'GENIUS' AS A TERM OF ENGLISH 
LITERARY CRITICISM
A Phase of English Romanticism

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(Received September 15, 1965)

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I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Scope of This Study:—During the later seventeenth and the whole eighteenth centuries the plea for the liberation of humanity had been made in various ways: a Deistic claim of natural goodness instead of Calvinistic doctrine of human depravity in religion; an increasing power of the Whig party against the Tory in politics; and an artistic call for freedom and spontaneity of poetic creations rather than the neo-classical rules and artificial
decorum. These demands were supported more or less by that steadily growing faith in human progress; and they were inseparably associated with each other.

One of the main aspects of the movement from neo-classicism to romanticism in literature is marked by the decline of the wit, learning and talent and the emergence of the original genius. What the genuine advocate of genius proclaimed was the spontaneity and originality, which involved a negation of the restrictions, such as the Rules of Aristotle, artificial decorum and the mechanical imitation-theory (the theory which had been also Aristotelian in origin), of the neo-classicists. The trend away from the respect to wit, learning and talent, towards the glorification of genius, corresponding to the movement from reason to imagination, reveals one aspect of the romantic revolt against formalism and uniformitarianism—claims of liberty and spontaneity of individuals; namely, a faith of diversitarianism.

In the present paper, then, I shall attempt to trace, as one of the manifestations of such a new, romantic movement, the origin and sense-development of the word 'genius' as a term of literary criticism, and, if possible, to consider some of the inducements, both intellectual and social, which necessitated such a birth and involved the sense-development of the word.

And before proceeding here I shall limit my investigation of the word 'genius' merely to its use in literary criticism, and since the usage of 'genius' as a literary term is of English origin and because of the convenience and a required simplification of the present consideration, it may do better to focus my attention especially to England. Furthermore, in the course of my discussion I may fairly rely upon the principle of contrast: between original genius, on one hand, and wit, learning and talent, on the other, because the writers of the years concerned, more consciously and amply had made use of this antithesis and the sense of the single term had been conceived and fully developed largely in contrast with the opposed one.

**Origin and Meaning of the Word 'Genius':**—I shall begin with the etymology of the word 'genius.' Etymologically speaking, 'genius,' corresponding to French génie and German Genie, is an adoption of Latin genius formed on *gen*-root of *gi-*gn-*ère* (to beget), Greek γέννατος (to be born, come into being). In classical Latin the word meant originally "the guardian spirit of a man or place" (to which meaning Kant alludes in his *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (1790)) and rarely it was used for the "talent or natural capacity." In the course of its sense-development the word had been largely affected by confusion with the word *ingenium*, meaning both a "natural ability or capacity" and by metonymy "a man of genius."

Two words genius and talent were originally the terms with the same meaning; and the sense of 'ability' of the word 'talent' came from the parable of Latin *talentum* and Greek ἄλησθεν (meaning 'a balance,' 'sum of money' or 'talent'). For example, in England Sir Philip Sidney (1554–86), whom Sir William Temple esteemed as "both the greatest Poet and the Noblest Genius" (Spingarn, ed., *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Bloomington, 1963,
III. 91), used the word ‘genius’ as a synonym for ‘talent’ when he said in
An Apology for Poetry (1595): “a poet no industry can make, if his own genius
be not carried unto it; and therefore is it an old proverb, Orator fil., Poeta
nascitur” (Jones, ed., English Critical Essays: XVth-XVIIIth Centuries, W.
C., London, 1961, 43). This usage still lingered on about the middle of the
eighteenth century, when, therefore, the distinction was drawn rather
between ‘genius,’ on one hand, ‘wit’ and ‘learning,’ on the other, as seen in
Edward Young.

As time went on, the concept of ‘genius’ (with the meaning ‘a natural
capacity’ or ‘a person so endowed’), based upon the philosophical basis, in
the Continent, especially in Germany and France, had been further developed
and glorified as something distinguished sharply from ‘talent’ and skill (i.e.
the capacities which could be acquired by hard training and indefatigable
industry). It was such a concept of ‘genius’ as conceived in the striking
contrast with ‘talent’ that the romanticists accepted. Thus the two words
were, as the Oxford English Dictionary points out in the article genius,
sharpened into so strong an antithesis that now one cannot thoroughly
understand the word ‘genius’ without referring to the other; and, therefore,
just as ‘imagination’ is to be more clearly defined by contrast with ‘reason’,
so ‘genius’ can be better described in its opposition to ‘talent.’ And, at
the same time, the word ‘genius’ came to be connected with such notions
as ‘inspiration,’ ‘imaginative creation,’ ‘originality,’ and ‘spontaneity.’ Thus
the ‘genius’ became the important word to denote the natural gift and
endowment (superior capacity to ‘talent’ or the acquired capacity) which was
most susceptible of some divine inspiration sent from the Muses, enabled
thereby to create original, true forms in Nature and human life by intuitive
perception and spontaneous activities, rather than by analytical, calculating
processes. This sense of the word appears only in the singular, whereas the
sense of “a person so endowed” is used in the plural, like ‘geniuses.’

II. GENIUS UNDER SUSPICION

Throughout “the Augustan age of England,” so Dr. Johnson called his
own time rather boastingly (Boswell’s Life of Johnson, O. S. A., London,
1961, 1110), the neo-classicists had brought poetry under control to a general
standards of criticism. They, as a general rule, failed to admit any kind of
deviation from them; they were delighted in the uniformity and immutability
instead of the individuality of the things. Genius, too, as far as it was
closely related to the exaltation of the individuality, speciality of a specified
person, fell under suspicion. Perhaps it seems from this reason that in his
Dictionary of the English Language (1755) Dr. Johnson did not recognize the
meaning of “a natural capacity” or “a person thus endowed” of the word
‘genius.’

Poet or Wit: Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679):—While in France it was the
philosophy of Descartes that became the basis of the neo-classical criticism,
in England it was Thomas Hobbes’s. As has been said, he was a literary
critic as well as a philosopher. To him poets belong among men of wit—natural rather than acquired wit; a good poet, however great his fancy may be, must not be deficient in judgment; he must be guided by good judgment, wide experience and full memory. Here one may make clear Hobbes's conceptions of 'imagination' (or 'fancy'), memory, wit, etc. to clarify his views on a poet and poetry.

According to him, phantoms or all human ideas are the result of internal motions occasioned by the sense-impression. 'Imagination' is the phantom remaining after the object is removed; it is the "conception remaining, and by little and little decaying from and after the act of sense" (Elements of Law, 1640: Melesworth, ed., The English Works of T. Hobbes of Malynesbury, London, 1839-45, IV, 9). To Hobbes imagination is no creative power but only the faculty of poetic ornament. He makes no clear distinction between fancy and imagination. The 'decaying sense' is called imagination or fancy: but when he expresses the decay and means that "the Sense is fading, old, and past, it is called Memory;" then, between the two faculties there is no essential difference. He further defined Experience as "much memory, or memory of many things" (Leviathan, 1651, I, ii: Hobbes's Leviathan, Everyman's Library, London, 1962, 5), and judgement as the faculty by which man can attain to exact and perfect knowledge, a power capable of distinction and discernment.

In Hobbes 'fancy' is considered to be indispensable to poetic creation, but it was only allowed to act in due subordination to reason and judgment. In The Virtue of an Heroic Poem (1675) he gives to Fancy "alone the name of Wit," and "in Fancie consisteth the Sublimity of a Poet, which is that Poetical Fury;" but "if there be not Discretion at home... their delight and grace is lost" (Slingarn, op. cit., II, 70). He seems profoundly convinced that in a good wit as well as in a good poetry there must be a due proportion of fancy and judgment.

He conceives a poet as man of natural wit, and fancy as wit. In the eighth chapter of the Leviathan he distinguishes between "natural" and "acquired" virtue or wit. By "natural" he does not mean what a man has from his birth, namely, "Sense," wherein "men differ so little one from another, and from brute Beasts." Natural Wit is got by Use and Experience, "without Method, Culture, or Instruction;" on the contrary, Acquired Wit is acquired by "method and instruction," and its synonym is Reason, which is "grounded on the right use of Speech" and produces the Sciences (Everyman's Lib., 33, 35). Thus Hobbes seeks to attribute all good mental faculties to either experience or instruction. To him a "good fancy" and a "good wit" are used in the same meaning: he asserts, "Fancy, without the help of Judgement, is not commended as a Vertue," and, again, "Judgement therefore without Fancy is Wit, but Fancy without Judgement not" (Everyman's Lib., 33, 34).

It has been admitted that in his Answer to Davenant (1650) he established the neo-classical conception of poetry that poetry was but a construction of the six cardinal empirical elements: Time, Education, Experience, Memory, Judgement and Fancy (Slingarn, op. cit., II, 59). In favour of wit, natural or acquired, derived from Experience or Instruction, Hobbes discounted the genius,
natural, original, inspired, spontaneous and creative, and eliminated it from his critical speculation. His theory of poetry had exerted a great influence during the latter half of the seventeenth century and a half that followed.

Poet or Wit as Engendering out of Empirical Knowledge:—The mechanical philosophy of Hobbes and Locke was accepted by the neo-classical writers and became the basis of the criticism of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The scheme of neo-classicism could be best epitomized in Pope's Essay on Criticism (1711).

"Those RULES of old discovered, not devis'd,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd;
Nature, like liberty, is but restrain'd
By the same laws which first herself ordain'd." (LL. 88–91)

To think, act and write in accordance with the voice of reason and nature was the nearest way to happiness and good writing. To Pope and most of neo-classicists the poetic faculty is nothing but true Wit:

"True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well, express'd;
Something, whose truth convinc'd at sight we find,
That gives us back the image of our mind." (LL. 297–300)

Sir William Davenant (1606–1668):—Sir William Davenant's Preface to Gondibert (1650), addressed to "his much Honour'd Friend Mr. HOBS," has been described as "a dilution of the aesthetic theory of Hobbes" (Spingarn, op. cit., I, xxxiii). In the Preface he thinks that the poetic faculty is but wit or fancy (corresponding nearly to Hobbes's), a result of labour and learning. To him "Wit is the laborious and the lucky resulances of thought;" it is "a Webb consisting of the subt'lest threds; and like that of the Spider is considerately woven out of our selves" (that is, not by chance but by design); therefore, the works of wit are "the works of time, and have their contextures alike" (op. cit., II, 20).

It is clear from this statement that Davenant does not rely on inspiration but on labour and experience. In the same spirit he goes on, declaring that "pains" are most requisite to the great undertaking:

"...great forces (of a Poet) aske great labor in managing.... For a wise Poet, like a wise General, will not shew his strengths till they are in exact government and order, which are not the postures of chance (i. e. the products of 'the quickness and facility'), but proceed from Vigilance and labour.

Yet to such painfull Poets some upbraid the want of extemporary fury, or rather inspiration, a dangerous word which many have of late successfully us'd; and inspiration is a spiritual Fitt, deriv'd from the ancient Ethnick Poets." (Op. cit., II, 24–5)

A little later in his Answer to Davenant (1650) Hobbes intends to support his disciple's opinion; he discards the dull, credulous fanatic's faith in inspiration sent from the Muses. This empiricist reasons that poetry is the product of purely empirical activities of men. To him even the Muses appear reduced to the maid-servants for such humble servitude. "The Ancients therefore,"
he says, "fabled not absurdly in making memory the Mother of the Muses" (Sipgarn, op. cit., II, 59).

It must be remembered that in spite of all emphasis upon labour and learning Davenant has a reason why he should be regarded to be an earlier champion of originality (cf. Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, Djakarta, 1953, 24). It is true that he respects Homer but denounces the blind imitation of this great ancient. Virgil, Lucan, Statius, Tasso, and Spenser are upbraided for their direct imitation of their predecessors (Sipgarn, op. cit., II, 2–6). He asserts that "tis with Originall Poems as with Originall Pieces of Painters, whose Copies abate the excessive price of the first Hand" (op. cit., II, 5). Then he advocates originality by comparing a mere imitator to the ship captain: "Such limits to the progress of every thing, even of worthiness as well as defect, doth Imitation give; for whilst we imitate others, we can no more excel them, then he that sailes by others Mapps can make a new discovery" (op. cit., II, 7).

Thomas Rymer (1641–1713):—Rymer, England's most notorious critic, drawing his critical sources chiefly from Hobbes, Davenant and the French critics like Rapin, Dacier, Le Bossu, etc., is one of the thorough-going advocate of neo-classical standards of criticism in England, who unhappily lacks in good taste in literature. He, with his translation of Rapin's Réflexions in 1674, the year of its publication, addresses himself to the task as a supporter of neo-classicism in its most rigid form. This rationalist, then, brandishes that artificial decorum and the three unities the French formalists set up.

Rymer uses the words talent and genius rather promiscuously (cf. Sipgarn, op. cit., II, 170–1). He refers to a classical genius or a man of wit, relating the word 'genius' to the fixed design. In his Short View of Tragedy (1693) he claims that "Poetry is to follow Nature; Philosophy must be his guide" (op. cit., II, 253). To follow Nature, here, implies to live, think, act, and write according to the dictates of Reason and something like nature methodized.

Following Hobbes, Rymer speaks contemptuously of those who assert that "Poetry... is blind inspiration, is pure enthusiasm, is rapture and rage all over," and nicknames those who thus object against reason "Fanaticks in Poetry" (Tragedies of the Last Age, 1678: Sipgarn, op. cit., II, 185).

He has been known extremely to dislike to value poetry by means of taste; he wishes to subject all the plays to an elaborated set of restrictions borrowed from the French critics. He complains that Shakespeare's plays were not composed according to the classical rules and decorum. To illustrate the importance and necessity of the classical rules he himself wrote the play Edgar in 1677 and published the next year, but without success.

III. DEFENDERS OF GENIUS

Limitations of Neo-classical Criticism:—What was most inconvenient to the reason-governed neo-classicists was the irresistible appeal of the older
national achievements, which had been produced before the acceptance of the classical rationalistic dogma. In spite of the general tendency towards neo-classicism, some of the critics with the mind of literary sincerity already advocated the superiority of the Elizabethan dramatists, especially of Shakespeare, and demanded freedom for the national genius. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries apparently they never ceased to refer to the greatness of their old dramatists even when they flattered the ancients like Homer and Virgil. Pope, himself, for example, who is deeply convinced that the true poet should be the true Wit, remarks: "If ever any author deserved the name of an original, it was Shakespeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature.... The poetry of Shakespeare was inspiration indeed: he is not so much an imitator as an instrument of nature" (The Preface to The Works of Shakespeare, 1725: Elledge, ed., Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays, New York, 1961, I, 279).

Objections to Rymer's ruthless judgment in defence of tiresome surface of classical rules and outer decorum were raised immediately by many genuine lovers of literature, such as Samuel Butler, Shaftesbury, Dennis, Addison and the like. Throughout the period of neo-classicism they exalted freedom and originality of genius. Before them England had produced her earlier defenders of unfettered imagination and inspired genius. Sir Philip Sidney in An Apology for Poetry (1595) allowed the unlimited freedom of imagination, and Sir William Alexander asserted in Anacrisis (?1634): "...every Author hath his own Genius, directing him by a secret Inspiration to that wherein he may most excell" (Spingarn, op. cit., I, 185).

Samuel Butler (1612–1680):—One of the direct answers to the detractors of the national poetry was given in Samuel Butler's lines written in heroic couplet: "Upon Critics Who Judge of Modern Plays Precisely by the Rules of the Antients" (?1678), Rymer's attack of Beaumont and Fletcher in his Tragedies of the Last Age (1677) seemed to provoke first Butler and led him take a pen "between November, 1677, and September, 1680" (Spingarn, op. cit., II, 351) in honour of the poetic Muses. Butler regards the poetic fury to be an essence of poetry. He warns:

"An English Poet should be tryd b' his Peres
And not by Pedants & Philosophers,
Incompetent to Judge Poetique Fury."

(Ll. 71–73: Spingarn, op. cit., II. 280)

Here could be seen an eager intention to rekindle the flame of inspiration which had been put out by the heartless Rymer and his partisans.

Cult of Genius, Passion and Enthusiasm in the General Outlook of the Neoclassical Formalism: John Dennis (1657–1734): — Creative activity of man's mind must be free and spontaneous; no rules can set limits to its poetic creation. This was the claim of the genuine poets and critics who could create or discern the beauties of artistic productions. Such was also the case with John Dennis.

Now, therefore, it is fair next to turn to Dennis (a disciple of Hobbes), whom J. G. Robertson considers to be "Addison's predecessor" (Studies in the
Genesis of Romantic Theory in the Eighteenth Century, Cambridge, 1923, 243–4. Dennis is generally a follower of French formalists, especially of Le Bossu, but, unlike Rymer, he is too literarily gifted to adhere to the formulae of the French to the end; that is, he reveals one aspect of the shift in emphasis from the neo-classical to the romantic in critical theory.

In 1696, in the Preface to the Remarks upon "Prince Arthur" (London, 1696, A2) he essays "a Discourse concerning Poetical genius," which subject, as he puts it, has never been hitherto treated. In this treatise he attempts "to show that this extraordinary thing in Poetry which has been hitherto taken for something Supernatural and Divine, is nothing but a very common Passion, or a complication of common Passions." And the definition of genius as passion appears also in The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry published five years later. Here the three propositions are said to be requisite for good poetry: the first is "Nature," which is "the basis of all," for "Nature is the same thing with Genius, and Genius and Passion are all one" and "Passion in a Poem is Genius, and the power of exciting Passion is Genius in a Poet;" the second is the rules; and the third is the language used as adequately to convey the passions of the poet (London, 1701, 115). Again in the same treatise the critic further states in the same spirit: "Everything that is great in Poetry must be great by the Genius that is felt in it, which is the chief thing in Poetry.... Now all Genius is Passion because it moves, and all Passion is either Enthusiasm or ordinary Passion" (op. cit., 66). He goes on: "Poetical Genius in a Poet, is the power of expressing such Passion (as Ordinary or Enthusiastick Passion) worthily and the sublime is a great thought express with the Enthusiasm that belongs to it" (op. cit., 46).

It becomes clear from the previous passages I have cited that Dennis identifies genius with passion as well as the capacity for experiencing, expressing and producing passion. His explanation seems very near to the claim of spontaneity and to the theory that poetry is the expression of exalted passion or enthusiasm. But with all his seemingly romantic claims Dennis, just like Hobbes, seeks to require judgment as necessary to a poet and poetry. He declares: "Poetical Enthusiasm is a Passion guided by Judgment, whose cause is not comprehended by us.... That it ought to be guided by Judgment is indubitable. For otherwise it would be Madness, and not Poetical Passion" (op. cit., 29). Thus in Dennis one cannot find a true claim of spontaneity, free from judgment and the rules of art in poetic creations.

It will be noted, however, that, while he asserts the indispensability of judgment and reason, he has a claim of enthusiasm and intuition: "Man ... constantly contemplated God, not so much by the force of Reason as of Intuition, or luminous lively Intelligence" (op. cit., 146–7). In another treatise he discusses that the greatest wit, when he cannot appeal to the heart, is only "a Rhimer and not a Poet." He goes on: "Poetical Genius... is it self a Passion.... And it is for this reason, that Point and Conceit, and all that they call Wit, is to be for ever banish’d from true Poetry; because he who uses it, speaks to the Head alone" and "a Poet is so indispensably oblig’d to speak
to the Heart" (Remarks upon "Prince Arthur," op. cit., 186–7). One may notice that as a condition to aesthetic response he postulates the idea of imagination or the faculty for making and conveying images as related closely to passion (cf. The Advancement, op. cit., 32–3).

In applying his theory in practical criticism he often overleaps the narrow boundary of the neo-classical formalism. He has a mind more susceptible of Beauties than such Faults as committed by deviating from the Rules of Art. To him the reputation of poetry must not be determined by the number of its faults, but by the greatness (namely, quality) of its beauties. The Impartial Critic, Etc. (1693), written as an answer to Rymer's A Short View of Tragedy, is one of the best example. The essay contains a vindication of Shakespeare against his most violent detractor. I shall quote at length the passage concerned:

"For Mr. Rymer, who pretends that this last (i.e. Shakespeare) is without Excellency, affirming that the fore-mention'd Verses of the first (Waller) are without Fault, it appears to me to be very plain that the Man who overlookt Mr. Waller's Faults might overlook Shakespeare's Excellencies. For it is much more easie to find Faults than it is to discern Beauties. To do the first requires but common Sence, but to do the last a Man must have Genius."

(Spargarn, op. cit., III, 152)

Dennis is going to give Shakespeare the name of genius. So in the Dialogue he lets Freeman show Beaumont that, "contrary to Mr. Rymer's assertion, Shakespeare was a great Genius," and declares that, though Mr. Rymer's "Censures of Shakespeare in most of the particulars are very sensible and very just," yet "it does not follow, because Shakespeare has Faults, that therefore he has no Beauties" (op. cit., III, 196–7). If this passage cited above, reveals Dennis's real intention, his way of vindication of Shakespeare's incorrectness is to be considered rather as apologetical, not positive.

An Earlier Defender of Genius or a Divine Gift: — Sir William Temple (1628–1699), with his essay On Ancient and Modern Learning (1690), is considered by A. Bosker (Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, Djakarta, 1953, 240) to be the immediate forerunner of Young in the Conjectures on Original Composition. As early as 1690 Temple, quite unlike Hobbes and his disciple Davenant, suggests that Genius is a divine gift and it manifests itself in Invention, and declares that Learning may lessen "the Force and Growth" of Genius, and weaken "Invention in a man that has great Advantages from Nature and Birth" (On Ancient and Modern Learning, Spargarn, op. cit., III, 48). The passage in another essay in which this idea reappears is very significant and will bear extended quotation:

"From this arises that Elevation of Genius which can never be produced by any Art or study, by Pains or by Industry, which cannot be taught by Precepts or Examples, and therefore is agreed by all to be the pure and free Gift of Heaven or of Nature, and to be a Fire kindled out of some hidden spark of the very first Conception.

But tho' Invention be the Mother of Poetry, yet this Child is like all others born naked, and must be Nourished with Care, Cloathed with
Exactness and Elegance, Educated with Industry, Instructed with Art, Improved by Application, Corrected with Severity, and Accomplished with Labour and with Time, before it Arrives at any great Perfection or Growth.”

(Of Poetry: Spingarn, op. cit., III, 80)

He accepts the contemporary opinion that genius is essential but it must acquire empirical knowledge to fulfil the circle of its own capacities. He asserts:

“Tis certain that no Composition requires so many several Ingredients, or of more different sorts than this, nor that to excel in any qualities there are necessary so many Gifts of Nature and so many improvements of Learning and of Art. For there must be an universal Genius, of great Compass as well as great Elevation. There must be a spritely Imagination or Fancy, fertile in a thousand Productions, ranging over infinite Ground, piercing into every Corner, and by the Light of that true Poetical Fire discovering a thousand little Bodies or Images in the World, and Similitudes among them, unseen to common Eyes, and which could not be discovered without the Rays of that Sun.”

(Op. cit., III, 80-1)

With all his advanced view of genius he clings to the classical theory of poetry that poetry necessitates wit and judgment as well as fancy. “Besides the heat of Invention and liveliness of Wit,” he asserts, “there must be the coldness of good Sense and soundness of Judgment… Without the Forces of Wit all Poetry is flat and languishing; without the succors of Judgment 'tis wild and extravagant. The true wonder of Poesy is, That such contraries must meet to compose it” (op. cit., III, 81).

But he must not be counted among the strict formalists, for he complains:

“The Modern French Wits (or Pretenders) have been very severe in their Censures and exact in their Rules, I think to very little Purpose; For I know not why they might not have contented themselves with those given by Aristotle and Horace… The Truth is, there is something in the Genius of Poetry too Libertine to be confined to so many Rules; and whoever goes about to subject it to such Constraints loses both its Spirit and Grace, which are ever Native, and never learnt, even of the best Masters. 'Tis as if, to make excellent Honey, you should cut off the Wings of your Bees, confine them to their Hive or their Stands, and lay Flowers before them, such as you think the sweetest and like to yield the finest Extraction; you had as good pull out their Stings, and make arrant Drones of them.”


Temple considers Homer and Virgil to be the specimens of true Poets. Homer is no doubt “the most Universal Genius that has been known in the World,” and “Virgil the most accomplish'd.” We must allow Homer “the most fertile Invention, the richest Vein, the most general Knowledge, and the most lively Expression.” He declares:

“… we find in the Works of Homer the most Spirit, Force, and Life. … Homer had more Fire and Rapture, Virgil more Light and Swiftness… Upon the whole, I think it must be confessed that Homer was of the two, and perhaps of all others, the vastest, the sublimest, and the most wonderful Genius.”

(Op. cit., III, 82-3)
Superiority of Genius when Accompanied by Art and Learning:— Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) was one of those who in the general tendency to accept the neo-classical doctrines of Boileau, Rapin and Rymer, the materialistic philosophy of Hobbes and Locke, and the Calvinistic belief in the human depravity, adventured to offer the new standards of aesthetic criticism (as ‘Taste’ or ‘Moral Sense’), organic conception of universe, a faith in genius and in natural goodness of man. Though, as a boy, he had been tended by John Locke, he arrived at the conclusion in his speculation quite opposed to his mentor.

To him Universe is nothing but a synonym for Harmony and Order and Beauty as suggested by the Greek “Cosmos,” which corresponds to Harmony, Order, and Beauty of Human Mind. A virtuous man implies one who acquires and keeps such a perfect symmetry within one's mind. Man, to be virtuous, must follow Nature; to follow Nature, in him, is not to live according to the dictates of reason or voice of ‘nature methodized,’ but in conformity to the Sentiments and Instincts of Nature (Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, London, 1732, I, 354). In this meaning the great poet or philosopher must be a “Copyist after NATURE” (op. cit., I, 354).

Shaftesbury’s literary views are best expressed in the essay Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author (1710). Here he seeks to undermine whatever the neoclassicists hope to achieve by mere mechanic imitation, dismissing the mechanical Rules and outward Decorum, because, he asserts, the inward Decorum and the inward Beautys—marks indispensable for the great poet and philosopher—could never be arrived at by such means.

He seems ready to assert that what comes to genius spontaneously is superior to any deliberate and careful efforts of the mere scholar. But it may be be noted that he does not say the greatest work always belongs to the untutored genius. Like most critics of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, he believes in and claims Horatian statement that genius is necessary to the poet, but that it must be accompanied by art and study.

“Nor more can a Genius alone make a Poet.... The Skill and grace of Writing is found in Knowledge and good Sense: and not barely in that Knowledge, which is to be learnt from common Authors, or the general Conversation of the World; but from those particular Rules of Art, which Philosophy alone exhibits.” (Op. cit., I, 192)

Then he quotes from Horace (Ars Poet., 11. 309–310): “Scribendi rectè, sapere est & principium & fons, / Rem tibi SORATICAES poterunt ostendere CHARTAE.” (Trans.: “Wisdom is the source and fountain of good writing; and your matter the Socratic pages can set forth.”) There in Shaftesbury seems nothing incompatible between genius and education as seen in the French extremists.

Shaftesbury, an “Enthusiastick Friend” (op. cit., I, 55), abhors Rymer and all the other obdurate formalists who have not been able to estimate the Elizabethan dramatists without relying on the classical Rules and Decorum. He maintains that as to the Tragic spirit the English have exceeded France, the country of Boileau and Corneille (op. cit., I, 218). He takes a higher
opinion of Shakespeare, and commends especially his Hamlet, a work which shows the consistent excellence in morals and style (op. cit., I, 275–6). To him the reputation of Shakespeare itself is the undoubted historical fact. His vindication of "our old dramatick Poet," however, must be described as rather apologetic: Shakespeare's faults, he defends, are the faults of the age when he lived (op. cit., I, 358–9, 217–8).

Addison's Distinction between Natural Genius and Genius as a Result of Art and Learning:— Though he was in his general outlook a tame Augustan, Joseph Addison (1672–1719), as far as the literary criticism is concerned, seems rather inclined to discredit the formulae of the neo-classical formalists; he generally keeps a contemptuous attitude towards the Rules of Aristotle, which have marked the character of Augustan critics, and he believes in the fact of genius and the pleasures of the imagination.

It has been a common practice among the modern critics that with the papers on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" (The Spectator, Nos. 400–421: 1712) Addison laid the foundation of the romantic aestheticism in England (cf. J. G. Robertson, op. cit., 241). He derives the psychological basis of his imagination-theory primarily from Locke and, then, Hobbes; for example, Addisionian distinction between the primary and secondary pleasures is said to be "a deduction from Locke's distinction between 'Ideas of Primary Qualities of Bodies and Ideas produced by their Secondary Qualities'" (op. cit., 248).

What is not less important than this in his contribution to the establishment of the new aesthetic criticism, is his theory of genius. The glorification of genius and depreciation of learning and the rules marks, more or less, the whole side of Addisonian criticism. He has a more developed idea of genius than his predecessor John Dennis in the writings like the Remarks upon "Prince Arthur" (1696) and The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry (1701).

In The Spectator, No. 592, in 1714, which follows the year of Rymer's death, Addison rails against the little critics, especially against Rymer, who are ignorant of the fact that "First, there is sometimes a greater judgment shewn in deviating from the rules of art, than in adhering to them; and Secondly, That there is more beauty in the works of a great genius who is ignorant of the rules of art, than in the works of a little genius, who not only knows, but scrupulously observes them" (Tickell, ed., Works of J. Addison, London, 1804, III, 135). This quotation shows that Addison attempts to clarify the concept of genius by contrast with learning and the classical rules.

He essays a further analysis of genius by discriminating between natural genius and genius as a result of art and learning: the first are the "great natural geniuses" with inborn and untutored powers, that were "never disciplined and broken by rules of art;" and the lesser kind of geniuses, are "those that have formed themselves by rules, and submitted the greatness of their natural talents to the corrections and restraints of art" (No. 160, 1711: op. cit., i, 344, 346). To give a more detailed account, the first kind
of geniuses have “something nobly wild and extravagant... that is infinitely more beautiful” and “more elevated and sublime;” they, “by the mere strength of natural parts, and without any assistance of art or learning, have produced works that were the delight of their own times, and the wonder of posterity;” whereas the lesser kind of geniuses are apt to “cramp their own abilities too much by imitation, and form themselves altogether upon models, without giving the full play to their own natural parts.” And further, for the remarkable instances of this kind of geniuses Addison suggests the names of Homer, Pindar, and Shakespeare; on the contrary, among the lesser kind of geniuses Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Milton and Bacon belong. The critic’s judgment on the alternative of the mere imitation and original genius is self-evident from the above without consultation with the sentence that “an imitation of the best authors is not to compare with a good original” (op. cit., I, 347).

In The Spectator, No. 291 (1711) he discusses with Loginus in mind that “the productions of a great genius, with many lapses and inadvertencies, are infinitely preferable to the works of an inferior kind of author, which are scrupulously exact, and conformable to all the rules of correct writing” (op. cit., II, 116). The passage clearly echoes the same logic as often used in the seventeenth–century critics (like Temple). In The Spectator, No. 592, in opposition to the little artificial cavillers he declares:

“Our inimitable Shakspear is a stumbling– block to whole tribe of these rigid critics. Who would not rather read one of his plays, where there is not a single rule of the stage observed, than any production of a modern critic (like Rymer’s Edgar), where there is not one of them violated? Shakspear was indeed born with all the seeds of poetry, and may be compared to the stone in Pyrrhus’s ring, which, as Pliny tells us, had the figure of Apollo and the nine Muses in the vein of it, produced by the spontaneous hand of nature, without any help from art.”


Here in the above quotation is a hint of spontaneity of inspired genius, just as in the following remark: “Pindar was a great genius of the first class, who was hurried on by a natural fire and impetuosity to vast conceptions of things, and noble sallies of imagination” (No. 160: op. cit., I, 346). One is forced to admit that, while the neo-classical critics denied the belief in genius and divine inspiration, in Addison there is a glorified combination of the notions of genius, inspiration, and free, spontaneous creation.

**Dr. Johnson and Sir Joshua Reynolds on Genius and Rules:** — In his Dictionary of the English Language (1755) the classical Dr. Johnson does not recognize the usage of ‘genius’ for “natural endowment” or “a person thus endowed;” to him the word ‘originality’ itself has the meaning of “quality or state of being original (i.e. primitive)” (Johnson’s Dictionary).

Reynolds, a member of Johnson’s Literary Club, in The Idler, No. 76 (Sept. 29, 1759), writes that instead of detecting the faults a great critic must dwell on “the just estimation of the sublime beauties in works of genius,” for “whatever part of an art can be executed or criticized by rules,
that part is no longer the work of genius, which implies excellence out of the reach of rules." Reynolds warns the critics against "such a propensity to criticize that instead of giving up the reins of their imagination into their author's hands, their frigid minds are employed in examining whether the performance be according to the rules of art." Then he ridicules the "connoisseur" who laments that "so great a genius as Raphael had not lived in this enlightened age, since the art has been reduced to principles, and had his education in one of the modern Academies" (Elledge, op. cit., II, 829-31).

In his Discourses he clings to the same view. Genius cannot be judged, because "genius is supposed to be a power of producing excellencies, which are out of the reach of the rules of art; a power which no precepts can teach, and which no industry can acquire" (The Sixth Discourse, quoted in Hazlitt's Table Talk, Everyman's Library, 1961, 126). So much for Reynolds's opinion on genius against rules. But, it must be remembered that this ingenious critic is not convinced that "rules are absolutely unnecessary," but only tries "to censure scrupulosity, a servile attention to minute exactness, which is sometimes inconsistent with higher excellence and is lost in the blaze of expanded genius" (Elledge, op. cit., II, 831).

Glorification of Genius in Defiance of Mere Imitation and Learning: — Modern critics have considered Edward Young (1683-1765) to be one of the initiators of the new movement. In Young, a member of Addison's literary circle, a hackneyed maxim to imitate the models of the ancients is unwarrantable. He assumes a contemptuous attitude towards the productions which are bound up with the classical rules set up by rational critics. A good poet must imitate the spirit of the ancients; he has to let his genius manifest itself free and spontaneous. In recounting the various marks of genius, Young connects the notion with those of divine inspiration and spontaneous self-creation. In him one may find many of the notions approximate to those which the romanticists are ready to use.

Originality and spontaneity of genius is asserted more emphatically by Young. Earlier Addison proclaimed the superiority of an original genius or of what manifested itself spontaneously, to a mere mechanical imitator, and to those that were produced by conscious efforts and by submission to the classical models.

There are many reasons why Young has been called one of the greatest champions of the original genius. As has been pointed out, the subject of which he treated was not so new as his predecessors, but it had never been dealt with at such length. Already in his early writings he glorified an original genius: he suggested that it was essential to the good poetry. But the most important is, needless to say, the little volume written in the form of a letter addressed to S. Richardson, "the Author of Sir Charles Grandison" (a novel, published in 1753).

Young's theory on genius calls for the special comment, because he, especially with his Conjectures on Original Composition, prepared the way for the conception of the 'original genius' that led to the very heart of the romantic
principle. In spite of a general disposition of the century to accept imitation and learning as essential, he dwells upon originality and genius with so much enthusiasm. In 1759 Young published anonymously the Conjectures in order to pay homage to Addison. From this volume one may expect a number of germs of romanticism, such as glorification of original genius, exaltation of spontaneity and freedom of the poet, and dethronement of the Rules of Aristotle and of Reason. And it is here that he uses and develops the words 'original genius' as opposed to the mere imitation (i.e. copy) and learning (i.e. acquired capacities).

Before Young, in A Dissertation Concerning the Perfection of the English Language, Etc. (1724), Leonard Welsted complains that the great part of English writers in the past and in his times, have been "servile copiers," and that this is the reason why "the English genius has not gone greater length." He, then, describes "imitation" as "the bane of writing," and adds that "works of imitation differ from originals as fruits brought to maturity by artificial fires differ from those that are ripened by the natural heat of the sun and the indulgence of a kindly-climate" (Elledge, op. cit., I, 335-6). And in Tom Jones (1749; XIV. i) Fielding speaks also of "the wonderful force of genius only, without the least assistance of learning."

It is sure that when Young claims the fact of originality, he is confronted with the obstacle of traditional imitation-theory. He seems to have overcome the difficulty by distinguishing two kinds of imitations, "one of nature, one of authors;" the former he calls "originals" and the latter a mere "imitation." He makes an "original" surpass a mere "imitation;" he neglects the "meddling ape imitation," which is only to destroy "all mental individuality" (Jones, op. cit., 285). Young is profoundly convinced that original genius is supreme and he advises the poet to "imitate not the composition, but the man," which is to make the best use of original genius (op. cit., 277). By so doing he opens the way, instead of banishing the imitation-theory away, for such an exaltation of the imitation in the quite different sense from the neo-classicists', as appears common in the romanticists. (For the concepts of plagiarism, imitation and copy, in the early half of the eighteenth century, see A. Bosker, op. cit., 236-9.)

The dissatisfaction with mechanical imitation or copy necessarily involves the vanity of translation. Then Young compares Homer, the original, with Pope, the translator. With his translation of Homer, the critic asserts, Pope killed Homer's spirit; Pope is stigmatized not only as "an avowed professor of imitation," but as "a zealous recommender of it" (Jones, op. cit., 293). And elsewhere one may find Young contrasting the classicist Jonson, the imitator, and Shakespeare, the original writer (op. cit., 299). As to original geniuses Young boasts that England has excelled other countries in 'polite composition' as well as in 'natural and mathematical knowledge' and that it has had great originals like Bacon, Boyle, Newton, Shakespeare and Milton (op. cit., 297); in Young, as the examples of originals, both artists and scientists are thus referred to. Now, according to Young, of the moderns, the immortal Mr. Addison is the brightest (op. cit., 301), for he has "a more
refined, decent, judicious, and extensive genius, than Pope or Swift." Addison is "a great author," the critic compares, whereas Swift is only "a singular wit" and Pope "a correct poet" (op. cit., 305).

He distinguishes two kinds of geniuses, earlier and later, or infantine and adult; the first, of which Shakespeare's genius is a good example, "comes out of Nature's hand... at full growth and mature," and the second, as exemplified in Swift, is "a genius, which, like other infants, must be nursed, and educated, or it will come to naught: learning is its nurse and tutor" (op. cit., 281). In the list of original genius Young enrolled the names of Homer, Pindar and Shakespeare. He judges that the greatest genius of the moderns is Shakespeare; of the ancients, Pindar (to say nothing of Homer), who "boasted of his no-learning, calling himself the eagle, for his flight above it" (op. cit., 280). Our modern Shakespeare is an equal to the ancients and is as great as they, not in "the fewness of his faults" but in "the number and brightness of his beauties" (op. cit., 298). Thus the greatness of Young in his criticism of Shakespeare, primarily consists in that he defended the greatest dramatist in England, positively, not apologetically as it had been a long critical custom. To the Jonsonian complaint of little learning of Shakespeare Young answers in the following fashion:

"Perhaps he was as learned as his dramatic province required; for whatever other learning he wanted, he was master of two books, unknown to many of the profoundly read... the book of Nature, and that of man. These he had by heart, and has transcribed many admirable pages of them, into his immortal works... If Milton had spared some of his learning, his muse would have gained more glory, than he would have lost it."

(Opera cit., 299-300)

Young understands genius antithetically with learning. He compares genius to "a master workman" (i.e. an agent), and learning to a mere "instrument" (op. cit., 279). He considers that learning loves and boasts of laborious "pains" and "rules" (which, "like crutches, are a needful aid to the lame, though an impediment to the strong") and that it cries out against "natural unstudied grace, small harmless inaccuracies," and seeks to put limits to "that liberty, to which genius often owes its supreme glory;" on the contrary, he asserts, the marks of genius are "unprescribed beauties and unexampled excellence," which lie beyond "the pale of learning's authorities and laws" (loc. cit.). For him learning is "borrowed knowledge," while genius is "knowledge innate, and quite our own" and can be called "wisdom." He thinks: "Genius can set us right in composition, without the rules of the learned" (op. cit., 283, 280). Therefore, he claims the freedom of poets: "Modern writers have a choice to make... They may soar in the regions of liberty, or move in the soft fetters of easy imitations" (op. cit., 276). At last he declares that "to neglect of learning, genius sometimes owes its greater glory" (op. cit., 280).

In Young an emphasis is placed especially on the poetic inspiration as a mark of genius. The concept of genius becomes more important to the romanticists for the first time when it comes to be connected with that of
divine inspiration. Young cherishes the notion of the intimate relationship between genius and divine inspiration; that the greatest kind of genius is one that is most subject to the comings and goings of the divine inspiration. He conceives that genius is a divine, natural endowment susceptible of inspiration. Genius gives us "rapture" and it "inspires," he says (op. cit., 283). "Genius is from heaven, learning from man;" it is innate wisdom and "that god within" (op. cit., 280); it creates without any assistance of "common tools;" hence it has been "supposed to partake of something divine" (op. cit., 279). The author seeks further to combine the inspired genius with the notion of fancy which is equated to imagination. Only in the world of fancy genius can utilize its own creative power. "In the fairyland of fancy, genius may wander wild; there it has a creative power, and may reign arbitrarily over its own empire of chimeras" (op. cit., 283). Genius in poetry should be free; and in its freedom it would bring its creative faculty into full play.

Young relates the notion of genius closely to that of 'originals' as the spontaneous productions of genius. "The mind of a man of genius is a fertile and pleasant field.; it enjoys a perpetual spring," and "originals" are "the fairest flowers" of that spring, productions of genius (op. cit., 273). He emphasizes the contrast between originals or the spontaneous compositions of genius and the mere imitations as manufactured by the mechanical, artificial labour. So he writes: "An original may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made. Imitations are often a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art and labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own" (op. cit., 274; italics mine). He asserts: "Originals shine, like comets; have no peer in their path; are rivalled by none, and the gaze of all" (op. cit., 295); and, therefore, "May our genius shine...!" (Op. cit., 297)

It may be noted that in spite of the glorification of natural, untutored, original genius, he does not always detract from learning, saying that learning we must thank, because it gives us "pleasure," and it "informs" (op. cit., 282–3).

If a poet wants to fulfil his genuine genius in the fullest sense, he must repudiate a mere mechanical imitation in favour of a spontaneous creation. He must not imitate the composition but the author's spirit. The best of Young's poetry seem the poetic applications of this theory. As early as 1730 in the Preface to Imperium Pelagi: A Naval Lyric Young remarks that he wrote the poem "in Imitation of Pindar's Spirit," and not by following one of his poems. And later in the Preface to The Night Thoughts (1742–5) he proclaims:

"As the occasion of this Poem was real, not fictitious; so the method pursued in it was rather imposed by what spontaneously arose in the Author's mind on that occasion, than meditated or designed. Which will appear very probable from the nature of it. For it differs from the common mode of poetry; which is, from long narrations to draw short morals. Here, on the contrary, the narrative is short, and the morality rising from it makes the bulk of the Poem. The reason of it is, that the facts mentioned did naturally pour these moral reflections on the thought

Here one may recall a happy conversation held between Johnson and Boswell about Young's genius. Both men of literature esteemed The Night Thoughts written in blank verse, as "a mass of the grandest and richest poetry that human genius has ever produced;" Johnson observes, "In his Night Thoughts, he has exhibited a very wide display of original poetry, variegated with deep reflections and striking allusions; a wilderness of thought, in which the fertility of fancy scatters flowers of every hue and of every odour."

(Boswell's Life of Johnson, op. cit., 111)

The basic tone of Young's writings must be taken as prospective, not retrospective; he was never a primitivist nor a mere nostalgic of the Golden Age. Endless advance of human knowledge as steadily acquired in modern science, affected profoundly and permeated every corner of his soul.

The neo-classicists have depended upon the dictates of reason and nature; to follow the models of the ancients, to observe the classical rules, and use heroic couplets has been long the shortest way to become the greatest poet. There is an unbroken development from Young's explanations of original genius down to those of the romanticists. He points the way directly to the romantic criticism of literature—the rejection of formalism, restrictions, prosaic reasoning, etc. and, instead, the exclusive emphasis upon original genius, exaltation of freedom of all human activities, based upon the cult of natural goodness and human progress, in which we find the germs of dynamic organicism, which is soon to bear fruit in the Romantic Period that follows.

The exaltation of the inspired, original genius becomes all the more enthusiastic when genius is related with imagination and their relationship is emphasized. Though Young did mention imagination, yet he never dwelt upon it, nor did he try to re-examine the fact of genius in relation to the imagination. One of its earlier attempts, though pseudo-psychological, one must find in Alexander Gerard's remarkable essay. Here the closer connection between genius and imagination is to be acknowledged, brought under question, and discussed much in detail.

Imagination as a Mark of Genius: Two Scottish Writers, Alexander Gerard (1728-95) and William Duff (1732-1815):—It was not until William Duff and Alexander Gerard that the closer relation between genius and imagination was discovered and analyzed. Indeed that relation was casually suggested before them, but generally, as seen in Addison, two notions had been hitherto discussed separately.

It was Duff that intended to elaborate the connection between genius and imagination, while making a clear distinction between fancy and imagination. In An Essay on Original Genius (1767), written in favour of originality and against the mere imitation and inventions, he calls the "creative Imagination the distinguishing characteristic of true Genius." To him "Wit & Humour are produced by the efforts of a rambling and sportive Fancy, the latter (i.e. Genius) proceeds from the copious effusions of a plastic Imagination" (p. 52). And "a vigorous, extensive, and plastic
Imagination is the principal qualification of the one (Genius), and a quick and lively Fancy the distinguishing characteristic of the other" (p. 58).

The more elaborated investigation of the connection of genius and imagination, however, one may find in Gerard, who noticed and discussed the relation down in detail in An Essay on Genius which appeared in 1774. The Scottish philosopher believes in the fact of genius and imagination both in science and in literature; to him imagination and genius seem to work more freely in literature and art than in science, for in the latter their operations are controlled by judgment and subjected to the facts.

Primarily he devotes himself to elucidating the origin and nature of what he calls "genius" (dependent on imagination, fancy or invention) in the light of new associationism. First he counts the three marks of genius in every art and in every science by assigning them respectively to comprehensiveness, regularity and activity, of imagination—the powers which are described as the "associating powers," "the associating principles" (Ellodge, op. cit., II, 891), by virtue of which the ideas are associated and which "contributes very much to the disposition of every work" (op. cit., II, 892) in art and science. Homer in literature and Newton in science are Gerard's examples of the greatest genius.

And labour and industry Gerard conceives as "opposite to true genius." A lesser man who must labour "under this debility of mind" and rely on memory, will become "instead of a philosopher a devoted follower or a dull laborious commentator; instead of a poet, a servile imitator or a painful translator" (op. cit., II, 883). He shows a preference of spontaneous operations of genius in creation to labour and industry of the learned. "The operations of genius in forming its designs are of a more perfect kind than the operations of art (i.e. skill) or industry in executing them," he writes (op. cit., II, 892).

Genius is considered to be a man who "possesseth a fertile imagination" and capable of exerting "the full spirit of the original" (op. cit., II, 884, 885). Original genius reveals itself in such a creative process as best described by a vegetable: "When a vegetable draws in moisture from the earth, nature, by the same action by which it draws it in, and at the same time, converts it to the nourishment of the plant....In like manner, genius arranges its ideas by the same operation, and almost at the same time, that it collects them" (op. cit., II, 892).

In Gerard genius, as a rule, appears attended with "enthusiasm," "inspiration," and "rapture:"

"Enthusiasm has been generally considered as a very common, if not an inseparable, attendant of genius. Poets have been looked upon as inspired, both by themselves and others. No man can be an accomplished orator who is not possessed of such sensibility of heart as to be actuated at pleasure by the passions which he would excite in others. Even the speculative philosopher and the cool mathematician have often displayed a very high degree of ardor in the exertion of their genius."

(Op. cit., II, 893)

Thus "a high degree of genius" is said to be accompanied "with something
of that elevation and warmth of imagination which we term enthusiasm" (op. cit., II, 893-4). The following passage will also present this view:

"Its motions (i.e. the motions of imagination) become still more impetuous, till the mind is enraptured with the subject and exalted into an ecstasy. In this manner the fire of genius, like a divine impulse, raises the mind above itself, and by the natural influence of imagination actuates it as if it were supernaturally inspired." (Op. cit., II, 894)

In assuming the mark of genius proceeding from creative imagination and claiming spontaneity and originality of inspired genius Gerard anticipates the romantic conviction of genius.

Kant's Definition of Genius as "originalgeist:"— One may find in Kant (1724-1804) one of the most consummated examples of the theory of genius. In his Kritik der Urteilskraft (1790) he was deeply influenced by English thinkers like Young, Gerard, Duff and the like.

First, to Kant, who seeks to find the foundation of art in "das Unbewusste," originality (die Originalität) is the striking mark of genius (das Genie). The principle of genius's creation is produced only by Nature, not by training nor imitation. He, unlike Gerard, denies genius to any scientists, even to Newton, because their brains, however great they may be, are to be learned, followed, and imitated; that is, in genius the difference is not a difference, as in a scholar, of degree, but of kind.

Secondly, since genius is a natural endowment, it cannot be imitated nor acquired by any effort. Instead of the obedience to the rules it creates its own laws. As the word 'genius' originally means the tutelary god, so genius is to derive its inspiration and ideas from the heavenly revelation.

Thirdly, genius is defined to be "der musterhafte Originalgeist" which means "das Vermögen der Darstellung aesthetischer Ideen" (K. d. U., §. 49); and the "aesthetische Idee" here is nothing but a kind of intuition (unsusceptible of analysis and reasoning) as well as creations of imagination, and so it is the antonym of the "Vernunftidee." Kant draws a sharp line between Genius and Talent, aesthetical and logical judgments.

IV. ROMANTIC CONCEPT OF GENIUS

In his provoking essay The Four Ages of Poetry (1820) Shelley's cynical friend T. L. Peacock makes an interesting comment on the creeds attributed to the poets of what he calls "the age of brass:"

"Poetical genius is the finest of all things, and we feel that we have more of it than any one ever had. The way to bring it to perfection is to cultivate poetical impressions exclusively. Poetical impressions can be received only among natural scenes: for all that is artificial is anti-poetical. Society is artificial, therefore we live out of society. The mountains are natural, therefore we will live in the mountains. ...' To some such perversion of intellect we owe that egregious confraternity of rhymesters, known by the name of the Lake Poets.... They wrote verses on a new principle; saw rocks and rivers in a new light; and remaining studiously
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ignorant of history, society, and human nature, cultivated the phantasy only at the expense of the memory and the reason.'
(Brett-Smith, ed., Peacock's 'Four Ages of Poetry,' Etc., Oxford, 1953, 14)

Though he is known to be an enemy of the romanticists, Peacock in this passage comes nearly at a true knowledge of the whole entity of the romantic conviction.

For my present purpose the important signification of the 'genius' is generally that of the "native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as is attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art, speculation, or practice; instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginatıve creation, original thought, invention, or discovery; often contrasted with talent" (N. E. D.), and that of "the person thus endowed." English concept of original and creative genius was borrowed by the Germans and a French in the eighteenth century, who then in their turn developed it. Perhaps France had contributed much to that sharp distinction between 'genius' and 'talent'. This is the reason why that contrast is said to have been the product of the Continent, though it was referred to in the most casual manner in England. The contrast was to be accepted by the English writers, especially by Coleridge, who was profoundly fascinated with the transcendental philosophy of Kant.

S. T. Coleridge's Contrast between Genius and Talent: — It has been alleged that Coleridge (1772–1834) contributed most to the formation of the romantic theory of criticism including the indispensable concepts of 'imagination' and 'genius' (as contrasted with talent). But by the time of Coleridge, it may be noted, the meaning and implication of the word 'genius' had been much enriched by its approximation to, or rather its absorption into the concept of 'imagination,' the unconscious faculty of perception and creation.

The word 'talent' in Coleridge is used for "the faculty of appropriating and applying the knowledge of others," whereas 'genius' for "the creative, and self-sufficing power" (Shawcross, ed., Biographia Literaria by Coleridge, Oxford, 1907, I, 20). And in another place he speaks with the contrast of the two words in mind: "Talent was a manufacture: genius a gift which no labour or study could supply. . . ."(Ashe, ed., Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare, Bohn's Library, 1902, 13).

To Coleridge, like to many of the romanticists, the realm of genius is the world of spontaneity, feelings and sensibility. He is sure of the spontaneous activity of genius: that "there is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius." He is not subject to "lifeless technical rules" (On Poesy or Art: Shawcross, op. cit., II, 258).

William Hazlitt (1778–1830) and De Quincey (1785–1859): — Coleridge's view had a great influence upon his friends. William Hazlitt, for example, accepted his view, writing: "Talent is the capacity of doing any thing that depends on application and industry. . . . Talent differs from genius, as voluntary differs from involuntary power" (The Indian Jugglers, Table Talk, 1821–2: Everyman's Library, 1961, 84). And in the essay On Genius and Common
Sense in the same book the critic describes: "Genius or originality is, for
the most part, some strong quality in the mind, answering to and bringing out
some new and striking quality in nature" (op. cit., 42: italics in original). In
the Plain Speaker (1826) he arrives at the definition of genius: that "it acts
unconsciously; and those who have produced immortal works, have done so
without knowing how or why. The greatest power operates unseen" (Collected
Works, I, 284).

The same distinction De Quincey elaborates in his other essays; the quo-
tation from the Autobiography (1853) appears available to the present purpose:

"Talent and genius... are not merely different, they are in polar oppo-
tion to each other. Talent is intellectual power of every kind, which acts
and manifests itself... through the will and the active forces. Genius... is that
much rarer species of intellectual power which is derived from the genial
nature—from the spirit of suffering and enjoying—from the spirit of pleasure
and pain.... It is a function of the passive nature."

P. B. Shelley (1792–1822):—Shelley, an admirer of the poetry of Wordsworth
and Coleridge, is eager to put an exclusive emphasis on one's genius and
originality and declares the human emancipation from the yoke of neo-
classicism. In his early essay on Prince Alexy Haimatoff (1814) he protests
against the "empirical bibliopolism" and "mediocrity" of those who, relying
upon their shallow knowledge of "all the unities" that have been preserved
in a "French tragedy," are ready to complain both a neglect of "common
rules" and some "errors of youth and genius"—those faults which appear to
him no more than a blot in comparison with the subtle delicacy of imagi-
nation in "the most memorable specimens of human genius" and of "the
most elevated genius" (Shawcross, ed., Shelley's Literary and Philosophical
Criticism, London, 1933, 10–11). To him the greatest work must bear
"indisputable marks of a singular and original genius" (Shelley to Hogg, Nov.

Shelley has been regarded as one of those who, instead of labour and
study, exaggerate spontaneity and unconsciousness of the inspired imagination
at work, which grows nearly to the verge of divine madness. This belief he
elaborates in A Defence of Poetry (1821): "Poetry is not like reasoning, a
power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man
cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it"
(Shawcross, op. cit., 153). Everything, artificial or mechanical, that limits
spontaneity of the poetic mind is so alien to the original genius.

V. CONCLUSION

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had experienced
the cutting-off of the yoke of Calvinistic dogmas and the classical formulae
in favour of the faith in man's natural goodness, universal harmony and
love, which pointed the way directly or indirectly to the new movement of
romanticism. Throughout the centuries concerned the English Augustans, so
they rather boastingly named themselves, had been accustomed to rely on
outer authorities, and did not seem to recognize the significance of 'genius' and 'imagination;' the superiority of the rôle of 'genius' and 'imagination' in literature and aesthetics never entered their heads. They had tried to subject all poetry to the generalized rules and cried out against any deviation from them. The most inconvenient factor, however, in following the classical, methodized rules was the unfailing popularity of England's older poets; Shakespeare, the greatest genius, was nothing but the stumbling-block to an acceptance of the reason-governed theory. The increase of his fame tended to deepen the belief in 'genius' instead.

I have examined that the cult of uneducated, original genius in the eighteenth century did not, as W. J. Bate observes (From Classic to Romantic Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England, New York, 1961, 95), come out rather suddenly, but it as a term of criticism had already germinated in England before the century, being gradually and steadily cared for and tended by many of critics and philosophers for more than a century before it attained the full growth.

And it will be fair to say that during the years 1750–1798, the theory of 'genius' had been rapidly developed with mysterious connotations, being fostered by the notions of 'originality,' 'divine inspiration,' 'spontaneous creation' and 'poetic truth.' There were, indeed, many authors in those years who laid an emphasis enthusiastically upon spontaneity and originality of the inspired, productive genius and who added much to the establishment of the romantic discussion of 'genius' as put into a closer relationship to the notion of 'imagination.'

Edward Young seemed to share much the same mission with his predecessors to be in revolt against the neo-classical formalism. He is considered to be the most eminent of many contributors to the development of the theory of 'genius;' by him 'genius' came to be reckoned among the important vocabulary of literary criticism. The theory of 'genius' advocated by Young, Gerard, etc., was received enthusiastically in Germany and France, where the notion of 'genius' was developed in a marked contrast to that of 'talent.' This is the reason why the striking distinction drawn between 'genius' and 'talent' is considered largely to be of Continental origin, though the contrast was casually suggested in England.

As I have suggested, the word 'genius' as a term of critical standards was originally of English origin; at an earlier stage in its sense-development the word was contrasted rather with 'wit' (or 'learning') and at the final stage the contrast was drawn sharply between 'genius' and 'talent' or the faculties which were to be acquired by learning and industry. (Earlier the two words 'genius' and 'talent' were used as synonyms.)

One may say that the concept of 'genius' did not occupy a really important position in English literary criticism until the difference between 'genius' (as natural capacities) and acquired capacities came thus to be sharpened into a strong antithesis, corresponding to the distinction between the writers whose natural and innate endowment acted spontaneously and unfolded itself without any assitance of art and learning, and those whose capacities (or
‘talent’) were the product of labour and study. It may be considered, therefore, that the ‘genius’ used for ‘natural faculties’ or “a person thus endowed” in English romantic criticism was placed under the category of imagination, originality, unconsciousness, inspiration, etc.; and that it was an indispensable mark of the greatest kind of poets. (Thus the word ‘genius’ not infrequently recurred in Shakespeare criticism.)

TEXTS

Hazlitt, W., Table Talk, London (Everyman’s Library), 1961.

REFERENCE BOOKS

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