

‘HALF FASHION AND HALF PASSION’:
THE LIFE OF PUBLISHER HENRY COLBURN

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on some of the most significant and least understood aspects of the life of London publisher Henry Colburn (c.1784-1855). Its purposes are to correct the misinformation currently in circulation, to introduce new information, and to reassess Colburn's reputation and accomplishments in light of this evidence. The thesis first examines the errors and limitations of previous appraisals of Colburn and how various primary sources can be used to correct and augment them. It next considers Colburn's early years before surveying his periodical publications and his controversial publicity methods. The thesis briefly recounts Colburn's involvement with the 'silver-fork' school of fiction and then examines in greater depth his relationships with writer Benjamin Disraeli and one-time business partner Richard Bentley. Colburn's two marriages are also studied as the focus of the thesis moves onto the latter half of his career, his retirement, and his death. The final chapter tenders some general conclusions based on the foregoing matter and suggests further avenues of study concerning Colburn, his role in the history of publishing, and his place in the traditional paradigms of Romantic and Victorian literary culture.

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DEDICATION

To my grandparents, George and Josephine Reinhart.

Requiescant in pace.

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(Author's collection.) Colburn's grave, in Kensal Green Cemetery, London, is now mostly obscured by the bush growing at its head. The grave is on the west side of South Branch Avenue.

ABBREVIATIONS

- BDL Benjamin Disraeli, *Letters*—Refers to letter number, not page number
- BL British Library—Includes the Bentley Papers
- BO Bentley Obituary—Refers to Richard Bentley’s unpublished obituary of Henry Colburn (provided here as Appendix D)
- DLB *Dictionary of Literary Biography*
- DNB *Dictionary of National Biography*
- GM *Gentleman’s Magazine*
- HP Hughenden Papers—Benjamin Disraeli’s papers
- ILN *Illustrated London News*
- LP Lytton Papers—Edward Lytton Bulwer’s papers
- NAL National Art Library—Includes the Forster Papers
- PRO Public Records Office
- SP Sadleir Papers
- Sutherland Refers to John Sutherland’s article ‘Henry Colburn, Publisher’ unless otherwise stated

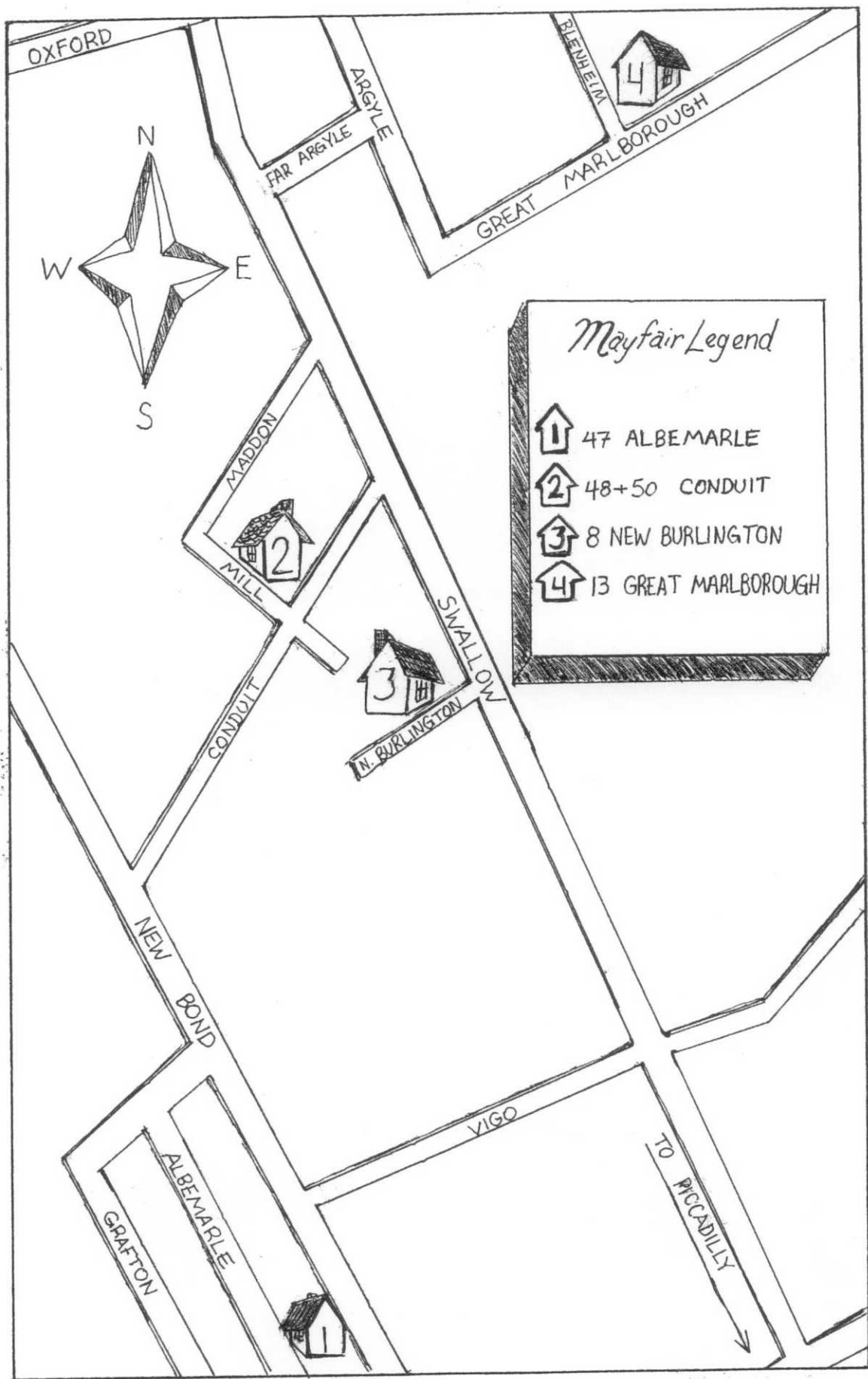
A NOTE ON NAMES

Edward Lytton Bulwer’s name went through so many permutations during his lifetime that he was variously known as Bulwer, Lytton, Bulwer-Lytton (with and without the hyphen), and Baron Lytton of Knebworth. His association with Colburn centred on the time before the changes began to take place, so I have retained his original appellation: Edward Lytton Bulwer, or just Bulwer.

Benjamin Disraeli dropped the apostrophe from his surname early in life, while his father Isaac and other relatives maintained it (viz., D’Israeli). I have maintained these different spellings throughout this thesis, though Colburn, Bulwer, and other correspondents apostrophised the name at whim.

‘We have long been induced to suspect that the seeds of true sublimity lurk in a life which, like this book, is half fashion and half passion’.

Benjamin Disraeli, *The Young Duke*



1. 'A DISPOSITION TO BE TROUBLESOME': RE-EVALUATING COLBURN'S REPUTATION

On 14 February 1830, Benjamin Disraeli wrote a letter to his publisher, Henry Colburn, extolling the virtues of his forthcoming novel, *The Young Duke*. He wrote in the informal, even impertinent tone that had gradually become acceptable during his four-year association with Colburn: 'I have been fool enough to be intent upon a novel—But such a novel! It will astound you, draw tears from Princesses, and grins from Printers devils [*sic*] [...]. In a word to give you an idea of it. It is exactly the kind of work which you wo[ul]d write yourself, if you had time' (BDL 76). As Disraeli went on ruefully to admit, his novel's chief flaw was that it was as yet only half finished. When this was rectified and the book finally published, at its heart was a chilling recitation of things that are bitter. At the heart of *that* lay the assertion, 'It is bitter to be neglected; it is more bitter to be misunderstood' (Bk. II, Ch. XIV).

Would Henry Colburn have written that line, if he had had the time? There is a hardly a line in the book more applicable to the publisher, then or now. In his day, which spanned almost the entire first half of the nineteenth century, Colburn was responsible for first editions of Pepys's *Diary* and Evelyn's *Memoirs*; Mary Shelley's later novels and her only introduction to *Frankenstein*; Frances Burney's *Diary and Letters*; William Hazlitt's *Table Talk* and *The Spirit of the Age*; Charles Darwin's *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle*; and the first British editions of James Fenimore Cooper, Benjamin Franklin, and Washington Irving. Yet to succeeding generations he has become merely the producer of middlebrow popular fiction, not a worthy or even acceptable topic for many literature scholars until late in the twentieth century. Thus Colburn has received little acknowledgement for his phenomenal success with the silver-fork school, populated

by such figures as Edward Lytton Bulwer, Catherine Gore, Lady Sydney Morgan, and, of course, Disraeli.

The difficulties with Colburn's reputation, however, stem from more than just academic prejudice. He suffered from the disagreeable comments and actions of his estranged partner, Richard Bentley, who went on to be a successful publisher in his own right. At the dissolution of their bond, Bentley's lawyer claimed that 'some indications of a disposition to be troublesome have manifested themselves on the part of Mr Colburn' and the allegations only got worse from there (BL Add.MS.46632A, 38-43). Some contemporaries and modern critics looked—briefly—at Colburn's method of conducting his business, particularly of promoting his publications, and did not like what they saw. They accused him of being an unscrupulous rogue, using dirty tricks and dishonest ploys to foist his wares upon the unsuspecting public. This was called 'puffery' and once the charge was made, it left an indelible stain on Colburn's name.

Other factors in the neglect and misunderstanding of Henry Colburn's role in publishing history have been a lack of information and actual misinformation. With his reputation preceding him, Colburn never seemed worth the time needed to undertake the full search of primary sources necessary for an accurate assessment of his life and work. Yet the unremitting negativity of Colburn's reputation should have set someone on just such a search long ago, for he was never likely to be as wicked, insignificant, or uninfluential as he had been made to appear.

If ever there was a time when it was appropriate to judge a publisher on his perceived morality, it is long past. The only way to evaluate such a person is to ask how he conducted his business. Was Colburn a successful publisher? Did he influence the history of literature? Did he influence publishing practice? Is our knowledge of his time and milieu poorer for not knowing him? With the answer to all of these questions being,

demonstrably, a resounding yes, there is the justification for delivering Colburn from neglect. It should go without saying that our duty to truth and to factual evidence is justification enough for delivering him from misunderstanding.

THE STATE OF THE ART

The natural starting point for an examination of Henry Colburn's life and career is, of course, a survey of the research already conducted on the subject. There are actually very few published sources specifically about Colburn, though he is frequently mentioned in passing in texts on topics such as literary magazines or the history of advertising. The entire body of Colburn research is riddled with factual errors, with few sources claiming to have consulted primary archival material. The problem began with the earliest major published piece on Colburn, an obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1855) that fails to cite any sources—primary or secondary—whatsoever. Following on from this were a chapter in Henry Curwen's *History of Booksellers* (1873), an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1908), a chapter in Matthew Rosa's *Silver-Fork School* (1936), an article in *Publishing History* by John Sutherland (1986), and a joint entry with Richard Bentley in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (1991). No prior knowledge of Colburn's life is needed to spot the errors in these writings: one need only read them to see that, while they agree on a basic outline, on specific points there is usually at least one source at variance with the rest. Particularly when this occurs with dates, it is clear that somebody must be wrong. Collating these six sources gives an idea of the scope of this problem—and also provides that basic outline of Colburn's career.

Henry Colburn's early life is wholly unknown until the publication of his first books in 1806, when he was probably working for bookseller William Earle but might already have been working at Mr. Morgan's British and Foreign Public Library. Colburn

became sole proprietor of Morgan's Library that same year (Sutherland 65) or 1816—depending on which source one consults. There he published mainly memoirs and travelogues, before steadily shifting his focus to fiction. Colburn sold the library to Saunders and Otley in 1816 (Curwen 282), 1824 (DLB 41), 1824-25 (Sutherland 65), or at some indeterminate point (DNB 710) and set up his own establishment in New Burlington Street. Early in his career, he began his lifelong habit of founding magazines: the *New Monthly* in 1814, the *Literary Gazette* in 1817 or 1825 (GM 548), the *Athenaeum* in 1828, the *Court Journal* in 1828 (GM 548, Curwen 291) or 1829, and the *United Service Journal* definitely in 1829. The primary purpose of his magazines seems to have been the promotion of his other publications, not merely through advertisements but also through ostensibly disinterested book reviews and news items. This and similar publicity methods were derided in his day as puffery, and it was only a matter of time until he acquired the title 'Prince of Puffers'.

From the late 1810s through most of the 1820s Colburn was in dire financial difficulty, running up £18,000 worth of debt (DLB 40)—or he was the most successful general trade publisher in England, regularly earning £20,000 a year (DLB 41). He enjoyed notable successes with the first editions of Evelyn's *Diary* in 1818, Pepys's *Diary* in 1825, and Burke's *Peerage* in 1826. Colburn created and perpetuated the boom in silver-fork novels by publishing and, of course, vigorously promoting the first novels of Bulwer, Disraeli, and Thomas Henry Lister, among others. At the height of his success, in 1829—or possibly 1830 (GM 548, Curwen 291)—he took on his printer, Richard Bentley, as his partner, for reasons known only to them but perhaps stemming from Colburn's alleged debts. They enjoyed great success with their affordable reprint series, Colburn and Bentley's Standard Novels, but again for unspecified reasons, they fell out with each other and dissolved the partnership in 1832.

Under the fiendishly complicated terms of the partnership agreement and its final settlement (which no source claims to understand fully), Colburn was barred from publishing any new works within twenty miles of London—and could only publish his magazines and new editions of his old works in London through Bentley. He made the most of his old copyrights by devising a profitable reprint series called Colburn's Modern Novelists, which may or may not have been the same as Colburn's Modern Standard Novelists. Finally, in 1835 (DLB 45) or 1836, he moved to Windsor—*twenty-one* miles outside of London—to escape Bentley's control and resume the publishing of new works. Realizing that he was beaten, Bentley allowed Colburn to buy his way out of the agreement and return to London in 1836.

Colburn set up shop in Great Marlborough Street, where he welcomed the return of all (Curwen 292) or many of his old authors and launched the careers of Anthony Trollope and Margaret Oliphant. He enjoyed appreciable success until his retirement in 1852, when he sold his business to the newly formed partnership of Hurst and Blackett. Henry Colburn died on 16 August 1855 or 1857 (Rosa 187) and was survived by his second wife, the former Eliza Ann Crosbie, whom he had married in 1841. (He had married his nameless first wife in 1830 and was *apparently* widowed not long after—no one even ventures a guess at the details.) Colburn had no children.

This brief look at the main sources on Colburn's life makes two things very clear: first, that not one of them can be relied upon for a completely accurate account of Colburn's career, particularly where dates—the bedrock of any such account—are concerned; and second, that Colburn's achievements were varied and numerous and covered substantial portions of both the Romantic and Victorian periods. To me, these articles also made clear that more research needed to be done, not just because of the errors currently in circulation, but because Colburn was so obviously a significant figure

in publishing and literary history. My work therefore began with assessing where previous writers went wrong. Here, then, is a brief look at the problems afflicting each of the main secondary sources on Colburn.

The *Gentleman's Magazine* obituary is an important piece not only because of its temporal proximity to Colburn but also because it is cited by other sources such as Sutherland and the *Dictionary of National Biography*. It appears to be the main authority on Colburn's early years with Earle and Morgan, but there is no telling where the magazine got this information. Clearly operating under the maxim 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum', the article paints a uniformly positive picture of Colburn's life and work, shorn of any details that might be at all problematic. The hugely contentious issue of puffery, for example, is glossed over with the solitary sentence, 'Mr. Colburn was unrivalled in the art of advertising his publications' (547). Several dates and names are erroneous and, taken all together, this obituary does not inspire much confidence in its content.

Curwen's chapter on Colburn is more factual—particularly in regard to his periodicals—but reproduces a few of the *Gentleman's Magazine's* errors and seriously misdates the publisher's move to New Burlington Street. In keeping with his conversational style, Curwen allows himself several digressionary discussions of Colburn's authors. His remarks on Morgan and Bulwer are fairly brief but those on Theodore Hook comprise nearly five of the article's sixteen pages. While regrettable for readers seeking specific information on Colburn, it may be that these digressions are included precisely because Curwen lacked such information. He presumably did not have access to any archival material and could not even consult Colburn's former associates, most of whom—including his successors, Hurst and Blackett—were already dead by 1873. Curwen's piece is at least notable for its readability and its rating of Colburn as a figure worthy of a chapter unto himself.

Colburn's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* is chiefly characterized by its slavish repetition of the errors of its predecessors. Its sources are listed as being the *Gentleman's Magazine* obituary; Curwen; biographies of two of Colburn's minor associates, A. A. Watts and John Banim; and Timperley's *Encyclopaedia*, which is in fact Timperley's *Dictionary of Printers and Printing*. The latter three sources have very little to say about Colburn and, as we have already seen, the initial two sources are riddled with errors. The *Dictionary of National Biography* writer—H. R. Tedder, F.S.A.—is clearly aware of the problem: when his sources present conflicting information, as they invariably do, he simply smooths over it by omitting dates or opting for vague statements. It is a shame that Tedder did not feel comfortable acknowledging the lack of sound information on Colburn because his article has only succeeded in disseminating misinformation to a large readership.

Rosa's *Silver-Fork School* was the first full-length study of Colburn's own genre and fittingly includes a whole chapter on the publisher. Rosa is frequently more concerned with Colburn's promotional methods and the large sums of money he spent on them than with his personal role within the silver-fork school and his relations with its authors. He is torn between admiration of Colburn's ingenuity and entrepreneurialism and distaste for his puffery and lack of literary cachet. Rosa quotes extensively from contemporary sources, which tends to perpetuate their dislike of Colburn, rather than taking a more objective or modern view. Rosa makes a few factual errors but more often slips up by not citing sources at all or by quoting very selectively from those he does cite: for example, using the part of a letter from Charles Dickens to Theodore Hook that denigrates Colburn's behaviour but not the part that questions the wisdom of Hook's own actions (203).

Sutherland's 'Henry Colburn, Publisher' is the most accurate, extensive, and well documented of all the published sources on Colburn. Sutherland is unique in his readiness to admit to being unsure of certain dates and other murky matters in Colburn's life. He makes a few factual errors but, as with his predecessors, his reliance on other secondary materials is what really lets him down. This is especially problematic in his treatment of the Colburn and Bentley partnership, which he bases on *A Victorian Publisher* by Royal Gettmann—who, as Sutherland himself says, wrote 'as the partisan of Richard Bentley' (59). Like Rosa, Sutherland cannot quite commit himself as a Colburn apologist despite a genuine appreciation for the publisher's innovative advertising schemes and business practices. In the end, he cannot resist the lure of the many anecdotes concerning Colburn's puffery and other 'ungentlemanly' behaviour and so never manages to mount a wholehearted defence. Because of the overall quality of this piece, however, it has become probably the most frequently cited source on Colburn.

Colburn's entry in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, written by Roger Wallins, is problematic in its very conception, which sees Colburn as an adjunct to Richard Bentley. This is quite inexcusable when one considers that their partnership represented just three years of Colburn's forty-seven-year career. The irony is that, even while lumping Colburn and Bentley together in this article, Wallins actually complains that Bentley is too often tarred with the same brush as Colburn and that his reputation has suffered by association with his one-time partner (39). The article is reasonably accurate, citing sources such as Sutherland and Rosa as well as the old Curwen piece. Perhaps its greatest failing is in providing a number of interesting business and financial details without citing any sources for them at all.

Sitting uneasily between these main secondary sources and more generalized works that mention Colburn in passing is Michael Sadleir's *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*

(1951). As a standard reference work, its section ‘Henry Colburn, His Character and Partnership with Richard Bentley’ has understandably been viewed as a major source on the publisher and enjoyed some influence. Sadleir’s piece is, however, not a short biography like the six others above but, as its title suggests, a tool facilitating comparison with Bentley, which works to Colburn’s detriment in two ways. First, it falsely inflates the significance of their short-lived partnership in proportion to Colburn’s other achievements. Second, even when Sadleir admits that Colburn’s business skills were superior to Bentley’s, his extreme personal distaste for the former means that the latter always comes out looking best. Sadleir’s stream of grudgingly tempered invective against Colburn (‘a brilliant, disturbing, meanly admirable little man’ [II, 113]) makes it very difficult to accept his discussion as being entirely rational and just. That said, when Sadleir deals in hard facts, he achieves greater accuracy than most other sources and is the only one to painstakingly sort out the complexities of the reprint series, Colburn’s *Modern (Standard) Novelists*.

The references to Colburn in other general publishing histories and in biographies of his authors imitate the model of the six main sources; that is, they offer some interesting information but are almost never entirely free of inaccuracies. And, as with the sources just discussed, these minor references have improved in accuracy and completeness over the years so that modern works are generally more reliable than older ones. This is largely a product of the overall scholarly trend towards seeking out the most credible historical evidence and carefully documenting its use. Thus, in the past, we had books such as *The Life of John Banim* by Patrick Murray (1857)—cited by Tedder in the *Dictionary of National Biography*—who blithely refers to letters without dates, quotations without provenance, and quite obviously does not know ‘Mr Colburn’s’ first name. Nowadays, a book such as Susan Normington’s *Lady Caroline Lamb* (2001),

which is aimed at a popular rather than an academic audience, nevertheless relies on well-documented manuscript materials for information. This is true not only for Lady Caroline's relationships with key figures such as Byron and William Lamb, but also where comparatively minor players like Colburn are concerned. There are unfortunate exceptions to this trend, including A. C. Grayling's well-reviewed *Quarrel of the Age* (2001) on William Hazlitt. Despite Colburn's status as the publisher of Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* and various *New Monthly Magazine* contributions, Grayling consistently misspells his surname ('Colbourn') and, like Murray before him, is unable to preface it with 'Henry'. (One wonders just what his sources were, since even the worst articles on Colburn get these things right.) Thankfully, this kind of horror is increasingly rare.

Overall, these secondary sources do not offer a great deal in terms of reliable information, but they did prove very helpful to me in pointing out the areas most in need of further research, as well as the crippling absence of a trustworthy chronology. They also reinforced the importance of focusing on primary sources, in their own tendency to go astray largely through *not* focusing on them. The next step in my research therefore had to be uncovering these primary Colburn sources.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The only major writer on Colburn who is at all bothered about primary sources and who could, therefore, point me in the right direction is Sutherland. He categorically states that 'there is available no comprehensive archive of Colburn's office materials (beyond those for the two years of his partnership with Bentley)' and explains that these were destroyed in the Blitz (64). Leaving aside the fact that the partnership lasted three years, the import of that statement is clear enough. It meant that Sutherland felt he had to rely upon a list of Colburn's publications (a 'product profile') compiled from the *English*

Catalogue, along with an array of secondary sources, including biographies of Colburn's authors. This narrow approach was understandable since he could hardly be expected to undertake a lengthy quest for primary documents in support of a twenty-five-page article. Because such an approach was obviously *not* sufficient for my project, however, I began my quest with the hints Sutherland had dropped. I needed to look at the archival materials that covered Colburn's partnership with Bentley, to compile a product profile, and to see what Colburn's authors might be able to reveal.

The Bentley Papers are a sprawling collection of documents relating to Richard Bentley and the family firm that he subsequently established. They are spread between the British Library and the libraries of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of California at Los Angeles. Most of these are available on microfilm but the decipherability of the documents is frequently compromised, which is a serious drawback considering that Colburn's handwriting is barely legible at the best of times.¹ Among the Colburn and Bentley documents are ledger entries and records of a number of mundane business transactions that, while valuable in their way, are not of much significance to a life of Colburn. Vitally important, however, are the contracts signed by the publishers at the beginning and end of their partnership. With these among the Bentley Papers, there is no excuse for misdating the alliance or speculating about why it was formed and why dissolved.

Nearly as revelatory are the documents covering the period between their break up and Colburn's return to the trade. There is simply no reason for the events of that time to be as poorly understood as they are—because Bentley carefully documented them. He saved Colburn's letters from this time—even going so far as to annotate some of them—and kept copies of his own replies. Bentley also collected some of Colburn's

¹ For these reasons, I consulted the original Bentley Papers manuscripts at the British Library, which included the bulk of the Colburn information. Additionally, I used transcriptions of Richard Bentley's manuscript diaries at the University of Illinois (generously provided by Patrick Leary).

advertisements in an apparent effort to construct a legal case against him for breaching the terms of their dissolution settlement. But most of this information is passed over in the two major studies of the Bentley Papers, Gordon N. Ray's article 'The Bentley Papers' (1952) and Gettmann's *Victorian Publisher* (1960). Ray is not particularly interested in Colburn, which is fair enough, but Gettmann's bias against him perhaps explains why he was loath to examine this ordeal from which Colburn made an impressive comeback.

Having found a solid if somewhat limited resource in the Bentley Papers, I turned my attention to compiling a Colburn product profile. This would have been a daunting project without the assistance of Michael Turner, the Head of Preservation and Conservation at the Bodleian Library (since retired). Before taking that position, Turner was a bibliographer who had spent a good deal of time compiling notes for a complete listing of the publications of Henry Colburn. He kept the notes but had never done anything with them, so he very generously opened up his archives to me. Turner had compiled his information from a variety of sources, including the *London Catalogue of Books*, the Bodleian and British Library catalogues, a publication list compiled by Bentley's grandson, and as many of the original books as he could locate. In the course of his work, he managed to identify many authors of anonymous texts.

After inputting most of Turner's information—his titles, authors, dates, and printers—into a database, I found myself with well over 900 individual Colburn titles. Sutherland totalled 996, so I suspect that we are very near the true number; the discrepancy probably comes from differing methodologies and the handling of joint Colburn and Bentley titles. My database has allowed me to cite the number of books Colburn published in a given year (while always recognizing that further research might amend that number) and to track larger trends over time. These include his early trade in French books and their English translations, his progressive shift from non-fiction to

fiction, and the basic ups and downs of his business concerns. None of these things has been documented in any other source, and it is only through the analysis of Michael Turner's findings that I have been able to reconstruct Colburn's publishing output.²

Beyond this database, Colburn's own publications vary in their usefulness as primary sources. His books are unhelpful in that so many fell foul of his flexible dating system and wily business practices. Generally speaking, if a book was released in November or December, its title page would be dated with the upcoming year—and depending on how the mood took him, Colburn would sometimes deploy this strategy as early as September. The object was, of course, to slow the aging process of his books, especially those that might not sell so well. Colburn also had few scruples about adding new title pages to old books and selling them as revised editions, thus further complicating their usefulness as documentary evidence. Michael Turner was painstaking in his use of these books and it is doubtful that there is much more information to be wrung from them, although a few advertisements and announcements have proved useful.

Colburn's magazines are another matter altogether. His *New Monthly* has already proven fertile ground for Ph.D. theses, including Neil Gilbert Grill's and Linda B. Jones's, while Robert Duncan wrote his doctorate on the *Literary Gazette*. As we have seen, Colburn also published the *Court Journal* and *United Service Journal*, and founded the *Athenaeum*. He held some interest in the *Sunday Times*, as well. Only Curwen seems to know that he was responsible for John Galt's short-lived *New British Theatre*; none of the major sources know that his periodical empire even extended to *The Quarterly Journal of Science, Literature, and Art*, and the *Naval and Military Gazette*. (If Jones's Ph.D. thesis is to be believed, Colburn was involved with still more periodicals, but I

² I chose not to provide a print version of my database as part of this thesis for several reasons, chief among them being that the research was undertaken by someone else, whose methodology and accuracy I am not in a position to defend. While I personally have every confidence in Turner's work, in its current form it is merely a tool and requires the attention of a trained bibliographer before it is polished enough to stand as a scholarly document.

have been unable to link him conclusively with any other titles.) The sheer number of magazines Colburn published gives an idea of the scope of his business and the kind of power he wielded within the trade, and research into the circumstances surrounding his proprietorship of each title has revealed a great deal more. The major publications have their own stories to tell about Colburn's dealings with editors and contributors and even his influence on content. In some respects, these magazines also offer definitive evidence of puffery, demonstrating how and to what extent Colburn used them to promote his books.

While Sutherland and others consulted biographies of Colburn's authors, it seemed more to my purpose to seek out their archives. After all, if the best information on Colburn lay in the primary sources, then the same was likely to be true of information on his authors. I began with the archives of Colburn's best-known author, Benjamin Disraeli, which are kept at the Bodleian Library for the National Trust as the Hughenden Papers (named after his stately home in Buckinghamshire). They naturally include a great deal of political material but do not neglect his literary side, which is represented in part by several letters from Colburn to both Disraeli and his wife, some proofs and clippings, and an interesting correspondence between Disraeli and another Colburn author, Edward Lytton Bulwer. Disraeli's many letters—including several to Colburn and others concerning him—have recently been collected in a fine scholarly edition by the University of Toronto press and I have treated this tremendously important source as a kind of supplement to the Hughenden Papers. Altogether, these Disraeli-related documents rival the Bentley Papers in significance, cover a longer period of time, and offer a multiplicity of views.

There is more about Bulwer in the Lytton Papers, on deposit from his Knebworth Estate at the Hertfordshire Archives. These contain several letters from Colburn and a few

notes by Bulwer, all stemming from either Bulwer's editorship of the *New Monthly* or Colburn's later career after his split with Bentley. They reveal something about both men and these important periods of time but are plagued by the publisher's scrawl at its very worst. After this, I consulted the small Isaac D'Israeli archive at the Jewish Museum London and the few miscellaneous letters at the University of Iowa—useful but of no great import. The Huntington Library in Pasadena, California holds a small and interesting collection of Colburn letters, some of which date from the under-documented 1810s.³

The very best miscellaneous collection of archival material regarding Colburn's authors is, somewhat surprisingly, to be found at the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum. They are part of the John Forster Papers, Forster having been an associate of Colburn during the publisher's lifetime and the husband of his widow thereafter. Passed on through the one-time Mrs. Colburn were a considerable number of letters from Thomas Campbell, William Godwin, Lady Caroline Lamb, and Thomas Henry Lister, among others. They cover topics ranging from choosing book titles and agreeing payments to making Sunday visits and sending gifts of game. Thus, they offer substantial amounts of new information about Colburn's personal dealings with these authors as well as his business dealings, and contribute significantly to this thesis.

In my continuing search for author archives, I uncovered a collection that did not fit that description but in fact turned out to be a serious rival to the Bentley Papers, with which my research began. The Michael Sadleir Papers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have until now been an untapped fount of information for those interested in Colburn.⁴ Notes in Sadleir's own hand explain that he was writing a book on Bentley, having already produced a short monograph on Bentley's Standard Novels and the pro-

³ I used transcriptions of these letters, which were gratefully received from Nicholas Mason.

⁴ The Sadleir Papers also comprise many Sadleir family materials as well as notes and sources for his books, including *Bulwer: A Panorama* (1931).

Bentley section of *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* already mentioned; it is likely then that he acquired his not inconsiderable collection of Colburn-Bentley correspondence to contribute to his book. How he acquired the correspondence is not immediately obvious, but as he was known to be on good terms with the publisher's family, Sadleir could have received it directly from them. Almost all of the letters are from Colburn to Bentley, and the majority stem from 1829 and 1830—thus closing an important gap in our documentary knowledge of that period of their partnership and giving Colburn a voice where before only Bentley's was heard. Sadleir's notes cover the whole of Colburn's early history, about which he knew as little as everybody else. Still, he has a convincing theory on Colburn's origins and a few other interesting additions to the body of knowledge about him. All in all, the Sadleir Papers make an enormous contribution to this area of research and are in themselves worthy of deeper study.

That there is yet more primary material floating around in private hands, undocumented and largely inaccessible, has been amply proven by antiquarian Richard Ford of London. He handled some portions of the Bentley Papers, including correspondence that was sold piecemeal to private and institutional collectors as late as 1999. Bentley ephemera is still trickling into his office, and Ford generously granted me access to three intriguing items. The first was an official contract for life insurance taken out by Bentley immediately prior to his partnership with Colburn; the second was a brief memorandum about their break up. The third and final item from Richard Ford's collection was a most unusual document that has provided crucial new information: a proof of an (incomplete) obituary of Colburn written by Bentley. It is undated, though obviously written at some point after Colburn's burial, and was apparently never published since it is otherwise unknown—although it may be this to which Gettmann fleetingly refers (18). We can trust the attribution not just because of its provenance or

even the amount of intimate details it includes but also because, as a textual comparison reveals, this obituary is clearly one of the sources Bentley's grandson quotes in *Some Leaves From the Past* (1896). Despite its obvious bias, Bentley's obituary is positively revelatory on Colburn's first marriage and other personal matters, while also shedding light on certain aspects of their partnership. The text is reproduced here as Appendix D.

The last primary sources that I turned to in my search were, strictly speaking, the first primary sources on Colburn ever available outside his circle. These were public records, which had never before been consulted. The easiest document to find, as it is now available to download from the Public Record Office's web site, is Colburn's will. This lengthy and rather complex document had been referred to in the *Gentleman's Magazine* obituary and many of the subsequent secondary sources but their lack of detail and misinterpretation of some of its parts make it doubtful that any had studied the complete text. Having my own copy of the entire will has allowed me to quote from it and thoroughly discuss its implications. Almost as easy to locate were Colburn's marriage licence allegations, an allegation being a form attesting to a couple's legal eligibility to marry. I ordered these online through the Society of Genealogists' web site, which includes allegations from both the Vicar General (for Colburn's first marriage) and the Faculty Office (for his second marriage). These have made it possible for me to give Colburn's first wife a first name and to confirm the facts about his second wife.

Finding original documents about Colburn's funeral and final resting place was more difficult than it would have been if I had received the Bentley obituary at an earlier date. My procedure began with contacting his parish church, St. Mary's Bryanston Square, where I found that their records had been incorporated into the London Metropolitan Archives. Their principal archivist found that there was no burial register extant for St. Mary's so instead consulted the Bishops' Transcripts of burials on my

behalf. This wise decision turned up an entry for Colburn that included his address (confirming what was already known), date of burial, name of the presiding official at the burial, and—to my great surprise—Colburn’s age at the time of his death. As is discussed in chapter two, there is good reason to question this age, but it is noteworthy as the only one on record. Somewhere there may be other public records documenting Colburn’s birth and other aspects of his early life, but since there is not even an indication of where he was born, it is impossible to know where to start looking for records. Perhaps someone with a great deal of time and patience will eventually manage to close this unfortunate gap in the documentation of Henry Colburn’s life.

A final resource that I have employed occasionally—though one hesitates to include it amongst the authentic, factual materials just discussed—is satire. Colburn’s prominence alone might have made him the target of satire, but his particular line of work raised up a considerable number of rival publishers and rejected authors who were ready, willing, and able to parody and ridicule him in print. Most of these are very minor and comment on little more than his reputation for puffing. A few, however, offer more extensive treatments of his business practices and even his personal relationships; accordingly, these are the satires that I have seen fit to consider here. Great care is needed in reaching the kernels of truth hidden in such satirical pieces because of the preponderance of exaggeration and embellishment necessarily included therein. I have therefore cautiously suggested where I believe the satirists have revealed genuine information about Colburn, but I have been freer in my use of the satires simply to demonstrate how he was perceived by some of his contemporaries.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Having found so many rich sources of credible information, my next and considerably more difficult task was deciding how best to employ them. My options ranged from writing a straightforward narrative of Colburn's life to reorienting him *vis-à-vis* his authors or his contemporaries in the publishing trade. During the process of clarifying my objectives, I considered and discarded several possibilities. Before discussing precisely what this thesis aims to be, it will perhaps be useful to establish what it is not.

This is not a defence of Colburn. I have not intended to prove (or disprove) anything except that the current body of literature on Colburn is indefensibly slight, filled with errors, and not infrequently biased. Because I set out in opposition to a body of sources that were largely negative in tone, my own research sometimes appears overwhelmingly positive in contrast. The new information I have found that actually does place Colburn in positive light—and there is a considerable amount of it—only reinforces this impression. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but the salient point is that it has arisen from the documentary evidence I have uncovered and not as part of a strategy to rehabilitate the publisher.

This is not a treatise on puffery. Early commentators on Colburn berated him for his puffery and similar promotional methods, later ones have tried to redress the balance by claiming that he was ahead of his time in the field of advertising—yet essentially this same narrow focus has persisted for the better part of two hundred years. My approach is far wider, taking in Colburn's entire life and career, as far as the primary sources allow, and considering as many of his accomplishments and contributions to the trade as possible. This has incidentally illuminated the puffery issue by establishing a sense of context and proportion and by approaching it impartially.

This is not a comparative study. When trying to understand a largely obscure figure such as Colburn, it may seem natural and even desirable to compare him to other publishers of the time in hopes of relating him to some kind of norm and placing him in an appropriate milieu. Although I refer to Colburn's competitors whenever they are directly relevant to a particular point, I have eschewed a comparative approach for specific reasons. First, this kind of approach is possible only once the facts of Colburn's life have been established, which is the primary and necessary work of this thesis. It follows, therefore, that this thesis helps to make possible a wide-ranging study of early nineteenth-century publishers, but it does not undertake such work.

The second reason for avoiding direct comparisons between Colburn and his contemporaries is the almost tangible absence of anyone with whom he could fairly be compared. While it is true that a comparison of any two individuals must allow for some differences, the fact is that I am aware of no publisher whose similarities to Colburn outnumber the differences. For obvious reasons, he cannot be compared to any of the major partnerships, such as Taylor and Hessey or Chapman and Hall. Grill obliquely hints that, of all individual publishers, Colburn might best be compared to John Murray. Certainly they both enjoyed considerable commercial success, catered to a similar clientele of the upper middle classes and minor aristocracy, and were each responsible for a major journal of the time (Murray owned the *Quarterly Review*). However, Murray's status as a 'gentleman' publisher associated with such illustrious poets as Byron and Coleridge contrasts so strikingly with Colburn's status as a 'trade' publisher of light, fashionable literature that it is hard to imagine what might be gained by comparing the two men. In the end, the only publishers whose output and status were similar enough to Colburn's to bear comparison with him were those to whom he gave their start in the trade: Saunders and Otley, Hurst and Blackett, and Richard Bentley. They certainly have

their part to play in this thesis, but little would be learnt by comparing the copies with the original.

This thesis is not a study of Colburn's relationships with his authors. While works like Chilcott's *A Publisher and His Circle* (1972), on John Taylor and his impressive coterie of writers, tell us a great deal about the publishing trade as well as the individuals concerned, the drawback is that they deflect attention away from the publisher himself. They also, intentionally or otherwise, create the impression that a publisher can be judged by his authors, but this is true on only a rather superficial level. We can see that counting Benjamin Disraeli, for example, among his authors has not secured a place for Colburn among the pantheon of eminent publishers, despite Disraeli being a good writer and a great public figure. Then, too, it is apparent that *not* publishing literary giants like Charles Dickens or the Brontë sisters in no way prevented Colburn from running a thriving and profitable publishing house (in various guises and locations) for nearly half a century. His authors get a good deal of attention in this thesis, particularly since I have made such substantial use of their archives, but they are neither the main focus nor an additional focus, nor are they a simple yardstick by which Colburn's stature is measured.

It has to be said, however, that my perusal of all of these authors' archives has, almost inevitably, unearthed nearly as many fascinating details about the authors as about Colburn. Because most of his associates have not been subjected to serious academic study, I was sorely tempted to make greater use of this new information about them, nudging them towards their proper places in literary and publishing history. This is a temptation that has had to be resisted, of course, as going well beyond the scope of this thesis—although I have allowed myself space in chapter six to erect a few signposts for future scholars. The world will have to wait a while longer to renew its acquaintance with these forgotten figures of the nineteenth century, but one hopes that for people such as

Thomas Campbell and Thomas Henry Lister—who led interesting lives and left considerable documentation of them—the wait will not be too long.

Finally, it has to be said that this thesis is not a comprehensive biography of Colburn. It devotes even less attention to his private life than the little documentation of it allows; it omits far more of his authors than it includes; and it leaves some circumstances (such as the first twenty years of his life) still relatively unknown. Perhaps no biography is ever truly complete, just as no line of research is ever truly exhausted. Still, I believe that I have accounted for the most important primary sources on Colburn and that they are, in their essentials, well represented here. I am also satisfied that I have omitted only that which is better explained elsewhere (such as the lengthy histories of his major periodicals), that which has been repeated *ad nauseam* (his ‘Lady Morgan at Half Price’ campaign comes to mind), and that which simply does not add anything important or new.

With these caveats thus established, I was able to create a fairly straightforward and practicable agenda for this thesis. My purposes are: first, to correct the erroneous information currently in circulation; second, to introduce the new information I have uncovered; and third, to reassess Henry Colburn’s career and reputation in light of the revised or new information.

Therefore, the first objective of this thesis is to correct matters of fact where previous sources have been in error. With errors of commission, I have not attempted to be completist. Noting every time a scholar mistakes a publication date or confuses the names of Colburn’s staff members would just be glorified copyediting. Knowing that Colburn first published Pepys’s *Diary* in 1825, not 1818 (as some sources have it), makes no material difference to one’s assessment of his career. It is for this reason that I only point out specific errors in printed sources when they have led to or are likely to lead to

greater, more serious errors in interpretation. For example, Rosa's erroneous assertion that Murray originally published Lister's silver-fork novels detracts from Colburn's status as the originator and premier publisher of that genre and must therefore be refuted.

Errors of omission are a different matter altogether. The greatest error of this kind is, of course, that most of the published sources on Colburn omitted to do any original research and consequently repeated the mistakes and misinterpretations of their forebears. The employment of original research in this thesis is then in itself a rectification of error. I have thought it necessary to call special attention to the incorporation of new research only when the result is a wholesale reinterpretation of events, such as my rereading of the Bentley Papers in regard to Colburn's intended retirement.

Looming over all of this is the fact that Colburn spent nearly fifty years in public life—and he had lived another twenty or so years before that. This leaves a truly vast amount of time and, consequently, information to be covered. After all, even those early years of his life have to be mentioned and the speculation about them aired, despite the lack of any hard evidence. My solution to this particular problem has been to concentrate my efforts on those areas of Colburn's life most ignored and most erroneously reported (that is, most neglected and most misunderstood), while briefly acknowledging other areas in order to complete the picture or, of course, to add or correct information. A detailed examination of the Colburn and Bentley partnership, including its aftermath, was an absolute necessity, while a study of Colburn's relationship with his star author, Disraeli, seemed no less obligatory. The whole vexed question of puffery needed to be liberated from its anecdotal evidence and addressed through primary source materials as much as possible. It also seemed desirable to look in depth at the latter half of Colburn's career, when the magazine founding and silver-fork promoting was over and Bentley was

a competitor instead of an ally; this was also an opportunity to look at life with his second wife and to clarify the terms of his will.

Organizing all of this has proven to be a complex task. The primary difficulty was the interconnectedness of virtually all aspects of Colburn's life; for instance, puffery, silver-fork novels, periodicals, and the Richard Bentley debacle all draw on the same cast of characters and unfold concurrently. One only needs to consider the example of Bulwer—who edited a periodical for Colburn while writing a silver-fork novel for Bentley, corresponding with Disraeli, and denying accusations of colluding in puffery—to see the scale of the problem. When one also recalls that the details of Colburn's personal life almost always involved his publishing associates—to the extent that his widow married one of his editors—it becomes evident that matters are too closely intertwined to allow the solitary unravelling of each narrative thread.

Even while admitting the impossibility of arranging things in a *strictly* chronological order, with no overlap, one has to question the desirability of such an arrangement. The ever-quotable Disraeli wrote in *Venetia* that 'Life is not dated merely by years. Events are sometimes the best calendars. There are epochs in our existence which cannot be ascertained by a formal appeal to the registry' (Bk. II, Ch. I). Applying this to Colburn, I take it to mean that it is best to follow the crucial events of his life as they unfold, tracing their significations and effects, and freeing them from unrelated events that happened to occur at the same time. (Nevertheless, because I have been able to clarify and pinpoint so many important dates in Colburn's life, I have provided a chronology as Appendix A.)

With matters thus prioritised, it remained for me to arrange them so as to preserve their essentially compound nature while breaking them down into components on a more manageable scale. To this end, I have devised a scheme that is part chronological and part

thematic. The thesis is ordered along broadly chronological lines, from Colburn's early days to his relationship with Disraeli, then on to his partnership with Bentley and the after-effects of that alliance. The chapters have chronological underpinnings but they all overlap with each other. The benefit of such an arrangement is, of course, that it allows the tracing of the most important topics from start to finish within a single chapter, rather than having to piece it together over several chapters.

Chapter two, 'The Power of Ballyhoo', begins with a history of Colburn's early life, including his mysterious origins. It also encompasses the years he spent running a circulating library in Conduit Street and his early efforts as a publisher. The main focus here, however, is on Colburn as a proprietor of periodicals. This chapter covers his early success in founding the *New Monthly Magazine* and the *Literary Gazette* as well as his founding or buying into other periodicals in his later career. Besides looking at the periodicals themselves, I also draw on the published and unpublished correspondence mentioned above. The chapter then moves on to Colburn's use of those periodicals to promote his other publications: the practice generally known as puffery but contemptuously dismissed by Sadleir as ballyhoo. The frequent characterization of Colburn as a puffer is evaluated with the aid of both contemporary and modern sources. This look at the first part of Colburn's career concludes with new information on his sale of the library and removal to New Burlington Street in 1824, along with a look at his staff members.

Chapter three, *The Virgin and the Bawd*, uses the figure of Benjamin Disraeli to trace the next stage of Colburn's career. The starting point is the boom in silver-fork novels, engineered by the publisher in the late 1820s. Disraeli characterized himself as a literary virgin and Colburn as his publishing bawd, but their shared business instincts gave rise to a close personal relationship. Using Disraeli's published letters as well as the

unpublished Hughenden Papers, I chart the rise and fall of their mutual fortunes with special attention to the watershed years of 1836-37. We see how Disraeli remained loyal to his old publisher, even as his political career gathered momentum, and how he was in some respects the archetypal Colburn author. Also included in this chapter is a brief look at Disraeli's policy of referring family and friends with literary ambitions to Colburn.

Chapter four, 'The Burlington Street Delphos', undertakes a detailed examination of Colburn's ill-starred partnership with Richard Bentley. I use the Bentley and Sadleir Papers to establish what actually happened between the two men, from the circumstances engendering the partnership to Colburn's semi-retirement at the end of it and the legal wrangling that finally dissolved all ties. The primary focus is on the partnership years of 1829-32, when Bulwer referred to the firm as the 'Burlington Street Delphos'. As part of that focus, I consider what impact Colburn's 1830 marriage might have had on his relationship with Bentley. I also examine some of Colburn and Bentley's publishing achievements and their continuation of the senior partner's business practices. The chapter ends as Colburn abandons his retirement plans and sets up in Great Marlborough Street as an independent publisher once again.

Chapter five, 'Colburnius, alias The Great Marlboro', begins with Disraeli's witty phrase and his rebirth as a successful novelist in the hands of Colburn's new firm. I outline the trend away from silver-fork novels and note Colburn's dealings with up-and-coming Victorian writers such as Frances and Anthony Trollope. I utilize Charles Dickens's letters and W. M. Thackeray's *Pendennis* to explore Colburn's standing in the trade as well as his hitherto unexamined personal life. After the publisher's retirement and succession by Hurst and Blackett in January 1853, the chapter concludes with a careful reading of Colburn's will and a brief look at the events that followed his death in 1855.

The purpose of chapter six, 'The Result of Our Labours', is two-fold. First, it examines the results of Henry Colburn's labours, summing up his accomplishments and re-evaluating them in light of the new information presented here. Second, it deals with the results of my own labours, considering what further study my work has made possible and listing some of the remaining gaps in our knowledge of the publisher. I pay special attention to his fascinating but generally unremarked connections to Lord Byron and his circle. I also lay some of the framework for repositioning Colburn within the traditional paradigms of Romantic and Victorian literary culture. Ultimately, this chapter summarizes the case for ensuring that Henry Colburn no longer suffers, in Disraeli's terms, the bitterness of being neglected or misunderstood.

2. 'THE POWER OF BALLYHOO': PERIODICALS, PUFFERY, AND PROFITS

Because nineteenth-century periodicals have proven themselves to be such fertile and attractive ground for study—by indexers, doctoral candidates, and scholars at large—Colburn's contributions to this form of literature have garnered more attention than most of his other accomplishments. His *New Monthly Magazine* in particular has been explored by researchers impressed with its stellar list of contributors and their occasionally insightful articles. Though useful, such research overlooks the important role of the publisher in coordinating the efforts of his writers and editors. This focus on contributions and attributions has also meant that there is still no thorough history of the interplay—and infighting—among these people over the periodical's many years. The correspondence and memoirs of the major players demonstrate just how detailed (and entertaining) such a study could be but, alas, it does not answer the purposes of this thesis to undertake one. So, passing over the intrigues of editors, sub-editors, and would-be editors, I look at how the *New Monthly* fit into Colburn's overall publishing career and reflected his business practices.

After starting the *New Monthly*, however, Colburn continued to found and otherwise associate himself with other periodicals throughout his career, more so than the published sources on his life have acknowledged. With these other titles, which might be considered minor today but were hardly so in their time, the aim of our study must be somewhat different. Since they have been studied so little, there are hardly any misconceptions to worry about; indeed, our first aim must be to determine exactly what his interest in them was. Though his other titles might be mere footnotes to the study of the most influential magazines of the nineteenth century, they are not negligible—nor, on

the whole, were they unsuccessful—and they provide added insight into Colburn’s long-term plans while generally confirming his talent for periodical publishing.

The issue of puffery is by no means confined to Colburn’s periodicals. It arises in every chapter of this thesis just as it arose at every stage of his career and in regard to every facet of his publishing business. Puffery is, however, perhaps most logically considered alongside the periodicals because these were widely believed to be his best vehicles for delivering puffs to the unsuspecting consumer. Thus, once we have the background on Colburn’s periodicals, we can consider what puffery was and just how intimately it was connected to those periodicals, along with its place in Colburn’s career and his enduring reputation. But all of this can only be accomplished after a better acquaintance with Colburn’s early life and start in the trade.

PRIVATE LIFE, PUBLIC LIBRARY

Perhaps the greatest question mark over Henry Colburn’s personal history and youth is not the identity of his parents or how he entered the trade, but why *absolutely nothing* is known with certainty. It would be no great wonder if a clerk had mislaid his baptismal record or his early correspondence had gone missing; fire, flood, the Blitz, and the passage of two hundred years could easily account for the destruction of documentary evidence. But it is wondrous indeed that Colburn himself—a literate, sociable, and well-connected man—never divulged the details to anyone inclined to make them more widely known. Much as one might hate to indulge in conspiracy theories, it is hard not to conclude that the publisher pursued his rigorous, lifelong policy of silence because he had something to hide.

The favourite speculative ‘shameful secret’ in his past is illegitimacy. It is certainly a circumstance that would explain why his birth was undocumented and why all

of his family connections remain unknown. Most of the major sources on Colburn's life note rumours of his father being either Lord Lansdowne or the Duke of York. That the Lansdowne rumour was current in Colburn's own lifetime is attested to by S. C. Hall in his personal memoirs (I, 316). William Carew Hazlitt apparently circulated the Duke of York rumour, leading us to wonder whether he had heard anything from his distinguished father, who published some important works with Colburn (Rosa 179). The *Dictionary of Literary Biography* voices a suspicion that the publisher 'had a hand in' circulating these rumours, with the object of boosting his reputation through such illustrious connections (39). Rosa voices the same suspicion before closing the issue, since 'royal bastard or guttersnipe matters little' (179).

Well, yes and no. Colburn's lineage is no longer relevant to his reputation, but it certainly would dispel some of the mystery surrounding him. In particular, a birth akin to that of a 'royal bastard' could explain some of the facts observable in his later life: his sound education, a private fortune large enough to set him up in the publishing business, connections to blueblood authors from the very start of his career, and so on. Though they are not incontrovertible evidence of an aristocratic background, they go a long way towards ruling out a 'guttersnipe's' upbringing. In some ways, it is his education that seems most to mark Colburn as a beneficiary of the upper classes: his English was excellent (the spelling is usually perfect in even his most hurried notes); he was fluent in both written and spoken French; his polished manners put him at ease with both his titled authors and his well-heeled clientele; and, judging by his intimate knowledge of Paris, he had enjoyed at least one extended stay there. While the lack of hard evidence is always before us, it is a lot easier to accept Colburn's ties to the aristocracy than the near-miracle that would otherwise be necessary to explain all of these advantages in a working- or even middle-class lad.

The most detailed and thoughtful speculation on Colburn's mysterious origin as a whole comes from the pen of Michael Sadleir, who wrote it as part of his unfinished monograph on Richard Bentley. He takes on board the usual themes but moulds them into an original theory that is worth quoting in its entirety:

My guess is that he was the illegitimate son of an Englishman by a French mother, that his name was fictitious, and that he grew up in France. This is admittedly pure conjecture. But the mystery of Colburn's origin is so marked that there must have been something to hide. His French affiliations, his familiarity with the French language and his knowledge of Paris indicate that he lived in France for some years, and these can only have been the years of boyhood and adolescence, for once in evidence in London he remained there. If he were a love-child, he would naturally have been cared for by his mother or her relatives, and, assuming that he was born early in the 1780s and came to England in his late 'teens, the change of residence may well have been connected with an émigré flight from the Revolution. This suggests on his mother's side an aristocratic or at any rate an anti-Jacobin origin—a theory supported by his later activity in publishing Bonapartist literature. It may be added that the suddenness with which he set up as a publisher implies that funds were available, and these would most likely have been supplied by an English father of rank or of substance. When exactly he came to London is not known, but he seems to have established himself there in the publishing and lending library business during the early eighteen hundreds. (SP 360, 1-12)

Though it is indeed 'pure conjecture', this impressive theory manages seamlessly to account for all the known facts without resorting to improbable explanations. Unless someone discovers evidence to the contrary, Sadleir's version of Colburn's personal history is the leading contender to be the accepted version.

The only flaw is that Sadleir casually assumes that Colburn 'was born early in the 1780s' without stating his reasons. Admittedly, the published sources offer a scant handful of clues that seem to support such a guess. In its notice of Colburn's death in 1855, the *Illustrated London News* wondered, at the time of his passing, whether 'he had not exceeded the Scriptural period of threescore and ten' (231). S. C. Hall reported that Colburn was 'somewhat aged' at the time of his 1830 marriage (I, 316), which could describe a man of forty-five or fifty years, but the phrase is too imprecise to be of much value. Perhaps the best clue is simply the duration of Colburn's public life: it spanned

nearly fifty years from his death back to his publishing debut, at which time one would expect him to have been at least twenty years old if not older. Such calculations lead us right back to the early 1780s.

They are, however, contradicted by the lone primary source that notes Colburn's age: the record of his burial. This simple ledger entry, evidently made at his interment on 23 August 1855, lists his age at the time of his death as being sixty-five (Bishops' Transcripts, entry 24557). This is a bit difficult to accept. Again working backwards from his death, we find that Colburn would have been merely sixteen years of age when he published his first books in 1806. Knowing that he served an apprenticeship before that, we would have to believe that he entered the trade at the age of ten or perhaps twelve—highly unlikely if not completely inconceivable.

Fortunately, Richard Bentley was granted an intimate knowledge of his former partner and included some of it in his unpublished obituary of Colburn, where he forthrightly tackles the age issue. He wrote that the former publisher died 'in, I believe, his 71st year, although the coffin-plate [...] described him as aged 65'. Thus we learn that the age in the burial register matched that on the coffin, but probably not that of the remains inside. Colburn's being seventy-one at the time of his death makes much greater sense. It means that he was twenty-two at the time of his first publications—still young but not unreasonably so—and squares with Sadleir's guess as well as all of the other circumstantial evidence. It also has the advantage of coming from someone who knew Colburn intimately for more than a decade. For all of these reasons, I have accepted this age and accordingly used 1784 as the year of his birth throughout this thesis. Yet we may ask, why the pretence of being sixty-five years old in 1855? It is always possible that someone made an honest mistake: his grieving widow or the emissary she sent to make the burial arrangements, for example. It is more likely, however, that this was a deliberate

ploy to continue—or, indeed, set the seal on—the long campaign of obfuscation carried out by Colburn all his life.

Tradition says that Colburn began his long service to the book trade as an assistant to bookseller William Earle. Richard Bentley confirmed this when he noted in his diary on 25 August 1859 that he had met up with ‘Mr. Earle, son of the bookseller Earle of Albemarle Street, to whom Colburn was bound apprentice’. The apprenticeship raises all sorts of questions: Who decided that Colburn was to go into publishing? Who was the responsible adult that bound Colburn to Earle? Did Earle know about Colburn’s origins? Was he a friend or acquaintance of Colburn’s family? The answers remain frustratingly elusive and, in fact, we cannot even settle the simple question of *when* Colburn worked for Earle. The year 1800 seems a good possibility, considering that sixteen was a suitable age for apprenticeship during this period (it was the age at which Bentley began his printing apprenticeship [SP 360, 7]), although fourteen would not have been unreasonable.

In the same diary entry, Richard Bentley remarked that ‘it is said Colburn behaved badly to Mr. Earle’s sister’. This vague allegation sits uneasily with the diarist’s later assertion that ‘whatever faults Colburn might have had he was a gentleman as regards ladies’ (31 July 1860), but it is possible that his younger self did not possess that virtue. Whether Colburn’s alleged misbehaviour with Miss Earle was a factor in his leaving Albemarle Street is unknown, but by 1806 he was established at Morgan’s Public Library at 48-50 Conduit Street. Tradition says Colburn was an assistant to Mr. Morgan but does not record that gentleman’s first name or the connection (personal or professional) that brought Colburn to him. We might wonder at the young man’s transition from bookselling to librarianship, but since the lines between these practices—and publishing—were still quite fluid during this period, it was not so remarkable a change.

The truly remarkable thing was Colburn's publishing three books from Morgan's Conduit Street establishment in 1806, apparently not all that long after his arrival there. We can explain his being able to do this if we accept that it was his unidentified but wealthy relatives who provided the capital to set him up in the trade. What we cannot explain is the nature of the arrangement with Morgan that allowed Colburn to publish from his premises without including the senior man's name on the title page. Morgan was never connected, at least in print, with Colburn's publishing interests and disappears at this time: even the library is no longer formally referred to as being his. From this point on, Colburn's title pages refer to the Conduit Street business as the 'English and Foreign Circulating Library'; the 'English, French, and Italian Subscription Library'; the 'British and Foreign Public Library'; and any number of variations on these themes. The advertisements for Colburn's publications cut through the niceties and refer to their origin as the 'Public Library', 'Library' or, most tellingly, 'Colburn's Library'. Does this mean that Colburn owned the establishment lock, stock, and barrel in 1806? Sutherland suspects as much (65), but a twenty-two-year-old single-handedly running a joint lending, bookselling, and publishing venture is a little improbable, though by no means impossible. Instead, it may have been that Colburn's financial leverage allowed him to take on an important role in the business, even to the extent of becoming its 'public face', while Morgan quietly managed the place and taught his protégé the ropes. Indeed, there seems to be a good case for arguing that Colburn did not become sole proprietor of the library—and thus a truly independent operator—until 1812.

Alison Adburgham is confident that 1810 was the landmark year, while the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and *Dictionary of National Biography* opt for 1816, and other sources hedge their bets. The vital clue that I believe they have overlooked lies not in documents from the beginning of Colburn's career but from its conclusion. As is

discussed in greater detail in chapter five, Colburn sold his business upon his retirement to the newly formed partnership of Hurst and Blackett, Daniel Hurst having worked for the publisher for several years previously. The pair began publishing in 1853 with the motto ‘Successors to Henry Colburn’ prominent on their title pages. After trading on that connection as long as was seemly, they invented a new epithet to give their business the aura of a long-established firm: ‘Publishers since 1812’. Since this could not possibly refer to the inception of the house of Hurst and Blackett, it could only refer to the founding of their predecessor’s business. Hurst would have chosen the date based on his personal knowledge of Colburn and his access to many of his old business documents—the ones destroyed in the Blitz—so there is good reason to believe that 1812 was indeed the year that Colburn struck out on his own. Further support for the 1812 theory comes from an otherwise inexplicable hiccup in Colburn’s published output for that period. His annual output had steadily risen from three books in 1806 to twenty-three in 1811. In 1812, however, it suddenly dropped to twelve books—only one per month in April, May, and June, and the rest appearing from July onward. If Colburn had taken sole possession of the library at the beginning of 1812, his coming to grips with its demands could explain the lull in his publishing sideline for the first few months of that year. Normal business resumed once he settled into his new position, with his 1813 output soaring to thirty-five titles.

Colburn’s management of the library was to last until 1820, but details of the long-running concern are not plentiful. It seems to have been much like any other fashionable circulating library—a place to meet others of similar station while choosing popular volumes generally too expensive to purchase. But the ambitious Colburn wanted his establishment to be better than average and assured the public, in an advertisement in one of his 1808 publications, that ‘it now stands unrivalled, embracing a most general

Selection of Works in every Branch of English, French and Italian Literature; to which are regularly added all new English and Foreign Works; including Magazines, Reviews, Pamphlets, &c. and immediately on their Publication or arrival in Town'. It was not only his selection that was extensive: Colburn set his sights beyond London and promised in other advertisements to post books to subscribers anywhere in the country.

Colburn naturally promoted his library via his magazines as well as his books, and one specimen advertisement from the *Literary Gazette* for 8 November 1817 gives us a good overview of the establishment (304). 'Mr. Colburn' announced that, of the works described above, he had 'upwards of FIFTY THOUSAND VOLUMES'. His Terms of Subscription were fairly complicated, to the point of specifying the size of books (quarto, octavo, etc.) members might borrow and the different terms applying to town and country members. Class 1 subscribers paid 5*l*.5*s*., Class 2 paid 4*l*.4*s*., and Class 3 paid 3*l*.3*s*. per annum for a sliding scale of privileges. Colburn was confident that all of his subscribers would benefit from 'the various new arrangements he has lately concluded in London, and his Continental connexions'. We do not know what the 'new arrangements' were, but his ties to the continent are somewhat clearer.

Colburn published French works in their original language and in English translations almost from the very beginning of his career. Many of these were memoirs—often by aristocratic French émigrés fleeing the aftermath of the Revolution—but a substantial number were novels. Colburn published works by such worthies as the Marchioness de Sillery (Madame de Genlis), the Comtesse de Lichtenau, the Baroness de Staël-Holstein, and the Vicomte de Chateaubriand. These books often bore the imprint 'A Paris et se trouve a Londres, chez Colburn, Libraire', or something similar, but we can only guess at the business details behind it. He might simply have had a reciprocal agreement with a Paris firm, wherein each published certain works and distributed them

along with the other's publications in their own country. Colburn might even have had a branch office in Paris, though one would have expected to find some documentation of such a venture. Whatever the precise nature of his ties, they were important enough to draw him and his printer, Richard Bentley, to Paris in 1821 (for which see chapter four) and to prompt Lady Caroline Lamb to write 'I am going to Paris can I do anything for you' to her publisher-cum-librarian (NAL F.48.E.22, 53-54). All this, of course, leads us back to the speculation about Colburn's origins being in France and confirms that his 'connexions' there were every bit as good as his advertisements implied.

In fact, for a man with a mysterious lineage, Henry Colburn was curiously partial to people with titles. In setting himself up as a bookseller in Conduit Street, he was clearly aiming for the aristocratic Mayfair carriage trade. He played on his customers' perceived snobbery by offering memoirs authored by members of their own class, frequently, as we have seen, by their exiled French counterparts. And, of course, he was the man who founded the institution that is Burke's *Peerage*. Colburn's fascination with the aristocracy might be an indication that he truly was one of them by birth; certainly, the fact that he knew so many aristocrats bespeaks a connection, an entrée to their world that other booksellers did not have. But his fascination with them might also have had more pragmatic roots. In the first place, it would have struck his bookseller's mind that obscure works by grandly titled writers were far more likely to move than those by equally obscure writers—particularly when the clientele are themselves grandly titled or aspire to be. And if one is keen to move books and make money, does it not pay set up shop in the most affluent part of town and supply the locals accordingly? Blood ties to the aristocracy there may have been, but the financial ties were what mattered most.

For Colburn, running the circulating library went hand-in-hand with book publishing (later expanded to include periodical publishing), particularly as the latter

concern had the happy effect of keeping the library stocked with new publications. In addition to the foreign titles, Colburn's more popular efforts during these early years included books by Lady Morgan, Charles Brockden Brown, Anne Plumptre, Eaton Stannard Barrett, and—much to the publisher's surprise—the very first edition of John Evelyn's memoirs (1818), which he had published on the advice of his antiquarian friend, William Upcott. Besides Upcott, practically the only other known associate of Colburn in this early part of his career was Frederick Shoberl.⁵ A multi-lingual man of letters, he was not a member of Colburn's staff but what we might now call a freelancer. Shoberl was responsible for translating and preparing a number of works for the publisher from his earliest years in the publishing business (and probably more than are documented), including the 1807-08 *History of the Female Sex*. He was associated with the *New Monthly Magazine*, but there is no hard evidence to support the claims that he was one of its co-founders. As far as can be determined, the credit for creating the *New Monthly* goes to Colburn alone.

COLBURN'S EARLY PERIODICALS

Despite his publishing successes, Henry Colburn was swimming against the tide in what was still largely a market dominated by poetry, and his books did not, on the whole, make the kind of impact that his later novels would. Fortunately for him, Colburn understood the merits of diversification, so that while the library maintained a steady business and the books were paving the way for more illustrious successors, he had magazines actively bringing in revenue and raising the profile of his other ventures. During his career, Colburn would hold some share in no fewer than nine periodicals, and

⁵ Any number of sources confuse Frederick Shoberl with his son William, who also worked for Colburn, albeit a few decades later. A general rule of thumb is that the Colburn and Bentley partnership divides Frederick Shoberl's era from William's. An additional problem is that some sources misread Shoberl as Schubert, which can probably be ascribed to illegible handwriting and the unusualness of the name.

it has been suggested—but not proved—that he was involved with even more. Those with which he was demonstrably involved are, in chronological order, the *New Monthly Magazine*; the *New British Theatre*; the *Literary Gazette*; the *Sunday Times*; the *Quarterly Journal of Science, Literature, and Art*; the *Athenaeum*; the *Court Journal*; the *United Service Journal*; and the *Naval and Military Gazette*. Only one of these was a verifiable failure, although two others are too obscure to be accurately judged. Yet Colburn's successes in the field of periodical publishing are, for the most part, one more aspect of his impressive career that has been overlooked.

At this point it is worth considering an issue that other writers ignore: how to term Colburn's position in regard to his periodicals. Over the *New Monthly* he held unquestioned authority, so whether one chooses to term him the publisher, proprietor, or conductor is of little consequence. This was also true for the *United Service Journal* and the *Naval and Military Gazette*, where he was simply the boss. With the other periodicals, however, it is sometimes difficult to know exactly what role he played in their production, how large a stake he owned in them, or what his relationship was to the editors. Further complicating matters are the way these factors change over time and the ambiguity of the very terms themselves, which other writers use interchangeably. For the sake of consistency and accuracy, it seems best to refer to Colburn as the (or a) 'proprietor' of all these periodicals, because the term implies ownership but not necessarily any other involvement. When he did not own them outright, he at least owned a share, regardless of whether he exerted any influence over the content or form of these periodicals. The exception to all of this is the *Quarterly Journal of Science, Literature, and Art*, of which, for reasons that will become clear later, Colburn can only be called the publisher.

As has been noted already, the *New Monthly* has attracted the most interest of all of Colburn's periodicals. It alone is included in the *Wellesley Index to Victorian*

Periodicals and has been the subject of two Ph.D. theses: Grill's, covering 1814 to 1820, and Jones's, covering 1821 to 1830. There is no question that the *New Monthly* thoroughly deserves this kind of attention: its strong sales placed it among the most popular magazines of its time, while its company of illustrious contributors and editors is nearly as interesting to modern literary historians as it was to its original readers. Among Colburn's writers and editors were such stalwarts of early nineteenth-century literature as Bulwer, Disraeli, Gore, Hazlitt, Theodore Hook, Leigh Hunt, and Mary Shelley—all of whom also published books with Colburn.

It certainly has done Colburn's reputation no harm to be associated with such people, but the relentless focus on the magazine's big names and their important articles has, ironically, diverted attention from its proprietor. Colburn has not received due credit for bringing such talents together and dexterously presenting them to the public. This is all the more unfortunate since the *New Monthly* was one of Colburn's dearest concerns, being the first magazine that he founded and the recipient of much of his time and energy. It is also, for those who care to look, the magazine that reveals the most about Colburn's reading of the public interest, managerial skills, and latent editorial tendencies. To gain such a perspective, it is necessary to approach the magazine through evidence such as the correspondence between the publisher and his contributors, rather than through another trawl of the volumes, which would merely duplicate the work of past scholars.

The history of Colburn's premier periodical began on 1 February 1814, when the first issue of the *New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register* appeared, in obvious opposition to the old *Monthly Magazine and British Register* of Sir Richard Phillips. Part of the opposition was in aligning the new magazine with Tory principles, which gave the *New Monthly* a place in the ever-expanding body of periodical literature and capitalized on the era's interest in political matters. Colburn's politics, however, amounted to little

more than supporting (and trying to gain the support of) the Establishment. Even this he would not take to extremes for fear of alienating too many readers on the other side. The result was a perfectly decent but rather nondescript miscellany that sold well enough without making a significant impact. Equally unspectacular were the competent editors who saw the magazine through its first six years: Frederick Shoberl, John ‘Dictionary’ Watkins, Alaric Watts, Cyrus Redding, and Thomas Noon Talfourd.

As the periodicals market became ever more competitive, Colburn became increasingly aware of the need to make the *New Monthly* stand out from the crowd. Part of this would include dropping the largely meaningless Tory label in favour of something more voguish and more expressly Colburnian. His apt solution was to start a new series with a new title that reflected a new focus on his old line of work: the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. It was at this point that Colburn realized that he could apply to his magazine something he had learned from bookselling—namely, that there was always a demand for works by the famous or at least the titled. Rather than relying on one or two well-known writers, as other journals tended to do, Colburn went in search of a celebrity editor who would be in a position to recruit celebrity writers, potentially from among his own acquaintance.

Colburn eventually induced the poet Thomas Campbell to sign a three-year contract, beginning on 1 January 1821, to edit the *New Monthly* and contribute twelve articles per annum for a salary of £500 (Beattie II, 357). Campbell, though unread today, enjoyed considerable recognition and respect in his own time and so was, by Colburn’s standard, a good choice. By other standards, however, he was abysmal: desperately disorganized, indecisive, unambitious to the point of indolence, timid about expressing criticism, and oversensitive in reacting to it. Cyrus Redding, who picked up most of the slack as the *New Monthly*’s sub-editor, illustrated the nature and extent of Campbell’s

inadequacy when he remarked, ‘I do not believe the poet ever read through a single number of the magazine during the whole ten years he was its editor’ (*Literary Reminiscences* I, 202). At the end of Campbell’s three-year stint, Colburn toyed with the idea of replacing him with Horace Smith, a universally liked gentleman with all the talent of the incumbent editor but none of the flaws (Rollins 361). Unfortunately for Smith, he lacked Campbell’s fame—and that was proving to be as valuable to the *New Monthly* as Colburn had predicted.

Thomas Campbell was indeed able to attract other highly regarded writers, including many of the contributors listed above as well as Sir Charles and Lady Sydney Morgan, Mary Russell Mitford, and Stendhal. They were all attracted to the idea of earning money (and Colburn paid well, as will be seen) from a venture that was populated by writers of similar status, and in no way beneath them. Campbell and his illustrious writers in turn attracted an increasing number of subscribers. Reliable statistics are not available but it is widely accepted that, at its peak under Campbell, the *New Monthly* had at least five thousand subscribers. Considering that the magazine was priced at a fairly steep 3s.6d. per issue—more than other monthlies and not much less than the quarterlies—this was a formidable number, and enough to put the *New Monthly* among the ‘most prominent magazines’ of the time (Parker 1). Thus, Colburn had justification for overlooking Campbell’s shortcomings and retaining him as editor for a further seven years.

Campbell eventually vacated the editorship in December 1830, after which it was filled by a succession of literary celebrities and obscure journalists, all assisted by Colburn himself. The low-profile editors tended to be drawn from the ranks of Colburn’s in-house staff and also served as sub-editors when the need arose; these included S. C. Hall and P. G. Patmore. The high-profile editors were like Campbell in possessing real

literary talents but not necessarily of the editorial kind. Hall concluded that ‘in short, though a great man, [Campbell] was utterly unfit to be an editor. I have nearly the same to say of Theodore Hook, Lytton Bulwer, and Tom Hood, who were his successors in the editorial chair’ (I, 314).

Bulwer was Campbell’s closest successor not just chronologically (contracting for the job on 4 October 1831), but also in terms of furthering the *New Monthly*’s reputation as an important literary periodical. He had already published several profitable novels with Colburn and had an impressive number of friends blessed with writing ability. Under Bulwer, the *New Monthly* ran pieces by the young John Forster, Lady Marguerite Blessington, and both Isaac D’Israeli and Benjamin Disraeli, among others. Bulwer was a serving M.P. at this time and his heavy parliamentary workload, along with his obvious pro-Reform editorial agenda, brought his editorship to an end. In his twenty-two months at the helm, he worried his publisher about a return to the *New Monthly*’s bad old political days and scared off about one thousand subscribers (Redding, *Literary* I, 317).

After Bulwer resigned in 1833, Colburn relievedly installed Hall as editor, resulting in diverting and wholly uncontroversial articles. Colburn’s relief came at a price, however: losing Bulwer meant losing the celebrity and the high-quality contributions of him and his circle. This marked the start of an inexorable decline for the *New Monthly*, as it slowly reverted to the bland, unremarkable status it had held in its early days. Colburn engineered another relaunch in 1837, this time to join the trend towards humorous magazines in general and to compete with *Bentley’s Miscellany* in particular. The next two celebrity editors of the rechristened *New Monthly Magazine and Humourist* were, fittingly, humorists Theodore Hook and Thomas Hood. Hook, who had published with Colburn back in the 1820s, took on the editorship from 1836 until his death in August 1841. Hood picked up where he left off and remained at the post until handing in his

resignation in October 1843, ostensibly over puffery. Colburn split the editorial duties with his usual conspirators, such as Patmore, until selling the *New Monthly* to William Harrison Ainsworth in June 1845. The magazine limped along till its ultimate demise in 1884, its seventieth year.

The history of the *New Monthly*, though interesting in itself and deserving of a fuller treatment than it has yet received from any quarter, reveals a wealth of information specifically about its proprietor. Most obvious is Colburn's fixation with famous names—a fixation clearly shared by a good proportion of the periodical-buying public. Also speaking for itself is his willingness to keep abreast of trends. To the cynical mind, trendiness is a sure sign of shallowness; to the business mind, it is a legitimate way of avoiding obsolescence. Colburn badly wanted to keep his premier magazine in step with public taste and, to varying degrees, managed to do it. Less obviously, the history of the *New Monthly* also has a lot to say about Colburn's ability to manage subordinates, his financial generosity, and his desire for control.

Colburn's relationships with the magazine's writers and editors were marked by his great tactfulness and personal attention. These were employed to particularly good effect in Colburn's handling of the prickly Thomas Campbell. He was so difficult that he demanded a sub-editor to assist him, received the services of Edward Dubois, and then ousted him after only one issue because they clashed (Redding, *Literary* I, 163-5). As is discussed in chapter three, Campbell was also concerned that Colburn's puffery would reflect badly on his own reputation and consequently kicked up a fuss from time to time. Yet Colburn contrived to stay on good terms with him, not just placating the editor but making him feel valued and liked. He accomplished this through such actions as replacing the unlucky Dubois without demur and taking Campbell into his confidence by asking his opinion about hiring a partner (NAL F.48.E.11, 40-41). What Colburn did *not* do was

equally important: he refrained from criticizing the minimal efforts that Campbell put into his editorship and, whenever disagreements did arise, he avoided painful confrontations and displays of anger.

Campbell's letters to Colburn are a testament to the success of the publisher's methods. In one, he explicitly acknowledges Colburn's calm and ameliorating manner during a disagreement: 'I agree with you however in the sentiment which you uttered at our last meeting that whatever may be the perplexity there is no use in our losing our temper on the subject & I felt the justice of your remonstrating on my temporary irritation' (NAL F.48.E.11, 78-79). Throughout the correspondence, Campbell consistently uses such informal salutations as 'My dear Colbourn'⁶ and even 'My dear Good Friend', and also speaks directly about the closeness he felt with his publisher. One particularly striking letter, written as Campbell set out on a trip to Scotland, assures Colburn 'that I shall mention your name in the north as one of the most honourable men I have to deal with & one of the best friends I possess' (NAL F.48.E.11, 66-67). Colburn's behaviour was not a charade designed to placate an editor, it was his usual mode of conduct; as late as 1842, long after Campbell had left the *New Monthly*, he and Colburn were still exchanging friendly missives.

Tactfulness and a genial manner, important though they are, can only go so far in making people feel valued. Because Colburn's relations with Campbell and other contributors were predicated on business matters, it was also important for him to pay them generously. When a book sold unexpectedly well, Colburn would sometimes give the author a bonus on top of the agreed fee for the copyright; Rosa lists *ex gratia* payments for Theodore Hook, Horace Smith, and Lady Morgan, but they were not alone

⁶ Campbell misspelt Colburn's name for years but finally started getting it right towards the end of his editorship. Manuscript sources show that the publisher's correspondents spelt his name in all sorts of inelegant ways—Colbourn, Coulbourn, Colbourne, etc.—but since the man himself always spelt it consistently, there is no obvious reason for these persistent errors.

(188-9). Colburn's liberality is another of his traits that has been widely acknowledged, though sometimes with the cynical caveat that he was actually buying loyalty rather than acting generously. It should hardly be necessary to defend Colburn against this charge: none of his writers or editors complained that they were being bought off, and most of them recognized that they were getting a better deal with him than they would elsewhere. Thinking that Colburn's behaviour was untoward seems to be on a par with the eighteenth-century view that it was ungentlemanly to accept payment for or earn a living by writing.

Colburn was indeed rewarded with the loyalty of his well-paid writers, who not only stayed with him for years—and offered him their books as well as their magazine articles—but also commented on it directly in their letters to him. Campbell summed up his time at the *New Monthly* by saying that he found its proprietor to be 'punctual as a time piece & at times exceedingly liberal'—hinting at another of Colburn's virtues: paying not only generously but swiftly and ungrudgingly (NAL F.48.E.11, 80-81). William Godwin, in the middle of negotiations with Colburn, remarked in 1824 that 'I have found you on all occasions accommodating & considerate; & I cannot persuade myself that I shall find you illiberal now' (NAL F.48.E.3, 125). Horace Smith, whose prose was so well suited to the *New Monthly Magazine* that Colburn paid him £200 per annum to contribute whatever he liked, giddily wrote on 15 May 1821 that 'however quickly I may move I find it difficult to keep pace with your liberality, which I have only thankfully to acknowledge' (quoted in Rollins 359).

Curwen accurately summed up the situation by noting that 'throughout the whole of his business life, Colburn had a very keen perception as to what the public required, and of the market value of the productions offered him; and yet he was almost uniformly liberal in his dealings' (292). Colburn's monetary liberality was just one part of his

gracious behaviour towards those who worked for him and had the noteworthy effect of pleasing everyone. For him, it gained the services of popular, intelligent writers for his magazine and kept him on easy, friendly terms with them; for the contributors, it provided a dependable living and eliminated the stresses of negotiating with publishers inclined to pay the lowest possible fee. Sadleir complains that ‘there was little enough of kindness and consideration for Colburn authors whose books had failed to sell’ (*Nineteenth* II, 113), but this is sophistry. Sadleir cannot flatly claim that Colburn was rude because there is scant evidence for it, nor can he contend that it would have been good business practice for Colburn to court authors who lost him money.

One of Colburn’s more problematic traits was his tendency to override editorial decisions or circumvent the editor altogether. An important example of this, with Colburn overriding no less an editor than Charles Dickens, is discussed in chapter five. Despite the apparent absurdity of such an action, the reason behind Colburn’s behaviour pattern can readily be appreciated. His ability to judge what material would sell and what would not was almost always far more acute than that of his editors; stepping in to increase the magazine’s success benefited everyone in the long term, even though it meant stepping on toes in the short term. Colburn could have implemented his editorial decisions in a more honest and direct manner, but it is likely that he took covert action because of his continuing aversion to personal confrontations.

In some circumstances, Colburn’s editorial zeal was a positive boon. Campbell’s disinclination towards fulfilling all the usual duties of an editor-in-chief would have created an intolerable workload for sub-editor Cyrus Redding had Colburn not been willing to shoulder some of the burden. P. G. Patmore, who was intimately acquainted with the inner workings of Colburn’s operation, commented on a manuscript of his that was ostensibly turned down by Campbell: ‘The probabilities are, that he never even saw

it—that, being glanced at by the worthy proprietor of the Magazine (through whose hands all communications for the editor passed) [...] was therefore, to prevent accidents intercepted on its way: a species of sifting which I believe everything underwent’ (I, 115). Clearly, this ‘sifting’ through manuscripts not only lightened Redding’s load but also made sure that he and Campbell did not introduce into the *New Monthly* anything that, to Colburn’s way of thinking, would be unsuitable or unpopular.

Then, too, Colburn’s deftness in giving the *New Monthly*’s readers what they wanted came in exceedingly handy throughout most of 1831, when he had lost Campbell but not yet signed Bulwer. On 24 January 1831, one of his staff members wrote a letter to G. P. R. James, a prolific Colburn author, that ‘Mr. Colburn since the first of January has taken the work under his immediate care and intends to devote much of his time to it. Be so good, therefore, as to send him any communication you may design for the Magazine’ (BL Add.MS.46640, 35). Though in this case short lived, Colburn’s editorial career had its uses as an adjunct to his career as a proprietor of magazines.

In the end, Colburn’s *New Monthly* enjoyed its success mainly due to three of the things that underpinned many of his other successes: his recognition of talent, his recognition that sometimes fame is more important than talent, and his ability to attract and retain those with either or both qualities through his generous payments and personal affability. While the *New Monthly* had the prestige of some first-rate contributors and a string of famous editors, it was not an innovative publication and enjoyed a comparatively short heyday amid stiff competition. True innovation and market dominance were better represented among the other eight periodicals of which Colburn was a proprietor.

In the same year that he founded the *New Monthly Magazine*, Colburn also began the *New British Theatre*. This was done at the instigation of John Galt, who served as the journal’s editor. Galt, having recently had his play *The Witness* rejected by all the London

theatre managers, concluded that the said managers lacked taste and were depriving the public of fine drama. The *New British Theatre* would remedy the situation by printing a selection of these rejected plays on a monthly basis. As the months went by and Galt found himself inundated with the scribblings of would-be dramatists, however, he was forced to concede that they had been rejected for a reason: 'Many of the authors did not appear possessed of the commonest rudiments of education, and were equally low in conception and literature. The only good thing I am aware the publication did, was in vindicating the managers' (Galt, *Literary Life* 163). The *New British Theatre* ceased publication in 1815, but was collected into a four-volume set that was still being advertised as late as 1817.

If Galt had misjudged the theatre managers, then he and Colburn had also misjudged their readers. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the publication's title, which for the first several months was the *Rejected Theatre*. Ian Gordon, in his biography of Galt, swears that this was designed to capitalize on the success of Horace and James Smith's *Rejected Addresses*, enormously popular parodies of the major writers of the day (18). But whereas the *Rejected Addresses* were humorous in conception, the *Rejected Theatre* was all too seriously substandard. That Colburn thought it a good idea to announce this in the publication's title is perhaps an indication that his marketing ability did not spring from him fully formed but developed over time. The wisdom of substituting 'New' for 'Rejected' (and adding a patriotic touch with 'British') seems self-evident, but an advertisement inserted into the first collected volume claims that the name change was due to the decision to include plays not actually submitted to theatre managers (and therefore never rejected) (I, 1: xxv). Even putting aside the minor fiasco of its title, the *New British Theatre* was a very poorly conceived undertaking. It was founded on the basis of Galt's personal grudge, appealed to a very tiny niche market of which

Colburn had no previous experience, and diverted time and money away from his infinitely more promising periodical, the *New Monthly*. Why Colburn agreed to the project is unclear, though he might simply have been won over by Galt's personal enthusiasm. The two men obviously enjoyed a good working relationship, which continued through Colburn's publication of Galt's *Life of Byron* in 1830. Then, too, Colburn may have been hoping that success with drama via the *New British Theatre* would give his publishing career a direction and focus that it otherwise lacked.

The *Literary Gazette* was the third periodical founded by Colburn, debuting on 25 January 1817. Its initial, and lasting, claim to fame is that it was the first weekly devoted exclusively to literary matters. The monthly and quarterly reviews—including Colburn's own *New Monthly*, of course—had been the major source of literary intelligence and notices of new works, but there were drawbacks to relying on them for such information. First was the relative infrequency of publication. Breaking news, not to mention gossip, was already old news by the time it found its way into print in the monthlies and quarterlies. These periodicals, being more or less venerable and established, also put off readers not interested in their lofty articles. They were more or less at odds with that portion of the public interested largely in books as entertainment, particularly the modern novel.

It is not difficult to see why Colburn felt that he was the man to fill the gap in the periodicals market. Literary intelligence was for him as real a commodity as the books that lined his shelves. He was both a spotter and setter of trends who had already capitalized on the burgeoning interests in things political and things French. Colburn had enjoyed connections with distinguished writers from the very start of his career and at this stage was catering to an equally impressive clientele in his Conduit Street premises. And it goes without saying that his own publishing efforts provided him with a very exclusive

line of literary intelligence. These same efforts were taking him further and further away from the worthy literature preferred by the monthlies and quarterlies. Though worthiness had never been a Colburn hallmark, his initially varied publications were becoming increasingly populist, tending towards the light literature and, especially, novels that would indeed be a hallmark of his later career. Thus, he was the producer of literature that was getting short shrift in reviews that his clientele often could not be bothered to read. That he should set up a new forum for this vein of literature and its readers was only to be expected from someone with Colburn's clear perception of the marketplace.

The *Literary Gazette* thus served up the latest notices and gossip to a very receptive audience. Its own standard of writing was not very high, lacking as it did the top-flight names attracted to those monthly and quarterly reviews with all their status. When it did feature such writers, they tended to be on secondment from the *New Monthly*: Bulwer, Hood, Hook, and so on. Articles were usually unattributed, but it has been not unreasonably assumed that the majority were written by the *Literary Gazette*'s editor, William Jerdan (Sullivan 242). (Some sources name H. E. Lloyd and a Miss Ross or Rose as the *Literary Gazette*'s first editors, but there is no solid evidence to prove this, and these names do not appear to be connected with Colburn in any other way.) Jerdan was by no means a first-rate man of letters but was prominent among Colburn's stable of jobbing writers and editors. He discovered and encouraged the *Literary Gazette*'s one home-grown star, the poet Letitia Elizabeth Landon, usually known as L. E. L. Jerdan remained at the helm of the magazine from its inception until 1850, enjoying an influence over literary affairs far beyond that which his talents would have otherwise commanded.

Just how much influence Colburn enjoyed over the *Literary Gazette* is a matter for debate, though there is no suggestion that he was as involved with it as with the *New Monthly*. His main contribution may have been keeping Jerdan well supplied with

preview copies of his latest works and with nuggets of information about his authors, which he naturally expected to appear in the journal. But while Colburn remained the sole owner of the *New Monthly* until 1845, he parted with shares of his ownership of the *Literary Gazette* barely six months after founding it. The split involved one-third of the property going to Jerdan, one-third to Longmans, and the final third remaining with the proprietor. Richard Bentley states that Colburn ‘mortgaged to me his one-third share of *Literary Gazette*’ during their partnership’s financial troubles circa 1830 (BO). Colburn evidently paid off the mortgage at some undisclosed date, for it was he who sold that share to William Jerdan in 1841 (Duncan 50). At any rate, the fact remains that whatever Colburnian puffing appeared within the magazine’s pages between 1819 and 1841 did so with the tacit consent of Jerdan and Longmans.

COLBURN’S LATER PERIODICALS

It seems safe to conclude that the *Literary Gazette* was primarily a money-spinner and advertising vehicle for Colburn; his part share ensured that he had little control over—and little responsibility for—its daily operation. It was much the same with Colburn’s share in the *Sunday Times*. Plenty of sources refer to this, but since Colburn and his correspondents never do, it is tempting to doubt the existence of this connection. Richard Bentley’s obituary of his former partner dispels such doubts by relating that, during Colburn’s great reorganization of his periodicals in the middle of their partnership, he ‘sold his *Sunday Times* share’ outright. Details such as how large a share it was, how long he had owned it, and so forth remain unknown and perhaps unknowable, but at least it can be said with certainty that Colburn was once associated with this august publication.

In January 1827, Colburn took over the publication of the Royal Institution's quarterly journal. This had undergone a variety of name changes, all variations on a theme, since its foundation in 1816 and most recently had been published as the *Quarterly Journal of Science, Literature, and the Arts* by John Murray. Under Colburn the title altered slightly to the *Quarterly Journal of Science, Literature, and Art*, but the content included the same old line up of respectable scientific articles enlivened by the occasional foray into literary or artistic matters. This journal was never likely to have broad appeal or make a significant profit, and its circulation was accordingly limited to one thousand copies of each number (Sullivan 355). There is no explanation for Colburn taking on this publication, though it certainly would have appealed to his fondness for exclusivity and anything including the word 'royal'. Perhaps he hoped to elevate the tone of his publishing business by this association with the Royal Institution. In any case the association was short lived and, in 1830, Colburn ceased to publish the journal, which continued for a few numbers under the auspices of the Royal Institution itself before ceasing entirely. Though the *Quarterly Journal* was but a footnote in Colburn's career, it is worth noting the years of his involvement with it for, as we shall see, the timing was important to the publisher's wider schemes.

While his involvement with other periodicals waxed and waned, Colburn's connection with the *Literary Gazette* remained a placid and profitable one—until 1827. That year, William Jerdan, who had never been an avid puffer but tended to give positive reviews as a general rule, for some reason delivered a string of non-committal reviews of Colburn publications. Colburn expected better than this, and when Jerdan panned *The O'Briens and the O'Flaherties* by one of the publisher's favourite authors, Lady Morgan, it was the last straw (Jerdan IV, 72). Colburn's solution was to start another magazine, one that would be a little more appreciative of his publications. To this end, he reached an

agreement with writer James Silk Buckingham (whose travel books he also published) to found a general interest weekly called the *Athenaeum*. Shortly before its first issue appeared, on 2 January 1828, Colburn wrote to Jerdan and Longmans to apprise them of his intention to support this new magazine, adding that he did not expect it to infringe upon the territory of the *Literary Gazette*.

But ‘the writer of this epistle immediately paid the piper, and caused others ultimately to do the same, in consequence of this little suicidal act of pique and folly’, as Jerdan so rightly put it (IV, 68). All too soon, Colburn had clashed with Buckingham, who was even less accepting of puffery than Jerdan, prompting him to sell off his share in May 1828. After struggling through its first two years under a brisk succession of editors, the *Athenaeum* took off under the editorship of Charles Wentworth Dilke to become one of the most popular and respected weeklies in England. Its coverage of literature put it in direct competition with the *Literary Gazette*; its lower price and rather more skilful staff allowed it to triumph over its rival. Thus it was that Colburn not only lost the successful new periodical he had just founded but also damaged the successful old periodical that augmented his income. Fortunately, Colburn had enough profitable irons in the fire to see him through this misery of his own making.

In 1829, Colburn founded the *Court Journal* and purchased the monthly *Naval and Military Magazine*, which he promptly relaunched as the *United Service Journal*. At first glance, the two periodicals could hardly have been more different: while the former catered to his usual audience, fond of light literature and high-society gossip, the latter was a serious publication for Britain’s large population of active and retired servicemen. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that neither the readers nor the content of these publications were quite as distinct as they might seem. Officers of both services would inevitably have been drawn from the same upper-middle and upper classes

that populated (and read) the pages of publications like the *Court Journal*. By the same token, civilian members of these classes would have known or been related to servicemen and thus had at least a latent interest in matters military and naval. The *United Service Journal* explicitly stated, in the first issue under Colburn's proprietorship, that it hoped to be of interest to the general public (Jan 1829, 2). Ultimately, both the *Court Journal* and the *United Service Journal* were aimed at the usual Colburnian carriage trade.

In his chapter on the military in *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, Albert Tucker not only acknowledges the affiliation of officers with fashionable society, but he also perceives a connection between military periodicals and fashionable literature. He notes that, in Colburn's day, 'serious military subjects tended to be more than balanced by memoirs, semi-fictional tales, and anecdotes in which the authors sought, in their style and choice of subject, to imitate writers of silver-fork fiction' (63). Certainly the *United Service Journal*, even in its earliest issues, featured writing by Colburn's authors (including a translation by Jane Porter, author of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*) and excerpts from his books (such as the three-volume *Naval Sketch Book*). With only minimal changes in presentation, this material could have appeared in the *Court Journal* or the *New Monthly*.

The magazine also contrived to engage with serious issues and offer genuinely useful information. Its articles and letters to the editor featured, for example, a debate on the use of brevet ranks that continued over a period of years. It annually recorded the distribution of the army and of the navy, listing regiments or ships, their commanders, and their locations. Each month the journal included an almanac of promotions, births, marriages, and deaths of officers. Moreover, the *United Service Journal's* very appearance appealed to lovers of military precision: with its single-columned text, wide margins, and high-quality illustrations (all typical of its original printers, the Bentley

brothers), it looked more like a fine book than a periodical. Circulation figures are not available, but as it was the only monthly military periodical in Britain until the 1850s, one can assume that Colburn derived all the usual benefits of a monopoly. Its success is also attested to by its longevity: Colburn rechristened it the *United Service Magazine and Naval and Military Journal* in 1842 and gave it up altogether on his retirement in 1853, but it soldiered on into the twentieth century.

That Colburn had a sure touch with the military market was further demonstrated in 1833 when he founded a weekly periodical to complement his monthly *United Service Journal*. Tucker is practically the only scholar to acknowledge Colburn's hand in the establishment of the *Naval and Military Gazette* and he is also singularly generous in recognizing 'the serious professional intent of the publisher' behind both magazines (66). Colburn's seriousness was, Tucker believes, shown most clearly by his hiring Sir John Philippart as editor of the *Naval and Military Gazette* from the time of its foundation and of the *United Service Magazine* from its 1842 relaunch. Philippart had not only worked at the War Office but also had experience in editing a similar periodical (the *Military Panorama*), and he was given the freedom to join the drive for reform that marked so many military circles (Tucker 66). The contrast between Philippart's situation and that of Campbell or Bulwer is most striking—and indicative of how accurately the proprietor perceived the differing needs and expectations of his audiences. The *Naval and Military Gazette* not only provided a good return on Colburn's investment but also outlived him, merging with another periodical in 1886.

'Henry Colburn, therefore, owned and directed two of the most important military periodicals in Britain for twenty-six years (1829-55)'—quite an accomplishment for a man often belittled for his light literature and compulsion to puff (Tucker 65). As we have

seen, this was not an anomalous or even unusual direction for the publisher, but a typically perceptive filling of a gap in what was already his market.

Just a few short months after beginning his assault on the market for military periodicals, Colburn launched a magazine in an area much more obviously related to his other interests. *The Court Journal: A Record of Manners, Literature, Science, Art, and Fashion* first appeared on Saturday, 2 May 1829, and weekly thereafter. This frothy magazine reads much like an expanded version of Colburn's sales catalogue, with articles on all of the topics usually associated with his name, including authorship, balls and similar festivities, life in Mayfair, the united services, and, of course, royalty. Eventually, all pretence of covering science and art was dropped and the subtitle changed to 'Gazette of the Fashionable World'.

The *Court Journal*, being directed towards Colburn's primary market, is inevitably full of puffs in the guise of book reviews, 'literary intelligence', and feature articles on his authors. One of the sneakiest is a lament on the death of William Hazlitt that refutes suggestions that he died in poverty: 'He had, within the two or three previous months, received considerable sums from a great publishing house for works just completed by him, and one of which is just now published' (25 Sept 1830, 648). The work was an expanded edition of Hazlitt's 'Boswell Redivivus' essays from the *New Monthly* entitled *Conversations with James Northcote*; the 'great publishing house' was none other than Colburn and Bentley, whose interests were further served by an exceptionally good review of the *Conversations* in the following week's issue. But to castigate such a minor instance of puffery is to overlook the big picture. The fact is that the *Court Journal* is one giant puff for Colburn and all his works; it could hardly be otherwise, considering his dominance of the niche market to which the magazine catered.

Colburn knew that market so well that he was able to make a success of what was essentially a silver-fork periodical. On 26 December 1829, he and Bentley were moved to mark the *Court Journal*'s first six months with an address expressing their 'sincere gratitude for the unprecedented degree of favour and support which they have received in that high class of society from which the chief materials of their work have been derived, and for the consequent establishment of their Journal in the estimation of the English Public'. All continued well until the partnership hit the difficult patch that necessitated Colburn's sale of his share in the *Sunday Times*: Bentley records that Colburn sold the *Court Journal* at the same time (BO). Considering that the library holdings of the magazine I have seen cease with the 25 December 1830 issue, this may be the point at which it changed hands—possibly becoming the *Court Circular*, which ran into the twentieth-century.

Perhaps the great unasked question regarding Colburn's periodicals is why he founded or became otherwise involved with so many of them in such a short time span, viz., 1827-29. As will be shown in chapter four, Colburn was planning to go into semi-retirement at the end of his partnership with Bentley in 1832. He would no longer bring out new books but would manage his periodicals and live off the income. It therefore behoved him to found additional periodicals prior to that retirement so that they would be established and in the black by the time he needed their profits; hence the advent of the *Court Journal* and the *United Service Journal* in 1829. Of course, financial problems meant that he lost the *Court Journal* and *Sunday Times*, but he did manage to keep the most important ones and, when things again began to look dire after the break with Bentley, Colburn founded the *Naval and Military Gazette*. Considering the longevity of those periodicals he retained until eventually selling them at a profit, Colburn's investment strategy can be said to have paid off in the long run.

A final note about Colburn's publishing of periodicals, before moving on to the puffery within them, must raise the possibility that he published even more titles than those mentioned here. Linda Jones, in her Ph.D. thesis on the *New Monthly* under Campbell, says that Colburn owned in whole or in part the *Literary Museum*, *London Weekly Review*, *Oriental Herald* and *The Sphynx*. Her sources are memoirs and letters that put the attribution of ownership at second- or third-hand. This does not necessarily render it untrustworthy, and it is clear that Colburn had—at least in the late 1820s—a particular interest in periodical ownership. However, it is striking that none of the undeniably trustworthy primary sources mentions any of these titles, and until such hard evidence turns up, the question of further periodical ownership on Colburn's part must remain open.

‘HIS PUFFING VOCATION’

Charges of puffery greeted Colburn's every move in the periodicals market, made their mark on his book publishing, and have dogged his reputation ever since. Yet puffery is a vague and problematic concept, its deleteriousness is a far more subjective matter than is usually conceded, and Colburn's involvement with it has most frequently been decried by those with an axe to grind or a similarly pointed agenda. Perhaps worst of all, *Fraser's Magazine's* mock-tribute, ‘Thou shalt live for ever, as Prince Paramount of Puffers and Quacks’, has proven all too accurate (April 1830, 320). The caricature of Colburn as the ‘prince of puffers’ has been perpetuated by so many other sources—from the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (155) to Sutherland (81)—that it has endured longer than any other images of him, particularly the positive ones. By any definition, Colburn was a puffer, but that is not sufficient reason to let puffery define him.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the meaning of puffery as ‘inflated laudation, esp[ecially] by way of advertisement’, while a puffer is ‘one who extols a person or thing in inflated terms, and usually for some interested reason’. For a publisher, it might take the form of ensuring good reviews—or ‘notices’, as they were often called—for his books, either in his own magazines or in other magazines made friendly by the purchase of legitimate advertising within their pages. Puffs could also masquerade as teasers or other comments about a publisher’s titles in the literary intelligence columns that were a standard feature of these periodicals. By making readers think that these were editorial opinions rather than advertisements, the claims made for these books appeared to be independent and, therefore, genuine. In practice, puffery extended beyond these formal definitions to include practically any kind of publicity stunt. A really clever publisher would create a controversy surrounding a book or journal to whip up interest in it, or perhaps indulge in intertextual puffery, mentioning one of his magazines in one of his books or vice versa. As it happened, Colburn was a really clever publisher.

One is reluctant to excuse behaviour on the grounds that ‘everyone else does it’, but if a practice is so widespread as to be almost commonplace, no one practitioner can logically be singled out for engaging in it. Yet this is exactly what happened to Colburn. Puffery was common long before he was even born—the *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the use of ‘puff’ in the publishing sense back to the 1730s—and in his time was routine among both authors and publishers. The many book writers who also contributed to journals were perfectly positioned to construct favourable reviews of their friends’ publications or, should the need arise, their own. That this occurred with even the most exalted literary figures is made clear by Robert Southey’s letter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge of 12 February 1808, in which he cries, ‘Puff me, Coleridge! if you love me, puff me! Puff a couple of hundreds into my pocket!’ (quoted in Erickson 96). This,

however, was mere histrionics on Southey's part—Coleridge had already proven his love by publishing a puffing review of Southey's *Espriella* in the *Courier*. Thus, when L. E. L. wrote a panegyric on Bulwer's career in the *New Monthly* and he reciprocated with a glowing review of her *Romance and Reality*, for example, it was nothing new or noteworthy (Adburgham 179-81); nor was it unheard of for Campbell to write 'paragraphs'—a polite term for puffs—for his own books (letter from Colburn to Campbell, Appendix B). These instances just happened to involve personages somewhat less august than Southey and to occur under the jurisdiction of Henry Colburn.

He was by no means the only publisher overseeing puffery campaigns, nor was he the only quality publisher to sully his hands with the practice. Most of the major publishers practiced it—or allowed it—in some degree (Rosa 195). John Taylor, of the firm of Taylor and Hessey, has often been portrayed as the quintessential gentleman publisher, yet, on occasion, he personally puffed his authors—using no less a medium than his *London Magazine*. Taylor wrote the article 'A Visit to John Clare, with a Notice of His New Poems' and published it in the November 1821 issue, contemporaneously with Clare's new poems. When Erickson refers to this case, he tellingly calls it 'direct marketing', not puffery, which is evidently too dirty a word for so honourable a publisher (195-6). Yet Taylor actually came out and said what one suspects Colburn only thought; he wrote to his brother James on 28 April 1821 that owning the *London* brought 'the Advantages of a public Situation equal to a perpetual Advertisement' (quoted in Chilcott 134).

One of the reasons why publishers practised puffery, aside from the obvious 'advantages' to be gained thereby, was that they felt keenly the limitations of the standard advertising methods of the time, which consisted almost solely of placing small print advertisements in magazines and in the backs of other books. These were scarcely

advertisements as such, usually just dull announcements that a new title had been published and was available from a specified bookseller. They were sufficient for many books, particularly non-fiction titles that were expected to have a limited sale anyway, and Colburn was among those who used them extensively, frequently leading off his *New Monthly Magazine* with six or eight pages of them. Other books needed more help than this. This was particularly true of novels, which had only their title and author to recommend them; when the author was not yet established or chose to remain anonymous, the situation was even more fraught. As Colburn's publications increasingly met these criteria, he increasingly resorted to other measures to bring them to the public's attention. The trendy books he began publishing in the 1820s, such as silver-fork novels, required all-out publicity campaigns that would ensure a large initial sale before the books began their almost inevitable descent into obscurity after one or two seasons.

Fortunately, Colburn was never short of ideas when it came to publicity. He is thought to have been the first publisher with a dedicated advertising department, a development which appalled the gentlemen at *Fraser's*: 'Does he not keep clerks and writers whose exclusive employ is, as he says, "solely to look after the papers and advertisements"?' (April 1830, 319). The simplest and most direct means of puffery that Colburn and his advertising department had at their disposal was, of course, the printing of favourable reviews in his magazines. He did this to varying degrees in all of his journals, but it is a rare issue when the works of other publishers do not get some space—and sometimes even good reviews. Of course, this is not proof positive of impartial reviewing: one notices that Murray in particular took out many paid advertisements in Colburn's periodicals and came away with good notices as well. If other publishers were, essentially, paying for good reviews, Colburn could hardly be expected scrupulously to refrain from puffing his own works, particularly in the *Literary Gazette* and *Court*

Journal, which, as we have seen, shared his areas of specialization and were aimed at precisely the same market as his novels.

Colburn sometimes got a little carried away and puffed titles to audiences with no direct interest in them. A prime example of this occurs in the *United Service Journal*, wherein appears a notice for the Standard Novels, the monthly reprint series launched by Colburn and Bentley in 1831. It delivers its verdict on the first four titles in the series:

We cannot speak in terms of too high praise of this design, nor of the manner in which the spirited publishers are performing their part of it. [...] Here then we have in three volumes the condensed (not abridged) matter of nine, most neatly printed with frontispiece and vignettes, of most convenient size, and also most conveniently cheap. We can add no stronger recommendation of the Standard Novels. (April 1831, 240)

Indeed, it *is* hard to conceive of a stronger recommendation than this. ‘The spirited publishers’ were no doubt satisfied with the publicity value of the *United Service Journal*.

Circulating subtler literary intelligence was another art deftly practised by Colburn. One of the more amusing, and least repeated, anecdotes about this branch of puffery is related by Cyrus Redding in his *Fifty Years’ Recollections*:

When Horace Smith published “Brambletye House” I went down to Brighton to see him, and among other things, remarked that one of the newspapers had said pic-nic parties were continually made up to visit the remains of that old place. The paragraph had the simplicity and air of truth to characterise it. When I came back to town I told Colburn I had seen Mr. Smith, who was equally pleased with myself at the intelligence. The paragraph, I found, had been concocted in town, and sent to the country papers by the publisher. I allowed I was taken in by an unworthy practice. (II, 345)

Since Colburn’s ingenious puff about picnicking readers, ‘unworthy’ as it may have been, managed to deceive one of his editors and the author of the work in question, one can only imagine its success with readers. A similar—and similarly successful—tactic involved circulating morsels of speculation as to the identity of the author of an anonymous work. Colburn practically perfected this practice, which is discussed in relation to Disraeli’s *Vivian Grey* in chapter three.

For a man with a knack for publicity and a whole lot of publications to promote, it was only a matter of time before he hit upon the idea of using these publications to promote each another. This was achieved with little effort since it was quite natural for one journal to refer to another or even for a fashionable novel to refer to a fashionable journal. Colburn frequently exercised these easy options but also presided over more complex efforts. One of these was the reprinting in the *Court Journal* of a letter from Thomas Campbell to Thomas Moore correcting an anecdote in Moore's recent biography of Lord Byron. The date of the letter was 18 February 1830, the date of the magazine was the following Saturday, and the *Court Journal* felt sure that 'our readers will thank us, on more than one account, for using an opportunity which presented itself, of *intercepting* the following copy' of Campbell's letter (italics in original). Since Campbell never complained about the interception, it is fair to conclude that this was the inside job it appears to be: the editor of the *New Monthly* shared an exclusive document with a sister journal and reaped the reward of having his point of view set in print. Colburn had one journal with a scoop, another with a bit of subtle but free publicity, and at least one happy editor.

Having established that Colburn was an unabashed puffer, one must next consider why he was so stigmatised because of it. It is true that puffery was an inherently deceitful practice, but it was no less deceitful when Taylor or others did it. It is also true that Colburn puffed on a grand scale, but this alone cannot account for the singular treatment that he received. The determining factor is not that he puffed too much or over too many years or in too many ways, but that he puffed too successfully. Colburn's profitable attempts at puffery not only drew the attention of his competitors but also, frankly, made them jealous. Unable to beat him at his own game, they resorted to criticizing him. John Blackwood made this clear enough in 1843, when he wrote to his brothers that one of

Colburn's wilder publicity stunts—viz., having an author take him to court for the return of his manuscript, then publishing the thing three days later—'has excited the admiration and *envy* of the whole trade' (Oliphant 356, italics mine).

The whole trade included, naturally enough, Colburn's competitors in the periodicals market. Thus the *Noctes Ambrosianae* series, populated as it was by fictionalised versions of the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* staff, had a go at Colburn's 'shameful and shameless puffery' even while admitting that the publisher was an 'enterprising' man with a sense of 'honour' (July 1826, 98). The *Westminster Review* charted a similar course. Far less inclined to acknowledge Colburn's good points were magazines such as the *Athenaeum* and *Fraser's*, which exulted in the righteousness of not being associated with any book publishers and, therefore, not being organs of puffery. This may have been true but they were still actively competing with Colburn's magazines and they acted accordingly. Some of *Fraser's* comments on Colburn's puffery have already been cited, but these are just the tip of the iceberg. One particularly extravagant critique was constructed around Colburn and Bentley's latest novel by Bulwer—then the editor of the *New Monthly* and *Fraser's* *bête noire*:

Turn we to *Paul Clifford*, which his booksellers, in their usual way of puffing,—directly, indirectly, obliquely, diagonally, transversely,—have cried up as the most extraordinary production that this, or any other country, in times bygone, or in times present, or times to come, have, are, or will be favoured with. The praise of puffing it might be supposed can no farther go; but we shall see that, when the author honours the world with his next performance. (June 1830, 526)

No doubt *Fraser's* chief complaint was that, thanks in part to the puffery, the first impression of *Paul Clifford*—the largest first impression of any modern novel until that time—sold out on the day of publication (Adburgham 160). The *Athenaeum*, too, resorted to satire when it parodied Colburn as 'Colophon' on its front page (1 July 1829); thereafter it engaged in more serious attacks on its founder.

Rosa recognizes a variation on this problem, noting that it was not just rival publishers who skewered Colburn's promotional techniques: 'writers, especially those whose books were not published by Colburn, loved to make slighting references to his puffery' (190-1). Sutherland essentially reaches the same conclusion, attributing the 'spiteful anecdotes and lampoons' of Colburn to a motley crew of 'aggrieved contemporaries' composed of various writers and editors (60). W. M. Thackeray's extended parody of Colburn and Bentley in *Pendennis*, discussed in chapter five, is one example that tends to back this up. Many of Colburn's authors commented on their publisher's puffery, especially his more blatant or elaborate antics, but most recognized that his advertising campaigns gave their works the best possible chance of succeeding. It was generally only those whose efforts for his firm did not succeed—or who could not get their works published by Colburn at all—who took a hard line against puffery.

The anger and envy felt by Colburn's competitors and disgruntled contributors was undoubtedly compounded by his being largely impervious to their complaints. This was true on the broadest scale: neither their criticisms of his puffery, nor his publications, nor even his very self seemed to touch him at all (as it did, for example, such sensitive souls as Bulwer and Campbell). Not for nothing had *Fraser's* used the word 'shameless' to describe him. The surest sign of Colburn's unconcern was, of course, that he kept right on doing all the things people complained about. He stuck with his puffery and took essentially the same approach to advertising throughout his lengthy career. Further, when he directly refers to puffery (such as in the letter to Bentley quoted in chapter four), he is wholly unapologetic. Colburn's insouciance is further displayed in a 9 December 1836 letter to Benjamin Disraeli concerning some harsh criticism of the author's *Henrietta Temple*, 'which need not therefore give you any more concern than it does me, which is very little indeed. I have no fears for the success of the book' (HP 235/3, 25-26). This last

line is the real giveaway: as long as his books sold, it scarcely mattered what his critics and competitors said about them or him. Even when certain titles did not sell, the impact of the criticism was muted by Colburn's publishing—and puffing—on such a large scale that other best sellers were usually waiting in the wings.

One can easily understand why jealous competitors and writers would berate Colburn's puffing ways and his 'cheerful disrespect for their dignified conception of business-methods', but it is more difficult to comprehend why later commentators bought into these initial criticisms and further blackened the publisher's already tarnished name (SP 360, 8). In truth, most of them have had their own kind of jealousy of Colburn, their contempt for someone who did not fulfil their concept of what a publisher should be. Sadleir is only the most obvious and vitriolic among them. In *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, he is forced to concede Colburn's 'daring and intelligence', among other good qualities, but launches much more willingly into how 'he debauched the critics and put them on his pay-sheet'. Even more revealing is the contrast he draws between Colburn—'a book-manufacturer, not a publisher'—and Richard Bentley, 'the serious-minded craftsman-booklover'. Without stopping to challenge this characterization of Bentley, we can see that Sadleir's problem with Colburn is actually part of his distaste for the modern, businesslike approach to publishing. He prefers publishers in the earlier, more gentlemanly mode, employing their fine taste to support worthy men of letters, regardless of the financial consequences. (113) The conflict between so-called gentleman and trade publishers has endured throughout much of the history of the printed book, subsisting largely on the elitism and prejudice of commentators such as Sadleir.

His manuscript biographical piece on Colburn concludes that, 'above all he realised the power of ballyhoo at a time when ostentation was considered smart and so-called Society mistook for health and gaiety what was really the flush and excitement of a

transient fever' (360, 11-12). Thus it appears that Colburn's clientele did not quite live up to Sadleir's standards either, and were at least partly to blame for giving the trade publisher an opening. Ultimately, criticism of this sort betrays a sense of injustice at Colburn's being able to make ephemeral, second-rate prose fly off the shelves while upright gentlemen like Taylor were lucky to break even on timeless, seminal poetry like that of Keats and Clare. One appreciates the irony of the situation, but expecting business to be fair, in defiance of the vagaries of the marketplace, is just ludicrous—as is the expectation that public taste will hinge on literary worth.

More recent commentators have begun to distance themselves from the usual charges made against Colburn, primarily by recontextualizing his puffery. As far back as 1928, Collins recognized him as a 'prophet of the modern spirit' of advertising, and indeed, one cannot see a publisher's press release or hear about authors writing their own 'reader reviews' on Amazon.com without being reminded that Colburn blazed a trail through this territory well over a century ago (192). Sutherland acknowledges as much, concluding that 'as regards his more extravagant feats of "puffing" (what is now called "hype"), Colburn's main offence was to be ahead of his time' (80). A few writers are convinced that he was so far ahead—and therefore so close to modern practice—as to be a 'genius' (Elfenbein in Wilson 79, Erickson 152). Thus, opinion has come full circle and gone from deriding Colburn for his puffery to elevating him because of it.

Back in 1818, Lady Morgan and her husband had arrived in London to find her books selling out one edition after another and a host of admirers eager to welcome them. Knowing full well who had engineered both circumstances, she wrote in a letter that 'Colburn, as usual, has indulged his puffing vocation' (27). This jokey comment has an interesting idea at its heart: puffery as a vocation, and vocation not as a job but as a special suitability for a job. Colburn truly had a talent, a gift even, for promotional

activities. He was able to use this gift to further his chosen career of selling books and magazines and, though it transgressed the ideals of many, it did not differ greatly from everyday practice. Approached from such a pragmatic viewpoint, Colburn's puffing techniques need be neither the disgrace nor the all-consuming issue that it generally has been till now.

MOVING ON

By 1820, Henry Colburn had accomplished a great deal since his rather mysterious debut in the trade fourteen years earlier. He was no longer primarily a librarian with a successful sideline in book and periodical publishing. As the main sources on his life tell it, he was at this point primarily a publisher who also happened to run a library—that is, before selling it to William Saunders and Edward John Otley in the mid-1820s. This is mere guesswork, however; Colburn's relationship with these partners has been left unexplored by past historians, to the extent that Saunders and Otley seem to materialize out of thin air to buy the library just when Colburn is ready to sell. Sutherland realizes that something else is afoot during this time period, noting a lull in Colburn's publishing in 1819, his incorporating as Colburn and Co. between 1820 and 1824, and an urgent recall of volumes to the library in 1820 (68). But he is unable to construct a detailed narrative of events, speculating only that Colburn might have had financial problems and put the library on the market.

Sutherland is on the right track but missing the key piece of the puzzle: Saunders and Otley. Michael Sadleir's bibliographical research into Colburn's career, left in manuscript among his papers, turned up the last piece of evidence needed to construct a full version of events in those years:

For a few years during the eighteen-teens, Saunders and Otley [...] were associated with [Colburn] in a lending library; but I can find no evidence that they

were also active partners in publishing or any book bearing the three names in a joint imprint. About 1820 the association ended, or rather a formal separation took place between the library and publishing departments. This may be deduced from a Library Catalogue of that date [...]. It shows the premises at 50 Conduit Street as occupied by Colburn & Co, Publishers. But the title page of the catalogue reads: "Catalogue of Saunders and Otley's (late Colburn, Saunders and Otley's) British and Foreign Public Library, Conduit St, Hanover Square etc." (SP 360, 3-4)

Since Sadleir actually possessed a copy of the library catalogue on which his theory hinges, there is no cause to doubt his assertions. Therefore, it can be confidently stated that Colburn was in fact associated with Saunders and Otley before the big changes of 1820. Curwen's assertion that Colburn sold the library to Saunders and Otley in 1816 is obviously wrong but may actually reflect the year that they joined him in running it (282). This arrangement evidently lasted until 1820, when Colburn transformed the duo into the 'and Co.' segment of his business and allowed them to take charge of the library completely. Colburn remained on the premises but devoted himself entirely to publishing; this was satisfactory for a while, but Colburn eventually unincorporated himself and moved out altogether.

Dating Colburn's departure from Conduit Street has proven difficult, with guesses in the past ranging over a number of years. This might, to some extent, reflect the time it took to find and outfit a suitable new location, as well as to transfer stock and other items from one building to another. Fortunately, the Bentley Papers include the actual lease signed by Colburn for his new premises (BL Add.MS.46632A, 1-2); this narrows the time frame and provides some interesting details. Signed on 9 February 1823 by Henry, William, and Stephen Dawson, the lease grants 8 New Burlington Street, 'Together with the Stables and Coachhouses behind the same leading into Burlington Mews', to Colburn for twenty-eight years from 25 March. One of the Dawsons was evidently a solicitor, of the partnership Dawson, Capron, and Rowley; George Capron lived next door to the property.

The landlord's profession is all too evident within the contract, which spells out in fanatical detail Colburn's numerous obligations besides paying his £210 annual rent. These range from insuring the premises for at least £3000 with the Sun Fire Insurance Office to repainting them every three years with two coats of good oil paint. Most interesting is the clause designed to ensure that the building looked like the property of a gentleman rather than of a shopkeeper. It abjures Colburn not to 'expose for sale or otherwise any Books or other Goods in the front of the premises near New Burlington Street aforesaid so that the said Premises shall not externally bear the appearance of other than a private Residence'. As a concession to the fact that Colburn *was* trying to run a business, the lease allowed him to affix over the front door—in letters not more than two inches high—his name and profession. (One wonders whether he opted for 'bookseller' or 'publisher'.) Colburn was also allowed to let the door stand open, so as not to shut out too many customers.

Colburn accepted all of these demands as a small price to pay for a spacious building in an excellent location. His options were limited to the fashionable part of London—a smallish area bounded by Oxford Street in the north and Bond Street in the west, and encompassing Piccadilly and the newly constructed Regent Street. Conduit Street ran straight through the heart of this fashionable sector, and tiny New Burlington Street, just to its south, was nearly as well situated. Number 8 had the added bonus of being near the residence of Lady Cork, the eldest and most genuinely liked of London's society hostesses. She had moved to 6 New Burlington Street when widowed in 1798 and would remain there till her death in 1840, after Colburn had already moved on. Still, in 1823, it was exactly where he wanted to be. Since Colburn's books bear his Conduit Street imprint throughout 1823 and none bears a New Burlington Street imprint until 1824, it is to be inferred that the publisher spent much of the first year of the lease

remodelling the place to suit his needs and tastes, perhaps moving in early in 1824 (Brown 42). Not surprisingly, Colburn lived at the address—which was, after all, primarily a residence—till Richard Bentley’s arrival in autumn 1829.

Colburn’s move to New Burlington Street necessitated the hiring of several new members of staff. It is to be supposed that he transferred some of his employees who were already *au fait* with his book and magazine publishing affairs, but he undoubtedly needed more readers and editors of manuscripts as well as differently specialized office staff. The details of who the publisher hired and when are mostly to be found in a memoir written by Edward Morgan (no relation to the librarian or Colburn’s writers of that name).⁷ According to his own account, Morgan was a bookkeeper by trade and was employed by Colburn for four years before Bentley joined the business in 1829. He insinuated himself with the new partner and, after the 1832 split, remained in New Burlington Street until his retirement in 1858 (SP 357, 16). Morgan wrote his memoir after Bentley’s death in 1871 (which is mentioned in the text), presumably for the benefit of his successor, George Bentley. Morgan certainly is unstinting in his praise of Richard Bentley; he is also constant in emphasizing his intimacy with the publisher, unrelenting in his disparagement of Colburn, and eager to broadcast his own merits. He claims, for example, that Colburn continually tried to ‘allure’ him from Bentley’s service (SP 357, 14) and, audaciously, that Bentley’s firm would not have experienced its downturn in the 1840s if only he, Morgan, had had a greater role within it (16).

Considering that Edward Morgan was probably no less than seventy years old at the time he wrote his memoir, his recollections could be indulged if their only real sin was spinning the facts; unfortunately, he sometimes flatly contradicts the facts. Perhaps the worst example of this is Morgan’s perpetuating the idea that Colburn and Bentley split

⁷ Though the original of this memoir is among the Bentley Papers, I found it more expedient to use Michael Sadleir’s typed transcription of it.

because of their personal disagreements, when Colburn's semi-retirement in 1832 had actually been planned from the very beginning of their partnership. Morgan, by his own account on intimate terms with one of the partners, should have known the truth as well as anyone but perhaps found that it did not fit his portrait of Bentley as the victim of Colburn's evil machinations. The other possible explanation for this and similar errors is that his memory was failing him in his old age. Personal biases and fading memories do not make for reliable sources, and it could be asked whether Edward Morgan's memoir can be legitimately employed at all. His rudimentary histories of his fellow staff members have enough hallmarks of credibility to warrant their inclusion here, but it is worth bearing in mind their source.

Morgan relates that it was George Dubourg's 'solicitation' that brought him to work for Colburn in September 1825, so we might conjecture that Dubourg had been with the publisher since his removal to New Burlington Street in 1824, if not earlier (SP 357, 1). He was Colburn's ledger keeper and earned his employer's complete trust; late in 1829, when Colburn set up his own offices independent of those he shared with Bentley, he transferred Dubourg there to be his personal employee (SP 357, 5). Immediately after the partnership's dissolution, a lawsuit brought against Colburn by Bentley characterized Dubourg as 'a person who is generally employed by the said H[enr]y Colburn as his Agent in all matters relat[ing] to his bus[ines]s of a publisher' (BL Add.MS.46632A, 177-189). There is proof that Dubourg stayed with Colburn at least until 1835, but he may in fact have remained longer (BL Add.MS.46640, 126).

Charles Ollier had made his name as co-proprietor of a publishing firm with his younger brother James. They had the distinction of publishing some of Keats's and many of Shelley's works but fell on hard financial times—Keats and Shelley not being strong sellers initially—and dissolved the firm in 1822, after only five years in business (Ollier

246-8). Morgan claims that Ollier arrived at Colburn's establishment shortly after himself, which is to say, after September 1825 (SP 357, 1). Once there, Ollier distinguished himself as a reader of manuscripts. We find Colburn eager for his opinion of Thomas Henry Lister's tragedy (SP 348, 19) and know that, after reversing Shoberl's verdict on Bulwer's *Pelham*, he was assigned to the author's manuscripts from then on (SP 348, 2). The Sadleir papers also show Ollier to have been one of Colburn's chief puff writers: in October 1829, Colburn writes more than once of the need for him to write paragraphs and notices of James Fenimore Cooper's *Borderers* (SP 348, 5-6, 18).

William Hazlitt commented that he believed that Colburn, or Ollier in his stead, would not receive him at the office when the writer was attracting bad publicity (Patmore II, 351). Regardless of the truth of this particular example, it implies that Ollier was the publisher's right-hand man, stepping in for Colburn during his absences. We can be certain that he did this in 1830, when it was Ollier, rather than Bentley, whom Colburn delegated to deal with Mary Shelley and William Jerdan (SP 348, 1; 349, 2). Gettmann rightly tags Ollier as 'the general handyman in New Burlington Street', and it was there that he stayed, with Bentley, after the partnership's dissolution (41).

It is difficult to know exactly what job description to attach to P. G. Patmore (father of the better-known Coventry Patmore). He of course contributed to the *New Monthly* magazine from the 1820s, when Colburn also published a few of his works in book form, to the 1840s. That Patmore was not just another hack, however, is demonstrated by the fact that he was a confidant of important Colburn writers such as Campbell and Hazlitt. Patmore also appears to have been a silent editor of Colburn's books. He disclosed that he recommended changes in Robert Ward's novels *Tremaine* (1825) and *De Vere* (1827) and even maintained an anonymous correspondence with the equally anonymous author until the second book was published. Colburn's authors

frequently refer to his ‘literary friend’ having suggested changes to their manuscripts; this would usually have been Shoberl or Ollier, but it might sometimes have been Patmore. Colburn was not slow to employ another person’s literary gifts for his own ends.

The early portion of Colburn’s career is marked by several things that have loomed large in his enduring reputation: his mysterious origins, his founding of several periodicals but most notably the *New Monthly Magazine* and the *Literary Gazette*, and his puffing promotional methods. This chapter has shown that, while these are all genuinely important to understanding Colburn’s life and work, the common conception of them in their details is, in fact, a *misconception*. New information—and a more distanced perspective on the old information—has made it possible to resituate these concerns alongside others, such as Colburn’s personal qualities and relationships, and to amend the view of the man and his role in public life.

3. 'THE VIRGIN AND THE BAWD': DISRAELI'S RELATIONSHIP WITH COLBURN

In some ways, a chapter on Benjamin Disraeli's relationship with his primary publisher needs no justification: because he went on to become one of the most important political figures of the nineteenth century, all matters touching Disraeli assume an importance of their own. The fact that his literary career consumed the first ten years of his public life and continued alongside his political career makes it particularly worthy of study, though his biographers have usually felt differently. Even Bernard Jerman and Jane Ridley, whose biographies concentrate on the first half of Disraeli's life, include a good deal of information on Colburn without conceiving of him or his long involvement in Disraeli's life as being significant or in need of careful analysis. With the biographical emphasis always on politics, it is a telling example of how the end of Disraeli's life story has skewed the narration of its beginning. This chapter rectifies the situation and puts first things first.

If we approach the matter from the publisher's side, the need for an extensive examination of the relationship is no less obvious. Disraeli's personal standing alone makes him Henry Colburn's most important author, during their lifetimes as well as in the historical view. There is, too, the additional consideration that many of the Colburn publications still in print were authored by Disraeli: *Coningsby* and *Sybil* are currently among the Penguin Classics, while Pickering Chatto is about to release *Vivian Grey*, *The Young Duke*, *Contarini Fleming*, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy*, *Henrietta Temple*, and *Venetia* as 'The Early Novels of Benjamin Disraeli'.⁸ In the most basic terms, Disraeli is Colburn's lasting claim to fame.

⁸ The six-volume set is edited by Jane Ridley, author of *The Young Disraeli*, and due to be published in December 2002.

But Disraeli is also much more than that: he is at once both a mirror and instigator of the various stages of Colburn's career. He entered Colburn's service with a sensational silver-fork novel at the beginning of the silver-fork boom, wandered like Colburn in the wilderness after the publisher's acrimonious split from Richard Bentley, provided the first best-seller of Colburn's comeback, then sailed along contentedly with the publisher until his retirement. Example after example shows that they were both astute businessmen, aware of what their public wanted, and willing and able to adapt to it. Furthermore, they trusted each other's judgment and always kept in close contact, often leading them to move in similar directions.

Beyond these other connections, however, there seems to have been a genuine emotional attachment between the two men. Colburn initially treated Disraeli with his usual kindness and generosity, to which the young author responded well. Disraeli's letters to Colburn soon became very personal in tone, even to the point of teasing. His loyalty to Colburn was strengthened by the difficult partnership with and separation from Bentley, after which Disraeli maintained an exclusive relationship with Colburn for a decade and a half. Perhaps the ultimate proof of Disraeli's trust in his publisher is the fact that he led his maiden sister, elderly father, and various friends to entrust their works to him. If anything, Colburn felt this attachment even more strongly. He grew from admiring Disraeli as a writer to being charmed by his playful impertinence to respecting him as a clever yet sympathetic colleague. Disraeli was in fact the only correspondent who provoked the publisher into commenting on his personal feelings; in 1835, the publisher wrote to Disraeli, 'I feel with regard to yourself as I do towards scarcely any other person as to the desire of meeting your wishes' (HP 235/3, 12-13). Though not an especially passionate declaration, this is actually one of the most personal remarks to be found in all of Colburn's papers. Taken together with other subtle yet revealing comments and his

many generous actions towards Disraeli, it becomes clear that this relationship had an emotional depth that Colburn's dealings with his other authors lacked.

The *degree* of intimacy in the relationship is very difficult to judge. Disraeli's remarks and behaviour can be especially hard to interpret; he was flamboyant and inconsistent at the best of times and he also suffered through bouts of depression. And underlying all of the sentiment is the complicating truth that theirs was at heart a business alliance. It should never be forgotten that Colburn and Disraeli were, first and foremost, publisher and author, burdened with all of the tensions and pressures of that working relationship. Additional difficulties lay in Colburn's continually being classed as a tradesman while Disraeli aspired to the status of gentleman. Thus it is their business alliance that is of primary importance and forms the basis for the secondary consideration of the emotional bond between the two. To begin to understand any aspect of the relationship, however, one must return to its origins and the circumstances that first brought Disraeli to Colburn.

SILVER-FORK POLISHERS

We have already seen how, in the course of his first twenty years in business, Henry Colburn's publishing focus included a mixture of non-fiction to fiction. Initially, he had published whatever novels seemed likely to sell and, even as his business plans became more sophisticated, his primary concern remained popularity, not literary quality or style. His pursuit of the popular met with early success when the most sensational novel of the 1810s landed on his desk—Lady Caroline Lamb had decided that Colburn was the man to publish *Glenarvon* (1816), a thinly veiled account of her liaison with Lord Byron. *Glenarvon* surely owed a large measure of its success to its subject matter and the associated scandal, but another attraction was its survey of life in high society by

someone on the inside. Of course, this had always been one of the selling points of Colburn's aristocratic memoirs as well. At the relaunch of his firm in New Burlington Street, the publisher decided also to relaunch himself as a specialist in tales of high life.

Colburn's first move was to hire Theodore Hook, editor of *John Bull*, to write about fashionable society. His proffered £600 fee called forth a three-volume collection of sketches called *Sayings and Doings* (1824), which rewarded Colburn's enterprise by selling over six thousand copies. This was incontrovertible proof that the publisher had indeed discovered an untapped market. He responded by awarding Hook a £350 bonus and contracts for two more series of sketches. From this point forward, Colburn both commissioned tales of fashionable life and gave precedence to manuscripts of that description that came unsolicited to his office. These books—usually novels rather than sketches—captured in great detail the leisured life of the aristocratic few, cataloguing their social engagements and reproducing their 'quizzing' talk. Many of them focused on a younger son's quest for fame, fortune, and love, but there were plenty of variations on the theme. Truly indispensable were their hints at what was currently fashionable and their veiled portraits or caricatures of real society figures. The upper classes thus perused these novels to discover portrayals of themselves and their friends, while the aspirational classes read them as training manuals. It was not a very edifying genre, but after years of elevated poetry and often didactic novels, it certainly proved to be a popular one.

In 1827, William Hazlitt skewered this new brand of fiction in an article for the *Examiner* called 'The Dandy School'. Hazlitt complained that these fashionable novels were 'superficial', displaying only 'the servility, egotism, and upstart pretensions of the writers' (721). Especially irksome to him was Hook's awed repetition of the peculiar detail 'that the quality eat fish with silver forks' (722). (Strangely enough, Disraeli was equally impressed with this detail, writing in an 1824 letter about a dinner that was

‘served up in the neatest and purest manner imaginable, silver forks, etc’ [quoted in Ridley 28].) If Hazlitt was displeased with the recurrence of this phrase in one book, he must have been thoroughly vexed when it slipped into common parlance as the name of the entire school: silver-fork fiction.

Alison Adburgham and Matthew Rosa are the only two scholars to have produced book-length studies of the genre. Both have difficulty deciding what exactly constitutes a silver-fork novel and, consequently, do not agree on the first example. Adburgham leans towards Lady Morgan’s *O’Donnell* in 1814 or possibly *Glenarvon* in 1816, while Rosa believes that the first was Robert Ward’s *Tremaine* in 1825. Regardless, the key concept here is that all three of these titles were published by Colburn. Both Adburgham and Rosa happily concede that he was the driving force behind the genre: ‘He was its conceptor, producer, editor, publisher and—most effectively—promoter’ (Adburgham 23). Rosa suspects that Colburn accounted for perhaps ninety percent of all silver-fork novels (178) and marvels at his manipulation of the genre: ‘there are no [other publishers] who have controlled so many best sellers over so long a period of time’ (179). While this is impressive, Colburn’s success should not be so surprising. After all, who else had better connections to the class of writers and readers that formed the bedrock of the silver-fork school? Who else had a fleet of periodicals aimed at this readership in which to promote his publications? Who else had built his career on trend-spotting and investment therein? Once Colburn had given up his sideline in librarianship and moved into full-time publishing, there was no one better positioned to turn a handful of silver-fork stories into a thriving genre.

Just as Colburn sought to capitalize on his new silver-fork success, he received a fortunate visit from one Sara Austen, who came bearing the manuscript for a novel called *Tremaine*. She was married to a solicitor who counted among his friends and clients the

man of letters Isaac D'Israeli, who lived near the Austens with his family. The novel that Sara brought to Colburn, however, was neither her own handiwork nor her neighbour's but that of Robert Ward (who later changed his name to Robert Plumer Ward). Ward was another of Benjamin Austen's legal clients and an uptight gentleman who had just completed a long and undistinguished career in the House of Commons (Adburgham 79). Because he was not sanguine about his novel's prospects, he maintained his anonymity by recruiting Sara Austen as his intermediary. She copied out Ward's manuscript in her own hand and then negotiated with Colburn on his behalf. She intimated that the author was an exalted member of high society; Colburn may or may not have believed this, but he certainly did his utmost to convince the public of it. All the advance publicity he constructed along that line helped to sell out several editions of *Tremaine*, largely negating the fact that the author's fashionability did not live up to its claims.

Colburn's next silver-fork success was *Granby*, the work of a proper blue blood, the young and dashing Thomas Henry Lister.⁹ With this novel, Colburn further refined the art of publishing a work anonymously while broadly hinting at the author's aristocratic pedigree—which in this case actually existed. *Granby* enjoyed even greater success than Ward's novel, thanks initially to the publicity campaign, but attributable in the long term to Lister's superior talent for light prose. Readers are referred to Adburgham and Rosa for the complete history of Colburn's silver-fork school, but the short version is that he made a great success of it for over a decade. He published further works by Hook, Ward, and Lister, but also discovered such prolific writers as Catherine Gore and Lady Charlotte Bury. Colburn appreciated authors such as Bury for their titles as much as for their insights into high society, but he also happily published the work of writers who had experienced such society only in their imaginations.

⁹ Rosa inexplicably refers to Lister as one of John Murray's authors, believing that Colburn only acquired his copyrights in the late 1830s (71). That this is wholly untrue is proven by several sources, including the Lister correspondence at the National Art Library and, of course, the first editions of his works.

His critics took aim at the writers in both categories. The staff at *Fraser's Magazine* carried out a personal campaign against one unfortunate novelist whom it treated as a mere toady to the aristocratic despite his genuine patrician pedigree. This was Edward Lytton Bulwer, dismissed by *Fraser's* as a 'silver-fork polisher' (quoted in Sadleir, *Bulwer* 258) but a star in Colburn's school. His first novel, *Falkland* (1827), was a failure, but Colburn accepted the manuscript for his second novel, *Pelham* (1828), and handed it to his in-house readers. When Shoberl advised against it and Ollier contradicted him, Colburn read it himself and declared that it would be the book of the year. It was. Read as a satire by some, as a pure fashionable novel by others, *Pelham* enjoyed strong sales not just in 1828 but throughout the nineteenth century. Bulwer followed it up with other successful titles for Colburn, but it was *Pelham* that made his name—and it was *Pelham* that prompted Benjamin Disraeli to write him what was essentially a fan letter. It was a tentative start to a strong friendship between two of Colburn's most illustrious authors, a friendship that would continue throughout Colburn's lifetime. But Disraeli was already well acquainted with silver-forkery before *Pelham's* debut.

Back in 1825, Benjamin Disraeli—not yet twenty-one years old—felt increasingly frustrated with his lot in life. He was bright and reasonably well educated, but as he had been taught at home and in small private schools, he had none of the social advantages that came with attending public school or university. His Jewish heritage isolated him further, although he had been baptized into the Church of England. The D'Israeli family was comfortably well off, but not rich. Benjamin's father Isaac was a literary man who largely preferred the seclusion of his library to the bustle of fashionable society. Isaac had arranged for Benjamin to read law with the most prominent Jewish barrister in the country, but his son was not interested—a fact that the barrister realised when Benjamin turned up for his first day in chambers carrying a copy of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*

(Ridley 30). A legal career was not to be, but Benjamin was still unsure about where his future lay. Restless to do something and excited by the political and economic events of the day, he availed himself of Isaac's best contact: his publisher, John Murray.

Murray had been Byron's publisher and was still producing successful new works, along with the influential Tory journal, the *Quarterly Review*. Benjamin Disraeli came to him with a variety of schemes, including the creation of a new pro-Tory newspaper, the distribution of Tory pamphlets written by himself, and investment in South American mining companies. The normally cautious Murray was won over by Disraeli's enthusiasm and self-confidence. Sorting out exactly what happened between Murray and Disraeli in the few months during which these schemes lasted is outside our purposes here, but suffice it to say that the end result was just short of disaster.¹⁰ Disraeli lacked experience in both political and literary affairs and frankly was out of his depth. Financing the schemes had put him into considerable debt—but it had done even more damage to Murray who, in his anger, severed ties with the entire D'Israeli family. In return, Isaac vowed never to publish with him again. Even Benjamin's reclusive mother Maria made herself heard, telling Murray that he should have known better than to put his trust and his money behind a callow twenty-year-old (Ridley 48).

A depression settled on Benjamin Disraeli after this episode, and he remained for some time in seclusion with his family. They holidayed in Hyde House, near Amersham, rented from none other than Robert Ward. His *Tremaine* was the talk of the town—and although the identity of the author remained a secret to the general public, the D'Israeli circle were in the know. This went to work on Benjamin's lively imagination and, soon enough, Ward had unwittingly inspired Disraeli's next foray into the world of publishing: he would write a silver-fork novel. Disraeli assumed that it was of little importance that

¹⁰ Ridley provides the fullest account available of this debacle, in chapter two of *The Young Disraeli*.

he had almost no first-hand experience of his subject matter, apart from dining off real silver forks. He based his tale on what he had read, heard, and imagined about society and based his hero on himself. This was not a substantially different procedure from that of many other silver-fork novelists, but Disraeli did manage to give his novel, *Vivian Grey*, even less of a plot than was usual and noticeably more wit.

When he had completed the first few chapters, he showed them to the trusty Sara Austen. She reacted with great enthusiasm and immediately set about arranging the novel's anonymous publication, for which she again turned to Colburn. She seems to have insinuated that, like *Tremaine*, this new novel was written by a prominent member of high society. The fact that Colburn offered only £200 for the copyright to *Vivian Grey*—his standard sum for a promising unknown, but about half of what he had offered for *Tremaine* and *Granby*—seems to indicate that he had doubts about the author's credentials. One certainly would have expected the publisher, with twenty years' experience of dealing with aristocrats, to recognize that one had not authored *Vivian Grey*. At any rate, Disraeli was happy with the £200 and the publication processes got underway, with Sara Austen complaining to Colburn that his printers, Samuel and Richard Bentley, were slow and inefficient. Colburn seems to have taken little notice of this as he was engaged in publicizing the new work just as he had *Tremaine* and *Granby*.

Colburn's handling of the publicity for *Vivian Grey* demonstrates some of the techniques that brought him commercial success while rousing the ire of his competitors and damaging his own reputation. He took advantage of his stake in several periodicals by circulating as literary intelligence puffs about the real people caricatured in the novel. Colburn also asked William Jerdan for a favourable notice in the *Literary Gazette*, wherein duly appeared a three-page puff with extensive quotations. And of course, he played up interest in the author's anonymity. Rosa opines that 'since Colburn himself did

not know the author's name, he probably experienced an unusual glow of righteousness when he urged his puff-writers to concoct innumerable hints concerning the illustrious author' (101). All of Colburn's efforts stirred up great demand for the book on its publication on 22 April 1826. The speculation as to the author's identity intensified. Colburn seems to have become carried away with it, telling the sub-editor of the *New Monthly* that 'I have a capital book out, *Vivian Grey*, the authorship is a great secret—a man of high fashion—very high—keeps the first society' (Redding, *Fifty Years* 322). If he truly believed this, then he must have been as shocked as everyone else when the author's true identity finally emerged. As Ridley puts it, 'reviewers kicked themselves for swallowing Colburn's puff and allowing a young unknown Jew to pull the wool over their eyes' (49). The *Literary Magnet* was sure that Disraeli and Sara Austen 'had conspired to defraud Colburn' (quoted in Blake 42), while other magazines denounced both author and publisher for their deceit. Colburn handled the backlash to *Vivian Grey* in his own inimitable manner: he offered Disraeli £500 for a sequel.

The young author was initially hurt at the row over *Vivian Grey*, which saw him called everything from a puppy and a dandy to a fraud and an irrelevance. It may have precipitated the depressive illness he suffered in the summer of 1826, which was only alleviated by a tour of the continent with the Austens. On his return to London, however, Disraeli—still burdened with debt—gratefully accepted Colburn's offer and delivered *Vivian Grey, Part II*. Published on 23 February 1827, it did not perform as well as the original nor was it as good. Disraeli responded to the criticism of it by writing an article for Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine* that explained the classical precedents for some of its scenes. The publisher passed it on to the editor, Thomas Campbell, but he was not as pliable as his counterpart at the *Literary Gazette*. He refused to include the piece without extensive revisions, telling the publisher: 'The article you propose to insert is a puff of the

most extravagant and iniquitous praise such as I could not shew my face in society if it suffered to appear under my auspices' (HP 235/3, 10-11).¹¹ When Colburn pressed him on the matter, the virtuous Campbell wrote him a reply dated 26 March 1827, saying 'there never was greater infatuation than your forgetting how much higher you stand as the proprietor of an unimpeachable & honourable work like the New Monthly than as the proprietor of a gossiping & ephemeral novel' (NAL F.48.E.11, 60-61). 'Infatuation' is a curious choice of words to describe Colburn's attitude towards the author of *Vivian Grey*, and the letter in which it appeared was enough to make the publisher back down.

'THE MASTER'

It may have been Colburn's nascent fond feelings for Disraeli that prompted him to offer the young man another £500 for his next novel and to begin entreating him to write for his periodicals, but he surely had some sound reasons as well. The generous sum was an investment in the future, binding Disraeli to him with gratitude and a sense of allegiance, in hopes that his future productions would prove as successful as his first. In the short term, securing Disraeli's services allowed Colburn to capitalize on the sensation of *Vivian Grey* before it was forgotten. Though to the modern mind this seems a logical, even normal, way to proceed, it actually led to yet more criticism of Colburn, on the charge of manufacturing novels as if they were simple commodities. As with his publicity techniques, Colburn's production methods were indeed more progressive than some members of the trade would have preferred. He was on the cutting edge of the industrialization of the publishing trade, opening it up to different types of publishers and of readers. When William Maginn satirized Colburn in *Whitehall* (1827), his main target was actually Colburn's perceived 'mass production' of popular novels. Maginn's farce of

¹¹ The fact that this letter ended up in Disraeli's papers suggests that Colburn later gave it to him, perhaps as a kind of private joke between them.

‘Henri Le Grand’ as a slave driver is not only amusing but also includes a very interesting encounter with one ‘slave’ in particular.

Henri Le Grand (also known as ‘Harry Badger’ and ‘The Master’) owns a manufactory on Burlington Street filled with writers—fifteen to a desk (322)—whom he refers to as journeymen. The image of them as hired hands is reinforced when The Master berates them for being idle and not producing as much as they should. He complains, for example, that ‘there’s not a man among you who has done a sheet, this blessed day, yet’ (306); one only needs to know that a sheet equals sixteen octavo pages and that the time in this scene is not yet 9.00 a.m. to take Maginn’s point. Quantity is so much more important than quality that the foreman weighs manuscripts to judge how well work is progressing. As The Master continues to castigate his workers, he looks at one youth and shouts, “‘you, Sir, [...] you passed me off, as materials fit for high life, a commodity that belonged to a Jew washer-woman. Dang me, but I could find it in my heart to let them there confounded slinking shoulders feel the taste of—’” (307-8). The Master’s verbal assault is here interrupted when the young man faints from fear and gashes his head on the fine marble floor.

There can be no doubt that the youth is Disraeli—the Jewish reference being particularly obvious—or that The Master’s remarks refer specifically to the deception surrounding his authorship of *Vivian Grey*. Maginn also makes a clear point about class by having Henri Le Grand, in contrast to his name, speak in such a low and uncouth manner. With the characters and background thus established, the scene continues:

The Master displayed, however, a touch of a feeling mind upon this occasion—for though he was obliged to keep his workmen in order, he was naturally of a kind disposition.

“Get him to bed,” said he, “and put some horse turpentine in the cut, and you may give him some beef-tea with his gruel. You need not come to-morrow to work, my lad.”

The grateful looks of the youth as he was borne out testified his sense of the clemency of his master, and impressed Smithers [the hero of *Whitehall*] with a

high opinion of the manner in which affairs were carried on in the manufactory.
(308-309)

It need hardly be said that Maginn was in fact less than impressed with the manner in which Colburn's affairs were carried on, nor was he convinced of the publisher's oft-remarked kindness and beneficence. But in trying to parody these qualities—something he does accomplish with great humour, the gruel being a particularly fine touch—Maginn actually paints a fairly accurate portrait of Colburn's relationship with Disraeli. The publisher truly was generous to his young author, both financially and in standing by him during controversy, while the author was growing to recognize and appreciate it. It is unlikely that Maginn actually knew about Disraeli's burgeoning relationship with his publisher but simply just caricatured the author of *Vivian Grey* at this point in the narrative. He nevertheless provides us with a striking image of Colburn and Disraeli.

The young author had accepted Colburn's offer of £500 for a new novel to follow parts one and two of *Vivian Grey*; lingering debts from the John Murray affair meant that he was hardly in a position to decline such liberal payments. Accordingly, after another bout of nervous illness, he turned out a one-volume satire called *The Voyage of Captain Popanilla*. Colburn published it in June 1828 but, shortly thereafter, Disraeli became ill yet again. Ridley is convinced that all of Disraeli's health problems were related to depression, a condition from which his father had suffered, but it is impossible to make a definitive diagnosis at this remove. If Disraeli himself did not know the exact cause of his poor health, he at least felt confident that travel would succeed where his physicians' 'cures' had failed. It had worked in 1826, so in 1829 Disraeli conceived a visit to the Levant. Such a trip would require money that he did not have. Disraeli's creditors were bearing down upon him and his only apparent source of income (besides loans from his friends) was the handful of articles he submitted to Colburn's *Court Journal*. There was

only one way to acquire enough money for his big trip; on 8 December 1829, he explained it to Sara Austen's husband Benjamin:

I fear I must *hack* for it. A literary prostitute I have never yet been, tho' born in an age of general prostitution, and tho' I have more than once been subject to temptations which might have been the *ruination* of a less virtuous young woman. My muse however is still a virgin, but the mystical flower, I fear, must soon be plucked. Colburn I suppose will be the bawd. Tempting Mother Colburn! (BDL 74)

Though the concept of literary prostitution is fascinating (as is the transposition of Disraeli and Colburn into feminine roles), Disraeli does not create the impression that it seriously concerned him. It is employed in this letter, with his usual theatrical style, to dramatise the situation and is not mentioned again. Disraeli seems to have had no real misgivings about writing—or *hacking*—for a living and certainly wasted no time in starting work on another novel, this one with an obvious silver-fork title: *The Young Duke*.

About halfway through the writing of this novel, on 14 February 1830, Disraeli paused to consult his publisher. The letter has already been quoted in part at the beginning of chapter one, but it reveals so much about Colburn and Disraeli's relationship, that it is worth considering now in full:

PRIVATE

Dear Sir,

Forward the enclosed [letter to Catherine Gore] and don't look pale about the postage, which I will religiously discharge when we meet. I have not forgotten you, tho' the preparations for my departure and another cause have prevented me lately sending you a contribution. In a word, being declared to be in a decline, which is all stuff, but really with positive Exile, probable Death, and possible Damnation hanging over me, I have been fool enough to be intent upon a novel—But such a novel! It will astound you, draw tears from Princesses, and grins from Printers devils: it will atone for all the stupid books you have been lately publishing, and allow me to die in a blaze. In a word to give you an idea of it. It is exactly the kind of work which you wo[ul]d write yourself, if you had time, and delightfully adapted to the most corrupt taste. This immortal work which will set all Europe afire and not be forgotten till at least 3 months has only one fault—it is not written.

Seriously however *a volume and ½* are finished, but as I must go off before the end of March I am afraid it is impossible to let you have it, but perhaps I can

finish it at Rome before I go off to Greece, and then you can have it for next Season. A pity because it is exactly suited to the present. Write if you wish me to hatch this Phoenix—but any rate be SECRET AS THE GRAVE.

In haste

B. Disraeli

P.S. I have not yet read Mrs. C[atherine] G[ore]'s novel, which how[ever], I have. You are publishing a good deal of dull stuff. *Imitations of imitations*. (BDL 76)

If ever proof were needed of Henry Colburn's fondness for Benjamin Disraeli, this letter is it. How else to explain his passive acceptance of Disraeli's remarks about his 'dull' and 'stupid' books? True, Colburn was used to jibes at his publications and, at any rate, seems to have harboured few illusions about their literary quality, but it is difficult to imagine him tolerating such disparagement from any other author whose last two efforts were still languishing in the warehouse. Yet Disraeli clearly sensed that he was on safe ground here, trusting that Colburn would find his cheekiness endearing.

Indeed, for a man who had spent far more time in his sick room than in New Burlington Street, Disraeli seems to have taken a pretty accurate measure of his publisher. Not only had he correctly gauged Colburn's tolerance and affection for him, but he had also discerned precisely the characteristics of a typical Colburn novel. It was purely of the moment, not expected to last more than a season, and remarkably similar to those that had gone before. It promised laughter and tears and a hint of scandal. So sure was Disraeli of his man that he even claimed to know what Colburn himself would write. He certainly knew how Colburn would puff the novel and how the press would react. Whether he dreaded the kind of vicious reaction that had met *Vivian Grey* or whether he simply hankered after a publisher who could elevate his reputation, Disraeli pulled a surprising and dirty move: having planned *The Young Duke* for Colburn all along, upon its completion, he offered it to Murray. There is nothing to show that Colburn either knew about this or reacted to it. After Murray turned it down, the next we know is that Disraeli sealed the deal with Colburn and headed for the Levant with another £500 payment.

Between Colburn's reception of the manuscript in May 1830 and its publication in April 1831, there is a strange pause. There is no definite explanation for the delay but that need not imply any bad blood between author and publisher over the Murray affair. The initial delay in *The Young Duke*'s publication is explained by the fact that, as Disraeli implied in his 14 February letter, the novel would have to be held back till the beginning of the next 'season', which began in October. The secondary delay might be explained by the wave of populist sentiment after the death of George IV, making it an unpropitious time to publish the dandiacal story of a fabulously wealthy aristocrat. This, at least, was how Benjamin Disraeli's sister Sarah saw things: 'in this our mobbing and huzzaing age, Colburn deems us too vulgar' (quoted in Ridley 80).

It is hard to know whether *The Young Duke* really was the sort of novel Colburn would have written, but we can easily imagine that he relished it as a publisher. The story is simply about a young man who learns that the love of a good woman is more valuable than his money and property, but it takes in every possible silver-fork convention *en route* to its moral. One of Disraeli's characters actually quotes a receipt for this sort of production: 'Take a pair of pistols and a pack of cards, a cookery-book and a set of new quadrilles; mix them up with half an intrigue and a whole marriage, and divide them into three equal portions' (Bk. III, Ch. I, 122). *The Young Duke* continues in this humorously self-referential vein and also sidles into self-publicity: 'I never venture to a strange dinner, lest I should stumble upon a fashionable novelist; and even with all this vigilance, and all this denial, I have an intimate friend whom I cannot cut, and who, they say, writes for the *Court Journal*' (Bk. III, Ch. VIII, 162). Eventually, Disraeli pulls out all the stops and mentions Ward and Bulwer by name. If Colburn had not already been won over by the high standard of silver-forkery and Disraeli's familiar facetious tone, he must surely have loved the author's bold attempts at puffery.

‘A KINDLY FEELING’

In all of his previous dealings with Henry Colburn, Disraeli had bypassed his staff and dealt directly with the publisher himself, but he would return from the Levant to find things changed at New Burlington Street: a new person had joined the firm in a conspicuous position. In September 1829, Colburn had taken on one of his printers, Richard Bentley, as a partner in his firm for a three-year period. Their partnership is surveyed in the next chapter, but the salient points are that Colburn intended to go into semi-retirement in 1832 and leave the publishing concern in Bentley’s hands. Colburn would continue to manage his periodicals and reprint his large store of old copyrights as and when he saw fit. Bentley was a questionable choice as partner and successor because of the contrast between his personality and Colburn’s—friction seemed unavoidable. Though younger than Colburn by ten years, Bentley was far more sober, methodical, and conventional than his partner. In contrast to Colburn’s good-humoured and relaxed approach to business, Bentley proved to be a legalistic bean counter.

Almost inevitably then, things went badly wrong from the very beginning. Bentley was startled by the vast sums Colburn was spending, not to mention the state of his account books, and professed to be shocked upon discovering the nature and extent of his puffery. Colburn, for his part, was annoyed at what he saw as Bentley’s meddling in his perfectly successful business practices but must have been appalled by the way Bentley treated their authors. He exhibited none of the warmth, tolerance, or understanding that marked Colburn’s easy relationships with most of his writers. We have already seen that Disraeli had had an unpleasant experience with Bentley as the printer of *Vivian Grey*, but it seems likely that Bentley’s manner was the real key to understanding Disraeli’s continuing dislike of him; certainly, some of Disraeli’s correspondence from

1831 neatly demonstrates the disparity between the two publishers' approaches and could only have reinforced his loyalty to Colburn.

Finances were a perpetual problem for Disraeli, who had piled new travel expenses atop old debts. He told friends that Colburn was willing to help fund his travels privately, writing, for example, on 3 November 1831 that Colburn 'had promised to honor my draught to any discreet amount' (BDL 120). Disraeli had gained a great deal of business savvy by this time and, realising that a publisher had much to gain by making him his debtor, he managed to circumvent the need for a personal loan from Colburn. Nevertheless, Disraeli's numerous references to Colburn's offer show how much it flattered him. In stark contrast to this is a letter *to* Disraeli dated just one month later, 9 December 1831 (BL Add.MS.46640, 71). The letter is from Colburn and Bentley, reminding him that he had received a £100 advance on a second edition of *The Young Duke*, but since a second edition had not yet been called for, the firm wanted its money back. It is impossible to reconcile this note with the earlier letter and with Colburn's usual financial liberality—why would he demand the return of £100 from Disraeli only weeks after offering him an almost unlimited sum? In truth, Colburn did not want his money back: although the letter is signed with both partners' names, it is wholly in the handwriting of Richard Bentley. Disraeli, like Colburn, preferred to take the long view of business matters and had little tolerance for this kind of pettiness. Bentley's ungenerous behaviour was duly noted.

The Bentley problem surfaced again in connection with Colburn's periodicals, which had taken on special prominence as the prop of his coming semi-retirement. After the poet Thomas Campbell resigned as editor of Colburn's flagship journal, the *New Monthly*, in 1830, the publisher assumed his duties until he found another celebrity to take the post. The new editor was, of course, the silver-fork polisher himself, Edward Lytton

Bulwer. Bulwer's friendship with Disraeli had extended to a correspondence with him while he was overseas. On his return, Disraeli found that editor and publisher had been plotting to move him from the relatively minor *Court Journal*, to which he had been contributing, to the important *New Monthly*. Bulwer related the news in a letter on 8 November 1831:

My dear Disraeli
Pray let me not be the last—if I have not been among the first to congratulate you on your safe return. I only heard of it yesterday from our mutual Ally of the Burlington Street Delphos “Mr. Disraeli, Sir, is come to town—young Mr. Disraeli! —Won't he give us a nice light article about his travels?”...Of that hereafter. But while, at present neglecting the hint of our worthy Publisher, I by no means forget it. (HP 104/1, 21-22)

This is a jocular letter, but it has some serious implications: if ‘the Burlington Street Delphos’ is Colburn and Bentley, and their ‘mutual Ally’ within it is Colburn, then the enemy they are allied against would seem to be Bentley. Bulwer's dislike of this junior partner never matched Disraeli's, but two years into the Colburn and Bentley partnership, he clearly still considered only the former to be his ‘worthy Publisher’. Colburn, for his part, was still showing his authors a generous hand. After he and Bulwer induced Disraeli to write three articles for the *New Monthly* (presumably with little difficulty), the editor wrote to Disraeli on 18 August 1832 that ‘Mr Colburn has sent me [9 pounds, 9 shillings] for your little paper [...] being at the rate of 20 [guineas] a sheet—His very highest Reward’ (HP 104/1, 34).

At the dissolution of their partnership on 31 August 1832, Colburn and Bentley were no longer on speaking terms. Colburn had retreated to his counting house on Great Marlborough Street and started to question the wisdom of selling his ‘good will’—a misnomer if ever there was one—to Bentley. The former printer had problems of his own. On becoming head of the New Burlington Street firm, Bentley had also expected to become the doyen of silver-fork publishing. But because Colburn had taken the lucrative

pre-1829 back catalogue with him, the earliest (and some of the best) silver-fork titles were outside of Bentley's control. Even worse, many of the genre's biggest names, including Gore and Bury, had left with Colburn. Bentley was taken aback by their loyalty, as he considered his former partner to be unscrupulous and a poor businessman; Colburn, however, was now reaping his reward for years of treating his authors kindly and indulgently. Though the partnership's deed of dissolution decreed that Colburn should no longer publish new works, some of his loyal authors made a point of not publishing with Bentley either, and most continued to contribute to Colburn's magazines. To Bentley's dismay, Benjamin Disraeli was firmly with the majority.

The Colburn and Bentley split hit Disraeli almost as hard as it hit the two erstwhile partners. At the time of *The Young Duke*, Disraeli had happily contracted for a new novel, thinking only of Henry Colburn as his publisher, much as Bulwer had. As the partnership's dissolution approached, however, Disraeli saw that he would now be unhappily contracted to Richard Bentley. Feeling the need to escape this obligation—and also recognizing an opportunity to move to a more prestigious publisher—Disraeli wrote with a unique combination of servility and self-confidence to John Murray. In a letter dated 4 March 1832, Disraeli explained that 'in quitting my present publisher, I incur, from the terms of our last agreement, a *virtual penalty*, which I have no means to pay except by the proceeds of my pen'—and then he asked for an advance to pay the penalty (BDL 148). Always a sucker for Disraeli's particular brand of enthusiasm, Murray agreed to the deal.

Alas, Disraeli soon found out what Colburn had known all along: namely, that upmarket literary publishers did not know how to promote fashionable novels or have a suitable clientele for them. When Murray published Disraeli's novel *Contarini Fleming* at the end of 1832, it was an utter failure, despite continuing endorsement from Colburn's

Literary Gazette and *New Monthly Magazine*, the latter still in Bulwer's hands. Murray declined to publish Disraeli's next offering, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy*. Saunders and Otley, who had of course been Colburn's successors when he sold his circulating library, published it in 1833. Disraeli liked these partners and enthused about the support and encouragement they gave him. But the honeymoon with Saunders and Otley—or 'S and O', as Disraeli always called them—did not last long. When the partners noted their displeasure with a political satire Disraeli was preparing with his sister Sarah, *A Year at Hartlebury, or the Election*, he wrote to her that 'I am in the greatest rage with S and O' (BDL 306). They published the book in 1834 but, as they had no success with either it or *Alroy*, they like Murray declined any further Disraeli novels.

Adding to Disraeli's woes were the numerous parliamentary election campaigns he mounted and lost during this period (two in 1832 and a further two in 1835). Through all the difficulties, however, Disraeli continued to receive support from Colburn, who hired him as a regular contributor to his *New Monthly*. After signing a contract on this matter in May 1834, it is probably not wholly coincidental that Disraeli complimented Colburn on the *New Monthly* the very next month, writing, 'I think your Mag: is improving' (BDL 333). Facetious remarks aside, the poor sales of his novels and the expensive election campaigns meant that Disraeli was still having difficulty ordering his financial affairs as late as 1836. (Ridley calls him 'a debtor by profession' at this stage in his life [189].) He owed Benjamin Austen money and needed an advance from Colburn to cover it. The publisher was apparently not quick enough off the mark with his £100. Disraeli wrote to Austen about the delay on Colburn's part, adding 'you know what a difficult man he is to manage' (BDL 523). Interestingly, Disraeli immediately qualifies this by explaining, 'At this moment too he is entirely absorbed with a new arrangement of his Magazine and the quarrels of rival editors [Theodore Hook and S. C. Hall]'.

The year 1836, however, marked a turning point for Henry Colburn and, by extension, for Benjamin Disraeli. Colburn's magazines and reprints of old books were doing fairly well, but he wanted to return to the publishing of new works and finally found a legal loophole that would let him do it. Bentley, loathe to have to compete with 'The Master' but leery of taking him to court, settled with his former partner for a hefty fee. Colburn thus returned to the trade he loved, settling his firm into his Great Marlborough Street premises. Whether in relation to the settlement with Bentley or to another matter, Disraeli evidently made some sort of gesture in support of Colburn at this point. In a letter to Disraeli dated 22 August 1836, Colburn wrote: 'I am exceedingly obliged to you for your advocacy of my cause; for I think you entertain a kindly feeling towards me' (HP 235/3, 21-22). Be that as it may, Disraeli was definitely about to entertain a feeling of gratitude for his publisher's return.

After the instability that marked most of the decade for both Colburn and Disraeli, everything fell into place throughout 1836 and 1837: Colburn wholly re-established himself as a publisher of new works and Disraeli finally made it to Parliament (as Tory M.P. for Maidstone). He nevertheless found time to write the novel *Henrietta Temple*, for which Colburn paid him his highest fee yet (BDL 511). Colburn published it on 1 December 1836 and set his revamped publicity machine in motion. With *Henrietta Temple*, he produced Disraeli's biggest sale since *Vivian Grey*—a triumph for author and publisher alike (Ridley 183). A letter from Disraeli to his sister detailed their success:

I saw Colburn yesterday who met me with a smiling face. The sale is very brisk and increases. [...] He is in excellent spirits and says if I can only manage to get out another book this season, of a deep and high interest, he thinks I shall have regained at a bound all the lost ground of the last 3 years in this sort of work. He has offered me 600£ for a novel by the 1st of May, and wishes it to be serious and pathetic. (BDL 543)

Henrietta Temple proved that Colburn could succeed where more prestigious publishers like Murray had failed. It cemented his business relationship with Disraeli, permanently

stifling his urge to seek the literary cachet that Colburn could not provide. No longer an idealistic virgin, Disraeli had learnt to be content with his bawd.

Disraeli embraced Colburn's plan to hurry out another novel in the next year but briefly lost his confidence in the new book: as he sat down to work on it, he quipped that he would be ruining Colburn (BDL 551). It was Colburn's own confidence, however, that bolstered him; later the same month, Disraeli noted with gratification that 'He cannot receive too much of my writings now he says or too speedily' (BDL 567). Not only was Colburn eager to return to publishing new works, he evidently was trying to make up for lost time—and lost Disraeli. *Venetia* (discussed in chapter six) was published in May 1837, and though it was not an unqualified success like *Henrietta Temple*, neither did it ruin the publisher.

Later that same year Disraeli wrote one of the most intriguing lines in all of his intriguing letters. On 15 December, the new M.P. wrote to his sister about Talfourd's copyright bill, saying, 'I suggested a clause to Talfourd, with the idea of which I had been furnished by Colburn' (BDL 690). What the clause was and whether it was eventually enshrined in law we do not know, but this is quite a testament to Disraeli's faith in Colburn's judgment on all matters relating to publishing. Colburn must have been well pleased to find that he, a mere trade publisher who had just survived a bruising struggle with Bentley, had the ear of a rising young M.P. and had made a tiny contribution to parliamentary debate. No wonder he was smiling and 'in excellent spirits'.

'A RUN OF LUCK'

It has already been established that Disraeli was given to making impertinent remarks about Colburn, sometimes negating them in the next sentence. This part of his changeable nature comes to the fore in his correspondence for 1839. The first of his

remarks draws on Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. In February 1839, Disraeli noted: 'Coming from the house with Bul[wer], settled Bentley was Fagin; Colburn the artful Dodger; S[aunder]s and Otley, Claypole' (BDL 889). In fairness, we must bear in mind that this was a comparison dreamt up late at night after a trip to the theatre with Bulwer and made at least partly in jest. But it is also true that when Disraeli remembered it the following day, he still found it worth mentioning in a letter to his sister. And why not? The name alone conjures up vivid associations with Colburn: 'Artful' betrays a sneaking admiration for the cleverness, even artistry, he employed in practising his trade; 'Dodger' aptly describes his ability to escape all the criticism and problems that beset him. One appraisal of the Artful Dodger could just as easily have been made of Colburn: "'That 'ere Dodger has such a run of luck that there's no standing again' him'" (XXV, 192). Then, too, Colburn, like the Dodger, made much of his own good luck.

While still being wary of investing Disraeli's casual comment with too great a significance, it is useful nevertheless to consider the other comparisons he notes: as Henry Colburn is the Artful Dodger, so Richard Bentley is Fagin, and Saunders and Otley together are Noah Claypole. The point of all this is basically to establish publishers as the villains of the literary world—a notion which Bulwer apparently supported. But in *Oliver Twist*, Fagin is the blackest of villains, entrapping children in desperate lives of crime and prostitution. In the end, he is hanged. By comparison, the Artful Dodger is merely a pickpocket. Moreover, he is a very talented one, working hard to master the intricacies of his trade and deserving the admiration of his peers. So far is the Artful Dodger from the vileness and evil-doing of Fagin that he actually becomes something of a likeable rogue, with Dickens allowing him to bow out in an amusing courtroom scene instead of troubling the Dodger with a prison sentence or transportation.

Strangely, the fates of these fictional characters approximate those of their publishing counterparts during the 1840s. Saunders and Otley had, like Claypole in *Oliver Twist*, always been minor players in the publishing trade, and they found themselves increasingly marginalized in the new Victorian era. Bentley's ungenerous character alienated him from several authors, including Dickens himself, and his rigid attitude towards business found him struggling throughout the decade (Barnes, *Free Trade* 39). Colburn, however, escaped the trials of the 1830s to become once again a successful publisher, though he would never recapture the glamour of his silver-fork heyday. He recognized that that genre was dead or dying and continually adapted his publications to suit his readers' tastes. The same was true of Disraeli, who had as a politician changed parties to suit voters' tastes (more than once) and was now eager to bury his silver-fork past and move on to something new.

The other difficult remarks that Disraeli made in 1839, besides those relating to *Oliver Twist*, appeared in a letter that is no longer extant. All we have is the reply in Henry Colburn's hand, which reveals, at one and the same time, Disraeli's volatility and the publisher's affectionate tolerance of it. Unfortunately, the handwriting is illegible in parts, but it is still possible to decipher two unquestionably important statements: 'I certainly never expected that you would call in question my zeal or my liberality' and 'I do therefore feel much hurt at the tone of your letter' (HP 235/3, 29-30). We can easily understand how the habitually zealous and liberal Colburn would be stung by comments to the contrary, coming from his literary pride and joy, Disraeli. That Colburn felt it was appropriate to come right out and express his pain speaks of both the depth of his feeling and the solidity of their relationship. True to form, the rest of this letter goes on to discuss the usual sort of business concerns and the matter of Disraeli's hurtful letter seems to have rested there.

Once embarked on his political career, it was some time before Disraeli had the time and inclination to write another novel. When he did, he produced *Coningsby; or, the New Generation*, a seminal social problem novel that ended his tenure as a silver-fork novelist. Its publication in 1844 marked the first time his name appeared on a novel's title page, but the name of the publisher was a very familiar one: Henry Colburn. It may seem odd that the publisher whose name was practically synonymous with the silver-fork school brought out the novel, but Colburn had already seen the writing on the wall and moved away from fashionable novels towards domestic fiction. This might have been less consequential than the simple fact that Disraeli had known Colburn for close to twenty years and trusted him to look after his personal and professional best interests. *Coningsby* was an unqualified commercial success, the importance of which is attested to by the Hughenden Papers. There, amongst hundreds of boxes of correspondence and official documents, lies just one box of press cuttings commemorating Disraeli's long career as a writer: the vast majority of these concern *Coningsby*. Interestingly, Colburn himself, who obviously took as much care with publicity as ever, provided some of the cuttings. For example, a copy of *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* containing a glowing notice of *Coningsby* is inscribed 'Henry Colburn, With Mr. Tait's Compts' (HP 226). When a new edition of the book appeared in 1849, the publisher loaned Disraeli his own copies of the notices (HP 188, 153-154).

Coningsby marked the start of another period of close cooperation between the author and publisher. Disraeli wrote and Colburn published two sequels over the next three years: *Sybil; or, the Two Nations* (1845) and *Tancred; or, the New Crusade* (1847). These books make up what has become known as the 'Young England' trilogy, extremely successful in its own time and probably Disraeli's greatest lasting literary achievement. Into this publishing idyll strode the man now irrevocably cast as the villain, Richard

Bentley. One of his greatest solo successes had been his reprint series, the *Standard Novels*, initially conceived with Colburn then carried on alone. Late in 1845, with *Coningsby* and *Sybil* enjoying much popular acclaim, Bentley shrewdly determined to introduce into the series *The Young Duke*, the copyright of which had devolved to him at the dissolution of the partnership. Disraeli, now a rising politician and an author of 'serious' works, was not keen to have his youthful follies paraded before the public and wrote to Bentley to tell him so. Thus began a quarrel that continued for the better part of a year.

Disraeli briefly contended that the copyright was already his, citing an unknown letter from Colburn in June 1830 and the fact that he had bought out his contract with Bentley in 1832 (BDL 1474). Bentley was unconvinced but made a big show of trying to accommodate Disraeli's wishes, writing 'if you can indicate any mode by which our mutual interests can be reconciled it will give me unfeigned pleasure to give my earnest attention to it, so that the publication may be avoided' (HP 235/4, 78). Publication could have been avoided easily enough if Bentley had just accepted the sum Disraeli eventually offered for the copyright, but the publisher wanted a new work instead. Disraeli was immovable in his refusal of this bargain and tried to get his point across by alternately ignoring Bentley and drafting furious letters to him (cf. HP 235/4, 95-96). It is ironic that this quarrel with Bentley should have been about *The Young Duke*, the very novel that Disraeli said Colburn would have written. This, too, was the Colburn novel that had nearly ended up in Murray's hands, and now it had to be rescued from Bentley's. In the end, the 'Burlington Street brigand' (see Patten 75) backed down from battling the M.P. and sold the copyright to Disraeli outright.

Unfortunately for Disraeli, Bentley had been right in anticipating that the popularity of the Young England novels would revive public interest in his early silver-

fork titles instead of obliterating their memory. Never one to miss a sales opportunity, Colburn immediately suggested a collected edition of Disraeli's works. They signed an agreement on this (HP 235/3, 144-145) but Disraeli was not really committed to the project so it was allowed to drop. A few years later he received a very tempting offer for a collected works from Simms and McIntyre and told Colburn about it. The publisher replied that he 'would not stand in the way' of a good arrangement but would not sanction exceptionally cheap reprints either, believing that they damaged the trade (quoted in BDL 2044, n1). Regardless of one's position on cheap reprints, one must admire Colburn's unfailing generosity. Disraeli also deserves credit not only for dealing with the matter in such an open manner but especially for deciding to postpone the collected edition until after Colburn's retirement.

It is only with the Young England trilogy that Mary Anne Disraeli, whom Benjamin had married on 28 August 1839, enters the story of his relationship with Colburn. The publisher had always gotten along well with women, publishing many female authors, and Mary Anne was no exception. This was fortunate because with *Tancred*, Mary Anne became so involved in helping her husband revise the proofs that at one point Colburn was sending them directly to her (BDL 1540, n4). Colburn showed his liking for the couple by the best means at his disposal: he stocked their library with gratis copies of his other publications. Disraeli mentions this twice in a letter to Mary Anne dated 12 December 1848:

[Colburn] also particularly asked about the Library, as his contribution is getting ready, & he hopes to send them to Hughenden as a Xmas present. [...] Colburn put Mrs. Gore's new novel [*The Diamond and the Pearl*] for you in my cab, & made many enquiries after you. He seemed in high spirits & said business was more lively than it had been for some long time. (BDL 1752)

Disraeli tactfully refrained from pointing out the obvious here, namely, that his own novels were responsible for a large part of Colburn's lively trade.

When word began to circulate in the early 1850s that Disraeli was writing a biography of his political ally, Lord George Bentinck, publishers began queuing up to bid for the work (see, for example, Edward Moxon's letter of entreaty: HP 235/4, 29). They seemed to be operating on the assumption that Disraeli would not publish with Colburn, who was by now in his sixties and in the process of turning over his business to his young assistant Daniel Hurst. Even Bulwer, that long-time associate of both Colburn and Disraeli, assumed that the latter would be looking for a new publisher—but he was wrong. The last major publication of Henry Colburn's career, released just months before he formally retired in January 1853, was Benjamin Disraeli's *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography*. It was another success and a fitting denouement to this stage of Colburn and Disraeli's relationship.

As is discussed in chapter five, Colburn was reluctant to retire. It made little difference that he was old and had a sweet young wife waiting for him at home; Colburn's life was publishing and he was loath to leave it. This had been a major problem after the partnership with Bentley and it must have been an issue each subsequent time Colburn considered retirement. That he did consider retirement at other points was revealed by Disraeli in April 1851, when Colburn bowed to the inevitable and again incorporated as 'Colburn & Co.', in preparation for selling the firm. Disraeli reported to Bulwer that 'the venerable Colburn, positively for the last time, is going to retire from business' (BDL 2123) and to his sister that 'Colburn for the 10th time was really going to give up business' (BDL 2124). The other essays at retirement are not recorded elsewhere, so it may be that Colburn only raised them in private conversation with Disraeli. Faced with the prospect of losing the publisher who had been a constant in his vicissitudinous life, Disraeli allowed himself a winsome reflection at the end of that

letter to Bulwer: '[Colburn] has been doing it for ½ a cent[ur]y, &, marvellous man, appears to me now younger than he was in the days of our youth'.

Disraeli remained friendly with Colburn after his retirement, joining the former publisher and his wife for social gatherings at their home in Bryanston Square (Renton 237). He also stayed in contact with Colburn on business matters, since Colburn retained Disraeli's copyrights after his retirement (as he did with a few other popular titles). Yet his successors, Daniel Hurst and his new partner Henry Blackett, also seem to have gained some stake in them when they bought Colburn's firm, probably an option to buy them should Colburn choose to sell. Colburn owned the copyrights to *Vivian Grey*, *Venetia*, and *Lord George Bentinck*, so when Disraeli finally moved on a collected edition of his novels, he needed to procure the copyrights to the two early works. Clearly responding to a letter from Disraeli, the supposedly retired Colburn wrote on 26 February 1853 that 'I lost no time in obtaining from Messrs Hurst & Blackett their formal relinquishment of the right of pre-emption in their purchase, so that as you wished you might have no one but myself to arrange with about them' (quoted in BDL 2671, n1). He shortly thereafter sold all of his remaining copyrights back to Disraeli for a mere £200, a token sum rather than their true worth. Perhaps the pride Colburn felt in still being Disraeli's preferred agent was payment enough.

The trade seemed to acknowledge the significance of their bond after Colburn died on 16 August 1855, when a decent six months were allowed to pass before any other publisher approached Disraeli. The publisher who had been least patiently biding his time—not since 1855, but since 1832—was Richard Bentley. On 1 February 1856, he wrote Disraeli the following letter:

Hearing from various quarters that you are engaged upon a Life of Bolingbroke, I write to ask you to do me the favor of permitting me to negotiate with you for the copyright of that work. So long as Mr Colburn survived, I did not approach you with any offers, but now, perhaps, you will allow me to say, that it will give me

pleasure to have an opportunity of becoming your publisher. Whatever may be the consideration agreed upon, in the event of an arrangement being made, I beg to say it would be made, as I do always now, in cash. (HP 235/4, 91)

The crass ending alone must have proved to Disraeli, if indeed he ever doubted it, that Bentley had never learnt anything from Colburn about how to deal with authors. Disraeli's reply to this letter is, sadly, no longer extant, but the fact that he made Longmans his publisher from then on speaks for itself.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Colburn and Disraeli's relationship has now been traced from the inception of the genre that brought them together to the publisher's death. This has provided numerous examples of the tolerance, appreciation, and even affection that marked their dealings with each other, despite the very real gulf between author and publisher. Disraeli's concern with appearances and reputation might have made him slightly uncomfortable with Colburn's trade status, but he appreciated his publisher's formidable talents and felt very comfortable with the man himself. On his part, Colburn witnessed Disraeli's maturation into a practical businessman after his own heart and so was able to discard his usual reserve and to act more forthrightly with him, as well as to indulge to his personal quirks. It is even possible that the two men felt united in their position as outsiders in genteel society. That is to say that Disraeli's Jewish heritage and Colburn's mysterious but apparently illegitimate birth might have produced a special empathy that allowed them to face the outside world together. When one considers the kinds of things they discussed in private—Disraeli's contribution to copyright legislation, Colburn's retirement plans, and so on—it is clear that, although these were professional matters, the emphasis was on personal opinions, decisions, and reactions. Each respected the other's viewpoints on professional matters and sought them when making personal decisions.

Disraeli never had this with another publisher, despite those repeated attempts to sidle up to John Murray, and though Colburn was close to a few other authors, he seems never to have engaged with them as he did with Disraeli.

But the story of this literary virgin and his publishing bawd does not end there. Their relationship was not just a private affair, worked out to mutual advantage through one's writing ability and the other's talent for promoting it. It was also a bond connecting Colburn to a circle of Disraeli's family and friends. Loyalty to a tradesman is one thing; it is flattering but need not be based on anything more than personal preference. Recommending a tradesman to others is something else; it bespeaks trust in that person and a belief that he measures up to a commonly held standard. Recommending a tradesman to one's family and closest friends is perhaps the highest accolade of all—and this is the accolade Disraeli bestowed on his publisher. He sent his father, his sister, and his dear friend William Meredith to Henry Colburn.

Meredith's literary work has received little attention but his personal history is well established. He maintained a secret engagement with Disraeli's sister Sarah for ten years because of his family's opposition to the union (based largely on her Jewish origins). When Meredith felt moved by his passion for history to write a book, Disraeli sent it with his personal recommendation to New Burlington Street. Colburn obviously felt it to be of high quality and some interest since he published Meredith's *Memorials of Charles John, King of Sweden and Norway* in 1829. Disraeli naturally took an active interest in his friend's book, even taking the printer to task for producing Meredith's proofs too slowly (BDL 71). The name of the printer? Richard Bentley.

William Meredith accompanied Disraeli on his 1830-31 trip to the Levant but fell ill with smallpox in Cairo and died there in July 1831. It takes little imagination to conceive the effect of Meredith's death on Sarah Disraeli (as well as on Benjamin, to

whose grief was added the task of breaking the news to his friend's loved ones [Ridley 100]). In some ways this tragedy brought brother and sister even closer together, so that Sarah began to follow in Benjamin's footsteps as a writer. We have already seen how they collaborated on *A Year at Hartlebury*, reluctantly published by Saunders and Otley in 1834. Their correspondence also indicates that she composed a few solo pieces for the *New Monthly*, but there is no record of these ever appearing. Bradford writes of Disraeli 'unsuccessfully attempting to persuade Colburn to publish another novel of Sarah's' but does not clarify what her first novel was (164). There is no direct evidence to suggest that Sarah actually published anything but *A Year at Hartlebury*, though she certainly wrote more.

Needless to say, if Disraeli's blood relatives could not count on lenient treatment from Colburn, his friends had no chance of getting by on anything but merit. In 1834, Colburn turned down an article by an unidentified friend of Disraeli, writing that the 'story though possessing considerable merit is yet not found sufficiently striking for the mag[azin]e' (HP 233/1, 103). Similarly, in 1845, Disraeli sent Thomas Cooper with manuscript in hand to Colburn, requesting 'a kind & impartial hearing' (BDL 1413); Cooper no doubt got that, but Colburn did not see fit to publish his novel (which the editors of Disraeli's *Letters* believe to have been *Captain Cobler, or the Lincolnshire Rebellion*). In a way, Colburn's rejections of works by Disraeli's acquaintances say more about their relationship than his acceptances. They demonstrate that Colburn did not blindly or slavishly seek to please Disraeli but always kept a close eye on his own interests, as any good businessman would. Disraeli, for his part, seems to have accepted all these rejections with equanimity, out of respect for Colburn's acumen and an unwillingness to hold the publisher to ransom, as it were, with works of dubious quality and sales potential.

The one member of Disraeli's circle who did not actually need a recommendation to Colburn was, of course, Isaac D'Israeli. His works were in print before Colburn had even entered the trade, making his name in 1791 with *Curiosities of Literature*. As we have seen, he had taken to publishing with John Murray and was part of his Albemarle Street circle until Murray quarrelled with Benjamin. Though the two antagonists eventually patched things up, Isaac showed himself capable of serious grudge holding and never published with Murray again. No doubt encouraged by the magnanimous treatment his son was receiving, Isaac D'Israeli agreed to take his works to Colburn. The publisher began his association with the elder D'Israeli by bringing out the fourth revised edition of *The Literary Character* in 1828, then by agreeing to publish Isaac's new biography of Charles I. This appeared in five volumes between 1828 and 1831. The brief correspondence between D'Israeli and Colburn (from 1829, Colburn and Bentley) in the Jewish Museum London betrays the writer's impatience to see the proofs, have the work announced in the press, and so on. He seems not to have appreciated the workload shouldered by the new partnership nor the widespread lack of interest in political matters outside the great Reform issue. Isaac D'Israeli did, however, feel something like his son's affinity for Colburn, writing from Buckinghamshire on 5 November 1829, 'If you pass by this way, you may be certain of a bed at my House. I shall be very glad to see you for as long a time as you please' (Jewish Museum MS 5, 2).

Isaac D'Israeli received a much warmer welcome from the *New Monthly Magazine* than his daughter had—and not just because of his greater talent. Edward Lytton Bulwer admired Isaac as much as he liked Benjamin and therefore used his editorial position to solicit contributions from him. Benjamin, however, maintained a proprietorial interest over his father and felt that he knew best how to manage his dealings with Colburn. This prompted the following letter from Bulwer on 19 April 1832:

I return you your father's letter with many apologies if I transgressed your wishes in showing it to Colburn. I did it so that he might see what curious & rare papers your father appeared to promise. And I assure you that Mr. Disraeli never could seem to Colburn in the light of a voluntary self-proposed contributor—inasmuch as I especially informed him that your father's letter was in reply to my earnest solicitations & a result of your friendly interest.
(HP 104/1, 30)

Few of Isaac's papers were ultimately published in the *New Monthly*. His later books were published with Edward Moxon, who had a more suitable clientele for such works, but he nevertheless added some lustre to Colburn's list of authors and another link between Colburn and Disraeli.

This chapter has demonstrated how important the relationship between Henry Colburn and Benjamin Disraeli was to both men, in personal as well as professional terms. It proves that Colburn was able to nurture a talented young author and to maintain a mature, non-opportunistic alliance with him. The evidence cited here also proves that Disraeli's publisher was a consistent and meaningful influence on him over a period of nearly thirty years, just as his writing was a significant part of his entire adult life, not merely a sideshow to the political main event. There is perhaps no more striking confirmation of this than Disraeli's choice of title when awarded an earldom in 1876. He was granted his request to become 'Earl of Beaconsfield', a title he had invented fifty years before in his first Colburn publication, *Vivian Grey*.

4. 'THE BURLINGTON STREET DELPHOS': THE HOUSE OF COLBURN & BENTLEY

In terms of Henry Colburn's reputation, his partnership with Richard Bentley is the quintessential mixed blessing. On the one hand, Colburn is often best remembered for being one half of the house of Colburn and Bentley; on the other hand, he also tends to be remembered as the malefactor behind the firm's dissolution. Furthermore, the alliance produced the Standard Novels series, which is the publication those literature scholars not familiar with Colburn's silver-fork novels most associate with him. Quite how a three-year partnership, from 1829 to 1832, came to have such a prominent role in the public mind is an interesting question. The answer lies partly in the fact that, from 1832 to 1836, Colburn and Bentley engaged in the kind of legal wrangling that attracts attention—and that, even after the lawsuits were concluded, their mutual animosity continued until they became a by-word. Thus, three years become seven years, and seven years become a lifetime.

But it is more than the length of their association that gives it its prominence. Over the years, Bentley's name—and the story of his first venture in the trade, as Colburn's partner—have been kept alive by his son and grandson, his sympathetic biographer Royal Gettmann, and historians like Gordon Ray and Michael Sadleir who were also well disposed towards him. And these men are just among the most prominent in establishing the pro-Bentley trend in posterity—their numerous company includes a host of figures, from obituary writers to the editors of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Though these writers largely refrain from actually twisting facts to favour Bentley, they have capitalized on the frequent absence of facts or explanatory details. Bentley's gains have been Colburn's losses.

Time and again, Colburn is represented as little more than an obstacle Bentley had to clear on his way to solo fame and fortune. But, time and again, original documents—mostly letters—that Gettmann and his cohorts either did not know about or chose to ignore prove them wrong. These previously unconsulted documents allow a far more realistically complex and far less biased account of the Colburn and Bentley partnership than has ever been presented before. Taken together with fresh readings of established resources such as the Bentley Papers, they also provide a new perspective on the personal relationship at the heart of the business partnership, one based not on the assignation of blame but on an earnest desire to understand. This new perspective reveals two *men*, not the caricatures of later years. And it is perhaps this that ultimately makes the study of the Colburn and Bentley union so crucial to the study of Colburn separately.

THE ADVENT OF RICHARD BENTLEY

Henry Colburn's hiring of John Nichols's firm in 1818 to print the first edition of John Evelyn's *Diary* was the first time his path crossed with that of Nichols's promising young nephews, Samuel and Richard Bentley. (Knowing that Richard was apprenticed to his prosperous uncle at the age of sixteen, in 1810, we can deduce that his older brother Samuel was probably apprenticed to him at the same age, in 1801 [SP 360, 7].) Richard later related that he did not meet Colburn during work on this project but came to know of him through William Upcott, who was reading the proofs of the *Diary* (BO). By 1819, the Bentley brothers had gained enough experience at Nichols's firm to strike out on their own, and their documents among the Bentley Papers show that Colburn was an early patron, providing steady work during their first few years in business. He may have gone to them on account of their connection to Nichols or possibly even on Upcott's

recommendation. Colburn demonstrated his satisfaction with the firm by awarding the brothers the contract for printing his *New Monthly Magazine* from its 1821 relaunch.

In October of the following year, Colburn took Richard Bentley with him on a business trip to Paris, suggesting that their personal relationship was also flourishing (Bentley 88-9). Sadleir, however, suggests that Samuel Bentley was displeased with this chumminess between his little brother and the publisher with something of a reputation. In support of this, Sadleir cites a letter from Samuel to Richard in Paris encouraging him to learn about French printing techniques and so on, but closing with a dour postscript: ‘I don’t say any more about your stay—you know my sentiments on that head. I suppose you and Mr C. will return together’ (SP 360, 5b)¹². It is unsurprising that Sadleir, never a Colburn fan, puts such a sinister interpretation on what is, after all, a very vague statement. Samuel Bentley might just as well have been worried about Richard succumbing to Paris’s less businesslike attractions and hoped that ‘Mr C.’ would bring him back unscathed.

Whatever the intricacies of their personal relationships, the Bentley brothers remained on good business terms with Colburn. They developed something of a speciality in fine printing jobs—and certainly produced cleaner, subtler page layouts than most of Colburn’s other printers—so the publisher used them for his showier quarto volumes and some of his most promising triple-deckers, including Disraeli’s *Vivian Grey* and the Banim brothers’ *Tales by the O’Hara Family*. The Bentleys did such a satisfactory job with the *New Monthly Magazine* that Colburn also hired them to print his new *Court Journal* from its founding in May 1829. Such a track record speaks for itself, but there is little extant documentation of the period between the 1821 Paris trip and the 1829

¹² Sadleir’s incomplete manuscript of his book on Bentley includes a typescript of this letter, dated 18 October 1821, but not the original document. His is the only reference to this letter I have ever seen, so I suspect that the original was in his possession at some point—and may be even now amongst his voluminous papers, though my research did not uncover it.

partnership agreement. Consequently, narratives of Bentley's leap from being Colburn's printer to being his partner have tended to be speculative rather than factual affairs.

The primary concerns are why Colburn wanted a partner and why Bentley wanted the job. While some sources have glossed over the first question, others have speculated that Colburn was in serious debt and therefore wanted the injection of cash that a partner would bring (see, for example, DLB 42 and Sutherland 72). Although this is possible—especially in light of Colburn's vaunted 'liberality' and extensive business speculations—no one has produced proof of such debt and, as will be seen, Bentley did not mention it in his obituary of Colburn. (Unfortunately, he does not mention *any* issues that might have prompted Colburn to take on a partner.) Thankfully, letters among the Sadleir Papers do seem to hold the key to this problem.

At the time of the partnership agreement, Colburn was forty-five and had been in business for more than half his life. The Sadleir Papers reveal that Colburn was also in poor health at this time and was finding it difficult to attend to his professional duties as diligently as usual. His letters show that he was troubled by ear and tooth problems that prevented him from sleeping for nights on end (SP 351, 7). The pollution in London exacerbated his discomfort and necessitated excursions to the seaside where he could take in the revivifying air (SP 348, 19). Retiring to a seaside town after having installed his successor must have appeared to be a happy solution to Colburn as his afflictions continued. Though these apparently minor medical complaints might not, in and of themselves, have driven Colburn to retire, the time was ripe for him to seek a less hectic and more physically comfortable lifestyle.

That retirement was his true motivation in taking a partner—which is to say, a designated successor—is made clear in the Indenture he eventually signed with Richard Bentley. As will be shown later, that agreement fixed the period of partnership at three

years and made careful provision for Colburn's retirement at the end of it. When the partnership did reach its conclusion in 1832, Colburn summed up the situation for one of the partnership's authors, James Fenimore Cooper. In a letter to Cooper, he acknowledged his 'having resigned the publishing business to Mr Bentley, and I hasten to state to you [...] that I went into the partnership with him for three years with the express intention of so retiring at the end of the term' (BL Add.MS.46632A, 55). Documents such as this letter and the Indenture confirm beyond doubt Colburn's true reason for taking a partner.

Knowing that Colburn planned to retire makes it much more difficult to believe that debt was an issue for him. Simply put, if one is in debt, the last thing one does is stop working. This would hold true even in Colburn's case, when he could count on the partnership to bring him some ready cash and on his periodicals to provide a steady income. Whatever funds the new partner conferred upon him might be enough to pay off the debt, but they would hardly be enough on which to retire.

Colburn had been toying with the idea of retirement for some time and had floated the idea of partnership with Charles Knight in a letter to Thomas Campbell, who was then editing the *New Monthly Magazine* (NAL F.48.E.11, 40-41). In his obituary of Colburn, Bentley reported that others were also considered before he devised the solution to Colburn's partnership dilemma:

In 1828-9 I learnt accidentally that Colburn was about to dispose of his business. He had spoken to Alderman Key, to the Magnays, and others. As our business with him was very important—about £3,000 to £3,500 a year—I did not like the idea of its going into hands adverse to us. Therefore I spoke to him about it. He was much pleased. I offered it to brother Samuel, who declined; then to brother Will, who also declined it. Then I said I would take it myself.

Thus it transpires that Richard Bentley, though not especially keen to become a publisher, did so for the good of the family printing business. Although this was not an auspicious beginning to his new career, Bentley at least enjoyed great expectations as the future head

of the New Burlington Street firm. Despite the way things turned out in the end, we can understand why Colburn was initially much pleased with the arrangement. He had been building a personal relationship with Richard Bentley for the past decade and knew that the printer already had intimate knowledge of some of his business affairs. Being ten years younger than the senior partner, Bentley could reasonably be expected to stay in business for years to come, ensuring—in the absence of a Colburn heir—that the firm built up by Colburn's hard work would live on.

Richard Bentley signed an Indenture with Henry Colburn on 3 June 1829, which was to go into effect on 31 August of that year (BL Add.MS.46632A, 3-13). It fixed the three-year duration of their partnership and the manner in which affairs would be settled upon Colburn's retirement at the end of that period. Financially, the crux of the matter was an apportioning of three-fifths for Colburn and two-fifths for Bentley, which represented the division of profits (Article 3), debts (Article 10), and expenses (Article 7). In regard to the latter, Bentley was liable for sums totalling no more than £2500, after which point Colburn was to pay on his behalf. That £2500 thus became the price of Bentley's partnership, and he almost certainly paid it by selling out his half of the family printing firm (DLB 42). Bentley was allowed to reside in the part of the house on New Burlington Street not taken up by the business and was to have the lease transferred to his name after the dissolution of the partnership. The Indenture gave Colburn the right of entry to the premises whenever he desired it, 'without being bound to be there more than he shall think proper' (Article 5). The implication that Colburn would be distancing himself from the day-to-day operations of the firm—largely to accommodate his health problems, as we now know—was subsequently made explicit, as was Bentley's subjection to Colburn:

the said Richard Bentley shall & will during the said copartnership take upon himself all the active part of the said Business & all the labor [*sic*] & trouble of

carrying on & conducting the same in a manner subject to the approbation of the said Henry Colburn & for that purpose shall give up all his time & attention to the same & shall exert himself with due care & diligence to manage & promote the same to the best of his judgment & ability. (Article 6)

The bookkeeping (Article 8) and even the annual stocktaking and division of profits (Article 16) fell to Bentley. The Indenture did make clear that the permission of both partners was necessary for most business dealings, but Colburn's periodicals were entirely exempt from the agreement—they were to remain his alone, both during and after the partnership. To all appearances, a semi-retirement as the distant proprietor of a few popular journals awaited Henry Colburn in 1832.

Looking ahead to that time, the Indenture set a price on Colburn's interest in the firm: Bentley was to pay him £10,000 for the business *if* that amount was approximately equal to two-thirds of the total value of the business (Article 17). The valuation was to include the profits made during the three years of the partnership, unsold stock, and copyrights—but did not include Colburn's periodicals or any of the stock and copyrights he owned prior to the inception of the partnership on 31 August 1829, which remained entirely in his possession (Article 24). If two-thirds of the firm's value was greater than £10,000, Bentley was to increase his payment accordingly; if the value was less than £10,000 or if the partners disagreed over the valuation, they were each to select an 'indifferent person', both of whom would then choose an 'umpire' to arbitrate the matter (Articles 30 & 32).

At first glance, £10,000 looks like a reasonable price for such an established and successful business, but Articles 20 through 22 of the Indenture show that this was no bargain. All that money bought him was the lease on the premises (an ongoing expense of £210 per year) and, as subsequent documents put it, Henry Colburn's 'good will'. It did not include Colburn's three-fifths interest in the firm's jointly held copyrights and unsold stock—though the Indenture gave Bentley first option to buy them and thoughtfully

provided a timetable for the appropriate payments to Colburn, using his two-fifths share of the partnership's holdings as 'collateral security' (Article 22).

While the Indenture demanded a great deal of cash from Bentley, it also held out a great promise that must have comforted him as he toiled for three years at running another man's business: in the end, not only would he be an independent operator, but he also would have no direct competition. A significant part of Colburn's success stemmed from the fact that he had constructed a niche market all his own, based around fashionable novels—and after 31 August 1832, it would all be Bentley's. Article 26 of the Indenture made sure of this:

the said Henry Colburn shall engage & covenant not to purchase for separate publication or publish without the consent of the said Richard Bentley any new Book or Work of any person or persons whomsoever on his own private or separate acct nor shall not nor will at any time hereafter print or publish or be concerned or engaged in the printing or publishing of any Books Works Copyrights or publications or in any manner use exercise or carry on the Trade or Business of a Bookseller or Publisher or enter into or be engaged or interested in any literary Speculations of what nature or kind soever Save as hereinafter next mentioned.

The exceptions were no surprise: Colburn could carry on with his journals and sell and reprint all of his pre-1829 holdings at will; most of the periodicals and all of the books had to be published via Bentley (at a commission of two percent), which would ensure a steady income and serve as a sign of Colburn's continuing good will. Bentley also had first option to buy the journals when Colburn decided to retire altogether.

'ONE OF THE BEST BUSINESSES IN LONDON'

As has been shown, it was always intended that Bentley would take over the running of the day-to-day affairs, freeing Colburn to rest at home or by the sea as his medical conditions required. Unfortunately, his health worsened to the point that he required such rest precisely at the time of Bentley's induction into the partnership. For his

part, Colburn thought that this was no coincidence and wrote to Bentley that the stress of the upheaval was exacerbating his medical complaints, noting: 'I am so very unwell with the great exertions I have been making these several days past' (SP 351, 8). And so he was forced—by having no alternative solution—at several points in the early months of the partnership, to rest and recuperate at his new home in Northumberland Place or near the sea in Hastings or Margate.

When Colburn was at work both immediately before and after his new partner's arrival, he kept busy with his publishing speculations and, of course, with preparing the house on New Burlington Street for its new resident. What Bentley was doing during August 1829 is unknown, but he most certainly was not liaising with Colburn. The publisher summed up the situation in a letter dated 31 August: 'I have much to say relative to the *conduct of the business* and *regret much* it has been impossible for me to find leisure when you have been in town to enter upon it' (SP 348, 14). Once the partnership began in earnest and Colburn found himself too unwell to conduct business in person, he attempted to rectify matters by writing letter after letter to Bentley explaining the many details of the operation and how best to attend to them. But he could not explain in a letter or even a series of letters the entire process of running the business, nor could he outline all of Bentley's tasks without creating the impression of a remote dictator barking orders. Colburn at least tried his best to sound encouraging and appreciative of Bentley's efforts, writing from Hastings at the end of September that

I have at last really made my escape & left all my troubles upon your shoulders pro tempore & from what I have already seen I must confess you seem to be able to bear them better & lessen them sooner than I could do, tho you may always rely on all my assistance whether in town or country (SP 348, 19).

Still, leaving the novice publisher unsupervised, unaided, and perhaps just a little overwhelmed was a most unpropitious way to begin the partnership.

There was, though, no immediate reason to conclude that Colburn's illness and his frequent separations from Bentley would do any lasting damage to their relationship. After all, the agreement existing between them was based on the premise that Colburn would be something of an absentee landlord while Bentley kept things running. Although the situation in autumn 1829 was strained because of the lack of face-to-face communication between the partners, in its essentials it actually differed very little from that envisioned by them at the time they signed their Indenture. With patience, genuine good will, and Colburn's continued efforts to tutor Bentley in the ways of fashionable publishing, this initial rough patch surely could have been overcome.

Patience, however, was running low even before the partnership commenced. Richard Bentley's impatience to move on to this new stage of his career is evident from an undated letter that Colburn wrote to him in what was probably the spring of 1829 (SP 348, 13). In it, he remarks upon Bentley's recent proposal to advance the start of their partnership to 1 August. Colburn has decided against this on the grounds that he will still have a busy publishing schedule to attend to throughout June and July and that 'I must have a little breathing time in August to arrange matters in my own house & to prepare for you'. He goes on to assure his future partner that since 'August & September are both blank months for Bookselling', he would have the whole of the latter month 'before you can begin to do any thing'. Of course, as things transpired, Bentley found himself with plenty to do in the month of September, however 'blank' it may have been, thanks to Colburn's frequent absences. Nevertheless, Bentley's eagerness to establish himself without regard for Colburn's own needs and concerns set a poor precedent.

Again, this type of incident is nothing that could not be overcome with a little diplomacy and a lot of communication, but, again, the reality was that communication between Colburn and Bentley was limited to hastily written letters—haste being the scourge of real tactfulness. The swiftness with which these letters were composed need not be deduced from Colburn’s abysmal handwriting and frequent crossings out, nor even from the fact that they sometimes came at a rate of one per day. Instead Colburn notes when he is hurrying to catch the post (SP 349, 8) and actually signs a good many of his letters ‘Yours in haste’ where others might write ‘Yours faithfully’ (SP 351, 8). The pitfalls of communicating almost solely via scribbled notes are obvious: in the absence of facial expressions, body language, and voice modulations, terse instructions might be read as harsh orders, while the provision of background information might seem like the emphasis of present ignorance. On top of this, the sheer number of these letters might in itself have seemed to be proof of Colburn’s lack of confidence and trust in Bentley, regardless of the occasional compliments.

If patience had been lacking between Colburn and Bentley since the mild disagreement over when to start the partnership, both it and the famous good will were conspicuous by their absence on the day before that partnership began in earnest. On 31 August 1829, Colburn wrote a letter (SP 348, 14) informing Bentley that he had ‘got pretty clear out of B. Street’ and now wanted to discuss the arrangements for renovating the place. He makes it clear that Bentley had not taken the time or indeed made any effort to discuss matters with him before summoning the builders—but had nevertheless proposed that his partner pay for part or all of the alterations to the building in which Bentley was going to live and work. Needless to say, Colburn declined:

You must really excuse my taking any part, and I think on consideration & consultation with your friends that you will not have much cause to regret being put to such a trifling expense, considering that without paying any thing! you are

about to receive 2/5ths profits of one of the best businesses in London, a house made by 20 years labour & Capital.

One hopes that his exclamation mark is meant to proclaim the facetiousness of his comment about Bentley paying nothing. Still, it is typical of Colburn to take the long view of spending a little money in the present to reap great rewards in the future—this was, of course, precisely his attitude to spending money on author bonuses and on advertising.

It is also typical of Colburn and Bentley that they did not take advantage of Colburn's presence in town to talk face-to-face and resolve the matter once and for all. Instead, more of Colburn's letters reflect the continuing battle over what should be done to their property and who should pay for it. First, they debated the execution of skylights in the counting house, with Bentley preferring them small and round while Colburn wanted them large and square, since 'we may as well get a good light for the dark winter days' (SP 348, 10). Then, there was the great controversy about stucco, which Colburn recommended and Bentley had executed at great expense—though not enough to prevent Colburn from remarking that he had 'never witnessed such a shameful job' (SP 348, 15). When the renovations were at last finished, the bills paid, and the minutiae exhausted, Colburn and Bentley got started on the important stuff: they began to argue about publishing.

While history is indeed fortunate to possess a tranche of Colburn's missives, Bentley's replies to them have not survived. This is unsurprising since one can hardly imagine Colburn bothering to bring them back from the seaside or taking the time to store them carefully at his London residence. It nevertheless creates the unfortunate situation of preserving only one side of this crucial correspondence. Bentley apparently sought to remedy this, in his own unique way, by annotating some of Colburn's letters with his reactions to and comments on how things eventually turned out. These are quite clearly

later additions—though whether they were made immediately after the dissolution of the partnership or many years later remains unknown—and as they reflect the emotions and perspectives of a later time, they therefore cannot serve as reliable indicators of Bentley's feelings in 1829 and 1830. They do, however, strike the reader with the contrast between Colburn's generally warm, good-natured tone and Bentley's sour attempts to justify all the nastiness of his subsequent actions. Typical of this contrast is the letter about the 'shameful' stucco job: Colburn admits that he had approved the stuccoing but warned against further alterations to the front exterior, yet Bentley notes in the margin that he actually tracked down the original contractor and got him to agree that Colburn had indeed sanctioned the whole raft of renovations (SP 348, 15).

With this example in mind, it will perhaps come as no surprise that it was not just adverse circumstances or a lack of intimate communication that ultimately doomed the house of Colburn and Bentley, although these clearly played their part. The partners' differing personalities also accounted for many of the difficulties. As Sutherland put it, 'Colburn was a slovenly book-keeper; Bentley punctilious. Colburn was unscrupulous in his business dealings; Bentley was conscientious to a fault' (73). Leaving aside the question of Colburn's scruples, the salient point here is that the partnership was at heart a mismatch. Had Colburn taken more time to understand his partner or had Bentley loosened up, things would have improved somewhat, but it is unlikely that they could have ever really connected in the way that partners need to. This was a particular shame since, in some ways, Colburn and Bentley seemed well suited to each other. Not only had they worked together for years but also each had enjoyed success in his respective part of the trade—Colburn in publishing and bookselling, Bentley in printing—that should have contributed to a glorious whole. Similarly, Colburn had shown himself to be something of a visionary, discerning and manipulating the public's tastes, which Bentley might have

complemented with his pragmatism and efficiency. Alas, what sounds good in theory is not always borne out in practice.

For all the misery that dogged the partnership—or, indeed, was generated by it—things were not always as dire as they seemed or were made out to be. Bentley later recounted tales of his suffering at the hands of the evil Colburn and, as we have seen, annotated many of Colburn's letters with his own rebuttals and wry remarks. The letters from the senior partner, however, go a long way towards destroying his image as a selfish, harsh taskmaster. They contain, first of all, the occasional glowing remark about Bentley, such as the one quoted above about his ability to lighten the burdens of business. Furthermore, they take a tone otherwise seen only in Colburn's correspondence with Disraeli: that of genuine warmth and friendliness. The closing that he uses for the first two years of the partnership—'I am, My dear Mr B, HC'—betokens an informality highly unusual in Colburn's letters. Building on this tone, Colburn filled his missives to Bentley with amusing asides and references to his personal life that appear in absolutely none of his other extant letters. It is in letters to Bentley that Colburn's only written references to his first wife appear (SP 349, 9, 11), along with his only known apologies for his atrocious handwriting, including the rather endearing postscript, 'I fear you can hardly read my scrawl. I swear to try & write better!—I do, indeed!' (SP 351, 4). Considering that the Colburn and Bentley relationship was conducted in large part through the written word, it seems fair to take examples such as these to be indicative of the nature of that relationship or, at least, the nature Colburn hoped it would assume.

STANDARD PRACTICE AND STANDARD NOVELS

Richard Bentley's apologists have long implied that he joined Colburn's firm without knowing the true extent of his puffery and, once in the firm, distanced himself

from his partner's worst excesses in that line. The first implication is preposterous: anyone who read any of the literary journals knew all about Colburn's puffery, and Bentley, being one of the *New Monthly Magazine's* printers, must have seen plenty of puffs at first hand. The second implication is equally unbelievable: as part of his effort to mould Bentley in his own image, Colburn peppered his numerous letters with puffing instructions and plans, most of which seem to have been carried out. And indeed there are no letters from Bentley—in the Bentley Papers, in the Sadleir Papers, or anywhere else—contradicting Colburn's orders, remonstrating with him over his techniques, or otherwise expressing his disapproval. Nor does Bentley refer to it in his obituary of Colburn, where he does venture onto other negative subjects. Beyond this evidence, there is also the silent testimony of several successful puffery campaigns carried out under the joint auspices of Colburn and Bentley, which induced *Fraser's* to pluralize Colburn's usual epithet and dub the partners 'the princes of Puffing' (Feb 1831, 113). And the sums that they spent together on advertising speak for themselves: Edward Morgan estimated an expenditure of £27,000 during their three years together (SP 350, 2) and most other sources agree on an annual figure between £9,000 and £10,000.

That puffery was simply standard practice for the firm is revealed in some detail by a couple of documents, now among the Sadleir Papers, prepared by Colburn on 19 October 1829 for Bentley and the New Burlington Street staff. Colburn drew up a list of those to whom review copies of Cooper's *Borderers* should be sent, explaining to Bentley, 'I have much neglected these points & am anxious now that they should be attended to in the most regular & systematic way, for they are next in importance to our own early paragraphs, besides that the volunteer notices will furnish me with materials for new paragraphs' (SP 351, 2). The term 'volunteer notices' is particularly interesting. Colburn obviously uses it to denote legitimate reviews by the magazines' own staff, as

differentiated from regular ‘notices’, which were provided by the publisher himself as a matter of course. But then, according to this letter, even volunteer notices would be turned into regular notices eventually.

The plan or system that Colburn laid out for Bentley (SP 348, 5-6) consists of some lists and a few general points. The lists are directed to Mr. Cochrane and name the various journal editors and reviewers to whom ‘gratis copies’ of various books should be sent. One list is exclusively for *The Borderers*, with Colburn pointing out that such a list needs to be constructed for each individual title, with variations dependent on ‘the nature of the work’. A second list enumerates those lucky few who should receive copies of everything. This group naturally consists of representatives of Colburn’s own journals: the *New Monthly*, *Court Journal*, *Sunday Times*, *Literary Gazette* and—one surprise—the editor of the *Spectator*, possibly a personal acquaintance.

At this point Colburn feels the need to intervene with an explanation marked ‘Very important’:

In addition to the above, two notices of each Book with review about 1/3 of a Column should be written by Mr Ollier or Mr Roscoe for insertion in the Courier & Globe, whose editors have not time to write reviews. These 2 notices should be accompanied by Copies & a note from Mr Colburn (for the present).

There is never any hurry for those 2 notices as our paragraphs will be operating at first effectually in these and the general newspapers, but it is particularly desirable that copies for perusing should go early to the weekly papers, as marked.

This certainly is a nice summary of Colburn’s puffing tactics in the newspapers—and one particularly likes the note of altruism struck by his providing reviews for editors who ‘have not time’ to write their own. Colburn also seems to be gearing up for the eventual handing over of power to Bentley when he says that he will write the accompanying notes ‘for the present’.

The final list in Colburn’s plan takes the form of a chart, with an extensive catalogue of reviewers and editors on one side, Colburn and Bentley’s five latest titles

across the top, and a series of ticks denoting who was to receive what. Theodore Hook, editing *John Bull* at this time, received one of each, as did John Gibson Lockhart at the *Quarterly Review*. Still in Colburn's good books was Lady Morgan, who was to receive two of the titles with the 'publisher's compliments'. Perhaps thinking of this author reminded Colburn to say a few words to Cochrane about the authors' place in the puffing system, for he adds: 'Authors—q[uer]y, have they any influential friends to whom it would be worthwhile sending copies? In case of ½ profits, charge copies to authors'. The first part of that directive comes as no surprise, but the second part reveals that extensive puffery—particularly the sending out of gratis copies—was not to be undertaken for every book. Colburn puffed extravagantly but not recklessly, always mindful of his own expenses and weighing up the likely return on them.

It is important to note that even Colburn did not quite buy into the adage that all publicity is good publicity. This was particularly true when bad publicity arose unexpectedly, as it did in the autumn of 1830. At that time, Colburn and Bentley published *The Separation* by Lady Charlotte Bury, one of the most prolific silver-fork authors. Unfortunately, *The Separation* turned out to be a none-too-subtle rehash of Bury's *Self-Indulgence* (1812), dating from before her association with Colburn. The *Court Journal* innocently remarked the resemblance, but it was William Jerdan in the *Literary Gazette* who spelled out the deception and, in trying to clear Colburn and Bentley's name, made the grave error of referring to their puffery directly. The critical reaction to both Bury's deception and her publishers' advertising practices was every bit as nasty as one would expect. (Rosa 197-8)

Among the Sadleir Papers is a handful of letters from Colburn to Bentley touching on this debacle and making clear that neither man had even suspected Bury's ruse; both were nevertheless saddled with a good deal of blame and negative publicity. Colburn's

initial reaction was to write a formal reply to the *Literary Gazette* as well as the other journals, including the ranting *Athenaeum* and *Courier*, but he decided to give Bury the opportunity to air her side of the story to him and Bentley first. When she failed to respond to their enquiries, Colburn concluded that ‘all the disgrace must fall upon her’ and decided to let things lie (SP 349, 4a). He realized that publicly dissecting the mishap would only make things worse: ‘do not let us magnify the affair’, he warned Bentley (SP 349, 4a). As one would imagine, Colburn did not take kindly to being wrong-footed by the journals with whom he advertised (‘Let them libel us & let us trounce them’ [SP 349, 4a]) or by an editor whom he had installed (‘This is not the first appearance of William Jerdan’s cloven hoof!’ [SP 349, 2]). But the control he exercised over his anger paid off: the story died a mercifully quick death, the admission of puffery seemed to surprise no one, Colburn and Bury escaped nearly untarnished, and they successfully worked together as publisher and author again.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Colburn and Bentley’s partnership was just how successful it managed to be in spite of the setbacks, personal disagreements, and growing estrangement between them. The latter very wisely put his trust in Colburn’s discernment of the public taste, so the partners were able to launch more silver-fork bestsellers from Bulwer, Disraeli, and Catherine Gore. They offered new works by Mary Shelley and Captain Marryat and, perhaps most importantly, they hit upon a new way of making money from the old works that Colburn had stockpiled over the years. Their brainchild was the Standard Novels reprint series. It became the definitive publishing arrangement for reprints for the rest of the century (Sutherland 73) and can even be seen as a forerunner of today’s system of expensive, hardcover first editions followed by cheaper paperback editions.

The Standard Novels series is worth examining in some depth because of its innovative nature, because it has historically been the most widely recognized achievement of the Colburn and Bentley partnership, and because it is too often attributed to Bentley alone. Like most innovations, it was not conjured out of thin air but evolved naturally from previous efforts. When the Standard Novels debuted in 1831, the publishing world was gripped by a fad for uniform series of non-fiction titles such as John Murray's Family Library and Charles Knight's Library of Entertaining Knowledge, both begun in 1830. Colburn and Bentley had already boarded that particular bandwagon the same year with their Family Classical Library, Juvenile Library, and National Library—none of which outlived the partnership or the fad that spawned them. Each had its own strengths and weaknesses but all suffered from being churned out primarily by the firm's hack writers and editors, rather than its premier authors. The occasional popular volume—such as Galt's *Life of Byron*, number one in the National Library—could not compensate for such deathly titles as *The History of Chemistry* (numbers three and ten in the National Library) or *Lives of Remarkable Youths of Both Sexes* (number one in the Juvenile Library).

The non-fiction series trend was exclusively that—non-fiction. Reprint series of novels had been tried before but had not really caught on in the way that poetry and drama series had. Perhaps the most noteworthy effort before Colburn and Bentley's time was Ballantyne's Novelist's Library, which ran from 1821 to 1824. Edited and featuring biographical prefaces by Sir Walter Scott, it was the forerunner of the classics series, offering uniform editions of Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Radcliffe, and others. Alas, this particular forerunner had been hobbled at the gate: Scott packaged more than one novel in each volume, thus necessitating both massive page counts and tiny print, and included even the novelists' most obscure works. The only surprise at its demise was that it lasted

as long as it did. Scott and publisher Robert Cadell had clearly learned the lessons of Ballantyne's Novelist's Library by the time they issued the Author's Edition of the Waverley novels. Each volume contained one novel, was issued monthly, and possessed the twin virtues of portability and affordability. The result was sales figures that were astonishing even by Scott's own impressive standards. Though in some respects the Author's Edition had more in common with the collected works than the reprint series, it established once and for all that uniform issue could work with fiction, and with recent fiction at that. It also demonstrated that practical considerations such as price and size were at least as important as content.

In contrast to the Waverley reissue, most novels of this period were published only in three-volume sets at a retail price of 31*s.6d.* and therefore were affordable almost solely to circulating libraries. When a novel went out of print in this expensive format, it usually went out of print altogether—few alternative formats were available. This was clearly unfortunate for readers but was really no better for publishers, who bought the copyrights of novels (and most other works) outright from their authors for lump sum payments. This practice simplified business matters, but it meant that once a book's sale to the libraries was over, the publisher was stuck with a copyright for which he had no further use. This must have been weighing heavily on the mind of either Henry Colburn or Richard Bentley, for one of them eventually divined how to make new money out of old copyrights: a reprint series of novels. Circumstantial evidence would seem to point to Colburn, who had a reputation as an innovator and a vested interest in seeing how back catalogues could best be put to use, since he was about to retire on his.

The partners dreamt up the name Standard Novels—slyly implying that they set the standard others tried to live up to—and began to transform some of their recent triple-deckers into compact single volumes. Such downsizing suited the books to home

libraries, but the consequent reduction in price was the real attraction: Colburn and Bentley charged just 6s. for each novel, complete in one volume. Though that was not cheap in the common sense of the word, it was just one-fifth of the price of a brand new novel. Nor were the Standard Novels cheap in the qualitative sense: as the puffs emphasized, they were ‘condensed, not abridged’ and came complete with engraved frontispiece and vignette. Colburn and Bentley also contrived to add extra value for money by commissioning those authors still among the living to write new introductory material and even, on occasion, to revise the text. It is to this facet of the publishers’ plan that we owe the 1831 revision of *Frankenstein*—Standard Novel number nine—complete with the only introduction to the novel that Mary Shelley ever wrote.

Besides taking to heart the lessons about format and price from their forbears, Colburn and Bentley also borrowed Cadell’s idea of releasing one volume per month—a clever way to turn casual customers into habitual purchasers. At one point the publishers even pursued the idea of recycling Scott’s prefaces from Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library for one-volume editions of the most popular works by Fielding, Smollett, and others, but Chittick is wrong to say that they intended to focus the whole series on these eighteenth-century novelists (29). The Bentley Papers show that the partners undertook the purchase of these prefaces after the first few volumes of Cooper and Godwin had already been released (BL Add.MS.46632A, 35, 37), so it is clear that what Colburn and Bentley had truly wanted their series to do was encompass the whole heyday of the novel. When the purchase agreement for Scott’s material fell through, however, the partners took the wise decision to continue recycling their own copyrights instead.

In retrospect, it is curious that Colburn and Bentley were interested in reprinting eighteenth-century novels. Classic, enduring literature was never their forte—nor was it the preferred reading matter of their clientele—and a reprint series was so obviously the

ideal way to make use of Colburn's substantial catalogue of old copyrights. From the series' inception to the end of their partnership, they managed to produce nineteen volumes, some of which would find a home in any classics series now in print. Among them were five novels by James Fenimore Cooper, two by William Godwin, and several titles by sisters Anne Maria and Jane Porter. All of these had sold reasonably well for Colburn on their initial release (though for some of the Cooper titles, such as *The Last of the Mohicans*, this was their initial British release, thus slightly fudging the reprint issue) and sold well enough in this new format to keep both Colburn and Bentley happy. By the time the partners split, eleven of the first twelve volumes had turned a profit and were still selling, while the later volumes were also heading for the same profitable outcome (Erickson 151).

When the boom in series publishing ended, only a few years after it began, the Standard Novels were still going strong. This was, of course, attributable partly to the many strengths already discussed as well as a stronger market for novels than non-fiction, but also to the very concept of publishing in series. This was fundamentally sound, not faddish at all, and one of the most succinct explanations of it comes, somewhat surprisingly, from F. Scott Fitzgerald. In 1922, he wrote to his publisher, Charles Scribner II, to propose a reprint series to compete directly with the Modern Library. Fitzgerald did not just enthuse about the idea but even described the rationale behind it—and every other reprint series:

...uniformity gives it a sort of permanence, a place of honor in the scraggly library that adorns every small home. Besides that, it is a much easier thing for a bookseller to display and keep up. The titles are numbered and it gives people a chance to sample writers by one book in this edition. Also it keeps before the public such books as have once been popular and have since been forgotten. (Brucoli 56)

It is hard to imagine Colburn and Bentley joining Fitzgerald in 'mourning that so many good or lively books are dead so soon', but they clearly appreciated and capitalised upon

those traits that he associated with profitable series (Brucoli 58). Though they had come to recognise these traits through trial and error—their own and others’—Colburn and Bentley’s Standard Novels more than compensated them for the failures of the National Library and its siblings. The series was an unmitigated success, one of the partnership’s primary contributions to standard publishing practice, and—sadly, but not unexpectedly—a bone of contention once Colburn and Bentley’s relationship had broken down. That day was fast approaching but, in the meantime, another relationship took precedence in Colburn’s life.

ROMANTIC INTERLUDE

While Henry Colburn was still settling into his partnership with Richard Bentley, having been out of town for much of their first year together, he also formalised another alliance: his first marriage. Contemporary memoirs do not give a name to his bride, secondary sources have done no better, and Colburn himself simply calls her ‘Mrs C.’ on the two occasions he mentions her in his letters to Bentley. Her name is, however, recorded on the marriage license allegation that Colburn filed at the Vicar-General’s Office on 30 September 1830, stating his intention to wed one Mary Daysh Campbell of the parish of St. Pancras. This is the only original document respecting the marriage yet located and it reveals little about the couple beyond the facts that both were over the age of twenty-one, never before married, and intended to hold the ceremony in the rectory church district of St. Marylebone. The date on which this ceremony was actually held remains a mystery, but it undoubtedly took place during the ensuing two weeks as Colburn’s first reference to Mrs. C. occurs on 14 October (SP 349, 9). If that letter is anything to go by, the newlyweds must have honeymooned in Worthing.

Additional information on the first Mrs. Colburn—including the circumstance that paved the way for the second Mrs. Colburn—has long been as hard to locate as her name. Editor S. C. Hall became a major source about her simply by devoting a few short but intriguing lines to her in his 1883 memoirs. There he relates that he habitually spent one evening per week at the Colburn home discussing plans for the upcoming number of the *New Monthly Magazine*:

[Colburn] was then, though somewhat aged, newly married, and to a wife who made him miserable. She had originally kept a small circulating library. Colburn married her, and by her habits she rendered both him and his home wretched. I once saw her fling a teapot at his head, and she died at last a victim to intemperance. (I, 316)

Cyrus Redding, the *New Monthly*'s long-serving sub-editor, completes the body of published intelligence about Mary with his fleeting references to her in *Yesterday and Today*. He first states what might have been true for the majority of the publisher's associates: 'we had heard of Colburn's marriage, but the lady was invisible' (III, 72). If this really were true of others, then it would explain why so few ever mention her. Redding is uncertain as to her end, stating only that she was thought to have died in Paris, not long after the marriage. With reference to the circulating library she appears to have kept, possibly near Oxford Street, he offers the following epigram by Lady Morgan's husband, Sir Thomas:

When Colburn wedded the tenth muse,
Who lends out novels, plays, reviews,
He could not, for his little life,
Select more cunningly his wife.
He rightly judged his situation,
His own books wanting circulation
And placed a dame at his devotion
Whose books are in perpetual motion. (III, 74)

Besides demonstrating why Morgan never attained fame as a poet, this verse raises the unsavoury possibility that the marriage was more of a business transaction than a love match.

Happily, all of this intrigue with Mary took place while Colburn was still on good terms with Bentley, who, in his obituary of his former partner, was ready and willing to share the details (though, perversely, he too fails to give the lady's first name). Bentley launches into the narrative with the revelation that Colburn 'kept a woman for some years who kept a library called Campbell's Library in Rathbone Place'. One day (in the autumn of 1830, as we now know from the marriage licence allegation), Colburn appeared at the office with 'a singular expression of countenance' that prompted Bentley to enquire what was wrong. After an uneasy pause, Colburn announced his intention to be married and asked Bentley to give the bride away. Accordingly, Colburn sent a coach round for his junior partner on the appointed day, and Bentley went forth to escort Mary Campbell and sign the marriage register at Marylebone Church.

This account, with its hints at the groom's unease and the absence of the bride's family, would be even more mystifying than those of Hall and Redding if Bentley did not follow it up with some personal comments and a coherent ending. He continues: 'The marriage was unfortunate. I suppose it is the fate of such marriages that it should be so. At any rate, Colburn did what I think was the part of a Christian and worthy member of society'. Reading between the lines, the reason behind this 'unfortunate' union becomes all too clear: Mary Campbell was pregnant. Her family might have been too embarrassed to support her publicly (and they probably were not all that thrilled with her having been a 'kept woman' either), but Colburn was willing to take responsibility as the baby's father. Of course, there is no record of any such child, but if Mary, in her expectant condition, was as 'invisible' as Redding reports, then it is likely that only a very few people knew of the child's existence. Bentley, who was surely one of them, concludes his sketch of this sad relationship by fleshing out Hall's account of Mary's violence and intemperance: 'This Mrs. Colburn took to drinking, and in her fits was very violent, and was a fruitful

cause of trouble to the poor man. Finally she went to Boulogne, where she resided in apartments, and where, having abundance of cognac, she soon cut her way to death. He allowed her £300 a year there’.

In these few lines, Bentley offers some food for thought. First, one is struck by the French connection and wonders whether Colburn packed his wife off to stay with friends—or even relatives—of his across the channel. But the most interesting thing about Bentley’s account, in terms of what it adds to our knowledge of Colburn, is his wife’s terrible descent into alcoholism. There may be a pretty simple explanation behind it, inasmuch as the causes of such a disease can ever be simple. If Mary lost her child, whether through miscarriage, stillbirth, or antenatal complications, this would have left her not only in deep mourning but also stuck in a forced marriage with no child for consolation. Liquor might well have provided some solace. Colburn, finding the marriage not worth saving and Mary’s behaviour beyond tolerating, eventually engineered and financed a separation. Mary Colburn’s swift demise at least freed both parties from their wretched alliance.

Knowing, as we now do, something of the realities of Colburn’s marriage, we can readily appreciate the kind of emotional turmoil he was experiencing during this time. After enduring a shotgun wedding, he was apparently hit with the loss of his child and then the descent of his wife into violence. For all the latent humour of the teapot-throwing incident, Mary’s continuing physical and verbal abuse of her spouse must have had a seriously distressing impact on him. The separation obviously provided a respite for Colburn, and Mary’s death might well have come as a relief to him, but such life-changing events are nevertheless inherently stressful. The fact that all of these things seem to have happened in the space of only a year or so (1830-31) must have concentrated their effect. And on top of all this suffering, which hardly seems too strong a

word for what Colburn endured, was his continuing poor health. Indeed, compared to the problems in his personal life, Colburn's difficult relationship with Bentley might not have seemed so bad. That was about to change.

DISSOLUTION AND AFTERMATH

Something of a turning point appears to have been reached in 1831, the last full year of the partnership. As has already been mentioned, a shortage of ready cash in that year proved so serious that Colburn was forced to sell or mortgage several of his periodical holdings. Bentley attributes this financial crisis to three factors: a large stock of 'printed unpublished books' from Colburn's solo days that did not repay their costs, the failure of their non-fiction series, and a remainder sale that earned just over half of what Thomas Tegg, the famous remainderer, would have paid them if given the chance. Bentley reports that Colburn's fire sale was not enough to make up for their shortfall so that, consequently, they both had to absorb some losses. (BO)

By now, the clash of personalities had turned into a battle. Colburn, who had kept a private office throughout the partnership—first in Golden Square, then in nearby Great Marlborough Street—now made it his exclusive place of business and appears to have communicated with Bentley in New Burlington Street exclusively by letter or messenger. It is difficult to determine at what point their troubled relationship failed irredeemably. One suspects that their financial problems brought simmering disagreements to a head, but there is no record of a particular incident or argument that might have engendered the antipathy and even bitterness that increasingly marked their association. Considering what Colburn had just gone through in his personal life, he was almost certainly not his usual tactful and genial self. Bentley, too, must have been in ill humour as he saw his

future financial prospects dampened. A vicious clash between these short-tempered parties is not unlikely.

It was at this point that Bentley began the anti-Colburn campaign that would last for years. Previously, Bentley had confined himself to handling whatever problems had crossed his desk in the normal course of events—outstanding debts, dubious or nonexistent bookkeeping, and so on; now, however, he began to seek out irregularities in Colburn's business practices, watching his every move. Not surprisingly, given Bentley's uncompromising standards, he saw plenty that he did not like. With just over one month left in the life of their partnership, Bentley had his lawyers compile a case for judicial opinion (BL Add.MS.46632A, 38-43). That case—wherein Colburn's 'disposition to be troublesome' is noted—claims that Bentley believed that Colburn had agreed not to sell to the trade small quantities of the titles he personally owned without his partner's permission—the point being, presumably, to give Bentley tighter control over the firm's dealings and to impress upon Colburn that he was no longer a free agent. But, as the case also reveals, Colburn felt he had agreed to no such thing and was therefore selling 'two copies to one person five to another and so on'.

It was typical of Bentley to devote time and effort to such a minor concern, and frankly absurd when one considers that the same case predicts far greater problems ahead. It notes that the Indenture had made no formal provision for either partner to be paid, so they had struck a verbal agreement (during one of their relatively rare meetings) to pay themselves in proportion to the usual three-fifths to two-fifths ratio. (According to the Bentley obituary, Colburn took £75 per month and Bentley took £50.) The case also states that the annual stocktaking and ledger balancing mandated by the Indenture never took place—an amazing omission by the otherwise conscientious Bentley. The upshot was that, at the end of three years, the partners did not know whether they were in profit or in

debt, and Bentley was starting to fret over the possibility that Colburn could force him into paying any monies due. As the case admitted, presumably in reference to the 1831 crisis, Colburn had already bailed out the concern by providing more than his fair share of capital—now it would be Bentley’s turn, if he were to take over the business.

This particular case seems not to have led to any action, perhaps because it was superseded by a new Indenture drawn up at the dissolution of the partnership on 1 September 1832. This Indenture (BL Add.MS.46632A, 57-70) was necessary because Colburn and Bentley had failed to carry out the terms of the old one, which in any case had proved inadequate in several respects. The new agreement set the price of Colburn’s good will at £4000 (a significant reduction from the original £10,000) plus his three-fifths of any profits; Bentley would buy their unpublished stock and copyrights at cost; and the two would bid for their published stock and copyrights. Bentley still insisted on handling Colburn’s books, using the formula ‘Published for Henry Colburn by Richard Bentley’. The new Indenture sought to ensure that Colburn kept to his semi-retirement by enjoining him not to publish any new works or open a shop within twenty miles of London or Edinburgh, under penalty of a £5000 fine.

There can be no doubt that at the time of the dissolution, Colburn fully intended to abide by the terms of the Indenture and go into semi-retirement. On 15 September 1832, he and Bentley sent out a joint circular notifying their clients of the dissolution that had occurred two weeks before. A copy of this notice is among the Bentley Papers, along with Colburn’s printed cover letter, which spells out his personal position:

The accompanying circular will inform you of my having retired from the Publishing Business, and that my late Partner, Mr Bentley, has succeeded to the same. It is my intention to confine myself for the future to the management of my Periodical Publications and to the disposal of my own stock of Books. (BL Add.MS.46632A, 106-107)

Along with the letter to James Fenimore Cooper quoted earlier, these documents make clear that Colburn was winding up his involvement in the publishing of new works and earnestly trying to meet the terms to which he had agreed. Four years later, however, Colburn was back in business, in London, publishing new works as well as his old ones and all of his periodicals. What happened to change his mind and bring him out of retirement and into direct competition with his erstwhile partner?

Colburn's detractors—Richard Bentley among them—suspected that he never really intended to retire in the first place, but both Colburn's actions and his written statements prove that his intentions were genuine. A more likely consideration is that Colburn simply missed the work too much to give it up. He was just under fifty years old, a widower with no known family and a circle of friends drawn entirely from the publishing business. Furthermore, he seems to have previously devoted every waking hour to the rush of publishing new works: negotiating contracts, wooing authors, planning new formats, spotting and manipulating the latest trends. Like many other retirees, he may have found himself with too much time on his hands. With his chance at domestic happiness blighted, is it any wonder that Colburn found his state of semi-retirement less than satisfactory? For such a sociable and bustling man, no private life and a diminished professional one might well have seemed unbearable, even without Bentley's antagonistic actions.

In addition to this probable inability to adjust to retirement, Colburn was surely also influenced by the actions of Richard Bentley. At the dissolution of the partnership, Bentley was not content to run the publishing firm that had finally devolved to his personal control; instead, he continued to keep Colburn under surveillance, determined to make him follow the terms of their agreement to the letter. It was only a matter of time before Colburn began to chafe under Bentley's controlling grasp and ran afoul of the

agreement. Colburn had been ploughing a lonely furrow in the field of publishing for nearly thirty years—disregarding convention, pioneering trends, and creating new trade practices; he was never going to do things Bentley's way. What is more, Colburn himself foresaw trouble on this point, as he wrote to Bentley in August 1832, when he refused to accept the latter's proposed penalties for infringement of the new Indenture: 'I would appeal to any one whether it be reasonable that I should do so considering that they might be enforced on some trifling point which by a mere accident might be infringed & by which you might be damaged some few shillings' (BL Add.MS.59631, 7). Whether or not the terms were infringed by 'mere accident', infringed they were. The incidents in question may well have been 'trifling' to Colburn, but as far as Bentley was concerned, they posed a real threat to his livelihood.

And so there were other legal cases: Colburn published a book collating articles from the *New Monthly Magazine* with new material; Bentley considered this an entirely new work and wanted it stopped (BL Add.MS.46632A, 177-189). Colburn published his reprints in a series; Bentley felt this 'prejudiced' his own Standard Novels series and wanted it stopped (BL Add.MS.46632A, 203-205). Colburn had inserted new engravings and notes into the books in his established Modern Novelists series; Bentley believed that these amounted to new works and wanted them stopped (BL Add.MS.46632A, 203-205). Virtually none of Bentley's many legal proceedings amounted to more than threatening documents, but he continued to devote his time and money to showering them upon Colburn.

Eventually, Colburn realised that he was fighting a losing battle—partly against the boredom of being a reprint publisher, but mainly against Richard Bentley. Despite his original good intentions, Colburn's distinctive style of conducting business condemned him to perpetual conflict with Bentley's strict interpretation of how he *should* conduct it.

As long as Colburn was publishing in any capacity, while the Indenture was still in effect, he would also be wrangling with Bentley. Another man, perhaps one who loved the business less or at least had more interests outside of it, might have chosen the simple solution to this dilemma and retired altogether. But Henry Colburn felt differently. He felt that he could beat Bentley if only they were on a level playing field where he, Colburn, was once again an active and independent publisher. So it was that, late in 1834, he set about regaining that status. Displaying a hitherto unsuspected appreciation of symbolism, Colburn switched from his old 'HC' wax seal to a new one depicting a phoenix (LP D/EK/C22—109). He then tidied up some outstanding paperwork, at last handing over the lease on 8 New Burlington Street (BL Add.MS.46632B, 7-8)¹³ and cynically signing over his nominal good will upon receiving the last of Bentley's outstanding payments (BL Add.MS.46632B, 28-30). Bentley, however, was to be left in no doubt that Colburn's good will could not be bought.

On 1 January 1835, Colburn—making a fresh start on New Year's Day—issued a printed statement (BL Add.MS.46632B, 1) announcing that he would no longer be publishing his journals through Bentley; he would do it himself. He also announced that he would limit Bentley's exclusive rights to some of his books to a period of one month; after that, Colburn would start selling them from his own shop in Great Marlborough Street. Bentley preserved this announcement among his papers, presumably as ammunition for his lawyers' next assault on Colburn, but there are no records of legal action in this instance. Bentley previously had recourse to the law on decidedly flimsy pretexts; now, with the law clearly on his side, he inexplicably failed to act.

¹³ The delay in signing over the lease was not actually Colburn's fault. The 1829 Indenture allowed him to keep the lease until Bentley paid off his interest in the business and, as the 14 January 1835, lease transfer (BL Add.MS.46632B, 7-8) makes clear, there was an additional delay because two of the three original lessors had died in the intervening years.

The next legal case among the Bentley Papers, undoubtedly dating from the spring of 1836, reveals Colburn's next move away from retirement. It stated that 'Mr Bentley has received information which leads him to believe that Mr Colburn with a view to injuring him rather than that of benefiting himself has determined to resume the business of a bookseller & publisher & that his plan is to establish himself just beyond the verge prescribed by the Deed of Dissolution', viz., twenty miles of London or Edinburgh (BL Add.MS.46632B, 91-92). Bentley requested a decision on whether this return to publishing was permissible on any count and, if not, how it could be stopped. Despite the hint of paranoia in the wording, Bentley was right to worry: Colburn had just taken a house and business premises in Windsor, an extremely convenient *twenty-one* miles away from London. Colburn was neither toying with Bentley nor running a provincial front for a London-based operation; he had actually begun living in Windsor for extended periods and was receiving visits from authors and editors (see, for example, NAL F.48.E.11, 86-87).

Once Bentley learnt how serious Colburn was, yet another case was drawn up (BP Add.46632B, 102-111), based on the premise that Colburn was violating the spirit, if not the letter of their agreement. The case alleged that Colburn's setting up shop in Windsor was the same 'as if his shop were opened in London the more especially as from having carried on the same business there for a period of 25 years his name is so well known as to render it of no importance in what place he is actually domiciled'. Bentley—or at least his lawyers—must have understood the dubiousness of this claim and the fact that Colburn had at last gained the upper hand, for this case is marked by a new twisting of facts in Bentley's favour. Rather than admitting that Colburn had bailed out the partnership in its time of trouble, as previous cases had done, this one states that 'instead of assisting it as he was by the Articles bound to do Mr Colburn actually drew out from

time to time considerable sums of money & but for the assistance of Mr Bentley (thro his friends) the business must have sunk'. That Bentley should resort to such tactics was an indication of his desperation.

Richard Bentley's instinct told him to fight on as a matter of principle, but the interventions of friends made him see reason. William Upcott was the primary interlocutor between the estranged partners but, according to Bentley's own account, it was his lawyers who finally convinced him to settle with Colburn. Bentley's grandson quotes his ancestor as remembering:

I had a consultation with Mr. Knight-Bruce, and when I found my agreement was of no use in protecting me, I was exceedingly angry with Gregory (the solicitor who drew it up). On this Mr. Knight-Bruce stopped me, and said I was wrong in finding fault with Mr. Gregory, and that it was impossible to frame any agreement for such a man. (91)

Knight-Bruce wondered if Colburn had offered Bentley any money to release him from the Indenture. Upon learning he had, but that Bentley was too proud to consider such a thing, Knight-Bruce's considered advice was: 'For God's sake, sir, take his money! Take his money!' (Bentley 91).¹⁴ In the end, Bentley did.

June 1836 brought a formal cessation of the hostilities between Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley. On 4 June, they signed an Agreement resolving the outstanding financial matters between them and setting the price of Colburn's freedom at £3500 (BL Add.MS.46632B, 140-141). One week later, Colburn handed over the money and both men signed a formal Deed of Release (BL Add.MS.46632B, 142-154). They also signed a strange little declaration:

At the suggestion of our mutual Professional Friends for the better restoring harmony and good feeling between us we now withdraw all offensive representations which in the heat of a contest upon topics of difference that unfortunately arose between us, we may have been induced to make the one against the other Dated this 11th day of June 1836 (BL Add.MS.46632B, 155)

¹⁴ The second Richard Bentley is quoting this entire scene almost verbatim from the first Richard Bentley's unpublished obituary of Colburn.

Needless to say, ‘harmony and good feeling’ were never going to have a place in this relationship, but at least the worst of the fighting was over. Ultimately, they lived happily ever after. Bentley built on the strengths of Colburn’s old business and continued his line of middlebrow fiction backed by aggressive advertising. As for Colburn, the man who was supposed to be enjoying semi-retirement at the seaside instead enjoyed setting up and running a whole new firm.

Surveying this short-lived but complex and fascinating partnership adds a great deal to our knowledge and perceptions of both Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley. The senior partner emerges as a sympathetic character who genuinely did his best to welcome Bentley into his firm and to prepare him for a career as an independent publisher. Colburn’s primary problem appears to have been a tendency to disregard legal and financial technicalities, preferring instead to follow his own notions, gleaned from long experience, of what was proper and expedient. The junior partner, too, in his frustrations and disappointments appears more human than even his supporters have made him out to be. While the wasted potential of this alliance is almost palpable, these mismatched partners nevertheless achieved a degree of success on a professional level that was never possible on a personal one.

5. 'COLBURNIUS, ALIAS THE GREAT MARLBORO': HIS POST-BENTLEY COMEBACK

After Henry Colburn's semi-retirement in 1832, he returned to the publishing trade and remained active therein for another two decades. We have already seen how the first four years of that comeback period were filled with his struggles against Richard Bentley's narrow interpretation of their Deed of Dissolution and his own inability to distance himself from the trade to which he had dedicated his entire adult life. Colburn's decision to subvert these challenges by foregoing all his retirement plans exacted a heavy toll that he continued to pay in the 1830s and beyond. Only part of this price was paid in ready money: the move to Windsor, the penalty to Bentley for resuming business in London, the subsequent move to Great Marlborough Street, and the fees of the solicitors whom he kept so well occupied. Colburn paid a still higher price in both short- and long-term damage to his reputation and the alienation of many acquaintances within the trade.

The publisher's reputation, never wholly enviable, initially suffered its most direct blows at Bentley's hands. Previously, jealous and allegedly scandalized competitors had whispered against Colburn or taken sideswipes at him in the monthlies and quarterlies; now Bentley was proclaiming all of Colburn's misdeeds, real or imagined, from the rooftops. Colburn could give as good as he got but frequently did not bother, knowing from long experience that a good reputation within the trade was by no means crucial to his success. He was content to re-establish his reputation with readers as a dependable purveyor of light literature and as this happened, he paid less and less attention to Bentley. But just when it looked as though Colburn might be able to bury that failed partnership under his revitalized career, along came W. M. Thackeray to revive the old miseries. At the comparatively late date of 1848, Thackeray began publishing what was to

become the definitive parody of Bentley and Colburn, as the bickering publishers Bacon and Bungay in *Pendennis*.

Worse even than Colburn's sizeable expenses and battered reputation was the estrangement from his authors and staff that his semi-retirement had engendered and perpetuated. Though he was able to reconnect with most of his writers and even some of his staff after his return to London in 1836, he could never recapture the heady silver-fork success of the late 1820s. The moment had passed and the writers who returned to him were no longer the lively young dandies who had so captivated his readers. They could not help but be aware that Colburn had botched his own retirement and had a hand in turning a promising partnership into a byword for bitterness. From a writer's point of view, then, Colburn might not have been the most desirable person with whom to maintain a close relationship. There were an intrepid few who knew their man better and stood by him, but it took him many years to form a new circle of literary acquaintances with whom he was also on good personal terms. Fortunately for Colburn, 1841 at last saw the arrival of an intimate companion not bound up in the trade—his second wife, Eliza. A support in the difficult times, she was a special happiness when business improved and Colburn was able to retire at last in congenial and comfortable circumstances.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

Henry Colburn's retirement from the publishing of new books was, as we have seen, actually a semi-retirement into the publishing of periodicals. He had provided against the day when he would have to rely on them for his income by founding new titles like the *United Service Journal* and fortifying his *New Monthly Magazine* by hiring Bulwer as its editor. When he decided that neither retirement nor semi-retirement was for him, Colburn was fortunate to have these periodicals as a platform from which to

relaunch his publishing career. Despite the *New Monthly* having fallen from its previously exalted position (with Bulwer's eventually resigning in frustration and exhaustion) and the *Literary Gazette* being only partially Colburn's, these and the other titles provided continuity in a career otherwise cut adrift from its recent past. Of more practical importance, they brought in some revenue, kept his name in circulation, and helped to promote the few books he managed to produce.

As Sutherland dryly noted, 'The problem, however, was what to advertise?' (75). During the mid-1830s Colburn only had his stock of old copyrights to turn into new works, but his ingenuity meant that he was able to make especially good use of them. His Modern (Standard) Novelists series is the best example. This had started life as Colburn and Bentley's Modern Novelists, a series of 'disguised remainders' designed to use up Colburn's old stock (Sadleir, *Nineteenth* II, 114). After the split, Colburn relaunched the series a couple of times and renamed it Colburn's Modern Standard Novelists to compete with Bentley's Standard Novels, thus provoking one of the lawsuits mentioned in chapter four. The novels in this series ultimately became some of the cheapest books Colburn ever issued and capitalized on the continuing demand for such titles as *Granby*, *Pelham*, and *Sayings and Doings*. In a similar vein to the Modern Standard Novelists, Colburn's Naval and Military Library and his series of Irish National Tales and Romances did not exactly revolutionize the publishing industry, but they did add a certain novelty value to his old material. More importantly, they kept him afloat while he was sorting out matters with Bentley and returning to the publishing of truly new works. Colburn did manage a few new titles in 1836, but the crucial point in his comeback arrived five full years after the dissolution of his partnership with Bentley, via his 1837 reunion with Benjamin Disraeli.

Though the details have already been recounted in chapter three, it is worth restating the importance of that event and its long-term consequences. Disraeli was not just a link to Colburn's illustrious past but a long-term investment for the future. This began paying dividends with *Henrietta Temple*—the success of which moved Disraeli to christen his publisher, 'Colburnius, alias the Great Marlboro' (BDL 552)—but it was his landmark 'Young England' trilogy of the 1840s that best rewarded the author and publisher's constancy. Disraeli's *Lord George Bentinck* (1852) provided one final triumph in what was the last year of Colburn's working life. But beyond even the impressive sales and financial benefits of this relationship, perhaps the greatest blessing for Colburn was the sheer pleasure of Disraeli's loyalty. For a man with no family who had become isolated from many of his business colleagues, the mutual understanding with his 'one undoubted first-league author' was a source of real satisfaction (Sutherland 76).

Benjamin Disraeli was not, however, the only author to remain steadfast throughout the vicissitudes of Colburn's career. Horace Smith, though inferior to Disraeli in talent and renown, was his near equal in loyalty to and friendship with Colburn. He was a frequent and highly remunerated contributor to the *New Monthly* before Colburn steered him towards writing novels, where he enjoyed limited success. Smith's true claim to fame was his noble and loveable nature, which was widely remarked upon. Percy Bysshe Shelley thought him 'the only truly generous person I ever knew'; while Leigh Hunt concluded that he was simply 'delicious' (*Autobiography* II, 31). Smith's correspondence with Colburn, neatly traced by Hyder Rollins, reveals the engaging modesty and desire to please which so evidently charmed the publisher. Colburn responded with more than his usual generosity, publishing Smith's novels though they did not 'answer' (a euphemism for 'sell' often used by Colburn), and issuing two volumes of

The Poetical Works of Horace Smith (1846) when there was scant demand for one.

Perhaps the final proof of their closeness lies in the numerous visits Colburn and his second wife paid to Horace Smith and his wife, even spending at least one Christmas with them (Funchion 138).

Among the other writers who had been identified with Colburn before his partnership with Bentley, most published with him again but not always exclusively. Catherine Gore and Lady Charlotte Bury were not averse to other publishers but seemed to recognize that their brand of fiction was really only viable in Colburn's hands. Bury helpfully chose Colburn's comeback year of 1837 as the time to scrap anonymity and start publishing under her own—aristocratic—name. Even the former editors of the *New Monthly*, Bulwer and Campbell, made their way back to Colburn eventually. Bulwer published his major works with the likes of Saunders and Otley and even Bentley, but still sent minor pieces such as *The New Timon* (1846) to Great Marlborough Street. Campbell had financial obligations that tied him to Colburn immediately after his editorial resignation, but of his own free will allowed him to publish *Letters from the South* (1837), *Frederick the Great, His Court and Times* (1842-43), and other later works.

Lady Morgan's reconciliation with Colburn after her 1830 defection to Saunders and Otley has not only been disputed but also has given rise to one of the most sordid accusations made against the publisher. Cyrus Redding reports, in *Yesterday and Today*, that Lady Morgan told him of Colburn's attempt to mend their relationship after long-past disagreements. She had squared matters with him and was therefore agreeable when he asked her to sign over one of her copyrights to a young friend of his who was just setting up in the publishing business. Redding admits to being fuzzy on the details—the young publisher was either Price or Rice, the copyright in question may or may not have been *Salvator Rosa*—but he states twice that Colburn tricked Lady Morgan into signing away

all of her copyrights, not just one. This was apparently done by catching her at a party, when she had no time to read the document she was signing. Lady Morgan confided that she was ready to take Colburn into Chancery over this, had he not died before action could be taken. (III, 30-31) Sutherland repeats this story in ‘Henry Colburn, Publisher’, citing Lionel Stevenson’s 1936 biography of Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl*. He claims that Colburn perpetrated the deception by taking advantage of the author’s failing eyesight, making an already sleazy story even worse.

But did things actually happen this way? Redding appears not to be as reliable a source as might be thought. First, there is the admitted confusion over details. Second, Redding also confesses on more than one occasion that he was not close to Lady Morgan at this time of her life and consequently did not communicate with her often (cf. III, 31). This allows considerable scope for misunderstanding. Finally and most importantly, he also relates that Lady Morgan herself told him—at their very last meeting, and much to his surprise—that she and Colburn had once again been reconciled (III, 29). This flatly contradicts her statement that she was preparing a Chancery suit against him at the time of his death. Either Lady Morgan herself was untrustworthy or Redding was mistaken.

The only other contemporary source on Lady Morgan’s life holds out the possibility of some resolution of this matter. William Fitzpatrick was a personal friend of the author and, immediately after her death, released *The Friends, Foes, and Adventures of Lady Morgan*, later expanded into *Lady Morgan: Her Career, Literary and Personal*. Fitzpatrick is a staunch defender of his subject, going on at some length, for example, to refute critical notices of her novels. He could, therefore, be expected to side with her in her sufferings at the hands of Colburn—but he gives no indication that they ever took place. On the contrary, he paints a pleasant picture of the last major transaction between author and publisher:

In 1846, Mr. Colburn made a liberal offer to Lady Morgan for liberty to republish her early works in a cheap and popular form. Referring to this circumstance, the authoress said, “I have lived long enough to be once more the proprietor of some of my earliest productions, and thus as it were to become my own posterity...” (281)

Here at last are the hallmarks of a true Colburn story: liberal pay, popular reprints, a satisfied novelist. With Fitzpatrick’s account of Lady Morgan editing and writing a preface for Colburn’s new edition of *The Wild Irish Girl* (1846), it seems that we can comfortably accept her statement that she was reconciled with her publisher at the end. How the sordid tale of his deception came into being is unclear, but despite its acceptance by Redding and Sutherland, the balance of evidence tilts against such blackguardly behaviour on Colburn’s part.

The publisher was undoubtedly pleased with all of the authors who returned to the fold, but this did not prevent him from looking for new authors or spotting coming trends. So it was that the silver-fork fiction on his list was gradually replaced by the domestic fiction of new writers like Anne Marsh and Frances Trollope. The latter, at the height of her popularity, was publishing simultaneously with Colburn, Bentley, and Saunders and Otley—a state of affairs that could not have pleased any of these rivals. She took Colburn into the realms of the industrial novel with *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, Factory Boy*, which he published serially in 1839-40 before releasing it in hardcover. Frances Trollope finally settled with Colburn from 1844 until his retirement and was briefly joined there by her youngest son.

The failure of Anthony Trollope’s first novel for Colburn (his second novel overall), *The Kellys and the O’Kellys* (1848), prompted a rather strange letter from the publisher. In it, Colburn admitted that ‘it is impossible for me to give any encouragement to you to proceed in novel-writing’ but concluded that ‘as, however, I understand you have nearly finished the novel *La Vendée*, perhaps you will favour me with a sight of it

when convenient' (Trollope, *Autobiography*, 78-9). Trollope himself commented that the letter was 'not strictly logical' but sympathized with Colburn's appraisal of his future career: 'I would have bet twenty to one against my own success' (*Autobiography* 79). One can only speculate as to why Colburn chose to simultaneously discourage Trollope's writing while offering to publish his next novel; perhaps he saw a spark of talent but did not want to raise unrealistic hopes. At any rate, he did publish *La Vendée* in 1850 and, in its failure, saw his opinion of Trollope's future confirmed. Colburn seems to have been purely luckless in this matter, considering that it was Trollope's very next novel, *The Warden*, that brought him his first success. The publisher's luck was no better in his dealings with another up-and-coming Victorian, Charles Dickens.

John Macrone was a young publisher who had enjoyed considerable success with the collected *Sketches by Boz* before falling out with Dickens and suffering a general decline in business. In 1837, at the age of just twenty-eight, he sickened and died. Dickens—perhaps feeling a little guilty over Macrone's demise—conceived the idea of producing a book to benefit his widow and children, who had been left in a precarious financial situation. He was publishing with Bentley at that time but, for reasons known only to him, took this book idea to the recently rehabilitated Colburn. The two signed an agreement on 10 August 1838 naming Dickens as the editor of a three-volume work to be published the next autumn (*Letters* I, 664-5). It was to consist primarily of short pieces by Dickens and other former associates of Macrone, including Hunt, W. H. Ainsworth, Thomas Moore, and Dickens's close friend, John Forster. The editor was also to supply illustrations by George Cruikshank and Hablot K. Browne ('Phiz'). Colburn, for his part, was to pad out the volumes with an American text, Joseph Neal's *Charcoal Sketches*, and pay Dickens £450 for the copyright. As all the contributors donated their work, this sum

was to be handed over to Mrs. Macrone, who was entitled to a further £50 if the volume sold over two thousand copies in its first twelve months.

As things turned out, she never received the extra £50 and had to wait years for the original £450. The completion of this straightforward project—eventually christened *The Pic-Nic Papers*—dragged on an inexplicably long time, even allowing for the hectic lives and many obligations of its creators. Dickens thought that everything was just about ready for publication in August 1840 (*Letters* II, 119), and then found that Colburn was meddling with his editorial decisions. According to Dickens, the publisher had rejected Walter Savage Landor's contribution to the volume,¹⁵ discussed the matter with the intervening Forster, and then refused to engage with Dickens on the matter. The author-cum-editor withheld his own contribution in protest and the matter languished until Dickens remonstrated with Colburn by letter on 1 April 1841 but ultimately allowed the publisher to have his way (*Letters* II, 247). This got Colburn moving, but in late May, editor and publisher were still waiting on Cruikshank's illustrations (Dickens, *Letters* II, 287). *The Pic-Nic Papers* were finally published on 9 August 1841—almost three years to the day since the original contract was signed, and nearly four years since Macrone's death. Sales were evidently disappointing, certainly not reaching the required number of copies within a year. Dickens may well have scuppered the chances of real success by his inclusion in the original contract of a clause forbidding puffery (advertisements were to be limited to a list of contents and 'bona fide' review extracts), potentially Colburn's greatest contribution to the effort.

Needless to say, this affair dampened the previous good relations between him and Dickens and ruined any chance of his being allowed to publish 'Boz' in the future. In May 1841, Dickens had declared that 'I have never had anything to do with anybody that

¹⁵ Dickens told Leigh Hunt that Colburn had rejected the article on his reader's advice that it '*wasn't Protestant*' (*Letters*, III, 274—italics Dickens's). This explains nothing, particularly since Colburn was generally unconcerned about religion, but he clearly felt strongly about omitting Landor's piece.

has given me the annoyance of this simple affair of business with Mr. Colburn.... I most heartily and thoroughly regret that I ever took this work in hand, and would, if I could, blot the whole affair from the page of my life' (*Letters* VII, 829). Dickens seems never to have been an easy man to do business with, but Colburn clearly was at fault here both for holding up a charity project and meddling in Dickens's editorial concerns. Though dismayed at the delay in relieving Mrs. Macrone, it was this latter instance of Colburn's interference with Dickens's 'right as Editor' that really angered him: 'If the book were publishing as my own property or for my own profit, I would not forego this right though I retarded its publication a dozen years and wanted bread the while' (*Letters* II, 248). Perhaps all that can be said in Colburn's defence is that he had been judging the public taste considerably longer than Dickens and had seen his editorial decisions reap substantial rewards. He seems not to have appreciated that Dickens was different from the other editors he had dealt with, neither an absentee like Thomas Campbell nor a hack like Cyrus Redding.

Happily, Dickens moved on to bigger and better things and any actual hostility against Colburn was allowed to die. Dickens would one day dine at Colburn's table and, as will be seen, his whole set—including the artists Daniel Maclise and Clarkson Stanfield—eventually came to be involved with the publisher to some degree. They already had a mutual friend in Bulwer, but the coming man was Dickens's *alter ego*, John Forster. He occasionally served as the publisher's intermediary with other men of letters and also prepared a vastly expanded edition of Evelyn's diary in 1852, which was a commercial success and another feather in Colburn's 'serious literature' cap. The publisher's early career had, of course, focused on such memoirs and he continued to invest in non-fiction with Bentley and afterwards. One of his most successful later ventures in this arena was *The Lives of the Queens of England* (1840-8) by Elizabeth and

Agnes Strickland, though credited only to Agnes at Elizabeth's express wish. After Colburn's death, the Strickland copyright would unite Forster, Dickens, and Colburn's widow in an apposite conclusion.

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

In many ways, Henry Colburn's efforts to rebuild his career during and after the Bentley episode are inspirational. Colburn's ingenuity, perseverance, and abiding belief in himself through the most trying years of his professional life are nothing short of admirable. They are particularly so when one recognizes that he faced his troubles alone. Though he had the support of some of his writers, as has already been discussed, even there he had to cope with many losses before they returned to his fold. After the death of his wife Mary circa 1831, there is no trace of anyone in his life unconnected with the publishing business. For such a sociable man, it must have been a painfully lonely time. The gradual return of some of his authors and staff and a slight elevation in his status surely provided some consolation, but real personal happiness seems to have eluded him until 1841. That year, after a decade as a widower, Henry Colburn once again became a married man.

On 26 February 1841, he signed a marriage licence allegation at the Faculty Office in preparation for a union between himself and Eliza Ann Crosbie, 'a spinster'. The date of the actual marriage ceremony is uncertain, but it may be presumed to have taken place shortly thereafter in their parish church of St. James's, Westminster. Many sources—including Colburn's obituaries—refer to Eliza as the only daughter of Captain Robert Crosbie, R.N., and while this is undoubtedly true, it is not clear why the Captain was deemed to be so noteworthy. The marriage licence allegation states, according to the usual formula, that Eliza had reached the age of at least twenty-one years at the time of

her marriage to Colburn, but neither this document nor any of the major sources on the publisher's life gives her true age or even speculates on it. For those seeking such details about Colburn's second wife, it is fortunate that, after being widowed, she went on to marry John Forster.

The man of letters himself disseminated little information about his wife, but his great friend Dickens incorporated in his voluminous correspondence details of Mrs. Eliza Forster that are not recorded elsewhere. The most basic, and perhaps the most intriguing, of these is her age. In the year of her marriage to Forster, 1856, Dickens estimated her age at 'five or six and thirty', indicating that she was born around 1820 (VIII, 165). This means that she was in fact barely twenty-one years old at the time of her marriage to Colburn, when he was fifty-seven. How the couple met and what effect the vast age difference had on their marriage—being a childless match, one might speculate that it was platonic—are questions that even Dickens cannot answer. He does, however, reveal that Eliza had a speech impediment; in a letter written in 1860, he quotes the then Mrs. Forster as speaking of ““brilgil up the Lord Chief Barrel's youlgest childrel to see the Lord Mayor's Show”” (IX, 339). In this same letter and in others, however, Dickens also makes clear that her unfortunate propensity to substitute 'l' for 'n' did not prevent Eliza from speaking enthusiastically or at length.

Dickens also remarks in his letters upon the genial nature of the second Mrs. Colburn, calling her 'agreeable, and rather pretty' (VIII, 165), but here he is no longer the sole source of information. S. C. Hall referred to Eliza as 'an estimable lady' (I, 316), but she had a genuine enthusiast in Richard Renton: '[Colburn's] wife was, I think, the most charming, the sweetest-natured woman it is possible to conceive. *Petite*, dainty in form and feature, she was, at the same time, clever and shrewd beyond the average woman of her day' (94). Like Dickens and Hall, Renton spoke from personal knowledge of the lady:

she frequently paid visits to his mother when he was a lad and even brought him Christmas presents (Renton 114). The age difference notwithstanding, Eliza seems to have been a fair match for Colburn, who was himself ‘petite’ in stature and well deserving of the epithet ‘clever and shrewd’. Their sociability and conversational skills made them quite a convivial couple, adding to the attractions of their much remarked-upon literary soirées (*ILN* 231, *GM* 548, Renton 158) even after Colburn had retired from the publishing business.

Henry and Eliza Colburn apparently also were united by a common fondness for Benjamin Disraeli. The publisher’s feelings for his star author have already been examined, but it appears that his spouse shared them:

Mrs. Forster also, when Mrs. Colburn, was on especially friendly terms with Lord Beaconsfield, then Mr. Disraeli, whom Forster positively hated, “Dizzy” being a familiar figure at her receptions in Bryanston Square. In going through the Forster MSS. I came across several letters of the statesman-novelist to Mrs. Colburn, written in his customary courtly fashion. From their tenor it is easy to see that he had a great admiration for Henry Colburn’s clever wife; and Disraeli never praised without the very best of good reasons. (Renton 237)

Whatever Disraeli’s particular reasons for praising and admiring Eliza, he certainly was in good company in doing so. There is by no means a great body of knowledge on Colburn’s second wife, but what does exist is thoroughly positive and bespeaks a truly happy union between her and her husband.

Details of what the couple actually *did* together are scarce, though it must be remembered that for most of their married life, Colburn was still an active publisher, retiring less than three years before his death. There is no indication that they made as many seaside excursions as Colburn had with his first wife, though there were those frequent visits to Horace Smith and his wife in Brighton. It would seem that their primary social activity was indeed entertaining at home, and all the sources remark that their invitees were quite naturally drawn from Colburn’s numerous literary acquaintances:

Renton includes Dickens, Forster, and Leigh Hunt as well as Disraeli on the guest list (158). This harked back to the days when Colburn had entertained Schlegel at Conduit Street while he was visiting his friend Thomas Campbell (Redding, *Literary* I, 208) and to ‘his customary dinners in Great Marlborough Street’ (Hall I, 320).

The Colburns did their entertaining in their home at 14 Bryanston Square, but exactly when Henry and Eliza removed to that leafy enclave is unclear. Colburn’s will, written in 1854, refers to him as being ‘late of Great Marlborough Street [...] but now of Bryanstone [*sic*] Square’, implying that the change of address was a recent one (PRO: PROB 11/2219). It is just possible that the couple moved only when Colburn retired from publishing at the end of 1852. Renton claims that they in fact moved to Montagu Square (an address abutting Bryanstone Square) just before Colburn’s death (94), but this is not borne out by contemporary sources. Eliza certainly did live at 46 Montagu Square during her second marriage, but she moved there with Forster, not Colburn.

Considering the great gaps in our knowledge of Colburn’s personal life, it is very strange that there should be multiple sources of information on the paintings he had hanging in his home. In his *Literary Reminiscences of Thomas Campbell*, Cyrus Redding noted that the publisher owned a high-quality copy of Sir Thomas Lawrence’s portrait in oils of Thomas Campbell (II, 125). The notice of Colburn’s death in the *Illustrated London News* further notes that ‘his drawing-rooms were decorated by two masterpieces of our living English school of art’, explaining that the front drawing-room held Daniel Maclise’s *Caxton’s Printing Office* (also known by other titles) while the other drawing-room held ‘one of the finest landscapes of Mr. Clarkson Stanfield’ (231). The latter painting is so far unidentified; the former is not only traceable but also mentioned in another of Dickens’s letters.

On 1 October 1850, he wrote to Alfred, Count d'Orsay with the latest gossip about their friends, including Maclise: 'Il fait un grand tableau (commandé par Colburn, libraire) de Caxton l'inventeur de l'art d'imprimer. Il va l'envoyer a l'exposition de 1851 Marotte du Prince, et mort de Brougham' (VI, 184-5).¹⁶ The editors of Dickens's letters note that 'no other reference to its commissioning by Colburn has been found', but the very fact that he had it hanging in his home shortly after its completion tends to verify Dickens's statement. Maclise was actually an old friend of the D'Israeli family, so it is just possible that they made the introductions between the artist and the publisher (Ridley 178). At any rate, the printer of England's first book advertisement was certainly a most suitable subject for the home of England's champion book advertiser (Mumby 47). The painting's subsequent owner was John Forster, though it is unclear whether he purchased it or acquired it through Eliza. Forster in turn bequeathed it to Edward Lytton Bulwer's son Robert, and Maclise's painting happily remains within the Colburn circle even now, on display at the Lytton family's Knebworth estate.

There is far less information available about Colburn's personal life in general—and his married life in particular—than is necessary for a thorough knowledge of him. The details that do emerge continue to suggest a man totally immersed in his publishing milieu, bringing his wife into it rather than following her out of it. So involved was she that Thackeray saw fit to include her in the parody of her husband (and her husband's arch-rival) he created in *Pendennis*.

¹⁶ 'He is painting a large portrait (ordered by the bookseller Colburn) of Caxton, the inventor of the art of print. He is going to send it to the 1851 Exposition, which is the Prince's craze and will be Brougham's death'. My thanks are due to Marie Brown, who translated this letter for me.

‘SULTAN BUNGAY’

If Henry Colburn has not achieved lasting fame through the novels he published, he has at least achieved something like it via a novel he did not publish. The work is W. M. Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, but precisely how Colburn declined to publish it is another point of contention. Sutherland cites Rosa as saying that the publisher lost *Vanity Fair* in the sale of the *New Monthly Magazine* to Ainsworth, losing a masterpiece ‘in his scramble to make £2,500’ (60). It was actually S. M. Ellis who said this of Colburn, in his biography of Ainsworth; Rosa reads the situation very differently. First, he believes that Colburn rejected *Vanity Fair* rather than acquiring it and letting it go with the *New Monthly*. The crucial detail, however, is that Colburn did not reject *Vanity Fair* per se, but a sample of what Thackeray was then proposing as a series called *Pencil Sketches of English Society* (205). This goes a long way towards making Colburn’s rejection understandable: ‘when Colburn was presented with a chapter or two of a manuscript by his not over-valued contributor, he can hardly be blamed for not being eager about it’ (Rosa 206).¹⁷

Rosa and Sutherland seem to agree, however, that Colburn’s acceptance of Thackeray’s masterpiece would have earned him some measure of the respect that has so long eluded him, but there is no real reason to think that Thackeray could have done what Evelyn, Pepys, Disraeli, and the rest could not. The one thing Colburn’s rejection of *Vanity Fair* did earn him was Thackeray’s enmity. He had in the past written a few articles for the *New Monthly* but had never been friendly with the publisher or considered himself part of his coterie; now Thackeray felt that Colburn had insulted him by not responding to his manuscript quickly enough—and he was none too pleased with the rejection either. The result was not just estrangement but also a starring role for Colburn

¹⁷ Rosa claims that Colburn also turned down Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* but does not cite his source for this.

in Thackeray's next novel, *Pendennis*, with its extended parody of literary hacks. As with Maginn's parody of Colburn as Harry Badger in *Whitehall*, discussed in chapter three, Thackeray's portrayal of Colburn as Marmaduke Bungay in *Pendennis* is of interest not only because it represents a contemporary's opinion of him, but also because it is based on factual material that can add to the body of knowledge about him. The difficulty, as ever, lies in distinguishing fact from fiction.

We can at least recognize for certain the one central fact that lies at the heart of Thackeray's parody: Colburn's rivalry with Richard Bentley. In *Pendennis*, they appear as the publishers Bacon and Bungay, who 'were for some time the closest friends and partners' but now 'are at daggers drawn' (XXXI, 402). The main conceit is that each is trying to outdo the other but, in the process, ends up imitating him exactly; thus, they establish rival annuals superintended by rival poetesses, and are the proprietors of an evenly matched number of rival journals (based, of course, on Bentley's actually founding his *Miscellany* in opposition to Colburn's *New Monthly*). Their blind determination to gain an advantage over each other leaves them vulnerable to manipulation by writers such as Arthur Pendennis, who engineers a bidding war that results in hugely inflated payments for him.

This notion of the publishers going head to head is concretised by Thackeray's positioning of their shops directly across the street from each other. Into the description of this layout, Thackeray drops an impressively clever hint as to Bungay's 'true' identity: 'Exactly opposite to Bacon's house was that of Mr. Bungay, which was newly painted and elaborately decorated in the style of the seventeenth century, so that you might have fancied stately Mr. Evelyn passing over the threshold, or curious Mr. Pepys examining the books in the window' (XXXI, 399). That Thackeray should employ the most respectable names associated with Colburn to disparage the man is as much a testament to

his own subtle genius as to his dislike of the publisher. On a more prosaic note, his description of the ornate premises of ‘Sultan Bungay’ (XXXIV, 428) chimes so nicely with Colburn and Bentley’s improvements to 8 New Burlington Street that it seems to be more a matter of fact than fancy.

For all of Thackeray’s animosity towards Colburn, the publisher’s fictional persona does not really fare any worse than Bentley’s. Both are stated to have no taste in literature, shown to be ignorant of cultural matters generally, and speak without the eloquence of the educated hero. Bungay is, unsurprisingly, the one slated for his puffery: faced with Pendennis’s honest reviewing of books for one of Bungay’s journals, the publisher ‘grumbled sadly at his impartiality’ (XXXV, 445). Thackeray is rather indulgent on this point, however; when Pendennis asks whether he should be biased against Bacon’s books, the journal’s editor replies, “‘My good young friend—for what do you suppose a benevolent publisher undertakes a critical journal, to benefit his rival?’” (XXXV, 445). The implication is that while Bungay’s methods are far from ideal, they are nevertheless an ordinary part of the trade.

Less ordinary is Bungay’s generosity, that trait which so distinguished Henry Colburn among his peers. In Thackeray’s version of events, the publisher treats his associates to lavish meals at his home and settles the bill when they go out, helps to get one of his editors out of debtors’ prison when moved by the plight of his family, and pays his hacks immediately upon delivery of their work, saying, “‘I’m as good as my word, I am. When I say I’ll pay, I pay’” (XXXI, 407). This reflects as well on Bungay/Colburn as it does on Thackeray’s own sense of justice and fair play. It also implies that he knew all about Colburn’s visiting Theodore Hook in debtor’s prison to commission books from him.

Precisely how the warm-hearted Bungay has entered into such deadly enmity with Bacon is not clear, but Pendennis's friend Warrington reports that 'each married the sister of the other' and that each publisher's partisans blame his sister for causing the trouble (XXXI, 402). This is an amusing conceit that provides the novel with feuding wives in addition to feuding husbands, but it also makes one wonder if Thackeray's parody of Colburn extends beyond the professional realm. At the risk of reading too much into a speedily written novel containing known inconsistencies, it is worth tracing the parallels between Bungay's fictional life and Colburn's actual personal life. The initial question is one of timing. In the course of the narrative it emerges that Bacon and Bungay were in the early stages of both their partnership and their marriages, approximately eighteen years ago. At the time of their interactions with Pendennis, the time is vaguely the mid-1830s. Eighteen years before that would be the late 1810s, a meaningless date for the real-life counterparts of Bacon and Bungay. However, eighteen years before the time of *Pendennis's* publication would be circa 1830, the heyday of the Colburn and Bentley partnership *and* the date of Colburn's first marriage. We have already seen, in chapter four, that this marriage immediately preceded the first signs of animosity between Colburn and Bentley—is Thackeray suggesting that it was more than coincidence?

Matters become even more complicated as the character of Mrs. Bungay is developed. She is not a direct parody of either Mary or Eliza Colburn, but a troubling amalgamation of both. At first sight she is 'as grim as Lady Macbeth', but on further acquaintance she is revealed to be 'the fierce but really soft Mrs. Bungay' (XXXIII, 426). Just as her softness becomes clear through her dealings with the sweet Mrs. Shandon and her little girl, the cause of Mrs. Bungay's tetchiness also becomes clear: she has lost her own daughter and is now childless. 'Mrs. Bungay's thoughts flew back to a period eighteen years back, when Bacon and Bungay had just set up business [...] and when she

had had a child, named Bessy' (XXXIII, 427). Again, this corresponds closely to Colburn's own situation eighteen years before, when his wife seems to have lost a child. Mrs. Bungay still keenly feels her loss, which is used by Mrs. Bacon to prick her envy: when Mrs. Bungay shows off her fabulous clothing and chaise to her rival across the street, Mrs. Bacon responds by displaying her four children in the drawing-room window (XXXIV, 428-429). One hates to accuse Thackeray of callously poking fun at the first Mrs. Colburn's misfortune or the second (present) Mrs. Colburn's childlessness, but it is hard not to see that in his treatment of Mrs. Bungay.

Pendennis contains still more parallels that make it difficult to believe that Thackeray was not employing some very private details in his very public parody. Naming is one of the most obvious. He has the Bungays refer to each other as 'Mr. B.' and 'Mrs. B.', which is perhaps not unusual, but is nevertheless reminiscent of the way Colburn always referred to Mary as 'Mrs C.' The real giveaway, however, comes when Bungay at last calls his wife by her first name, Elizabeth (XXXIII, 427)—essentially the name of Colburn's actual wife. Intriguingly, Mrs. Bungay's name changes to Flora in the following and subsequent chapters. This could be due to a simple oversight on Thackeray's part, a desire to differentiate her from their dead child Bessy, or a realization that he had strayed too far from his target and was now hurting the blameless Eliza Colburn. Considering that Thackeray was not unduly harsh in his portrayal of Colburn as Bungay, it may well be that his discomfiting creation of Mrs. Bungay was an unfortunate mistake rather than a deliberate attack. Motivation aside, we must concede that Thackeray knew more about Colburn's personal life (through association if not intimate acquaintance) than we do today, and therefore should not be too quick to dismiss the possibility that real clues to his private difficulties lie in what is ostensibly a parody.

As useful as this parody of Colburn is from a historical point of view, in most other respects his association with Thackeray was regrettable. He gained no glory from working with that talented author but did suffer some ignominy for rejecting a work that went on to become a classic. Furthermore, the publisher found himself parodied at length not in an ephemeral novel, such as Maginn's *Whitehall* had been, but in a novel still in print long after most of his own have faded. To some people, Colburn is *only* known as the original of Bungay. And perhaps worst of all, from Colburn's point of view, *Pendennis* meant that he could never live down his hostilities with Bentley. Their partnership had been dead fifteen years before that novel appeared, but the rivalry would now live on far longer than the antipathy that animated it.

‘SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN’

The Thackeray parody and similar jibes did not damage Colburn's position in his own time as much as they did subsequently. With his still generous manner and fine networking skills, Colburn actually fared better than Bentley in the 1840s and gradually reconnected to others in the trade. When they began to get serious about implementing international copyright agreements, Colburn was in a position to aid the movement. Of course, he had already advised Disraeli on pursuing the issue at the parliamentary level, but here was an opportunity to take action—in the surprising company of his competitors, no less. So it was that Colburn found himself at a meeting chaired by Thomas Longman on 30 June 1842, moving and seconding motions against piracy (Dickens, *Letters* III, 253n). Nearly ten years later, he was still involved in the copyright issue, sitting on the platform at another meeting on 1 July 1851 (Dickens, *Letters* VI, 421n). The actual influence wielded by these worthy gatherings is questionable, but they are among the few instances of Colburn taking a public role.

Why he chose to launch himself into public life, albeit in a limited capacity, at this late stage of his career can only be matter for speculation. It is, of course, quite possible that this was simply the only issue that really interested Colburn enough to prompt him into action. He might also have been inspired by his talks with Disraeli or encouraged by Eliza. Then, too, he might just have enjoyed the company at these gatherings, which usually included many of his own authors. The 1842 meeting, for example, involved G. P. R. James, Horace Smith, Lord William Lennox, Sir Charles Morgan, and J. S. Buckingham. Bulwer had sent a letter of support to that meeting and took the chair himself at the 1851 gathering. The casual observer could be forgiven for thinking that Colburn was actually leading his writers into action on the copyright issue. Perhaps because he was *not* a leader, his activity in this area is never remarked upon in the major sources about his life, but his willingness to play a new role in the publishing trade is a revealing addition to our knowledge of him.

One of his activities within the trade that *has* often been noted is Colburn's founding of new publishing houses. This was not a specific aim of his, but a natural by-product of the decisions he made in pursuing his real goals. Saunders and Otley had purchased his circulating library, and then followed him into the business of publishing new books, having first watched the master at work. Richard Bentley had been groomed to succeed Colburn upon his retirement, and then found himself competing with the man who had taught him the business. After working for Colburn, Frederick Shoberl's son William also entered the trade (Sutherland 64). Though unremarked elsewhere, it seems likely that Colburn engendered the publishing partnership of Cochrane and Pickersgill, too.

According to Edward Morgan, James Cochrane entered Colburn's employ at approximately the same time as Ollier and 'ere long obtained a large share of Mr.

Colburn's confidence' (SP 357, 1). He witnessed the contract Colburn signed with Sir Walter Scott for *Religious Discourses by a Layman* in 1828 (NAL F.48.G.4, 20). Morgan relates that Bentley, shortly after his arrival, ordered Cochrane's sacking on the grounds that he 'had committed some fraudulent act some few years before when in the service of Underwood a medical publisher' (SP 357, 5). Cochrane's departure occurred after 19 October 1829, when Colburn sent him the instructions for sending out gratis copies of *The Borderers*, revealing that Cochrane held an key post in Colburn's vaunted advertising department (SP 348, 5-6). Morgan's memoir also reveals that Colburn, in reorganizing his staff at the start of the partnership, considered bringing in John Pickersgill—'a brother of the painter of that name and a Royal Academician'—as head bookkeeper (SP 357, 3). This was Morgan's post and he, unwilling to work under someone new to the firm, threatened to quit. Bentley took his part so Colburn, no doubt concluding that this was not worth fighting over, gave Morgan the prime position and relegated the unlucky Pickersgill to keeping the booksellers' accounts. (SP 357, 3-4) If he was unhappy with this position, as well he might have been, Pickersgill could conceivably have left the firm at about the same time as the disgraced Cochrane, joining forces with him shortly thereafter.

Cochrane and Pickersgill claimed their place in publishing history by producing Roscoe's Novelist's Library from 1831 to 1833.¹⁸ They began this reprint series on 1 May 1831, a strikingly short time after Colburn and Bentley began their Standard Novels series on 25 February. Sadleir, in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, claims that 'the interval between these two dates is too short for the later series to be accused of having imitated the earlier one' (II, 108). This could truly be said of any other publishers, but it looks very much as if Cochrane and Pickersgill were privy to Colburn and Bentley's publishing plans, either

¹⁸ This series was associated with a Thomas Roscoe, who may or may not have been the same Mr. Roscoe referred to in Colburn's puffing instructions to Cochrane.

through a friend at the firm or through Pickersgill's employment there till a late date. It is, of course, possible that the young publishing firm conceived their reprint series all on their own, but as pupils of Henry Colburn, it would have been unusual for Cochrane and Pickersgill not to spot a coming trend and act speedily to capitalize upon it.

As Colburn began to prepare himself for his definitive retirement, he once again looked round for a successor and this time found him already among his staff. He was Daniel Hurst. Information about Hurst is scarce, but we do at least know that he was born in 1826. The fact that he witnessed a contract between Colburn and John Poole in 1842, at the tender age of 16, implies that he was apprenticed to the publisher, just as Colburn had been to Earle (NAL F.48.E.4, 118). Hurst is referred to by several writers as conducting business on Colburn's behalf from 1843 onwards, so he was clearly a promising assistant. The *Dictionary of Literary Biography* refers to him as Colburn's 'junior partner', but the precise meaning of that term is unclear (155). There is certainly no evidence to suggest that he was a partner in the sense of an equal to Colburn; rather, 'junior partner' seems to mean anointed successor. There could hardly have been anyone more qualified for that role than Hurst, whose entire working life had been spent at Colburn's feet and who may well have seemed like a surrogate son to the aging publisher.

The reasons why Colburn staved off retirement until 1852, when he was well into old age, are most likely the same ones that drew him out of his first retirement: a genuine love of the publishing trade, the creative excitement of his business dealings, the personal ties to many of his writers, the galvanizing effect of his rivalry with Bentley. One nebulous factor in Colburn's later working life is his health, the problems concerning which might have been expected to increase or worsen with age. Just as he had previously confided the details of his ailments to Bentley, at this stage of his career Colburn confided them to the Disraelis. In various notes and letters to them, he makes such remarks as, 'I

have really been too unwell to attend properly to business matters' (HP 235/3, 157-158), and the far more interesting, 'I am sorry I cannot have the pleasure of waiting upon you as I have hurt my foot & cannot put a shoe on' (HP 235/3, 60-61). While they reveal that he was not in optimal health—and perhaps had not been since the late 1820s—such statements do not make clear whether he was very poorly or just feeling the usual aches and pains of old age. Whatever the case, his love of publishing—and steely determination—kept him in business when many other people would have retired to take their ease.

The year 1852 presents some difficulties to the Colburn historian as certain sources claim that he retired in that year, while documents of the time attest to his continuing involvement in affairs at Great Marlborough Street. In truth, it was a time of transition, with Colburn wrapping up his own affairs and Hurst preparing to take over the firm. Part of Hurst's preparation was organizing the finances to purchase the firm. Richard Bentley, it will be remembered, raised his money by selling his share in the printing firm he ran with his brother; Hurst had no such property to sell, so his solution was partnership. He persuaded Henry Blackett, twenty-three years his senior but a good friend, to put up the money and join him in the publishing trade. Where Blackett got the money is not known. This truly lamentable lack of information about Hurst and Blackett must, it seems, be ascribed to the destruction of most of their archives.

Whatever the details of its formation, the new partnership of Hurst and Blackett succeeded Colburn in January 1853, publishing for years under the slogan 'Successors to Henry Colburn'. They inherited several of his authors, including Frances Trollope, but lost others, including Disraeli, who had stuck with the firm in the past out of personal loyalty to Colburn. Just as they continued to maintain Colburn's literary focus, so they also seem to have kept up his business practices, which were surely ingrained in Daniel

Hurst from long service with Colburn. The *Dictionary of Literary Biography* characterizes Hurst and Blackett as ‘one of the less substantial houses’, along with Colburn’s other publishing progeny, Saunders and Otley (155), but that did not stop either firm from enjoying continued success in the arena of light literature. Henry Blackett died in March 1870, followed by Daniel Hurst just sixteen months later. The firm then continued under the auspices of Blackett’s sons (DLB 157) and survived well into the twentieth century, when it was subsumed into Hutchinson’s during the period of consolidation in the industry after the Great War. The last Hurst and Blackett imprint appeared in 1954, marking the demise of the last of Colburn’s direct successors (DLB 158).

Colburn demonstrated his business acumen one last time at the very moment of his retirement by deciding to retain, along with the Disraeli copyrights, the seven copyrights he considered to be most valuable, along with the remaining stock of the titles and their stereotype plates. Colburn had, of course, retained his old copyrights after his split from Bentley, intending at that time to live off the profits of the reprints; at his second retirement, they were retained as investments for himself and his wife. His choices comprised his very best sellers: Eliot Warburton’s *Crescent and the Cross: Romance and Realities of Eastern Travel*; *The Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn*; *The Diary and Correspondence of Samuel Pepys*; Agnes Strickland’s *Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest*; Sir Bernard Burke’s *Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire*, and the companion volumes on the *Landed Gentry* and *Extinct Peerages*. The prices these investments ultimately fetched for the Colburn estate are discussed below, but it is some measure of his astuteness in choosing them that the Strickland copyright, originally purchased for £2,000, sold for £6,900 at auction in 1857.

WHERE THERE'S A WILL...

Henry Colburn did not have long to enjoy his richly deserved retirement: he died at his home in Bryanston Square on Thursday, 16 August 1855, at the age of seventy-one. In his unpublished obituary of Colburn, Richard Bentley reports that his former partner had 'suffered more than a year before from a fistula, which had been operated upon by Brodie; but about a month ago the disease returned, and after three days' intense suffering he sank under it'.¹⁹ One would give a great deal to know exactly how Bentley acquired all of his information, but he obviously kept a close eye on Colburn long after he had ceased to be a dangerous competitor.

Bentley attended the funeral, too, which took place on 23 August in All Souls' Cemetery in Kensal Green.²⁰ Colburn's funeral 'was conducted with more than ordinary form. Hearse with four horses, and two mourning coaches, and four private carriages. The coffin had gilt trappings' (BO). With all of this pomp at the funeral, one might have expected a suitably grand monument to mark the grave, but there is in fact only a plain landing stone marked with the plot number (12644) and a simple inscription:

HENRY COLBURN
Died
16th August 1855

Thus, Colburn contrived to keep his birth date and other personal details secret for good. The observant Bentley, who reveals much about the obsequies that would not otherwise be known, sadly fails to divulge the names of those who filled all the coaches and carriages at Colburn's interment. There is no indication whether any of the other mourners were connected to the trade, but one might have expected at least Daniel Hurst

¹⁹ The reference is to Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie, sergeant-surgeon to both King William IV and Queen Victoria and a key figure in the British medical establishment of the time.

²⁰ Known as Kensal Green Cemetery, this was one of several private cemeteries founded in the 1830s to accommodate London's rapidly expanding population. It was an apt choice for Colburn: Thomas Henry Lister was already buried there, and John Forster, Leigh Hunt, and W. M. Thackeray would eventually join him.

to pay his respects. As for family, Colburn had only Eliza and her few relatives, who probably attended the funeral as well.

It was to these people that he left a substantial estate and a lengthy will. This document offers clarification of a few factual matters but like so many other things associated with Colburn, it is far more complicated than it initially seems and actually raises as many questions about his life and legacy as it answers. Henry Colburn drew up his will (PRO: PROB 11/2219, 445) on 1 August 1854 with solicitors G. F. Hudson and C. Coupland of London—not otherwise known in Colburnian affairs. After the brief preamble about his place of residence, it names Eliza as his sole executrix and her brother Malcolm Douglas Crosbie as her substitute should she predecease her husband. Like Colburn's solicitors, Malcolm enters Colburn's personal history with this will, in which he features prominently. Nothing is known about him before or after the date of this document. If it seems odd that a hitherto obscure relative should be suddenly elevated to the status of beneficiary *and* trustee of the publisher's estate, it must be remembered that Colburn had no relatives of his own and Eliza seems to have had no one but Malcolm. The fact that Colburn's will is almost solely concerned with the Crosbies confirms suspicions that he had few personal ties outside of the publishing business.

Colburn's will does, however, mention a few people besides the Crosbie family and the first is indeed an acquaintance drawn from his business affairs. Immediately after the naming of his executor, Colburn begins distributing his largesse:

I bequeath unto my friend Lavinia Hurst the wife of Daniel Hurst of Great Marlborough Street aforesaid Publisher as a mark of my esteem for her the sum of Five hundred pounds and for her sole and separate absolutely [*sic*] use independently of her said present or any future husband.²¹

²¹ Quotations from Henry Colburn's will are presented exactly as they were written, i.e., without any punctuation.

Because there is no previous indication of a close relationship—or indeed *any* relationship—between Colburn and his successor’s wife, this special bequest comes as quite a surprise. Daniel Hurst had been his associate for so long that it was almost inevitable that Colburn would be on familiar terms with his wife but still unusual that he should remember her in his will with such a tidy sum. Just as intriguing as their relationship and the money is the clause keeping it out of Daniel Hurst’s hands. It is tempting to imagine romantic explanations about Lavinia’s secret life (and, indeed, Colburn’s), but in the absence of any other evidence, one has to accept at face value Colburn’s assertion that the gift is purely a mark of his ‘esteem’.

Similar questions are posed by the next special bequest in Colburn’s will, whereby he settles an annuity on ‘Harriett Smith the wife of Philip Smith of Brook Street West Square South Lambeth’. The will states that the amount of the annuity shall be £80 as long as her mother Alice (surname illegible, unfortunately) is alive, but shall drop to £50 for the survivor ‘after the death of either of them’. At no point does Philip Smith figure in the equation. Here again the absence of hard fact forces speculation as to who these people were and why Colburn bestowed money on them. There is some possibility of a romantic attachment to either Harriett or Alice, although if that were the case he might have been slightly more generous. A more prosaic possibility is that Harriett or Alice or both were servants in the Colburn household. This makes the sums seem reasonable (£80 annually would keep two working-class women comfortable but would have been insulting to someone of Lavinia Hurst’s status) and could well explain why both women are mentioned in the will.

In the end, though, the simplest explanation for these bequests is that Colburn was just companionable with all of these women and wanted to ensure that they were well provided for when he was no longer around to look after them. This is in keeping with his

generally good relations with women, his lack of other confidants and relatives to provide for in his will, and his known propensity for gift giving. That Colburn should be friends with Lavinia, Harriet, and Alice and remember them in his will is, rather than unusual, almost to be expected.

After the bequests to these ladies, Colburn's will turns its full attention upon the most important lady in his life, destined to be his executor after his death, Eliza. Colburn bequeaths her £10,000 to be used to purchase annuities, which after her decease are to benefit Malcolm Crosbie's children: Maria, Fanny, Henry, Mary Alice, Arnold, and Eliza Ann. These children were, of course, the Colburns' nieces and nephews, and one cannot help noticing that the publisher and his wife have their own namesakes among them. Such strong familial bonds no doubt reflected genuine affection but must also have stemmed from the smallness of that family group, which has already been mentioned. With no other claims upon his fortune, Colburn goes on to provide in his will another £10,000 to Malcolm himself, again to benefit the children after his demise. (The *Gentleman's Magazine* obituary makes quite a mistake here, claiming that the bequest was actually to Eliza's 'sister, the wife of Malcolm Douglas Crosbie' [548]; apparently, no one thought to query why Eliza's brother-in-law shared her maiden name.)

Unfortunately for anyone attempting to read this will, matters are not set out as simply as they are here. Wills in general are not models of brevity and concise expression, but Colburn's is a particularly painful example of a benefactor—or, perhaps that benefactor's solicitors—laboriously making provision for every possible eventuality. Thus, there are restrictions respecting the children's ages and the daughters' marital status, and endless contingency plans should one or some or all of the children die during Eliza or Malcolm's lifetimes. Then there is the naming of trustees and how one might go about resigning as a trustee or appointing a new one should an old one resign or die or 'go

to reside beyond the Seas'. The document sprawls over six pages, each of them containing precisely fifty-seven closely written lines. This excess of detail may well be attributable to exceptionally zealous solicitors and clerks, but one would like to think that, after plenty of lawsuits over vague and poorly planned contracts, Henry Colburn had finally learned to demand a precise and unchallengeable legal document.

Almost buried beneath repetitious jargon and interminable clauses lies one last bequest, with some very interesting and even problematic caveats attached. To appreciate fully the situation Colburn constructed, it is necessary to quote at length:

And as to all that my Leasehold Messuage or [illegible] house in which I now reside situate in Bryanstone Square aforesaid and all my Copyrights and ALL THE REST AND RESIDUE OF MY PROPERTY ESTATE AND EFFECTS whether [illegible] or personal or whatsoever and wheresoever and including what may be undisposed of of my said property in the improbable event of none of the said children of the said Malcolm Douglas Crosbie acquiring a vested Interest in their said Legacies or bequests I give devise and bequeath the said unto my said wife for her own sole and separate absolute use and benefit Provided always that in case my wife shall die in my lifetime then I devise and bequeath my said Leasehold Messuage [illegible] house copyrights and all other my said residuary property estate and effects unto the said Malcolm Douglas Crosbie his heirs executors administrators and assigns according to the nature and quality thereof respectively [illegible] that he or they be and shall with all convenient speed after my decease sell all and convert into money all the said Leaseholds copyrights and other residuary personal Estate and effects[.]

The unfortunate illegibilities obfuscate matters, but it does seem that Eliza was to inherit his property to do with as she pleases, while Malcolm and his heirs, should they inherit, would be forced to convert the property into ready cash.

Why Colburn would make such a proviso is yet another question without a definite answer. The simplest explanation may be that it is only possible to fairly divide an inheritance between six children and their father once that inheritance is liquidated. This would certainly preclude any arguing over who got the Stanfield painting, whether to sell the house, and so on. The publisher managed to introduce an amusing note into the legalistic proceedings at this point—though unintentionally—by directing Malcolm and

his heirs to spend whatever amount they deem 'reasonable for promoting and facilitating such Sale or Sales'. Only Colburn would contrive to advertise from beyond the grave.

Though a carefully constructed document, his will is not without its flaws, and the chief one appears in relation to the notable matter of his copyrights. In the long quotation above, these copyrights are included in the property that Eliza inherits outright and that Malcolm must sell. Nevertheless, they are mentioned later, after the advertising proviso, as a separate entity exempt from the big property sale: 'as to my Copyrights the said Malcolm Douglas Crosbie shall have full discretion and authority to sell or to retain and publish the same as he shall think best'. Because Eliza survived her husband, and her brother never inherited, these conflicting clauses were never subjected to legal scrutiny. The latter clause does, however, imply that Colburn trusted Malcolm to put his copyrights to good use, just as he trusted Eliza. What actually happened to these copyrights is yet another enigmatic episode in Colburn's uncertain history.

Eliza Colburn lost no time in proving her husband's will, taking care of that matter on 1 September 1855, just one week after his funeral. This need not reflect badly on her as it shows her discharging an important responsibility while also pragmatically moving on to the next stage of her life. Colburn was, after all, an old man whose death could not have been entirely unexpected, while she was a lively woman with no dependents and a small fortune at her disposal. The precise size of that fortune is uncertain, only partly due to the muddle surrounding the copyrights. Colburn's obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* claims that his estate was 'sworn to be under 35,000*l.*' (548); this is repeated in Curwen's *History of Booksellers* (293) and the *Dictionary of National Biography* (711). Dickens, writing just a year after Colburn's death, valued the estate differently, stating that Eliza had 'as many thousand pounds as she is years of age', namely, 'five or six and thirty' (VIII, 165). This notion that she had inherited an estate

worth £35,000, not *under* that amount, is taken up by the *Dictionary of National Biography* (49). Based on what we know of Colburn's possessions, it seems likely that his estate would have had a total value close to £35,000, including the £10,000 each for Eliza and Malcolm, some liquid assets, the house in Bryanston Square, its furnishings, and perhaps Colburn's copyrights.

Regardless of her fortune's precise monetary value and composition, Eliza Colburn was by any standard well provided for. Taken in conjunction with this wealth, her relative youth and charming character made remarriage a distinct possibility, though it seems that her late husband had once registered his disapproval of such an action. This is remarked upon by none other than Richard Bentley, who wrote in his diary of 'poor Colburn who was most desirous that his widow should not marry again' (31 July 1860). Bentley most likely culled that from industry gossip—surely not from Colburn himself—which might also have been the source for his mistaken conviction that his erstwhile partner had 'made Forster one of his executors' (Diary, 31 July 1860). It is possible that John Forster was made a trustee of Colburn's estate under the various clauses of his will, but nowhere in that document is Forster named in any capacity. He soon secured his own place in Colburn's affairs by marrying the executrix on 24 September 1856.

While this is not the place to scrutinize Eliza's second marriage, it is nevertheless instructive to note just how surprising the event was—and why. The surprise came despite the fact that Renton—and therefore, one assumes, others—knew of Mrs. Colburn's disposition: 'She and Forster had always been the best of friends: her respect and admiration for the big, burly Northumbrian man of letters, being unbounded' (95). Renton's remark that no one knew how the marriage was arranged (95) is borne out by the fact that when Forster notified his two closest friends of the match, both Bulwer and Dickens wrote back expressing shock as well as congratulations. Bulwer was so far

outside the loop that he had to admit to Forster, just a week before the wedding, ‘I have at present but a slight acquaintance with Mrs. Colburn’ (Renton 147-8). Dickens not only knew Eliza but also realized that she and Forster were keeping company as early as March 1856. This did not preclude him, however, from reacting with characteristic drama to news of Forster’s betrothal: ‘It is a thing of that kind, that after I knew it (from himself) this morning, I lay down flat, as if an Engine and Tender had fallen upon me’ (*Letters* VIII, 70).

This surprise was surely due in part to Forster being forty-four years old and a confirmed bachelor, and in part to the couple’s discretion. But the marked contrast between Eliza’s first husband and her second one seems also to have been an issue. We have already seen evidence of Colburn’s gentlemanly behaviour towards women—both during his lifetime and through the medium of his will—and need not doubt that he granted Eliza a liberal allowance as well as mastery of her free time and social life. Renton pointedly contrasts the jolly Mrs. Colburn who frequently came calling and bestowing gifts with the subservient Mrs. Forster who spent her time tending to her husband, ‘a despot in his own house’ (114). The theme is picked up by Bentley, who continued to keep a sharp eye on Colburnian matters. Four years into the marriage, Bentley told his diary: ‘Long ago no doubt the poor woman has discovered her mistake. Whatever faults Colburn might have had he was a gentleman as regards ladies and was capable on occasion of doing many kind and generous actions. Forster is a brute’ (31 July 1860). A further two years later, Bentley heard that Forster was cutting old acquaintances since acquiring the money and status of ‘the foolish young widow of Colburn’; ‘he can never come within a hundred miles of the character of a gentleman, a boisterous, brutal ruffian as he is’ (6 Feb 1862).

That Forster should provoke such strong feelings in Bentley as to drive him to praise Colburn and pity his widow seems to speak for itself, but it might be unwise to take Bentley's statements at face value. First, we have seen that he was deriving his information from gossip (remembering, for example, that he mistakenly believed Forster to be Colburn's executor) and therefore was not an unimpeachable witness to John and Eliza Forster's relationship. Just as important is the fact that Bentley had badly fallen out with Forster in 1840, when the writer had backed out of a deal to write a biography of Queen Anne for Bentley (Renton 142-3). The publisher had, of course, blundered into even worse relations with Forster's great friend, Dickens, who battled with him over novel agreements and the editing of *Bentley's Miscellany*. While Bentley's own motives in criticizing Forster must, then, be taken into consideration, we need not wholly discount his appraisal of the man who took Henry Colburn's place at Eliza's side—after all, even Dickens once felt the need to remark that Forster was not so bad as he seemed, explaining that 'he has great tenderness under a tough exterior' (*Letters X*, 173).

Diverting as they may be, further details of Eliza Colburn's second marriage cannot concern us here.²² The crucial event after Colburn's death was the disposal of his property, particularly those important copyrights. The obituaries, of course, have nothing at all on the dispersal of his effects, but the other major sources offer a refreshingly united front. We have already seen that Colburn retained his seven most valuable copyrights and it was these that were auctioned off on 26 May 1857. Together they fetched a very impressive £14,000, with Strickland's *Lives of the Queens of England* accounting for £6,900 of that total.

Into this situation where all the older, and usually less reliable, sources are actually in perfect harmony, Sutherland introduces intriguing new information (79), based

²² John Forster died in 1876 while Eliza lived on until 1894. They are buried together in Kensal Green Cemetery (plot number 21356).

on a contemporary article in *Notes & Queries*. Besides recounting some of the items sold and prices fetched, he identifies the men who ran the auction and bought the items: Charles Dickens and John Forster, respectively. Sutherland reports that the auction took place ‘with Dickens acting as umpire’, though he does not explain whether this means ‘auctioneer’ or just a kind of arbiter of fair play. While one can readily imagine Dickens acting in either of those capacities, this is actually a misreading of the *Notes & Queries* article. In that report, the auctioneers are named as ‘Messrs. Southgate & Barrett, of Fleet Street’; Dickens only enters the picture when the option on an abridgement of Strickland’s *Lives of the Queens of England* is mentioned: ‘This abridgement has been made, and is now ready for press; the price to be settled by reference, Mr. Charles Dickens having been named as umpire’ (458). Thus it is left to the novelist to arbitrate a price between Miss Strickland and the purchaser of the copyright, not named in *Notes & Queries* but purported by Sutherland to have been John Forster. (One has to question the fairness of an arrangement in which the ‘umpire’ is the best friend of one of the concerned parties.) Besides the Strickland copyright, Sutherland says that ‘Forster acquired for himself the manuscript correspondence of Garrick, the Burke copyright’ and ‘other material’. *Notes & Queries* confirms that Forster actually bought all three of the Burke copyrights—the *Peerage*, the *Landed Gentry*, and the *Extinct Peerages*—but makes no mention of any manuscript materials being included in the auction. Forster surely owned the Garrick manuscripts but, given the lack of any direct evidence, whether he truly acquired them in this way could be questioned.

Sutherland realizes that this auction brings us right back to the matter of Henry Colburn’s original will: ‘The fact of the auction suggests that Colburn’s will prevented a direct transfer of property from Mrs Colburn to her new husband’ (79). But as we have seen, among the myriad clauses of that document, there was no such obstruction placed

upon Eliza or any future husband. She inherited that portion of Colburn's estate outright to do with as she pleased, just as all the women mentioned in the will were granted bequests to hold independently. It is therefore most perplexing that an auction in which Forster was obliged to be the chief purchaser took place at all. The matter is further complicated by the question of how Forster acquired documents such as the Garrick manuscripts if not via this auction. There is hardly enough information available to support even broad speculation; Dickens, regrettably, does not refer to the auction or Forster's acquisitions in any of his extant letters and none of the other sources on Colburn seem even to be aware of the involvement of Dickens and Forster in this matter.

And so, even in death, Henry Colburn contrived to augment the many mysteries and perplexities that surrounded him in life. This last mystery of the auction would be particularly worth unravelling as it promises to shed light on many other puzzling matters: exactly what documents Colburn retained, what legal provisions he might have made for Eliza outside of his will, the full character of his relationship with Forster, and Colburn's real standing with that great circle of friends that included Bulwer, Maclise, and Stanfield as well as Dickens and Forster. Until the day of enlightenment, however, it is as well to assess the facts that have been established and to acknowledge the level of success Colburn reached. Though not phenomenally wealthy, he did exceptionally well to engineer what were essentially two careers: the first, his advent in the publishing business from total obscurity, and the second, his return after his struggles with Bentley. Whatever wealth, status, and personal happiness Colburn possessed at the time of his death, he had earned.

6. 'THE RESULT OF OUR LABOURS'

In 1830, while negotiating with Edward Lytton Bulwer for his latest novel, *Paul Clifford*, Henry Colburn wrote the author a letter recapitulating their agreement thus far (SP 348, 2). The publisher noted that although they still differed on one point—on which he did not elaborate—he would send Bentley round to collect the manuscript anyway, promising that Bulwer's other terms would be met and that Bentley would come bearing a cheque. The letter concluded with Colburn passing over the disputed matter 'and trusting that we shall all be eventually perfectly satisfied with the result of our labours'. At this point in the thesis it is useful to adopt an attitude similar to Colburn's in this letter. Having surveyed the publisher's life, concentrating on those people and incidents that were most important, most intriguing, or most poorly understood, it is now time to sum up—acknowledging that there are still some outstanding matters but nevertheless moving towards a satisfactory result.

The aims of this thesis were threefold: to correct misinformation about Colburn, to add new information, and to reassess Colburn's reputation and accomplishments in light of the facts thus established. The many primary sources that I was able to uncover meant that much could be accomplished in respect of the first two aims. These sources allowed me to establish such elementary yet previously unknown details as the probable year of Colburn's birth, the name of his first wife, the dates of his moves between business addresses, and the terms of his will. They also made it possible to delineate, partially if not wholly, Colburn's extensive involvement in periodical publishing, his friendship with Disraeli, his partnership with Bentley, the business practices on which he built his success, and the backlash that coloured how that success was perceived. Even while correcting or adding to the facts of these matters I have had occasion to note where gaps

remain, where there are no primary sources to reveal, for example, Colburn's family origins, his personal friends and interests outside the trade, or the point at which his difficulties with Bentley metamorphosed into estrangement. Yet these gaps cannot be—indeed, have not been—enough to prevent the achievement of the third aim: reassessment. Many of the slurs on Colburn's character have been countered with evidence of his finer points and, in some cases, of the hidden agendas at work against him. In the same vein, the characterization of him as a rogue in the publishing trade has been foiled by proof that he did not operate outside the norm but in its vanguard. Colburn's progressiveness can now be seen more clearly than ever through his involvement in the inception of a number of important magazines, several other publishing houses, and the careers of more authors than is customarily acknowledged.

This chapter gathers together the three strands of purpose in this thesis, considering the results as well as the questions they have left unanswered and the matters yet to be explored. The first section considers Colburn as a person, not just a name on a title page or a figure in a series of anecdotes. The next section collects the fallacies circulated about Colburn—personal and professional—and pits them against the realities discovered or recovered by this thesis. Following this are three sections suggesting further lines of enquiry about Colburn: 'Defacers of Paper' looks at some of his minor authors and what their correspondence begins to reveal; 'Crede Byron' uncovers the numerous but unexamined connections between the poet and the publisher; and 'The Spirit of the Age' offers some ideas on beginning to situate Colburn within the publishing trade and, more generally, within the literary world of his time. Ultimately, it becomes clear that this thesis has not so much closed the book on Henry Colburn as opened it up and provided reliable groundwork for its continuation and expansion.

‘THIS SINGULAR MAN’

With so much verifiable information about Colburn now available, including a number of statements in his own words, it is tempting to conclude that we now have a more or less accurate measure of the man. The temptation is particularly strong because his private life is no longer the blank that it used to be, since we now have some details about both of his marriages and a few of his friendships. Yet it is dangerous and, perhaps, flatly wrong to conclude that we really understand Colburn as a complete individual. Our knowledge of him in the intimacy of his marital relationships is virtually nil, with the facts consisting of only basic names and dates, augmented by a scattering of details from outside observers and none directly from Henry, Mary, or Eliza Colburn. The situation is not quite so dire with his friendships, where there is at least some extant correspondence between the parties involved. Even here, however, the fact that these friendships were predicated upon business concerns means that they involve Colburn’s professional as well as his private self. It is much safer to confine our appraisals of his character to his public persona; there the evidence allows us to know Colburn the publisher far better than Colburn the man. Looking at Colburn’s conduct allows us to reassess him at a more comprehensive level, where we can evaluate the big picture rather than just particular incidents or interactions, and it is also a necessary step towards placing him alongside other publishers and in the history of publishing generally. We are able to see the traits and tendencies that made him a successful publisher, both in the strictly economic sense and in the sense of the human economy that is the foundation of such a business. It is too much to say that because Colburn’s characteristics helped him to become very successful, they are *ipso facto* the characteristics of a successful publisher, but knowing what worked for one man does provide a basis for considering what might have worked for others.

It is hardly surprising to find that previous attempts to delineate Colburn's characteristics were riddled with errors, but it is startling to find that even some contemporary accounts included procrastination and indecisiveness among his failings (see, for example, Hall I, 316 and Rosa 199). Because Colburn could move very swiftly when it mattered—such as when capitalizing on an author's success—it is obvious that procrastination was not habitual. Nor was indecisiveness: Colburn had opinions on everything, from trends in fiction to book titles to renovations in his office building, and he usually proved willing to express and act on those opinions. Furthermore, it is obvious that no publisher could succeed as well and for as long as Colburn did by putting off or fudging key decisions. How then can these claims be reconciled with Colburn's known actions?

An explanation of sorts comes from Richard Bentley. In his tell-all obituary of Colburn, Bentley claimed that 'in the character of his mind he was a *woman*, not regulated by manly judgment', explaining that 'when he took a notion or prejudice into his head it could not be removed; in that respect he considered his judgment infallible. In other matters the latest advice frequently prevailed'. Though Bentley's belief in the inherent flightiness of women is depressing, his point about Colburn is clear and understandable. Equally easy to understand is how this tendency to trust his intuition or follow the latest trend could be mistaken for indecisiveness or, given the right circumstances, procrastination. When Colburn's actions and judgments did not suit the other party concerned, they might even have been misrepresented as indicating these negative traits.

When viewed more favourably, the ability to act swiftly as intuition or fashion dictates could be seen as a positive boon to a man trying to stay ahead of the volatile reading public. The *Illustrated London News* saw things this way and included in its

obituary of Colburn a comment ‘by one perfectly competent to pass an opinion of the kind, that in his long experience of the London trade no one was more intuitively a publisher than Henry Colburn’ (231). The veracity of this statement is impossible to prove but almost as hard to deny. There is no other explanation for Colburn’s uncanny ability to spot gaps in the market, fill them in the most suitable manner, and promote his goods in ingeniously effective ways—over a period of forty-seven years, no less. This sort of talent is not learned; as Lady Morgan’s ‘puffing vocation’ comment implied, this sort of talent is innate. For someone as pragmatic and methodical as Bentley—governed by ‘manly judgment’, as he would probably say—this might have been difficult to comprehend and perhaps even more difficult to work with.

The final nail in the coffin of the procrastination slur comes from the more frequent characterization of Colburn as a ‘bustling’ man (see, for example, ‘Fashionable Society’ 186 and Hall I, 316—who sees no contradiction between bustle and delay). A simple consideration of the periodicals, books, and promotions he handled at any one time shows that he had to hasten through his days just to keep up with the work. In addition to making countless business decisions, Colburn had to communicate them to his writers and staff members, either in person or by letter. He disclosed the extent of those personal contacts in an 1838 letter to Bulwer, averring that ‘for the last few weeks I have been scarcely alone for a quarter of an hour together’ (LP D/EK/C22-109). That this state of affairs continued beyond normal business hours is made clear by the numerous letters mentioning evening visits with associates like Godwin and Upcott. Then, too, the draft of his response to Lady Caroline Lamb’s offer of *Glenarvon* is dated ‘Monday night 42 o’clock’—indicating that Colburn used the silent hours of night to catch up on his correspondence (NAL F.48.E.22, 21). It is well to bear this lifestyle in mind when we are inclined to wonder why Colburn had so few connections outside the trade.

Impressive as was the publisher's ability to juggle such a heavy workload, it seems sometimes to have led him into the frustrating practice of micromanagement. In addition to taking all the big decisions on book publishing and the running of his many periodicals, he also took personal charge of the advertising department and, in the early days of his partnership with Bentley, more or less took personal charge of him. Since Colburn was by no means averse to taking the small decisions as well, it was he who often chose titles for silver-fork novels; Ward reported that his *De Clifford* was initially just *Clifford*, 'to which Colburn clapped on a De, and so here we are' (quoted in Patmore II, 125). Colburn even evinced a personal interest in such trivia as the colour of the binding on a reprint edition of Disraeli's *Coningsby*—for which he preferred emerald green (HP 188/4, 149-150). Atop all of these concerns was that of looking after his authors. In addition to all the usual petting and reassuring, Colburn personally sent out his authors' gift copies (even inscribing Thomas Henry Lister's on his behalf [NAL F.48.E.4, 100]) as well as copies of his own publications. His establishment must have resembled a post office at times, as he received and forwarded letters for the likes of Disraeli and Lady Morgan and collected parcels for the Banim brothers, among others.

Colburn's generally excellent relations with his authors have formed a kind of trope in this thesis, standing as proof against most of the nastier comments made about his character. This can be attributed in part to his tactfulness, which has already been demonstrated by his dealings with touchy writers such as Campbell and Disraeli. Bentley, though not possessing much of the quality himself, at least knew it when he saw it: 'That [Colburn] possessed great tact is most true, and in conducting literary negotiations he had great adroitness' (BO). Tact—and the related 'people skills' that Colburn exercised so adeptly—only count for so much, however, and it seems that Colburn also possessed a genuine warmth and friendliness that endeared him to many people.

These qualities came across, as we have seen, in his early letters to Bentley, and even in his troubled association with Colburn there is a kind of allegiance to him. It is a truism that hatred is born of the same passion as love, and though we might not venture to say that Bentley once loved Colburn, he undoubtedly liked him. Their ten-year relationship as printer and publisher was a highly successful one that led to a partnership initially agreeable and hopeful. Despite the unhappiness around the time of its dissolution, Bentley went on to declare that ‘it was very painful to me that [Colburn] should have died without our being reconciled, but, as I have previously said, my heart was at peace with him for many years’ (BO). Indeed, Bentley’s later writings indicate that his bitterness began to yield to recollections of Colburn’s good points and not unsympathetic accounts of his difficulties; once, he even calls him ‘Harry’, which sounds suspiciously like a term of endearment (BO). These writings go a long way towards rescuing not only Colburn but also Bentley from the pall of malevolence so long cast over them.

The fact that Colburn was so favourably received and accepted by most of his authors and business associates could only have strengthened the last major characteristic we need to consider: his self-confidence. He must have had an innate confidence to strike out in the trade so independently, on such an innovative course, without family support. Yet just as his financial successes confirmed his belief in the business decisions he was making, so his social successes must have heartened and encouraged him to ignore the sometimes vicious criticisms he faced. A confident person would be disinclined to worry over jibes by anonymous magazine critics; a confident person who not only worked but socialized and dined with some of the top authors of his day would be even less so. Colburn’s sense of self-esteem was rooted in decades of positive experiences, which should in turn be considered when forming an estimation of him now. Henry Colburn’s pleasant character earned him a secure and favoured place among many of his

contemporaries in the world of publishing and we can confidently disregard those envious competitors and disgruntled commentators who tell us otherwise.

‘POPULAR FALLACIES’

One of Charles Lamb’s most amusing contributions to the *New Monthly Magazine* was a series of essays entitled ‘Popular Fallacies’. Published between January and September 1826 under his usual ‘Elia’ pseudonym, these essays found Lamb challenging the notion, for example, ‘That you must love me and love my dog’, and ‘That ill-gotten gain never prospers’. This thesis has likewise taken aim at the many fallacies about Colburn that have gained both credence and popularity over the years. The previous section summarized the case against claims that Colburn possessed some particularly disagreeable traits and against refusals to admit to his many good ones. In this section, we can further follow Lamb’s precedent and debunk more of the most popular fallacies about his sometime publisher, Henry Colburn.

That the destruction of Colburn’s archive precluded further research into his career.

Were this thesis to disprove just one fallacy, this would be it. The destruction of the Colburn archive has been a stumbling block over the years, diverting researchers from using primary sources and even discouraging them from undertaking any new research on the publisher at all. My research has shown that there are numerous manuscript materials still extant in collections spread across two continents, virtually all of which make important contributions to the body of knowledge about Colburn. If approached in a different way or in conjunction with other sources, they might be able to yield even more information. It is very likely that there are yet more small holdings of Colburn manuscripts still undiscovered but quite possibly able to divulge some new facts and influence the interpretations of them. The conclusion to be drawn from this is simply that

there is more than enough primary evidence, of various descriptions, to inform a wide-ranging study of Colburn's life and career and that my attempt at such a study has not exhausted the available resources.

That Colburn's influence on publishing practice was limited to puffery.

The initial response to this must be to point out that while Colburn's publicity techniques have indeed been influential down to the present time, he did not invent puffery or introduce it into the publishing trade—as has been discussed in chapter two. Beyond that, it should be obvious that Colburn contributed other things as well, from the affordable reprint series of novels to the prominence of the celebrity editor. His importation of the work of American authors such as Charles Brockden Brown and James Fenimore Cooper set an important precedent, as did his founding magazines like the *Court Journal* and *United Service Journal* to capitalize on trends among specific reading audiences. Colburn also gave genre publishing a boost with his silver-fork and domestic fiction, to say nothing of the early Newgate novels he published (starting with the above-mentioned *Paul Clifford*). Though this led to charges that he was mass-producing books, it was just another instance of his ability to discern what the reading public wanted and to meet the demand almost single-handedly.

That Colburn never published a great writer—or a great literary work.

The typical response to this sort of allegation is to produce the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn with a triumphal air; the typical counterclaim is that their publication was due to William Upcott's judgment as much as Colburn's and that even Evelyn was not particularly successful until John Forster masterminded a vastly improved second edition. Beyond these examples, it is difficult to disprove such a fallacy because of the impossibility of definitively establishing the criteria for greatness. Does 'great' mean canonical? Best-selling? Still in print? If it means any of these things, then Colburn

published someone who meets the criteria. Bulwer, Cooper, Disraeli, Godwin, Hazlitt, Mary Shelley, and Anthony Trollope all have pretty convincing claims to greatness, none of which can be negated by reference to Colburn's antiquarian friends or talented editors.

Considering this roster, one might wonder how the fallacy gained credence in the first place—if it were not for the prejudices that have continually prevented Colburn from receiving proper credit for his accomplishments. We have already seen how various critics have disparaged Colburn for being a 'trade' publisher when a 'gentleman' publisher would have been preferred, and there is a similar problem at work here. It is the elevation of 'great' or 'serious' literature over the 'popular' or 'light' literature for which Colburn was so well known. It is the kind of value judgment that has elbowed Bulwer and Gore out of conventional histories of nineteenth-century literature in defiance of the tens of thousands of books they sold and the innumerable readers they pleased and moved. Needless to say, when such authors fail to receive their due, there is no chance that their publisher will. Thankfully, 'popular' is no longer the dirty word it used to be in English literature, so that both the canon and literary history increasingly take account of a broader range of authors and publishers who are significant for a whole range of reasons—not just because of some critics' perception of 'greatness'.

One does not need, however, to go into the whole argument about the value of popular literature to extricate Colburn from the fallacy that damns the worth of his publications. The final problem with this desire for 'great' authors and books is the presupposition that all publishers share it, a fallacy in and of itself. Even a passing acquaintance with Colburn's career suffices to show that his aim was never to produce 'great', lofty, or enduring classics of literature; on the contrary, he made his fortune catering to readers who desired a very different type of product. Colburn deserves credit

for excelling in his own chosen arena, not for failing in the arena that certain critics and commentators prefer.

‘DEFACERS OF PAPER’²³

A further reason for not granting literary ‘greatness’ (however defined) undue significance is its tangential relation to our historical and biographical purposes. Simply put, the mere possession of writing ability does not make someone a useful witness to or crucial participant in another person’s life. Though in Colburn’s case Disraeli proved to be both a talented writer and an important acquaintance, other major authors such as Bulwer offer only minor insights into their publisher’s life—and Bulwer’s, at least, were usually prompted by Disraeli. On the other hand, minor figures sometimes make observations and comments that may be striking in themselves or merely suggest stimulating possibilities. With this in mind, it is salutary to examine a few of the minor authors to whom posterity has not been kind but who nevertheless have something to say about Colburn: Lady Caroline Lamb, James Boaden, and Thomas Henry Lister. The primary collections of their correspondence with Colburn, in the National Art Library, have been employed throughout this thesis, but make their own case for further study. An 1831 article in *Fraser’s Magazine* referred to a whole catalogue of Colburnian authors as ‘defacers of paper’—a vituperative epithet even by *Fraser’s* standards (‘The Novels of the Season’ 95). While readers and scholars might ultimately agree with this assessment of the following writers’ literary work, their correspondence is of inordinate value.

Lady Caroline Lamb’s brief literary career was, even in her own lifetime, easily overshadowed by her affair with Lord Byron and the controversy attendant upon it. This is not to be wondered at, in view of Byron’s celebrity and Lady Caroline’s dubious prose,

²³ All citations in this section are from the National Art Library unless otherwise specified.

but her works were of considerable importance to her and made an impact on her family and on Colburn. He published *Glenarvon* in 1816 and *Graham Hamilton* in 1821, and though the correspondence refers to other works, they do not appear to have been published by Colburn. As a barely veiled depiction of the Byron affair, *Glenarvon* went through three editions in its first year—a considerable coup for Colburn at that early stage of his career. *Graham Hamilton* seems to have enjoyed respectable sales, though we are dependent upon Lady Caroline for that assessment: ‘I hope you are pleased about Graham for it is liked’ (F.48.E.22, 51-52).

Her unstable temperament and bizarre behaviour is too complicated to be sketched out here, since even her biographers have had difficulty discerning precisely what she did and why. Crompton indicates the problem when he notes that ‘her famous remark after meeting Byron—“mad, bad, and dangerous to know”—proved in this affair even more applicable to herself’ (197). Thus, once Lady Caroline and Henry Colburn struck a deal on *Glenarvon* (after Byron’s publisher, John Murray, had predictably turned it down), the publication process became one of high drama. A natural intriguer, the author suggested to her publisher schemes to arouse interest in the novel’s anonymity (F.48.E.22, 16-17), and then complained when her identity was found out. When one bookseller actually advertised *Glenarvon* under her name, she wrote to Colburn: ‘I do entreat you to go instantly & have it stopped’, as if her publisher was also her enforcer (F.48.E.22, 32-33). She wasted a good deal of his time vacillating over whether she should attach her name to subsequent editions, but her husband William (subsequently Lord Melbourne) cut to the chase and asked Colburn not to publish any new editions at all (F.48.E.22, 23-24).

Throughout their correspondence Lady Caroline frequently lauded her publisher for ‘your zeal your kindness & above all your good nature’ (F.48.E.22, 11-13), and it is interesting to see William Lamb adopt a similarly flattering tone in his letter to Colburn,

remarking on 'your good sense & knowledge of the world as well as of your profession'. Colburn's good sense told him to keep Lady Caroline happy, which he attempted to do by cheerfully meeting her many requests for complimentary copies for her friends and stocking her private library with complimentary copies of his other books, just as he would later do for Disraeli. Lady Caroline's letters are by and large undated but they are so arranged as to show a change from this pleasant but somewhat distant relationship to one more dependent upon personal visits. Thus she began frequently to invite Colburn to her house, but certain letters make her invitations sound more like demands: 'I want you to come here could you call at 4 if by any accident I do not see you today, be home at 11 tomorrow' (F.48.E.22, 75-76). As preparations for the publication of Lady Caroline's *Graham Hamilton* progressed, Colburn obtained entry to the Lambs' country house: 'I believe I had better come to Town to see you unless you would like some sunday [*sic*] to come here to me. The expence is [illegible] I need not besides add how happy I shall be to defray it & to receive you, you can either sleep here or return the same day as is convenient I wish also to talk to you on many subjects' (F.48.E.22, 31).

This bonhomie led Lady Caroline to send Colburn occasional presents, including a brace of partridges (F.48.E.22, 46-47), and on one occasion to ask him to perform a very unusual (for a publisher) and strangely intimate task. 'Would you kindly do me the favour', she wrote, 'to see this person whose address I inclose, to tell me sincerely whether you think she is a respectable & accomplished Governess [...] let me really know what you think of her' (F.48.E.22, 90-91). Colburn's response to this entreaty might have established just how far he was prepared to go to please his authors but it has lamentably gone unrecorded. The latter part of his relationship with Lady Caroline was marred by the advent of one Wilmington Fleming, who seems to have been both con artist and

blackmailer. He evidently contacted both author and publisher but the particulars of their intercourse have yet to be fully unravelled.

That is essentially true of the whole relationship between Henry Colburn and Lady Caroline Lamb. There are any number of interesting, even fascinating details available but no complete study of what they might mean to the broader histories of all the people involved. Susan Normington, Lady Caroline's latest biographer, quotes extensively from the same correspondence cited here but fails to appreciate that her subject's publisher was a confidant for several years and thus deserves attention as an individual. The body of knowledge about both Lady Caroline and Colburn could be usefully expanded by a more concentrated study of her papers in the National Art Library as well as the Lamb manuscripts in the British Library and the others that are sure to be scattered elsewhere. Possibly there is also a criminal record for Wilmington Fleming that deserves attention.

The body of knowledge about Lady Caroline Lamb and her dealings with Colburn looks positively bloated, however, when compared to that of James Boaden and his publishing arrangements. Boaden was primarily a dramatist in his early life, and then took to writing biographies of theatrical people, and it was in this latter capacity that he attracted Colburn as his publisher. For him, Boaden produced the *Life of Mrs Siddons* (1827) and the memoir attached to the *Private Correspondence of David Garrick with the Most Celebrated Persons of His Time* (1831), and perhaps other similar titles. He also wrote two novels, at least one of which—*The Man of Two Lives* (1828)—was published from 8 New Burlington Street (and lauded in the pages of Disraeli's *Venetia*). Ultimately, though, these bare facts reveal very little about Boaden or his relationship with Colburn and nothing at all about the history of his connection with the publisher. Boaden's correspondence does, however, make plain that he was perennially short of funds and that

he relied on Colburn, *as a friend*, to make up the shortfall.²⁴ Practically every letter to Colburn preserved in the National Art Library refers to these circumstances. For example, on 17 January 1826, Boaden requested £100 with the injunction, ‘Pray don’t fail me!’ (F.48.E.4, 85); four months later he thanked Colburn for another £100 (F.48.E.4, 86); even in his last letter, of 28 September 1829, he asked for £50 ‘on account of anything’, concluding, ‘My dear friend, you must not refuse me, seriously’ (F.48.E.4, 92).

Boaden’s letters have a certain charm about them, particularly in the naked honesty of their appeals to Colburn, but he must have wheedled a serious amount of money out of the publisher over the years. Genuine friendship seems the most likely explanation for Colburn’s excessive generosity, but this is precisely what would make further research into the alliance so valuable. Lifting Boaden from obscurity has the potential to add a great deal to our knowledge of Colburn’s personal relationships with his authors. It might also help to clarify the extent of Colburn’s practice of loaning money to writers who were also friends, something that could inform a broader study of author-publisher relations.

Despite Colburn’s affinity for writers like Lady Morgan and Horace Smith, as well as his special bond with Disraeli, one wonders if Thomas Henry Lister might not have been his ideal author. Young, handsome, aristocratic, fashionable, bright, talented, punctilious yet amiable—whatever personal flaws he had were successfully concealed. He wrote only three novels for Colburn before dying at a comparatively young age, but all were models of the silver-fork school. Adburgham and Sadleir, among others, recognize that he was among the very best silver-fork writers and it is evident that he had a better grasp of plot, pace, and narrative structure than more illustrious colleagues in that school such as Bulwer and Disraeli. This alone might make him worthy of further

²⁴ If the *Dictionary of National Biography* is to be believed, Boaden had nine children; this would go some way towards explaining the continual strain on the finances of a jobbing writer.

consideration but his correspondence with Colburn provides more details about the publisher's business practices and raises a few questions as well.

Thomas Henry Lister (he always used his middle name, to distinguish himself from his father) was born in 1800 to the Listers of Armitage Park, Lichfield, who were relatives of Lord Ribblesdale. His years at Westminster School and Cambridge University made him one of the best-educated Colburn authors as well as one of his most eloquent (and legible) correspondents. With his impressive background and reputation for running with 'a very fast set', Lister was a natural silver-fork author (Adburgham 94). How exactly he came to write *Granby* and submit it to Colburn in 1826 has yet to be established, but there is the possibility of a pre-existing attachment to the publisher. On the death of his father in 1828, Lister wrote to Colburn about putting an obituary in the *New Monthly*, remarking 'You knew my father, & I therefore feel assured of your regret' (F.48.E.4, 109). The question is whether Colburn knew Thomas Lister before 1826 or through sending him complimentary copies of his son's works in the intervening years. Considering that Colburn's aristocratic connections are potentially vital to uncovering his origins and early life history, the Lister connection merits further exploration.

Lister's earliest letters to Colburn document a great deal of cordiality between the two men. He makes mention of his publisher's 'very handsome & liberal manner' (F.48.E.4, 99) and rather touchingly notes that 'the attacks upon yourself I was glad to see have been rebutted' (100), referring, of course, to the usual criticisms of Colburn's publicity techniques. When offered only £150 for the copyright to his next novel, *Herbert Lacy*, Lister accepted it though he wanted more: 'I feel that I am dealing with a person of character & honour, & have a reliance on your just & fair view of the circumstances' (F.48.E.4, 102). This was wise, as Colburn soon came round to the view that £300 was more just and fair (F.48.E.4, 112). The letters also contain a number of typical author-

publisher disagreements on titles, corrections, and so forth, but Lister's affability never flags and he usually defers to Colburn's judgment in the end.

After *Granby*, Thomas Henry Lister wrote two novels that did reasonably well without creating the kind of sensation that attended his first work, which had sold out three editions in its first year. *Herbert Lacy* was published in 1828 and *Arlington* in 1832. In the autumn of 1829, Lister sent his only known attempt at drama, *Epicharis*, to Colburn and new partner Richard Bentley. Colburn was on one of his seaside excursions at the time and directed Bentley to stall Lister until the play had been assessed by Ollier while making clear that he wanted to reach a deal on the piece, 'tho' under any circumstances except keeping a good author to ourselves it cannot be an affair of any moment' (SP 348, 19). Colburn steeled himself for the play's reception—'if it should be condemned as is very likely and only run three nights'—but still advised Bentley to do a half-profits deal with Lister (SP 348, 18). *Epicharis* actually received a favourable reception on stage and went to two print editions the same year.

Throughout this period, Lister's letters raise the questions of how much he knew about Colburn's publicity methods and whether he was troubled by them. Lister was truly displeased with the loss of his anonymity over *Granby*, which he all but blamed on Colburn (F.48.E.4, 110), but was rather more ambivalent about puffery. He initially seems not to have understood the connection between Colburn's books and periodicals, thanking his publisher for sending him a copy of the 'flattering' review from the *Literary Gazette* and charmingly expressing his hopes that it will help *Granby*'s sales (F.48.E.4, 104). By the time *Herbert Lacy* was ready for publication, however, he may have understood a great deal more than he was willing to admit outright. One can only imagine what Colburn made of the following lines, written by Lister on 3 December 1827:

Will you excuse my suggesting a doubt whether much notice in newspaper paragraphs is likely to be beneficial to my forthcoming work. It is a mode of

exciting attention which has been so much adopted (as you have doubtless observed) by publishers in your neighbourhood in the case of very inferior books that I think it has begun to produce distrust much more than curiosity. (F.48.E.4, 111)

Was Lister genuinely trying to advise his publisher or was he obliquely criticizing Colburn's infamous publicity schemes? He might have been doing both. Lister's other letters declare his abiding faith in Colburn's judgment, and the very fact that he never took his fiction to another publisher indicates that he had no real qualms with Colburn's *modus operandi*. Yet he was obviously aware of the 'attacks' on his publisher's methods from other quarters of the trade and may have consequently felt that puffery promised to do more harm than good. Still, the artfulness of these lines is as good a testament to Lister's writing ability as any of his novels.

Interestingly, though not very surprisingly, the *Dictionary of National Biography* erroneously credits Lister with four more novels than he actually wrote, including *Flirtation*, which came from the active pen of Lady Charlotte Bury. It correctly names Lister as the author of *The Life and Administration of Edward, First Earl of Clarendon*, issued in 1837 by Longmans. As this title indicates, Lister's interests turned toward politics as he matured and settled into domestic life with Maria Theresa Villiers, whom he married in 1830. Eventually he served as a commissioner on various inquiries and was named the very first registrar-general of England and Wales in 1836. Sadly, he passed away on 5 June 1842, from a cause that has been impossible to discover. As has already been mentioned, Lister was buried in what would eventually be Colburn's final resting place, Kensal Green Cemetery, where he was laid in the catacomb beneath the North Terrace Colonnade.

There is a final question raised by the correspondence of Boaden and Lister with their publisher: why did he preserve it? For preserve it he did. Most of Colburn's letters, as we know, were passed on to Hurst and Blackett and to the sad fate reserved for their

archives. Only a select number of letters were reserved in Colburn's personal papers then passed on through his widow to the happy preservation of the Forster Papers. It takes little imagination to see why Colburn would have kept the infamous Lady Caroline Lamb's letters, but why he kept Lister and Boaden's letters is not so obvious. Boaden, of course, kept declaring his affection for Colburn and this just might have been the salient factor. Perhaps it is the publisher's connection with Lister's father that made the son's letters dear. A broad-based search for more letters would be the next step toward answering these questions and perhaps resolving the other uncertainties surrounding Boaden and Lister's relationships with Colburn.

'CREDE BYRON'

Against the jibes—deserved and undeserved, contemporary and modern—about the obscurity and mediocrity of Colburn's authors stands the strange but fascinating case of Lord Byron. It need hardly be said that Colburn did not publish any works *by* the poet: if he had, his historical standing would have been radically altered. Instead, Colburn carved out a considerable but hitherto unremarked niche by publishing works *about* Byron.²⁵ The poet infiltrates practically all Colburnian affairs: for decades his magazines teem with articles and letters about Byron; throughout the 1820s, '30s, and '40s, his book lists include a steady stream of memoirs about the poet; his puffs sometimes use Byron as a standard of comparison; and his silver-fork novelists frequently reference him. Yet only Cyrus Redding noted that Byron had a special place in Colburn's heart, largely because he had been forced to give Byron a special place in Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine* (*Fifty Years* II, 270 and *Literary* II, 236). While it is unsurprising that the limited amount

²⁵ A list of the Byron-related works uncovered in the course of my research is included as Appendix C.

of research into Colburn's work did not uncover this, it is quite remarkable that the vast amount of research into Byron's work missed it as well.

The most fertile and, perhaps, least surprising ground for Byronic pieces is Colburn's stable of magazines. Devoted as they were to literature, high society, and current affairs, they had an obvious interest in Byron on all three counts. Thus, in 1815, with the poet's so-called *Turkish Tales* being read in drawing rooms everywhere, the *New Monthly* offered Henry Hoppner Meyer's elegant engraving of Byron to its readers, knowing full well that they were his readers, too. From this point onward, it is a rare issue of the *New Monthly* or, after their respective inceptions in 1817 and 1829, the *Literary Gazette* or *Court Journal* that does not include a review, article, letter, or piece of 'literary intelligence' about Byron. That this continued into the 1830s and, in a lesser degree, the 1840s, proves just how popular the Byronic focus was.

Of the hundreds of pieces perpetuating this focus that appeared in Colburn's periodicals over the years, few are more interesting than a paper featured in the April 1819 issue of the *New Monthly*. Headed 'Extract of a Letter from Geneva, with Anecdotes of Lord Byron, &c.', it is prefaced with a revealing note from the editor, who says it is included 'on account of its containing anecdotes of an Individual, concerning whom the most trifling circumstances, if they tend to mark even the minor features of his mind, cannot fail of being considered important and valuable by those who know how to appreciate his erratic but transcendent genius' (1). 'Trifling' is indeed the word to describe what follows this adulatory introduction, as it contains only information obtained at second- and third-hand.

The 'Letter from Geneva', however, is itself followed by something much more diverting: 'The Vampyre: A Tale by Lord Byron'. It is hard to believe that this attribution was accepted, considering the dullness of the prose. (Byron himself eventually declared,

‘I scarcely think that any one who knows me would believe the thing in the Magazine to be mine’ [*Letters* 25 May 1819].) The respectability of the *New Monthly*, however, along with the public desire to read anything associated with Byron, made ‘The Vampyre’ another coup for Colburn. It was soon mentioned in the expatriate periodical, Galignani’s *Messenger*, where Byron—then resident in Venice—first learnt of it. At about the time that he was writing to the *Messenger* to disown ‘The Vampyre’, John Murray was writing to him to inquire about its authorship. Byron sternly replied that ‘what is not published by you is not written by me’ (*Letters* 15 May 1819).

The story had, in fact, been written by John Polidori, a young physician who had joined the poet for part of his travels on the continent. He had been present in 1816 when Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Mary Shelley entertained themselves by writing ghost stories. Polidori had taken Byron’s draft narrative and turned it into ‘The Vampyre’, which circumstances soon forced him to claim as his own. He did this in a letter to the editor of the *New Monthly* that appeared in the next issue, swearing that the magazine’s correspondent had misunderstood his role in bringing to fruition what Byron had only begun (May 1819, 332). This may well have been true, but Polidori was still destined to be overshadowed by the poet; the next sensation was the idea that he had based his title character on Byron. Whether Byron was the author or the model for the vampire, he ended up being so closely associated with the story ‘that today the classic figure of the vampire is Byron’s blood relation: a dandyish, high-born, anti-hero’ (Wilson 14).

Colburn’s role in all this is questionable. He may or may not have believed Byron to be the true author of the piece, but he definitely allowed it to be published as such (much as he allowed *Vivian Grey* to be puffed as the work of an aristocrat even though he doubted its origins). Once apprised of Polidori’s authorship of ‘The Vampyre’, Colburn declined to publish it in book form, though another publisher did take it up. He

undoubtedly benefited from again being connected to Byron in the public's mind and determined to maintain the connection, coming right back in the very next issue of the *New Monthly* with 'Lord Byron's Travels in Greece'. Over the ensuing years, no opportunity was lost. Even his *United Service Journal*—not the obvious home for articles on a dead poet—ran pieces such as an examination of the 'Original of the Shipwreck in *Don Juan*' (Feb 1829).

But, of course, Colburn's appeals to the Byron-loving public were not confined to his periodicals. His first great foray into Byroniana had been his publication of *Glenarvon*, Lady Caroline Lamb's *succès de scandale*, in 1816. (Here, as with 'The Vampyre', Colburn was spared potential difficulties by Byron's inclination to blame the authors of these works for their appearance, not the publisher.) Thus began Colburn's long line of fictionalised portraits of Byron, from his walk-on part in Lady Morgan's *Florence Macarthy* (1818) to his starring role in Edward Trelawny's near-autobiography *Adventures of a Younger Son* (1831). The poet even featured, sometimes in disguise but frequently as himself, in a number of silver-fork novels, those paeans to all things fashionable. As will be seen, the authors' interest in the poet went beyond pleasing their Byron-mad publisher and readers.

It took John Murray until 1830 to produce a biography of his greatest—indeed, *the* greatest—celebrity poet, when he published Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with Notices of His Life*. Colburn anticipated Murray by eight years, commissioning the cut-and-paste *Memoirs of Lord Byron* by John 'Dictionary' Watkins in 1822. The work was indefensibly shoddy but nevertheless started a trend, to which Colburn added memoirs by Thomas Medwin (Percy Bysshe Shelley's cousin), Leigh Hunt, John Galt, and Lady Blessington. Hunt's book was originally autobiographical but, as he explained in a later preface, his personal details had to make way for Byron's,

because ‘my publisher thought it best’ (xii). The same publisher also thought it best to squeeze extra profits out of Lady Blessington’s *Conversations of Lord Byron* by first serializing them in the *New Monthly*.

One must question what this Byron fixation might ultimately mean. It might reveal that Colburn was as fascinated with Byron as his readers, that he had a personal connection to the poet that is not yet known, that he sought to create a new speciality in his publishing business, or perhaps even that Colburn secretly liked poetry. The catalogue of Byron connections that my research has adventitiously uncovered does not have an immediately discernable interpretation, but it does very strongly imply one thing: Colburn’s understanding of celebrity and publicity was even deeper and more modern than previously thought. It has long been established that Colburn capitalized on his own hot property with an alacrity and relentlessness otherwise unknown in the trade. Publishing the Byron memoirs and articles sprang from exactly the same principle but introduced the novelty of capitalizing on *someone else*’s hot property. This would make an excellent starting point for a study of the cult of celebrity and how publishers contribute to it. It could also inform an examination of Colburn’s innovations in the arenas of publishing and advertising. The first step in any study, of course, would be to deliberately search out all of Colburn’s Byronic publications (including all of those magazine pieces), a task that would begin to answer some of these questions about Colburn’s career as well as almost certainly adding to the body of knowledge about Byron’s public reception and celebrity status both before and after his death in 1824.

Considering Byron’s enormous popularity, it is not surprising that the next generation of writers felt inspired by him. Edward Lytton Bulwer, as a youth, went to the extreme of conducting a near-affair with Lady Caroline Lamb in his efforts to learn more about the poet and enter what remained of his milieu. At a slightly more mature age, he

included references to Byron in his silver-fork novels, though they showed that he had moved on from straightforward idolatry. In *Pelham*, for example, there is scathing criticism of the hordes of young men who dress like Byron and fancy themselves afflicted by his poetic melancholy. But Bulwer still revered the genuine article and, in the 1830s, derived great joy from moving into Byron's old rooms in the Albany in London. At the end of his occupancy, Bulwer endeavoured to turn over the rooms to an equally reverent tenant, Benjamin Disraeli (Ridley 187).

Disraeli had virtually worshipped Byron from his youth, when the poet corresponded with his father, whose work he admired. When Disraeli wrote his first novel, then, it was inevitable that he should make mention of Byron. Instead of a passing reference, however, *Vivian Grey* included a discussion of Byron, his best friend, John Cam Hobhouse, and their circle. Colburn—or at least his staff—encouraged and played on the Byronic connections by puffing *Vivian Grey* as 'a sort of *Don Juan* in prose' (quoted in Bradford 23).²⁶ Literature was not, however, the only realm in which Disraeli was linked to Byron. He emulated his dandiacal dress, affected a similarly flamboyant public persona, and, for the stamp of authenticity, returned from his pilgrimage to the Mediterranean with Byron's former servant Tita in tow. The message was clear: Disraeli was not just another of the poet's devotees, he was the new Byron. To emphasize the point, Disraeli subtitled *The Young Duke* with a line from *Don Juan*—'A moral tale, though gay' (Canto I, Stanza 207)—then took the ultimate step of writing a novel about Byron. *Venetia* (1837) is a fictionalised account of the poet's relationship with Percy Bysshe Shelley that takes a less worshipful view of Byron than his previous efforts. Ridley contends that it is an 'exorcism' for Disraeli, a 'repudiation of his Byronic youth', but this seems overly dramatic (198). It is only natural that he would take a more

²⁶ This was later emulated by John Murray, who publicized *Contarini Fleming* as 'a *Childe Harold* in prose' (quoted in Ridley 108).

considered, mature view of the poet's life and work than he had in his youth. This is particularly so as *Venetia* appeared in the year when Disraeli finally entered parliament and dropped the Regency dandy pose to cultivate a more statesmanlike air. Disraeli was no longer obsessed with Byron but remained attached to his memory.²⁷

Ridley offers a substantial amount of information about Byron's influence on Disraeli, incidental to her biography of him, while Elfenbein (in Wilson's *Byromania*) takes a thoughtful look at *Venetia*, but the connection between these two men could actually support a study of its own. The question of literary influence, the rise of the author as celebrity, the concept of self-promotion, and the issue of one celebrity modelling himself on another can and should be directly addressed. It would be no less interesting to approach this connection from the perspective of gay studies. Ridley is convinced that Disraeli was bisexual, Blake is strongly suspicious, and a good deal of circumstantial evidence does seem to point in this direction. Given Byron's well-established bisexuality, his position as a role model for the younger Disraeli now appears to have a new dimension, at which Elfenbein cautiously hints (see Wilson 81-2). For students of Henry Colburn, there is potentially a great deal to be gained by examining the bonds between two of the most important names associated with his own. It is too simplistic to say that Disraeli is the missing link between Colburn and Byron, but together they create a harmonious whole, and more information would allow better and deeper analysis of it.

Henry Colburn followed the injunction of the poet's family motto, 'Crede Byron', and trusted Lord Byron to increase sales and add lustre to his catalogue of publications. This worked for the publisher for more than two decades. That it even now excites

²⁷ In a strikingly apt quirk of fate, Disraeli died on 19 April 1881—the fifty-seventh anniversary of Byron's death.

interest and offers new possibilities for evaluating Colburn's career, historical impact, and literary reputation indicates just how well placed his trust was.

‘THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE’

Typical of Henry Colburn's individuality and confident determination to go his own way is his joining the book trade in the middle of the Romantic poetry boom and not publishing any.²⁸ Most other young publishers would have been tempted to go for the ‘sure thing’ and bring out ballads à la Scott or epics à la Southey, but Colburn saw the wisdom of carving out his own niche rather than competing with others on their own turf. The upshot of this was his personal association with the silver-fork school and a total disassociation from conceptions of Romantic poetry in particular and Romantic literature in general. This coexists uneasily with Colburn's usual impressive discernment of trends and public taste, and capitalization upon it. Could an entire era or school of writing, however loosely defined, have really passed him by unnoticed? The answer, frankly, is no.

We have already remarked how the Byron circle encompassed a number of Colburn's most prominent writers, from Mary Shelley to Lady Caroline Lamb. These ties are worth exploring in greater depth, so as to assess his personal achievements as well as his place in publishing history. In truth, this is another task that deserves the full attention of a future researcher, but it is still possible to begin this exploration—and to ask more questions—based on the research already conducted for this thesis.

One of the most important figures to write for Colburn about Byron was Leigh Hunt, whose autobiographical bent was so peremptorily stifled by his publisher. It was in

²⁸ Trying to define the concept of Romanticism is not only a thankless task but also well beyond the scope of this thesis. In using the term, I believe I have stayed within fairly conservative boundaries, both chronological and theoretical.

the guise of novelist, however, rather than memoirist, that Hunt usually dealt with Colburn. His chronic financial problems were well documented by all who knew him and his chronic inability to deliver copy in a timely manner is well documented by several letters among the Colburn manuscript materials. The composition of *Sir Ralph Esher* in 1829 was particularly trying. Colburn wanted Bentley to go and sort things out in person but witheringly warned his junior partner that Hunt 'however is not a very early riser' (SP 351, 12). After a concerted effort by both Colburn and Bentley to procure the first volume had failed, the former wrote from Hastings to advise the latter, 'You had better cut short the business with Leigh Hunt or he will plague you to eternity' (SP 351, 4). This advice was heeded as future dealings with Hunt were somewhat curtailed. It was grand to be associated with this champion of Keats and housemate of Byron but less felicitous when he turned out to be, in Colburn's words, 'so very troublesome a person' (SP 348, 20).

The Shelleys were another important Romantic connection for Colburn. Though he published little relating to Percy Bysshe, apart from a smattering of articles in his magazines, he published some important pieces by Mary. Her father, the philosopher and writer William Godwin, had begun working with Colburn at least as early as 1821 on his monumental *History of the Commonwealth of England*. The two men got on very well and there is an extensive correspondence showing that Godwin was a regular visitor to Colburn's home in the evenings (see, for example, NAL F.48.E.3 125, 127). Over the years, Godwin introduced two interesting people to his publisher. The first was Charles Clairmont, son of the second Mrs. Godwin, who was sent to Colburn on 26 May 1829 with a proposition regarding German literature, Clairmont having lived in Germany for the preceding decade (NAL F.48.E.3, 138). Nothing appears to have come of this introduction, but a previous one had positive results all round.

On 13 December 1823, Godwin had written to Colburn:

I remember that several months ago you asked me whether I could recommend to you any good writer for the *New Monthly Magazine*. It did not occur to me then that I could do you any service in that way. The recollection of that conversation however has its share in prompting me on the present occasion. My daughter, Mrs. Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein & Valperga*, expressed to me the other day an inclination to try her powers in the same publication with her friend, the author of the *Rejected Addresses*. (NAL F.48.E.3, 122)

The terms he subsequently offered to Mary Shelley were agreeable, so she joined the distinguished ranks of *New Monthly* contributors. Colburn was obviously pleased to count her among his writers and went on to acquire the copyright to *Valperga*, which had just been published by Whittaker in 1823, and released his own three-volume edition in 1824. Mary Shelley sent her new novel, *The Last Man*, directly to Colburn, who had to be convinced by Godwin to retain that title (NAL F.48.E.3, 129). It had been used several times in previous years and, when grudgingly used again by Colburn in 1826, met with the chilly reception he had feared (Seymour 360-1). His next undertaking with her was a revision of *Frankenstein*, commissioned for inclusion in the Standard Novels series in 1831. Though the revised version of Mary Shelley's greatest work is generally considered inferior to the 1818 original, it included her first and only introduction to the novel. As the Godwin letter quoted above indicates, his daughter had a friend at the *New Monthly* even before she began her association with Colburn. The author (actually co-author) of *Rejected Addresses* to whom Godwin refers was Colburn's good friend and dependable writer, Horace Smith.

Godwin counted among his friends two other contributors to the *New Monthly*: William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb (both of whom received complimentary copies of his *History of the Commonwealth* from Colburn [NAL F.48.E.3, 130]). Hazlitt seems to have gotten along with Colburn well enough, which was fortunate considering the sad state of his relationship with editor Thomas Campbell. The timorous poet was displeased by the

aggression of Hazlitt's pieces, but the publisher was just pleased to have lured the era's premier essayist away from Taylor and Hessey's *London Magazine*. With the editor unlikely to prove helpful, Hazlitt seems to have dealt directly with Colburn, who went so far as to collect Hazlitt's essays in book form and published *Table Talk* in 1822, two editions of *The Spirit of the Age* in 1825, and *The Plain Speaker* in 1826. Hazlitt, of course, became a severe critic of the silver-fork school, but there is no record of any difficulties between him and his publisher on the subject.

Charles Lamb seems to have had considerably less intercourse with Colburn, contributing fewer articles than his friend Hazlitt and never releasing any collections through the publisher. Like Godwin, however, Lamb did make at least one if not two notable introductions to Colburn. On 25 September 1827, a young man arrived at New Burlington Street bearing a letter from Lamb which began, 'I beg leave in the warmest manner to recommend to your notice Mr Moxon, the bearer of this, if by any chance yourself should want a steady hand in your business, or know of any Publisher that may want such a one' (NAL F.48.E.3, 22). The young Edward Moxon was unhappy in his current position with Longmans but, alas, did not find a new one with Colburn and would have to wait a few years yet before making his name as the foremost publisher of Victorian poetry. Charles Lamb may also have introduced Colburn to Thomas Hood, who, of course, went on to edit the *New Monthly* in later years. Lamb sent to Charles Ollier an undated note with the postscript: 'My friend Hood, a prime genius & hearty fellow brings this' (NAL F.48.E.3, 21). Whether Ollier's boss knew the 'hearty fellow' before this remains to be established.

These specific instances of Colburn's dealings with figures identified with the Romantic era, as well as his Byronic interests and the time period in which he began working, raise the question of whether Colburn himself should be more widely identified

with that era. It is a question with the potential to spark long-running debate and may ultimately prove as unanswerable as the old ‘What is Romanticism, anyway?’ chestnut. Nevertheless, it would be worth pursuing because of the changes it could bring to the general equation of Romantic writers with gentleman publishers. Then, too, it could reinforce the modern emphasis on Romantic writers outside the poetry genre, since Colburn for some years maintained two of the greatest essayists of the era, Hazlitt and Lamb (one might say *the* greatest but for Thomas De Quincey). Without implying that Romanticism was Colburn’s chief concern or that he was the backbone of the movement, it can at least be said that there is an undeniable connection between the two worthy of further consideration and study.

The conclusion that Colburn exercised some influence (of debatable extent) upon Romantic literature can be reached without this in any way compromising his position as the head of the silver-fork school. On the contrary, it is now easy to see how some of this literature fed into the fashionable novels that so dominated literature in the decade or so between the twilight of the Romantic era and the inception of the Victorian era. Byron was, of course, first and foremost among the influences that Colburn shepherded through the 1820s and 1830s. Not only did Colburn recognise the poet’s place in literature by publishing innumerable works about him, but he also encouraged and disseminated the Byron-inspired works of silver-fork authors such as Bulwer and Disraeli. These same authors felt the influence of and even personally knew, as Colburn did, other Romantic notables such as Godwin and Hunt. Would the influence of the Romantics have trickled down to the fashionables if Colburn had not been there to facilitate it? Quite possibly. Did his publications nevertheless positively impact and solidify that influence? Certainly.

Colburn’s influence, though, did not cease with the transitional literature of the 1820s and ’30s. As has already been pointed out, the latter half of his career saw him

dealing, albeit not very successfully, with Dickens, Thackeray, and Trollope at the early stages of their own careers. Colburn also published such Victorian stalwarts as Captain Frederick Marryat and W. H. Ainsworth as well as the enduringly popular Bulwer, Disraeli, and Gore. Again, one can appreciate the significance of Colburn's participation in the development of Victorian literature without making any spectacular claims about the connection.

Among his miscellaneous jottings, Disraeli once scribbled: 'Spirit of the Times. To know it and oneself the secret of success' (Ridley 267). It has long been established that Colburn's artful capturing of the spirit of the times in his silver-fork novels brought him considerable success. His alertness to the change in spirit allowed him to remain successful as time went on, though that has been less widely acknowledged. Now it can also be said with certainty that Colburn knew the spirit of the times at an even earlier period and, in his own particular idiom, acted upon it with both immediate and long-lasting consequences. All things considered, there is sufficient evidence not to suggest or invite further study of Colburn's position in relation to Romantic and Victorian literary culture, but to demand it.

Benjamin Disraeli, who has contributed so much to this thesis in the guise of quotations, anecdotes, and insights into Colburn, has bestowed upon it yet one more thing that remains to be discussed: its title. He coined the phrase in *The Young Duke*, the silver-fork novel that eluded both Bentley and Murray to come down to us as the book that Colburn himself would have written if he had had the time: 'We have long been induced to suspect that the seeds of true sublimity lurk in a life which, like this book, is half fashion and half passion' (Bk. IV, Ch. III, 224). Though we might not wish to go so far as to say that Colburn would have written that specific line, its elevation of fashion and

passion is highly appropriate to the publisher. Fashion we know to have been a guiding light to many of his business decisions as well as to his most famous literary production, the fashionable novel. Then too, passion is surely the word to describe Colburn's half-century of devotion to a trade that, though it also rewarded him financially, often responded with criticism, satire, hypocrisy, and elitism. Disraeli ventured a suspicion that fashion and passion in tandem produce 'the seeds of true sublimity'. This may have been wishful thinking by a young author who was passionately living a fashionable life, yet it is just possible that those seeds are indeed lurking in the life of publisher Henry Colburn.



APPENDIX A: COLBURN CHRONOLOGY

c.1784	Born—day, place, and parents unknown
c.1800	Works as assistant to bookseller William Earle at 47 Albemarle Street
1806	Publishes first books from the Public Library at 48-50 Conduit Street
c.1812	Assumes full control of Conduit Street library
1814	Founds the <i>New Monthly Magazine</i> —first issue appears on 1 February
1817	Founds the <i>Literary Gazette</i> —first issue appears on 25 January
c.1820	Relinquishes control of Conduit Street library to William Saunders and Edward John Otley but maintains publishing business on the premises; Eliza Ann Crosbie born
1823-24	Relinquishes Conduit Street premises to Saunders and Otley; sets up publishing business at 8 New Burlington Street
1828	Founds the <i>Athenaeum</i> in January but sells out in May
1829	Founds the <i>Court Journal</i> and the <i>United Service Journal</i> ; Bentley buys a partnership in Colburn's firm, effective 31 August
1830	Weds Mary Campbell but is widowed the following year—no children
1832	Goes into semi-retirement managing his periodicals and old copyrights; Bentley controls the New Burlington Street firm from 1 September
1836	Establishes firm in Windsor before agreeing to terms with Bentley; returns to London and establishes new firm at 13 Great Marlborough Street
1841	Marries Eliza Ann Crosbie—no children; sells his share of the <i>Literary Gazette</i> to William Jerdan
1845	Sells the <i>New Monthly Magazine</i> to William Harrison Ainsworth
1852-53	Retires; sells firm to Daniel Hurst and Henry Blackett
1855	Dies in his home at 14 Bryanston Square on 16 August; buried in All Souls' (Kensal Green) Cemetery on 23 August

- 1856 Eliza Colburn marries John Forster on 24 September
- 1857 Colburn's stock and copyrights are auctioned on 26 May
- 1894 Eliza Forster dies and is buried in Kensal Green Cemetery

APPENDIX B:
UNPUBLISHED LETTER FROM HENRY COLBURN
TO THOMAS CAMPBELL

I acquired this autograph letter from bookseller Julian Browning of London. Colburn is writing to Thomas Campbell about his Frederick the Great, His Court and Times, published by Colburn in 1842. The postscript intimates that Campbell was involved in puffing his own work and therefore hypocritical in criticizing other puffery campaigns. Incidentally, it was normal for Colburn (and his correspondents) to spell 'Marlborough' in the abbreviated form used here.

13 Great Marlboro St

Nov 10/ 41.

Dear Sir,

As I cannot proceed for want of the proper information, I entreat you will acquaint me immediately by return of post whether there are a sufficient number of original Letters or Extracts therefrom of Frederick in the first two volumes of the Memoirs to justify our alluding to them in the title page.

As to what there may be in Vols 3 & 4 is another affair, and must not now enter into our consideration.

Yours truly,

H Colburn

P.S. In two or three days I shall be glad to receive one or two other Paragraphs alluding to the work as published, & pointing out any new & peculiar features of the volumes. A List of all the very distinguished persons of whom anecdotes are given in the course of the work would, of itself, form a very good Paragraph.

HC:

APPENDIX C: COLBURN'S MAJOR BYRONIC PUBLICATIONS

- 1815 Portrait of Lord Byron, by Henry Hoppner Meyer, after George Henry Harlow. *New Monthly Magazine*, August 1815.
- 1816 Lamb, Lady Caroline. *Glenarvon*. [Byron appears as Lord Glenarvon]
- 1818 Morgan, Lady Sydney. *Florence Macarthy: An Irish Tale*. [Byron appears as De Vere]
- 1819 Polidori, John. 'The Vampyre.' *New Monthly Magazine*, April 1819, and as a single volume published the same year. [Short fiction initially purported to be by Byron; he may also be the model for Lord Ruthven]
- 1819 Anonymous. *Harold the Exile*. [Byron appears as Lord Harold Augustus]
- 1822 Watkins, John. *Memoirs of Lord Byron*.
- 1824 Medwin, Thomas. *Conversations of Lord Byron: Noted during a residence at Pisa*.
- 1826 Shelley, Mary W. *The Last Man*. [Byron appears as Lord Raymond]
- 1828 Hunt, Leigh. *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries; With recollections of the author's life, and of his visit to Italy*.
- 1830 Galt, John. *The Life of Lord Byron*.
- 1831 Trelawny, Edward. *Adventures of a Younger Son*. [A fictionalized autobiography that emphasizes Trelawny's intimacy with Byron]
- 1834 Marguerite, Countess of Blessington. *Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington*. [originally serialized in the *New Monthly Magazine*]
- 1837 Disraeli, Benjamin. *Venetia*. [Byron appears as Lord Cadurcis]

Additionally, many of Colburn's silver-fork novels mention Byron by name as either a literary or sartorial influence and, from the late 1810s to the 1830s, most issues of Colburn's periodicals referred to the poet in one context or another.

APPENDIX D:
UNPUBLISHED OBITUARY OF HENRY COLBURN
BY RICHARD BENTLEY

This document was written at some indeterminate point after Colburn's funeral on 23 August 1855. What appears to be the sole surviving copy, consisting of proof sheets, is incomplete and ends abruptly. Chapter one includes a full discussion of this document.

August 16, 1855. This day died Henry Colburn, at his house in Bryanstone [sic] Square, in, I believe, his 71st year, although the coffin-plate which Horace read described him as aged 65. He had suffered more than a year before from a fistula, which had been successfully operated upon by Brodie; but about a month ago the disease returned, and after three days' intense suffering he sank under it. I went to his funeral in Kensal Green Cemetery, Thursday, August 23. It was conducted with more than ordinary form. Hearse with four horses, and two mourning coaches, and four private carriages. The coffin had gilt trappings.

Thus passed away one with whom formerly I was much connected, with whom I had much cruel and bitter law proceedings, who pursued me with bitter feeling to the last; but I thank God most heartily I did not sympathise with this feeling, for I had long ago forgiven him—forget the injuries he did me I cannot. If I live to have any leisure time, I will endeavour to put down some notice of this singular man, for his peculiarities were very amusing. I do not like, after all I have suffered from him, to think of him otherwise than calmly and impartially. In the character of his mind he was a *woman*, not regulated by manly judgment. No disparagement to the ladies, but that which is very amiable in them is scarcely so with men. When he took a notion or prejudice into his head it could not be removed; in that respect he considered his judgment infallible. In other matters the latest advice frequently prevailed. He never was *in error*; he had a most convenient way

of shifting the burden from his own shoulders to those of others. That he possessed great tact is most true, and in conducting literary negotiations he had great adroitness, and skilfully availed himself of professional knowledge to induce those with whom he negotiated to consent to agreements which, if they had been duly instructed, they would not have done.

This was remarkably instanced in the case of Lord Normanby. He sold to Colburn his novel, [blank], for £600, £400 of which was to be paid at once, and the remaining £200 on 2nd edition. Lord Normanby, when I saw him afterwards, complained of Mr. Colburn's having misled him that he would get £600; this was to be regretted. He left the interest of £10,000 to his widow, with remainder to the children of Mr. Crosby [*sic*], her brother; £10,000 to Mr. Crosby, £100 to Campier, £800 to Mrs. Hurst. Whether this included all his property in copyright books, etc., I do not know, but should think not.

It was very painful to me that he should have died without our being reconciled, but, as I have previously said, my heart was at peace with him for many years. He kept a woman for some years who kept a library called Campbell's Library in Rathbone Place. This person he afterwards married. I shall never forget his coming to me one morning, with a singular expression of countenance, which made me anxious. I asked him what had happened—whether any ill-tidings of business caused him to look so oddly. After he had kept me waiting very anxious for a long time, he said he had a favour to ask me. I said I was sure he would not ask me to do anything which would not be a pleasure to me. At last he said he was going to be married. I said I was glad to hear it. He went on, 'and I wish you to give the bride away.' 'With all my heart,' said I. 'Well,' said he, 'on Thursday morning a coach will call for you, and bring you gloves [*sic*].' Accordingly, *this* lady was wedded to Harry Colburn at Marylebone Church, and I duly signed my name in the register.

The marriage was unfortunate. I suppose it is the fate of such marriages that it should be so. At any rate, Colburn did what I think was the part of a Christian and worthy member of society. This Mrs. Colburn took to drinking, and in her fits was very violent, and was a fruitful cause of trouble to the poor man. Finally she went to Boulogne, where she resided in apartments, and where, having abundance of cognac, she soon cut her way to death. He allowed her £300 a year there. His widow I have always heard well spoken of, as an agreeable woman, who rendered his latter days very comfortable.

I first became known to him through William Upcott, Librarian of the London Institution; I used to go down to Upcott to read the first proofs of 'Evelyn's Diary.' In 1819 dear Samuel and I went into business as printers, in Dorset Street, Salisbury Square, and in 1820 I first became known to Colburn. When the *New Monthly* was commenced under the editorship of Campbell we printed it, and afterwards became largely connected with Colburn. About 1825 a coolness came over our connection, in consequence of our pressing him a little for money, which we required. To renew this connection I proposed to him to transact any business for him in Paris during a visit I contemplated with two *odd 'uns*—Uncle Francis, 'dear child,' as Miss Swift calls him, 'of 70,' and Queer Tom the younger. These two I inveigled to Paris, believing they were only going to Canterbury to pay a visit to Mr. Read in Dame John.

On my return we gradually became more friendly, in consequence of my constant attention to him. So we went on; and in 1828-9 I learnt accidentally that Colburn was about to dispose of his business. He had spoken to Alderman Key, to the Magnays, and others. As our business with him was very important—about £3,000 to £3,500 a year—I did not like the idea of its going into hands adverse to us. Therefore I spoke to him about it. He was much pleased. I offered it to brother Samuel, who declined; then to brother Will, who also declined it. Then I said I would take it myself. Colburn wanted to

associate others with me, which I declined. Then in September, 1829, I went into partnership with Colburn for three years; that is, to terminate in September, 1832, the conditions being that I was to pay on [the] first day of partnership £2,500 as my two-fifths of the partnership; Colburn to pay three-fifths. Any more money, if required, which Colburn had we would not be required to be furnished by Colburn at 5 per cent [*sic*].

So we begun [*sic*]. Colburn offered me copyright, and printed unpublished books to the amount of £10,000, for which he took credit at once. In the course of one year and a half of our partnership it clearly appeared that the major part of these books were comparatively worthless—certainly not worth half that they were valued at, and we soon began to want money. We drew monthly, I £50 and Colburn £75. Soon we had to raise money. Several schemes went wrong, ‘The National Library’ and the ‘Juvenile Library’ both failed. Then we had a sale at the Albion, where we realized from stock £2,700, for which it afterwards appeared we might have obtained from Tegg £4,000. Colburn mortgaged to me his one-third share of *Literary Gazette*, mortgaged to Key *New Monthly* and *United Service Journal*, sold his *Sunday Times* share, and his *Court Journal*.

All did not suffice. At the termination of our partnership I had lost the first sum of £2,500 and £1,300 more. Our agreement in the Deed of Partnership was that Colburn was to receive at the rate of two years’ profits of the business as he consideration for goodwill. This consideration he announced to be worth £5,000 a year; therefore he reckoned on receiving £10,000; now so far from profit there was a loss. And this loss he basely attributed to me, as a way of not paying for the business, forgetting that he himself always conducted it. ‘Therefore,’ he now said, ‘the conditions not being fulfilled, of course I was to go about my business, as well as I could!’ ‘No,’ said I; ‘not if there is any redress from the law.’ ‘Well,’ said he, ‘you will find that what I say is correct. The law will not allow

me to bind myself from going into business anywhere.’ ‘Then,’ I said, ‘you, who knew this, misled me. But I will see about that.’

Accordingly I went to Gregory, who corroborated what Colburn had said. Then I entered into arrangements with Colburn regarding Gregory,²⁹ this time to bind him fast, and he was bound, not to go into business within twenty miles of London, Edinburgh, or Dublin, and I paid him for this £3,500. But this could not bind him. So he threatened to go to Eton, twenty-one miles from London, and took a place. Then Upcott, his friend and *seemingly my* friend, came to me to endeavour to negotiate with me, for permission for Colburn to go into business. This I declined.

The same day I had a consultation with Mr. Knight Bruce, and when I found my agreement of no use in protecting me I was exceedingly angry with Gregory. On this Mr. Knight Bruce stopped me and said I was wrong in finding fault with Mr. Gregory, that it was impossible to frame any agreement for such a man. I said that it appeared to me that instead of protecting the right, law was made for the lawless. Mr. Knight Bruce observed that if a man chose so far to disregard the opinion of society as to do what Colburn was about to do, he could do it. ‘Had he offered me any money?’ I said he had endeavoured to negotiate. ‘For God’s sake, sir, take his money—take his money!’

Heavy at heart I returned home, and did not sleep that night. I had refused to negotiate, and he could do as the rascal promised to do. In the morning, however, I received comfort. Upcott called again, and that time I hooked my trout. Affected not to desire it, said that if he would give me £10,000 for it it would not answer my purpose—that I did not buy it to recall it, etc. Finally, I agree[d] to let him go into business.

And he proceeded in the expectation that he would be able to crush me, as he had previously sought, but all in vain. In 1832, during our quarrel at the end of our

²⁹ This undoubtedly should read: ‘I entered into arrangements with Gregory regarding Colburn’.

partnership, he had intimated to several persons with whom we dealt—to Dickenson, the stationer, to Magnay, and others—that it would not be well to trust me. Then Dickenson declined, but I paid him for what I had, and so answered him. Magnay basely pressed me for the balance of account of Colburn and Bentley, for £1,600 goods had on the faith of our account and credit, and were shamed out of these proceedings by their own lawyers. For years afterwards I would have nothing to say to Magnay.

When Colburn first talked to me of his business he represented it to me as worth upwards of £5,000 a year, and I have his memorandum to me of this. In an article which appeared a day or two after his funeral in the *Morning Advertiser*,³⁰ he is said, ‘despite a luckless partnership, to have died wealthy.’ A more scoundrel-remark

³⁰ This same article appeared as ‘The Late Mr. Colburn’ in the *Literary Gazette* on 1 September 1855, page 558.

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