"Genius" has a spectacular history, and eighteenth-century England is the scene of its most dramatic metamorphoses. In the writings of Anthony Shaftesbury, and until mid-century, "genius" runs roughly parallel to the German Geist, and retains traces of its Latin heritage; all individuals have a genius (spirit or mind) of some sort. Afterward, despite occasional efforts to recover classical meanings, a new range of signification takes control. While Joseph Addison anticipates this result as early as 1711, the eighteenth century fully appropriates Addison's use of the word only after Edward Young's conjectures of 1759. Beginning in the 1750s, a craze of theoretical writings urges that the inspired need not have a genius; instead an inspired author has genius or is a genius.

English usage has never shaken off this powerful introjection. The gods have fled, or we have buried them within ourselves by means of a verbal turn. The eighteenth century is both the meeting ground of genius and monologue and the scene of a decisive battle between the languages of theology and psychology. When Young writes of genius as "that god within," theological genius symbolically cedes to subjective monologue.

In retracing certain pathways in the eighteenth-century discussions of genius, this chapter is suggestive rather than comprehensive, and the present context excludes all analysis of the related theories of wit and imagination. Lord Shaftesbury and Joseph Addison sketch the
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early model for modern genius. Henry Fielding, Alexander Gerard, Edward Young, and William Duff propose improvements, often in the form of elaborate scenarios. Immanuel Kant, by importing their invention, reveals limitations in the English product. Viewed collectively, these authors' expressions of "genius" exemplify ways in which verbal transformations predetermine intellectual history.

Characteristics and Authors of Genius

The modern turn to subjectivity and monologue is signaled by Shaftesbury's identification of Greek daimôn and Latin genius with soliloquy: the influence of an externalized guardian spirit becomes indistinguishable from effects of individual intelligence. In Shaftesbury's usage, "genius" is a vague term like the German Geist and roughly equivalent to "spirit," "mind," or "intellect." If individuals have genius to varying degrees, Shaftesbury's "Miscellaneous Reflections" can refer without redundancy to "the free Spirits and forward Genius's of Mankind." As a spirit may be free, so a genius may be forward. Comfortable with applying the word "genius" to individuals, Shaftesbury writes of what modernity calls geniuses as "the better Genius's" (Char. III, 273). Shaftesbury also refers to "divine Men of a transcending Genius" (Char. III, 136). Because "genius" no longer names a transcendent being or power, certain men may be said to possess "a transcending Genius"; another may be only a "popular Genius" (Char. III, 4). As an individual has a personality, so individuals are characterized by a certain kind of genius.

"Genius" does not refer only to the mind of men in general; it also denotes a special capacity. Shaftesbury anticipates Addison's discussion when he writes of authors "who have a Genius for Writing" (Char. III, 272). Like Addison after him, he censures authors who "wou'd be all Genius" (Char. III, 258). Every man and woman has a genius of some kind, and only rare authors have genius of the forward variety; yet "genius" can also signify a particular quality of writing that should not be exaggerated.

In his "Soliloquy; or, Advice to an Author" (1710), Shaftesbury

1Anthony Shaftesbury, Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (London, 1711), vol. 3, p. 2 (henceforth cited as Char.). I have italicized words originally printed all in capital letters.
further revises the notion of genius. When Shaftesbury explicitly associates soliloquy with the notions of "Daemon, Genius, Angel or Guardian-Spirit," the transcendent genius vanishes and is replaced by monologue as a kind of internal dialogue. If such "beings" did in fact accompany us, their existence would support his argument, "for it wou'd be infallibly prov'd a kind of Sacrilege or Impiety to slight the Company of so Divine a Guest, and in a manner banish him our Breast, by refusing to enter with him into those secret Conferences by which alone he cou'd be enabled to become our Adviser and Guide" (Char. I, 168–69). But Shaftesbury disputes the belief that these spirits were ever independent of men and prefers to read them figuratively. The ancient authors meant that, through soliloquy, "we could discover a certain Duplicity of Soul, and divide our-selves into two Partys" (Char. I, 169). A genius is no supernatural agency but rather our "self-dissecting" partner in "this Home-Dialect of Soliloquy" (Char. I, 170).

On September 2, 1711, a long and productive Sunday, "genius" was transformed. The printers rested from their labors on The Spectator, and readers were at leisure to contemplate the mysterious fiction of the day before. In Saturday's issue, number 159, Addison had pretended to translate the "first Vision" of an obscure "Oriental Manuscript" entitled The Visions of Mirzah. The narrator of this extended allegory approaches "the Haunt of a Genius": "I drew near with that Reverence which is due to a superior Nature; and as my Heart was entirely subdued by the captivating Strains I had heard, I fell down at his Feet and wept. The Genius smiled upon me with a Look of Compassion and Affability that familiarized him to my Imagination, and at once dispelled all the Fears and Apprehensions with which I approached him" (Spec. 323). This is both a fictional tale of encounter with a divine being and Addison's account of his own approach to the classical term genius. The narrator first approaches fearfully, but his reverence is soon replaced by familiarity. (In the following paper, Addison shows how familiar genius has become to his imagination.) Addison's narrator has apparently read Shaftesbury's "Soliloquy," and thus his guide "lifted me from the Ground, and taking me by the Hand, Mirzah, said he, I have heard thee in thy Soliloquies, follow

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me" (ibid.). As the allegory proceeds, the Genius shows a vision of human life as a bridge and reveals islands of eternity reserved for men after death. “Despite the immense popularity of this Mirzah paper,” a modern editor notes, “no others were published” (Spec. 326n): the allegorical bridge stretches, not only from mundane life to eternity, but also from the classical to the modern genius. A Genius fades from view at the close of number 159, and when the following number appears on Monday, “genius” makes its debut under a new guise.

Addison’s decisive statement on genius, in The Spectator, number 160, opens with an epigraph from Horace:

—Cui mens divinior, atque os
Magna sonaturum, des nominis hujus honorem.

[Satires I. iv. 43-44]

—Honor him with this name [of poet],
Who has a divine mind and a great voice.

This citation from the Satires is aptly ambiguous, for the mens divinior signals both divine intervention and introjected divinity. But the absence of the opening words of the excerpted lines is especially suggestive. The passage from Horace reads: Ingenium cui sit, cui mens divinior, atque os / Magna sonaturum, des nominis hujus honorem, which may be translated: “To whom there is genius [ingenium], who has a divine mind and a great voice, / Honor him with this name [of poet].” Addison omits the crucial word ingenium from the passage he cites. He will discuss a form of genius that derives from nature and chooses not to acknowledge that Horace employs the difficult word ingenium, rather than the familiar genius. Addison’s innovation depends on his simultaneous usurpation of both ranges of meaning and denial of their difference. Addison makes English “genius” signify as does the Latin ingenium, at the same time displacing the spiritual notion of a guardian genius. He conceals the Latin origins of “genius” and shifts the emphasis to mental capacity without acknowledging its separate origins in ingenium. The guardian spirit steals away in silence.

3To this day the German language preserves the difference between Genius (from the Latin genius) and Genie (from seventeenth-century French génie, which bears traces of both the Latin genius and ingenium). After Addison’s rather French usage, this distinction has remained unclear in English. Compare “Génie” in Diderot’s Encyclopédie (1751) and “Genie” in the Grimm brothers’ Wörterbuch (1854).
In the opening words of his article in *The Spectator*, number 160, Addison soberly maligns the genius of his contemporaries: “There is no Character more frequently given to a Writer, than that of being a Genius. I have heard many a little Sonneteer called a *fine Genius*. There is not an Heroick Scribler in the Nation, that has not his Admirers who think him a *great Genius*; and as for your Smatterers in Tragedy, there is scarce a Man among them who is not cried up by one or other for a *prodigious Genius*” (Spec. 327). By fusing two notions of genius, Addison innovates (with a French accent) and at the same time gives his invention the appearance of age. Genius is indeed ascribed to all people, in the sense that every individual has a mind or mental capacity; by means of an implicit synecdoche, Addison pretends that “genius” must mean “great Genius.” Addison exerts control over linguistic development by shifting the application of “genius” while retaining the fact of its frequent, former usage. Shaftesbury repeatedly refers to diverse types of “genius”; Addison moves toward the modern sense of “genius” as an extraordinary mind. Yet Addison also writes of “great Genius’s,” which is not redundant if “genius” retains the older sense of mental faculty in general. In his discussion of “great natural Genius’s,” then, Addison both retains an established sense and innovates, along the lines of contemporary French *génie*.

Solomon, Homer, Pindar, and Shakespeare are Addison’s examples of “great natural Genius’s, that were never disciplined and broken by Rules of Art” (Spec. 328). A second class consists of “those that have formed themselves by Rules and submitted the Greatness of their natural Talents to the Corrections and Restraints of Art” (Spec. 329–30). Addison discerns a “great Danger in these latter kind of Genius’s,” for they may “cramp their own Abilities too much by Imitation, and form themselves altogether upon Models, without giving full Play to their own natural Parts” (Spec. 330). According to Addison, genius is a natural gift; the forces of genius have precedence over the forces of art, so that a genius is endangered by following rules and models. Despite an explicit denial, in other words, Addison prefers geniuses of the first, natural class: “An imitation of the best Authors, is not to compare with a good Original; and I believe we may observe that very few Writers make an extraordinary Figure in the World, who have not something in their Way of thinking or expressing themselves that is peculiar to them and entirely their own”
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Addison’s *Spectator* essay unveils a fully formed mythology of an “extraordinary Figure,” the “original Genius.” At the same time that he expresses hostility toward convention, Addison favors peculiarity in a manner that is decisive for later expositions.

Fielding revives Addison’s “genius” and may have provoked Young’s formulations. The narrator of *Tom Jones* mentions characters of “great Genius,” of a “great Genius,” and of “the greatest Genius.” If it is still possible to refer to a person’s “vast Strength of Genius” (*TJ* 159) without redundancy, then “genius” does not yet carry its modern signification. To speak of a “great Genius” is like speaking of a great mind or, in German, like speaking of a *grosen Geist*.

Whereas Addison’s narrator tacitly takes leave of the archaic and exotic Genius in *Visions of Mirzah*, Fielding explicitly renounces all spiritual guidance. He notes, “The Arabians and Persians had an equal Advantage in writing their Tales from the Genii and Fairies, which they believe in as an Article of their Faith,” yet adds: “We have none of these Helps. To natural Means alone are we confined” (*TJ* 676). Nevertheless, Fielding is not beyond referring to genius in mock epic invocation. In his skeptical age, Fielding asks for the assistance of “Genius; thou Gift of Heaven; without whose Aid, in vain we struggle against the Stream of Nature” (*TJ* 525). Here genius is a gift and not a “Geist” of heaven, for heaven gives a mental capacity, not a mythical attendant. Thus genius requires an education: “And thou, O Learning, (for without thy Assistance nothing pure, nothing correct, can Genius produce) do thou guide my Pen” (*TJ* 526). Although this passage is fraught with irony, Fielding apparently does believe that genius is a “Gift of Nature.” His empirical definition of genius is a forerunner of Gerard’s theories: “By Genius I would understand that Power, or rather those Powers of the Mind, which are capable of penetrating into all Things within our Reach and Knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential Differences. These are no other than Invention and Judgment; and they are both called by the collective Name of Genius, as they are of those Gifts of Nature which we bring with us into the World” (*TJ* 372).

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5 Compare John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1706/1690), bk. 2, chap. 11, on “the difference of wit and judgment.” See also Addison’s article in *Spec.*, no. 62.
invention is "a creative Faculty," instead arguing that it involves "a quick and sagacious Penetration into the true Essence of all the Objects of our Contemplation." Consistently opposed to mystification, Fielding anticipates the cautious theoreticians of the following decades when he adds that invention "can rarely exist without the Concomitancy of Judgment" (TJ 372-73). Hence Fielding follows Addison, although he does not support the trope that equates "genius" with "a great Genius." At the same time, Fielding disputes the less rationalistic hints contained in The Spectator, number 62. The discussion of genius in terms of invention and judgment recurs in the writings of Gerard and thus indirectly influences the entire tradition after Kant.

Following Addison's prodigious leap from September 1 to September 3, 1711, almost fifty years pass before expressions of the new genius advance further. By synecdoche, Addison writes "genius" and signifies "a great Genius." When this trope comes into its own, it captures the theoretical imagination of the 1760s.

Alexander Gerard's Essay on Taste appears in the same year as Edward Young's "Conjectures on Original Composition," and although they represent opposing traditions, both rely on elaborate images to represent the workings of genius. Gerard is especially indebted to the associationism of Locke, whereas Young's reputation is founded on his poem entitled "Night Thoughts."

Gerard concurs with Fielding when he asserts that "the first and leading quality of genius is invention," but he conceives this as "a readiness of associating the remotest ideas that are any way related." Like a magnet, invention first collects materials and then "by its magical force ranges them into different species." Genius distinguishes itself by its design of "a regular and well-proportioned whole" (ET 164).

*Alexander Gerard, An Essay on Taste (1759), 3d ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1780), 163 (henceforth cited as ET). In his Dissertation on Genius (London, 1755), William Sharpe tersely expresses Gerard's associationist assumptions. If a tabula rasa theory of the mind is assumed, what explains the difference between one person's mind and another's? Considering a hypothetical pair of brothers, Sharpe asks: "why is Richard's Genius brighter than Bill's? You answer, because the tabula rasa of Richard's Genius is more susceptible of ideas than that of Bill's is: allowed indeed that his Genius is, but this superiority of it is not founded upon any innate difference between the tabula rasa of his and that of his brother's understanding; rather upon the different means and opportunities he has had of arriving at ideas between this period of his age, and the minute of his birth" (p. 11). Furthermore, Sharpe explicitly rejects all inspiration theories of genius; no "divine energy" impinges on the mind (pp. 16-17).
Gerard’s characterization emphasizes classical order and makes genius into “the grand architect which not only chuses the materials, but disposes them into a regular structure” (ibid.). For the perfection of its structure, however, genius requires the assistance of taste. The greatest tragic poets combined genius and taste: “The vigour of their imaginations led them into unexplored tracks; and they had such light and discernment, as, without danger of error, directed their course in this untrodden wilderness” (ET 168). Landscape imagery reappears throughout the tradition, for genius is typically in danger of straying into forests of wild figuration and of eluding the rigorous systematization Gerard seeks.

Meanwhile, some “forward Genius’s” attempt to impose order. Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary (1755) provides the clearest summary of previous applications of the word “genius.” Johnson lists five senses:

1. The protecting or ruling power of men, places, or things
2. A man endowed with superior faculties
3. Mental power or faculties
4. Disposition of nature by which any one is qualified for some peculiar employment

The first sense corresponds roughly to the archaic usage (still present in Shakespeare’s Macbeth III.i). The second sense derives from Addison’s article of 1711. Senses 3, 4, and 5 chronologically precede Addison’s usage and are the basis on which he can write of geniuses of diverse types. Johnson’s Dictionary entry expresses the eighteenth-century tensions between theological and psychological interpretations; the writings of Young and Duff exemplify two distinct paths of speculation within the new humanistic traditions.

Landscapes of Genius

Edward Young’s “Conjectures on Original Composition” (1759) and William Duff’s Essay on Original Genius (1767) both emphasize the originality or peculiarity of genius. At the same time, they blur the origins of originality, for how can original genius originate in men? If Addison demonstrates that a genius is a man of great “natural Parts,” does it follow that original genius is really original nature?
Although Young explicitly discusses Addison, his essay conceals the link between their "original" conceptions.

The "Conjectures on Original Composition" are framed by an epistolary convention. Subtitled "a letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison," referring to the novel published by Samuel Richardson in 1753–54, Young's essay is initially concerned with age, and the tone is apologetic.7 Young's immediate concern is to justify the production of his text. Because he values original composition, Young fears that a writer who is old may have no justification for his activity of writing. An elderly author, Young implicitly writes his essay to explain how, by virtue of genius, his mind may "enjoy a perpetual Spring."

The predominant imagery of the "Conjectures" is that of landscape. After describing his letter as "miscellaneous" and "somewhat licentious in its conduct," he notes that he has "endeavoured to make some amends, by digressing into subjects more important." Digression takes on special significance, both in the progress of the essay and in the content of Young's aesthetic theory. Young compares the movement of his essay to an extended scenario: "A serious thought standing single among many of a lighter nature, will sometimes strike the careless wanderer after amusement only, with useful awe: as monumental marbles scattered in a wide pleasure-garden (and such there are) will call to recollection those who would never have sought in a church-yard walk of mournful yews" (Conj. 67). The reader of Young's letter is, then, like a "careless wanderer after amusement only" who will be affected by "useful awe" in confrontation with scattered, serious thoughts. Landscapes are central to the figuration of the essay, and at this point the entire essay is figured as "a wide pleasure-garden" in which "monumental marbles" are scattered. Genius and originality, like monuments in a garden, are the more serious thoughts to which Young wanders. Young continues his landscape imagery when he describes the "Conjectures" as a kind of voyage leading to a "hidden lustre." This natural scene provides the ground for Young's essay; Addison is the luminary he uncovers, but in fact the true goal of the "Conjectures" is Young's own revision of Addison's "genius."

In terms of genius and originality, the remainder of the essay con-

7"Conjectures on Original Composition" (henceforth cited as "Conj.") in The Works of Edward Young (Edinburgh: C. Elliot, 1774), 67.
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siders the difference between compositions that shine brightly and those that are extinguished.

Young further develops his version of genius by means of a series of natural images. He connects problems of linguistic originality and genius with processes of natural aging, for example, when he states that "it is with thoughts as it is with words, and with both as with men; they may grow old, and die" (Conj. 72). In contrast to this process of decay, Young writes that "the mind of a man of genius is a fertile and pleasant field; pleasant as Elysium, and fertile as Tempe; it enjoys a perpetual spring" (Conj. 70). References to Elysium and Tempe gesture in the direction of an explicit paradise myth of genius, associated with a supernatural nature. Defying the processes of deterioration that would make him imaginatively old, Young finds a way to defeat time by positing that genius is endowed with "a perpetual spring." Two kinds of growth, originals and imitations, arise from that spring; if not all fruits of genius are originals, an aging man of genius may have reason to doubt the merits of his writing. This complication leads to a more aggressive turn in the figuration.

With a hint at the world of exploration, Young shifts from the figure of natural growth to that of territorial conquest: originals "are great benefactors: they extend the republic of letters, and add a new province to its dominion" (ibid.). Behind this presentation stands a powerful myth that writing can (dis)cover new ground. On the other hand, an imitator is ultimately weak because he always "builds on another's foundation" (Conj. 71). When genius appears as conqueror, the artist begins to stand at a distance from the art he masters. Young leaves ambiguous whether the original author is nature or only has special powers like those of nature. Insisting on natural imagery, Young conceives genius as a spontaneous growth: "an original may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made" (ibid.). "Genius" names the magical place of creation ex nihilo, or rather, "out of a barren waste."

This mystification does not long retain its full force. After all, even a "barren waste" may have to be wrested from previous settlers, and a "new province" is not so easily annexed. "Why are originals so few?" Young asks. According to the previous account, a dearth of originals should result from a lack of genius or of new terrain, but Young explains that in fact "illustrious examples engross, prejudice, and intimidate" (Conj. 73). Obstructive presences, not a scarcity of
genius, impede the creation of originals. Poetic originality demands both the natural power called "genius" and an avoidance of excessive exposure to previous examples. Overwhelmed by prior authors, we are inclined to "bury our strength."

Before acknowledging that a more radical move is necessary, Young returns to a naturalistic solution in answer to the problem, "Must we then (you say) not imitate ancient authors?" He responds: "Imitate them, by all means, but imitate aright. He that imitates the divine Iliad, does not imitate Homer; but he who takes the same method which Homer took, for arriving at a capacity of accomplishing a work so great. Tread in his steps to the sole fountain of immortality; drink where he drank, at the true Helicon, that is, at the breast of nature" (Conj. 74–75). But it is not enough to insist that the original author must drink "at the breast of nature." Young supplements this natural myth by suggesting that an author must turn away from his predecessors: "As far as a regard to nature and sound sense will permit a departure from your great predecessors; so far, ambitiously, depart from them: the farther from them in similitude, the nearer are you to them in excellence: you rise by it into an original" (Conj. 75). At this crossroad, the departure from predecessors, rather than spontaneous growth, appears to constitute originality: "All eminence, and distinction, lyes out of the beaten road; excursion and deviation are necessary to find it, and the more remote your path from the highway, the more reputable" (ibid.). Deviation replaces natural growth as the determining mark of the original. Images of travel or errancy undo the initial, natural myth and necessitate deviation rather than straightforward growth.

After the publications of Young and others, William Duff's situation is far more difficult. Although he does not refer to contemporary writers, in an "Advertisement" to the Essay on Original Genius, Duff shows his awareness that the field is already crowded. Speaking of himself in the third person, Duff writes that "he is at the same time well aware, that in an Essay on Original Genius, Originality of Sentiment will naturally, and may, no doubt, justly be expected; and where this is altogether wanting, no other excellence can supply the defect." Whereas Young displaces his fears to the problems associated with

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old age, Duff directly confronts the necessity of justifying his text, recognizing that his *Essay on Original Genius* must itself proceed in the manner of original genius. Duff is "not a little apprehensive of the issue of a strict examination" (*EOG* x-xi) when readers employ originality as their criterion of merit. 9

Duff’s landscapes resemble Young’s figures for imaginative activity, although he dispenses with the "perpetual spring." Instead of conceiving original genius as a natural growth, Duff immediately identifies it as an errant traveler: "To explore unbeaten tracks, and make new discoveries in the regions of Science; to invent the designs, and perfect the productions of Art, is the province of Genius alone" (*EOG* 5). Again, "it is the peculiar character of original Genius to strike out a path for itself whatever sphere it attempts to occupy" (*EOG* 90). In Duff’s treatise, literary landscapes are the only sites of divergences and divagations by genius. Later, however, Duff admits that precursors may represent serious obstacles: "A Poet of real Genius, who lives in a distant uncultivated age, possesses great and peculiar advantages for original composition." Like Young, Duff prefers new imaginative ground. The genius in an "uncultivated age" is free to uncover treasures without restraint, "the mines of Fancy not having been opened before his time" (*EOG* 265).

Duff emphasizes that *deviation* characterizes original genius by noting that imagination, left to itself, has a tendency to deviate: "Imagination . . . perpetually attempting to soar, is apt to deviate into the mazes of error" (*EOG* 9). As if to excuse the aberrations of genius, Duff carefully transforms these deviations into positive effects: "The objects he has, or ought to have in view, are, to bring into open light those truths that are wrapped in the shades of obscurity, or involved in the mazes of error, and to apply them to the purpose of promoting the happiness of mankind" (*EOG* 92). Duff’s subsequent turn away from the errant conception of genius occurs by mediation of "mazes of error": those mazes by which the genius was endangered become those that genius illuminates for the benefit of all.

*Duff’s apology revolves around a distinction between what he calls “derived” and “original sentiments” (*EOG* xi). No sooner does Duff set up this opposition, however, than he calls it into question. Again the problem of *justice* arises, and Duff is perhaps too quick to allow certain claims of originality “where not the least imitation was intended.” Writing after Young, Duff attempts to separate himself from the class of blameworthy, intentional imitators, and he implies that “a casual coincidence” will sometimes occur, although he does not “intend” to imitate Young.*
As Duff would have it, then, the brightness of original genius serves to illuminate obscure paths. Yet he cannot fail to acknowledge that genius is at times the source of confusions. Duff discusses imagery as a distinctive mark, an elevated style that corresponds to the flights characteristic of genius (EOG 143–45). Elevated above "ordinary modes of speech," a poet's language attains "a peculiar dignity." Images, however, do not always shed light, or rather may blind by shedding too much light at once: "An original Author indeed will frequently be apt to exceed in the use of this ornament, by pouring forth such a blaze of imagery, as to dazzle and overpower the mental sight; the effect of which is, that his Writings become obscure, if not unintelligible to common Readers; just as the eye is for some time rendered incapable of distinguishing the objects that are presented to it, after having stedfastly [sic] contemplated the sun" (EOG 145–46). As excessive light produces darkness, an excess of metaphor obscures. If writings of an original genius are too extreme in their figuration, they overpower readers' abilities and cause pseudoblindness. Duff prefers to close his eyes to the danger that must consequently attach to creations of original genius.

Both Young and Duff acknowledge that original genius is known, not simply for what it is, but for what it is not; the lights of genius shine in contrast to other lights, and flights of genius astound in contrast to the motions of those who crawl. When Young considers the subject of words old and new, he returns to the theme that opens the "Conjectures": "It is with thoughts as it is with words, and with both as with men; they may grow old, and die. Words tarnished, by passing through the mouths of the vulgar, are laid aside as inelegant and obsolete; so thoughts, when become too common, should lose their currency; and we should send new metal to the mint; that is, new meaning to the press" (Conj. 72). Genius must take care to select proper currency, for the original genius is known by its "new metal." Young does not wish to lose the ground of original composition by undermining its supposed origins in genius, yet the subsequent passage suggests a need for new schemes: "So few are originals, that, if all other books were to be burnt, the lettered world would resemble some metropolis in flames, where a few incombustible buildings, a fortress, temple, or tower, lift their heads, in melancholy grandeur, amid the mighty ruin" (Conj. 73). The ambitious author might perhaps wish for such a conflagration; the blaze of genius returns as a
burning of previous authors’ works. Is the success of an original genius akin to the “melancholy grandeur” of ruins amid a charred city? What is the temple Young imagines still standing after the destruction of a city?

Genius, Introjected Divinity

Young and Duff elaborate myths of genius because, without this figure, originality could threaten to subvert all grounds. To justify and explain innovations, genius must supply the ground and the new harvest of literary creation: as Young writes, “an original may be said to be of a vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made” (Conj. 71). Similarly, Duff conceives original genius as a power that frees an author from the need to imitate:

A Poet endued with a truly original Genius, will however be under no necessity of drawing any of the materials of his composition from the Works of preceding Bards; since he has an unfailing resource in the exuberance of his own Imagination, which will furnish him with a redundance of all those materials, and particularly with an inexhaustible variety of new and splendid imagery, which must be regarded as one distinguishing mark of original poetic Genius. [EOG 148]

“New and splendid imagery” is supposed to derive from genius, especially in happier, freer moments when there is no necessity to deviate. Duff strives to make original genius the ultimate ground, whereas Young draws from the Roman tradition to intimate divine origins of genius. Young and Duff rely on much of the same naturalistic figuration; their difference arises from Duff’s suppression of the theological dimension.

Young interprets the origins of originality through a myth of divine inspiration. But this genius is not analogous to the daimonion of Socrates nor to any of the guardian spirits suggested by tradition. Instead, Young radically introjects the divine spark: “With regard to the moral world, conscience; with regard to the intellectual, genius, is that god within” (Conj. 78). Young’s “genius” does not descend to man but rises with him; he advises the aspiring author: “let thy genius rise (if a genius thou hast) as the sun from chaos; and if I
So PHILOSOPHY OF GENIUS should then say, like an Indian, Worship it, (though too bold), yet should I say little more than my second rule enjoins, (viz.) Reverence thyself” (Conj. 87). Young thus proposes a secularized religion of self-realization. Unfortunately, our genius does not necessarily present itself directly: “Genius, in this view, is like a dear friend in our company under disguise; who, while we are lamenting his absence, drops his mask, striking us, at once, with equal surprise and joy” (Conj. 86). Originals are the products of divinity in man, but divine epiphany occurs in a peculiar scene of self-demasking. To recognize our own genius, we must wait for the moment when the disguise is dropped. Our disguise presumably consists of “figures” borrowed from previous authors, and which we in rare moments escape—unless the “dear friend” whose absence we lament turns out to be, not our own genius, but a feared precursor. The Christian exorcism of “daemons” (Conj. 96–97) is a figure for the pseudoreligious turn Young proffers, the passage from multiple precursors to an original persona.

The theological framework of Young’s “Conjectures” becomes most explicit at its close. Raising the subject of Addison’s genius, Young considers Addison’s final words that “taught us how to die.” If “the mind of a man of genius” is like “a perpetual spring” that assures eternal life, these dying words that “spoke human nature not unrelated to the divine” (Conj. 109) perform a similar function.

Young’s final three paragraphs return to the image drawn by the initial two. He prefaces his remarks by writing of a wish to reveal the “hidden lustre” concealed in some monument. Now he refers again to “the sacred deposit, which by Providence was lodged in my hands.” At the same time that he reflects the Roman tradition of a genius that passes on a torch to man, Young passes on his revised conception of genius. Addison, a Christian man of genius, turns out to be the “sepulchral lamp” mentioned earlier; Young has led us to “the long hidden lustre of our accomplished countryman, who now rises, as from his tomb, to receive the regard so greatly due to the dignity of his death; a death to be distinguished by tears of joy; a death which angels beheld with delight” (Conj. 109). Why is Young so concerned to praise Addison? In his praise, of course, he chooses to ignore Addison as a forerunner in the theory of genius. While Young asserts

10 Compare Shaftesbury’s “Soliloquy”: “Thus Dialogue is at an End. The Antients cou’d see Their own Faces; but we can’t” (Char. I, 205).
his wish to restore Addison's reputation, he simultaneously proclaims his own mission, to eulogize Addison, a "sacred deposit, which by Providence was lodged in my hands." To pronounce Addison's genius is for Young to become a divine messenger, to mediate between heavens and earth, to transform the light of the sun into sparks of thought and the blaze of imagery: to write with genius, as genius.

One striking absence from Duff's account is the theological ground that Young retains for genius. Young's original composition appears to "rise from the vital root of genius," and genius, in turn, "is that god within" (Conj. 71, 78). Duff curtails the theological dimension and implies, firmly within the empiricist tradition, that genius is an independent power of mind. Although Young's "genius" prevails in the poetic tradition of the nineteenth century, his rival Gerard, whose associationist theory in some ways parallels Duff's, finds double-edged expression in modern aesthetics.

Eighteenth-century aesthetics culminates in the writings of Immanuel Kant, whose *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) and the *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798) present central statements on genius (*Genie*) in the tradition begun by Shaftesbury. Both brief passages begin by conceiving genius in connection with a theory of talented artistic creation. Section 46 of the third *Kritik* and section 47 of the *Anthropologie* attempt unified expositions of genius following the associationism of Gerard, but hints of the theological conception destabilize Kant's definitions.

Kant explicitly links the German *Genie* with French *génie* rather than with Latin *genius*—because he discusses genius as an inborn capacity of the artist, that is, he traces the word to Latin *ingenium* and keeps the Latin *genius* at a distance. The genius of the artist is the product of nature, not of divine agency. In a parenthesis, however, Kant acknowledges the buried etymology of genius: "For presumably the word *Genie* is derived from *genius*, from the peculiar guiding, guardian spirit that is given to a person at his birth, and from whose inspiration these ideas were supposed to come forth." The recognition of a double etymology allows Kant (like Addison) to emphasize the meaning of "Genie" as a mental capacity (*ingenium*) while retaining the mythological overtones suggested by the notion of a guardian *genius*.

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But Kant (again like Addison) does not acknowledge the difficulties associated with combining psychological and mythological conceptions. The discussion in the Anthropologie also becomes more complex when Kant seeks to explain the reason for using a "mystical" name, Genie, to mean "the exemplary originality of talent":

But the reason why the exemplary originality of talent is called by this mystical name, is that the one who has it cannot explain its outbursts to himself; nor can he make comprehensible to himself how he comes upon an art, which he could not have learned. For invisibility (of the cause of an effect) is a collateral idea of a spirit [Geist] (a genius [Genius], which accompanied the talented already at his birth), whose inspiration, so to speak, it only follows.  

At the close of a century of dispute between theological and psychological explanations, Kant observes the final similarity between the notion of talent and the idea that a spirit accompanies a man from the time of his birth. The "exemplary originality of talent" that creates beautiful art cannot be explained, even by its possessor.

According to Kant's later analysis, then, Genie derives from Latin genius, but this guiding spirit appears essentially in the capacity of Latin ingenium. Although Kant directly acknowledges the work of Alexander Gerard, his efforts to equate genius with ingenium ultimately ally him with Addison and Young. Yet the palimpsest of "genius" asserts itself when Kant finishes by recognizing its etymology: a slip-page from Genie (ingenium) to genius occurs in both the Kritik der Urteilskraft and the Anthropologie.

Whereas Greek daimôn names a vague transcendent power, and Latin genius refers to a transcendent being, modern English "genius" characteristically signifies an immanent, self-sufficient mental activity. As the eighteenth century opens, Shaftesbury casts "genius" in the role of "mind," or "human spirit." This genius is not transcendent, and thus Shaftesbury mentions unusual "divine Men of a transcending Genius." Soliloquy, in Shaftesbury's terminology, names the independence of human genius; yet theorists of genius never agree con-

cerning the origins of originality. "Transcending (original) genius," or mind that steps beyond established paths, uneasily seeks to usurp the place of transcendent guidance. Addison gives a radical turn to English "genius" by means of the synecdoche that equates it with "great Genius." All genius comes to be great though nontranscendent. In the wake of Locke's associationism, Fielding understands genius as a power of mind, a gift of nature that must be combined with learning. Gerard similarly writes of genius as a natural faculty of mind, closest to invention.

When Young persists in ascribing divine origins to genius, he simultaneously creates an introjected divinity, "that god within." An unnamed friend is like the Christian emperors who "expelled daemons, and dedicated their temples to the living God." The new "genius" suggests a religion of the self that purges itself of precursor-daemons. Yet the notion of originality displaces transcendent origins, for the pre-Romantic genius strives to become its own originator. In a complex natural scenario, however, self-origination appears as a necessary deviation from overtrodden paths.

Despite their search for a sound basis of originality, then, eighteenth-century English authors represent originality as a swerve away from origins. The poet, who can no longer claim a transcendent muse, relies on natural talents that permit him to explore new paths. Genius turns inward, transformed from the status of an externalized divine guide into the role of a mundane wanderer in aesthetic realms. The new humanistic genius fails to replace spiritual guidance by soliloquy, however, for new forms of transcendence emerge.