor's belief that 'the defense of political and social privilege was justified as a defense of the culture of the English people.'⁸⁵ As with the other radical rhetoric we have examined, the author argues that such devices mask truth, and calls upon an older poetical tradition to prove that good poetry is by its nature truthful and, therefore, political poetry.⁸⁶ The following article also points to the stranglehold that the ruling classes have over literature, and drama in particular, and makes resistance to such a stranglehold, the attempt to enter this medium, into a question of political, artistic and moral integrity:

[W]e have received works replete with genius, but without moral - either political, social, or religious. We would earnestly advise those talented men, who are capable of thus much, to do something more, - more in the matter they treat of - more in the moral they deduce. Where is the Bulwer of Chartism - where is the Knowles of Democracy? Can no new fire be infused into what is called the 'expiring drama?' - expiring, because it has been dedicated to an expiring cause - because it has been the pander to wealth and fashion, instead of the vindicator of manhood and industry.

[...] Critics have objected that the English dramatic author is destitute of inventive power; it is not so: but as long as he is restricted to the advocacy of

⁸⁴ *The Chartist Circular*, 11 July 1840, p. 11.

⁸⁵ *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 149.

⁸⁶ As such, the article uses the same 'return to sources' strategy to challenge the establishment in the political sphere that we saw employed by 'young' authors during their challenges within the literary sphere.

monopolies, in defence of which nothing can be said, so long may he tax his ingenuity in vain, to produce that free flow of language, incident and moral, which an honest and fertile theme alone affords the author.

Let our dramatic talent be on the look out. Chartism is marching into the fields of literature with rapid strides; the precincts of the drama it has not yet passed. Its poetry is, indeed, the freshest and most stirring of the age.⁸⁷

While such critics use theatre as a symbol for contemporary social inequality, they do so by pointing to it as an example of something that has been abused rather than as a metaphor for abuse itself. It is not theatricality that is being criticised but the influence of State control, which corrupts it by making it unrepresentative and untruthful. It is not, therefore, beyond saving, and is an area which radicals should be trying to reclaim. The main rhetorical force behind their arguments is that the best poets are moral and truthful and that their natural empathy is with the moral and truthful ideology of radicalism. They appear to belong to that earnest, sober and intellectually sophisticated strand that can be seen cultivated in the 'march of mind' radicalism of the 1820s and which held an important position among the artisans and lower middle-class radicals of Chartism. It encourages a very different type of theatricality from that which would have been embraced by 'Little Waddy' or Robert Taylor. Nevertheless, it opens up further the possibility that certain radicals were writing for, or encouraging political interpretations of, the theatre.

My aim during this section of the thesis has been to foreground certain areas of early 19th-century culture which have been largely ignored by other critics concerned with studying Newgate drama and the controversy it generated. I have been wary of pursuing that line of inquiry, common following the advent of post-disciplinary study, which adopts 'theatricality' as a concept extending far beyond the theatre, and thereby characterises and links independent events, movements, or cultures. Jane Moody has

⁸⁷ 'Literary Review', *The Labourer*, 2 (1847), 94-96 (p.94). It is clear that *The Labourer* regarded Bulwer's literature as politicised, although it recognised that he was no Chartist.

rightly warned of the dangers of attempting to 'textualise' reality and history, of transposing melodrama 'from theatrical genre to cultural "text"'.⁸⁸ To impose such a conceptual structure can obscure the influence of 'individual or collective agency', lead us to 'attribute to "genre" (for which read any cultural event) a teleological force beyond that of any individuals or cultural groups', and 'threaten to transform genres from unstable, evolving forms into politically monolithic categories'.⁸⁹ It is with this in mind that I will be testing theories of melodrama like Hadley's very specifically against individual texts. I have not suggested that the theatre was inherently subversive, but instead, against a critical background which has frequently regarded melodrama as enforcing the prevailing hegemony, opened the possibility that radical messages, as well as reactionary ones, could be drawn from it. Similarly, I hope not to have suggested a seamless link between melodrama and radicalism through their modes of expression, but, by outlining some of the imagery and ideology common to contemporary radicalism, enacted both textually and physically, to have highlighted some specific features which might have been incorporated, interpreted, or feared in the adaptations of *Jack Sheppard*. In essence, this section has sought to present an alternative background against which to assess Newgate drama, and thereby ensure a more open approach to the texts themselves than that encouraged by the studies of critics like Hollingsworth.

3. Buckstone's 'Jack Sheppard' and Other Dramatic Adaptations

20th-century critics have frequently been influenced by the theories of Foucault into interpreting melodrama as a genre of containment, as one which encourages self-surveillance and self-discipline in spectators, and which is in essence supportive of the dominant culture. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, for instance, suggest

⁸⁸ Jane Moody, 'The Silence of New Historicism: A Mutinous Echo from 1830', *Nineteenth Century Theatre*, 24 (Winter 1996), 61-89 (p.68).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

that while plays like Walker's *The Factory Lad* of 1832 depict social and economic hardship among the working classes, they ultimately discourage rebellion by showing the consequences of such action, and encourage the lower-class spectators to withdraw into a state of 'psychological regression' in the face of the 'harsh external world.'⁹⁰ Jeffrey Cox's reading of Jerrold's *The Mutiny at the Nore* (1828) claims that it is representative of nautical melodrama as a whole in trying 'to insure that the audience performs upon its own emotional responses the same kind of discipline that the plays perform upon the thoughts and feelings of their characters.'⁹¹ Ultimately, then, the conflicts of melodrama are seen to be enacted 'within the bounds of a morality authorized by the cultural discourse of the bourgeoisie'.⁹² But others, most notably Hadley, have interpreted melodrama differently. While, as we have seen, Hadley takes a Foucauldian view of the development of society in the 19th century, and the new relationship between patriarch and humble figure as spectator and actor respectively, both inside and outside the theatre, she actually excludes melodrama from collusion in this process of social change. For her, stage melodrama is a genre resistant to this encroachment of the market, of classification, and growth of the private space. Its typical plot-lines, revolving around disguise and revelation, separation and reconciliation, represent not the eventual advocacy of bourgeois domesticity, but ultimate support for a return to the values of a hierarchical and deferential society which will reunite familial groups torn apart by the process of capitalism. It is, therefore, a genre of resistance which is backward-looking and almost conservative in form, features which Klancher and Jones have suggested were characteristic of politically radical groups, including the Chartists, in the first half of the 19th century. This nostalgic nature seems alien to us now, and has perhaps obscured any potentially subversive strains within melodrama from many modern critics. Alan Liu has observed

⁹⁰ Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, 'Introduction', in *The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, pp.iii-xv (pp.xii-xiii).

⁹¹ Jeffrey Cox, 'The Ideological Tack of Nautical Melodrama', in *The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, pp.184-99 (p.186).

⁹² *The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, p.xiv.

that, '[i]n our own political climate, we do not expect - and cannot really understand - the possibility of a subversion expressed as total conservatism.'⁹³ Any connection between the world view of some melodrama and that of broader radical discourse is, of course, important in assessing fears surrounding Newgate drama. It would, however, be wrong to accuse Hadley of defining melodrama as a homogeneous form; she rightly shows that ideologically it was unstable, reflecting a society in flux, and that while a voice against capitalism it was also a product of capitalism, striving for commercial success, and at times adopting some of the values of that system. Nevertheless, the implication of her argument is that the ideology of resistance is ultimately the dominant one.

Perhaps a more accurate assessment is to avoid attaching to melodrama as a whole a dominant ideology or political intention, and to recognise that different plays could perform different functions. Certainly this is the line that Moody takes as she strives to preserve a consideration of the influence of individual plays, managers, authors and audiences within the broader genre. In her consideration of Jerrold's *The Mutiny at the Nore* she challenges Cox's interpretation of the play as a disciplinary narrative, the 'assumption that nautical melodrama does a particular and identifiable kind of ideological work', and argues instead for a more disjointed play containing 'the collision and fracturing of political languages amongst spectators, managers, and magistrates and within the playwright himself.'⁹⁴ This is a characteristic I have noted in the Newgate novels. I will similarly contest readings of Buckstone's 'Jack Sheppard' as a purely disciplinary narrative by suggesting alternative interpretations, and arguing for a mixture of registers within Newgate drama, not just between plays but within them, and not only textually but within the modes of performance themselves. I will suggest that the confusion surrounding Newgate drama, both at the time and now, arises from

⁹³ Alan Liu, 'Wordsworth and Subversion, 1793-1804: Trying Cultural Criticism', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2 (Spring 1989), 79-99 (p.88).

⁹⁴ *Nineteenth Century Theatre*, 24 (Winter 1996), 70.

the fact that none of these registers obviously dominates. The plays are open to varied and unpredictable responses not only among individual audiences but individual spectators. There are many tensions within *Jack Sheppard* which could create difficult choices or rouse complex emotions - tension between enjoyment of Jack's actions and denunciation of them, between Jack's yearning for fame and repulsion at its consequences, between Jack's working-class background and noble clothing. Like *The Mutiny at the Nore*, it could be said that *Jack Sheppard* arouses 'an unresolvable tension between sympathy and condemnation'.⁹⁵ Perhaps by seeing this within the phenomenon we are more accurately reconstructing the context of the times in which it emerged than by seeing it as either definitively supportive of, or resistant towards, the dominant agents of political and cultural power.

The most famous adaptation of *Jack Sheppard*, that by J. B. Buckstone, opened at the Adelphi on 28 October 1839, ran until Christmas, and was frequently revived. The Adelphi had, by this stage, largely shed a deserved reputation for rowdiness. It was in a desirable district in the West Strand, and now had audiences which included educated West End pleasure-seekers, although the majority were of lower middle- and lower-class backgrounds. As well as being immensely popular, this play received a certain amount of critical praise which was accorded to no other dramatisation, and which seemed to cut across the general antipathy towards Newgate drama. *The Times*, for example, applauded Buckstone for making the best of an indifferent novel and writing a play which 'met with the almost unequivocal approbation of an overflowing audience'.⁹⁶ The *Standard* commended it as 'a very effective dramatic piece'.⁹⁷ The reviews seem to support the idea that it induced a cheerful response in spectators. Part of the reason for this undoubtedly lies in differences from other plays both in presentation of the plot and in the manner of

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁶ *The Times*, 29 October 1839, p.3.

⁹⁷ *Standard*, 29 October 1839, p.1.

performance, and I will discuss these later. Yet, despite this, the play was later banned along with all the other versions. It is my contention that, while the Adelphi version received some tributes, it remained dangerous because it could be interpreted as politically subversive in a manner that other adaptations could not. One way in which the theatre has always had a certain political and class-based symbolism, and did so particularly at a time when drama was so categorically divided between the illegitimate and the legitimate, is in the issue of representation. As I have already suggested, the connection between theatrical representation and wider political representation had been notoriously demonstrated by the Old Price riots at Drury Lane in 1809. Buckstone's adaptation not only shows an awareness of the various representations of Jack, but positively plays upon them in a manner that other versions do not. This, in itself, was enough to invite radical interpretations and make the Adelphi a site for criticisms about the nature of political representation. It demonstrates that the varied dynamics which attached themselves to these tales as they crossed generic boundaries meant that a politicised threat was inherent even in the most apparently 'safe' of the dramatic productions.

Buckstone is conscious throughout of Jack's status as an inter-textual figure, as an almost mythical character whose tale has been recycled many times already. Since the execution of the historical Jack Sheppard, the story of his remarkable life had been told in a wide variety of forms. Ballads and pamphlets had surfaced immediately. Two pamphlets lamenting his demise were supposedly the work of Daniel Defoe. The first play based on his life, 'Harlequin Sheppard', was staged just twelve days after his death. Within a year several memoirs had been written. A portrait, supposedly commissioned by George I, was painted by Sir James Thornhill who visited Jack in the condemned hold at Newgate three days before his subject's death. There is no evidence to support claims that Hogarth too visited the cell, but his series 'Industry and Idleness' of 1747, with the industrious and idle apprentices, was almost certainly inspired by the Sheppard story. And popular interest in the young criminal clearly influenced Gay's

'The Beggar's Opera'. The range of cultural forms touched by the tale is truly astounding, covering as it does the literature of the streets to the art of the monarch. Furthermore, this range of representations of Jack, with its inherent contradictions and tensions, was something that clearly interested those of the 18th century involved in the process. It even appears to have preoccupied the criminal himself. An account of Jack's life and death by 'John Highwayman Sheppard', for instance, demonstrates this very clearly. It describes the historical figure's enjoyment of his fame and the way in which he actively changed his appearance to match his new status. After one escape, he robbed a house of various fine clothes and, resolving to act like a gentleman among old friends in Drury Lane and Clare-market, he

strutted about in a fine suit of black, a light tie-wig, and a ruffled shirt, with a silver-hilted sword by his side, a diamond ring on his finger, and a gold watch in his pocket, notwithstanding he knew there was a diligent search made for him.⁹⁸

On another occasion he joined a crowd while in disguise, and obviously revelled in his literary status as a criminal hero: "[I] mixed with a crowd round two ballad singers, the subject being concerning Sheppard; and I remember the company was very merry about the matter."⁹⁹

And yet elsewhere he appears aware of his other status, as suffering and exploited victim. He takes great delight in sending a letter to Mr Applebee, a printer of the dying speeches of executed prisoners, after his escape from the condemned cell at Newgate. He cheekily writes that he hopes

'these few lines will find you in good health, as I am at present; but I must own you are the loser for want of my dying-speech; but to make up your loss, if you think this sheet worth your while, pray make the best of it.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ John Highwayman Sheppard [pseud.], *The Life of Jack Sheppard* (London: J. Bysh, 1830), p.16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14.

Here he takes pleasure in retaining control of the representations of himself, but by doing so he shows himself aware that frequently this control is in the hands of others. He makes this clearer when observing of those who visited him in prison that '[t]hey were all ginger-bread fellows, who came rather out of curiosity than charity; or to form papers and ballads out of my behaviour.'¹⁰¹ This ambiguous attitude to his fame, the simultaneous pride in, and resentment of, the promulgation of his own story, is echoed by those involved in this process. The author of the account himself constantly struggles to navigate a path between enjoyment and admiration of Jack and his feats, and moral repugnance towards these very feats, and thereby seems conscious of his own ambiguous role in representing him. Indeed, the account concludes with the following extract from the *British Journal* of 28 November 1724:

Thornhill, 'tis thine to gild with fame,
Th'obscure, and raise the humble name;
To make the form elude the grave,
And Sheppard from oblivion save.

Tho' life, in vain, the wretch implores,
An exile to the farthest shores;
Thy pencil brings a kind reprieve,
And bids the dying robber live.

This piece to latest times shall stand,
And shew the wonders of thy hand:
Thus former masters grac'd their name,
And gave egregious robbers fame.

Apelles Alexander drew;
Caesar is to Aurelius due;
Cromwell in Lilly's works doth shine;
And Sheppard, Thornhill, lives in thine.¹⁰²

Sheppard inspires reactions by various people in different forms, each aware not only of Jack's story, but of other representations of his story, and consequently conscious of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.17.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.24.

their own role in this representational mosaic. Here Jack's image is preserved in paint by Thornhill, which attracts mock praise in poetry, and is included in a prose version of the tale to illustrate precisely these tensions. From a very early stage representations of the young criminal, and the uncomfortable connotations attached, were an intrinsic part of his story. What makes Buckstone interesting is that his version continues to foreground this characteristic while other adaptations of the time do not. By capturing Jack's historical ambiguity, Buckstone had found a symbol for the wider confusion of a society coming to terms with the market culture and its inherent contradictions and oppositions.

The third scene of Act Four, especially, highlights the self-conscious manner in which Buckstone refers to and assimilates the prior forms which have adopted Jack for their subject. It is a scene which has no key role in the thrust of the plot, and one which is found in none of the other dramatisations of the time.¹⁰³ Its inclusion by Buckstone, therefore, is important. It reenacts the famous moment when Sir James Thornhill visited Jack in his cell in Newgate, and imagines that Hogarth and Gay were also present. And in many ways it embodies the moment of triumph for Jack, the point at which his teenage fantasies become realised, when he attracts the attention and admiration of the rich and important, and makes the transition from unknown apprentice to immortal figure of myth. On one level the scene plays upon and participates in exactly this fantastical quality. Jack's visitors revel in his elusiveness, and marvel at the elevated heights of recognition to which his feats have taken him. Thornhill observes that, by having his portrait commissioned by the king, 'no housebreaker was ever so highly honoured before'. Gay is astonished by Jack and

¹⁰³ It is included in a much later version by Joseph Hatton which was licensed for the Globe in 1897. However, here it appears to serve simply to demonstrate Jack's fearless bravado, and certainly contains no suggestion that he is an exploited victim. He displays no sorrow or regret, and boasts to those around him, 'By Jove, you'll talk of this day when you are old. You'll boast that you knew Jack Sheppard.' Joseph Hatton, 'Jack Sheppard, or, The Idle Apprentice', London, British Library, Additional MS 53,645B, Act IV, sc. I.

cries, 'Well, you are an extraordinary fellow - not the man I expected to see. I looked for a six-foot ruffian - not a stripling!' Hogarth, as he leaves, says to Jack in an excited aside, 'I shall expect to hear of your escape to-morrow' ('JS', Act IV, sc.3, pp.62-64). It is a scene of relative jollity and amusement as well as admiration, and as such fits into that strand of the mythical canon which portrays Jack as a kind of criminal Peter Pan.

Yet it contains moments which contrast such submission to the general mythical status and suggest that there is a real figure behind the tradition, one not entirely in touch with the representations, and one less in control of his own destiny than the myth might suggest. For ultimately Jack's fame is dependent upon his imprisonment in Newgate, and, however many escapes he performs, his eventual death. Honoured he might be, but it is a form of honour that demands absolute sacrifice. It reminds us that despite the potency of his tale, the outcome is a very final one, the reality and tragedy of which the visitors appear to forget as they cheerfully remark, 'Never mind, Jack, die game!', and make the death as playfully mythical as the escapes ('JS', Act 4, sc.3, p.62). It is a tension which an observation by Walter Goodman, in his anecdotal book *The Keeleys on the Stage and at Home*, suggests made itself felt to some in the audience:

Of course, sitting for a portrait on the stage is a very different thing to the same performance in a studio, and as the audience were well aware of this, their sympathies for Jack Sheppard's sufferings were not reawakened on this account. But to pose for your likeness with manacles upon your wrists and heavy rings of iron on your legs is quite another matter, and it was doubtless for this reason that when the scene shifted and the 'notorious highwayman' was discovered in the act of having his head taken off on canvas as a preliminary exercise to be followed by hanging by the neck, there was more than one suggestive shudder among the spectators.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Walter Goodman, *The Keeleys on the Stage and at Home* (London: Richard Bentley, 1895), p.24.

Jack's fame is but a brief by-product of his temporary avoidance of the scaffold. Furthermore, the visitors may leave with their ideas, sketches and paintings, may use Jack's image to secure their own fame and success, while avoiding any such penalty themselves. The visitors manoeuvre Jack and compose the scene to best suit their art. Thornhill cries at one point, 'There it is! - the exact expression I want! Don't move, Jack - don't alter a muscle'. Gay exclaims, 'Ah, the very face! with all the escapes written in it.' The portrayal is so forced that Jack actually needs a break from this artificial pose, and pleads 'Now, if you please, as I am rather tired of sitting so long in one position, I'll rest a bit' ('JS', Act IV, sc.3, pp.63, 62). The scene touches upon the irony of Jack's chosen art, one which while relying initially upon slipperiness and escape, ultimately demands motionlessness and closure in order to transfer itself into the field of representation, the realm of print and paint. In comparing Jack's search for fame with that of Thornhill, Hogarth and Gay, a set of thoughts about exploitation are inevitably suggested. As the play 'realises' the Cruikshank illustration which accompanied Ainsworth's novel, the admiring circle of artists can in this light appear as the imprisoning and exploitative circle of representations of Jack Sheppard. The allusion to this scene, in which the origins of the famous representations of Jack are shown to lie, embodies a playful, self-conscious referentiality which could nevertheless receive a far more radically active reading from an audience ready to interpret issues of representation in a political way.

Before examining this feature more closely, it would be of benefit to consider Buckstone himself to see whether his life offers any clues regarding his intentions for this play. There is no solid evidence to suggest that he was directly involved in the radical politics of the 1830s and 1840s, but, as Taylor has observed in introducing the play, he 'clearly appreciated the sympathies of his audience, which at the Adelphi was largely drawn from the traditionally radical classes of retailers and craftsmen.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ George Taylor, 'John Baldwin Buckstone (1802-1879)', in *Tribby and other Plays*,

Furthermore, as a comic actor he employed a crude, arch style which more readily appealed to the pit than the boxes. That his style could offend a sense of bourgeois respectability is clear from the following comments of one observer:

Mr Buckstone has talents, Mr Buckstone has humour, Mr Buckstone has much waggishness, but Mr Buckstone has no refinement. A *double entendre* lurks in each eye; his smirk is a hint of an unclean presence [...]. He is the son of mirth and vulgarity [...]. Mr Buckstone takes care to impart a meaning of his own, and makes plain speech a sort of intellectual perspective for the satyr who leers with dewy eyes upon the spectator, and whilst he forces himself to laugh, compels him to despise the occasion of his merriment.¹⁰⁶

What is equally interesting, in the light of a Foucauldian reading of 19th-century society as divided between actor and spectator, and Hadley's interpretation of melodrama as a form engaged in combating this, is that Buckstone's style seems to have aimed at somehow reversing this relationship and drawing a reluctant spectator into the role of actor. And his lifestyle beyond the stage also took a form which ran very much against that encouraged by the Society for the Suppression of Vice and the code of bourgeois morality. He was always at the centre of festivities which invariably included copious amounts of alcohol and raucous singing. He founded and chaired the Theatrical Club which held meetings in an apartment at the top of the staircase at the Haymarket. Marston's recollections of being introduced to one of these meetings suggest that they bore more than a passing resemblance to the tavern scenes of *Jack Sheppard* and *Paul Clifford*, or the gatherings of ultra-radicals, in their mock-ceremony and drunkenness:

Buckstone, still in the dress he had worn on stage, was in the chair, and proposed the health of the newcomer with a comical assumption of dignity, and in words which implied the great favour shown to any one admitted into the circle of the august brotherhood, which could boast more than masonic mysteries and privileges. This brief address he accompanied by looks of droll appeal to the members of the club, chiefly, if not wholly composed of the actors of the theatre, who, as he was popular with them, fell into his humour, and echoed his sentiments

ed. by George Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.3-5 (p.3).

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in *Players and Performances*, p.65.

with the most deferential loyalty. The languid pomposity of an Eastern despot in Buckstone's manner, and the obsequious homage of his courtiers, was in itself a very enjoyable bit of comedy.¹⁰⁷

Of greater relevance was his participation in plays like *Keeley Worried by Buckstone* of 1852 where the comforts of bourgeois domesticity were deliberately disrupted. The play imagined that the comic actor Robert Keeley, who frequently served as a foil to Buckstone, had decided to retire, and follows the attempts of his colleague to change his mind:

[Buckstone] invades Keeley's peaceful home at Pelham Crescent, and behaves so badly [...] by converting the neatly-arranged apartment into a perfect bear-garden - that altogether its owner is driven nearly distracted.¹⁰⁸

While this, of course, embodies a clownish comedy, its depiction of an anarchist destroying the symbol of bourgeois security and the private space of the market society must also have taken on a specifically social aspect. As Taylor observed, 'subliminally it had all the sinister threat of an early Pinter play.'¹⁰⁹ Some of Buckstone's plays themselves were also hostile to society's leaders. *Luke the Labourer* (1828) pits a displaced farm labourer against a cruel landlord. And Hadley has used two of Buckstone's mid-century melodramas as examples of radical dramatic resistance to the market and the dangers associated with the change from inalienable to alienable property. In *Isabelle*, first performed in 1834, she argues, we are shown one form of familial disintegration as a husband abandons his wife after succumbing to the speculative appetites associated with the market, and indulges in philandering and gambling. Here, for the male characters, marriage becomes just another form of speculation, and women the passive victims of this speculation. In *Victorine* it is the woman who becomes the active agent as, on the eve of being married, she comes to recognise her value as currency within an unregulated market culture, and dreams of

¹⁰⁷ John Westland Marston, *Our Recent Actors*, 2 vols (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888), II, 97.

¹⁰⁸ Goodman, pp.150-51.

¹⁰⁹ *Players and Performances*, p.68.

becoming the mistress of a wealthy man and the owner of a gambling house. In both plays the incursions of the market, and its accompanying private sexual and economic motives, are shown to be fatal to unifying institutions like marriage.¹¹⁰ Buckstone may not have been actively engaged in politics, but frequently his actions as author, actor and man were at least dismissive of contemporary bourgeois social and moral beliefs, and could be interpreted as more directly antagonistic and radical.

With this in mind, the possibility presents itself more strongly that the scene with Hogarth, Gay and Thornhill was an important one, that it was more than a colourful episode on the periphery of the plot and instead was intrinsic to the tone of the play as a whole. An examination of the playbills advertising the production further reinforces this impression. On the first playbill to broadcast Buckstone's drama, alongside the cast of actors, is printed a 'taster' from just one of the scenes. The scene chosen happens to be the very one in which Hogarth, Gay and Thornhill appear. I have mentioned the importance of such material in influencing audiences prior to the entertainment, and the prominence given to this scene in the advertising literature can only have attracted greater attention to it during the performance. The audience's interpretation of this scene could also have been guided by other information contained on the playbill. Particularly eye-catching are the following lines in connection with the afterpiece, a pantomime called 'Harlequin and Mother Red Cap!, or, Merlin and the Fairy Snowdrop!':

A Celebrated Publisher's and Millwright's Shop

A hard race, stop 'em who can - dandy barber - shave for a penny - hair and vegetable powder - sage resolve - 1st of September - we'll go out a shooting - a goose shot with duck - let's have a nice bit roasted - I'll take a merry-thought - oh, lord, it's gone to greece - its a great sea captain - all right, he's cooked - hush! here's another - oh, how I love him - wait a bit - stealing an author no plagiarism - making a play without a patent - oh, 'tis love, 'tis love - ha! ha! - now we'll make one, and nix my dolls - here he is, Jack Sheppard, I'll sell

¹¹⁰ See Hadley, pp.151-54.

him in parts - we'll all have him [...] rival managers - minors beating the majors - a popular favourite in a new place - a song, a song, 'We all love a pretty girl under the rose, And all like a comic song called "Jolly Nose"'.¹¹¹

Although this extract now seems fairly obscure, it appears to parody the habit of hack writers and publishers to plagiarise works and use the sensational tales of criminals or public figures for their own profit. In this sense it perhaps suggests a similar self-consciousness to the accounts examined earlier. The imagery used is especially interesting, suggesting as it does the violent hunting, dismembering and consuming of the subject. Most importantly it includes a reference to selling Jack Sheppard 'in parts'. With this in mind, it makes the circle of Hogarth, Gay and Thornhill around Jack seem particularly predatory, and reinforces, perhaps even suggested, Goodman's parallel between the criminal's real execution and 'his head [being] taken off on canvas.' Furthermore, if we accept the potential effect of advertising on an audience's interpretation of the production, then a playbill of 1840, in which 'Jack Sheppard' is featured alongside 'Robespierre!, or, Two Days of the Revolution!', could also encourage a radical reading of such incidents. Whatever the tone of the actual production of 'Robespierre!', the notice includes politically suggestive phrases like 'France - one and indivisible', 'Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!', and the concluding statement, in large, bold letters, 'FREEDOM TO FRANCE!'.¹¹² This awakens at least the possibility that scenes in 'Jack Sheppard' could be interpreted politically, that the portrayal of artistic representation could be equated with the injustices of social representation, and that the successful escapes of a young criminal could symbolise the need for the English, like the French, to struggle to regain their liberty.

The issue of representation was certainly one that had been actively politicised beyond the theatre by radical politics during the period. Gareth Stedman Jones, in his influential essay 'Rethinking Chartism', observed that for earlier radicalism and for

¹¹¹ British Library, Carr-Glyn Collection of Playbills, 353, 'Adelphi Theatre 1821-41', p.82.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.84.

Chartism, 'the dividing line between classes was not that between employer and employed, but that between the represented and the unrepresented.'¹¹³ Radical writing was based upon the belief that the power to name and classify was part of the ruling power's control and hold over the masses. For Hadley, this process of classification was a feature of the emergent system of capitalism, one which divided people into 'actors' and 'spectators'. We have seen how radical writing therefore struggled to avoid being defined by such signs, while attempting to uncover the truth and show the consequences behind the supposed lies inherent in middle-class and ministerial representations. Viewed with this in mind, the scene is transformed from one which uses the visit to indulge in Jack's fame, and to preface and elevate his greatest escape, into an allegory for middle-class control of the modes of representation and exploitation of the working-class image. The scene gains its fascination from purporting to show the myth in the making, to remind the audience of representations with which they would already be familiar and to provide them with an illusory glimpse of these representations at their conception. But to a mind more receptive to the notion of representation as a political issue bound up with class inequality, this could be interpreted as the radical act of stripping away the masks inherent in middle-class representations and revealing the true motives behind them. Hogarth, for instance, says that he will use Jack's example to teach the apprentices that a course other than perseverance and industry leads to Tyburn. In a political sense he is thereby reprocessing a tale of working-class defiance of authority and making it into a middle-class moral exemplum against such defiance, a didactic discourse encouraging submission to the status quo. And in using Jack's image he could also be seen to be commodifying it. In essence, the scene provides an allegorical depiction of the relationship between society's victimised actors and its exploitative spectators.

¹¹³ Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', in *The Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp.90-178 (pp.106-107).

This interpretation is made easier by considering the reasons behind Thornhill's portrait. On one level its royal commission demonstrates the impact that Jack's antics have had and thus adds to his mythical status. But on a more politically activated level it can be regarded as a graphic demonstration of a central precept of radicalism in the 1830s. The fundamental social conflict was felt to be not between the employer and the employed but between the working and the idle classes. And those in the middle, who bought cheap and sold dear, were willing compliers in this tyrannical rule of property. Thornhill's act fulfils exactly this middling role, using the unrepresented to sell to the aristocratic. When Hogarth observes, 'Don't you see, he's all muscle and activity, without an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him', we are struck by a description which makes Jack sound like a prize horse at a market ('JS', Act IV, sc.3, p.63). What is particularly interesting is the frequency with which periodicals like the *Poor Man's Guardian* describe the effect of such participation as one of 'enslaving' those below. On 14th February 1835, for example, an article lamented that,

No individual is blameable for accumulating all he can earn as employer, shopkeeper, pawnbroker, or otherwise, so long as the present system endures. That system leaves an individual no choice but to *live by it* or die. At all events, it leaves him no alternative but that of enslaving others or being a slave himself. The guilt, then, is not in living *by* the system or *according to it* - it is in supporting it.¹¹⁴

With such radical imagery in mind, the realisation of Cruikshank's illustration could appear to be an allegorical one showing a middle class which controls the modes of representation and makes prisoners of the working classes by commodifying and exploiting their images, drawing them into the system of capital which ensures they have no power over their own represented selves. Such an allegorical interpretation of Jack's predicament, his enslavement by a representational system beyond his control,

¹¹⁴ 'Wants and Prospects of the People', *Poor Man's Guardian*, 14 February 1835, 1-3 (p.1).

could be used both as a means of awakening a working-class consciousness and as a demonstration of the need for universal suffrage.

If we are able to imagine a radical interpretation of such a scene, of the politicisation of certain modes of representation, and of portraiture in particular, then we can trace the progress of such a reading in other areas of the play. For portraits in various forms prove to be important both to the scenery and to the unravelling of the plot itself. They are, for instance, vital in the depiction of Sir Rowland Trenchard. Sir Rowland is one of the villains of the tale, a man who attempts murder in order to suppress the claims of his sister's offspring to his share of the family estate. The presence of a painting of the Earl of Mar, a leading Jacobite, in his house is actually highlighted by Jack, who asks, 'Who's that queer cove in the full-bottomed wig?' ('JS', Act II, sc.5, p.33). In the scheme of the play its purpose is threefold. First, it plays its part in the intricacies of one of the sub-plots by silently suggesting the strong hold the blackmailer Jonathan Wild has over Sir Rowland. Second, it underlines the hypocrisy of an aristocrat who believes in the sanctity of property and the aristocratic bloodline, while doing everything possible to prevent the inheritance of Thames. And third, it strengthens the notion, vital to the story, of the revelatory power of portraits. For it is through recognition of his own likeness in a miniature portrait, stolen from the house by Jack, that Thames is ultimately able to claim his rightful inheritance as Sir Rowland's nephew, and discover also the noble origins of Jack's mother. Sir Rowland's possession of this portrait had been the means of retaining his stranglehold on his property and wealth by suppressing the rights of Thames and Jack. Furthermore, its vast expense, emphasised by its being set with diamonds, ensured Thames had no legal means of possessing it. Jack had to steal it in order for the mystery to be resolved. He dislikes the word 'stolen'. 'Stolen's, a queer word,' he says, 'no, I haven't stolen it, I only brought it away with me' ('JS', Act II, sc.1, p.23). And in many ways he is right, for his action represents the only way of returning to Thames what is rightfully his.

So it is that a portrait becomes the clue in the plot's resolution of these birth mysteries. Read in a radical discursive framework, however, it can be seen to extend the allegorical associations of portraiture with the exploitative control of the means of representation by the ruling classes from the earlier scene with Thornhill, Gay and Hogarth. The portrait symbolises both the immoral dispossession by the rich of the poor, the rejection of traditional patriarchal duties, and control of the means by which this act can be proved and righted. The only way that those of the working class can possess such portraits, can reclaim their own image, is by subverting the system of capital and breaking the laws set up by the ruling classes. As the dominant modes of representation are linked to, and sustain, the control of capital, the working classes have no legal means of redressing this representational imbalance. The control of the working-class image therefore becomes directly linked to the control of property and wealth, to those dominant in the market. Jack's actions embody a process of 'publicisation', of breaking down the barriers enclosing this private sphere, and thereby ultimately not only solving a birth mystery but reuniting a family fractured by the selfish pursuit of money.

Nor can the working classes adopt a cultural medium like portraiture to portray themselves. Winnifred's attempt to paint her lover Thames is doomed to failure. When he asks her why she had not shown her painting to him, she cries, 'Because it is not quite like you!' ('JS', Act II, sc.1, p.22). She recognises in it a form she can never master, and refuses his requests to paint one of herself for him to carry as a keepsake. Instead she gives him a lock of her own hair, which becomes the only means she has of representing herself accurately. This act is reminiscent of the ghoulish trade at the scenes of executions in pieces of the hanged criminal's body - skin, fingernails or hair - or the broadsides carrying the supposed last confessions of the criminal alongside a print of his or her hanging body. These are the posters which, in the opening scene of the play when Wood visits Mrs Sheppard to offer to bring up her son, adorn her walls as the only reminders of her dead husband. They are the only

portraits which the poor may possess, and, as with Thornhill's painting of Jack, they imply recent or impending execution at the hands of society's enforcers. Legal control of the modes of representation is monopolised by the ruling classes, and the only chance the working classes have for expressing themselves is to operate outside the legal framework. Interpreted politically, therefore, Jack's criminality is not just a myth to be enjoyed, nor an ironical comment on an individual's chosen path to fame through sacrifice. It becomes an allegory for the complete lack of a working-class political voice within a system that uses its control of the representational means to exploit and oppress those at the bottom. Criminality is not just a metaphor for one form of working-class comment and expression. It is shown to be the *only available* form of working-class comment and expression. The gallows moments, which famously gave the criminal a chance to abuse and ridicule the lofty heights of authority, which gave him a public voice and an opportunity to enter the political debate regarding the social system, also required his sacrifice to that system. And thus Jack's criminality becomes both a celebration of lawless rejection of an unfair system and a distasteful recognition that such a sacrificial form of self-representation is the only form open to a working class without a political voice.

And herein lies part of Jack's ambiguity, and part of the paradox faced by the audience. It is only by employing secrecy and crime, essentially by immersing himself in the murky world of the private sphere and playing Rowland at his own game, and eventually being punished for doing so, that resolution can take place. For all those characteristics which categorise the villains of the plot, and which were being used beyond the theatre as metaphors for the evils of contemporary society, are at some time or another adopted by Jack. One example is the use of, and familiarity with, disguise and concealment. It serves to divide the characters into good and bad: the good are open and 'public', and do not use or see through disguises, while the bad employ veils and secret passageways, and are frequently quick to see through the false representations of others. Thus it is that Wood and his wife fail to recognise Blueskin

and Wild when they are disguised as Mr Jackson and Mr Smith; Thames fails to recognise himself in the portrait stolen by Jack; and Agnes is unable to paint herself. The evils of false representation, and its association with ruling-class signs and masks and unjust control, serve to distinguish the characters and guide the judgements of the audience. Yet Jack is sandwiched between the two. In many ways he is proud of his sense of honour, of his openness which distances him from Wild and Trenchard, that his promises can be relied on, that '[he] always keep[s his] word' ('JS', Act III, sc.4, p.51). As with Paine, he claims the qualities of transparency and honesty for his discourse. And yet it is only by being able to recognise Thames's face in the stolen portrait, to see beyond Wild's disguise, to literally conceal himself behind a cloak in Wild's house - essentially to read and adopt the artificial signs of the predatory world of the ruling and represented classes - that he is able to strip these veils away.¹¹⁵

This sense of ambiguity was perhaps strengthened by the inclusion of Mrs Keeley in the lead role, further highlighting the importance of deception as a metaphor during the play, and particularly the coexistence of disguise and revelation within Jack. On one hand, as a female playing a male character, her presence involved the constant and prominent adoption of disguise; on the other, while this disguise 'fooled' the other characters of the play, Mrs Keeley's 'star' quality, her familiarity with the audience, indeed the very prominence of the disguise, served to convey a feeling of openness, of the actress behind the role, which may not have been so strong with a male lead. Jack's attempt at regaining a place and identity within society demonstrates the ideological uncertainty which Hadley has recognised in melodrama as a whole. In his overwhelming urge to carve his name in history, to become one of a long line of famous criminals, he is essentially endeavouring to join an older familial community

¹¹⁵ In this adoption and deconstruction of the veils and disguises of Trenchard and his associates, Jack's actions work in the same way as those of some of the ultra-radicals like 'Little Waddy' that we saw earlier. Jack's choice to attire himself in the splendid clothes of a nobleman performs a similar function.

from which Rowland's actions have isolated him. And yet while this is clearly successful not only in reclaiming his own sense of identity within a broader group, but the true identities of others, and in repairing the fractured familial hierarchy as a whole, it simultaneously entails a further alienation through his commodification and execution. It is an inherent paradox which is a feature of a play reacting to a society in flux, and embodying a mode of visible resistance rather than expounding political philosophy (as in some of the novels).

And so it is that portrait painting can be seen to embody the containment of the subject within the realm of the bourgeois or aristocratic, the displacement of the figure from the realm of real political and cultural interpretation and identification, and its imprisonment in the dominant site of knowledge. It is a direct representation of a new alliance between the middle and upper classes, brought about by a market culture, and geared towards the restriction and exploitation and disinheritance of those at the bottom. It is an allegory for the contemporary theories surrounding social control, the classificatory impulse which threw up Bentham's panopticon, the New Poor Law, and the very idea of class itself.¹¹⁶ Jack's surrounded and watched self is the figurative manifestation of these influential social theories. Yet, as we have seen, while he is shown to be a typical victim of this system, while his sacrifice to it serves to reveal its inhumanity, he is also the symbol of ultimate antagonism and resistance. His is a life devoted to the defiant rejection of mechanisms of containment, be they the solid walls of the prison house or the manipulated laws of property. As such, his tale can be regarded as one very much steeped in the epoch of the 19th century, and far more than

¹¹⁶ The image of disinheriting the poor was particularly strong when associated with opposition to the New Poor Law. The abolition of outdoor relief and of relief in aid of wages seemed to many to be equivalent to an act of disinheritance because it denied to the poor the assistance which they had previously considered a birthright, an inheritance from their parochial fathers. After 1834, the poor were, in law, wholly supported by wage labour. They had no legacies, no lineal connections to their superiors, no histories or homes. They were, in effect, commodities. See Hadley, pp. 100-102.

an enjoyable story about a rebel against the Bloody Code of a past era. While there may not be any sustained and cohesive political theory, Jack, and the criminals of other Newgate drama, can be seen as symbols of anti-authority and, therefore, indirectly figures of political and social comment. For Jack is not typical in his criminality in being motivated by greed. His actions are guided not only by an urge for identity but by an instinctive, almost abstracted, antipathy to authority and its institutions. He embodies the very spirit of the carnivalesque. He is a leaping, cartwheeling, whirling dervish. The escapes themselves, particularly from the supposedly invincible Newgate, the acts of getting outside from within, involve a reconstruction of space and the suggestion of shape-changing which by implication challenges all rigid laws. As he dances and sings during his climactic escape from Newgate he demonstrates a stark refusal to be classified as the sullen and subjugated prisoner.¹¹⁷ He becomes an impish force of nature whose colour and energy contrast the grey solidity of the man-made structure whose purpose is to stifle such energy. His manner, his actions, essentially his revelry in a form of unlawful game, like 'Little Waddy's' irreverence in court, alters this ultimate symbol of officialdom's restrictive powers. Furthermore, certain aspects of the broader criminal community are characterised by a similar sense of natural energy and life, of the cyclical process of death and rebirth. In the opening scene, Wood is struck by Jack's similarity to his executed father, exclaiming, 'Lord help me, he's the very image of his father! - like carpenter, like chips' ('JS', Act I, sc.1, p.7) Indeed, Ainsworth's novel makes the connection closer still by informing the readers

¹¹⁷ I am here suggesting that such dancing can be seen as a symbolic 'frame-breaking' device. This device can be observed elsewhere too in the style of acting embraced at the Adelphi. Taylor has remarked that Mrs Keeley often employed the 'arch' style of comedy, giving the impression that she was enjoying the joke quite as much as the audience and that actors like Paul Bedford, playing Blueskin, made liberal use of nods and winks to the spectators. In an interpretation following Hadley's reading of melodramatic tactics this can be seen to performatively echo the process of 'publicisation', of deconstructing the barriers between 'actors' and 'spectators' newly erected by the market. Alternatively, as I will show later, such familiarity could be seen to undercut serious radical comment by detracting from realism. I would argue that this serves as another example of the play's ambiguity, and further explains why censors may have feared it. *Players and Performances*, p.142.

that Jack's birth fell on the same day as his father's death. As we saw in Chapter 1, this powerful sense of decay and natural regrowth is evident in *Paul Clifford*, too, where the criminal fraternity firmly believe that a lawless career will span seven years before authority catches up and a new criminal rises in place of the old. And this echoes the very real criminal cycle of the gallows where an execution attracted pickpockets who literally fed off the death of their unfortunate compatriot.

That is not to say that all the criminals are portrayed in this way. Some are motivated more completely by selfish greed, and their actions function in the opposite way, by imprisoning and fracturing communities. Jonathan Wild is a villain, but he differs from the villains of much melodrama in being driven not by some abstract force of evil but by the allure of money. He is not motivelessly malignant, but will offer his services to the highest bidder, and in this sense he is linked with the processes of the market. His connection with Rowland Trenchard, which takes the form of a contractual agreement to commit murder, unites the high with the very low in the same way that the new market was seen to bring about those criminal sexual-economic exchanges between the high and low in the private boxes of the theatre and in wider society. The speculative pursuits of Trenchard have replaced his patriarchal role, and there is a fresh link between criminality and the changed, selfish aristocracy. And this, of course, means that although Buckstone appears to have toned down Jack's conflicts with visible symbols of authority, as we will see, his struggle with Wild could still be interpreted as a criticism of the direction of contemporary society and its leaders, as a fight between market and anti-market forces. Where Jack embodies the spirit of life and regeneration, Wild represents the spirit of death and entrapment associated with the market. The criminals of the Newgate drama therefore take two forms - the loveable rogues and the genuine villains. The latter are motivated by monetary gain, are characterised by secrecy, and bring about familial disjuncture and broken bloodlines. Their actions, and particularly their contractual links with higher figures of society, parallel fears surrounding the market and its criminal and immoral

temptations, motivated by greed, and behind closed doors. The former, impelled less by consuming greed and more by a romantic sense of playfulness and gamesmanship, bring about the reconciliation of broken families and reawaken a sense of community. They serve to break down the barriers enclosing the private space, and the manner in which they conduct their lives, and the cyclical features which characterise much of their community, establish them as energetic forces of nature in opposition to the rigid, oppressive, scheming and artificial forces of society's leaders and their social theories and practices. In essence, they come to challenge the unnatural processes of the market, and its attempts to classify, categorise, and privatise.

I have deliberately approached Buckstone's play with Hadley's theory and radical culture and discourse in mind to suggest a subversive interpretation. There is no doubt, however, that it can also be seen to have encompassed alternative discourses. Figures like Thames and Agnes, for instance, emerge intact and happy having followed a way of living more compatible with the bourgeois values of honesty and hard work. What becomes clear when comparing Buckstone's version to some of the other adaptations of *Jack Sheppard* is that his approach to the tale differs not only from other dramatic versions but from Ainsworth's novel itself. Where we have seen the ways in which allegory, imagery and symbolism could provide a sustained, though ideologically unstable, critique of contemporary social trends, it also appears at times to deliberately avoid opportunities for more direct and realistic confrontations with authority. There is a very real possibility that Buckstone was wary of inviting attack or even censorship by pitting his eponymous hero too directly against authority, particularly because the limited licence held by the Adelphi meant that it was subject to the scrutiny of the Lord Chamberlain. It was on reading Ainsworth's novel, after all, that Mitford was 'struck by the great danger, in these times, of representing authorities so constantly and fearfully in the wrong; so tyrannous, so devilish'.¹¹⁸ I have

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Ellis, I, 376.

suggested that one way of interpreting the struggle between Jack and Wild could have been as a struggle between the market and forces resistant to it. But equally it could be argued that this point would be more forcefully made by setting Jack against evil forces more closely allied with recognisable authority, and that what the opposition between Jack and Wild actually does is replace a battle between a victim and society's rulers with a battle between two individuals. Despite the numerous escapes from authority which made Jack famous, this authority is rarely visible in Buckstone's version where it is usually Wild and his henchmen who act as tormentors.

This is demonstrated convincingly by turning to Ainsworth's novel and other dramatic adaptations, where authority's presence is far more prominent. The closing scenes, especially, make an interesting point of comparison. In the novel a long and descriptive chapter details the procession to Tyburn and the death of Jack Sheppard. *Horse-soldiers, javelin-men and constables*, representatives of the power of the ruling classes, are all prominently displayed:

The cavalcade was now put slowly in motion. The horse-soldiers wheeled round and cleared a path: the foot closed in upon the cart. Then came the javelin-men, walking four abreast, and, lastly, a long line of constables, marching in the same order.

The procession had just got into line of march, when a dreadful groan [...] was heard. This was occasioned by Jonathan Wild, who was seen to mount his horse and join the train. (*JS*, III, 295)

Wild is part of the procession and has an important role, supported by the guards and other authority figures, in subduing the angry crowd. The gestural and expressive groan which greets Wild's arrival becomes aimed at authority in general because of the visible association. The lines of conflict are graphically depicted - the rigid, ceremonial, and corrupt lines of authority's procession versus the fluid and vocal body of the people. And authority is conspicuously successful in executing its justice upon Jack. As Jack is cut down from the gallows while yet breathing, bullets from the soldiers ensure that his life is terminated according to the laws of the land. At the same time

the swords and firearms of these soldiers successfully defend Wild from the wrath of the mob, thus cementing the partnership between Wild and established authority (*J.S.*, III, 309-10).

Manuscripts of plays at many of the rival minor theatres are difficult to find because before the 1843 Theatre Regulation Act they were under no obligation to submit them to the Lord Chamberlain, and afterwards would often perform dramas without submitting them for licensing. Those that were not submitted, and which therefore do not survive in the Lord Chamberlain's records, may well have been more overtly subversive. Nevertheless, those that do exist, as well as surviving playbills, appear to include Ainsworth's tension between Jack and authority. Where we have seen that the advertising literature for the Adelphi production foregrounded the scene containing Hogarth, Gay and Thornhill, elsewhere the closing images of the procession and execution, based upon 'realisations' of Cruikshank's illustrations for the novel, formed the pre-play focal point. The playbill for the Surrey's offering of 1839 provides a detailed description of the various stages of this procession, which included a moving background called a 'diorama'. It proclaims, 'DIORAMA! PROCESSION from the OLD BAILEY to TYBURN! With Authorities, Civil, and Military.'¹¹⁹ The presence of the various figures of authority is evidently important. The version at the City of London, advertised for 14 July 1845, declared that it included 'The Executioner summoned - the Veil - the Rescue - the Death of Jack and Blueskin - the Attack on Wild, with Grand and Imposing Tableau.'¹²⁰ The Pavilion, which had a licence issued by the Lord Chamberlain on 11 July 1855, similarly reproduced these stages and included Jack's death at the hands of the soldiers as the crowd attempted to rescue

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Meisel, p.278.

¹²⁰ BL, Catalogue of Playbills, 370. This was presumably the unlicensed production, referred to earlier, which was raided on the authority of the Lord Chamberlain. The Pavilion was a seedy theatre in the East End with a reputation among middle-class commentators for the high proportion of criminals in its audiences. Isaac Cohen, the manager, was supposed to have said that he knew all Whitechapel, and 'numbered most of its thieves among the patrons of his theatre.' Quoted in Bleackley, p.123

him.¹²¹ At another point in this dramatisation, in a scene reminiscent of Dickens's portrayal of the workhouse in *Oliver Twist*, we are shown a further example of authority's cold brutality and, in a more direct and literal fashion than the figurative nature of Buckstone's play, the truth behind those institutions which supposedly cared for the weak. When Jack visits his mother in Bedlam she fails to recognise him, and, during the course of her deranged rantings, refers to ill-treatment which she has obviously been subjected to by her 'carers', and which includes being stripped and having icy water thrown over her.¹²² And thus the prominent demonstration of authority's power over the individual is not only retained in the plays but appears to become one of the prime selling points upon the playbills. The struggle between the authorities, and Jack and his supporters, must have provided a graphic image of division and conflict which those texts available suggest were hinted at throughout. It was perhaps this as much as anything else that frightened those among the ruling classes who had similar misgivings to Mitford about the accumulative effect of such tales at such a time.

This vivid and visible antagonism between Jack and established authority in some of the other minors appears to have been heightened in another way too. In a number of cases the theatres chose to stress the aggressively confrontational aspect of Jack's character by casting an actor who must have been far more physically impressive and imposing than the stringy youth of the early 18th century. F. E. Saville, for example, appeared at the City of London Theatre in the title role of 'Jack Sheppard' in 1845. In the same year, and at the same theatre, Saville also appeared as Sikes in a production of *Oliver Twist*. The version of *Jack Sheppard* was evidently a cheap,

¹²¹ BL, Addit. 52,954DD.

¹²² Ibid., Act III, sc. 14.

unauthorised production, and there is no eyewitness account of it as a result. But John Hollingshead recalled the effect upon the audience of Savile's performance as Sikes:

The 'murder of Nancy' was the great scene [...]. No language ever dreamt of in Bedlam could equal the outburst. A thousand enraged voices, which sounded like ten thousand, [...] filled the theatre, and [...] when the smiling ruffian came forward and bowed, [...] expressed a fierce determination to tear his sanguinary entrails from his sanguinary body.

It was common practice during this period for an actor to specialise in performing a certain 'type' of character. Basil Potter, for instance, took the roles of Sikes, '(a Housebreaker of a savage and reckless disposition)', in 'Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress', and Sir Rowland Trenchard, '(a deep designing villain)', in 'Jack Sheppard!' at the Royal Grecian in 1855.¹²³ Potter's acting skills and appearance were clearly suited to playing the villains. It seems highly improbable, particularly when actors were generally typecast, that Savile could capture both the burly form and aggressive physicality of Sikes and the vulnerable, boyish looks of Jack Sheppard. His performance as Sikes suggests that he must have brought at least a hint of rugged and confrontational masculinity to his interpretation of Jack. Indeed, a description of Jack's costume at the Surrey production of 1839 implies that, far from being accidental, this was the studied purpose:

The youthful miscreant is depicted full length in full fig, with the famous shaped cap bearing a complete armoury. A pistol in each hand, two more in belt, and sheathed sword at side. Silk doublet, rest of costume and armoury heavily tinselled, top boots.¹²⁴

In productions at the Surrey and the City of London, at least, Jack was played not only by a fully mature man with an imposing physical presence, but one whose physicality was emphasised through costume.

¹²³ BL, Catalogue of Playbills, 370.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Bleackley, p.92.

Furthermore, such confrontational suggestiveness is frequently echoed in the available texts. In the Pavilion's dramatisation of 1855, for instance, there are several speeches which suggest Jack's readiness for bodily aggression. Instead of employing tricks and disguises, he is prepared to stand up directly to Jonathan Wild, by this stage his malignant tormentor, and declares,

Hear me, it is time you should know who you have to deal with. Henceforth I utterly throw off the yoke you have laid upon me. I will stir neither hand or foot for you more [...]. You are more in my power than I am in yours. Jack Sheppard is a match for Jonathan Wild, any day.¹²⁵

The final point to note, however, is that despite bluntly depicting Jack's crime and his clashes with authority, these plays never fail also to show the consequences of his actions. Jack's death is always included. We might treat this cautiously because most of the available texts are post-1843 and may, therefore, have included such apparent moral strictures in order to secure a licence when they had excluded them before. And, of course, Jack's execution could make him a heroic martyr to a harsh and heartless authority. But the moral message is more emphatically and personally voiced during earlier scenes by witnessing the effect of Jack's crime on other innocent parties. In the Pavilion's production, for example, a matron, ignorant of Jack's true identity, describes how his crimes have directly caused his mother's loss of mind:

[T]hey say her son's taken at last - and is to be hanged - I'm glad of it - for it's all oweing to him his mother's here, see what crime does sir, those who act wickedly bring crime on all connected with them - and so gentle as this poor creature is when she is not in her wild fits - it would melt a heart of stone to see her. She will cry for days and nights together. If Jack Sheppard could behold his mother in this state - he'd have a lesson he'd never forget - Hardened as he may be this is a sight that must touch him.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ BL, Addit. 52,954DD, Act III, sc.4.

¹²⁶ Ibid., Act III, sc.14.

This quote appears both to challenge the impersonal and cruel face of institutional society shown earlier, and encourage an introspective and self-imposed discipline on those considering crime by revealing its effects on others. Here Jack is destroying his family rather than repairing it, a division which is demonstrated elsewhere when Jack directly chooses crime over his mother. Familial unity and crime are entirely incompatible:

Mrs Sheppard: You hear my son. Choose between good and evil, between him and me - and mind your life, more than your life hangs upon your choice.
*(Jack pauses and then darts off)*¹²⁷

Such a lesson seems to reflect rather than undermine contemporary disciplinary theories like Bentham's panopticon, and thus could be seen to present a contending discourse more compatible with what Hays calls the bounds of a morality authorised by the cultural discourse of the bourgeoisie.

We are thus confronted with a group of plays which, as we will see, differ significantly from Buckstone's version and yet, like his, represent vast difficulties in interpretation by encompassing various registers which invite varying readings. They show little regard for middle-class sensibilities. For example, the prostitute Bess plays a conspicuous role in the plot of the Pavilion's production, and there is no clear attempt to obscure her relationship with Jack. After one of the escapes, he cries, 'Bravo Bess, my gal, we are again at liberty. My darling you look fatigued with your exertion'.¹²⁸ Jack and Blueskin are aggressive heroes whose criminal acts are also graphically depicted. Many of the robberies are shown, as is Mrs Wood's murder by Blueskin during the robbery of her house after he promised that he would 'make short work with her' if she got in the way.¹²⁹ These actions, unlike the crime in the Adelphi

¹²⁷ Ibid., Act III, sc. 9.

¹²⁸ Ibid., Act III, sc. 7.

¹²⁹ Ibid., Act III, sc. 1.

version which I will discuss, are not characterised by a sense of enjoyable and skilled 'performance' on the part of the actors. Nor, unlike Buckstone's play, are they diluted by comedy or song. Where songs are included they are generally abbreviated, even token, extracts from Buckstone's text. The scene in which Wild and Blueskin disguise themselves in order to arrest Kneebone as a Jacobite receives a markedly different treatment at the Pavilion. Where Buckstone's version creates a situation characterised by visual and linguistic comedy, the Pavilion's is strikingly serious and threatening by comparison.¹³⁰ The criminality is 'realistic' and brutal, recognisably working-class and confrontational, and the production invites the audience to sympathise with Jack and Blueskin simply by pitting them against Jonathan Wild. This becomes particularly dangerous when Wild is so openly linked with established authority, and when the audiences would have been drawn from the lower classes of society. The battle lines are prominently drawn between the working-class hero and the powerful classes. Nevertheless, while this antagonism is never resolved or dissipated, there coexists a strong moral discourse which shows the damage Jack's actions have done to his own family. It is something which Jack himself comes to recognise, so that ultimately Jack's final acceptance of, and repentance for, his guilt in his mother's death becomes as much a climax of the plot as his dramatic escape from Newgate. It is profoundly difficult at this distance to decide which discourse would prove dominant, and there is no reason to suggest that it would have been any easier for contemporary censors and commentators, faced by a comparable 'distance' from the productions. One must conclude that interpretation could have varied from audience to audience, night to night, and even individual to individual, and this very openness must have seemed highly dangerous.

Buckstone's ending is significantly different from that of either the novel or the other adaptations. It revolves primarily around the burning of Wild's house which,

¹³⁰ Compare 'JS', Act II, sc.2, p.25 with BL, Addit. 52,954 DD, Act II, sc.3.

unlike the novel, contains Wild. His punishment is therefore secured, and he is certainly not linked to authority by conspicuously supervising at Jack's procession to Tyburn. Indeed this procession, the symbolic demonstration of authority's limitless power, is excluded altogether. Jack is still very much alive at the end. And although he is in the hands of the authorities, it is implied that he enters their custody willingly, and that they receive him passively, allowing him to seize and kiss the hand of Wood ('JS', Act IV, sc.9, p.72). There is no direct suggestion of an aggressive, repressive or stifling power which eventually grinds the individual down. The first time that figures of authority appear in significant numbers is when Wild is on the point of death. In this sense every effort seems to have been made, except through verbal references where the plot demanded otherwise, to keep Wild and the authorities separate. The focus of conflict is very largely upon Wild and Jack, and it is a conflict which Buckstone sharpens by removing the less vivid opposition of the novel. Whereas for much of the novel, and other adaptations, Jack is actually in league with Wild, in this play they are strictly opposed almost from the outset, and are certainly never shown working together. While I have highlighted readings which could suggest otherwise, it may also have been possible to interpret the tale as one which resists social commentary by concentrating on the struggles of a young man against the vindictive schemes of the typical melodramatic villain. Jack would become a working-class hero, but a hero to be enjoyed and supported in his individual problems rather than rallied around as a symbol of resistance to society's oppressive leaders.

Furthermore, unlike some of the other minor productions we have seen, the potential for portraying an aggressive and masculine figure of conflict was also avoided at the Adelphi where Jack was played by a woman, Mrs Keeley.¹³¹ Mrs Keeley was already an actress of some repute, but it was as Jack Sheppard that she

¹³¹ The Adelphi was not alone in casting a woman in the role - Mrs Hopper and Miss Richardson played the part at Sadler's Wells and Miss Rogers at the Queen's.

would be remembered. It was not unusual in itself for a woman to represent a boy - most productions of *Oliver Twist* contained a female lead. Mrs Keeley had played the bold young imp, Little Pickle, in the 'Spoiled Child' (1829), and was widely applauded in 1838 for her pathetic rendering of Smike in 'Nicholas Nickleby'. Indeed, Madame Vestris' infamous roles in 'Don Giovanni in London' and 'The Beggar's Opera' in 1820 show that it was far from rare for a woman to play a fully grown man. But Jack Sheppard is a more active and anarchic character than the passive and law-abiding Oliver, and certain quotes suggest that some critics, at least, were conscious of the effect a female presence had upon such a character. One wrote,

Nothing could be more exquisite than Mrs Keeley's acting; the naïveté, the assurance, the humour, and the boldness of Jack Sheppard were excellently delineated; the slang was given without the least admixture of vulgarity.¹³²

Mr Serjeant Ballantine wrote later,

How well I remember her charming little figure upon the stool in Jack's workshop, and her sweet voice singing the naughty sentiment contained in the words, 'and I'll carve my name on the dungeon stone.'¹³³

Mrs Keeley's aspect cleansed slang of its potential to offend middle-class sensibilities. Similarly, there would have been moments when her presence in the role served to alter the tone of the text. References to Jack's appearance must have been particularly susceptible to such alterations. Mrs Wood at one stage compares Jack unfavourably with Thames:

Oh, that boy! that boy! - I shudder when I look at him, with his fierce dark eyes, and his short black hair, and his bullet head, not like my Thames, bless his long locks and bright eyes. ('JS', Act II, sc. 1, p.21)

¹³² Quoted in Bleackley, p.97.

¹³³ Quoted *ibid.*, p.97.

Such an outburst invited the audience to make a direct comparison between the fierce masculinity of Jack and the graceful, almost feminine attributes of Thames, who was played by Mr E. H. Butler. It must have been laden with an enjoyable irony that undercut the apparent attempt to demonstrate Jack's threatening aspect. Similarly, innocent comments like those of Quilt Arnold, who tells Jack 'you've lived like a gentleman all the while', are invested with an alternative comic meaning in performance which is invisible in the printed text ('JS', Act III, sc.1, p.40). And the relationship of Jack to the two prostitutes, Poll Maggott and Edgeworth Bess, must have been marked by a pantomimic style of comedy and stripped of the raw sexual tension and energy which was so potentially offensive to middle-class morality. Some years later Weedon Goldsmith, the actor, was to exclaim, 'it is amazing that this rough blackguard should ever have been played by one of the gentler sex'. He was echoed by Ellis who felt that 'only a young male actor could present Jack Sheppard in a realistic manner.'¹³⁴ Jack's status as an aggressive, strong and masculine figure of working-class identification, as a realistic and confrontational voice for radical sentiment, was to remain concealed, at least for some, by her very sex.

But that is not to say that Mrs Keeley's performance revolved around a self-conscious play upon her gender. She did not follow in the thigh-slapping travesti tradition which saw Madame Vestris clad in the tightest of tight hose and made her legs the talk of the town. There was nothing of the 'principal boy' in Keeley's appearance - her costume was based upon the Cruikshank illustrations, and she even wore a short-cropped wig. Her portrayal endeavoured to avoid any conscious flavour of sexual titillation and to divert as far as possible any tension arising from her gender. And I would argue that this serious approach to re-creating Jack allowed the production to resist being drawn into parody or burlesque while also presenting an alternative performative discourse to the radical one which can be drawn from the text.

¹³⁴ Bleackley, p.121.

Mrs Keeley's meticulous preparation went beyond authentic costume and make-up. Everything about the way she approached the part was motivated by the craving for authority and realism. She visited Newgate and saw the manacles that Jack was supposed to have escaped from. Goodman noticed that during the second act, when Jack quarrels with Thames, Mrs Keeley 'placed herself in the orthodox boxing attitude, and her sparring movements clearly suggested that she had some knowledge of pugilism, and must certainly have been coached in the art'. It is likely that in some areas her sex meant that the expertise was especially appreciated. She observed, for instance, of her carpentry that 'The planing business in [the first] scene was always received with a round of applause, as the audience liked to see real planing done on the stage, *especially by a woman*' [my italics].¹³⁵ But otherwise she was applauded because, regardless of sex, the audiences were immensely appreciative of her efforts. They were, however, particularly impressed by her mastery of those feats which had become Jack Sheppard's trademarks and which had been the very foundations of his mythical status. She described how she refused to compromise even in freeing herself from the shackles:

When I slipped [the handcuffs] off it was no stage slip, but a bona-fide operation. And it hurt me sometimes! But I contrived to squeeze my hands out by bringing the broad part together [...]. I came down to the front, in full blaze of the footlights, so that the audience might fairly judge, and I always got an extra round of applause. I think I deserved it.¹³⁶

Goodman described another moment when Mrs Keeley reenacted Jack's pickpocketing of Jonathan Wild:

The abstraction of the documents from Jonathan Wild's pocket was so rapid and dextrous as to appear the accomplishment of a practiced hand at pocket-picking. Indeed, it looked so like the real thing that the audience were afraid lest

¹³⁵ Goodman, pp. 15-16.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

the unwary thief-taker should turn round and catch the young culprit in the act, and there was quite a sigh of relief when Jack had safely landed the rightful proofs of his birth. The pickpocket incident was the result of careful study on the part of the actress, assisted by some instruction from an expert in the ways of thieves. The actor of Jonathan Wild seldom, if ever, felt the small, flexible hand of Mrs Keeley as it dived neatly into his pocket, and was hardly aware that the trick was done.¹³⁷

The interplay between the reality of Mrs Keeley's physical skill and the fiction of these situations made for an electrifying atmosphere which captured the very essence of melodrama and allowed fascinating theatre. But it did more than this. It set up a curious and momentarily dangerous ambivalence between art and crime. For these were technical and exact demonstrations which could be read as lessons in criminal procedure, as subversive crime 'manuals' which glorified the evils of criminality. And yet it was precisely this frank display, this eagerness to bring the demonstration up close and under the lights, to startle and amaze through the authenticity of the performance in a way very different from the other productions, which brought the actions out from the murky haunts of the true criminal and subverted them by converting them into pieces of circus exhibitionism. As I hope to have shown with so much of this play, such openness could have been interpreted as a further example of 'stripping away the veils' of secrecy, as a dramatic enactment of the 'melodramatic mode' which contrasted the masked intentions and actions of the other characters (and of society's leaders). However, the very performative nature of the performance also drew attention to Mrs Keeley as actress and real-life personality. The spectators found themselves watching the performance of Mrs Keeley rather than the exploits of Jack Sheppard. Criminality became art, and the artist the focus of attention rather than the criminal. The episodes of dancing and singing, again largely unique to the Adelphi production, could be seen to have further detracted from any sense of criminal realism and elevated the atmosphere of individual showmanship. In the very process of recognising the player intimately, the audience was distanced from the character she was playing. Goodman observed, 'I began at last to regard the actress and the

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.20.

character as one and the same persons'.¹³⁸ In other words, if those in the audience were to try to recapture the sense of the character behind the actress, of Jack Sheppard behind Mrs Keeley, they were presented with an otherworldly, androgynous figure, a freak of nature, and certainly not a representative working-class man. By identifying with Mrs Keeley as an extra-textual personality they were prevented from identifying with Jack as a working-class criminal and symbol of contemporary working-class suffering. By so successfully re-creating Jack's antics, by so exhaustively appropriating his image and mythical status, she had obscured from the audience any form of radical political commentary made realistically and directly and based upon actual working-class self-identification. Her success in claiming the part for herself is demonstrated by the fact that she continued to be cast in the leading role in various revivals until she was fifty years old.

What, then, can be concluded from this study of some of the dramatic adaptations of *Jack Sheppard*? The primary conclusion must be that to understand the reasons behind the fears of contemporary censors and commentators an approach more sympathetic to their inherent complexities, and to the epoch in which they appeared, is required than that employed by Hollingsworth. By re-examining Buckstone's version with the 'Hadleyan' interpretation of melodrama in mind, by playing devil's advocate to the traditional view among literary critics of this play's support for the dominant culture, a convincing argument can be made for the presence of a very different competing discourse. It requires also a more open-minded evaluation of what could and could not be 'subversive'. There is no doubt that the instances of comedy and song, the presence of Mrs Keeley and her self-conscious style of performance, served to undercut any serious realism and accompanying self-identification from the audience. Yet it may be that such 'Brechtian' alienation served as another way of exciting radical interpretation by providing a more considered and

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.3.

symbolic critique of society where open hostility was impossible because of the censorial eye. It is true that Buckstone dilutes direct confrontation between Jack and the visible symbols of authority's power. But this does not negate, and may even have encouraged, a more subtle and sophisticated critique of market society at a time when the prominent display of authority's brutal power was diminishing anyway. During a period when the Bloody Code was being dismantled, when, as Foucault has shown, systems of discipline as embodied by Bentham's panopticon were concentrating more on 'internalising' punishment and restraint, and when social classes were increasingly less likely to come together in public, it may be that a modern and relevant form of radical protest could be seen running through Buckstone's play.

What is equally clear from comparing Buckstone's adaptation with some of the other versions is the validity of Moody's urge to remain sensitive to variations within the melodramatic genre. For these plays appear to adopt a very different approach to the same tale. They provide a more 'realistic' portrayal of a working-class criminal, and include a strong vein of aggressive hostility to visible authority. While lacking an ideological framework, and while, as I have suggested, the scenes of the procession to Jack's execution were becoming less relevant to contemporary penal methods, they were nevertheless symbolic of present tensions and played upon a natural antagonism towards established authority among their spectators from the industrial working classes. Of those still in existence, we must also be conscious of the strong moral framework which provided a parallel discourse of 'containment'. While by definition there is no evidence to confirm this, it seems possible now, and must have to concerned commentators at the time, that versions before 1843, or those at the cheapest theatres which ignored licensing procedure, excluded this moral discourse altogether. Even excluding this possibility, there is no reason automatically to assume that the moral discourse was dominant. It seems equally possible that some spectators could leave the theatre with a deep sense of social injustice and class antagonism

If we are to more comprehensively understand the controversy, we must also recognise that, despite their distinct differences, these plays could have appeared threatening as a collective group. Along with nautical and industrial melodrama, they formed part of a relatively new breed of drama which dragged its stories away from the fantastical situations of foreign climes to the recognisably English setting of urban London. They revolved around the antics of a genuine criminal. And, as literacy and the number of theatres increased, as drama was no longer the preserve of the élite, its effect on a new section of society was relatively unknown and unpredictable. Such fears concerning the influence of certain cultural mediums were naturally elevated at a time when the social power structures were in the process of change. As Jack's defiance was played night after night at numerous theatres there must have been a feeling of danger in such celebration of an anarchic working-class man, the proliferation of a working-class myth, alongside deep social dissatisfaction and apparent working-class attempts at organisation. Furthermore, the specific nature of the culture in which Jack was portrayed, that of the tavern with its drunken behaviour and communal flash-ken singing, and the manner in which he expressed his insurgence, was perhaps too reminiscent of those cultures on the fringes of society so disapproved of by the emerging middle classes. At the very least, they tapped into a way of living embraced by drinking or sports societies with their attendant associations with drunkenness and gambling. At worst, they may have brought to mind ultra-radical gatherings - after all, Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and, to a lesser extent, Bulwer's *Paul Clifford*, had already used criminal communities, and their conviviality in taverns, as symbols of an alternative, inclusive and preferable social model. Either way, while the ruling classes would have liked to see the theatre participating in the formation and cementing of middle-class society, presenting unambiguous characters which encouraged the development of bourgeois sensibilities in spectators, these plays could be seen to include a carnivalesque spirit which ran counter to such ideals. The Newgate drama was ambiguous and open, it included a collision of various registers which made interpretation ambiguous, and it contained a strong flavour of

misbehaviour. The effect of such mischief on spectators was felt to be a dangerous one. As one spy noted, acts like blasphemy were believed to make ultra-radicals 'better fitted for acts of desperation.'¹³⁹ These factors alone were enough to make it politically radical.

We should not be greatly surprised by the interest generated by Jack Sheppard's story - fascination with criminal behaviour of different forms is a universal one which spans classes and epochs. But certain types of criminality, at certain times, can take on a mythological quality in their dissemination which can make the criminal a political figure acting on behalf of not just himself, but a supposedly downtrodden section of society. It is a testament to the enduring influence of such stories that a newspaper article of 1998 provides the last piece of evidence to support my belief that fears surrounding Newgate drama were political as well as moral ones. The following extract helps us to understand the importance of the social climate in determining Jack Sheppard's status and popularity, and the consequent political connotations that he could be seen to carry:

The biggest reward in South Korean history was posted yesterday for a fugitive killer posing as a latter-day Robin Hood. Shin Chang-won has avoided capture six times during the past 18 months and has transformed himself into a working-class hero by giving the equivalent of nearly £1,000 to the poor and disabled. He insists that he robs only the rich. Shin, 31, has eluded a week-long manhunt, prompting police to raise the reward for his capture from 10 million won (£4,720) to 50 million. Dozens of officers have been sacked after failed attempts to capture him. While some South Koreans want to see him back behind bars, many are inspired by his refusal to surrender as they struggle to survive the worst recession in decades. Shin was jailed for life in 1989 for murder. He escaped in January 1997, after apparently fasting for 20 days so that he could squeeze through a narrow window. Since then he has maintained two girlfriends and a lavish lifestyle. He drives an expensive car and is reported to have committed 82 robberies while on the run. The manhunt began last week after he was spotted by two officers, only

¹³⁹ PRO, HO 42/179 (31 August 1818).

to escape after biting the ear of one and stealing his gun. He returned the gun to the shocked men and sped off in their car.¹⁴⁰

The slippery and inventive escapes, the company of two women, the adoption of a lavish lifestyle beyond his 'station', and the cavalier nature of the criminal are features strikingly similar to Jack Sheppard's tale. More important still, however, is the way in which the contemporary social and economic climate have been vital in the process of converting this man from a criminal into a symbol of working-class defiance and triumph against the odds. And, as in the 1830s and 40s, this symbolism clearly deeply frightens the authorities who offer an unprecedented reward for his capture. There are, of course, obvious differences. The newspaper above simply reports concerns; it is not actually a part of those concerns. By contrast, the medium in which the tale of Jack Sheppard was being told, quite as much as the tale itself, was intrinsic to 19th-century anxieties. Nevertheless, the political or economic state is clearly a prominent factor in the formation of defiant myth. In the 1830s, social instability served to heighten uncertainty about generic representation. I would suggest not only that the *Jack Sheppard* adaptations were politicised, but that it was this openness to political interpretation that gave birth to, and sustained the adaptations. Without the political, economic and cultural pressures of these years, the Sheppard phenomenon may never have come about at all.

¹⁴⁰ John Larkin, 'Killer on Run is Hailed as "Robin Hood"', *Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 1998, p. 19.

CONCLUSION

The Newgate phenomenon stirred up a storm by provoking debates about cultural dissemination, and playing upon fears surrounding issues of cultural fluidity, production and movement. At the same time, the 'criminal' became a highly politicised symbol within a variety of spheres of social thinking. Cutting across the realms of politics, morality, class, and law, as well as literature, the criminal was the ultimate 'sign' of the times. The depth and breadth of this symbolic significance reflected a set of circumstances peculiar to the period; it is difficult to imagine the Newgate phenomenon taking hold at any other moment in history. It is instructive, however, to compare it with modern attitudes towards culture. If the novels and drama which have been the subjects of this study tell us much about the 1830s, they can also awaken us to the nature of our own relationship towards such production and its influence. Hollingsworth concludes his examination of the Newgate novels by suggesting that modern discussions of the freedom of the artist imply that art does not have the power to influence thought and action. He believes that such an attitude belittles art's importance. The early Victorians, by contrast, 'respected art enough to be a little afraid of it.'¹ Yet such an interpretation disguises the fact that issues surrounding the influence of art and culture, issues of genre and cultural fluidity, are far from resolved. The evolving nature of artistic representation simply means that the politicised sites of debate have shifted to different genres. The genres of which we are now 'a bit afraid', just as in the 1830s, are those which are relatively new to us.

¹ Hollingsworth, p.229.

It is most noticeable that discomfort has largely moved away from the novel. While it is true that 'some crime novels still awkwardly straddle the literary and the popular', it is also the case that, while they may provoke discussions between reviewers or academics, they rarely have the power to generate heated controversy of the sort which surrounded the Newgate novels over their social or political or literary influence.² Of course, in exceptional cases they do so. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) is an obvious example. And in a recent article Sutherland notes 'striking similarities' between the supposed influence of Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* on Courvoisier's crime, and the claim by Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma bomber executed for killing 168 people, that his actions were inspired by William Pierce's *Turner Diaries*.³ These are, however, exceptions to the rule. Anxieties are now directed towards the radical potential of popular visual forms. Arguments about the influence of films or computer games upon behaviour, particularly of the young, are common. John rightly draws parallels between the banning of films like *Natural Born Killers* on video in Britain, and of dramatic adaptations of *Jack Sheppard* on stage.⁴ However, while her explanation for this focuses upon questions of cultural ownership, it ignores issues of generic dynamics and social or critical perception of these dynamics. She writes, 'popular culture has been the focus of the most urgent debates about the power structure and moral fibre of society, while highbrow culture, in today's Britain, is bypassed.'⁵ Her interpretation of why the novel escapes censure relies upon a certain division of culture between the high and the low, the highbrow and the popular, in which the novel is denied the 'popularity' of film.

This differentiation is strangely unsatisfactory when applied to those modern instances of cultural movement which most closely resemble the Newgate

² *Cult Criminals*, I, p.lv.

³ John Sutherland, 'Let's Hope that Gore Vidal can do Justice to the Murder of the Murderer Timothy McVeigh', *Guardian* (G2 Section), 11 June 2001, p.9.

⁴ Oliver Stone, 1994, US; *Cult Criminals*, I, lv.

⁵ *Cult Criminals*, I, lv.

phenomenon - crime novels and their cinematic adaptations. While, for instance, the film version of Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) provoked a controversy which 'bypassed' the novel, one could not deny that the book was comparably 'popular', both in its subject matter and its commercial draw.⁶ This difference of reception cannot be explained by denying to the novel either popular appeal or social criticism. Indeed, with regards to the latter, it is interesting to note an apparent debt on the part of the author to melodrama, at least when his novels are subjected to a Hadleyan interpretation. They contain an ambiguity and a form of social critique which echo that of the Newgate novels and drama, and can be read on an allegorical level in a way that I have suggested is particularly apparent in *Paul Clifford*. The character Hannibal Lecter, in true Newgate fashion, is both a product of, and symbol of resistance towards, social mechanisms. With six fingers on his right hand, and maroon eyes, his physical individuality serves to resist the stifling homogeneity of modern society. He believes in 'chaos', in opposition to those in 'the order business'.⁷ His criminality involves the literal deconstruction and consumption of those connected with institutional classification. He recalls that '[a] census taker tried to quantify me once. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a big Amarone.'⁸ In the recently published *Hannibal* (1999), we meet Mason Verger, who intrigues with a circle of corrupt politicians and law-enforcers, and shows an irresponsible disregard for the environmental impact of his business. In an obsession signifying corporate capitalism's abuse and alienation of the innocent and helpless, he drinks Martinis made from the tears of children.⁹ All these private actions are hidden behind a public mask of social respectability. Lecter literally strips away these veils by forcing Verger to cut

⁶ On the back cover of *Hannibal*, Stephen King describes it as '[t]he best popular novel published since *The Godfather*'. It is interesting, however, that it has also been adopted by the literary intelligentsia. It is a strong example of a novel which straddles the dividing line between the highbrow and the popular.

⁷ Thomas Harris, *'Red Dragon' and 'Silence of the Lambs'* (London: Peering, 1991), p.90.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.301

⁹ Thomas Harris, *Hannibal* (London: William Heinemann, 1999), p.66.

off his own face with the shards of a broken mirror - the symbol of selfish vanity and false appearance.¹⁰ Yet, as a psychiatrist, and one startlingly aware of human types, he is also representative of the very institutionalised classificatory process that he opposes. The exterior civility and sophistication, concealing an underlying savagery, parallels something Harris sees not only in contemporary society but in the human condition itself. Lecter awakens FBI agent Starling to 'things about herself so terribly true her heart resounded like a great deep bell.'¹¹

As both a victim of, and figure of resistance towards, social mechanisms, and as a criminal for whom the reader nevertheless retains a certain sympathy, Harris's protagonist embodies the ambiguity and duality evident in Jack Sheppard and Paul Clifford. His literal removal of false faces parallels the more symbolic acts of carnivalism of his 19th-century predecessors in donning the clothes of the elegant.¹² As a cultured and scholarly criminal he is perhaps even more reminiscent of Eugene Aram. As we would expect, there are differences. The story does not adopt a defiant figure of lower-class myth, and the details of authority's form have altered to reflect the more developed and global nature of capitalism. Despite this, in general the perceived evils of society remain startlingly similar. The target is still the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a small number who retain and consolidate their social superiority behind the screen of respectability. Yet the ambiguities and social criticisms of these novels, which would have seemed so dangerous during the 1830s, no longer cause unease. Indeed, at a time when the novel as a form has become 'fixed' in the Bakhtinian sense, and fractured into easily defined subgenres, such ambiguity adds to its claims to artistic merit. Authors are encouraged

¹⁰ Ibid., p.62.

¹¹ '*Red Dragon*' and '*Silence of the Lambs*', p.388.

¹² Indeed, in *The Silence of the Lambs* Lecter drags these carnivalesque acts of appropriating masks of authority from the symbolic into the literal when he escapes confinement by disguising himself with the actual face of a dead police officer. 'Masks and Faces', the title considered by Bulwer for *Paul Clifford*, would seem especially appropriate for Harris's novel. '*Red Dragon*' and '*Silence of the Lambs*', p.451.

to destabilise literary boundaries and challenge perceptions of reality. Robert McCrum commented in the *Observer* that, 'What lifts it to the level of art is the surprising humanity Harris finds in Starling and, most surprisingly, in Lecter himself.' He goes on to say, 'Ignore the fact that this is that despised thing, the genre novel. It contains writing of which our best writers would be proud.'¹³ The novel is no longer 'novel'; political and moral ambiguity are not only accepted but welcomed in 'popular' as well as 'highbrow' literature.

But such ambiguity causes significant unease when it is transferred to the screen. The sense in which film's effects are not wholly understood leads to an anxiety about its influence upon social values reminiscent of early Victorian anxieties about the effects of the novel. The visual form also allows a sensual impact which the novel cannot convey. Images of Lecter's acts of brutality are more shocking when witnessed than when read, and it is this added immediacy which elevated fears surrounding *Jack Sheppard* still further when it was adapted for the theatre. Significantly, the effect upon those of stable and affluent background, those who certainly encounter the tales in the novels as well (without provoking debate), causes as much concern as the effect upon those of lower social status. In 1999, the *Independent* reported that '[a]s the US struggles to make sense of the recent spate of school shootings', there are growing anxieties that Hollywood is 'to blame for turning white middle-class teenagers into mass murderers.'¹⁴ Furthermore, there is the suggestion that subversive messages are being intentionally included, that 'the nation's youth is being deliberately and knowingly corrupted', and that direct State intervention may be required in a step reminiscent of the anti-Communist witch-hunt of the 1940s and 1950s - and, of course, the early-Victorian prohibition of theatrical versions of *Jack Sheppard*.¹⁵ The concerns clearly

¹³ Robert McCrum, 'Wicked and Witty Novel of the Year', *Observer*, 6 June 1999, p.3.

¹⁴ Andrew Gumbel, 'Backlash on Violence Hits Hollywood', *Independent*, 7 June 1999, p.9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9.

go beyond film's influence on criminal activity, although this is an important element, they include fears regarding film's political and social influence. This subversiveness becomes active during generic transferral. As one writer complained, 'Every picture I have done has come out more violent than the way I wrote it, and you have to ask yourself why.'¹⁶ Such debates certainly have much to do with notions of cultural ownership, of struggles for control of the soul of film. They also, however, have to do with uncertainties over the dynamics of film as a genre. Old questions about the relationship between 'reality' and the representation of reality remain, but now in the media of film and television. Should crime and violence be depicted realistically on film? Does it become dangerous when it is glamorised? This uncertainty is epitomised by the fact that, while the ending of *Hannibal* - where Lecter is not only left unpunished, but becomes Starling's lover - was applauded in the novel, Jodie Foster refused to take the lead role in a film with such a conclusion. Moral ambiguity, it seems, is universally accepted in books but not in films. The power of art is something which still commands respect.

Nevertheless, fears about the representation of reality were more vividly felt during the 1830s because of the depth of contemporary uncertainty about the nature of reality itself. As we have seen, such uncertainty expressed itself beyond the literary sphere, in debates such as those over penal law and the provision of testimony in court. This is hardly surprising when we consider the scale of change which had occurred, and was still occurring, in a relatively short space of time. Society was experiencing profound upheaval, and nobody was left unaffected. Aristocrats were being forced to reconsider their responsibilities at the social apex in a desperate bid to retain some hold upon power. The emergent middle classes were equally keen to consolidate their new influence, and forge a strong sense of identity around which to reinforce their position. Those of the lower classes were beginning to experience the

¹⁶ Ibid., p.9.

stirrings of class consciousness, and the desire to receive proper rewards for their labour and proper political representation. The very role of society was coming under scrutiny and, inevitably, the role of the individual within this new order. All this took place against a backdrop of failing harvests and the spectre of revolution on the Continent.

It is because of this that the very definition of what was and was not radical is difficult for modern critics. Radicalism could be expressed as a form of backward-looking conservatism which seems paradoxical to us now. The seismic shifts taking place in society also served to blur ideological divisions. The level of complexity becomes obvious when we consider the main figures of the dispute. They might appear to embody challengers to, and defenders of, the status quo. Bulwer regarded himself as a radical, in literary and political terms. *Fraser's* attacked him vociferously. However, *Fraser's* was a new magazine, and one which saw itself as both staunchly middle-class and radically innovative. Bulwer, on the other hand, was of privileged, aristocratic stock. Similarly, Thackeray could be savage in his assaults upon Bulwer while sharing his distaste for public executions and social conditions. It is quite impossible to explain the phenomenon wholly in terms of class, or with binary definitions like 'Establishment' and 'anti-Establishment'. Indeed, it was equally difficult at the time, and part of the controversy over the Newgate phenomenon can be seen as a reaction towards a threat which was vaguely sensed rather than properly understood.

We can come closer to making sense of the phenomenon by examining it within the framework of literary competition and position-taking. The primary participants were 'young' authors and publications striving to establish themselves at a time when the status of, and opportunities for, the author were altering radically. They were engaged in a scrummage within the field of letters, as the cultural sphere was smitten by the revolutionary spirit, and redefined by technological advances and changes in the boundaries of cultural ownership. As books became cheaper, and the

public increasingly literate, the publishing world took its first real step towards modern mass production. As Klancher remarks, this historical moment 'would give rise to the great systemic culture whose battle lines were those of high culture and mass culture, bourgeoisie and working class, [...] - in short, the Victorian and modernist societies whose categories early 19th-century writers and readers had only begun to glimpse'¹⁷ As a consequence, however, the reading public was undefined for the first time, and authors faced not only confusion over the nature of reality and their representations of it, but indefinite notions of their own readerships. Culture 'had passed beyond the immobilised zones of church, home, vocation and village'; it was no longer the preserve of the privileged.¹⁸ As languages collided, and readers and authors alike had to reorient themselves, the Newgate novels demonstrated the extent to which new discourses had become available to producers of culture. Whether we interpret this as a process of cultural appropriation by the ruling classes, or the subversive upward mobility of 'street literature', or a simultaneous double-movement, it embodied a struggle for the very soul of the novel.

Bulwer, Ainsworth and Dickens, in different ways, set themselves in opposition to the empiricist and experiential character of what we would now term 'realist' fiction. Bulwer, with ambitions both for himself as an artist and the novel as a genre of high art, championed the 'metaphysical' novel. Ainsworth, equally, although less idealistically, driven by the wish to be remembered, and more concerned with entertaining than instructing, sought to revive and preserve the genre of romance. Dickens, less willing openly to confront prevailing assumptions about the novel's form, included a subtle blend of metaphysicality and romance in a structure which nevertheless preserved a strong moral framework. In writing, each was inevitably participating in debates about the definitions of the novel's purpose, form and

¹⁷ Klancher, p.13.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.3.

responsibility, and in struggles to attain recognition within the literary field. They were also, however, concurrently immersed in the general urge to make sense of the social fabric and orientate themselves as individuals within a changed society. Bulwer, especially, was not only espousing his own literary and political views, but endeavouring to reconcile the role of the Romantic alien, the egotism and idealism of the individual, with the new drive towards collectivism and social consciousness. The ambiguity of his novels was not just the cause of confusion and anxiety among contemporary commentators; it was itself a reflection of the confusion and anxiety experienced by the author. Literary debates were never divorced from social and political ones; while it is valuable in comprehending the various strands of the Newgate phenomenon to examine the literary sphere in partial isolation, one must not overstate the extent of culture's autonomy. Literary, political, moral and social arguments all came together; they mixed and fed off each other, and meant that the novels were melting-pots for a diverse range of politicised discourses.

As they moved down the cultural escalator into the theatre, the tales became politicised further as they were acted upon by a fresh set of social and political associations, and generic dynamics. The distinction between drama of the major and minor playhouses provided a ready symbol of social division. Furthermore, the representation of the plight of the individual in opposition to the mechanisms of authority gave more immediate and visible utterance to social dissatisfaction. While the philosophical and ideological complexities possible in the novels faded, the dramatic adaptations could tap more directly into the behavioural (or misbehavioural) registers on the fringes of society which ran counter to the codes of bourgeois respectability and included the ultra-radicals. They could reactivate the link between Newgate literature and those expressions of lower-class defiance in broadside literature from which it derived and which had been, at least partially, diluted in the novels.¹⁹ The

¹⁹ McCalman has noted the link between criminal broadsheets and ultra-radicalism

interpretative possibilities were endless. They were dictated by the multifarious authors, managers and actors, by the moods, attitudes and beliefs of individual audiences and spectators, and even by the tone of advertising playbills or the nature of other plays on offer. There was no guarantee that a play received in good spirit by an audience on one night would not stir political anger in another audience on the subsequent night. And these fears were exacerbated not only by the predominantly lower-class backgrounds of members of these audiences, but by the uncomfortable recognition that many productions were taking place beyond the scope of censorial surveillance. The dramas were elusive and open, like the criminals they portrayed, and this very slipperiness made them significant and frightening politicised modes of cultural representation.

The crime literature of later decades was written against a very different social and literary background. Middle-class dominance was more secure, and fears surrounding the extension of low manners and morals less intense. The immediate threat of violent revolution had faded. Furthermore, the novel was no longer such a 'novelty'. Not until new forms of cultural communication were developed - most notably the film - would real concerns about the influence of crime narratives arise once more. Despite this, however, and the triumph of 'realism' in fiction, we must resist the familiar inclination to blot the 1830s from the literary record and dismiss the literature of this period as a 'void between Scott and Dickens'.²⁰ The Newgate novels came at a seminal moment in the development of modern literature. They sparked one of the most vitriolic controversies in literary history, and one which included at least

during the Regency period and the 1820s. William Hone had harnessed the sensational 'crime and horrors' genre to the radical cause, and the literary strand of the old radical underworld continued into the mid-Victorian period through publishers like William Dugdale, Edward and John Duncombe, and George Cannon. Although beyond the scope of this study, further research into the impact of criminal narratives published by ultra-radicals upon the reception of Newgate drama could prove very useful. See *Radical Underworld*, pp. 206, 235.

²⁰ Engel and King, p. 1.

two of the great writers of the Victorian period. They were at the very forefront of the move towards modern, mass production of culture, and '[l]egend has it that *Paul Clifford* cleared the largest impression ever of a novel on its first day of publication'²¹ Christensen has documented the extent of Bulwer's influence upon literature²² He founded, or had a significant impact upon, the silver-fork novel, the Newgate novel, the detective novel, the 'bildungsroman', the historical novel, the novel of domestic life, and the utopian satire. It is probably difficult to find a book that has not been influenced by the work of Dickens. Ainsworth's literary influence is less marked, but it was primarily his receptivity to dramatic adaptation, his readiness to dismantle the barriers between the novel and the drama, which raised the sensitive issue of cultural influence and artistic responsibility. Moreover, as a group, the insistence of these novelists upon preserving elements of the metaphysical and the romantic in opposition to the realistic 'may have helped delay the imposition of much more restrictive standards until nearly the twentieth century, a delay for which the Victorian novel is no doubt the richer'.²³ Most importantly, the hybridity of the drama and novels of Newgate, the range of debates in which they were involved, the mixture of registers they encompassed, the number of spheres they politicised, and the anxieties they provoked tell us much not only about the 1830s, but about our own relationship with cultural production and representation.

²¹ *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, p.389.

²² Christensen, pp.222-34.

²³ Engel and King, p.60.

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