



Utilitarians, Educators, Poets: The Beginnings of the *Westminster Review* and the London Mechanics' Institution

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The *Westminster Review* and the London Mechanics' Institution were established within months of each other in 1823–24. The prestige periodical, founded on faith in the power of print media to improve lives by the diffusion of knowledge through the social body, and the institution undertaking a more direct and practical route to the same end, were evidently of the same political spirit and historical moment. This article seeks to add texture to the early history of these two initiatives and the radical London milieu that produced them by delving beneath the official documented accounts into the subterranean networks that connected the *Westminster* and the London Mechanics' Institution in the mid-1820s. In so doing it complicates a too easy identification of the relationship between them as simply one of shared utilitarian and party political ideology. It looks beyond public manifestos to consider other sources, such as Anna Birkbeck's album (begun in 1825), which brings familiar figures into different relation, and introduces new names, such as Mary Shelley, into the interwoven threads that represented radical London at this time. Other stories, like that of the Greek Committee, whose secretary John Bowring, also editor of the *Westminster*, contributed a poem on George Birkbeck to the album, cut across the histories of the journal Bowring edited and the mechanics' institution he supported. Other actors, such as Lord Byron, and other forms — poems, cartoons — help us to view these years more fully, and resist the binaried accounts of utilitarianism and Romanticism that run through early commentaries and subsequent scholarship. In fact, things were much less clearly defined. Such an approach reminds us that the imaginative arts were an integral part of the conception and practice of both the *Westminster Review* and Dr Birkbeck's London Mechanics' (later Literary and Scientific) Institution.



The first article in the first number of the newly launched journal of the Philosophical Radicals, the *Westminster Review* (January 1824), refers to the foundation of the London Mechanics' Institution (LMI) a month earlier (December 1823).¹ 'London has followed Glasgow and Edinburgh in the establishment of a Mechanic's Institute', the anonymous author approvingly notes: 'These proceedings are evidently progressive, and tend to a great and felicitous change in the structure of society [...]; but the effect must be to elevate the character and increase the enjoyments of the labouring portion of the community.'² The new educational initiative, which would in 1866 be named the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution (later Birkbeck College) in honour of its founder and first president, is clearly aligned with the cultural and political ethos of the fledgling journal and its authors' declared belief in the value of education and science as bringers of social benefit. Indeed, the same powerful names appear among the sponsors of both enterprises. Jeremy Bentham, who founded and largely funded the *Westminster*, and James Mill, who lent intellectual weight to its early numbers, were key supporters of the LMI and personal friends of George Birkbeck and others with a significant role in its establishment, such as Francis Place.³ John Bowring, the *Westminster's* first editor and a friend of both Bentham and Birkbeck, gave lectures at the newly established institution, as did another mutual friend who was a regular contributor to the journal, Dr Thomas Southwood Smith. James Cam Hobhouse MP, also an early sponsor of the LMI, and others associated with Birkbeck's initiative, contributed articles to the *Westminster*. They were pitched to different audiences: the *Westminster* to a readership of reformist intellectuals; the LMI (affiliated with an altogether different order of radical journal, the *Mechanics' Magazine*) to working-class students seeking educational betterment.⁴ But the prestige periodical, founded on faith in the power of print media to improve lives by the diffusion of knowledge through the social body, and the institution undertaking a more direct and practical route to the same end, were evidently of the same political spirit and historical moment.

This article seeks to add texture to the early history, so ably documented by others, of these two initiatives and the radical London milieu that produced them,

¹ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this article and to the editor, Luisa Calè, for their helpful suggestions.

² 'Men and Things in 1823. A Poem, with Notes, by James Shergold Boone', *Westminster Review*, January 1824, pp. 1–18 (p. 8).

³ See the [article by Ian Newman](#) in this issue of 19 on Francis Place and his role in the founding of the LMI: 'From Magazine to Meeting: Francis Place, the Crown and Anchor Tavern, and the Founding of the London Mechanics' Institution'.

⁴ As discussed by Newman, 'From Magazine to Meeting', and James Mussell, "'This is Ours and For Us': The *Mechanics' Magazine* and Low Scientific Culture in Regency London', in *Repositioning Victorian Sciences: Shifting Centres in Nineteenth-Century Scientific Thinking*, ed. by David Clifford and others (Anthem Press, 2006), pp. 107–18.

by delving beneath the official documented accounts into the subterranean networks that connected the *Westminster Review* and the LMI in the mid-1820s.⁵ In so doing it complicates a too easy identification of the relationship between them as simply one of shared utilitarian and party political ideology. It looks beyond public manifestos to consider other, perhaps more personal sources. Anna Birkbeck's album, for example, begun in 1825 by the wife of the distinguished physician and founder of the college, brings familiar figures into different relation and introduces new names, such as Mary Shelley, into the interwoven threads that represented radical London at this time. Other stories, like that of the Greek Committee, whose secretary John Bowring contributed a poem on George Birkbeck to the album, cut across the histories of the journal Bowring edited and the mechanics' institution he supported. Other actors, such as Lord Byron, and other forms, such as poems and cartoons, help us view these years more fully and resist the binarized accounts enshrined in John Stuart Mill's essays that juxtapose Bentham and Coleridge, or in histories of British involvement in the struggle for Greek independence that contrast Bentham and Byron. The polarities of utilitarian and Romantic run through early commentaries and subsequent scholarship, but in fact things were much less clearly defined.⁶ 'Bentham' was, from the beginning, leavened by 'Coleridge' and 'Byron'. Mill recognized, even as he opposed them, that 'antagonistic modes of thought [...] are as necessary to one another in speculation, as mutually checking powers are in a political constitution'; 'these two sorts of men, who seem to be, and believe themselves to be, enemies, are in reality allies', he concluded.⁷

Not least, such an approach reminds us that the imaginative arts were an integral part of the conception and practice of both the *Westminster Review* and Dr Birkbeck's

⁵ On the LMI, in addition to Newman, see Joanna Bourke, *Birkbeck: 200 Years of Radical Learning for Working People* (Oxford University Press, 2022); Gregory Claeys, 'Political Economy and Popular Education: Thomas Hodgskin and the London Mechanics' Institute, 1823-8', in *Radicalism and Revolution in Britain, 1775-1858: Essays in Honour of Malcolm I. Thomis*, ed. by Michael T. Davis (Macmillan, 2000), pp. 157-75; and Helen Hudson Flexner, 'The London Mechanics' Institution: Social and Cultural Foundations, 1823-1830' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2014) <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/20344902.pdf>> [accessed 13 July 2024]. On the *Westminster*, see George Lyman Nesbitt, *Benthamite Reviewing: The First Twelve Years of the 'Westminster Review', 1824-1836* (Columbia University Press, 1934); and Rosemary VanArsdel, 'The 'Westminster Review', 1825-1837: With Special Emphasis on Literary Attitudes' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1961).

⁶ As Anthony Julius argues in 'More Bentham, Less Mill', in *Bentham and the Arts*, ed. by Anthony Julius, Malcolm Quinn, and Philip Schofield (UCL Press, 2020), pp. 160-97, doi:[10.14324/111.9781787357365](https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787357365). Julius and other contributors to the volume address the question of Bentham's supposed philistinism and contempt for the arts. What emerges is a more nuanced view of the utilitarian's aesthetic that challenges the idea that Romanticism and utilitarianism represented alternative and incompatible views of the world.

⁷ *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, ed. by F. R. Leavis (Chatto & Windus, 1971), pp. 104, 140.

London Mechanics' (later Literary and Scientific) Institution.⁸ That Bowring did not share Bentham's ostensible disdain for literature,⁹ believing instead that it added to the common stock of pleasure and knowledge of humanity, is amply demonstrated by the varied contents of the *Westminster* under his editorship (including his own review essays on Russian, Greek, Spanish, and Serbian literature) as well as by his prolific writing and translation projects as an early popularizer of European literature in Britain.¹⁰ Beginning with *Specimens of the Russian Poets* in 1820, over the next decade he produced translations of Dutch, Spanish, Polish, Serbian, Hungarian, and Czech poetry, wrote on Danish, Norwegian, and Dutch literature in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* (1828–32), and published eighty-eight hymns. No more did Birkbeck eschew the humanities. Literature, drama, and the visual arts (taught respectively by, among others: the Romantic poet and political activist John Thelwall, friend of Coleridge and Wordsworth; Shakespearean actor Charles Reece Pemberton; and the historical painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, a close member of the Keats circle) figured prominently on the LMI's curriculum.¹¹ Birkbeck himself had a keen personal interest in the arts and was a member of the managing committee of the National Repository, formed in 1828 on the initiative of the Society of Arts to organize an annual exhibition of English arts and manufactures in London — a forerunner of the 1851 Great Exhibition.¹² While Birkbeck agreed with the general aim of the utilitarians, and viewed them as allies for his educational and political objectives, his biographer Thomas Kelly argues 'there

⁸ John Gardner points out that mechanics' institutes formed in the first quarter of the nineteenth century 'fought to include literary and historical studies despite opposition from bodies such as sections of the established Church'. John Gardner, 'A Disruptive and Dangerous Education and the Wealth of the Nation: The Early Mechanics' Institutes', in *Institutions of Literature, 1700–1900: The Development of Literary Culture and Production*, ed. by Jon Mee and Matthew Sangster (Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 196–214 (p. 196).

⁹ According to Bentham, 'Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either.' See 'The Rationale of Reward', in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. by John Bowring, 11 vols (Tait, and Simpkin, Marshall, 1838–43), II (1843), pp. 189–266 (p. 253). Mill defends his subject against charges of 'contempt for the pleasure of the imagination, and for the fine arts', but refers to this aphorism in his account of 'Bentham's peculiar opinions on poetry' towards which he 'entertained no favour' (*Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, p. 95). It has often since then been quoted as encapsulating Bentham's impoverished view of the arts.

¹⁰ Bowring's articles in the *Westminster Review* in the 1820s include: 'Living Poets of Holland', January 1829, pp. 36–51; 'Hungarian Tales', January 1829, pp. 101–16; 'Gomez Arias; or, The Moors of Alpujarras', January 1829, pp. 149–69; 'Living Poets of the Magyars', July 1829, pp. 29–49. Other publications by him in this period include: *Specimens of the Russian Poets* (1821–23); *Peter Schlemihl*, translated from German (1824); *Batavian Anthology; or, Specimens of the Dutch Poets* (1824); *Ancient Poetry and Romances of Spain* (1824); *Hymns* (privately published, 1825); *Matins and Vespers with Hymns and Occasional Devotional Pieces* (1827); *Specimens of the Polish Poets* (1827); *Serbian Popular Poetry* (1827); *Poetry of the Magyars* (1830); and *Cheskian Anthology* (1832).

¹¹ On Thelwall, see [Judith Thompson's article](#) in this issue of 19.

¹² Thomas Kelly, *George Birkbeck: Pioneer of Adult Education* (Liverpool University Press, 1957), pp. 151–52.

can be no doubt that the philosophical assumptions of the Utilitarian movement were fundamentally alien to him. The best description of him is “humanitarian” (p. 147).

A curious episode in Birkbeck’s relationship with Bentham is suggestive. On his death in 1832, Bentham bequeathed his body to their mutual friend, the physician Thomas Southwood Smith, with instructions following dissection to create an ‘auto-icon’ of the philosopher, seated in his chair, in his usual clothes and attitude, to be exhibited in a wooden cabinet. It is now on display at University College London (Fig. 1). But for some years Southwood Smith kept the skeleton, stuffed with hay and dressed in Bentham’s customary black suit, surmounted by a waxen head topped with some of Bentham’s own hair, in his consulting room at 38 Finsbury Square.



Fig. 1: MykReeve, Jeremy Bentham’s Auto-Icon (2003). Wikimedia Commons.

In a temple of rationalism there is this rather Gothic spookiness. 38 Finsbury Square was also Birkbeck's private residence. Bentham's (auto)iconic presence in Birkbeck's own house owes more to art than philosophy, emotion than reason.¹³ The utilitarian's wildly fanciful, perpetual performance of himself as the embodiment of the principles he founded has a weird, egotistic theatricality at odds with the calculating machine of legend. Rather than *Hard Times*'s Gradgrind, it resembles the outlandish creations of Dickens's taxidermist and articulator of bones Mr Venus in *Our Mutual Friend*. It certainly disturbs the idea that Bentham's influence on the educator, any more than on the *Westminster Review*, was simple or unmediated.

No one was better placed than John Stuart Mill to observe that the early history of the *Westminster Review* was complicated. He exposed deep conflicts behind its confident and unified public face in his *Autobiography*, published posthumously in 1873, just fifty years after the journal's (and his own) debut. Describing the periodical's uneven beginnings, Mill clarifies that his father, James Mill, the anonymous author of some of the journal's most incendiary and reputation-defining early articles, was, 'contrary to what may have been supposed [...] in no degree a party to setting up the *Westminster Review*'. Its founder in 1823, Jeremy Bentham, first offered the editorship to Mill père, and only after it was declined did Bentham entrust it to John Bowring, 'at that time a merchant in the City', who had, John Mill implies, ingratiated himself with Bentham. He was well placed through his foreign trade networks to become 'a powerful agent in spreading Bentham's fame and doctrines through all quarters of the world'. According to Mill, it was a controversial appointment:

My father had seen little of Bowring, but knew enough of him to have formed a strong opinion, that he was a man of an entirely different type from what my father considered suitable for conducting a political and philosophical review.

Indeed, Bowring's appointment 'augured so ill of the enterprise that he [James Mill] regretted it altogether, feeling persuaded not only that Mr. Bentham would lose his money, but that discredit would probably be brought upon radical principles'.¹⁴ In the event, not wishing to desert Bentham, Mill senior published a number of articles in the first years of the *Westminster*, including a major manifesto piece in the first number announcing the journal's agenda, marking out its territory, and claiming its status

¹³ As recognized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, which included Bentham's auto-icon in its exhibition 'Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body' in 2018.

¹⁴ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. by Jack Stillinger (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 56–57.

alongside the Whig *Edinburgh Review* (established in 1802) and the Tory *Quarterly Review* (established in 1809).¹⁵ His son, by his own count, would become the most frequent contributor of all, writing altogether thirteen articles between the second number of the journal (1824) and the eighteenth (1828).¹⁶ The *Westminster Review* was, somewhat to their surprise, a success. However, the Mills' apprehensions about Bowring as editor were confirmed and their antipathy hardened. 'On the whole [...] the conduct of the Review was never satisfactory to any of the persons strongly interested in its principles', John Mill recalls in his *Autobiography*: 'Hardly ever did a number come out without containing several things extremely offensive to us, either in point of opinion, of taste, or by mere want of ability.' The periodical organ by which Benthamism was best known was, in short, 'from the first extremely unsatisfactory to those, whose opinions on all subjects it was supposed specially to represent' (p. 60). In 1828 both Mills withdrew from involvement on the grounds of Bowring's behaviour as editor. Although James Mill was persuaded to contribute one more piece, and John Stuart Mill would later edit the consolidated *London and Westminster Review* (1836–40), the first troubled chapter of the *Westminster's* life under Bowring's editorship seems to have ended acrimoniously.

Notwithstanding the reservations of his two lead contributors, Bentham appears to have unstintingly supported Bowring, his editorship of the *Westminster*, and his activities on behalf of shared causes. When Bowring became secretary of the Greek Committee, created in March 1823 to mobilize British support for the cause of Greek independence from Ottoman rule, he enlisted Bentham as one of its first members. Bentham advocated (unsuccessfully) for Bowring to be made inaugural professor of English or history at the newly formed University of London in 1827. Eventually, a week before he died in 1832, Bentham appointed Bowring as his literary executor (against the wishes of Bentham's nephew, who mounted and lost a legal challenge). Bowring's reputation as a supporter of liberal causes across Europe and beyond endeared him to some who shared his radical politics. But Bowring courted controversy, and there seems to have been an air of untrustworthiness about him, a whiff of financial mismanagement, even before the calamitous business of the Greek loan, of which he was one of the brokers, brought his probity publicly into question. The loan, raised in Britain to help stabilize the fledgling Greek government, was insufficiently safeguarded and was squandered, the speculative bubble burst, and Bowring and his colleagues were accused (by William

¹⁵ [James Mill], 'Periodical Literature', *Westminster Review*, January 1824, pp. 206–49.

¹⁶ Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 59.

Cobbett among others) of ‘cramming their fingers into [the Greek] pie’.¹⁷ There was something of the cloak and dagger about Bowring’s dealings, especially following his arrest in Calais in October 1822, the discovery that he was carrying confidential papers detailing French plans to restore the ousted Spanish monarchy, and his brief imprisonment in Boulogne. His friend and fellow founder of the Greek Committee, Edward Blaquiere, addressed reports intended for Bowring and directed to his home in London to a ‘Mr Henry Murdoch’, notes Roderick Beaton, ‘no doubt to avoid the watchful eyes of mail interceptors on the continent, to whom Bowring’s name was known’ (pp. 124–25). Lord Byron likewise exercised caution when communicating with Bowring. As an envoy of the Greek Committee, sending first-hand reports back to London about the situation on the ground in Greece in October 1823, he too was mindful of Bowring’s ‘adventure in France’.¹⁸ Evidently fearing that documents sent directly to Bowring might be intercepted by the Bourbon authorities, he entrusted them instead to his friend Hobhouse as intermediary.

Byron’s role in the Greek cause is well known. Less familiar is the part he played in the constellation of interests that formed around the *Westminster Review* and the LMI and shaped their evolving identities. According to William Parry’s ghostwritten account, *The Last Days of Lord Byron* (1825), the poet was an enthusiastic supporter of Birkbeck’s new initiative and committed fifty pounds, though he did not live to give the promised subscription: ‘I have lately read’, Parry reports Byron as saying on one occasion, ‘of an institution recently established in London for the instruction of mechanics. I highly approve of this, and intend to subscribe 50*l.* to it.’¹⁹ He would accompany his order for the money, Byron reportedly said, with a letter giving his opinion on the importance of working-class involvement in the management and running of the LMI:

I am always apprehensive schemes of this description are intended to dupe people, and unless all the offices in such an institution are filled with real practical mechanics, the working classes will soon find themselves deceived. If they permit any but mechanics to have the direction of their affairs, they will only become the tools of

¹⁷ See ‘Greek Cause!’, *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 4 November 1826, pp. 363–68 (p. 367); and Roderick Beaton, *Byron’s War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 270. Beaton recounts the long, complicated saga of the loan when the Greek government first resolved to send deputies to England to try to negotiate (p. 144). See also the accounts by F. Rosen, in *Bentham, Byron, and Greece: Constitutionalism, Nationalism, and Early Liberal Political Thought* (Clarendon Press, 1992); and F. Rosen, ‘London Greek Committee (act. 1823–1826)’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, entry dated 24 May 2007), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/95072.

¹⁸ Lord Byron, *Selected Letters and Journals*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand (Picador, 1984), p. 306.

¹⁹ William Parry, *The Last Days of Lord Byron* (printed for Knight and Lacey, and Westley and Tyrrell, 1825), pp. 204–05.

others. The real working man will soon be ousted, and his more cunning pretended friends will take possession and reap all the benefits. (p. 205)

The aristocrat was in this respect aligned with the working-class radicals J. C. Robertson and Thomas Hodgskin, early supporters of the LMI who wanted it to be an organization entirely independent of middle-class control. Indeed, as Gardner and Newman discuss, the early history of mechanics' institutes, many of which had their origins in benevolent paternalism, was characterized by conflicts around questions of paternalist governance and class composition.²⁰ However, with due safeguards in place, Byron declared, 'It gives me pleasure to think what a mass of natural intellect this will call into action'; for 'if the plan succeed, and I firmly hope it may, [...] the most useful and numerous body of people in the nation will then judge for themselves, and when properly informed will judge correctly'.²¹

The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) was not formed by Whig MP and educational reformer Henry Brougham until 1826, but the question of the usefulness of knowledge to the 'most useful and numerous body of people' was already a burning issue. Brougham himself, a friend of Birkbeck since their student days at Edinburgh University and author of *Practical Observations upon the Education of the People* (1825), had lent his support to the establishment of the LMI and was, with Birkbeck, a founding member of London University (later UCL), established in 1826. Writing in late 1823 from the field in Greece, Byron had good reason to think about the value of a useful education and practical support, and to question even the well-meaning attempts of utilitarians to manage and intervene in affairs of which they had little experience. Greece proved something of a flashpoint, indeed, given its centrality to both classical education and modern geopolitics. A letter written on 26 October 1823 by Byron on the point of leaving for Missolonghi to Bowring as secretary of the Greek Committee is as revealing as it is amusing:

The Supplies of the Committee are some useful — and all excellent in their kind — but occasionally hardly *practical* enough — in the present state of Greece — for instance the Mathematical instruments are thrown away — none of the Greeks know a problem from a poker — we must conquer first — and plan afterwards. — The use

²⁰ See Gardner, pp. 204–05, 213–14; and Newman, 'From Magazine to Meeting'. Flexner argues that the LMI was more progressive than most in this regard, noting the formal requirement that a majority of its management committee be working class (p. 13).

²¹ Parry, p. 205. According to Parry, Byron said: 'The mechanics and working classes who can maintain their families, are in my opinion the happiest body of men. Poverty is wretchedness; but it is perhaps to be preferred to the heartless unmeaning dissipation of the higher orders' (pp. 205–06).

of the trumpets too may be doubted — unless Constantinople were Jericho — for the Hellenists have no ear for Bugles — and you must send us somebody to listen to them.

He adds a postscript about the arrival of Colonel Leicester Stanhope (a disciple of Bentham, friend of the Birkbecks, and later a contributor to Anna Birkbeck's album), saying he seemed likely to be of great service to the cause and to the committee, despite his ill-preparedness for the situation on the ground: 'He came up (as they all do who have not been in the country before) with some high-flown notions of the sixth form at Harrow or Eton, &c.', Byron writes, 'but Col. Napier and I set him to rights on those points, which is absolutely necessary to prevent disgust, or perhaps return.'²²

Byron's observations to Bowring about the irrelevance of a 'high-flown' public school and Oxbridge classical education to the realpolitik of modern Greece chime interestingly with the calls in several early articles in the *Westminster Review* for reform of the British educational curriculum at all levels to make it adequate to contemporary needs. The January 1824 inaugural issue of the journal includes a substantial anonymous review article on literary education, for example, by Bowring's, Birkbeck's, and Bentham's friend Southwood Smith. It discusses Bentham's *Chrestomathia* (1817) and the secondary school curriculum it proposes influenced by Bentham's linguistic theory, together with Matthew and Rowland Hill's *Public Education* (1822) about the Hazelwood School near Birmingham, an experiment in progressive education admired by reformers for its adoption of the monitorial system and rejection of corporal punishment.²³ The July 1825 number has an article entitled 'Present System of Education', advocating the extension to other educational establishments of the 'practical system' of teaching logic at the University of Glasgow. It critiques the monopoly of the ancient languages in the public school and Oxbridge-led education system and the neglect of useful knowledge, such as the acquisition of modern languages and familiarity with contemporary European cultures.²⁴ The April 1827 issue leads with an article entitled 'Education of the People' on the SDUK's 'Library of Useful Knowledge'. This last, which extols the value of educating the working classes to manufacture, among other things, superior mathematical instruments, was written by Bowring himself. 'It ought surely to be superfluous in the present day', he declares, 'to point out the connexion which the education or enlightening of the people has had throughout Europe, from the very commencement of its history downwards, with the melioration of its systems

²² Byron, *Selected Letters*, pp. 308–09, 309, emphasis in original.

²³ [Thomas Southwood Smith], 'Education', *Westminster Review*, January 1824, pp. 43–79.

²⁴ 'Present System of Education', *Westminster Review*, July 1825, pp. 147–76.

of laws and government'; and also, he adds, 'with that progress in sciences and arts which this portion of the world has made, and by which it has attained a rank which it never could have derived from its physical importance or advantages'.²⁵ Bowring's belief in the social, political, and economic value of a diffused public education system is unsurprising in the context of the Benthamite periodical he edits, but his particular advocacy of an education in the arts is distinctive. He insists upon 'the utility of educating the common people' in the arts as well as other areas, not only because of 'the value of art in commerce, or in money-making' but because of its human value (pp. 290, 284). He cites as a model France, where there are schools of art for workmen, and where there is no perceived incompatibility between lowly work and the enjoyment of literature and art (p. 286). He points out that the SDUK book under review, intended as an introduction to the series to follow, highlights 'the beauty of science, rather than its utility or applications' (p. 308). Like Birkbeck, he was a humanist.

Byron did not live to read Bowring extol the art of mathematical instrument-making in the pages of the *Westminster Review*, nor to read his article 'Greece and its Popular Poetry' that would have interested the poet more. Bowring's review of Pouqueville's *Histoire de la régénération de la Grèce* (1824) did not appear until a few months after Byron's death on 19 April 1824.²⁶ Friends of Byron who belonged to both Bowring's and Birkbeck's circles defended the poet's posthumous reputation in the pages of the *Westminster*. Hobhouse, for example, wrote an excoriating anonymous review for the January 1825 number of two publications that appeared shortly after his friend's death which he claimed to be inaccurate and defamatory: R. C. Dallas's *Recollections of the Life of Lord Byron* and Shelley's cousin Thomas Medwin's *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron*.²⁷ Several articles specifically about Byron's fight for the Greek cause and his relationship with the Greek Committee exhibit the *Westminster's* Panhellenic interests under Bowring's editorship. An anonymous piece in the July 1824 issue, attributed by Wellesley to Edward Blaquiere, which was to have been a review of Byron's *The Deformed Transformed; a Drama*, was recast following news of the poet's death to 'Lord Byron in Greece'.²⁸ And Byron features in Bowring's anonymous defence, in the July 1826 issue, of the activities of the Greek Committee, 'A Summary Account of the Steam-boats for Lord Cochrane's Expedition; with some few words upon the two Frigates ordered at New York for the Service of Greece'.²⁹

²⁵ [John Bowring], 'Education of the People', *Westminster Review*, April 1827, pp. 269–317 (p. 269).

²⁶ [John Bowring], 'Greece and its Popular Poetry', *Westminster Review*, July 1824, pp. 149–69.

²⁷ [John Cam Hobhouse], 'Dallas's *Recollections* and Medwin's *Conversations*', *Westminster Review*, January 1825, pp. 1–35.

²⁸ See [Edward Blaquiere], 'Lord Byron in Greece', *Westminster Review*, July 1824, pp. 225–62.

²⁹ [John Bowring], 'Greek Committee', *Westminster Review*, July 1826, pp. 113–33.

Greece was a common cause for Byron and Bowring, and it was their efforts for its liberation that brought the two men together. But interestingly, it was as a fellow author that Byron addressed Bowring in his last letter to him, written from Missolonghi on 30 March 1824, just three weeks before his death. Bowring had evidently sent Byron (along with the bugles and mathematical instruments that the poet found risible) a copy of his translations into English verse of a selection of Russian poetry, *Specimens of the Russian Poets*. Byron had not yet read it when he wrote, and probably never had an opportunity to do so before he succumbed to the fever that killed him, but he generously refers to it in the same breath as his own work (probably *Don Juan*):

They may say what they will of the work in question — but it will stand — and as high as most others in time. — — This latter observation is address to you — as an *author* — I have only recently received your translation — from which I promise myself much pleasure — the Russians are greatly obliged to you — but I did not know that you so greatly admired their Czar — their poetry — at least in your version — will be [words torn off with seal] than [words torn off] princes.³⁰

It is likewise as an author that Bowring appears in Anna Birkbeck's album. While his poem in praise of her husband does not suggest that Bowring deserves a place alongside Byron in the canon, it is telling that he chose to write his tribute to the founder of the LMI in verse:

Not his, to build, — as poets do —
 Their votive altars to the few —
 Not his — as chroniclers — to bring
 Superfluous praise to chief, or King;
 Not his — to shade in laurels green
 Death — desolation's battle scene: —
 But, 'neath Instruction's downy pinion
 To gird the world in his dominion
 And o'er the many to outpour
 Young wisdom's cornucopian store; —
 This — O high honor! this shall be
 The bliss, — the bounty shed on thee
 And this (Ye heroes, blush at fame!)

³⁰ Byron, *Selected Letters*, p. 319, emphasis in original.

The glory of a Birkbeck's name.

April 26. 1831. John Bowring.³¹

Anna Margaret Birkbeck, née Gardner was the second wife of George Birkbeck, whom she married in 1817 at the age of 24. Her album contains poems and other texts, drawings, watercolours, and autographs by men and women of the couple's acquaintance that she began to collect in 1825. Gathered in its decorated pages are some of the friends who probably gathered at their home in Finsbury Square: distinguished writers such as John Thelwall (who in 1831 named his son Weymouth Birkbeck after the educator), William Godwin, Letitia Landon, Amelia Opie, and Mary Shelley; and well-known public figures, such as Robert Owen and Henry Brougham. It includes contributions in Arabic, French, Italian, and Russian. As Patrizia Di Bello has discussed, the album offers fascinating insights into the cosmopolitan cultural and political circles in which the Birkbecks moved.³² In its pages the register varies, moving between sentimental images and verses addressed to Anna Birkbeck, tributes to her husband and his work, and entries that reference the radical reforms led by some of its contributors. Begun within a year of the launch of the *Westminster*, it is suggestive as a quite differently inflected (domestic and decidedly feminine) counterpart to the combative, masculine, public-facing periodical. The album is designedly personal, bearing the stamp of the individual taste and social networks of the woman who created and arranged it. Its contents are mostly handwritten or hand-drawn and coloured and, importantly, autographed. Though not private, it was intended for only a small readership of friends and acquaintances. The *Westminster* in these early years was, by contrast, a publication with a relatively wide circulation, its character defined by its radical political identity rather than by any one individual. Its articles were conventionally anonymous. But notwithstanding the obvious differences between the album and the journal, their contributors moved in the same circles and shared social, cultural, and political affiliations. Some, like Bowring himself and Mary Shelley, wrote for both. The album, then, offers an intriguing perspective on issues with which the *Westminster* and the LMI were respectively associated, making visible intersections of interests that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The Greek question is a case in point. Both the LMI and the Greek Committee were conceived and founded in 1823 at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on the Strand, a popular

³¹ *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, Birkbeck, University of London, p. 67. I am grateful to Luisa Calè for sharing the 'MA Victorian Studies (2022–23) Students' Transcript of Anna Birkbeck's Album', and I thank for their transcriptions Beatrice Norris, Celeste Sykes, Emi Del Bene, Francesca Paloschi, Laetitia Carbone, Nera Hart, Prabhjeet Binjal, Usha Rasagopal, and Zoe Baron.

³² See Patrizia Di Bello, 'Mrs Birkbeck's Album: The Hand-written and the Printed in Early Nineteenth-Century Feminine Culture', 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 1 (2005), doi:10.16995/ntn.435.

meeting place for radicals in the ‘convivial public sphere’ of oppositional politics and entertainment that Ian Newman identifies with Romantic sociability.³³ Although several of Birkbeck’s friends and associates, including Brougham and Hobhouse as well as Bowring and Bentham, were centrally involved in the Greek Committee, and though he was sympathetic to European independence movements (joining the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland in support of Polish independence in 1832), he himself was never formally a member.³⁴ However, Anna Birkbeck’s album suggests the couple’s close affiliation with the Greek cause as it subsequently unfolded. It contains, for instance, a contribution by British officer and philhellene Leicester Stanhope, who joined Byron in October 1823 to fight for Greek independence, as previously noted, and published an account of his experiences in *Greece, in 1823 and 1824* (1825). The unattributed quotation, in French, transcribed by Stanhope into the album, is from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile, ou de l’éducation* (1762), a book that had an important influence on the development of a national education system in post-Revolutionary France:

Quand on dit que l’homme est foible, que veut on dire? Le mot de foiblesse indique un rapport à l’être auquel on l’applique, celui dont la force passe les besoins, fût il un insecte, un ver, est un être fort celui dont les besoins passent la force, fût il un éléphant, un lion; fût il un conquérant, un héros; fût il un dieu; c’est un être foible.³⁵

Other notable contributors to the album closely associated with the Greek cause were Aikaterini Trikoupi and her husband Spyridon Trikoupis. Trikoupi was the sister of the Greek politician Alexandros Mavrokordatos, a friend of the Shelleys and Byron in 1821

³³ Ian Newman, *The Romantic Tavern: Literature and Conviviality in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 107.

³⁴ Rosen points out that the London Greek Committee ‘drew support from some Tories and numerous Whigs, but was not especially animated by ideas of radical reform. Noted radicals, such as Francis Place and James Mill, as well as figures like William Cobbett and “Orator” Hunt, were conspicuously absent from the ranks of the Committee. What separated the Whigs and many radicals in the 1820s was the preoccupation of the latter with parliamentary reform, and the cause of Greece was not directly part of this debate.’ F. Rosen, ‘Introduction’, *Bentham, Byron, and Greece: Constitutionalism, Nationalism, and Early Liberal Political Thought* (Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 1–22 (p. 6), doi:[10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198200789.003.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198200789.003.0001).

³⁵ ‘When it is said that man is weak, what is meant? This word *weak* indicates a relation, a relation obtaining within the being to which one applies it. He whose strength surpasses his needs, be he an insect or a worm, is a strong being. He whose needs surpass his strength, be he an elephant or a lion, be he a conqueror or a hero, be he a God, is a weak being.’ *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, p. 107. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, ou de l’éducation*, 4 vols (Paris: [n.pub.], 1762), I, p. 77; *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, ed. by Christopher Kelly and others, 13 vols (University Press of New England, 1990–2010), XIII: *Emile; or, On Education (Includes ‘Emile and Sophie; or, The Solitaries’)*, ed. by Christopher Kelly and Allan Bloom (2010), p. 212.

and 1822 when they lived in Pisa, and the dedicatee of Shelley's verse drama *Hellas*, published in 1822 with a view to raising money for the Greek War of Independence.³⁶ She contributed an elegy in Greek to Anna Birkbeck's album:

Ἐλεγείον.

Νὰ ἡ Μυρτοῦλα,

ποῦ ἡ ξανθοῦλα

πρὶν ἀρχίσει

νὰ φωτίσῃ

μιὰ φορά,

έμαδοῦσε,

κ' ἐκοσμοῦσε

τὴν χρυσὴν τῆς

κορυφὴν τῆς,

μιὰ χαρὰ.

Ἦλθε τόρ

ἡ πικρὴ ὥρα,

τέτοια χάρι

τὸ κλονάρι

δὲν θωρεῖ·

κυματίζει,

ψιθυρίζει,

γιὰ τὸ χέρι,

πλὴν τὸ χέρι

πλιὸ δὲν ζῆ.

Ἐποίησεν ἐν Λονδίῳ τῷ αὐτῷ ἔτει, τῇ κβ/ι

Ἰαννουαρίου

Αἰκατερίνα Τρικούπη _

³⁶ According to Kelvin Everest's notes to *Hellas*, 'The familiarity of the Shelleys with Alexandros Mavrokordatos (1791–1865) between December 1820 and June 1821 is a vital context for the poem.' *The Poems of Shelley*, Longman Annotated English Poets, 6 vols (Routledge, 2023–24), V: 1821–1822 (2024), ed. by Carlene Anderson and others, p. 15. I am grateful to Professor Everest for sharing his research prior to publication. Shelley's dedication reads: 'To His Excellency Prince Alexander Mavrocordato late secretary for foreign affairs to the Hospodar of Wallachia the drama of *Hellas* is inscribed as an imperfect token of the admiration, sympathy, and friendship of the author. Pisa, November 1, 1821.' Alexandros Mavrokordatos corresponded with Bentham in 1823 about the question of the codification of the law.

(Elegy

Behold the myrtle
 which the fair maiden
 once
 before dawn

she would pluck
 and adorn
 her golden hair
 happily.

Now has come
 the bitter hour
 and the twig
 sees such grace no more;

it rustles
 and murmurs softly for the hand,
 but the hand
 is now dead.

Written in London in the year 1835, on 22/10 January
 By Aikaterini Trikoupi).³⁷

Spyridon Trikoupi became the first prime minister of Greece before becoming Greek ambassador to London. A friend of Byron's, he gave the poet's funeral oration in the cathedral at Missolonghi in 1824. His contribution to Anna Birkbeck's album was a piece of political commentary in French, 'Au moment des Elections du 1835' (At the time of the elections of 1835):

Tout est agité et tout est calme; c'est que les passions sont subordonnées à la maison, et les volontés aux Lois. Le Peuple anglais n'est grand que parce qu'il sait temperer l'excès de la liberté par la sagesse, et en corriger les égarements par ses longues habitudes d'ordre et de stabilité. [*sic*] admirable pays, où l'intemperance politique

³⁷ *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, p. 201. For their transcription and translation of this poem I am indebted to: Maria Schoina, Department of English Literature and Culture, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki; Aikaterini Tiktopoulos, Modern Greek Philology, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki; with the assistance of Professor Kyriakos Tsantsanoglou, emeritus professor of Greek, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki. The double date can perhaps be explained by Aikaterini Trikoupi's wish to give the date in both the Gregorian and Julian (then still used in Greece) calendars (though they are 13 not 12 days apart).

donne, contre son essence, plus de vie que de corruption au corps politique! En suivant les grands evenements du jour, on s'en éclaire et on s'informe, on grandit même au milieu des grands hommes de ce pays, grands hommes en sagesse et en patriotisme.

le 21 Janvr 1835 S. Tricoupi.³⁸

One of the most interesting figures the album reveals to have been part of the Birkbecks' circle, and who further corroborates the underlying interfiliations between Birkbeck's educational initiative and the *Westminster Review*, is Mary Shelley. She was closely involved with the Greek cause during the period when she, Shelley, and Byron were living in Pisa from 1820 to 1822. As Roderick Beaton has shown, she developed an intimate friendship with Alexandros Mavrokordatos independently of her husband's over a seven-month period from 1820 to 1821 immediately before the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence, when he left Italy to serve his country.³⁹ He taught her Greek, she reciprocated by teaching him English, and they regularly met and corresponded, though communication ceased following his departure and they never met again. Whether or not Mary Shelley knew Mavrokordatos's sister who, aged 19 or 20 at the time, may have been with her brother in Pisa, the two women meet in Anna Birkbeck's album. Shelley inscribed her poem 'The Death of Love' on 19 November 1831:

Alas, for Love! the gentle boy is dead!
 Through what sad ill did fairest Love expire?
 By the sharp pang he felt when Theseus fled —
 Or in the terrors of lost Dido's pyre?
 Leapt he with love: lorn Sapho from the steep,
 Which o'ertops the dark and threat'ning sea?
 Or was he strangled by the raging deep,
 Which wrestled with Leander fatally?
 Did wintry absence chill his gentle heart?—
 Or died he in the tempest of a frown?
 Or by a word, more mortal than a dart,
 Was he to his low grave untimely thrown?

³⁸ 'Everything is agitated and everything is calm; the passions are subordinated to the house, and the wills to the Laws. English people are great only because they know how to temper the excesses of freedom with wisdom, and to correct their aberrations by their longstanding habits of order and stability, admirable country, where political intemperance yields, against its essence, more life than corruption to the body politic! By following the great events of the day, one enlightens oneself through information, one grows even in the midst of the great men of this country, great men in wisdom and in patriotism. 21 January 1835 S. Tricoupi! *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, p. 203. Translation by students of Birkbeck's MA Victorian Studies programme 2022–23.

³⁹ See Beaton, *Byron's War*, pp. 70–78.

Ah, no! he pined like one of food bereft,
 An infant orphaned of its Mother's care,
 The waning Moon; by fickle Phoebus left,
 Which pales and lessens in the darkling air.

With a soft sigh he laid him down to sleep,
 Seeking in balmy dreams for a release
 From bitter thoughts, which made him groan and weep,
 And Death in pity gave eternal peace: —
 Nor will he e'er again his lids uncloze,
 And his sweet smile for age is unreturning, —
 Nor would I have him from his calm repose
 Back to this woful life of tears and mourning.

—

No — sleep, poor Love; take thine unwaking rest
 In this lorn heart — so late thy most[?] blest abode,
 And may no ruder touch invade the breast,
 Which is the tomb of an immortal God!
 Yet at the lonely and the midnight hour
 Thine image like a palid ghost may rise,
 And o'er my dreams thou may'st extend thy power,
 Gilding the visions of my sleep: closed eyes! —⁴⁰

M W Shelley
 19 November — 1831

'I can never write verses', Mary Shelley wrote to her friend Maria Gisborne on 11 June 1835, 'except under the influence of a strong sentiment & seldom even then.'⁴¹ More often in the mid-1820s to early 1830s she wrote prose, including seven or eight anonymous review articles (attributions vary) for the *Westminster Review* between 1826 and 1832.⁴² One of the most interesting of these was her review of Anna Brownell

⁴⁰ *The Album of Anna Birkbeck*, pp. 189–90.

⁴¹ *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980–88), II (1983), p. 246.

⁴² 'The English in Italy', *Westminster Review*, October 1826, pp. 325–41; 'The Italian Novelists', *Westminster Review*, January 1827, pp. 115–26; 'Illyrian Poems — Feudal Scenes', *Westminster Review*, January 1829, pp. 71–81; 'Modern Italy', *Westminster Review*, July 1829, pp. 127–40; 'The Loves of the Poets', *Westminster Review*, October 1829, pp. 472–77; 'Chronicle of the Times of Charles the Ninth', *Westminster Review*, October 1830, pp. 495–502; 'J. P. Cobbett's *Tour in Italy*', *Westminster Review*, January 1831, pp. 174–80; and 'The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald', *Westminster Review*, January 1832, pp. 110–21.

Jameson's book *The Loves of the Poets* (1829) in October 1829. In response to the question Mary Shelley poses at the outset of her review about 'what Love, and what a Poet is', she poignantly cites her own late poet-husband's definition of love in his essay 'On Love', and declares 'a poet's soul is Love'.⁴³ A footnote informs the reader that P. B. Shelley's essay was published in *The Keepsake* for 1829, an illustrated, commercially produced annual, marketed at women, launched in 1828 by Charles Heath's printing house, that mimicked the kind of handmade album created by Anna Birkbeck. The *Westminster* could hardly be a more different kind of periodical publication, but its female reviewer connects them.

Mary Shelley was one of very few female contributors to the *Westminster* in its early years, and she had rare expertise in the subject of the book reviewed. Her other review articles for the journal are similarly on topics in which she could claim special knowledge. Several related to Italy. Jameson's first book, for example, *The Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826), was one of three works Shelley reviewed in October 1826 in her first article for the *Westminster*, 'The English in Italy'. She called it 'a very well written and interesting imposture'.⁴⁴ Though she felt duped by discovering that the so-called diarist who had supposedly died was merely a fiction, she nevertheless found things to admire in the volume which, ostensibly a diary, itself constitutes an intriguing example of the uncertain boundaries between private and public genres (and the ambiguities of the idea of a journal). It is not known whether Mary Shelley knew Anna Jameson (who was for some years a close friend of Lady Byron, so it seems unlikely), but Shelley knew and corresponded with John Bowring, with whom she appeared to be on friendly terms (asking to borrow books; passing on her best wishes to his wife).⁴⁵ She acted as intermediary between him and her friend Thomas Moore, persuading Bowring to entrust to Moore the aforementioned letters he had received from Byron in Greece for his biography of the poet. Moore recorded in his journal on 12–30 April 1828 that 'Mrs. Shelley [...] has procured for me from Bowring (who has been more complying on the subject than I expected) copies of some of Byron's letters to him from Greece, with a promise of the remainder'.⁴⁶ However, her letters

⁴³ 'The Loves of the Poets', p. 473.

⁴⁴ 'The English in Italy', p. 339.

⁴⁵ On her letters to Bowring from 25 February through 15 August 1828, see Betty T. Bennett, 'Newly Uncovered Letters and Poems by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: ("It was my birthday and it pleased me to tell the people so —")', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 46 (1997), pp. 51–74 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30210368>> [accessed 13 July 2024]. For further letters written in 1828 to Bowring, see vol. II of *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Bennett.

⁴⁶ *The Journal of Thomas Moore*, ed. by Wilfred S. Dowden, 6 vols (University of Delaware Press, 1983–91), III: 1826–1830 (1983), p. 1130.

are mostly about her articles for the *Westminster* and are addressed to Bowring as its editor. She appears to have proposed some of the topics and volumes she undertook to review and vetoed others. She wrote as a confident professional writer and by no means restricted her subjects to poetry, love, and female diarists. As Nora Crook argues, the *Westminster* was ‘the journal that elicited some of her most politically engaged writing’ and the arena for her ‘involvement in public debate during the run-up to the Reform Bill of 1832’.⁴⁷

Few readers of the *Westminster* would have been aware that the author of the review of *The Loves of the Poets*, let alone of Prosper Mérimée’s *Chronicle of the Times of Charles the Ninth*, J. P. Cobbett’s *Tour in Italy*, and Thomas Moore’s *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald*, was Shelley’s widow and the author of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). *Frankenstein* was itself published anonymously in its first London edition. Mary Shelley’s name appeared, after a fashion, in the second edition, published in French in Paris in 1821; the book is described on the cover as ‘Dédié à William Godwin’ and ‘Par Mme. Shelly [sic], sa Nièce [sic]’. The author was finally properly identified as Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley for the second English edition in 1823, and she oversaw the publication of a revised popular edition, for which she wrote a preface, in 1831.⁴⁸ In fact, the huge shadow cast by Victor Frankenstein’s creature connected the *Westminster Review* and the LMI in a more amorphously figurative way than its author suspected, or indeed any of the other individuals or organizations this article has discussed. The novel’s reformist political vision was of its time; its commentary on contemporary scientific, political, educational, social, and economic issues, albeit in a different register again from either the *Westminster*’s intellectual analysis or the LMI’s pedagogy, captured the imagination of the public on both sides of the ideological divide; its monster became a popular symbol for the inexorable ‘march of intellect’ that both the journal and the institution endorsed but others feared or mocked.

A satirical cartoon depicting *The March of Intellect* (Fig. 2) created around 1828 by Robert Seymour (under the nom de plume Shortshanks, in parodic reference to fellow

⁴⁷ Nora Crook, ‘Counting the Carbonari: A Newly-Attributed Mary Shelley Article’, *Keats-Shelley Review*, 23 (2009), pp. 39–50 (p. 45), doi:[10.1179/ksr.2009.23.1.39](https://doi.org/10.1179/ksr.2009.23.1.39).

⁴⁸ See *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, 3 vols (printed for Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, & Jones, 1818); Mme. Shelly [sic], *Frankenstein; ou, le Prométhée moderne*, trans. by J[ules] S[aladin], 3 vols (Corréard, 1821); Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, 2 vols (printed for G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1823); and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (Colburn and Bentley, 1831).

illustrator George Cruikshank) conveys something of the power of Mary Shelley's symbolic creature. The patched automaton figure that strides across the establishment, laying waste to the lawyers, clerics, and quacks who sustain and profit from the status quo, quite literally connects the radical press to reformist educators. As its caption indicates, 'the legs with which it strode were like unto presses that men called printers use' for the production of both elite intellectual quarterlies and the penny press, while 'on its learned head it bore a Crown of many towers', representing the newly founded secular London University. The learned head itself is a stack of books, with the words 'HISTORY', 'PHILOSOPHY', and 'ENQUIRY' on their spines, at the bottom of which is one bearing the title 'MECHANICS', calling to mind not only the new discipline that drove the steam-powered world but the Mechanics' Institution that Birkbeck once declared was the parent of London University.⁴⁹ In a playful reference to the name of the co-founder of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, London University in 1826, and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in 1827, Henry Brougham's head is mounted on the broom with which the automaton sweeps away the dross of the old order. The teetering mound of 'Forms in Chancery' and the bewigged barristers with their weighty tomes of 'Obsolete Laws' and 'Law Lumber' evoke Bentham's advocacy of legal reform. The ghost of the Test and Corporation Acts, revoked on 9 May 1828, reminds us that John Bowring argued powerfully for its repeal in a 'Letter to the Right Honorable George Canning, on the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts' in the pages of the *Westminster Review*.⁵⁰ The balloons puffed from the automaton's pipe may be full of hot air and the 'puffs' of a journalistic clique, but they offer hope to those who plead for deliverance as they float off into the blue above the clouds of polluting 'dust' that inevitably go along with the scientific advances of an increasingly mechanized industrial society.⁵¹ Seymour later illustrated the early numbers of Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* before his death by suicide in 1836. What he would have made of the dustheaps and taxidermy of *Our Mutual Friend* or the Gradgrind pedagogy of *Hard Times* can only, alas, be imagined.

⁴⁹ See Kelly's discussion of this claim, which he says has 'a measure of truth', though it would be 'truer [...] to regard the two institutions as cousins'. He points out that 'Birkbeck, who was brought in by Brougham, was active in the enterprise from the beginning, and was elected a member of the provisional Council in December 1825'. Kelly, *George Birkbeck*, p. 153.

⁵⁰ 'The Test-Act Reporter', *Westminster Review*, January 1828, pp. 1-20.

⁵¹ See Brian E. Maidment's discussion of the trope of dust and dustmen in graphic satire of this period in "'Penny" Wise, "Penny" Foolish?: Popular Periodicals and the "March of Intellect" in the 1820s and 1830s', in *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, and David Finkelstein (Palgrave, 2000), pp. 104-21.

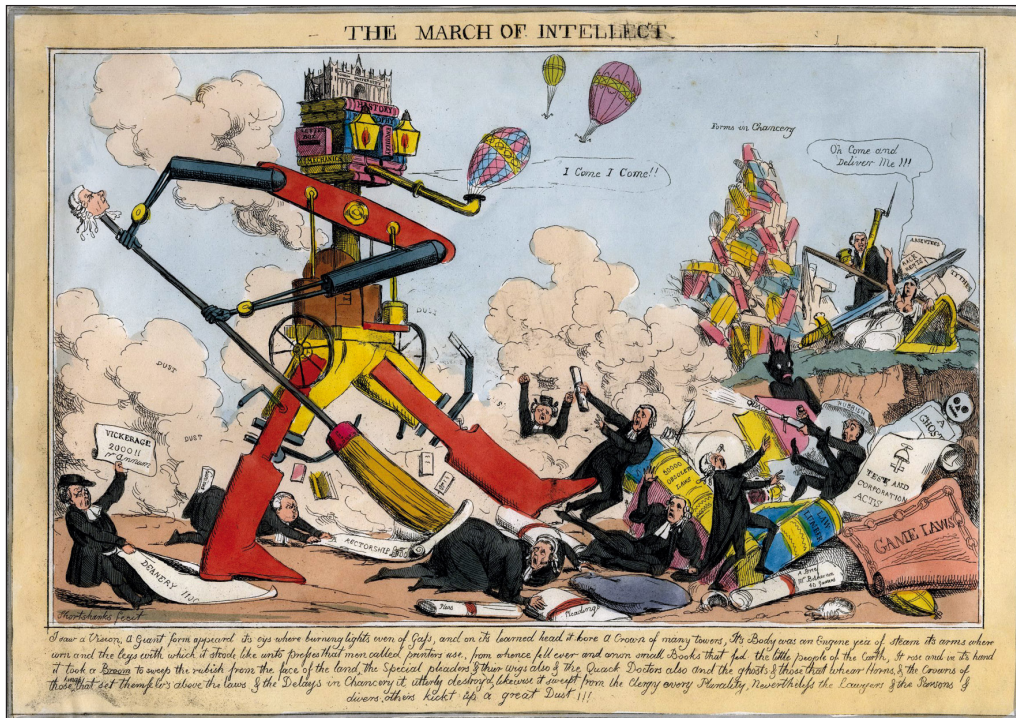


Fig. 2: Robert Seymour, *The March of Intellect* (c. 1828). British Museum. Wikimedia Commons.

Frankenstein's creature, a miscellaneous collection of body parts put together as a scientific experiment that takes on a monstrous life of its own, teaches himself to read, implausibly enough, from a lost satchel of books he finds by chance, and he learns about human society by listening in to conversations. Within months of his fictional creation, Frankenstein and his monster became indirectly associated with the education of mechanics when Andrew Ure, George Birkbeck's successor in his previous role teaching a popular mechanics' class at Glasgow's Anderson's Institution, publicized experiments he conducted to reanimate a corpse. 'Galvanism has set some corpses grinning', wrote Byron in *Don Juan*, alluding to Ure's grisly endeavours.⁵² Ten years after he was brought to life by the Gothic imagination of a 17-year-old girl and invoked by Ure to promote his sensationalist experiments, the creature is depicted by Seymour as a patchwork of miscellaneous knowledge let loose. The generative proximity of educational and political reformist initiatives that sprang from similar Radical-Whig-Nonconformist convictions amplified their perceived collective power. As this article has explored, such a perception was not misplaced. The offices of the SDUK were in Bedford Square, close to the new London University, which was supported by figures

⁵² Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, ed. by T. G. Steffan, E. Steffan, and W. W. Pratt (Penguin, 1973), p. 78 (l. 130).

associated with the establishment of the university, such as Brougham and James Mill; and those people were associated with Birkbeck and supporters of the LMI, who were in turn involved in the early years of the *Westminster Review*, some of them with the Greek Committee too. They met in the same drawing rooms and taverns, lived in the same squares, sometimes the same houses, and wrote in the same papers. They were, to push the *Frankenstein* metaphor, different limbs and organs of the same body. It was this collective intimacy that better represents the diverse intellectual life of the moment rather than polarized abstractions which juxtapose rational to Romantic. To appreciate the intricacy of their connections, it is important to recognize the variety of literary and visual sources which contributed to a lively intellectual and political life, from Anna Birkbeck's unique handmade album to popular satirical cartoons. Likewise, bringing on stage a wider range of actors, including figures like Byron and Mary Shelley, and noting their links with the ostensibly stiff-necked, severe-minded utilitarian group, provides a more natural history of that life. Placing together the composite body of Frankenstein's creature and the stuffed auto-icon of Jeremy Bentham, the ornate album entries and the clanking presses of the periodicals, adds depth and complexity to our sense of radical London in the mid-1820s when the *Westminster Review* and the London Mechanics' Institution were born.

