

## Abstract

This essay examines three key texts, by William Buchan, Isaac D'Israeli, and Richard Robert Madden, which demonstrate the emergence of the newly conceived idea of literary genius in the Romantic period. It considers the role of a new genre, the “medical biography”, in the development of this phenomenon. While the mental precariousness of the Romantic genius has been much commented upon, this essay concentrates instead on the bodily or physical aspects of genius, which is itself figured as a disease. The study and writing involved in publication are viewed as stimulants that can be addictive, ruining the health and wellbeing of authors and even leading to their early deaths.

Keywords: medicine, body, reading, writing, genius

## **The Medical Dangers of Literary Genius**

It has been well established that during what we now call the Romantic period, there was a new and unprecedented interest in the personal lives of writers and poets, which tried to account for an equally new sense of literary genius.<sup>1</sup> The extent to which this examination of so-called “men of genius” focused upon their bodies as well as their minds has not yet been fully explored. Medical professionals advised against taking up the pen, warning about its threat to the longevity of poets, say, compared to other professions. Both writing and reading had the potential to make people ill and ample evidence of this was offered to readers of the lives of Robert Burns, Lord Byron, Thomas de Quincey, William Godwin, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Wordsworth.<sup>2</sup> A character in Benjamin D'Israeli's 1870 novel *Lothair* was even to remark, “Books are fatal”.<sup>3</sup> In this essay, I examine the medical advice given to authors with regard to their profession, finding that both reading and writing were thought to have the propensity to overstimulate the nervous system.

There was a flurry of books published on “men of genius” at the start of the nineteenth century. One of these, written by the biographer John Watkins, and published in 1808, claimed that in the past biographies had offered mere panegyrics on their subjects. These texts did not avoid presenting the examples of “men of learning and genius” as warnings to their readers.<sup>4</sup> The biographies he wrote, in contrast, would be “useful” because they would give a “faithful representation of infirmities as well as excellencies” of the men discussed.<sup>5</sup> David Higgins has shown how “In early nineteenth-century Britain, there was an unprecedented interest among writers and readers in the subject of genius and, in particular, in examining and discussing the personal characteristics and life histories of ‘great men.’”<sup>6</sup> These included personal characteristics that might be less than flattering as well as symptoms and signs of physical and mental weakness. Whereas, according to Higgins, in the eighteenth century, “accounts of genius generally took the form of theories of how the mind worked, or how society should be organized, or arguments about the importance of artistic originality”, in the early nineteenth century, there was far more attention paid to “how the possession of genius affected a person’s character and life history (whether “men of genius” were generally virtuous, sane or mad, celebrated or neglected)”.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the body of the man of genius, his infirmities, illnesses, and physical flaws, very often became the focus of attention.

We might expect the phrase “man of genius” to refer solely and simply to original genius, in the manner of William Duff’s 1767 *Essay*: a man who is born a genius, and whose original and unique literary creations come to him through inspiration.<sup>8</sup> Yet there remains, in the texts discussed here, a sense of the hard graft undertaken by a man of genius and of the physical toll upon his body caused by late nights spent reading others’ writings and composing his own literary works. When I use the phrase “man of genius” in this essay, I follow this contemporary usage, which incorporates the idea of a man of learning, or someone who dedicates his life to study and erudition. The earliest

text considered here concerns solely this kind of man and the physical dangers associated with long hours spent studying and writing. Later texts are concerned with the man of genius we would recognize, a special, privileged being, who occupies a position that may not be attained simply by working hard. But, as is clear here, the man of genius still does work hard and the nature of this hard work has detrimental effects on his health. My essay considers the physical effect of reading as study, rather than as a leisurely pursuit.

This essay traces a shift in the way that the pathology of reading and writing was represented in a few key texts, from William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (1769), through Isaac D'Israeli's *Essay on the Manners and Genius of the Literary Character* (1795) and *The Literary Character* (1818), to Richard Robert Madden's *The Infirmities of Genius* (1833).<sup>9</sup> Though there are real differences in these texts, since, for example, Buchan and Madden were trained medical professionals, while D'Israeli was not, all three texts are united in their intention to popularize medical ideas for the general reader. In these texts, which respond to and develop each other's ideas, we can see clearly that the emergence of a specifically "Romantic" notion of genius is accompanied by an equally specific understanding of the body of the genius. This does not yet exist in Buchan's text; he feels that the bad health of learned men is entirely of their own making. D'Israeli and Madden, however, think men of genius have a propensity to disease and regard them as hallowed objects of sympathy. In all these texts, though, the act of reading and writing and the habits associated with study are thought to lead to ill health unless properly regulated. Authors are portrayed as peculiarly susceptible to the addictive stimulation that is writing and study. Contrary to the now popular idea that creative writing is therapeutic, in the Romantic period it was thought to be dangerous for one's health.

### **The Mental and Physical Dangers Associated with "Intense Thinking"**

William Buchan's immensely popular *Domestic Medicine, or, The Family Physician* was very clear on the dangers associated with a literary life.<sup>10</sup> His book was first published in 1769 but went into at least 142 English-language editions, becoming the best-known health guide in Britain.<sup>11</sup> He directed one section of his guide to the illnesses of the "studious", following earlier sections on the "laborious" and the "sedentary". In the 1803 edition, he specifies that he is addressing himself to those who engage in "literary pursuits" though this includes all "men of science and genius" and thus is not limited to the purely "literary" as we would understand this term today.<sup>12</sup> Buchan's book is a useful counterpoint to texts that come later: we see here a no-nonsense view of men of genius, as he calls them, which does not valorize them as Isaac D'Israeli and Richard Robert Madden will in their later texts. There is no sign yet in Buchan of the tortured Romantic poet whose gift of genius comes at the price of his health.

In fact, Buchan is really rather rude about men of genius: he thinks that, "Hardly any thing can be more preposterous than for a person to make study his sole business".<sup>13</sup> There is no sense in which propensity to disease is a predisposition of genius, as there will be in later texts to be discussed. All the illnesses that Buchan finds in men of genius are of their own making. Even a short period of intense study can "ruin an excellent constitution, by inducing a train of nervous complaints which could never be removed".<sup>14</sup> An added paragraph at the end of this section warning the "studious" in the 1803 edition of *Domestic Medicine* states that Buchan has been criticized for his sensorious approach in earlier editions. He feels the need to be explicit in his key message in this later edition because his earlier comments have been interpreted "as discouraging the manly exertions of real talents".<sup>15</sup> Namely, literary pursuits are only bad for the health "when continued with incessant toil, at late hours, and without due intervals of rest, refreshment, relaxation, and exercise".<sup>16</sup> In fact, this new addition contradicts strongly

with the tone of the rest of the section, which had remained intact since the earliest editions of this text.

It is not, Buchan argues, that all thought is bad for us, only “*painful and intense thinking*”.<sup>17</sup> The section begins with the claim that “Intense thinking is so destructive to health, that few instances can be produced of studious persons who are strong and healthy.”<sup>18</sup> Buchan is adamant that studying without attendant exercise is extremely bad for you. His ideas on this topic are, in many ways to us, refreshingly modern; he encourages proper exercise, allowing one’s food to digest slowly, not spending too long reading by candlelight, and he worries about the posture of those who spend much time bent over their desks reading and writing. These ideas need to be placed in the context of George Cheyne’s writings, such as his famous treatise *The English Malady*, first published in 1733, which advocated a regimen of healthy diet and exercise for diseases of lifestyle. Buchan’s book explicitly acknowledged his debt to Cheyne, but *Domestic Medicine* also has a “strongly social” aspect to it and it also covers diseases peculiar to kinds of work, such as mining.<sup>19</sup> In keeping with this, part of his book gives advice about how the particularly studious can live a healthy life and he is keen to promote a balance in everything: “Man is evidently not formed for continual thought more than for perpetual action, and would be as soon worn out by the one as by the other.”<sup>20</sup> He goes further than this though, even arguing that “a degree of thoughtlessness is necessary to health”, and he points out that the “perpetual thinker” rarely enjoys either good health or good spirits, “while the person who can hardly be said to think at all, generally enjoys both.”<sup>21</sup> In Buchan’s view, the mind is paramount; it has the power to affect everything in our body and those who use it too often have a tendency to suffer as a result.

The mind’s power is such “that, by its influence, the whole vital motions may be accelerated or retarded, to almost any degree”.<sup>22</sup> Buchan believes that positive emotions, such as “cheerfulness and mirth quicken the circulation, and promote all the secretions;

whereas sadness and profound thought never fail to retard them”.<sup>23</sup> There are diseases to which the studious are particularly prone, such as gout, the stone and gravel, and “schirrous livers”.<sup>24</sup> In particular, he notes that, “Few diseases prove more fatal to the studious than consumptions of the lungs”.<sup>25</sup> The reason he gives for consumption being so prevalent among literary types is lack of exercise and the posture held when reading and writing, the “habit of bending forwards” over a desk.<sup>26</sup> The “powers of digestion” are weakened by periods of “intense thinking and inactivity” and the studious are likely to experience headache, vertigo, palsies “and other fatal disorders” because of the nature of their work.<sup>27</sup> He singles out “Fevers, especially of the nervous kind” as the “effect of study” and comments, “Nothing affects the nerves so much as intense thought”.<sup>28</sup> The most common diseases to attack the studious specifically though is that of “the hypochondriac: This disease seldom fails to be the companion of deep thought.”<sup>29</sup> The disease Hypochondria was understood at the time as a somatic (rather than mental illness), originating in the hypochondres or upper abdomen.<sup>30</sup> Cheyne had linked the nerves with mental illness in a new attempt to prove that mania came from the body.<sup>31</sup> David Hume attributed his own personal crisis, which evinced both physical and mental symptoms, to his study of ancient metaphysics.<sup>32</sup> Many of these ideas occur again in D’Israeli and Madden but there they are invested with a degree of awe and wonder, viewed as an innate part of the character of genius. For Buchan, though, they are wholly preventable and, indeed, encouraged by the egotistical nature of the men being discussed.

Buchan is unforgiving: he regards the studies of such “men of genius” as often “of a very trifling nature”, distracting them from “the most important duties of life”.<sup>33</sup> Too much knowledge, he argues, only serves to make us miserable, skeptical and lacking in common sense.<sup>34</sup> He is clear about how to treat the maladies that accompany too much study: “Studious persons, in order to relieve their minds, must not only discontinue to read and write, but engage in some employment or diversion” that will

occupy their minds elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> A solitary walk is out of the question, since this will just “encourage thought”.<sup>36</sup> Instead, you should ensure that the room in which you work is “large and well-aired”, be “attentive to [...] posture”, making sure to “sit and stand by turns” and to keep the back straight.<sup>37</sup> He urges sufferers not to turn to the bottle when they feel the bodily effects of intense study but instead to go on a bracing horseback ride, a more “effectual remedy” than all the “strong liquors in the world”.<sup>38</sup> He gives advice as to the best diet and exercise for the studious, encouraging bathing, walking and riding.<sup>39</sup> In terms of lifestyle, he states: “No person ought either to take violent exercise, or to study immediately after a full meal”.<sup>40</sup> Digestion is crucial and mental exercise exists in the same relationship to food as it does to physical exercise. It would be just as dangerous to study after a full meal as to go for a run.

In Madden’s 1833 account of *The Infirmities of Genius* we see many of the same ideas. It is quite possible that Madden was acquainted with Buchan’s text given how popular it was (it was still being published in new and enlarged editions at this time).<sup>41</sup> Despite this, the ideas that Buchan and Madden share appear not to be commonplace or to be universally agreed by the 1830s. Madden accuses biographers of men of “great talent” of not taking into consideration, or of not understanding, “the influence on the physical and moral constitution of studious habits inordinately pursued, of mental exertion long continued, of bodily exercise perhaps wholly neglected!”<sup>42</sup> In this, he makes the “man of genius” a martyr to his art. While the medical opinion voiced has much in common with Buchan, the tone is different: Madden claims that the ordinary person cannot possibly comprehend what the author has given up for his vocation. Only those who are trained in medicine can fully understand exactly what the mental and physical effects of “studious habits” are. Madden himself had studied medicine in Paris, Naples, and St George’s Hospital, London, becoming a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and practicing as a surgeon in London until the publication of this text in 1833

when he went to Jamaica to pursue another career as a special magistrate.<sup>43</sup> He approves of James Currie's controversial account of Robert Burns's life first affixed to his edition of Burns's *Works* in 1800 precisely because Currie was also a medical professional.<sup>44</sup> Madden thought it was right that Currie drew attention to Burns's physical and mental infirmities because he was expert in such matters and so had the requisite knowledge and understanding.<sup>45</sup>

In Madden's account, "the literary man" can do little to avoid ill health; it is the inescapable result of his labor, which he undertakes with fervor akin to religious devotion. In Madden's words, "The studious man sets out with stealing an hour or two from his ordinary repose; sometimes perhaps more; and finishes by devoting whole nights to his pursuits. But this nightwork leads to exhaustion".<sup>46</sup> The act of study is an addictive one in Madden's view, which if left unregulated, will escalate into a life damaging pursuit. In another passage, he notes that

if the literary man consume his strength and spirits in his study, forego all necessary exercise, keep his mind continually on the stretch, and even, at his meals, deprive the digestive organs of that nervous energy which is then essential to their healthy action

he will suffer a succession of infirmities, most particularly hypochondria.<sup>47</sup> For Madden, the "literary man" surrenders his health and wellbeing to his pursuits. While he acknowledges that "the sufferer has, in a great measure, drawn the evil on himself", he writes that equally we have to "admit that his infirmities of mind and body are entitled to indulgence and compassion".<sup>48</sup> These infirmities are, in Madden's view, the inevitable effects of genius, which "demand[s] no less", than the physical and mental wellbeing of those it favors.<sup>49</sup> As evidence, he quotes Edmund Burke's statement that a "vigorous mind" must be "accompanied by violent passions".<sup>50</sup> The difference between Buchan



and Madden, then, is that the latter does not hold men of genius entirely responsible for their infirmities.

For Madden, the mind is not more powerful than the body: the two exert power over each other reciprocally and equally.<sup>51</sup> He claims that the mind can no more exert itself when the body is too tired, than the body can be exercised when the mind is fatigued.<sup>52</sup> This leads him to conclude “the balance of health can be maintained in its natural equilibrium only when mental exertion is proportioned to bodily activity”.<sup>53</sup> In both Buchan and Madden the body of the literary genius is as much in danger as his mind. Buchan had also argued that a balance was needed between exercising both the mind and the body, but for him, this balance was entirely within the grasp of literary men. Madden’s language is far less critical even though he acknowledges that ill health is not an essential characteristic of genius though it is unsurprising and perhaps inevitable. He writes of “literary fame” being “dearly purchased” and laments that “health [...] has been sacrificed for its attainment”.<sup>54</sup> In both Buchan and Madden, it is striking that the brain is an organ to be exercised and stretched as much as any other part of the body. The results of over exertion are thus the same as for the body: fatigue and debilitated function.<sup>55</sup> Madden goes much further than Buchan, though, when he sets out tables of figures to show the “Influence of Studious Habits on the Duration of Life”, comparing the effects of different types of professions against each other. Even among men of genius there are certain kinds of writing that are better for you than others. Madden finds, through his own examination, that natural philosophers have the longest lifespan (seventy-five years on average) compared to poets (who only survive an average of fifty-seven years).<sup>56</sup>

### **The Idea that Genius is a Disease**

Madden’s 1833 account of the *Infirmities of Genius* explicitly draws upon Isaac D’Israeli’s *The Literary Character, Illustrated by the History of the Men of Genius*, which was first published

in 1818.<sup>57</sup> This text was itself an extension of an earlier publication, *An Essay on the Manners and Genius of the Literary Character* published in 1795. D'Israeli had suffered first hand one of the illnesses that Madden would list among the *Infirmities of Genius*; between 1794 and 1796, he had a nervous breakdown, writing the *Essay* during his convalescence in Exeter and dedicating another text written at the same time to his medical advisor from this period, Dr Hugh Downman, who was also a man of letters.<sup>58</sup> Many of the ideas that are set out in D'Israeli's 1818 book exist already formed in the earlier 1795 essay, such as that "there is a familiarity in the characters of the Men of Genius", which enables them to be studied as a group.<sup>59</sup> In the later text he expounds on this: he thinks that literary characters display "the most striking family resemblance" to each other.<sup>60</sup> He writes of an "invisible brotherhood" existing between them and he characterizes this brotherhood as possessing universal and natural symptoms and treatment: "these men feel the same thirst, which is allayed at the same fountains."<sup>61</sup> In D'Israeli's mind, these men are a type or genus, which cannot be understood by the ordinary man who should make allowances, specifically, for their "irritability of disposition".<sup>62</sup> Aristotle had discussed the irritability of genius in his *Problems*. This idea is D'Israeli's unique contribution to the physical study of genius as it unfolds in the three texts considered here and it is confirmed in Madden's later book when he writes that "It is generally admitted that literary men are an irritable race".<sup>63</sup>

For D'Israeli, to be possessed of genius is not an unalloyed pleasure; instead he describes it as "a perilous gift of Nature".<sup>64</sup> Men of genius are innately irritable, in all senses of this word, including that they have the "most violent passions, with reason to restrain them".<sup>65</sup> These passions are such that "their relish for enjoyment [is] more keen" than other men.<sup>66</sup> Men of genius, by this account, seem to live life in a fuller degree than others: they are capable of extreme emotions and their desire for pleasure is more intense than is usually the case. In such statements, D'Israeli makes allowances for men of genius,

valorizing them far more than Buchan had, making their vices and depravities a sad but inevitable symptom of their genius. There is much in their character, as it is described by D'Israeli, that today might suggest addiction: they crave, thirst, experience violent passions, and possess a sharper relish for enjoyment. It seems that theirs is a character addicted to stimulation.

For D'Israeli, the literary character is one that transcends historical and geographical bounds; it is, he writes, “of a more independent and permanent nature” than other kinds of characters and it is this aspect that particularly enables it to be studied.<sup>67</sup> He compares his methodology in his *Essay* to Francis Bacon’s empiricism and to the observation skills of the physician Thomas Sydenham.<sup>68</sup> Once again Burns is presented as the archetype of the “irritable genius!”<sup>69</sup> According to D'Israeli, men of genius simply cannot help their “great irritability of disposition” and it is this that predisposes them to particular illnesses and diseases as well as infirmities of a moral nature.<sup>70</sup> Irritability is understood as that state of matter that all living creatures display; it is closely aligned to sensibility, which evinces a greater degree of responsiveness to external stimuli. It was a commonplace in the Romantic period to regard authors, particularly poets, as possessing a peculiar sensibility.<sup>71</sup> D'Israeli states, for example, that playwright Jean Racine had “extreme sensibility”.<sup>72</sup> This is a necessary part of the character of genius for both D'Israeli and Madden, in contrast to Buchan, and in this we can see clearly the shift in opinion that has occurred. Both later writers note the “morbid sensibility” of genius, which, for D'Israeli, using medical language, “lurks in the temperament of genius, and the infection is often discovered where it is not always suspected”.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, D'Israeli quotes Germaine de Stael on how genius should be “treated as a real disease” and notes in his own words that the “irritability of genius is a malady”.<sup>74</sup>

A clear link is posited between irritability and sensibility, but D'Israeli's emphasis on the former allows him also to account for, and argue for tolerance of, the irascible tempers of men of genius. They cannot help it, he argues; the insolence, querulousness, and teeth gnashing witnessed in these men is simply the effect of their morbid sensibility.<sup>75</sup> Anne C. Vila notes that even while sensibility was exalted by eighteenth-century authors, there was also a "deep anxiety about it": sensibility was viewed "as a potentially dangerous quality that could lead to emotional excess, moral degeneracy, and physical debilitation".<sup>76</sup> This had been established explicitly in Currie's account of Burns's life and was approvingly repeated by Madden. He quotes Currie on Burns's morbidly sensible "constitution", which displayed "the peculiarities and the delicacies that belong to the temperament of genius".<sup>77</sup> Put this way, Burns had no chance: "He was liable, from a very early period of life, to that interruption in the process of digestion which arises from deep and anxious thought".<sup>78</sup> He was already constituted in such a way as to be liable to the infirmities of genius, both physical and mental. Madden was convinced that the pre-eminent "literary malady" was indigestion and in this he echoed Buchan's concerns about a particular kind of "anxious thought" that was especially detrimental to men.<sup>79</sup> Buchan had stated that, "intense thinking and inactivity never fail to weaken the powers of digestion".<sup>80</sup>

More significant are the differences between Buchan's and Madden's positions, which allow us to see the shift in thinking that has occurred. Buchan thinks that a man of genius ruins an otherwise healthy constitution through bad habits of study whereas Madden thinks the constitution of a man of genius is already impaired and there is little he can do to improve it. Burns, according to Madden and via Currie, had been "Endowed by nature with great sensibility of nerves", which meant he had a "predisposition to disease which strict temperance and diet, regular exercise and sound sleep, might have subdued"; instead, "habits of a very different nature strengthened and

inflamed” this sensibility.<sup>81</sup> Both D’Israeli and Madden are deeply sympathetic to Burns’s plight. His descent into alcoholism and womanizing is partially understood in terms of the natural conditions of genius. Placed in relation to each other, the three authors considered here clearly demonstrate the gradations that lead to the Romantic notion of genius. What has perhaps not been fully understood before is the bodily nature of genius. It is figured as a disease by D’Israeli, a disease that one is born with rather than one that is acquired by the bad habits associated with writing. For Madden, this innate predisposition to illness is coupled with these bad habits to the detriment of the literary genius.

### **Literature as Stimulation**

Jane Darcy has shown how Currie intended to use Burns’ life as a medical case that demonstrated his own thinking on “the condition of melancholy and hypochondria”.<sup>82</sup> According to her, Currie had a particular theory that he wished to promote – contra John Brown’s theory – with regard to “the value or danger of over-stimulating the body using alcohol and opium”.<sup>83</sup> Where Brown regarded all diseases as a matter of over- or under-stimulation and endorsed treatment accordingly with depressants or stimulants thought to counteract the effects, Currie seeks in his life of Burns to show the detrimental effects that alcohol and opium had on what Darcy calls “a physiology of extreme sensibility”.<sup>84</sup> Currie advocated for authors a regime of strict diet, exercise and sleep, rather than being perpetually stimulated by alcohol and opium. Indeed there is some evidence in the nineteenth-century texts discussed here that for so-called men of genius, writing and reading were themselves a form of nervous stimulation to which they could be unhealthily addicted. James Kennaway has examined how “Views of music as a form of nervous stimulation had already been commonplace in Enlightenment aesthetics”, leading some, like Kant, to wonder whether it was merely a ‘sensual pleasure rather than

an art.”<sup>85</sup> Kennaway traces a shift in the way that music was thought of through to the early nineteenth century when it was only “over-stimulating, effeminate, and dangerous sensual music” that was considered “In terms of the nervous system”.<sup>86</sup> In contrast, there is evidence in the texts considered here that poets, in particular, were constitutionally predisposed to the over-stimulating effects of their profession, leading, as we see in Madden’s tables of longevity organized by occupation, to a shortened lifespan.

Both Buchan and Madden recognize in the literary man of genius an inclination towards stimulation. Buchan notes that many “votaries” of learning “betake themselves to the use of strong liquors” in order to “relieve the mind after study”.<sup>87</sup> He represents such actions as a “reproach” to a female personified “learning”.<sup>88</sup> In Madden’s texts, there is evidence of far more sympathy with authors and his language invokes a sense of religious devotion; the studious man is so ardent that he devotes “whole nights to his pursuits”, but the consequent physical exhaustion requires the use of stimulants and the result is that “the existence that is passed in a constant circle of excitement and exhaustion, is shortened, or rendered miserable by such alternations; and the victim becomes accessory to his own sufferings”.<sup>89</sup> The difference between Madden and Buchan is that this behavior is excused even while it is censured by Madden.<sup>90</sup> Such, again, was the archetypal case of “poor Burns”.<sup>91</sup> Madden writes of Burns’s dyspepsia, or indigestion:

No one but a dyspeptic man, who is acquainted with the moral martyrdom of the disease, can understand the degree of exhaustion to which the mind is reduced, and the insupportable sense of sinking in every organ of the body which drives the sufferer to the use of stimulants of one kind or another. Whether wine, alcohol, ammonia, or the black drop, it is still the want of a remedy, and not the pleasure of the indulgence which sends the hypochondriac to that stimulant for relief.<sup>92</sup>

Burns is a martyr to his disease; once again, we are told that it is impossible for ordinary people to understand what someone with this illness is going through. Madden writes explicitly that Burns was driven to seek a remedy in the stimulants listed; he is keen to emphasize that Burns did not take them for pleasure or recreation.<sup>93</sup> For Madden, this is the price one has to pay: “The errors of genius demand no less” than one’s health and longevity.<sup>94</sup> His extremely detailed medical account of the causes and symptoms of the infirmities of genius give his text a decidedly professional tone.

D’Israeli has a whole chapter of *Literary Character* dedicated to “The Enthusiasm of Genius”, using a term that draws on the association of two types of mental excess, which were themselves often linked: religion and madness.<sup>95</sup> He writes that there is a state of mind “in the most active operations of genius” that does not even have a term sufficient to describe it because it is beyond the experience of “the multitude”, though “*reverie*” comes closest.<sup>96</sup> This enthusiasm is a mysterious phenomenon, which cannot be analyzed and “indeed can only be discovered by men of genius themselves”.<sup>97</sup> The consumptive poets Henry Headley and Kirke White are described as “early victims of the enthusiasm of study”, mourned by others like them who are “organised” in the same way.<sup>98</sup> This term suggests bodily or physical organization. Madden describes poetry as the language of the “religion of the heart” but warns that this is also “the religion of enthusiasm [...] whose exaltation is followed by the prostration of the strength and spirits”.<sup>99</sup> Writing is here imagined as producing a cycle of exhilaration and depression, which was commonly attributed to the use of stimulants. Indeed poetry becomes a stimulant itself in this formulation: while it may raise the poet up in the first instance there will be a corresponding consequent abasement. This is figured in D’Israeli as a rising up and a falling down in religious fervor.

Currie had argued that the “occupations of a poet” specifically caused Burns’ health to deteriorate. He had the constitutional problems to be expected of a “man of

genius” and his innate sensibility required a “perpetual control” that was not to be offered by the occupation of poetry.<sup>100</sup> Madden adds to this that Burns’s “new career” of poetry, unlike his work at the plough, led him into vices and excesses that he would never otherwise have encountered.<sup>101</sup> The second volume of *Infirmities of Genius* offers “brief sketches of the physical infirmities” of Pope, Johnson, Burns, Cowper, Byron and Scott.<sup>102</sup> The last author, unlike the others in this list, is credited with avoiding “the ordinary errors of genius” by means of his “well-regulated habits”.<sup>103</sup> Again, this might be placed in the context of Cheyne’s insistence on regimen and control and to the longer history of keeping diaries of one’s food consumption and exercise.<sup>104</sup> Thus, the natural sensibility of genius needs to be regulated and controlled but the occupation of writer exacerbates the infirmities of the already potentially dangerous constitution.

As previously mentioned, D’Israeli and Madden are particularly forgiving of the poets and authors in whose lives can be seen the “infirmities of genius”. Madden reserves scorn for the biographers who rake up the “frailties” of such authors in order to satiate public appetite.<sup>105</sup> He mentions Percy Shelley, whose “indiscretions”, he writes, “had rendered his name an unmentionable one” ten years earlier but whose poetry more recently is receiving a sympathetic reception due to the change in public morals.<sup>106</sup> Madden would write about Shelley in another publication, his *Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington*, published in 1855. In this he cited P. G. Patmore’s 1854 account of Shelley, which confirmed Madden’s view of the physical infirmities experienced by poets: “his features had an unnatural sharpness, and an unhealthy paleness, like a flower that has been kept from the light of day”.<sup>107</sup> Madden also cites Patmore, who claimed that William Hazlitt “tortured” all these characteristics “Into external types and symbols of that unnatural and unwholesome craving after injurious excitement”.<sup>108</sup> What is seen in Hazlitt as unnatural is rehabilitated in Madden as a sad but inescapable aspect of the literary character. Madden claims that it is a lack of



medical knowledge that permits critics to misdiagnose authors' infirmities. The "distempered visions" of a "heat oppressed brain" are mistaken "for impersonated impressions", for example, when they are in fact symptoms of the author's true indisposition.<sup>109</sup> He rails against those biographers who highlight authors' "imperfections" for the delight of the "prevailing appetite for literary gossip" and who never think of referring these imperfections instead "to a temperament deranged by ill-regulated or excessive mental application".<sup>110</sup> Madden is always ready to excuse the behavior of a literary author and feels justified in doing so because of his medical expertise. For D'Israeli too, the "learned author" must be excused: "Erudition is a thirst which its fountains have never satiated. What volumes remain to open! What manuscript but makes his heart palpitate!"<sup>111</sup> The "malady" of genius is such that we should not "be surprized at the poetical temperament".<sup>112</sup> Shelley himself was advised to stop writing *Laon and Cythna* in September 1817 by his doctor William Lawrence because of the nervous excitement it was thought to be causing him and the effects this was having on his body.<sup>113</sup>

### **The End of Literary Life**

It is often the case in the books discussed in this essay that "men of genius" are identified as such by the fact of their literary productions, but these writings are not always of the poetic, novelistic, or dramatic genres. That said, D'Israeli and Madden clearly feel that the writers of literary works, and especially poets, are more in danger than other kinds of writers or thinkers.<sup>114</sup> D'Israeli does not confine his comments and examples to the purely literary as we would now understand it; his book features artists, composers and men of science and medicine too. John Hunter, the Comte de Buffon, Linnaeus, Bacon, Newton, are all regarded as examples of the irritable genius in D'Israeli's *Literary Character*.<sup>115</sup> Madden equally applies the term "literary [...]" to all

persons who make books the business of their lives” and he casts a similarly wide net to D’Israeli.<sup>116</sup> In the tables that Madden sets out of “the most celebrated authors in the various departments of literature and science”, he enters into an extended discussion concerning which of the professions is the most conducive to health and finds invariably that men of science outlive their literary counterparts.<sup>117</sup> Natural philosophy has “the first place in the list of studies conducive to longevity”, which is evidence, he assumes, that it offers “tranquility of mind, and bodily well-being”, while poetry “appears to occupy the last” place in this list.<sup>118</sup> He offers a few ideas for why this might be: perhaps natural philosophy is a “less laborious study, or calls for less profound reflection than poetry”; or perhaps poetry does not use one sole faculty but instead “demands the exercise of all the faculties, and communicates excitement to all our feelings”; finally he asks, “is it that the throes of imaginative labour are productive of greater exhaustion than those of all the other faculties?”<sup>119</sup> His discussion is framed in terms of the body and the imagination is represented as a faculty that is exercised, worked, and which can become exhausted. It is the labor of poetry itself that is dangerous. Madden considers poets to be using up their life force in the act of composition: “No trifling expenditure of vital energy is required for the translation of fine thoughts from the regions of earth to those of heaven”.<sup>120</sup> The language of commercial exchange continues: the poet has “abridged his life to immortalize his name.”<sup>121</sup>

Within the ranks of the natural philosophers, astronomers do best because their attention is lifted above the “trivial vexations and petty miseries of life” to contemplate the sublimity of the night sky.<sup>122</sup> Dramatists live longer than poets because their “toils” are so different; dramatists “exercise other and more sober faculties” in their work.<sup>123</sup> He portrays dramatists as being connected to the real world, giving poetical conceptions “the garb of real life”, giving “breath and animation to exalted sentiments”, and giving “to legendary exploits the vivid character of actual events”.<sup>124</sup> He feels vindicated in his

theory that “the labours of dramatic composition have not the same depressing influence on the energies of life as those of the other branches of poetry” by the evidence he uses to show the longevity of dramatists.<sup>125</sup>

When comparing the lifespan of medical authors with novelists and other miscellaneous writers, Madden finds that those “into whose pursuits imagination little enters” (in other words, those in the worlds of science and medicine) have a higher life expectancy.<sup>126</sup> He considers periodical writing to be the most dangerous to health:

There is, indeed, no labour more destructive to health, than that of periodical literature [...] The readers of those light articles which appear to cost so little labour in the various literary publications of the day, are little aware how many constitutions are broken down in the service of their literary taste.<sup>127</sup>

Again, the language of this discussion is physical and bodily: he writes of the “labour” of writing and of “the wear and tear of mind and body so early and so severely felt”.<sup>128</sup> What seem to be light-hearted pieces cost their makers dearly in terms of their health and lifespan. In contrast, he argues, novelists concentrate on just one subject for a prolonged period of time and this subject comes from their own imaginations, rather than requiring the laborious and excessive study of other authors.

The “literary”, according to Madden, are defined as those who are “addicted to studious habits”.<sup>129</sup> Currie’s and Madden’s texts, when positioned in relation to both Buchan’s and D’Israeli’s, begin to seem like a new kind of genre: the medical biography. While many of the ideas presented in these texts may not be new, they are put into a new generic context, popularizing medical ideas for a general reader. In Madden’s second volume of *Infirmities*, he explores the lives of a few poets and one novelist in close detail. In his chapter on Byron, he notes the current “unprecedented avidity” of the public appetite for “lives, last days, recollections, conversations, notices, and journals”.<sup>130</sup> His own account is different to these, however. He makes allowances for Byron’s many

defects, such as his depiction as “inconstant, vain, irascible, sarcastic, and dissolute”, because this is the “constitutional state” of the “poetic temperament”.<sup>131</sup> These evils arise not solely from the occupation of poetry in Madden’s opinion but “to every species of intellectual labour, too long continued, or too intensely followed, and the result is a state of morbid sensibility, arising from bodily disease”.<sup>132</sup> Importantly, while Madden considers the mental state of literary authors, he is also very much concerned with the physical condition of literary genius. Madden is a medical professional who uses his diagnostic tools to analyze and explain. He engages in what we would now consider the dubious practice of retrospective diagnosis when he identifies the “disease” that Byron had been suffering from throughout his life: “epileptic diathesis”.<sup>133</sup> His “excessive mental exertion” is one of the key reasons given for calling into activity “the dormant malady to which he was predisposed” and Madden even seems to think that this is the cause of Byron’s death.<sup>134</sup> In Madden’s account we see a new confidence in the ability of medicine to understand the multi-faceted irritability and sensibility of literary genius.

The idea of the mad genius has a long and complex history, but perhaps these texts represent a staging post in its mythology, which continues to this day. There are also clear links drawn between this stereotype of the mad genius and overwork or excessive study. Perhaps the most famous mad genius of all, Victor Frankenstein, becomes ill because he applies himself to his task with “unremitting ardour”; his “cheek had grown pale with study, and [his] person had become emaciated with confinement.” Frankenstein suffers from unspecified nervous illness on a number of occasions in the novel, leaving him to declare that “If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, [...] then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind.”<sup>135</sup> For Frankenstein, study that destroys social and domestic affection is morally wrong, whereas, D’Israeli, for example, considers the man of genius to be necessarily antisocial and often not fit for company. There are lines to be

drawn between such accounts and future texts, such as Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892), which similarly saw in fin de siècle art and society the symptoms of a disease. Similarly, Cesare Lombroso thought that criminality originated in inherited physical defects. The shift that has been traced here, is from Buchan's idea that it was possible to separate studiousness from the individual, with the encouragement of good digestion and exercise, but for D'Israeli, Madden and Currie genius is a state of being that could and should be medicalized.

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<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) and Jane Darcy, *Melancholy and Literary Biography, 1640-1791* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Being a literary genius in these books is a peculiarly male phenomenon though women can experience the associated disease of sensibility. Some of these authors are mentioned briefly in this essay; for William Godwin's many illnesses see his diary online: *The Diary of William Godwin*, eds. Victoria Myers, David O'Shaughnessy, and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010), accessed September 16, 2015, <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin D'Israeli, *Lothair*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Green and Company, 1807), 1: 276.

<sup>4</sup> John Watkins, *Characteristic Anecdotes of Men of Learning and Genius [...]* (London: James Cundee, 1808).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, "Preface".

<sup>6</sup> Higgins, *Romantic Genius*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

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<sup>8</sup> William Duff, *Essay on Original Genius*. (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1767); I have written about the shift in the way that literary creation was perceived in William Godwin, Mary Shelley and others in chapter 3 of *Creating Romanticism: the Literature, Science and Medicine of the 1790s*. (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine [...]*, 18th ed. (London: A. Strahanm T. Cadell, and W. Davies, 1803); Isaac D'Israeli, *An Essay on the Manners and Genius of the Literary Character* (London: T. Cadell, Jnr and W. Davies, 1795); Isaac D'Israeli, *The Literary Character, Illustrated by the History of the Men of Genius [...]* (London: John Murray, 1818); R. Madden, *The Infirmities of Genius, Illustrate by Referring to the Anomalies in the Literary Character to the Habits and Constitutional Peculiarities of Men of Genius*, 2 vols. (London: Saunders and Ottley, 1833).

<sup>10</sup> The Brontë household had a copy of Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* and it has been used in readings of their novels, such as in a discussion of *Wuthering Heights* in chapter 4 of Janis McLarren Caldwell, *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain: From Mary Shelley to George Eliot* (Cambridge, CUP, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> "Buchan, William (1729–1805)," Christopher Lawrence in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, September 2012. Accessed September 16, 2015 <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/article/3828>. See also Lawrence's "William Buchan: Medicine Laid Open," *Medical History* 19 (1975): 20-35. It seems likely that William Smellie helped write *Domestic Medicine*.

<sup>12</sup> Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, 57.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

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- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., 57.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 57.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 50.
- <sup>19</sup> Lawrence, “William Buchan”, 25.
- <sup>20</sup> Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, 50.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 51.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 52.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 53.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> See Darcy, 71.
- <sup>31</sup> Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 309.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 324.
- <sup>33</sup> Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, 53.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 53-54.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 54.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 55.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 56.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 57.

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<sup>41</sup> There are a number of editions printed by various publishers in 1830 (and after this date) for example.

<sup>42</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 6, 7.

<sup>43</sup> J. M. Rigg, “Madden, Richard Robert (1798–1886),” rev. Lynn Milne, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, 2004, accessed September 16, 2015: <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/article/17753>.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism on his Writings*. [...], 4 vols. (London: T. Cadell, Jnr. and W. Davies, 1800).

<sup>45</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 267ff. William Wordsworth, whom Madden does not mention once in his *Infirmities of Genius*, thought Currie should be censured for “revealing to the world the infirmities” of Burns, *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns: Occasioned by an Intended Republication of the Account of the Life of Burns, by Dr. Currie, and of the Selection Made by Him from His Letters* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), 8.

<sup>46</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 17.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 18.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 19.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Interestingly, this reported quotation from Burke seems to come from a biography, published in 1824, which discovers in Burke the “peculiar sensitiveness of genius [that] has been so often noted one of its marked features”, James Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Edmund Burke: with Specimens of his Poetry and Letters, and an Estimate of his Genius and Talents, Compared with Those of his Great Contemporaries* (London: H. and E. Sheffield, 1839), 544.

<sup>51</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 41.



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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1: 41, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1: 42.

<sup>56</sup> Madden's table compared twenty natural philosophers to twenty poets drawn from different times and nationalities. To give a sense of this, his list of poets comprised Aristo, Burns, Byron, Camoens, Collins, Cowle[y], Cowper, Dante, Dryden, Goldsmith, Gray, Metastasio, Milton, Petrarch, Pope, Shenstone, Spencer, Tasso, Thomson, and Young, 1: 68.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Madden's reference to D'Israeli's *Literary Character* in *Infirmities*, 1: 155. One of D'Israeli's chapters in *Literary Character* was even called 'Some Observations Respecting the Infirmities and Defects of Men of Genius', 103. Madden may have known D'Israeli's text in a later edition; there was a third edition "considerably enlarged and improved" published in 1822 for example and revised fourth edition published in 1828.

<sup>58</sup> "D'Israeli, Isaac (1766–1848)," James Ogden in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2008, accessed September 16, 2015:

<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/article/7690>.

<sup>59</sup> D'Israeli, *Essay*, iii.

<sup>60</sup> D'Israeli, *Literary Character*, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4, 3.

<sup>62</sup> D'Israeli, *Essay*, 104.

<sup>63</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 1. D'Israeli's publications on this topic enjoyed such success that he capitalized on this with *Calamities of Authors*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1812) and

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*Quarrels of Authors*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1814). The former covered such topics in chapters as “Literary Disappointments Disordering the Intellect”.

<sup>64</sup> D’Israeli, *Essay*, 113.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>67</sup> D’Israeli, *Literary Character*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> D’Israeli, *Essay*, vi, vii.

<sup>69</sup> D’Israeli, *Literary Character*, 80

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> One iteration of this appears in P. B. Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry*, where he writes that poetry is written by those who experience the world with increased sensibility: “These and corresponding conditions of being are experienced principally by those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination”, Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 697.

<sup>72</sup> D’Israeli, *Literary Character*, 91.

<sup>73</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 7; D’Israeli, *Literary Character*, 139. Wordsworth uses the phrase “morbid pleasure” in his poem “Lines Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree” to describe the actions of a person he described as a “man of talent and learning” in a later note added in 1843, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter (Ontario: Broadview, 2008), 30 (line 28).

<sup>74</sup> D’Israeli, *Literary Character*, 91, 99.

<sup>75</sup> D’Israeli, *Literary Character*, 77. Higgins examines the connection that D’Israeli makes between genius and madness and quotes Coleridge’s agreement with D’Israeli’s argument that men of genius are ‘Innately ‘Irritable’” in both senses of the word outlined above, *Romantic Genius*, 13.

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<sup>76</sup> Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>77</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 293. See Darcy on Currie's particular investment in portraying Burns's sensibility. She argues convincingly that Currie wanted "to present the case of Burns as an important example of the effect of stimulants on a physiology of extreme sensibility", and for the bodily as well as mental state of genius in the case of Burns, *Melancholy*, 145. Darcy's book is more generally concerned with the links to be made by biographers between "the alleged melancholy of their subjects to their acute sensibility", *Melancholy*, 107. Melancholy had been associated with genius since Aristotle's *Problems* and the two have a long and interesting history.

<sup>78</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 293.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 294.

<sup>80</sup> Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, 52.

<sup>81</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 294. Madden is quoting from Currie in Burns, *Works*, 1: 220.

<sup>82</sup> Darcy, *Melancholy*, 144.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>85</sup> James Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 3.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, 55.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 17.

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<sup>90</sup> Madden writes, in a kind of amalgam of the positions of both Buchan and D’Israeli: “who can deny that the sufferer has, in a great measure, drawn the evil on himself, but who will not admit that his infirmities of mind and body are entitled to indulgence and compassion?” *Infirmities* 1: 19.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 20.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 276-77.

<sup>93</sup> On the subject of taking opium recreationally and as an aid to literary work, there is no mention of Thomas de Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* in Madden’s work. Madden does claim that novelists live longer than periodical writers because of the nature of their work: “the compulsory toil of periodical composition has a greater influence on health than voluntary labours to a far greater amount”, *Infirmities*, 1: 115.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 19.

<sup>95</sup> See Jon Mee on the many uses of the word enthusiasm in the period and in relation to poetry in particular and on how it is coupled with a need for proper regulation, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: OUP, 2005). Darcy further ‘complicates’ the picture that Mee draws, 174.

<sup>96</sup> D’Israeli, *Literary Character*, 164.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 189. For more on the links between poetry and consumption, see Clark Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>99</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 91-92.

<sup>100</sup> Currie is clear that a man of genius has any number of “safe and salutary occupations open to him” but that the “biography of the poets” makes it obvious that poetry is a particularly dangerous choice, Burns, *Works*, 1: 242, 245.

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<sup>101</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 275.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 176.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Porter, 232-3.

<sup>105</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 4.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 6.

<sup>107</sup> Cited in R. R. Madden, *The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington* 3 vols. (London: Harper and Brothers, 1855), 2: 563.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 563. Hazlitt regarded Shelley as suffering from a “disease”; in his review of Mary Shelley’s edition of the *Posthumous Poems*, for example, he writes that Shelley had “a fever of the soul, thirsting and craving after what it cannot have”, “ART. X. *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*”, *Edinburgh Review* 40 (July 1824): 494-514 (494). In his essay “On Paradox and Common-place” in *Table Talk*, Hazlitt wrote that Shelley “has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech” and compared him to a religious enthusiast, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1930-34), 8: 148.

<sup>109</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 7.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 7-8.

<sup>111</sup> D’Israeli, *Literary Character*, 84.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>113</sup> See my *Shelley and Vitality* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 91.

<sup>114</sup> Of course there was also a high value placed on poetic melancholy, a tradition that Darcy sees as beginning with Milton and continuing through the Graveyard poets to Cowper, 176.

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<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth Green Musselman has examined the illnesses and infirmities of nineteenth-century men of science and the influence these had on their scientific work in *Nervous Conditions: Science and the Body Politic in Early Industrial Britain* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006).

<sup>116</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 21.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 71.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 91.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 92.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 96.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 108, 109.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 109, 110.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 112.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 116.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Madden, *Infirmities*, 1: 21. Bibliomania, an addiction to collecting books, became a recognized — if parodied — phenomenon around this time too, with poems like *The Bibliomania* by John Ferriar (1809) and *Bibliography* Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1812).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 106.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 112.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 112-113.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 129.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 138.

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<sup>135</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: The Original 1818 Text*, ed. D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012), 81, 82.

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