The Judgements of Regency Literature

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In the English-speaking world, both the modern novel and modern science trace their roots to the same period, roughly the latter part of the seventeenth century. This commonality is no coincidence. Both were based upon the same set of values that were in the process of being negotiated in the context of an increasingly bourgeois-dominated society. The key – and closely related – values in question have been convincingly articulated as virtue in the case of the modern novel, and as trust in the case of modern science.[1] Just as authority and credibility on the part of the experimenter was an ongoing theme for science through the next three centuries, so narratological changes in literature encouraged readers to treat its claims in a variety of ways. Texts could present themselves as authoritative, or could invite varying degrees of belief, doubt or dialogue with the reader. Readers could vary in their compliance with interpretative norms. It is my contention that texts, no less than physical forums such as the Royal Institution or the Geological Society, provided a space to negotiate the same issues of authority that were crucial to science.

There are some important potential criticisms regarding a focus on literary form. One is that formalists can be overly concerned with authorial intent; another is that formalism can be historically anachronistic in trying to fit novels from different eras into a single framework of formal typology. However, one can take confidence in the fact that forms, when stable, *are* a shared and understood framework for generating meaning.[2] One can also offer the possibility of treating form historically. Throughout modern history, discussions about meaning, judgement and epistemology have continually taken place, in the areas of literary criticism, science, and jurisprudence to name but three. The literary critic can exploit this by taking historical debates and using them as formal keys to literary texts from the period in

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question.[3] This is the modus operandi of this paper. It takes two models of judgement from the Regency period and uses them to understand the epistolarity of two texts. The models are those of Jeremy Bentham and William Whewell, and the texts are Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833–4).

The range of Bentham's scholarship bridged the thematic poles of the Regency period. On the one hand, his radical democracy meshed naturally with the philosophical and political radicalism of the Enlightenment. On the other, his tendency towards authoritarianism sat well with the political anxiety of the early nineteenth century. Thus he was a fertile source of interpretative inspiration for readers caught between the same socio-political pulls of radicalism and order. Such readers included those of *Frankenstein*, which has been chosen as a case-study as a widely-read text that obviously engaged with questions of selfhood in the light of science. Its tergiversation between Romantic indulgence and Enlightenment restraint reflects the ambiguity of Bentham's political position, while its nested construction makes it a suitable candidate for discussion in terms of literary form.

Whewell was, in pragmatic terms, the most important philosopher of science of the nineteenth century. His position of power and influence meant that his epistemological standards were widely disseminated amongst practising scientific researchers; the popular, educated interest in science meant that most readers were, directly or indirectly, aware of his moral ideals for judgement. Carlyle's idealism (and social background) makes him a natural twin for Whewell. His ambivalent meditation about the suitability of idealism as social doctrine very much mirrors, and intersects with, the political dilemmas of gentlemen of science in the 1830s.

In this essay Bentham and Whewell are analyzed for the frameworks they provided for reading and judging texts in the Regency era. Bentham's readings are presented as an experiment in radical democracy that was almost, but not quite, effaced by the idealist mode introduced a generation later by Whewell. These modes of reading, and the textual judgements that they entailed, are used to help understand the epistemology of scientific evidence in the Regency era. It is claimed that both literary and scientific judgements were, at root, political, and furthermore that judgement in the courtroom formed their model. Multiple levels of nested and epistolary fiction enabled readers to rehearse and attend to political arguments about the nature of scientific evidence: evidence that, in an era of high political tension, decided the case about nothing less than their own selfhood. Each of the essay's two parts is introduced by a different contested body, a problematic self that linked the judgements of truth and fiction, the sciences and the law.

Bentham and Shelley: Democratic Judgements

On an icy January morning in 1803, George Forster was found guilty of the murder of his fourth child and estranged wife.[4] Mr Bushwell, his boss from a coach-making workshop, had come to visit him in custody before the trial to see if he could help. Forster begged him to go to the Green Dragon at Highgate and ask if anyone

remembered him being there on the evening of the murder, taking a glass of rum and asking after a Mrs Young. This, he hoped, would be his alibi. Mr Bushwell obliged, but it turned out that he was not allowed to give his evidence in court. Silenced by the power of the law, Forster listened helplessly as the judge pronounced the most dreaded verdict: hanging and anatomisation.

Forster's body was cut down from the gallows and hurried down High Holborn to the Royal College of Surgeons at Lincoln's Inn Fields where it was received by a flamboyant self-publicist, an Italian natural philosopher named Giovanni Aldini, eager to show off his gruesome theories.[5] Aldini attached metallic rods to the corpse's face and body and by the power of galvanism produced all kinds of contortions in Forster's rapidly cooling body.

Over two hundred years later, is impossible to tell whether Forster was really guilty of murder. The sad and sordid events for which he was prosecuted were not remarkable enough in their day to generate a great deal of historical documentation. One thing, however, is for sure: if the legal reformer Jeremy Bentham had had his way, Mr Bushwell would have been able to stand up in court and allow the jury to hear evidence that Forster had been in the Green Dragon on the night in question. Who knows, things might then have turned out very differently.

The stories of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and George Forster (?-1803) are interwoven on a number of levels: science, jurisprudence, and literature. Both highlight questions of evidence and belief. Bentham advocated a radical reform of the law, sweeping away the power of the legal profession and allowing the voice of the people – such as Mr Bushmill's – to be heard more clearly in the process of justice.[6] It was all a question of whose evidence was to be trusted. Bentham and especially his literary protégé Bowring extended the challenge to science: 'In the map of science, the department of evidence remains to this hour a perfect blank. Power has hitherto kept it in a state of wilderness: reason has never visited it.'[7] As jurisprudence decided the fate of the individual, so science would determine the nature and hence fate of personhood in general.

The other key participant in the story – Aldini, and his taboo-breaking experiments – would undoubtedly have sprung to mind for many of Shelley's readers. Radical atheist philosophers had for some time been propounding the materialist philosophy that there was no such thing as the soul. The human body was nothing more than a machine, as the French philosopher de la Mettrie had put it. Now, Aldini and others suggested that it was nothing more mysterious than electricity that animated the body; that made the difference between a corpse and a living person. Mary Shelley recalled conversations on the British materialist controversy during the famous house party at which *Frankenstein* was hatched, and as Marilyn Butler writes, the debate's public notoriety during the five years or so after *Frankenstein*'s publication ensured that the novel's first reading public interpreted it in its light.[8] This article, however, does not so much consider the *case* on which readers' judgement was invited – whether the body had a soul or whether it could be described in materialist terms – but rather the *processes* by which their judgement was obtained. Entering the narrative from multiple points of witness, the

reader joined Shelley in weighing up the evidence produced by the materialists.

Picking up on the famous words of Diderot, literary critics have emphasised how epistolary novels like Shelley's were considered to offer a direct insight into their characters, and thus to teach truths about humanity and life itself.[9] For some eighteenth century commentators, this made them a dangerous thing when it came to those vulnerable readers otherwise known as women.[10] Novels, and epistolary novels in particular, were leaky. Their stories did not stay safely on the page; they whispered in their readers' ears, forever changing their perspectives on the world and even their personalities. A woman needed to be given the right books to read, claimed James Fordyce in his *Sermons to Young Women*, for reading would affect a woman's passions as well as providing a model to govern her practice. Mary Wollstonecraft too railed against the effects of silly novels on unthinking women, albeit for very different reasons. Unlike Fordyce she did not propose forbidding them, nor even ridiculing them *en masse*. Rather,

> if a judicious person, with some turn for humour, would read several to a young girl, and point out both by tones, and apt comparisons with pathetic incidents and heroic characters in history, how foolishly and ridiculously they caricatured human nature, just opinions might be substituted instead of romantic senti-ments.[11]

Wollstonecraft's confidently democratic attitude towards reading contrasts with Fordyce's didactic model. She did not believe that an epistolary novel would whisper irresistible temptations in its reader's ear, like some kind of literary serpent. Through the process of discussion, knowledge claims could be judged.

A dialogue could be achieved between two readers of a book, and such conversa-tion was both the maker and marker of good eighteenth-century taste.[12] Could this paradigm of dialogue be extended further? Could a single reader have a conversa-tion with a book? Could a book even contain a conversation within itself? This is the intratextuality that Wollstonecraft's 'tones' might seem to suggest, and it is also the manner in which historian John Brewer treats eighteenth-century journals, texts in which the writer/reader became 'a spectator of [him or her] self'.[13] At this point it is appropriate to return to the philosophy of Jeremy Bentham, because besides forming an important type of literature, the adjective 'epistolary' also designated a common type of evidence in the courtroom. Bentham's formula for courtroom 'conversation' intersected with the broader issues of judgement that also applied to literature.

Bentham had an exceptionally low opinion of the existing system of the law, frequently referring to lawyers' 'sinister interest' in making the system as compli-cated, long-winded and hence lucrative as possible.[14] Many of these nefarious technicalities were concerned with the exclusion of certain types of evidence from the courtroom; Mr Bushwell, for example, could not relay the alibi from the Green Dragon because it would have been hearsay evidence. There were all sorts of witnesses forbidden to give evidence in court on the grounds that they were incom-petent: infants, the elderly and the insane, to name three categories. Bentham's

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overriding mission in the *Rationale of Judicial Evidence* was a radical expansion of permissible evidence, for justice could only be served by making absolutely all evidence available to the court. A person might be unreliable in one respect but still reliable in another. False testimony could be sniffed out – and in fact, the nature of a falsehood might help to highlight the truth. (If a person lied, then their reasons for doing so would help lead to a true explanation of the case.) Underlying all of this was Bentham's instinctive faith in the average person's ability to make sound judgements. In a deliberately domestic analogy, he compared the work of the court to the cook's judgement as to whether a leg of lamb was properly cooked. Anyone could do the work of a judge.

Out of all the obfuscating technicalities of the courtroom, Bentham singled out written or epistolary evidence as particularly heinous, whether in the form of official documents or written witness statements provided in response to a judge's request. Bentham thought the practice asinine because it was so much easier for witnesses to lie on paper than in person. Jurors could not even know if the author was who he claimed to be. By dividing the person as writer from person as witness, it reduced his sense of responsibility for telling the truth:

> When a man speaks in his own person, he considers what he says to be his own discourse, and himself to be in the highest degree responsible for it …. When he is made to speak in the third person, to speak of himself as he would of another person, the idea of responsibility is apt to be in a considerable degree fainter. He scarce knows in what character to consider himself; whether in that of the author, or only of the subject of the discourse …. Self-deceit conceals from him his own image in the character of the author, bids him consider himself as the subject, and look for the author in the person of the professional scribe by whom he is thus spoken of, and who, in fact, is the author of the words.[15]

Thus for Bentham, the fact of the matter was always embedded in its expression. In a court room, the truth of a fact was always embedded in the reliability of the witness's statement. The fact could not make itself known to the court in any other way; it must always come via a person, whose credibility must be weighed up. Bentham's preferred alternative to epistolary evidence was the viva voce: the appearance of a witness in person before the judge for cross-examination. That way everyone could see whether they seemed shifty or reliable, and whether their story was consistent under questioning.

It is widely known that writers of epistolary novels in the eighteenth century actively presented and published them in a way that implied they were genuine troves of letters and journal entries.[16] The name of the author was often not attached so that there was no sense of the volume being a work of fiction. Rather than the 'I' being split into untrustworthy subject and narrator, as in Bentham's critique of epistolary evidence, subject and narrator in the epistolary novel were artificially conflated into a single person. Was epistolarity, then, inherently deceitful in the novel, as Bentham claimed it was in a court of law? Obviously, one cannot judge novels in the same way as courtroom evidence for the very simple reason that the

former do not purport to be a communication of fact. Leaving aside the unsubtle and unlikely possibility that the epistolary novelist was attempting nothing more than a hoax, one has to consider his or her text as invitation to a more complex process of witnessing and judgement than that occurring in the courtroom. What is being judged is not, as in the case of a hoax or a trial, the actuality of the events narrated. Instead it is a judgement on virtue concerning the moral economy of the tale.

On first sight, it would seem that Bentham's criterion of transparent witness could never be achieved by a novel because there is no possibility of its interrogation; one cannot generally have a conversation with the author. Yet in one sense, this was precisely what the multi-layered, epistolary novel permitted. If it purported to be a univocal guide such as Fordyce feared, then it was at fault. If, however, it were constituted as layers of 'tone' and 'apt comparison', a different result obtained. It would become a mixture of witnesses in its different layers. By having the layers speak to one another, the text could suggest spaces in which the reader might also participate. The reader's participation could be simulated by the text itself,[17] and the real world could become the outermost layer to the tale. The moral or virtuous nature of the text was the point of commonsense judgement at which the characters and the reader could mutually affirm one another's testimony.[18]

Thus the spirit of Bentham's comments on narrative might be respected:

> Abstain from those artificial forms [i.e. writing in the third person] which probably had deceit and depredation for their object, and certainly have never had any other than mischief for their effect. Read as you would speak, is the fundamental precept in the art of reading: it is the precept of good taste. Write as you would speak, – at any rate in the same person as you would speak in, – is a law in the enactment of which good taste concurs with probity.[19]

Writing in an artificial form (the first person, in the case of the novel) was not deceitful if it were used to invite conversation, the tasteful, drawing-room equivalent of interrogation. Bentham's was a democratic approach to evidence, just as Wollstonecraft extended democracy to literary criticism. Like Wollstonecraft, he did not believe that anything should be withheld from the reader or listener. Both gave credit to ordinary people (women and jurors) and their ability to deal with evidence and other tales, however deceitful or nefarious. Both had confidence that, by comparing the different narratives one against the other, their intra- and inter-textual corroborations and inconsistencies would cause the truth to emerge.

Frankenstein is constructed as just such a multiple narrative: five stories nested within one another. Margaret Saville's trove of letters relates the tale of her brother Captain Walton, who tells the story of Victor Frankenstein; Frankenstein recounts the creature's autobiography, which includes the history of Safie. This construction means that the reader journeys inward to the centre of tale before emerging to discover the ultimate fate of Frankenstein, his creature and Walton, and to reach uneasy conclusions about human materiality and the soul. Shelley added the outer layer of the story when re-working it for publication in 1818, so it was a carefully

thought-over conceit. Highlighting its form, she explained it thus: 'Every thing must have a beginning ...and that beginning must be linked to something that went before.'[20]

'I now hasten to the more moving part of my story,' says the creature, as Shelley conducts us to the very inmost shell of her tale (77). It concerns the history of Safie, a young woman who escapes from the oppression of life in a Turkish harem to find freedom in Christian Europe with Felix. Amongst its meanings, this story resonates with the outer shells that contain it in terms of frustrated partnerships: Safie and Felix; the creature and its wife; Victor and Elizabeth; and Margaret and her brother. Where there is no partnership, there is no dialogue; where there is no dialogue, there is no accountability. The saintly Clerval always desired 'the intercourse of others' (108), but Frankenstein was dangerous because in his isolation he was free to follow his mind's unhinged promptings.[21] For us, as for the creature, our dialogue comes through reading:

> I can hardly describe to you the effect of these books ... As I read ... I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar, yet strangely unlike the beings concerning whom I read, and to whose conversation I was a listener (86).

The power of reading was that it could emulate conversation. Epistolary and layered books were conversations overheard, where the reader's responses could be rehearsed and weighed.

There are several important moments in *Frankenstein* when Shelley's characters draw attention to their reciprocal acts of witnessing, all centred upon texts. The creature listens as Felix reads improving literature to Safie, and shares a sympathetic reaction to the text: 'I heard of the discovery of the American hemisphere, and wept with Safie over the hapless fate of its original inhabitants ... the words induced me to turn towards myself' (80). This description of the creature learning and identifying with Safie through Volney's *Ruins of Empires* presages the reader's learning and weeping with Safie (whose story follows on immediately) and, ultimately, doing so also with Frankenstein. Just as Safie and Felix are unaware of the creature's 'reading' of them, so too is the author unaware of each reader taking in their words. By implication the reader has a textually-mediated relationship with the author just as the creature has with Safie.

Safie's tale of betrayal by her father is evidenced as true by a trove of letters which the creature claims to have in his possession; he promises to give them to Frankenstein before he departs in order to 'prove the truth of [his] tale' (83). These written tokens prove to be crucial to Walton's judgement of Frankenstein:

> His tale is connected, and told with an appearance of the simplest truth; yet I own to you that the letters of Felix and Safie, which he shewed me ... brought to me a greater conviction of the truth of his narrative than his asseverations, however earnest and connected (146).

Thus Shelley draws attention to the power of writing to facilitate correct judgement; it is more reliable than raw sentiment, or is at least a necessary counterpart to the latter.

The most obvious dialogue between layers of the novel is that between the narratives of Walton and Frankenstein. 'You seek for knowledge, as I once did', Frankenstein warns the Captain, 'and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been' (17). Yet when the crew comes to Walton begging him to abandon the voyage, it is Frankenstein that persuades them to go on. Though dying, his eyes briefly sparkle once more as he presses upon them the glory that awaits if they would but continue. The men are 'moved ... [and] unable to reply' (150); Walton hopes that their courage will return and that they will consent to press on. In the 1831 edition of the novel, Walton's attitude to Frankenstein borders on hero-worship, giving greater pointedness to the latter's warning to 'avoid ambition ... in science and discoveries' (152).

There is a peculiar moral power to tales within tales. The reader, in judging the tale within the tale, becomes part of the moral economy of the whole and is accountable to the moral judgement of the outer tale (Walton and Frankenstein). The creature tells Felix's blind father a story about a man whose friends reject him because of prejudice. De Lacey expresses dismay, but does not succeed in applying the moral of the story. Just then, the rest of the family return and lash out at the hideous monster before De Lacey has a chance to explain. His failure to educate his family by use of the creature's fable perhaps hides a dark doubt about the power of fiction at the centre of the novel.

By the temporal end of the novel, Frankenstein has had his sensibility partially restored by the tales he has encountered. He has moments of 'benevolence and sweetness' (14); his manners are 'conciliating and gentle' (15). 'He is so gentle, yet so wise; his mind is so cultivated' (15). The hope is that Walton can effect this transformation more completely. Again, it is interlocution with tales that offers salvation. Walton admits candidly:

> Now I am twenty-eight and am in reality more illiterate than many schoolboys of fifteen. It is true that I have thought more and that my daydreams are more extended and magnificent, but they want (as the painters call it) *keeping*; and I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind (10).

Such a friend, as his first sentence hints, must be the regulating power of literacy.

If the reader has been following the story carefully, he or she will see that Walton should not listen to Frankenstein's words but should rather learn from his downfall. The inconsistency between Frankenstein's words and fate are only too clear. Frankenstein has proved himself an unreliable witness; morally, he is not to be trusted. Walton should not repeat the abandonment of Elizabeth with his sister Margaret. Applying Frankenstein's moral to Walton allows the reader to carry the moral through one further layer and out into the real world, if they so wish.

However, the novel is by no means a straightforward morality tale, as countless

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plodding critics have contended. Walton, Frankenstein and the creature are dangerous characters, and all of their testimonies should be treated with caution. Moreover, the romantic in Shelley revels in the horror of the events. The reader is drawn to Frankenstein's flashing eyes and Walton's outrageous ambitions. Silently, the reader urges both to press on, to see what happens next – otherwise, the book would be laid aside. The reader does not dutifully proceed towards the moral, but actively simulates their own dialogues of judgement.

Frankenstein, then, is a novel composed of dialogue whose layers interrogate one another: a series of debates about ambition, honour and appearance, and above all, about the soul. A Benthamite perspective sees all these characters and their textual layers of interlocution as collectively constituting a dialogue in which the reader, the outermost layer of storytelling, also participates. The tale of the creature dealt a series of powerful blows against political and religious conservatism. It did not suggest that such a monster could really be made, but it suggested that the real materialist science underpinning Frankenstein's endeavour had some uncomfortable implications for how the reader should see him or herself. Perhaps, if materialism were true, everyone was a soul-less monster. The old, comforting myths of moral judgement were stripped away, with no certain replacements. The radicalism of the new science appealed, but it offered no easy answers. Because of the looping process of textual affirmation, the real world itself became a layer of the text, and the debates applied there too. *Frankenstein* invited a radically democratic reading; Bentham would have approved of its good taste.

Whewell and Carlyle: Idealist Judgements

In 1830, the Iron Man arose in its terrible beauty from the inventor's bench, stronger and quicker than any mortal. By the power of his mighty, mechanical arm he crushed the resistance of men, until they became docile subjects of his rule. This was no Frankenstein's creature, however; no fiction but rather reality. The Iron Man was the name given by factory workers to a device (properly known as the self-acting mule) that could take yarn after it was drawn and twisted, and wind it at the correct tension into the shape of a cone. Before its appearance, the mule-spinners' job had been a skilled one and in consequence was highly paid. However, the spinners had fomented industrial unrest in the 1820s, and by 1830 Richard Roberts' invention had turned these troublemakers out of work, replacing them with the device and its semi-skilled operators. The new employees were expendable and could not strike for higher wages.

The Scottish doctor Andrew Ure thought the Iron Man was wonderful.[22] In fact many of the phrases in this section's opening paragraph – intended by him as unambiguous terms of praise – are drawn from his 1835 description of the device.[23] Besides his medical training, Ure, like Frankenstein, had studied extensively in chemistry and natural philosophy. And, like Frankenstein – or at least like Aldini – in 1818 he went on to demonstrate the effects of electricity on the body of a hanged man.[24] Ure believed that the principles of chemistry and mechanics exemplified

in such demonstrations were vital knowledge for industrialists, topics upon which he lectured them for around 25 years. The factory system was a perfected body; Frankenstein's time would have been better spent in Lancashire and Derbyshire than at the Swiss University of Ingolstadt. This was a great irony of the nineteenth century. A materialist conception of the body, propounded by political radicals, came to be broadly accepted. However, in its acceptance it formed the philosophical support for a wholesale mistreatment of the working class – exactly the opposite use to that which the radicals had in mind when developing the model.

Bentham played an ambiguous part in this historical process. Was he a hero or a villain of the common good? Commentators and historians have swung wildly from one conclusion to the other, depending on their political persuasions.[25] Though historians' conclusions about Bentham are fluid, there is no doubt that the debate in which he participated – the controversy over witnessing and evidence – played a prominent part in nineteenth-century discussions about the alleged inhumanity of the factory system. The Tory MP Michael Sadler was the lightning rod that drew down the furore.

Sadler was greatly troubled by the lot of the poor and concerned about the condition of factory workers, especially children. In 1831 he took charge of the so-called 10–hour bill in Parliament, which aimed to limit the amount of time worked by factory children, as well as prohibiting employment of those under the age of nine. It also included other features such as some very basic provision for the education of child employees, and a system of fines for employers found to have caused injury by negligence. However, Sadler's passionate speech on behalf of mistreated young workers backfired. Members of the House protested that his claims were exaggerated, and demanded a formal inquiry to find out what conditions were really like. The resulting committee of MPs was headed by Sadler, and after examining 89 witnesses in 1832 it backed up his original claims. There was a public outcry at this revelation of poor conditions and cruel abuses occurring within factories. This did not go down well with Whigs – MPs and manufacturers – who quickly requested a second inquiry in the form of a Royal Commission. Its purpose was supposedly to verify the results of the Committee but in reality aimed to quash it by finding contradictory evidence.[26]

Both Sadler's original Committee and the subsequent Royal Commission were criticised by their respective opponents, not just for the facts that they found but for the type of evidence they had permitted. By attacking the process of witnessing, or giving evidence, these critics nullified the reports' findings. They echoed familiar themes of authority and credibility articulated by Bentham and his legal targets. Who was a reliable witness? What was a reliable kind of statement? What kind of evidence was admissible?

Andrew Ure complained that the Committee members would believe any old sob story rather than believe the evidence of their eyes, noting their 'sentimental fever' and 'incredible credulity'.[27] The report of the subsequent Factory Commission also criticised the evidence placed before the Committee. It implied that much of its evidence should have been ruled inadmissible on the grounds that its witnesses

were unreliable. Of three witnesses from Manchester, none was a doctor, manufacturer or clergyman (evidently the most reliable sorts of witness). The unreliability of the three was illustrated for the Commission by the fact that one was an atheist, another a tavern-keeper, and that the third – though yielding no dirt himself – had a colleague who had obtained a job with false references and had been convicted of a 'gross assault upon a woman'.[28] This was exactly the kind of thing that made Bentham so very angry.

Not only the witnesses, but the witnesses of the witnesses were called into question. The Committee was condemned because it was not composed of lawyers, experts in hearing and judging evidence, but by MPs. The Royal Commissioners were rejected as unreliable by trade union members on the grounds that they were lawyers used to the courtroom, not the factory, and had the wrong type of expertise to dig out the right kind of evidence. It appeared that many critics shared Bentham's assumption that a properly run court case was the only acceptable model for an inquiry into the factory system, though of course what counted as 'properly run' was a matter of partiality. On the Whig side, mill owners complained that they were not given time to present their case, as they would have been in court. Likewise, the results of Sadler's Committee were first heard by many members of the House not in a formal Parliamentary announcement, but in the newspaper. For the Whigs, this was trial by the mob rather than by due legal process.

Amongst radicals and patrician Tories, there was another set of courtroom-inspired critiques.[29] The Commission was criticised because its hearing of evidence was not public, so not open to the informal judgement of the people. Its evidence was not taken on oath so that the full civic and religious obligation upon witnesses to tell the truth was not in place. Nor were witnesses cross-examined – the viva voce that Bentham rated so highly – to test their evidence. As if this were not enough, Bentham's *bête noire* – unreliable written depositions – were also permitted. Of course, this privilege only extended to the mill owners, since most of their workers could not write. Factory owners were heard after workers, so that they had the last word: an opportunity to deny and rebut the allegations of the workers. Because of the order in which evidence was taken, the workers had no such opportunity in relation to their employers. Finally, the self-interest of the factory owners in requesting the Commission (an illegal process according to some) made the whole thing biased. There was also legal precedent for excluding the evidence of witnesses whose interests would be served by the conviction of the defendant. In this case, the interest of mill-owning witnesses would be served by the exoneration of their system.

Democratic judgement, that possibility so tantalisingly extended by Bentham, had been withdrawn. The body was reconstructed as an inorganic entity for instrumental gain; the Iron Man was both a tool to discipline the workforce and a model for them to aspire to. The more workers could behave like machines the better they would fit their immediate workspace and the entire political economy. With no soul, or at least a simple electric one, they would have no needs beyond the physical and measurable.

Bentham's reforms were in general not nearly so influential as he hoped, either in Law or the other areas in which he thought they might be relevant, such as science. The radical democracy which he offered was not taken up, and the influence of rationalists like Godwin and Wollstonecraft faded away. Men of science wrought a careful compromise so as not to suggest that their work was too radical. Their new British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) rooted itself firmly to Oxford and Cambridge, where all students had to pledge allegiance to the Church of England.[30] The most important figurehead for the BAAS was William Whewell, and from his position of influence he laid out new rules for scientific epistemology, or the ways in which scientific evidence should be judged. These were developed in his *Philosophy* and *History of the Inductive Sciences* (1840 and 1847).

Whewell's starting point for thinking about science was to divide it into two kinds of thinking: deduction and induction. Deduction was a useful tool, said Whewell, but it was not a method to enable any interesting discoveries in science. On the basis of this, Whewell built some bridges with the Romantics in the 1820s, who shared a repugnance at the mechanised reduction of modern life.[31] For Whewell, worthwhile science had to involve more than the grindings of pure, mathematical, deductive logic. He dubbed the complement 'induction': the gathering and gener-alisation of evidence, and an explanatory leap to postulate a law of nature. However, Whewell did not believe that inductive evidence self-evidently hung together to give the right answers. One needed more than just experience of evidence in order to reach the correct conclusion. After all, as he pointed out, was it not the case that the evidence of the senses showed the stars moving while the earth stood still? And yet every educated person knew that the opposite was the case; the stars only had an *illusion* of movement.[32]

To arrive at the correct conclusion, one needed to make the correct mental leap, that is, to have the right idea in mind to begin with: 'The Ideas, the germs of them at least, were in the human mind before [experience]; but by the progress of scien-tific thought they are unfolded into clearness and distinctness.'[33] Completing the process of induction was like making an inspired leap of understanding in relation to another person's mind. One can never see the evidence of what is going on inside someone's mind, but by observing their actions and getting to know them really well one can make that final leap of intimate knowledge. When it came to science this was for Whewell – an ordained clergyman – a leap into the very mind of God.

By including this theological basis for science, Whewell implied that the set of people with the right kind of scientific abilities were not political radicals and atheists. Oxford and Cambridge, with their Anglican foundations, were automati-cally included as acceptable origins for scientific knowledge.[34] The BAAS was a self-governed association with just enough freedom to let people pursue their ideas, and just enough discipline to make sure these ideas were politically acceptable. Thus it avoided the dangers of political radicalism that lurked amongst the romantics whom Whewell had courted in the 1820s. Under Whewell's direction, men of science regrouped and retrenched themselves in the 1830s and 40s as an elite group uniquely qualified to pronounce on nature. In effect, they achieved precisely what

Bentham criticised so strongly in the legal profession. The BAAS was a scientific elite that would protect its members' ability to create, understand and apply knowledge. Trust us, they said.

Distinctly *not* to be trusted was one Herr Teufelsdröckh: man of science, philosopher, and cry-baby. In this character, the writer Thomas Carlyle satirised men of science, their place in society, and explored alternatives to their mechanical philosophies. Teufelsdröckh is the elusive hero of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* [*The Tailor Retailored*] which first appeared in serial form in *Fraser's Magazine* 1833–34 and was published as a single volume in Britain in 1838.[35] It purported to tell the life and clothes-philosophy of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, a German philosopher of the same Romantic school as Goethe and his contemporaries.

There are five layers to the text of *Sartor Resartus*, and Carlyle exploited its epistolary form to foreground questions of credibility. On the outermost layer is the book's supposed publisher, Oliver Yorke. Yorke was in fact one of a number of pseudonyms adopted by the editor of *Fraser's*, William Maginn, between 1830 and 1836. The literary historian Melissa Frazier has explored how *Fraser's* professed itself, with only partial credibility, to be 'a little literary republic' of democratic reading.[36] The magazine announced 'Honest Noll' Yorke as its new editor, confecting an entirely spurious report about how this handsome man was democratically elected by a roomful of its (substantially female) readership.

Yorke presents a text supplied to him by its editor, the 'author of the work' and a figure so shadowy that he only communicates with Yorke 'in some sort of mask, or muffler' and, Yorke supposes with ironic outrage, 'under a feigned name!' (14). This editor has had his biographical material supplied by one Hofrath Heuschrecke, whose name, Councillor Grasshopper, suggests that his chirruped information may not be of the highest quality. Heuschrecke has his evidence in the unusual form of six paper bags, stuffed with assorted notes, lists, bills, trivia and occasional autobiographical fragments, all from Teufelsdröckh himself. The editor on several occasions notes his fear that there may have been some deliberate 'mystification' in the filling and passing on of these unconventional archives (207).

Essentially, Teufelsdröckh's Philosophy of Clothes is an *ad absurdam* extension of mechanical philosophy. If one is going to treat humans merely as bodies with factory-working potential, one may as well regard them simply as physical shells, which is to say, by their clothes. Clothes were also the final product of the new factory system, whose Malthusianism, laissez-faire economics and utilitarianism – Bentham's science of political economy – all come in for a drubbing. The problem is that the editor appears to possess Whiggish tendencies, so that Teufelsdröckh's critiques are painful to him; the 'professor' (who has given no lectures, ever) appears to him 'a speculative Radical … of the very darkest tinge' (73).

Instead of the dull realities and generalities discovered by the eye, Teufelsdröckh's science is based on beautiful, true ideas that appear in the mind, having their origin in some greater reality. This is the philosophy of idealism: 'The beginning of Wisdom is to look fixedly on Clothes … till they become *transparent*' (76). Observe until the right idea makes sense of it all; rise above mere generalisation based on the senses.

13

It is the Whewellian method, and indeed Carlyle had a good deal in common with Whewell. Both came of working-class backgrounds, yet aspired to a patrician kind of conservatism: a heartfelt rejection of mechanism, combined with a not always realistic romantic alternative. (Teufelsdröckh's method, however, contains more nudity and dung than the Reverend would have countenanced.) The critic Gerald Bruns puts it that Carlyle intends his reader to see that the ideas of idealism must have their roots in a historical reality, rather than possessing a purely philosophical ontology.[37]

Sartor hardly presents German Romanticism as a credible alternative to mechanistic philosophy. On this at least the doughty English editor is right: Teufelsdröckh's philosophy is unreadable stuff, tortured and prolix. Nor is the reader inclined to trust Teufelsdröckh, due both to the untrustworthy nature of the sources and to the laughable nature of his character and history such as we have it. With a friend like the editor, Teufelsdröckh has no need of enemies. According to him, the philosopher has 'Genius ... dulness, double-vision, utter blindness ... manifold ineptitude' (32–3). 'There is much rubbish in this book,' the editor is forced to concede (33). The editor explicitly declines to comment on Teufelsdröckh's own garb (31), thus undermining his ostensible respect for the German's philosophy in one stroke of the pen.

One suspects that some of what Teufelsdröckh says *is* supposed to be credible, but that Carlyle cannot bring himself to endorse it overtly.[38] Sometimes Teufelsdröckh scores palpable satirical hits, but Carlyle hides his opinions behind a joke, or behind a joke within a joke – and so on to a five-fold complexity. Carlyle himself wrote to *Fraser's* proprietor that *Sartor*,

> contains more of my opinions on Art, Politics, Religion, Heaven, Earth and Air, than all the things I have yet written. The Creed promulgated on all these things, as you may judge, is *mine*, and firmly *believed:* for the rest, the main Actor in the business ('Editor of these sheets' as he often calls himself) assumes a kind of Conservative (tho' Antiquack) character.[39]

However, the italicisation of the Carlyle's ownership of and belief in the opinions expressed actually has the opposite effect to reinforcement, as does his introduction of the 'actor' who 'assumes' a role. His division of himself into editor and autobiographical subject, who are often at odds with one another (not to mention Councillor Grasshopper and the paper bags) makes it impossible neatly to ascribe his opinions to one character or another.[40]

Though the democratic pretensions of *Fraser's* have been shown by Frazier to be false in the 'election' of its editor,[41] Carlyle's layered book nevertheless extends the dialogic possibilities of reading to its readers. Carlyle himself called *Fraser's* a 'blackguard Periodical' but conceded that within it there breathed 'a kind of mad morbid Life, perhaps a shade less hateful to one than the calm dry bones that smile on you their Death's-head smile in most others'.[42] He went on to affirm the value of opening all perspectives to discussion: 'Tories, Radicals, Whigs even, all the world is interesting to me.'[43] A free-for-all rabble of reading was better than the silence of

consensus. Thus the readings offered by the text. *Sartor* is romantic and idealist like Whewell, but in its epistolary form it retains the possibility of democratic reading. The critic Lee C. R. Baker has dubbed *Sartor* 'maeiutic,' meaning that Carlyle 'acts as a midwife to bring forth [the] realization which the reader himself achieves'.[44] The reader can agree with Teufelsdröckh, or agree with him ironically, or agree with the editor, or read through his opinions to the opposite truth underneath, just as he or she pleases. Nor does the reader need to do the same thing consistently throughout the book. Like all good satire, there is no consistent object of attack, and no single perspective that is offered as alternative. Everything at one time or another is up for satirical grabs, and the reader may pick and choose their jokes and their morals. *Sartor* is, as Carlyle states in its opening words, a 'questionable little book'.

Evidence was ineluctably a political question in the Regency era. From the 1790s to the 1830s there was a perception in Britain that things might tip over into social revolt, perhaps revolution. Thus any invitation to democratic judgement, or its withdrawal, carried political overtones. It was in this context of political tension that judgements in both science and literature had to be made. And they were judgements, not interpretations. Interpretations leave space for future amendment, but in times where order is threatened, a case needs to be closed once and for all. Therefore jurisprudence was the pivot-point where politics, science and literature met. It was the perfect model for closure where the nature of evidential credibility was in question.

The judgements of science and literature were also connected for the simple reason that scientific knowledge is, at some stage or another, always conveyed in written form. Thus the scientific question of evidence always entailed that of textual credibility.[45] Considerations of literary criticism, whether explicit or implicit in experiments with literary form, were very much part of the debate about scientific judgement. As I have demonstrated, epistolary novels leant themselves to a reading within a Benthamite framework whereby the levels interrogated one another, and the reader could enter into dialogue with the text.

Even after idealism had scotched the temporary possibility of democratic episte-mology in science, the possibility of democratic readings remained in literature.[46] Carlyle reflected Whewellian idealism but did not buy into it in formal terms; *Sartor Resartus*, despite its subject matter, invited a reading closer to the Benthamite model. Literary texts cannot be neatly pigeon-holed as being in line with one episte-mological method or the other (nor, indeed, were these the only two on offer). Nevertheless, experiments with literary form, especially the techniques of narra-tive nesting and epistolarity, invited readers to engage in dialogue with the text on various levels. Readers were the judges. They formed their own opinions; they reflected on the process of opinion-making; with the tiny rudder of the bookmark, they might even shift its course, as Carlyle suggested:

> Nay, since Books, like invisible scouts, permeate the whole habitable globe, and Tombuctoo itself is not safe from British Literature, may not some Copy find out even the [truth]; and gently force even him to disclose himself?[47]

Notes

1 Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (London, 1988); Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1994).

2 Michael H. Whitworth, *Einstein's Wake: Relativity, Metaphor, and Modernist Literature* (Oxford, 2001), p. 4.

3 See, for example, Gerald L. Bruns, 'The Formal Nature of Victorian Thinking', *PMLA*, 90 (1975), 904–18.

4 Charlotte Sleigh, 'Life, Death and Galvanism', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 29 (1998), 219–48.

5 Sleigh, 'Life, Death and Galvanism'; Marilyn Butler, 'Frankenstein and Radical Science', in J. Paul Hunter (ed.), *Frankenstein* (New York, 1996), pp. 302–13. All subsequent quotations from *Frankenstein* are taken from this edition of the 1818 text. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

6 Jeremy Bentham, *Rationale of Evidence, Specially Applied to English Practice* (London, 1827).

7 Bowring quoted in William L. Twining, *Theories of Evidence: Bentham and Wigmore* (Stanford, 1985), pp. 25–6.

8 Butler, 'Frankenstein and Radical Science'.

9 Denis Diderot, *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. Geoffrey Bremner (London, 1994), pp. 80–98.

10 James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 12th edn., 2 vols (Philadelphia, 1809), vol. 1, p. 75. Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge, 1999).

11 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 2nd edn. (Mineola, NY, 1996), p. 192.

12 John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), pp. 56–122.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

14 Bentham, *Rationale*, passim; C. K. Ogden, *Bentham's Theory of Fictions* (London, 1932), p. 18.

15 Bentham, *Rationale*, pp. 189–90 and 194.

16 Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel*, 2nd edn. (Philadelphia, 1996). In the same way many scientific demonstrators aimed to simulate reality in their optical displays; Iwan Rhys Morus, 'Seeing and Believing Science', *Isis*, 97 (2006), 101–10.

17 Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, 1974).

18 This process most famously occurs in *Pamela*, at the moment where Mr B discovers the eponymous heroine's journal.

19 Bentham, *Rationale*, p. 189.

20 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford, 1994), p. 195.

21 Crosbie Smith, 'Frankenstein and Natural Magic', in Stephen Bann (ed.), *Frankenstein: Creation and Monstrosity* (London, 1994), pp. 39–59.

22 Simon Schaffer, 'Babbage's Intelligence: Calculating Engines and the Factory System', *Critical Inquiry*, 21 (1994), 203–27.

23 Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures: Or, An Exposition of the Scientific, Moral and Commercial Economy of the Factory System of Great Britain* (London, 1967), pp. 367–8.

24 Iwan Rhys Morus, *Frankenstein's Children: Electricity, Exhibition and Experiment in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 128–9.

25 See for example Philip Schofield, *Utility and Democracy: The Political Thought of*

Jeremy Bentham (Oxford, 2006); Lea Campos Boralevi, *Bentham and the Oppressed* (New York, 1984); Bhikhu Parekh and Pareth B. Staff (eds), *Jeremy Bentham: Critical Assessments* (London, 1993).

26 Robert Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England, 1830–1860* (Cambridge, 2002), 48–58.

27 Ure, *Philosophy of Manufactures*, p. 290.

28 Ure, *Philosophy of Manufactures*, p. 291.

29 Geoffrey Crabtree and John Charles Spencer, *Factory Commission: The Legality of Its Appointment Questioned and the Illegality of Its Proceedings Proved, Addressed to Lord Althorpe* (London, 1833).

30 Jack Morrell and Arnold Thackray, *Gentlemen of Science. Early Years of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, (Oxford, 1982).

31 The Romantics came at this from a radical perspective, and Whewell from an Anglican, patrician Tory one, informed also by his working-class background.

32 William Whewell, *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences: Founded Upon Their History*, 2nd edn., 2 vols (London, 1847) vol. 2, p. 655.

33 William Whewell, *On the Philosophy of Discovery: Chapters Historical and Critical* (London, 1860), p. 373.

34 Susan Faye Cannon, *Science in Culture: The Early Victorian Period* (New York, 1978).

35 Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Edinburgh, 2002). All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

36 Melissa Frazier, *Romantic Encounters: Writers, Readers, and the Library for Reading* (Stanford, 2007), p. 104.

37 Bruns, 'The Formal Nature of Victorian Thinking', p. 905.

38 Lee C. R. Baker, 'The Open Secret of 'Sartor Resartus': Carlyle's Method of Converting His Reader', *Studies in Philology*, 83 (1986), 218–35.

39 Thomas Carlyle to James Fraser, 27 May 1833; *The Carlyle Letters Online* [*CLO*]. 2007. <http://carlyleletters.org>.; *CL* 6: 395–398. Carlyle's more straightforward views on mechanism are expressed in his 1829 essay 'Signs of the Times'.

40 Hence the school of criticism which condemned Carlyle's book as revealing its author's 'divided consciousness'. See Baker, 'The Open Secret', p. 219, note 4.

41 Frazier, *Romantic Encounters*, p. 108.

42 Thomas Carlyle to John Stuart Mill ; 18 July 1833; *The Carlyle Letters Online*, *CL* 6: 411–415.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Baker, 'The Open Secret', p. 222.

45 Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, 1998); Marina Frasca-Spada and Nick Jardine (eds), *Books and the Sciences in History* (Cambridge, 2000).

46 Of course, the *possibility* of democratic epistemology remained in science; see Morus, *Frankenstein's Children* for the ill-fated displays of democratic knowledge in the nineteenth century. The possibility of democracy was more frequently demonstrated in reading.

47 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 101.

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