CHAPTER ONE

Introduction
Living authors

At some point in the middle of the second decade of the nineteenth century authors began to live. The emergence of the 'living author' was not, as Michel Foucault famously described a cognate historical development, a 'privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas', but rather one of collective embodiment and group recognition.[1] A plethora of volume and periodical publications dedicated to documenting the serial names and images of living or contemporary authors date from this period. As John Watkins and Fredric Shobal, the editors of *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain* (1816) declare, one of the primary aims of such publications lay simply in enumerating the 'present race of Authors and their works' for the 'intelligence' of the reader.[2] One practical function of the identification of 'living authors' was to affirm that these authors currently existed, and were thus open to channels of communication with the reading public to which the dead were plainly impervious. This is not to suggest that dead authors were no longer of interest to contemporary readers. Watkins and Shobal declare in their Preface an intention to publish a complementary 'DICTIONARY OF DECEASED AUTHORS OF GREAT BRITAIN' in the future.[3] What is striking, though, is that the category of 'deceased authors' must be rigorously separated from that of the living, a practice which became commonplace in collective biographies of the early nineteenth century. Wherever possible, the living and the dead were forced to inhabit separate textual spheres, designed to elicit different, though equally compelling, readerly sympathies. While representations of deceased authors are typically framed as acts of memorialization or posthumous fame, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain* was intended not merely to compile information but also to display the industry of contemporary authors to the public, marking an awareness of professional identity and solidarity.

The recognition of living authors as a distinct collective body was consolidated by some of the most prominent collective (or serial) biographies

of the following two decades. What is now the most familiar of these texts, William Hazlitt's *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), was assembled from biographical sketches originally contributed to series on 'Living Authors' in *The London Magazine* (1820–1) and 'The Spirits of the Age' in *The New Monthly Magazine* (1824), and thus very much the product of a popular generic format within literary periodicals of the period. As its title indicates, *The Spirit of the Age* defines the genre of collective biography within temporal boundaries that enforce an exclusive concentration on contemporary figures. For Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, Hazlitt's text provides a 'composite historical portrait' of the present within which the trope of biographical portraiture provides 'a way of spatializing his critical investigations of the Zeitgeist'.[4] Of course, Hazlitt's critical and ironic treatment of the leading intellectual figures of his age makes his book far from an exercise in professional self-aggrandisement: if the format of collective biography may be described as 'iconographic', as Wheeler Cafarelli suggests, the tone of the individual sketches is often iconoclastic.[5] Many of the same generic features can be found in William Maginn and Daniel Maclise's 'Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters', published in *Fraser's Magazine* from 1830 to 1838, a work of serial biography often noted for its vehement hostility to the progressive politics of Hazlitt and the periodicals to which he contributed. Recent critical discussion of *Fraser's* 'Gallery' as a text which exhibits an emerging 'Victorian' consciousness of collective identity amongst professional writers during the 1830s has tended to erase its continuity with some of the practices of Hazlitt and other 'Romantic' biographical sketches.[6] Most obviously, 'The Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters' was conceived as a literary portrait gallery devoted predominantly to living authors and to a self-conscious expression of the transient historical conditions within which it was produced. Though Hazlitt himself is not mentioned by name, Maginn was clearly responsive to the serial biographies promoted by rival periodicals and gained much of his satirical impetus from this exchange. In this respect, *Fraser's* 'Gallery' may be viewed as a Tory adaptation of a formula patented in Radical and Liberal magazines of the 1820s. On the other hand, Maginn presents his 'Gallery' as an ephemeral parody of, and tribute to, Edmund Lodge's monumental twelve-volume historical work, *Portraits of Illustrious Personages of Great Britain* (1823–34). In its combination of verbal and visual media (biographical sketch plus portrait), Lodge's publication provides a more exact generic template for *Fraser's* 'Gallery' than *The Spirit of the Age*, and indeed for the multitude of biographical portrait galleries which followed. Yet whereas Lodge fashioned a 'Gallery of Illustrious Dead', posthumous

in focus and restricted to a traditional hierarchy of biographical signifi-
cance (the model of the aristocratic portrait gallery), Maginn presents an
oxymoronic Gallery of the 'illustrious obscure', humorously deflating any
pretension to monumental form.[7] Often the subjects of *Fraser's* 'Gallery'
are selected precisely on the grounds of their supposed lack of lasting cul-
tural significance, giving it some resemblance to a latter-day Dunciad: in
particular, the number of magazine writers and editors featured in the series
indicates a deliberate correspondence between its formal medium and the-
matic reflection on the transient condition of modern literary reputation.[8]
Like Hazlitt, though, Maginn implies that the very contemporaneity of the
'Gallery' gives it a representative status which may, paradoxically, appeal to
posterity.

   In other examples from the 1830s and 1840s, the desire to represent
contemporary or recent authors as a visible collective body took a more
conventional iconographic form. Henry Fothergill Chorley's 1838 collec-
tion, *The Authors of England*, combined *Fraser's* professional demarcation
of the 'literary character' with the reverential formality of Lodge's bio-
graphical portraiture. Of the fourteen authors featured in this volume,
only about half were living at the time of publication, but its focus is firmly
on 'contemporaries' as against 'predecessors'; Chorley planned to extend the
series so as to 'include the portraits of all our modern authors of celebrity'.[9]
Thus, the commemorative style of engraved portraits accompanying the
biographical sketches – typically featuring the author's bust in classical pos-
ture – does not distinguish between the likes of Sir Walter Scott or Lord
Byron (deceased) and Edward Bulwer-Lytton or William Wordsworth (still
living) on empirical grounds, but is rather a signifying code for the cultural
respect afforded to modern authors in general. Contemporary authors are
deemed worthy of what might be termed proleptic commemoration, an act
constructing the aura of enduring fame which it appears simply to record.
To later readers, Chorley's collection may seem to possess a strangely hybrid
character, mingling a majority of writers from the 'Romantic' period with
a few (largely unfamiliar) early Victorian figures, but this, of course, is
not likely to have been a contemporary response. Nevertheless, the early
to mid-century endeavour to establish the category of 'living authors' was
forced to confront the inherently unstable nature of its referent. Less than
twenty years after the publication of *The Spirit of the Age*, Richard Hengist
Horne (with substantial assistance from Elizabeth Barrett) published *A
New Spirit of the Age* (1844), which set out to update Hazlitt's collection
on the grounds that 'a new set of men, several of them animated by a new
spirit, have obtained eminent positions in the public mind'.[10] Conceived

as a necessary supplement to Hazlitt's original text, *A New Spirit of the Age* begs the question as to what has changed during the relatively short intervening period: how does Horne account for the process of transition to this 'new spirit' of the age, which both departs from and yet is modelled on its predecessor? At no point in the two volumes of the collection is there a clear attempt to address this question. Andrew Sanders views the prominence of Charles Dickens – the subject of the opening essay whose portrait is reproduced in the frontispiece of the first volume – as evidence that the collection charts the emergence of a distinctively 'post-Romantic', Victorian generation, but there is little concrete indication as to how the 'spirit' of Dickens's age differs from, say, that of Walter Scott.[11] Both Hazlitt and Horne define the 'spirit of the age' in broadly reformist and progressive terms: just as the radical Dickens is judged by Horne to be 'manifestly the product of his age . . . a genuine emanation from its aggregate and entire spirit', so, for Hazlitt, the reactionary Scott 'would fain put down the Spirit of the Age'.[12] As, then, the 'spirit' of 1844 remains not dissimilar to that of 1824, the difference between the two publications arises implicitly from Horne's urge to document the emergence of a new group of living authors: the supplementary text both validates and replenishes the perceived deficiency of its original source. In the Preface to the First Edition of 1844, Horne reveals his anxiety to avoid overlap not only with Hazlitt's selection of biographical subjects but also Chorley's much more recent volume. Whereas Chorley's focus on the commemoration of established contemporary names gives, retrospectively, a slightly dated air to *The Authors of England*, Horne specifies that 'our selection has not been made from those who are already "crowned", and their claims settled, but almost entirely from those who are in progress and midway of fame'.[13] It is the policy of choosing to represent emergent figures – authors in the process of formation – rather than those who are 'already "crowned"', which makes *A New Spirit of the Age* appear to later readers as a distinctively Victorian collection. It is important to recognize, however, that the impetus for this effect comes not so much from Horne's recognition of an essentially *new* spirit of the age as from his desire to record the changing ranks of contemporary writers – to value their newness for its own sake. An obvious corollary of the supplementary logic of Horne's text is that it leaves scope for future editions, each wishing to articulate a spirit even newer than the last.

A similar logic is at play in Thomas Powell's *The Living Authors of England* (1849), a volume which, despite its lack of visual illustration, was later published under the title *Pictures of the Living Authors of Britain*

(1851). Powell introduces his up-to-the-minute literary portrait gallery by admitting some writers of the 'last generation', such as Wordsworth, on the grounds that although 'somewhat "past the bourne" of contemporary criticism, yet the fact of their physical existence renders some account of them necessary in a book which professes to treat of the living authors of England and America'. Thus, between the current generation of the 1840s and the generation of two decades earlier lies an intermediate category of authors who are neither fully living nor entirely dead: 'To a certain extent, they are already judged, and have received a posthumous fame which seldom belongs to writers who are still alive.'[14] The ultimate extension of this increasingly refined attempt to capture the 'living author' can be seen in an extraordinary publishing phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century, the biographical dictionary *Men of the Time*, first published in 1852 and reissued in thirteen separate editions over the course of the next forty years. Variously described as a collection of *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Living Characters* and a *Dictionary of Contemporaries*, *Men of the Time* was clearly established on the generic and conceptual foundations of earlier works, but succeeded in achieving the truly encyclopaedic scale that previous writers had only projected. While not narrowly restricted to cataloguing contemporary authors, the dictionary sought to document what it called 'the aristocracy of intellect', a class of persons which it claimed was not adequately represented by more traditional social and professional registers, such as the peerage and army lists.[15] The most essential attribute for inclusion in the dictionary, however, was the sheer contemporaneity of the living subject with each successive edition. New editions of *Men of the Time* were published in order to remove the names of the deceased, which were replaced by those which have 'during the same period come prominently before the public'; in some editions a separate 'Necrology', or list of 'eminent persons deceased', was printed at the end of the volume as if to demarcate spatially the temporal distinction between contemporary recognition and posthumous fame.[16]

The taxonomic function of such monumental biographical projects reflects, however indirectly, an increasing professionalization of personal identity through the nineteenth century. In the specific sub-field of Literature one of the primary goals of early Victorian proponents of professional reform, such as Dickens, was simply to 'register the names and works of all the authors in the British empire', thereby establishing the basic identity and membership of the collective body whose professional 'rights' were to be defended.[17] Byron had written in *Don Juan* (1819–23) of his protagonist's experience of fashionable literary society: 'At great assemblies

or in parties small, / He saw ten thousand living authors pass, / That being about their average numeral'.[18] Yet the composition of this horde of 'living authors' was not easy to identify in a period when authorship was not fully recognized as a legitimate profession and the convention of anonymous publication prevailed throughout most of the periodical press. The national Census of 1841 grouped authors under the category of 'Other Educated Persons', of which only 167 out of 626 individuals declared their main occupation as writing. The 1861 Census was the first to recognize authorship as a distinct professional grouping, or rather cluster of groups that include editors, journalists, artists, actors, and musicians, amounting to some 1,673 individuals, and by the 1880s the number of self-declared authors had risen to 6,111. Only in 1911, though, did the official number of professional authors (13,786) come to exceed Byron's estimate.[19] Thus, during the period examined in this study – from the early 1820s to the late 1850s – the existence of what later came to be understood as the 'literary profession' cannot be taken for granted. The biographical sketch collection is just one of the cultural forms that were used during this early phase of professional development to validate a new kind of author.

If the enumeration and cataloguing of contemporary writers forms one strategy for achieving professional recognition, another relies conversely on the capacity of authors to endure, and accrue value, beyond the transient present. Moreover, these seemingly opposing strategies were strikingly coextensive: during the very same period that authors were marshalled into the category of 'living authors', they were also (as noted above) increasingly ranked amongst the dead. Andrew Bennett has argued that a 'culture of posterity' defines Romanticism as a rhetorical intervention within the construction of literary tradition: whereas 'neoclassicism may be said to involve the invention of the (English, literary) canon as a category of dead writers, Romanticism involves the imaginative insertion of the *living* writer into that canonical cadre'.[20] What is significant, for Bennett, is not so much the fact that in popular cultural mythology Romanticism came to be represented as a cult of dead authors, as that the notion of 'posterity' was installed at the very foundation of authorial practice: 'the judgement of future generations becomes the necessary condition of the act of writing itself'.[21] The capacity to achieve posthumous recognition is thus commonly associated in Romantic discourse with the idea that an author's enduring value, or true fame, transcends the immediate context of his/her reception, even to the point at which 'fame' and 'reputation' (or 'celebrity', a somewhat later nineteenth-century neologism) are deemed mutually exclusive

states.[22] William Hazlitt, whom Leo Braudy heralds as the 'first great fame theorist of the modern age', is again a seminal figure in the formulation of this cultural discourse.[23] Though Hazlitt values the 'contemporary' as a site of historical struggle and temporal flux to which the leading 'Spirits of the Age' are bound in dialectical tension, he insists elsewhere on the importance of posterity as the perspective from which the achievement of biographical subjects can be fully judged. In his essay 'On Different Sorts of Fame' (1817) Hazlitt privileges posthumous fame on the basis of its greater capacity for 'disinterested' judgement. Although the principle underlying all love of fame is a desire for 'sympathy with the feelings of others', from which the subject expects to receive personal gratification, the approbation of posterity has the virtue of purging this desire of its vanity so that it becomes an 'ambition to attain the highest excellence, sanctioned by the highest authority, that of time'.[24] This 'true love of fame' renounces the 'impatient' or premature desire to experience fame through popularity, which serves only to 'mimic the voice of fame, and to convert a prize-medal or a newspaper puff into a passport to immortality'.[25] As his reference to the promotional mechanisms of the newspaper press indicates, however, Hazlitt fears that the aspiration for posthumous acclaim may be 'superseded' by the temporal horizons of modern print culture: 'instead of waiting for the award of distant ages, the poet or prose-writer receives his final doom from the next number of the *Edinburgh* or *Quarterly Review*'.[26] The material conditions of the periodical press are conducive not to a culture of posterity, or deferred gratification, but one characterized by an accelerating rhythm of demands and rewards. In 'The Periodical Press' (1823), an article first published in one of the aforementioned Reviews, he observes that '[l]iterary immortality is now let on short leases, and must be contented to succeed by rotation'.[27] What is striking about Hazlitt's theory of fame, then, is not so much the intrinsic value that it places on the concept of posterity as the underlying apprehension of cultural friction from which the need for posterity emerges. This analysis was to prove influential on later writers such as Thomas Carlyle, Bulwer-Lytton, and John Stuart Mill, who saw the 'ephemeral' nature of modern authorship as an obstacle to the elevation of the literary profession.[28]

While the Romantic 'culture of posterity' may appear under threat from this rival culture of journalism and celebrity, it is more accurate to view these two simultaneous developments as mutually constitutive.[29] It was precisely because modern conditions of production appeared to challenge the value of literary fame that the appeal to posterity began to make sense as a strategy for demarcating professional achievement against the ephemeral activities

of amateur writers and literary hacks. Hazlitt's association of posterity with disinterest, for example, can be linked to the development of nineteenth-century professional discourse, in which, as both Claire Pettitt and Jennifer Ruth have shown, notions of deferred gratification and future-oriented value played a crucial role.[30] The familiar idea that time is the test of true genius correlates, in ideological terms, to the extended development of professional authority over the course of a lifetime and to the posthumous value inscribed through legal copyright in the products of literary labour, notwithstanding the difference between popular cultural images of the genius and the professional. Coleridge's figuration of Wordsworth's poetic achievement as a 'sacred Roll . . . placed . . . with gradual fame / Among the archives of mankind' can be seen as one of many examples of the Romantic dichotomy between permanent and transient fame, but is also prescient of the rhetoric surrounding mid-century professional reform.[31] In the context of this spatialized conceit of posterity, the word 'gradual' is used principally to signify the hierarchical ranking of poets after death, but also connotes the more familiar modern sense of incremental development over time. Towards the end of his life, as Catherine Seville has shown, Wordsworth played an important role in supporting Thomas Talfourd's campaign for copyright reform, which culminated in the passage of the 1842 Copyright Act. Like Talfourd, Wordsworth argued for the extension of copyright term on the basis of protecting those authors whose literary achievement was of 'slow growth' and 'enduring character' rather than a matter of transient popularity.[32]

Consecration and disenchantment

The historical period examined in this book has traditionally been viewed as one which marks the transition from Romantic to Victorian paradigms of literary culture. The decade from the mid 1820s through to the mid 1830s, in particular, has been seen as an indeterminate borderland between disciplinary frontiers, resisting incorporation into either of the adjacent territories. But whilst recent scholars, such as Richard Cronin, have expressed dissatisfaction over the 'lumbering reifications' of 'Romanticism' and 'Victorianism', they continue to use these terms, acknowledging their stubborn efficacy as cultural short-hand.[33] The discourse of authorship commonly construed as 'Romantic' is that which is described by the historian of French Romanticism, Paul Bénichou, under the heading of 'the consecration of the writer'. According to Bénichou, the years 1800 to 1820 (the period of the Counter-revolution in France) saw the emergence of the 'idea

of a spiritual ministry of the poet' in reaction against the 'materialism' of eighteenth-century thought.[34] This corresponds in chronology with the establishment of the broader, but related, idea of the 'secular immortality of great spirits', which Ben Knights suggests had also become 'commonplace' by the 1820s.[35] The most celebrated exponents of these ideas were Goethe, in Germany, and Coleridge, in England: both the heroic example offered by the former and the conception of the 'clerisy' as a quasi-institutional intellectual elite outlined by the latter informed Carlyle's later doctrine of the sacerdotal character of the 'man of letters', organized, by preference, within the collective body of a 'Literary Guild'.[36] By contrast, the representations of authorship most commonly associated with Victorian culture are those described by Cronin as 'worldly' in nature. What distinguishes early Victorian accounts of writing from their Romantic predecessors, he argues, is that '[w]riting for them does not have a secret, inexplicable origin enclosed in the mind of the poet, rather it originates from the world that we all share; a world of books and of book publishers, and a world in which writers, like the rest of us, need to eat and sleep, look after their children, and earn the money to do these things'.[37] The term which I employ in this book to convey the worldliness of Victorian authorship is 'disenchantment', a word used by many of the nineteenth-century writers who I will be discussing, but also derived from the work of later critical theorists for whom it is synonymous with the experience of cultural modernity and the processes of rationalized and secularized thought.[38] Pierre Bourdieu, for example, has discussed the professionalization of art and literature in the nineteenth century as a mechanism of 'defence against the *disenchantment* produced by the progress of the division of labour' [original emphasis]; professional recognition, he suggests, was conferred through various institutional and informal 'agents of consecration', such as academies, salons, and periodicals, which sought to dispel the 'disenchanted' image of authorship as a 'job like any other'.[39] It would be reductive, then, to conceive of the disenchantment of the author simply as a Victorian response to the Romantic discourse of consecration. In accordance with Cronin, this study questions the fixity of period boundaries between Romantic and Victorian models of authorship, even while it accepts the convenience of using such polarized categories.

It is certainly true that during the early Victorian period a reaction against some of the most prominent literary figures and cultural attitudes of the first two decades of the century began to set in, albeit within the context of a still pervasive influence. The best known example of this is the anti-Byronic turn dating from the 1830s, which received its most

memorable expression in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833–4). Just as Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh exhorts his reader to 'Close thy *Byron*; open thy *Goethe*', so Charles Kingsley later dismissed the English Romantic poets as an 'immature' version of German Romanticism, his primary culprit being Shelley.[40] The language of organic development is often used by early Victorian writers to suggest a process of cultural maturation from the preceding generation to the present, ironically at the expense of writers more commonly associated with the 'natural' (Byron perhaps excepted). However, the relationship between the Romantic figure of creative genius and the worldly Victorian professional does not afford a neat historical antinomy; as Pettitt has suggested, both 'stereotypes' coexist with 'irreconcilable tensions' for much of the century.[41] This is partly because the transition from 'genius' to 'professional' describes an underlying continuum and symbiosis of characteristics at the same time as exhibiting a marked contrast. Common to both formulations is the postulate of the 'proprietary author', to use Mark Rose's term, which emerges from the convergence of legal and aesthetic discourse during the course of the eighteenth century.[42] Just as much as the legal-juridical definitions of 'literary property' that paved the way for the concerted professionalization of the mid nineteenth century, aesthetic definitions of genius were predicated on the assumption of a primal ownership of the fruits of mental labour – the literary work as an 'objectification of a personality', not merely words on a page.[43] As indicated above, recent scholarship has traced the development of professional ideology back into the Romantic period, especially as regards Wordsworth.[44] Both the terms 'genius' and 'professional' were fluid and contestable throughout the period covered by this study: at times used as antonyms, elsewhere they become virtually synonymous.

The voluminous writings of Isaac D'Israeli over the first three decades of the century offer an illuminating example of this conceptual indeterminacy. In some ways, D'Israeli's tireless cataloguing of the misfortunes and injustices of authorship can be seen as a form of proto-professional advocacy on behalf of the collective literary class, yet he himself characterized the 'profession' of authorship as one of its 'calamities', contrary in spirit to '[t]he title of Author [which] still retains its seduction among our youth, and is consecrated by ages'. For D'Israeli, the term 'Authors by Profession' continues to evoke the mid-eighteenth-century world of 'grub street' (he attributes its first usage to Guthrie in 1762): 'to become an "Author by Profession", is to have no other means of subsistence than such as are extracted from the quill; and no one believes these to be so precarious as they really are, until disappointed, distressed, and thrown