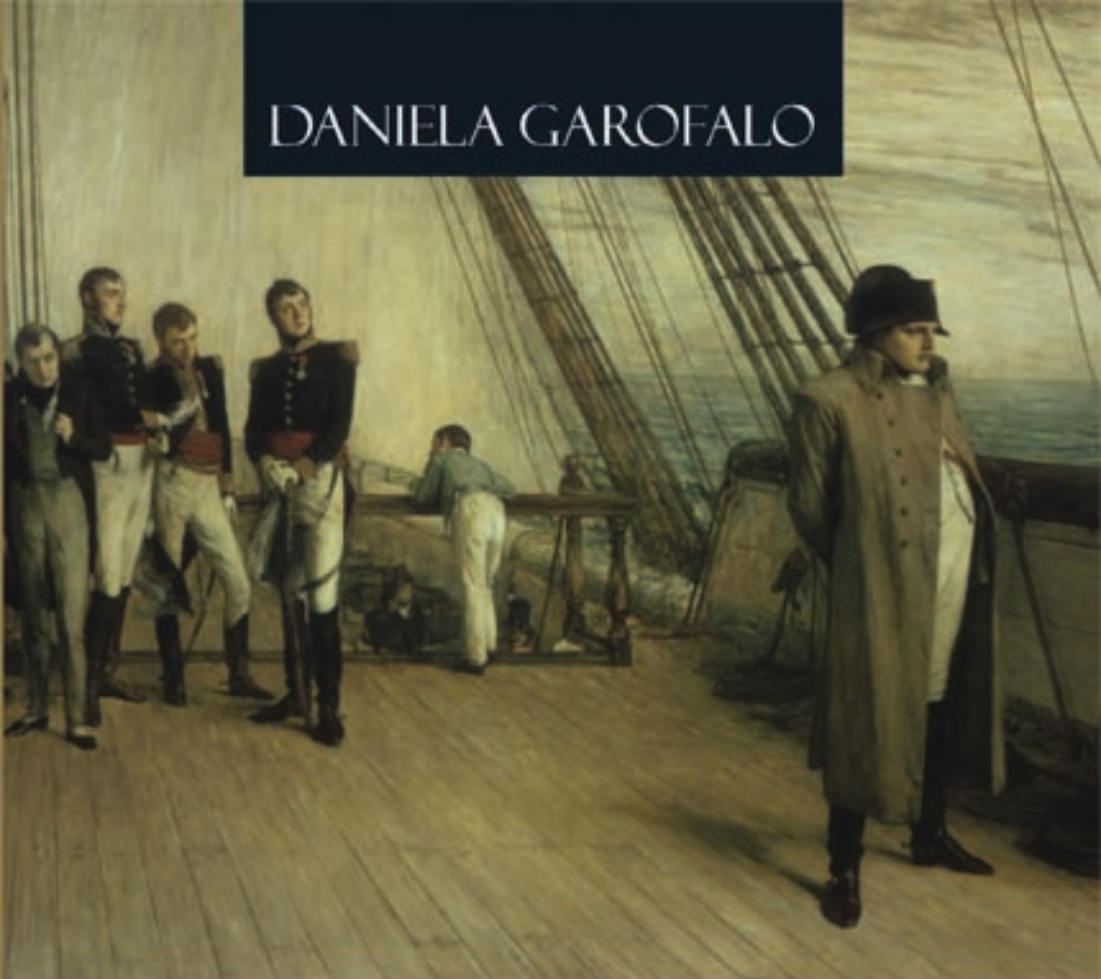


DANIELA GAROFALO



MANLY LEADERS

IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
BRITISH LITERATURE

Manly Leaders in Nineteenth-Century British Literature

SUNY series, Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century
Pamela K. Gilbert, editor

Manly Leaders in Nineteenth-Century British Literature

Daniela Garofalo



State University of New York Press

Cover image: *Napoleon on Board the Bellerophon* by Sir William Orchardson (1880). Oil on canvas. © Tate Gallery, London/Art Resources NY.

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

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For information, contact State University of New York Press, Albany, NY
www.sunypress.edu

Production by Judith Block and Eileen Meehan
Marketing by Fran Keneston

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Garofalo, Daniela, 1968 –

Manly leaders in nineteenth-century British literature / Daniela Garofalo.

p. cm. — (SUNY series, studies in the long nineteenth century)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7914-7357-3 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. English literature—19th century—History and criticism. 2. Masculinity in literature. 3. Men in literature. 4. Leadership in literature. 5. Sex role in literature. I. Title.

PR468.M38G37 2007

820.9'353—dc22

2007024994

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Acknowledgments

This book could not have come together without the support, wisdom, and generosity of many teachers, colleagues, and friends. My greatest thanks to Orrin Wang whose insightful reading and theoretical sophistication provided invaluable guidance from the inception of *Manly Leaders*. I wish to thank my other teachers at the University of Maryland, Neil Fraistat, William Cohen, and Marshall Grossman who helped make this a better book. Geoffrey Schramm has been a constant source of encouragement and critical insight. I also owe Joel Faflak a debt of gratitude for supporting this book. The anonymous readers for SUNY Press, who offered wonderful responses, helped clarify and tighten the arguments in *Manly Leaders*.

My colleagues at the University of Oklahoma offered great intellectual support. A special thanks to Daniel Cottom and Ronald Schleifer who helped see me through the process of turning a dissertation into a book. I am grateful also for the insights and kindness of my colleagues Chris Carter, Yianna Liatsos, Kenneth Hodges, and Su Fang Ng. I completed the book with the help of two junior faculty fellowships at the University of Oklahoma.

Finally, thanks to my family, to whom I owe more than I can say, my partner, Riad Hajjnajeeb; my mother and best friend, Fern Garofalo; and my friends, fellow scholars, and siblings, David Garofalo and Micaela Garofalo-Saffire.



An earlier version of chapter 3 appeared as “Political Seductions: The Show of War in Byron’s *Sardanapalus*” in *Criticism* 44:1, © 2002, reprinted with the permission of Wayne State University Press. Chapter 5 first appeared as “Communities in Mourning: Making Capital out of Loss in Carlyle’s *Past and Present* and *Heroes*,” in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 45:3, © 2003 by the University of Texas Press; all rights reserved. A part of chapter 2 appeared as “‘A Left-Handed Way’: Modern Masters in William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*” in *European Romantic Review* 17:2, © 2006.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Fantasies of National Virility and William Wordsworth's Poet Leader

Violent Warriors and Benevolent Leaders: Masculinity in the Early Nineteenth-Century

In 1822 British women committed a public act against propriety. They commissioned a statue in honor of Lord Wellington, whose prowess was represented by Achilles, shield held aloft, nude in full muscular glory. Known as the “Ladies’ ‘Fancy Man,’” however, the statue shocked men on the statue committee who demanded a fig leaf to protect the public’s outraged sensibilities.¹ Linda Colley points to this comical moment in postwar British history as a sign of “the often blatantly sexual fantasies that gathered around warriors such as Nelson and Wellington.”²

However, the statue in its imitation of a classical aesthetic necessarily recalled not only the thrilling glory of Great Britain’s military might, but also the appeal of the defeated but still fascinating Napoleon. After all, the classical aesthetic was central to the public representation of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic regimes. If a classical statue was supposed to apotheosize Wellington, it also inevitably spoke to a revolutionary and martial manhood associated with the recently defeated enemy. Napoleon himself had commissioned a nude classical statue from Canova that Marie Busco speculates “would have been known” to Sir Richard Westmacott, who cast the bronze Achilles. In fact Canova’s *Napoleon* was conveniently located in the stairwell of Apsley House after Louis XVIII presented it to the Duke of Wellington.³

These associations with Napoleon might simply have underscored the British superiority the Wellington statue suggested. However, the problem

of public representation was a delicate business. The subscription committee, run by elite women such as the Duchess of York, intended the statue to be “symbolic of ‘the Triumph of Skill and Valour over Force’” (920). The point from the beginning, then, was not to suggest that the British were better than the French at their own game. Rather, the French, associated with war and violence, were different from the English, whose skill and valor were the opposite of French brutality. However, the incorporation of French brass (the statue “was composed primarily of twelve twenty-four pound French cannons captured during Wellington’s victorious campaigns,” [921]) the use of the classical model (for which the British public was unprepared,) and the choice of Achilles, the martial figure par excellence, suggest a confusion about representational intentions and effects.

The cartoon “Making Decent” by George Cruikshank (see Figure 1) underscores the impropriety of the statue. It represents an outraged William Wilberforce. Known for his abolitionist campaign, he was also the founder of the Society for the Reformation of Manners (923). In this role, he is drawn standing by the statue, covering its fig leaf with his hat. The actual stone inscription under the statue reproduced in the cartoon reads, “To Arthur Duke of Wellington and his Brave companions in arms. This Statue of Achilles cast in French Brass is inscribed by their Countrywomen!! June 18th 1822.” The inscription speaks to the double nature of the statue. As it commemorates British victory, the statue cast in French brass suggests that it is also made of Greek form and Gallic stuff and, consequently, may not be as wholly British as patriots might wish. The caption in the cartoon reads, “Making Decent __!! __ This Print Commemorative of Anglo French Brass & True British *Chastity* is inscribed with veneration to that worthy man Mr. Wilberforce who with saintlike regard for the morals of the country has undertaken to make the above fig Decent from 10 in the M.g till Dusk.” Implying that brass is the phallic stuff of both nations but chastity is specifically British, the cartoon suggests a certain British shame about exposure that speaks not only to sexual shame, but also to an embarrassment about the overtly masculine and martial power of the statue.

During the extended war with France, as Colley and others have made clear, Britons attempted to define themselves in difference from martial France to propose a specifically British culture of moderation and freedom. Violence and aggression were French characteristics. Britons often imagined themselves as a peaceful, commercial people, slow to anger but resolute and prepared for defense when threatened. However, because the statue suggested certain similarities between the two nations, it spoke to an embarrassing British pleasure in martial aggression. The reference to Achilles, the most arrogant and aggressive of Homeric heroes, the colonizing aggressor of a besieged city, underscores the Napoleonlike qualities of

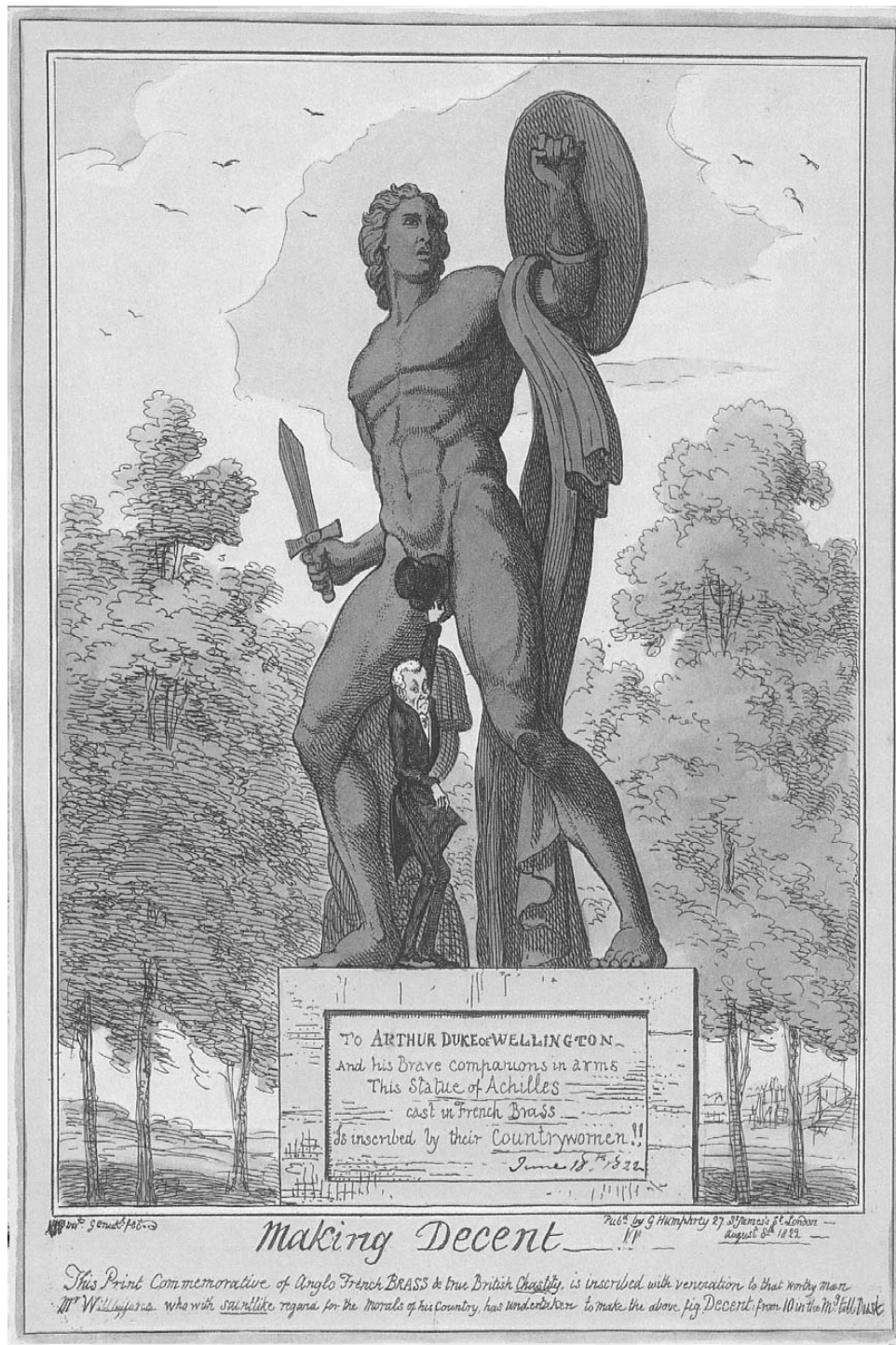


Figure 1. “Making Decent,” (1822) by George Cruikshank. Courtesy of the British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Wellington. It furthermore suggests that women, who presumably uphold the tender virtues of the nation, who, unlike French women, remained true to their womanly nature, betrayed in this incident a Gallic quality unbecoming British womanhood.

The cartoons that ridiculed the monument suggest a further dimension to the scandal of the Hyde Park Achilles. Although the actual statue was cast with a clenched fist in which Westmacott planned to place a sword, the fist remained empty until about 1865.⁴ The cartoons of the time, however, all represent the statue holding a sword aggressively held aloft. With a sword, the Achilles is an unmistakably virile and phallic figure who, in the humorous representations of the cartoons, draws women in crowds. One cartoon, representing women congregating under the gigantic fig leaf, offers the caption: "Ladies BUY your LEAF!!" Without the sword, however, the actual statue remained more ambiguous, reminding some of a "prizefighter." For others, the "Achilles looked as if he were running away from a foe" (923). Too martial or too feminized, the statue never succeeded in persuading the immediate post-Waterloo audience of its patriotic power. Like the statue itself, these reactions speak to a larger problem of representation, which is the subject of this book.

Fearful that the nation had become effeminate due to an expanding commercial economy, virile men who promised to empower the nation and the empire fascinated nineteenth-century Britons. However, overt representations of martial and imperialist virility disturbed them, and they preferred to represent successful British leaders as tempered by gentleness, benevolence, and liberality. This fascination with British leaders who both promise and restrain power speaks to a crisis of authority after the French Revolution in a nation that imagined itself to be the most liberal nation in the world but that also feared the radical democratic potential of the French Revolution. With its overthrow of traditional hierarchy, its reliance on paper money over the gold standard, and its emphasis on financial speculation rather than on landed wealth, the Revolutionary government seemed to embody all the fears many Britons associated with modernization. Napoleon's regime added new fears: tyranny, unlicensed imperial expansion, and a military state. To avoid the twin evils of anarchy and tyranny, some Britons sought to reconcile the individual and the public good, controlling individualist excesses in a commercial economy and managing democratic demands while avoiding the other extreme of martial tyranny. Britons sought to appease emerging movements for the rights of women and the lower classes while maintaining traditional hierarchies and expanding the empire. The benevolent leader was a fantasy figure designed to make possible a British nation seemingly sympathetic to individual rights and liberties but wedded to hierarchy at home and to empire abroad.

The nineteenth-century literary representation of leadership creates a figure endowed with charismatic virility, which is characteristically slow to violence, taciturn, unpolished, and reticent, but resolute and immovable.⁵ In these representations, his capacity to replace his followers' multiple desires with his own will allows him to remedy the common fear in the period that commercial and democratic modernity licenses the chaos of competing individual ambitions, the mob effect associated with the French Revolution. After all, predicting that the French Revolution would degenerate into anarchy, Edmund Burke famously wrote, "the age of chivalry is gone.—that of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever."⁶ Nostalgically bidding farewell to chivalry, Burke actually helped inaugurate an age obsessed with all things chivalric, an age critical of the stultifying and degenerating effects of mere calculators. The age of sophisters and economists, it seemed to many, would create a feminized nation too weak to defeat enemies both domestically and abroad. In literary representations, the leader's virility offers an exciting escape from petty personal concerns and promises a higher commitment to some cause or individual who can establish national unity. The hero's power lies in his ability to promise the follower that modern life comprises not only the mundane concerns of the individual, but also the thrill of a meaningful, chivalric life, which can still be part of modernity if only the proper leaders can be found.

As my brief discussion of the "Ladies' 'Fancy Man'" and the nostalgia for an age of chivalry indicate, gender was a crucial category for Britons in their attempts to control democracy. Recent work in gender studies has pointed out how the "nation and state" became increasingly "entwined" since the French Revolution in ways that were "thoroughly gendered."⁷ Masculinity "in particular was deployed in the various political and military projects that aimed at building the modern nation and at opening up the institutions of the state and of political life to this newly imagined collective entity" (6). Historians of gender have emphasized "the essentially gendered nature of politics in nineteenth-century Britain."⁸ Although more traditional historians tended to push gender to the sidelines, historians of gender have shown how every aspect of British life was informed by complex and sometimes competing notions of gender. Davidoff and Hall early on offered a crucial study on "the centrality of the sexual division of labour within families for the development of capitalist enterprise."⁹ Because they examined the connection "between the formation of the English middle class and gender" and the "male and female experience, they succeeded in bringing gender to the forefront of mainstream social history."¹⁰ Where Davidoff and Hall focused on gender and the middle class, much work has also been done on the roles of men and women in the working classes.¹¹ Historians have

recently begun to emphasize that a British understanding of gender was also crucially connected with imperial power and relations with British colonies.¹²

Work on gender in the period has become increasingly more complex over time often questioning the public-private divide that some saw as defining a clear separation between women and men. Amanda Vickery and Joyce Thomas have been most explicit in their critique of the separate spheres approach.¹³ But most historians, including Davidoff and Hall, have long insisted that permeability always existed between public and private.¹⁴ Several critics have pointed to the difficulty of defining the public sphere as well as to the need to be attentive to how the rhetoric of separate spheres changes over time and in different locations.¹⁵ For Joan Scott, gender needs to be studied in areas that have seemed to historians to be divorced from concerns of gender such as war and high politics. Hall, McClelland, and Rendall suggest that Scott's refusal of the separate spheres opposition allows for a better understanding of "the connections between gender and power relations."¹⁶ *Manly Leaders* also relies on a more complex and fluid sense of the public and private and on how representations of seemingly private relationships have crucial effects beyond the home. In fact, my examination of the so-called domestic novel finds that the home becomes a crucial site for enacting the political dramas of the nation and of the empire.

The study of gender has, thus, moved from a focus on recovering women in history to understanding the complex ways in which gender systems operate in different places and times and how gender relates to race, class, ethnicity, and nationality. This opening up of the study of gender beyond a concern with the recovery of forgotten women has also led to the creation of masculinity studies.¹⁷ If some have feared that the interest in masculinity would simply replicate the traditional focus on men, others have argued that a broader study of gender can give us a more nuanced picture of how gender systems work in varied arenas.

Manly Leaders participates in this new interest in masculinities and in the inextricable interconnections between gender, politics, economics, and national identity. One of the reasons gender was so crucial in the nineteenth century was that the emphasis on manliness responded to a fear of democracy and of commercial culture, a culture that many thought might produce an effeminate people. Nineteenth-century Britons feared that modern political and economic systems were devoid of an exciting cause that could attach the people to the nation and to the status quo. Democratic equality and the scramble for economic power could threaten hierarchy as well as suggest that the political landscape had become peopled by ordinary individuals struggling for their share of power, a dull leveling that only imperiled the nation. Modernity required the supplement of gender to eroticize submission and make hierarchy again legitimate.

However, historians have examined various types of masculinity in the period suggesting an ongoing struggle in the nineteenth century to define and canonize maleness. For example, scholarship on gender in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has often described a softened masculinity. Historians such as Randolph Trumbach and Alan Bray have pointed to the creation of the molly, a figure connected to both effeminate manners and homosexuality, in the eighteenth century. The fop, too, is an important figure, but his effeminacy is more often associated with heterosexuality and an overeager desire for the company and manners of women.¹⁸ The dandy in the nineteenth century assumes the notorious charge of effeminacy but, like the fop, he is not always or necessarily associated with homosexuality.¹⁹ Although less clearly marked by effeminacy, other versions of masculinity also downplayed violence and roughness in favor of softened manners. John Tosh points out the “decline of bearing arms as a core attribute of masculinity. Along with the exercise of household authority, bearing arms had been the central attribute of manhood since feudal times.”²⁰ Still important during the Napoleonic wars, “it rapidly lost ground after 1815” (222). Others have pointed to a softened masculinity altered by companionate marriage and the cult of sensibility that required men abandon roughness and learn their manners from women.²¹ These changes helped make the virile display of martial manhood in the statue for Wellington an embarrassing miscalculation.

Yet, if we see changes in conceptions of masculinity, we also see continuities and resistances to the perceived feminization of men in a commercial and modern culture. Tosh underscores the disturbing continuity and increase of violence against women and children and a greater male authoritarianism in the home despite the new view of companionate marriage: “The theory of middle-class domesticity might be based on marital harmony achieved through complimentary roles, but the reality had to take account of men’s continuing insistence on mastery in the home.”²² This new ideal of domesticity, “if anything, increased rather than diminished the incidence of household tyranny” (223). Although the field of masculinity studies is new and many questions remain unanswered, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century masculinity cannot be characterized as simply more gentle, more in harmony with women, and more domesticated than earlier forms. Despite a tendency to minimize martial manhood, a fear of effeminacy in varied arenas and in different forms remains important until at least the 1840s.

By insisting on male violence that persists both in actuality and as a desired but unacknowledged response, this book contests the often-repeated narrative of “beset” masculinity in gender studies. In an admirable effort to demystify an essentialized notion of masculinity, gender studies often claims that men experience the failure of their gender, that they are beset by insecurities and incoherencies. At the heart of all modern masculinity lies the

discovery of a disturbing femininity that undermines all claims to real manhood. But, as Bryce Traister, speaking specifically about the American context, puts it, are

there actually no “real men” out there? What do we say to the African American men still being dragged around behind pick up trucks driven by white men? To the gay college student mercilessly beaten unconscious and left to freeze to death over the course of a cold Wyoming prairie night? To the women and children hiding in underfunded shelters? I just do not know whether the vicious masculinity behind these crimes is enduring a “crisis” in any way comparable to that of their victims, or if instead we are dealing with a manhood smoothly coherent, frighteningly competent, and alarmingly tranquil.²³

Traister argues that the claims of “the ‘crisis theory’ of American masculinity” (291) only serve to occlude a historical reality of male violence and power. Traister extends these claims about masculinity studies to the context of British literary studies in which similar claims about manhood in crisis likewise hold pride of place.²⁴

A more nuanced view of masculinity studies might emphasize that critics have pointed out how the loss of manly power can produce violent reactions as John Tosh’s example of domestic violence suggests. However, I join Traister in pointing to a type of remarkably successful masculinity and, in difference from much recent work in masculinity studies, I claim that representations of loss, incoherence, and benevolence do not necessarily indicate real failure or loss of power. Rather, benevolence can become a seductive means by which followers become even more fully submissive to their leaders.

Manly Leaders examines the work of William Wordsworth, William Godwin, Lord Byron, William Hazlitt, Thomas Carlyle, Jane Austen, and Charlotte Brontë. These writers all imagined charismatic figures who promise to make the nation powerful despite the widespread fear of the individualizing, atomizing, and even feminizing effects of democracy and commercial culture. Although the Romantic and early Victorian periods offered many types of masculinity, Wordsworth’s good Governor and his true poet, Godwin’s chivalric Falkland, the Byronic hero, Hazlitt’s Napoleon, Carlyle’s captain of industry, Austen’s Darcy, and Brontë’s Rochester exemplify the operations of one particularly disturbing type of masculinity, among the competing modes in play during the period. Most of the works I examine had a powerful effect on contemporaries and later generations particularly in their conceptions of masculine behavior. Godwin’s novel, widely read in the 1790s and beyond, represents a disturbingly perverse picture of elite manhood as superficially benevolent but fundamentally violent and cruel.

Wordsworth had, as is well known, a lasting effect on our understanding of the value of poetry, but he was also influential as is less often acknowledged in nineteenth-century conceptions of manhood and leadership. Byron created a type of hero famous throughout the world for his seductive power. Carlyle engaged in one of the most successful appropriations of the kind of hero Byron helped create by connecting his type of silent, mysterious hero to the world of capitalist production, thus establishing the influential image of the virile and commanding leader of industry. Austen and Brontë's heroes Darcy and Rochester remain powerfully compelling figures of elite manhood.

Hazlitt, like Carlyle and Brontë, also appropriated some of the features of the charismatic hero Byron had earlier made famous and, yet, had little lasting effect on his contemporaries and virtually none in our own time. Hazlitt's writing on Napoleon has been largely ignored. The one example in this book of a noncanonical appropriation and development of this type of masculinity owes its lack of success at least in part to the fact that Hazlitt explicitly connects the leader's charisma to terror and totalitarian politics and champions the need for spectacles of violence.²⁵ Like the Hyde Park Achilles, his Napoleon shows too much.

Manly Leaders, then, offers a different approach to gender studies by emphasizing not a manliness in crisis but a successful manliness enlisted to quell those crises of modernization that have so often been represented as threats to masculinity. By seeing masculinity as the victim of a modernizing world, critics have failed to understand the ways in which this narrative feeds a fantasy of enduring masculinity that survives these feminizing conditions to rise again out of the purifying fires of suffering and loss.

This chapter considers the specific historical conditions of the postrevolutionary period that led to this interest in manliness, making a case for a larger historical perspective that sees continuities between the Romantic and early Victorian periods. It furthermore examines the complexity of nineteenth-century political culture that, although often wedded to the values of individualism, retained a serious concern about public unity. It concludes by offering in William Wordsworth's aesthetic and political theory, an example of why the literary was particularly important for creating manly leaders and submissive followers in a developing commercial and democratic culture.

Fear of Democracy: A Crisis of Authority

A widespread belief in the eighteenth century was that Great Britain was the freest nation in the world and for many it was "the only land in which political and civil liberty was possible."²⁶ Yet, this book argues that Britons nonetheless engaged in an exciting and complex flirtation with submission,

demonstrating an implicit desire to maintain unequal political, social, and economic structures, kept in place in extreme instances by violence and imperialist coercion. James Vernon argues that although we tend to point to the period from 1815 to 1867 as the time that “established English political liberty and democracy,”²⁷ this “founding moment” actually saw “the closure of democratic political forms, the stifling of a radical libertarian tradition” (7). The political culture became increasingly “fashioned from above” and it mostly “told the story the official political establishment wanted to be heard” (102). Jonathan Perry points to the fact that “in 1890 Britain had almost the least democratic franchise in Europe.”²⁸ Historians tend to agree “on the persistent importance until about 1880 of a ‘traditional’ politics in which local, aristocratic and religious influences remained paramount.... If there is a single theme that predominates, it is the persistence of aristocratic politics.”²⁹ If the strong hold on power by elites was cemented in the course of the century, it was not clear at the beginning of the nineteenth century that elites would maintain control and could stifle democratic desires.

The period from the 1790s to the 1840s is marked by an acute sense of impending political and social collapse, which brought to the fore fears about national virility and coherence. Britons experienced “a constant sensation of fear—fear of revolution, of the masses, of crime, famine, and poverty, of disorder and instability.”³⁰ Historians agree that in the first half of the nineteenth century fear was widespread that democracy would lead to an anarchic leveling of society. To be sure, this fear of democracy was not entirely new. Don Herzog asserts that issues of democracy and the people’s rights did not emerge for the first time with the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. England had a history of civil unrest and regicide that made questions of authority part of its political culture. However, for nineteenth-century men and women the French Revolution did inaugurate a new era in which something profoundly different had occurred. Herzog asks, “What’s so special about the years 1789 to 1834?... First there were real changes in these years, changes of decisive political importance. Second, the Revolution heightened anxieties, threw things in bold relief, posed worrisome choices that preceding generations managed more easily to evade.”³¹ Whatever the possibilities of democracy might have been in the past, the present seemed far more dangerously overrun by democratic claims. Alarmed contemporaries referred to the dangers of democracy not as distant possibilities but as a spreading “conflagration” or “as venom coursing through the body politic” (99). Herzog points out that, whereas the *Tatler* could comfortably ridicule coffeehouse culture and the claims of citizenship and rights openly discussed there, no such ease could be felt after the Revolution (53). Now, “political discussions, it became painfully (or exhilaratingly) clear, might well issue in hated revolutionary politics” (53).³²

Beyond the years of Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, social unrest in England itself only exacerbated fears of mob rule. Between the “passage of the first Reform Bill in 1832 and the dying-out of Chartist agitation in the Christian Socialism of the early fifties . . . there was always present in men’s minds the possibility that the English working classes would assume political power, perhaps even by some kind of violence.”³³ The second half of the century experienced a greater sense of stability: “Against the broadening background of prosperity and social peace traditionally symbolized by the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851, the militant demands for radical change once so dismayingly expressed in post-Waterloo and prereform Bill periods had through repetition and accommodation . . . been seemingly brought to a benign and cooperative resolution.”³⁴ By mid-century, Britons, having “escaped the violent revolutions experienced throughout the continent” could imagine that “revolution was a foreign disease.”³⁵ But before then, in the first half of the new century, Romantic-era Britons and early Victorians faced both the threat and the promise of democracy and the commercial economy with a sense of particular urgency.

By moving beyond the confines of the Romantic period, this book joins recent critics in making a claim for the long nineteenth century. The tendency to see a clear demarcation between Romantic and Victorian periods has recently come under some attack.³⁶ This study of political representations after the French Revolution fruitfully examines continuities between the Romantic and early Victorian periods. For this study, the demarcation might be more interestingly placed at midcentury when the sense that the political order might collapse became less vivid.

Common Ground: Tory, Whig, and Liberal Reactions to Modernity

This section examines some reactions to democratic pressures and to an expanding commercial economy among political antagonists who often shared similar fears about modernity. The following review of recent historical work on nineteenth-century politics, argues that Britons of various political persuasions tended to accept, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that some accommodation had to be made with demands for civil rights and for commercial development. By the end of the eighteenth century, the “rights of man” were “held to be ‘self-evident’ and freestanding: no king, no divine authority, no imperial interest, no superiority of race or creed could nullify them.”³⁷ However, this willingness to accept some features of modernity was coupled with a desire to carefully manage and control the new forces that, for many, threatened to lead to anarchy. C. A. Bayly writes, during “the early part of the nineteenth century power-holders and intellectuals sought to find

ways—political, economic, and ideological—to constrain the forces of change which had been unleashed” (127).

Much recent work on the desire to control democracy in the period focuses on conservative thought partly because conservatives were often more overt about their concerns with order and partly because they offered innovative analyses of how submission works. Boyd Hilton argues that “neo-conservative (‘Throne and Altar’) ideology, so far from representing an *ancien regime*, was a *new* development following the American and French revolutions; that it was a reaction against the ‘progressive’ ideologies associated with those events” (30). As Yoon Sun Lee claims, in “the half century between 1790 and the mid-1840’s,” Britain valued “the display of loyal feelings” and put a premium “on the civic emotions which were to keep the nation’s parts in their places.”³⁸ Lee examines how conservative writers adopted irony as one solution to the problem of deference. Romantic nationalism sought to address the fear of democracy and commercial culture by maintaining “the stern necessity of [social differences] while insisting on the unity and, at some level, the fraternity of the nation. Its mandate was to discover the ideas and emotions that could keep these parts in their subordinate places, in spite of the myths of equality, liberty” (5). Lee sees non-English but British conservative writers as contesting the myth of British nationalism that claimed a “uniform character” for all British subjects” (5). These non-English writers developed an ironic stance that both emphasized the “anomalies of Britain’s identity, structure, and relation to its own past” and “license[d] the experience of particular types of feeling beneficial to the state” (5). Irony had a “capacious address” (5) that could acknowledge the failure of national myths while insisting on the need for submission.

At the level of high politics, the Tory party was often understood as the representative of conservative authoritarianism. Critics in the nineteenth-century commonly charged the Tories with support for king and church at the expense of the people. The word “Tory” became widely used by at least 1815 to define those who accepted authority and wished to limit civil and religious freedoms.³⁹ Orthodox Tories thought that “hierarchy was a natural principle of social organization because it took account of fundamental differences in human capacities and experience.”⁴⁰ The Tories became particularly authoritarian due to the “great fear inspired among the country gentry by the French Revolution and its aftermath.”⁴¹ As a result, commercial “interests were subordinated to an increasingly belligerent foreign policy and ultimately subsumed altogether in the exigencies of war” (26).

Yet even those thinkers and political leaders we tend to define as conservative cannot be understood as mere reactionaries. To see them as only reactionary is to miss how they sometimes grudgingly accepted and sometimes

even embraced certain modern ideas and values. The label “conservative” may allow us to forget that before the French Revolution, Pitt’s party had been far more congenial to commercial interests than the Whigs. When the revolutionary threat subsided in the 1820s, the liberal Tories, “as they became known, to contemporaries as well as to historians,” again came to represent commercial interests and to cement an alliance with those commercially oriented members of the gentry and middle class who had felt alienated by the Tories during the war years (25). Paradoxically, then, the party that tended in moments of crisis to embrace authoritarian politics, was also the party that in more relaxed times embraced economic liberalism: if “government was to promote ‘liberty,’ it was commercial liberty that the Pittites had in mind, with sweeping tariff reforms a consistent aim of peacetime governments from the 1780’s to the 1820s” (25).

The liberal Tories were more enthusiastic than many other conservatives about the political economy, but they were not alone in supposing that some accommodation had to be made with commerce. Important conservative thinkers such as Coleridge warned against “the overbalance of the commercial spirit.”⁴² Yet, even as Coleridge warned about the danger posed by the absence of “counterweights” to the commercial spirit, he was careful to point out that his “opinions would be greatly misinterpreted if I were supposed to think hostilely of the spirit of commerce to which I attribute the largest proportion of our actual freedom (i.e. as Englishmen, and not merely as landowners)” (662). Critics of modernity were not simply reactionaries who wished to turn back the clock. They were interested in “counterbalances,” in ways of controlling modern forces. Coleridge attempted to be “useful in the modern world.”⁴³ He tended to reiterate the concerns of civic republicanism about the dangers of commerce while ascribing to some of the “values derived from a rival tradition of ‘commercial humanism’” (126). He connected “the growth of commerce” with “expanding opportunities for the exercise of human freedom” (129).

If conservatives had to come to terms with economic liberalism, they were also not simply able to ignore demands for greater civil rights. Although the kind of liberalism associated with civil rights “sparked off a violent conservative backlash,” it could not, however, be completely denigrated.⁴⁴ Don Herzog finds in much conservative commentary an effort to come to terms with the liberal idea of universal equality. Herzog examines the scandal of Burke’s phrase, “a swinish multitude,” which became particularly evocative and infamous.⁴⁵ If the image of the people as swine was initially thoroughly dismissive, it took on a new life when radicals appropriated it to ridicule the ruling elite and to demonstrate “the contempt that the reigning establishment had for the people of England” (512). Herzog makes the point that this sort of phrase, unacceptable today, was already becoming so in the late

eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries (544). Exposing this degree of contempt for the people was neither safe nor sound policy.

Despite crackdowns on radicals and serious threats to rights and liberties during the years of the Revolution, Great Britain was not simply an authoritarian state in which hierarchy could be unproblematically defended. Certain values, that by midcentury would become clearly associated with liberals such as the right to property, certain civic freedoms such as freedom of religion, and the belief in universal human equality, were earlier widely disseminated across the political spectrum.⁴⁶ Dismissing the rights and liberties of the individual in a commercial economy and in a modern political universe in which middle and lower classes demanded more share in national government was unhealthy. The problem for many was how to persuade the post-Enlightenment individual that her true interests lay with hierarchy, order, and empire.

A sense that denigrating equality, liberty, and the swinish multitude was no longer healthy made the defense of hierarchy particularly urgent and particularly difficult. As Herzog makes clear, the problem the general assumption of human equality raised is that if “people are naturally equal and if we’re not trying to conceal that behind the veil of secrecy, how successfully can [social inferiors] carry off the routines of deference and hierarchy? Why won’t their role playing always be ironic, detached, not fully sincere or committed? And if their role playing isn’t sincere, won’t the social drama of inequality collapse?” (220) Herzog offers innumerable examples of masters worrying about the loyalty and deference of their servants. For instance, one contemporary observed, “a serious Rumpus among the servants. That tribe of beings are much altered of late years, no subordination among them. The Glorious Effects of the French Revolution” (226).

If some powerful Tories embraced economic liberalism and if conservatives had to find careful ways of managing the modern belief in equality and liberty, Whigs, who have often been understood by historians as the proto-Liberal party before the Liberal party came into being, were at times guided by a High Whig faction that was resistant to liberal economics and very committed to strong aristocratic government. Although the Tories reacted to the threat of democracy by becoming more authoritarian, this concern with strong central leadership cannot be defined as only an Ultra Tory reaction. A study of nineteenth-century political culture reveals a more complex situation.

Historian Peter Mandler argues that in the age of reform, the High Whigs were able to rally support for their idea of strong government led by virtuous aristocrats. Yet, their interest in elite power could not completely ignore modern forces. Whigs sought to marry central authority with certain kinds of civic freedom and commercial interest. For Mandler, our frequent tendency to see a liberal ascendancy in the early nineteenth century that