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PRIMITIVE BALLADS, MODERN CRITICISM, ANCIENT SKEPTICISM: MACAULAY'S *LAYS OF ANCIENT ROME*

By William R. McKelvy

ONE OF THE BEST selling volumes of Victorian verse, as Donald Gray has shown, was Thomas Babington Macaulay's *The Lays of Ancient Rome* first published in 1842 (*Complete Writings* 19: 167–279). For a generation after its publication, the *Lays* also generally enjoyed the praise of critics and poets.[1] But in 1860, just months after Macaulay had been interred in Poets' Corner, Matthew Arnold offered up the *Lays* as a touchstone of the grandly bad. In his lectures *On Translating Homer,* Arnold said that "a man's power to detect the ring of false metal in those Lays is a good measure of his fitness to give an opinion about poetical matters at all" (1: 211). Arnold's put-down was echoed in later works such as Thomas Humphry Ward's multi-volume anthology *The English Poets* (1880), which opened with Arnold's essay "The Study of Poetry." Ward cited the continuing popularity of the *Lays,* but he pointed out that "the higher critical authorities have pronounced against them, and are even teaching us to wonder whether they can be called poetry at all. They find in the *Lays* the same faults which mar the author's prose — commonplaceness of ideas, cheapness of sentiment and imagery, made to prevail by dint of the writer's irresistible command of a new rhetorical force; in a word, eloquent Philistinism" (4: 540). At about the same time — in the mid-1880s — the *Lays* started to enjoy a new kind of popularity within a context created by the institutionalization of national primary education. Numerous teaching editions aimed at adolescent males were published (*British Library* 273–75), and this particular success of the *Lays* guaranteed yet another kind of denigration.[2]

In the context of the early 1840s — a literary landscape I'll shortly try to sketch — the *Lays* was critically acclaimed. In the 1860s and after, the *Lays* was given a special niche in Arnold's poetic Hall of Shame. How and why did the *Lays* become bad poetry for adolescent Philistines? How and why did Macaulay become the Philistine bard? Part of the answer reflects a disenchantment, largely engineered by Arnold, with the idea that Homeric epic was analogous to British minstrelsy. But the rise and fall of the *Lays* has a more complicated history as well. The *Lays* was — as all those schoolboy editions hint — the Philistine epic of the political class which was created by the constitutional reforms of 1828–1832. The *Lays* blatantly promised imperial dividends for liberal reform. But Ma-

caulay also used the *Lays* to advocate liberalization in another fashion which acknowledged the hermeneutic basis of a sectarian (in this case Anglican) theory of the state which still had to be dismantled in the 1840s. Macaulay's work has a particular and peculiar relation to the rise of modern mythological criticism, a kind of criticism which was at the center of the nineteenth century's most profound ideological transformation, the secularization of the state. So while we can imagine the *Lays* being read in 1908 side by side with Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys,* we might also think of the *Lays* as a prologue to Frazer's *The Golden Bough,* which began, appropriately enough, with an epigraph from Macaulay's ballad on Castor and Pollux:

> The still glassy lake that sleeps
> Beneath Aricia's trees —
> Those trees in whose dim shadow
> The ghastly priest doth reign,
> The priest who slew the slayer,
> And shall himself be slain. (1: 1; cf. Macaulay 19: 224)

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THE INITIAL SUCCESS of the *Lays* was a product of several generations of speculation about the ways in which epic, balladry, and national history were related. The tendency to equate balladry and primitive epic led to a generic transformation which caused much of the discomfort associated with the Homeric Question. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* as Henry Hart Milman put it in 1831, had been "resolved into a number of disconnected rhapsodies, collected and arranged at a late period of Grecian history — the minstrelsy of the Grecian border modelled into a continuous story" (124). The *Lays* is the best early Victorian example of a less noted process in which national minstrelsies were elevated to epic status, a project which had been in motion ever since the publication of Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765).[3] In the early nineteenth century, the modern ballad revival gained further ground on the classical past when Barthold Niebuhr argued that Rome's earliest annals were based on unwritten epic songs. The recovery of Rome's authentic national epic, then, was only a matter of translating ancient Roman prose back into its original poetic form, an act of literary conversion which was Macaulay's fundamental task in the *Lays.* Niebuhr, being German, naturally thought that Rome's recovered epic should be cast in the mold of the *Nibelungenlied* (1:220). Macaulay turned to Percy's *Reliques* as his model for constructing a Latin ballad epic.

Following the editorial pattern set by Percy, Macaulay's ballad book had a general introduction, and each of his four ballads came with its own independent preface. The individual prefaces described the political context of the period when the ballad was supposed to have been composed and the earlier time when the events portrayed in the ballad were supposed to have happened. "Horatius" was composed in 394 BC and described how an Etruscan attack on Rome in 514 BC was turned back. "The Battle of the Lake Regillus" was composed in 303 BC and described the defeat of a Latin army in 496 BC. "Virginia" was composed in 372 BC and described the attempt of a Patrician to exploit a Plebeian sexually in 449 BC. "The Prophecy of Capys" was composed in 275 BC

and described how a prophecy of national glory was disclosed to Romulus in 753 BC — the traditional date of Rome's foundation.

The cloven context of each of the four sections of the *Lays* produces a book which invites at least three different readings. In the first place, the *Lays* is a collection of primitive poetry narrating important events in national history. It was, according to Thomas Carlyle's definition of things, the Bible and epic of Latium, a ballad history burning with the enthusiastic and ill-informed belief of the Roman nation in its infancy.[4] Secondly, the *Lays* is a book about the public performance of poetry at four different moments during a period of about 120 years (394–275 BC). Finally, the *Lays* is a book about the ways in which national history and literary performance influenced each other during the first (roughly) 500 years of Roman history (753–275 BC). The *Lays* shows how historical events become literature and how literary performances became historically important events in the life of a nation.

Like Percy and other connoisseurs of recovered texts, Macaulay had not only to produce a text but also to explain how that text had fallen into obscurity. So while Macaulay's four ballads pretended to recapture Rome's oral traditions, his prose documented their demise by uniting the assumptions of the modern ballad revival with the old idea that Rome's political domination of the ancient world coincided with her cultural subjugation to the Greeks (19: 177–78). Macaulay's innovation was to retell this story using the ballad as the representative of cultural authenticity. His ballads represented "an earlier Latin literature, a literature truly Latin, which has wholly perished" (170). Onto this canon of perished balladry Macaulay inscribed the marks of its journey into literary oblivion by noting the signs of Greek cultural influence. The first ballad, "Horatius," "is meant to be purely Roman." "The Battle of the Lake Regillus" from ninety years later "has a slight tincture of Greek learning and of Greek superstition" (211). The final ballad, "The Prophecy of Capys," represents "the latest age of Latin ballad-poetry" (269).[5]

Two poetic generations after Macaulay's last bard sang his last song, Ennius (239–169 BC) would compose his *Annales* in hexameters, and all succeeding epic poets in Latin would follow him in keeping to the meter of Homer and Hesiod. Virgil in particular only managed a "feeble echo of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*" (19: 170). Macaulay's bard, though, possesses a kind of originality derived from his wildly anachronistic literary affiliation. This last of the Roman bards owes his greatest literary debts to Thomas Gray, Thomas Percy, and Walter Scott. Like the Welsh bard in Gray's famous poem, Macaulay's bard sings his prophetic song on the precipice of extinction. But while Gray's bard represents a national poetic corpus destroyed by Plantagenet imperialism, a force immigrating into Britain out of France, Macaulay's Roman bard represents a national literary tradition doomed to destruction by the military successes of his own people. In this sense, Macaulay's bard descends directly from Percy and succeeding British ballad scholars who dated the demise of the English minstrels to the rise of Elizabethan culture, England's golden age of verse and exploration (1: 377, 381). Macaulay's account of the demise of authentic Latin poetry — like Percy's account of the marginalization of the old minstrelsy — was a complex tribute to imperial progress. The object being nostalgically recalled, Rome's lost ballad canon, is also the sacrificial offering to the notion of a nation moving forward.[6]

Twentieth-century scholars continue to debate whether Rome's lost ballad tradition ever existed and whether it can be discussed as a source for early Roman prose history

(Momigliano; Toohey 91). Macaulay's admiring reviewers endorsed this proposition without exception. At the same time, these reviewers endorsed a definition of Homeric epic which Macaulay had used to "prove" the existence of those Latin ballads. Illustrating the ballad's universal appearance at a certain stage in civilization, Macaulay said that "there can be no doubt that the great Homeric poems are generally ballads" (19: 172). The best indication of the tremendous changes in epic theory that occurred between Percy's *Reliques* and Macaulay's *Lays* is this new proof to which everyone assented in 1842: Homeric epic bears decisive witness to the existence of Roman ballads. If the epic genre had lost elements of grandness by becoming balladry, there was ample compensation in the notion that balladry, by virtue of an unimpeachable tautology, represented the authentic national spirit as no other literary form could.

The reviewer in the *Athenaeum* saluted Macaulay for playing the role of "the Homer of ancient Rome" (942). Robert Browning recorded the cultural significance of playing Homer in such a fashion: the *Lays* was "a kind of revenge on that literature which so long plagued ours with Muses, and Apollo, and Luna and all that, — by taking the stalest subjects in it, and as plentifully bestowing on them the commonplaces of our indigenous ballad verse" (6: 221). The *Lays* made authentic epic poets hold a minstrel's harp that had been fashioned in the land of border chivalry, and, more than any other Victorian, Macaulay popularized the idea that authentic national epics, including the poems ascribed to Homer, were generically ballads. The triumph of the *Lays* signalled the culmination of a formal revolution which began when Percy argued in the 1760s that he had discovered in his parcel of old ballads the source of Spenser's Gothic epic. This formal aspect of the *Lays* partially explains Arnold's powerful antipathy. Arnold could not "allow that Homer's poetry is ballad-poetry at all" (1: 207), and for Arnold to discredit the notion that Homer's epics were like popular ballads, he needed to convince his audience that Macaulay's ballads were not at all poetic.

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IMPERIAL EXPANSION caused the eclipse of Rome's native canon. But the cause of this culturally self-effacing expansion, Macaulay argued, was a reform of the body politic which resolved Rome's most important internal social conflict, the enmity between Patricians and Plebeians. To at once bear and illustrate this political message, Macaulay invented a Roman literature in which internal and external conflicts were fused. The poetic texts of "Horatius" and "The Battle of the Lake Regillus," for example, describe the Romans defeating other Italian armies, but Macaulay's prose introductions describe how domestic conflicts influenced the performance or composition of these ballads. In the final ballad, "The Prophecy of Capys," Macaulay parallels the eighth-century resolution of a family feud (between the twins Romulus and Remus and their uncle Amulius) with the resolution of class conflict in the third century BC. The poetic text is a prophecy of national greatness which is uttered to Romulus after he and Remus have murdered their uncle King Amulius and the priest Camers:

Now slain is King Amulius,
  Of the great Sylvian line,
Who reigned in Alba Longa,

On the throne of Aventine.
Slain is the pontiff Camers,
Who spake the words of doom:
"The children to the Tiber;
The mother to the tomb." (19: 270)

While marching around with the severed head of Amulius, Romulus comes across the priest Capys, who is, understandably, trembling from "head to foot" (see Figure 1). Capys atones for the earlier prophecy (made by his sacerdotal colleague Camers) by predicting a glorious future of military triumph in all of Rome's external conflicts. This situation set in 753 BC is mirrored by the context of the poem's performance in 275 BC. The Roman defeat of the Greeks at Tarentum was made possible by the earlier resolution of the conflict between Plebeians and Patricians, a socialized conflict which rephrases the mythic family feud involving the twins, the royal tyrant, and the priest that doomed the twins to the river.

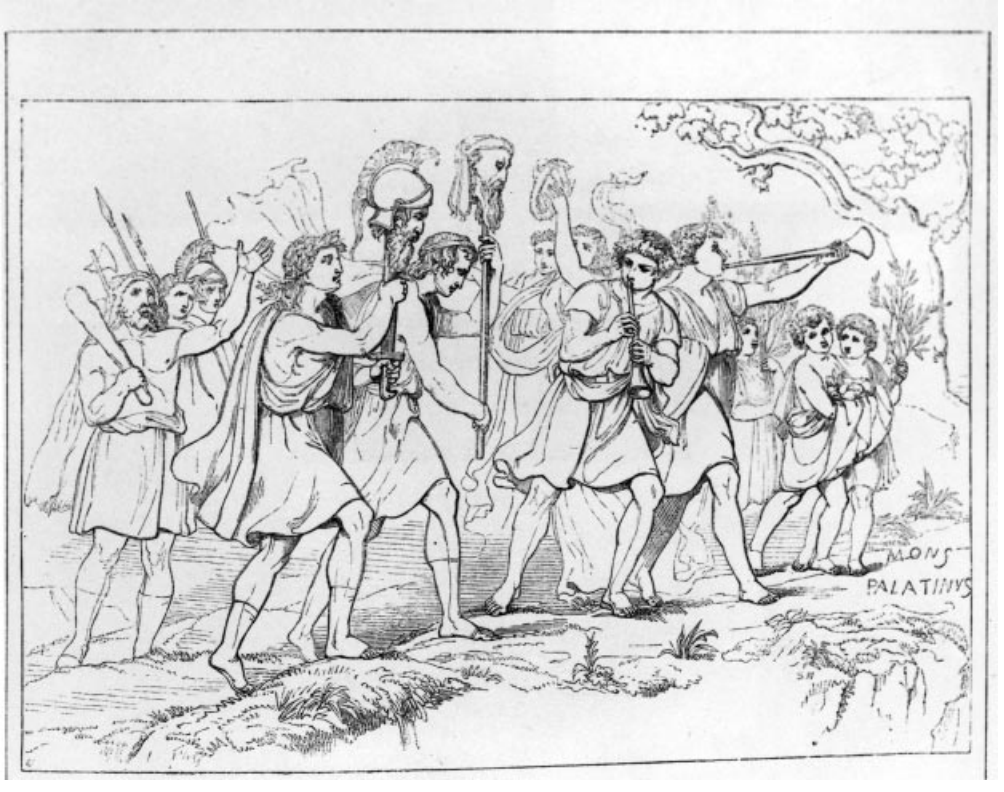

Figure 1. Georg Scharf, Romulus and Remus with the heads of Amiulius and Camers. From Thomas Babington Macaulay, "The Prophecy of Capys," *The Lays of Ancient Rome* (London, 1847), 191. Courtesy of Fales Library / Special Collections, New York University.

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Macaulay's dual theme of reform and empire reflected the main terms of his political life during the 1830s. He began composing his Roman ballads in the summer of 1834 in India, where he had obtained a position on the Supreme Council for India, and his lucrative post (his salary was £10,000 a year) was a reward from the Whig magnates for his famous speeches in favor of Reform. So while Macaulay later recalled that the plan for the *Lays* "occurred to me in the jungle at the foot of the Neilgherry hills" (*Letters* 4: 66), the poet found himself in an Asian jungle because of his speeches in the House of Commons. In one of these speeches he gave a theory of revolutions which invoked an analogy between Roman and British social conflict. "All history," Macaulay said on March 2, 1831,

> is full of revolutions, produced by causes similar to those which are now operating in England. A portion of the community which had been of no account expands and becomes strong. It demands a place in the system, suited, not to its former weakness, but to its present power. If this is granted, all is well. If this is refused, then comes the struggle between the young energy of one class and the ancient privileges of another.

Having described the economy of social revolution, Macaulay lists its recurring type in seven separate instances ranging from the struggle in ancient Rome between Patricians and Plebeians to the present struggle between the "middle classes" and the "aristocracy" (*Complete Writings* 17:8–9).

The reference to Roman history in 1831 was a key element of Macaulay's pro-Reform rhetoric, and that same pro-Reform rhetoric provided the essential plan for his recovery of Rome's oral poetry. Macaulay showed how public performances of historical poetry in ancient Rome — like his own historically informed parliamentary performances — were involved with a series of constitutional reforms culminating in the Licinian Laws (367 BC), a reform which liberal historians of the 1830s often compared to England's constitutional changes of 1828–32.[7] These laws, carried by Caius Licinius and Lucius Sextus, required one of the two annually elected consuls to come from Plebeian ranks and removed religious and civil disabilities placed on the Plebeians, disabilities which Macaulay compared to those borne by Catholics in the United Kingdom before 1829. The Roman aristocracy resisted the calls for reform — as the English aristocracy did in 1828–32 — but "[a]t length, the good cause triumphed" — as it did in England — and

> The results of this great change were singularly happy and glorious. Two centuries of prosperity, harmony and victory followed the reconciliation of the orders. Men who remembered Rome engaged in waging petty wars almost within sight of the Capitol lived to see her mistress of Italy. While the disabilities of the Plebeians continued she was scarcely able to maintain ground against the Volscians and Hernicans. When those disabilities were removed, she rapidly became more than a match for Carthage and Macedon. (19: 246)

The removal of Plebeian religious and civil disabilities led to "a turning-point in the history of the world" (267), the historic *translatio imperii* represented by the Roman eclipse of Greek and Carthaginian power. And in recounting the list of the patriotic citizens who first stood up to the haughty Greeks and later became "the terror of Carthage," Macaulay pointed out that

> It is impossible to recount the names of these eminent citizens, without reflecting that they were all, without exception, Plebeians, and would, but for the ever-memorable struggle maintained by Caius Licinius and Lucius Sextus, have been doomed to hide in obscurity, or to waste in civil broils, the capacity and energy which prevailed against Pyrrhus and Hamilcar [the father of Hannibal]. (19: 268–69)

On one level, the *Lays* was the Philistine epic of the political class which was created by the constitutional reforms of 1828–32. Macaulay offered the partners of what would become known as the Victorian compromise a reassuring historical analogy which favored religious toleration and an expanded franchise. Just as Rome's emergence as a Mediterranean power was traced to the constitutional reforms which made Plebeian vitality available to the imperial mission of the Roman state, England's mission grew bolder with the admission of the middle class, Catholics, and Dissenters to the privileges and responsibility of citizenship. So in addition to marking a formal revolution long in the making, the *Lays* celebrated England's constitutional revolution of 1828–32. Macaulay's book was about the dividends of liberal reform — in the ancient and modern worlds. Macaulay had translated the historical rationale for the constitutional reforms of 1828–32 into a poetic text and addressed this text, the *Lays,* to England's post-Reform readers, a book-buying public that was politically indebted to the historical rhetoric versified in the *Lays.*

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HISTORIANS ADDRESSING a liberal audience today find themselves rephrasing Macaulay's arguments for political liberalization. Macaulay's pro-Reform rhetoric, in other words, survives as a standard interpretation of how and why those changes took place. In her study of the constitution of modern British national identity, for example, Linda Colley portrays Catholic emancipation, the decisive ideological break of 1828–32, as a military bargain, saying "As far as the governing elite was concerned, the main solvent of traditional Protestant intolerance was war and its demands" (326). The *Lays,* however, was conceived in an atmosphere in which there was an alternative to liberalism, and liberalism was understood to be much more than a utilitarian plan to make Catholic peasants into imperialists. The triumph of liberalism did make it possible for all, regardless of their religious beliefs (or lack of them), to become loyal patriots invested with the full load of civil rights and responsibilities, but before liberals could refashion the state into a kind of agnostic police agency, they had to dismantle the sectarian state. Macaulay contributed to this process directly as a politician, essayist, and orator who regularly provided the most vigorous formulations of the liberal theory that the state should be indifferent to theology. As the author of a popular volume of primitive national poetry, he advocated liberalization in another, more complicated fashion which acknowledged the hermeneutic basis of a sectarian (in this case Anglican) political and cultural hegemony. He led the readers of the *Lays* through a lesson in the kind of historical criticism which was the most important internal solvent of Britain's sectarian ideology. The *Lays* was a sly essay about the origin of national scripture and its modern (that is, historical) interpretation, and Macaulay made it seem as if political liberalization were sanctioned by the findings and methods of the mythological interpretation endorsed by historical critics. The four contemporary historians cited in Macaulay's preface (Connop Thirlwall, Henry Malden, Thomas Arnold, and

Barthold Niebuhr [169]), were all notorious liberals, but the *Lays* did more than invoke the authority of liberal historians. The *Lays* bore the message that men like Thirlwall, Malden, and Arnold were liberals *because* they practiced a particular type of historiography which was the essence of nondogmatic, liberal theology.[8]

The underlying assumption of the *Lays* was the classical version of the idea that early Hebrew history, as recounted in the Old Testament text, was based on a variety of different source materials which were conflated, combined, and redacted by a succession of scribes or politically empowered editors. The ancient Roman annals were similarly derived from two competing canons of aristocratic-priestly documents and popular oral traditions. This idea about the two main sources of early Roman history was associated with the proverbially difficult work of Niebuhr, but it also appeared in popular historical works such as Henry Malden's *History of Rome* (1830), which was published by the SDUK and which Macaulay read and corrected in manuscript (*Letters* 1: 249). Summing up Niebuhr's theory, Malden had described how early Roman history was composed "from two distinct sources, which correspond to the two orders of the people":

> In nations where an hereditary or exclusive priesthood has maintained itself, the early history is commonly nothing but an arbitrary chronological outline, in which are comprehended memorials of institutions and events connected with religious observances. Where the mind of a people has not been cramped by such a dominant order, the native early history has commonly developed itself in the form of popular traditions, and often of popular poems. The twofold state of Rome possessed both kinds of history. The religious books were the property of the Patricians; the traditionary poems were probably cherished by the Plebeians or Commons. That the two streams of history were at first separate and independent will appear still more probable, when in the course of the history the distinction between the Patricians and Plebeians shall have been more developed. As by the progress of civil institutions the *two orders were blended into one people,* so in the annals of the first historians the *two kinds of materials were compounded into one narrative.* (60–61; emphasis added)

In the minds of its proponents, historical criticism was able to recover true history from ancient texts by separating their distinct sources. Critics could solve problematic readings and inconsistencies within a text by recovering the way in which that text had originated from earlier sources. Not surprisingly, historians in the nineteenth century often associated these non-existent source-texts with the great source of contemporary conflict, that is, class conflict. Writing during an age when England was self-consciously transforming itself through a class struggle between an old aristocracy and a new middle-class, historians guessed that the narrative of Roman history was derived from different sources associated with different classes. But because Macaulay played the dual role of author and editor, bard and ballad scholar, he had the opportunity in 1842 to prove the class-conflict hypothesis by composing texts which were the product of conflating Patrician and Plebeian literary forms.

Macaulay's analysis of the origin of national scripture and its modern interpretation begins with "Horatius" and the most basic hermeneutic crux, the interpretation of two conflicting narratives (or what Biblical scholars call a doublet). As Macaulay describes it, there are two main traditions narrating the heroic efforts of Horatius to save Rome from an Etruscan attack. In one, followed by Polybius, Horatius singlehandedly defends a

bridge over the Tiber and perishes when he finally plunges into the water. In the second version, followed by Livy, Horatius fights with two others and safely swims ashore. According to Macaulay, the two traditions reflected political differences within the Roman nation-state. One version, sung by Macaulay's Plebeian bard, "was preferred by the multitude, the other, which ascribed the whole glory to Horatius alone, may have been the favorite with the Horatian house," an ancient Patrician tribe (19: 188). Far from being an interpretive problem, these conflicting narratives endorse Macaulay's conclusion that ancient Roman history was a series of class conflicts wisely resolved by liberal reforms.

In his next ballad, "The Battle of the Lake Regillus," Macaulay shows how the political reconciliation of Patrician and Plebeian called for the literal synthesis of the religious documents controlled by the constitutional elite and the oral poetry cherished by the common people. The main action in "The Battle of the Lake Regillus" is political, religious, literary, and interpretive — almost anything but military. Macaulay's primary interest is not the Roman victory over the Latines in 496 BC, but rather the political crisis of 303 BC that occasioned the composition of the poetic narrative. As Macaulay tells the story, the republic was saved from revolution in 303 BC by two censors, one a Patrician, the other a Plebeian, who instituted a series of reforms and a new equestrian ritual, the *transvectio equitum:*

> One of their reforms was a remodeling of the equestrian order; and having effected this reform, they determined to give to their work a sanction derived from religion. . . . It was ordained that a grand muster and inspection of the equestrian body should be part of the ceremonial performed, on the anniversary of the battle of Regillus, in honour of Castor and Pollux, the two equestrian Gods. (19: 215–16)

Given the success of these reforms, there "can be no doubt," Macaulay said, that Rome's Patrician clergy, the Pontiffs, acted in concert with the reformers, and "it is probable that those high religious functionaries were, as usual, fortunate enough to find in their books or traditions some warrant for the innovation" (217). This divine sanction then finds its way into the prophetic close of "The Battle of the Lake Regillus" as sung by Macaulay's fictional bard. There, the High Pontiff Sergius gives an inspired command that the equestrian muster take place to commemorate the assistance of Castor and Pollux (242). In other words, the bard's rhapsody set in 496 BC ends with the prophetic institution of an equestrian ritual first performed in 303 BC, a religious ceremony which is anachronistically instituted by the recitation of the poem. The text is a pious forgery and illustrates how the crisis-diverting act of blending "the two orders . . . into one people" was literally a matter of compounding "two kinds of materials . . . into one narrative" (Malden 61).

Macaulay's third ballad, "Virginia," is supposed to have been sung in 372 BC, about seventy years before the reforms which gave rise to the composition of "The Battle of the Lake Regillus." The filicidal violence recounted in the poem represents Rome's class conflict at its worst just before the passage of the Licinian Laws, and this penultimate text sets the stage for a dramatic resolution of that internal political tension in Macaulay's final ballad, "The Prophecy of Capys." Macaulay's primary interest, again, is in the relationship between the story told in poem — an event set in 753 BC — and the occasion of the oral publication of that story — an event set in 275 BC. "The Prophecy of Capys" is the last in

a series of epic scenarios in which some form of divination is associated with military conflict. In "The Battle of the Lake Regillus," as we have just seen, the associated act of scriptural interpretation is a politically expedient postscript. In his opening ballad "Horatius," Macaulay invented a disastrous act of Etruscan divination. Before marching on Rome, "thirty chosen prophets" from the Etruscan confederation search their scriptures for a sign about the upcoming war:

> Evening and morn the Thirty
> Have turned the verses o'er,
> Traced from the right on linen white
> By mighty seers of yore.

These inspired exegetes find texts propitious of victory and tell Lars Porsena to "[g]o forth, beloved of Heaven; / Go, and return in glory" (19:192). But Roman swordcraft proves more potent than Etruscan priestcraft, and the "pale augurs, muttering low" have their prophecy confounded (203). In "The Prophecy of Capys," Rome has once again won a military victory. But instead of recalling a scene of scriptural interpretation in the poetic text (as in "Horatius") or in the introductory prose (as in "The Battle of the Lake Regillus"), Macaulay closes his ballad book with an ambitious regress to the original moment when the divine promise was given to Romulus, the moment when the known world was disclosed as Rome's promised land. The ballad is both a rustic rendition of the imperial revelation given to Aeneas in the sixth book of the *Aeneid* and a version of the Lord's promise to Abraham that "I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:2). The revelation to Romulus, as Macaulay puts it,

> was likely to be a favorite theme of the old Latin minstrels. They would naturally attribute the project of Romulus to some divine intimation of the power and prosperity which it was decreed that his city should attain. They would probably introduce seers foretelling the victories of unborn Consuls and Dictators, and the last great victory [at Tarentum] would generally occupy the most conspicuous place in the prediction. (265)

And once again, as with the other cases of prophecy in the *Lays,* this greatest of all moments of Roman divination is subordinated to the social and political forces which require its narration. But while national theology was formerly in the hands of a hereditary priesthood, the series of constitutional reforms described in the *Lays* has expanded the mythic franchise of Rome and yielded Roman theology to the nation — or at least the crowd-cheered bard who speaks for it. The Patrician and Plebeian versions of the revelation to Romulus are identical because that revelation is the transcendent fiction which unifies all Roman classes.

The *Lays* ends on the theme of civil concord. But this reconciliation is accompanied by a philosophical discord between social history and theology. Macaulay's poetic text gives a theological explanation for Rome's greatness, but his prose attributes this greatness to a series of constitutional reforms. In the context of antiquity, the time when the bard sang, the *Lays* can be said to end with a rousing celebration of Roman religion. In the context of modernity, however, the *Lays* ends with a national theology dramatically undermined. Macaulay is, after all, interested in Roman revelation to the extent that he

can show that it is a mythic tradition about a historical process determined by respectable revolution. The religion which promises internal concord and promotes external expansion is, according to the thesis of the *Lays,* the religion which most easily represents the evolving aspirations of its believers. At a time when politics were troubled by the double question of the fate of England's official state religion and the degree to which England would be a religiously defined state, Macaulay showed how modern historical criticism tended to discover the historical and theoretical rationale of the liberal state. Using the same principles that could make ballads seem like national scripture, he made the liberal state appear to be history's consecrated polity. As the British polity was slowly becoming secular, liberalization seemed more sensible than rash if one could accept the fact that the religions of historically prosperous nations were based on popular traditions rather than revelations from above.

Rome's historic state religion was, for the most part, dead, so there were no believers in the old faith to be offended by Macaulay's mythological interpretation of Roman theology. But Macaulay's university-educated audience would be sensitive to the way in which the *Lays* had implications for interpreting Scripture. Niebuhr, the most famous historian associated with the theories informing the *Lays,* was a notorious figure precisely because he demanded that all ancient texts, whether they be the ancient annals of the Romans or Hebrews, should be read in the same historical manner. As Alfred Tennyson said in the 1860s, "the true origin of modern Biblical Criticism was to be ascribed not to Strauss, but to Niebuhr, who lived a generation earlier" (2: 463), and some of the most disturbing conclusions of nineteenth-century historical criticism described the origin of Scripture in the same Niebuhrian terms that Macaulay used in his representation of Roman prophecy. Rowland Williams's contribution to *Essays and Reviews* (1860), for example, was a summary of the recent work of Niebuhr's disciple, Baron Bunsen. In his review, Williams discussed how it now seemed clear that the book of Daniel, which Jesus quotes by name in the Gospel by Matthew (24:15), was neither by Daniel nor from the time it was supposed to be from, the sixth century BC. Instead, it was from the second century and, rather than being prophetic, was a form of history written in the guise of prophecy. "The truth seems," Williams wrote, "that starting like many a patriot bard of our own, from a name traditionally sacred, the writer used it with no deceptive intention, as a dramatic form which dignified his encouragement of his countrymen in their great struggle against Antiochus" (76). Like "The Prophecy of Capys," the prophecy of Daniel was a national legend set in the past and inspired by contemporary events, and Macaulay's patriotic bard threatened the theological foundations of the Anglican state because he represented a form of criticism which was willing to concede the legendary or literary character of Scripture.[9]

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TAKING THE TIME to understand the *Lays* in its early Victorian context allows us to see how it was not, despite its overwhelmingly boyish Edwardian readership, any childish book. I now want to explain the most complicated reason behind its evolving childishness. The *Lays* had a subversively ambivalent attitude to the supposedly new hermeneutic tradition of Germanic historicism, and this ambivalence was an essential part of Macaulay's evolution into the Philistine bard. The *Lays* seemed to fly the banner of historical

criticism, but the *Lays* also uncovered historical criticism's roots in the infidelity of an ageless enlightenment, an enlightenment which was, in Macaulay's mind, not reliant on any recent philosophical development. To understand this aspect of the *Lays,* it is best to start with a recollection of the powerful early Victorian voices which were ready to denounce the anti-dogmatic civic religion idealized in the *Lays.* In John Newman's "Advent Sermons on Antichrist," published in 1838, for example, this civic religion defined the peculiar social sin of the French Revolution. The leaders of the French Revolution were avowed atheists, Newman said, but they nevertheless

> gave a name to the reprobate state itself into which they had thrown themselves and exalted it, that very negation of religion, or rather that real and living blasphemy, into a kind of God. They called it LIBERTY, and they *literally* worshipped it as a divinity. . . . [T]hey proceeded to decree, in the public assembly of the nation, the adoration of Liberty and Equality as divinities; and they appointed festivals besides in honor of Reason, the Country, the Constitution, and the Virtues.

These civically devout revolutionaries "introduce[d] the old Roman democratic worship" (22), and this public worship of liberty for its own sake, which was liberalism in its horrid essence to Newman, was a sure sign of Satan's success. Whether it was in ancient Rome, Revolutionary France, or England under the Whigs, Satan always hid "his poison" in "fair promises":

> He promises you civil liberty; he promises you equality; he promises you trade and wealth; he promises you a remission of taxes; he promises you reform. This is the way in which he conceals from you the kind of work to which he is putting you; he tempts you to rail against your rulers and superiors; he does so himself, and induces you to imitate him; or he promises you illumination — he offers you knowledge, science, philosophy, enlargement of mind. (13–14)

The link between the promises of reform and the promises of illumination that Newman makes here was an essential part of his critique of the ills of England during the Whig ascendency. England was beset by a coalition of Whigs and Radicals intent on destroying sacred institutions under the guise of enlightenment. In 1841, Newman wrote a series of anonymous letters to the *Times* accusing Peel and the Tories of unwittingly imbibing this spiritually fatal tonic of liberalism. Newman described the apostasy of Peel's party with an extravagantly compressed genealogy: "Cicero handed the recipe to Brougham, and Brougham has passed it on to Peel" (*Discussions* 264). The Tories, Newman means, were getting their principles from the Whigs, and the Whigs from that paragon of rationalism, the Enlightenment hero, Cicero.

For the same classically educated audience that could understand Newman's genealogy of error, Macaulay also invoked a Ciceronian skepticism in the *Lays* as the rationale for a national religion which was historically contingent and popularly constituted. The gods Castor and Pollux, that appeared in Macaulay's ballad "The Battle of the Lake Regillus," were the most important links to this tradition of philosophical inquiry. At least since Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* (*On the Nature of the Gods*) and *De Divinatione* (*On Divination*), Castor and Pollux have been representatives of revealed religion — and its

critique by rationalists. In the first dialogue, Cicero sets forth the agnostic position that the gods cannot be known and that the reports of their manifestations are not to be trusted. One of the believers in revealed religion, Balbus, cites the appearance of Castor and Pollux "at the critical battle of Lake Regillus" as one proof that the gods "often manifest their power in bodily presence" (II.6). The epiphany of Castor and Pollux, however, does not impress Cicero's Academic skeptic, Cotta, who proceeds to demolish the theology of Balbus (III.11–13). *On Divination* is a dialogue between Quintus and Cicero himself and begins with Quintus saying that he had just read *On the Nature of the Gods,* which has "shaken [his] views of religion" (I.8). Quintus defends the notion of divination, twice mentioning Castor and Pollux and their temple (I.75; I.98), while Cicero himself plays the skeptic, rejecting all forms of divination as "superstition" (II.148). At the end of *On Divination,* Cicero gives the classic endorsement of the civic religion reviled by Newman. Cicero rejects that class of religious belief that includes divine apparitions such as those of Castor and Pollux, but he also says that he "consider[s] it the part of wisdom to preserve the institutions of our forefathers by retaining their sacred rites and ceremonies" (II.148). Or as he said elsewhere, it was desirable for the people to worship as gods those mortals "whose merits have admitted them to heaven: Hercules, Liber, Aesculapius, Castor, Pollux, Quirinus." By publicly acknowledging such figures, the people were actually worshipping civic virtues (*De Legibus* II.19).

Because his works seemed to expose the absurdities of Rome's pre-Christian religious traditions, Cicero became an authority cited in Christian deprecations of those traditions. When Augustine, for example, replied to the charge that the Roman state's conversion to Christianity had brought the empire to ruin, he cited the philosophical skepticism which reached its mellow perfection in Cicero as evidence that the contemporary social crisis was not to be blamed on the apostasy from Rome's ancient state religion. It was senseless to blame Rome's troubles on the conversion to Christianity because the pagan philosophers themselves admitted that the older gods like Castor and Pollux were popular myths, not real divinities (*City of God* IV.27). Much later, Castor and Pollux made regular appearances in Protestant works which charged that Roman Catholic devotional practices were the relics of pagan traditions. The heavenly twins, for example, appear in the second book of *Homilies* (1562), a collection of tracts that are endorsed in the Thirty-Fifth Article of Religion of the Anglican Church. In the homily "Against Peril of Idolatry," attributed to John Jewel (1522–71), the author argues that the Romish belief in perspiring icons, for instance, was no less superstitious than the fable of Castor and Pollux appearing at the battle of Lake Regillus, a fable that inspired the erection of temples and the worshiping of miraculous images (208–09). Modern Roman idolatry was not only equivalent to pagan superstitions; it was in some cases directly descended from pagan rituals.

The claim that Roman Catholicism was infected with Roman paganism was the thesis of many post-Reformation works, and the Anglican clergyman Conyers Middleton (1683–1750) produced the most elegant eighteenth-century version of this argument in *A Letter from Rome, shewing an exact conformity between Popery and Paganism,* published in 1729 (5: 81–183). "If I had leisure," Middleton wrote, "to examine the pretended miracles, and pious frauds of the Romish Church, I should be able to trace them all from the same source of Paganism, and find, that the priests of New Rome are not degenerated from their predecessors, in the art of forging these holy impostures" (140). Pressed for

time, Middleton chose one major example, the appearance of Castor and Pollux at the battle of Lake Regillus:

> Now this miracle . . . has, I dare say, as authentic an attestation, as any which the Papists can produce: the decree of a Senate to confirm it; a Temple erected in consequence of it; visible marks of the fact on the spot where it was transacted; and all this supported by the concurrent testimony of the best authors of antiquity; amongst whom Dionysius of Halicarnassus says, that there was subsisting in his time at Rome, many evident proofs of its realty, besides a yearly festival, with a solemn sacrifice, and procession in memory of it; yet for all this, these stories were but the jest of men of sense, even in the times of Heathenism. . . . What better opinion then can we have, of all those of the same stamp in the Popish Legends, which they have plainly built on this foundation, and copied from this very original? (141)

Middleton's work was well received by Protestant readers, and he won more fame yet as a prose stylist with his 1741 biography of Cicero. In his next important work, *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church from the earliest Ages, through several successive Centuries,* first published in 1749 (1: 121–367), Middleton won a fair amount of infamy by treating ecclesiastical history with a Ciceronian skepticism. In the *Free Inquiry* Middleton set out to prove "that there is no sufficient reason to believe, from the testimony of antiquity, that any miraculous powers did ever actually subsist in any age of the Church, after the times of the Apostles" (lxxviii). To this point most of the Georgian Church was prone to assent, because the cessation of miracles was the chief historical threshold that allowed Protestants to distinguish primitive, uncorrupted Christianity from Roman Catholicism. But Middleton's dismissal of post-Apostolic miracles was only part of an attack on the credibility of the Fathers and their hermeneutic principles, and in this attack on the Christian Fathers, the gods Castor and Pollux once again played a decisive role in turning the battle. The Patristic apologists argued that a rejection of the credibility of the Fathers would be subversive of all history. If one were going to suspect the miracles of St. Simeon Stylites, then one would have to suspect the credibility of all ancient history (350). Middleton replied by arguing that history was not either all myth or all fact, but often a mixture of the two, and the appearance of Castor and Pollux at the battle of Lake Regillus was Middleton's prime *exemplum.* "Now tho' nobody at this day believes a tittle of the miracle," Middleton wrote, "yet the faith of History is not hurt by it. We admit the battel (sic) and the victory; and take the miraculous part to be, what it certainly was, the fiction of the commanders or persons interested; contrived for the sake of some private, as well as public benefit" (352–53).

Even though Middleton began with what most of his readers considered a commendable attack on Roman Catholicism, by the late 1740s he was being accused of trying to undermine the miraculous nature of Christianity. As John Wesley wrote in one of many replies to Middleton, "it is easy to observe, the whole tenor of your argument tends to prove . . . that no miracles were wrought by Christ or his Apostles" (qtd. in Campbell 45). Middleton's posthumously published essay "Reflections on the Variations, or Inconsistencies, which are found among the four Evangelists" (2: 297–376) did reach conclusions that were being denounced in the nineteenth century as subversive of the supernatural character of Christianity, and to most British Christians, Middleton's skeptical writings invited

the accusation that he was a Ciceronian agnostic. Thomas De Quincey's 1842 statement that "Conyers Middleton is a name that cannot be mentioned without an expression of disgust" is a typical early Victorian reaction to Middleton. For De Quincey, Middleton was the worst type of heresiarch. "From the Church he drew his bread" even as "the labour of his life was to bring the Church into contempt" (187).[10] Most Victorians knew to despise Middleton because they knew that his most influential eighteenth-century reader was the infidel Edward Gibbon. As Gibbon described it in his *Memoirs,* reading the *Free Inquiry* as a student at Oxford created a dilemma (86–88). Either Middleton was right, and the majority of post-Apostolic ecclesiastical history was recorded by superstitious fanatics, or Middleton was wrong, and the miracles recorded by the Church Fathers and their medieval descendents proved that the Roman Catholic Church was the authentic, divinely superintended form of Christianity. As a young man, Gibbon decided to trust the Christian Fathers. He became a Roman Catholic, was expelled from Oxford, and exiled to Geneva where he was, according to the plans of his father, to benefit from the tutelage of a Calvinist minister. As Gibbon's education progressed, he decided that Middleton was right, and his infamous portrait of the early history of Christianity is heavily indebted to Middleton's *Free Inquiry.*[11]

Macaulay was a close reader of Gibbon, Middleton, and Cicero, whose dialogues on popular theology are the ultimate source of so many writings that plant the manifestation of Castor and Pollux as the fulcrum of a theological argument. Among the writings published during his life, Macaulay pays a few brief and high compliments to Middleton (14:4–5), but we know from Macaulay's Journal and annotated copy of Middleton's *Miscellaneous Works* (5 vols., 1755) that Macaulay reserved more specific praise for Middleton's *Free Inquiry.* "No man in English literature," Macaulay said of Middleton, "had a clearer and more just understanding, or a style which more exactly or agreeably expressed his meaning. The Free Inquiry is Middleton's masterpiece." Macaulay, like the mature Gibbon, believed that Middleton had "settled the authority of the Fathers for ever with all reasonable men" (Trevelyan 2: 474n). In the *Lays* Macaulay alluded to Middleton and the Enlightenment tradition of Ciceronian skepticism by featuring the miraculous appearance of Castor and Pollux in his poetry and speculating about how fabulous narratives became associated with real historical events. As an example of how the popular imagination even in "modern times" was ready to believe that historical events could be "decided by supernatural agency" (19: 213–14), Macaulay cited the appearance of St. James, also on horseback, at a decisive battle in the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The apparition of this heavenly creature was another example of how real historical events could be recorded in narratives that contained superstitious fables. At this point in the *Lays,* Macaulay was also following (and invoking) Middleton at a critical point in the *Free Enquiry.* In Middleton's discussion of the appearance of Castor and Pollux, he referred to Laurence Echard's *History of England* (3rd ed., 1720) as a modern example of the way in which uncontested historical events could inspire false narratives. Echard's description of the decisive battle of Worcester (1651), Middleton pointed out, included a report of "a certain contract made in form between Oliver Cromwell and the Devil." Just as the introduction of this event into Echard's narrative did not force us to reject the reality of the battle of Worcester, Middleton argued, the early histories of pagans and Christians could be read historically even while discounting the miraculous events recounted in them (1:352–53).

Because he was familiar with the implications of Middleton's method, Macaulay only alluded to the *Free Inquiry*. Middleton, Macaulay wrote, "knew that what alarmed the Church was not his conclusion [i.e., the cessation of miraculous powers], but the arguments by which he arrived at that conclusion. His conclusion might be just, and yet Christianity might be of Divine origin; but his arguments seem to be quite as applicable to the miracles related by St. Luke as to those related by Jerome." Most of Middleton's detractors believed that he abstained from a frontal assault on Christianity out of cowardice and greed. Macaulay held that Middleton tempered his criticism out of a Ciceronian belief that attacking established religions would "do more harm than good to mankind." But Macaulay also believed that Middleton had put himself in a "deplorable predicament." Middleton's attacks on miraculous narratives were so strongly framed that they "inevitably brought him into the necessity of either declaring himself an infidel, or resorting to a thousand dishonest shifts, injurious to his arguments, and discreditable to his character" (Trevelyan 2:473n–74n).

* * *

MACAULAY DID NOT wholly avoid Middleton's predicament, and doubts about his personal commitment to his nation's revealed religion eventually cost him his seat in Parliament in 1847. When the first two volumes of his *History of England* were published in 1848, several Christian periodicals censured him for his religious indifference (Lang 73). But Macaulay's mature religious skepticism was eventually overshadowed by (at least in today's context) a more embarrassing predicament, that of becoming the chubby icon of Victorian intellectual complacency. "A squat thickset, low-browed, short, and rather potbellied, grizzled little man of fifty: these be thy gods O Israel!" growled Thomas Carlyle after dining with Macaulay in 1848 and being impressed by the "[e]ssentially irremediable commonplace nature of the man." When his *History of England* became, as Carlyle called it (with disgust), the "most popular history book ever written," Macaulay's image got even more deeply involved with unattractive Victorian commonplaces (*Letters* 22: 266n, 24: 30). Ever since, to conjure up the aesthetic, critical, or imaginative limitations of Victorian culture, one needs to do no more than cite the wild popularity of Macaulay's writings. "He was," as Carlyle's disciple James Froude wrote in 1876, "the counterpart of his own age. The prevailing sentiment of his age, on large matters or small, Lord Macaulay invariably reflected, and to the end of his life never materially dissented from it. . . . He was the creation and representative of his own age. What his age said and felt, whether it was wise or foolish, Macaulay said and felt. It was the key to his extraordinary popularity" (681).

The reception of G. O. Trevelyan's *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (1876), which inspired Froude's comment, constituted a literary event of no small importance: the near unanimous designation of Macaulay as *the* Philistine laureate (Jann 100–02). Starting in April 1876 and extending into 1877, Matthew Arnold and second-generation Victorian sages like John Morley, Leslie Stephen, and Froude emerged from the crowd to cast stones at the reigning (though dead) giant of popular prose and adolescent verse.[12] According to this view of Macaulay, he was ignorant or uninterested in what was regularly described as a modern revolution in historiography, hermeneutics, and metaphysics. The representative Philistine, in particular, was supposed to be ignorant of contemporary historical

criticism, and what was worse for the tone of Victorian culture in general, the sheer force of his rhetorical powers allowed him to retard, singlehandedly, Britian's historiographic evolution. Macaulay was guilty of keeping Victorian readers happy with literary, picturesque historiography at precisely the time when German historians such as Ranke were putting history on professional, scientific grounds.

Macaulay, it was true, often projected a type of indifference to things such as modern Biblical criticism. In what may be his cruelest letter, for example, Macaulay thanked Andrews Norton, America's greatest Unitarian Biblical scholar, for a volume of his *The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels* (3 vols., 1837–44). "I have of late stolen a few minutes daily," Macaulay wrote in 1840, "while dressing and undressing, to make acquiantance with the theological writers of Germany. I admire their learning and ingenuity, without implicity adopting the opinions of any school among them; and I shall be truly happy to have my judgement corrected by yours" (*Letters* 3:338). Macaulay's boast of consuming proverbially ponderous theological works as he took off his trousers was one way of registering his suspicion of the novelty of historical criticism. But Macaulay's withering, affected apathy was not based on the ignorance with which he is often charged. Macaulay was well informed about recent Biblical criticism, its conclusions about the nature of miraculous Biblical narratives, and the controversies surrounding these conclusions. He owned Thirlwall's translation of Schleiermacher (1825), a work produced while both Macaulay and Thirlwall held fellowships at Trinity, and W. H. Mill's *Observations on the Attempted Application of Pantheistic Principles to the Theory and Historic Criticism of the Gospel* (1840), a lengthy reply to the most important mythical critic of the age, D. F. Strauss. Macaulay also owned Bishop Marsh's translation of Michaelis, a translation which recalled an earlier period when orthodox Anglican divines were trying to make German scholarship available to English readers.[13] In his Parliamentary speeches and periodical essays, Macaulay cited Marsh's scholarship as evidence that the best of English divines were admitting that Scripture had to be interpreted like any other book, an admission that made conflicting interpretations inevitable, and the definition of civil rights based on particular interpretations, foolish and unfair ("London University" 9–11). In 1838 when Gladstone published his book attacking the "parallel and concurrent" action of political and religious liberalism (2: 274), Macaulay replied by invoking an ineluctable theological indeterminacy. Few people throughout history, Macaulay argued in the *Edinburgh Review,* could agree about which texts were divinely inspired, or even how a given text should be interpreted. Most people in all ages were convinced that there was a deity, but beyond that general and reassuring conviction loomed a series of "questions respecting which there exists the widest diversity of opinion" (*Complete Writings* 14: 251–52).

Macaulay understood, in other words, that hermeneutic indeterminacy was the theoretical basis for the liberal state. The problem for Macaulay's later reputation was his ambivalence towards historical criticism itself, an ambivalence which I have represented as the compromised intellectual allegiance of the *Lays* to the very different worlds of Barthold Niebuhr and of Conyers Middleton. On the one hand, Macaulay popularized historical criticism and the theories of Niebuhr, the most notorious historical critic of the early nineteenth century. On the other hand, Macaulay perversely illustrated a standard argument of those most opposed to historical criticism. Macaulay's book showed how Niebuhr and company were indeed repeating the arguments of eighteenth-century

deists, a group of infidels that derived their ideas about revealed religion from Cicero and other heathens. In the genealogy of enlightenment implied by the *Lays,* the conclusions of modern historical criticism had long been available to any one with a freely inquiring mind. The learned rationale for indifference to dogmatic theology was an ancient tradition of philosophical skepticism, not a new hermeneutic fashioned in Göttingen or Tübingen. Macaulay endorsed the findings of historical criticism, and for this he earned the disapproval and suspicion of some Christians. But Macaulay also self-consciously abstained from the chorus which proclaimed a historiographic revolution to have begun somewhere around 1750. In an age crowded with lapsed believers desperate to think that they had given up the old faith in exchange for something new, Macaulay undermined the reigning economy of intellectual compensation. In doing so, he prepared the way for his later reputation as a rhetorician uninterested in the new science of modern historiography. The lack of anxiousness so apparent in Macaulay's style was another sign of a lack of ambition. Rather than donning the mantle (and dealing in the tropes) of the Victorian sage, Macaulay wrote novelistic history and schoolboy poetry. Carlyle had remarked in the early 1830s that Macaulay was "unhappily without *divine idea.*" Macaulay had "yet attained to no *belief,* and apparently is not wretched for not having any," said the prophet of the new fideistic earnestness (*Note Books* 236, 277). And Carlyle's followers spread the word, as when Morley informed readers of the *Fortnightly Review* in 1876 that Macaulay lacked "the divine spirit of meditation" (498). Macaulay's denigration by the second generation of aspiring sages such as Morley and Stephen was further assured by his refusal to publicize his degree of agnosticism. Macaulay was at ease with the notion that a man might subscribe to the Anglican Articles of Religion with a sigh or a smile. He represented the kind of latitudinarianism with which Stephen had broken in 1862 when he resigned his tutorship at Trinity College, Cambridge, and which Morley would denounce in (the misleadingly entitled) *On Compromise.*

With the manifestation of Castor and Pollux, Macaulay situated the *Lays* in a rhetorical tradition that was skeptical of revealed religion. But Macaulay was also ready to scoff at the claims of intellectual innovation made by the most enthusiastic proponents of historical criticism. In this context, Castor and Pollux recalled a skepticism about metaphysics, the philosophical alternative to dogmatic theology in an age which would eventually discover its masters in Kant and Hegel. Writing to his friend Ellis in 1837 as he was preparing to return to England from India, and with most of the *Lays* already composed, Macaulay said, "I feel a sort of presentiment, a kind of admonition of the Deity, which assures me that the final cause of my existence, the end for which I was sent into this vale of tears, was to make game of certain Germans" (*Letters* 3: 211). For a long time — while invoking German historians — we have made game of Macaulay as a dilettantish practitioner of rhetorical history. After the debunking of the notion that some type of scientific, objective historical method was invented during the nineteenth century, we can perhaps now appreciate Macaulay as someone who decided to be behind his times by design. At a time when many people were declaring a great step forward in metaphysics, theology, and historiography, Macaulay devoutly believed in a future which would be unimpressed with the progress thereby made.

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NOTES

1. In Elizabeth Barrett Browning's mind, for example, Macaulay's performance placed him in the front rank of living poetic genius (see *Correspondence* 6: 195, 7: 347, 348n, 355–56, 357, 362). To recall the initial praise bestowed upon the *Lays,* see Donne, Horne, Johnstone, J. S. Mill, Milman (1843), Wilson, and the unattributed reviews in the *Athenaeum, Examiner, Fraser's, Monthly Review,* and *Spectator.*
2. When Leslie Stephen wrote the entry for Macaulay in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1893), the *Lays* was again enlisted into the ranks of rhetoric: "if they are hardly poetry, they are most effective declamation" (12:417). The first text-book presentation of the *Lays* seems to have been *Macaulay's Horatius, with notes* which was included in the series Allman's English Classics for Elementary Schools (London, 1884). In 1888, Winston Churchill won a prize at Harrow for declaiming 1200 lines (Churchill 112).
3. On the ballad revival in general, see Friedman. Haywood has shown how that revival and the related projects of Macpherson and Chatterton were creative responses to the eighteenth-century quest for national epics. For an analysis of the ways in which ballad scholarship informed hermeneutic debates, see McGann.
4. See Clubbe for the many places in which Carlyle confounds ballad books and national scripture.
5. Macaulay classified "Virginia" as a satire, "the only sort of composition in which the Latin poets . . . were not mere imitators of foreign models" (19:247). The subject of "Virginia" and its genre were explicitly domestic: it is a poem about class conflict in 449 BC, and the performance of it is inspired by class conflict in 372 BC. The other three ballads were constructed to show different levels of foreign literary influence, and they were about external threats. While I mostly discuss the epic ballads relating to war and conquest, "Virginia" was still an important part of Macaulay's larger design of intertwining domestic and foreign affairs. It provided another chance to discuss the class conflict which shaded the literary relation of Rome's external struggles.
6. By yoking together declinist poetics and ideas of progress, Macaulay was also elaborating on the central argument of his famous essay on Milton (*Complete Writings* 11:xx–39), a performance which Jones, Weber, and Wellek (126–28) have placed in a larger context of poetic theory and the history of criticism.
7. See, for example, Keightley's review articles (spanning Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bill) on Niebuhr.
8. On liberal historiography during this time, see Forbes, Burrow, and Brent. See Zemka (68–91) on Thomas Arnold, historical criticism, and Reform in the 1830s; Pattison for a study of Newman's theological definition of liberalism, and Nockles for a concise history of the Oxford-based resistance to theological liberalism.
9. For the classic Victorian defense of the sixth-century prophetic Daniel and a vigorous attack on the presumptions of historical criticism, see Pusey.
10. For Middleton's affiliation with a larger group of Cambridge intellectuals suspicious of the claims of revealed religion, see Gascoigne (138–41). For other representative nineteenth-century portraits of Middleton, see Landor's dialogue (1824), the papers "Popery and Paganism" in the *Christian Observer* (1843), Lecky (167–73), and "Conyers Middleton." The most influential Victorian description of Middleton came in Stephen's *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876), where Middleton was described as the great anticipator of historical criticism—and described as "this most insidious of all assailants of Christianity" for attacking the "orthodox dogmas" covertly from the bosom of the Church (1: 264, 270). A different line of Middleton's influence came through Bentham and his disciples. Bentham's pseudonymously published *Not Paul, But Jesus* pretended to be a pious continuation of

Middleton's work. Bentham's protege Grote also relied on Middleton in his essay "Magick," a thinly veiled attack on revealed religion which had been intended for publication in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Vaio 273n26, 292n8).

11. In the attack on Gibbon by Davis, the one to which Gibbon replied in his *Vindication,* Gibbon was accused of plagiarizing Middleton. Davis called Gibbon Middleton's "servile transcriber," and the title-page epigraph of his work came from Pearce's *Reply to Dr. Middleton* (*Examination* iv, 170n).
12. See Morley, Morison, Stephen, and Froude. Matthew Arnold also inserted some memorable insults in his January 1877 essay "A French Critic on Milton" (8: 165–87). The essays by Morley and Stephen were reprinted in popular collections of their writings. Stephen also wrote the *DNB* entry for Macaulay, and Morison expanded his essay into the *Macaulay* volume for Morley's English Men of Letters series.
13. For information about Macaulay's library and his often interesting marginalia, see Munby.

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