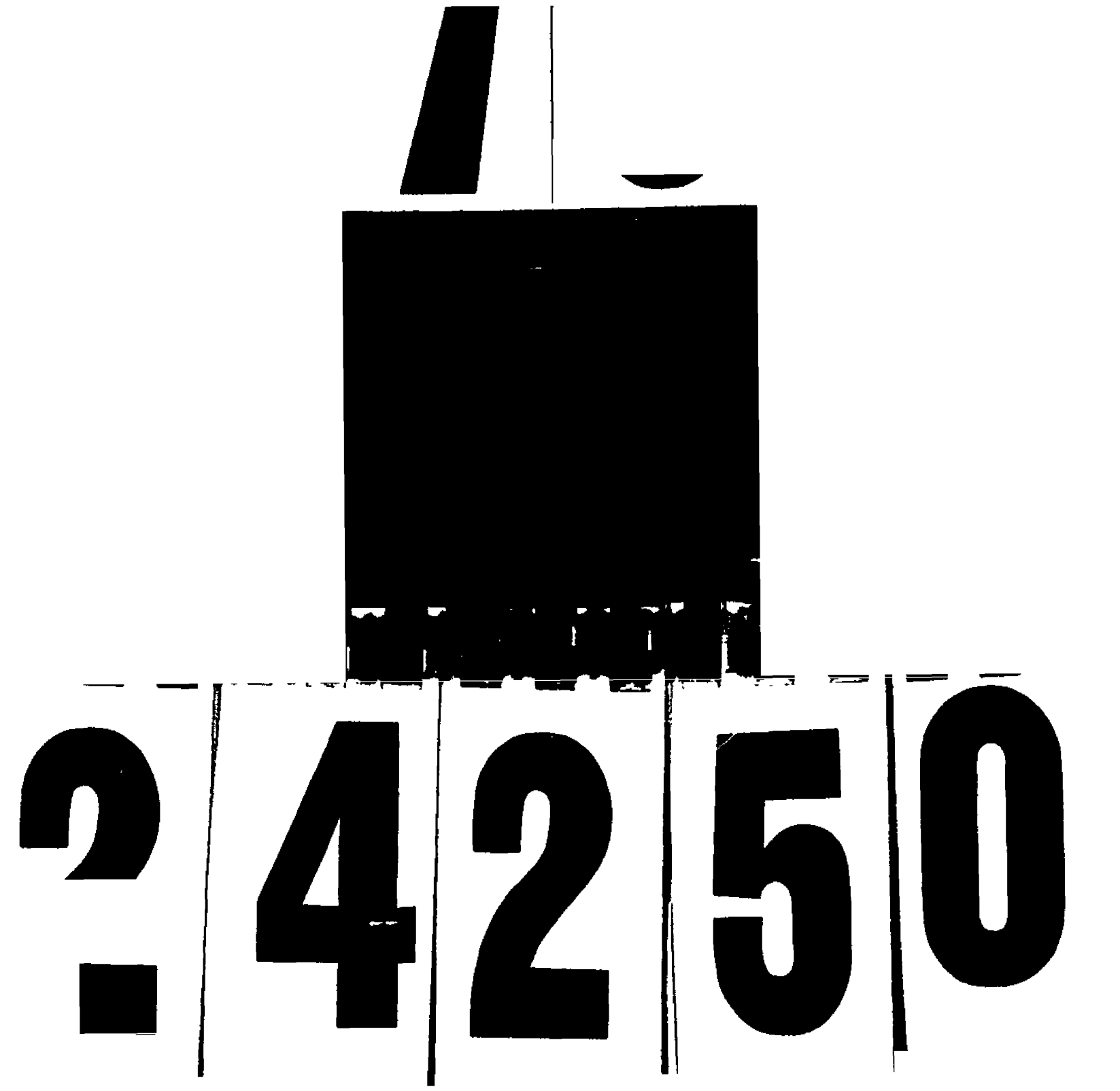


73-24,250

BIRD, Clarence Thomas, 1943-
UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGISLATORS: THE IMAGE OF THE ARTIST IN PAINTING AND LITERATURE OF THE ROMANTIC ERA.

The Florida State University, Ph.D., 1973
Language and Literature, general

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGISLATORS: THE IMAGE OF THE ARTIST IN PAINTING AND LITERATURE OF THE ROMANTIC ERA

By

CLARENCE THOMAS BIRD

A Dissertation submitted to
the Department of Humanities
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved:

Professor directing Dissertation

June, 1973

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Any lengthy study is the product of more than one author. This work is no exception. I am deeply grateful, therefore, to several persons for the assistance needed to complete it. My gratitude is extended, first, to Dr. George Yost who spent so many hours in careful consideration of the manuscript. His suggestions were not only helpful but always offered in a courteous way. Secondly, I deeply appreciate the time given by Professors Hans Braendlin, Azurra Givens, and John Andrews in reading the paper with great care. Lastly, but most of all, I am indebted to my wife, and best friend, Barbara, whose spiritual comfort and cheerful tolerance has permitted me to work on this book with a certain relaxed persistence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

*The illustration follows the page indicated.

21. Delacroix, "Tasso in Prison," p. 91.

22. Daumier, "Patrons," p. 92.

23. Daumier, "A True Lover of the Arts," p. 92.

24. Daumier, "Exposition of 1859," p. 112.

25. Carus, "Goethe's Grave," p. 119.

26. Durand, "Kindred Spirits," p. 132.

27. Mount, "The Painter's Triumph," p. 171.

PREFACE

The intent of this study is two-fold. The primary goal is to examine the function of the Romantic artist in early nineteenth-century culture. For the purposes of exploring this phenomenon I have found it advantageous to limit the focus of this work to the figure of the Romantic creative man as he is portrayed in the two media of literature and painting.

Before we go further, it is wise to establish certain definitions and procedures. The occupation of "artist," as used in this study, does not just refer to the painter but is used in a general sense. The Romantics themselves were convinced that all the arts are Art, that any practitioner of the arts could lay claim to the designation "artiste." Using the term with these connotations, poets, composers, painters, sculptors, architects, all qualify as artists. Secondly, we must liberally define also the Romantic period as those seventy-five years or so stretching from the American Revolution to the mid-nineteenth century.

Also, by the term "artist" I am suggesting not just the individual as he exists in history, but primarily the commonly idealized artist-persona appearing conspic-

uously in the Romantic's artistic works. It is in the fictionalized character of the artist--his physical appearance, his life in society, his concept of the poet's abilities and responsibilities--that the sociological conditions of the real historical artist are exposed. Simply stated, the real poet depicts something of his actual existence in his central characters, especially the central persona.

The second goal of this study is to substantiate the fact that the image of the artist is one consolidated across national lines. To illustrate this, I have used references to the figure of the poet and painter in works from the United States, England, France, and Germany. Principles are the major concern here and consequently I have made an illustrative rather than exhaustive survey of references from these countries. Major creative works are used for the most part and I have not resorted to citing every instance of the figure of the artist. Again, consistency of imagery from country to country is the main interest.

Among the material available I have chosen relevant works from the literature and painting of the four countries. Thus, the survey not only crosses national lines but media boundaries as well. The use of a comparative technique for the investigation of cultural patterns is a traditional one in the field of Humanities. The greatest value of this

method is the elucidation of themes and influences in an author's work which have hitherto passed unnoticed or have been little emphasized.

The scope of each chapter might be mentioned here too. An introductory chapter offers a general account of the artist's place in society from Classical times to the Romantic era. It also includes a summary examination of the artist's new role in the predominantly bourgeois culture of the early nineteenth century. As a method of assessing the artist's real role in this new culture and his self-concept of his position in that society, subsequent chapters will clarify the traits of the Romantic artist-persona. Each chapter studies a special feature of the character's image, and illustrations from literature and painting are cited to help define that particular trait. By examining the composite, mosaic image of the fictionalized artist, we ultimately arrive at some notion of the actual role of the artist in the Romantic period.

Chapter II, then, specifically focuses on the artist's estimation of his physical appearance. Chapter III is concerned with the life of the poet in society--how he is treated by the public and how he reacts to this treatment. Chapter IV concentrates on the self-conceived abilities of the artist; that is, his beliefs about his own intellectual nature. The fifth chapter reviews the artist's idea of his

function in society. We see here the poet's attempt to define his responsibilities to mankind. Chapter VI draws some final conclusions about the Romantic artist's status in bourgeois society and its foreshadowing of the artist's position in modern culture.

CHAPTER I

PAST AND PRESENT

Arnold Hauser, in The Social History of Art, suggests that the basic characteristics of the Romantic world view arise from aestheticism.[1] This declaration is an accurate one and can be substantiated by noting the widespread concern over art in the period. Any number of passages from literature and painting of the era demonstrate this interest. One such example is a comment from Théophile Gautier's History of Romanticism characterizing the era:

> Men were drunk with lyrism and art. It seemed as though the great lost secret had been found again; and it was, for Poetry had been lost and now was found.[2]

The Romantic generation's aesthetic temperament is best viewed, I believe, in terms of the contrast between the spiritual aspirations of the Romantic artist and the goals of the surrounding Middle Class society.

It is in Romantic culture, then, that aesthetic

---

[1]Arnold Hauser, Rococo, Classicism, Romanticism, Vol. III of The Social History of Art (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1951), p. 179.

[2]Théophile Gautier, A History of Romanticism, Vol. VIII of The Works of Théophile Gautier, trans. F. C. de Sumichrast (New York: G. G. Harrap, 1902), p. 16.

values are closely intertwined within the fabric of society. Important aesthetic pursuits also characterize the earlier civilization of the Renaissance, of course. However, never before the Romantic era do artistic goals give rise to such vicious conflicts within society itself. There are, to be sure, reasons for the strange occurrence.

* * *

The Revolutions of the late eighteenth century suggest one clue to the question of why the Romantic youth adopted aesthetic pursuits. After the violent upheavals of the French and American Revolutions a young generation came forth applying itself with eager enthusiasm to those highest of intellectual goals which had so long been neglected. During the previous years of war the sons of America, France, England, and Germany had had other vocations than the construction of aesthetic credos. The best energies of each nation had been directed into the channels of politics, military enterprise, and civil administration. Now a large faction of intellectual forces which had long been preoccupied elsewhere was suddenly redirected toward art.[3]

Art, in the post-Empire period, was soon regarded as a last contingent of the Revolution. Many artists, whether or not they participated directly in the political

---

[3]George M. Brandes, The Romantic School in France, Vol. V of Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature (New York: Macmillan, 1904), p. 1.

and social upheavals, now regarded it in this light. Still fired by the ideals of the Revolution, they hoped to discover a means of emotional and intellectual restoration through art, a field embracing timeless verities.[4] In sum, during the decades of revolution youth had fought for liberty and equality; now they fought for art.[5]

In undertaking the occupation of art these men did not see themselves, however, as painters, composers, or writers simply in terms of the work they did standing before an easel or meditating at a desk. For the Romantic mind the very engagement in this form of activity seemed to be a declaration of independence against a dull, prosaic life--a life typified by the bourgeoisie, the new class of "citizens." The occupation of the young artist was an affirmation of the image of the free, mystical prophet, a figure who had become a hero during the intellectual and political developments of the Revolution.[6] That is, the artist now saw himself as the hero among mankind.

In view of the Romantic poet's new conception of his position in the Age of Revolution, one must deny a popular theory that the artists of this generation were "escapists," uninterested in the social and aesthetic problems of the

---

[4]Geraldine Pelles, Art, Artists, and Society (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 18.

[5]Brandes, The Romantic School in France, p. 9.

[6]Pelles, p. 18.

common man. Although aestheticism suggests to many modern readers a devotion to Plato's distant world of pure Ideas, to the sensitive, young, creative men of the Romantic era, spiritual ideals were verities to be incorporated into one's everyday life here on earth. This occurred on such a heightened scale that the pursuit of Ideal Goodness, Truth, and Beauty--leading to a utopian community of men--became the pronounced characteristic of the Romantic artists.

Since they were dedicated to ideal goals, they felt that they must have been divinely inspired. Artists had been "chosen" by God and blessed with a special sensitivity to life around them. This heightened feeling gave them a privileged insight into the meaning of Nature and into the meaning of man's existence. The gift, it is true, did have a reciprocal responsibility attached to it. The artist must always pursue the ideal and never elect to follow another occupation in life.

Several poets felt that the special knowledge of the artist could never be communicated to the new public surrounding them. Considering the insensitive bourgeoisie a doomed entity incapable of ever perceiving aesthetic goals, these artists adopted an Ivory Tower, Art-for-Art's-Sake mode of existence. The Ivory Tower artist feels that his only responsibility in life is to art. He owes nothing to society. Stated in another fashion, the artist need not have a direct utilitarian function because art is a

valuable end in itself. E. T. A. Hoffmann is a common example of an author who satirizes any notion of artists becoming proper utilitarian citizens in society. One of his artist-personae, the conductor Johannes Kreisler, bitterly rejects the idea of the artist giving up his sacred, visionary pursuits for a bourgeois trade. He remarks to a noblewoman:

> Yes, my dear lady, you cannot believe how I profited from my position as conductor of the orchestra; but I became especially convinced that it is good for artists to have a steady position. . . . Let the worthy composer become a conductor or musical director, let the poet become a court writer, the painter a court portraitist, . . . and you will shortly have no more useless visionaries in the country, nothing but useful citizens of good education and gentle manners![7]

A similar view, we shall later see, is also occasionally espoused by Vigny and Gautier in France, Byron and Keats in England, Hawthorne and Thoreau in the United States.

But, for a second and much larger group of Romantics, the aesthetic goals they too pursued were also recognized as bearing a social responsibility. Art was not just to be rigourously pursued on a defiant, individual basis; the sensitive genius must actively teach aesthetic mandates to a suffering public in need of spiritual progress. Victor Hugo makes a plea to his fellow artists to elevate their fellow man to spiritual goals, not to just retreat

---

[7]E. T. A. Hoffmann, Kater Murr, Vol. II of Selected Writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann, trans. L. J. Dent and E. C. Knight (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 64.

into art-for-art's sake isolationism.

> Ah, minds, be useful! Be of some service. Do not be fastidious when so much depends upon being efficient and good. Art for art's sake may be very fine, but art for progress is finer still. To dream of castles in Spain is well; to dream of Utopia is better.[8]

I believe it is appropriate to call this group "Humanitarian" artists.

The Humanitarian poets, like the Ivory Tower artists, still affirm, however, that the artist is the gifted individual. Even their social goals are realized in these terms. The objective of art was formulated as the humanitarian salvation of society through the individual's fulfillment. This achievement would be attained by uniting the citizen's mind with some great universal expression and reproducing within him the divine thought which animated the artist. Shelley proposes just such a pantheistic objective in The Defense of Poetry. Consequently, the poets sought the progressive "poetization" of the world. By this they meant the transformation of society from its present hybrid state, in which it was partially material, partially spiritual, into the culminating and wholly spiritual state of being poetry.[9]

In keeping with this plan, the artist who educates

---

[8]Victor Hugo, William Shakespeare, trans. M. B. Anderson (New York: New Universal Library, 1905), p. 243.

[9]Ralph Tymms, German Romantic Literature (London: Methuen, 1955), p. 11.

mankind to the possibilities of Spirit exerted both a practical and moral influence. He saw his own person, therefore, as a deeply sensitive, moral soul following a Messianic tradition in history. The artists of this period typically view themselves as Philosopher-Kings, prophets, seers, priests, or even as Christ. Boundless pretentions are justified, the artist believed, since he is the incarnation of the divine spirit of Beauty leading the people to a new life.

Most of the Romantics saw the theories of "Art-for-Art's-Sake" and "Humanitarian" art as irreconcilable existential poles impossible to pursue at the same time. One idea both parties did agree upon, though, was the belief that the artist must always dedicate himself to the ideal, never prostituting his special talents by accepting an ordinary occupation. When Emerson is giving advice to a poet whom he calls "Saadi" he voices this belief.

> Let the great world bustle on
> With war and trade, with camp and town;
> A thousand men shall dig and eat;
> At forge and furnace thousands sweat;
>
> . . .
>
> Or crowd the market and bazaar;
> Oft shall war end, and peace return,
> And cities rise where cities burn,
> Ere one man my hill shall climb,
> Who can turn the golden rhyme.
> Let them manage how they may,
> Heed thou only Saadi's lay.[10]

---

[10]Ralph W. Emerson, "Saadi," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Centenary Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-18), p. 133.

19. HOMER RECITING HIS POEMS
85×114. R.A. 1791. (180)
Major W. M. P. Kincaid-Lennox

fig. 1. Sir Thomas Lawrence, "Homer Reciting His Poems"

Sir Thomas Lawrence's painting "Homer Reciting His Poems" also presents the image of the poet dedicated to his art while surrounded by people apathetic to aesthetic subjects.[11] This, in brief, was the artist's view of himself. The bourgeoisie had another view.

* * *

The artist wasn't the only one reassessing his position in society. Changes in the structure of social classes had led not only the poet but also the public at large to view the function of the artist in a new light. Sadly enough, the new citizens of Europe and America, raised by Revolution into a position of power, failed to agree with the Romantic's belief in the value of art and artists. The public had no use for the artist.

The merchant's notion about the uselessness of the artist stemmed primarily from the public's materialistic pursuits; pursuits appearing to the aesthetic artist as antithetical to his own goals. The bourgeoisie felt that the poet and painter were superfluous figures in society since they produced nothing of direct material value. If the artist could not create something utilitarian in the present Industrial Age he must change his occupation.

Understandably enough, this attitude proved shockingly distasteful to the artist. Nevertheless, it was

---

[11]Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), "Homer Reciting His Poems," 1791. fig. 1.

an attitude the Romantic artist would have to confront and, hopefully, conquer. Ignoring the citizens' insensitivity to art was impossible since they were now his only patrons. Economic support by an art-appreciative aristocracy, the previous form of financial aid for the artist, no longer existed just as monarchy no longer really existed.

The rampant materialism existing among the bourgeoisie had economic, religious, and political roots. Economic influences, promoting a utilitarian view of life, were a result of the inevitable financial realities of the businessman's existence. The new accepted way to prosperity was through material acquisition, not family lineage. It seemed to the grasping bourgeoisie that factory production could create unlimited panaceas of wealth.

But the mercantile tradition was not really novel to the Romantic age. It had only begun to accelerate rapidly in this period. Actually it had been growing steadily since the Renaissance. It was only now, however, that the artist was seriously influenced by the merchant's life and values.

Religious as well as economic forces helped forge an interest among the bourgeoisie in utilitarianism. Protestantism was widely praised and had been increasingly accepted after the Reformation. It finally reached a high-water mark of militant Methodism, formulated by John Wesley, among the manufacturing classes in the early

industrial period. Rooted in Lutheran doctrine, the new social doctrines of the late eighteenth century helped cast grave reflections on the value of the poet. Luther had made the worldly professions into the central element of social division. Each occupation was to be justified on the basis of its service to mankind.[12] Work contributing to the general welfare was indicated as the sole valuable activity of every individual.

Methodism, then, saw no real service to mankind on the poet's part. The utilitarian nature of this religion fostered a low opinion of the painter also, a fellow who actively engages in the sensual and fruitless activity of painting--a lazy, immoral character who misuses valuable time daydreaming or staring at nude models. What was permitted at best, under this view, was a craft-like mode of art producing portraiture and simple still-lifes. Many young painters and writers, especially in America and England where Methodism was predominantly active, were understandably hesitant to undertake a career that their pragmatic peers regarded as immoral, effeminate, and unworthy of a virtuous man.[13]

---

[12]M. H. Bragg, "The Concept of the Profession of the Poet in Germany During the Eighteenth-Century and the Evaluation of a New Theory of Literature," DA, 27 (1967), p. 3446a.

[13]Pelles, pp. 46-47.

The public's aversion to aestheticism had a third source as well: the new political ideals of the Empire era. In the Neo-Classical, Revolutionary period new states were being formed. Statesmen such as Napoleon and Jefferson were busy formulating a classical platform for their new republics. A revived Greek or Roman civilization could not tolerate egocentric, useless figures who cared little for the public at large. Further, art was associated with the old aristocracy and was therefore sensuous and corrupt.[14] At best, art would only be admitted to the new, uncorrupted state on a utilitarian basis. The artist could only serve as a propagandist for the statesman. This was particularly the view in France and America, where David, Peale, and Trumbull accepted commissions with the agreement that they provide art glorifying the state. Painters were asked to render flattering portraits of impressive heroes like Washington and Napoleon. It was quite evident that the artist was still not the hero in this culture.

Faced with the merchant's economic, religious, and political values, the Romantic artist--a man devoted to an aesthetic destiny--soon discovered himself alienated from his materialistic, patriotic, Methodist peers. Conversely, the public was estranged from the artist too, and quickly

---

[14]Neal Harris, The Artist in American Society (New York: G. Braziller, 1966), p. 28.

abandoned him as a useless, degenerate figure. The poet, without a patron or subservient to him, became at worst ignored by the public, ending his life in poverty and despair. At best, he prostituted his talents for financial gain. John Flaxman's melodramatic painting showing a deluded poet living in squalor captures something of the artist's plight.[15] This unsatisfactory relationship between the artist and the Middle Class did not spring full-grown like Athene from the head of Zeus. It had an interesting, if not devious, heritage of its own.

* * *

The social status of the poet in periods prior to the rise of the merchant class indicates that no essential conflicts existed between the artist and the society that surrounded him. The poet had a clear, utilitarian function. In the culture of Greece and Rome the ancient world accorded the painter and poet a lofty position. Among the Greeks, Orpheus and Amphion were sons of gods or kings and artificers of cities; and Homer was patronized by a special cult. Apelles was one of the most renowned figures under Alexander's reign. Under the Romans, the poet became a "vates" or prophetic teacher, possessing a special insight into the nature of things. The Romans went even further,

---

[15]John Flaxman (1755-1826), "Thomas Chatterton Taking the Bowl of Poison from the Spirit of Despair," n.d. Fig. 2.

fig. 2. John Flaxman, "Thomas Chatterton Taking the Bowl of Poison From the Spirit of Despair"

acclaiming Virgil a second Homer, a national bard. Everywhere, poets were regarded as civilizers and lawgivers. "Orpheus, sacred interpreter of the Gods," says Horace in Ars Poetica, "weaned man, then a dweller in the forest, from violence and the food of beasts."

The exalted image of the artist died out in the Middle Ages when the priest replaced the poet as a sacred figure in society. The poet or painter was silently relegated to the class of craftsmen. Although Medieval culture, like the Romantics, aspired toward spiritual goals, the earlier society was not basically founded on an egocentric mentality. During the Renaissance, however, something of the classical, charismatic personality was revived, and subsequently the poet regained his treasured position as a hero among men.

During the Renaissance, aristocratic, learned patrons provided both financial aid and extravagant praise for the beautiful and often non-utilitarian works of the artist. The Medici family--including Pope Leo X--as well as Pope Julius II were typical of the age with their fascination with the arts and admiration for artists. True, the painter or architect was socially subservient to his patrons, but he was recognized as fulfilling a needed function in society. In addition, he did manage to surround himself with an intellectual, sympathetic audience. This helped him forget, at least partially, his subordinate

status.

In the Classical-Baroque period the exalted image of the artist diminished rapidly in direct proportion to the growth of the merchant culture. Aristocracy still commissioned Racine, Poussin, and El Greco to create works based on heroic themes, but a growing potential source of patronage, the bourgeoisie, would not pay for paintings based on these subjects. Nothing better than corporation portraits would be assigned to a Rembrandt or a still-life to Chardin. For the poet, a similar plight existed. Great authors like Milton and Donne wrote for a select intellectual group among the bourgeoisie. If a writer was intent on capturing the admiration of the general public he would have to abandon his ambition to create high tragedy and author a sentimental drama or novel. Nicholas Rowe's The Tragedy of Jane Shore, Diderot's The Illegitimate Child, and Lessing's Miss Sara Sampson are all instances of the type.

Generally, though, the artist was less and less admired by the new populace. The poet and painter were increasingly regarded as superfluous men whose role consisted in amusing and entertaining the higher classes. This view of the artist is generally accurate for the period. Most of the great painters of the era--Reubens, Lebrun, and Watteau--worked almost exclusively for the aristocracy. Racine, Dryden, Pope, and Jefferson obviously wrote for the select intelligentsia of the day.

If the Baroque artist found little consolation any longer in satisfying the public at large, at least he still received commissions from the aristocracy and did not starve. Aligning himself with the upper-class, he and the aristocracy did their best to ignore the growing class of tradesmen. This was a task more and more difficult to do and by the final quarter of the eighteenth century the public could be ignored no longer. Victor Hugo clearly reflects the situation by the time of the French Revolution.

> One can understand kings saying to the poet, "Be useless"; but one does not understand the people saying so to him.[16]

Actually, the bourgeoisie's lack of admiration for the poet can be accounted for, in part, by an evolution in this class's conception of the hero's ontological nature. The imaginative Renaissance artist, characterized by a colorful personality, had gradually changed into the man of Reason in the Classical Age. By the seventeenth century he appears as the honnête homme. Later, in Rococo culture, he is the man of sensibility, a "philosophe." The "Rational man," like the Renaissance artist, possesses a distinct nature. The new hero's exceptional character is based on: (1) "genius" or an ability to "reason" in a common-sense fashion; (2) a devotion to common sense and good manners; (3) a mimetic ability for "imitating" life.

---

[16]Hugo, William Shakespeare, p. 261.

The nature of "genius" as conceived at this time is quite different from the definition given to that term by the Romantics. There is no doubt though that the development of the Romantic conception of the artist has its sources in the Baroque notion of genius.[17] In fact, in America the Enlightenment's theory of genius is perhaps the chief aesthetic belief passed on to Emerson and the New England transcendentalists.

For the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, "genius," like the ability to feel, is only one faculty of the human organism. Genius is considered simply a particular condition of mental forces, of which reason and judgment are the two most important components.[18] For the Romantic era, the term "genius" will aptly describe the man himself and not just a single element in his personality.

The faculties of reason and judgment are usually reflected in the Rational Man's common sense and impeccable manners. Many writers of the Enlightenment, like Boileau and Franklin, even take this to an extreme, showing an undue reverence for what they conceive to be the general sense of their time.[19] In following good taste and popular

---

[17] H. Dieckmann, "Diderot's Conception of Genius," JHI, 2(1941), 152-3.

[18] M. Z. Shroder, Icarus (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 16.

[19] Irving Babbitt, Rosseau and Romanticism (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), pp. 87-88.

sense the honnête homme, as he is described by La Rochefoucauld or Boswell, does not stand out at all in public; he is the man so completely at one with society that he all but fades imperceptibly into that society.[20] One might say that the classicist sees no conflict between himself and society. He realizes his existence in terms of his peers. Envisioning a social order in which the individual must adapt himself to the needs of the larger community, he practices renunciation and self-restraint.

In the Enlightenment, the philosophe and Jeffersonian statesman subsumes the characteristics of the gentleman. The philosophe stands out more than the honnête homme, but only because he possesses good taste and judgment in a heightened degree. He is more judicious than the gentleman, more prone to submit his behavior and motives to rational scrutiny.

Another factor leading to the displacement of the artist as hero stems from the classical notion of art as a mimetic activity. Art, as defined by the classicist, is secondary to all forms of life which it imitates. This theory is developed to the point that the poet is taught that he must follow not only life but traditional art styles as well. Success in the arts is achieved through imitation of the ancients and with the help of their rules,

---

[20]Shroder, p. 27.

cited in such works as Aristotle's Poetics. Imitation of techniques in art did its share to foster the belief that the artist was only a craftsman--a figure who should learn his trade by the rote acquisition of mechanical skills. This was the status of the poet at the height of the Enlightenment.

* * *

The Romantic artist, for all his distinctions from the Middle Class, was caught up like the bourgeoisie in the transformation of social classes at the close of the eighteenth century. The self-concept of the artist along with the self-concept of the citizens changed dramatically in this period of turmoil. The poet's unstable role at this time led him to ask serious questions about what the creative man is able to do in life, and what he should accomplish: what his abilities are and what his social duties are. In attempting to answer these queries, the new Romantic artist revealed an important charactersitic of himself. These questions could only have been posed by a figure who was conscious of his unique destiny in history.

Self-awareness also had its sources in the eighteenth-century mind. It was a natural conclusion to the philosophe's attribute of genius. As the eighteenth century passed genius was increasingly assessed as a quality shared only by a few elect people. Genius could not be acquired either, since more and more its nature was inter-

preted as reaching beyond any set of rules by which it could be attained or imitated.

Awareness of the self, a simple consequence of the special "gift" of the philosophe, evolved eventually into the egocentric self-consciousness of the Romantic. The idea of "giftedness" also played its part in contributing to the artist's profound sense of uniqueness among men.

The possession of a special nature was not the only trait giving the poet a sense of isolation. The character of his new audience also stimulated the artist's feeling of individuality. The faceless Middle Class appeared to the poet and painter to be inherently valueless and cultureless because the content of its life lacked definition, boundaries, self-containment, and, therefore, intrinsic worth. The bourgeoisie did not echo the spirit of a true culture. It did not challenge a person's "real" being, nor was it an assertion or an expression of that being. For that reason, the public, no matter how self-centered, would always be lacking in individuality.[21]

The poet's awareness of his unique nature, coupled with his consciousness of the faceless public, gave the artist the idea that he was a "cursed" victim of society. The world was seen as a prison in which the winged poet is confined and crushed. He is surrounded by fools. The

---

[21]Cesar Graña, Bohemian Versus Bourgeois (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 104-5.

life of the late Renaissance poet Torquato Tasso was often cited by the Romantics as an example of the imprisoned bard. Byron, in "The Lament of Tasso" portrays the despondent poet in his cell just as Delacroix does in his series of paintings on the same subject.

> Long years!--It tries the thrilling frame to bear
> And eagle-spirit of a Child of Song--
> Long years of outrage--calumny--and wrong;
> Imputed madness, prisoned solitude,
> And the Mind's canker in its savage mood,
> When the impatient thirst of light and air
> Parches the heart; and the abhorred grate,
> Marring the sunbeams with its hideous shade,
> Works through the throbbing eyeballs to the brain,
> With a hot sense of heaviness and pain;
> And bare, at once, captivity displayed
> Stands scoffing through the never-opened gate,
> Which nothing through its bars admits, save day. . . .[22]

Suicide is sometimes seen as the only solution to the insurmountable conflict between the artist and the public. According to the Quaker in Vigny's Chatterton, this is the poet's fate.

> Quaker: He [Chatterton] is struck by a disease that is moral and almost incurable, and sometimes contagious; a terrible disease that mostly seizes young souls that are passionate and new to life, worn out by the love of the just and the beautiful, and coming into a world to experience, at each step, all the inequities and all the ugliness of a badly constructed society. This evil is the hatred of life and the love of death: it is stubborn Suicide.[23]

---

[22]George N. G., Lord Byron, "Lament of Tasso" in Poetry, Vol. IV of The Works of Lord Byron, ed. E. H. Coleridge (New York: C. Scribner, 1898-1905), pp. 143-4.

[23]Alfred de Vigny, Chatterton, translation my own, (Bologna: Ricardo Patron, 1962), p. 119.

A favorite Romantic variation on this theme is the Euripidean idealist who, despite a heroic struggle, is eventually crushed by an insensitive, brutal society. Blythe visualizes a pathetic artist of this sort in his painting "Art versus Law."[24] We are shown a shabby, emaciated bard--obviously dedicated to his work--standing in disbelief before his closed studio. He is too poor to pay the rent. Novalis, Shelley, Vigny, and Hawthorne are major poets who duplicate this scene.

With an image of the savage public victimizing the poet in his ken, the Romantic artist unconciously dedicated himself to his first task: to assert, by various modes of behavior, his feeling of isolation in society, an isolation existing because of his pursuit of aesthetic goals. Consciously assembling a credo of coherent ideas justifying this exalted concept of the exceptional self would be his second task. Actions occur first and then are later justified.

What we must realize in his behavior and doctrines is the artist's attempt to free himself from the psychological and social shackles of an eighteenth-century status as a mere craftsman and to assume the dignity of something akin to the ancient profession of the artist with its special function and group consciousness. In a new culture

---

[24]David G. Blythe (1815-65), "Art versus Law," n.d. fig. 3.

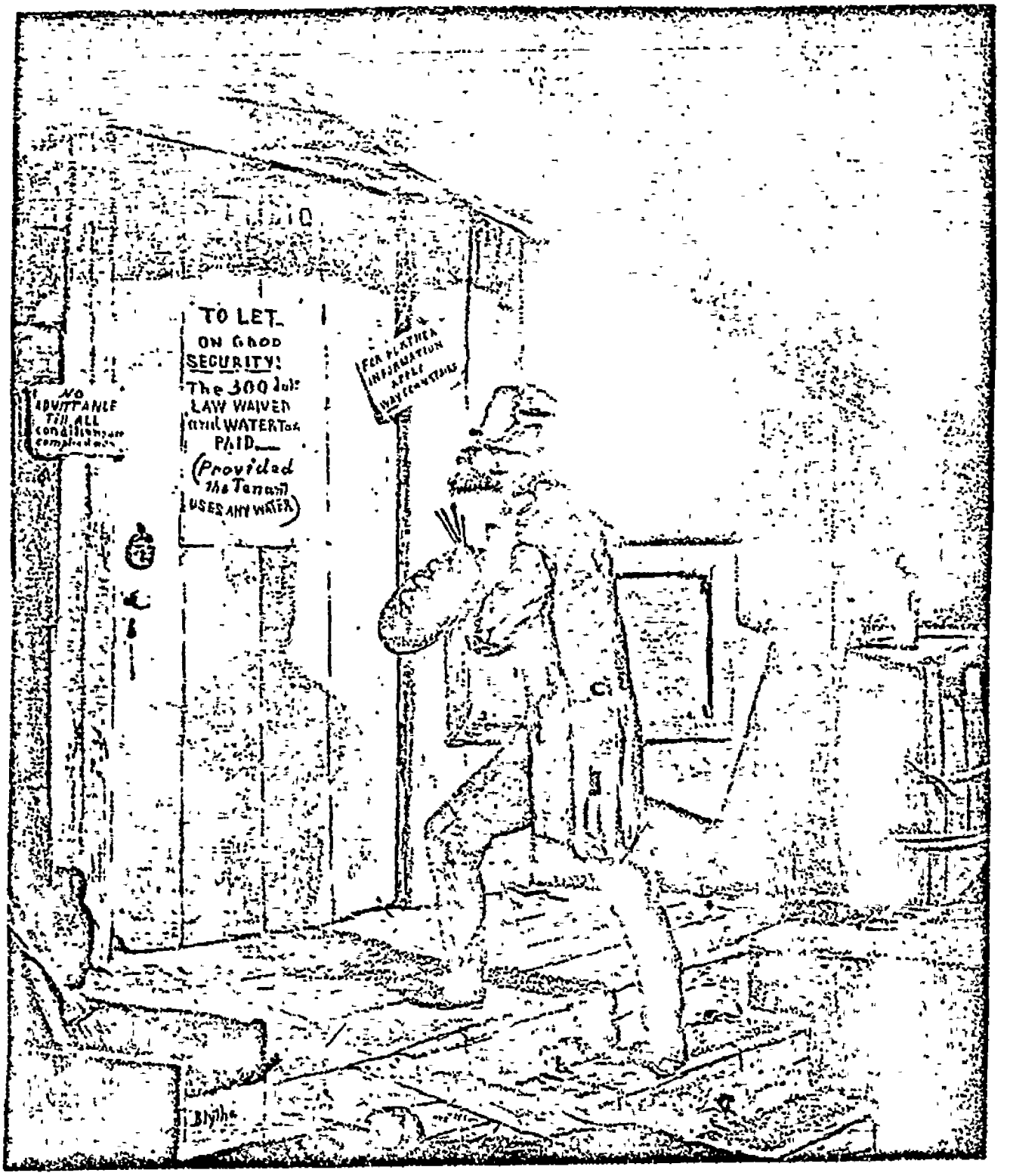


fig. 3. David Blythe, "Art versus Law"

based upon equality of opportunity, the effort was extremely difficult. Artists were forced to make an embarrassing plea for special privileges before they were earned.[25]

Requests made to a despised bourgeoisie put the bard into something less than a pleasant mood. Inevitable hostilities soon came out into the open and were expressed in various forms of behavior. One of these was a passive, melancholy stance. More prevalent, however, was the adoption of a belicose posture which would finally be justified in the concept of "l'art pour l'art."

The passive mode of behavior is characterized most accurately in the widespread state of despondency affecting many poets. "Ennui," said Alfred de Musset in The Confessions of a Child of the Century, is the sickness of the age. Loathing for the philistines, the Middle Class, led to melancholic brooding, love of solitude, morbid introspection, and self-analysis. A number of works depicting the solitary, contemplative poet will be discussed in the second and third chapters. For now, Delacroix's painting of Michelangelo lost in thought in his studio will suffice as an example.[26]

These forms of behavior were only of the passive, introverted type. More outward, excessive patterns of

---

[25]Harris, p. 58.

[26]Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863), "Michel-Angelo in His Studio," 1950. fig. 4.

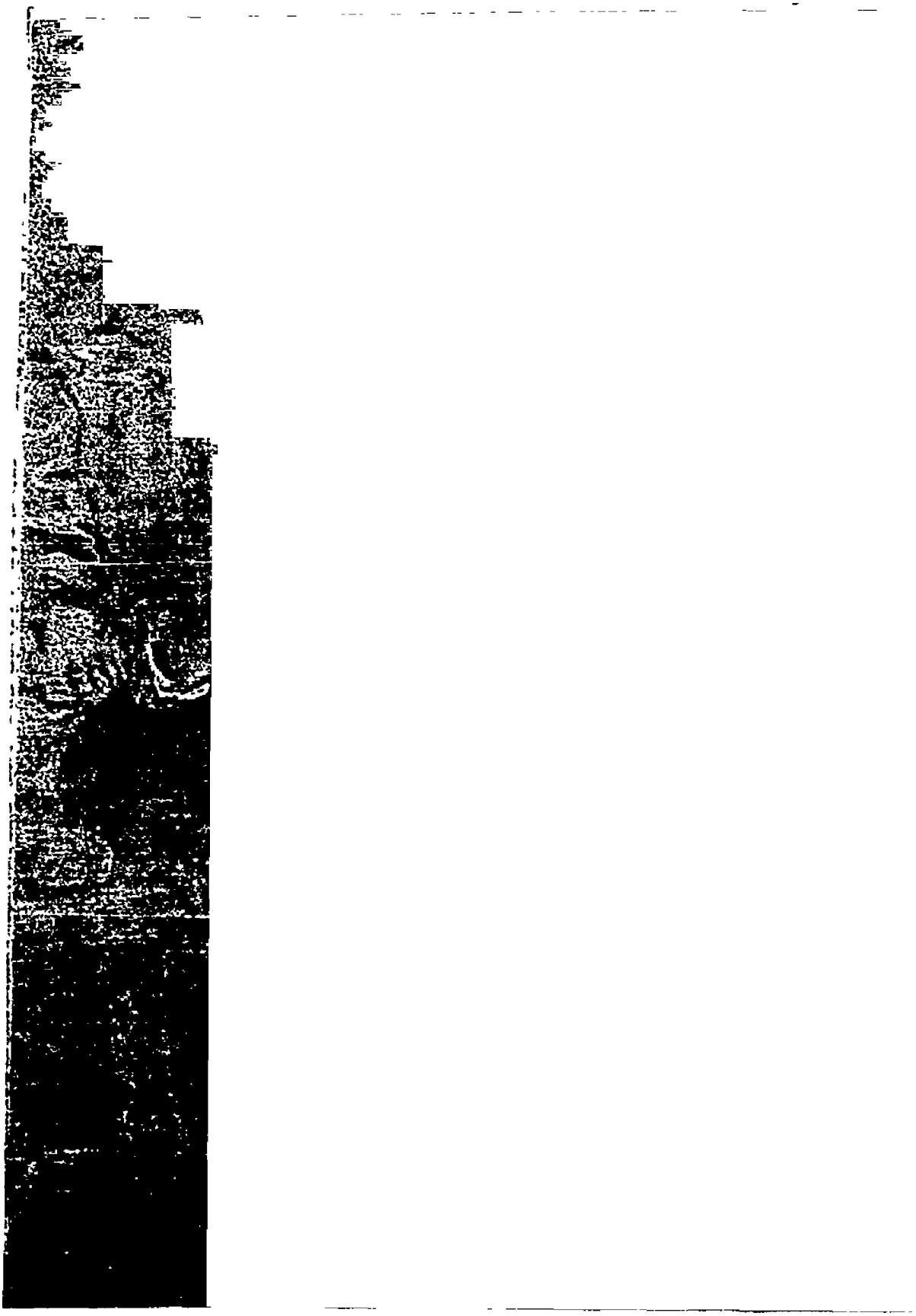


fig. 4. Eugene Delacroix, "Michel-Angelo in His Studio"

behavior also existed. For the most part these activities, like the passive modes, were developed in defiance of the common citizens--an avaricious, narrow-minded, hypocritical and tyrannous group.

Extroverted behavior was adopted by artists with a design to differentiate themselves from society at large. It indicated the insurmountable gap between the genius and the common man. Bohemians and dandies--a new but rapidly growing group of would-be artists short on talent but long on bravado--especially demonstrated bad manners and impertinences of all sorts. It was a childish albeit desperate attempt to embarrass and provoke the unsuspecting bourgeoisie. They further engaged in dissipations, violence, cruelties of all kinds, sometimes in real life but more often in literature and painting. Gautier, Byron, and Poe are all notorious figures that occasionally engaged in these activities. Hoffmann's Cardillac is a common example of the demonic and violent artist-persona.[27] Cardillac, a renowned goldsmith, prowls the streets of Paris at night waylaying his customers in order that he may get his handcrafted jewelery back again.

Scorning traditional moral codes in art, several painters and poets depicted horrible incidents and grisly

---

[27]The figure of Cardillac appears in Hoffmann's story "Mademoiselle de Scudéri," in The Tales, Vol. I of The Selected Writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann, trans. L. J. Dent and E. C. Knight (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 213-271.

scenes, told of strange vices and crimes. Gericault gives us shocking scenes of cannibalism in his well known work "The Raft of the Medusa," Coleridge tells of the perverse crime of killing one of God's creatures in The Ancient Mariner, and De Quincy relates the life of an opium addict. Strange forms of dress defying the conventions of good taste were adopted. Gautier proudly recollects the initial performance of Hugo's Hernani when he shocked the audience by wearing a red waistcoat and green trousers. He remarks: "I am bound to confess that this costume was well devised to irritate and scandalize the Philistines."[28] Eccentricities in appearance were everywhere to be witnessed, not the least of which was Petrus Borel's beard:

> A beard! A very ordinary matter in France nowadays, but at the time there were but two in the country: Eugène Deveria's and Petrus Borel's. It required absolutely heroic self-possession and contempt of the multitude to wear one. And mark that when I say beard, I do not mean mutton-chop or fin-shaped whiskers, or a tip of a tuft, but a geniune, full, complete beard, one to make a man shudder.[29]

Bizarre experiments in language were not uncommon either. Free and easy, paradoxical language filled with indecencies and invective characterizes much of Romantic literature. Whitman's poetry, for example, was shockingly crude to the nineteenth-century American. He defiantly boasts this in

---

[28]Gautier, History of Romanticism, p. 134.

[29]Ibid., p. 38.

his Song of Myself when he shouts: "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world."

* * *

A life-style symbolizing the rejection of established codes of materialism and utilitarianism helped constantly to remind the Romantic artist of his commitment to unique goals. He had, at first, acted with a natural aversion to the public but without clearly announcing the reasons why he felt that way. Later, as the nineteenth century progressed, great poets like Emerson, Shelley, Hugo, and Goethe would formulate various apologiae defending their odd behavior. These "Defenses" usually assumed the form of a clear reassessment of the artist's abilities and his ultimate responsibility, if any, to the new citizens.

The new concept of the artist's abilities was clearly molded in defiance of the characteristics of the eighteenth century philosophe. We said previously that for the Rational Man, and earlier, the honnête homme, the element "genius" was only one attribute of the mind, an important one but nevertheless only one facet of the complete personality. We also found that genius became an increasingly appreciated quality as the Enlightenment passed.

This trend finally climaxed in the Romantic era. Now, genius was no longer determined to be just one attribute of the mind, but characterized a specific type in

society. For a man to possess genie meant an extraordinary force had been incarnated in a man and constituted his being; it was inextricably connected with his inner nature.[30] Victor Hugo, in William Shakespeare, tells us: "What is a genius? It is not perchance a cosmic soul--a soul penetrated by a ray from the unknown?"[31] Shelley called the same force "Nature's plastic stress." This "ray," working within the genius, gives him the desire and the ability to reach his full human potential. Realization of an individual's potential was one of the greatest aspirations of the Romantic era. Faust's "striving" exemplifies this characteristic clearly. The same trait shows up in Novalis's Henry von Ofterdingen. Henry searches for the ideal--symbolized by the blue flower--just as Shelley's moth desires the light of the star.

In defense of a life devoted to art, the poets and painters of the Romantic era attempted to explain their excessive behavior by proclaiming that the practice of art was the most elevated activity for fulfilling man's potential. The genius, being the only one in society dedicated to this achievement, was necessarily the finest and most worthy of men.[32]

---

[30]Dieckmann, pp. 152-3.

[31]Hugo, William Shakespeare, p. 141.

[32]Shroder, p. 1.

The genuis's strange life was further defended on the basis of his unique nature. To have a highly personal code of behavior indicated the presence of a unique personality. In Emerson's estimation of Goethe and all poets in general, he indicates the necessity of personality: "Talent alone does not make a writer. There must be a man behind the book; a personality. . . ."[33] Judgment of an artist's specific work, or indeed the entire canon of his work, was not considered valid beyond the point that the piece or collection reflected "un grand caractère." The philosophe's reliance on Aristotle's formula, that to define a man as a good flute player one must first decide whether he plays the flute well, is all but abandoned in the Romantic's conception of art and its dependence on personality.[34]

Personality, we could conclude then, became an absolute for the artist, probably because it was something the public was unable to define and because it was unique in each person. Depictions of the exceptional genius abound in painting and literature of the period. In painting, the glory of Romantic portraiture lay not in the transmission of particular features but in the character expressed.[35]

---

[33]R. W. Emerson, "Shakespeare; or The Poet," in Representative Men, Vol. IV in The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 281.

[34]Roger L. Williams, "Berlioz as Artist-Hero," French Review, 41 (1968), p. 496.

[35]Harris, p. 175.

For this reason painters like Delacroix, Sully, and Lawrence developed an impasto technique of roughly rendering their figures, concentrating only on suggesting the true features of the face. It was in the forehead and eyes that "genius" could be recognized. The portrayal of personality in the artist was the important goal of the painter. Genius, since it could never be clearly imitated, could only be suggested and not clearly outlined. Delacroix's shadowy rendition of Chopin is an excellent work of this type.[36]

A second distinction between the abilities of the Romantic artist and the Enlightenment's Rational Man centers on the contrast between "imagination" and "reason." In judging the affairs of daily life the philosophe relied on reason, not emotion or intuition, to lead him finally to a "common sense" solution to the problem. Whatever the general and rational understanding of the times was, it was to be valid. As Pope remarked in "The Essay on Man," "Whatever is, is right."

The Romantic genius, on the other hand, rejected reason and common sense as tools to reach the truth. Instead, he favored the use of that strange faculty of ambiguous nature, the "imagination." One's imagination was measured by one's remoteness from the general sense of the

---

[36]Delacroix, "Chopin," 1837. Fig. 5.

fig. 5. Eugene Delacroix, "Chopin"

times. Conversely, the bourgeoisie's insistence on common sense was ample proof to the artist of the public's lack of imagination.[37] Good sense is identified with the low state of lifeless convention which the Romantic artist felt to be the state of affairs at the end of the eighteenth century. Gautier tells us: "It is impossible to realize the depth of insignificance and colorlessness literature had fallen into; and the case of painting was no better."[38]

Imagination, by the late eighteenth century, was not a clearly established trait that could be acquired by following a set of rules. It was the very irrational factor in imagination that made it such a highly valued quality to the Romantic. The feeling that the mind worked in strange, irrational patterns was an idea in direct contrast to the mechanistic view of psychology in the seventeenth century. Imagination, for the Romantics, was a "gift" that a person had; it could not be learned or acquired; it could not be apprehended by reason.

The faculty of imagination was highly regarded too because it allowed the artist to accurately portray the minds of many men. Imagination, Keats would say, gives the poet a "negative capability," a means of getting through strange seas of intellect.

---

[37]Babbitt, pp. 87-88.

[38]Gautier, A History of Romanticism, p. 16.

A third distinction drawn between the Baroque, Rational hero and the heroic Romantic artist concerns the individual's concept of his personal identity and its relation to society. The Neo-Classical hero harmonized with society; he saw no essential conflicts between himself and the group. Like the ancients, he realized his individuality in the group by practicing self-restraint. His good manners and good taste attest to this adaptation to the social norm. Since he identifies the self with society, it is society at large which takes precedence over the individual.

In contrast, the Romantic genius sees no realizable harmony between the individual and the masses. He comprehends no harmony because he senses that he is not at all like other men; he may not be better or worse than they are, but he is not like them. He relies, as one commentator suggests, on the conviction of difference.[39] Unlike the Rational Man's desire for common taste and common customs, the Romantic artist acquires peculiar appetites and odd manners.

The Ivory Tower artists decided to revel in their uncommon nature. They subsequently lived out their life in constant defiance of the bourgeoisie's existence. The more prominent group of Humanitarian artists, however,

---

[39]Shroder, p. 28.

attempted to bridge the separation between the poet and the public. Never forgetting their unique nature, these artists advocated a new structure of civilization in which an association of free individuals would be joined together in perfect union. The word "community" would be used to denote the new ideal in contrast to the Classicist's "society."[40]

The concept of a communal society was appealing because it implied no restrictions on the bohemian behavior of the artist. Freedom for the individual was also mandatory in the future society since the Romantic could only achieve his identity through an unrestricted assertion of the personality. The Romantic, under this form of culture, merely identifies membership in and full development with the community. He contributes his unique talents to the aggregate of individuals without abandoning individual freedom.

A variety of experimental "communities" sprang up in this period to make the dream a reality. Brook Farm was only one of several planned cultures that reflected the fervent hopes of poets like Emerson and Coleridge; hopes for an ideal society composed of unique individuals each freely contributing his talents to sustain the group.

---

[40]Ludwig W. Kahn, Social Ideals in German Literature, 1770-1830 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1938), p. 57.

Sadly enough, ideal states never seem to work out. This was certainly the case in the Romantic period at any rate. Romantic individualism was simply too manifest to allow group endeavors to succeed.

The question of the function of the artist constitutes a fourth point for contrasting the heroes of the Baroque and Romantic periods. A philosophe, such as Voltaire or Franklin, saw himself as an imitator of life and art; he mirrored life and he followed classical precepts in the mimesis of art. The Romantic artist, in contrast, believed the prime mark of genius to be a refusal to imitate. To copy life is to be subservient to life; to follow rules in art indicates that one is a plagiarist, not a creator. The imagination, so critical for true creation, can only function in the absence of mimesis.

The imagination, then, as it resides in the man of "personality" creates or animates life. Coleridge called it the "shaping spirit." The poet and the painter give life to the lifeless world around them. Meyer Abrams has indicated, in his classic work The Mirror and the Lamp, that the Romantic thinks of himself in this fashion; not as a mirror reflecting reality, but as a lamp "illuminating" existence. The activity of the artist is hardly subordinate to life under this concept since he actually creates life by bringing it to the awareness of the public. In Hawthorne's story "The Prophetic Pictures" the persona

voices a popular belief among the Romantics:

> "O glorious Art!" thus mused the enthusiastic painter as he trod the street, "thou art the image of the Creator's own. The innumerable forms, that wander in nothingness, start into being at thy beck. The dead live again. Thou recallest them to their old scenes, and givest their grey shadows the lustre of a better life, at once earthly and immortal."[41]

The possibility of assessing other special abilities occurred to the artist. Perhaps he was not only a creator but a "seer" or "prophet" as well. All of these ideas logically followed as a simple conclusion from the kinds of abilities he knew he possessed and had already defined. For example, one of the special traits he believed he possessed, or had at least discovered in his own person, was imagination. The imagination had given him special insights into a new world of fantastical reality. Any person with a privileged knowledge of unknown worlds was obviously a unique and necessary person to the community. In Goethe's poem "Hans Sach's Poetical Mission" the allegorical character Industry takes the poet by the hand, confessing to him:

> "I have selected thee", she said,
> "From all who earth's wild mazes tread,
> That thou shouldst have clear-sighted sense,
> And nought that's wrong shouldst e'er commence.
> When others run in strange confusion,
> Thy gaze shall see through each illusion. . . ."[42]

---

[41]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Prophetic Pictures," in The Complete Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Doubleday, 1959), p. 97.

[42]Johann W. von Goethe, "Hans Sach's Poetical Mission," in Poems of Goethe, trans, E. A. Bowring (London: G. Bell, 1874), p. 217.

A gift for seeing into the heart of things was only one of two special gifts the poet possessed. The other was an ability to express his special knowledge. Not only did the artist know more than most men, he could also communicate his unique feelings to his fellow man. Wordsworth among others mentions these two traits.

> The sum of what was said is, that the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner.[43]

It was only a matter of a few logical deductions before the Romantic artist would conclude an acceptable activity to follow in life. The conclusions were based upon his two abilities: insight and expression. The one traditional figure in history who possessed both of these gifts was the seer or prophet. The seer holds world meaning in the palm of his hand; he understands the nature of the universe and its destiny. This primal sympathy with, or knowledge of, Nature occurs because he is a child of Nature, a child of the gods. In Runge's painting "The Source and the Poet" we are given a clear example of the poet's life close to Nature; the poet is at the center of all things.[44] The poet, like the wood nymph, is at home

---

[43]William Wordsworth, "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads, in Poetical Works, Vol. II of William Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbinshire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-6), p. 397.

[44]Philipp Otto Runge (1777-1810), "The Source and the Poet," 1805. Fig. 6.

fig. 6. Philipp Runge, "The Source and the Poet"

here at the source of Nature. This image is especially popular with the Romantic writers of the day. Hawthorne felt that the poet existed on a "middle ground," a plane existing between the everyday and the supernatural worlds. Vigny's Stello also relates this conception of the artist's life to his psychiatrist Dr. Noir:

> I have faith in myself because I feel at the bottom of my heart a secret power, something indefinable and invisible, which is at once a presentiment of the future and an insight into the past, where lie the mysterious germs of the present. I have faith in myself because there exists in creation nothing beautiful, nothing grand, nothing harmonious which does not send a prophetic quiver through me, which does not make itself felt in my very bowels, and fill my eyes with divine and mysterious tears. I believe firmly that I have been called to a transcendental vocation. . . .[45]

An identical view of the poet, as we shall see later, is cited by Whitman and Emerson in America; Hugo and Gautier in France; Shelley and Keats in England; Novalis, Holderlin, Hoffmann, Goethe, and Schiller in Germany.

The artist arrived, as we have said, at the belief that he was a seer or demigod by deducing certain conclusions on his own. The general revival of religious idealism in the Romantic era indirectly helped him further to formulate a prophetic occupation. The Romantics adopted, along with other values, a belief in a transcendental, world-pervading spirit as the source of poetic inspiration.[46]

---

[45]Alfred de Vigny, Stello, trans. I. Massey (Montreal: McGill Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 18-19.

[46]Hauser, p. 210.

Emerson calls this force the "Over-Soul." Shelley called it "Nature's Plastic stress." Other artists referred to it as Nature or God. Nevertheless, to allow oneself to be controlled by it was considered by them to be a sign of the highest artistic genius. The Romantic looked back to Plato's poet who was seized, like the Old Testament prophets, with a state of uncontrollable "enthusiasm" during moments of divine inspiration. That is, the genius was imbued with a violent emotion which puts him beside himself. This emotion or enthusiasm was the sign of the genius struck by inspiration.[47] The poet saw himself as animated by a flame placed in his soul by God. Shelley and Hölderlin's ecstatic pantheism was a classical example of this faith.

In sum, the artist saw himself as a god, an omnipotent being in the universe. Perhaps what we understand in this deific self-concept is the desire to dominate and an unwillingness to be dominated. A poetized world ruled over by the poet is conceived as a higher, purer, more divine universe. The sublime itself seems to have no other criteria, for the artist, than those derived from poetry.

Since the spirit of God or Nature permeates the soul of the poet, the association is drawn between art and prophecy. This parallel is seen by Victor Hugo, Emerson, Shelley, and the other Humanitarian poets. The artist would function as God's vicar on earth. The artist would bring

---

[47]Dieckmann, pp. 164-5.

the word of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness to man; he would bring joy to the people.

More indirect evidence reinforcing the association between the artist and the prophet was discovered in the Bible. The eighteenth century pre-Romantics recalled that the Biblical prophets had written in verse.[48] Identifying with anyone who communicated in the same medium, the poets placed ancient priests high in the ranks of poetical models.

Coincidental to the discovery of the Bible's literary style was a sudden appreciation for the work's emotional intensity and its demand for moral integrity.[49] The prophet's emphasis on feeling seemed to the Romantic to be the antithesis of the philosophe's detachment. In the vivid emotional testimony of the Old Testament prophets the Romantic poet could see a similarity to his own abilities to feel and to express. Emotion was, after all, the animating force in his art.

Most important, the revival of religion contributed to many poets' growing belief that the prophet had a responsibility to the new Middle Class. The increasing prevalence of this thought stemmed partly from the growing popularity of Unitarian theology. Unitarianism seemed to reverse the tenets of Calvinism so prevalent in the

---

[48]Murray Roston, Prophet and Poet (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 156-7.

[49]Ibid., p. 18.

eighteenth century.[50] Instead of characterizing man as a base creature subject to a God of wrath, it professed to reveal a loving Father spreading his love to man. Unitarianism, in its noblest expression during the early nineteenth century, became a humanistic religion both ethical and individual but fostering deep and warm social sympathies. These feelings of fellowship permitted the Humanitarian Romantics, at least, to look forward to another golden age, a revival of a happy, human community with love and good will, not duty and restraint as the controlling forces.[51] It was a utopian dream spurred on by the New Testament spirit.

* * *

The Romantic poets and painters almost universally agreed that they were gifted seers. There was no such broad agreement, however, as to their function in society. Most felt, as we indicated, that they should not only dedicate themselves to the preservation of the Ideal but must also elevate the bourgeoisie to a more spiritual existence. We referred to this large group as "Humanitarian" poets.

A smaller group felt no such compunction to teach or communicate anything to the public. These artists

---

[50] V. C. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1930), p. 237.

[51] Kahn, p. 58.

abandoned all efforts to redirect the base, materialistic structure of bourgeois society. Their only responsibility in life was to themselves, to pursue the Ideal. Hence, the "Art-for-Art's-Sake" movement or the religion of beauty was born. Theirs was a kingdom whose integrity was free from the secular world, whose task arose only out of the individual's own creativity and which, therefore, allowed the gratification of a need to be both significant and self-centered.[52] There are indications scattered throughout the work of Emerson, Vigny, Gautier, Keats, Byron, Grillparzer, and Hoffmann that these men sometimes maintained the "Ivory Tower" credo. Gautier is one of the best spokesmen for this position. He bitterly defies the bourgeois demand for utility in his preface to Mlle. de Maupin.

> No, fools, no goitrous cretins that you are, a book does not make a gelatine soup; a novel is not a pair of seamless boots; a sonnet a syringe with a continuous jet;
>
> . . .
>
> In truth, it is enough to make one burst with laughing to hear the dissertations of these Republican or Saint-Simonian utilitarian gentlemen. I should, first of all, very much like to know the precise meaning of this . . . utility. What is this work, and to what is it applicable?
>
> There are two sorts of utility, and the meaning of the vocable is always a relative one. What is useful for one is not useful for another. You are a cobbler, I am a poet. It is useful to me to have my first verse rhyme with my second.
>
> . . .
>
> To this you will object that a cobbler is far above a poet, and that people can do without the one better than

---

[52] Graña, p. 78.

> without the other. Without affecting to disparage the illustrious profession of cobbler, . . . I humbly confess that I would rather have my shoe unstitched than my verse badly rhyme, and that I should be more willing to go without boots than without poems.
>
> . . .
>
> Nothing that is beautiful is indispensable to life. You might suppress flowers, and the world would not suffer materially; yet who would wish that there were no more flowers?[53]

The bourgeois were not the first to ask that the poet be pragmatic. Plato had made the same demand in ancient times. In the Enlightenment the serious-minded philosophe had accused the poet of being unstable and useless. By the early Romantic period the Middle Class, from statesman to merchant, had adopted this belief. All now asserted that the artist was incapable of performing any task not immediately connected with his art. The Romantic Humanitarians denied this view. They defended their existence by tracing the poet's lineage back to the old Roman "vates" or inspired prophet.

But with increasing frequency as the nineteenth century passed, the Ivory Tower artist accepted the bourgeoisie's accusation as a truth and found in it a source of pride. We noted this reaction in the case of Gautier. The Romantics were now convinced that the artist's inability to participate in the life of his fellow man, to share in his utilitarian occupations, was further proof of his exalted,

---

[53]Théophile Gautier, "Preface" to Mademoiselle de Maupin, trans. unknown (New York: Random House, n.d.), pp. xxii-iii.

deific nature.[54] The poet's function, commissioned by the Divine, was to maintain the ideals of society. He must not be expected to engage in tainted, common occupations. Moral and political utility meant the death of art.

There were additional justifications for the artist's aloofness. The Ivory Tower Romantics suggested that socially oriented ideas were senseless because social experience itself was of no value. Real experience was achieved only by the individual. It necessarily follows, then, that the individual, as a point of integrity and in view of the nature of real experience, should refuse any "responsible" attitude toward society.[55] Allegiance to the group would destroy the self.

Since the bourgeois were unreceptive to the artist's concept of his sacred gifts the artist's abilities were, ironically, the source of the poet's curse. He saw himself as the "poète maudit." His special talents coupled with a dedication to the Ideal elevated him above his fellow man. As a result the public envied him. Jealousy inevitably turned to hatred. Some of the Art-for-Art's-Sake Romantics felt that the poetic gift was part of their cursed destiny. They were fated to possess a blessing that also thwarted human companionship. For many, that blessing was an

---

[54] Shroder, pp. 36-37.

[55] Graña, p. 78.

unwanted gift. Vigny's Moses curses the burden he must bear.

> He said unto the Lord: -- "Shall I ne'er be done?
> Where wilt thou still that I my footsteps turn?
> Am I to live for aye, great, powerful, alone.
> What did I to thee to be chosen thine elect?
> Let now some other stand 'twixt thee and thine!
> Some other curb thy wild steed, Israel!"[56]

Grillparzer's Sappho is another poet who would be happy to relinquish the poetic gift for a more human existence.

Others in this group, [illegible] gladly accepted their gift and reveled in the [illegible]rdom.[57] Having decided that the world [illegible]ce, that the triumph of the bourge[illegible]ugliness, mediocrity, and injus[illegible]h, the artist isolated himself in an [illegible] Indulging in rapt contemplation of th[illegible]t waited for the persecution he was convinced [illegible]eceive at the hands of the vulgar bourgeoisie. He was Christ nailed to the cross by the Pharisees. Chateaubriand was this martyr to Victor Hugo.

> Woe unto him! the child of this sad earth,
> Who, in a troubled world, unjust and blind,
> Bears Genius--treasure of celestial birth
> Within his solitary soul enshrined.
> Woe unto him! for Envy's pangs impure,
> Like the undying vultures', will be driven
> Into his noble heart, that must endure

---

[56]Alfred de Vigny, "Moise," trans. G. King, in Old France and the Revolution, Vol. VI in Columbia University Course in Literature, ed. J. W. Cunliffe (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1896), p. 456.

[57]Shroder, p. 52.

Pangs for each triumph; and, still unforgiven,
Suffer Prometheus' doom, who ravished fire from
Heaven.
Still though his destiny on earth may be
Grief and injustice; who would not endure,
With joyful calm, each proffered agony;
Could he the prize of Genius thus ensure?

. . .

No! though the clamours of the envious crowd
Pursue the son of Genius, he will rise
From the dull clod, borne by an effort proud
Beyond the reach of vulgar enmities.

. . .

While he, rejoicing in his tranquil flight,
More upward soars sublime in heaven's eternal
light.[58]

There is no doubt that the very real financial problems of the artist reinforced in him a belief in the image of the cursed poet. With the overthrow of aristocratic domination during the French and American revolutions the artist was transformed, along with all common citizens, into a free social agent. The artist had always, of course, been an unrepressed figure in America, where the bourgeoisie were not only predominant but the only recognized class of citizens. Because of this social revolution the artist was faced with a new economic dilemma. It was from the merchants, the bourgeoisie, that the poet had divorced himself. Materialism, practicality, hard-headedness, and hard-heartedness were Middle Class characteristics he had opposed. But now, it was only from the Middle Class that the poet and painter could win rewards and recognition;

---

[58]Victor Hugo, "Genius: To Chateaubriand," in Victor Hugo: Poems and Dramas, trans. N. Crosland (New York: Univ. Society, n.d.), pp. 11-12.

unwanted gift. Vigny's Moses curses the burden he must bear.

> He said unto the Lord: -- "Shall I ne'er be done?
> Where wilt thou still that I my footsteps turn?
> Am I to live for aye, great, powerful, alone.
> What did I to thee to be chosen thine elect?
> Let now some other stand 'twixt thee and thine!
> Some other curb thy wild steed, Israel!"[56]

Grillparzer's Sappho is another poet who would be happy to relinquish the poetic gift for a more human existence.

Others in this group, however, gladly accepted their gift and reveled in the role of proud martyrdom.[57] Having decided that the world is an unattractive place, that the triumph of the bourgeoisie is the victory of ugliness, mediocrity, and injustice over beauty and truth, the artist isolated himself in an attitude of disdain. Indulging in rapt contemplation of the Ideal, the prophet waited for the persecution he was convinced he would receive at the hands of the vulgar bourgeoisie. He was Christ nailed to the cross by the Pharisees. Chateaubriand was this martyr to Victor Hugo.

> Woe unto him! the child of this sad earth,
> Who, in a troubled world, unjust and blind,
> Bears Genius--treasure of celestial birth
> Within his solitary soul enshrined.
> Woe unto him! for Envy's pangs impure,
> Like the undying vultures', will be driven
> Into his noble heart, that must endure

---

[56]Alfred de Vigny, "Moise," trans. G. King, in Old France and the Revolution, Vol. VI in Columbia University Course in Literature, ed. J. W. Cunliffe (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1896), p. 456.

[57]Shroder, p. 52.

Pangs for each triumph; and, still unforgiven,
Suffer Prometheus' doom, who ravished fire from
Heaven.
Still though his destiny on earth may be
Grief and injustice; who would not endure,
With joyful calm, each proffered agony;
Could he the prize of Genius thus ensure?

. . .

No! though the clamours of the envious crowd
Pursue the son of Genius, he will rise
From the dull clod, borne by an effort proud
Beyond the reach of vulgar enmities.

. . .

While he, rejoicing in his tranquil flight,
More upward soars sublime in heaven's eternal
light.[58]

There is no doubt that the very real financial problems of the artist reinforced in him a belief in the image of the cursed poet. With the overthrow of aristocratic domination during the French and American revolutions the artist was transformed, along with all common citizens, into a free social agent. The artist had always, of course, been an unrepressed figure in America, where the bourgeoisie were not only predominant but the only recognized class of citizens. Because of this social revolution the artist was faced with a new economic dilemma. It was from the merchants, the bourgeoisie, that the poet had divorced himself. Materialism, practicality, hard-headedness, and hard-heartedness were Middle Class characteristics he had opposed. But now, it was only from the Middle Class that the poet and painter could win rewards and recognition;

---

[58]Victor Hugo, "Genius: To Chateaubriand," in Victor Hugo: Poems and Dramas, trans. N. Crosland (New York: Univ. Society, n.d.), pp. 11-12.

only by satisfying bourgeois tastes could he make a living.[59] But pleasing the public meant catering to the vulgar and profane. That implied the greatest of crimes for the Romantic. It meant denying one's individuality, prostituting one's genius to society.

A few poets tried to please the public, but seeking success with a public characterized by superficial, fickle tastes became a test of survival. The frustration and anxiety incurred in this situation is evidenced by the continual vehement attacks upon the vulgar, tasteless, and unreceptive philistines.[60] Daumier's satiric "Theatre Sketches" allude to the painter's feelings.[61] Daumier sees the bourgeoisie as Roman barbarians satisfied by the most puerile entertainment.

Attempts to please the citizens were endeavors viewed quite differently by the Humanitarian artist-seers. We have opted to call this group "humanitarian" prophets because of their desire to construct a peaceful coexistence with the new public. This enterprise was clearly established by Emerson, Whitman, Shelley, Wordsworth, Goethe, Hölderlin, and Victor Hugo.

---

[59]Shroder, p. 42.

[60]John B. Halsted, "Introduction," to Romanticism, ed. J. B. Halsted (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 7-8.

[61]Honoré Daumier (1808-79), "Theatre Sketches," 1864. Fig. 7.

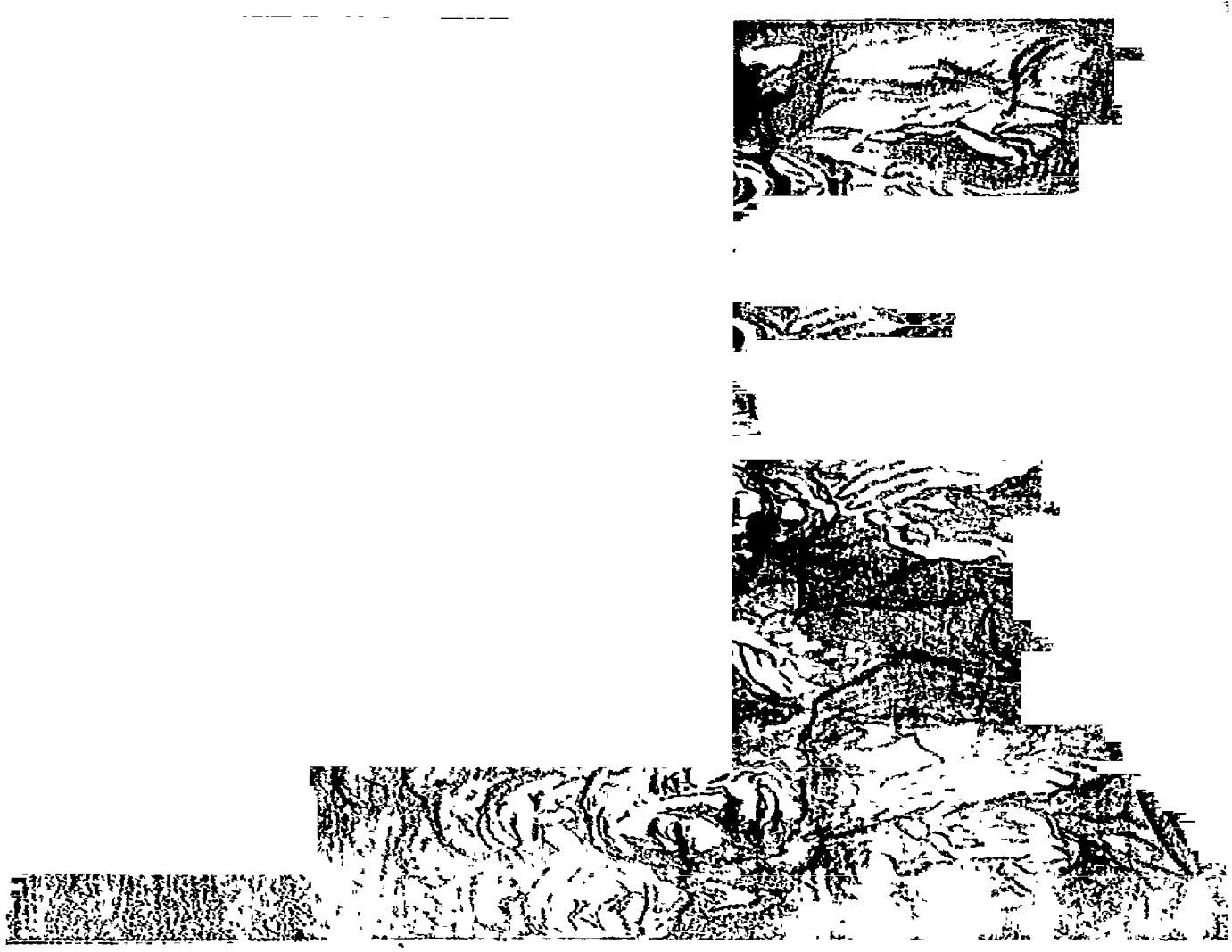


fig. 7. Honoré Daumier, "Theatre Sketches"

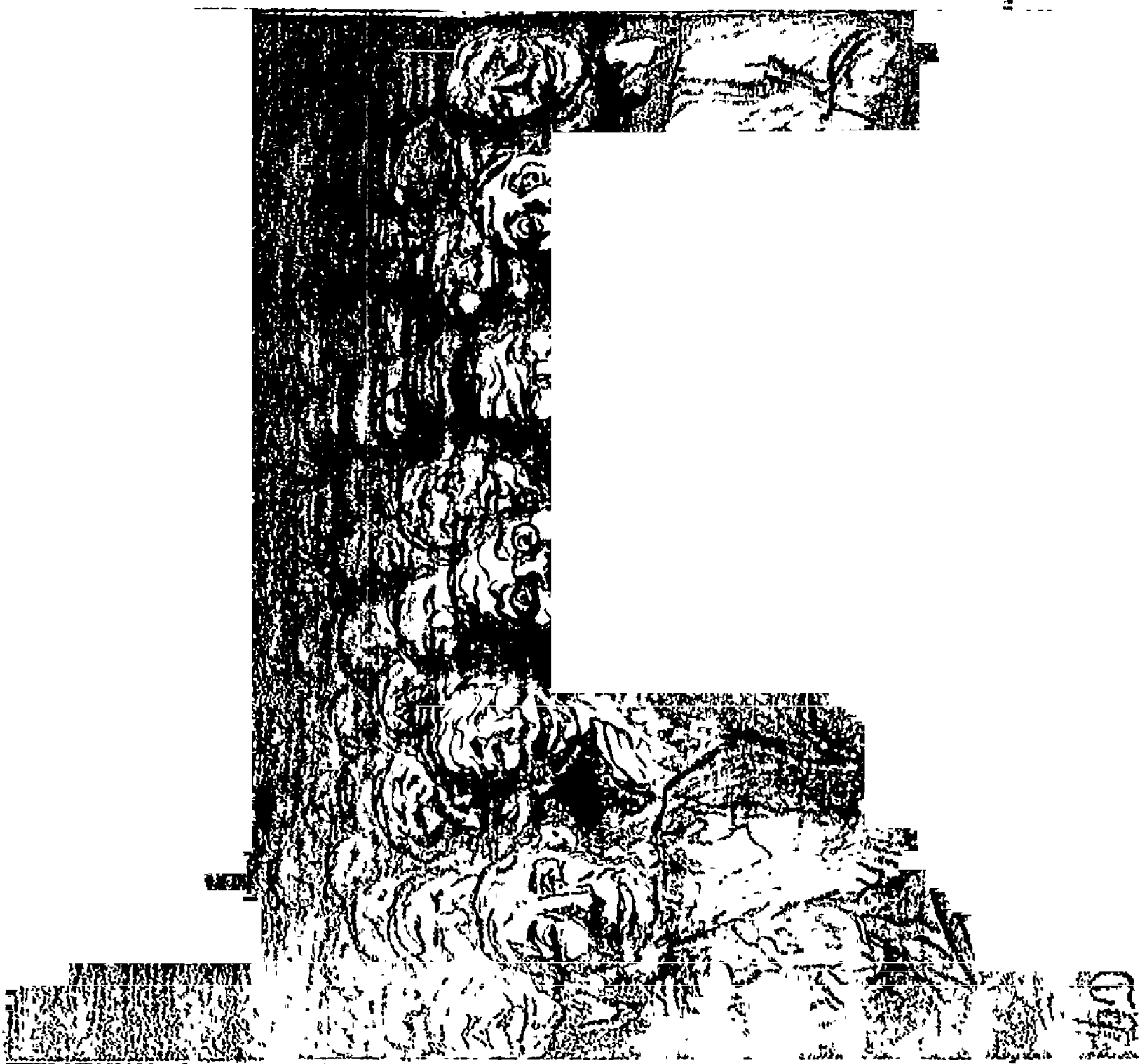


fig. 7. Honoré Daumier, "Theatre Sketches"

As in the case of the Ivory Tower artist, the motives of the Humanitarian poet reflects the Romantic genius's inextricable relationship with the Middle Class. While he still hoped for a chance to strive for aesthetic Ideals, the ideals he envisioned were destined for the utilitarian benefit of mankind.[62] Specifically, the benefit would be the much-needed spiritual regeneration of the materialistic bourgeoisie. As a leader in this social reformation the Romantic artist portrayed himself as not only a gifted seer but a prophetic priest or moral legislator as well. Shelley's fascination with the image of the legislator in A Defense of Poetry is well known. The poet, according to Shelley, apprehends the beauty and order of the universe and shares his knowledge with mankind. Thus, he directs the public into a proper aesthetic-oriented mode of existence. The public, in turn, should be grateful for the poet's assistance.

> But poets, or those who imagine and express the indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and music, of the dance and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers . . . of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion.
>
> . . .
>
> Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators, or prophets; a poet essentially comprises and unites both these

---

[62]Halsted, p. 40.

characters.[63]

For Shelley, nothing could be more beneficial to the present materialistic age than for the artist to indicate to the public its foolish emphasis on materialism.

> The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature.[64]

Artists, then, are heralds of the proper road in life. They interpret correctly too the proper meaning of the external world. The public must recognize the necessity of following the poet's direction in this new era.

> The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is Poetry.
>
> . . .
>
> Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.[65]

The Messianic pretentions of Shelley and the other Humanitarian Romantics were clearly a continuation of the social function of the political hero in the Enlightenment. The Statesman had fought for the freedom and equality of the people. With the reorientation to aesthetic values in the post-Revolution era, the artist-prophet fought for the same goal; the emancipation of the public from slavery to

---

[63] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," in Prose, Vol. VII, in The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. R. Ingpen and W. E. Peck (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), p. 112.

[64] Ibid., p. 135.

[65] Ibid., p. 140.

material goods. Humanizing the new citizens and awakening them to a fuller experience of reality could only be achieved by the prophet-bard. It was this desire for special reform that gave the Humanitarian movement a spirit so warmly ethical. Martin's painting "The Bard" is representative of this idea. The deific poet, stationed on the heights like an eagle, exhorts mankind below to follow him.[66]

The Romantic's conception of the artist as spiritual leader had a second source in Neo-Classical culture. The late eighteenth century archeologist unearthed not only Herculaneum but the classical notion of the "vates," the inspired poet who stands at the head of his tribe making its laws and speaking with the accents of a vicar of God.[67] The bard foretold great events in a heroic age. Ossian and his attendant bards fulfilled this prophetic figure for the Enlightenment. Francois Gerard's painting "Ossian Playing the Harp" visualizes the mythical poet.[68] As the Orphean musician strikes his lyre he conjures forth herculean figures capable of great deeds. Napoleon, one of the most fervent readers of Ossian, believed that an emperor needed

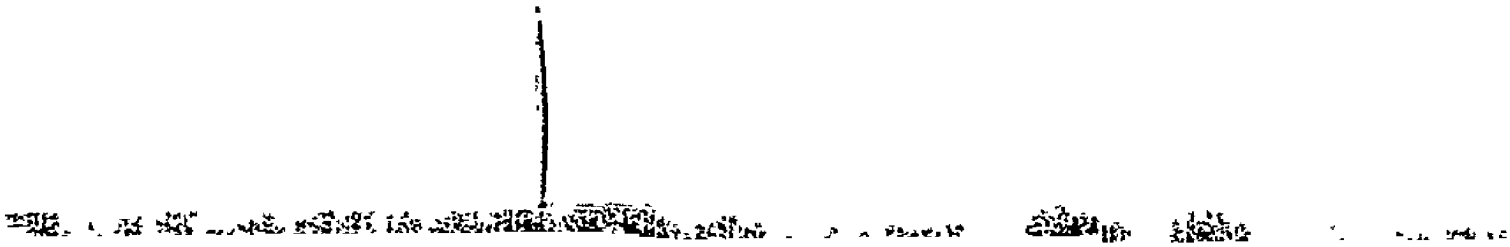
---

[66] Ibid., p. 140.

[67] Shroder, pp. 46-7.

[68] Francois Gerard (1770-1831), "Ossian Playing the Harp," n.d. Fig. 9.

fig. 8. John Martin, "The Bard"



a bard to inspire his troops.[69] On his campaign to Egypt he took his own bard, Perceval de Grandmaison, who was to sing and thereby rouse the spirits of the troops.

The image of the prophetic artist helped the Romantic poet gain prestige in the Revolutionary period. But the creative poet was still socially subservient to the political hero. This had even been true of the prophets in ancient times. The poet's job, during the Revolution and before, had always been to glorify the aristocrat and his consorts. Now, however, the artist no longer felt any real compulsion to serve the hero. The aristocrat had been dethroned and so the artist simply replaced the hero.[70] The artist now assumed the rewards and responsibilities formerly reserved for the warrior-aristocrat hero.

To validate his pretentions to natural nobility the Romantic popularized the myth of Orpheus.[71] The legend of the ancient bard served to reflect the poet's mission as religious leader, celebrant of the mysteries, lover of mankind, creator of laws and political institutions. The figure of the Orphean poet is the one given us in England by Shelley, in Germany by Grillparzer, in America by Whitman.

---

[69] Shroder, p. 23.

[70] Ibid., p. 44.

[71] Ibid., p. 47.

fig. 9. Francois Gerard, "Ossian Playing the Harp"

A similar redefinition of the artist's function in society occurred in post-Revolutionary American culture. The American renaissance had a pronounced ethical atmosphere given to it by the heirs of its New England ministers, a group of intellectuals, poets, and reformers including such such names as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman.[72] In a zealous attempt to create a utopia in the New World, these men believed themselves to be social and ethical legislators. Emerson indicated this belief in The American Scholar.

Perhaps the most representative and most carefully worked out notion of a "Humanitarian Poet" is found in early French romanticism; that is, in the socialist doctrines of the Saint-Simonians. Highly influential, Saint-Simon's theories would be generally adhered to by Goethe, Shelley, Hugo, and Emerson a few years later. The Saint-Simonian doctrine was founded on two factors: a criticism of the customs of Middle Class society and a proposal for the economic reorganization of society. The Romantics generally rejected Saint-Simon's economic theories so there is no real need for us to relate them here. Nevertheless, the Humanitarian artists were influenced by Saint-Simon's constructive criticism of society and subsequently adopted two of his ideas: the idea of social progress and a belief in brotherly love.

---

[72]Parrington, p. 273.

In Saint-Simon's program what was first necessary for the rehabilitation of the public was the condemnation of the bourgeoisie's economic policies, their customs, usages, and morality. Selfishness and greed, as exemplified in the wealthy merchant who ruthlessly exploits the poor and weak and condemns them to a life of vice and degradation, must be destroyed. The artist must criticize the oppression of women whom society refuses equality with men; he must not tolerate idlers and parasites who live at the expense of others. In general, the artist must insist on the need for reform which will broaden the moral, intellectual, social, and economic base of the state in order that it may provide justice and equality for the masses.[73]

According to the Saint-Simonians this reorganization of civilization would be directed by the artists. Nature had endowed the poet with an extraordinary capacity for feeling and sympathy. Utilizing his ability to communicate to all men he might exercise, therefore, the noble mission of directing man into the ways of peace and human brotherhood. Thus, the artist had the lofty function of developing in man his emotional capacity and educating him to his spiritual nature.

---

[73]N. H. Clement, Romanticism in France (New York: Modern Language Association, 1939), p. 251.

As the emotional and aesthetic growth of the bourgeoisie progressed, the public would shed its brutal instincts and curb its selfish nature. The transition to a loving community would then be complete. The State, in turn, would reward adequately the humanitarian leader. Free from financial cares he could devote himself exclusively to directing society in its proper course.

In a certain sense, the role that the Saint-Simonian group assigned to the artist--the role of prophet, seer, and teacher of men--discouraged individualism in art and literature. This humanitarian organization was disconcerted over the egoism manifested in the Art-for-Art's-Sake artists. The Saint-Simonians found that the only force able to cool the friction between the artist and society was the development of man's affective nature, the nourishment of his capacity for human sympathy. Egocentricity only served to alienate men from one another. In the new order Love would be the agent that would bind man to man. The poet would be the priest of love.[74] Love would be the cure for the "mal du siècle." Love leads to joy, order, and concern among the race of men now torn asunder by jealousy, suspicion, and hatred.

* * *

Although the Humanitarian and Art-for-Art's-Sake

---

[74] Ibid., pp. 231-31.

artists differed in their judgments on the purpose of art, the two parties did reach some agreement on other matters relevant to themselves. One of these subjects was the idea of the artist's physical appearance. Almost without exception each Romantic writer and painter that took time to render a self-portrait did so in a similar style. As one might suspect, the artist depicted himself in the guise of a Romantic hero; that is, in the image of the Genius. But, the particular substance of these autobiographical illustrations is a subject entire in itself and worthy of some discussion.

CHAPTER II

THE ROMANTIC ICON

The outward, physical configuration of the Romantic artist partially serves as an accurate gauge of his particular inner nature. Among the genius's many traits we are told constantly whether or not the artist is young or old, his precise facial features, the costume he wears, and the outward emotions he displays. We are also informed of the literal environment he lives in. These conditions are consistently related in literature and painting from country to country. Therefore, we will use these two media, as we did in the introductory chapter, to clarify some aspects of the self-concept of the Romantic artist.

In brief, we might say that the visual manifestations of the bard are a natural consequence of his spiritual existence. For the Romantics, Shakespeare's Polonius was correct in remarking that "the apparel oft proclaims the man." Thus, the aspirant to the Ideal, usually young, is depicted either as a powerful, masculine poet; or as a delicate, frail, feminine figure. In the instance of the masculine type we are shown a handsome and youthful artist with powerful physique, dark hair and dark eyes, and curly,

tossled hair. Each of these features suggests the passionate man. In a counter vein, but still reflecting the bard dedicated to the three Verities, is the feminine poet. Drawn as a fair-skinned youth, he has fair hair and blue eyes. We might say that the two types indicate the Northern and Southern European ideal; the former from the South, the latter from the North.

The artist's living conditions are important too. If the bard is a social outcast, distrusted by the bourgeoisie, he is commonly portrayed as living in squalor and poorly dressed. If the Romantic artist fancies that his artist-protagonist is recognized by the Middle Class as a valuable member of society the character may be rendered as a proud, well-dressed man with a noble bearing.

Contrasting divisions between the ignored and appreciated poet account in part for the emotions the artist-persona displays. If he is a respected figure in the community he is portrayed as cheerful. He may be joyful also because the artist is proud of his gifted insight and ability to express the common sentiments of mankind. More often, unfortunately, he is the alienated individual in a new bourgeois culture, forlorn and melancholy. Depicted as a daydreamer, the poet or painter is lost in contemplation of the Ideal world.

When the observant student examines the major documents of early nineteenth century art and literature he

is struck by the consistent recurrence of the visual traits mentioned. In American culture, for example, Emerson and Hawthorne give us the portrait in literature while West, Sully, and Trumbull do the same in painting. Each of the above in one work or another depicts one or more of the physical features of the artist. Pieced together, these individual aspects form a complete and detailed image of the Romantic bard's conception of his external appearance.

In Ralph Waldo Emerson's series of essays collectively entitled Representative Men he distinguishes between a variety of world views omnipresent throughout history. During his analysis of Montaigne--who Emerson feels personifies the "skeptic" mentality--he gives us a nominalist's view of the abstractionist, a man devoted to aesthetic ideals. What we find in this passage is one image of the Romantic poet, a relentless but ineffectual Idealist.

> The studious class are their own victims, they are thin and pale, their feet are cold, their heads are hot, the night is without sleep, the day a fear of interruption, --pallor, squalor, hunger and egotism. If you come near them and see what conceits they entertain,--they are abstractionists, and spend their days and nights in dreaming some dream; in expecting the homage of society to some precious scheme, built on a truth, but destitute of proportion in its presentment, of justness in its application, and of all energy of will in the schemer to embody and vitalize it.[1]

This characterization of the poet was partly prompted

---

[1]Ralph Waldo Emerson, Representative Men, Vol. IV of The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Centenary ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-18), pp. 155-56.

undoubtedly by the prevalent attitude of the bourgeoisie toward the Romantic artist.

Emerson, however, sharply denies the belief that the poet is an effeminate, ineffectual person. In one of his most renowned works, The American Scholar, the artist-scholar is a hero of more pragmatic, masculine, utilitarian mettle.

> There goes in the world a notion that the scholar should be a recluse, a valetudinarian,--as unfit for any handiwork or public labor as a penknife for an axe. The so-called "practical men" sneer at speculative men, as if, because they speculate or see, they could do nothing. I have heard it said that the clergy,--who are always, more universally than any other class, the scholars of their day,--are addressed as women; . . . . As far as this is true of the studious classes, it is not just or wise. Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential.
>
> . . .
>
> The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power.[2]

Emerson relates additional concrete features of the Romantic artist in his poem "The Poet." Although the poet here is fantastically rendered, the physical traits Emerson mentions are meant to reflect a mystical, prophetic character. His poet possesses: "solar eyes/ Like meteors which chose their way/ And rived the dark like a new day!"[3] The poet's face turns eastward toward God, the source of

---

[2] _____, The American Scholar, in Essays, Vol. I of The Complete Works . . . , pp. 94-95.

[3] _____, "The Poet," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works . . . , pp. 309-20.

his power.

Nathaniel Hawthorne is another American author who devotes some attention to the features of the Romantic prophet. In his short story "The Artist of the Beautiful" the inventor Owen Warland fashions a small, delicate machine into a living butterfly--an act necessitating pure, God-given genius. Hawthorne tells us that:

> . . . Owen's mind was microscopic, and turned naturally to the minute, in accordance with his diminutive frame and the marvellous smallness and delicate power of his fingers.[4]

Juxtaposed to the massive features of Robert Danforth, a Middle Class blacksmith, the Romantic artist is a delicate, feminine figure.

In their own turn, a generation of American Romantic painters create a strong, firmly drawn, and plastic portraiture whose aim, like that of the poets, is to capture the artist's inner character.[5] For example, in W. E. West's "Trelawny" we are given a bold, masculine image of Shelley's friend and fellow poet.[6] The figure might well be Byron's corsair. Trelawny is rendered as the passionate, heroic

---

[4]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful," in The Complete Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Doubleday, 1959), p. 423.

[5]Edgar P. Richardson, Painting in America (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1965), p. 205.

[6]William E. West (1788-1857), "Trelawny," 1822. fig. 10.

fig. 10. W. E. West, "Trelawny"

bard with fixed stare, dark eyes, and dark hair. He displays a bold moustache. We are reminded of Gautier's description of Petrus Borel's prodigious facial growth cited earlier. The bourgeoisie would have found Trelawny's demonic moustache a shocking feature.

Thomas Sully's portrait of a youthful Lord Byron fills in further details of the image of the Romantic poet.[7] Again, we find sketched a masculine, stalwart figure with a fixated stare. The dark hair is tousled, the eyebrows are arched; the poet is contemplating profound but melancholy thoughts. The viewer's attention is drawn to the brow, illuminated by some vague source of light from afar. The forehead traditionally suggests that part of the anatomy from which inspiration springs. The artist is Man Thinking, man contemplating the Ideal.

A third poignant example is the portrait of the American painter Asher B. Durand by John Trumbull.[8] As in Sully's painting, Trumbull's artist is a youthful one lost in thought. To accentuate the fact that the painter is a contemplative man, Trumbull places a book in the sitter's hand. Again, we are given dark, curly hair, dark eyes, fixed stare, and prominent forehead.

---

[7]Thomas Sully (1783-1872), "Lord Byron." 1833? fig. 11.

[8]John Trumbull (1756-1843), "Asher B. Durand," 1826. fig. 12.

fig. 11. Thomas Sully, "Lord Byron"

fig. 12. John Trumbull, "Asher B. Durand"

* * *

The portrait of the artist in Romantic England receives much the same treatment as that of the American artist. Shelley gives us a notable description of the poet in literature while Lawrence and Haydon do the same on canvas. Shelley's poet Alastor, for example, has a frail, diminutive physique, at one moment "a lovely youth" with "wild eyes," and a "sweet voice." He is the personification of the emaciated but spirited artist at other times.

> And now his limbs were lean; his scattered hair
> Sered by the autumn of strange suffering
> Sung dirges in the wind; his listless hand
> Hung like dead bone within its withered skin;
> Life, and the lustre that consumed it, shone
> As in a furnace burning secretly
> From his dark eyes alone.[9]

Sir Thomas Lawrence, like his Romantic peers in America, leaned toward realism in his art. Still, Lawrence did manage to give his artist-subjects very Romantic features. His portrait of the English Romantic poet Robert Southey seems almost a duplicate of Trumbull's "Asher B. Durand."[10] All the same traits of the bard are evident. In a second work "Sir Walter Scott" we are shown a mature, but still virile, novelist--unlike American painters'

---

[9]P. B. Shelley, "Alastor," in The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. T. Hutchinson (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), pp. 16-20.

[10]Sir Thomas Lawrence (1969-1830), "Robert Southey," 1829. fig. 13.

fig. 13. Sir Thomas Lawrence, "Robert Southey"

youthful poets--with the distinguishable characteristics of the artist.[11] Here, Scott's hair is curling, suggesting the passionate man rather than the cool, collected Rational hero. The emphasis again is on the illuminated forehead--the source of Genius--as well as the eyes with a distant look; he is a man of principles. From his proud, defiant pose we are assured he is no timid, ineffectual poet but a respected and admired man of the world.

Benjamin Haydon's "Portrait of William Wordsworth" is handled in the more traditional Romantic manner.[12] All but the most pertinent details in the painting are only roughly rendered. This technique is in keeping with Delacroix's and other Romantics' belief that Genius could only be "suggested" and never clearly defined. Consequently, Haydon attempts to evoke an appropriate mood or atmosphere rather than clarity of ideas. Behind a stormy backdrop we are shown the hazy portrait of a man of renowned sensitivity. We are given an aging bard lost in meditation, much like Lawrence's depiction of Scott. The only illuminated portions of the anatomy are the head and hands, the two extremities needed for the creation of poetry. The trait of Genius is implied in the typical Romantic manner by focusing

---

[11] _____, "Sir Walter Scott," 1827. fig. 14.

[12] Benjamin Haydon (1786-1846), "Portrait of William Wordsworth," 1842. fig. 15.

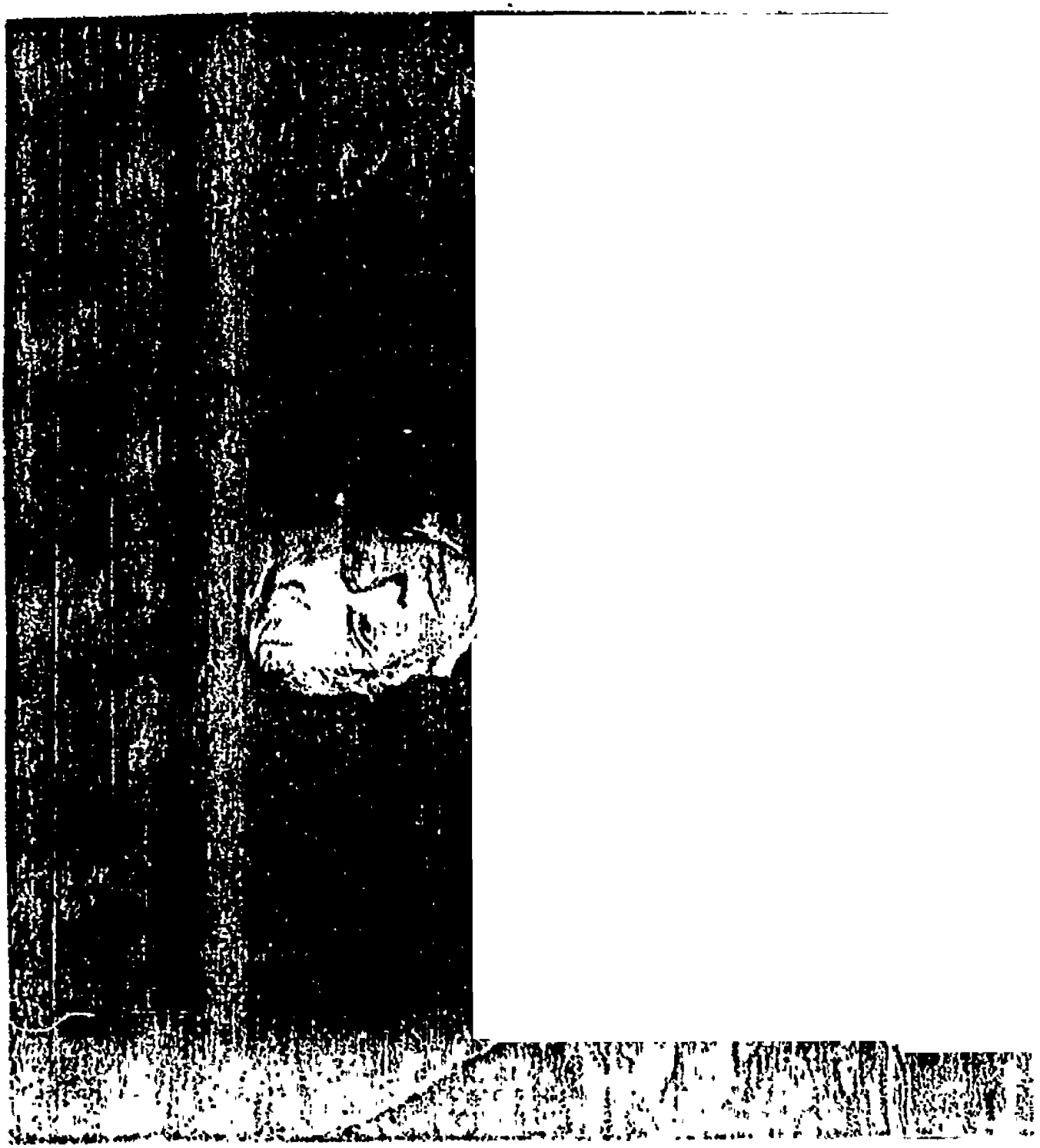
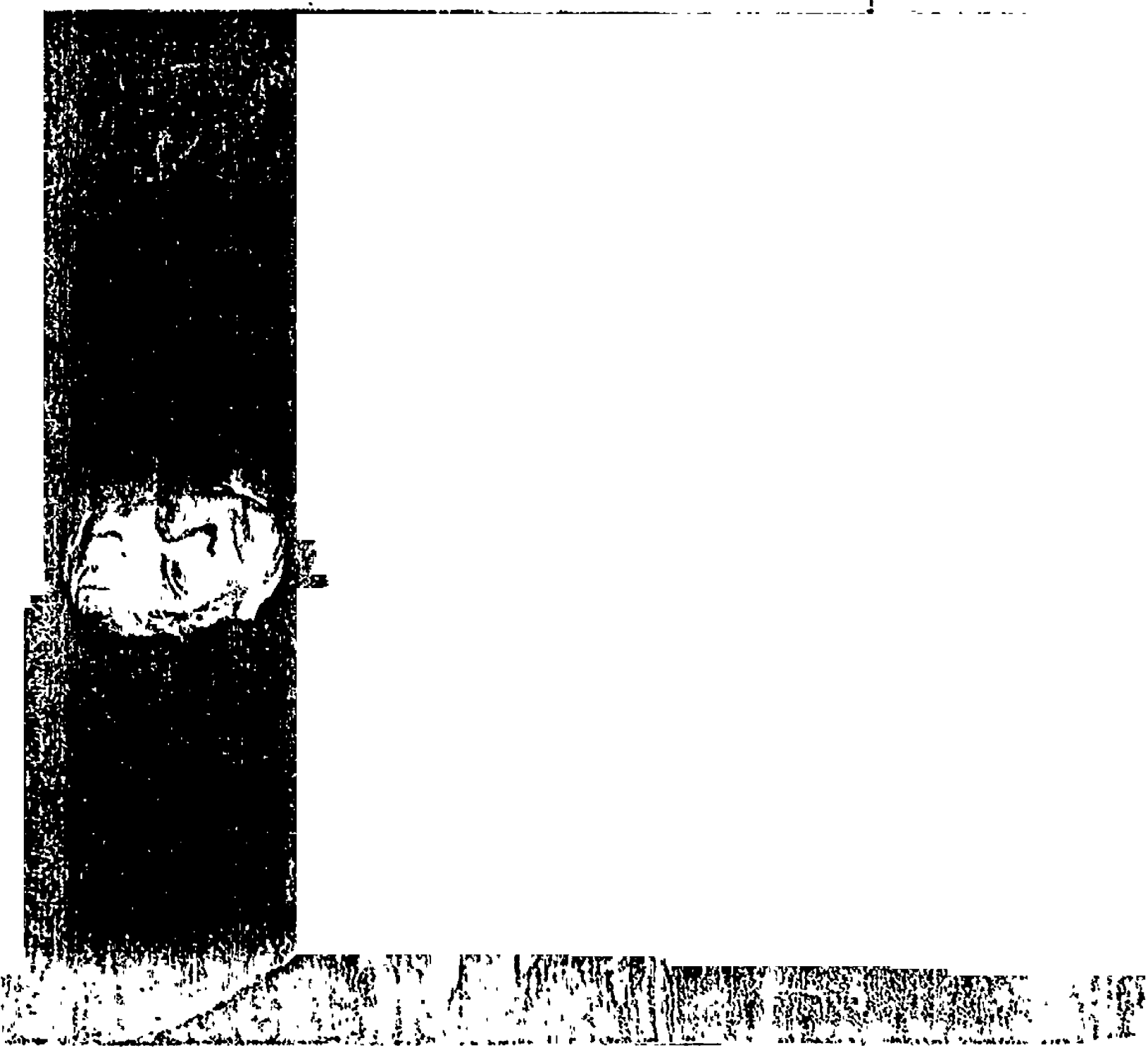


fig. 14. Sir Thomas Lawrence, "Sir Walter Scott"



. 14. Sir Thomas Lawrence, "Sir Walter Scott"

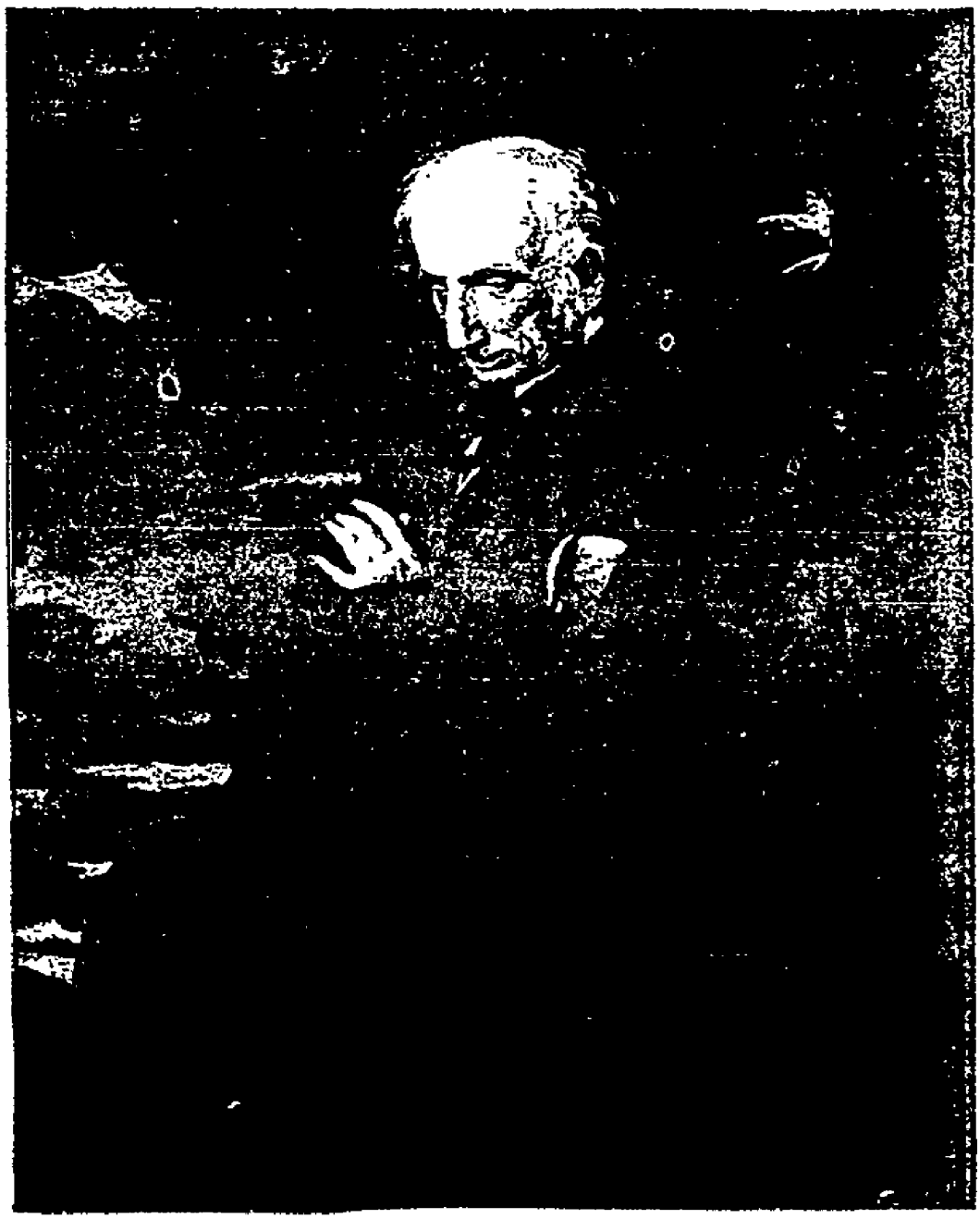


fig. 15. Benjamin Haydon, "Portrait of William Wordsworth"

on the brow, the seat of inspiration and imagination.

One final reference in the category of English painting is the illustration by Flaxman of Thomas Chatterton (fig. 2). This English artist visibly renders the idea of the poet living in squalor, a superfluous figure in the Middle Class community. Chatterton, a disillusioned youth, rests on a shabby bed, in an even more dilapidated room. He is financially and spiritually bankrupt.

* * *

The French Romantics exhibit the most concern about the plight of the suffering artist. Reasons for this fact are dubious, but at least one explanation can be proposed. Only in France were class lines and class distinctions pronouncedly sensitive subjects after the era of revolution. The Empire period made all Frenchmen intensely aware of their status as "citizens" or members of the bourgeois class. Examination of peoples and occupations who did not seem to belong to this class inevitably led to the poet's acute sensitivity to his own role in the new culture.

Although the reasons for France's interest in the artist are diverse, the fact remains that almost all major French authors and painters addressed themselves to the figure's problem. André Chénier, Alfred de Vigny, Victor Hugo, and Théophile Gautier all depict the image of the

artist in literature. Three great painters of the Romantic age--Courbet, Gericault, and Delacroix--create the image on canvas.

If we turn first to late eighteenth-century French literature we are confronted with Chénier's picture of the poet. In his poem "The Young Captive" the imprisoned victim of society, a young poet, sings his swan song. The proud, captive spirit bears a close identity to Chénier himself, executed in 1794 at the age of thirty-one. He was charged on the pretext of being "an enemy of the people." Our interest at the present, however, is the physical image of the poet that he relates in his poem. The artist sees himself as a fair flower: "And I, a flower like them, as fair, as pure . . . ."[13] As a frail victim of society, we may fill in the rest of the image for ourselves. The imprisoned poet is a delicate, feminine figure. Chénier might have gone on to sketch in blond hair, and blue eyes.

Chénier's brief description of the artist is extended and developed in Alfred de Vigny's works. In Vigny's novel Stello for instance, we find this description of a poet. During a therapy session, Stello relates to Dr. Noir his memories of seeing Chénier for the first time.

---

[13]André Chénier, "The Young Captive," trans. K. Hillard, in Old France and the Revolution, Vol. VI of Columbia University Course in Literature, ed. J. W. Cunliffe (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1896), p. 402.

> Among these groups I noticed the pale face of the young man, sad, worn, and passionate, as he moved silently through the crowd, his head sunk over his folded arms.
>
> . . .
>
> There was something of the officer's appearance in his attire, in the grey suit cut in the military fashion, in the black collar and the double-breasted vest. Clothing and features alike, smooth black hair, black eyes--there was a marked resemblance. This was the original of the portrait I was carrying: it was André de Chénier.[14]

The same description typifies another hero of Vigny's: the English poet Thomas Chatterton. Chatterton, like Chénier, is the personification of despair; an emaciated but defiant outcast of society. Vigny includes this brief character sketch at the beginning of his play Chatterton.

> A young man, eighteen years old, pale, strong face, weak body, worn out by nights of thought, both simple and elegant in his manner, timid and tender with Kitty Bell, friendly and good to the Quaker, proud with all others, and on the defensive with everyone; serious and impassioned in tone and language.[15]

Alfred de Vigny was not the only French Romantic to extoll the virtues of the ostentatious but despised poet. Théophile Gautier, Vigny's contemporary, was even more enamored of the character. He spends considerable time in A History of Romanticism describing the physical appearance of several great Romantic writers whom he knew. Although his portraits are highly glamorized and are almost

---

[14] Alfred de Vigny, Stello, trans. I. Massey (Montreal: McGill Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 110-11.

[15] _____, Chatterton, translation my own (Bologna: Riccardo Patron, 1962), p. 61.

identical to those of Vigny, his poet's features indicate the presence of an even greater spiritual force. Observe the following recollections of the initial confrontation between Gautier and Victor Hugo.

> What first struck one in Victor Hugo was the truly monumental brow that crowned his serious, placid face like a pediment of white marble . . . it really was of superhuman beauty and breadth. The mightiest thoughts might be written upon it as upon the brow of a god or of a Caesar. It bore the sign of power.
>
> . . .
>
> Hugo wore neither beard, mustache, whiskers, nor tuft on the lower lip; his face, remarkably pale, was clean shaved.
>
> . . .
>
> His dress consisted of . . . a get up at once simple and correct. Indeed no one would have suspected this thorough gentleman of being the leader of the hairy, bearded bands that were the terror of the smooth-chinned bourgeois.[16]

Gautier attributes the same external extensions of Genius to another French Romantic, Gérard de Nerval. In this case he adds the "visionary" trait to the compounded image of the artist. The bard possesses not only "light, fair hair", and a "porcelain brow" but at times "he might be seen at a street corner, hat in hand, in a sort of ecstasy, plainly away from the place where stood his body." This idea clearly refers back to the story of Plato, occasionally pausing in his walks seized in a moment of thought. Gautier continues:

---

[16]Théophile Gautier, A History of Romanticism, Vol. VIII of The Works of Théophile Gautier, p. 28.

> When I came upon him thus occupied, I was always careful not to accost him abruptly, lest I should cause him to fall from the heights of his reverie. . . . I used to stand in the line of his gaze, giving him time to return from the depths of his dream, and waiting until his eye should fall upon me of itself. . . .[17]

While Gautier develops his description of the period, he gives us a clear idea of how carefully cultivated the image of the prophet was. Recounting the evening of the first performance of Hugo's Hernani, he suggests that those young artists that had gathered at the theatre were not only of one mind about their dress but that they also agreed they were the new leaders of the new civilization.

> It was not Attila's filthy, fierce, unkempt, ignorant Huns that were encamped in front of the Théâtre-Français, but the knights of the future, the champions of thought, the defenders of the freedom of art; and they were handsome, free, and young. They had hair . . . plenty of hair, falling in soft and shining curls, for they combed it carefully. Some wore small mustaches and others full beards; that is quite true, but this fashion became their clever, proud, bold faces, which the Renaissance masters would willingly have taken for models.[18]

Vigny and Gautier sketched a verbal icon for the Romantic age. Delacroix, Gericault, and Courbet were busy rendering the same image in painting.

Eugene Delacroix is undoubtedly the greatest of the Romantic portraitists. He was also the most significant innovator of the age in his particular medium. Adhering to

---

[17] Ibid., p. 98.

[18] Ibid., pp. 139-40.

the Romantic credo that the abstract traits of a "Genius"--such as imagination and passion--could never be clearly outlined or portrayed, he resorted to developing a style in painting suitable to "suggesting" or hinting at these qualities in his sitter. Consequently, his portraits are shadowy and roughly sketched, using stormy scenes and much chiaroscuro to imply turbulent emotion and energy. Here, everything depends on loosely-knit brushwork, and on coloring, and if much seems undefined it is not only because the portrait may be unfinished but also because Delacroix felt that the spirit of greatness could not be encompassed within perfect lines and burnished form.[19] The nature of Genius was as hazy a subject as the forms in his paintings.

All of Delacroix's artist-portraits burn with this spiritual intensity. His "Self-Portrait as Ravenswood" might well be a figure who possesses the genius of Gautier's Victor Hugo.[20] This "knight of the future," this young, handsome, Hamlet character with long, dark hair and eyes, seems ready to soar like a winged spirit.

The same passionate intensity appears in another "Self-Portrait" as it does in his well-known "Chopin" and

---

[19]Lee Johnson, Delacroix (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), p. 50.

[20]Eugene Delacroix (1799-1877), "Self-Portrait as Ravenswood," 1824. fig. 16.

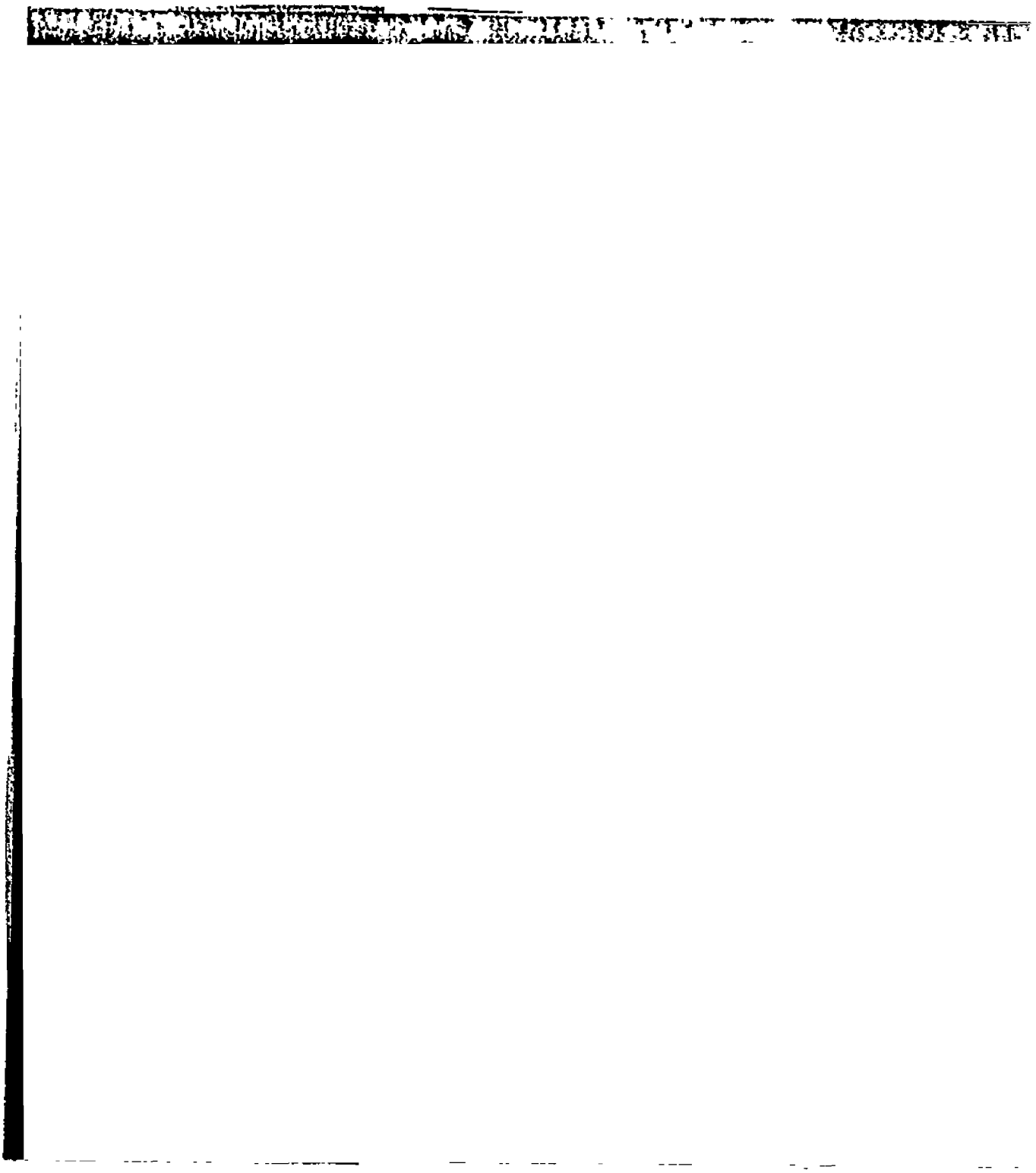


fig. 16. Eugene Delacroix, "Self Portrait as Ravenswood"

"Paganini" sketches.[21] Delacroix's pictorial conception of himself reflects a spirit emanating from within; he radiates sheer force of character. Of course, all the standard features of the Romantic portrait are present: the pale skin, the moustache, the dark, wavy hair and dark eyes, the proud, martial posture.

A similar scene, using the same sketchy technique, is adopted later by Gustave Courbet. His portrait of Hector Berlioz, the renowned Romantic composer of "Symphonie Fantastique," indicates the same defiant bard.[22] This work was not the only one which Courbet devoted to the image of the Genius. His "Portrait of Charles Baudelaire" and a "Self-Portrait" present a second popular facet of the poet's character; the contemplative man. In the canvas "Self-Portrait" painted in 1844 Courbet conceives of himself as a sleeping cavalier.[23] The bearded figure appears lost in troubled sleep. He is carelessly dressed, a characteristic of the passionate and tempestuous personality. Again, chiaroscuro is employed to create a stormy, dynamic scene.

Théodore Gericault is a third major French painter concerning himself, to some degree, with the figure of the

---

[21] _____, "Self-Portrait," n.d. fig. 17

[22] Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), "Portrait of Hector Berlioz," 1950. fig. 18.

[23] _____, "Self-Portrait," 1844. fig. 19.

fig. 17. Eugene Delacroix, "Self Portrait"

fig. 18. Gustave Courbet, "Portrait of Hector Berlioz"

fig. 19. Gustave Courbet, "Self Portrait"

artist. Like Courbet's "Self-Portrait," Gericault's autobiographic work depicts a young genius lost in dreamy contemplation.[24] The traditional windblown hair and sensitive features of the face are present but Gericault adds other items to the scene to support the mood or tone of the painting. The artist's Byronic interest in skulls is indicated by placing one or two on a shelf on the rear wall. In addition, the wall seems roughly plastered, suggesting that the painter inhabits a poor apartment. The small statue in the lower left probably symbolizes the Greek ideal, the subject of the sitter's thought.

* * *

We can conclude a cross-cultural investigation of the visual icon by a brief glance at German literature. The dominant Romantic painters of Germany, of whom few existed in this age, did not devote their major enterprises to the figure of the artist. Without a doubt many secondary artists did, but they are not our concern here. The significant German Romantic poets and painters appear to be less concerned with actually rendering the physical image of the bard than are the Americans, English, and French. However, there are a few literary documents devoted to the theme and the image is often implied if not directly given.

---

[24]Théodore Gericault (1791-1824), "Self-Portrait," n.d. fig. 20.

fig. 20. "Théodore Gericault, "Self Portrait"

Further, if the German Romantics do not devote many pages to the visual features of the artist, they certainly compensate for this absence by an intense interest in the prophet's spiritual nature and his role in society. These factors will be reviewed in later chapters of this study.

Novalis is one of the few Romantic poets of Germany to sketch for us the image of the deific bard. In a short novel, Henry von Ofterdingen, he relates his conception of the new hero. The statements below recount an historical incident in which an ancient, fictional poet recites his song for a group of courtiers.

> Such a song had never been heard, and all believed that a heavenly being had appeared among them, especially since the youth while singing seemed to become more and more beautiful, more and more magnificent, and his voice more and more powerful. The light breeze played with his golden locks. In his hands his lute seemed to become a living soul and his rapt gaze appeared to look beyond into a more mysterious realm. The childlike innocence and simplicity of his face appeared supernatural to everyone.[25]

While this fair, delicate prophet exists in the past, more masterly, manly poets live, for Novalis, in the present age. When Henry--the poet-protagonist of the work--is first introduced to Klingsohr, another Romantic poet, he describes him in the popular image of the era.

> The noble appearance of this man distinguished him above all the others. A cheerful earnestness made up the spirit of his face. A frank and lofty forehead; large,

---

[25]Novalis, Henry von Ofterdingen, trans. P. Hilty (New York: Ungar, 1964), p. 48.

> black, penetrating, and steady eyes; a mischievous touch about his cheerful mouth, and thoroughly clear, manly proportions--all these made his face significant and attractive. He was of sturdy build, his movements were quiet and expressive . . . .[26]

Much the same conventional configuration is related in E. T. A. Hoffmann's novel Kater Murr or The Tomcat Murr. In this case the artist is again surrounded by the aristocracy. One of them describes the appearance and behavior of the conductor Johannes Kreisler in the following fashion:

> "I have always," interreupted the Ratin, "I have always believed that music affects you too strongly, even destructively; for at the performance of any excellent work your whole being seems filled with it, and at the same time all the features of your face change. You become pale and incapable of speech, you have nothing but signs and tears and then attack with the bitterest mockery, with deeply wounding scorn, anyone who wants to say even one word about the artist's work."[27]

Kreisler might well be Delacroix's Chopin or Courbet's Hector Berlioz. Each is the image of pallor and defiance.

What we realize in all of these passages and paintings is a consistent delineation of the character of the Romantic artist. The Romantics chose a variety of means to declare the new spiritual, prophetic mission of the poet in the current Middle Class culture. One of these methods, the one we have just examined, was to define the exterior

---

[26] Ibid., pp. 96-97.

[27] E. T. A. Hoffmann, Kater Murr, Vol. II of Selected Writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann, trans. L. J. Dent and E. C. Knight (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 63.

of the Genius. This was one way of illuminating the interior nature of the new hero. The technique was amazingly successful and one does begin to reach some initial estimation of the stereotyped self-concept of the artist in this era. Delacroix was correct to assume that the trait of "genius" could only be suggested. The visual image comes closest to accomplishing this goal. Portraiture fills in where philosophic analysis must stop.

The visual icon was not a complete solution to the Romantic artist's desire for self-declaration. Many other methods were needed to fully illuminate the character of the prophet and seer. One of these schemes would consist of depicting, in painting and language, the treatment of the artist by bourgeois society. Other techniques would involve the analysis of the poet's abilities and his function in culture. Each of these methods would contribute in its own fashion to the completed, multihued, figure of the new savior of mankind.

CHAPTER III

LIVING WITH THE PHILISTINES

One sensitive area of concern for the Romantic artist is the life of the Genius among a bourgeois public. Reactions to this subject appear in literature and painting of the early nineteenth century. These reactions show up in dramatizations of the life of poets and painters and their treatment by the Middle Class. The creative works devoted to this theme tend to focus on two topics: (1) the literal existence of the artist-persona who is financially dependent upon the merchant class; (2) the persona's reaction to his own lacerations by the surrounding society. These topics may sometimes only be a fanciful account of the real existence of the historical Romantic artist but they do indicate something about the values of the actual poet and painter. It is on the basis, then, of these two subjects that we will organize the investigation.

The artist in the new age of necessity had to earn a living from his writing in a culture where the bourgeois materialists determined success or failure. He correctly believed that this culture had little sympathy for him or for his work. In short, the Romantic artist--no matter

whether he resided in nineteenth-century America, England, France or Germany--felt that he was a cursed outcast in society. He saw himself as the superfluous man. A captive bird, the bard was physically and spiritually crushed. It is understandable that the poet-prophet is characterized as a sleepless insomniac destined for a premature death.

A sense of alienation from the mainstream of civilization seemed to stem from two major characteristics of the artist. First, the poet had chosen a road not taken by the Middle Class when he adopted non-utilitarian goals. He had foresaken financial aspirations for spiritual ones. In an industrial age characterized by its hot pursuit of monetary gains, the drive for aesthetic goals very definitely differentiated one from the commonweal.

Secondly, the estrangement of the poet from his fellow man was caused by the artist's peculiar nature. The artist, by definition, is a figure with special gifts, the gifts of insight and expression. Since the average citizen never possessed these two abilities it was inevitable that the two parties--the artist and the public--experienced a mutual antipathy for one another. Thus, the poet's special gift ironically constitutes his special curse.

The citizens' feelings of distrust and suspicion were manifested in several forms. For one, the artist had to endure a general condition of ingratitude from a public

who considered him a foolish figure lost in pursuit of a fictitious, non-materialistic ideal. Secondly, the Middle Class taste for insipid art was detrimental to improving the social conditions of the poet and painter. As a result of general apathy for the arts there were simply no patrons or buyers for art other than the most realistic or sentimental. A well-known scholar's estimation of the status of American painting in the Romantic era applies equally well to European art of the same period.

> The portrait remained the staple of American painting, both as an economic base and as a disciplined craft, throughout the early nineteenth century. The public wanted portraits and would pay for no other kind of painting. When artists painted other types of subject matter, it was to please themselves.[1]

The true nature of this situation and what it really meant to the alienated Romantic artist can best be comprehended by examining some artistic documents from the period. The image of the artist-outcast appears in America as it does elsewhere.

One of the finest examples of the utilitarian citizen's hostility toward the artistic Genius is found in Hawthorne's short story "The Artist of the Beautiful." From passages cited in previous chapters we know that the central protagonist, Owen Warland, is a frail figure dedicated to painting. The artist's middle-class parents take

---

[1]E. P. Richardson, Painting in America, p. 150.

exception nevertheless, to his occupation. This particular incident of a clash between the values of two cultures is a microcosm of a larger problem existing in the age. First, we are given the artist's view of Owen's life--a life in this case dedicated to creating a living object out of inanimate materials.

> It seemed, in fact, a new development of the love of the beautiful, such as might have made him a poet, a painter, or a sculptor, and which was as completely refined from all utilitarian coarseness as it could have been in either of the fine arts.[2]

The audience is then informed of his parents' contrasting view of Owen's activities.

> But, at all events, . . . his objects and accomplishments made the world even more incapable than it might otherwise have been of appreciating Owen Warland's genius. The boy's relatives saw nothing better to be done--as perhaps there was not--than to bind him apprentice to a watchmaker, hoping that his strange ingenuity might thus be regulated and put to utilitarian purposes.[3]

This atmosphere of distrust for the arts is more caustically rendered in the person of Peter Hovenden, a watchmaker and the personification of materialism. As this figure reaches out to touch Owen's artistic creation Hawthorne gives us this description of the materialist.

> "Let us see," said Peter Hovenden, rising from his chair, with a sneer upon his face that always made people doubt, as he himself did, in everything but a

---

[2]N. Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful," in The Complete Short Stories. . . . , p. 423.

[3]Ibid., p. 423.

material existence.[4]

If Hawthorne seems concerned about the common citizen's reaction to art and artists, Emerson is even more upset by the state of affairs. At the beginning of his Phi Beta Kappa address to a Harvard audience he quickly introduces one of his major concerns: the debilitating effect of the new preoccupation with materialism.

> Thus far, our holiday has been simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give to letters any more.
>
> . . .
>
> Perhaps the time is already come . . . when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill.[5]

Later, while discussing the office of the artist in society, he remarks that the public is not only apathetic toward the poet but actively hates the man. The maligned scholar exists, he says, in a "state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand to society and especially to educated society."[6]

This belief is reiterated in another essay, "The Poet." Again, Emerson analyzes the nature of creative Genius, this time as it is embodied in the poet rather than

---

[4] Ibid., p. 436.

[5] R. W. Emerson, The American Scholar, in Essays Vol. I of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 81.

[6] Ibid., p. 101.

the scholar. The poet, like the educated man, is estranged from his fellow citizens:

> He is isolated among his contemporaries by truth and by his art, but with this consolation in his pursuits, that they will draw all men sooner or later. For all men live by truth and stand in need of expression.[7]

The reason for the alienation between the artist and the public is the bourgeoisie's blind pursuit of material goods. During Emerson's lament over the absence of any great national bard in America up to his time, he tells us of the mentality of the early nineteenth-century public.

> We have yet no genius in America with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times. . . .

At the close of his essay, he exhorts his fellow artists to endure during adverse times. Emerson could not have rendered so pathetic an image of the despised poet if it had not been a somewhat accurate picture of the real poet in society in his own day.

> Doubt not, O poet, but persist. Say "It is in me, and shall out." Stand there, balked and dumb, stuttering and stammering, hissed and hooted, ...[9]

The same hard times exist for Emerson's bardic characters in the poems "Saadi" and "The Poet." Scattered lines throughout both poems duplicate the traits of the Romantic

---

[7]Emerson, The Poet, in Essays, Vol. III of The Complete Works . . . ., p. 5.

[8]Ibid., p. 37.

[9]Ibid., p. 40.

artist enumerated in the essays. For this reason it is not really necessary to examine any passages from those poems. What is more significant is to examine the conditions of the artist's life as it appears in American painting.

Richardson, one of the few authorities on American Romantic art, has related that the painter devoted little time to canvases that reflect his own interest in life. This is true, I believe, and the fact that few narrative pictures by major artists are created in this era bears out Richardson's contention. Portraiture and landscape are the primary subjects that the painter could sell. If he spent any time on images of his own interest it was usually in the form of a self-portrait rendered in the new style of Delacroix. One exception to this general rule, however, is Blythe's "Art versus Law" (fig. 3). Not only does this scene depict a debilitated poet with gaunt frame, but the man is obviously a deviant from the values of the times, at least from the values of the merchant who undoubtedly owns the painter's studio. The painter clearly suffers from lack of financial support and cannot pay his bills.

A comparable status exists for the bard in English Romantic culture and receives somewhat the same depiction by English poets and painters. The "zeitgeist" of the times included a general suspicion of the creative man. An examination of the works of the six great English Romantic

poets will reveal the fact that almost all of the poets devoted some lines in a few of their best poems to the subject of the superfluous artist. Byron, for example, in "The Lament of Tasso" portrays an imprisoned Renaissance poet, the outcast of society. He is the victim of a culture that cannot comprehend his values or his motives. He is thought by the bourgeoisie to be a madman, a fool. The bard ponders his plight in prison:

> Long years!--It tries the thrilling frame to bear
> And eagle-spirit of a Child of Song--
> Long years of outrage--calumny--and wrong;
> Imputed madness, prisoned solitude. . . .[10]

This picture of an estranged Tasso is also rendered by Delacroix and by Goethe.

Wordsworth was another poet who confessed that the times were not sympathetic to the artist. In a sonnet dedicated to a despondent fellow artist--the painter Benjamin R. Haydon--he urges his friend to continue the pursuit of art even in the face of current adversity to that occupation. He suggests that "Creative Art" demands a stalwart soul in order that she may infuse "Faith in the whispers of the lonely Muse,/ While the whole world seems adverse to desert."[11] Although Wordsworth was a "humanitarian" poet

---

[10]G. N. G. Byron, "Lament of Tasso," in Poems, Vol. IV of The Works. . . . , p. 143.

[11]W. Wordsworth, "To B. R. Haydon," in Poems, Vol. III of Poetical Works, p. 21.

in basic sympathy with the common man, he did recognize that the present society was not the best of all possible civilizations.

Shelley was of the same mind but more acutely concerned for the alienated poet. The image suited his needs for depicting the tortured soul in life. He investigates the true nature of the artist and his proper role in society in a rather rational fashion in his famous "Defense of Poetry." Speaking out on the necessity of poetry in an age of materialism, he manages to condemn the current greedy nature of the bourgeoisie.

> The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceeds the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. The body has then become too unwieldy for that which animates it.[12]

For Shelley, the salvation to the age's rampant materialism lay in the teachings of the poet-legislator. This prophet would announce the direction society should take and the proper interpretation of the new goods the bourgeoisie were rapidly acquiring.

Shelley launched similar campaigns against the philistine materialists in several of his poems. In "Adonais," an elegy on the death of Keats, the poet suggests

---

[12]P. B. Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," in Prose, Vol. VII of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 135.

that Keats's premature death was induced by living in an environment of envy and hatred; the crude reviewers and public critics had cut the artist to the quick. Shelley remarks in a preface to the poem that he is not surprised that the young Keats is dead because "where cankerworms abound, what wonder if its young flower was blighted in the bud?"[13] In the fifth stanza of the poem he repeats the belief that the poet's life is one of suffering: "And some yet live, treading the thorny road,/ Which leads, through toil and hate, to Fame's serene abode."[14]

In a lesser known lament, dedicated to Wordsworth, Shelley again condemns the perverse treatment of the poet by the public. These six lines appear in the middle of the short poem published in 1816:

> Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine
> On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar:
> Thou hast like to a rock-built refuge stood
> Above the blind and battling multitude:
> In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
> Songs consecrate to truth and liberty--. . . .[15]

Shelley, as a Romantic artist, asserts in a third poet "Alastor: or the Spirit of Solitude" that the poet is indeed, an alienated member of the human community. The

---

[13]Shelley, "Adonais," in The Complete Poetical Works . . . , p. 431.

[14]Ibid., p. 433.

[15]Shelley, "To Wordsworth," in The Complete Poetical Works. . . . , p. 526.

poem details the life of the poet, an existence defined by images of desecration. His untimely death is mourned by Nature only, not mankind.

> There was a Poet whose untimely tomb
> No human hands with pious reverence reared,
> But the charmed eddies of autumnal winds
> Built o'er his moldering bones a pyramid
> Of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness:--
> . . .
> He lived, he died, he sung, in solitude.[16]

"Alastor" then, as in Shelley's other poems and in his essays, completes the multifarious picture of the solitary artist with non-utilitarian goals. The public's reaction to this figure is one of apathy and ingratitude.

Keats is a fourth English Romantic poet with some concern for the social plight of his fellow poets. In reality, his interest in the subject is slight, however. Keats is wise enough, no doubt, to avoid spending too much time dwelling on passing financial and social tribulations. Instead, he expends his major energies reflecting on more enduring aspects of human existence. There are a couple of documents, nevertheless, that show that Keats, at an early age, had some awareness of the aesthetic wilderness of the early Industrial Age. In a sonnet entitled "To Chatterton" Keats suggests that Chatterton suffers no longer; his soul has soared above a hostile world.

---

[16]Shelley, "Alastor," in The Complete Poetical Works. . . . , p. 16.

> Thou didst die
> A half-blown flow'ret which cold blasts amate.
> But this is past: thou art among the stars
> Of highest Heaven: to the rolling spheres
> Thou sweetly singest: nought thy hymning mars,
> Above the ingrate world and human fears.[17]

The same image of a base world is depicted in another poem, "The Poet." Here, a poet's spirit sometimes flies "above the gross and palpable things/ Of this diurnal ball. ... ."[18]

English painting in this period must also not be neglected as a source for the image of the cursed artist. We have already seen two such canvases which focus on the physical configuration of the poet. The same two scenes depict, in addition, the artist's confrontation with the public. In Lawrence's painting "Homer Reciting His Poems" (fig. 1) the ancient bard, dedicated to his songs, is surrounded by an apathetic audience. Flaxman's depiction of Thomas Chatterton (fig. 2) adds to the completed picture of the alienated poet. Chatterton's madness and his squalid living quarters are the result of a hostile public who refuses to allot any financial support to the artist.

If we turn to French arts and letters of the period we discover a more immediate awareness of the friction between the poet and the bourgeoisie. Vigny, Gautier, and

---

[17]John Keats, "To Chatterton," in Poems, Vol. IV of The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats, ed. H. B. Forman (New York: C. Scribners, 1938-9), p. 18.

[18]Keats, "The Poet," in Poems, Vol. IV of The Poetical Works. . . . , p. 30.

Hugo analyze the situation in literature while Daumier and Delacroix reveal the type in painting. In each artist's canon of work there are significant pieces devoted to the image. We can begin a brief survey with Vigny's play Chatterton.

Chatterton, as the reader may have concluded, is a popular image, for the Romantics, of the "poète maudit," the cursed poet. Vigny utilizes this particular historical figure in order to depict, on a larger scale, the hazardous occupation of the artist. As the drama unfolds the audience is invited to observe Chatterton's destiny--endless lacerations at the hands of a materialistic, bourgeois society. This fate is played out in John Bell's shop. The artist is surrounded by the utensils of a mercantile and industrial society personified in the fat and stuffy Lord Mayor Beckford and in the person of John Bell. Bell especially represents everything that Vigny and his fellow artists hated. In this bourgeois world Chatterton is judged solely on the basis of his material value. As a pariah he has none. Consequently, society will not support him and he must starve. As Chatterton relates his woes to the Quaker, a religious confidant and close friend, he tells us of the poet's real life: "Men of imagination are eternally crucified; sarcasm and misery are the nails of their cross." Chatterton characterizes himself as Christ among the Romans. He is the

martyred Genius, the poet who seems to be living under a curse in suffering the superior nature he has received from God. The Quaker sees Chatterton this way too.

The Quaker has no sympathy for a public who feels that the prophet is a superfluous entity. In a resounding statement, the Quaker pronounces society's utilitarian disease as incurable. The artist is superfluous since he does not possess this "mal de siecle."

> Quaker: The disease is incurable.
> Chat.: Mine?
> Quaker: No, society's--In your heart you feel compassion for those who say to you: "Be other than what you are;"-- In my thoughts I despise them because they want to say: "Withdraw from our sun; there is no room for you."[19]

Vigny's Stello reasserts the victimization of the poet-prophet. This novel repeatedly depicts the status of the aesthetic artist amid a bourgeois society. In each case, the poet is the victim of a merciless, materialistic public. Vigny illustrates, in three examples, that under all forms of government the poet meets with indifference and hatred. An absolute monarchy allows Laurent Gilbert to starve to death, a parliamentary monarchy drives Thomas Chatterton to suicide, a republic guillotines André Chénier.

Any number of passages can be found that dramatize the artist's life, and the one on Chatterton cited here is typical. In this scene, the Lord Mayor of London, William

---

[19]Alfred de Vigny, Chatterton, p. 86.

Beckford--a pragmatic materialist of the first order and a figure representing the public's view--considers giving a destitute Chatterton a job, but not before admonishing him about the worthlessness of art.

> "I have mentioned your name in certain quarters, my friend, and I do want to help you out of your predicament. For the past year no one has asked the Lord Mayor of London for help in vain. I know that you don't know how to do anything but scribble those damn verses in that incomprehensible gibberish of yours. Even assuming that someone might be able to understand them, they aren't much good any way.
>
> . . .
>
> But even if they were fine poetry, very beautiful, and all that, what would they be good for? I ask you that: what is it all good for?"
>
> Chatterton showed no more sign of movement than a statue. The seven or eight bystanders preserved a profound and discreet silence: but one could see in their glances their hearty approval of the Lord Mayor's conclusion, and the smiles they exchanged repeated: "What is it all good for?"[20]

By maliciously offering Tom a job as a valet rather than a government sponsorship as a poet, Beckford consciously denies the value of Chatterton's existence. Beckford asserts that Tom's only possible value to society is utilitarian. By choosing not to accept the poet on his own terms he condemns him to death.[21]

It is natural that Beckford--holding this set of definitions for art--feels that those who pursue poetry pursue fantasy and illusion. Consequently, they are fools.

---

[20]Vigny, Stello, p. 58.

[21]R. C. Dale, "Chatterton is the Essential Romantic Drama," ECr, 5 (1965), 137.

Beckford continues:

> "To our mind, poetry is a rather interesting stylistic discipline which is sometimes practised by clever people; but who ever takes it seriously? Only fools!"[22]

Perhaps the most cynical statement made in the novel is that by Dr. Noir. The comment suggests that artists will be outcasts eternally under traditional governments becuase all political institutions are based on false premises. Governments hate and fear the truth. Since the poet is dedicated to Beuaty, Goodness, and Truth--especially Truth--he confronts a fated antipathy by government. Dr. Noir attempts to convince Stello of this fact, and of the fact that all political activities are antithetical to the poet's nature. Dr. Noir speaks on government or "Power":

> "Since Power is based on the conventions of the times, and since every social order is founded on a more or less ridiculous falsehood, while on the contrary the beauty of Art can only derive from the most intimate cast of truth, you will understand that Power, of whatever sort it may be, finds perpetual opposition in every work created in this way. Hence its constant effort to suppress or to seduce the arts."
> "Alas!" said Stello; "to what a painful resistance the Powers condemn the Poet! But cannot Power also adjust itself to Truth?"
> "No, it cannot, I tell you!" the Doctor cried violently, striking the floor with his cane. My three political examples were not meant to prove that Powers were wrong to act as they did, but simply that the essence of Power is irreconcilable with your poetic essence, and that one cannot expect it to do anything but try to destroy what conflicts with it."[23]

---

[22] Vigny, Stello, p. 60.

[23] Ibid., pp. 172-3.

Stello concludes with Dr. Noir's sound advice to all poets present and future. Artists must purposely isolate themselves from society if they hope to lead the proper life. Further, artists must dedicate themselves solely to the pursuit of Beauty and Truth. They must "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's."

Although Victor Hugo is essentially a Humanitarian poet while his contemporary, Alfred de Vigny, is a promulgator of the Art-for-Art's-Sake movement, both men do agree that the artist suffers mightily at the hands of an unappreciative bourgeois public. Hugo's work, like Vigny's, is permeated with comments to this effect. Passages lamenting the treatment of men of Genius abound in the "Preface" to Hernani, in several poems, and in William Shakespeare, a work that attempts to analyze the character of greatness. All of these works denounce the conditions of the times, the conditions under which the poet has to work.

A selection or two from Hugo's works should serve to demonstrate his interest in the social conditions of the artist's life. One such example is a passage from the preface to his revolutionary play Hernani first performed in 1830. In a few, brief, introductory pages he illuminates something of the times, something of the status of the artist in 1830. He begins by lamenting the recent, premature

death of a poet:

> At this moment of literary turmoil and contention, whom should we the more pity, those who die, or those who wrestle? Truly, it is sad to see a poet of twenty years old pass away, to behold a broken lyre, and a future that vanishes; but, is not repose also some advantage? Are there not those around whom calumnies, injuries, hatreds, jealousies, secret wrongs, base treasons incessantly gather; true men, against whom disloyal war is waged; devoted men, who only seek to bestow on their country one sort of freedom the more, that of art and intelligence; laborious men, who peaceably pursue their conscientious work, a prey on one side to the vile stratagems of official censure, and on the other exposed too often to the ingratitude of even those for whom they toil; may not such be permitted sometimes to turn their eyes with envy toward those who have fallen behind them, and who rest in the tomb?[24]

Hugo proposes that in these perilous times of ingratitude and betrayal it is understandable that the poet might occasionally envy the dead. Since the artist pursues the nonmaterialistic goals of art and intelligence he is hated and envied.

The author of Hernani also devoted several poems to the subject. One of them, "Genius: To Chateaubriand," depicts the stock image of the tortured poet whose poetic genius constitutes both a gift and a curse. He is a "solitary soul" who must "suffer Prometheus' doom," hatred and envy. A second poem, from a series entitled "Songs of Youth," establishes a wasteland backdrop for the environment of the lacerated poet. The poem begins with a scene

---

[24]Victor Hugo, "Preface" to Hernani in Victor Hugo: Poems and Dramas, p. 3.

in which the artist beholds a tree in bloom.

> Ere yet my youthful songs beloved,
> Tender and true, keen pangs had proved
> Of the base world's ingratitude,
> Far from the bitter blasts of reason,
> How bloomed they in how bright a season
> With sweetest scents and rays endued![25]

The poet's songs, like petals on a tree, bloom in spring--an amiable season. Yet it is now the winter of discontent; his songs, like the petals, are now driven off the tree by the freezing wind and are bespattered with mud from the earth. Observing the tree racked by frigid blasts of cold, he is brought back from his apotheosis to the present moment, a world of mockery and contempt. The poem ends with these lines:

> Till lo, I'm turned from looking after,
> Hearing the dull world's mocking laughter
> Around the sighing branches bare![26]

Hugo scrutinizes the poet's position in culture in a more hypothetical manner in his long essay, William Shakespeare. One passage in this work elucidates what is evidently a common complaint by the bourgeois and pedants against the man of genius. Artists are accused of being disruptive citizens in an age desiring order.

> These poets agitate, disturb, trouble, upset, overwhelm, make everything shiver, break things occasionally

---

[25]Hugo, "Songs of Youth," in Victor Hugo: Poems and Dramas, p. 85.

[26]Ibid., p. 86.

> here and there; they may do mischief--the thing is serious! Thus speak the Athenae . . . the sworn professors, the societies called "learned," . . . and the Philistines after them--all who represent in literature and art the great party of order.[27]

Hugo later remarks, though, that these reasons--for the casting out of the poet from society--are only excuses masking the true feelings of the populace. The public hates the poet actually because it envies him; he is a superior man. Hugo them proposes that it is inevitable that the bourgeoisie should be angry with the artist.

> The powerful, the grand, the luminous, are, from a certain point of view, things calculated to offend. To be surpassed is never agreeable; to feel one's own inferiority is to feel a pang. The beautiful . . . humilitates at the same time that it enchants; . . . so that the pleasure beauty gives is tainted with resentment, and the word "superb" comes finally to have two senses, one which breeds distrust of the other.[28]

If we look for a visual image of the victimized poet in France, we must turn to the paintings of Eugene Delacroix and Honoré Daumier. Delacroix's series on Tasso in prison, of which figure 21 is a typical example, depicts the emaciated poet imprisoned while jeering fools look on.[29] In this canvas completed in 1826 we are shown a despondent Renaissance artist in a state of sad melancholy oblivious to the crowd.

---

[27]Hugo, William Shakespeare, p. 205.

[28]Ibid., p. 208.

[29]Eugene Delacroix, "Tasso In Prison," 1826. fig. 21.

fig. 21. Eugene Delacroix, "Tasso in Prison"

An artist tormented by fools is also the theme of Daumier's "Patrons."[30] Gullible patrons--the bourgeoisie--scrutinize the painter's work with naive amazement. Plump, contented fools judge the work of the sensitive, Romantic Genius. The artist makes a valiant attempt to suppress his livid hatred of the couple.

The same cruel lack of understanding on the bourgeoisie's part shows up in Daumier's sketch "A True Lover of the Arts."[31] A paunchy merchant armed with magnifying glass adopts an anachronistic, philosophe's view of Romantic painting. He feels that art, like life, is subject to close, scientific examination. The merchant's study of detail and precision of line is irrelevant to Delacroix's method of painting. Vague "suggestion" and lack of detail reflect the purpose of the Romantic's work. This man obviously loathes painting and only inhabits the museum in a vain attempt to emulate the passé, cultured aristocracy.

In conclusion, we turn to German Romantic literature for the image of the crushed artist. German literature from the early Romantic period demonstrates that the configuration is already present. Goethe depicts the circumstances of the artist in society in two of his major works,

---

[30]Daumier, "Patrons," n.d. fig. 22.

[31]Daumier, "A True Lover of the Arts," 1847. fig. 23.

fig. 22. "Honoré Daumier, "Patrons"

fig. 23. Honoré Daumier, "The Middle Class: A True Lover of the Arts"

Torquato Tasso and Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship. In these dramas the author draws an artist figure tortured by a materialistic, pragmatic-minded, Middle Class.

In Goethe's tragic portrayal of the Renaissance poet Torquato Tasso, we see the German dramatist's characterization of public hatred for the artist. In turn, Tasso's harmartia is his naivete about this rude nature of the common man. Because he strives, as a poet, for the Ideal he fails to cope with the real world. Because of this error he is finally placed in prison.

Tasso's greatest adversary, the bourgeoisie, is represented by one figure in the play: Antonio, the king's counselor. By commerce and diligent work he has elevated himself to a position in which he keeps company with the aristocracy. The artist Tasso has been awarded the same social privilege but purely on the basis of his God-given poetic talents, not on the basis of his utilitarian industriousness. The prudent Antonio resents as presumptuous Tasso's violation of ordinary rules for social mobility and holds up the poet's foibles and eccentricities to ridicule. At the same time Antonio envies the homage the aristocracy pays to the bard. These polar forces act as a catalyst to produce the tragic outcome of the work--the imprisonment of Tasso and consequently his divorce from the world at large.

This is the basic dilemma which generates the

action of the play. But while a tragic series of events develops we discover several passages that reflect the mentality of a later, Romantic Age. For example, as Tasso talks with Leonora, his close friend, he makes this declaration about the artist: "With shy reserve the artist shuns the crowd,--/ Its judgment but perplexes."[32] The same belief is repeated in a soliloquy later in Act IV. Tasso feels that he is surrounded by envious fools. He laments his betrayal by all those around him.

> The hateful and ill-boding, feather'd throng,
> Obscene attendants upon ancient night,
> Swarm forth and whirl round my devoted head.
> Whither, oh whither, shall I bend my steps,
> To shun the loathsome brood that round me flit,
> And 'scape the dread abyss that yawns before.[33]

Thus, our image of the superfluous outcast appears again and again.

Tasso offers an explanation for the sharp contention between the bourgeois Antonio and himself, the artist. He suggests that the middle-class merchant hates the artist because the Genuis possesses a God-given talent, a talent the merchant cannot win through work or through finance. This poetic gift--a blessing of fate--allows the artist to abide in the company of kings, to be recognized as a Genius.

---

[32]Johann W. Goethe, Torquato Tasso, in The Dramatic Works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, trans. E. A. Bowring, et al. (London: Bell, 1918), p. 369.

[33]Ibid., p. 426.

The artist's status the bourgeois finds either impossible or difficult to acquire. Tasso relates to Leonora his distrust of Antonio:

> Trust me, no selfish spirit can escape
> The torment of base envy. Such a man
> Pardons in others honour, rank, and wealth;
> For thus he argues, these thou hast thyself,
> Or thou canst have them, if thou persevere,
> Of if propitious fortune smile on thee.
> But that which Nature can alone bestow,
> Which aye remaineth inaccessible
> To toil and patient effort, which nor gold
> Nor yet the sword, nor stern persistency
> Hath power to wrest--that he will never forgive.[34]

Tasso's estimation of Antonio's rude character seems true. But it is realized too late and it foreshadows the poet's imprisonment as a result of the counselor's accusations. Tasso arrives, like Vigny's Dr. Noir, at the conclusion that the poet's destruction may be an inevitable consequence of his own aesthetic nature. The poet is a victim of his own beauty.

Near the conclusion of the play Alphonso, the king, pleads with Tasso to abandon his stubborn devotion to an idealistic life and adopt a more pragmatic existence: "I charge thee, Tasso, snatch thee from thyself!/ The man will profit, though the bard may lose."[35] Tasso's reply to this advice reflects the Romantic artist's belief in his fatal destiny. He accepts the notion that his artistic activities

---

[34] Ibid., p. 429.

[35] Ibid., p. 452.

will inevitably instigate his ruin.

> To quell the impulse I should vainly strive,
> Which ceaseless in my bosom, day and night
> Alternates ever. Life were life no more
> Were I to choose to poetize, to dream.
> Wouldst thou forbid the cunning worm to spin,
> For that to nearer death he spins himself?
> From his own being, he unfoldeth still
> The costly texture, nor suspends his toil,
> Till in his shroud he hath immur'd himself.[36]

These are scattered instances in another work by Goethe--Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship--that also illuminate the frictions between the merchant class and the artist. This "bildungsroman" focuses on the youth and early adulthood of Wilhelm Meister, an aspiring playwright. One of the minor aspects of the novel is the running contention between Meister's old friend Werner, a merchant, and himself. Wilhelm often rebukes his utilitarian friend for deviating from the true path of life, an aesthetic existence. He addresses Werner, for example, in this fashion:

> "Pardon me" said Wilhelm, smiling; "you begin by the form, as if it were the matter; you traders commonly, in your additions and balancings, forget what is the proper net-result of life."[37]

Miester accuses Werner of possessing the malady of the bourgeoisie, a grasping, peurile materialism.

> Thy mode of being and imagining appears to turn on boundless acquisition, and a light mirthful manner of enjoyment: I need scarcely tell thee, that in all this

---

[36] Ibid., p. 452.

[37] Goethe, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, Vol. I. of Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels, trans. T. Carlyle (London: Chapman, 1907), p. 65.

I find little that can charm me.[38]

A comparable view of the Genius who has rejected a life of material acquisition appears in Novalis's novel of apprenticeship Henry von Ofterdingen. The mystical poet appears amidst the populace singing his songs. He bemoans the fact that while he spreads a gospel of joy and beauty, the surrounding philistines ignore him. The poet-prophet suffers ingratitude, public apathy, and poverty. The bard sings this song about the poet's cursed gift.

> The bard on pathways rude and hilly
> Must rend his garb on many a thorn;
> He wades through bogs and waters chilly:
> None lends a hand to the forlorn.
> Alone and pathless--lamentation
> Now overflows his heart again.
>
> . . .
>
> 'A mournful lot to me was given,
> Abandon and alone I stray;
> I spread the peace and joy of heaven,
> Yet no one will in kind repay.
> Though people draw from me the pleasure
> They take in life and all their land,
> They choke their hearts with niggard measure
> And send me forth with empty hand.[39]

Among other Romantic works of art containing descriptions of the maligned artist, three might be examined at least briefly: Grillparzer's play Sappho, Hoffmann's novel Kater Murr, and Hölderlin's epistolary novel Hyperion.

Although Franz Grillparzer's play Sappho follows a classical, Aristotelian structure, the drama can be inter-

---

[38] Ibid., p. 327.

[39] Novalis, Henry von Ofterdingen, p. 49.

preted as a Romantic document. Sappho, the tragic heroine and central persona, is a deific poetess more suited for life on Mount Olympus than an existence among the valleys of mankind. Yet Sappho's one weakness, her single harmartia, is a love for mankind, a human need for companionship. Love, which is normally thought of as an admirable trait in a person, constitutes, for Sappho, a near fatal flaw in her character. Her love for the human race is symbolized in her love for Phaon, a handsome Greek youth. She hopes to abandon the lonely, aloof life of art and join the life of men and their sensuous pleasures. We see this desire in Sappho's reference to Phaon when she speaks to her fellow citizens:

> With his superb endowments he was destined
> To draw me down with sweet compulsive force
> From the high cloudy peaks of poetry
> Into the fair and flowery vales of life; . . . .[40]

Human existence seems a golden dream to Sappho. She contrasts the human level of life with the dismal existence of the poet. The life Sappho refers to here can be interpreted as the life of the Romantic artist among a bourgeois public. With bitter irony in her voice, the prophetess suggests that the poetic gift is also a curse.

> It's not for nothing that the Muses' chorus
> Have picked the laurel as a mark of grace,

---

[40]F. Grillparzer, Sappho in Franz Grillparzer's Plays on Classical Themes, trans. S. Solomon (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 34.

> Cold, fruitless, scentless, it fatigues the head
> As recompense for many a sacrifice.
> A harsh wind haunts the heights of human kind
> And the poor artist is forever forced,
> To beg a little from life's overflow![41]

Unfortunately, the love between Sappho and Phaon does not endure, and Sappho is soon betrayed by her lover. This betrayal characterizes, in an allegorical fashion, the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the artist. The artist lavishes his poetry on an envious, boorish public who react only by attempting to pull the bard down to a base existence. Phaon is the first to realize this condition is inevitable but Sappho is the last to understand. Phaon remarks to Sappho in Act V that the poet must remain aloof in life. It is the same conclusion that Vigny's Stello came to.

> Let Sappho consort with the lofty ones;
> One may not with impunity descend
> From the gods' feast to mortal company.
> The arm, in which the golden lyre rested,
> Is dedicated, may not touch what's earthly.[42]

Late in the play Phaon, as a public figure, is rebuked for his treatment of the bard. Rhamnes, a devoted servant to Sappho, scolds Phaon for his inhospitable reaction to Sappho's wonderful gifts of poetry and love. Rhamnes suggests that Sappho's one error was stooping to the level of mankind, getting involved in the chaotic, vile

---

[41] Ibid., p. 40.

[42] Ibid., p. 119.

life of man.

> That she did love you, that she should have raised
> Up to her from the dust the thankless viper
> That lacerates her heart with venomous tooth;
> That she should squander all her wealth on you,
> In no sense worthy to esteem such treasures
> This is the single blemish in her life. . . .[43]

Grillparzer's tragic denouement concludes with Sappho's plea to the gods to absolve her of a weakness for mankind, to allow her to regain the aloof, deific life of the artist.

Hoffmann's Kater Murr is much more humorous in tone than Grillparzer's Sappho. Nevertheless, there are some serious themes in Hoffmann's fragmented novel. These topics center on the social conditions of the artist in the Romantic period. Hoffmann's artist, Meister Abraham, symbolizes the poet who suffers envy and hatred at the hands of the public. Because the poet devotes himself to noble aspirations he is feared and distrusted by the common man who centers his life on more mundane matters. As a consequence of the public's attitude the poet is a pariah, a scapegoat, an object-lesson in a materialistic society. Meister Abraham defends a fellow artist--Johannes Kreisler--before a group of courtiers. Actually, he is offering an apologia for the artist at large.

> "What," he cried in a rising voice, "what do you all have against this Johannes? What evil has he ever done you that you will not grant him a refuge, a little place in the world?

---

[43] Ibid., p. 123.

> . . .
> You see, Kreisler does not wear your colors, he does not understand your idiom; . . . . You cannot regard him as one of yourselves, and that angers you.
> . . .
> The spirit of true love dwells in him; but can it warm a heart that is frozen for all eternity, in which indeed, there never was the spark which that spirit can inflame? You do not like Kreisler because that feeling of superiority that you are forced to concede to him is an uncomfortable one and because you fear the man who traffics in matters higher than those that fit exactly into your sphere."[44]

Again, we must conclude that the poet is destined, by his very nature, to be alienated from his fellow man.

We will finish our survey of the estranged artist in Romantic Germany with Friedrich Hölderlin's Hyperion. In Hyperion's letters to his confidential friend, Bellarmin, the poet illustrates a typical Romantic reaction to the world about him. He concludes that most men exist on the level of brute beasts.

> As I went now here, now there among these polished people, it seemed to me that human nature had resolved itself into the multifarious species of the animal kingdom. As everywhere, so here, too, the men were especially demoralized and corrupted.
> Some animals howl when they hear music. But my more mannerly humans laughed when the conversation turned to beauty of spirit and virtue of heart. Wolves run away when you strike a light. When these men saw a spark of reason, they turned their back like thieves.[45]

That men are beasts is a notion concluded often by Hyperion throughout the novel. This idea is especia[illegible] hammered

---

[44]E. T. A. Hoffmann, Kater Murr, p. 198.

[45]Hölderlin, Hyperion, trans. W. R. Trask (New York: New American Lib., 1965), p. 35.

home when he attempts to lead a subjugated Greece to freedom and the virtuous life only to discover that the Greeks, once freed, loot and pillage the decimated land.

There are additional passages in the work that decry the plight of the artist, and this final lament for the alienated bard is typical.

> It is heart-rending, too, to see your poets, your artists, and all those who still honour the Genius, who love and cultivate Beauty. The poor good creatures live in the world like strangers in their own house, they are exactly like longsuffering Ulysses when he sat at his door disguised as a beggar while the shameless suitors rioted in the hall and asked, "Who sent us this vagabond?"[46]

The image of the superfluous artist is a part of German Romantic culture as the various works cited above indicate. Yet, the figure of the poet or painter does not appear in the major works of any important German painter of the era. We must remember, however, that there really were few significant painters in Germany at this time. In abandoning, then, any discussion of the cursed poet, it must suffice to say that an interest in the social conditions of the artist does exist for the German Romantic but that the figure of the bard appears substantially only in literature of the period.

* * *

These were the social conditions under which the

---

[46] Ibid., pp. 165-6.

artist was forced to work. Estranged from the public, he adopted one of two positions towards his tormentors. He either remained passive and gave in to the citizens' desire for utilitarianism or he defied the bourgeoisie and their materialistic aspirations. His defiance of the Middle Class manifests itself in a disregard for bourgeois, conventional manners, and the adoption of a superior, arrogant pose. But one almost believes on occasion that this latter type took some malicious comfort in his defiance. The image of the agonized artist, who sports as a stigmata of his holy war against the Philistines his often self-inflicted wounds, is almost dear to the Romantic Genius. The image, after all, was well adapted to his conception of himself as a martry to the arts. He could have the satisfaction of visualizing himself as an apostle of the religion of art, persecuted for his beliefs.[47]

The two reactions--the "assertive" and the "passive"--possess characteristics peculiar to each. The assertive or extroverted artist is characterized by his violent temper and his atrocious, irritable mannerisms. Both traits indicate a defiant, Promethean individual hostile to the prevailing bourgeois culture. He is Gray's angry Bard instead of Macpherson's Ossian.

---

[47]So professor Pelles feels in Art, Artists, and Society, p. 36.

Romantic artists demonstrate their hostility by pursuing a life-style that serves to reinforce their alienation from the community. That is, the assertive bard hates the insensitive, materialistic bourgeoisie and therefore makes a conscious attempt to differentiate himself in any possible fashion from these "philistines." The behavioral pattern he undertakes to announce his uniqueness among men consists of an atypical, bohemian set of social manners often including some form of shocking costume. Théophile Gautier's red vest and green trousers and Byron's bizarre escapades are only two examples of behaviour reflecting the defiant, assertive, Romantic artist.

In contrast to the belligerent artist we also observe a second personality type and his peculiar reaction to the Middle Class. We might call this figure the introverted or passive poet. Life acts upon him, not he upon life. He is characterized by an introspective, melancholy personality. Withdrawn and self-analytic, this character prefers to retire rather than defy the surrounding insensitive world. Convinced he cannot change the nature of a crass bourgeoisie, he relinquishes the attempt and dreams of soaring, bird-like, to a more pleasing, poetic realm. In some ways this figure is nothing more than the man of feeling of the eighteenth century--somewhat deprived perhaps, by a greater sense of fatality and of impending doom, sick

with the "mal du diecle."[48] Lamartine became famous in his assumption of this pose. Something of the desire for self-dissolution appears also in Keats's poem "Ode to a Nightingale." As the poet silently observes a nightingale he thinks that the bird symbolizes an existence freed from the gross burdens of this world. The artist wishes he could escape or retreat from chaotic life into the serene abode of a nightingale, to fade away gently and die without protest.

> . . . That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
> And with thee fade away into the forest dim:
>
> Fade far away, dissolve and quite forget
> What thou among the leaves hast never known,
> The weariness, the fever, and the fret. . . .

The characterization of both reactionary patterns of behavior, the assertive and passive, appears from country to country during the early nineteenth century. Further, it appears in the two media of literature and painting. A brief survey of the two types is helpful for the purposes of further elucidating the position of the artist-prophet in society.

Emerson is one American Romantic who presents the image of the assertive, defiant bard. His characterization of the figure shows up in his essay The American Scholar and his poem, "Merlin." We have already noted, in an

---

[48] M. Shroder, Icarus, p. 38.

earlier discussion of Emerson, his declaration that the artist is an active man.[49] He is no recluse. He begrudges every opportunity for action lost. But Emerson includes other traits of the poet-prophet in this essay too. Once he has established that the "scholar" or artist has determined the proper aesthetic goals in life, and accepted the responsibility for leading society in this correct direction, he must then never relent in his pursuits. He must defy the public's cry of discontent. Emerson conveys this proposition in the following manner.

> These being his functions, it becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and he only knows the world.[50]

A similar estimation of character appears in the image of Merlin, the powerful and dynamic prophet. In the poem titled after this Arthurian person, we see a Platonic poet inspired by the gods. The poet uses his inspiration, in turn, to lead mankind toward a noble and joyful existence. This is no passive recluse that Emerson heroizes. He is a forceful, assertive personality reforming a foolish, insensitive civilization.

> The kingly bard
> Must smite the chords rudely and hard,
> As with hammar or with mace;

---

[49]Cf. passage by Emerson on the American scholar, cited on pp. 51-2.

[50]Emerson, The American Scholar, in Essays, Vol. I of The Complete Works. . . . , pp. 120-22.

> Artful thunder, which conveys
> Secrets of the solar track,
> Sparks of the supersolar blaze.
> . . .
> He shall not seek to weave,
> In weak, unhappy times,
> Efficacious rhymes;
> Wait his returning strength.
> Bird that from the nadir's floor
> To the zenith's top can soar--. . . .[51]

Consistently, the tone and general imagery is generated from a figure of strength. The prophet might well be a massive and powerful Moses as rendered by Michelangelo.

Hawthorne's bard is less powerful in physique but is still a defiant man. He refuses to give in to bourgeois demands. The image of the artist--as it appears in his two stories that concern that character--is always one of an exceptional, forceful personality, if not a giant in physical stature. In "The Prophetic Pictures" Hawthorne's painter is a demonic man, creating the future of individual's lives. His prophetic pictures foreshadow realities. In "The Artist of the Beautiful" Owen Warland--a diminutive artist-persona--prompts himself to be a strong-willed artist in the face of Robert Danforth, a blacksmith symbolizing the Middle Class. He laments a state of affairs in which the pursuit of art seems useless when juxtaposed to the pragmatic value of the blacksmith's trade.

> ". . . all, all, look so vain and idle whenever my path is crossed by Robert Danforth! He would drive me mad

---

[51]Emerson, "Merlin," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works . . . , pp. 120-22.

> were I to meet him often. His hard, brute force darkens and confuses the spiritual element within me; but I, too, will be strong in my own way. I will not yield to him."[52]

While Owen contemplates this posture of defiance the narrator of the story supports the artist's decision to defend his integrity.

> It is requisite for the ideal artist to possess a force of character that seems hardly compatible with its delicacy; he must keep his faith in himself while the incredulous world assails him with its utter disbelief; he must stand up against mankind and be his sole disciple, both as respects his genius and the objects to which it is directed.[53]

Walt Whitman wrote few works that directly describe the assertive and defiant poet. He seldom presents an irritable, hostile bard primarily because his poet-prophets are humanitarian types who realize no deep-rooted conflicts with their fellow bourgeois citizens. If his poems do not contain an angry artist he does create a general tone of picture of an assertive poet. Sometimes a line can be found here or there in his poems that does paint the forceful, prophetic figure. An example appears in his early poem "Starting from Paumanok." "I exultant to be ready for them will now shake out carols stronger and haughtier than have ever yet been heard upon earth."[54]

---

[52]Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful," in The Complete Short Stories . . . . , p. 425.

[53]Ibid., p. 425.

[54]Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok," in Poems, Vol. III of The Collected Writings . . . . , p. 22.

The configuration of the "haughty" artist shows up at least once in American painting of the Romantic era. In West's "Trelawny" (fig. 10) we have already observed the features of the passionate personality. We can also see that this English Romantic is a forceful individual. We must assume that he is a man of action.

When we turn to English Romantic literature and painting the appearance of the assertive, Promethean bard is virtually absent. No aritst-persona in major works can be classified as a defiant type. There are proud, irritable, defiant artists in the era but these men did not give their bards a hostile guise in their writings. Blake and Byron, according to popular accounts of their lives, led audacious, defiant existences, but the artist-personas drawn by Byron, for example, are always of the passive sort.

Even in English painting the image of the arrogant poet seldom exists. Two exceptions perhaps are Martin's "The Bard" (fig. 8) and Lawrence's portrait of Sir Walter Scott (fig. 14). In the first work a solitary poet, high up on a pinnacle of rock, hurls down what may be insults to civilization below. In the second painting Scott is shown as a proud, defiant personality ready to defend the value of his occupation against any scoffing, bourgeois critic.

French Romanticism abounds in the image of the caustic, defiant bard in contrast to the absence of the figure

in English arts. Vigny and Gautier use the type in their writings while Courbet and Daumier do so on canvas.

In Vigny's Stello, the artist-persona Stello recounts the day André de Chénier was captured and imprisoned. Chénier, Stello recalls, announced that he would use his last ounce of strength to defy his tormentors. Remarks to this effect are spoken while Chénier and others are in prison.

> "They are nothing but butchers, scribbling laws; since the blade cannot gleam in my grasp, I can still avenge myself with my one remaining weapon, my pen; if I have but one day left to live, it will be used to spit upon their names, to hail their approaching torture. . . ."
> Hearing his voice ring out, the prisoners had gathered round him, ... An unbelievable change had come over him. He seemed to have grown suddenly taller; his anger magnified him and gave a new power to his look; he was magnificent.[55]

Théophile Gautier, in his History of Romanticism, points out that the pose of defiance was an admired and highly cultivated life-style in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Rejection of middle-class mores had become the basis for a new mode of existence. Gautier describes the life of a large group of artists:

> The main points of the programme which every man endeavored to carry out to the best of his ability, the ideals and the secret desires of the Romanticist youth, were to freely develop every caprice of thought, even if it offended taste, conventionality, and rule; to hate and repel to the utmost of one's power the profane vulgar, as Horace called it, the grocers, Philistines, or bourgeois, as the mustachioed and long-haired young

---

[55]Vigny, Stello, p. 114.

painter students named them. . . .[56]

Later, Gautier reminisces fondly of his epitaph--the man who wore a red vest and had long hair. He is satisfied with this legend of himself because it symbolized his alienation from the public.

> Nor am I sorry to leave this impression behind me; it has a certain grim haughtiness about it, and in spite of some youthful lack of taste, exhibits a not unpleasant contempt for public opinion and ridicule.[57]

Perhaps the disgust of the superfluous, Romantic artist for the surrounding materialistic society is best manifested in the following comment by Gautier. In these lines a victimized generation of young bards releases its hostilities towards an apathetic, adult community.

> Yea, verily, I did look at them with contempt, these larvae of the past and routine, at all those foes of art, of idealism, of liberty, and of poetry, who sought to close the gates of the future with their palsied hands, and in my heart burned fierce desire to scalp them with my tomahawk and to hang these trophies on my belt.[58]

Declarations similar to these appear in French Romantic painting. Courbet's "Self-Portrait" (fig. 19) shows the poet as a sleeping cavalier, a bard with an assertive nature. His portrait of Hector Berlioz (fig. 18) depicts the same forceful character. Here, however, we also

---

[56]Gautier, A History of Romanticism, p. 89.

[57]Ibid., p. 128.

[58]Ibid., p. 135.

see the angry artist of irritable temper.

Daumier, as an artist, strikes out at the crude tastes of the Middle Class also. He characterizes the bourgeois audiences of the day as easily-duped idiots in "Theatre Sketches" (fig. 7) and in "Patrons" (fig. 22). Daumier, however, could sometimes see the affected side of the bellicose, artist role. The French cartoonist must have felt that Fielding was correct when he suggested that one great source of the ridiculous is affectation. In Daumier's sketch "The Exposition of 1859" he properly satirizes the would-be artist of great pretentions but little talent.[59] The caption beneath the drawing reads: "They refused to let me show this . . . the fools." He ridicules the artistic "dandy" who procures a mode of existence in imitation of a true artist.

Unlike the French Romantic artists, the German poets and painters took little interest in acknowledging, in their arts, the existence of a defiant, assertive prophet. A passive, melancholy, Werther personality pleased them much more and was compatible with the ubiquitous notion of the superfluous, alienated poet. The popularity of the introverted Genius had been evidenced in England too. On that note then, we turn to an investigation of the introspective or escapist personality as it appears in America and Europe.

---

[59]Daumier, "Exposition of 1859," 1859. fig. 24.

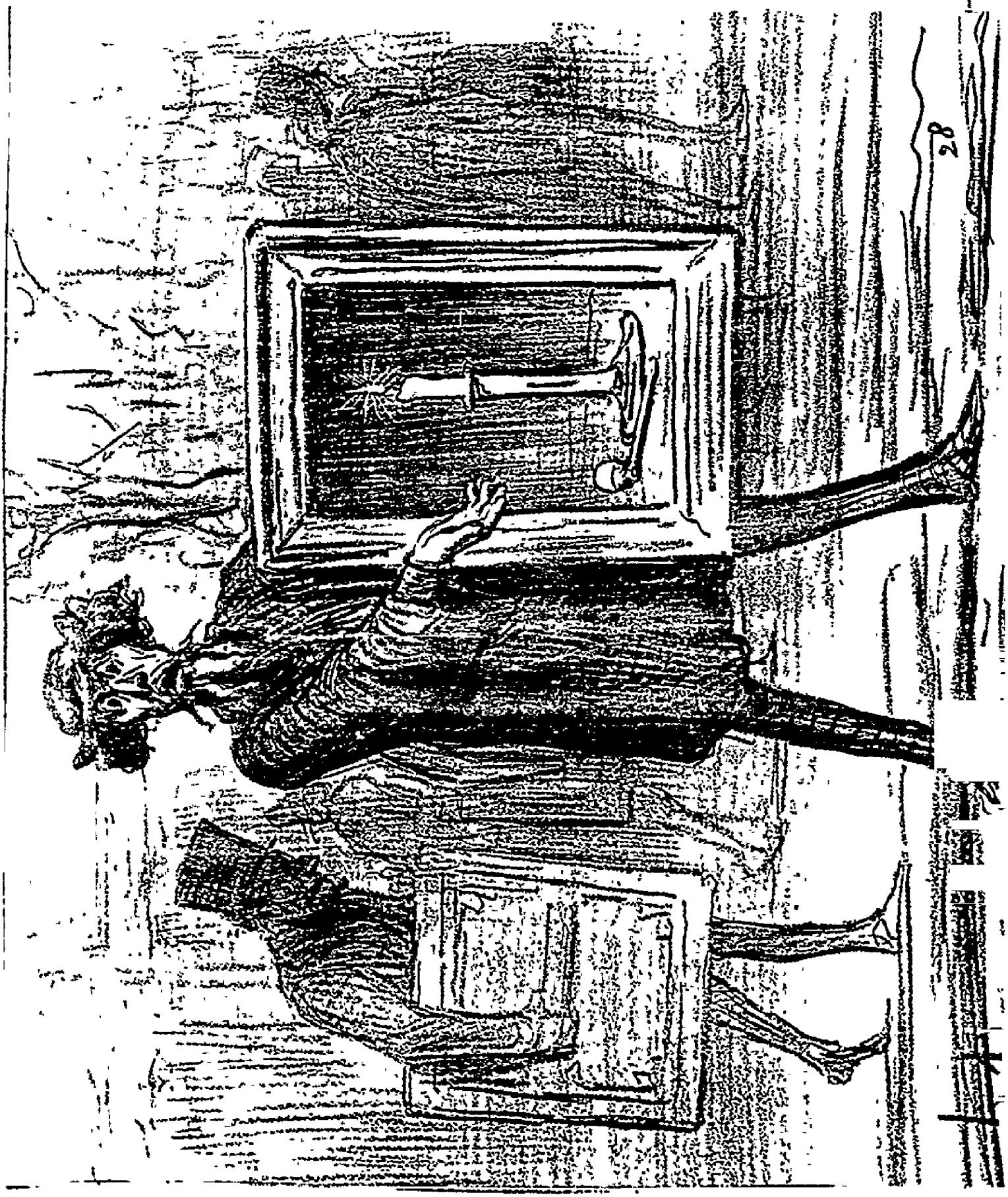


fig. 24. Honoré Daumier, "Exposition of 1859"

The American Romantic mentality never found the man of passivity and melancholy worth depicting in major works. Romantic heroes in early nineteenth-century America are assertive types or they do not exist. They are always active, energetic figures whether in defiance of the public or whether leading society in the prophetic-humanitarian tradition. America would not tolerate, it seems, the withdrawn or escapist Genius.

The same is not true of England in the Romantic period. A spirit of melancholy, coupled with a general tone of passivity, appears often in this country's creative works. We have already noted one example in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." The air of melancholy reappears in his "Ode on Melancholy."

Shelley seems also half in love with a world removed from the anguish of this globe. He envies the skylark who is a "scorner of the ground." He envies the dead Keats's resting place in paradise high above the tainted earth. The poet, unlike Prometheus, is essentially passive with an absence of willed rebellion.

> Nor let us weep that our delight is fled
> Far from these carrion kites that scream below;
> He wakes or sleeps with the enduring dead;
> Thou canst not soar where he is sitting now.--
> . . .
> He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
> Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
> And that unrest which men miscall delight,
> Can touch him not and torture not again;
> From the contagion of the world's slow stain

He is secure. . . .[60]

Byron, too, portrays the introverted and melancholy bard who attempts to soar above the throes of this life. In "The Lament of Tasso" the audience is shown a restive but nondefiant poet imprisoned physically but not spiritually.

> I stoop not to despair;
> For I have battled with mine agony,
> And make me wings wherewith to overfly
> The narrow circus of my dungeon wall. . . .[61]

He also questions whether he should voice his anger in defiance of those who have betrayed him. He concludes that he prefers to simply retreat from the predicament. He opts for death and what subsequently follows, release.

> Feel I not wrath with those who placed me here?
> Who have debased me in the minds of men, ...
> . . .
> No!--still too proud to be vindictive--I
> Have pardoned Princes' insults, and would die.[62]

Some few examples of the passive figure show up in French literature and painting of the Romantic era. Like the American temperament, the French generally preferred a more forceful, dynamic personality no matter whether this boldness was directed toward the assistance of the public or

---

[60]Shelley, "Adonais," in The Complete Poetical Works. . . . , p. 440.

[61]Byron, "Lament for Tasso," in Poems, Vol. IV of The Works. . . . , p. 144.

[62]Ibid., pp. 146-7.

in defiance of it. Some notable exceptions to this rule appear though.

An early picture of the submissive artist emerges from Chénier's poem "The Young Captive." In a passage similar to Byron's "Lament for Tasso" we see the captive poet who envisions an escape from his plight as a social outcast. He does not attempt to defy those forces that placed him in this situation so much as he strives to extricate himself from his condition.

> "And still within my breast nestles illusion bright;
> In vain these prison walls shut out the noonday light;
> Fair Hope has lent me wings.
> So from the fowler's net, again set free to fly,
> More swift, more joyous, through the summer sky,
> Philomel soars and sings."[63]

A second image appears in Vigny's poem "Moses." Although Vigny's bard adopts an extroverted, belligerent pose in Stello, the poet attempts to passively elude his tormentors in "Moses." Actually, the two reactions are not ultimately antithetical ones. They are simply two different reactions to a hostile public. In the poem, titled after the Hebrew prophet, the central figure wishes to disavow his poetic gift which has become a curse. Although a somewhat forceful figure, Moses seeks to abandon the burden and return to a more blissful state. Vigny concludes his poem

---

[63]Chénier, "The Young Captive," in Old France and the Revolution, pp. 402-3.

with this quatrain, spoken by Moses.

> "I am the Great: my feet tread nation's necks,
> My hand holds generations in its will.
> Alas, my Lord! I am great--I am alone:
> Give me--ah, give me leave to sleep the sleep of earth!"[64]

One last instance of the French passive mode appears in Hugo's poem "Genius." Again, the image of soaring or striving for escape occurs in conjunction with the image of the unwanted, albeit strident, artist.

> No! though the clamours of the envious crowd
> Pursue the son of Genius, he will rise
>
> From the dull clod, borne by an effort proud
> Beyond the reach of vulgar enmities.
> 'Tis thus the eagle, with his pinions spread,
> Reposing o'er the tempest, from that height
> Sees the clouds reel and roll above our head,
> While he, rejoicing in his tranquil flight
> More upward soars sublime in heaven's eternal light.[65]

The German Romantics, more than any other nationality, favored the figure of the melancholy, introspective artist. This submissive, frail character repeatedly attempts to escape from his cursed role in life. Goethe, Hölderlin, and Novalis present the type in major literary works. Carl Carus captures something of the passive bard in painting.

Goethe focuses on the melancholy artist in two documents: Torquato Tasso and The Sorrows of Young Werther. In his play based on the life of a Renaissance artist Goethe

---

[64]Vigny, "Moses," in Old France and the Revolution, p. 456.

[65]Hugo, "Genius," in Poems and Dramas, p. 12.

focuses on the suffering bard who prefers to retreat from life's intolerable conditions. Speaking to the king, Tasso draws a comparison between his desire for death and a better life after death, and the silk worm which spins out its own death as it weaves a cocoon.

> Oh, to us mortals may some gracious power
> Accord the insect's enviable doom,
> In some new sunny vale, with sudden joy,
> To spread our eager pinions.[66]

Goethe's Werther is another protagonist with an artistic occupation. He is a painter. Yet Goethe, the great German dramatist, does not utilize this early Sturm und Drang character to portray the antagonism between the artist and the bourgeoisie. Werther's "Weltschmerz" may spring from innumerable sources, but alienation stemming directly from public ingratitude is not one of them. In fact, Goethe is generally unconcerned about Werther's occupation and merely assigns him the role of painter as a popular literary convention. For this reason we will dispense with any analysis of the novel. It will suffice to indicate that the central persona is a sensitive soul who desires to withdraw from life. He commits suicide after a brief existence filled with agony and despair.

Hölderlin devotes some attention to the passive, prophetic artist in his epistolary novel Hyperion. Hyperion,

---

[66]Goethe, Torquato Tasso, in The Dramatic Works. . . , p. 452.

a Greek, has made some attempt to lead his countrymen to freedom but has been rewarded only with public apathy and lack of interest. He has decided to abandon the patriotic enterprise and to withdraw from any further engagements in life. He writes to his friend Bellarmin:

> My business on earth is over and done. I set to work full of determination, I gave of my blood to it, and made the world not a penny the richer.
> Unknown and alone, I have returned to wander through my native country, which lies about me like a vast graveyard. . . .[67]

Hyperion has no real desire to admonish his fellow citizens or to instill in them a desire for freedom and a more aesthetic existence. The persona suggests, in the passage below, that he no longer tries to elevate the people to noble aspirations and has simply retreated from any further engagements with the bourgeoisie.

> I grudged no one his opinions or his improprieties. I was converted, I no longer wished to convert others; . . . .[68]

Novalis's artist-persona in Henry von Ofterdingen is an additional example of the introspective bard in the passive tradition. At one point in this novel Novalis distinguishes between the hero and the artist. In this comparison the artist is drawn as a retiring personality, a man who observes life from a serene and safe haven. The poet

---

[67] Hölderlin, Hyperion, p. 22.

[68] Ibid., pp. 52-3.

does not participate in life actively. He searches for the meaning of life within himself. In contrast, the hero is a man engaged in the active life; he creates history. He is not given to introspective reverie. This is the fashion in which Novalis characterizes the bourgeoisie or that class from which spring the heroes of the age. Artists are different.

> It is different with those serene, little-known people whose world is their soul, whose activity is contemplation, whose life is a gradual development of their inner powers. No restlessness exerts an outward drive.
>
> . . .
>
> Great and complex events would disturb these introverted people.[69]

Carl Gustave Carus creates the same image of the serene bard existing aloof from the morass of men. In his painting "Goethe's Grave" the painter summarizes the artist's life by depicting the poet's tomb.[70] High in the mountains the prophet finds his final retreat. He is one with the gods on Mt. Olympus. The scene has no tone of defiance but simply one of passive serenity.

* * *

This brief survey is only illustrative of numerous passages, both oblique and literal, that describe the

---

[69]Novalis, Henry von Ofterdingen, p. 93.

[70]Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869), "Goethe's Grave," 1832. fig. 25.

fig. 25. Carl Carus, "Goethe's Grave"

figures of the assertive and the passive poet. In addition, the examples cited above indicate solely the predominant reactions of the artist who grieved over the fact that he was a superfluous member of society. Other artists, especially the Humanitarian ones, felt that they could convince the bourgeoisie of their necessary role as spiritual leaders and thereby reconcile their differences with the public. The type we have just examined--often called the Art-for-Art's-Sake artists--felt that the hiatus between themselves and the public could never be breached. As we have just observed, they reacted in observance of this belief in either a defiant or an escapist manner.

In the final analysis we must interpret the existence and declarations of both the active and passive types as a superfluity. The dramatization of their external life among men did not exist alone however. To help point out the absurdity of their treatment at the hands of the bourgeoisie they contrasted their destitute social conditions with their gifted abilities. By illustrating the Genius's great intellectual or spiritual nature, the artist hoped to end public disregard for the Genius. Consequently, to comprehend another facet of the Romantic artist's existence among middle-class culture we must examine his conception of the poet and painter's gifted life.

CHAPTER IV

GODS, ARTISTS, AND MEN

If the Romantic artist saw himself as an outcast of society he could still console himself by remembering that Christ, like himself, was hated by the majority of men. He could also remind himself--and try to remind the bourgeoisie too--that he possessed, like the Messiah, a hierophantic gift for complete perception. In addition, he had the power to express or convey that knowledge to his fellow man. Taken collectively, the two traits--that of total cognition and that of expression--could only be found in one type of individual, so the artist reasoned: God's vicar on earth.

The notion of divinity in the artist is clearly manifested in several popular conceptualizations of the intellectual nature of the poet and painter during the Romantic era. In each case, though, the equation is drawn between art and prophecy. No one poet or painter of the era manages to construct, as one might suspect, a complete image of the multi-faceted intellect of the Romantic magus but several artists do contribute fragments to the complete self-concept of the creative Genius.

One place to initiate a formulation of the intel-

lectual abilities of the artist is to examine the belief in the bard's special insight. The Romantic Genius visualizes himself as a seer, as Tiresias. That is, he sees through the chaos of this world to the eternal realm of Truth and ultimate Harmony. He is Shelley looking beyond a faceted life of cloudy reality into the animating source of pure Light.

Sometimes the artist feels that he has earned his cognitive faculties through the careful observation of human existence and an active participation in the course of human affairs. But many Romantic artists do not claim responsibility for their gift of insight. They suggest that God works through the poet or painter or sculptor to reveal His Truth. Consequently, many artists picture themselves as Plato's poet involuntarily seized by inspiration and lacking any control over the poetic process.

The bard manages to "see" into the life of things because he possesses the faculties of genius, of imagination, of intuition. These attributes allow the artist to circumscribe the limitations of rational thought and to reach eternal truths. Of course, the above traits can only function in a sensitive personality. Typically the artist feels he is more keenly aware of life around him, more acutely sensitive also to the real truths inherent in the life surrounding him, that is, the Truths of God and Nature.

True knowledge is communicated to the world ultimately through the creative titan's gift for creativity or expression. After the artist acquires his special insight into life he then declares or represents his profound knowledge in some artistic medium--a declaration which may be God speaking through the poet to mankind. He shares with his fellow man, then, this knowledge expressed in a language or form they can comprehend; he translates the cryptic language of God's message into a lucid, intelligible language relevant to the common man.

The Romantic idea of the gift of expression is an elaborate and abstruse concept. There are certain tenets, however, upon which most artists of the period agree. For one, the artist believes that he expresses what all men half perceive but can not find the ability to express: a sense that Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are the appropriate virtues for mankind to pursue. In expressing this unconscious belief the artist reinforces in mankind proper aesthetic goals.

Secondly, the Romantic artist believes that once the bourgeoisie have adopted the proper virtues they will be happy. They will be overjoyed because man is always happiest when he is in harmony with the directives of the universe, when he pursues proper goals in life. Mankind is also happy when it hears the poet voice what it has always felt but never been able to express.

A third belief about the nature of the bard's expression is even more noteworthy. The Romantic feels that the creative Genius not only expresses eternal verities but actually creates or shapes life in a sense. His words, in a fashion, become commandments. For example, by discoursing on the beauty of a particular object hitherto almost unnoticed he gives the average man an acute awareness of that object. Thus, he brings it alive. Further, in this animating process his words or figures become one-to-one analogues with real-life objects; his paintings and words directly symbolize the object they refer to. One instance of this is in Hawthorne's short story "The Prophetic Pictures." Here the artist is a deific creator. His portrait of a person's facial features literally forges in the future the same features in his subject.

We might complete a diagram of the artist's concept of his intellectual qualities by indicating that the poet vaguely conceived of himself as a second Messiah. Several arguments were proposed in defense of this belief. We have already seen one--the artist creates life by making men sensitive to, and conscious of, certain experiences in life. The only other being in history who could perform the same activity was Christ.

The bard believed he was deific for another reason also. Since his attributes of special insight and expression could not be acquired through any rational learning

process or any program of sheer industriousness his "genius" was interpreted as a gift from Heaven. It was conferred upon him by God. The Romantic seer had only to refer to the creative process to further substantiate this idea. In his moments of greatest creative activity the poet was not really in control of himself--he was seized by inspiration as if God were speaking to mankind through the mind of a prophet. As we indicated earlier, Plato had described the poet as being seized, during the creative act, in a state of enthusiasm or frenzy.

Lastly, the Romantic artist-prophet identified with a divine being because he visualized himself as Representative Man, his being encompassed all of life. That is, his character is founded on the breadth of human existence and not upon a particular individual in history. The Self and the Whole are one for him. The artist embodies the values and aspirations and feelings of every man.

Since he embraces the whole of life, he need not search outside himself for the meaning of human existence. As he looks inward he sees all of life flowing through him. In a sense the seer is the ultimate "personality," the supreme protagonist. God and the artist are one and the same since they alone define their being by this all-encompassing scope of existence. Perhaps Walt Whitman in America comes closest to illustrating the artist with the all-embracing, Messianic soul.

It was inevitable that the Romantic artist would identify his role as seer with the sacred occupation of the Church. After all, religion was the only other field besides art that prompted man to pursue some alternative to materialistic goals. Religion and art stimulated mankind to follow a spiritual, aesthetic existence, the only proper one for human beings.

In varying degrees, then, the artists of America and Europe in the early nineteenth century contributed to a general image of the artist as a prophet of eloquent expression. Often, they fell just short of the supreme arrogance of calling themselves Christ. An examination of American and Continental art will bear out this phenomenon.

* * *

The major artists of the American Renaissance invariably express some thoughts on the gifted attributes of the creative genius. Emerson and Whitman seem particularly interested in the notion that the artist is a godlike creature, a child of Nature. Being deific, he is a miracle-worker and the wonders he achieves are heavenly inspired.

Emerson manages in his important poems and essays to touch on almost all of these points. In his poem "The Poet," for example, he describes the bard as something akin to Christ.

Right upward on the road of fame
With sounding steps the poet came;
Born and nourished in miracles,
His feet were shod with golden bells,
Or where he stepped the soil did peal
As if the dust were glass and steel.[1]

This miraculous creature, like Christ, is directed or inspired by God.

The Fairest enchants me,
The Mighty commands me,
Saying, "Stand in thy place;
Up and eastward turn thy face; . . . ."[2]

In the poem "Saadi" Emerson fills in more information to complete the image of the divine poet. He declares that the artist's ability to express is a gift from heaven:

God, who gave to him the lyre,
Of all mortals the desire,
For all breathing men's behoof,
Straitly charged him, "Sit aloof;" . . . .[3]

In addition, Saadi, or the poet, possesses the wisdom of God.

Be thou ware where Saadi dwells;
Wisdom of the gods is he,--
Entertain it reverently.[4]

Emerson continues these thoughts in many of his substantial essays. In The Poet, The American Scholar, and

---

[1]Emerson, "The Poet," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 309.

[2]Ibid., p. 313.

[3]Emerson, "Saadi," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works. . . . , pp. 129-30.

[4]Ibid., p. 130.

Representative Men he proposes that the artist-prophet is a child of Nature, an earthly manifestation of God. The bard is also seen as "Representative Man," or the greatest human being. His existence, like God's son, is the summation of all human existence.

> The breadth of the problem is great, for the poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the common wealth. The young man reveres men of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is.[5]

The representative poet, one might say, has more potential than the common man. He possesses an extraordinary power to encompass all of human experience and a superior ability to impart that experience to the commonweal.

> The poet is the person in whom these powers are in balance, the man without impediment, who sees and handles that which others dream of, traverses the whole scale of experience, and is representative man, in virtue of his being the largest power to receive and to impart.[6]

The American scholar typifies the true artist. He too is a representative man. In him, supreme potential is fulfilled: "All the rest behold in the hero or the poet their own green and crude being,--ripened. . . ."[7] Since his being embraces all of life he need only peer into

---

[5]Emerson, The Poet, in Essays, Vol. III of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 5.

[6]Ibid., p. 6.

[7]Emerson, The American Scholar, in Essays, Vol. I of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 106.

himself for the diverse secrets of the universe. Emerson says of the American scholar:

> He then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds. He learns that he who has mastered any law in his private thought, is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated.[8]

Emerson fairly summarizes his theories of the deific, representative poet-prophet in his work entitled Representative Men. In this volume of collected essays he repeatedly asserts--in his analysis of various cultures throughout history--that artists represent the collective conscious of the human race. He adds an additional note: the power of the poet resides in his ability to portray the general mentality of the people.

> Great genial power, one would almost say, consists in not being original at all; in being altogether receptive; in letting the world do all, and suffering the spirit of the hour to pass unobstructed through the mind.[9]

Walt Whitman was another American Romantic convinced of the artist's representative qualities. In several poems he remarks that the bard voices the wishes and sentiments of all America. Like Emerson's poet-prophet, the feelings of the people pass through him unimpeded. The lines below are only one example of this idea.

---

[8] Ibid., p. 103.

[9] Emerson, Representative Men, in Vol. IV of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 191.

I am the credulous man of qualities, ages, races,
I advance from the people in their own spirit,
Here is what sings unrestricted faith.[10]

If all of life flows through the poet, it is reasonable to assume that the divine poet can discover all of life within himself. He need not search outside the Self for the full range of human experience. Whitman writes in "Song of Myself" of the poet's Self:

And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.[11]

In another poem Whitman declares that the poet unifies life, he reconciles within himself discordant forces and induces harmony. The Romantic poet is a miracle-worker, just as Christ was for an earlier age.

All these hearts as of fretted children shall be sooth'd,
All affection shall be fully responded to, the secret shall be told,
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd and link'd together,
. . .
Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and compacted by the true son of God, the poet. . . .[12]

American painting in the first half of the nineteenth century seldom included any definite narrative art.

---

[10]Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok," in Poems, Vol. VIII of The Collected Writings. . . . , p. 19.

[11]Whitman, "Song of Myself," in Poems, Vol. VIII of The Collected Writings. . . . , p. 44.

[12]Whitman, "Passage to India," in Poems, Vol. VII of The Collected Writings. . . . , p. 415.

Instead, portraiture and landscape were the acceptable modes in this era. These were the only scenes the American painter could sell to a bourgeois public, and even the sums he received from these works were seldom sufficient to give him a permissible living. No one, the painter felt, realized the value of, or would pay for, glorious portraits of the Romantic Genius. Out of necessity, consequently, the painter usually confined his aspirations for grandeur to his private thoughts and kept his convictions off the canvas.

There is at least one possible exception to this rule. One of the ways a painter might obliquely represent the divinely-inspired artist was to depict the poet or painter near the source of his inspiration--the heavens or Nature. This method might indicate vague analogues between the artist and his spiritual mentor but it was the best that could be done. After all, the abstract concept of the artist's divinity could not be easily rendered in a concrete, pictorial fashion. This had been the dilemma, too, of medieval artists; how to render a visually recognizable image of God and yet sustain the idea of God's abstract nature.

Two notable attempts to circumlocute this impasse appear in American Romantic painting. One is Thomas Sully's "Lord Byron" (fig. 11). In this work a contemplative, inspired Byron is portrayed near the source of his

genius, the illumined heavens. It is from God that he has received his poetic gifts.

Another instance is Asher B. Durand's "Kindred Spirits."[13] We are shown two Romantic artists--Thomas Cole and William C. Bryant--in the midst of Nature's bounty, the Catskills. This painting is one of a few works produced in the period that constitutes an allegory of the artist and his source of inspiration. Durand himself believed that Nature was not only the source of the artist's inspiration but that it was the artist's duty, in turn, to reveal the beuaty of Nature. Nature reveals her grandeur by working through the poet or painter. The painter is, consequently, an outlet for the Divine.

The English Romantics also developed the notion of the gifted and divine Genius. Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats all write about this belief. In a short poem entitled "To B. R. Haydon" Wordsworth confides to a fellow artist that the creative Genius is a chosen person, he is God's elect.

> High is our calling, Friend!--Creative Art
> . . .
> Demands the service of a mind and heart,
> Though sensitive, yet, in the weakest part,
> Heroically fashioned--to infuse
> Faith in the whispers of the lonely Muse. . . .[14]

---

[13]Asher B. Durand (1796-1886), "Kindred Spirits," 1849. fig. 26.

[14]Wordsworth, "To B. R. Haydon," in Poems, Vol. III of Poetical Works, p. 21.

fig. 26. Asher B. Durand, "Kindred Spirits"

Wordsworth fills his passage with implications that the artist is a prophet of God or the Muse. The prophet's task, in this case, is to spread the gospel, the glad tidings of Art.

The same imagery appears again in "London, 1802," another short poem dedicated to a great artist. Here, Wordsworth invokes the spirit of Milton to come forward and save the world from dissipation. We gather from the imagery in the lines cited below that Milton might well be Christ. The bard is seen as a titan who has stooped to conquer mankind. Wordsworth pleads with Milton:

> Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
> And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
> Thy soul was like to a Star, and dwelt apart;
> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
> Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
> So didst thou travel on life's common way,
> In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
> The lowliest duties on herself did lay.[15]

Wordsworth adds more substance to the composite picture of the deific poet in "The Prelude." The poet-prophet is now depicted as an agent of Nature. Further, the bard's power to interpret Nature correctly is a gift from Heaven.

> And that the Genius of the Poet hence
> May boldly take his way among mankind
> Wherever Nature leads; that he hath stood
> By Nature's side among the men of old,
> And so shall stand for ever. Dearest Friend!

---

[15]Wordsworth, "London, 1802," in Poems, Vol. III of Poetical Works, p. 116.

> If thou partake the animating faith
> That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
> Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
> Have each his own peculiar faculty,
> Heaven's gift, a sense that fits him to perceive
> Something unseen before; . . . .[16]

We might reiterate again that the attributes Wordsworth gives to the artist have only applied to one other figure in history, the sacred prophet.

Shelley has some words to say about the poet-prophet also. He and Wordsworth both agree that the bard is inseparable from his divine source, Nature. Nature speaks through the poet and the poet speaks of Nature. Shelley tells us about Keats, or the artist, in "Adonais."

> He is made one with Nature: there is heard
> His voice in all her music, from the moan
> Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
> He is a presence to be felt and known
> In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
> Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
> Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
> Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
> Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.
>
> He is a portion of the loveliness
> Which once he made more lovely. . . .[17]

Shelley implies that the bard has returned to Heaven to sit at the right hand of the Divine.

Shelley also writes about the idea of the divinely-gifted, all embracing artist, just as Wordsworth does.

---

[16]Wordsworth, "Prelude," Vol. I of Poetical Works, pp. 471-2.

[17]Shelley, "Adonais," in The Complete Poetical Works. . . . , p.441.

He proposes, like his fellow Romantic, that the product of the artist is sacred and that the ability to create divine poetry is a gift from Heaven. These principles appear in his essay A Defense of Poetry.

> Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all; . . . .
>
> . . .
>
> A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it: for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind awakens to transitory brightness: . . . .[18]

Keats is another Romantic who shows some interest in the divine nature of the artist. In a poem devoted to the glorification of the poet he conveys to his audience two traits of the bard: the poet is a miracle-worker able to revitalize things for men, and the poet is a child of the gods. That is, the poet communes often with his heavenly peers. First, Keats points out that the poet-prophet is a miracle-worker:

> At Morn, at Noon, at Eve, and Middle Night,
> He passes forth into the charmed air,
> With talisman to call up spirits rare
> From plant, cave, rock, fountains.[19]

---

[18] Shelley, A Defense of Poetry, in Essays, Vol. III of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 135.

[19] Keats, "The Poet," in Poems, Vol. IV of The Poetical Works. . . . , p. 30. I have assumed, here, that this poem is written by Keats although there is some question of its authenticity.

Sometimes the creator-poet converses with his true parents, the Heavenly Host.

> Sometimes, above the gross and palpable things
> Of this diurnal ball, his spirit flies
> On awful wing; and with its destined skies
> Holds premature and mystic communings:
> Till such unearthly intercourses shed
> A visible halo round his mortal head.[20]

English Romantic portraitists recognized the same impasse as did American painters when they attempted to visually portray the Messianic artist. The only solution to the problem appeared to be the technique Sully was using in America, the exposure of the artist in close proximity to the seat of his inspiration, the heavens. Thomas Lawrence and Benjamin Haydon utilize this technique in two of their artist portraits. In both works--Lawrence's "Robert Southey" (fig. 13) and Haydon's "Wordsworth" (fig. 15)--the scene is treated identically, the man of Genius posed against the backdrop of a turbulent sky. We may imagine that he takes his imagination and knowledge from that dynamic source.

The phenomenon of the grandiose self-concept of the Romantic artist is manifested in France in the early nineteenth century just as it is in America and England of the same period. Victor Hugo is one of several French artists who feels that men of Genius are, in some ways, divine.

---

[20] Ibid., p. 30.

Several of his prose and verse works are founded on this very belief. In his lengthy essay William Shakespeare, for example, the author describes the poet--the greatest of Geniuses--in imagery that could well fit the description of Christ. The artist, like the Savior, is a spiritual being; the gift of knowledge comes directly from Heaven.

> To the eyes of the thinker, these men of genius occupy thrones in the ideal kingdom. To the individual works that these men have left us must be added various collective works,--the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, ...
>
> Some of these works are revealed and sacred. They bear the marks of unknown collaboration.
>
> . . .
>
> "These books were not composed by man alone," says the inscription of Ash-Nagar.[21]

Hugo urges us to have faith in the special integrity of the artist. Specifically, we must believe that the Genius directs us in the path of divine destiny.

> Genius on earth is God giving himself. Whenever a masterpiece appears, a distribution of God is taking place. The masterpiece is a variety of the miracle. Thence, in all religions and among all peoples, comes faith in divine men. They deceive themselves who think that we deny the divinity of the Christs.[22]

In the poem "Genius: To Chateaubriand" Hugo clarifies another aspect of the divine bard. Upon the termination of a tortured existence on earth the artist, like Christ, ascends to his original home at the right

---

[21] Hugo, William Shakespeare, p. 65.

[22] Ibid., p. 244.

hand of God.

> No! though the clamours of the envious crowd
> Pursue the son of Genius, he will rise
>
> From the dull clod, borne by an effort proud
>
> . . .
>
> While he, rejoicing in his tranquil flight
> More upward soars sublime in heaven's eternal light.[23]

Théophile Gautier duplicates what Hugo says about the supernatural qualities of the artist. In fact, he feels that Victor Hugo himself is one of the chosen ones. Gautier's description of his initial confrontation with Hugo is similar to the accounts given by those who first witnessed the Messiah.

> . . . suddenly the door opened and in a blaze of light, like Phoebus and Apollo issuing from the gates of Dawn, there appeared on the dark landing Victor Hugo himself in all his glory! Like Esther before Ahasuerus, I nearly fainted.
>
> . . .
>
> He smiled, but did not seem surprised, accustomed as he was to meeting daily, as he took his walks abroad, poets in a fainting state, artist students blushing crimson or pale as death, and even grown men who remained speechless or able only to stammer a few words.[24]

This reverence for Hugo indicates Gautier's estimation of the motivation for the entire Romantic movement. According to Gautier, the new group of writers emerging from the newly established, bourgeois culture saw themselves as Creators forging a new system of values.

---

[23]Hugo, "Genius: To Chateaubriand," in Poems and Dramas, p. 12.

[24]Gautier, A History of Romanticism, pp. 25-6.

In the sense that they were artificers of a new age they identified with the Olympians. Gautier makes this point in The History of Romanticism.

> The main points of the programme which every man endeavoured to carry out to the best of his ability, the ideals and the secret desires of the Romanticist youth, were . . . to set it [love] up as the sole end and sole means of happiness, and to sanctify and deify Art, which was to be upheld as a second creator.[25]

Alfred de Vigny is a third French Romantic who suggests that the artist is a divine creature and that the creation of poetry is something akin to a religious vocation, to be regarded with awe and veneration. He substantiates this proposition in a number of ways. One defense he makes refers to the hatred of the Middle Class for the artist. These lines appear in Stello:

> "The general pantomime used in dealing with the Poet is a patronizing and disdainful smile; but they all feel something else at the bottom of their hearts, something like the presence of a superior Deity.
> "And in this respect they are still far above the common people who, sensing this superiority only dimly, experience in the presence of the Poet nothing but the uneasiness, that the proximity of some great passion, incomprehensible to them, creates."[26]

A few pages later Vigny cites a second reason why Stello feels that the artist is deific. Stello is convinced that the artist is God's apostle on earth.

> What moves men, if not emotion? What creates emotion, if not art? And who teaches men art, if not God

---

[25] Ibid., pp. 89-90.

[26] Vigny, Stello, p. 167.

> Himself? For the Poet has no master, and all disciplines can be learned except his.[27]

A third argument Stello uses refers to the moment of poetic creation. Reminiscent of Plato's description of the poetic process, Stello's bard is seized by an outside force beyond his control. This power is sometimes called the Muse, sometimes God. The Romantic Genius can never anticipate when this "enthusiasm" will come. It is the same way the biblical prophets were transfixed by divine inspiration.

> The Muse has not come for nothing; it knows what it is about, but the Poet cannot tell its purposes beforehand. It is only in the moment of his inspiration that he finds out.--His mission is to produce, and to produce only when he hears the secret voice.[28]

We may easily interpret Stello's "secret voice" as the voice of God.

Major French Romantic painting is devoid of clear representations of the heaven-inspired poet-prophet. This is not surprising, however, when we recall that the characteristic of the artist we are currently illustrating is an extremely abstract one. At best the divine essence of the bard could only be obliquely suggested on canvas. We saw some attempt at this method in one or two English and American Romantic painters. But this technique is a

---

[27] Ibid., p. 171.

[28] Ibid., p. 172.

weak one at best and literature better lends itself, obviously, to depicting an abstract concept. Therefore, one is not disconcerted to see an absence of the image of the deific artist in French painting of the era.

German poets and painters are inclined toward the same interest in the gifted superhuman nature of the poet-prophet as America and other European nationalities. Even as early as the end of the eighteenth century Goethe and Schiller were foreshadowing the Romantic conception of the artist as a divinity. Schiller sees the artist as a child of Nature, a child of God.

> Enjoy, O Nature's noblest lords,
> The place your chartered right insures:
> The high spiritual world affords
> No rank to mortal-born like yours![29]

He also determines that the bard is Representative Man, he is the summation of what all men only partly possess.

> Where'er, amid your human race,
> Ye marked, in some more noble son,
> Supremest wisdom, strength, or grace,
> Ye knit those powers in sweet embrace,
> And fixed them into one.
> And round that one, which typed the whole,
> Diffused your glorious aureole.[30]

Goethe devoted many more lines to an analysis of the "chosen" poet. Art, for Goethe, is constantly realized as a symbol of the creative energy of Nature manifesting

---

[29]Schiller, "The Artists," in The Poems and Ballads of Schiller, trans. F. B. Lytton (New York: Crowell, n.d.), p. 311.

[30]Ibid., p. 315.

itself through the person of the artist. The novel Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, the play Torquato Tasso, as well as several poems, center on the figure of the sacred artificer. In the novel mentioned above, the central persona explains to a bourgeois relative that the artist possesses divine gifts from the gods. He goes further and explains that the poet represents all men; he encompasses the totality of human experience. Within the poet all discord is reconciled into sublime harmony. Meister describes the bard in this fashion:

> Heaven has furnished him internally with precious gifts. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> Look at men, how they struggle after happiness and satisfaction! Their wishes, their toil, their gold, are ever hunting restlessly; and after what? After that which the poet has received from nature,--the right enjoyment of the world; the feeling of himself in others; the harmonious conjunction of many things that will seldom exist together.
>
> . . .
>
> . . . the strangest of incidents is to him but a part both of the past and of the future. And thus the poet is at once a teacher, a prophet, a friend of gods and men.[31]

If a poet encompasses all things within himself then it follows that he need only search inward to discover the total spectrum of experience. Torquato Tasso implies this belief. In the passage below Antonio, the king's counselor, makes this comment about the artist Tasso:

---

[31]Goethe, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, pp. 112-3.

We see him now retire into himself,
As if the world were rounded in his breast;
Lost in the working of that inner world,
The outward universe he casts aside,
And his rapt spirit, self-included, rests.[32]

Hölderlin, Hoffmann, Grillparzer, and Novalis are four German Romantics that staunchly defend the divinity of the bard. Hölderlin, for one, deifies the artist in his poems "The Poet's Vocation," "The Poet's Courage," and "As on a Holiday," and in his novel Hyperion. These lines appear in "The Poet's Vocation" and are representative of his other poetic works.

The banks of Ganges heard how the god of joy
Was hailed when conquering all from far Indus came
The youthful Bacchus, and with holy
Wine from their drowsiness woke the peoples.

And you, our own day's angel, do not awake
Those drowsing still? O give us the laws, and give
us life. You, Master, triumph! Only
You, like the god, have the right to conquer.[33]

Hölderlin declares that the Romantic artist is the modern age's equivalent to the ancient gods. A similar passage appears in Hölderlin's novel. Diotima, Hyperion's love, forecasts the destiny of the artist. The bard will usher in a new age. He will be the divine leader of men.

"All shall be changed! From the root of humanity the new world shall spring! A new divinity shall rule over them, a new future brighten before them.
"In the workshop, in houses, in gatherings, in

---

[32]Goethe, Torquato Tasso, pp. 422-3.

[33]Hölderlin, "The Poet's Vocation," in Poems and Fragments, trans. M. Hamburger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 173.

> temples there will be a change everywhere!
>
> . . .
>
> You will be the teacher of our people, you will be a great man, I hope.[34]

Hölderlin clearly feels that the artist is a resurrected Christ returning for the second millenium.

Hoffmann is another who professes a faith in the deific artist. The artist-protagonist of his novel Johannes Kreisler bears distinct similarities to the figure of Christ. When Kreisler arrives at an abbey--an institution established for the pursuit of spiritual goals, the same goals the artist follows--the monks all sense that a kindred spirit has joined them. Instinctively, they realize Kreisler's divinity and gather about him as the apostles were magnetically drawn to Jesus. Kreisler is not only described as possessing a spirit compatible to these men, but is actually characterized as a greater power than they.

> Kreisler's arrival at the Abbey gave new impetus to this musical activity. The scholars closed their books; the devout shortened their prayers; all gathered around Kreisler, whom they loved and whose works they valued more than any other's.[35]

The Abbot of the monastery, more than anyone else, is convinced of the truly gifted nature of the composer. He is just as convinced that the man is one of God's elect. He urges Johannes to abandon a secular existence and to join

---

[34]Hölderlin, Hyperion, pp. 100-1.

[35]Hoffmann, Kater Murr, p. 233.

him here at the abbey in a life devoted to spiritual ends.

> "And you--you, my Johannes, belong to these whom the eternal power through earthly grievances raises to the divine. That active awareness of a higher existence that will always alienate you, must alienate you, from narrow earthly activities radiates powerfully from your art, which belongs to another world and which, a holy secret of divine love, is locked with yearning in your breast. This art is the most ardent reverence itself; and you, who are completely devoted to it, have nothing in common with worldly trifles, which you hurl from yourself with scorn as a youth his boyhood toys."[36]

Franz Grillparzer's heroine in Sappho is another descendent of the gods. Although she loves mankind and desires to join the life of men, at the same time she is thankful for her divine gifts which elevate her above the chaotic existence of man. At the close of the play Sappho gives thanks to the gods for her special, heavenly nature. Again, the figure might well be Christ giving thanks to His Father.

> Sublime and holy Gods!
> You have adorned me with your bounteous blessings!
> In my hand you bestowed your bow of song,
> Bestowed your quiverful of poesy,
> A heart to feel, a mind to comprehend,
> And power to fashion what I have conceived.
> You have adorned me with your bounteous blessings!
> I give you thanks!
>
> You have with victory crowned my humble head
> And broadcast far and wide in distant lands
> My poet's fame, seed for eternity!
> My golden song pours forth from foreign tongues,
> And only with the earth shall Sappho perish.
> I give you thanks![37]

---

[36] Ibid., p. 237.

[37] Grillparzer, Sappho, p. 130.

Like Christ, the artist possesses an immortal spiritual essence. Only the physical body is mortal.

We conclude a survey of the gifted traits of the prophetic artist in German Romantic literature with a quick assessment of Novalis's Henry von Ofterdingen. Novalis describes his mythic bard in more poetic terms than Grillparzer, but behind these fanciful descriptions lies the same firm conviction that the artist does not consciously acquire his poetic abilities but must passively receive them as natural gifts. In this sense God has chosen the artist, over all others, to convey His message to mankind. Consequently, the Romantic artist is a priest of sorts.

> It is the poets, these rare wandering men, who at times stroll through our dwellings and everywhere renew the old and honorable office of mankind and its earliest gods--. . . . They are already in possession of heavenly tranquility here on earth. . . . They are untrammeled visitors, whose golden feet make no sound and whose presence involuntary unfolds wings in everyone.
>
> . . .
>
> Henry was by nature born to be a poet.[38]

Two paintings by German artists in the Romantic era seem to prophesy the same message as the literary authors of this time. Both are cited during earlier discussions but they apply equally well at this moment. In Runge's "The Source and the Poet" (fig. 6) we are shown the

---

[38]Novalis, Henry von Ofterdingen, p. 94.

divine bard at the source of his inspiration, divine Nature. Carus's painting, "Goethe's Grave" (fig. 25), likewise declares the artist's divinity but in another fashion. In this sketch, Goethe's tomb, high in the mountains, is surrounded by angels. The artist has returned to his true source, olympian Nature.

* * *

The heaven-inspired Romantic Genius exhibits his peculiar talents in two ways. First, he demonstrates clearly to society that he possesses the gift of eternal knowledge or insight. Secondly, he manifests his gifted nature by a demonstrated ability to express that profound insight. The first of these abilities we will examine at this time.

Very simply, the Romantic artist envisions himself as a Delphic oracle. He sees through and beyond the chaotic experience of everyman to Truth and ultimate Harmony. A common example of this view is given by Shelley who senses the presence of "some unseen Power" as voiced in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty."

The artist-prophet feels that his power of perception stems directly from his faculties of genius, imagination, and intuition. These faculties allow the artist to transcend the limitations of rational thought and reach eternal truths. But there is one other faculty that permits the bard to see "into the life of things." He has a

prodigious sensitivity to life around him. This acute consciousness makes him more aware of the true nature of the universe, of the true nature of Goodness, Truth, Beauty.

In the end, the bard's lucid vision of truth has its outlet, or exposes itself, in the artist's talent for expression. Subsequent to the Genius's acquisition of true knowledge--through observation of life and participation in the communal experience of mankind--he then evokes an expression of his profound knowledge, he shares divine truth with the common man. In addition, the poet-seer's declarations appear in a language that the average man can understand and admire. One might say he translates the cryptic symbols of life into an intelligible language.

The image of the Orphean Romantic appears often in the first half of the nineteenth century. Since the concept of a mental attribute is an abstract one, it is not portrayed by major Romantic painters. But it is mentioned readily in literature of the era, and on the basis of that phenomenon the following survey will be limited to that medium.

One of the popular preoccupations of the American Renaissance writers is the notion of a divine artist possessing a truly gifted insight. Emerson, Hawthorne, and Whitman are three writers who particularly relish the idea. Emerson especially found the idea congenial to his conception of the prophetic artist. Because of this, he often

gives an account in his poems and essays of the poet's power to see into the heart of the cosmos, or into the "Over-Soul." One instance of this occurs in a poem about the poet. Here, the bard's apprenticeship is described: the poet brings to fruition the gift of the Muse, the ability to experience all of life and to envision the truth of things.

> For the Muse gave special charge
> His learning should be deep and large,
> And his training should not scant
> The deepest lore of wealth or want:
> His flesh should feel, his eyes should read
> Every maxim of dreadful Need;
> In its fulness he should taste
> Life's honeycomb, but not too fast;
> Full fed, but not intoxicated;
> . . .
> But oh, to see his solar eyes
> Like meteors which chose their way
> And rived the dark like a new day![39]

In the poem "Merlin," Emerson brings up another trait of the seer-poet. The bard sees beyond the discordant, apparitional forces of life into the reality of the Logos, or Word.

> By Sybarites beguiled,
> He shall no task decline;
> Merlin's mighty line
> Extremes of nature reconciled,--
> Bereaved a tyrant of his will,
> And made the lion mild.[40]

---

[39]Emerson, "The Poet," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works. . . . , pp. 310-11.

[40]Emerson, "Merlin," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works. . . . , pp. 121-2.

The prophetic artist is able to look forward to the end of the age at which all things will be reconciled.

The same idea, but more completely developed, is transmitted in Emerson's essays. The Poet contains a detailed analysis of the artist's gifted nature. In this work the author tells his readers that the poet is the greatest of visionaries. Nevertheless, the bard does not stop with the acquisition of knowledge. He goes on to convey this information to mankind.

> The sign and credentials of the poet are that he announces that which no man foretold. He is the true and only doctor; he knows and tells; he is the only teller of news, for he was present and privy to the appearance which he describes. He is a beholder of ideas and an utterer of the necessary and causal. For we do not speak now of men of poetical talents, or of industry and skill in metre, but of the true poet.[41]

Emerson further elucidates the nature of the poet's cognitive powers. He states that true perception is displayed in imagination, the purest form of comprehension.

> This insight, which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees; by sharing the path or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucid to others.[42]

Emerson reiterates the idea of poetic insight in two other essays: The American Scholar and Representative

---

[41]Emerson, The Poet, in Essays, Vol. III of The Complete Works. . . . , pp. 8-9.

[42]Ibid., p. 26.

Men. A selection or two from each will serve to illustrate the extent of his occupation with the concept. In the first of these two he declares that the bard is the only figure in society that grasps eternal knowledge, a knowledge usually in contrast to the popular opinions of the day. He urges the artist to continue to have faith in the validity of his insights and never allow the false beliefs of the hour to prevail.

> Those being his functions, it becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and he only knows the world. The world of any moment is the merest of appearances.
>
> . . .
>
> In silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself; add observation to observation, patient of neglect, patient of reproach, and bide his own time,--happy enough if he can satisfy himself alone that this day he has seen something truly.[43]

The seer also lives under a certain burden; an obligation to convey to the public his divine knowledge.

> There lies the burden on his mind,--the burden of truth to be declared,--more or less understood; and it constitutes his business and calling in the world to see those facts through, and to make them known.[44]

Hawthorne is a second American Romantic who is captivated by the idea of the prophetic artist. In one of many short stories he focuses on this very subject. The painter in "The Prophetic Pictures" can indeed see into the

---

[43]Emerson, The American Scholar, in Essays, Vol. I of The Complete Works. . . . , pp. 102-3.

[44]Emerson, Representative Men, Vol. IV of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 281.

mind and heart of his sitters. This power suggests that the artist has a unique gift, not an acquired ability. One character in the story describes the artist in these words:

> "They say that he paints not merely a man's features, but his mind and heart. He catches the secret sentiments and passions, and throws them upon the canvas, like sunshine--or perhaps, in the portraits of dark-souled men, like a gleam of infernal fire. It is an awful gift."[45]

Later in the story, the artist himself declares that his task is to envision the future character of his sitter, and to then transfer that knowledge onto the canvas for all to see.

> "The artist--the true artist--must look beneath the exterior. It is his gift--his proudest, but often a melancholy one--to see the inmost soul, and, by a power indefinable even to himself, to make it grow or darken upon the canvas, in glances that express the thought and sentiment of years."[46]

We conclude our analysis of the image of the seer in American Romanticism with some brief attention to Whitman's poetry. Whitman accepts, just as his Romantic peers do, the prevailing conviction that the artist is the new Messiah. The poet possesses, as Christ had possessed earlier, the aptitude for seeing the true destiny of the cosmos. Whitman feels that the "true son of God, the poet" will fuse the disjoined forces of Man and Nature and

---

[45]Hawthorne, "The Prophetic Pictures," in The Complete Short Stories. . . . , p. 90.

[46]Ibid., p. 95.

restore harmony. Not stopping at this, the deific bard would realize God's Word intuitively and through his verse explain God's mysteries to those who could not understand them directly. Whitman describes the bard in this fashion in several works, including "Passage to India," "Starting from Paumanok," "Song of Myself," and the "Preface" to Leaves of Grass. He speaks of the artist's facility for unifying experience in "Passage to India":

> After the seas are all cross'd (as they seem
> already cross'd,)
> After the great captains and engineers have
> accomplish'd their work,
> After the noble inventors, after the scientists,
> the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,
> Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,
> The true son of God shall come singing his songs.
>
> Then not your deeds only O voyagers, O scientists
> and inventors, shall be justified,
> All these hearts as of fretted children shall be
> sooth'd,
> All affection shall be fully responded to, the
> secret shall be told,
> All these separations and gaps shall be taken up
> and hook'd and link'd together,
> . . .
> The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.[47]

The same conception of the artist, but drawn in a more comprehensive manner, appears in the "Preface" to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass. Again, the poet-prophet is defined as a divine creature, a new leader, a prophetic seer speaking with the voice of true knowledge.

---

[47]Whitman, "Passage to India," in Poems, Vol. VIII of The Collected Writings. . . . , pp. 415-16

> The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he breathes into any thing that was before thought small it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe. He is a seer. . . . he is individual. . . . he is complete in himself. . . . the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not.[48]

Later in the "Preface," Whitman becomes more explicit about the Messianic nature of the new, Romantic bard.

> There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done.
>
> . . .
>
> A superior breed shall take their place. . . . the gangs of kosmos and prophets en masse shall take their place. A new order shall arise and they shall be the priests of man, ...
>
> . . .
>
> Through the divinity of themselves shall the kosmos and the new breed of poets be interpreters of men and women and of all events and things.[49]

English Romantic writers propose an identical image of the seer-poet to that of the American authors. It is a consensus of opinion among Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats that the Romantic artist is an artificer and seer. Each of these men illustrates a conviction that art assumes no function to perform other than to convey the Word of God to mankind, to offer a vision of the spiritual world beyond or within reality. Blake, for example, found in the Old Testament the source for his concept of the poet as a fiery, prophetic visionary.

---

[48] Whitman, "Preface" to Leaves of Grass, in Poems, Vol. VIII of The Collected Writings. . . . , p. 713.

[49] Ibid., p. 727.

Numerous declarations of the divinely-gifted artist appear also in both the prose and poetry of Wordsworth. One instance is a passage from the poem "Occasioned by the Battle of Waterloo."

> The Bard--whose soul is meek as dawning day,
> Yet trained to judgments righteously severe,
> Fervid, yet conversant with holy fear,
> As recognizing one Almighty sway:
> He--whose experienced eye can pierce the array
> Of past events; to whom, in vision clear,
> The aspiring heads of future things
> appear, ...[50]

Another declaration appears in "The Prelude," Book XIII.

> That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
> Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
> Have each his own peculiar faculty,
> Heaven's gift, a sense that fits him to
> perceive
> Objects unseen before, thou wilt not blame
> The humblest of this band who dares to hope
> That unto him hath also been vouchsafed
> An insight that in some sort he possesses, ...[51]

Other instances are cited in his "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads but it is not imperative to quote them since they only repeat what has been pronounced in the poems above.

If Coleridge disagreed with Wordsworth on several major convictions about poetry, he did agree with his friend that the poet was an Orphean prophet. These lines appear in an apologetic poem:

---

[50]Wordsworth, "Occasioned by the Battle of Waterloo," in Poems, Vol. III of Poetical Works, pp. 150-1.

[51]Wordsworth, "Prelude," Vol. I of Poetical Works, pp. 471-3.

> The poet in his lone yet genial hour
> Gives to his eyes a magnifying power:
> Or rather he emancipates his eyes
> . . .
> His gifted ken can see
> Phantoms of sublimity.[52]

According to Coleridge, the poet-seer is able to envision something akin to the realm of Plato's eternal Ideals--Goodness, Truth, and Beauty.

Shelley, like the early Romantics, believes that the artist is endowed with preternatural faculties for the reception and transference of sentiments such as Beauty and Truth. When Shelley describes the poet in "Alastor" and A Defense of Poetry he invariably points out that the bard is able to pierce through the false illusions of life and to see the divine harmony of God's world. A description of the poet in "Alastor: or The Spirit of Solitude" bears out Shelley's idea.

> By solemn vision, and bright silver dream,
> His infancy was nurtured. Every sight
> And sound from the vast earth and ambient air,
> Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
> The fountains of divine philosophy
> Fled not his thirsting lips, and all of great,
> Or good, or lovely, which the sacred past
> In truth or fable consecrates, he felt
> And knew. . . .[53]

The same belief is asserted in A Defense of Poetry.

---

[52]Coleridge, "Apologia Pro Vita Sua," in Poetical Works, ed. J. D. Campbell (London: Macmillan, 1925), p. 460.

[53]Shelley, "Alastor," in The Complete Poetical Works. . . . , pp. 16-7.

> . . . to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exists in the relation, subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression.[54]

We will close our account of the English Romantic's interest in the poet-seer with a word about John Keats. This poet is another who adopts the notion that the writer has special powers of vision beyond those of other men. Keats devotes two poems solely to the figure of the bard. But he writes other poems that could also be construed as tributes to the artist. "The Fall of Hyperion" is one of these. In Keats's two poems entitled "The Poet," he spells out quite clearly the notion that the poet senses the real truths of Nature. Keats answers the question: "What is a Poet?"

> "Tis the man who with a bird,
> Wren or Eagle, finds his way to
> All its instincts; he hath heard
> The Lion's roaring, and can tell
> What his horny throat expresseth. . . ."[55]

More on the occupation of the artist is found in another poem dedicated to the poet-prophet. The poet is described in this way:

> . . . To his sight
> The hush of natural objects opens quite
> To the core: and every secret essence there

---

[54]Shelley, A Defense of Poetry, in Essays, Vol. VII of The Complete Works. . . . , pp. 111-12.

[55]Keats, "The Poet: A Fragment," in Poems, Vol. IV of The Poetical Works. . . . , p. 64.

Reveals the elements of good and fair;
Making him see, where Learning hath no light.[56]

The image of the artist as seer is by no means absent from French Romanticism either. Vigny is most intrigued by the unique conceptual ability of the poet. Other French Romantics, including Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier, write about traits of the divine Genius also but do not care to touch on the figure's particular gift for insight. For this reason we will confine our comments, now, to Vigny's work.

Two substantial works by Vigny focus on the nature and plight of the gifted bard; the novel Stello and the play Chatterton. Both contain references to the seer. In Vigny's novel, Stello pronounces this credo:

> "I have faith in myself because I feel at the bottom of my heart a secret power, something indefinable and invisible, which is at once a presentiment of the future and an insight into the past, where lie the mysterious germs of the present.
>
> . . .
>
> . . . so I too feel the light of thought and inspiration grow dim when Love, that indefinable force that sustains my life, leaves me forsaken of its ardent strength; but while it lives in me, my whole soul lights up, and I understand at once Eternity, Infinity, the whole Creation, together with its creatures and its Fate. . . .[57]

Something of the same conceptualization of the bard is voiced by Chatterton. In the play, entitled after the

---

[56]Keats, "Sonnet: The Poet," in Poems, Vol. IV of The Poetical Works. . . . , p. 30.

[57]Vigny, Stello, pp. 18-9.

English Romantic poet, the central persona is queried about the occupation of the artist. Chatterton replies: "He reads the road that the finger of the Lord shows us in the Stars."[58] Clearly, Vigny, like his Romantic peers in America and England, views the poets of his generation as prophets, tracing the destiny of mankind as directed by God.

Germany, too, experienced a flourish of converts during the Romantic era to the idea of the divine seer. This faith permeates the Romantic movement from its outset through the close of the period. Several authors touch on the subject, but for the sake of brevity we will limit our survey to Goethe, Novalis, and Hölderlin.

Goethe evidences a substantial interest in the subject of the artist-seer. This is said with some assurance, since he describes such a poetic figure in several works. In the following passage from the poem "Hans Sach's Poetical Mission," a goddess tells the artist:

> "I have selected thee," she said,
> "From all who earth's wild mazes tread,
> That thou shouldst have clear-sighted sense,
> . . .
> When others run in strange confusion,
> Thy gaze shall see through each illusion;
> . . .
> Fair Nature's Genius by the hand
> Shall lead thee on through every land,
> Teach thee each different life to scan

---

[58] Vigny, Chatterton, p. 151.

Show thee the wondrous ways of man. . . .[59]

Hans Sachs, a prolific albeit lesser-known Renaissance artist, is drawn as a prophetic titan in the Romantic tradition--he is a special genius who sees through chaos to Truth and Harmony.

Goeth's readers are given the same idea in his novel Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship. Wilhelm, a budding poet, confesses a heart-felt conviction to his friend Werner: the poet transcends the chaotic life of men.

> Now fate has exalted the poet above all this, as if he were a god. He views the conflicting tumult of the passions; sees families and kingdoms raging in aimless commotion; sees those inexplicable enigmas of misunderstanding, which frequently a single monosyllable would suffice to explain, occasioning convulsions unutterably baleful.
>
> . . .
>
> From his heart, his native soil, springs up the lovely flower of wisdom; and if others, while waking, dream, and are pained with fantastic delusions from their every sense, he passes the dream of life like one awake, and the strangest of incidents is to him but a part both of the past and of the future.[60]

One final example extracted from Goethe's works may help reinforce the conviction that Germany's great poet maintained a continuing interest in the figure who possessed divine insight. The Renaissance artist Tasso is described in this typical manner in Goethe's play Torquato Tasso:

---

[59]Goethe, "Hans Sach's Poetical Mission," in Poems of Goethe, p. 217.

[60]Goethe, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, pp. 112-13.

> His eye scarce lingers on this earthly scene,
> To nature's harmony his ear is tuned.
> What history offers, and what life presents,
> His bosom promptly and with joy receives,
> The widely scatter'd is by him combined. . . .[61]

According to Goethe, Tasso, the artist, is able to take in diverse experience, sort it out, and then see within this diversity some unity.

Novalis, or Friedrich von Hardenberg, is a second German Romantic captured by the Genius with insight and delicate sensibility. He indicates this interest particularly in his novel Henry von Ofterdingen. At one point in this work a peasant lauds the gifted talents of the artist. He suggests that the artist is able to evaluate the common man's life and tell him the truth of his existence. Mankind subsequently experiences joy at the revelation of the true meaning of his life.

> "I too," said the miner, "have always been fond of poets for that reson. They have made life and the world clearer and more vivid for me.
>
> . . .
>
> Their songs made me feel the gentle unfolding of my own nature, which then seemed to be able to move more freely, to rejoice in its desires and social bent, to coordinate its members with calm delight and to evoke all sorts of pleasant effects."[62]

Later in the novel Klingsohr, the poet, tells the apprentice-bard Henry something of the necessary qualities a true poet must possess. One of these is true wisdom,

---

[61]Goethe, Torquato Tasso, p. 360.

[62]Novalis, Henry von Ofterdingen, p. 85.

a comprehensive knowledge of human activity.

> "I cannot sufficiently urge you laboriously and diligently to cultivate your intelligence, your natural impulse to know how everything happens and logically and sequentially hangs together. Nothing is more needful for the poet than insight into the nature of every occupation, acquaintance with the means to attain every end. . . ."[63]

Friedrich Hölderlin is a third poet in our compendium of faithful believers in the poet-vates. This faith is exhibited in at least two of his poems. Three lines included in his poem "The Poet's Vocation" refer to the knowledgeable artist.

> . . . Yet never gladly the poet keeps
> His lore unshared, but likes to join with
> Others who help him to understand it.[64]

In a second poem, entitled "As On a Holiday," Hölderlin again discourses on the poet's special sensitivity. At one point in the poem the narrator prompts all poets to grasp God's "ray," or the divine message of Truth, and relay it to mankind. When the artist accomplishes this he is a priest, a mediator, between God and mankind.

> Yet, fellow poets, us it behooves to stand
> Bare-headed beneath God's thunderstorms,
> To grasp the Father's ray, no less, with our
> own two hands
> And, wrapping in song the heavenly gift,
> To offer it to the people.[65]

---

[63] Ibid., p. 108.

[64] Hölderlin, "The Poet's Vocation," in Poems and Fragments, p. 177.

[65] Hölderlin, "As On a Holiday," in Poems and Fragments, pp. 375-77.

If the poet-prophet is a seer, a diviner of sacred mysteries, he feels compelled to share his heaven-sent knowledge with his fellow man. Fortunately, the artist also possesses the unique ability to communicate or express his divine secrets. The third portion of this chapter concerns itself with an analysis of the artist's gift for expression and the citation of a few examples from literature and painting demonstrating the Romantic artist's belief in that gift.

* * *

The Romantic conviction that the artist has a unique power to voice the divine truths of God is an idea that can be examined by itself. When one surveys selected documents in Romantic painting and literature one discovers a consistent conception of the articulate bard that can be described as follows. The artist expresses, or gives voice to, those feelings or inner truths that all men half sense but are at a loss to declare in language or painting. That is, each man is half aware of the wondrous beauty of Nature, God, and Art, but he is never fully conscious of this fact. Further, even if he were fully alert to the real value of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, he can never find the adequate means to convey that revelation to others.

Unlike the average human being, the artist is

fully conscious of the eternal truths of the universe and can give voice to those truths in proper expression. In turn, by giving proper representation to the experiences of life he clarifies their nature for one and all.

The activity of poetic expression carries with it even greater dimensions. Many Romantic artists suggest that the bard not only voices the human experience but even creates life, after a fashion. For example, by illuminating man to the special beauty of a particular object he creates in the common citizen an acute consciousness of that object. In this sense he has "created" a hitherto unnoticed object. Stated succinctly, the artist brings things alive for an insensitive public.

During this animating or enlivening activity, the common man begins to associate the artist's words or painting with the real object they describe. One could say the poet expresses the perfect description of an object, and his expression, as a consequence, becomes inextricably linked with the thing described--his language constitutes a direct analogue to real life or a one-to-one verbal symbol of an object.

In conclusion, the Romantic artist declares that the bard's perfect expression brings great joy to mankind. This is true, the Romantic artist believes, for two reasons. First, man is happiest when he realizes proper goals in life--the virtues the bard has previously given expression

to. Secondly, every man is overjoyed when he hears expressed what he has always felt but never been able to express.

It is this complex of beliefs--centering on the ability of the Romantic poet to express--that appears repeatedly in the arts of the first half of the nineteenth century. A brief account of those ideas in American Romanticism affords an excellent point to begin a survey.

Emerson's poetry and prose abound with testimony on the vocal artist. In each instance the figure of the artist possesses the gift of expression, the power to voice the sentiments of a nation. Because of this precious gift Emerson believes that the creative Genius ought to be America's most prized citizen. But some reference to particular passages on the artist-seer will convey a more exact idea of Emerson's concept of the poet than any general exposition on that subject.

"Saadi" is one of the author's better-known poems, and it is also one that contains notes on the expressive bard. In fact, the entire poem is devoted to citing the many gifts of the poet. The poem, too, indicates that this gifted Genius is persecuted by society. Among the traits Emerson attributes to his poet, one is that of "joy-giver." He states that the artist brings joy to mankind because he expresses what no man ever can--the truths of Nature. A second attribute he gives the artist is the ability to

create or enliven Nature. The bard's language so closely represents the external world that the audience realizes, in the poet's every word, the immediate presence of Nature. Saadi, or the poet, is described as follows:

> "His words like a storm-wind can bring
> Terror and beauty on their wing;
> In his every syllable
> Lurketh Nature veritable;
> . . .
> Yet before the listener's eye
> Swims the world in ecstasy,
> . . .
> And life pulsates in rock or tree.
> Saadi, so far thy words shall reach:
> Suns rise and set in Saadi's speech!"[66]

Similar conceptualizations of the poet appear in Emerson's poems "The Poet" and "Merlin." In each case the artist gives the perfect expression to human experience. The expression is so precise, in fact, that the individual never forgets it and always calls that object or experience by the artist's words. One might conclude that the artist is conceived of as God, going about after the Creation, naming and baptizing all flora and fauna. These lines from "The Poet" clearly reflect such a belief.

> The gallant child where'er he came
> Threw to each fact a tuneful name.
> The things whereon he cast his eyes
> Could not the nations rebaptize,
> Nor Time's snows hide the names he set,
> Nor last posterity forget.[67]

---

[66]Emerson, "Saadi," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 134.

[67]Emerson, "The Poet," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 309.

Emerson reiterates the notion of baptizing in "Merlin" but adds that this activity brings lasting joy to the lives of men.

> He shall daily joy dispense
> Hid in song's sweet influence.
> Forms more cheerly live and go,
> What time the subtle mind
> Sings aloud the tune whereto
> Their pulses beat,
> And march their feet,
> And their members are combined.[68]

In essays on the American scholar and the poet Emerson elaborates on the theme of the gifted poet endowed with artistic expression. Emerson tells us that the Scholar-Genius, a desirable leader for American culture, follows certain processes that conclude in significant art. As the poet searches the inner self for the true meaning of life he records his new-found knowledge for posterity. In doing so he brings everlasting happiness to other men because they now understand something about themselves by realizing something of the nature of the poet or Representative Man.

But it is our particular interest here to note that Emerson, as a Romantic artist, feels that the artist's gift for expression brings happiness to mankind. Man is pleased because he finally sees or hears, in the artist's work, an experience he knows but cannot express. Emerson suggests

---

[68]Emerson, "Merlin," in Poems, Vol. IX of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 121.

that the poet discovers this fact during his apprenticeship.

> He learns that he who has mastered any law in his private thoughts, is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated.
>
> . . .
>
> The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions, his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses, until he finds that he is the compliment of his hearers;--that they drink his words because he fulfils for them their own nature;. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> The people delight in it; the better part of every man feels, This is my music; this is myself.[69]

In no other work does Emerson analyze the unique gifts of the artist as he does in his essay The Poet. Here, the author enumerates trait after trait of the aesthetic Genius. Emerson tells us that the poet not only possesses divine insight into the composition of human existence but that the artist is also a "sayer, a namer, and represents beauty." He adds further that all men stand in need of expression but only a few gifted men in history have had this ability. Emerson points out that a poet's word is the perfect pronouncement; the bard's language and the painter's canvas directly symbolize the hitherto undefined, communal experience. Of the seer's language he says:

> It is the truest word ever spoken, and the phrase will be the fittest, most musical, and the unerring voice of the world for that time.
>
> All that we call sacred history attests that the

---

[69]Emerson, The American Scholar, in Essays, Vol. I of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 103.

> birth of a poet is the principal event in chronology. Man, never so often deceived, still watches for the arrival of a brother who can hold him steady to a truth until he has made it his own.[70]

The ubiquitous Romantic image of the prophet, who can correctly represent his interior feelings, appears also in Hawthorne's and Whitman's writings. We have previously noted in Hawthorne's story "The Prophetic Pictures" (cf. note 46) that the artist not only sees but then expresses his peculiar insight. These endowments are so manifest in the central persons of this story that the artist actually creates life for his sitter; he forges the future destiny of his subject. Hawthorne apparently agrees with Emerson that the artist's gift for expression is unique as well as profound and therefore one must consider the advent of a poet as a substantial event in history. It is in this manner that Hawthorne describes his central character:

> He had pried into their souls with his keenest insight, and pictured the result upon their features with his utmost skill, so as barely to fall short of that standard which no genius ever reached, his own severe conception. He had caught from the duskiness of the future--at least, so he fancied--a fearful secret, and had obscurely revealed it on the portraits.[71]

Hawthorne's story "The artist of the Beautiful" is another work indicating concern with the expressive artist. The story can easily be interpreted as a polemic on the

---

[70]Emerson, The Poet, in Essays, Vol. III of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 11.

[71]Hawthorne, "The Prophetic Pictures," in The Complete Short Stories. . . . , p. 97.

subject of the gifted Genius. Owen Warland, a delicate and sensitive creature, has managed to create or represent, in the most profound manner, his private apotheosis of beauty. His expression of beauty--in the form of a mechanical butterfly--is so refined that it comes alive. Owen is:

> . . . an artist who, symbolizing a lofty moral by a material trifle,--converting what was earthly to spiritual gold,--had won the beautiful into his handiwork.[72]

Any estimation of the Orphean artist must include at least a brief note on Walt Whitman. Like his Romantic peers, Whitman demonstrates a preoccupation with the image of the gifted poet who vocalizes his inner feelings. This obsession is referred to constantly throughout his poetry and prose. One passage, cited below, is typical; the author suggests that the poet's expression brings things to life.

> Americanos! conquerors! marches humanitarian!
> Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!
> For you a programme of chants.
>
> . . .
>
> Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all.[73]

We can sum up our survey of the divinely-gifted artist by a brief word on American Romantic painting. The idea of the expressive artist is an abstract one and we are not upset to discover a general apathy for the visual portrayal of the idea. Nevertheless, at least one attempt at

---

[72]Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful," in The Complete Short Stories. . . . , p. 435.

[73]Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok," in Poems, Vol. VIII of The Collected Writings. . . . , p. 17.

representing the artist's faculty does appear in William Sidney Mount's "The Painter's Triumph."[74] In this sketch we see a portrait of Mount ably expressing on canvas what is probably a common human experience. The bourgeois onlooker is entirely pleased. Utilizing his peculiar gift for expression, the artist has represented for the common man the true nature of human existence. In turn, the enthusiastic viewer is happy to see "what was often thought but never so well expressed."

Two great English authors of the early nineteenth century echo the sentiments of the American artist. Wordsworth and Shelley exhibit an occasional interest in the idea of the unique artist able to express his inward feelings and insights. Often too, each writer announces that the seer's poetry brings pleasure to mankind. Wordsworth's writings afford excellent examples which attest to this fact. In the "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth details much information about the unique complexion of the poet and his poetry. At one point in the analysis the author says that poets are men who combine two principal and unique talents: a gift for insight into the true sensations of life; and ability to relate in language these feelings. He summarizes his thoughts on the poet in this way:

---

[74]W. S. Mount (1807-68), "The Painter's Triumph." 1838. fig. 27.

fig. 27. W. S. Mount, "The Painter's Triumph"

> The sum of what was said is, that the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men.[75]

Prior to these lines the author indicates that the expressions of the artist bring joy to men. In fact, the poet's sole purpose is to bring men happiness.

> The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> Nor let this necessity of producing immediate pleasure be considered as a degradation of the Poet's art. It is far otherwise. It is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe. . . .[76]

Shelley states substantially the same convictions in his "Defense of Poetry." In this expository essay Shelley repeatedly declares that the poet expresses the universal sentiments of mankind. He adds that this perfect expression gives life to objects and sensations because the expression makes man eternally aware of those objects and sensations. As a consequence of the artist's expression, and mankind's subsequent new apprehension of Nature, the human race is forever happy.

> . . . the pleasure resulting from the manner in which they [poets] express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to

---

[75]Wordsworth, "Preface," to Lyrical Ballads, in Poems and Prefaces, Vol. II of Poetical Works, p. 397.

[76]Ibid., p. 395.

> others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community. Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relation of things and perpetuates their apprehension. . . .[77]

Major works that poignantly depict the expressive bard are absent in English painting of the Romantic era. We have suggested before that we do not find this curious since the concept of the vocal artist is an abstract one and does not really lend itself to pictoral representation. The best that a Romantic painter could do is to indirectly imply that artists are able to declare their feelings. He depicts, for example, a poet or painter using the tools of his trade--a pen or a paintbrush. In figure fourteen Lawrence portrays a seated Scott, with pen in hand, ready to compose. Or, he could represent the bard voicing his poetry in a solemn fashion. Lawrence's painting "Homer reciting His Poems" (fig. 1) is an instance of this technique.

The absence of prominent paintings on the subject at hand is also not disturbing since it is only one of several traits of the divine artist. No English Romantic artist carefully works out a systematic conceptualization of the seer-prophet and then graphically depicts all aspects of the character.

When one searches for instances of the expressive

---

[77]Shelley, A Defense of Poetry, in Essays, Vol. VII of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 111.

bard in French literature and painting of the era, one again discovers little in existence. Yet, this does not imply that the idea is of no interest to artists. Rather, it indicates that the idea of expressiveness in the seer is assumed or implied and is, therefore, not stated. A typical example of this truism is revealed in André Chénier's poem "The Young Captive." In this short work, lamenting the injustice of an imprisoned young woman the bard declares that her songs will have a pronounced effect on someone, her expression will touch a sensitive heart somewhere. These comments imply that the poet can effectively express his thoughts.

> I strove in all the sweet and tender words I knew
> Her gentle grief to tell.
>
> Melodious witness of my captive days,
> These rhymes shall make some lover of my lays
> Seek the maid I have sung.[78]

In French painting the same oblique suggestions appear as we see in English painting. The viewer is invited to conclude that the artist is able to express himself since he is surrounded either by art objects or the tools necessary to express aesthetic ideas. Those who examine Delacroix's "Michel-Angelo in His Studio" (fig. 4) and "Tasso in Prison" (fig. 21) are asked to infer that a

---

[78]Chénier, "The Young Captive," in Old France and the Revolution, p. 403.

poet and painter can express his thoughts in some medium. A contemplative Michelangelo has worked out his ideas in the stone sculpture around him just as Tasso has written out his feelings on the manuscript scattered about him in prison. A third example is Gerard's "Ossian Playing the Harp" (fig. 9). The bard is rendered playing the lyre, proclaiming his epic thoughts for all to hear.

German Romantic literature, unlike the prose and poetry in France of the period, abounds with direct pronouncements of the artist's gift for expression. As early as Sturm und Drang days Goethe and Schiller are captivated by the figure of the bard as seer and vocal prophet. Later, the image becomes even more accessible and appears repeatedly in the works of Novalis, Hölderlin, and Grillparzer, to name a few. An account of this trait in the deific Romantic artist could well begin with Schiller, then.

"The Artists," a poem by Schiller, is a clear example of a work that touches on the subject of the artist's special abilities. One of these is the poet's power of expression. Schiller comments that an artist is the one person in society who communicates to his fellow man the truths of Heaven and Nature. The passage below is dedicated to the artist.

> By you was thus the earliest sound
> Of the Ideal Beauty given,
> As in the Natural World ye found,
> And showed--the Prototypes of Heaven.

> The Passions wild that throng the soul
> And Fortune's lawless sports with man,
> Duty and instinct's hard control
> Ye marked with sympathetic scan,
> And gave the involved and jarring whole,
> The purpose and the plan.[79]

Goethe joins Schiller in declaring that the bard possesses the gift of expression; the seer perceives the truth and then conveys the truth to men in an eloquent expression. In three of Goethe's major works--"Hans Sach's Poetical Mission," Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, and Torquato Tasso--the author has something to say about the Genius's ability to represent his exceptional insights. A passage or two from each work is sufficient to document this fact.

Goethe's poem about the sixteenth-century poet and playwright Hans Sachs centers, for the most part, around the persons's varied abilities. One of these is his talent for expression.

> He had a tongue that charm'd when 'twas heard,
> And graceful and light flow'd ev'ry word;
> Which made the Muses in him rejoice,
> The Master-singer of their choice.[80]

Here, as elsewhere in Romantic art, we find the bard represented as God's chosen prophet translating God's message to mankind. In turn, the poet's audience is overjoyed

---

[79]Schiller, "The Artist," in Poems and Ballads, p. 316.

[80]Goethe, "Hans Sachs' Poetical Mission," in Poems of Goethe, p. 216.

to discover, in the poet, a figure who can express these truths.

The idea that the artist's work is wrought in a precious and exceptional manner is reiterated in Goethe's play about the Renaissance poet Torquato Tasso. Several figures in the play, at one time or another, suggest that the poet's language is charming to the ear and, thus, induces a sense of pleasure in each man. It is also interesting to note that the poet's gifts are necessary to the hero, according to one character in the play. The Princess believes that the two roles in society complement one another; the poet's duty is to tell, in eloquent language, of the hero's epic exploits. Ergo, the bard takes on nobility because of the noble events he relates.

> Princess: "How bard and hero for each other live,
> And toward each other know no envious thought.
> Noble in truth are deeds deserving fame,
> But it is also noble to transmit
> The lofty grandeur of heroic deeds,
> Through worthy song, to our posterity."[81]

One last reference to the theme in Goethe's works comes from his novel on a youth's apprenticeship. The following comments by Meister indicate the unusual value of the artist to society.

> "Sufficiently provided for within, they [poets] had need of little from without; the gift of communicating lofty emotions and glorious images to men, in melodies and words that charmed the ear, and fixed themselves

---

[81]Goethe, Torquato Tasso, p. 381.

> inseparably on whatever objects they referred to, of old enraptured the world, and served the gifted as a rich inheritance."[82]

Clearly, Meister--the budding Romantic artist--believes that he and his fellow poets possess not only marvelous knowledge but also the gift to communicate that understanding to the rest of the world.

Friedrich von Hardenburg, writing under the pseudonym Novalis, also penned a Künstlerroman, Henry von Ofterdingen. One of the many themes in this novel is the proposal that the poet is a prophetic creature, declaring Goodness, Beauty, and Truth in eloquent, pleasing language. Several passages focus on this belief and the one cited here is illustrative.

> "Divine favor had highly honoured the bards so that, inspired by invisible communion, they could proclaim heavenly wisdom on earth in sweet sounds."[83]

Hölderlin is a third poet to center a substantial amount of poetry on the figure on the poet. Poems such as "As on a Holiday," "To the Young Poets," "The Poet's Courage," and "The Poet's Vocation" detail various traits of the Romantic artist. "As on a Holiday" states that an artist possesses the ability to sing of God's divine truths.

> Yet, fellow poets, us it behooves to stand
> Bare-headed beneath God's thunderstorms,
> To grasp the Father's ray, no less, with our own two hands

---

[82]Goethe, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, p. 113.

[83]Novalis, Henry von Ofterdingen, p. 30.

> And, wrapping in song the heavenly gift,
> To offer it to the people.[84]

We can bring our study of the divine Romantic poet--who bears the gifts of insight and artistic representation--to a close with the citation of a brief passage from Grillparzer's play Sappho. At the conclusion of the drama the poetess Sappho gives thanks to the gods for her unique artistic attributes. The artist is thankful for her special knowledge as well as the beautiful expressions she is able to compose.

> Sublime and holy Gods
> You have adorned me with your bounteous blessings!
> In my hand you bestowed your bow of song,
> Bestowed your quiverful of poesy,
> A heart to feel, a mind to comprehend,
> And power to fashion what I have conceived.
> You have adorned me with your beauteous blessings!
> I give you thanks![85]

* * *

As we have seen, the notion that the poet is a seer-prophet, able to express profound insights, is coupled with a certain physical appearance and a particular existence in society. But this is clearly not the totality of the Romantic artist's concern with his position in a new bourgeois culture. In forging an apologia for his life, the poet and painter is forced to clarify one more facet

---

[84]Hölderlin, "As on a Holiday," in Poems and Fragments, pp. 375-7.

[85]Grillparzer, Sappho, p. 130.

of the image of the deific artist; that is, the question of the poet's role in civilization. If the bard is aware of the truths of God and Nature what should he do with that special knowledge? The resolution of this dilemma is typified by two antithetical traditions within the Romantic era; the Art-for-Art's-Sake movement as contrasted to that of the Humanitarian artists. The next chapter investigates the conceptualization of these two traditions and reviews representative sclections of art depicting the two traditions.

CHAPTER V

THE ARTIST'S FUNCTION: TWO TRADITIONS

The Romantic artist is convinced of his gifted genius. He believes that his talents indicate two wonderful faculties he possesses: an ability to clearly perceive the true values at hand in human experience; an ability to express that perceptive knowledge in some artistic medium. But another question is raised that relates to the bard's unique nature--what is the seer-poet's function or occupation in society? Does the artist have a basic responsibility to share his knowledge of Nature and Beauty with the commonweal? The question of "utility" brings with it one of two general reactions by the artist to the new bourgeois public, a culture constantly demanding that each occupation be pragmatic and useful. Regardless of which reaction he adopts, though, the seer-poet never relinquishes one belief--moral and aesthetic values somehow have to be maintained, now more than ever, in the present, valueless, mechanistic age.

To the bourgeoisie's demand for occupational accountability, several Romantic artists react with the reply "L'Art pour l'art!" It seems to the Art-for-Art's-

Sake or Ivory Tower poets and painters that the influence of Middle Class tastelessness is tainting the quality of art. Consequently, these men set out to uncompromisingly defend art's imperative dignity and purity. One historian of the era describes the group in this fashion:

> While the industrialization of the civilized world proceeded rapidly and inexorably, these guardians of the romantic legacy turned their backs on the loathsome spectacle. They kindled in the privacy of their studies and esoteric circles an impassioned worship of beauty.[1]

Few of the Art-for-Art's-Sake artists ever bother to develop a systematic defense of their views on the subject of art-corrupting, bourgeois tastes. Yet, certain general tenets or opinions about society's need for art do appear in the major works of these poets and painters.

The Ivory Tower artist appears to hold something not unlike the following convictions. First, in reply to the question of art's usefulness, it is clear that art need not have what is commonly conceived of as a "utilitarian" function. In another light, however, art actually produces the greatest utility of all since art represents Beauty and Beauty brings the greatest happiness. In conclusion, to ask that art have a practical value in the common sense is to absurdly ask the value of flowers, the mercantile value of religion.

---

[1]Katherine E. Gilbert and H. Kuhn, A History of Aesthetics (New York: Macmillan, 1939), p. 486.

Secondly, given the present existence of a valueless, cultureless, bourgeois society--a boundless, undefined culture impossible for the artist to communicate his special knowledge of Beauty to--the creative Genius has no choice but to abandon any hope of elevating this culture above its degenerate level and to dedicate himself solely to aesthetic goals. In brief, in periods of public insensitivity to art, such as the present age, the artist's only duty is to maintain the artistic tradition, a tradition dedicated to high cultural values. In a sense, he is a heroic figure who sustains noble, moral, and aesthetic traditions in the face of a barbarian or utilitarian, industrial age.

Generally, the defenses of the Ivory Tower or Art-for-Art's-Sake artists reflect a certain introverted, anti-social personality. The figure discovers a quieting effect on his restless temperament when he contemplates art as pure beauty rather than considering art's effect on society. The Ivory Tower, visionary artist is often characterized by his preoccupation with Beauty, or perhaps, God's Word. He dwells so much on the poetic experience, or the Word, that he often ignores his prospective audience. Since the artist places a premium on the value of the individual's experience, it follows inevitably that he feels any social experience is useless. Repeatedly, the Romantic artist declares that the individual's lone search for Beauty is

the only plausible enterprise. Attempts at any moral or aesthetic reformation of the public are destined to fail. Collectively, society will never achieve anything meaningful to the soul. A proper impulse in the individual and the artist, therefore, is to turn away from the company of men, to seek happiness in striving for the Ideal or, perhaps, in the search for Self. Both can be discovered in the close study of art.

A second, larger group of Romantic artists also dedicate themselves to pursuing the Idea. The Humanitarian Romantics do not praise civic society nor do they seek isolation in an aloof ivory tower. Instead, they look forward to a golden age consisting of a happy, art-appreciative, harmonious community.

Unlike the Ivory Tower bards, the Humanitarian poets believe that the God-given gift for perceiving the Ideal carries with it social obligations, a lofty duty to forge in their fellow man an awareness of Beauty and Truth. In brief, the Humanitarian poet searches for a singular, aesthetic experience but then dutifully relates that experience to mankind thereby making him conscious of the beauty of art. Sympathizing with the suffering and hopelessness of the working classes of the Industrial Age, Of their need for artistic and moral guidance, the Romantic artist senses a Messianic call to alleviate the bourgeoisie's malady. In following an artistic occupation, the poet-seer

has a sense of contributing to the world, of healing and changing its insensitivie nature. His "good works," in turn, he believes will clearly justify the artist's place in the social scheme of things.

The assumption here is, of course, that the artist is the most qualified person to legislate the direction of social progress. Humanitarian artists such as Emerson, Shelley, Hugo, and Goethe argue that the poet-priest's claim to leadership is rightly made on the basis of his unique talents for perception and expression.

There is a certain personality type behind the Humanitarian movement just as there is in the Art-for-Art's-Sake artist. A compassionate, humanistic mentality is present in the various reform movements of the Romantic era. It is a temperament--perhaps more healthy than that of the Aesthetic character--which feels comfortable at one and the same time with the individual search for beauty coupled with a pursuit of social reform. It is a personality compelled to share, charitably, its own revelations and experiences with others.

The Humanitarian movement by far is the more dominant one in the Romantic period. Recognizing the inevitability of a growing bourgeois culture, this group seeks to cooperate with Middle Class interests rather than turn away from them. This is not to say that the Humanitarian artist feels he is accepting bourgeois tastes in art. On

the contrary, they, as well as the Art-for-Art's-Sake figures, decry society's preoccupation with materialism. Unlike the Ivory Tower bards, however, the Humanitarians believe some hope exists for reforming the working classes.

The present chapter is concerned with clarifying and substantiating the existence of the artist's reactions to the demand for functionalism in art. But certain obstacles arise in attempting such a project. One discovers upon an examination of Romantic art that the two traditions are often implied rather than stated in any systematic fashion. This situation tends to obscure the artist's concern over the genius's role in society. Then, too, the two traditions are abstract in conception not lending themselves, in painting especially, to graphic representation. Nevertheless, scattered examples of art can be found that directly address the question of the poet's or artist's role in society. I believe the scarcity of material does not indicate a lack of interest in the problem of the Romantic artificer's social role but suggests that the artist's response to the problem is generally an unconscious one. His response shows up as an undercurrent attitude in his writings but he is not aware of it. This is particularly true of the Humanitarian artist's works, which manifest a deep sense of pity for the debased common man but do not contain, for example, a clear declaration of the need for social reform. Nor is

there a statement, on many occasions, that the artist is the one to lead this much-needed cultural revolution. William Blake, for one, is an artist who implies that the poet, after his achievement of the knowledge of Truth and Beauty, will in turn pass on that knowledge to others in benefit to mankind.

* * *

The Art-for-Art's-Sake or Aesthetic tradition, so avidly followed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, derives its initial impetus from certain Romantic artists. Poe, Keats, Gautier, and Hoffmann are the best examples. But this tradition or theory is still vague in outline at its earliest stage in the Romantic era, and one discovers only scattered documents illuminating the idea. This is especially evident in American and English art. The movement first started in France or perhaps Germany and then spread westward rapidly. By the last half of the nineteenth century the Aesthetic tradition is clearly defined and expoused by Pater, Rossetti, Wilde, Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Heine.[2]

Any study of the Ivory Tower movement in American Romanticism affords few discernable documents testifying

---

[2]It is conjectural just who first developed the idea. A discussion of the subject is found in R. J. Egan, "The Origin of the Theory of Art for Art's Sake." Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, Vol. II, No. 4, Vol. V, No. 3.

to its presence. Edgar Allan Poe's essays The Philosophy of Composition and The Poetic Principle are filled with passages "implying" but not stating that the artist's only duty in life, the soul's most rewarding activity, is the quest for absolute Beauty. Typical of the early stages of an artistic tradition, Poe's beliefs anticipate rather than formulate a notion of Art for its own sake.

The same may be said of Emily Dickinson's poetry which exposes her disdain for the public at large. Dickinson is a poet who finds the individual's search for Beauty a sufficient subject to sustain her interest for a life time. One may infer from her voluminous poetry that this pursuit is the only one of true merit.

Nathaniel Hawthorne is a third figure aligning himself on occasion with the Aesthetic movement. Many of his stories are filled with Calvinistic admonitions against the mercantilism of his era. In addition, he does not share Emerson's faith in the potentiality of man's moral salvation. "The Artist of the Beautiful" is one story reflecting the protagonist's dedication to art alone. In the following passage the disillusioned artist Owen Warland is reinspired by his art work (a mechanical butterfly) and, as a result, recollects what his true mission in life is: to pursue the Ideal only.

> Perhaps, as in a former instance, the butterfly came and hovered about his head and reinspired him--as indeed this creature of the sunshine has always a mys-

> terious mission for the artist,--reinspired him with the former purpose of his life.[3]

Owen finally achieves his goal at the close of the story. He attempts to display his art work to the surrounding bourgeois town-folk but it is destroyed by them. However, this is of little concern to Owen, now, who has achieved his ultimate Ideal--pure beauty. The consoling fact for the artist to remember is that he has pursued the Ideal, not the fact that his art work has failed to benefit the public.

> And as for Owen Warland, he looked placidly at what seemed the ruin of his life's labor, and which was yet no ruin. He had caught a far other butterfly than this. When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality.[4]

No American paintings depict the Art-for-Art's-Sake tradition in an obvious way. Essentially, this is the result of the abstract, non-pictorial nature of the theory and does not indicate the painter's lack of concern for the values of aestheticism. Declarations here and there in the correspondence of various American Romantic painters attest to their longing to purify art from the overwhelming bourgeois influence of the period.[5] But this

---

[3]Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful," in The Complete Short Stories. . . . , p. 432.

[4]Ibid., p. 437.

[5]Samuel F. B. Morse and Thomas Cole speak, in their journals, of the desire to pursue only the Ideal in

literature does not constitute creative art and for that reason we do not cite it here.

English Romanticism has its advocates for the Ivory Tower tradition also. This is clearly true of later Romantics like Pater and Rosetti. Keats appears to be the sole representative of the tradition in its early Romantic stage. Keats constantly exposes, in his art work, a personality frustrated by contact with the common man. In "Ode to a Nightingale" we observe a narrator who prefers to "drink, and leave the world unseen," to "fade away into the forest dim:. . . ." Or, in his famous "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the bard concludes that Beauty, or Truth, is its own reward; Beauty is the one Ideal worth seeking for a lifetime. The question of the poet's responsibility to elevate the public culturally is absent in Keats's writings. In a letter to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats states emphatically that he feels no allegiance at all to the public.

> . . . I have not the slightest feel of humility towards the Public--or to anything in existence,--but the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the Memory of great Men. . . .[6]

English Romantic painting, like American painting of the

---

art. Comments by these men and other Romantic painters are included in H. T. Tuckerman, Book of the Artists, and E. P. Richardson, American Romantic Painting.

[6]Keats, "To John Hamilton Reynolds," in Letters, Vol. VI of The Poetical Works. . . . , pp. 186-7.

same period, is noticeably lacking in its declaration of the Art-for-Art's-Sake platform. The reasons for this phenomenon are the same as those for American painting: the nature of the idea does not lend itself to visual representation. Again, this does not imply--just as it does not suggest in American Romantic painting--that there is no interest in the Ivory Tower tradition in art.

When one turns to the arts of early nineteenth-century France one discovers a bold defense of the artist's dedication to the Ideal only. There is little doubt, in fact, that the Art-for-Art's-Sake tradition is originally formulated in France during the Romantic age. Gautier and Vigny are its primary representatives.

Théophile Gautier, in his "Preface" to the novel Mlle. de Maupin, cautions against the popular Romantic eagerness for social reform. Gautier, unlike the Humanitarian artists, considers the human race incapable of being improved; social progress does not exist.

> Good heavens! what a foolish thing is this pretended perfectibility of the human race which is continually being dinned into our ears! One would think, in truth, that man is a machine susceptible of improvements, and that some wheel-work in better gear or counterpoise more suitably placed would make him work in a more convenient and easy fashion.[7]

The author demonstrates at some length the absurdity of searching for a utilitarian function in art. In his

---

[7]Gautier, "Preface," to Mlle. de Maupin, p. xxvii.

polemic on aestheticism he first ridicules the entire Humanitarian tradition, characterized by reformers like the Saint-Simonian school.

> In truth, it is enough to make one burst with laughing to hear the dissertations of these Republican or Saint-Simonian utilitarian gentlemen. I should, first of all, very much like to know the precise meaning of this great lanky substantive . . . and sacramental term--utility.
>
> . . .
>
> There are two sorts of utility, and the meaning of the vocable is always a relative one. What is useful for one is not useful for another. You are a cobbler, I am a poet. It is useful to me to have my first verse rhyme with my second.[8]

The author concludes that those who demand material utility out of everything in life are philistines whose life is a spiritual void. Art is not designed to satisfy man's physical, appetitive nature but is only meant to serve his spiritual needs.

> Nothing that is beautiful is indispensable to life. You might suppress flowers, and the world would not suffer materially; yet who would wish that there were no more flowers? I would rather give up potatoes than roses, and I think there is none but an utilitarian in the world capable of pulling up a bed of tulips in order to plant cabbages therein.[9]

Gautier strengthens his defense of aestheticism in A History of Romanticism. By way of recounting the lives of the great artists of the 1820's and 1830's he also mentions the aspirations of those artists; they were men

---

[8] Ibid., p. xxiv.

[9] Ibid., p. xxv.

devoted principally to art.

> I had the honour of being enrolled in those useful bands that fought for idealism, poesy, and freedom in art, with an enthusiasm, a bravery, and a devotion unknown nowadays.[10]

The heroes in Vigny's works, like the central characters in Gautier's Mlle. de Maupin, are egocentric, withdrawn personalities who shun social enterprises such as cultural reform. They favor, instead, a preoccupation with art and, as a result, the interior Self. Vigny's Stello is repeatedly advised by his counselor Dr. Noir to abandon any hope of correlating a political and artistic career. Art, Dr. Noir maintains, is useful in itself. It need not be placed in the service of any social need. The physician tells Stello that artists must never forget the ultimate utilitarian value of their art.

> Let him not worry that his work may be useless; if it be beautiful, it will be useful by virtue of that fact alone, since it will unite men in a common reverence and contemplation of itself, and of the idea for which it stands.[11]

Chatterton demonstrates the same thesis. The prodigious artist hero of this drama is only intent on poetic pursuits. All of his social relationships are abysmal failures. Nature dictates that his only success lies in the individual search for poetic truth.

French painting of the Romantic era contains some

---

[10]Gautier, A History of Romanticism, p. 15.

[11]Vigny, Stello, p. 172.

testimony to the Art-for-Art's-Sake tradition also. Daumier's satiric sketch "Patrons" (fig. 22) visualizes the proposition that the artist functions best when he is left to his own work, to his own ideals. While the bourgeois onlookers seek in the painting something meaningful to themselves, the painter is only intent on perfecting his art.

Certain German Romantic artists join Vigny and Gautier in a demonstrated preference for the figure of the Ivory Tower artist. There are definite indications that Friedrich Schlegel, Hoffmann, Hölderlin, and Grillparzer, among others, favor the Aesthetic tradition. Significant German Romantic paintings picturing the same subject are not to be discovered however. But the reason for this absence is the same that accounts for the absence of paintings on the theme in American and English Romantic art as well; the subject does not readily lend itself to visual representation. For this reason only, we must restrict our survey of the German interest in Art-for-Art's-Sake to literature alone.

A number of Schlegel's aphorisms imply that the poet-seer is a gifted soul dedicated, for the most part, to searching for the eternal verities of life. Explained another way, the poet bases his identify on aesthetic rather than social pursuits.

> The priest as such exists only in the invisible world. How can he appear among men? On earth he will only want to transform the finite into the eternal, and thus, whatever title his endeavor may have, he must be and remain an artist.[12]

Hölderlin, a second poet writing in the Aesthetic tradition, sees no necessary social responsibility on the artist's part either. At least two of his works depict the artist working satisfactorily only when he is not diverted from his own artistic goals. Any act of social reform invariably concludes in failure. The advice included in the quatrain below urges poets to follow the dictates of the Ideal only.

> Of mortal men think kindly, but love the gods!
> Loathe drunkenness like frost! Don't describe
> or teach!
> And if you fear your master's bluntness,
> Go to great Nature, let her advise you![13]

Similar instructions, directing the bard to avoid utilitarian art, appear again in "The Poet's Vocation" and in the novel Hyperion. One of the cold facts Hyperion comes to realize in life is that projects to better the human condition are fruitless. Hyperion experiences several crushing defeats in charitable social endeavors before this reality is finally and totally understood by him. He

---

[12]F. Schlegel, "Aphorism 16," in "Dialogue on Poetry" and Literary Aphorisms, trans. E. Behler and R. Struc (University Park: Penn State Univ. Press, 1968), p. 150.

[13]Hölderlin, "To the Young Poets," in Poems and Fragments, p. 57.

repeatedly reprimands himself, as he does in the passage below, for accepting any obligations other than to his art.

> Yes, only forget that there are men, O famished, beleaguered, infinitely troubled heart! and return thither whence you came, to the arts of Nature, the changeless, the quiet, the beautiful.
>
> . . .
>
> My business on earth is over and done. I set to work full of determination, I gave of my blood to it, and made the world not a penny the richer.[14]

Grillparzer's play Sappho lacks language specifically condemning a poet's desire to aid his fellow man and yet the major action of the play turns on the folly of the bard's involvement with society. Although the poetess Sappho seeks to bring her arts to mankind, and further, to join the simple life of men, she discovers--after a series of disastrous events--that her dreams of unity with mankind are hopeless. The poet, God demands, must only pursue the beautiful, the Ideal. She fully realizes this mandate by the conclusion of the play.

We might offer a brief note, in closing, on the work of E. T. A. Hoffmann. Hoffmann accepts the popular Aesthetic thesis that artists must escape from social pressures. That is, the poet is wedded to his art, not society. Much has previously been related about the alienated protagonist in Hoffmann's novel Kater Murr. It is

---

[14]Hölderlin, Hyperion, p. 22.

clear to any reader of the work, too, that Johannes Kreisler is an artist dedicated only to his music. He suffers intensely when asked to perform a utilitarian service such as conducting the court orchestra on a full-time basis. The artist demands to be left alone to follow the dictates of his work. The reader must conclude that the artist works strictly to satisfy his own needs and the demands of pure art.

The same theme reappears on Hoffmann's short story "Mademoiselle de Scuderi." When the demonic artist-goldsmith Cardillac is questioned as to whom he designs his works for, he replies:

> "For no one but myself," . . . .
>
> . . .
>
> "Yes, you may find it strange, Madame Marquise, but that's how it is. For no reason other than to create something beautiful, I gathered my finest stones and, simply for the sheer joy of it, worked on them more diligently and carefully than ever before."[15]

Hoffmann's plot is generated out of Cardillac's conviction that art is its own reward. We see the goldsmith actually rob his clients in order that he may recover his own artwork. Art, indeed, is most valuable to the artist alone. Art is not meant to satisfy the public but is created for

---

[15]Hoffmann, "Mademoiselle de Scuderi," in Tales, Vol. I of Selected Writings. . . . , p. 231.

the sake of the uniquely sensitive man.

Hoffmann's heroes maintain artistic convictions that are common to other Art-for-Art's-Sake bards of the period. In some ways, these beliefs adequately characterize a certain Romantic proposition--the suffering, isolated artist is misunderstood by a bourgeois, industrial age. The Art-for-Art's-Sake artists surveyed choose to justify their belief, through their works, that art and the artist will always suffer these conditions as long as the public looks for a pragmatic, functional element in art. In addition, as long as the public maintains this view of art artists will always confound and annoy the common man. Art, the poets declare, must be enjoyed for its own sake. It must not be harnessed to social reform.

* * *

A larger group of bards did not agree with the Ivory Tower artists on the question of the creative genius's role in society. Many writers from America, England, and the Continent feel that poets, painters, and sculptors should occupy themselves, it is true, with the Ideal but they must transform that Ideal into something beneficial to society. The works of the Humanitarian artists reflect their belief that they could cure the absence of a moral and aesthetic sense in the bourgeoisie by creating didactic art designed to educate the public to their malady. In

this way artists could pursue art but fulfill a necessary social function. These artists appear to be truly convinced of their ideas, as their biographies attest. Almost all are engaged in some humanitarian social activity in their private lives. What we generally find, then, in the Humanitarian tradition is a charitable, society-oriented personality. It is not a temperament hostile to society but one willing to work with mankind to achieve common goals.

A faith in the humanizing effects of art appears in American Romanticism as it does across Europe in the same era. Whitman and Emerson, as well as W. S. Mount, reflect on this faith. Whitman's long poem "Song of Myself" relies on Emerson's idea that the poet and society interreact completely. Each works for the other and ultimately the human race is perfected. In a typical passage, cited here, the bard feels that his art work will be beneficial to the public; the poet-prophet will create a purer, a more refined and harmonious culture. This beneficient process symbolizes the true love between the poet and mankind.

> You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
> But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
> And filter and fiber your blood.
>
> Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
> Missing me one place search another

I stop somewhere waiting for you.[16]

Emerson's writings further document the poet's need to relate his artistic endeavors to society at large; that is, the poet fulfills the public's need for Beauty and Truth. Several essays including The American Scholar, The Poet, and Representative Men assert this conviction. What is consistently proposed in these works is the idea that the poet or painter is a legislator of civilization, a director of men toward proper moral and aesthetic values. Thus, Emerson links his career in art to his earlier vocation as minister. The American Romantic assays the nature of the scholar's or Genius's duties:

> The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances.
>
> . . .
>
> He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart. He is to resist the vulgar prosperity that retrogrades ever to barbarism by preserving and communicating heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history.[17]

American painters in the first half of the nineteenth century are nurtured in the genres of landscape and portraiture, a tradition of functional, realistic art. Most accept this condition and feel that it is suitable to the American faith in utilitarianism, an attitude

---

[16]Whitman, "Song of Myself," in Poems, Vol. VIII of The Collected Writings. . . . , p. 89.

[17]Emerson, The American Scholar, Essays, Vol. I of The Complete Works. . . . , pp. 100-2.

ingrained in the country since its inception. But other artists feel that the painter and the public could establish a compatible arrangement on another basis. The artist would portray Ideals, such as Goodness and Truth, and this, in turn, would be an exact remedy for the American preoccupation with mercantilism. The public would be grateful for the artist's instruction. This satisfying, congenial relationship between artist and patron is represented in Mount's "The Painter's Triumph" (fig. 27) so aptly named. Here, the painter is enlisted in the aid of social reform as he both pleases and instructs his audience.

Romantic England, in addition to America, has its own artists occupied with social reform. Blake is a poet in deep sympathy with the misery of the working classes. Poems such as "Holy Thursday," "The Chimney Sweeper," and "London" testify to these humanitarian sentiments. Yet, Blake has no poems discussing the subject of the bard's function in society and therfore we will drop any further consideration of his work in this study.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley are four additional English Romantics who adopt the notion of the bard's basic responsibility to better mankind. Coleridge, in his "Religious Musings," suggests that philosophers and bards will calm the social upheaval of the Revolutionary period. Wordsworth's poem "London, 1802" and his

"Preface" to Lyrical Ballads offer a judgment on the notion of healing the public too. In "London, 1802" the great seventeenth-century bard Milton is called upon to save mankind from its present, chaotic, floundering state in the Romantic age.

> Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
> England hath need of thee: she is a fen
> Of stagnant waters: . . .
> . . .
> Oh! raise up, return to us again;
> And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.[18]

In Wordsworth's famous preface to the jointly-authored Lyrical Ballads he acknowledges a sense of duty, on the poet's behalf, to help sensitize the public to art. For Wordsworth, this is the poet's function: to make man as acutely conscious of the beauty of the universe as the artist is.

> For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged.[19]

Wordsworth adds that the poet's function to elevate and sensitize is especially needed in his own era, a period characterized by its bourgeois, utilitarian public.

---

[18]Wordsworth, "London, 1802," in Poems, Vol. III of Poetical Works, p. 116.

[19]Wordsworth, "Preface," to Lyrical Ballads, in Poems and Prefaces, Vol. II of Poetical Works, p. 389.

> . . . but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day. For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, . . . to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor.[20]

Byron's "Lament of Tasso" also portrays the humanitarian poet-prophet. Tasso is a poet who has designed his epic work Jerusalem Delivered, to further the cause of social and religious justice. The Renaissance bard offers an apologia for his life while in prison:

> . . . I stoop not to despair;
> For I have battled with mine agony,
> . . .
> And freed the Holy Sepulchre from thrall;
> And revelled among men and things divine,
> And poured my spirit over Palestine,
> In honour of the sacred war for Him,[21]

This poem, among others, casts a reflection on Byron's zest for social reform. Various actions in the poet's own life, such as his participation in the Greeks' campaign for independence, illuminate his social interests.

Shelley is a well-known humanitarian figure in the Romantic period. His concern for social welfare is seen, for example, in the figure of Prometheus, a heroic benefactor of mankind. Another instance is his essay A Defense of Poetry, a typical Romantic apology for art. Like Wordsworth, Shelley feels that the poet's primary utility

---

[20] Ibid., p. 389.

[21] Byron, "Lament of Tasso," in Poems, Vol. IV of The Works. . . . , p. 144.

is to enliven the common man's sensitivity to Nature and Beauty. He announces his desire to achieve this goal at the conclusion of "Ode to the West Wind." But Shelley goes further and adds that the bard leads man to a greater understanding of truth. Without artists, Shelley believes, mankind would seldom progress in knowledge.

> The exertions of Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rosseau, and their disciples, in favour of oppressed and deluded humanity, are entitled to the gratitude of mankind. Yet it is easy to calculate the degree of moral and intellectual improvement which the world would have exhibited, had they never lived. A little more nonsennse would have been talked for a century or two; and perhaps a few more men, women, and children, burnt as heretics.[22]

Being the most sensitive, perceptive man of all, the poet is the one person best qualified to legislate the direction of society's growth. Shelley closes his essay with some famous words: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."[23]

English painting has at least one likely example of a scene characterizing the spirit of humanitarian art. Martin's "The Bard" (fig. 8) depicts the aloof poet--an aspirant to the Ideal--admonishing mankind, in the vales of ignorance below, to acquire the Ideals of the poet. Thus, the poet-seer not only personally follows Beauty in

---

[22]Shelley, A Defense of Poetry, in Essays, Vol. VII of The Complete Works. . . . , p. 133.

[23]Ibid., p. 140.

life but is compelled toward cultural reform as well.

While French Romanticism gives birth and impetus to the theory of "L'Art pour l'art," France also has its share of poets owing allegiance to the idea of the bourgeoisie's cultural rehabilitation. Saint-Simon and his program of social reform has a substantial influence on such artists as Lamartine, Victor Hugo, George Sand, Eugene Sue, and Delacroix. Each of these artists, in at least one work, focuses on the unhealthy social conditions of the time. These works, as a consequence, not only expose the writer's interest in public welfare but indicate something of the Romantic bard's feelings on the subject of art's utility.

For the sake of brevity we will elect to study from the above group only the work of Victor Hugo, the most artistic member of the humanitarian writers. Also, a selection or two from his works will adequately represent the sentiments of the reformists. In the preface to Hernani Hugo laments the public's hostility toward the poet, an atmosphere under which the artist must work. He deems the bourgeoisie's attitude unwarranted since the labors of the artist are intended for the public.

> Are there not those around whom calumnies, injuries, hatreds, jealousies, . . . incessantly gather; true men, against whom disloyal war is waged; devoted men, who only seek to bestow on their country one sort of freedom

the more, that of art and intelligence.[24]

A more lengthy, detailed polemic on the character of the artist and his potential value to society appears in William Shakespeare. Time and again in this work Hugo prompts the poet to create art that communicates noble sentiments to the Middle Class. The artist must devote his life not only to his art but also to society at large.

> To stimulate, to press, to chide, to awaken, to suggest, to inspire--these are all the functions which, fulfilled everywhere by writers, impress on the literature of this century so marked a stamp of power and originality. To remain faithful to all the laws of art, while combining them with the law of progress--such is the problem triumphantly solved by so many noble and lofty minds.[25]

Like any number of Romantic Humanitarian writers and painters, Hugo believes that the creative Genius brings the greatest of desirable gifts to civilization--the Ideal.

> Excessive devotion to the material is the evil of our epoch; hence a certain sluggishness.
> The great problem is to restore to the human mind something of the ideal. Whence shall we draw the ideal? Wherever it is to be found. The poets, and philosophers, the thinkers are its urn.
> . . .
> By this means you will cure the present malady and establish forever the health of the human mind.
> You will cure the middle-class, and found the people.
> . . .
> What an aim--to construct the people![26]

Hugo and a number of other writers are characterized by interests divided between art and society. At

---

[24]Hugo, "Preface," to Hernani, in Poems and Dramas, p. 3.

[25]Hugo, William Shakespeare, p. 297.

[26]Ibid., p. 241.

least one Romantic painter in France demonstrates similar preoccupations. Eugene Delacroix does several canvases that indicate his concern not only with artistic, painterly technique, but also with the social and political events of the period. Scenes such as "Liberty Leading the People" and "Scenes of the Massacres of Scio" reflect Delacroix's attitude toward certain political events of the day. His canvas "Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi" is even more pertinent to the Humanitarian tradition. This painting is a tribute to Byron's involvement in the Greek's struggle for independence. Delacroix appears to envy the poet's participation in both art and politics. Inspired by the July Revolution, Delacroix remarks of his "Liberty Leading the People": "I have undertaken a modern subject, a scene on the barricades . . . and if I haven't fought for my country at least I have painted for her."

We terminate our cross-cultural survey of humanitarian reformers in the Romantic period with a brief examination of German writers. No work of great achievement in the field of German Romantic painting is clearly devoted to the subject of the Humanitarian artist, so we must limit our search for the theme to the medium of literature. Again, the absence of appearances of the subject in painting is primarily caused by the non-pictorial nature of the idea.

There is evidence to suggest that Goethe, Schiller, and Novalis feel some duty to the bourgeoisie that surround

them. Since these writers clearly demonstrate an interest in the poet's obligation to society we will confine our discussion to them. Typical of the poets and painters we have grouped under the Humanitarian school, Schiller characterizes the bard as a figure bringing enlightenment to mankind. The artist's work is always designed for mankind's benefit. Schiller, writing in a popular mode, draws the artist as the grandest creature of all:

> Darlings beloved of holiest Harmony!
> Gladsome companions through our being here!
> Gentlest and noblest of all powers that be
> Given to life, to make that life more dear![27]

Goethe duplicates Schiller's image of the Genius. In such works as Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, Torquato Tasso, "Authors," and "Hans Sachs' Poetical Mission" the poet is represented elevating the moral and aesthetic conditions of society; the poet creates his work to bring joy to someone other than himself. Goethe's characters constantly remark that there is no real conflict between art and society, or between striving to attain Ideals in life and directing the course of civilization. The artist, ideally, acts as mediator between heaven and mankind. He helps sensitize or elevate man to the Olympian virtues of Goodness, Beauty, and Truth while translating--or bringing down to a commonly-understandable level--these virtues to

---

[27]Schiller, "The Artist," in Poems and Ballads, p. 320.

society. This reciprocal process symbolizes the ultimate utilitarian function any occupation can have. The two passages cited here are from Goethe's novel Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship but typify the concept of art rendered in each of the author's works mentioned above.

> Nay, if thou wilt have it, who but the poet was it that first formed gods for us; that exalted us to them, and brought them down to us?[28]

In some attempt to synthesize the epoch's pursuit of both idealism and utilitarianism, one of Goethe's protagonists comes to this conclusion:

> Every gift is valuable, and ought to be unfolded. When one encourages the beautiful alone, and another encourages the useful alone, it takes them both to form a man. The useful encourages itself; for the multitude produce it, and no one can dispense with it: the beautiful must be encouraged; for few can set it forth, and many need it.[29]

A third German Romantic, Novalis, works under the Humanitarian stereotyped concept of art. Novalis consistently writes of the poet's art in terms of its relation to both the Ideal and society. The hero of Henry von Ofterdingen never doubts that his poetic gifts were given to him but for one reason, to bring truth and happiness to mankind.

> Divine favor had highly honored the bards so that, inspired by invisible communion, they could proclaim

---

[28]Goethe, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, Vol. I, p. 114.

[29]Ibid., Vol. II, p. 132.

heavenly wisdom on earth in sweet sounds.[30]

Henry feels that God's gifts of perception and expression are given to the poet only with the understanding that the bard utilize these powers to transmit His message to man. Because the artist is a responsible figure, as well as highly talented, Novalis visualizes the artist as the greatest of men, a poet-magus, God's elect on earth.

* * *

We see that the two traditions--Art-for-Art's-Sake and Humanitarian art--exist side-by-side from country to country in the first half of the nineteenth century. We also know that these traditions are of great interest to artists working in more than one medium. These facts suggest that the Romantic painter as well as the Romantic poet are caught up in one of the controversial issues of the era: the paramount question of the artist's function in the new bourgeois society.

Yet, another facet of Romantic culture is illustrated in the artist's concern over the Middle-Class demand for functionalism. A larger dilemma--symbolized in the two traditions related in the preceding pages--is the conflict between the Romantic's egocentric search for the aesthetic experience and the loss of aristocratic patronage formerly enabling him to pursue that experience. The bourgeoisie

---

[30]Novalis, Henry von Ofterdingen, p. 30.

had absolutely no interest in supporting an artist's self-centered search for art, an enterprise bearing no relationship, as far as they could see, to themselves. At the same time the Ivory Tower artist, at least, does little to relate art to the common man's existence.

Only in the Romantic era does the necessity of wedding art to a utilitarian purpose become evident to certain artists. And it primarily comes to the artist's attention because of his new social and economic environment, a condition born out of the nature of the new bourgeois audience. In reaction to this new class the Art-for-Art's-Sake bards--always a small, economically-independent group--struggle to maintain a dying aristocratic tradition in art. It is a difficult struggle and the bohemian tradition, while surviving into modern times, never really gains public approval in the new Industrial Age; that is, in modern culture. The Humanitarian artists, on the other hand, experience more success and finally merge their interests in art with the bourgeoisie's concern over their own conditions. Later in the nineteenth century, Henry James, Dickens, and Emile Zola would follow the Humanitarian spirit of art.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

To close this study, we might briefly reexamine its format and content. The major chapters of this work have surveyed not only the socio-economic history of the Romantic artist's novel economic and artistic environment, but have also investigated the bard's reaction to these new conditions. In illuminating those responses, I have always relied on the assumption that art reflects the character of a particular social milieu. This assumption is a valid one, I believe, and was substantiated in this study by exposing the Romantic artist's projections of his own financial and artistic fears into his art. These concerns were made known by the artists' interest in creating literature and painting with an artist-persona as the central hero of the work. This central character paralleled, with a certain consistency, the real historical artist of the early nineteenth century.

We have noted, too, at least one significant cultural phenomenon portrayed in the artist novels, poems, plays, and paintings of the Romantic era--the existence of a strained relationship between the creative Genius and the

new ruling class, the bourgeoisie. Economic as well as artistic conflicts arose in the period in direct proportion to the growing ascendency of the Middle Class over the aristocracy. This displacement of the nobility by the bourgeoisie reached its zenith during the American and French Revolutions. Following these events a new class became omnipotent, a pragmatic-minded society who saw little functional utility in artistic occupations. This new culture refused to praise art and to support it economically.

Confronted with the turn of events following the decades of the Revolutions the Romantic artist perceived that his occupation in addition to his integrity, his "raison d'être," was in jeopardy. Defending his right to exist and create, the Romantic artificer forged a new and unique image of himself. This configuration, appearing in his art, was something of a stereotyped picture, and manifested itself in America and Europe. It can be summarized simply as an exalted view of the creative man. In offering an apology for his life and his art, the artist portrayed himself as the ultimate hero of the epoch. The precise character of his image as a hero reflected, in turn, his position in Middle-Class culture.

At least four distinct traits were delineated in the standardized representation of the Romantic artist-hero. In an attempt to magnify his importance to society,

the artist gave his artist-hero a certain physical image. This figure was commonly drawn as a pale, emaciated youth with dark, tossled hair and dark eyes. He had a high forehead and he gazed toward the heavens, the Olympian source of his inspiration.

A second facet of the creative genius was illuminated when the reader was shown the bard's treatment by the bourgeois public. The poet and painter was typically depicted as a sensitive individual unappreciated by the vulgar masses. Society both envied and hated the genius's gifted nature. For revenge, the public refused to support monetarily the artist's struggle to capture pure art. Consequently, the artistic outcast literally starved in a hostile environment.

The artist-hero was also imbued with the two God-given gifts of true insight and expression. He was a man who keenly perceived, like Christ, the reality of the Cosmos, the realities of life, and was able to give artistic expression to his special perceptions. In view of his talents, the bard saw himself as a divine seer, a prophet, a Messiah. He was Orpheus, he was Christ.

A fourth aspect of the artist was mentioned too--the creator's function in society. In keeping with the glorious image of himself, the Romantic artist alloted the highest and most admirable occupation to the artist. The bard functioned not only as a teacher of ethical and

aesthetic virtues to a decadent culture but functioned, in addition, as a director of social progress.

From what we know of the history of aesthetics, the sociological and aesthetic image of the artist in the nineteenth and twentiety centuries was first established in the Romantic era. Even in our own time the four traits of the Romantic artist not only survive but actually constitute the general view of the modern artificer. The contemporary view of the artist as an oddly-behaved, bohemian character dressed in a flamboyant fashion also came down to us from the early nineteenth century. Further, the economic plight of the modern artist was first established almost two centuries ago. Confronted with a bourgeois audience, the novice poet or painter or composer still finds himself without economic support. He still discovers, like his Romantic predecessor, that the public is generally uninterested in, and ignorant of, art.

Because of the modern artist's Romantic heritage, a close examination of the Romantic artist-persona contributes greatly to any estimation of the true character of the twentieth-century artist. But a more substantial crisis for modern man can first be recognized in the earlier impasse between the Romantic poet's interests and those of the bourgeoisie. Often thought to be a phenomenon unique to our own century, the twentieth-century confrontation

between the individual and society is a macrocosm of the Romantic artist's estrangement from the public. That is, the present alienation of the sensitive, egocentric individual from a larger, faceless, callous group is a condition generated, essentially, in the post-revolutionary, Romantic culture. The Romantic artist was the first person preoccupied with creating an identity as a sensitive, unique spirit surrounded by a vulgar, insensitive public. He was the first to initiate a trend of increasing cynicism over the possibility of finding meaning outside oneself.

The Romantic artificer, like his modern counterpart, was a being both revered and cursed. He saw himself in this light also, and became paranoid in his view of life. Believing himself to be the least admired, least appreciated member of a utilitarian-minded community, he saw himself, at the same time, as a deific person, as Christ on earth.

The artist appears to be cursed by his own nature. As a unique and gifted man he is destined to be forever separated or alienated from the main stream of civilization, a fate never leading to tranquility. It is always an admired person who possesses great talents but that same person never captures the solace that comes from companionship among men.

If the artist of the last two centuries is a condemned man, he is also a hero. The artist is always

admired as an upholder of precious, humanistic traditions. Art in the modern age is felt to be a valuable counter-force to the influences of the machine and technology, forces still believed to be antagonistic to human values. In addition, the bard is cherished for his talents. The Middle Class--characterized by its mediocrity, its lack of unique talent, its constrained passions--always envies the artist's autonomy, his air of rebellious freedom, his gifted and strange talents. One might say the common man constantly seeks to become an artist. It is an urge or striving toward creativity that is inherent in man.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Works

Byron, George N. G. The Works of Lord Byron. Edited by E. H. Coleridge. 13 vols. New York: C. Scribner, 1898-1905.

Chénier, André. "The Young Captive." Translated by K. Hillard, in Old France and the Revolution, Vol. VI of Columbia University Course in Literature. Edited by J. W. Cunliffe. New York: Columbia University Press, 1896. p. 402.

Coleridge, Samuel T. Poetical Works. Edited by J. D. Campbell. London: Macmillan, 1925.

Emerson, Ralph W. The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Centenary Edition. 12 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-18.

Gautier, Théophile. Mlle. de Maupin. Translator unknown. New York: Random House, n.d.

_____. The Works of Théophile Gautier. Translated by F. C. de Sumichrast. New York: G. G. Harrap, 1902.

Goethe, Johanne W. von. The Dramatic Works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Translated by E. A. Bowring, et al. London: Bell, 1918.

_____. Poems of Goethe. Translated by E. A. Bowring. London: Bell, 1874.

_____. Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels. Translated by T. Carlyle. London: Chapman, 1907.

Grillparzer, Franz. Franz Grillparzer's Plays on Classical Themes: Sappho. Translated by S. Solomon. New York: Random House, 1969.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The Complete Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne. New York: Doubleday, 1959.

Hoffmann, E. T. A. Selected Writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann. Translated by L. J. Dent and E. C. Knight. 2 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

Hölderlin, Friedrich. Hyperion. Translated by W. R. Trask. New York: New American Library, 1965.

_____. Poems and Fragments by Friedrich Hölderlin. Translated by M. Hamburger. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967.

Hugo, Victor. Poems and Dramas. Translated by N. Crosland. New York: University Society, n.d.

_____. William Shakespeare. Translated by M. B. Anderson. New York: New Universal Library, 1905.

Keats, John. The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats. Edited by H. B. Forman. 8 vols. New York: C. Scribner, 1938-9.

Novalis (Freidrich von Hardenburg). Henry von Ofterdingen. Translated by P. Hilty. New York: Ungar, 1964.

Schlegel, Friedrich von. "Dialogue on Poetry" and Literary Aphorisms. Translated by E. Behler and R. Struc. University Park: Penn State University Press, 1968.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by T. Hutchinson. London: Oxford University Press, 1956.

_____. The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by R. Ingpen and W. E. Peck. 10 vols. New York: Gordian Press, 1965.

Schiller, Johann C. F. "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry" and "On the Sublime." Translated by J. A. Elias. New York: Ungar, 1966.

_____. The Poems and Ballads of Schiller. Translated by Sir F. B. Lytton. New York: Crowell, n.d.

Vigny, Alfred de. Chatterton. Translation my own. Bologna: Riccardo Patron, 1962.

_____. "Moses." Translated by G. King, in Old France and the Revolution, Vol. VI of Columbia University Course in Literature. Edited by J. W. Cunliffe. New York: Columbia University Press, 1896, p. 456.

_____. Stello. Translated by I. Massey. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1963.

Whitman, Walt. The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman. Edited by G. W. Allen and E. S. Bradley. 15 vols. New York: New York University Press, 1961-.

Wordsworth, William. William Wordsworth: Poetical Works. Edited by E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire. 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-6.

Secondary Works

Babbitt, Irving. Rosseau and Romanticism. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919.

Bragg, M. H. "The Concept of the Professional Poet in Germany During the Eighteenth Century and the Evolution of a New Theory of Literature." DA, 27 (1967), 3447a.

Brandes, George M. Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature. Vol. II: The Romantic School in France. New York: Macmillan, 1904.

Clement, N. H. Romanticism in France. New York: Modern Language Association, 1939.

Dale, R. C. "Chatterton is the Essential Romantic Drama." ECr, V(1965), 131-7.

Dieckmann, Herbert. "Diderot's Conception of Genius." JHI, II(1941), 151-82.

Gilbert, Katherine E. and H. Kuhn. A History of Aesthetics. New York: Macmillan, 1939.

Graña, Cesar. Bohemian versus Bourgeois. New York: Basic Books, 1964.

Halsted, John B. "Introduction." in Romanticism. Edited by J. B. Halsted. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

Harris, Neal. The Artist in American Society. New York: G. Braziller, 1966.

Hauser, Arnold. The Social History of Art. Vol. III: Rococo, Classicism, Romanticism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951.

Johnson, Lee. Delacroix. New York: W. W. Norton, 1963.

Kahn, Ludwig W. Social Ideals in German Literature, 1770-1830. New York: Columbia University Press, 1938.

Parrington, V. C. Main Currents in American Thought. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1930.

Pelles, Geraldine. Art, Artists, and Society: Origins of a Modern Dilemma. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

Richardson, Edgar P. Painting in America. New York: Crowell, 1965.

Roston, Murray. Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965.

Shroder, Maurice Z. Icarus: The Image of the Artist in French Romanticism. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961.

Tymms, Ralph. German Romantic Literature. London: Methuen, 1955.

Williams, Roger L. "Berlioz as Artist-Hero." FR, XLI (1968), 493-7.

VITA

Clarence Thomas Bird, a native of Tampa, Florida, completed his undergraduate (1966) and Master's of Arts (1969) degrees at University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. While finishing his Master's degree he taught at East Bay and Tampa Catholic high schools in Tampa from 1967 to 1969. In 1969 he began the doctoral program in Humanities at Florida State University where he held an assistantship for two years.