

CONVERSING WITH BOOKS: READING THE PERIODICAL ESSAY IN  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN AND JEFFERSONIAN AMERICA

by

RICHARD J. SQUIBBS

A Dissertation submitted to the  
Graduate School-New Brunswick  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Literatures in English

written under the direction of

William C. Dowling

and approved by

---

---

---

---

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2007

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Conversing with Books: Reading the Periodical Essay in Eighteenth-Century Britain and

Jeffersonian America

By RICHARD J. SQUIBBS

Dissertation Director:  
William C. Dowling

The periodical essay is the sole British literary genre to have emerged and declined within the chronological eighteenth century. It appeared in London during the reign of Queen Anne, and by the end of the century had virtually disappeared amidst a new culture of magazine publication. This study charts the various guises the genre assumed across the eighteenth century as essayists in Edinburgh, Philadelphia and Manhattan adapted the worldviews expressed in the earlier London essays to the particular circumstances of their cities. What the English essayists and their readers had regarded as timely, topical conversations in print about manners and culture became something more to their Scottish and American avatars. The periodical essay for them became a medium for witnessing historical change, a genre centrally concerned with what might have been.

Each of the first three chapters focuses on a particular figure within the periodical essay tradition, showing how each one articulates a moral relationship to civil society that the essays' authors encourage their readers to adopt. The Censor in chapter one represents

a certain manner of reading, one that means to prompt social self-reflection in the name of a broader, more comprehensive civic awareness. Chapter two takes the whimsical essayistic persona as its subject, reading whimsicality as a principled resistance to the rationalizations of time management in a developing market society, and as a direct challenge to the herd mentality periodical writers see as the real face of liberal individualism in its consumer-market guise. My third chapter shows how the Templar, a young law student who finds himself drawn increasingly to literature, comes to figure in Scottish and American essay series a perception that belletristic writing must assume a law-like moral function in recording for posterity these writers' exemplary resistance to civic decline. My final chapter then reads Washington Irving's History of New York as self-consciously drawing upon these elements of the periodical tradition to create a sort of literary conscience for a new American polity seemingly intent on reducing all of civic life to an imaginatively impoverished market for consumer goods.

## Acknowledgements

I have been fortunate to have received tremendous support – moral, financial, and other – from a number of people and institutions throughout my years of research and writing. Institutionally, the Rutgers English department has been a most generous source of material support. I would like especially to acknowledge the Mellon Summer Dissertation Fellowship and the Mellon Problems in Historical Method Fellowship, both of which directly hastened this project to completion. On a more personal level, I was extremely lucky to have had access to the minds, expertise, and patience of two Rutgers faculty members in particular. William C. Dowling went above and beyond the call of duty in his attention to my thinking and writing, balancing his unflagging encouragement with sustained, though always fair, criticism that has proved essential to my continued development as a scholar, critic, and author. He has kept me honest through this entire process, and his example will continue to do so through the remainder of my career. William Galperin brought his enormous intelligence, curiosity, and wit to bear on my work always in a timely fashion, and the final product bears the marks of his commentary on almost every page. I would also like to acknowledge the time and energy Brad Evans, Myra Jehlen, Jonathan Kramnick, Meredith McGill, Michael McKeon, Adam Potkay, Cheryl Robinson, and Michael Warner contributed to my development not simply as a scholar and thinker, but as a professional as well. Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Ron and Mary, and my brother Ron, Jr., who rarely asked when I was finally going to finish this project, but always had faith that when I did, it would be worth all the time and effort I invested in it.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
1. Literary Citizenship	17
2. Civic Humorism	89
3. The Artful Templar	138
4. Reading Knickerbocker History	211
Bibliography	266
Curriculum vita	287

## INTRODUCTION

The British periodical essay has not received its due in eighteenth-century studies. Until roughly the 1980s, critics mined the genre for knowledge about the emergence of modern literary criticism in a new age of professional imaginative writing, or treated the periodical essay's representations of fashions, customs, and commerce as more or less accurate reflections of urban English culture in the period. Proponents of "the new eighteenth century" then took a different tack, approaching the genre as an instrument of bourgeois hegemony given to disseminating the most tepid manifestations of middle-class taste. Even those studies which adopt a more positive view of the essays nonetheless tend to relegate them to the status of uninteresting ephemera, excepting the handful of regularly anthologized numbers by Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and Samuel Johnson.<sup>1</sup> Devoid of the charge and excitement of popular radical publications, and too immediately associated with the milieu of belles-lettres to garner much notice from practitioners of the new social history, the periodical essay has yet to be studied in terms of its remarkable generic specificity.

The following chapters attempt such a study. Along the way, they show how perceptions of the genre changed across the eighteenth century as essayists in Edinburgh, Philadelphia and Manhattan adapted the worldviews expressed in the earlier London essays to the particular circumstances of their cities. What the English essayists and their readers had regarded as timely, topical conversations in print about manners and culture

---

<sup>1</sup> The most anthologized Spectator essays include Addison's "Pleasures of the Imagination" papers (411-421); the account of the Spectator Club (2); number 10, on the aims of the series; Addison's essay on wit (62) and Addison's remarks on Paradise Lost (267). Johnson's Rambler essays on fiction (4), pastoral (36, 37), biography (60), and literary imitation (121) are perhaps his best known and most widely read.

became something more to their Scottish and American avatars. The periodical essay for them became a medium for witnessing historical change. Conceived increasingly as records of the present for the edification of future readers, these essays would chronicle habits of mind and ways of everyday being which their authors believed were at that moment vanishing from view. The periodical essay became a genre centrally concerned with what might have been.

This analysis unfolds historically across approximately one hundred years, which marks a significant departure from previous studies. Criticism of the genre typically proceeds synchronically, focusing on a particular series in a particular moment. The Spectator (1711-14), written by Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and a few associates during a time of significant political unrest and cultural flux, has received the most attention of this sort, followed closely by its predecessor, The Tatler (1709-10), which began as Steele's venture but became a collaborative effort with Addison in its final months.<sup>2</sup> Samuel Johnson's The Rambler (1750-51), and to a lesser degree The Idler (1758-60), have been subject to a certain amount of study.<sup>3</sup> The Connoisseur (1755-57)

---

<sup>2</sup> See chapter one, passim for examples of Spectator criticism in this mode. See also Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom and Edmund Leites, Educating the Audience: Addison, Steele, and Eighteenth-Century Culture (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1984); Richmond P. Bond, The Tatler: The Making of a Literary Journal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Albert Furtwangler, "The Making of Mr. Spectator," MLQ 38 (March 1977): 21-39; Charles A. Knight, "The Spectator's Generalizing Discourse," Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism 16 (April 1993): 44-57; Knight, "The Spectator's Moral Economy," Modern Philology 91 (1993): 161-179; and Neil Saccamano, "The Sublime Force of Words in Addison's 'Pleasures,'" ELH 58 (1991): 83-106, as well as the essays collected in The Spectator: Emerging Discourses, ed. Donald J. Newman (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> See Leopold Damrosch, Jr., "Johnson's Manner of Proceeding in the Rambler," ELH 40 (1973): 70-89; John Converse Dixon, "Politicizing Samuel Johnson: The Moral Essays and the Question of Ideology," College Literature 25 (Fall 1998): 67-91; Patrick

was written about twice in the twentieth century, while The World (1753-56), The Adventurer (1752-54), and The Looker-On (1792-94) have not even been that lucky.<sup>4</sup> Edinburgh's Mirror (1775-77) and Lounger (1779-80) together have exactly one essay in English devoted to them.<sup>5</sup> These synchronic studies have surely yielded valuable insights, and their impact can be felt on nearly every page of what follows. But the development of a loose tradition of periodical writing across the eighteenth century has yet to receive sustained attention as a phenomenon in its own right.

The existing criticism occasionally makes reference to this development, though only to note that The Spectator inspired scores of essay serials, almost all of which were but pale imitations of it. According to this conventional line, Johnson alone approached The Spectator's polish, intellectual energy, and claim to the notice of posterity; it follows that other series like The World and The Connoisseur are little more than curios in the

---

O'Flaherty, "Johnson's Idler: The Equipment of a Satirist," ELH 37 (June 1970): 211-225; Pat Rogers, "The Rambler and the Eighteenth-Century Periodical Essay: A Dissenting View," in Telling People What to Think: Early Eighteenth-Century Periodicals from The Review to The Rambler, ed. J. A. Downie, Thomas N. Corns (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 116-129; Robert Donald Spector, Samuel Johnson and the Essay (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997); and James F. Woodruff, "Johnson's Rambler and Its Contemporary Context," Bulletin of Research in the Humanities 85 (Spring 1982): 27-64.

<sup>4</sup> See Lance Bertelsen, The Nonsense Club: Literature and Popular Culture, 1749-1764 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 32-61; Robert Donald Spector, "The Connoisseur: A Study of the Functions of a Persona," in English Writers of the Eighteenth Century, ed. John H. Middendorf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 109-121; Spector, English Literary Journals and the Climate of Opinion During the Seven Years War (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), passim; George P. Winship, Jr., "The Printing History of the World," in Studies in the Early English Periodical, ed. Richmond P. Bond (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 185-195; and the Studies in the Early English Periodical volume as a whole.

<sup>5</sup> Charles A. Knight, "The Created World of the Edinburgh Periodicals," Scottish Literary Journal (December 1979): 20-36.



cabinet of literary history one can pass by quickly without missing much. While I do not want to engage in ultimately subjective arguments about literary value, I do want to draw attention to the implied arguments for the value of certain periodical series in two major publishing ventures undertaken at the end of the eighteenth century: Select British Classics (London, 1793) and The British Essayists (London, 1803).<sup>6</sup> These multi-volume sets bequeathed to American writers at the beginning of the nineteenth century the notion that British periodical essays could offer readers instructive histories of mundane life in London and Edinburgh. This way of reading the British essays would then have significant impact on the emergence American serials like those in Joseph Dennie's Port Folio (1801-1811) and Washington Irving's Salmagundi (1807-08).<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Select British Classics, brought out in London by the publisher J. Parsons, represented the first bid formally to establish a tradition of the periodical essay in Britain. Most of the dozen titles collected therein comprise what we have come to regard as examples of the "classic" periodical essay: The Tatler, The Spectator, The Guardian, The Rambler, The Adventurer, The World, The Connoisseur, The Idler, and The Mirror. The 38-volume set was rounded out by three volumes of essays not exactly of the periodical genre: Oliver Goldsmith's Citizen of the World letters, his miscellaneous Essays (including The Bee, a periodical series in the mode of The Spectator), and William Shenstone's Essays on Men and Manners. The British Essayists, compiled by Alexander Chalmers in 1803-04 and supplemented with biographical accounts of the series' authors, replaced these non-periodical series with The Lounger and The Looker-On. This became the standard collection of British periodical essays, as it was reprinted on both sides of the Atlantic several times through the end of the nineteenth century.

<sup>7</sup> The Port Folio continued to publish until 1827, but for the purposes of this study I focus on the years of Joseph Dennie's editorship until his death in 1812. As he established it, The Port Folio was a literary magazine that did not shy away from criticism – oblique and direct – of Jefferson and his supporters, but which moved toward much less political, and more literary, content after its first few years of publication. Though it was a magazine, The Port Folio included a number of periodical essay series written largely by Dennie himself, and modeled on the British series contained in Select British Classics and The British Essayists.

My sense of what I call “the periodical tradition” derives from these collections. To a degree, my decision to focus on the titles they contain was a practical matter, for between 1704 and 1796 nearly two hundred serials were published in Britain that loosely fit the definition of a periodical essay. Many of these serials share only the bare fact of periodical publication with persona-driven series like The Spectator and The Lounger, and so are not included in this account of the genre. Those series which take political matters as their primary subject, like The Examiner (1710-16), The Craftsman (1726-50), Common-Sense (1737-43) and The North Briton (1762-71), likewise stand outside the range of this study. The specialization and topical character of titles such as The Free-thinker (1718-21), The Theatre (1719-20) and The Anti-Theatre (1719-20) distinguishes their contents from the broader, more ecumenical approach to cultural concerns in the periodical series I treat. Too much didacticism in a given series places it beyond the boundaries of my study as well. This has the perhaps unfortunate result of excluding periodical series authored by women from sustained consideration, as serials such as The Female Spectator (1744-46), The Old Maid (1755-56), and The Gleaner (1792) aim to educate readers in a straightforward, unambiguously moral fashion. Owing to the social expectations and strictures that tended to govern women’s writing in the period, the more freewheeling, ironic, and irreverent takes on urban life and letters characteristic of the essay series I treat do not feature so prominently in the works of female essayists. This is not to say that they are not present at all, as the examples of The Female Tatler (1709-10) and Mary Wortley Montagu’s contributions to The Nonsense of Commonsense (1737-38) make abundantly clear.<sup>8</sup> But their ironic challenges to readers and other essayists

---

<sup>8</sup> There were actually two competing Female Tatlers circulating in London in 1709, one

typically arise in the midst of explicitly political and personal controversy, and hence generically construe their interventions in the public arena in different terms than do the ones explored in this study.

The periodical tradition as I trace it from its origins in The Tatler through the early works of Washington Irving represents a distinctive strain in the history of Enlightenment serial publication. Insofar as the tradition had a politics, it involved self-conscious rejection of party interest in favor of literary independence. The urban life it reflects and comments on exists for the essays in something like a timeless order of meaning, where writers from the Greek polis and Roman republic weighed in on the states of modern London, Edinburgh, Philadelphia, New York and Paris along with Mr. Spectator and The Lounger. This was not high serious stuff, however. Their humanistic way of approaching everyday life in the city is of the Erasmian sort, the effects of whose “laughing philosophy” on popular English writing of the eighteenth century has yet to be studied in any depth.<sup>9</sup> Their sense of how reading and writing both index and transform public and individual character likewise extends the substance of Ciceronian humanism into a broad, popular arena. In the process, the essays in this tradition create new urban characters through their laughing, ironic take on everything from fashion trends, religious fanaticism, pedantic blockheads, and myriad lesser matters to the tendency for even their own characters to devolve into self-importance and cynicism. They thereby self-

---

published by Benjamin Bragge and one by Ann Baldwin. Each labeled the other spurious, but in the end Baldwin’s won out, appearing in 115 numbers through 1710.

<sup>9</sup> Though the present study does not deal directly with this branch of the essays’ humanism, I hope my exploration of the essays’ Ciceronian dimensions can prompt further reflection on the impact of various strains of humanism on the print culture of eighteenth-century London.

consciously constitute virtual communities sustained by the temporal rhythms of regular publication. But equally important, they come to forge a sense of community in later historical moments by virtue of being collected into multi-volume sets.

Insofar as they aim for some sort of consensus, whether in their initial periodical circulation or later as an effect of their memorialization in books, the essays appeal to readers by way of a coherent authorial personality. These personae express a shared sense of concern for the quality of civic life, while assuming that literature plays a central role in creating a sense of citizenship based in reading. Mr. Spectator, Fitz-Adam (The World), Mr. Town (The Connoisseur), Launcelot Langstaff (Salmagundi), or any of the others present attitudes toward everyday urban life which readers can consider, adopt, respond to, and/or criticize. They do, however, assume that those who tend to read poetry and belletristic treatments of history and philosophy, and make themselves aware of what is happening politically and culturally in their cities, will come to agree with the tenor and substance of many of their observations. Dissatisfaction with the state of a city's cultural life motivates the persona to write and publish. But his rhetoric (and personae are almost always male, though female correspondents feature prominently in many of the series) is neither expressly didactic, nor manifestly religiously motivated. What Alexander Chalmers, compiler of The British Essayists, called "the double dissimulation" of irony typifies the rhetorical relationship between personae and reader in this tradition of periodical writing.<sup>10</sup> By ironically impersonating perspectives wholly at odds with their essays' moral impetuses, these personae implicitly challenge readers to determine

---

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Chalmers, preface to The World, vols. 22-24 of The British Essayists, comp. A. Chalmers, 38 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1855), 22:15.

their own moral and ethical characters by fit – or unfit – readings of these ironical entities.

Steele's The Tatler (a study of which occupies much of chapter one) established the paradigm for this sort of essay, and he and Addison solidified it with their collaborative efforts in The Spectator. Both the Select British Classics and The British Essayists collections are arranged chronologically and begin with these two series, followed by Steele's subsequent serial The Guardian (1713). The two collections then skip ahead thirty-seven years to Johnson's Rambler, establishing an act of historical oversight which still operates today in most criticism of the periodical essay. But there is a discernible logic to this move, one which is not wholly reducible to the fact of Johnson's subsequent literary-historical celebrity.

One reason concerns Johnson's deliberate return to the publication format of The Tatler and Spectator. The significance of the essays' format will be addressed throughout the following study, but it is important to note at the outset how form and function reflected each other in the periodical essay genre. Early serials like the Tatler and Spectator were printed on folio half-sheets (roughly 11 x 15 inches) and could easily be folded and carried in one's pocket during the day for perusing in idle moments.<sup>11</sup> They contained just enough text to be read in a roughly half-hour session, which promoted indulgence in a brief interval of unbroken concentration amidst readers' daily activities.

---

<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to say with any precision what was the standard size for the folio half-sheets used for printing periodical essays. Most have disintegrated with time, leaving bound volumes of essays to comprise the archive from which scholars typically work, and the size of an average folio sheet used for printing in England during the first half of the eighteenth century ranged from 23.5 x 18.5 inches to 17.5 x 13.5 inches. See Philip Gaskell, A New Introduction to Bibliography (1974; reprint with corrections, New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1995), 73-83.

The scene of domestic reading memorably described in Spectator 10 proceeds from the possibilities offered by this form. Mr. Spectator hopes that families will adopt his series as “Part of the Tea Equipage” to be “punctually served up” each day with breakfast, during which the family can read and discuss his “Speculations,” and in turn carry on these discussions with others outside the home. Critics sometimes cite this moment to argue that The Spectator asserted its persona’s “male primacy in the personal realm,” or imposed “disciplinary technologies” on “impotent readers.”<sup>12</sup> But its promotion of reading as a daily activity meant to bring domestic privacy and the public world into productive contact might also be taken to represent a bid for making belletristic reading itself a fundamental condition for a modern public consciousness.

I explore Johnson’s contribution to this enterprise in the second half of chapter one. What makes The Rambler more significant to the literary history of the periodical essay than the thirty-plus series which came and went between The Guardian’s termination in 1713 and 1750 is Johnson’s manifest recognition that the genre needed to have its basic principles restated for a new readership. While series like The Censor (1715-17) and The Humourist (1720) expressly modeled themselves on The Spectator, they contributed nothing new to the genre, merely reiterating Addison and Steele’s accomplishments with markedly less wit and intellectual perspicuity. Beyond these shortcomings of style and content, the absorption of these periodical series into magazines made them emblematic of a new publishing market which, from the vantage

---

<sup>12</sup> Shawn Lisa Maurer, Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 21; Scott Paul Gordon, “Voyeuristic Dreams: Mr. Spectator and the Power of Spectacle,” The Eighteenth Century: Criticism and Interpretation 36, no. 1 (1995): 9, 20.

of an essayist like Johnson, appeared antithetical to the ethical aims of the periodical genre as given classic form in The Tatler and Spectator. This is where publishing format takes on real significance with regard to the sense of the genre instantiated in Select British Classics and The British Essayists, and passed on to readers and writers in early America.

By the time Johnson published The Rambler the single-sheet periodical essay had all but disappeared from London's bookstalls and coffeehouses owing to the changing economics of publishing. With its wide variety of material, the magazine offered something for everyone. It also allowed greater space for advertising, which mutually benefited publishers and merchants. Both The Tatler and The Spectator had featured advertising on the verso side of their sheets, which has led some scholars to conclude that whatever their authors' protestations to the contrary, these so-called moral essays are ultimately reducible to the raw fact of economic exchange.<sup>13</sup> As will become plain in the following pages, I am inclined to take more seriously the possibility limned in these essays that even amidst the bustling commerce of London, Philadelphia, and New York the cultivation of the mind, and the quality of civic life, could be widely valued more than the extent (or absence) of one's personal fortune. And this is something that Johnson, and after him the authors of The Adventurer, The World, The Connoisseur, The Observer, The Mirror, and The Lounger, among others not only grasped, but saw in terms of the symbolic value of publication format.

To publish a single-sheet periodical series, especially when it flew in the face of what had become the far more profitable business of magazine publishing (as it had by

---

<sup>13</sup> Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, "The Rise of Periodical Studies," PMLA 121 (March 2006): 517-531.

mid-century), was an act of symbolic resistance to the reduction of imaginative writing to its market value. Not all the essay series included in Select British Classics and The British Essayists were originally published in this format. Oliver Goldsmith's Citizen of the World (1760-61) first appeared in the Public Ledger, and Johnson's Idler (1758-59) ran as a column in The Universal Chronicle, or Weekly Gazette. Both these series nonetheless espoused the ethical worldview which forms the common point of reference and cultural desiderata of the essays collected in Parson's and Chalmers. While they appeared as columns amidst the miscellaneous material in newspapers, this does not necessarily invalidate their attempts to give readers opportunities for understanding themselves and their societies in terms distinct from, if not hostile to, those offered by the exigencies of the market. It surely complicates this aim; but the periodical essay in the Parson's/Chalmers tradition explicitly ruminates on its complicated relationship to commerce, marking another generic feature that chapters two and three explore in some depth.

An English version of classical humanism gives what I'm calling the essays' "ethical worldview" its pedigree, but in an informal way. Cicero's De Officiis is the key sourcebook for the genre's common notion of civic awareness. Its translation of this ethics into the mundane lives of unexceptional readers constitutes one of the periodical essay's key generic hallmarks. This is crucial to recognize, for many eighteenth-century critics consider classical philosophy and literature the property of a relatively small, increasingly embattled elite who wielded the classics as their primary cultural weapon against the more practically-oriented, and less philosophically- and poetically-inclined, representatives of the rising middle class. The classical tradition, in other words, stands



roughly for a declining aristocracy, while the novel (and, typically in such accounts, the periodical essay) represents the bourgeoisie, with all its progressive energy and internal contradictions. That these are untenable assumptions is argued at some length in chapter one.

The works of Cicero, Quintilian, Livy, Sallust, Seneca, Virgil, Tacitus, and other Roman authors had become staples of the humanist educational curriculum in England by the end of the fifteenth century. This was the body of learning which taught sons of the gentry to be courtiers and statesmen in the Tudor era. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, its reach expanded to the sons of the lesser gentry, who were to assume the status of relatively petty bureaucrats in increasingly populous towns throughout England. But towards the end of the Restoration relatively cheap editions of these works became more widely available in London. Since periodical series like The Tatler and Spectator made casual reference to them on nearly every page, it made sense for booksellers to have these on hand. Those without access to a university education, but with enough money to buy periodical sheets and the occasional book, could knock together enough familiarity with this classical tradition to make sense of these essays' habitual allusions to the classics. They might thereby begin to grasp the imagined continuities between the ancient Roman republic and eighteenth-century London (or early nineteenth-century Philadelphia or New York) which invested the essays' observations of the urban scene with an air of historical exemplarity. Apparently trivial matters like a preference for reading scandal sheets instead of substantial books; the desperate preening of bankrupt fop; or a momentary rage for impractical clothing begin to take on something like world-historical import when

encountered by readers mindful of the broad continuity of manners across nearly two centuries that this popularization of humanist learning impressed upon them.

To recognize this is to be made more aware of the possibly momentous consequences of everyday behavior. Sometimes this exemplarity aims at relatively high seriousness; in other instances it is played for laughs in the mock register typical of much of the period's writing. But its presence in almost every number of a series like The Spectator makes it difficult to believe, except in a prima-facie way, that such appeals to classical humanism are meant above all to establish superficial cultural cachet for the essays' readers. Whatever claims to high culture might be implied in references to classical learning even in a relatively popular form like the periodical essay, Ciceronian or Senecan philosophy cannot be reduced to badges of distinction worn by members of a burgeoning middle class to differentiate themselves from the grubby masses below. At the very least, such a reduction seriously impoverishes our understanding of the belletristic culture of the time.

Likewise, it does a disservice to the imagination and ingenuity of eighteenth-century readers to suggest that the classical character of the essays' ethics must be part of a desperate attempt to subject these men and women to the mind-forged manacles of an irreducibly aristocratic ideology. Cicero and Horace, perhaps the two most cited classical Roman authors in the period, were perennially concerned in their most popular writings with the foibles and ethics of urban life. We might thereby see in the ubiquitous uses to which British writers put them original, imaginative attempts to bring the accumulated wisdom of the past to bear on the present in expressly sociable ways. In this manner, periodical essays assisted in circulating throughout a broader reading public the

Ciceronian notion of the artes liberales, which freed individuals by making them aware of their participation in a moral and civic and imaginative order greater than the comparatively petty nature of their immediate, material surroundings. How this plays out as a grounding assumption in British periodical essays especially during the second half of the eighteenth century, and in American essays of the Jeffersonian era, is explored in chapter three.

My final chapter turns to Washington Irving's A History of New York (1809), which I regard as a culmination of the historicizing turn in belletristic writing that the periodical essay had initially prompted. Critical tradition has it that Irving's career followed a downward trajectory in which the satiric energy displayed in the History gives way to the sentimentalism of The Sketch Book (1819), and ultimately to Irving's public embarrassment by the History's anarchic character. I argue that the ironic take on modern commercial culture that he inherited from the periodical tradition, and which is everywhere in evidence in both his Salmagundi essays (1807-08) and the 1809 History, remains a significant strand in his writing right up through his final 1848 revision of the book, which critics continue to read as a betrayal of its original thrust. By showing how the History's narrative persona, Diedrich Knickerbocker, emerged from Irving's early efforts as a periodical essayist, I then follow Irving's resuscitation of that persona at key moments in his career. Rather than telling a sad story of a complacent author's gradual repudiation of his earlier, more vital satiric persona, this reading reveals how the periodical tradition's attempts at ironic community-making remained relevant to Irving's conception of authorship even in his 1848 revision of the History.

My study thus ends with the persistence in a new American polity of the periodical essay's mode of social and cultural critique. Attenuated though it may be, and reduced to a supporting role in another literary genre (in Irving's case, satiric history), its humanistic way of registering and trying to shape urban life was woven into the fabric of American literature of the early National period and beyond. By recovering the popular humanistic literary culture out of which the genre first emerged in England, I hope to shed new light as well on how writers across the Atlantic who inherited the Oppositional political culture of the English Augustan moment and shaped it to their own ends did the same with this most eighteenth-century, and most British, of literary genres. The present study provides only the broad outlines of such a transatlantic approach to literary history. But it marks, in my view, a significant step forward in our understanding of this unjustly neglected body of writing.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### LITERARY CITIZENSHIP

Joseph Addison, writing as Mr. Spectator in 1711, declared his ambition to “have it said” that he “brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses.”<sup>1</sup> Critics of the eighteenth-century British periodical essay have routinely cited this line in explaining the genre’s aims and character. But especially since the 1989 publication of Jürgen Habermas’s The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere in English, they have tended to read straight past “Philosophy” in rushing to the “Clubs and Assemblies,” “Tea-Tables” and “Coffee-Houses” (S 10).<sup>2</sup> For historians and literary critics writing in Habermas’s wake, the proliferation of these gathering places in London instance new

---

<sup>1</sup> The Spectator 10. Of the serials I cite throughout this dissertation only Addison and Steele’s, Goldsmith’s, and Johnson’s are published in standard, scholarly editions. In order to keep the citation format uniform, therefore, I will cite quotes from essays only by abbreviated title and number as listed below:

T: The Tatler, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

S: The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

R: The Rambler, vols. 3-5 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, eds. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

A: The Adventurer, vols. 19-21 of The British Essayists, comp. A. Chalmers (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1855).

W: The World, vols. 22-24 of Chalmers.

C: The Connoisseur, vols. 25-26 of Chalmers.

I: The Idler, vol. 2 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson.

M: The Mirror, vols. 28-29 of Chalmers.

L: The Lounger, vols. 30-31 of Chalmers.

CoW and B: The Citizen of the World & The Bee, By Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Austin Dobson (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1934).

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

habits of public socializing which were instrumental to the creation of modern bourgeois society. The current emphasis on social, rather than intellectual or literary, history in the larger field of eighteenth-century studies contributes as well to a general critical reluctance to conceive the essays' role in hastening this creation as a philosophical one in any serious sense. Insofar as the genre's literary and philosophical attributes are acknowledged by critics writing in this mode, they tend to be dismissed as mystifications of more primary social concerns.

At the positive pole of this body of criticism, the periodical genre appears as part of the cultural apparatus responsible for stimulating the rational-critical debate central to the bourgeois public sphere. For less sanguine critics, an essay series like The Spectator moved through these locations in order to convince, or coerce, their eighteenth-century readers to take on the values and behavioral standards historians have come to identify with the modern middle class.<sup>3</sup> The common denominator in both approaches is the rise of bourgeois society, a narrative whose validity tends to be assumed rather than made an object of analysis. This has the effect of demoting "Philosophy" in criticism of the

---

<sup>3</sup> See Stephen Copley, "Commerce, Conversation and Politeness in the Early Eighteenth-Century Periodical," British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies 18, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 63-77; Brian Cowan, "Mr. Spectator and the Coffeehouse Public Sphere," Eighteenth-Century Studies 37 (Spring 2004): 345-366; Terry Eagleton, The Function of Criticism: From "The Spectator" to Post-Structuralism (London: Verso, 1984); Scott Paul Gordon, "Voyeuristic Dreams: Mr. Spectator and the Power of Spectacle," The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation 36 (1995): 3-23; Erin Mackie, Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Shawn Lisa Maurer, Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Peter Stallybrass and Alan White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

periodical essay to the status of a second-order reflection of primary socio-economic changes, or of the class consciousness they generate (S 10).

Debate over the implications of Habermas's work has raged and waned in the past fifteen years, mostly in the areas of social theory and early American studies.<sup>4</sup> Those working in Restoration and eighteenth-century studies, on the other hand, have shown curiously little interest in re-examining his basic theory of how the public sphere came into being. Critics have certainly taken issue with Habermas's seeming equation of rationality with a white, male, middle-class self-understanding. But they have done so mainly to contest his assertion that the promise of Enlightenment public culture died near the end of the eighteenth century, precisely when women and members of the lower classes in London and Paris began to claim public voices for themselves.<sup>5</sup> Such critiques, however, rarely examine the public sphere in its moment of emergence for signs of different forms of critical publicity, ones not directly reducible to what we conventionally associate with an epoch-making bourgeois culture.

---

<sup>4</sup> See Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); and The William and Mary Quarterly 62, no. 1 (2005), a special issue devoted to the impact of public sphere theory on the study of colonial and early American literature and history.

<sup>5</sup> See Harry C. Boyte, "The Pragmatic Ends of Popular Politics," in Habermas, 340-355; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in The Phantom Public Sphere, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1-32; and Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," in Habermas, 259-288.

A recent issue of Criticism devoted to reassessing Habermas's theory in the context of eighteenth-century studies neatly exemplifies this.<sup>6</sup> Focusing mainly on what Habermas denoted the "precursor sphere" – the milieu of the literary essay, early novelistic fiction, and the early magazine – each of the contributors aims to elucidate its character, and explain how it made the transition from this "apolitical" mode to the public sphere we are all familiar with, the one expressly situated outside of, and in critical relation to, the state.<sup>7</sup> Yet those who deal specifically with the literariness of this precursor sphere do not challenge Habermas's basic formulation so much as emphasize more the private side of his public/private dialectic. For Habermas, the public sphere emerged out of a newfound sense of privacy marked by "a specific subjectivity," one "oriented to an audience."<sup>8</sup> He conceives the middle-class family unit as the key training ground in which this audience-oriented subjectivity develops, and from which emerge the critically reflective individuals who then come together as a public to debate matters of state, economy, and society. Kevin Pask in this issue of Criticism, like most eighteenth-century critics currently revisiting Habermas, assumes the validity of this basic narrative; his innovation is to foreground the role of diaries and familiar letters in hastening the process.<sup>9</sup> The result, according to the editors of this special issue, makes "strikingly

---

<sup>6</sup> Criticism 46 (Spring 2004). This special issue was edited by Joseph Lowenstein and Paul Stevens, and features essays by A. E. B. Coldiron, David Norbrook, Kevin Pask, Harold Love, and Michael McKeon.

<sup>7</sup> Habermas, Structural Transformation, 29.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas, Structural Transformation, 43.

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Pask, "The Bourgeois Public Sphere and the Concept of Literature," Criticism (Spring 2004): 241-256.



apparent ... the bourgeois qualities of new mid-seventeenth-century literary forms.”<sup>10</sup> But if we might entertain the notion that these bourgeois qualities were not automatically ordained by history to take center stage over the following half-century, we might then ask whether other ways of conceiving personality and character were available to readers and writers in this new, literary precursor sphere.

Insofar as Habermas regards private self-knowledge as a necessary precondition for the emergence of modern publicity, an analysis like Pask’s allows us to consider from another angle how certain, largely overlooked genres of writing helped this process along. But this focus on privacy and interiority, and on the kinds of writing that instance it most directly, avoids the question of whether or not public character in the period – or at least the versions of public character circulated in periodical essays – always, or necessarily, depended upon the articulation of private interiority for its self-definition. Might the presence of “bourgeois qualities” register a conceptual language belonging to but one of several rhetorics competing for public attention in eighteenth-century Britain?<sup>11</sup> Habermas’s work itself begs such a question, and suggests that a different story could be told, in which the periodical essay shows us a history of character writing from the outside, where the tenor of one’s everyday social interactions reveals more about individuals than their diaries ever could.

This might seem puzzling, especially to those who regard The Tatler (1709-10) and The Spectator (1711-14), and the scores of periodical essays they inspired, as being

---

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Lowenstein and Paul Stevens, “Introduction: Charting Habermas’s ‘Literary’ or ‘Precursor’ Public Sphere,” Criticism (Spring 2004): 203.

<sup>11</sup> Lowenstein and Stevens, “Introduction,” 203.

instrumental to the creation of modern middle-class consciousness, if not outright engines of bourgeois ideology. Edward and Lillian Bloom's optimistic assessment of Addison and Steele as proselytes of a new order of polite, Whiggish middle-class values, and later condemnations of Addison and Steele by Terry Eagleton, Erin Mackey, and a host of other critics for supposedly disseminating such values, together assume that modern bourgeois hegemony is the clear obverse of the periodical essay as a genre.<sup>12</sup> Yet by focusing on the character of the "Philosophy" Addison and Steele sought to circulate through the Town we can discern a version of Habermas's literary precursor sphere in which conceptions of civic character in early eighteenth-century London are very much up for grabs (§ 10). The struggle performed in the essays over how to define that character then poses social and cultural problems to which a pragmatic, mundane sort of philosophy derived from Ciceronian humanism is offered as a desirable, and workable, solution.

The ultimate payoff of such a discovery is not that it rescues Habermas's work from one-sided readings, nor that it proves wrong those critics determined to read periodical essays as ideologically bourgeois in uncomplicated ways. It rather allows us to understand anew the moment in early modern London when a group of essayists first wholly grasped the possible impact of the press on how vast numbers of readers thought, and on their capacity to assess themselves through their social relations with others. The periodical essay thereby articulates particular understandings of the urban milieu of print grounded in creative, adaptational readings of humanistic philosophy and history. Moreover, the Enlightenment concern with how politeness can be conceived as an

---

<sup>12</sup> See the books and essays listed in note 2.

original, modern ethics can be shown in this account to inform at a structural level the emergence of the periodical essay genre. Perhaps most important from the vantage of literary and cultural history, however, the periodical essay witnesses the difficulties involved in circulating conceptions of selfhood and personality which always presume the ethical priority of the social body. Read in these terms, the personae adopted by English essayists from the beginning to the middle of the eighteenth century become not only familiar fictional voices speaking from the page, or confident apostles of Enlightenment civil society, but self-conscious records of the failure of a modern humanistic reading culture to engage the participation of more than a small circle of readers.

The story of the periodical essay's appearance in early eighteenth-century London is, of course, one fundamentally bound up with the history of the press. The explosion of occasional pamphlets during the Civil War period is commonly cited as evidence of how a relatively unrestrained press fired more readers than ever before with an appetite for politics.<sup>13</sup> The growth of newspaper circulation in the quieter, if more watchful, climate of the reigns of Charles II, James II, and William and Mary bore further witness to a sense among at least the merchant classes that citizens had a right to know what was happening in the realms of state and economy, if only up to a point.<sup>14</sup> Early magazines

---

<sup>13</sup> See Christopher Small, The Printed Word: An Instrument of Popularity (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1982); Nigel Smith, Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); and Margaret Spufford, Small Books and Pleasant Histories (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> See Hannah Barker, Newspapers, Politics, and English Society, 1695-1855 (Harlow, England: Longman, 2000); and Jeremy Black, The English Press in the Eighteenth Century (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); and James Runciman

like Daniel Defoe's Review (1704-13) and John Dunton's Athenian Mercury (1691-97), to name but the two most well-known titles, went beyond providing timely information by aiming to educate readers while also entertaining them.<sup>15</sup> All of this increasing press activity, and the new serial and occasional forms it produced – newspapers, magazines, and the penny pamphlet among them – presumed the presence of citizens hungry for reading material. For these readers, the ritual of taking semi-daily, or weekly, sheets was constitutive in part of their senses of themselves as citizens. This does not mean, however, that all writers of such periodical literature understood their roles and aims, and imagined their putative readers, in the same way.

There are clear differences between the kinds of ideal readers that newspaper writers, magazine compilers, and periodical essayists imagined for their works. The editor of The Weekly Pacquet (1678), for instance, aimed at readers desiring a “Methodical Collection of the most Material Occurrences in Matters of State, Trade, Arts, and Sciences.”<sup>16</sup> Dunton's Athenian Mercury announces its intentions to resolve “the nice and curious questions proposed by the Ingenious.”<sup>17</sup> The Tatler and The Spectator, by contrast, propose aims both less exalted, and more practically philosophical. Steele in Tatler 1 asserts that because “this globe is not trodden upon by

---

Sutherland, The Restoration Newspaper and its Development (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> See Walter Graham, The Beginnings of English Literary Periodicals: A Study of Periodical Literature 1665-1715 (1926; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 1-54, for a succinct overview of these and other pre-Tatler periodical series.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Jeremy Black, English Press, 28.

<sup>17</sup> The Athenian Gazette or Casuistical Mercury, 17 March 1691. The paper soon changed its name simply to The Athenian Mercury, as it is now known.

mere drudges of business only,” newspapers and occasional didactic tracts that pronounce themselves “for the use of the good people of England” miss their mark as often as they hit it. He proposes instead to entertain “men of spirit and genius,” along with “the fair-sex,” with more trifling accounts of “the passages which occur in action or discourse throughout this town” (T 1). In these, The Tatler declares, we find ourselves and others as philosophical beings. This is what Habermas refers to in remarking how in reading periodicals like The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian (1713), the public held “up a mirror to itself ... entering itself into ‘literature’ as an object.”<sup>18</sup> By learning to objectify themselves as fully sociable entities, and to understand everyday life as in some sense a collaborative effort, readers are enjoined habitually “to think” (T 1). With this first number of The Tatler in 1709, Steele formally outlines the scope and intent of the periodical essay genre. How readers are to think is another matter.

When Isaac Bickerstaff (Steele’s persona) declares that the “end and purpose” of his serial is to instruct “worthy and well-affected members of the commonwealth ... after their reading, what to think,” his brash forthrightness signals that right from the start readers need to approach Bickerstaff from a substantial critical distance (T 1). This point appears to be missed in a collection of critical essays entitled Telling People What to Think, where the various authors assume that the eighteenth-century British periodical press instances a rather simple culture of didactic publications.<sup>19</sup> Critics who take Bickerstaff’s statement at face value, however, fail to recognize the ironically inflated

---

<sup>18</sup> Habermas, Structural Transformation, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Telling People What to Think: Early Eighteenth-Century Periodicals from The Review to The Rambler, ed. J. A. Downie, Thomas N. Corns (London: Frank Cass, 1993).

self-regard which is characteristic of periodical personae across the eighteenth century. This structural irony carves out a distinctive place for the genre within the larger milieu of periodical publishing in London.

At first glance, Bickerstaff's assessment of an almost manically politicized readership appears smugly to dismiss the notion that most citizens are capable of any political sense whatsoever. The "worthy and well-affected" need to be taught "what to think," we learn, because of their "strong zeal and weak intellects" (I 1). While surely "public-spirited," these unfortunately "political" people "neglect their own affairs to look into transactions of state" and end up out of their depth (I 1). When they begin to look into state matters, they find themselves at a loss to comprehend and criticize them; this is where public papers come in, playing the necessary role of telling them what to think. As thinking beings, these men emerge from newspapers, their minds filled only by news of "foreign edicts" and "dull proclamations," which equally suits and reflects the logic of the newspaper business (I 1). The very presence of newspapers, and the sight of others reading and discussing them vociferously in coffeehouses, makes these citizens feel that they must think something – anything – about politics. But on their own they do not really know what to think. Newspapers then supply material that provokes controversy and pulls readers' attention toward the scandalous deeds of others, one after another. This keeps citizens preoccupied and distracted, and is not at all conducive to the type of reflective self-examination Bickerstaff deems essential to civic life. The irony here surely operates at the expense of popular forms of political participation. But its edge turns back on Bickerstaff's self-presentation as well, opening the critical distance essential to the periodical essay as a distinctive genre.

In his willful self-regard, Bickerstaff appears to guarantee that his effort to reform the public with his essays will be an exercise in folly. Implying that he stands above all the superfluous information piling up around London, he declares himself the ultimate authority in determining the usefulness of knowledge. His superior sensibility is all he requires to winnow “all matters, of what kind soever, that shall occur” to him and retrieve by it pearls of wisdom guaranteed to produce “very wholesome effects” (I 1). His whims, in other words, better determine what is worth reading and thinking, and what not, than what otherwise appears in the public prints. How this whimsical posture expresses a particular sort of resistance to what periodical essayists in Britain from Steele through Henry Mackenzie, and those in America like Joseph Dennie and the young Washington Irving will regard as the mindless, novelty-obsessed character of a burgeoning consumer culture is explored in the following chapter. Such excessive confidence in the moral rectitude of one’s whimsical inclinations can, however, lead to debilitating forms of disengagement from society. This recognition drives the periodical essay as a genre to promote a form of whimsy through which individuals can engage others like themselves – those likewise possessed of “spirit and genius,” for instance – without falling into either solipsism, or monomania (I 1). The first number of The Tatler hints at this potential problem; The Spectator then appeals to Ciceronian humanism as the “Philosophy” best able to solve it, placing periodical essays and newspapers in symbolic opposition as rival means of forging civil society with the printed page.

In Spectator 124, Addison celebrates the “Art of Printing” because of the “Advantage” it gives modern essayists over “the Philosophers and great Men of Antiquity.” The rapid reproduction of writing that print makes possible, coupled with

improved distribution networks, helps “diffuse good Sense through the Bulk of the People” and “clear up the Understanding” in ways the ancient philosophers could only have dreamed of (§ 124). Scott Black has perceptibly remarked that in publishing The Tatler and The Spectator Addison and Steele sought “to comprehend the new social relations of the modern city” by offering “the formal conditions of an alternative to a political imaginary construed in the spaces of the country, the polis, or the res publica.”<sup>20</sup> Reacting in particular against Michael Warner’s thesis that The Spectator tries to constitute “a new form of public identity (republican disinterestedness),” Black argues that Addison and Steele do not so much promote disinterested action on behalf of the republic (through what Warner refers to as a republican “principle of supervision”) as apply to life in the modern city the “Socratic imperative” that moral knowledge proceeds from a “many-sided method of discussion” brought to bear exclusively on “human things.”<sup>21</sup> His emphasis on the Socratic dimension of The Spectator’s discourse is salutary insofar as it makes philosophical dialogue central to the periodical essay genre. This includes both the reader’s internal dialogue with him- or herself, and with the material or persona encountered on the page. Equally pertinent is the putative dialogue with others “out there” in the world which periodical essays always posit as a crucial extension of the reading process. Further, classical philosophy appears as a living

---

<sup>20</sup> Scott Black, “Social and Literary Form in the Spectator,” ELH 33 (1999): 37-38. For a thoroughgoing critique of the notion of Addison and Steele as bourgeois ideologues, see William Walker, “Ideology and Addison’s Essays on the Pleasures of the Imagination,” Eighteenth-Century Life 24 (2000), 65-84.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Warner, The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 41; Scott Black, “Social and Literary Form,” 35. For more on Warner’s understanding of republican publicity, see below, pp. 40-41.



discourse for the essayists of Black's early modern London; its flexibility, deep concern with language, and wholly social understanding of morality and ethics make it for Black especially adaptable in popular efforts to grasp the shapes and meanings of life in a rapidly changing urban society. More than any previous critic, Black is able to parse the philosophical orientations of Addison and Steele's publishing venture in ways that might have been recognizable even to the periodical's authors and readers.

Yet Black still endows print technology with ultimate determining force. As he critiques Warner for equating The Spectator's public rhetoric with that of classical republicanism, Black ends up deemphasizing the rhetorical originality of these essays and falls back on the notion that print possesses what Warner had critically referred to as "its own unchanging logic."<sup>22</sup> For Warner, republicanism stands as a "cultural mediation" of, or a conceptual rubric for, the function of printed discourse.<sup>23</sup> Print in his account is a neutral technology that does not automatically produce cultures and consciousness according to some inexorable logic. It does not, for example, "fix" knowledge more reliably than did scribal publication by sheer dint of its technological properties (the thesis of Elizabeth Eisenstein); nor does it instantly serve as the essential precondition for the rational-critical debate associated with Habermas's understanding of modern publicity.<sup>24</sup> Print merely makes reproduction and circulation of texts easier and less time-

---

<sup>22</sup> Warner, Letters, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Warner, Letters, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). David Zaret, "Religion, Science, and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth-Century England," in Habermas, 212-235, provides a classic reading of this sort of print-determinism. See Margaret J. M. Ezell, Social Authorship and the Advent of Print (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999),

consuming. Republicanism in Warner's account – construed formally by the rhetoric of personal disinterestedness and the primacy of the public good, together with the convention of authorial anonymity as practiced in The Spectator – thus gives print in early eighteenth-century Britain and America a logic which then comes to seem intrinsic to the technology. From an analytical standpoint, however, the gap between the technology and the rhetoric used to explain it must always be borne in mind by critics and historians of this early print culture.

Whatever possibly radical cultural changes print was capable of effecting need to be understood in terms of how contemporaries interpreted the medium's possibilities. "Steele and Addison developed a distinctly modern literature at the nexus of the mutually defining technology of the press and the emerging spaces of the city," Black tells us.<sup>25</sup> This surely highlights how the relative newness of regular periodical publication, and of the social mores and manners the rapid commercialization of London culture had stimulated at the beginning of the eighteenth century, created opportunities for the periodical essay to emerge as a genre. But in foregrounding print and socio-economic changes, casting them as the prime movers in the genre's development, Black underestimates how the humanism he rightly ascribes to Addison and Steele gave them a comprehensive notion of citizenship understood in largely literary terms. It is according to this notion that print and the "new social relations" of the modern city looked like

---

1-20, for an incisive critique of "the construction of print technology as a metaphor for the 'new'," as "associated with 'modern' in a positive sense, and ... simultaneously linked to 'professional' authorship and 'advanced' market economies" (9).

<sup>25</sup> Scott Black, "Social and Literary Form," 37.

historically fortuitous phenomena to them, for they provided greater opportunities for realizing this strain of humanism in everyday life than at any time previous.<sup>26</sup>

Cicero's treatise on civic life, De Officiis (ca. 44 B.C.), provides the blueprint in these essays for what I'm calling literary citizenship. His insistence that language not only reveals individual character, but creates the possibility for a meaningful and just social and civic life, provided an accessible and comprehensive means through which Addison and Steele and likeminded writers grasped the possibilities of print media. Cicero's works were a staple not just of the humanist educational curriculum in England, but of the wider print culture across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A brief overview of the publishing history of Cicero's writings not only forcefully drives home their omnipresence in London's bookstalls, but more importantly suggests how the English public received the character of Ciceronian humanism. Between the 1530s and 1800, nearly four hundred editions of Cicero's orations, letters, and philosophical works were published, mainly in London but also in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dublin, Cambridge and Oxford. In terms of publishing trends, two main strands are worth noting: Latin versus English editions, and rhetorical versus philosophical writings. The most reprinted Latin text collected Cicero's works on friendship, old age, the stoic paradoxes, Scipio's dream, and De Officiis (Of Offices, or Duties); at least forty-one editions of this collection were published between 1574 and 1791, and were most likely used as school texts, given the number of editions printed at Cambridge. Collections of Cicero's Orations (Orationes) and familiar letters (Epistulae Familiares), both core readings in the humanist educational curriculum, were reprinted in Latin nearly as often, with only very

---

<sup>26</sup> Scott Black, "Social and Literary Form," 37.

occasional English translations of each appearing until the 1750s, when English editions began to eclipse the Latin ones.

This matter of which of Cicero's works were brought out regularly in English or Latin becomes especially germane to understanding The Spectator's "Philosophy" when we recognize that those works concerned with the practical art of day-to-day living, as opposed to the more courtly arts of self-fashioning through stylized letter writing and oratory, were pulled off London's presses in discrete volumes almost exclusively in English translations. While the most reprinted Latin collection (the school text noted above) was translated only twice (1577 and 1755), three of the major works it included (De Officiis, De Amicitia [Of Friendship], and De Senectute [Of Old Age]) rarely – if ever – appeared in single-volume Latin editions. From the mid-sixteenth-century onwards, they were continually published in English, with Of Offices the most popular among them. It ran to at least twenty-eight editions between 1534 and 1798, with five different English translations (two in 1699 alone), and thirteen editions appearing in the eighteenth century. In light of this, it seems fair to say that for the eighteenth century there were at least two Ciceros: the great orator and teacher of rhetoric whose authority in the British schools was largely coterminous with his Latinity, and the more familiar dispenser of philosophical wisdom geared toward manifesting the good and happy life – both personal and civic – on an everyday basis.

De Officiis emblemized this latter Cicero for the period's readers. Adam Potkay remarks that "in the eighteenth century ... philosophy was more immediately an appendix to Cicero" than to Plato, noting that De Officiis was not only one of "the two most frequently cited works [of Cicero's] in both The Spectator and Johnson's Rambler," but

that it was of particular “importance to Enlightenment thought in Britain” as a whole.<sup>27</sup> Hume claimed that the book provided him an appropriate “catalogue of virtues” to draw upon in setting out to become a public writer.<sup>28</sup> Addison and Steele and their collaborators in The Spectator alluded to it so often that a correspondent noted with some defensiveness how “great with Tully” the periodical had recently been before submitting his own moral observations to the series (§ 154). This veneration for De Officiis did not stop at Britain’s western shore. Members of the Revolutionary generation in America cited it as “a salutary discourse on the duties and qualities proper to a republican gentleman,” and as “a work which does honour to human understanding and the human heart.”<sup>29</sup>

Mr. Spectator’s announcement that he intended to bring “Philosophy” out of the schools and into popular “Assemblies,” moreover, alludes directly to a passage in Cicero’s Quaestiones Tusculanae (Tusculan Disputations) (a work Johnson considered translating), where the Roman writer remarks of Socrates that he “was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens and set her in the cities of men and bring her also into their homes and compel her to ask questions about morality and things good and evil.”<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Adam Potkay, The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 78, and 78 note 5.

<sup>28</sup> Hume to Francis Hutcheson, Sept. 17, 1739, Life and Correspondence of David Hume, ed. John Hill Burton, 2 vols. (1846; reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), 1: 114.

<sup>29</sup> John Adams and James Wilson, quoted in Carl J. Richard, The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 36, 65.

<sup>30</sup> Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, trans. J. E. King (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945), 10.

Such appeals to Cicero as a familiar, urban moral philosopher lend particular shading to what Habermas generally casts as the “practical wisdom” which periodical writers sought to wrest from “the philosophy of the scholars.”<sup>31</sup> If the editors of the OED are to be relied upon, De Officiis even provided the standard definition of “philosophy” for the learned culture of eighteenth-century Britain: “philosophy,” Cicero writes, “is nothing else, if one will translate the word into our idiom, than ‘the love of wisdom.’ Wisdom, moreover, as the word has been defined by the philosophers of old, is ‘the knowledge of things human and divine and of the causes by which those things are controlled’.”<sup>32</sup> The “practical” dimension of this “wisdom” appears clearly in Cicero’s insistence that philosophy produces “mental enjoyment and relaxation” through its capacity to create “a good and happy life,” providing a “method” by which “strength of character and virtue” can be cultivated (173). For the Roman philosopher, casual conversation is a key – if often overlooked – source of mundane happiness, without which the love of wisdom, and hence a better life, could never manifest.

Peter Burke has suggested that all of the numerous early modern European and English humanist writings on conversation can fairly be read as “a series of footnotes to Cicero.”<sup>33</sup> We can understand why when we read in De Officiis that “[r]eason and

---

<sup>31</sup> Habermas, Structural Transformation, 43.

<sup>32</sup> Cicero, De Officiis, trans. Walter Miller (1913; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 173. OED, s. v. “philosophy,” notes that Cicero’s definition “was considered authoritative.”

<sup>33</sup> Peter Burke, The Art of Conversation (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 96. In an appendix, Burke lists 31 titles of works concerned principally with conversation published in Italy, France, and England between 1618 and 1791, all ostensibly “footnotes to Cicero” (96).

speech” are first among the “natural principles of human fellowship and community,” together responsible for the “bonding” that “unite[s] [human beings] in a kind of natural fellowship” from which proceed the notions of “justice, fairness [and] goodness” that define a true civilization.<sup>34</sup> From this foundational assertion of how language constitutes society, Cicero then distinguishes the two primary kinds of speech responsible for sustaining civil “fellowship”: oratory and conversation (21). Cicero was, of course, widely known for his stature as Rome’s greatest orator, whose attacks on Antony in the Philippic Orations led to his murder and subsequent status as martyr to republican freedom (his head, with his hands nailed to it, was set upon the rostrum where he had, time and again, defended the republic against tyrannical encroachments). But his insistence on the primary value of conversation demonstrates just how central the world of everyday speech was to his philosophy of virtue.

His complaint in De Officiis that while “[g]uidance about oratory is available” there is “none about conversation” might be echoed by contemporary eighteenth-century critics, who lack sustained studies of the impact of Cicero’s philosophies of society and language on the popular press (51). We have, for instance, studies of the Ciceronian dimensions of English political thought, and of polite conversation in the culture of the salon, but none concerned extensively with how the Ciceronian philosophy of conversation informed the essay genre in England.<sup>35</sup> Quentin Skinner’s passing remark

---

<sup>34</sup> Cicero, De Officiis (On Duties), ed. and trans. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21.

<sup>35</sup> For Cicero’s influence in “high” political discourse, see Peter N. Miller, “The Figure of Cicero,” in Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 21-87; Charles G.

that Cicero's signal contribution to English humanism was to recognize "that men are the materia of cities, and that they need to come together in a union of an honourable and mutually beneficial kind if they are to succeed in realizing their highest potentialities" goes straight to the heart of an early modern phenomenon that requires further elaboration.<sup>36</sup> In a London where definitions of citizenship were broadening and informal socializing was increasingly seen as key to the development of culture, the ethical dimensions of conversation in the works of Cicero and subsequent humanists supplied a practical way of placing learning and philosophical reflection at the center of civic life.

Cicero contends that conversation should be "gentle and without a trace of intransigence," but also "witty," and that no speaker should "exclude all others as if he were taking over occupancy of his own estate," being ever mindful that conversation is "shared," and it is only "fair ... for everyone to have a turn" (52). In substantial terms,

---

Nauert, Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), passim; Markku Peltonen, Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought 1570-1640 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and "Classical Eloquence in Renaissance England," in Quentin Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19-211. For studies that address Ciceronian humanism in more popular writings (however diffusely), see Jerome Christensen, "The Commerce of Letters," in Practicing Enlightenment: Hume and the Formation of a Literary Career (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 120-200 passim; Nicholas Phillipson, "Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of Early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Culture," in Scotland and England, 1286-1815, ed. Roger A. Mason (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, Ltd., 1987), 234; Adam Potkay, "Regretting Eloquence in Polite Letters," in The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 104-158 passim; and Potkay, The Passion for Happiness. For the relationship between belletristic writing, salons, and conversation, see Dena Goodman, The Republic of Letters. A Cultural History of the French Revolution (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); and David S. Shields, "Belles Lettres and the Arenas of Metropolitan Conversation," in Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 11-54.

<sup>36</sup> Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric, 2.



“Conversations are for the most part about domestic business or public affairs or else the study and teaching of the arts” (52). The tenor of Cicero’s conversational ethic can be heard in Bickerstaff’s many censures of “orators, in common conversation” whose self-important harangues violate the cardinal virtue of complaisance (T 264), and Mr. Spectator’s explication of “good Humour” in company as that which lifts “Conversation” a “Degree towards the Life of Angels” (S 100). It also sounds in The Adventurer’s lament that “loquacious imbecility” threatens the friendly converse which, “by connecting individuals, formed society” long ago where there was none before (44), and dozens of other essays that invest conversation with symbolic value as the root of not just civility, but of the fundamental social bonds which civility then progressively refines into cultures that produce individuals able to reflect upon this process, and to hasten it further by publishing essays.<sup>37</sup> This understanding of the apparently mundane milieu of conversation helps explain how the humanistic aspects of the republican tradition, which is conventionally studied in its heroic guise as one of the forces that toppled autocratic rule in England while laying the cultural groundwork for Enlightenment, exerted a more diffuse, but equally profound, influence in the more commonplace arenas of everyday life.

Writing some thirty years after The Tatler and Spectator introduced the periodical essay to the British literary scene, David Hume in “Of Essay-Writing” (1742) makes

---

<sup>37</sup> For more essays with a similarly Ciceronian take on conversation, see T 21, 45, 95, 224, 225, 226, 244; S 143, 409, 574; G 24; R 177, 188; A 85; W 27, 94; C 27, 138; L 3, 30. See Roy Porter, The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000) for an attempt at a full-scale synthesis of popular Enlightenment culture in (mainly) England, though one that leaves Ciceronian humanism entirely out of the picture.

explicit how the publication of essays channeled this tradition in more popular directions. While he contends that the “Separation of the Learned from the conversible World” was “the great Defect of the last Age,” Hume lauds his contemporaries for being “proud of borrowing from Books their most agreeable Topics of Conversation,” thereby forging a “League betwixt the learned and conversible World.”<sup>38</sup> This is not a one-way stream of influence, however. As a result of having been “shut up in Colleges and Cells, and secluded from the World and good Company ... Belles Lettres became totally barbarous, being cultivated by Men without any Taste of Life or Manners, and without that Liberty and Facility of Thought and Expression, which can only be acquir’d by Conversation.”<sup>39</sup> The “conversible” world – here figured as feminine, and marked by a “Delicacy of ... Taste” which asserts itself against the “dull Labours of Pedants and Commentators” bred by cloistered schooling – forces “Learning” to try its “Reasonings” against “that Experience, where alone it is to be found, in common Life and Conversation.”<sup>40</sup> Claiming grandly (if with cheek) that he knows “nothing more advantageous” to “promote a good Correspondence betwixt these two States” than “such Essays” as his, Hume asserts that publishing essays hastens the joining of “Mankind together in Society, where every one displays his Thoughts and Observations in the best Manner he is able, and mutually gives and receives Information, as well as Pleasure.”<sup>41</sup> The “proper Exercise of the Mind” he

---

<sup>38</sup> David Hume, “Of Essay-Writing,” in Essays Moral, Political, and Literary, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 534-535.

<sup>39</sup> “Of Essay-Writing,” 534.

<sup>40</sup> “Of Essay-Writing,” 536, 535.

<sup>41</sup> “Of Essay-Writing,” 535, 534.

hopes to stimulate by synthesizing learning and conversation in his essays represents “practical wisdom” in action.<sup>42</sup>

In an important essay on the Stoic character of eighteenth-century belletristic writing, Lois Agnew amplifies the implications of Hume’s assertion that belles-lettres is, at its core, an expressly community-making discourse.<sup>43</sup> “In emphasizing the role of education in simultaneously strengthening the individual’s language skills and fundamental moral sense,” she writes, “belletristic rhetoric carries forward the Stoic and Ciceronian belief in the significant connections among language, the human mind, and the social order.”<sup>44</sup> Agnew goes on to examine how eighteenth-century rhetoricians and philosophers like Thomas Reid, Hugh Blair, Alexander Gerard, and Lord Kames all extrapolate in their writings from “Cicero’s perception that individual virtue is necessarily enacted through language, which makes possible the social stability upon which humans inevitably depend.”<sup>45</sup> Like Hume, and Addison and Steele before him, these thinkers understand language to make social reality in a very real way, through the myriad daily interactions endemic to city life.

This conviction leads the authors of The Tatler and Spectator to pay special attention to the formal characteristics of periodical sheets in the belief that the manner in which words on the page conveys knowledge can formally shape a reader’s

---

<sup>42</sup> “Of Essay-Writing,” 534; Habermas, Structural Transformation, 43.

<sup>43</sup> Lois Agnew, “The Stoic Temper in Belletristic Rhetoric,” Rhetoric Society Quarterly 33, no. 2 (2003): 69-88.

<sup>44</sup> Agnew, “Stoic Temper,” 77.

<sup>45</sup> Agnew, “Stoic Temper,” 79.

consciousness. Mr. Spectator's resolve to "Print [him] self out" before he dies remarkably encapsulates the periodical essayists' sense that print and consciousness were coterminous (S 1). From the readers' side, Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography expresses a similar understanding. Warner has cited Franklin's witty epitaph (in which he figures his body as a book, and the translation of his soul to heaven as the bringing out of "a new & more perfect Edition") as evidence of how Franklin treats "print and life in equivalent terms."<sup>46</sup> He then reads Franklin's 1720 encounter with The Spectator as a key instance of how print functions as a primary generator of the instrumental rationality for which the sly and calculating Franklin is famous. Yet the emphasis in this reading on how Franklin internalizes The Spectator's ostensibly rational "Method in the Arrangement of Thoughts" downplays Franklin's stated objective in remaking himself through taking on The Spectator's language: to improve his "Manner in Writing" in order to be more persuasive in carrying on a "Discussion" in letters with "another Bookish Lad in the Town."<sup>47</sup> In writing his own "Spectator" out of the "short Hints of the Sentiment in each Sentence" he copied from the original as prompts, Franklin shapes his reading, thinking, and writing, and by extension his engagements with others interested in such things, according to the rhetorical force of The Spectator's "Language".<sup>48</sup> This is less the adoption of a "Method" in the rational-critical sense than an immersion in a specific, and highly socialized, world of language and learning. Franklin's willing subsumption by the

---

<sup>46</sup> Warner, Letters, 74.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin Franklin: Autobiography, Poor Richard, and Later Writings, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1997), 580, 579, 578.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin Franklin, 580.

periodical's rhetoric not only accords with its authors' intentions – Addison and Steele would, in fact, revise for style letters from correspondents to model how these writers could more felicitously inhabit The Spectator's language-world – but empowers him, in his new-found rhetorical facility, to revise The Spectator itself.<sup>49</sup>

But not every reader was Franklin. The Spectator presented a vision of a London public that wanted reading matter, and whose citizens felt compelled to take up pamphlets and weeklies, but were made distracted by the formal characteristics of newsprint and therefore unable to stop and think before reacting to, and passing on, news. “The Mind that lies fallow but a single Day,” Mr. Spectator insists, “sprouts up in Follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous Culture” (S 10). The flipside of this mock-egalitarian sentiment – that all minds are created equal in their susceptibility to “Follies” if left vacant – is how it clears a space for reflection on how, exactly, the public mind is to be conceived. In opposing the “Knowledge of ones-self” to that of “what passes in Muscovy or Poland” as the ideal desideratum of the popular press, The Spectator first aims to stimulate reflection on what, and how, citizens read (S 10). This, they hope, will then assist readers in “wearing out” the “Ignorance, Passion and Prejudice” that the newspaper press cultivated (S 10).

The survey of imagined readers in Spectator 10 concretizes this point. There are families whose “well-regulated” schedule “set[s] apart an Hour in every Morning” for breakfast during which The Spectator may be read aloud. Then there are the idle, whose

---

<sup>49</sup> Though only “sometimes,” and only in “certain Particulars of small Import,” he had nevertheless “been lucky enough to improve the Method or the Language” of the periodical (Benjamin Franklin, 580). See William Kinsley, “Meaning and Format: Mr. Spectator and His Folio Half-Sheets,” ELH 34 (1967): 482-94.

only “Business” is to lounge about town and “look upon” their fellows (§ 10). Mr. Spectator also hopes to persuade the “Fair ones” that “a more elevated Life and Conversation” is preferable to the round of trifling “Amusements ... contrived for them” by a masculine – and commercial – culture unwilling to regard them as “reasonable Creatures” (§ 10). Finally, and most inclusively, we have the “Blanks of Society” (§ 10). These readers are drawn from both the leisured and commercial worlds, and marked by a total lack of “Ideas” of their own (§ 10). Like parodic extensions of Locke’s theory of minds as *tabulae rasae*, these “Blanks” only attain ideas after the “Business and Conversation of the Day has supplied them,” after which they have something to think and talk about “for the ensuing twelve Hours” (§ 10). As the historian Brian Cowan notes, the types of reader denoted by the “Blanks” – also dubbed “*quidnuncs*” by Addison and Steele (Latin for “what now?”), a term that would stick in criticism of news mongering across the eighteenth century – represented simultaneously the tendency for coffeehouse discourse to degenerate into mere rumor-chasing, and the countervailing potential for *The Spectator* to “instill into” such readers “sound and wholesome Sentiments.”<sup>50</sup>

*The Spectator* thus renders the possibility for developing cultural and civic character through the press in early eighteenth-century London as a double-edged one. Echoes of the complaint in *Tatler* 178 that “imaginary entertainments” are kept up in “empty heads” by the “tautology, the contradictions, the doubts, and wants of confirmations” in newspapers can be heard clearly in a mock correspondent’s ironic revelation in *The World* of how the ravenous compulsiveness periodical essayists

---

<sup>50</sup> Cowan, “Mr. Spectator,” 353.

associate with consumer culture aligns with the proliferation of, and demand for, printed news in 1750s London. This reader, who dismisses “books” as nauseating “PHYSIC” while proclaiming “NEWS” to be the “true and genuine FOOD of the MIND” (W 70) is reminiscent of those Bickerstaff in The Tatler identified with Don Quixote, whose “weak heads” have been turned by “the newspapers of this island” like those of Spanish readers were by “books of chivalry” (T 178). But fifty years later, The World notes how increasing popular identifications of news reading with Enlightenment have emboldened such readers to scorn outright the very notion of humanistic learning. Fitz-Adam, The World’s eidolon, then pulls from this correspondent’s extolling the superior virtues of “NEWS” an explanation of the current popular vogue for “memoirs”: in their restriction of narrative to the shallow recesses of “personal character” and sensationalized renderings of personal experiences, such books demand nothing of their readers beyond their own narcissistic fascination with authors who write endlessly about themselves (W 70). In such a reading culture, distaste for the “labours” from which “knowledge” issues becomes epidemic, generating a mass conviction that one’s own opinion about matters of “religion and politics” justifies itself solely by being voiced, free of the dead weight of “study” and “experience” which, by another reckoning, might serve to qualify the legitimacy of one’s views (W 70).

Oliver Goldsmith’s Citizen of the World (1760) offers an even more cynical assessment of the mid-century public sphere as pattered on coffeehouse news reading. For Goldsmith’s persona Altangi, the “coffee-house” and “Daily Gazettes” sustaining one another in the economy of a newly bourgeois public sphere are wound together like a toy that spins for the delight of an aristocrat’s servant (CoW 4). Manipulating the “universal

passion for politics” which the essayist sees as a particularly English diversion, the “great man’s gentleman” concocts a false story, and “for his own amusement” watches as it makes the rounds of gossip from “a porter” to “a beau,” who passes it on to the “oracle of some coffee-house” one evening over a gaming table (CoW 4). This “oracle” then broadcasts the news at the coffee-house, where those “who compile these papers” transform erroneous hearsay into the printed “news” which is the sign and guarantee of the rectitude of public opinion on matters of state (CoW 4).

While associating coffeehouses and newspapers with the phenomenon of critical publicity had become commonplace as early as the 1670s, Goldsmith’s mock-exposure of aristocratic trifling as the animating force of this public realm raises key questions for his contemporaries, and for present historians and literary critics.<sup>51</sup> Might the rhetoric of self-determination through the press as espoused by an increasingly well-defined middling sort express mere wishful thinking, if – as it appears here – it remains subject even at mid-century to a stubborn “ancien regime”?<sup>52</sup> Or is Altangi’s point more simply that coffeehouse politicians need to be more circumspect regarding the circulation of what

---

<sup>51</sup> See The Character of a Coffee-House, with the Symptomes of a Town Wit (London, 1673); and Coffee-houses Vindicated (London, 1675). See also John Brewer, The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 34-39; Steve Pincus, “‘Coffee Politicians Does Create’: Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture,” The Journal of Modern History 67 (1995): 807-834; and Edward Robinson, The Early English Coffee House: With an Account of the First Use of Coffee (1893; reprint, Hants, England: The Dolphin Press, 1972).

<sup>52</sup> The term is used in J. C. D. Clark, English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics in the Ancien Regime (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) to describe England in the eighteenth century as a “confessional state,” in which aristocratic power and traditional religious habits of mind held sway to a far greater extent than is typically acknowledged by historians content to see England in the period as marching steadily toward a progressive, secular, and increasingly democratic modernity (26).



passes for news in order to rise above the daily round of hearsay and sensationalism threatening to make fools of them? But then, if newspapers are to be the primary medium of active citizenship, might the efficacy of their civic role depend upon the existence of reading publics already constituted by literary periodicals like Goldsmith's?

This last option seems the best gloss on the vexed relationship between humanistic reading and newspapers rendered in the pages of eighteenth-century periodical essays. But in order to understand why, we must be willing to see in the attacks on newsmongering in early periodicals something more than a pernicious anti-democratic impulse. This involves trying to grasp the grounds of the philosophical argument that belletristic reading necessarily prepares one to be better able to evaluate the quality and character of news. Viewed in the context of this philosophical approach to literary citizenship, English literary periodicals seek to alter the cultural conditions from which the current, debased practice of newsmongering springs. If, as Jeremy Black remarks, English newspapers across the eighteenth century were marked by "inherent conservatism" in both their consistent format and market-minded concern with only giving readers what they expected, so too complaints about the press changed little, if at all, from one end of the century to the other.<sup>53</sup> The Morning Post's 1780 attack on the "licentiousness of the press" for sowing "dissensions" and serving "faction" substantially restates the castigation in the 1722 St. James Journal of "that insufferable license" given to "seditious papers" which "poison the minds of the people."<sup>54</sup> Criticism of printed news

---

<sup>53</sup> Jeremy Black, The English Press, 278.

<sup>54</sup> Morning Post, 21 July 1780 and 7 November 1780, quoted in Hannah Barker, Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England (Oxford:

in both the ministerial and opposition press zeroed-in on how newspaper editors mobilized disinformation for immediate partisan advantage. Amongst habitual laments over how factions reliably abuse the “publick Prints” for short-term gain, however, praises of “Liberty of the Press” as a bulwark of Parliamentary sovereignty rang forth with equal predictability.<sup>55</sup> Both sides in this conflict posit the people as well-intentioned dupes, their eagerness to exercise their citizenship making them that much more manipulable by ill-intentioned power brokers.

Out of this strife emerges the “Censor of Great Britain” (I 162), the persona Steele-as-Bickerstaff adopted, as would scores of subsequent English writers and editors across the eighteenth century.<sup>56</sup> The Censor is not simply a severe judge of morals and conduct, nor primarily a monitor of the press charged with preventing morally offensive or politically inconvenient matter from reaching the public. As Steele and later periodical essayists received him, the Censor rather articulates homologies between print culture and personal ethics, and between linguistic expression and civic character, in a manner

---

Clarendon Press, 1998), 12; St. James Journal, 1 December 1722, quoted in Black, English Press, 123.

<sup>55</sup> Hyp-Doctor, 25 January 1732, quoted in Black, English Press, 124. For accounts of the ambivalent views of the press in eighteenth-century London, see Barker, Newspapers, 43-73; and Black, English Press, 113-134.

<sup>56</sup> In addition to The Censor, Lewis Theobald’s fairly successful London periodical series (1715-1717), Mr. Town of The Connoisseur declares himself “Censor-General” in the series’ first number, and an essay series called The Censor ran in the Philadelphia Toilet: a Weekly Collection of Literary Pieces in 1801. This is not to remark the literally hundreds of references to the Censor in essay series, or the dozens of newspapers and theater journals in England and America carrying “Censor” in their titles. Steele was frequently referenced as “The Censor” in the London press, often slightlyingly.

remarkably apt to engage what writers of literary periodicals perceived to be a print-mad city.

Knowledge of Marcus Cato (234-149 B.C.), the most famous Roman Censor, came to early modern English readers primarily through Plutarch, whose Lives were long a cornerstone of the humanist curriculum, first in Thomas North's oft-reprinted 1580 English translation, and then in what became the definitive "Dryden translation" of 1683-86. Along with the tradition of character writing, whose impact on the periodical essay is explored in the following chapter, Plutarch's Lives exerted enormous influence on the creation of literary lives, the most famous of which were, of course, Samuel Johnson's Lives of the Poets (1779-1781). What lent Plutarch such authority among English biographers was his attention to the personal peculiarities of his subjects. For him, as for his English avatars, "matter[s] of less moment, an expression or a jest, informs us better of [the] characters and inclinations" of Alexander, Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, and the other statesmen he writes about than do their "most glorious exploits."<sup>57</sup>

Such expositions of the seeming minutiae of character lent Plutarch's Lives a "moral purpose" which Johnson asserted showed "not how any man became great, but how he was made happy; not how he lost the favour of a prince, but how he became discontented with himself" (I 84).<sup>58</sup> The synthesis of private subjectivity and public

---

<sup>57</sup> Plutarch, "Alexander," in The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, trans. John Dryden and revised by Arthur Hugh Clough (1683-86; reprint, New York: Modern Library, n. d.), 801.

<sup>58</sup> Susanne Gippert, "The Poet and the Statesman: Plutarchan Biography in Eighteenth Century England," in The Statesman in Plutarch's Works ... Volume 1: Plutarch's Statesman and His Aftermath: Political, Philosophical, and Literary Aspects, ed. Lukas De Blois et al (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 311.

character central to the Habermasian theory of the public sphere appears here, and in the periodical essay more broadly, in a slightly different guise. Plutarch the biographer aims not to divulge the “real” character of a public figure in the particulars of his private life (which would imply that public and private constitute potentially radically separate spheres), but memorably to inflect the public character with personal shadings in order to flesh out those remarkable figures who have appeared with such force on the public stage. Personal idiosyncrasies are for him irreducibly public qualities, in that they allow readers, who likely have never performed deeds of public renown, to connect sympathetically with the subjects of his Lives. By adapting Plutarch’s approach to writing moral biography to the more mundane world of the periodical essay, Addison and Steele and subsequent essayists likewise seek to make readers experience their lives as being fundamentally public, and open to scrutiny and reformation in the give and take of the periodical’s pages.

The Censor is thus almost uncannily suited as a figure not just for the urban essayist, but for the essay genre’s relation to the world of print. The office of Censor was an elective one and “in a manner the highest step in civil affairs,” according to Plutarch, and Cato was especially remarkable for daring the people “not to choose the gentlest, but the roughest of physicians” to assume the office (422, 423). The Censor’s “Powers were many and various,” according to an essay in the 1746 Museum, for he “number’d the Citizens, distributed them into their Centuries and Classes, and took an Estimate of their Properties ... farm’d out the publick Revenues ... gave Laws to the Provinces ... had Care of the public Buildings and Highways; and regulated the Expences [sic] of the

public Sacrifices.”<sup>59</sup> While many of Cato’s censorial acts dealt with consular misconduct, he became notorious for enforcing sumptuary laws with special rigor, levying steep taxes on those who possessed luxury goods “so that people, burdened with these extra charges, and seeing others of as good estates, but more frugal and sparing, paying less into the public exchequer, might be tried out of their prodigality” (Plutarch, 424). The people duly recognized his efforts on behalf of the republic, and they erected a statue of him in the temple of the goddess Health in tribute. This memorialized not the singular success of his military exploits against Rome’s external foes, but his censorial accomplishments which, by “his good discipline and wise and temperate ordinances, reclaimed the Roman commonwealth when it was declining and sinking down into vice” (Plutarch, 425).<sup>60</sup>

While Steele’s translation of the Censorial function wholly into the realm of language would initially seem to blunt its force, his consciousness of how print materializes the character-forming power of language transforms the exemplary status of the Censor into a kind of public property available for readers to adopt. When Cato proscribed “Actions not subject to any formal Penalty, which yet indicate a worse and more wicked Character than many positive Crimes, of which the Law takes Cognizance,” we learn in “On the Office of the Censor” (1746), he appealed only to those “Statutes ... of eternal Truth and Moral Obligation” as grounds of censure, while making a public

---

<sup>59</sup> “On the Office of the Censor,” in The Museum: or, the Literary and Historical Register, 12 April 1746, 41-42. See Alan E. Astin, Cato the Censor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 78-103, for an account of Cato’s Censorship that synthesizes all the extant sources relating to it.

<sup>60</sup> Alan E. Astin, Cato, notes that given the lack of mention of this statue in other historical sources, Plutarch might have “uncritically assumed to have been contemporary a statue of whose existence he had heard but which was erected long afterwards” (103, n.89).

show of the incarnation of those standards in his own behavior.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, his ordering of citizens into their officially-recognized classes, and official power to demote miscreants from one class to another, translated the effects of individuals' conduct directly into material social relations.<sup>62</sup> The ethical circuit ran from individual behavior, through the eternal, objective "Statutes" the Censor's personal example represented, to the social rank these individuals subsequently occupied. Bickerstaff invokes this tradition of reviewing, "casting up," "ranging," "disposing," and "subdividing" the people to describe his own activities, but offers the results of his office to the judgment of his readers who, by assenting – or not – to this symbolic ordering of Town life, themselves become exempla of a positive or negative sort (T 162).

That language is the source and sign of ethical character in such acts of symbolic ordering, assent, and dissent is nowhere made clearer than in Tatler 230, where a letter – significantly reproduced by Bickerstaff "without the least alteration from the words of [this] correspondent" – exposes the "affectation of politeness" as an irreducibly linguistic matter. This writer's excoriation of "the great depravity of our taste, and the continual corruption of our style" evinced "among our English writers" springs from a conviction that "words are the clothing of our thoughts," outward manifestations of inner character made public (T 230). In his rhetorical worldview, "common sense," or its absence, is revealed in the use, or abuse, of "common grammar" (T 230). It follows that wanton brandishing of the "late refinements" in speech and writing – the "abbreviations and

---

<sup>61</sup> "On the Office," 43-44.

<sup>62</sup> Senatorial (senators), Equestrian (equites), commons (plebs), Latins (latini), foreigners (peregrini), Freedpeople (liberti or libertine), Slaves (servi).

elisions,” “abundance of polysyllables,” and neologisms taken in the Town and its coffeehouses for evidence of the “politeness” of their users – is the linguistic equivalent of the extraneous frippery and “ornament” of the strutting fop and “coxcomb” (I 230). The increasing presence of such linguistic excretion in books and essays of “history, politics, and the belles lettres” makes this even more pernicious in The Tatler’s estimation (I 230). Such “great and manifest evils” are no longer restricted to the conversational rounds of “town politeness” in the assemblies and coffeehouses and tea tables that The Spectator identified as raw material to be worked into higher degrees of intellectual, linguistic, and ethical refinement by literary periodicals (I 230). They have now ensconced themselves “in the world of letters,” mirroring the Town’s corrupt character back to itself as they reinforce in print the fashionableness and thoughtlessness Bickerstaff and this correspondent seek to reform out of existence (I 230).

Plutarch’s account of Cato’s hostility to the growing popularity of Greek philosophy in Rome stands as a key precedent for Tatler 230, lending a serious point to what might otherwise appear to be the serial’s overly fussy concern with how citizens of the Town speak and write. Late in his life, Cato became alarmed at the large crowds that gathered to hear Carneades the Academic speak, filling “like a wind,” according to Plutarch, “all the city with the sound of” his oratory (428). For Cato, the deep skepticism associated with Carneades’s Academic philosophy was a function of the bewildering power of his language (Cicero characterized Carneades as a rhetorician “accustomed to propound any view that suited his purpose”). This not only threatened to “undermine the ancient customs” of Rome with its caustic relativism, but to alter the very structure of

Roman civil life by instilling “a passion for words” in Roman youth, who would thereby “prefer the glory of speaking well before that of arms and doing well” (Plutarch, 428).

This version of the Stoic critique of the Academics, in which rhetoric and philosophical inquiry practiced solely for their own sakes are shown to destroy civic character, is inflected in several ways that bear directly upon the self-consciously Censorial character of the periodical essay. The herd-like madness for “philosophy” Plutarch ascribes to the youth of Rome is presented as a fashionable rage which instantly replaces all customary “pleasures and pastimes,” ending – in Cato’s view – in a self-indulgent quest for pointless speculation at the expense of public-oriented action (Plutarch, 428). Moreover, Cato confronts a Roman establishment that not only fails to comprehend his objection to this “passion for words,” but views “with much pleasure” the current rage for “the Greek literature” (Plutarch, 428). As a witness to the potentially grave civic consequences of this proliferation of idle language in republican Rome, Cato the Censor stands as a symbolic bridge between the civic concerns of an ancient culture marked by oratory and chirographic publication, and those of a modern one substantially created, and sustained, by print and conversation.

That language, and its misuse, for The Tatler lies at the center of politeness as a concept allows us to see how concern with manners represents for periodical writers and others in eighteenth-century England a systematic attempt to solve the social, cultural, and ethical problems generated by a new market and credit economy.<sup>63</sup> Though literary

---

<sup>63</sup> Lawrence E. Klein, “Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England,” Historical Journal 32, no. 3 (1989): 583-605; Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); “Coffeehouse Civility, 1660-1714: An Aspect of Post-Courtly Culture in England,” Huntingdon Library Quarterly 59, no. 1



critics tend to view politeness as a mystification of bourgeois class interest, its philosophical rootedness in the imperative to primary social awareness makes it difficult, when fully considered, to reduce politeness to an epiphenomenon of an ideology predicated on individual rights.<sup>64</sup> Certainly, aspects of the social refinement and emphasis on manners bound up with politeness can be abstracted from their ethical origins and used to shore up facile distinctions between social classes. But this was not news to Addison, Steele, or anyone else writing in the eighteenth century. Their promotions of “polite learning” and “polite society” always presumed the potential for manners to degenerate into mere form; hence, they never failed to emphasize how all genuinely polite manners spring initially from “complaisance,” a key part of what Lawrence Klein conceives as a “deep structure of temper.”<sup>65</sup> The Gentleman’s Magazine characterizes this as “an agreeable and delicate manner ... a certain Decency in Words and gestures in

---

(1997): 31-51; Nicholas Phillipson, “Politics, Politeness,” “Politics and Politeness in the Reigns of Anne and the Early Hanoverians,” in The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800, ed. J. G. A. Pocock, Gordon J. Schochet and Lois G. Schwoerer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 211-245. See also Brewer, Pleasures of the Imagination, 87-122; Stephen Copley, “The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture,” in Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art 1700-1850, ed. John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13-37; Peter France, Politeness and Its Discontents: Problems in French Classical Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Goodman, Republic of Letters; and Daniel Gordon, Citizens Without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Philip Carter, Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800 (London: Longman, 2001) is the best and most nuanced introduction to this body of literature.

<sup>64</sup> See especially Jenny Davidson, Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Maurer, Proposing Men, 135-175; and Thomas Woodman, Politeness and Poetry in the Age of Pope (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989).

<sup>65</sup> Klein, “Liberty, Manners,” 599.

order to please,” which “by shewing the Regard we have for others” through “an Assemblage of Discretion, and Complaisance ... renders to every one the Dues he has a Right to require.”<sup>66</sup> Hume less elaborately typifies complaisance as that which “leads us to resign our own inclinations to those of our companion”<sup>67</sup> In both accounts, as well as in Steele’s notion of “civil Virtue” in Spectator 248, we find just this promotion of social ends before individual ones as the motive and object of polite manners. Allowing for the possibility that this rhetoric of social awareness in the period is not merely a strategic cover for class-based self-interest permits one to comprehend eighteenth-century politeness and manners as comprising a serious, and real, system of social values.

Politeness is, of course, not a monolithic entity, as Peter Burke’s and Philip Carter’s exemplary surveys of its many forms and guises make clear.<sup>68</sup> In everyday social bearing, politeness could involve showing “delicacy” and “refinement” of taste, general accomplishment in learning, “elegance” of comportment, and a keen sense of social “decorum.”<sup>69</sup> Burke notes that these could assume either positive, “altruistic” or negative, “egoistic” forms.<sup>70</sup> The sense of Whiggish writers like Shaftesbury, Addison, Steele, Hume, and later periodical essayists in England and Scotland that “manners were

---

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Carter, Men and the Emergence, 20.

<sup>67</sup> David Hume, “The Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” in Essays, 1985), 126.

<sup>68</sup> See Peter Burke, “A Civil Tongue: Language and Politeness in Early Modern Europe,” in Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31-48; and Carter, Men and the Emergence, 19-23.

<sup>69</sup> Klein, “Liberty, Manners,” 599.

<sup>70</sup> Burke, “Civil Tongues,” 31.

the foundations of civic politics” can be grasped as a version of the altruistic notion.<sup>71</sup> Philosophically, this emerges from the mentality Potkay traces from Johnson, back through Hume and Pope (among other eighteenth-century writers), and ultimately to Cicero, where social life is conceived in terms of “concentric circles of moral sympathy.”<sup>72</sup> For some critics, this mentality acquired its power to persuade from the rather sudden shift in understandings of virtue, and of the virtuous citizen, brought about in response to the movement from landed property to “mobile,” or virtual, property as a primary ground of England’s economic self-understanding.<sup>73</sup> In the older model, land ownership had guaranteed the citizen’s virtue by materializing his investment in the realm, conferring on the landowner obligations to defend the nation and to act politically on its behalf. The newer credit-based model of virtual property threatened, in the eyes of its critics, to dissolve this network of obligations in a welter of turbulent, selfish passions, fueled by speculation and fantasy of further gain.

Manners and politeness, then, come to assume the burden of forging moral character in specific relation to an absent norm J. G. A. Pocock identifies as “undifferentiated personality” (122). This was the personal outcome of the combined pressure of social and political obligations on the land owner. In relation to this, the irrationality and instability a credit-based commercial economy fostered could only produce a fragmented aggregation of alienated individuals. This is the problem Pocock

---

<sup>71</sup> Klein, Shaftesbury, 145-46.

<sup>72</sup> Potkay, Passion, 110.

<sup>73</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, “The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology,” in Virtue, Commerce, and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 103-123.

sees driving a tradition of thought running from Sir William Temple's late seventeenth-century On the Original and Nature of Government through Josiah Tucker's 1781 Treatise Concerning Civil Government concerned with working out how commerce, through "the complexity of exchange ... rooted in experience," might be able instead to generate new bodies of ethical "opinion" to diffuse this threat (121). As it works to shape and refine personality away from the mere passion-driven scramble for profit, this "opinion" expresses a sense of mutual social obligation that nods to the older, landed republican dispensation its advocates idealized (121). But opinion asserts itself in the popular press at a substantial conceptual remove from its source in the direct political action associated with the ancient polis or res publica. Credit-based commerce, with its promises of untold material gratifications and affluence, was clearly incompatible with the more martial, austere qualities associated with the classical republican character. But instead of seeing this as a privation, or as necessarily tending toward corruption, proselytes of the modern polite personality rather explained its virtues in terms of how it could transform social life into thoughtfully pleasurable living. By casting the imperative to contribute to social enjoyment as the citizen's primary obligation, writers who were of this "opinion" translated the public-mindedness of the traditional republican order into a distinctively personalized form (Pocock, Virtue, 121).

Pocock's choice of "opinion" to describe the public side of the new commercial personality has special bearing on the Censor and his relation to the press, as well as on Steele's ultimately frustrated attempt to create in the Censor a public persona that could be received as different in kind from the author's personality (121). The term "opinion" in this period could connote one of several things. In her study of newspapers in late

eighteenth-century England, Hannah Barker notes that “‘public opinion’ in England was not revolutionary,” but “was instead a tribunal based outside the political structures of the state where state power could be judged and criticized by those who deemed themselves fit to be included within the boundaries of the political nation.”<sup>74</sup> This politically-oriented sense of opinion accords, in a more historically-inflected way, with Habermas’s “normative ideal” of public opinion, “construed as the universal reason of the generality of thinking individuals continuously engaged in open discussion,” before which “power and domination in human life were to give way to free acceptance of the enlightened order of human rationality.”<sup>75</sup> These senses of public opinion differ from Pocock’s in how they imply that rational-critical consensus is consistently opinion’s obverse. For Pocock, opinion connotes something less certain, more along the lines of a possibly persuasive interpretation of the character of social life, and of the place of individual drives and desires within that broader life. This is a less baldly political, more fundamentally cultural sense of opinion, and of how it operates in people’s lives. Opinion in this formulation creates the conditions for the emergence of politics, which then ideally expand upon the ethical grounding opinion provides for them. It is essential to recognize this ideal distinction between opinion and politics in trying to understand how periodical essayists typically grasped their roles as disinterested public writers.

Plutarch’s Cato set his office against both the rage for Academic philosophy among Rome’s youth, and the short-sighted indulgence of the city’s elders. Bickerstaff-

---

<sup>74</sup> Barker, Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Keith Michael Baker, “Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas,” in Habermas, 183.

as-Censor calls attention to the popular currency of affected politeness and the encroachment of empty, fashionable language into the “world of letters” (T 230). Both try to shock their audiences out of reflexive acquiescence in a uniform “popular Opinion” (T 230). This is the sort of opinion Milton had defined as “but knowledge in the making” that leads to “an imperfect assent or judgment,” a sense that persisted throughout the eighteenth century and into the present.<sup>76</sup> “[K]nowledge in the making” certainly could lead to a more perfect “assent or judgment;” this was, after all, the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>77</sup> The question was how could this uncertain and basically rhetorical sense of opinion constitute citizens of a putatively Enlightened republic? The self-awareness the Censor performs in The Tatler marks one answer. It tries to convince citizens that full personhood is always generated, and ethically measured, by everyday social engagement. The mundane pleasure it posits as the sign of its success is thus experienced as an effect of difference, which always makes it the antithesis of opinion understood as a group mentality. This is the conviction which informs the memorable figure of “popular Opinion” in Spectator 460, where readers encounter a crowd marching along in step to the Palace of Vanity. Each member of the crowd praises himself, while remaining completely oblivious to his companions’ own self-celebrations. The “undifferentiated personality” of Pocock’s traditional republican civic order that had addressed itself “undividedly to the public good” might have been irretrievably consigned to history (122). But it could still serve as an absent norm to mitigate the deleterious

---

<sup>76</sup> John Norris, An Essay Towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World, 2: 130; John Milton, Areopagitica, in Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), 743.

<sup>77</sup> Milton, Areopagitica, 743.

effects of reductive self-interest by holding out the possibility that even modern consumers could become active citizens if they were to see themselves first as members of a community. The Censor then tries to realize this norm in the periodical press, by forging a new imaginative order predicated on a fully socialized sense of self-awareness.

Steele's great innovation in The Tatler was to suggest that the realization of this new social order was fundamentally a matter of reading. This becomes clearest, however, in his admission in The Tatler's final number that he has failed in his aim as an essayist. Steele explores in this last essay the type of reading competence that is required to mark the moral distinction between authorial person and persona. When practiced properly, such reading exemplifies the preconditions of literary citizenship. Steele's argument here is that whatever his personal failings, the fictional Censor should, if rightly understood, still command moral authority amongst the public. He presents Bickerstaff's artificiality as an open secret, and a necessary one, given the delicate task of censoring manners in the most public fashion. Claiming that he never hid behind "the character of Isaac Bickerstaff" in order "to give any man any secret wound by [his] concealment," Steele – writing in his own person, having signed this last number of The Tatler with his full name, in capitals – maintains he "chose to talk in a mask" because only one who rigorously practices "severity in manners" can arrogate to himself the right personally to "censure others" (I 271). When he admits that such practice is beyond his personal capacities, Steele yet points to the potential in himself, and by extension in his readers, to imagine ways of being whose moral rectitude exceeds what presently seems possible. That he has failed to attain this status is not even in question. "I shall not carry my

humility so far as to call myself a vicious man,” he protests, “but at the same time must confess, my life is at best but pardonable” (T 271).

In this moment he performs the conceptual divide between differentiated and undifferentiated personality. If his readers could grasp the difference between them, Steele insists, society might not decline into what The Spectator will soon render as the “Company” of individuals marching in step to the Palace of Vanity (460). The problem is that few seem up to the task. In the context of Steele’s complaint, differentiated readers fall into two major categories: those who try, but ultimately fail, to understand the nature of the Censorial office; and those who refuse to believe that authors are driven by anything other than interestedness. The Tatler aims to mirror public mores in a non-individuated way, creating incarnated types of thoughtless behavior in whom readers might catch glimpses of themselves and thus be moved not to imitate such bad examples. But even the best-intentioned among Bickerstaff’s readers personalize this experience in ways that strike at the heart of the sociable ethic he tries to promote.

Among “a thousand other nameless things” that “have made it an irksome task” for Steele “to personate Mr. Bickerstaff any longer” is how public awareness of his role as The Tatler’s author has made real socializing deeply awkward, if not impossible, for him (271). Rather than the social self-awareness he hoped to stimulate, his efforts have instead made readers self-conscious to a debilitating degree. Here the best of personal motives fail in the wake of insufficiently thoughtful reading. “[P]eople ... whose modesty only makes them think themselves liable to censure,” he complains, cause themselves “pain to act before [him]” in unobjectionable ways (T 271). They uncomfortably contort themselves into various behavioral postures while assuming disingenuous masks to try



and meet their understandings of Bickerstaff's expectations. When readers fail to grasp its essentials, the Tatler's consciousness-raising discourse generates its opposite, becoming a barrier to social life rather than its facilitator. Politeness in this instance can only be of the negative, egoistic sort, whereby neither spontaneous enjoyment of company nor the cultivation of the "mental enjoyment and relaxation" Cicero had identified as the font of the "good and happy life" can manifest (De Officiis, 173).

This diagnosis of his serial's failure to accomplish what he originally set out to do belongs, of course, to the internal world of The Tatler, and we have to take Steele's word for it that such modest-to-a-fault readers actually existed in the Town. For external evidence of readers unable – or, in these cases, resolutely unwilling – to recognize in the Censor's "mask" a mark of ideal undifferentiated personality, we have "Daniel Doggerel," Censor Censorum (Censor of Censors), and the wholly anonymous author of The British Censor.<sup>78</sup> All three writers summarily dismiss Steele's claim that his "concealment" behind the Bickerstaff persona was not a disingenuous means of gaining the upper hand on adversaries (T 271). For evidence they cite Steele's efforts on behalf of the Whigs as editor of The London Gazette during the same time he published The Tatler (1709-1710), along with his post-Spectator periodical The Guardian, which broke with the previous series' cultivated political neutrality by flagrantly espousing Whig politics. The Life of Cato the Censor (1714) thus casts the nominally impartial, public-spirited Censor as a sower of "Strife & Mischief" who flaunts "Decency & Order" in flogging a specious "Liberty" that promises only the freedom for "each Man" selfishly to do "as he

---

<sup>78</sup> The Life of Cato the Censor. Humbly Dedicated to R. Steele, Esq. (London, 1714); A Condoling Letter to The Tattler: Or Account of the Misfortunes of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq. (London, n.d.); and The British Censor. A Poem (London, 1712).

lists he may do.”<sup>79</sup> The “modern Whig” Steele is at heart no better than “a senseless Rake” as he fulminates against those whose patriotism is founded in “lawful” submission to a “Government” rooted in “Law and Gospel.”<sup>80</sup> He denounces them as “Tory, Rogue, and Child of Sin” while gratifying his own unsavory desires.<sup>81</sup> Lest readers consider such attacks on Steele’s character untoward or unjust, the author of The British Censor: A Poem (1712) points out their consonance with the Censor’s professed aim to prompt chastening self-reflection in miscreant readers. In the application of Bickerstaff’s approach to Steele himself, “a fam’d Reformer ... Correcting all Men’s Manners, but his own” is stripped to reveal only an opportunistic political journalist for hire.<sup>82</sup>

Both The British Censor and A Condoling Letter to The Tatler: On Account of the MISFORTUNES of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq. (referring to Steele’s having been prosecuted for debt) work out at length this rather conventional assault on the pseudonymous satirist for pursuing “Int’rest” even as he claims that “Truth” and “Justice” are his only beacons.<sup>83</sup> These writers leverage against Steele the precedent of the historical Cato, whose “known Practice of a Rigid Vertue” the author of The Tatler has hijacked and used as a smokescreen to obscure his single-minded pursuit of political advancement.<sup>84</sup> “Daniel Doggerel” in The Life of Cato, however, goes further, disputing

---

<sup>79</sup> Life of Cato, 55-56.

<sup>80</sup> Life of Cato, 43, 47, 48, 50.

<sup>81</sup> Life of Cato, 61.

<sup>82</sup> British Censor, [9].

<sup>83</sup> British Censor, [6].

<sup>84</sup> Condoling Letter, 4.

the historical accuracy of Cato's legend altogether. Instead of attacking Steele for claiming duplicitously to have reincarnated the spirit of Cato in the pages of his periodical series, "Doggerel" contends that Cato and Bickerstaff do indeed exist on a historical continuum, that of fundamental human corruption and hypocrisy. Whereas Plutarch presents a wholly publicly-spirited Cato, Doggerel's Cato "pretended indeed, all was done for the sake of the Commonwealth" while knowing full well "how to set a Value upon his own Actions," from which he "still expected to be the principal gainer."<sup>85</sup> Seen in this light, modern London appears not as a sink of corruption that has fallen from the high civic ideals that Cato and the best of the Roman republicans embodied. Instead, if Cato were to "arise from the Grave, and give us a Visit, he might see himself and Friends exactly copied" in Steele and others equally given to proclamations of stern virtue while absorbed in their own material gratifications.<sup>86</sup>

If the whole of The Life of Cato could be reduced to a neat maxim, it would be that the personal is always political, and that personal character is the only thing that counts in the public arena. The rhetoric of the public good at the heart of undifferentiated personality as a concept is, to this writer, wholly empty. Behind Cato's publicly performed austerity and good sense we find a mean, scrounging slave-owner who, in a lesson in thrift, maintains his slaves with "Ill-Diet, Labour, [and] Thumps," and once they are worn "to the Stumps" he turns them out to starve, "Thinking no Man had Right to eat,

---

<sup>85</sup> Life of Cato, ii.

<sup>86</sup> Life of Cato, ii.

/ That had not Strength to earn his Meat.”<sup>87</sup> The author of The Life of Cato proffers a revisionist history in order to explode the phenomenon of republican publicity at its source, showing how Cato – like Steele – was nothing more than a strategizing politician, one who “plaid his Cards so well” that he, again like Steele, gained “better Places” and “got the fame.”<sup>88</sup>

Confronted by a London public in which overly self-conscious readers immediately personalize everything they read, and political and personal animosities take on an ad hominem style in the press, Steele-as-Bickerstaff publicly abandons his essay series, only to be drawn back into the medium within the year with the publication of The Spectator, and subsequently back into partisan politics with The Guardian. But Bickerstaff and Nestor Ironside, who pronounced himself in The Guardian’s first number a Tory in religion and a Whig in matters of state, represent differing assumptions about reading and the press. Even within what Warner presents as the distinctly republican mode of publicity driving both The Spectator and John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon’s Cato’s Letters (1720-1723) there are significant variations. In its wholly politicized form, as in Cato’s Letters (which appealed directly to popular outrage against stockjobbers who were taken to have engineered the frenzied financial speculation in which many investors crashed and burned when the South Sea Company collapsed), the public good assumes a watchdog-like character in its stern, testy vigilance. This sense of the public, and of the personal disinterestedness by which it is expressed, aligns with Warner’s description of how the principles of “supervision” and personal “negativity” establish impersonal

---

<sup>87</sup> Life of Cato, 274-75, 278-79.

<sup>88</sup> Life of Cato, 318, 320-21.

relations between author and reader in the circulation of essays, newspapers, and broadsheets.<sup>89</sup> “Virtue” in this model then follows from the “negation” of those “traits of personhood” not assimilable to the “rational and disinterested concern for the public good” of which personae like Trenchard and Gordon’s “Cato” the Younger and “Publius” of The Federalist Papers stand as classic exempla.<sup>90</sup> The Censor as a textual representative of undifferentiated personality does fit broadly into this pattern.

The breadth of this accord, however, should encourage us to pay attention to the ways in which the Censor of the periodical essay genre does not always, or ever wholly, conform to it. In the press controversy over Steele’s motivations, we have authors employing the pseudonymous author’s disinterested posture not simply to attack Steele, but even to rework the traditional story of Cato’s unbending principles and public-mindedness to this end. Most at stake in this wrangling is how best to comprehend the moral function of the press. For two of these authors, Steele invokes Cato’s precedent in order to beguile gullible readers into taking at face value his rhetoric of the public good. Republican publicity is thus exposed as a type of false consciousness when accepted by readers insufficiently critical of The Tatler’s modus operandi, while the anonymous authors of A Condoling Letter and The British Censor are, by implication, true exponents of virtuous supervision and personal negativity. The Life of Cato, as we have seen, even denies the grounds of republican publicity as a whole, rewriting its legitimating historical narrative as one of the irreducible self-interest that has operated always and everywhere since the beginning of time.

---

<sup>89</sup> Warner, Letters, 42.

<sup>90</sup> Warner, Letters, 42.

But this leaves out of the picture the structural role of irony at the heart of Bickerstaff's self-presentation. A passage in A Condoling Letter neatly exemplifies the consequences of reading past irony to a prosaic sort of literalism. In what this author takes for a coup de grâce, he contrasts how the virtuous Cato submitted to the people to be "chosen" Censor "for the Reputation of his own Austerity, and the known Practice of a Rigid Vertue" with Steele's presumption and arrogance in "usurp[ing] that Office" and "giv[ing] himself that Title" without recourse to a popular vote.<sup>91</sup> Here we confront what Steele was contending with: the ever-present possibility that The Tatler's readers could be wholly tone deaf to its author's irony. Such a misreading, especially when used as a basis for publicly attacking an author, highlights a problem of print communication which English essayists recognized from the start as being especially pertinent to periodical essay writing in this civic-oriented mode. Perceptions of this conundrum would become more even acute in the London press during the 1750s. In response, the aims and character of the periodical essay genre would be subtly redefined, and along with them the assumptions about literary citizenship which had served as the genre's animating concept.

Between the appearance of The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian, and the publication of Johnson's Rambler (1750), some thirty-three periodical series more or less directly imitative of Addison and Steele's ventures came and went in London.<sup>92</sup> Most of these titles – The Censor (1715-17), The Prompter (1734-36), The Conjuror (1736), The

---

<sup>91</sup> A Condoling Letter, 5.

<sup>92</sup> See George S. Marr, The Periodical Essayists of the Eighteenth Century (Appleton, 1923), 256-259, for a chronological list of periodicals published in Britain between 1704 and 1796.

Female Spectator (1744-46) and The Agreeable Companion (1745) among them – bear out the old critical saw that Addison and Steele spawned a veritable industry of copyists who lacked the wit, variety, and archly jocular relationship with their readers typified by Bickerstaff and Mr. Spectator. Didacticism, which had played a muted role in the wry and ironic musings of the earlier periodical series, came to the fore in the periodical essay over subsequent decades. But the appearance of Johnson’s Rambler marked a significant reevaluation of the periodical essay genre, and one not entirely projected back into its moment by modern literary critics appreciative of Johnson’s authorial talents as compared with the often leaden efforts of his contemporary essayists. Instead of being serialized in magazines and newspapers like most periodical essays in the decades following The Tatler and Spectator, The Rambler appeared in discrete folio half-sheets which formally imparted to it the self-contained occasion for readerly reflection that had achieved classic form with The Spectator.<sup>93</sup> But beyond this deliberate formal recapitulation of its illustrious predecessor, The Rambler is most deeply connected with the works of Addison and Steele in how it foregrounds the underlying logic of the periodical essay genre, while providing a general diagnosis of why the genre has been largely ineffective in fulfilling its aims.

Pat Rogers has remarked that The Spectator “codified the entire cultural world in which Johnson grew up.”<sup>94</sup> He asserts this in critiquing a tradition in Johnson criticism for which The Rambler is held to mark a distinctive departure from the main line of

---

<sup>93</sup> See Kinsley, “Meaning and Format.”

<sup>94</sup> Pat Rogers, “The Rambler and the Eighteenth-Century Periodical Essay: A Dissenting View,” in Telling People What to Think, 116-129.

English periodical writing. This notion proceeds from three major assumptions. First, Johnson's stolidly moralizing voice in his essays is believed to subordinate variety of material to a uniform moral outlook; it follows that his generalized reflections on timeless moral truths must speak to minds more or less abstracted from the petty business of day-to-day living. Finally, critics of this school tend to read the total of The Rambler's 208 essays as a unified literary production, rather than as a loose collection of occasional pieces.<sup>95</sup> Rogers's fundamental insight is to recognize that however impatient Johnson was with the bland moralizing of a series like The Agreeable Companion (1745) or the unfortunate witlessness of The Occasional Writer (1738), he nonetheless saw the quotidian dimension of the genre as being essential to its importance. His innovation therefore was to publish a series that sought to explain the fundamental terms of Addison and Steele's project for a new readership forty years removed from the genre's inception.

Johnson confronted a mid-century London public that seemed to him increasingly fragmented and composed of individuals inclined to measure their world, and the characters of others, solely by their own limited perspectives. He thereby conceived The Rambler as a means of drawing attention to what he regarded as the common human attributes linking individuals both in present society, and across historical time. This

---

<sup>95</sup> For the classic statement of this view of The Rambler as standing outside the main line of the periodical essay, see Bate's introduction to The Rambler in The Yale Johnson, 3: xxi-xlii. For critiques of this view, see Leopold Damrosch, Jr., "Johnson's Manner of Proceeding in the Rambler," ELH 40 (Spring 1973): 70-89; Iona Italia, The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century: Anxious Employment (London: Routledge, 2005), 140-164; Paul J. Korshin, "Johnson, the Essay, and The Rambler," in The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson, ed. Greg Clingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 51-66; Lawrence Lipking, Samuel Johnson: The Life of an Author (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 145-172; and Robert D. Spector, Samuel Johnson and the Essay (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 131-197.



community-making impetus is, as we have seen, definitive of the periodical essay genre. The difference for Johnson was that he saw in the proliferation of specialized periodical series, and in the magazine's eclipsing the essay sheet as the most successful periodical genre, a splintered set of readerships whose members needed to be reminded of what a larger community of readers looks like.<sup>96</sup>

Whether one sees Johnson's efforts as primarily aiming "to unify a readership and a society ... increasingly split into mutually hostile groups based on profession and class," or as more directly concerned with overcoming the "strange, distant, [and] diverse" character of the reading public as created by the very medium of print, the necessity of striking readers with a sense of belonging to a community appears with an urgency in The Rambler to a degree not seen in earlier essay serials.<sup>97</sup> This is the logic behind Johnson's many appeals to the "common reader" in his writings.<sup>98</sup> Alvin Kernan's sense of what this notion entails goes straight to the heart of Johnson's intervention as a periodical writer, showing in part why contemporaries recognized The Rambler as a distinctive contribution to the genre. "Johnson's common reader is not just a reflection of an actual historical audience of readers, nor merely an attempt to control the interpretation of books, nor only a way of overcoming the isolation of reader and author," he notes. "The reader is all of these things, but ultimately he is also a way of attributing to

---

<sup>96</sup> For Johnson's reaction to the growing success of magazines and other miscellaneous periodical publications, see Italia, Rise of Literary Journalism, 140-164.

<sup>97</sup> Italia, Rise of Literary Journalism, 140; Kernan, Printing Technology, 230.

<sup>98</sup> See Spector, "The Periodical Essays and the Common Reader," in Samuel Johnson and the Essay, 137-149. The relationship between Johnson and the "common reader" was cemented in the twentieth-century critical mind by Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953).

letters, as if its nature were a prior fact, a certain kind of existence and worth that in part corresponds to the realities of print culture, and in part realizes a conception of what letters at its best might be.”<sup>99</sup> Between the “realities of print culture” – its congeries of commercial motive, the typical anonymity of author and reader, and the potential for widespread circulation of writing – and an ideal conception of letters as a humanistic enterprise lies the periodical essay, as it had since Addison and Steele’s day. If Kernan misses one thing in his otherwise masterful summation of the symbolic valence of Johnson’s common reader, it is how Johnson saw his role as that of an explicator of what had been there all along in the print culture of eighteenth-century London, but was increasingly becoming invisible to readers.

Rather than reflecting back to discrete groups of individuals the kinds of specialized knowledge and interests they already possess, the periodical essay was meant to give readers a sense of belonging to a larger society made up of remarkably diverse characters. As an essayist, Johnson was not always successful in putting into practice his understanding of how this was supposed to work. James Boswell noted how The Rambler’s fictional female correspondents appeared “strangely formal, even to ridicule,” as contrasted with their more varied and sprightly fictional predecessors in The Tatler and Spectator.<sup>100</sup> The series’ relative stodginess prompted Lady Montagu to quip that The Rambler “followed the Spectator with the same pace a packhorse would do a hunter,” while The Connoisseur 27, no doubt with Johnson in mind, takes to task essayists who

---

<sup>99</sup> Kernan, Printing Technology, 234.

<sup>100</sup> Boswell’s Life of Johnson, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), 1: 223. See 1: 217-225 for Boswell’s account of contemporary criticism of The Rambler.

write “almost too abstrusely for the study,” involving their “thoughts in hard words and affected latinisms.”<sup>101</sup> While “Addison was proud that he could boast of having drawn learning out of schools and colleges into clubs and coffee-houses, as Socrates was said to draw morality from the clouds to dwell among men ” this writer goes on, writers like Johnson “mount the Clouds themselves” (C 27). Yet Johnson’s Rambler stimulated new attempts by writers in mid-century London to revitalize the genre, all of which took as their central problem the perceivable gap between the belletristic culture memorialized in volumes of Addison and Steele’s essays and the reading publics now apparently uninterested in becoming citizens of that republic of letters.

A 1753 essay in The Adventurer, the series Johnson began with John Hawkesworth almost immediately following his decision to end The Rambler with its 208<sup>th</sup> number, neatly crystallizes Johnson’s understanding of what it is that the periodical essay is meant to do. In his communicative model of history, individual readers ideally sympathize with one another in the current moment, while extending imaginative sympathy back through the past by learning from the writings it has bequeathed to the present. This marks Johnson’s extrapolation from The Tatler and The Spectator a total theory of literary citizenship. Appealing to Francis Bacon’s example as a comprehensive humanist, Adventurer 85 announces its intention to “inculcate” in readers “the necessity of reading, the fitness of consulting other understandings than their own, and of considering the sentiments and opinions” of past writers, “however neglected in the present age” they might be. While Johnson considers many readers (those of “common intellects”) to be up to the task, he encourages those who are not to draw upon the efforts

---

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in Donald Greene, Samuel Johnson (New York: Twayne, 1970), 141.

of others who either have more “leisure” to store their minds “with acquired knowledge,” or possess greater intellectual “abilities” (A 85). This essay furthermore enjoins the learned not to be closeted pedants unable, or unwilling, to communicate their learning; it also warns those disinclined to pursue systematic learning against accounting such scholars to be “useless or idle” (A 85). And both are made to recognize that the “number” of “those whom PROVIDENCE has qualified to make any additions to human knowledge ... is extremely small,” and that “what can be added by each single mind, even of this superior class, is very little” (A 85). In such circumstances, no one should overestimate his or her abilities, or the capacity of individual minds to generate new knowledge irrespective of what has come before. Everyone has some role to play in discovering, acquiring, communicating, receiving, and perpetuating knowledge. To comprehend this fully is to understand oneself not simply as a member of a community in the present, endowed with certain intellectual and communicative gifts while bereft of others, but as a citizen of history, the accumulated wisdom of which makes possible the very ability to think and write and speak in ways that others can understand.

Johnson also invokes in this essay the necessity of forging links between the scholarly and conversible worlds in terms reminiscent of Hume’s, but in a way that explains in a more theoretical register the irreducibly social character of knowledge. He argues that the unexpected turns and detours encountered in casual conversation with a variety of people do not simply polish one’s character, or leaven learning with pleasure (as they mainly do in Hume’s essay), but more fundamentally they fortify one’s ability to make any kind of knowledge at all useful. “[N]othing but long habit and frequent experiments [in “mixing with mankind”] can confer the power of changing a position into

various forms,” Johnson advises, “presenting it in different points of view, connecting it with known and granted truths, fortifying it with intelligible arguments, and illustrating with apt similitudes” (A 85). While knowledge and wisdom are to be had from books, the power to persuade others of their value cannot be learned in any other way than by putting oneself in a position not to be agreed with. The arts of making connections with the common stock of knowledge, both in substance and by way of artful comparisons, can only be cultivated in the world of talk and everyday life, in which alone knowledge becomes a source of wisdom.

The conclusion of this number rings some changes on the tradition of the essay from Montaigne to The Adventurer, while shedding new light on the moral logic of the essayistic persona as initially followed by Steele. Johnson invokes Montaigne’s recommendation in “Of Idleness” of writing down the “chimeras and fantastic monsters” spun off by the idle mind “without order or purpose.”<sup>102</sup> By considering “their ineptitude and strangeness” as he later reads these fragments “at [his] pleasure,” Montaigne claims that he can “make [his] mind ashamed of itself” in the pursuit of greater self-understanding.<sup>103</sup> Typically, Johnson pushes the implications of Montaigne’s essayistic quest for self-knowledge in a primarily social direction. “To fix the thoughts by writing, and subject them to frequent examinations and reviews,” he contends, “is the best method of enabling the mind to detect its own sophisms, and keep it on guard against the fallacies which it practices on others” (A 85). Johnson sees the anti-social deceptions of

---

<sup>102</sup> The Complete Works of Montaigne: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters, trans. Donald M. Frame (1948; reprint, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 21.

<sup>103</sup> Complete Works of Montaigne, 21.

sophistical arguments, rather than the unregulated productions of fancy, as what need to be curbed, with the surest cure being to objectify them in writing. Frequent converse with others is the proving ground for whether or not one can effectively communicate one's learning; writing then provides objective evidence of what impedes such communication, while affording regular practice in developing a method by which thoughts may be clarified, and made fit for conversation. This process, explored here in terms of an individual thinker's and writer's dilemma, then comes to stand for what the periodical essay as a genre means to catalyze amongst a wider public of readers.

"To read, write, and converse in due proportions, is, therefore, the business of a man of letters," Adventurer 85 concludes. What saves this sentiment from banality is Johnson's practical sense of what it might be possible for the average writer, and common reader, to accomplish, and of what role ideal character can play in the perpetuation of a literary culture. His communicative model of society allows for the contributions of individuals with different talents and abilities, and for the presence or absence of "equal opportunity" to display them (A 85). It also makes room for the personal vagaries by which "most men fail in one or other of the ends" they propose in their work, whether because they are "full without readiness" or "ready without exactness" (A 85). The "reasonable" allowance of an ideal of "PERFECTION" to guide one's efforts is, finally, what permits such a various set of individuals and talents to come together occasionally through their encounters with "excellence of writing" or "grace of conversation" (both requisite in constituting a "man of letters") (A 85). "[T]hough we know it never can be reached," he advises, the projection of such an ideal gives everyone something to "advance towards" (A 85).

In light of Johnson's meditation in the final Rambler on the role of the "mask" in essay writing, The Adventurer's rendering of this ideal in terms of an imaginative, and motivating, supplement to the sober recognition of everyone's personal "deficiency" can be read as a further gloss on Steele's justification of donning a "mask" in the effort to "insinuate" in readers "the weight of reason with the agreeableness of wit" (A 85; T 271). But whereas Steele sought in the last Tatler to defend himself against charges that he was presuming too much personal rectitude in daring publicly to "censure others," Johnson provides a typically general explanation of how the author's private character becomes largely irrelevant in the virtual world of print. Since no one is free of personal deficiencies, they "must be allowed to pass uncensored in the greater part of the world," so long as they are not truly vicious (A 85). By the same token, the logic of the mask excuses essay personae who present themselves with "seeming vanity," for the genre itself and the "example of those [like Steele] who have published essays before" bestows upon them that particular "privilege" (R 208). Readers who recognize this should, by extension, recognize also that the world of letters is the only place where ideals of "PERFECTION" can circulate with an aura of plausibility, and that it is their obligation to try and live up to those ideals they encounter in books and periodicals, while not deflecting attention from their own shortcomings by trumpeting those of the author (A 85).<sup>104</sup> This implied contract with readers is for Johnson a fundamental condition of a functioning literary culture.

---

<sup>104</sup> "The seeming vanity with which I have sometimes spoken of myself, would perhaps require an apology, were it not extenuated by the example of those who have published essays before me, and by the privilege which every nameless writer has been hitherto allowed. 'A mask,' says Castiglione, 'confers a right of acting and speaking with less restraint, even when the wearer happens to be known.' He that is discovered without his

Johnson's prescription for how the belletristic culture contained in The Spectator's pages could be made to grow again in mid-century London impressed upon readers that they should extend complaisance beyond the realms of conversation and casual socializing to encompass the natural shortcomings of authors and their works. In his worldview, readers have obligations just as writers do, and periodical essays were especially suited to delineating the character of these duties, and providing occasions for practicing them. What is noteworthy about Johnson's outlook as an essayist is how positive it appears in comparison to that of the major essay series that immediately followed his. In The World (1753-56) and The Connoisseur (1754-56), a thriving belletristic culture in mid-century London appears like a distant, hazy memory, and its status as an absent norm becomes a measure of how far London society has fallen, rather than of what the present and future might hold.

These essays reflect a reading culture full of individuals whose first impulse in whatever they read, think about, or talk about is to experience it in wholly personalized terms. The effects of this on the communicative model of reading and writing whose underlying structure Johnson explains in The Rambler and The Adventurer are deep and widespread. Further complicating matters is that booksellers and readers at mid-century approach books primarily, if not wholly, as material artifacts, admiring them for their quality of type but overlooking the ideas and sentiments the books contain. These essays trace the poverty of imagination exemplified in this curious circumstance to a recent commercialization of all notions of value, and a mass refusal of the Ciceronian model of

---

own consent, may claim some indulgence, and cannot be rigorously called to justify those sallies or frolicks which his disguise must prove him desirous to conceal" (R 208).



literary citizenship that had originally grounded the periodical essay genre. The sardonic diagnosis of the Town's cultural and moral ills in The World and The Connoisseur thus ultimately contravenes Johnson's faith in the potential dignity and productiveness of the common reader. As subsequent chapters will explore, this turn in the tradition of periodical writing would prove momentous for essayists in Scotland and America, who read in volumes of English periodical essays reflections of their own struggles in trying to give philosophical shape to the refractory urban cultures they confronted.

The republic of letters in The World, The Connoisseur, and the Citizen of the World (1760-61) appears in a state of moral anarchy. In it, readers search for the crassest personal motives in public writing, while authors and critics launch self-aggrandizing public controversies with other writers mainly to keep their names in circulation. Johnson saw a society of readers separated by particular interests and professional divides, but one in which many were capable of fixing attention on general ideas and common truths as stimuli to open conversation. These writers see at the source of literary production and reception in their London impulses and interests fundamentally at odds with the kinds of communication and self-understanding The Spectator classically defined as "Philosophy" (S 10). The first number of The World concretizes this point by having its persona, Fitz-Adam, announce his intentions in a mock "Advertisement" situated in the center of the essay. This reduction of the sociable, conversational relationship between persona and reader to a wholly commercial transaction proceeds from what Fitz-Adam announces as a wholesale redefinition of propriety. "It was the opinion of our ancestors," he avers, "that there are few things more difficult, or that required greater skill and address than the speaking properly of one's self" (W 1). "But if by speaking properly be meant speaking

successfully,” he concludes, “the art is now as well known among us as that of printing, or of making gunpowder” (W 1). With propriety and public manners reduced to the personal success they bring, and this associated in the print marketplace with the winner-take-all game of war, Fitz-Adam then introduces his “own importance to the public” in a genre guaranteed to catch its attention: an advertisement (W 1).

Of course, this send-up of a reading public that measures success in only the crassest commercial terms presumes the existence of another readership that gets Fitz-Adam’s sardonic joke. As The World and The Connoisseur remorsefully suggest, however, this readership is ever shrinking. Authors who use irony in reflecting upon the current state of the republic of letters thereby labor under even greater burdens than had their not entirely successful predecessors. Johnson attempted to overcome the stubborn fact of what Fitz-Adam calls “the various capacities and apprehensions of all sorts of readers” by patiently explaining the basic sentiments and capacities and shortcomings that bind all individuals together (W 104). The World and Connoisseur essayists prefer to apply ironic “corrosives” to what they deem the heedlessness of the broader public, which has rejected the mundane philosophical awareness promoted by The Tatler and Spectator, preferring the empty comfort of conceiving “the World” solely in terms of “the narrow compass of every man’s own sphere of life” (C 136). At its most effective, this ironic approach might be expected to catalyze self-awareness by working on the understanding until readers see how they tend to pass through everyday life in a state of self-involved myopia.<sup>105</sup> But conditions in the mid-century republic of letters have made

---

<sup>105</sup> The matter of irony as central to periodical writing in mid-century England and Scotland is explored more fully in chapter two.

it so that the average reader will either miss entirely an author's irony, or immediately ascribe its corrosive intent to petty personal motives.

The mass personalizing of reading and authorship which had spurred Bickerstaff to resign his office as Censor of Great Britain appears in The World and The Connoisseur to have finally replaced the Censor's undifferentiated character as the structural condition of print discourse. The World thus calls for a "revival of conversation" to reverse the trend toward controversy in London, which these essays ascribe as much to faulty reading practices as to ad hominem attacks like those which surrounded The Tatler (W 94). When readers overlook the manner and style of what they read in pursuing unsavory or incriminating details involving an author's real character, they exemplify a fundamental breakdown in communication in the republic of letters. The "revival" The World calls for is predicated on the ability to see a continuum between citizens and readers, and between writerly style and public manners, as a valid and necessary one. The problem, however, is not simply the absence of real conversation at mid-century, but that the very phenomenon has become incomprehensible to most people. The World and The Connoisseur thus reconfigure the periodical essay as a confrontation with citizens who have grown more or less unable to see in these "loose essays" anything but reflections, or instances, of private character (W 94).

The World's censure of "the peremptoriness and warmth that are employed in modern conferences" unfolds in explicit relation to this widespread personalization of the reading experience (94). In 1750s London, Fitz-Adam maintains, no one can publicly advance ideas without being immediately challenged by those who ascribe everything only to self-interest and suspect motive. Even in "debates ... purely speculative, a person

is obliged not only to defend the point in controversy, but even his understanding and moral character” (W 94). Casual conversation has become a zero-sum game, where every utterance is met by an “adversary” who dismisses hypothetical questions and refuses to grant anything for the sake of argument in his eagerness to expose the interestedness of every opinion, and assert his own superiority. Reading too proceeds along a similar track. People have come to read the “ingenious” works of Newton and Locke more for evidence against their personal characters than as unique, speculative “enquiries” into the principles of “gravitation and cohesion” and “the powers of the understanding” (W 94). It is much easier, in Fitz-Adam’s estimation, to find fault with an author’s character, and to make that the subject of everything one reads, than to try to step outside one’s habitual attitudes and assess a book or essay with an “unprejudiced” mind (W 94).

In The Connoisseur, this problem is explained in terms of a mass inability to take what is read on its own terms. While it at first appears less nettlesome here than it does in The World, the personalizing of the reading experience as The Connoisseur renders it crystallizes in a more broadly critical fashion what these essayists take to be a difficulty specific to periodical writing in mid-century London. The exasperation driving these essays as they try to explain what their authors assume the original readers of The Tatler and Spectator already knew contributes to the sense of crisis common to periodical writing in the 1750s. The possibility that published writing could project better ways of being vanishes, Connoisseur 114 contends, to the degree that readers mine the “peculiar turn and colour” of “writings” for information about “the author’s disposition.” In order for readers to find The Connoisseur “instructing or amusing” they would need to suspend such reflexively personal considerations and enter imaginatively into its particular

language world. When, according to The Connoisseur, readers refuse to do this they disable themselves from learning anything from what they read. Worse, this state of affairs dissuades “many a youth” from “drawing his pen in the service of literature,” for the possibility that he will suffer personal attacks appears far greater than that anyone will consider his writings a contribution to the republic of letters, to be evaluated according to the style and substance of its observations and reflections.<sup>106</sup>

As with the broader discourse of politeness, manner is here deemed absolutely inseparable from substance in both speech and writing. Fitz-Adam muses in The World 94 on how “the Platonic philosophy” rose to such prominence among the learned more by the “manner of its delivery” than its “superior excellence” as a system of thought (aside from its “moral parts,” which he believes the Platonists “divinely treated”). Aristotelian method surely surpassed it in “physics and other branches of science” (W 94). But the “dogmatical positions” and “ipse dixits” (unsupported assertions resting in a disputant’s personal authority) of the Aristotelians made it impossible for them to persuade people that their philosophy could be conducive to the good life (W 94). Because the Platonists practiced “modesty, politeness, and deference to the reason and dignity of mankind,” their dialogues were “rendered ... lovely even to [their] adversaries” (W 94). One could hardly ask for a better model of the pleasures of conversation in the periodical essay mode, where complaisance and philosophical rigor compliment one another and stand together against dogma and zero-sum disputation.

---

<sup>106</sup> See CoW 20 (1760) for an extended depiction of structural hostility in the mid-century British republic of letters.

Moreover, this model highlights the active participation demanded of the Platonists' addressees. Their philosophy encouraged people "to pursue the consequences of their own opinions," and to reflect upon them "till they led them to absurdity" (W 94). As in the modern rhetorical world of the periodical essay, politeness worked wonders for these ancient philosophers: the Platonists' winning manner made it so that these stunning realizations "seemed to be the effect" of their interlocutors' "own examination" (W 94). The experience of coming to self-consciousness through one's own volition, combined with its pleasurableness as stimulated by the give-and-take of "dialogue," can compel even a former "adversary" to "adopt with cheerfulness those principles, which were established on the ruins of [his] favourite prejudices" (W 94). The synthesis of a will to self-criticism and a capacity to experience it as something "lovely" rather than threatening appears in The World, and throughout the periodical essay tradition, as essential to a thriving humanistic culture. From the vantage of mid-century, however, it stands primarily as an historical curiosity to remark upon. Why, Fitz-Adam wonders, when this "milder manner of disputation" enjoyed such "success" in past moments, has it not had "greater influence in succeeding ages" (W 94)?

The Connoisseur picks up The World's puzzlement, tracing the problem to the gross materialism of modern print culture. "History, poetry, and the lighter parts of science" are all widely available in accessible treatments in London's bookstalls, Fitz-Adam notes (W 94). But why have they had so little effect in lending a philosophical tenor to conversation? Mr. Town in The Connoisseur, tipping his hat to Steele in dubbing himself "Censor General," surveys the network of London's coffeehouses and concludes that a culture-wide reduction of reading to a form of material acquisition has fatally

closed the circuit of self-involvement that reading on the humanist model was meant to break (C 1).

At the London exchange we see how the prospect of financial gain deadens the minds of the “Bubble-Brokers ... to all other sensations” of life; at Batson’s coffeehouse, where the doctors of learning congregate, scrupulously observed professional decorum disciplines the “risible muscles” on the faces of nominal conversationalists, and feeds the sort of egotism which makes every conversation a “harangue” (C 1). On his stop in St. Paul’s coffeehouse, Mr. Town contrasts “the magnificence of the cathedral without” with the penury of the country parsons who “ply here for an occasional Burial or Sermon,” and with “the happier drudges” who solicit coaches and chairs for the affluent city clergy (C 1). At the Temple coffeehouse he finds more courtiers manqué than students versed in the law, while at the Bedford, which scandalously takes for its “grand archetype” the Button’s of Augustan London where “Addison, Steele, Pope, and the rest of that celebrated set ... flourished,” he wryly marks “men of superior abilities” whose lack of sustained learning and “acquired excellence” becomes irrelevant “by the mere dint of an happy assurance” (C 1).<sup>107</sup> His final destination is White’s, which in The Tatler was the seat of “gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment” (T 1). Now the “great people” there “do not interrupt their politer amusements ... any farther than to go down to Westminster one Sessions to vote for a Bill, and the next to repeal it (C 1). These “great” individuals align with Goldsmith’s aristocrat in the Citizen of the World in how they regard power and

---

<sup>107</sup> See chapter three for an exploration of the Templar figure’s recurrent appearance in the periodical essay from The Spectator through the American Port Folio of the early nineteenth century.

station as sources of personal amusement rather than tokens of civic obligation.<sup>108</sup> In the decades since The Tatler ended its run, their leisure at White's has become mere idleness, for since "Learning is beneath the notice of a man of quality," they have nothing better to do than play games with the affairs of the nation (C 1).

At the heart of this dyspeptic tour through the Town, the Censor General zeros-in on the Chapter coffeehouse (the favorite haunt of the booksellers) where he observes first-hand the source of the decline of London's literary character. The power of print to form consciousness is rendered here not in the positive guise it assumed in The Tatler and Spectator, or even in its negative aspect as in the depictions of newspaper reading in those earlier essays. Instead, it instills in readers an especially thoughtless variety of materialism. The language of goodness when applied to books in the Chapter has nothing to do with their "style or sentiment," but only with whether they stimulate "quick and extensive sale" (C 1). Such condemnations of philistinism among booksellers are common enough in the period, and indeed in any society where authorship has become a professional trade in which merchants have a substantial interest. More germane to the periodical essay's diagnosis of cultural decline is the particular kind of reading this culture engenders. As Mr. Town watches aghast, a bookseller picks up "a Sermon," reads through it "with great attention," and pronounces it to be "'very good English'" (C 1). If the bookseller were to have experienced this sermon only an occasion for approving "the purity and elegance" of its "diction," it would be indictment enough of his manner of reading (C 1). But it comes to pass that he was responding solely to "the beauty of the

---

<sup>108</sup> See above pp. 21-22.



type” (C 1). Style, manner, content: this absurd reduction of books to the handsomeness of their printed typeface thrusts them all into irrelevance.

Connoisseur 8 offers an account of how this crude fixation on print has changed the ways periodical essays are produced and read. A type-centered approach to reading and writing reflects for Mr. Town a broader disintegration of personal and public character in the republic of letters. Readers, unlike their counterparts in The World’s Platonist idyll, have given over active engagement with themselves and with what they read. Writers worry more about “the beauty of the type” than about the philosophical quality of their sentiments, and rely upon “enlivening strokes” like boldface and italics, rather than rhetorical facility, to make their points (C 8). The combination of passive readers and clumsy writers creates a market in which volume after volume is brought forth, all their pages “sprinkle[d] ... with Italicks” and “large staring CAPITALS” that beat their senses into wholly passive readers like the Aristotelians in The World did with their dogma (C 8). Like “the marginal directions in plays, which inform the actor when he is to laugh or cry,” the crude printing practices of the mid-century book trade presume a public of readers incapable of coming to their own conclusions, or of questioning the value and quality of what the press foists upon them (C 8). Authors too have become convinced that “however dull in itself” a book might be, it “will become smart and brilliant” by the sheer dint of its type, as if the printing press can alchemically transform worthless matter into a precious commodity (C 8). “[O]ur modern writers seem to be more solicitous about outward elegance than the intrinsic merit of their compositions,” the Censor General muses, “and on this account it is thought no mean recommendation of their works, to advertise that they are neatly printed on an entire new letter” (C 8).

To try and compel readers to grasp what is happening around them The Connoisseur and The World reach back to the Ciceronian ethics at the heart of the periodical tradition and take readers step-by-step, as it were, through how the genre's relationship to a wider print culture has always been an ethical one. Mr. Town notes that "in the whole republic of letters there are none perhaps who are more obliged to the printer than the writers of periodical essays" (C 8). But the sense of obligation he asserts is grounded in the bare fact of print's capacity to, according to The Spectator, "diffuse good Sense through the Bulk of the People" in a far wider radius than the ancient philosophers had been able to cover (124). Print in this conception is but a convenient material vehicle for sense, and it is no wonder then that "The SPECTATORS indeed came into the world without any of the advantages we are possess'd of" (C 8). They were published on "a very bad print and paper" and "entirely destitute of all outward ornaments," which meant that readers came to them for what they could learn from the essays' matter (C 8). By contrast, the Censor General notes with dismay that his own essays are being "set off with every ornament of the press," which signals their participation in a print culture in which readers prize above all else the "outward graces and embellishments" which proliferate on the ruins of "genius" and philosophical discernment (C 8).

In a total reversal of value, the medium which was intended to stimulate its readers' critical "understanding" of their world has instead become their sole focus of attention (S 124). Mr. Town concludes that the mid-century book trade's elevation of print quality over intellectual substance is a totemic instance of modern practicality. "[O]ur modern essays as much excell the SPECTATORS in elegance of form, as perhaps

they may be thought to fall short of them in every other respect,” he avers (C 8). Because “it requires no genius to supply a defect of appearance,” mid-century authors and booksellers have opted to produce handsome, if vacuous, essays and volumes (C 8). This, finally, begins to answer Fitz-Adam’s puzzlement in The World as to why belles-lettres no longer enlivens the public mind despite the presence of more books and essays than ever before in London. The “continued, though varied exercise of the mind” promoted by belletristic reading, according to The World, both relieves the mental rigors of “abstracted studies” that occupy scholars, and elevates the minds of those given to everyday “business” (W 94). It provides grist for enlightening conversation, and draws together those of disparate dispositions in the greater citizenship of the republic of letters. Once, however, books become sources primarily of aesthetic pleasure that begins and ends with admiration of the printed page, and those volumes which are deemed “genteeler appendages of the tea-table” than the more crudely printed ones of The Spectator set the fashion, the very notion of literary citizenship as a popular possibility vanishes (C 8).

This concern with how the culture of print was shaping books, and the experience of reading them, drives The World’s call for “the revival of conversation,” which appeals for final authority to Cicero’s philosophical writings and the kind of public character they create (8). If he had not so highly valued informal, domestic conversation, where “subjects of reason and philosophy” were tossed around for the sake of casual discovery and refinement, Cicero would “have been delivered to posterity with no greater reputation, than what he was entitled to from the character of an eminent pleader and politician” (W 94). The key point here is that the writings “which have rendered him the

admiration of mankind” originated in “the hours of conversation” Cicero enjoyed with friends outside of his political capacity (W 94). These are what the periodical essay has subsequently sought to stimulate in the London reading public at large as a catalyst for mundane ethical consciousness. Out of Cicero’s conversations emerged those writings, like De Officiis, De Amicitia, and Quaestiones Tuscularum, which in turn inspired the writers of periodical essays to develop their animating concept of literary citizenship.

Once it appears to the writers of The World and The Connoisseur that books and conversation, and reading and reflection, no longer imply one another in their mid-century London, they look back to The Tatler’s and Spectator’s Ciceronianism as perhaps a failed experiment, but one at least worth keeping as much as possible in the public memory. The Spectator’s unadorned example is the literary and material sign of Cicero’s “precept” in De Officiis that “the owner should be an ornament to the house, and not the house to the owner;” in the rhetorical world of the periodical essay, this everyday philosophy speaks as much to the ethics of reading as to those of property ownership (C 8). The entire genre of the periodical essay was founded on the twin assumption that certain manners of reading imply ethical worldviews that reflexively inform how people associate with their fellows and understand themselves, and that a thriving civic life can be understood to originate in, and prosper by, books and essays. That readers at mid-century needed to be reminded of this so explicitly indicates that essayists writing in this tradition felt that the reach of the worldview their essays projected was increasingly being limited to the physical margins of their pages.

## CHAPTER TWO: CIVIC HUMORISM

I would write on the lintels of the door-post, Whim. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”

Emerson’s embrace of whim as the core of self-reliance comes near the end of a long struggle by Anglo-American writers to imagine meaningful civic relations in an increasingly fragmented world. The periodical essay was at the center of these efforts in England, as we have seen, and it would be too in Jeffersonian America.<sup>1</sup> The ironic personae typical of the genre, along with the various old humorists populating their essay serials, register a perplexing sense of personal disconnection in everyday social life. In Emerson’s hands, however, whimsical resistance to an unphilosophical culture assumes a severer guise than it had in eighteenth-century serials like The Tatler and The Connoisseur. “Society is a joint-stock company,” he declares, “in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater.”<sup>2</sup> While the authors of The World and The Connoisseur in 1750s London understood social decline primarily in relation to the republic of letters, Emerson targets what he sees as a society constitutionally hostile to free thinking, if not to thinking altogether. He hears in the language of the social contract in America a corporate mentality given to rationalizing away “liberty and culture” for the sake of “bread” and

---

<sup>1</sup> See chapter three for an account of American receptions of the British periodical essay during Jefferson’s presidency.

<sup>2</sup> “Self-Reliance,” in Emerson: Essays & Poems, ed. Joel Porte, Harold Bloom, and Paul Kane (Library of America, 1996), 261.

security.<sup>3</sup> This drives him to propose in “Self-Reliance” a more radical solution to this state of affairs than anything the English essayists had advocated. But his appeal to “Whim” as a hedge against conformist philistinism springs from a shared philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

Emerson’s explanation of what it means to live a good and happy life should sound familiar to anyone who has read even moderately in the periodical essay genre, or in the humanist philosophy it tried to popularize. “It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own,” he insists.<sup>5</sup> “[B]ut the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.”<sup>6</sup> The English periodical essay assumes that reading can conjure up a society-within-a-society comprised of such philosophically composed individuals. A half-century after the publication of one of the last British essay serials in this tradition, the Edinburgh Lounger (1785-87), however, Emerson confronts a bleaker social scene across the Atlantic. Viewed from within the ethical world of the periodical essay, the Jacksonian America standing in the immediate background of “Self-Reliance” looks very much like the writing periodical essayists saw on the walls of eighteenth-century London and Edinburgh, and early nineteenth-century New York and Philadelphia, but in boldface.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> “Self-Reliance,” 261.

<sup>4</sup> “Self-Reliance,” 262.

<sup>5</sup> “Self-Reliance,” 263.

<sup>6</sup> “Self-Reliance,” 263. Compare with Steele’s comment in Spectator 27: “... we can never live to our Satisfaction in the deepest Retirement, unless we are capable of living so in some measure amidst the Noise and Business of the World.” See below, pp. 90-93, for an account of the roots of this philosophical perspective.

<sup>7</sup> See Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) for a comprehensive history of Jacksonian America as

Economic self-interest and a near-total absence of civic consciousness have become the order of the day in Emerson's America.

Whimsicality in eighteenth-century periodical writing typically expresses itself as ironic approval of such reductive self-absorption. It also makes the experience of time an especially pointed source of ethical consciousness. This expression and experience together articulate a set of values opposed to a modern individualism that these essayists render as a state of aggressive unawareness, where unreflective surrender to materialistic compulsions is widely taken as the highest expression of a progressive society. The whimsical individual in this body of writing who refuses to relinquish his personality and creative idiosyncrasy to the culture of consumption proliferating around him thus bequeaths to Emerson a rhetoric with which to oppose the "smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times."<sup>8</sup> Yet Emerson's hope that the character of self-reliance "is somewhat better than whim at last" shows his sense that this older notion of whimsy has done all the work it can do in figuring the paradoxical identification of strong individualism with universal humanity Emerson is after. He then tries to get beyond the conceptual conundrum that has dogged whimsicality from the beginning; namely, that the language of civic virtue which had bolstered the initial claims of whimsy to an ethical posture always paradoxically threatens to undermine them through its internal logic, according to which whim can appear as little more than a quietist retreat from real civic engagement.

---

moment when "ushering in a democratic Millennium" while castigating the old republican "aristocracy" was guided by a fervid conviction that "money is power" (301, 345).

<sup>8</sup> "Self-Reliance," 267.

This consciousness of whimsicality's dual face as a principled, public stand against mindless consumerism and a defeatist refusal to engage these cultural forces head-on resonates through literary serials from the Tatler to Washington Irving's Salmagundi (1807-08). Grasping whimsicality as a central characteristic in periodical discourse shows us first how the essays consistently challenge what they take to be the status quo, most especially in its modern, liberal guise. The reading publics they project, then, locate ultimate value in renouncing the distractions of fashion and novelty in favor of the more durable pleasures of enriching character through reading, reflection, and conversation. The imaginative place where readers meet and gather into a virtual community, in other words, is constituted by the sense of reading as a bedrock source of self-aware personality that The Tatler and Spectator established as a mundane literary philosophy. As it translates the force of character-developing conversation into the formal rhythms of periodical circulation, literary whimsicality brings a laughing, ironic sense of humanity to bear on the particular characteristics of everyday urban, public life.<sup>9</sup> In so doing it seeks to deepen personality as a bulwark against the uniformity and thoughtlessness periodical writers associate both with the new market of luxury goods, and with rationalizations of commerce as the most promising engine of human progress.

Before the periodical essay assumed its prominence in London's literary world, books of character sketches filled a similar niche for seventeenth-century readers. The periodical essay's emergence as a variant of the character writing genre witnesses the end

---

<sup>9</sup> For accounts of conversation as a character-forming activity in the eighteenth century, see chapter one, 14-17 and 52-61. See also Jack Prostko, "'Natural Conversation Set in View': Shaftesbury and Moral Speech," Eighteenth-Century Studies 23 (1989): 42-61; and Leland E. Warren, "Turning Reality Round Together: Guides to Conversation in Eighteenth-Century England," Eighteenth-Century Life 8 (1983): 65-87.



point of the gradual popularization of what had been in England and France largely a mode of courtly, or coterie, writing. In the process, the traditional aristocratic disdain for mercantile business which appears throughout the seventeenth-century character sketch unravels, and from its threads proceeds an analysis of how excessive emphasis on commerce in a society warps both individual and social character. Paralleling this, the courtly premium placed on wit as a mode of verbal and social distinction gives way to what we might regard as a whimsical ethics, which casts claims to superiority based upon anything other than the socially-oriented self-awareness we find in periodical writing as rivaling reductive mercantile self-interest in their detrimental effects on civil society. The turn of the seventeenth into the eighteenth century, in fact, witnesses a kind of changing of the literary guard, in which the fashion for character writing as a discrete exercise gets taken up into the periodical essay, where it becomes one of several key elements in the new genre's formation.

Samuel Johnson drew a direct link between The Tatler and Spectator and the work of early modern Europe's most famous character writer, Jean de La Bruyère.<sup>10</sup> First published in France in 1688, his Les Caractères de Théophraste traduits du grec avec Les Caractères ou les mœurs de ce siècle brought forth a French translation of the fourth-century BC Greek Characters of Theophrastus, together with a critical preface and newly-written characters of his own. An English translation appeared in London in 1699 as The

---

<sup>10</sup> "The Tatler and Spectator adjusted, like Casa, the unsettled practice of daily intercourse by propriety and politeness; and, like La Bruyère, exhibited the 'Characters and Manners of the Age.'" Samuel Johnson, The Lives of the English Poets, 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1968), 1: 335. See also Edward Chauncey Baldwin, "The Relation of the Seventeenth-Century Character to the Periodical Essay," PMLA 19, no. 1 (1904): 75-114; and "La Bruyère's Influence Upon Addison," PMLA 19, no. 4 (1904): 479-495.

Characters, or the Manners of the Age (“made English by several hands”), which was reprinted several times through the end of the century.<sup>11</sup> Though La Bruyère claimed to improve upon Theophrastus by focusing on the inner lives and motivations of his original characters, he still considered himself firmly within the moral tradition of character writing Theophrastus was believed to have originated. Beginning with Isaac Causaubon’s 1592 Greek and Latin edition of the Characters, Theophrastus gained a reputation for advancing moral instruction with his “typological approach to human personality.”<sup>12</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century the proem which had licensed this reading of Theophrastus’s moral intent was deemed spurious.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, in 1802 Samuel Saunter in The American Lounger still praises Theophrastus as “an excellent moral limner,” echoing Bishop Joseph Hall nearly two centuries before, for whom the Characters were designed to “[draw] out the true lineaments of every virtue and vice ... whereby the ruder multitude might even by their sense learn to know virtue and discern what to detest.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> The Characters, or the Manners of the Age. By Monsieur de la Bruyere [sic], of the French Academy (London, 1699).

<sup>12</sup> J. W. Smeed, The Theophrastan ‘Character:’ The History of a Literary Genre (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 2.

<sup>13</sup> No one knows for certain when the proem was written, but as early as 1787 C. G. Sonntag determined that it was inauthentic, a view accepted by all of Theophrastus’ subsequent critics. See Richard C. Jebb, introduction to The Characters of Theophrastus (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), 18, and 36, n. 1.

<sup>14</sup> American Lounger 15; Joseph Hall, Characters of Vertues and Vices, in The Works of the Right Reverend Joseph Hall, vol. 6, ed. Philip Wynter (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 109.

Hall's and Saunter's praise for what they took to be Theophrastus's moral intent springs from a common assumption that human nature is everywhere the same, and not fundamentally subject to historical change. Because the ancient Greek Theophrastus wrote at the roots of the civilization which has subsequently been translated to England, Hall believes, his insights into character still basically apply to the daily lives even of the "runder multitude."<sup>15</sup> While Hall's contemporaries Thomas Overbury and John Earle tended to subordinate the bishop's staunchly moralizing impulses to displays of witty ingenuity in drawing their characters, they too basically adhered to what the Augustan critic Henry Gally would term the "Point of Reality" in representing character, stripping away particular, time-bound details to get at types that anyone, in any age, could immediately recognize as a Miser, a Fop, a Liar, etc.<sup>16</sup> "Reality" of character, by this reckoning, consists of a relatively closed gallery of typical forms to which readers – however "vulgar" – can refer in negotiating their way through life once they learn to recognize the signs of such characters in their day-to-day interactions.<sup>17</sup> Insofar as Hall advocates revising the Greek writer's discoveries, it is not to accommodate the trappings of new fashions and manners but to inflect their representations with a specifically Christian morality that had been unavailable to Theophrastus. But the tension between

---

<sup>15</sup> Hall, Characters, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Gally, "A Critical Essay on Characteristic-Writings," in The Moral Characters of Theophrastus (London, 1725), 38; [Sir Thomas Overbury], A Wife ... Whereunto are added many witty characters, and conceited newes, written by himselfe and other learned gentlemen his friends (London, 1614); John Earle, Microcosmography, or a Piece of the World Discovered in Essays and Characters (London, 1633). From here forward, Overbury will be cited as "Overbury," as it cannot be determined which of the character sketches attributed to him were his own work, and which were the work of others.

<sup>17</sup> Hall, Characters, 109.

timeless generality and the moral function of attending to historical particulars in drawing characters which was apparent at the origins of the English character tradition would grow more pronounced as the seventeenth century wore on.

Where character writing crosses with writing specifically about London – its locales and dangers and pedestrian challenges – self-conscious authorial ingenuity conspicuously steps to the fore. Taken as a whole, such works seldom rise in rhetoric or interest above the level of commonplace guidebooks. Yet their occasional flashes of wry, and sometimes inventive, ways of reading the city and characterizing its people show glimpses of the kinds of whimsical personae who would put character-making at the center of periodical essay writing. Beginning with “urban panorama” books like John Stow’s Survey of London (1598) and the related “coney-catching” books of Thomas Dekker and Donald Lupton, this body of writing gives character to the very streets of the city, and makes readers aware of how they, too, are always potentially being “read” and made into characters by their fellow pedestrians and observant loungers.<sup>18</sup>

Practically, Dekker’s The Bell-Man’s Second Night’s Walk (1608) and Lupton’s London and the Countrey Carbonadoed and Quartered into Severall Characters (1632) teach readers to avoid being gulled, or worse, by the sharpers and rogues they are bound

---

<sup>18</sup> John Stow, A suruay of London Contayning the originall, antiquity, increase, moderne estate, and description of that citie, written in the yeare 1598... (London, 1598). Stow’s book was updated by others in 1618 and 1633, and went on to inspire the anonymous A New View of London; or an Ample Account of That City (London, 1708), and Daniel Defoe’s A Tour Thro’ London (London, 1725). See Dana Brand, The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 16-17 for a brief account of “urban panorama” books in the seventeenth century.

to encounter within and without the city walls.<sup>19</sup> The state of awareness they figure and recommend is especially attentive to its own status as awareness, offering “a sense of the city not as complete and comprehensible at a glance, but as rapidly changing and randomly encountered.”<sup>20</sup> The real innovation of these books is in how they represent different locations in the city, giving character to ordinary environments by describing them as if their features and atmospheres were capable themselves of impacting those passing through them. How these places – The Bridge, Cheapeside, Turnchull Streete, et al – are perceived, and how their characters are rendered on the page, in other words, then evinces the type of mind (or character) that registers them as such. In practice, however, the personalities speaking from the page in these early urban character books tend to appear rather conventional, expressing blasé disdain for the goings-on in play-houses, Paris-Garden (“such a great Company so ill occupied, in so bad a place”), and Newgate, while only occasionally contributing something genuinely new, like Lupton’s characters of “Fencing-Schooles” and “Fisher-woemen.”<sup>21</sup> But at roughly the same time, “Overbury” and Earle were devoting increased attention to placing their own, more idiosyncratic stamp on the characters they drew, lending additional force to the revelation of personality involved in the act of publishing characters of people and places.

---

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Dekker, Lanthorne and candle-light. Or The bell-mans second nights-walke In which hee brings to light, a broode of more strange villanies, than euer were till this yeare discouered (London, 1608); Donald Lupton, London and the countrey carbonadoed and quartred into seuerall characters (London, 1632).

<sup>20</sup> Brand, The Spectator and the City, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Lupton, London, 69; 83-86, 91-94.

A character, “Overbury” tells us, “is wit’s descant on any plain song.”<sup>22</sup> The collection bearing his name, based around Sir Thomas Overbury’s original poem “A Wife” and containing numerous prose character sketches by several hands, highlights the authors’ play of wit in finding new ways of describing conventional types. “A fine gentleman,” we learn, “is the cinnamon tree, whose bark is worth more than his body,” while a Puritan “is a diseased piece of Apocrypha; bind him to the Bible, and he corrupts the whole text.”<sup>23</sup> Hall, too, introduces his characters with witty metaphors and similes to catch readers’ attention, as with “the Busybody” whose “estate is too narrow for his mind,” which compels him “to make himself room in others’ affairs.”<sup>24</sup> These self-conscious displays of authorial wit betray the courtly origins of English character writing. But as character collections become increasingly popular throughout the seventeenth century wit is correspondingly brought to bear more and more on places of public resort. This has the effect of drawing readers’ attention away from witty changes rung on old clichés in the courtly manner and toward their own surroundings, which these writings conceive as always ripe for “wit’s descant.”<sup>25</sup>

While we might see the introduction of the character of “A Prison” in “Overbury” as part of an attempt to capitalize on the sensational story of Overbury’s imprisonment and death in the Tower to generate more sales, Earle for one seemed inspired by this innovation, including characters of a tavern, a “bowl-alley,” and Paul’s Walk in his

---

<sup>22</sup> “Overbury,” 290.

<sup>23</sup> “Overbury,” 89, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Hall, Characters, 108.

<sup>25</sup> “Overbury,” 290.

Microcosmography.<sup>26</sup> As “a vast confusion of languages” and “the general mint of all famous lies,” Paul’s Walk embodies for Earle the Town’s tendency to obscure whatever might be the underlying reality of the characters encountered there. This proliferation of dishonesty among the merchants and fashionable people who wheedle and gossip at Paul’s Walk demonstrates the need for character books in helping others remain alert to the possibility of being manipulated. But it simultaneously makes this need a source of pleasure through modeling how an alert mind can see through deception and render the truths of character according to one’s own experience in the world. As practical guides, character collections continued to be reprinted into the eighteenth century, most often in miscellaneous publications like Abel Boyer’s The English Theophrastus: or, the Manners of the Age (1702), a fully-indexed compilation of characters from Theophrastus, La Bruyère, and seventeenth-century English writers, together with some of Boyer’s own. But La Bruyère, the author with the most significant impact on the eighteenth-century periodical essay, pushed character writing further in the direction of emphasizing the minds and attitudes that create characters, taking such writing deeper into interior exploration while also giving more prominence to the roles of urban places in shaping personality.

Looking back from the 1770s, William Craig in The Mirror declares La Bruyère’s distinguishing achievement to be his movement beyond traditional “account[s] ... of ...

---

<sup>26</sup> Once a favorite to the Earl of Somerset, Overbury fell from favor after circulating his poem “The Wife” in an attempt to dissuade the Earl from marrying the Countess of Essex, and then ran afoul of King James after apparently insulting the Queen. He was confined to the Tower, where he died in 1613, the apparent victim of poisoning ordered by the Countess. The Earl and Countess were later cleared of involvement in Overbury’s death, but suspicions remained. See Miriam Allen De Ford, The Overbury Affair: The Murder Trial that Rocked the Court of King James I (Philadelphia: Chilton Co., 1960).

external conduct” into describing “the internal feelings of the mind” (31). This reiterates La Bruyère’s declaration in the preface to his Characters that he has “mostly applied [himself] to the Vices of the mind, the secrets of the heart, and to all the interior part of Man, which Theophrastus has not done.”<sup>27</sup> Such plumbing the depths of character has its corollary in the increase of witty inventiveness on La Bruyère’s part, for delving into the interior springs of character calls for more original acts of interpretation, since the traditional types available to him concentrate so much on outward carriage and appearance as primary indices of character. His Characters were not without their English detractors, however, who objected to the highly mannered and self-conscious style of the sketches. In “A Critical Essay on Characteristic-Writings” (1725), Henry Gally charges the Frenchman with transgressing the “Degrees of Probability” by carrying “almost every thing to Excess” in his descriptions.<sup>28</sup> Later in the century Joseph Warton laments that La Bruyère occasionally “overcharge[s] his portraits with many ridiculous features that cannot exist together in one subject,” though he does – contra Gally – commend the “spirit and propriety” marking his characters.<sup>29</sup>

The conflict between originality and tradition involved in drawing characters with an ethical end in view is the point of contention here. For Gally, as we recall, the “Point of Reality” in representing character is collectively reached in the gallery of types handed down through the ages.<sup>30</sup> It follows that too much inventiveness, too much focus on

---

<sup>27</sup> Jean de la Bruyère, The Characters: or, Manners of the Age (London, 1699), 243.

<sup>28</sup> Gally, “Critical Essay,” 66-67.

<sup>29</sup> Adventurer 49.

<sup>30</sup> Gally, “Critical Essay,” 38.



authorial wit, can make character writing less a vehicle of practical, ethical knowledge than a mere pleasant diversion, or *jeu d'esprit*. La Bruyère was well aware of this possibility and insisted that he “did not so much endeavour to entertain the world with novelties, as to deliver down to posterity a Book of Manners.”<sup>31</sup> But his sense that moral knowledge can be generated continually in present moments of observation and reflection marks a key point of difference between La Bruyère and his later English critic.

When Gally insists that the character writer “must not only Study other Men,” but also undertake the “more difficult Task” of “study[ing] himself,” by which he will then “be able to lead a Reader, knowingly, thro’ that Labyrinth of the Passions, which fill the Heart of Man, and make him either a noble or despicable Creature,” he endorses just the kind of “interiour” exploration La Bruyère announces as his own, distinctive achievement.<sup>32</sup> He also parallels the French writer in linking interior and exterior “Study” in a mutually enriching dynamic, for “we cannot ... attain to a perfect Knowledge of human Nature, by studying others or our selves alone, but by studying both,” since “our Souls have Affections as different from one another, as our outward Faces are in their Lineaments” (32). But Gally’s sense that reflection and observation will always – if properly conducted – reveal those essential truths of unchanging character ratified by traditional types finally locates the ultimate meaning and value of character in a realm separate from the day-to-day world of flux and change from which, La Bruyère insists, true moral knowledge of character derives.

---

<sup>31</sup> La Bruyère, *Characters*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> Gally, “Critical Essay,” 29, 31; La Bruyère, *Characters*, 243.

La Bruyère's desire to produce new characters springs in part from his impatience with what he dismisses as "Maxims" of the "infallible," embodied (or, one might say, embalmed) in the typical tradition of character writing passed down through the ages.<sup>33</sup> When the traditional character types do not align with what he sees in his Paris, he looks to the mundane variants as sources of knowledge in their own right, not as ephemera to be disregarded. To "correct men by one another, by the Images of things that are Familiar to them" requires elevating immediate observations of the particularities of everyday social life as wellsprings of significant meaning.<sup>34</sup> But more than this, he posits the present and future as full of potential moral knowledge in ways that break with the insistence of writers like Gally that the immemorial is always the final arbiter of truth. Since "[w]e think things differently from one another, and we express 'em in a turn altogether as different," La Bruyère counsels, we should regard the possibility for writing better, more accurate, and deeper representations of character as forever open.<sup>35</sup> This author, who revised and expanded his Characters through nine editions up to his death in 1696, then charges readers to continue to challenge and extend what he has done by characterizing the Town according to their own observations and reflections.

This emphasis on the present at the expense of adhering to traditional authority does not, however, make him a "Modern" in any unproblematic way. A writer in the Philadelphia Port Folio of 1807 sums up the nature of La Bruyère's achievement by highlighting how the French writer used his innovations to skewer precisely the

---

<sup>33</sup> La Bruyère, Characters, 10.

<sup>34</sup> La Bruyère, Characters, 236.

<sup>35</sup> La Bruyère, Characters, 10.

“singularity” of the modern temperament.<sup>36</sup> In the Characters, those “arrogant” individuals who “cager for distinction,” “bending to the powerful” while “assuming” airs before “the unhappy,” become modern characters discerned by a philosophical temperament.<sup>37</sup> Writing “with the pen of a gentleman, as well as a scholar,” La Bruyère in this account synthesizes respect for antiquity – its literature, philosophy, and the civic values of the Greek polis he eulogizes in the preface to his Characters – with the imperative to modern sociability, a synthesis that marked the discourse of periodical writing from its inception.<sup>38</sup>

The Port Folio’s portrait of the French character writer thus neatly glosses La Bruyère’s sense of his own ideal readers as those who “apply themselves to the Manner of the times” out of frustration with how “Natural and Moral Philosophy [have been] left in a controversial suspense [sic] by the Ancients and Moderns” (458). To break this “suspense” he urges them publicly to assert themselves by writing down and circulating their own observations in print. By moving from books to the world (and back again, through their literary endeavors) these readers productively defamiliarize everyday social life, “deduc[ing] instructive inferences” from the ephemera that has customarily passed

---

<sup>36</sup> Port Folio, 3 January 1807.

<sup>37</sup> Port Folio, 3 January 1807.

<sup>38</sup> Oliver Goldsmith extrapolates a similar tension between “book knowledge” and the moral imperative to experience the world as-is: “Books ... while they teach us to respect the interests of others, often make us unmindful of our own; while they instruct the youthful reader to grasp at social happiness, he grows miserable in detail, and attentive to universal harmony, often forgets that he himself has a part to sustain in the concert ... A youth, who has thus spent his life among books, new to the world, and unacquainted with men, but by philosophic information, may be considered as a being, whose mind is filled with the vulgar errors of the wise ...” (Citizen of the World, 67).

beneath their notice (458). La Bruyère's beckoning readers to assume active roles in drawing characters themselves, and to do so out of the stock of their own experiences in everyday life, clearly informs the practice of periodical writing as it developed in the wake of his growing popularity in England. When the periodical essay transforms his stated aim to help readers "get loose from that prepossession in favor of their own Customs and Manners, which they ... take up on trust without any deliberation" into a whimsical sort of endeavor, it then gives us the persona-as-humorist which would become the genre's hallmark into the early nineteenth century (24).

Whim comes to define periodical writing early on. The Spectator's Sir Roger de Coverley remains the most well-known whimsical character in this tradition. His "Singularities" in "Behaviour" proceed, Mr. Spectator insists, only "from his good Sense, and are Contradictions to the Manners of the World, only as he thinks the World is in the wrong" (§ 2). This refusal to be confined "to Modes and Forms" out of a comical willfulness endeared Sir Roger to his fellows in the Spectator Club, as well as to readers through the end of the nineteenth century. The Spectator, in fact, enjoyed something of a literary-historical half-life in the 1890s with the publication of selected editions of just those essays centered around Sir Roger. The whimsical Mr. Umphrville and Colonel Caustic in The Mirror (1779-80) and The Lounger (1785-87), respectively, were cut from the same cloth as Sir Roger, as were the denizens of Cockloft Manor in Irving's Salmagundi. Their stubborn resolution to remain out of step with the times makes all these characters of a piece, but their old age and anachronistic ways render them harmless opponents of change rather than threatening figures of resistance. Within the fictional

worlds of their respective essay serials, they earn indulgent affection as what Stuart Tave has denoted “amiable humorists.”<sup>39</sup>

The whimsicality and humor that periodical personae manifest, however, operate at a deeper level of significance than does the whimsy these old humorist characters express. Imagining that future historians will remember him as a “great Humorist in all parts of his Life” (S 101), Mr. Spectator establishes the tradition of essayist-as-humorist perpetuated by, among others, Fitz-Adam (The World) and Mr. Town (The Connoisseur), and adapted to early American circumstances by Oliver Oldschool and Samuel Saunter in The Port Folio, and Salmagundi’s Launcelot Langstaff.<sup>40</sup> Whereas the amiable humorists embody the values of an antiquated world that persist mainly in enervated, passive gestures of protest, whimsical personae adopt a more aggressive and confrontational posture. They claim time as their domain, and make awareness of how one uses and experiences time into a potential ethical challenge to a society increasingly given to conceive time as little more than an index of commercial productivity.

Oliver Goldsmith, writing at mid-century in The Bee (1759), makes explicit this oppositional character of whimsical temporality. Since The Bee’s persona “intended to pursue no fixed method” with his series, “it was impossible [for him] to form any regular plan.”<sup>41</sup> Coolly bucking the formal conditions of periodical writing, he challenges as well

---

<sup>39</sup> Stuart M. Tave, The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

<sup>40</sup> The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:425.

<sup>41</sup> The Citizen of the World & The Bee, By Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Austin Dobson (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1934), Bee 1. All references to The Bee in this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by essay number and abbreviated B.

the expectations they create in their implied readership. Periodicity itself, the defining character of essay serials, is cast off in the name of whimsicality.<sup>42</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Washington Irving in Salmagundi's first number amplifies this mildly defiant tone, declaring flatly that "notice will be given when another number will be published," since whim dictates that the "work will not come out at stated periods."<sup>43</sup> But for Goldsmith in the 1750s, the kind of audience Irving attempts to conjure into being, one bound together by a common, if touchy, rejection of workaday time and its alienating force, is yet difficult to imagine with such seeming assurance. The Bee's persona thereby sees himself as a "whimsically dismal figure," trapped between his impulses and the "form" of initial address "the public" expects (B 1). Here, for the first time in periodical writing, a potential conflict between the essayist-as-humorist and the "regular plan" that formally characterizes the literary periodical becomes a subject for public rumination (B 1).

Goldsmith engages the imperatives of whimsicality head-on with those of the marketplace, figuring each as a different approach to time. His account of essay writing assumes the sense of periodic time in Spectator 10, where Addison extols publishing in

---

<sup>42</sup> For conventional declarations of periodicity, see The Tatler, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1:15-17; The Spectator, 1:44-47; and The Rambler, vols. 3-5 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, eds. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 3:6-8. Periodicals were typically published on Tuesdays and Saturdays (The Adventurer, The Rambler, The Mirror), or one day per week (The Lounger on Saturdays; The World on Tuesdays). The Tatler and Spectator were more ambitious, publishing three days per week (Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays) and six days per week (excluding Sunday), respectively.

<sup>43</sup> Salmagundi, in Letters of Jonathan Oldstyle, gent.; Salmagundi; or, The whims and opinions of Launcelot Langstaff, Esq. & others, eds. Bruce I. Granger and Martha Hartzog (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 69.

regular periods for helping ensure that readers' "Virtue and Discretion may not be short transient intermitting Starts of Thought," but "refresh[ed] ... from Day to Day" by the series' regular rhythm.<sup>44</sup> Stuart Sherman describes this objective as "a running argument in favor of a diurnal paradigm for achieving, recognizing, and inhabiting the fullness of time" in which to fill these periodic moments "in succession, from the resources of a contained and continuous consciousness, is to possess a life in full."<sup>45</sup> The flipside of such a regularized consciousness of time, however, is the kind of alienation propagated by an increasingly managed supervision of work time in a new money or market economy. E. P. Thompson captures this sense in remarking that when "reduced to money" time becomes "currency," something not to be "passed but spent."<sup>46</sup> Under such a rubric, "all time must be consumed, marketed, put to use."<sup>47</sup>

The total economic alienation Thompson describes goes hand-in-hand with the "gradual diffusion of a new type of time, based upon calculative rationality," a key hallmark of modern consciousness as conventionally described.<sup>48</sup> While the self-

---

<sup>44</sup> The Spectator, 1:44.

<sup>45</sup> Stuart Sherman, Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form 1660-1785 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 115.

<sup>46</sup> E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," Past and Present 38 (Dec. 1967): 61.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson, "Time," 91.

<sup>48</sup> Nigel Thrift, "Owners' Time and Own Time: The Making of a Capitalist Time Consciousness, 1300-1880," in Space and Time in Geography: Essays Dedicated to Torsten Hägerstrand, Lund Studies in Geography, Series B, Human Geography, no. 48 (CWK Gleerup: Royal University of Lund Department of Geography, 1981), 57. For modern senses of time, see Anthony Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 14-21; Helga Nowotny, Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience, trans. Neville Plaice

conscious periodicity of the Tatler and Spectator can be seen as part of this general “diffusion,” in recognizing this we should avoid reducing The Spectator – and periodical series in general – to mere generators of a capitalistic, or bourgeois consciousness.<sup>49</sup>

Recent work on the early modern literary public sphere has suggested that the time consciousness and reflexivity of periodical writing associated with the material conditions of print are not simple reflections of a capitalist ideology that is bound up, in at least one manner of historical reckoning, with print culture in general.<sup>50</sup> Seeing whimsicality as primarily an ethical discourse lends further support to such work, for by

---

(Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994), esp. 102-131; and G. J. Whitrow, Time in History: The Evolution of Our General Awareness of Time and Temporal Perspective (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 99-186.

<sup>49</sup> Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, Joseph Addison's Sociable Animal: In the Market Place, on the Hustings, in the Pulpit (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971) provides the classic interpretation of Addison and Steele as fully conscious proselytes of “bourgeois” ideology. Other, more critical readings of the “bourgeois” character of The Spectator include Eagleton, The Function of Criticism; Erin Mackie, Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in “The Tatler” and “The Spectator” (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); and Peter Stallybrass and Alan White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). All of these readings proceed on the assumption that the nascent public sphere in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries was irreducibly bourgeois from its inception, an assumption that obscures as much as it illuminates regarding conceptions of public discourse in the period, and historical shifts more broadly considered.

<sup>50</sup> Benedict Anderson famously coined the term “print capitalism” in Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1991). For Anderson, and those who follow him, the irreducibly market-driven nature of printing, charged with the “fatality of human linguistic diversity,” makes print a primary engine of capitalism at its core (43). See David McInerney, “Print-Capitalism?,” in Masses, Classes and the Public Sphere, ed. Mike Hill and Warren Montag (London: Verso, 2000) for a relatively stringent Marxist critique of Anderson’s argument for “the essentially capitalist nature of printing” (McInerney, 188-89). For a more nuanced use, and implicit critique, of Anderson relative to eighteenth-century British literary culture, see Jonathan Brody Kramnick, Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).



doing so we remind ourselves that the modern imperative to fill time with meaning admits more than one source of content, a lesson plainly reinforced by Goldsmith's self-consciously whimsical eidolon.<sup>51</sup>

As a way of conceiving time, whim demands to be seen as both form and content. The whimsical persona rhetorically subordinates systematic explication of his philosophy, plans for social reform, etc. to momentary inclination. Steele in The Tatler figures his relationship to periodicity in just these terms, promising "from Time to Time [to] Report and Consider all Matters of what Kind soever that shall occur to" him.<sup>52</sup> While he publishes his considerations in relatively fixed, regular intervals his persona exerts personal autonomy at least in choosing, apparently at random, what to reflect upon. Later in the century, The Mirror amplifies both the temporal unpredictability and the personal autonomy sketched in Steele's remark:

The complexion of my paper will depend upon a thousand circumstances, which it is impossible to foresee. Besides these little changes, to which every one is liable from external circumstances, I must fairly acknowledge, that my mind is naturally much more various than my

---

<sup>51</sup> The term "eidolon" derives from the Greek word for "ghost," and is regularly used by historians of the periodical press to refer to editorial and authorial personae. While Tedra Osell, "Tatling Women in the Public Sphere: Rhetorical Femininity and the English Essay Periodical," Eighteenth-Century Studies 38 (2005): 283-300, overshoots the mark in asserting that "the eidolon tends to be less individuated than a persona, expressing instead a broader sense of cultural or social identity" (I fail to see how an eidolon is any less, or a persona any more, individuated than the other), her overall point that the periodical personae or eidolons represent far more than individual character is a sound one (284).

<sup>52</sup> The Tatler, 1:15.

situation.<sup>53</sup>

Henry Mackenzie's persona casts his serial as subject to the unpredictable from two directions: the vagaries of his external circumstances, and the internal force of his whims. Yet in remarking that his "mind is naturally much more various than [his] situation" this eidolon suggests that no matter what befalls him from the outside, his "various" whims can free him, to a degree, from the effects of these "external circumstances" (M 2). This allies him with Goldsmith's persona in The Bee, especially as both writers manifest tension between the liberating power of whimsy and the generic characteristics of the periodical essay. The direct conflict in The Bee between imaginative inclination and the business of periodical publishing thus discloses an approach to essay writing that weaves the strands of whimsical temporality in The Tatler and The Spectator into an ethically coherent position that would inform the essayist's sense of vocation in Britain and America through the succeeding decades.

For Goldsmith, the pressures of an imagined audience that make the eidolon "whimsically dismal" spring less from generic periodicity than from the production side of the literary economy (B 1). Responding to the essayist's reluctance to step before the public, his publisher reduces the production and circulation of knowledge, as well as literary endeavor generally, to shop goods. On one hand, the "republic of letters" stands as an ideal polity devoted to pursuing enlightened knowledge regardless of national borders. It is the "commonwealth of learning" which, according to Joseph Stevens Buckminster across the Atlantic later in the century, stands as "the only permanent

---

<sup>53</sup> The Mirror, vols. 28-29 of The British Essayists, comp. A. Chalmers, 38 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1855), 28:26. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by volume and page number and abbreviated M.

example of pure and original democracy.”<sup>54</sup> But The Bee’s publisher has little time for such lofty notions, introducing instead the division of labor to speed things through. A “Magazine is not the result of any single man’s industry,” he assures the essayist, “but goes through as many hands as a new pin, before it is fit for the public” (B 1). While meant as a reassuring pat on the shoulder, this advice only hardens the persona’s resolve to follow his whims. In so doing, he refuses to allow the “republic of letters” to be “divided” into “classes” that perform restricted, repetitive tasks (B 1). Collaborative effort for him involves something more than parceling out labor in a system where one person comes up with the “plan,” another “works away at the body of the book,” a third “is a dab at an index” (B 1).

This picture of essay writing as a version of the compartmentalized labor appropriate to pin making transforms the kind of whimsical, imaginative freedom Mackenzie celebrates in The Mirror into an alienated task: the production of commodities geared to a public whose taste is presumably shaped by commercial forces. By giving a little entertainment, the publisher remarks (“three halfpence in hand”) while extending “three shillings more in promises,” he cheekily likens himself to the debased “Colonel Charteris” in manipulating the public’s desires to generate profit (B 1).<sup>55</sup> This matter-of-

---

<sup>54</sup> Monthly Anthology 3 (Jan., 1806), quoted in The Federalist Literary Mind: Selections from the Monthly Anthology and Boston Review, 1803-1811, ed. Lewis P. Simpson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), 181.

<sup>55</sup> According to The Malefactor’s Register; or, the Newgate and Tyburn Calendar..., 5 vols. (London, 1779), Francis Charteris (d. 1730) was a demonically profligate character, known as much for his ability to fleece people out of huge sums of money as for keeping a house filled with women he had “ruined”: “Being a most expert gamester, and of a disposition uncommonly avaricious, he made his knowledge of gambling subservient to his love of money; and, while the army was in winter-quarters, he stripped many of the officers of all their property by his skill at cards and dice. But he was as knavish as he

fact conflation of writing, shop work, and his ledger stands as a potent reminder of all the essayist should write against, and away from. Seventeen years later Adam Smith would immortalize the pin factory as his key example of how “the division of labour” increases “the productive powers” of industry.<sup>56</sup> Whimsicality, then, turns away instinctively from the shop logic of instrumental reason that subordinates the “democratic” model of the “commonwealth of letters” – the freedom of thinking and arguing and developing personality involved with the “amicable collision” of free speaking and reading and writing – to a profit-and-loss economy where consumer desires created and managed by market forces dictate what will be published and read.<sup>57</sup>

For Goldsmith and Mackenzie and other British and American essayists, the neo-Stoicism popularized by The Spectator philosophically justifies this whimsical attitude. The distinction between classical Stoicism and this modern variant concerns the source of that tranquility of mind at which Stoic discipline aims. For Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, reason properly used allows one to suffer the unpredictable blows of fortune

---

was dexterous: and, when he had defrauded a brother-officer of all his money, he would lend him a sum at the moderate interest of a hundred per cent, taking an assignment of his commission as security for the payment of the debt” (2:210).

<sup>56</sup> Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, 2 vols., eds. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), 1:15.

<sup>57</sup> Buckminster, in Simpson, 181; Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Sensus Communis, in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated SC. “Amicable collision” is, of course, a periphrastic way of referring to politeness, whose Latin root verb “polire” means “to polish, file, make smooth” (Cassell’s Latin Dictionary, s.v. “pōlio”). See Philip Carter, Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800 (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), 19-23 for a survey of definitions of politeness in the period.

patiently, revealing the inscrutable, transcendent order lying beyond this world of vicissitude and change. Seneca's certain declaration that scio omnia certa et in aeternumdicta lege decurrere ... Causa pendet ex causa, private ac publica longus ordo rerum trahit ('I know that everything proceeds according to law that is fixed and enacted for all time ... Cause is linked with cause, and all public and private issues are directed by a long sequence of events') summarizes the unshakable resolve of this conviction.<sup>58</sup> In its British form, the focus shifts from the power of rational faith in a higher order as a source of mental composure to the ethical function of such mental composure per se.

This is not to say that Scottish philosophers, in particular, ignored the providentialism at the heart of classical Stoicism, or were inattentive to the finer distinctions within the Stoic school in their specifically philosophical writings.<sup>59</sup> But in its popular form as mediated through the Ciceronianism at the heart of the periodical tradition, Anglo-Scots Stoicism tended to focus on "the realization that without 'ease' or

---

<sup>58</sup> Seneca, "De Providentia," in Moral Essays, 3 vols., ed. John W. Basore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1:36-38. See also "De Constantia" and "De Tranquillitate Animi," in Moral Essays, 1:48-105, 2:202-285; Epictetus, "Of Providence," "Of Steadfastness," "On Tranquility," and "Of Providence," in Discourses, 2 vols., ed. W. A. Oldfather (London: William Heinemann, 1925), 1:41-51, 1:187-205, 1:225-231, 2:109-113; and Marcus Aurelius, ed. C. R. Haines (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 67-97.

<sup>59</sup> Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 288; William Craig in The Lounger, vols. 30-31 of The British Essayists, 31:184-190; and even David Hume, "The Stoic," in Essays Moral, Political, and Literary, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 146-154 all deal with Stoicism in a more nuanced and subtle way than, for example, Richard Steele does in The Christian Hero, ed. Rae Blanchard (New York: Octagon Books, 1977). See John Dwyer Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland (Edinburgh: J. Donald, 1987), 46-51; and M. A. Stewart, "The Stoic Legacy in the Early Scottish Enlightenment," in Atoms, 'Pneuma,' and Tranquillity, ed. Margaret J. Osler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 273-296 for accounts of the foundational encounters with Stoicism among Scottish Enlightenment thinkers.

‘self-composure’, behavior could never be ethical.”<sup>60</sup> A parallel insight grounds Steele’s remark in The Spectator 27 that “we can never live to our Satisfaction in the deepest Retirement, unless we are capable of living so in some measure amidst the Noise and Business of the World.”<sup>61</sup> To keep mental composure amidst the distractions of commercial London is, for Steele and the essayists who followed in his wake, to open possibilities for acting as an ethical, self-reflective being while participating fully in urban social life.

The bare concept of mental freedom eventually allows whimsicality to assume a clear ethical kinship with Stoic resolve by recasting imaginative vigor as the key source of self-composure.<sup>62</sup> The difference between Mackenzie’s remarks on his “various” mind and Hugh Blair’s comparatively more conventional Stoic sentiments shows how this happens (M 2). When Blair writes that “the doctrine which the changes of the world perpetually inculcate is, that no state of external things should appear so important, or should so affect and agitate our spirits, as to deprive us of a calm, an equal and a steady mind,” he expresses a typically Anglo-Scots sense that “mind is superior to fortune; that what one feels within, is of much greater importance than all that befalls him without.”<sup>63</sup> Mackenzie follows Blair in emphasizing how a “thousand circumstances, which it is

---

<sup>60</sup> Dwyer, Virtuous Discourse, 47.

<sup>61</sup> The Spectator, 1:113.

<sup>62</sup> When Stewart remarks that Hume “detaches the moral doctrines from their historical roots in physics and metaphysics” in criticizing Stoicism he points to a quality of Scottish neo-Stoic thought that is not limited to Hume (“Stoic Legacy,” 278). Indeed, despite Hume’s critical intent, his exclusively moral focus dovetails with the tenor of the popularized Stoic philosophy in literary periodicals.

<sup>63</sup> Blair, sermon xviii; Blair, sermon ii, quoted in Dwyer, Virtuous Discourse, 48, 49.

impossible to foresee” will impact his writing, though fortunately his “mind” can detach itself from such “situation[s]” and allow him to carry on anyway (M 2). These neo-Stoic views of self-composure as “the necessary condition for virtue” in “a dangerous and corrupting world” suggest that a tranquil mind can disregard “those external impressions ... hurling themselves upon the imagination” in an increasingly busy and materialistic society.<sup>64</sup> Yet Mackenzie’s attention to the imaginative potency of the mind itself as a well-spring of “changes” posits the mind’s creative energies, rather than apprehension of an invisible, universal order or simple nonchalance in the face of “external circumstances,” as capable of settling the spirit amidst society’s baffling complexities and disappointments. In its “various” nature, expressed through personal quirks or “Hobby-Horses” or “Whim-Whams,” this imaginative intransigence invests whimsicality with a resolutely constructive force.<sup>65</sup> The mind for Mackenzie’s persona then generates tranquility – however momentarily – through the willful hope that people can imagine ways of being that reject the workaday world of alienated time and the mentalities it creates and sustains.

This clearly is not some proto-Romantic notion of the imagination as “the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception,” or of the humorist as the Promethean “legislator of the world,” but a more mundane elevation of personal idiosyncrasy as a

---

<sup>64</sup> Dwyer, Virtuous Discourse, 49.

<sup>65</sup> The most well-known exploration of whimsical “Hobby-Horses” is found in Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 61-62. It would take at least another essay to explore how the ethics of whimsicality in the periodical tradition inform Sterne’s narrative persona. For “Whim-Whams,” see Salmagundi, 67.

refuge from banal uniformity.<sup>66</sup> Periodical personae inhabit whim paradoxically as a kind of attitudinal stability. Whimsicality, in this account, is akin to self-mastery, whether read in relation to more traditional Stoic fortitude, or seen as a form of moral uprightness in the face of popular delusion. “Though the necessities as well as the luxuries of life may perhaps be denied us” essay writers, says Mr. Town, “we readily make up for the want of them by the creative power of the imagination.”<sup>67</sup> Such faith in the imagination to shore up self-worth grounds as well Fitz-Adam’s rhetorical style in The World, as he grandly disavows conformity with “the opinion of the world” in fulfilling his “duty” as a “public writer to oppose popular errors.”<sup>68</sup>

From the standpoint of the periodical tradition, unthinking submission to a life shaped and managed by consumer desires is the greatest of such errors. Celebrating whim as a form of resistance is thus part of a broader cultural refusal of “the collapse of a society based upon two dimensions, a system of instrumental action of work and the economy[,] and a system of symbolic interaction of communication and culture, into a one-dimensional society” governed solely by economic productivity and acquisition.<sup>69</sup> As compensation for a frustrated and bemused sense that conspicuous consumption and “the love of money” are elbowing conviviality and the ideal values of the republic of letters to

---

<sup>66</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, chap. 13, in The Major Works, ed. H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 313; Percy Bysshe Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry,” in Shelley’s Poetry and Prose, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977), 508.

<sup>67</sup> The Connoisseur, vols. 25-26 of The British Essayists, 26:131.

<sup>68</sup> The World, vols. 22-24 of The British Essayists, 22:400.

<sup>69</sup> Thrift, “Owners’ Time,” 56.



society's margins, reading and critical self-awareness – jeered by “the impertinence of the multitude” as ridiculous or peevish – become endowed with substantial ethical weight.<sup>70</sup>

This conception of whimsicality may always be glimpsed in the background of the wider eighteenth-century debates about luxury, politeness, and emergent consumerism. On this vexed, and vexing, configuration of social concerns hinges the self-conception of periodical writing as a refuge of genuine civic-mindedness amidst a public scarcely interested in much beyond the distinctions of material acquisition. But how, precisely, can reading and writing adequately substitute for virtuous action in the public domain? Categorically, of course, neither can: to Trenchard and Gordon, “Junius,” John Wilkes, and John Adams, for instance, writing and reading clearly – and necessarily – minister to active political ends.<sup>71</sup> But the imaginative work performed by locating ultimate value in certain perceptions of, and attitudes toward, commerce and its effects on character can, for periodical essayists, at least carve out places for non-materialistic and more traditionally humanistic values to survive as a kind of witness against a society that increasingly looks like a loose collection of atomized, covetous selves.

To grasp how this perspective might be persuasive involves understanding the terms of the gradual shift from the uncompromising rhetoric of civic humanism to

---

<sup>70</sup> The Rambler, 3:309; The Connoisseur, 26:412.

<sup>71</sup> See John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, preface to Cato's Letters, 2 vols., ed. Ronald Hamowy (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1995), 1:11-34; Junius [pseud.], preface to The Letters of Junius, ed. John Cannon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 13-20; The North Briton, 5 June 1762 (Dublin, 1763); John Adams, “A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law,” in Papers of John Adams, vol. 1, ed. Robert J. Taylor et al (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977 - ), 103-128, and Warner's reading of it in Letters, 1-6.

conceptions of politeness as an adequate response to the ethical complexities of commercial activity.<sup>72</sup> As discussed in chapter one, J. G. A. Pocock's analysis of undifferentiated personality grounds the conceptual roots of politeness in the stability a landed economy affords, by which the communal obligations that come with land ownership make the landed gentry "wholly political being[s]" bound, morally, to address themselves "undividedly to the public good."<sup>73</sup> The socially transforming effects of modern commerce, driven by a concept of mobile, or virtual, property (i.e. credit and cash value), look, from the perspective of this older, landed economic model, like the unleashing of untrammelled private interests on civil society, gutting it of any guiding social or political ethic save what Mandeville aphorized as "Private Vices, Publick Benefits."<sup>74</sup> Increasingly throughout the eighteenth century, however, politeness comes to bear the burden in a commercial economy of forging coherent moral personality as a stay against the corrupting effects of material wealth, which are lumped together under the baleful sign of Luxury.

---

<sup>72</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See also John Barrell, "Introduction: A Republic of Taste," in The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 1-68; Stephen Copley, "The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture," in Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art 1700-1850, ed. John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13-37; Lawrence E. Klein, Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Nicholas Phillipson, "Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Culture," in Scotland and England 1286-1815, ed. Roger A. Mason (Edinburgh: J. Donald, 1987), 226-246.

<sup>73</sup> Pocock, Virtue, Commerce, 121.

<sup>74</sup> Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees or Private Vices, Publick Benefits, 2 vols., ed. F. B. Kaye (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988).

But as essay serials try to hasten a conceptual shift from civic actor to active reader as their own contribution to the “polite and commercial” character, they register how hopelessly eccentric those who indulge their whims in following the life of the mind can appear to full-fledged, unapologetic members of commercial society, for whom whimsical pursuits look like forms of “idleness ... deeply threatening” to economic prosperity, and hence “to the nation.”<sup>75</sup> Within the conceptual world of civic humanism too, where, according to “Cato,” “ease, leisure, security, and plenty” reliably quicken literary and philosophical accomplishments, and where mindlessly following “fashionable stupidity” is the surest sign of corrupting “self-love,” the whimsical man of letters can appear to be shirking his “duty” to promote the “publick spirit,” and even treacherously to mistake his “dry dreams” for common sense.<sup>76</sup> This core tension haunting the humorist, a nagging sense that opting out of active economic and commercial life in favor of literary and intellectual pursuits might cast one as an idle wastrel or bad citizen, represents a structural problem at the heart of politeness as a cultural ideal. In the “considerable effort ... made to define the domain of politeness as being outside commerce and commodity exchange altogether,” advocates of politeness tend still to define their endeavors precisely in a structural relation to the commercial market, for “instruction in polite taste is in large part instruction in discriminating

---

<sup>75</sup> William Blackstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England, 4 vols. (London: A. Strahan, for T. Cadell and J. Butterworth and son, 1825), 3:326; Sarah Jordan, The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003), 18.

<sup>76</sup> Trenchard and Gordon, Cato’s Letters, 2:514, 518; 1:252-253.

consumption ... which will enable the polite to acquire standards of taste to guide their manners and their social and economic behaviour.”<sup>77</sup>

This pragmatic-aesthetic approach to consumerism, in which moving within an urban consumer culture generates opportunities for learning how not to follow the crowd by cultivating instead the “Pleasures of the Imagination,” surely runs the risk of protesting too much, especially for those critics inclined to see economic conditions as determining consciousness with monolithic force.<sup>78</sup> Yet what Stephen Copley terms the “characteristic Augustan representation of the production and reception of literary texts as a species of non-material aesthetic exchange between writer and ... reader” (16) – and, it should be added, between reader and reader in the “mass ceremony” Benedict Anderson describes as generating “imagined communities” through reading – does provide a structure of experience that draws on desires for individual satisfaction central to the consumerist ethos, but symbolically exchanges sociable, intellectual, and aesthetic rewards for its primary motivation.<sup>79</sup> While such a formulation does not resolve the contradictions of politeness Copley highlights, nor eradicate nagging doubts about the sufficiency of replacing the imperative to civic action with the symbolic community of the republic of letters, it does help crystallize for these writers how they might use structural irony to defend coherent, conversational personalities against distraction by the

---

<sup>77</sup> Copley, “Fine Arts,” 17, 16.

<sup>78</sup> The Spectator, 3:538. See especially Eagleton, Function of Criticism; Mackie, Market à la Mode; and Stallybrass and White, Politics and Poetics.

<sup>79</sup> Anderson, Imagined Communities, 35.

empty stimulations in the shop windows of Cheapside and Piccadilly, or the spectacles at Vauxhall and Ranelagh.

Since the whimsical humorist represents singularity personified, a community of humorists might be expected to generate more cranky friction than bemused fellowship, with little else besides. Periodical essayists take as a formal one the problem of how individuals can follow their whims in some kind of imagined unison with countless others doing the same. Corbyn Morris, the period's most jaundiced critic of humor and whimsy, writes caustically in 1744 that while "TRUTH, GOOD SENSE, WIT, and MIRTH, are ... the immediate Ancestors of HUMOUR," in the end humor "is derived from the Foibles, and whimsical Oddities of Persons in real Life, which flow rather from their Inconsistencies, and Weakness, than from TRUTH and GOOD SENSE."<sup>80</sup> The genesis Morris draws is instructive: though singularity is laudable in its origins, if indulged too far the singular attitude becomes personally alienating. But even worse, in valuing eccentricity for its own sake the humorist can unknowingly lose touch with why, exactly, he removes himself from the crowd. Out of inflated self-regard, he begins "to neglect the Company he likes;" as he grows worse, he then starts "to follow the Company he hates and despises," a victim of his own contrariness. Finally, with no one close enough to vent it on, the humorist turns his pathological "Disdain of all Imitation" on "his own Conviction," leaving him a mere crank, void of any principled reasons for opposing a society admittedly gone mad with self-interest and self-absorption.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Corbyn Morris, An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit... To which is Added, an Analysis of the Characters of an Humourist... (London, 1744), xx-xxi.

<sup>81</sup> Morris, An Essay, 18-19.

Morris gives us here another side of the humorist's deep entanglement with the culture of individualism: adjacent to the threat of diffusing one's personality in the "unreal wants" of the consumer market lies an exaggerated self-concern, the solipsistic extension of the modern focus on the self in philosophy and politics and political economy.<sup>82</sup> Johnson's portrait of the misanthrope as a "lion in the desert [sic]," who "roars without reply, and ravages without resistance," confident of his own "superiority[,] which swells the heart" with wounded pride is one way for the obstinate humorist to end up; the pathetic, incapacitated eccentric of American Lounger 62 – lost in "the illusions of the magical mind" and surrounded by his "pell mell confusion" of unfinished plays, poems, and plans for "new model" governments – is another.<sup>83</sup> In such figures, the logic of whimsicality turns back on itself, rendering the humorist a perverse fulfillment of the threat of social alienation at the heart of modern individualism as understood in the periodical essay's symbolic world.

Formally, the indefinite, incorporeal public projected as the condition of periodical discourse shores up the oppositional claims of whimsy by transforming what is potentially a delusional, self-devouring individualism into the basis for a new sense of social belonging. This imagined "public" reminds readers that "the speculative and recluse are apt to forget that the business and the entertainment of others are not the same

---

<sup>82</sup> James Thomson, "Winter," in The Seasons and the Castle of Indolence, ed. James Sambrook (1972; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 157. See William C. Dowling, The Epistolary Moment: The Poetics of the Eighteenth-Century Verse Epistle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 22-23 and following for an account of the "specter of solipsism not simply as isolation but as spiritual paralysis" in eighteenth-century writing (23).

<sup>83</sup> The Rambler, 4:13; The Port Folio, 4 June 1803, 1.

with their own,” and highlights “the folly of supposing, that the opinions of the rest of mankind are to be governed by the standard which they have been pleased to erect” (M 39).<sup>84</sup> While “there may be a Colour of Reason to deviate from the Multitude in some Particulars,” Addison admonishes, “a Man ought to sacrifice his private Inclinations and Opinions to the Practice of the Publick.”<sup>85</sup> Such publics, however, remain shadowy inferences, scarcely articulated beyond the suggestion that something like “TRUTH” and “GOOD SENSE” exist somewhere outside of the humorist’s own head.<sup>86</sup> They serve both to mitigate the isolation of the humorist and to reflect critically upon “the mass public” as construed by periodical essayists.<sup>87</sup> Irony, with its double-edged force, then simultaneously separates a whimsical public from the public-at-large, and keeps this new public together by casting self-reflection as its inclusive condition.

While it lays bare whim’s capacity for generating new forms of alienation, irony in periodical writing primarily reveals a hidden herd mentality as the real consequence of pursuing self-actualization through the consumer market. Where whimsicality as a temporal mode functions as a larger “disposition of mind,” as a form of ironic expression it wears the face of “an odd fancy,” interjecting critical distance between readers and personae while also inferring their possible agreement through the shared process of grasping what Alexander Chalmers in the preface to his 1803 edition of The World calls

---

<sup>84</sup> The Adventurer, vols. 19-21 of The British Essayists, 19:156.

<sup>85</sup> The Spectator, 5:570.

<sup>86</sup> Morris, An Essay, xx.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject” in Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

“the double dissimulation, or dissembling of dissimulation, necessary in this species of ridicule.”<sup>88</sup> Irony’s peculiar power to catalyze a sense of ethical commonality casts the individual’s discrete ability to make interpretive judgments as but the precondition for joining a community of readers whose existence irony always implies. As Denise Riley notes, “irony is the rhetorical form of self-reflexiveness.”<sup>89</sup> But it also “acts to bypass the limits of that individual subjectivity by inciting pursuit of the verbal consensus on which a coherent and self-conscious community must rest.”<sup>90</sup> By positing simultaneously the possibility of grasping and missing what is communicated, irony projects in- and out-groups of readers. Yet to grasp an ironic meaning is ultimately to make that meaning. Linda Hutcheon’s conception of ironic “inference” as “an intentional act” parallels Wayne C. Booth’s theory that since the “act of reconstruction [of meaning] and all that it entails about the author and his picture of the reader become an inseparable part of what is said, ... that act cannot really be said, it must be performed.”<sup>91</sup> But Booth’s further notion that because “[i]ts complexities are ... shared: the whole [ironic construction] cannot work at all unless both parties to the exchange have confidence that they are moving together in identical patterns” needs to be supplemented by the explicit awareness in periodicals of “the capacity of discourse to generate and regenerate

---

<sup>88</sup> OED, s.v. 3, 3b “whim;” Chalmers, preface to The World, 22:15.

<sup>89</sup> Denise Riley, The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 163.

<sup>90</sup> Gary J. Handwerk, Irony and Ethics in Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), viii.

<sup>91</sup> Linda Hutcheon, Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony (London: Routledge, 1995), 11; Wayne C. Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 39.



reflective community,” which takes us beyond the merely dyadic author-reader relationship Booth describes.<sup>92</sup>

Each act of the reader’s assent to the persona’s ironic self-criticism, satires of the town, or depictions of readerly misapprehension constitutes a moment in which the essay’s ethics are realized not merely in individual or dyadic terms, but more powerfully as part of what Michael Warner understands as “an abstract public never localizable in any relation between persons.”<sup>93</sup> Warner’s additional contention that “the mutual recognition promised in print discourse [is] not an interaction between particularized persons, but among persons constituted by the negating abstraction of themselves” applies here as well.<sup>94</sup> But what governs “the negating abstraction” in periodical essays is not republican discourse per se, as it is in Warner’s account of the public sphere in revolutionary America, but the strategic use of irony by essayists to create civic consciousness in the sense of an absence of republican values in the public at large. As a result, irony in periodical essays “appeals to a future consensus, rather than passively enacting an existing one.”<sup>95</sup> Reconstructing what this “future consensus” might entail then involves parsing the contours and textures of the flawed consensus the essays project in order to negate it.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Shaftesbury’s Sensus Communis gives us both the broad socio-historical account of civic decline, and a rhetorical theory of how

---

<sup>92</sup> Booth, A Rhetoric, 13; Handwerk, Irony, vii.

<sup>93</sup> Warner, “Mass Publics,” 61.

<sup>94</sup> Warner, “Mass Publics,” 62.

<sup>95</sup> Handwerk, Irony, 4.

it might be checked, assumed in periodical writers' assertions of the dignity of the republic of letters against what The World would wryly deem "our present improved state of morality," in which commercial self-interest "border[s] very nearly on the very perfection of merit."<sup>96</sup> Focusing on the character of wit and raillery in modern London, Shaftesbury deplores the passage of raillery as a mode of public interaction "from the men of pleasure to the men of business" (SC, 30). Among his foils and targets stands Sir Richard Blackmore, busy apologist for the merchant Whig order, who sees "Industry, good Sense, and regular Oeconomy" engaged in a pitched battle for the soul of the nation with a decadent culture of "pleasant Conversation."<sup>97</sup> Yet while Blackmore calls "men of business" to leave off aping the profligate "men of pleasure" and take pride in their mercantile accomplishments, Shaftesbury's antagonism does not simply reverse priorities to defend lofty aristocratic privilege. Instead, he argues for a heightened sense of social character, cultivated by the kind of self-knowledge disclosed in informal gatherings and chance encounters in open public areas that are, unfortunately, in short supply in his London.<sup>98</sup> Still, these highly public notions of character and personality extend the province of politeness beyond the restricted circles of the learned "men of pleasure" to include, theoretically, all men (and always, for Shaftesbury, men only) who choose to devote whatever leisure time they have to cultivating the mental independence and self-

---

<sup>96</sup> The World, 24:310-311.

<sup>97</sup> Sir Richard Blackmore, "An Essay Upon Wit," in Essays Upon Several Subjects (London, 1726), 195-6.

<sup>98</sup> See Miles Ogborn, Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies 1680-1780 (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), 83-84, for an account of Shaftesbury's "plea for a particular arrangement of urban space appropriate to classical notions of republicanism."

awareness brought forth through reading, conversing, and socializing for the sheer pleasure of it.

The contiguity of aesthetics and politics in Shaftesbury's writings speaks to a deeper, neo-Stoic apprehension of proportion bearing directly upon the individual's sense of relation to his community. His thoughts on the debasement of raillery should thereby be read with this larger adjacency in mind. Just as "the accomplishment of breeding is to learn whatever is decent in company or beautiful in arts," he writes, so "the sum of philosophy is to learn what is just in society and beautiful in nature and the order of the world," where "public virtue" and the "common good" comprise the highest aims of social life and action.<sup>99</sup> The expansive, self-reflective and ecumenical knowledge he hopes to stimulate through the "Freedom of Wit and Humour" reveals how the "symmetry and order, upon which beauty depends" are coterminous with one's experience of "his own immediate species, city or community" and "his higher polity or community, that common and universal one of which he is born a member."<sup>100</sup>

In this light, Shaftesbury's attack on town wit adduces a transposition of the push for personal advancement driving the new economic order into the conversational world, resulting in the spread of underhanded, and even inscrutable, irony, a rhetoric of alienation. Those who "go about industriously to confound men in a mysterious manner [and] make advantage or draw pleasure from that perplexity they are thrown in by such uncertain talk" are so pernicious because they use wit to sunder friendly commerce in the name of self-interest (SC, 30). This "mean, impotent and dull sort of wit," he goes on,

---

<sup>99</sup> Shaftesbury, Miscellany III, in Characteristics, 407, 412.

<sup>100</sup> Shaftesbury, Miscellany III, 414, 406.

“leaves the most sensible man and even a friend equally in doubt and at a loss to understand what one’s real mind is upon any subject” (SC, 31). Here is Shaftesbury’s vision of society as sprung from the “illiberal kind of wit” of Blackmore’s world, a collection of inarticulate, self-enclosed atoms unable to engage in that “amicable collision” – the frisson of politeness – through which a conversable, philosophical, and above all civil society comes into being (SC, 31).

Shaftesbury calls “soft Irony” the reflexive discourse he believes is capable of checking this state of affairs by sparking in company, as well as in readers, the laughing recognition of how not just religious fanaticism, but also this peevish, single-minded commitment to business and commerce prevents true civil liberty and freedom of mind and character from flourishing and giving creative shape to society.<sup>101</sup> The republican temperament, “grave and solemn” in its Stoic guise, acquires another form in Shaftesbury’s ethic; it becomes a mode of moving through the modern world in a state of bemusement, leavened with occasional, spirit-composing perceptions of beautiful order and harmony in everyday social experience (SC, 29). But while the theoretical implications of his system extend beyond the small circle of readers who could afford to buy the Characteristics, it fell to periodical essays to circulate “soft Irony” through the town via a broadly accessible, and relatively inexpensive medium.<sup>102</sup> These periodicals take the meritocratic ethic of Shaftesbury’s formally idealized conversable world – each

---

<sup>101</sup> Shaftesbury’s term “soft Irony” is quoted in Klein, Shaftesbury, 96.

<sup>102</sup> As Klein notes, the first several editions of the Characteristics “were works of high book art. The paper was heavy, the typography was exquisite, the layout was careful and elegant, the ornaments were copious but restrained,” placing these books near the opposite end of the publishing, and cost, spectrum from periodicals (Shaftesbury, 123).

section of the Characteristics has an answer and critique elsewhere in the book, making the “ironic distance” created by the crisscrossing of “chatty comment” formally reflect the desideratum of polite philosophizing – and transpose its relentlessly dialogic form into the periodic rhythms of public circulation.<sup>103</sup>

The primary object of such dialogic rigor is the cult of novelty that stands for the negative consensus the essayists attempt to disrupt, the herd mentality that gets passed off as the highest expression of singularity. What, after all, could be more ironic than thousands of consumers expressing their individualism by all buying the same thing? Richard Owen Cambridge in The World attributes this phenomenon to “a hasty and precipitate imitation of novelty,” a compulsive and irrational pursuit of newness and variety that can “make [even] the most active and varied life a tiresome sameness.”<sup>104</sup> This is a world in which everything is “directed by the capricious influence of fashion,” from “fancy and dress” to “the polite arts” and “taste.”<sup>105</sup> Here we have the central import of whimsicality as resistance to mindless consumption, as a genuine form of mental independence from the false promises of uniqueness and distinction driving the market for luxury goods.

By stimulating desires for novelty, in other words, this market commodifies whim, structuring individuals’ desires and inclinations for them so that “the endless variety of objects that present themselves” to the consumer “distract and dissipate the attention” (M 13). “Now,” as a result, The World informs us, “all men are equally struck

---

<sup>103</sup> Klein, Shaftesbury, 113.

<sup>104</sup> The World, 23:11; 22:364.

<sup>105</sup> Citizen of the World, 94.

with the novelty of an appearance; but few, after this first emotion, call in their judgment to correct the decision of their eye, and to tell them whether the pleasure they feel has any other cause than mere novelty.”<sup>106</sup> Understood in these terms, the reflexive personality periodicals aim to create means to shake readers out of such a consumerist torpor, and to reorient them toward a civic awareness that social life is not a mere dumb show of saleable goods guaranteed to make their owners stand out from the crowd by, paradoxically, “follow[ing] the crowd” in pursuit of novelty (M 1). To see this paradox clearly is to begin the process of thinking one’s way, in conjunction with others, towards the other, positive paradox Emerson was, in his own way, to encapsulate in the word “Whim.”<sup>107</sup>

But the ironic exposure of a mass public mentality is not enough, especially when such a mind is already presumed to be wholly unreflective, and thereby incapable of reconstruction. More insidious is a defensive, pragmatic accommodation of the times that disingenuously proclaims an egalitarian gospel as a cover for cynical self-interest. “[I]t is a much more compendious method, and saves much time, and labour, and self-reflection in writing,” the Mirror’s eidolon matter-of-factly assures readers, “to follow the crowd” (1). The American Lounger unpacks what this entails in recommending that “the road to honour, and ... exaltation” involves “not the practice of virtue, the cultivation of the mind, or the amelioration of the heart, but a pertinacious adherence to this maxim ...

---

<sup>106</sup> The World, 23:301. In Goldsmith’s Citizen of the World, this irrational thirst for novelty produces the bizarre circumstances in which a “cat with four legs is disregarded, though never so useful; but if it has but two, and is consequently incapable of catching mice, it is reckoned inestimable, and every man of taste is ready to raise the auction” (125).

<sup>107</sup> Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” 262.

Quaerenda pecunia primum est, / Virtus post nummos.”<sup>108</sup> Living the good life, the neo-Stoic life of the tranquil mind, these personae insist, merely requires setting aside the “arrogance of the ancients,” whose “idea of a perfect character ... included every public and private virtue” for such unbending adherence to principle is itself, by this logic, a form of elitist self-aggrandizement.<sup>109</sup> Recognizing, with Mr. Town, “the incontestable superiority of the moderns” thereby entails rejecting the “strict observance of all the duties of life” by which the ancients “lift[ed] themselves to an invidious superiority above the rest of the world.”<sup>110</sup>

Readers might, like the Mirror’s persona, feel a twinge of regret as they recall with some amazement the “immediate, though short interval” of the Augustan moment “when genius, knowledge, talents, and elegant accomplishments” not only “entitled their possessor to hold the rank of a man of fashion” but “were even deemed essentially requisite to form that character” (45). But those who dare criticize the present for promoting mediocrity treacherously assume the “superior” airs that a properly “enlightened” mind should throw off in full moral confidence that now “neither birth nor fortune, superior talents, nor superior abilities, are requisite to form a man of fashion” because “the present happy and enlightened age” has leveled such pernicious distinctions (M 45). As opposed to indulging the “sullen Stubbornness, and high Pride of Heart” these writers ironically associate with the civic tradition, citizens of the modern age have “laid

---

<sup>108</sup> The Port Folio, 3 December 1803, 386; “Money comes first, first / Get rich, then / Get Virtue,” from Horace Epistle I, 1, in The Essential Horace: Odes, Epodes, Satires, and Epistles, trans. Burton Raffel (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), 199.

<sup>109</sup> The Connoisseur, 26:54.

<sup>110</sup> The Connoisseur, 26:54.

the surest foundations of humility” by “let[ting] themselves down to a level with the lowest of their species.”<sup>111</sup>

Such ethical complacency springs from a sense that mere possession of material things confers real value on individuals and what they do. Both this attitude, and the culture that structures it, are shown capable in Lounger 19 of not only espousing a disingenuous egalitarianism but even of adopting the cultural ecumenicalism of the republic of letters itself to legitimate empty consumption. In its ironic guise, the writer’s admiring portrait of “a well-educated British gentleman” – the article “a” is significant, marking him as a general type rather than a particular individual – sums up everything periodicals project as the antithesis of their cultural world: shallow egotism, unthinking consumerism, the quest for novelty, and a patent inability to understand value in any but the crassest material terms. But in this fictional correspondent’s eyes, such a “modern” gentleman figures ideal cosmopolitanism, for through his wide-ranging tastes and learning, he “is of no country whatever,” uniting “in himself the characteristics of all different nations; he talks and dresses French, and sings Italian; he rivals the Spaniard in indolence, and the German in drinking; his house is Grecian, his offices Gothic, and his furniture Chinese.”<sup>112</sup> Behind the easy employment of national stereotypes, this catalog presents a deeper, more serious cultural critique. Most broadly, this figure’s cosmopolitanism appears as a version of the impulse Adam Smith describes as “the love of distinction so natural to man,” with superficial manners here standing in for Smith’s

---

<sup>111</sup> London Journal, 1 July 1732, quoted in Reed Browning, Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 212, n. 2; The Connoisseur, 26:54.

<sup>112</sup> The Lounger, vols. 30-31 of The British Essayists, 30:135-136.



useless “baubles” as ephemeral signs of value.<sup>113</sup> His further “generous admiration of everything foreign,” coupled with a rejection of “home productions” and domestic “manners and customs” wholly materializes the anti-provincial thrust of ideal cosmopolitanism, transforming it into gross consumerist singularity, a form of mental provincialism made more pernicious by the inability of those steeped in commercial values – like this fictional correspondent – to recognize it as such.<sup>114</sup>

But even more, this gentleman’s Grecian, Gothic, and Chinese architecture and furniture reveal the extent to which not just cultural forms and practices, but even politics and history can be commodified and emptied of meaning. This returns us to whimsicality’s roots in classical republican notions of civic virtue. To educated eighteenth-century readers, the Grecian and Gothic were matrices through which political aspects of British national identity were constituted: Liberty, the genius of civil society and national prosperity, wore both Grecian and Gothic robes in the period’s iconography. From earlier celebrations of the Greek polis as a model of polite virtue and civic and intellectual accomplishment in Shaftesbury, “Cato,” and Hume, to increasing valorization of Gothic strength and native genius in Thomson, Aaron Hill, and Gray, to William Collins’ “Ode to Liberty,” where the Temple of Liberty “[i]n Gothic pride ... seems to rise! / Yet Graecia’s graceful orders join / Majestic through the mixed design,” they sound loudly through the rhetoric of British nationhood.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, in Stowe Gardens –

---

<sup>113</sup> Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, 182, 180.

<sup>114</sup> The Lounger, 30:135.

<sup>115</sup> William Collins, “Ode to Liberty,” in The Poems of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longman, 1969), 453. For idealizations of ancient Greece, see Shaftesbury, Miscellany III, in Characteristics, 397-399, 403-404; Cato’s Letters, 2:514-

to take but one example – the Grecian Temple of Ancient Virtue and Palladian Bridge stand not far from the Gothic Temple and Saxon Deities, materializing in the landscape Cobham’s commitment to republican principles and a specifically British notion of Liberty.<sup>116</sup>

All of this is to point up, by contrast, the superficial capriciousness of the Grecian house and Gothic offices in this number of The Lounger, the latter even more ironic for the veneer of symbolic Anglo-Saxon Liberty that encloses the “British gentleman’s” place of business, the ultimate source of his debased commercial character.<sup>117</sup> But his Chinese furniture represents the ironic coup de grâce: within the symbolic economy of the periodical essay, the taste for Chinese accoutrements stands for parvenu wealth and a penchant for gaudy, luxurious displays of acquisition, identifications that underpinned criticism of British imperial ventures in the East, and indeed rejuvenated the anti-Luxury rhetoric that had declined in force momentarily in the wake of Britain’s spectacular

---

525; and Hume, “Of Eloquence,” and “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” in Essays, 97-110, 111-137. See also Adam Potkay, The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 24-58. See Christine Gerrard, “Patriot Gothic,” in The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 108-149. For overviews of Grecian, Gothic, and Chinese taste considered more broadly, see James Sambrook, The Eighteenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1700-1789, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 1993), 202-221; see Sally Jeffery, “Architecture,” in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Cambridge Cultural History, ed. Boris Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 217-259 for Grecian and Gothic architecture.

<sup>116</sup> In addition to Stowe, the landscape gardens at Castle Howard, Rousham, and Stourhead famously combined classical and Gothic structures that appealed to the mixed genealogy of British “Liberty.”

<sup>117</sup> The Lounger, 30:135.

victories in the Seven Years' War.<sup>118</sup> To fill Grecian and Gothic structures with Chinese furniture is thus to corrupt from within the ancient symbols of Liberty with the modern signs of Luxury, all in the name of the best taste that money can buy. For the ironic voice of pragmatic accommodation, this "gentleman" represents the "world" as it is, "in reality much better now" than at any time before.<sup>119</sup>

This return to an attenuated, ironic version of the classical republican attack on modern luxury shows how the persistence of republican publicity in periodical writing assumes a vestigial character, marking a sense that it now circulates primarily in language instead of directing the sphere of civic action. But this does not mean assertions of whimsicality, and of the inherent value of reading and thinking in essay serials, are devoid of practical, social force. As Riley observes, "a politics of irony" is "[b]y definition without predetermined content," which is not to say that it lacks content altogether.<sup>120</sup> Situated at the point where concern for the public good crosses the imperative to assert individual opposition to thoughtless consumption, the politics of whimsy are predicated on the imaginative association with potentially countless others

---

<sup>118</sup> See Kathleen Wilson, "Libertarianism, War and Empire, 1736-1762," in The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 178-205 for an account of the successful conclusion for Britain of the Seven Years War as "clearly the fulfillment and ultimate expression of the mercantilist-imperialist goals and aspirations articulated for the past three decades" (193). See also William C. Dowling, "Augustan England and British America," in The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 498-523.

<sup>119</sup> The Lounger, 30:134.

<sup>120</sup> Riley, Words of Selves, 162.

who must, in the rhetorical world of periodical writing, see through the charade of self-actualization in market culture.

Rather than marking a retrenchment of landed values or a smugly elitist sense of entitlement, when whimsical personae ironically reveal how economic individualism betokens a new kind of uniformity, they speak ultimately to a hope of establishing forms of public consciousness alternative to the rational-critical debate customarily taken to mark the early modern public sphere. By seeing these personae not as exponents of a complacent bourgeois individualism, but as instead idiosyncratic figures deeply resistant to the economic rationalizations of homo economicus, we get a more dynamic understanding of public culture in eighteenth-century Britain and early America, one in which the symbolic world of the periodical essay encapsulated a sense that civic life and culture could – and must – be determined by more than just a market.

Insofar as the cultural politics of whimsy can be said to possess content, then, it emerges from the personal negativity at the heart of republicanism as a “structuring metalanguage,” in that all assertions of whimsicality, in their rejection of a present consensus, always imply the possibility of creating a future one, however difficult it might currently be to imagine.<sup>121</sup> This primary assumption of a consensus derived from the language of republicanism is what ultimately distinguishes the whimsicality of the periodical essay tradition from Emerson’s “Whim.”<sup>122</sup> While he, too, struggles to make “intelligible” his belief that “the more exclusively idiosyncratic a man is, the more general and infinite he is,” Emerson’s formulation of this paradox as “self-reliance” finds

---

<sup>121</sup> Warner, “Mass Public,” 237.

<sup>122</sup> Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” 262.

greater conceptual coherence in drawing upon a fully-formed, culturally ratified ideology of individual initiative unavailable to earlier periodical writers, and eyed suspiciously by those at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>123</sup> In his hands, whimsy as a political entity comes closer to assuming “predetermined content” than does its ironic, eighteenth-century antecedent, whether one sees this content ultimately in terms of positing a transcendental sense of community, or as shoring up a radical – and socially maleficent – individualism.<sup>124</sup> But in doing so without the confines of a conceptual language that locates its highest ethical measure in the public good, it splinters off only a diminished portion of the whimsical publicity projected by periodical essays as a formal possibility. This marks the end of an historical moment in which the literary and political spheres were felt to commingle sufficiently to invest whimsical irony with the power perhaps to reshape more than literary publics after its example, and the beginning of a time when it is nearly impossible to imagine how this could ever have been the case.

---

<sup>123</sup> From Emerson’s 1830 journal, quoted in Quentin Anderson, The Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 11.

<sup>124</sup> Emerson’s critics have come to radically opposite conclusions regarding his conscious relationship to this ideology of individual initiative. For Stanley Cavell, once the individual retreats so far into imaginative isolation, his solitary “imagination begins to look alien, forbidding in its self-involvement.” Consequentially, it becomes possible through “taming [the mind’s] isolationist impulse” to accept “a world by recognizing in others an echo of your own thoughts and actions – the first prerequisite for political community” (David Mikics, “Emerson’s Individualism,” in The Romance of Individualism in Emerson and Nietzsche [Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003], 41-2). See Stanley Cavell, “Being Odd, Getting Even,” in Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 83-99. By sharp contrast, Quentin Anderson insists that Emerson’s work is the ideological foundation of that “[i]ndividualism ... which foster[s] impersonality in social and economic relations,” and “subjects others to [the self] through ... shrewdness in gauging their appetites and anticipating their needs” (Imperial Self, 4).

CHAPTER THREE:  
THE ARTFUL TEMPLAR

In April and May 1805 the Philadelphia Port Folio printed a series of “Legal Sketches,” brief biographical accounts of exemplary Baltimore lawyers whose “thorough knowledge of [the] habitudes and passions . . . polished to elegance, by every art of cultivation” distinguishes them from the throng of shysters scrambling along “the road to reputation and wealth” to the exclusion of higher concerns.<sup>1</sup> That these lawyers’ pseudonyms – “Antonius,” “Crassus,” and “Sulpicius” – are drawn from Cicero’s De Oratore (ca. 55 B.C.), an imagined conversation among a group of orators concerning the ideal development of civic character, reinforces the persistent sense in the Port Folio and other early American writings that present events only become fully intelligible when read as part of a larger, timeless drama in which a few embattled individuals work ceaselessly to defend the public good against the inevitable, gravity-like pull of self-interest.<sup>2</sup> If this were merely another articulation of the claims of Roman history on the fate of the American republic, it would scarcely be worth remarking. But when Joseph Dennie, the magazine’s editor, hails these lawyers above all for hastening “the progress of Polite Literature” he opens a window onto a curious aspect of the early Republic’s literary history.<sup>3</sup> While historians and literary critics have long recognized the correlation

---

<sup>1</sup> Port Folio, 20 April 1805, 114; 27 April 1805, 122.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, De Oratore, trans. E. W. Sutton, 2 vols. (1942; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). See Carl J. Richard, The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Port Folio, 20 April 1805, 113.

of law and literature as a distinctive feature of early American culture, this turn to belles-lettres by a dissident group of lawyer-writers as a new way of writing history has largely escaped their notice.

In “the murky gloom and darkness, which may be felt of our Night of republicanism,” Dennie proclaims, “the torch of Literature would either diffuse a baleful glare, or emit a delusive light; or rather wholly expire, were it not fed and trimmed by many a Lawyer.”<sup>4</sup> Their training and education, which ideally focused both on absorbing history and letters, and on putting their learning into practice before juries of the people, gave lawyers in The Port Folio dual-citizen status. In both the American republic and the larger republic of letters, lawyers figured with equal prominence. Lewis P. Simpson points out how this conception placed the literary lawyer at the nodal point between the accrued literary and legal wisdom of the past and its realization anew in the present. The “public order of rational, lettered mind conceived by mind itself” is for Simpson what the tradition of humanist reading projects and sustains in different moments across history.<sup>5</sup> This “public order” both makes lawyers by way of their education, and enjoins them to contribute back to it with their own writings.

Federalist lawyer-writers like Dennie and the young Washington Irving conceived the man of letters as an emissary between this learned realm and the everyday world of readers. By continuing to write and publish in dialogue with the citizens of this literary republic, they aimed in part to reveal “the right conduct of mind as a truth verifiable in

---

<sup>4</sup> Port Folio, 20 April 1805, 113.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis P. Simpson, “The Symbolism of Literary Alienation in the Revolutionary Age,” in The Brazen Face of History: Studies in the Literary Consciousness in America (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 28.

history.”<sup>6</sup> At the time the “Legal Sketches” appeared, Dennie and likeminded American writers feared that this republic of letters was under systematic assault by the twin forces of populist hostility to learning and crude nationalism. The Federalist republic of letters, whose charter members included Demosthenes, Quintilian, and Cicero, along with Harrington, Sidney, Trenchard & Gordon, Hume, “Junius,” Burke, and “Publius,” functioned as an ever-renewable well of inspiration. Running parallel to the everyday world of change and vicissitude, it could sustain the new republic by allowing those who read within it to experience imaginatively their participation in a larger moral order in which one is not, and cannot be, the center.<sup>7</sup> The Federalist periodical essayist understood himself as helping translate this collective, timeless expression of resistance to political and anti-intellectual tyranny into the popular language of his own day. In the pages of magazines and essays, these writers sought to create a court of public opinion in which to try the compulsive popular self-interest that always had bred such tyranny in the past. Mundane literary reading, they thought, might save the republic from itself.

---

<sup>6</sup> Simpson, “The Symbolism of Literary Alienation,” 28. For Irving’s Federalism see Henry Seidel Canby, Classic Americans: A Study of Eminent American Writers from Irving to Whitman (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), 67-96; Robert A. Ferguson, Law and Letters in American Culture (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 150-172; Allen Guttman, “Washington Irving and the Conservative Imagination,” American Literature 36 (1964): 165-173; and William Hedges, Washington Irving: An American Study, 1802-1832 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 8-10.

<sup>7</sup> For American inflections of the republic of letters, see Linda K. Kerber, Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America (1970; reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 95-134; Gilman M. Ostrander, The Republic of Letters: The American Intellectual Community, 1775-1865 (Madison, WI: Madison House Publishers, 1999); and Michael Warner, The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 118-150.



In the only sustained treatment of the intersections of law and literature in the early Republic, Robert A. Ferguson explores the ideal of the lawyer in early America as one possessed of what a contemporary of Dennie's considered a "philosophy of the human mind" that disclosed to him "the whole moral world" and "the abstract reason of all laws."<sup>8</sup> This lawyer was, like The Port Folio's "Crassus," a model citizen in the republic of letters whose mastery of "general literature" from Cicero and Seneca to Cervantes, Shakespeare, Samuel Butler, Rousseau, Hume and Sterne, among others, would give him a deeper understanding of human character and manners to put to work in service to the republic.<sup>9</sup> Yet, according to Ferguson, these expectations of broad and literary learning were balanced by a professional imperative that polite letters were not to distract young law students from their training. The demarcation of law and letters was to proceed sharply with the increasing specialization of law throughout the nineteenth century. To Dennie and his collaborators, however, it would not have appeared as an inevitable, or irreversible, trend.

Before the modern legal profession had so fully distinguished itself from the lighter distractions of belles-lettres, practicing lawyers and law students in America "furnished a majority of those who were active in the management of the general magazines and reviews," especially from the last decade of the eighteenth century through the third decade of the nineteenth.<sup>10</sup> Early American literary magazine culture

---

<sup>8</sup> James Wilson's "Lectures on Law..." (1790-91), quoted in Ferguson, Law and Letters, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 29-30.

<sup>10</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 71.

was dominated by such names as Noah Webster, Charles Brockden Brown, Richard Henry Dana, Sr., and William Cullen Bryant. Behind them loom even more remarkable lawyer-writers like Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, John Adams, and John Marshall. This “golden age” of the literary lawyer proceeded from a widespread assumption among the Revolution’s movers that the republic emerged out of the law, and that only through watchful maintenance of its laws could it be sustained. But this assumption would soon give way before the force of more distinctly populist notions of republicanism. The legal generalist, for whom law was substantially a philosophical enterprise, stood as a compelling ideal for many law students of the early Republic. This corresponded with a conviction that the republic and its laws were coterminous, and the lawyer’s business was to ensure that “the rights of men” were legally protected against “the encroachment of minorities and majorities.”<sup>11</sup> Populist challenges to this model centered on what its opponents conceived as a fundamentally elitist sense that the generalist’s deep and wide learning gave him superior knowledge of republicanism to that of the average citizen. From this perspective the legal generalists loomed as mystifiers of the law determined to keep power out of the hands of the people, rather than heroic guardians of constitutionally-sanctioned liberties.

Against the generalist’s expertise, more narrowly-defined notions of legal specialization exerted their force throughout the Jacksonian era. Though tensions between generalist and specialist approaches to law were evident in America since colonial times, the combined pressures of increasing commerce and western expansion in the early nineteenth century tipped the balance toward what one historian has deemed “an

---

<sup>11</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 278.

individualistic legal system.”<sup>12</sup> The battle between individualistic and communitarian systems of law achieved concrete form in the conflicts surrounding the 1801 Judiciary Act, where Jeffersonian Republicans sought to limit the scope of the federal judiciary in favor of state legal jurisdictions, while Federalists construed these efforts as attempts to empower judges imbued with local prejudices to disregard the letter of federal law.<sup>13</sup> By the 1820s, the typical professional lawyer was more likely occupied with an endless docket of property and credit cases than leavening his legal practice with classical learning and belletristic writing. While the “bar mushroomed as the market proliferated contractual relationships” in Jacksonian America, Charles Sellers asserts dramatically, lawyers increasingly became “the shock troops of capitalism.”<sup>14</sup>

The literary lawyer of the early Republic in Ferguson’s portrait is thus ultimately besieged by history from both sides. The simmering populist resentment of institutions of higher education during the Jeffersonian era betokened the full-scale assault on “learning” in Jacksonian America, where what Linda Kerber deems “respect for the crasser forms of success” would correspond with pointed scorn for intellectual achievement.<sup>15</sup> To both the radical populist and the commerce-minded of that moment, protestations against the Jacksonians that humanistic learning served a valuable civic

---

<sup>12</sup> Maxwell Bloomfield, “Antilawyer Sentiment in the Early Republic,” in American Lawyers in a Changing Society, 1776-1876 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 54.

<sup>13</sup> See Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 135-172 for an account of the conflicts bound up with the 1801 Judiciary Act.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 (Oxford University Press, 1991), 43.

<sup>15</sup> Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 134.

function appeared mainly as arguments for an invidious elitism. The lawyer-writer is haunted too by the intimidating specter of the Revolutionary generation, whose deep and wide learning and reading made them better lawyers and statesmen than what seemed possible for those of Dennie's generation. Anxiety-ridden in the shadow of such great men of action, whose "lifelong obligation to the profession" of law corresponded with prolific literary learning and writing, the belated literary lawyer of the early nineteenth century felt hopelessly torn between "[d]uty and creativity" in an increasingly specialized legal culture.<sup>16</sup> Though he does not acknowledge it as such, Ferguson's singular study of this phenomenon appears as a version of those Romantic narratives in which individual creativity struggles against the heavy burden of ancient authority. And while the protagonists of his story – Irving, Bryant, and the Richard Henry Danas, among others – all end up trying and failing to make sufficient compromises between the duties the past enjoins and a future defined by the freely creative spirit, they do so against what appears as the irrepressible force of modern individualism bending history to its will.

To read, as Ferguson does, back into the early Republic from the vantage of a mid-nineteenth-century radical individualism emblemized by a partial reading of Emerson's "self-reliance" and a literature of subjective exploration, the young lawyer-writer's struggles to balance his creative impulses with a sense of civic duty can only look like another version of a familiar trajectory. But to grasp something like The Port Folio's "Legal Sketches" in terms recognizable to Dennie and the magazine's subscribers necessitates reading from the other side of history. From there, Dennie's "wish, warm from the heart of a literary enthusiast" that "Crassus" will prefer the "character of a

---

<sup>16</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 94.

literary benefactor” to that of the practicing lawyer expresses a conviction that belletristic writing has assumed the status of historical witness against a society increasingly hostile to the literary culture upon which, in the estimation of Dennie and his Port Folio collaborators, the future of the republic depends.<sup>17</sup> This is more than merely a symbolic revision of Cicero’s favoritism toward Crassus, who argues against considerable opposition in De Oratore that mastering the “philosophy” of “human life and manners” (hic locus de vita et moribus totus) is essential to the orator’s ability to serve the public and the laws.<sup>18</sup> The Port Folio’s elevation of the lawyer’s literary role represents a conscious culmination of a strand in English and Scottish periodical writing concerned with how belles-lettres might shape civic character in an increasingly distracted society.

In the Scottish essay serials The Mirror (1779-80) and The Lounger (1785-87), Henry Mackenzie and his collaborators inferred their readers’ acceptance of a particular sort of polite civic consciousness derived from the English periodical tradition.<sup>19</sup> The Port Folio writers, by contrast, face a world they regard as having repudiated this consciousness out of a confused sense that literary endeavors amount to little more than idle self-indulgence, and that the prosperity of the republic depends mainly upon everyone pursuing his own economic interests to the exclusion of most everything else.

In such circumstances, the literary lawyer was felt to face a stark choice: either to practice

---

<sup>17</sup> Port Folio, 20 April 1805, 113.

<sup>18</sup> Cicero, De Oratore, 1:51.

<sup>19</sup> See Nicholas Phillipson, “Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of Early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Culture,” in Scotland and England 1286-1815, ed. Roger A. Mason (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1987), 226-246; and Phillipson, “The Scottish Enlightenment,” in The Enlightenment in National Context, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 19-40.

law in service to this soul-destroying scramble for dollars, or to legislate, as it were, in the republic of letters, preserving what remained of American civic character in imaginative writing. David S. Shields has influentially characterized belles-lettres in British America as part of an ephemeral literary current opposed to “durable learning and undying truth in favor of a passing, shared amusement” and “designed not to seek eternal regard.”<sup>20</sup> Yet the Port Folio writers deliberately transformed belletristic writing into an historical record of civic manners with a serious claim to “eternal regard” based in an acute sense that the American republican experiment was dissolving at the very moment in which The Port Folio was being published.

In this light, the magazine’s hailing as a momentous historical event the publication of an American edition of The Select British Classics, a collection of essay serials from The Tatler to The Mirror first brought out in London in 1793, appears less curious than it otherwise might. The Port Folio celebrates this veritable library of periodical essays for giving “a faithful picture of the manners of the eighteenth century,” before which “all the tomes of ancient philosophy, and all the gibberish of modern innovators ... sink into obscurity.”<sup>21</sup> Given that the magazine’s authors embraced Burkean notions of the long, slow accrual of tradition as the best guarantee of cultural health and national stability, and opposed to ahistorical doctrines of the “Rights of Man” and Rousseau’s theories of natural goodness, this conception of the periodical genre as

---

<sup>20</sup> David S. Shields, Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), xxv.

<sup>21</sup> Port Folio, 30 January 1802, 26. The other titles in the collection are: the Spectator, Guardian, Connoisseur, World, Rambler, Idler, Adventurer, Shenstone’s Essays on Men and Manners, The Citizen of the World, and the collected essays of Goldsmith.

more enduring than modern “gibberish” makes its own kind of sense.<sup>22</sup> But the concomitant elevation of what we have come to regard as trifling belletristic productions above “the tomes of ancient philosophy” as sources of wisdom might appear counterintuitive, unless we recognize how the deep relationship between law and periodical writing in eighteenth-century Scotland came to be understood in America as generating a particular kind of historical consciousness. This emerged from the perceived gap between the ideal manners represented in essay serials and the societies to which they were supposed to apply. The conceptual roots of this problem, and of the sense of history it brought forth, can be traced back nearly a century to The Spectator (1711-1714). There we confront the law student at London’s Inner Temple as a radically divided mind, for whom humanistic reading provides spiritual sanctuary from a culture of law he sees as degenerating into a morally empty practice.

Templars appear in English essay serials as reliable fixtures in London’s coffeehouses, holding forth on literary and other matters instead of studying law. The “Young Fellows at the Grecian, Squire’s, Searle’s, and all other Coffee-houses adjacent to the Law,” Mr. Spectator wryly informs us, “rise early for no other purpose but to publish their Laziness” (§ 24). An ambitious entrepreneur in the mid-century Connoisseur who flogs “Literary Commodities of every sort” seeks to expand his business by offering to “furnish young Students of the several Inns of Court with complete Canons of Criticism, and Opinions on any new Theatrical Cases; on which they

---

<sup>22</sup> For the terms of this conflict in the early Republic, see Samuel H. Beer, To Make a Nation: The Rediscovery of American Federalism (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1993), 139-162 and 206-214; and James Roger Sharp, American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 69-91.

may argue very learnedly at a tavern, or plead at the bar of a coffee-house.”<sup>23</sup> By the 1750s representations of Templars as at best idle chatterers, and at worst immoral prodigals, are more or less standard in English writing. The pattern was set most memorably by Wilding in Henry Fielding’s The Temple Beau (1730). Besides being a scheming, dissolute rake Wilding is a profligate Templar par excellence. When his father, Sir Harry Wilding, visits his chambers and demands Wilding’s servant to show him his son’s library, he finds that the boy has no books at all, never mind law books. The only volume he owns is a copy of Rochester’s poems (in this context, merely a dirty book), and within seconds of Sir Harry’s visit Wilding’s chambers are descended upon by a tailor, a milliner, a periwigmaker, a shoemaker, and a hosier, all looking for the vast sums of money Wilding owes them.<sup>24</sup>

This portrait of the Templar as “an extravagant rake” represents the far consequences of the lack of discipline of the Inns of Court, made all the worse by their nearness to the distractions of fashionable London. In the world of The Temple Beau, it is a wonder any true lawyers ever emerge from the Inner Temple. At the beginning of the century, however, The Spectator presented another sense of the Templar’s apparent shiftlessness and literary inclinations.<sup>25</sup> Torn between the demands of “an old humoursome father” who sent him to London to study law against his “own Inclinations”

---

<sup>23</sup> Connoisseur 96. See also Tatler 136; Spectator 150; and Connoisseur 133.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Fielding, The Temple Beau 2.2-6, in The Works of Henry Fielding (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967), 8:120-124.

<sup>25</sup> Fielding, Temple Beau 2.2-6. See also Author of Harlot’s Progress, The Progress of a Rake: or, the Templar’s Exit. In Ten Cantos, in Hudibrastick Verse (London, 1732); Frederick Pilon, Aerostation; or, the Templar’s Strategem. A Farce. In Two Acts (Dublin, 1785); and A Spy on Mother Midnight: or, the Templar Metamorphos’d (London, 1748).



and the irresistible pull of belletristic reading and the theater, The Spectator's Templar embodies a conflict between the “higher” reality of literature and a rueful sense that law has abandoned its once-motivating civic ideals. This predicament would come to drive Scottish and American revaluations of the periodical essay genre in a self-consciously historical direction.

No single factor compels the Templar to recoil from his law studies, but a number of forces in aggregate produce what is to him an intolerable situation. Strictly speaking, there was no formal program of practical legal study in English universities until the 1750s. Young lawyers-in-training for most of the century occupied themselves in an apprentice capacity at London's Inns of Court. At Lincoln's Inn, Gray's Inn, and the Inner Temple students were meant to spend most of their time attending court sessions, learning the practice of law by watching it in action and accumulating the unruly mass of Common law traditions and precedents in the process. There was not much formal oversight: attendance at mandatory dinners at the Inns four times a year was all the official proof of continued application required of students.<sup>26</sup> This was well before William Blackstone's Oxford lectures beginning in 1753, which spurred development of something like a standard curriculum in the study of Common law. In the words of one historian of early eighteenth-century legal culture, “if common lawyers became legal scholars” in the decades before Blackstone, “they did so in spite of their training.”<sup>27</sup> While students who desired to educate themselves within this system certainly could do

---

<sup>26</sup> David Lemmings, Professors of the Law: Barristers and English Legal Culture in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford University Press, 2000), 119.

<sup>27</sup> Lemmings, Professors, 116.

so, the rest met with little formal discipline at the Inns. Their proximity to London's taverns, gambling clubs, and theaters failed to help matters. When R. Campbell in 1747 described Lincoln's Inn as the one "for lawyers," this was merely to contrast it with Gray's Inn and the Temple, the Inns of choice for the "Beaus" and "Whorers" who comprised, by his estimation, the majority of law students.<sup>28</sup>

Such institutional shortcomings facilitated the sensual rebellion of Fielding's Wilding and the profligacy of those Templars in The Connoisseur (1754-1756) who deeply resent that their "eating, drinking, sleeping, and amusement" should be unfairly disturbed by outside expectations that they study.<sup>29</sup> But the Templar's recalcitrance in The Spectator has other sources. In his mind the lawyer stands as an Enlightenment hero, which allies him to a degree with those in England for whom the Glorious Revolution, with its enshrinement of individual liberty and limited government as totemic Whig principles, was primarily a victory of law and lawyers over royal prerogative. Michael Landon gives a more subtle gloss to this classic Whig line, arguing that "what the Revolution Settlement really meant was the triumph of the lawyers', and particularly the Whig lawyers', interpretation of the Common Law, as against the interpretation of Common Law favored by the first four Stuart kings."<sup>30</sup> This emphasis on painstaking legal interpretation and the search for precedent to legitimate the radical act of deposing a king would later resonate even more momentously with the colonists across the Atlantic,

---

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Lemmings, Professors, 64.

<sup>29</sup> Connoisseur 133.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Landon, The Triumph of the Lawyers: Their Role in English Politics, 1678-1689 (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1970), 248.

as they articulated their grievances against George III in legal language clearly inspired by the Declaration of Rights. These sweeping, world-historical legal events can further be seen to have sprung from a more fundamental notion of law as something that continuously generates the structure of civil society, in which the rights of subjects to live and think and speak freely within broad legal bounds guarantees the right of resistance to overreaching state control.<sup>31</sup>

This appeal to law as the root of legitimate opposition to autocratic power accounts in large part for the Enlightenment elevation of law to almost talismanic status. In a related register, the moderate tone so central to the cultural aims of periodical writing, the rhetoric of a free civil society made plain in essays from The Tatler and The Free-Thinker in Augustan England through the young Irving's urbane satires in the Oldstyle letters and Salmagundi in the early American republic, derives significantly from the space for secular inquiry carved out by the law's resistance to religious fanaticism. English legal thought "developed as ... an alternative to religious zeal," providing "a comprehensive, secular vision of country for Englishmen ... to define themselves within."<sup>32</sup> In Scotland we find law accorded a similar status, where, in the wake of the Union of 1707, lawyers assumed increasingly prominent roles as social and

---

<sup>31</sup> See Marvin B. Becker, The Emergence of Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century: A Privileged Moment in the History of England, Scotland, and France (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), esp. 32-65. See also Paul Langford, A Polite and Commercial People, England 1727-1783 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 289-304.

<sup>32</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 15, 14.

cultural leaders, initially in direct competition with orthodox churchmen.<sup>33</sup> While the “Moderate literati” who hastened the intellectual culture of the Scottish Enlightenment largely were members of the Presbyterian clergy, like the Latitudinarians of England their encouragement of relatively free philosophical speculation placed them at sharp odds with orthodox opinion.<sup>34</sup> English and Scottish legalism, in other words, helped create a social and intellectual climate in which moderate clergy and more radical thinkers met with fewer restrictions on their pursuits than less tolerant churchmen would have preferred. In America, too, especially during the first Great Awakening and subsequent eruptions of evangelical fervor, the profession of law operated as a primary source of social stability. The law’s ultimate capacity to help shore up a sense of social and national belonging, and to provide a locus of meaning and value alternative to that of revealed religion, cast it especially for early Americans as the fulcrum on which turned the future and fate of the republican experiment.<sup>35</sup>

Along with civic liberty and the moderation – rhetorical and ideological – an enlightened public sphere demanded, commerce in its myriad forms and practices fell squarely within the law’s jurisdiction, and in turn stimulated the most powerful legal minds of the period to consider anew the law’s assumptions, character, and applications.

---

<sup>33</sup> See David Allan, Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) for a full study of the traditions of “Calvinist humanism” within the early modern Scottish Kirk. Allan charges those scholars who focus on the continental and English civic humanist influences on Enlightened thought in Scotland with minimizing the profound impact this Presbyterianism had on the development of post-Union Scottish culture.

<sup>34</sup> Richard B. Sher, Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>35</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 15.

Blackstone's great, systematizing effort at making Common law comprehensible to lawyers, law students, and other interested readers was, in his view, essential to articulating the character of a "polite and commercial people."<sup>36</sup> Part of what drove Blackstone to assemble and publish his Commentaries was the growing prominence of equity in British legal culture. At the beginning of the modern natural law tradition, Grotius had given special prominence to equity, considering it "the correction of that, wherein the law (by reason of its universality) is deficient."<sup>37</sup> For Blackstone, Kames, John Millar and other jurists, equity would become of paramount concern in an increasingly commercial society, where property – the cornerstone of civil law from republican Rome through the numerous syntheses of civil and natural law of Blackstone's day – continued to undergo dizzying conceptual shifts. In its nascence, even an apostle of modern commerce like Defoe was overawed by the power of a credit economy to so drastically destabilize traditional indices of value like actual property in land: "the substantial non-entity called CREDIT ... this invisible je ne scay quoi" is ultimately for Defoe in 1709 an "emblem of something, though in itself nothing."<sup>38</sup> Writing to Lord Kames fifty years later, Lord Chancellor Hardwicke argued from circumstances

---

<sup>36</sup> William Blackstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England (London: A. Strahan, for T. Cadell and J. Butterworth and son, 1825), 3: 326.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in David Lieberman, "The Legal Needs of a Commercial Society: The Jurisprudence of Lord Kames," in Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Enlightenment, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 225. For an illuminating account of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century background to the equity/law debate in England and Scotland, see "Equity and Law," in Mark Fortier, The Culture of Equity in Early Modern England (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), 59-86.

<sup>38</sup> Review 6: no. 31 (14 June 1709), in The Best of Defoe's Review: An Anthology, ed. William L. Payne (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 117-118.

generated by Defoe's "invisible je ne scay quoi" that the "new discoveries and inventions in commerce" created "new species of contracts," which then produced "new contrivances to break and elude him."<sup>39</sup> All of this altered the social fabric in ways that "the ancient simplicity of the common law" had not anticipated, which meant that equity needed to be reassigned to a cornerstone position in British jurisprudence.<sup>40</sup>

For Lord Kames, Common law functions only as a set of basic "regulations to restrain individuals from doing mischief and to enforce performance of covenants."<sup>41</sup> Equity, then, by its practical, case-by-case adjudication, works within these broad "regulations" to comprehend the baffling structural changes that are part and parcel of what Hume regarded as the progressive improvement of all aspects of life stimulated by commerce. These involve above all the proliferation of pleasures and amusement in a vigorous market culture, where new luxury goods and forms of public entertainment generate and refine public mores with growing speed.<sup>42</sup> In Loose Hints Upon Education (1782) Kames considered manners "too complex for law" because of the "endless variety of circumstances" they depend upon, too various to be judged according to standards handed down from the distant past. Coupled with his insistence that "upon manners

---

<sup>39</sup> The Earl of Hardwicke to Lord Kames, 30 June 1759, in Alexander Fraser Tytler, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Honourable Henry Home of Kames (1807; reprint, with a new introduction and chronology by John Valdimir Price, London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1993), 1: 247.

<sup>40</sup> Hardwicke to Kames, 1: 247.

<sup>41</sup> Lieberman, "Legal Needs," 229.

<sup>42</sup> David Hume, "Of Commerce" and "Of Refinement in the Arts," in Essays Moral, Political, and Literary, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 253-267 and 268-280.

chiefly depends the well-being of society,” Kames argues that enforcement of law in terms of abstract, transhistorical precepts is insufficient to address the needs of an increasingly complex society.<sup>43</sup> His promotion of equity thus aims to address the shortcomings of law in a new commercial society, while implying the need for an analogously pragmatic approach to modulating personal conduct and comportment that exist and develop outside the strict jurisdiction of law.

At this nexus of civil liberty, secular civil society, and commerce we find the periodical essay. The sense of civic engagement endemic to the genre, together with its advocacy of a secular, enlightened culture of mind and promotion of literary reading to counterbalance commercial influences on public manners, brought the aims of periodical writing into close alignment with the ideal functions of the law in Anglo-American culture. The central concern with manners in essay serials – how they are adjudicated, dealt with practically, and accorded pluralistic tolerance within broadly prescribed bounds – casts periodicals as something Kames might well have regarded as an ever-circulating, literary form of equity. Representations of law and lawyers – and especially their shortcomings – in essay serials suggest that many essayists grasped periodical writing as a means of conceptualizing social and cultural problems with which the law proved inadequate to deal. The Templar’s symbolic value in this regard comes from the nature of his literary disillusionment with law, which he experiences as an acute sense of the law’s inability to address the fully sociable, and thoughtful, character of life in the city.

---

<sup>43</sup> Henry Home (Lord Kames), Loose Hints Upon Education Chiefly Concerning the Culture of the Heart (1782; reprint, with a new introduction by John Valdimir Price, London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1993), 21.

The status of the legal profession in the eighteenth century made it an attractive choice for upwardly-mobile young men.<sup>44</sup> Less manifestly dependent upon the family and political connections typically required to enter the church, the military, or civil service, the law – at least as it was widely perceived – allowed more room for individual talent and initiative as stepping stones to distinction. And it was certainly considered a more noble and gentlemanly pursuit than trade, which had yet to free itself from the stigma of petty interestedness laid upon it by a culture still steeped in both landed, aristocratic values (however attenuated) and the rhetoric of civic virtue. For their eighteenth-century apologists, a sense of lawyers as key public servants who upheld the English tradition of liberty invested the profession with a kind of nobility, in which those endowed with “great abilities and great parts” and “crowned with academic or literary honours” shone as bright examples to those students willing to develop their talents in service to public life.<sup>45</sup>

Later in the century, William Blackstone and Sir William Jones came particularly to embody this ideal for lawyers on both sides of the Atlantic. Before publishing the Commentaries, Blackstone had distinguished himself as a classical scholar, wrote criticism of Shakespeare, and published a handful of poems; Blackstone’s proselyte and explicator Sir William Jones was a pioneer of modern linguistics, a translator of eastern literature, and a poet, in addition to distinguishing himself as one of the century’s greatest

---

<sup>44</sup> Lemmings, Professors of the Law, 116.

<sup>45</sup> T. Ruggles, The Barrister: or, Strictures on the Education Proper for the Bar (London, 1791), quoted in Lemmings, 112.



legal authorities.<sup>46</sup> In Blackstone and Jones the lawyer appeared as a towering man of letters whose intellectual and literary achievements commanded respect even from political adversaries. While Jeremy Bentham in A Fragment on Government (1776) had vociferously attacked Blackstone's conservative Burkean conception of law, he could not help but admire the literary virtues of the Commentaries. The "style" of the book is unimpeachably "[c]orrect, elegant, unembarrassed, [and] ornamented," Bentham declares, lauding Blackstone as "first of all institutional writers [who] taught Jurisprudence to speak the language of the Scholar and the Gentleman."<sup>47</sup> Thomas Jefferson, too, whose populism and progressivism could not be more at odds with the politics of the towering English jurist, proclaimed the Commentaries "the most lucid in arrangement which had yet been written, correct in its matter, classical in style, and rightfully taking its place by the side of Justinian's Institutes."<sup>48</sup>

This is the type of lawyer the Templar idealizes, the man of letters whose vast learning and rhetorical elegance can command universal admiration. Far from a lazy coffeehouse dilettante, the Templar justifies his approval of but a "very few" modern books by the fact that he actually "has read all" of them (§ 2). While it is true, Mr. Spectator remarks with mild regret, that his "Taste of Books is a little too just for the Age he lives in," the problem lies ultimately with the "Age," not his "Taste" (§ 2). The

---

<sup>46</sup> W. S. Holdsworth, "Some Aspects of Blackstone and His Commentaries," The Cambridge Law Journal 4, no. 3 (1932): 261-285; Robert A. Ferguson, "The Emulation of Sir William Jones in the Early Republic," New England Quarterly 52 (March 1979): 1-26.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Holdsworth, "Some Aspects," 263.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Ferguson, Law and Letters, 31.

Templar's deep "Familiarity with the Customs, Manners, Actions, and Writings of the Ancients" thus "makes him a very delicate Observer of what occurs to him in the present World" overall (§ 2). This might signal a debilitating indulgence in imaginative idealism that unfits him for contending with the day-to-day realities of modern London, were it not that he shares this habit of mind with Shaftesbury and his French predecessor Jean de la Bruyère, among others, whose writings contemporaries recognized as significant interventions in molding social and political mores.<sup>49</sup> La Bruyère's prefatory remarks to his Characters (1688-1694) look back to an idealized Athenian polis not simply to lament what has been lost, but to inspire the recovery of political liberty and cultural vigor in the present: "what City like Athens! what Laws! what Policy! what Valour! what Discipline! what perfection in all Arts and Sciences! nay, what Politeness in their common Conversation and Language!"<sup>50</sup> Given the kindred nature of his own project, it is hardly surprising that Shaftesbury copied these lines into his commonplace book. When read in conjunction with such sentiments, the Templar's concerted study of "the Arguments" of "Demosthenes and Tully" to the exclusion of "the Reports of our own Courts" begins to look less like a singular folly and more part of a serious resistance to

---

<sup>49</sup> I cite Shaftesbury and La Bruyère in particular, rather than Pope, John Gilbert Cooper, Edward Young, and other neoclassical satirists not simply because the former were best known for writing dialogic prose rather than verse, but because they, like Addison and Steele and the Templar himself, both disavowed explicit politics in their writing and meant for their classical mediations to engage the everyday world of public conversation creatively, rather than castigate it.

<sup>50</sup> The Characters; or, Manners of the Age. By Monsieur de la Bruyere [sic], of the French Academy (London, 1699), 471r. Though Lawrence Klein, "The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness," Eighteenth-Century Studies 18 (1984-85): 211, credits these lines to Shaftesbury, La Bruyère was the actual author. For Shaftesbury and the city, see Miles Ogborn, Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies 1680-1780 (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 79-84.

particular currents in English society, most notably the apparent reduction of social life to the sum-total of exchanges within the cash nexus.

Thomas A. Wood's Some Thoughts Concerning the Study of the Laws of England in the Two Universities (1708) provides the period's most thorough account of the kind of legal culture against which the Templar rebels. The pamphlet is styled as a letter from a father to the head of an Oxford college on the matter of his son's education, which he finds wanting for its lack of training in English Common law. Wood adheres to the familiar eighteenth-century dichotomy of useless scholasticism on one side and practical worldly knowledge on the other, but trains this bifurcation specifically on the study of law. His son comes from Oxford well learned in "Old and New Philosophy" and appreciative of "the Finesses in the Classicks."<sup>51</sup> Yet "he is very ignorant of World, and of Mankind" and displays nothing but "Contempt" for "a General Knowledge of the Laws of his Country, and some insight into Business."<sup>52</sup> The problem for Wood lies in the curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge. Insofar as it teaches any law, it imparts to students the less "useful Part of that Knowledge" derived "from our English Histories" that "delight and instruct at the same time in Civil Prudence, and the Knowledge of the Manners of our People."<sup>53</sup> While this sort of knowledge has some value, he maintains, too much absorption in it "is of no use to the Publick" because it makes an ideal of "the

---

<sup>51</sup> Thomas A. Wood, Some Thoughts concerning the Study of the Laws of England in the Two Universities (London, 1708), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, Some Thoughts, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, Some Thoughts, 3.

Standard of the Civil Law” as codified by the Romans, while demoting Common law knowledge to second-class status.<sup>54</sup>

The study and practice of law according to Wood should be a largely pragmatic enterprise guided by some very basic maxims gleaned from summary acquaintance of English Common law, the kind to be found in handbook. Too much study of history and intellectual adherence to civil jurisprudence tends to make one either a “Pedant” or a “Bigot” to outmoded principles.<sup>55</sup> “A prudent Man need not be asham’d that he has not spent many Years in Turning over Books of Logical and Metaphysical Disputations, in composing Greek and Latin Orations,” Wood declares, or “in sweating over the Poets, or in Versifying; in Criticisms, or searching out the various Readings on prophane Authors, in Chronological Niceties, or in some sort of Greek and Roman Antiquities.”<sup>56</sup> None of this is to him “useful,” for in his world “the Rules of Right and Wrong in relation to private Property” comprise the beginning and end of law.<sup>57</sup> Common law is a record of practical judgments concerning “Freehold, Fine, Recovery” and “how Estates Real or Personal descend, or may be convey’d.”<sup>58</sup> Compared with such knowledge, the “Niceties” of civilian “Practice is [sic] of no use;” and where “Civil Law is out of use”

---

<sup>54</sup> Wood, Some Thoughts, 6, 4.

<sup>55</sup> Wood, Some Thoughts, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Wood, Some Thoughts, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Wood, Some Thoughts, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Wood, Some Thoughts, 7.

(most “particularly in Trade”) it must give way to an education suited for “Business” rather than high-minded “Fancy.”<sup>59</sup>

One could hardly ask for an articulation of the nature of law, and of its study, in Augustan England more at odds with the Templar’s dramatic sense of the lawyer as a learned humanist and civic actor. The Spectator then dramatizes how this opposition plays out practically. The Templar’s father sounds much like Wood, repeatedly sending to his son “Questions relating to Marriage-Articles, Leases, and Tenures, in the Neighborhood” where he, as a country gentleman, must negotiate such matters (§ 2). The Templar, whose humanistic and philosophical bent of mind compels him to study “the Passions themselves” rather than the legal “Debates among Men which arise from them,” then pays an “Attorney” after Wood’s model “to answer and take care of” these questions, which he then forwards to his father (§ 2). Renditions of this split between a philosophical conception of law and the reality of legal practice appear throughout eighteenth-century English writing most often in terms of the legal system’s economic sundering of social ties. The sentiment behind the title of an 1808 American novel, The Lawyer, or Man as He Ought Not to Be, goes back at least as far as Dick the Butcher’s laugh-line in Shakespeare’s 2 Henry VI (ca. 1600) – “The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers” – and continues through familiar works by Defoe, Swift, Fielding, Smollett, and Godwin.<sup>60</sup> Fielding’s “most vile petty-fogger” in Tom Jones (1749) “one of those ... hackneys of attornies ... [who] will ride more miles for half a crown than a post-boy,”

---

<sup>59</sup> Wood, Some Thoughts, 5, 26, 1, 4.

<sup>60</sup> George Watterston, The Lawyer, or, Man as He Ought Not to Be: A Tale (Pittsburgh, 1808). See David Punter, “Fictional Representation of the Law in the Eighteenth Century,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 16 (1982): 47-74.

and Gulliver's account of lawyers as being "bred up from their Youth in the Art of proving by Words multiplied for their Purpose, that White is Black, and Black is White, according as they are paid" are typical.<sup>61</sup>

Yet if the Templar has political or moral objections to modern law they must be inferred through what mostly appears as a temperamental disposition. His distaste for how the increasing reduction of law to an instrument of commerce betrays its nobler status as a Ciceronian calling certainly resonates with a tradition of English civic thought shortly to be remobilized in the popular press by Cato's Letters (1720-1723), The Craftsman (1726-50) and dozens more serials, essays, and poems published in opposition to the rationalized mercantile corruption of Robert Walpole's ministry.<sup>62</sup> But we mainly see the Templar fleeing his studies for the theater. Later satiric portraits of Templars in The World and The Connoisseur take their cue directly from this one's daily ritual in The Spectator. In preparation for attending the theater he regularly takes "a turn at Will's" coffeehouse (the critics' haunt) before having "his shoes rubb'd and his Perriwig

---

<sup>61</sup> Henry Fielding, The History of Tom Jones, ed. R. P. C. Mutter (London: Penguin, 1966), 388; Gulliver's Travels, in The Writings of Jonathan Swift, ed. Robert A. Greenberg and William B. Piper (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973), 215.

<sup>62</sup> My reading of the Templar's attitude obviously draws upon what has become known by historians and literary critics as the "civic humanist paradigm." J. G. A. Pocock's monumental The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton University Press, 1975) defined the paradigm for study of early modern England and America. For the classic Marxist reading of the confrontation between landed and credit economies in eighteenth-century England, see Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (1968; reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). For Walpole's "Robinocracy" see Christine Gerrard, The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Kramnick, Bolingbroke, 39-55 and 111-156; and W. A. Speck, Stability and Strife: England, 1714-1760 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 203-238.

powder'd at the Barber's as you go into the Rose [Tavern]" (S 2). But the Templar's superficial concern for his public image represents only one side of his character. The manner in which he mobilizes his learning in the theater endows him with a sort of public authority, and allows for the Templar's later recuperation by Scottish and American essayists as a figure for the socially generative character of imaginative writing.

The Templar is known around town, and especially amongst those drawn to Covent Garden and Drury Lane, as "an excellent Critick" (S 2). And it is no small detail that his most effective work occurs in the imagined world of the theater. Michael Ketcham remarks that while for Steele in The Tatler (1709-1710) "the stage is inherently a place of pretence and illusion, it is also a source of true sentiment felt equally in the actor and audience, and therefore a model of true social community."<sup>63</sup> This is why Steele insists that actors must draw on "Sentiments of the Mind" rather than rely upon outward "gesture" in performing, for only by meeting them on the common ground of feeling can actors spark sympathetic communion with their audiences (T 201). Acting based in gesture for Steele tends only to remind audiences of past performances the derivative actor now imitates; by entering wholly into the "Sentiments" the play's author imparted to his or her characters, however, the actor can wrap up his audience in a moment of shared emotion.

What Michael Ketcham calls "true sentiment," in Steele's estimation, thus involves creating a circuit of feeling common to both actor and audience.<sup>64</sup> Fit

---

<sup>63</sup> Michael G. Ketcham, Transparent Designs: Reading, Performance, and Form in the "Spectator" Papers (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 47. See Tatler 201.

<sup>64</sup> Ketcham, Transparent Designs, 47.

representations of emotion in a play's characters depend upon formally persuasive interpretations of demonstrative feeling in a given play text. Formulated in this way, the roles of the actor and the critic coincide. The Spectator's lightly mocking reference to "the Time of the Play" as the Templar's "Hour of Business," then, says something crucial as well about the social function of the Templar's literary-critical knowledge (2). If, as Steele implies in The Tatler, the theatrical experience models communities of feeling in ways that can impact the larger community outside the theater, his remark in Spectator 2 that the Templar's presence at a play "is for the Good of the Audience" because "the Actors have an Ambition to please him" intimates that the Templar's comprehensive knowledge of the "Laws ... of the Stage," along with his philosophical interest in "the Passions themselves," plays a vital role in a realm of art with distinctly – if not immediately apparent – social ramifications. One reader's shiftless, irresponsible young law student might thus be another's standard-bearer for the community-making power of art and language.

In the Templar's role as a critic we see how his humanistic study of law and imaginative gravitation toward literature complement one another. Michael Meehan argues that Augustan critical practice at its most effective partakes of just such a synthesis, where the critic pleads the hard case, based in comprehensive historical learning, in order to carve out space for new artistic freedoms.<sup>65</sup> Spectator 34 gives insight into how this works, though not without the share of irony that always marks the essays' accounts of the Templar's behavior. In an episode reminiscent of the battle in the

---

<sup>65</sup> Michael Meehan, "Neo-Classical Criticism," in The Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism, ed. Martin Gayle et al. (London: Routledge, 1990), 666-681.



press surrounding Bickerstaff and The Tatler's mode of proceeding, the members of the Spectator Club (comprising a "Representative" republic) raise a hue and cry against the satiric "Liberties" Mr. Spectator has taken with various members of Town society (§ 34). The terms of the debate are the perennial ones surrounding satire, concerning the propriety of publicly lashing manners in the name of the public good, or of "assault[ing] the Vice without hurting the Person" (§ 34).<sup>66</sup> The normally silent "Clergy-man" has the last word, declaring that the periodical essayist's jurisdiction takes in "those Vices which are too trivial for the Chastisement of the Law, and too fantastical for the Cognizance of the Pulpit" (§ 34). This is but another way of saying that breaches in everyday manners, rather than flagrant crimes, compel the attention of the periodical essay's brand of satire. Mr. Spectator thus defends his license "to march on boldly in the Cause of Virtue and good Sense, and to annoy their Adversaries in whatever Degree or Rank of Men they may be found" (§ 34). But the role of the Templar in pressing Mr. Spectator to come to this conclusion demonstrates the influence certain forms of legally-oriented thinking had on explicitly social conceptions of literary art.

Part of the joke of this essay is how each member of the Club, styled as a republican "Representative" of his respective constituents, will countenance satire of any number of Town types excepting his own (§ 34). The aging dandy Will Honeycomb warns Mr. Spectator against satirizing the follies of society ladies, for instance, while Sir Andrew Freeport calls foul when the targets are "Alderman and Citizens" and Sir Roger admonishes the essayist to "take Care how you meddle with Country Squires" (§ 34).

---

<sup>66</sup> See especially "A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire," in Essays of John Dryden, 2 vols., ed. W. P. Kerr (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), 2: 15-114; and Spectator 262.

The Templar too declares against Mr. Spectator that his “Raillery has made too great an Excursion, in attacking several Persons of the Inns of Court” (§ 34). But in defending his fellow Templars he appeals to literary-historical precedent as a way of determining present propriety. He insists against both Sir Andrew and Honeycomb that “the City had always been the Province for Satyr,” and that “the Follies of the Stage and Court had never been accounted too sacred for Ridicule,” drawing upon examples from “Horace, Juvenal, Boileau, and the best Writers of every Age” to drive his point home (§ 34). With the satirist’s jurisdiction in those areas so amply supported by strong precedent, he offers, no one can justifiably take offense to Mr. Spectator’s sallies. It follows that if the essayist could “shew” him “any Precedent for [his] Behaviour” in drawing his lash on Templars, then that too would be allowable (§ 34). The Templar however does “not believe” that Mr. Spectator can find one, which, given the strain of anti-lawyer sentiment in English writing throughout the seventeenth century, accounts for some of the essay’s humor (§ 34). But the legal structure of the Templar’s mind so clearly demonstrated in this episode speaks to a mode of critical reasoning for which history is always the last, infallible court of appeal, marking a confluence of literary learning and legal reasoning which would guide the reception and extension of the English periodical essay in 1770s Edinburgh and the early American republic.

This recourse to history, search for precedent, and direct challenge to Mr. Spectator to defend his satiric liberties typifies an Augustan critical approach which, as Meehan points out, the period’s critics routinely likened to legal procedure. Critics from Dryden and Rymer to Pope and Johnson “repeatedly” made “[i]nviting and persuasive

analogies between state law and literary rules,” he notes.<sup>67</sup> Such analogies were guided by an ethic that was less “legislative or even judicial” than it was “advocative,” however, and bespoke a critical mentality “intensely preoccupied with the hard case and the status of the wayward example.”<sup>68</sup> Meehan’s major aim is to counter the still-conventional sense of Augustan neo-classical criticism as being rigidly deductive, overly preoccupied with rules, and legalistic to a fault, highlighting instead the critical energy eighteenth-century English critics routinely brought to bear on literary works as they, “Portia-like, ran the legalism of inherited neo-classical authority against itself”.<sup>69</sup> But he also draws attention to how the critic-as-advocate who argues special cases and appeals to precedent to carve out new freedoms within the existing body of rules allies him with a broader culture of Enlightenment activism. “Legal metaphor and legal reference in British criticism, from Dryden to Johnson, is thus in many instances the means toward a careful monitoring of the values and prejudices of the ‘republic’, or ‘commonwealth’ of letters, by reference to the outward republic itself,” Meehan remarks, observing that the “procedural models” guiding their critical practice were consciously informed by the “ideal of civil freedom” in the political realm that “was itself the product of law.”<sup>70</sup> In this “attempt to ensure an appropriate accord between the inner textual world of critical

---

<sup>67</sup> Meehan, “Neo-Classical Criticism,” 671.

<sup>68</sup> Meehan, “Neo-Classical Criticism,” 668.

<sup>69</sup> Meehan, “Neo-Classical Criticism,” 671.

<sup>70</sup> Meehan, “Neo-Classical Criticism,” 674, 672.

judgment, and the procedures approved and applauded in the outer world of social organization” we have the critical milieu which the Templar calls home.<sup>71</sup>

The Templar’s assumption of an overlap between the republic of laws and the republic of letters, and The Spectator’s representation of him as sympathizing more with the latter out of frustration with the banal and petty concerns of a legal system increasingly being reduced to business dealings, makes him a most apt figure for the periodical essayist. And it is no accident that the sort of divided mind he possesses (civic obligation here, learning and literature over there) would resonate with Henry Mackenzie and his circle of lawyer-writers in 1770s Edinburgh. The unique historical circumstances of eighteenth-century Scotland placed lawyers in social and civic positions the Templar would only be able to envy from a distance. The dissolution of the Scottish parliament after the 1707 Act of Union, and the concomitant exodus to London of its most politically active members, deprived the Scottish oligarchy of much of its traditional cultural and political authority. In the power vacuum these circumstances created emerged a network of societies of literati in Edinburgh during the second decade of the eighteenth century. Together they constituted a “modern-minded elite concerned with the economic, social, and cultural improvement” of Scotland that was to shape Scottish society into the nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup> More than any other single group, lawyers were central in these efforts.

---

<sup>71</sup> Meehan, “Neo-Classical Criticism,” 674.

<sup>72</sup> Nicholas Phillipson, “Culture and Society in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Province: The Case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment,” in The University in Society, ed. Lawrence Stone (Princeton University Press, 1974), 2:441.

The Easy Club (1712-15), one of the most significant of these early groups, cultivated amongst its members a sense that Edinburgh's civic health depended significantly on the development of a polite literary culture.<sup>73</sup> At each meeting the club's members discussed essays from The Tatler and Spectator and other English periodicals in addition to their own writings, with members adopting "pseudonyms drawn from the ranks of the heroes of the ideological world of augustan [sic] ethics."<sup>74</sup> A few decades later the Select Society (1754-1764) picked up these literary ambitions, charging them with a higher degree of philosophical rigor and public impetus in the works of Hugh Blair, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, David Hume, and others.<sup>75</sup> By this time, the value of these societies and their contributions to Scottish cultural life were widely enough recognized that the "pursuit of literature had been established as an alternative to political participation for those seeking a life of civic virtue."<sup>76</sup> Yet few members of this new Scottish cultural vanguard were men of letters pure and simple, and many of them were lawyers.

---

<sup>73</sup> See David D. McElroy, Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Literary Clubs and Societies (Washington State University Press, 1969) for an extended treatment of these societies and clubs including the Honourable Society (1723-45), devoted to the promotion of agricultural improvement; and the Rankenian Club (1716-74) which pursued metaphysical inquiry with an eye toward generating "mutual improvement by liberal conversation and rational inquiry" (George Wallace, quoted in McElroy, 22).

<sup>74</sup> Phillipson, "Culture and Society," 434. See also Phillipson, "Politics, Politeness."

<sup>75</sup> Other notable members included William Robertson, James Boswell, Alexander Wedderburn, the painter and writer Allan Ramsay, and Lord Kames. For a complete list of members, see Roger L. Emerson, "The Social Composition of Enlightened Scotland: the Select Society of Edinburgh, 1754-1764," in Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 114 (1973): 323-328.

<sup>76</sup> Nicholas Phillipson, "Scottish Enlightenment," 32.

Of the Select Society's 162 members, lawyers accounted for sixty-one, making them the largest single professional bloc in the organization.<sup>77</sup> To Roger Emerson's observation that "as judges and administrators, the lawyers were sponsors and guides to the civil life of the kingdom; they were the real and effective rulers of Scotland," Nicholas Phillipson adds that as a kind of "para-parliament" the Select Society considered "[p]olite learning as well as inherited rank and position" essential to the assumption of "civic leadership."<sup>78</sup> In the immediate wake of the Select Society's demise in 1764, the Faculty of Advocates directly assumed the corporate role of civic leadership, a fact recognized by early-nineteenth-century Scottish historians like J. G. Lockhart, who asserted in 1819 that "the Scottish Lawyers have done more than any other class of their fellow-citizens, to keep alive the sorely threatened spirit of national independence in the thoughts and in the feelings of their countrymen," and Henry Cockburn, who referred to the law as "the profession the most intimately connected with literature."<sup>79</sup> This synthesis of civic authority, the legal profession, and a deep sense of the public import of polite letters at the heart of Edinburgh society in the latter half of the eighteenth century constitutes the interpretive matrix within which The Mirror and Lounger demand to be read.

---

<sup>77</sup> The other professions represented, in descending order of number, were military men (26), merchants or architects (18), physicians or surgeons (15), churchmen (14), with the rest composed of an assortment of aristocrats and "men of letters." See Emerson, "Social Composition," 292.

<sup>78</sup> Emerson, 305; Phillipson, "Lawyers, Landowners, and the Civic Leadership of Post-Union Scotland," Juridical Review (1976): 112.

<sup>79</sup> Lockhart quoted in Phillipson, "Lawyers, Landowners," 97; Cockburn quoted in Sher, Church and University, 316.

But at a more conceptual level, key distinctions between the culture and study of law in Scotland and England allowed the Mackenzie circle to see in the Templar's flight from the Inns to the more heightened worlds of his imagination an apt description of their own situation. The Civil law practiced in Scotland was a product of the philosophical study of legal principle that Wood had derogated in Some Thoughts on the Study of the Laws of England. Most Scottish lawyers trained on the continent, initially in France but increasingly in the Netherlands from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, where they absorbed the principles of the ius commune, or common law of Europe. This was, in aggregate, "the learned laws," or the Roman law "as it had been developed, glossed, and commented on in the medieval universities, and as it was to continue to develop for centuries to come."<sup>80</sup> The legal principles and maxims of this tradition, centered in Justinian's Institutes, formed "a secure point of reference" for lawyers and judges across most of the continent in reaching legal decisions.<sup>81</sup> This is not to say that continental law courts ignored local customs and precedents. But first recourse from particular cases in these courts was always to Roman law and its principles. This made the Civil system a markedly internationalist one, for across Europe the jurisprudential principles Roman courts had established were held to apply universally to western civilization.

In England, the Civil tradition operated in ecclesiastical courts, the Court of Admiralty, and in the two universities; hence, Wood's complaint that his son came from Oxford well-versed in this philosophical legal system, but ignorant of the Common law,

---

<sup>80</sup> David Ibbetson, Common Law and 'Ius Commune' (London: Selden Society, 2001), 6.

<sup>81</sup> Ibbetson, Common Law, 20.

which held sway in the Inns and in the Common law courts. The opposition in England between “the learned laws” and Common law was at one level understood in terms of conflicting cultures of law. English Common law advocates proudly celebrated the insularity of their system. For them, the ever-growing mass of precedents to which lawyers and judges were primarily to refer in particular cases comprised a singular expression of national legal character. From this specifically English legal tradition general principles were to be extracted, which could then serve as basic reference points in reaching legal decisions. But appeals to Civil maxims and principles in this system were muted, and certainly did not guide legal practice as they did on the continent, and in Scotland. Another way of characterizing the difference in legal education between the Civil and English Common law systems is that where on the continent law students learned, through studying Roman law, what always happens, in Common law education they mainly learned what happened in past legal cases. Common law education was an accumulation of case knowledge; education in Civil law was a course in “legal humanism,” demanding sustained immersion in the study of history and the philosophical bases of legal principle.<sup>82</sup> A French law student, for example, would typically be assigned a text from Justinian’s Institutes and made to give a discourse on it; then several pages from books of Roman law would be pointed out to him at random, and he would be expected to extemporize on the principles they expressed and implied.<sup>83</sup> Civil and

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibbetson, Common Law, 5, 13.

<sup>83</sup> Ibbetson, Common Law, 10.



English Common law, then, represent what David Ibbetson has deemed two “different worlds” of legal “reasoning.”<sup>84</sup>

Against this background we can see how The Spectator’s Templar, insofar as he displays affinities for the law, clearly sympathizes with the Civil tradition, which leaves him an odd man out at the Inns. And just as he flees instinctively from the prospect of poring over the minutiae of Common law precedent, Scottish lawyers of the period would view the English system, with its boundless, unsystematic accretion of cases and precedents, as bewildering and not a little foreign.<sup>85</sup> But where The Spectator’s Templar finds the commercial-mindedness of English legal culture a depressing prospect, the lawyer-writers of the Mackenzie circle, occupying positions of municipal and cultural authority undreamed of by English lawyers, were stimulated by the notion that commerce might engender moral and ethical development to a greater degree than was possible in the static social arrangements of the past. Looking onto a strange English society they were linked to politically, but with which they shared little culturally, these writers, and fellow Scots like Lord Kames, John Millar, Hume, and Smith took the nature and refinement of manners as a conceptual problem of enormous significance. When Kames declares manners “too complex for law” because of the “endless variety of circumstances” they depend upon, he articulates a conception of manners as being inextricably bound up with the manifest social and moral changes commerce was

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibbetson, Common Law, 16.

<sup>85</sup> See Peter Stein, “The Influence of Roman Law on the Law of Scotland,” Juridical Review (December 1963): 213-222.

producing.<sup>86</sup> Such changes were especially evident to Scottish observers with one eye on the material prosperity and metropolitan culture of commercial London, and the other on Scotland's laird system and the relative dourness of Edinburgh. The unique role of Edinburgh lawyer-writers as cultural and civic leaders gave special point to their notion of how manners could be refined in response to the "enrichment of personality" produced by "multiplying relationships ... with both things and persons" endemic to an emergent market culture.<sup>87</sup> And it further prompted them to perceive significant interrelations between periodical writing and the functions of Civil law in an increasingly commercialized society.

Akin to their perspective on English law, marked as it was by practical involvement mixed with a sense of curious detachment, Scottish writers read English periodical essays as bearing upon their endeavors in a refracted manner. To a degree this has to do with feelings of provincialism, which compelled Scottish essayists to write with London reading audiences in mind for reasons both cultural (to show metropolitan readers that Edinburgh authors could measure up) and practical (the market for literature was infinitely greater in London).<sup>88</sup> But a more material and genre-related factor involves the increasing publication of essay serials as books. The Mirror and The Lounger were

---

<sup>86</sup> Kames, Loose Hints, 21.

<sup>87</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 49. See also Lawrence E. Klein, "Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England," The Historical Journal 32 (1989): 583-605.

<sup>88</sup> See Charles A. Knight, "The Created World of the Edinburgh Periodicals," in Scottish Literary Journal (December 1979): 20-36; and John Clive and Bernard Bailyn, "England's Cultural Provinces: Scotland and America," The William and Mary Quarterly 11 (1954): 200-213.

not the only eighteenth-century serials to reach more readers as books than in their initial serial form. With the exceptions of The Spectator and The World (1753-1755), which sold well in both formats, every major periodical series found far more readers when brought out as bound volumes.<sup>89</sup> What had originally been sometimes topical, often whimsical productions were now ordered chronologically and presented as complete records of a literary club's productions, or of the ruminations of a series' persona, typically indexed for ease of browsing. The early success of bound editions of The Spectator, in fact, compelled subsequent essayists to conceive their projects from the start as ultimately headed for the bindery.<sup>90</sup> The creation of a "new kind of society" in the pages of The Lounger is but the most direct representation of this understanding of how the periodical essay has become more than just "periodical."<sup>91</sup> Receiving English serials as comprehensive repositories of manners and characters and attitudes, in other words, or as coherent fictional worlds, the Mackenzie circle saw in periodical writing a dual function. The periodical circulation of their essays was meant, of course, to stimulate the adoption of new manners in the present. But the growing sense especially in mid-century

---

<sup>89</sup> For accounts of sales of periodicals as bound volumes, see Knight, "Created World," 23; The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:lxix-lxxiii; and George P. Winship, Jr., "The Printing History of the World," in Studies in the English Periodical, ed. Richmond P. Bond (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 185-195.

<sup>90</sup> Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1930), notes that the "publishers of the Adventurer ... had their eyes on the book value of bound editions" and that its writers "[w]hen they began ... intended definitely to publish four volumes and no more." He adds that "the proprietors of the Rambler and the Gray's Inn Journal" had similar intentions (127). See also James E. Tierney, "The Museum, the 'Super-Excellent Magazine,'" SEL 13 (1973): 513-515.

<sup>91</sup> Lounger 1. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by essay number and abbreviated L.

English serials that these writings were simultaneously recording the processes by which this might occur for the benefit of future readers implies the ever-present possibility of failure, of only finding an ideal readership in the future. In this way, literary periodicals were to become for the Edinburgh group vehicles for the transmission of “wisdom” after the Ciceronian sense of liberal education, where writing for posterity coincides with the attempt to forge civic character in the present.<sup>92</sup> But these writers remained profoundly ambivalent about their chances of immediate success.

With a directness unprecedented in the English periodical tradition, the first number of The Lounger in 1785 roots the ethical function of periodical writing in reading, but reading understood as always producing a sense of belonging to a larger community. The Lounger’s persona is, above all, a man filled with words. “I had from my earliest age been fond of books,” he recounts, “and sometimes ventured to write when I was tired of reading” (L 1). Dwelling, like the Templar, in the worlds made available to him in books, the Lounger yet recognizes that writing and publishing are necessary checks on the tendency for those inclined to immerse themselves in reading to become estranged from society. But where the Templar put his literary knowledge to public use in the theatrical arena, the Lounger creates “a new kind of society” in language composed of the written “transcripts of what [he has] felt or thought, or little records of what [he has]

---

<sup>92</sup> Bruce A. Kimball distinguishes the “oratorical” tradition of liberal education – the older, Ciceronian model of the liberal arts rooted in transmitting the accrued wisdom of Greece and Rome, and their modern humanist descendents, in order to create active citizens – from the “philosophical,” or “liberal-free” ideal which, infused with the continental Enlightenment’s suspicion of inherited authority, refigured liberal education across the eighteenth century as a more skeptical, relativistic, and ultimately individualist enterprise. See Kimball, Orators & Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education, exp. ed. (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1995).

heard or read,” a virtual community he then circulates piece by piece as periodical essays to constitute a real community of readers (L 1).

When The Lounger traces the origins of the series to its persona’s “fire-side,” it does so in the shadow of those paradigmatic portions of The Tatler written in Bickerstaff’s apartment. As Scott Black notes, The Tatler as a whole undergoes a formal shift as the series progresses. At the beginning, the periodical divides its subject matter into topics which correspond to discrete public gathering places. Thus material concerning “gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment” will be reported from White’s chocolate house, while topics involving “poetry,” “learning,” and “domestic news,” will be treated at Will’s, the Grecian, and St. James’s coffeehouses, respectively.<sup>93</sup>

Miscellaneous, general reflections originate in Bickerstaff’s apartment; by the series’ end, the apartment becomes the sole locus of The Tatler’s subject matter. Black sees this shift as marking the ultimate subordination of topic to tone (or style) in The Tatler, by which Bickerstaff’s character comes to assume a rhetorical force that would subsequently achieve fullest expression in the politeness modeled by Mr. Spectator. But where, in Black’s persuasive reading, The Tatler’s increasing focus on the personal reflections associated with Bickerstaff’s apartment opens the way toward the emergence of the fully sociable, if enigmatic, figure of the clubbable Mr. Spectator, the beginnings of The Lounger at its persona’s fireside turn attention instead to how essay writing creates its own worlds in language.

---

<sup>93</sup> Scott Black, “Social and Literary Form in the Spectator,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 33, no. 1 (1999): 21-42.

In contrast to the English Tatler, Spectator, World, and Connoisseur, which all presented themselves as primarily deriving from, and responding to, the world of conversation in the town, The Lounger announces its entrance into the periodical tradition as a distinctly literary event. The series' first number foregrounds its constitution as a written document, which only subsequently moves through the town as material for conversation. By asserting that the origins of the essays' "created world" lie on the page, the lawyer-writers of the Mackenzie circle, like their English predecessors, aim to promote literariness as a core cultural value.<sup>94</sup> Yet by mid-century, as we have seen, English periodical essays rendered a widening gulf between the shrinking ranks of the literarily-inclined and the expanding ones of materialistic philistines. Insofar as the Templar seeks refuge in reading and theatrical art, he can be seen as an epitome of this cultural drift. When The Lounger restates this literary opposition in its third number, however, the essay presents it as an inherited problem which needs to be overcome.

The Lounger is manifestly of the Templar's kind. He is wholly a "Man of Letters" whose "idleness" only appears to be laziness or decadence to the dull sensibilities of the "man of business" (L 3). But because he drifts along in a "general current of opinion" which holds "the pursuits of literature" as "at best a finer species of dissipation," the "man of letters" defensively "looks down with a conscious superiority on the man of business engaged in the ordinary affairs of life" (L 3). Lounger 3 thus presents a social milieu defined by the "mutual contempt" between those who value reading and the life of

---

<sup>94</sup> My use of the term "created world" refers to the title of Charles A. Knight's essay on The Mirror and Lounger. But where Knight sees this "world" and the characters populating it as anticipating "the large fictional panoramas of the nineteenth-century novel" (32), my reading insists upon the Mackenzie circle's profound sense of the periodical essay as a genre with unique claims to cultural power in its own right.

the mind, and those for whom such concerns lead “to no end” and are “attended with no consequence” (L 3). Yet the series’ writers elect not to follow their English forbears in The World and The Connoisseur by shoring up the side of literary opposition. While the language of “ends” and “consequences” that “men of the world” employed typically reduces all activities either to the productive, or to “mere pastime[s],” The Lounger redefines the terms of usefulness (L 3). As rendered in this series, the imaginative experience of literature complements the ethical practice of business by first making possible the sympathetic currents out which alone genuine communities appear and thrive.

At first glance this appears as a simple restatement of the aims of The Tatler and The Spectator following the mid-century crisis of belief in the possibility of literary citizenship in England. But as witnessed in Lounger 100, the series reformulates the notion of literary citizenship specifically in relation to a commercial society whose existence could not yet be assumed in Addison and Steele’s London. To this end, Mackenzie distinguishes between men of business and “mere men of business” (L 100). The first possess capacious minds and imaginations open “to different motives of action, to the feelings of delicacy, [and] the sense of honour” (L 100). This makes them not only embrace ethical and meritocratic business practices, but even feel “contempt” for wealth “when earned by a desertion of those principles” (L 100). Here we have The Spectator’s literary citizen, but figured as one who stands at the center of the commercial world. His early immersion in literary reading has broadened his imagination, allowing him to engage sympathetically with the views, and attitudes, and feelings of others. Reciprocally, such reading then prompts him to scrutinize his own motives for tendencies

to place self-interest before the general good. The Lounger's man of business exemplifies a form of literary citizenship with primary reference to a society defined by commercial activity.

Clearly, Adam Smith's notion of sympathy lies in the immediate background of this representation. But where Smith's exposition of sympathy and moral feeling describes, analytically, the "certain feelings or emotions" of "approbation" and "disapprobation" as they "arise in the mind upon the view of different characters and actions" in the world, and the "imaginary change of situations" with others enabling this, The Lounger steps down from the realm of philosophical abstraction to argue for literature specifically as the medium most suited to stimulating such feelings.<sup>95</sup> Literary sympathy in The Mirror and The Lounger, as in The Spectator, assumes that the artes liberales free individuals by joining them in "a common bond, with a common culture, [as] members of a more universal res publica," pulling them out of isolation into something larger than themselves.<sup>96</sup> The notion of freedom as a communal phenomenon underwrites as well the Scottish writers' conception of the res publica of law and commerce. What Bruce A. Kimball identifies as the Ciceronian, "oratorical" tradition of liberal education, in which the transmission of ancient and modern humanist wisdom promotes active citizenship, provides the logic for The Mirror and Lounger writers as it had for the English essayists.<sup>97</sup> The Mackenzie circle's innovation lies in how they

---

<sup>95</sup> Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1976), 324, 317.

<sup>96</sup> George M. Logan, quoted in Kimball, Orators and Philosophers, 115.

<sup>97</sup> Kimball, Orators and Philosophers, 33.



summarize and revise the English periodical tradition precisely as a tradition, taking what essay personae typically present as casual, ephemeral productions and casting them instead as extensive, cross-referential works available for study and reflection along with the monumental writings of antiquity and their lesser modern counterparts.

Just as reading lay at the heart of the Ciceronian artes liberales tradition as Continental and English humanists reformulated it, so it does for periodical essayists. What differentiates the efforts of the Scottish writers from those of their English predecessors, however, is the deeper sense in The Mirror and The Lounger that history was already, in the moment in which they were writing, claiming their efforts. With the transmission to Edinburgh of the English periodicals in bound editions (and later, editions of The Mirror and Lounger to the American republic along with the English essays’ “rich magazine of moral and critical knowledge”) came the poignant knowledge that these were now artifacts of the past, records of the values and manners preserved against the passing neglect of contemporaries, and the more serious ravages of history.<sup>98</sup>

But as with The Spectator’s Templar, the “pursuit of letters and of science” in the Edinburgh essays conflicts with the norms and dictates of an increasingly alien society (L 3). What has changed in the intervening decades is the source of the alienation out of which the “literary Lounger” would emerge as a distinctive social type.<sup>99</sup> Mordaunt in Mirror 50 presents another version of the Templar, with whom the author of the essay sympathizes from a discernible critical distance. Like the Templar, Mordaunt’s father forced him to study law, though he appears more a modern man of feeling than a

---

<sup>98</sup> Spectator 1; Port Folio, 30 January 1802, 26.

<sup>99</sup> American Lounger 165, 257.

frustrated acolyte of Demosthenes and Cicero. His “large portion of indolence,” along with an “inclination to despondency” and “delicacy of feeling ... disqualified him for the drudgery of business, or the bustle of public life” (M 50). When he receives early encouragement, however, Mordaunt applies himself vigorously to his studies, incarnating the man of business as literary citizen The Lounger was subsequently to idealize. The deep learning demanded of the Civil lawyer ends up suiting his reserved and intellectual temperament, and Mordaunt begins to feel “more sanguine in his expectation of success” when his hard work and talents earn him his colleagues’ respect and “esteem” (M 50). His problems thus begin not with the nature of legal study per se, but with the realities of professional life.

Immersed in his learning, Mordaunt’s ultimate mastery of the law filled him with “a more constant flow of spirits” than the essay’s author had ever witnessed in him (M 50). Out in Scottish society, however, he finds that the legal profession recognizes above all not talent and aptitude but an unrelated ability “to court a set of men [upon] whose good will the attainment of practice” depends (M 50). Mordaunt’s subsequent decline into low spirits as his tentative idealism evaporates in this disappointment is more profound than anything we see in earlier accounts of Templars because law had truly appeared to him a viable way of being both an intellectual and a citizen. The Scottish legal system provided him at least with a course of study in which he could see real potential; the failure of actual legal practice in society to exemplify those civic and humanistic virtues implied by the Civil tradition then drives him to find solace in books.

Mirror 50 is cast as a letter from an anonymous correspondent, which formally encourages readers to approach its content with a certain amount of critical distance. At

least three attitudes jostle with each other over the subject of Mordaunt's literary retreat. From what we might call the "man of feeling" perspective, the disappointed lawyer appears happy and in his element, having conveniently been relieved of his impending material distress by the fortunate death of a relative who leaves him a modest, but sound, estate. We see a "plump, rosy, and robust" Mordaunt using his leisure to socialize with his neighboring villagers, improve his grounds, read, and engage in little acts of "secret benevolence" (M 50). The letter writer expresses a "man of the world" view, perceiving in his friend's apparently purposeless life only talent needlessly thrown away. The third perspective, that of the literary citizen, emerges out of the author's description of Mordaunt's study. Here we get a look at the books which have, and have not, shaped and cultivated Mordaunt's mind. "The Tale of a Tub ... The letters of Junius, Brydon's Travels, the World, Tristram Shandy, and two or three volumes of the British Poets," lie on his desk, "much used, and very dirty" (M 50). Beneath these lies "a heap of quarto's" [sic] containing "an Essay on the Wealth of Nations, Helvetius de l'Esprit, Hume's Essays, the Spirit of the Laws, [and] Bayle," a thick coat of dust covering the lot (M 50). "[I]nstead of politics, metaphysics, and morals," the essay's author laments, the books Mordaunt has spent his time with only "treated of Belles Lettres, or were calculated merely for amusement" (M 50).

Yet the Letters of Junius, The World, and the other works surely contain their share of "politics" and "morals," if not "metaphysics," an irony made all the more apparent by this essay's appearance in The Mirror which, along with The Lounger,

emerges from and extends just this body of English writing (M 50).<sup>100</sup> If Mordaunt had remained a practicing lawyer and wholly neglected his practice in favor of belletristic reading then he might have justifiably earned his friend's rebuke. But in turning his back on a manifestly corrupt legal system and cultivating his mind and sensibilities with periodical essays, Swift, Sterne, and the British poets, this "literary Lounger" hardly appears to suffer from what his friend regards as a "malady ... past a cure" (M 50).<sup>101</sup> This number of The Mirror thus renders for its readers' consideration the insufficiency of the "man of the world" perspective. Its demonstrable incomprehension of, and even hostility to, literature experienced as an end in itself places this worldview at considerable odds with the literary ethics of the Mackenzie circle. As a "man of feeling," however, Mordaunt is only allowed to prosper by the deus ex machina of his inheritance. He is as much a man out of the world as the essay's author is one of it. While the Edinburgh essayists do their best to transcend the pessimism of their mid-century English predecessors, the predicament of the "Man of Letters" in commercial Scotland as given in The Mirror ultimately seems no less vexed than that of the literary citizen in modern London (L 3).

Just as the Edinburgh writers tried to recover literary citizenship as a possibility after its rueful attenuation at the hands of English essayists, Federalist men of letters in the early American republic looked to their Scottish predecessors as exemplars in this

---

<sup>100</sup> For Sterne as "a moral guide in the eighteenth century," see Garry Wills, Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978; reprint, with a new introduction, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Mariner Books, 2002), 273-277.

<sup>101</sup> American Lounger 165, 267.

regard. Henry Mackenzie appears in contemporary literary history mainly – if not exclusively – as the author of The Man of Feeling and, to a lesser extent, of Julia de Roubigne. But the writers of the Philadelphia Port Folio under Joseph Dennie's editorship (1801-1811) celebrated him primarily as the author of The Mirror and Lounger. These American authors idealized the English and Scottish essayists for creating the conditions whereby a "great and commercial people have become readers."<sup>102</sup> As a result, the lawyer now makes his case in language "enliven[ed] ... by the brilliancy of metaphor;" the clergyman appeals to a wider and more complex sense of humanity derived from "the vista of Addison" and reflected "in the polished mirror of Mackenzie," and even the merchant closes "his day-book to tattle with Isaac Bickerstaff, or ramble with Dr. Johnson."<sup>103</sup> For this writer, and the Port Folio circle that reprinted his piece, the British periodical tradition forms a coherent body of work that sustains a particular kind of ethical society throughout the changes in fashion, politics, and more mundane circumstances of the preceding hundred years.

The special appeal of Mackenzie and his essays for these authors lies in how the Edinburgh exchequer contributed to the perpetuation of this society-in-language from squarely within the world of "business."<sup>104</sup> The biography running across two numbers of the 1803 Port Folio celebrates Mackenzie for not having "weakly suffered his attachment to literary pursuits to divert him from the diligent and zealous discharge of his duty as a

---

<sup>102</sup> Port Folio, 27 December 1806, 394. The quote is taken from the Prospectus for a new edition of the Companion, a Baltimore literary magazine.

<sup>103</sup> Port Folio, 27 December 1806, 394.

<sup>104</sup> Mackenzie was appointed King's Attorney in the Court of the Exchequer in 1773.

man of business,” living instead “a life in which the praise of literature is so happily, so elegantly, so gracefully associated with the best virtues of social and domestic life, and with the steady and judicious exercise of the most respectable talents for business.”<sup>105</sup>

Here Mackenzie stands in for the figure he idealized in Lounger 100, the man of business whose ethical sensibilities were formed by his literary reading. In this new American republic, Mackenzie and his efforts could be so idealized because of the cultural malaise these Federalist lawyer-writers acutely sensed around them. While Dennie and his fellows did not ignore the less-than-ideal circumstances in Scotland which led the Mackenzie circle to memorialize a figure like Mordaunt, they did regard Edinburgh’s cultural milieu as having been more hospitable to literary citizenship than was their own Philadelphia, and by extension, their America as a whole. As “the learned and polished capital of a shrewd and sensible nation, whose liberally instructed metropolis has long been justly called ... the hot bed of genius, and the darling of literature,” 1770s Edinburgh at least allowed Mackenzie to infer the possibility of regenerating in Scottish form the polite civic consciousness still thriving in the pages of The Tatler and Spectator.<sup>106</sup> But in Jeffersonian America even the Mackenzie circle’s optimistic efforts to revive this consciousness were quietly being consigned to the shelves of libraries, casualties of the battle over the true nature and legacy of republicanism raging among Jeffersonians and Federalists.

In The Port Folio, disillusionment with the decline of law into a morally empty technical practice compels young lawyers, as it does Mordaunt in The Mirror, to flee the

---

<sup>105</sup> Port Folio, 18 June 1803, 196.

<sup>106</sup> Port Folio, 1 January 1803, 7.

public world for the refuge made available in books. Charles C--- in the 1802 American Lounger, one of the dozen or so periodical series after the British model that ran in The Port Folio, exemplifies the fate of the alienated lawyer-writer in Jeffersonian America.<sup>107</sup>

Like the Templar, Charles came to the profession armed with a Ciceronian sense of law rooted in “the most accurate models of eloquence which antiquity had produced.”<sup>108</sup>

Given the nation’s self-image as the inheritor of classical republican principles and the fact that almost half the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and nearly two-thirds of the Constitutional Convention, were lawyers, Charles’s Ciceronian image of the profession might seem to accord with its practice.<sup>109</sup> The reality he finds, however, is even worse than those his predecessors encountered. The Spectator’s Templar confronts a Common law system concerned above all with matters of property and its acquisition, while Mordaunt runs afoul of a Civil system steeped in cronyism. In an America where, putatively, “the law is king,” Charles discovers the evisceration of republican ideals by the dictates of petty self-interest.<sup>110</sup> When he sees how “chicanery supplied the place of candour, meanness of liberality, [and] sophistry of argument,” and that “the money-changers had usurped the temple of Justice,” Charles runs head-on into the final reduction

---

<sup>107</sup> As conducted by Dennie, The American Lounger ran more or less weekly in The Port Folio for 183 numbers between 1/16/1802 and 12/13/1806. Several years after Dennie death, the series was revived with number 500 in 1816, and ran occasionally until its final number of 520 in 1823. The Lounger had English imitators, too. See The Lounger’s Common-Place Book ...To Be Continued Occasionally (London, 1792); and The Lounger’s Miscellany; or the Lucubrations [sic] of Abel Slug, Esq. (London, 1789).

<sup>108</sup> American Lounger 183, in Port Folio, 29 November 1806, 321.

<sup>109</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 11.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas Paine, quoted in Ferguson, Law and Letters, 11.

of a once noble profession to a deceitful charade.<sup>111</sup> Like the Templars before him, but with more vehemence, he renounces law in favor of literary reading.

Charles gives a more direct glimpse into the mind of the literary lounge than what we see with Mordaunt. In The Mirror, readers must infer Mordaunt's intellectual disposition from what they are told of his study; Charles himself articulates his despondency by reading his predicament in lines borrowed from William Cowper. American Lounge 183 takes its epigraph from Cowper's "Retirement," which tells of the poet's religious melancholy.<sup>112</sup> Opening a volume of Cowper, Charles extemporizes on his situation with reference to these lines. "Man is truly a harp [as in Cowper]," he avers, "and I find the harmony of my mind is too exquisite for the rude jargon of juridical litigation," especially when attorneys, "as Martial says, hire out their words and anger, verba et iras locant, to silence the feeble murmurs of complaint, or give new energy to the arm of oppression."<sup>113</sup> The "Sad realities" of the legal profession in America "stamp" his perception of this decline "with the impressive seal of truth."<sup>114</sup> The accord between his

---

<sup>111</sup> American Lounge 183, 322.

<sup>112</sup> The Poems of William Cowper, Vol. 1: 1748-1782, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 386. The epigraph reads:

'Tis not, as heads that never ache suppose,  
 Forgery of Fancy, and a dream of woes;  
 Man is a harp whose chords elude the sight,  
 Each yielding harmony, dispos'd aright;  
 The screws revers'd (a task which, if he please,  
 God in an instant executes with ease,)  
 Ten thousand thousand strings at once go loose,  
 Lost, till he tune them, all their power and use.

<sup>113</sup> American Lounge 183, 322.

<sup>114</sup> American Lounge 183, 322.



melancholy sense of things and the way they actually are legitimates for him his decision to “avoid” the “polluted Stream of venality” by abandoning law for literature, just as Cowper’s conviction that God, at his will, can reverse the “screws” of man’s harp-like soul confirms his belief that his own melancholy is not a “Forgery of Fancy” or “a dream of woes.”<sup>115</sup> In his pastiche of Martial, Cowper, and Shakespeare, Charles articulates a sense of belonging to a larger, timeless community of literary souls whose constitution declares itself at odds with “the lead-mine of Law” from which now issues the debased currency hastening the republic’s decline into corruption and self-interest.<sup>116</sup>

As with the writer of Mirror 50, “Sedley,” the author of this letter-essay in The American Lounger, opposes his friend’s bitter abandonment of law.<sup>117</sup> But rather than condemn Charles for embracing the unworldliness of the man of feeling, as The Mirror author does Mordaunt, “Sedley” accuses Charles of allowing “the romantic suggestions of a fastidious mind” to blind him to the possibilities still available in the profession of law for displaying “conspicuous merit.”<sup>118</sup> Mordaunt’s fault in The Mirror is his abandonment of public responsibility altogether for the private pleasures of reading and attending to his estate. Charles, however, still dwells imaginatively in the world of

---

<sup>115</sup> American Lounger 183, 321, 322.

<sup>116</sup> American Lounger 183, 322.

<sup>117</sup> Although no positive identification of the author of this number of The American Lounger is obtainable, it was likely written by Dennie’s fellow law student John Elihu Hall, who used the pseudonym “Sedley” on many occasions in contributing to The Port Folio. See Harold Milton Ellis, Joseph Dennie and His Circle: A Study in American Literature from 1792 to 1812 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1915), 162-63; and Randolph C. Randall, “Authors of the Port Folio Revealed by the Hall Files,” American Literature 11, no. 4 (1940): 379-416.

<sup>118</sup> American Lounger 183, 323.

classical “eloquence.”<sup>119</sup> According to “Sedley” his foible is to have blinded himself to the residual presence in the young Republic of a genuinely noble republican culture of law. Charles’s idealism, mixed with his fury against what he sees as an entirely degraded legal profession in America, prevents him from recognizing the opportunities for its regeneration in the present state of law.

“Sedley” admonishes him that while they are surely embattled, a cadre of lawyers still exists in America “whose splendid talents ornament the Bar” and “whose learning adds dignity to the Bench.”<sup>120</sup> They, as in Charles’s ideal, make law and literature mutually enriching endeavors. More than this, the civilizing process of literary reading allows them effortlessly to “suspend the war of words” in order “to mingle in the social circle,” for they recognize that without the enlivening virtues of conversation polite society will collapse into just the amoral scramble for gain that has so depressed Charles’s spirits.<sup>121</sup> Unlike The Spectator’s Templar, it is not Charles’s idealizing reading of “the most accurate models of eloquence which antiquity had produced and time had preserved” that places him out of step with the practice of law in his society.<sup>122</sup> His fault is in refusing to see that, if he would only reconnect his literary inclinations with his grasp of the law, and open his eyes to the existence of others – however few – still out there in American society who embrace the same kinds of values he does, Charles might

---

<sup>119</sup> American Lounger 183, 321.

<sup>120</sup> American Lounger 183, 322.

<sup>121</sup> American Lounger 183, 322.

<sup>122</sup> American Lounger 183, 321.

help restore to the center of the legal profession the republican values out of which the early American understanding of law had originally emerged.

But this is easier said than done. The Port Folio's recognition that this predicament is part of a perennial tradition is evident in the epigraph from The Tatler which appears at the head of an 1801 essay devoted to yet another disillusioned Templar. Meander in The Farrago, another of The Port Folio's periodical essay series, is what The Tatler had deemed "one of those close students, who read plays for their improvement in law" and he stands as an especially poignant culmination of the disillusioned, literarily-inclined law student in Anglo-American periodical writing.<sup>123</sup> His disheveled study essentially replicates Mordaunt's in The Mirror. "On a small table, lay several of his favourite authors, in all the confusion of carelessness," the essay's author notes with regret.<sup>124</sup> "Shakespeare, Congreve's comedies, letters of the younger Lyttleton, Mrs. Behn's novels, Fielding's Tom Jones, and a mountain of pamphlets, composed of magazines and plays" lay here and there, while "in a dark corner" he finds beneath an old "cobweb covering ... 'An Abridgement of the Law, by Matthew Bacon.'"<sup>125</sup> The Farrago's readers are then made privy to Meander's journal, where his flight from "Blackstone and Buller" to "Shakespeare and Sterne" is shown to be an unintended effect of the increasing devaluation of literature and learning in American society.<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> Tatler 136.

<sup>124</sup> The Farrago 2, in Port Folio, 24 January 1801, 29.

<sup>125</sup> The Farrago 2, 30.

<sup>126</sup> The Farrago 2, 30.

Meander is literally driven to distraction by a society bent on separating literary learning from the study and practice of law. In this he appears much like The Spectator's Templar, who simply could not abide the tedium and lack of philosophical consideration endemic to the study of the Common law. But whereas the other dissident law students we have encountered were all possessed of a countervailing sense of purpose with at least some consistency, the rudderless Meander wholly lives up to his name. Despite his resolve to study Blackstone and Coke, Meander finds himself reading instead Hume's History of England, Akenside's "Pleasures of the Imagination," and Centlivre's Busy Body, while imaginatively framing his experiences in language borrowed from Shakespeare, Sterne, and Charles Churchill.<sup>127</sup> His fitful movement from book to book, never finishing what he starts to read, but always turning back to books, represents an internal breakdown in the more sustained and absorptive attention to literary reading pursued by the Templar, Mordaunt, and even Charles. Dennie here renders the fate of the literary lawyer who has not only lost faith in law as a noble calling but finds himself living in a society that regards reading as "a waste of time."<sup>128</sup> For Meander, America appears as a version of the dystopia hinted at in the Edinburgh Lounger, where the "mere men of business" have wrested guardianship of the republic away from the humanistic lawyers, derogating literary work to the status of "a mere pastime, leading to no end, and attended with no consequence" (L 100; L 3).

---

<sup>127</sup> The Farrago 2, 30.

<sup>128</sup> William C. Dowling, Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 66. In its basic contours, my understanding of the implications of the Meander episode is drawn from Dowling's account (64-66).

The flipside of professional degradation appears in the figure of Samuel Scapegrace, Esq., in American Lounger 122. Thrust unwillingly into legal study by his parents, who were enchanted by the fame of Hamilton, Livingston, Harrison, and Hoffman, and the “wealth” of countless other lawyers, Scapegrace drudges along for a while before bidding “adieu to any serious study” and “plung[ing] into every kind of dissipation.”<sup>129</sup> After a term spent reading Tom Jones and Peregrine Pickle between sauntering the streets, entertaining girls, and indulging every “fashionable amusement,” he found himself admitted to his bar examination “pretty well stocked with impudence and ignorance” and nothing else.<sup>130</sup> To his surprise, he watched as, “by the signature of the ‘Chief Justice,’” he was “metamorphosed as it were by magic, into ‘Samuel Scapegrace, Esq. Attorney at Law.’”<sup>131</sup> His law practice then becomes an extension of his student days, marked by drinking, gaming, “idleness and ‘rakery,’” ending in the New York debtors’ prison from which he writes.<sup>132</sup> Scapegrace is an exemplary beneficiary of the program of law study “IGNORAMUS” had satirically recommended fifty years before in Connoisseur 133. Those students who empirically study laws by feeling the brunt of breaking them will find more success as lawyers in Jeffersonian America than those devoted foolishly to “poring over books” (C 133).

When the author of American Lounger 183 advises Charles to persist against this state of affairs as a learned lawyer in the cause of a classical republican culture of law, he

---

<sup>129</sup> American Lounger 122, in Port Folio, 25 May 1805, 153.

<sup>130</sup> American Lounger 122, 153.

<sup>131</sup> American Lounger 122, 153.

<sup>132</sup> American Lounger 122, 153.

does so in opposition to what appears as a strong tide of anti-intellectualism in American society. The Mackenzie circle elevated literary lounging simultaneously above late-aristocratic decadence and a narrow focus on profit-generating business, casting the Edinburgh Lounger as an avid reader who yet found “occasional companions in all characters and professions” in the Town (L 1). Samuel Saunter in The American Lounger, however, finds himself confronted by characters overtly hostile to reading and learning. Cymon Torpid, for instance, hearkens back to the “professedly idle” of The Lounger’s Edinburgh, who “warmly worship the deity” of “balls and card-parties” (L 1). But he ultimately exemplifies a peculiarly American strain of anti-intellectualism. Amidst his retailing of energy dissipated and plans never followed through, Torpid recalls a visit to the Philadelphia library where he finds “no fun going on, no talking, no laughing,” and sees “Oliver Oldschool,” The Port Folio’s fictional compiler, “half stupified [sic] over a book ... some d----d philosophy, I suppose,” noting to himself to avoid the place in the future, for there’s “Nobody here but bookworms,” and he is “not fond of such reptiles.”<sup>133</sup> Torpid remarks in conclusion that he “would rather list for a soldier, than stay at home at night, and be obliged to read.”<sup>134</sup>

Sebastian Sluggish in American Lounger 157 transcends even Torpid’s rank philistinism, deriving philosophical justification for his abhorrence of learning from the ideal of republican simplicity Jefferson had embraced and promoted. Rousseau is here the philosophical godfather, and his “state of nature” the desired condition for the American

---

<sup>133</sup> Port Folio, 13 March 1802, 73.

<sup>134</sup> Port Folio, 13 March 1802, 73.

republic.<sup>135</sup> If Samuel Saunter were “the true representative of the Loungers,” Sluggish chides, he “would hold a torch to the pile of learning, and consume, in one conflagration, every monument of human art and industry.”<sup>136</sup> The “immortal Rousseau” provides high philosophical justification for such destruction, for he “has clearly proved” that “the man who thinks is a depraved animal,” and that from thinking, “science,” “art,” “books” and “writing” proceed all those advancements of mind and knowledge and social life that have so debased Rousseau’s natural man.<sup>137</sup> Bouncing off the American mentality this philosophy produces, The Port Folio’s exhortations to Charles and Meander to raise themselves out of their depressed spirits begin to sound wishful, if not increasingly hollow.

As Drew McCoy has shown, Jefferson’s idea of agrarian republicanism was profoundly inspired by Rousseau’s notion that “[s]ocial development and the concomitant progress of the arts and sciences” celebrated by Voltaire, Hume, “and other enlightened optimists throughout Europe ... divorced the human soul from its natural qualities of simplicity, goodness, and compassion.”<sup>138</sup> Given Rousseau’s status as a prophet of French Jacobinism, it appeared evident to Federalist writers like Dennie that Republican celebrations of the common man precisely for his untutored wisdom – expressed most memorably in Jefferson’s remark that a “ploughman” would often decide a “moral case”

---

<sup>135</sup> American Lounger 157, in Port Folio, 22 February 1806, 97.

<sup>136</sup> American Lounger 157, in Port Folio, 22 February 1806, 98.

<sup>137</sup> American Lounger 157, in Port Folio, 22 February 1806, 97.

<sup>138</sup> Drew R. McCoy, The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 24.

better than “a professor” because “he has not been led astray by artificial rules” – amounted to a coherent, ideologically-driven assault on learning and literary culture.<sup>139</sup> In their eyes, this brand of egalitarianism appeared merely as a cover for naked economic self-interest. Populist elevations of “respect for the crasser forms of success” over “respect for learning” thus signaled a redefinition of republican simplicity, in which stripping the mind of cultivation would come to stand in for the anti-materialistic austerity that had traditionally coexisted in classical republicanism with the imperative to adorn the mind with literary riches.<sup>140</sup>

This perception of Rousseau’s influence on Jefferson’s attempt to redefine republican civic virtue away from its traditional associations with humanistic learning helps explain the otherwise curious anger driving The Port Folio’s nearly decade-long campaign to extend the hours of the Philadelphia library. In a petition to the directors of the library, “Literary Leisure” implores them to open the library from “five [am] to three [pm]” instead of perpetuating the present custom of waiting to open it “till food, and wine, and the fumes of tobacco had” made it all but impossible for any but a “slumbering study” to proceed.<sup>141</sup> Nearly nine years later, things had scarcely improved, for in The Beehive, another of The Port Folio’s periodical essay series, we learn that while in Europe libraries “are generally open from an early hour in the morning, till a late hour in the evening,” the Philadelphia public library “is opened at two o’clock, and shut at

---

<sup>139</sup> Jefferson to Peter Carr, Paris, 10 August 1787, Thomas Jefferson: Writings, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 902.

<sup>140</sup> Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 134.

<sup>141</sup> American Lounger 26, in Port Folio, 10 July 1802, 209.



sunset,” which “during a considerable portion of the year, is only three or four hours.”<sup>142</sup>

This, despite a prior appeal to the board of directors on behalf of those “studious men, who frequent public libraries, with a view of consulting authorities, and who find the morning more suitable to their pursuits, than the afternoon.”<sup>143</sup>

At the conclusion of his 1802 appeal to the library directors in The American Lounger Samuel Saunter draws a clear connection between Jefferson’s parsimonious economic policies and a profound strain of anti-intellectualism some Federalists saw as driving much of the president’s popular support. Invoking Gibbon and Cicero as tutelary spirits in his campaign to elevate the “AFFLUENCE OF LITERATURE” over “this vile stigma of avarice” that has “too long tarnished ... the honour of our country,” Saunter implores the board not to allow “the avenue of science [to] be blockaded by the pence table; by the sordid imps of a penny wise, and pound foolish economy.”<sup>144</sup> For Saunter, the local circumstance of the Philadelphia library’s curtailed hours is symptomatic of a broader, systematic attack on the cultural life of the nation, a perspective shared by, and amplified in, the satire of Jeffersonian “economy” in Irving’s 1807 Salmagundi.

“Economy” as a policy exemplifies in Salmagundi the failure of Jeffersonian republican theory to carry over into practice. For Irving, the order to dismantle the Battery at the New York harbor aptly symbolizes this general misconception, mixing a shortsighted defense policy with an urge to benefit citizens in a time of need that backfires terribly. Mustapha, a Tripolitan prisoner and satiric observer of Jeffersonian

---

<sup>142</sup> The Beehive 4, in Port Folio, January 1811, 53.

<sup>143</sup> The Beehive 4, 53.

<sup>144</sup> American Lounger 26, 209.

New York in the tradition of Montesquieu's Rica in Les Lettres Persanes (1721) and Oliver Goldsmith's Altangi in The Citizen of the World (1760-61), declares himself "perplexed" when considering this phenomenon of "ECONOMY ... the watch-word of this nation," which to him appears "a kind of national starvation, an experiment [in] how many comforts and necessities the body politic can be deprived of before it perishes."<sup>145</sup> In Salmagundi 5 "ECONOMY" provides the rationale for tearing down the "wooden bulwarks" of the Battery as firewood for the poor, which not only stripped the port of a line of defense but also blinded a number of people who tried "in vain ... to smoke themselves warm, with this charitable substitute for firewood."<sup>146</sup> It also produces an ill-equipped, tragically inept militia mustered by an "economic corporation."<sup>147</sup> The provision of basic resources for the less fortunate and reliance on militias, rather than standing armies, for the common defense – both hallmarks of traditional republican ideology – here end in disaster through a misapplied notion of economic austerity. The impractical confusion of theory with expediency which becomes a standard trope in anti-Jefferson polemic of the period gets concretized here as a fundamental misunderstanding of republicanism.

Salmagundi 9 again raises this issue of national defense and its perceived languishing at the hands of Jefferson's parsimoniousness, analyzing the phenomenon as a confusion of representational rhetoric and its public display for sound republican

---

<sup>145</sup> Salmagundi 5, 7 March 1807, 117. William Irving authored this Mustapha letter.

<sup>146</sup> Washington Irving, Diedrich Knickerbocker's A History of New York, ed. Stanley Williams and Tremain McDowell (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), 148.

<sup>147</sup> Salmagundi 5, 118.

principles. Mustapha notes how the “wonderful spirit of economy, that pervades every branch of this government” has led to the creation of a navy “of sorry little gun-boats[,] ... flat shallow vessels that can only sail before the wind” and “are continually foundering or running ashore,” to the point where “the cities are obliged to defend them” instead of being defended by them.<sup>148</sup> But since these measures were enacted after prolonged discussion and debate in the republican style – the “LOGOCRACY or government of words” in Irving’s satire – they were “almost deified by the majority of the people as a grand stroke of economy.”<sup>149</sup> Mustapha’s puzzlement over how anyone could support a government that puts concern for republican form ahead of providing for the common defense in a time of war; preferring, with “the good of the people ... at heart,” to “assemble and talk away ten thousand dollars” instead of investing in a functioning navy is, by hopeful extension in Salmagundi, the puzzlement of all thinking readers.<sup>150</sup>

Many Federalists suspected something darker behind such “economical” policies than simple confusion of theory with complicated reality, or mere feeble-mindedness on Jefferson’s part. They saw in Jefferson’s hostility to the “carrying trade,” the importing and exporting business mainly controlled by northeastern Federalist merchants, a partisan attack on the livelihood of those who subscribed to Federalist principles. His repeal of the

---

<sup>148</sup> Salmagundi 9, 25 April 1807, 173.

<sup>149</sup> Salmagundi 7, 4 April 1807, 142-143. For a discussion of the Salmagundi circle’s lamenting the Logocracy “not so much [for] the talking as the ‘talking to no purpose’ or talking at cross-purposes” see Christopher Looby, Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 78-86.

<sup>150</sup> Salmagundi 9, 171.

1801 Judiciary Act, which had initially increased the number of federal judges in order to impose a uniform standard of federal law in all states, likewise appeared to them as a concerted effort to dismantle the federal principles enshrined in the Constitution.<sup>151</sup> More than this, the contradictions involved in Jefferson's celebration of America as a pure, simple agrarian republic while enacting his trade embargo of 1807-09 were to Federalists like Dennie simply too much to take. Jefferson believed that severing commercial ties with Britain and other European mercantile societies was a way of starving them by depriving these countries of American staple goods. Many of his Federalist opponents saw instead in this isolationist policy a direct route to establishing in America mass factories on the Old World model, and the debased working populations they inevitably produced. Without European trade, they insisted, America would have to create its own, extensive system of manufactures, which more than anything else would hasten the failure of the American republican experiment.<sup>152</sup> Only a populace not sufficiently educated in republican principles, they believed, could be hoodwinked by the "LOGOGRACY" and support Jefferson in this misguided confusion over what it means to found and maintain a republic in history, rather than in theory. The failure to provide enough money to allow the Philadelphia library to keep substantial hours thus seemed to Dennie and his circle part of a larger effort to ensure that few citizens could attain the

---

<sup>151</sup> For the 1801 Judiciary Act see above, n. 7; for the "carrying trade" controversy, see McCoy, Elusive Republic, 209-235; for an illuminating overview of the political mood of Federalists at this time, see Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, "The Mentality of Federalism in 1800," in The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 691-754.

<sup>152</sup> See McCoy, Elusive Republic, 216-223.

requisite learning which would allow them to see through the empty charade of populist pomp that Jefferson and his followers appeared to be foisting on the nation.

Upon his return in 1807 from a journey to England, Rufus King wrote to Noah Webster of what he saw as a deliberate move by Republicans to dismantle America's college system, and especially its classical curriculum, out of a belief that it fostered an elitist caste at odds with the republic's egalitarian aims. While the Revolutionary generation "in the midst of their difficulties founded Colleges," which they regarded "as the best Schools of wisdom & Virtue" for instilling the moral and historical knowledge necessary to form the republican character, "we now consider them as nurseries of Inequality, and Enemies of Liberty."<sup>153</sup> King lays the blame for this on the "unnatural Genius of Equality, the arch Disturber of the moral world" – the turbulent, avaricious demos of classical republican theory, exemplified for Federalists by the French Jacobins whose example Jefferson seemed to them to be emulating – which seeks "her visionary Level, not by elevating what Ignorance and Vice have degraded, but by degrading what knowledge and virtue have elevated."<sup>154</sup>

In 1810, the Boston Monthly Anthology reprinted a 1769 essay by James Beattie, the Scottish poet and defender of common sense philosophy against Humean skepticism, which stated clearly what would become the Federalist case for viewing a classical curriculum as the primary engine of "knowledge and virtue."<sup>155</sup> According to Beattie, by

---

<sup>153</sup> Quoted in Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 111.

<sup>154</sup> Quoted in Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 111.

<sup>155</sup> See Everard H. King, James Beattie (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 38-48, for an account of Beattie's efforts in his Essay on Truth (1770) to hasten "the reversal of skepticism, which is immoral and impractical" in favor of the "Scottish brand of common

studying Greek and Latin students “may learn, without any additional expense of time, the principles of history, morality, politicks, geography and criticism; which, when taught in a foreign dialect, will perhaps be found to leave a deeper impression upon the memory.”<sup>156</sup> Many Federalists understood the value of this learning to lie in its synthesis of a “republican historical experience particularly appropriate for the careful consideration of citizens of a new republic.”<sup>157</sup> This is precisely the comprehensive education expected, at least ideally, of the lawyer as explicated by Robert Ferguson. Moreover, it provides the rationale for Burke’s contention in his “Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies” (1775) that because “the law [is] so general a study” in America, its people have been rendered “acute, inquisitive, dexterous, prompt in attack, ready in defence, full of resources.”<sup>158</sup> Americans steeped in the law recognize that the defense of liberty depends upon being collectively able to “anticipate the evil [of tyranny], and judge of the pressure of the grievance by the badness of the principle.”<sup>159</sup> Without a strong higher education system and its traditional classical curriculum, Federalists maintained, this vigilant, public-spirited concern for liberty would dissipate, ushering in the corruption and self-interest that had undermined all previous republics.

---

sense,” which is taken to be “the revival and final statement of true philosophy, which is moral and practical” (39).

<sup>156</sup> Quoted in Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 119.

<sup>157</sup> Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 119-120.

<sup>158</sup> “Mr. Burke’s Speech on Moving His Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies,” in On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters: Edmund Burke, ed. David Bromwich (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 84.

<sup>159</sup> “Mr. Burke’s Speech,” 85.

This humanist tradition, its men of letters, and especially lawyers all come under comprehensive attack in a 1798 manuscript that summarizes, in an extraordinary fashion, the sort of mentality that Dennie, Irving, and likeminded others feared was underwriting the Jeffersonian agenda. The living embodiment of Jefferson's "honest ploughman," William Manning in The Key of Libberty [sic] displays a conspiratorial sense of Federalists as a "roiallest" few employing "craft cunning & arts" to lord it over "the Many," matching in scope the systematic sense of conspiracy Federalist writers evinced in their suspicions of Jefferson and his followers.<sup>160</sup> Like his detested Federalists, Manning believes that "A Knowledge of Mankind," of "the differend interest that influence all ordirs [sic] of men," of the laws and "prinsaples of the government & Constitution he lives under," together with political awareness of the local concerns of his community, is "neseccary [sic] for every freeman" (247). But such knowledge is to be gained mainly through immediate, personal observation, bolstered by the basic reading and writing skills to be taught in universal grammar schools. Education, he maintains, should thus "be promoted in the cheepest and best manner possable," and at the full expense of the "Coleges & Acadimies" that presently turn out "Literary Men" who threaten the health and prosperity of the nation by treacherously favoring "Monocyes [monarchies]" while "runing down Republican prinsaples" (226).

Manning's plan for a fully democratic educational system is prompted in large part by his belief that "Lawyers," through their greater education, have made "Constitutions & Laws" as "numerous, intricate & as inexplicit as possable" so as to

---

<sup>160</sup> William Manning, The Key of Libberty, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison, in The William and Mary Quarterly, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 13, no. 2 (1956): 250, 217.

“take to themselves the right of giving them such explanations as suits their interests,” by which they derive “a grate advantage over the Many” (222). In this he echoes Rousseau, who saw law as having been deliberately established “on such metaphysical principles, that there are very few persons among us capable of comprehending them, much less of discovering them for themselves.”<sup>161</sup> By creating a mystified system grounded in complex reasoning, “these learned men” reserve to themselves the sole right of interpreting and understanding the law. Against this structure of manifest inequality, Rousseau advocates “throwing aside ... all those scientific books, which teach us only to see men such as they have made themselves, and contemplating the first and most simple operations of the human soul.”<sup>162</sup> Through this reduction, and by virtue of his being a “sentient” rather than a “rational” being, every man will then intuit, through feeling, “natural right” and the “fundamental principles of his duty.”<sup>163</sup> Though even the Jeffersonian Free Republican “proposes lawors as a necessary ordir in a free government, to curbe the arbitrary will of the Judge,” the Rousseauian Manning counters that this amounts to “seting [sic] the Cat to watch the Creem pot” (227). The people should be able to look to their “Lejeslatures” for protection from the “little selfish prinsaples” of lawyers, he notes with exasperation (227). But since these “fee officers” have crept into the legislative branch as “Representitives” it is therefore the people’s duty to rise up and “purge” them from Congress (227).

---

<sup>161</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” in The Social Contract and The Discourses, trans. G. D. H. Cole, revised and augmented by J. H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall (London: David Campbell Publishers, Ltd., 1993), 46.

<sup>162</sup> Rousseau, “A Discourse,” 46-47.

<sup>163</sup> Rousseau, “A Discourse,” 47.



Law and higher learning are, in Manning's account, inherently destructive to republican liberty because together they manipulate "the ignorance of the Many" to the unfair, even monarchical, advantage of the few (213). By replacing "Coleges & Acadimies" with "cheep schools" (226, 221), this fervid supporter of an American alliance with Jacobin France believes that the nation will become more truly republican. The line running from "economy," through the systematic destruction of higher learning understood as the "republican historical experience" embedded in the classical curriculum, finally to a Jacobin demos, could not be more clearly drawn in the eyes of Federalist men of letters.<sup>164</sup> In such a polity, the "literary Lounger" can only be an object of scorn and derision.<sup>165</sup> But more than charges of elitism and monarchism from populist republicans complicate his relationship to the world of law. As we have seen in the complaints of Charles and the example of Scapegrace, American hostility to learning has almost entirely new-modeled the legal profession after the example of the "bad" Templar of the English tradition. Those still inclined to view law as a republican calling in the classical sense then see the separation of literary endeavor from law as a last-ditch means of preserving the ends of a liberal education in the wake of their rejection by the legal profession in Jefferson's America.

It is finally in response to this sense of crisis, more than to the "anxiety of influence" that appears in Ferguson's account of the young lawyer-writer of the early

---

<sup>164</sup> Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 119. For an account of Manning in the context of "the egalitarian impulse in America" as "linked with a distrust for ... political specialization" or "expertise," see Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 151-154.

<sup>165</sup> *American Lounger* 165, 267.

Republic, that Dennie and his collaborators encourage exemplary lawyers like “Crassus” to turn full attention to belletristic writing. Instead of anxiously standing in self-conscious awe of the great lawyer-writers, literary Templars like Dennie and “Sedley” deliberately monumentalize them in the way Conyers Middleton did Cicero in his History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero (1741).<sup>166</sup> As Reed Browning has shown, the Cicero of Middleton’s Life provided historical and ideological justification for the policies and practices of Robert Walpole’s ministry, which was under constant attack from Tories and Opposition Whigs for securing loyalty through patronage and corruption. Opposition writers proclaimed Cato the Younger their standard bearer, whose inflexible adherence to Stoic principles compelled him to commit suicide rather than capitulate to the corrupt and autocratic rule of Julius Caesar. Much of this Opposition rhetoric drove colonial American challenges to the Crown, and would be mobilized again in related, though often opposed, ways by both Federalists and Jeffersonians at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Cicero’s multifaceted character as statesman, orator, philosopher, patriot, pragmatist, and urbane writer, however, had made him available for appropriation in England by Tories and Opposition Whigs, as well as by the Court Whigs who tried, via works like Middleton’s, to claim him for their own.<sup>167</sup> In Jeffersonian America, too, the great Roman orator appeared in more than one guise.

We have seen in chapter one how there were essentially two Ciceros in the reading culture of eighteenth-century Britain. Political historians have amply traced the

---

<sup>166</sup> Conyers Middleton, History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 3 vols. (London, 1741).

<sup>167</sup> Reed Browning, Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 210-256.

influence of Cicero's example as a stalwart defender of the republic on English political thinkers from Harrington to Burke.<sup>168</sup> Browning even suggests that the years between 1725 and 1755 might fairly be deemed the "Ciceronian" age of English politics.<sup>169</sup> But as Browning also notes, celebrations of Cicero's "literary achievements" often got in the way of Court Whig attempts to style the Roman orator as their most illustrious predecessor for political advantage.<sup>170</sup> Cicero as a familiar philosophical author served an exemplary role in the manifestly pre-political milieu of English belletristic writing, where he commanded respect as a writer commensurate with that he enjoyed as a political figure in the arenas of state and popular polemic. What happens in The Port Folio represents a revaluation of Cicero's attainments in response to his being eclipsed by the collective demos as a political exemplar. For many Federalists, the republican lawyer-writer was still the republican hero. Within the reformulation of republicanism stimulated by the populist impulses of the Jeffersonians, however, Cicero's time had passed. The Cicero who wrote familiar philosophical reflections for the benefit of posterity in the wake of the republic's fall then becomes the exemplary figure for these Federalist men of letters in

---

<sup>168</sup> Browning, Political and Constitutional Ideas, 210-256; Peter N. Miller, "The Figure of Cicero," in Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 21-87; Charles G. Nauert, Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), passim; Markku Peltonen, Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought 1570-1640 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and "Classical Eloquence in Renaissance England," in Quentin Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19-211.

<sup>169</sup> Browning, Political and Constitutional Ideas, 256.

<sup>170</sup> Browning, Political and Constitutional Ideas, 217.

The Port Folio, as they come to see in the new American republic the ruins of their humanistic ideals.

This is the Ciceronian perspective underlying the “Legal Sketches” with which this chapter began. The lawyer-writer stands with one foot in the courtroom and the other in his library. The entire scene, however, is rapidly being engulfed by the darkening shades of history. On one hand, when “Sedley” remonstrates with Charles in American Lounger 183 he offers for inspiration the portrait of a “real Lawyer,” who combines qualities of the “Grecian ... Castilian ... [and] the good Samaritan” as he “support[s] the weak and succour[s] the distressed” while “pour[ing] the voice of reproach on the audacious front of impudence and oppression.”<sup>171</sup> This character occupies the same elevated position of Middleton’s Cicero, whose “sole ambition ... to support the laws, the rights and liberties of his Citizens” at no matter what personal cost wholly earns the biographer’s “zeal” for praising the man’s “illustrious merit.”<sup>172</sup> That Cicero lived and defended the Roman republic some 1800 years before, while the lawyers sketched in The Port Folio are ostensibly practicing in Philadelphia and Baltimore, makes little material difference. All are announced by their respective writers as titanic figures who have, in fact, existed in the world, and to whom readers owe their liberties, and even country. Readers are further encouraged to “Imitate” their characters and actions to the best of their ability.<sup>173</sup> But like Middleton’s Cicero, the subjects of The Port Folio’s “Legal Sketches” and “Sedley’s” lawyer are self-consciously idealized, set off from the drudgery

---

<sup>171</sup> American Lounger 183, 323.

<sup>172</sup> Middleton, History of the Life, 1: xvii, xvi.

<sup>173</sup> American Lounger 183, 323.

of everyday legal practice and existing in a perpetually heightened moment, as if reading, orating, and advocating on behalf of civic virtue in a forum derived from, and now restricted to, the “higher” reality found in books.

Another “Sedley” letter in American Lounger 140 explains the moral logic of this idealizing move. The “student of literature” is there encouraged to cultivate the “sensible pleasure” of the “mere looker-on” by “abstracting himself from the broils and contentions” of current politics, forgetting “the political progress of his nation in his contemplation of her literary attainments.”<sup>174</sup> This might appear at first glance as a relatively early call for literary nationalism. But “Sedley” instructs his charge not to look defensively inward to an American literariness conceived as an end in itself, but forward to a moment when American letters can rightfully assume a place in the international republic of letters, considered as a realm of disinterested moral inquiry where the importance of national origins recedes behind the quality of a nation’s literary contributions.<sup>175</sup> While the “juvenile writer” might fail in his early efforts through “an honourable partiality to his native shores,” “Sedley” believes that “his deficiencies can be amply supplied by many a reflecting mind,” collectively able, as in the political republic depicted in The Federalist, to transcend local prejudices and interests in recognizing the higher good of the many.<sup>176</sup> In encouraging writers and readers to direct their attention away from politics and toward literary development, “Sedley” assumes that literary

---

<sup>174</sup> American Lounger 140, in The Port Folio, 28 September 1805, 297.

<sup>175</sup> Ostrander, The Republic of Letters.

<sup>176</sup> American Lounger 140, 297; see No. 10 in The Federalist Papers, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999), 45-52.

accomplishment alone is where America's fame in the eyes of posterity lies. While the founding lawyer-writers derived their republican ideals from the study of history and the models of historical and ideal commonwealths transmitted therein, the loss of these ideals in the self-interested scrambling for power in the Jeffersonian era means that civic-minded Americans can now do their part only by contributing to the higher order of literary reality. This is the order from which the Founders initially drew inspiration in creating the republic, and from which future generations might again draw in more propitious times.

The manifest pessimism in The Port Folio regarding the law's decreasing capacity to inspire by way of its incarnation of republican civic virtue is, then, one bound up with the very genre of the periodical essay as received by American Federalist writers from the Mackenzie circle they idealized. While The Port Folio hails The Select British Classics for transmitting to early American readers ideal forms of civic consciousness expressed as personal ways of being in everyday urban life, its writers assume that the societies which initially produced The Tatler, Spectator, World, Mirror and the other titles have, in the end, refused to adopt this consciousness. This makes the fictional politics these essays present available for imitation in republican America precisely because, in the view of the Port Folio authors, all claims to their originary "Englishness" or "Scottishness" have been forfeited by this historical turn of events. An American lawyer's knowledge of history and manners allowed him to see that this was the case; his literary inclinations then intimated a sense of how the missed opportunities for creating a society marked by the casual civic awareness enshrined in these periodicals could be freshly realized in a new American polity. But the victory of Jefferson's party in 1800,

and the reformulation of American republicanism away from its classical and humanist origins toward an economic populism deeply suspicious of higher learning as a pernicious form of elitism, signaled finally to these Federalist lawyer-writers that belles-lettres was destined to become a new form of history writing.<sup>177</sup> In putting this recognition into practice, they transformed a mundane literary genre into a significant record of the efforts of a small group of dissident authors to sustain an American humanist culture amidst mass hostility and indifference.

---

<sup>177</sup> For the Jeffersonians' redefinition of republicanism along populist economic lines, see Joyce Appleby, Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s (New York University Press, 1984).

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### READING KNICKERBOCKER HISTORY

Washington Irving's critics have long used A History of New York to chart the trajectory of his authorial career. The story they commonly tell goes something like this. When, in 1809, Irving launched the History into Manhattan's literary circles, he introduced an original satiric voice to early American literature. After capitalizing on the book's initial success by issuing a second, slightly revised edition in 1812, Irving left Manhattan for England in 1815 where he wrote the bulk of The Sketch Book (1819), the work that established his preeminence in American letters. The Sketch Book's persona, Geoffrey Crayon, lent a softer, more sentimental tone to the work, marking an artistic and ideological retrenchment from the brash and cantankerous Diedrich Knickerbocker of the History. His reputation thus secured, the almost middle-aged Irving spent the rest of his career spinning out biographies and assorted Americana, increasingly complacent in his role as the genial patriarch of American letters. When he returned to the book which had first gained him notice in American (and British) literary circles to produce an author's revised edition, this compromised artist – if financially successful author – finally repudiated the 1809 History as the work of “a young and inexperienced writer” who committed “presumptuous trespasses” with its publication.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent critics have strenuously disagreed, expressing unanimous regret that the sixty-five year-old author no

---

<sup>1</sup> A History of New York, ed. Michael L. Black and Nancy B. Black, vol. 7 of The Complete Works of Washington Irving (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 4. All references to this edition of the History in this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated H 1848.



longer resembled the brash young upstart who dared lampoon the civic pretensions of Manhattan's elders with his mischievously conceived History.

A few mentions of the History in Irving's letters and the testimony of his nephew Pierre, the author's apologist and literary executor, provide the main support for this narrative. Critics also point to the revisions Irving made to the book across a period of nearly forty years as evidence of the author's progressive failure of political nerve in the wake of his success as the mild, agreeable Geoffrey Crayon.<sup>2</sup> By the time of the History's final 1848 edition, its numerous potshots at Thomas Jefferson's presidency had been more or less eliminated, as had much of the book's satire of Enlightenment knowledge as so much relativistic balderdash. Coupled with the "Author's Apology" Irving added in this last edition, where he begged readers' "good-humored indulgence" for his youthful folly, these revisions have led most critics to dismiss the final product as a neutered, watered-down version (H 1848, 5). There is no doubt that the 1848 History proceeds with a softer touch than the book originally had. And while Irving added some satire of the Jacksonian era having to do with western expansion and the currency crisis of the 1830s and 40s to bring the book up to date, the later History as a whole lacks the satiric urgency and belligerence that have made the 1809 edition a favorite among scholars of early American literature.<sup>3</sup> From the tone of much of their criticism, it would appear that the

---

<sup>2</sup> For an account of what the 1812 edition omitted, see Black and Black, introduction to A History of New York, xxxiii-xxxiv. See Diedrich Knickerbocker's A History of New York, ed. Stanley Williams and Tremaine McDowell (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), 461-472 for the additions Irving made to the 1812 edition.

<sup>3</sup> For allusions to land-grabbing, see History 64-65, 80, 88-89, 91, 141, 162, 182-184, 257, and 262; for allusion to the currency crisis, see 145-147, and 171-172. See Black, "Introduction," in History lix-lxviii for a summary of these revisions.

sentimental Geoffrey Crayon treacherously murdered Diedrich Knickerbocker, the raging foe of political factionalism and nationalist self-regard who had, until The Sketch Book's success, been the young Irving's more compelling literary alter-ego.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Diedrich Knickerbocker did not die. His creator did, in fact, kill him off in the preface to the History's 1812 edition, long before he assumed the guise of Crayon.<sup>5</sup> But Irving kept his spirit alive by periodically returning to the writings Knickerbocker had ostensibly left behind. The Sketch Book presented "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle" as Knickerbocker's work, not Crayon's. Upon Irving's return to New York after seventeen years abroad he began contributing essays to the Knickerbocker Magazine, gracing its pages with occasional pieces purportedly drawn from Knickerbocker's manuscripts. And even in the final edition of the History the ghost of Knickerbocker, the cranky scourge of modern pedants and thoughtless consumers, haunts the work. Though muted, Knickerbocker's voice can still be heard even in the "Author's Apology," despite that document's critical reputation as Irving's summary judgment against his younger, more vital self. In varying degrees the Knickerbocker persona remained present in Irving's writings throughout his career. It ultimately serves as a reminder of his continuing debt to the periodical tradition in which he first found his authorial voice.

---

<sup>4</sup> See especially Robert A. Ferguson, Law and Letters in American Culture (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 170-172; Lewis Leary, "Washington Irving and the Comic Imagination," in Critical Essays on Washington Irving, ed. Ralph M. Aderman (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1990), 198-199; and Martin Roth, Comedy and America: The Lost World of Washington Irving (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1976), 153-154.

<sup>5</sup> For this addition to the original preface, see H 1848, 12-15.

In *Knickerbocker*, Irving created a critical perspective from which his fellow citizens' willingness to allow history, and historical consciousness, to dwindle into irrelevance stood revealed as a national disgrace. While his manner of expressing this would become more subtle over the intervening decades, Irving never relinquished it as part of his self-conception as an author. The role of revision in *A History of New York*'s development is indeed an essential part of the book's claim to our notice. But rather than focus on the history of the book's revisions subsequent to its initial publication, I want to explore instead how Irving's preceding revisions of the periodical tradition both helped bring *Knickerbocker*'s burlesque view of history to fruition and gave the book's satiric vision a coherence and stability that persisted all the way through its later, softening revisions. The mundane sort of historicity that essayists and critics in Jeffersonian America had associated with the periodical essay served as a springboard for Irving's creation of an original persona who would come to give the New York literary scene an imaginative history of its own.

When Irving brought out *A History of New York* in 1809, New York City was popularly regarded as the hub of American commerce, but hardly as a wellspring of intellectual and literary vitality. Elihu Hubbard Smith, founder of New York's Friendly Club in 1793 for the improvement of the city's cultural life, wrote that the "history of the City of New York is the history of the eager cultivation & rapid increase of the arts of gain," not of the cultivation of mind and the proliferation of the fine arts.<sup>6</sup> A contemporary historian notes that "New Yorkers acquired a reputation in the eighteenth

---

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 377.

century which they retained in the nineteenth for an all-absorbing money-mindedness that blinded them to higher civilized values.”<sup>7</sup> While “the Bostonian would ask you what books you had read,” according to a popular saying, “the New Yorker [would ask] how much you were worth.”<sup>8</sup> Irving’s critics have made much of the History’s satire of Thomas Jefferson in the figure of William Kieft, a peevish, headstrong character given to confusing words with action, and theory with practice.<sup>9</sup> But they have paid little attention to how the book responds pointedly to the efforts of New York’s intellectual elite to remedy this dearth of cultural vitality in their city.<sup>10</sup>

Gilman Ostrander remarked that it “was Washington Irving’s achievement to make cultural capital of New York’s lack of civic character.”<sup>11</sup> This insight, which in Ostrander’s account pertains especially to Salmagundi (1807-1808), has so far gone undeveloped, even in the book where it appears. Once critics have exhausted the possibilities for drawing parallels between characters in A History of New York and local

---

<sup>7</sup> Gilman M. Ostrander, Republic of Letters: The American Intellectual Community, 1776-1865 (Madison: Madison House Publishers, 1999), 121.

<sup>8</sup> Ostrander, Republic of Letters, 121.

<sup>9</sup> Michael L. Black, “Political Satire in Knickerbocker’s History,” in The Knickerbocker Tradition: Washington Irving’s New York, ed. Andrew B. Myers (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1974), 65-87; David Durant, “Aeolism in Knickerbocker’s A History of New York,” American Literature 41, no. 4 (1970): 493-506; Ferguson, Law and Letters, 150-172; Christopher Looby, Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 86-96; Roth, Comedy and America, 61-78; and Williams and McDowell, introduction to A History of New York, lxi-lxxiii.

<sup>10</sup> For an exception, see Mary Witherspoon Bowden, “Knickerbocker’s History and the ‘Enlightened’ Men of New York City,” American Literature 47, no. 2 (1975): 159-172.

<sup>11</sup> Ostrander, Republic of Letters, 125.

and national politicians of the time, and have pointed out the book's English influences in Swift's A Tale of a Tub, Fielding's Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, and Sterne's Tristram Shandy, consensus would have it that there is not much more to say about it.<sup>12</sup> Irving's History, however, offers a unique perspective on the cosmopolitan impetus driving the civic activities of New York's intelligentsia. The book's wry engagement with popular perceptions of New York's commercial and literary character clearly displays its roots in the ironic ethical consciousness which had achieved classic form in the British periodical essay. The previous chapters have argued that the periodical essay had, by the end of the eighteenth century, come to offer readers a kind of counter-history of urban life. Read together, they chronicle previous attempts and failures at creating literary citizens in their cities of origin. In the narrative which begins to emerge from their collected pages, what we would call the conspicuous consumer appears as the antithesis of the thoughtful reader, and pedantry is as useless to social life as ignorance is destructive of it. But the kind of reading the essays exemplify can make literary citizens if readers would use it to reflect on the value of socializing, and create a world of talk in which citizens shape each other's character through their daily interactions. This significance of the British periodical tradition for Irving, and for his contemporaries, must be borne in mind when assessing the nature of the genre's influence on his early work.

William Hedges long ago pointed to how the English essay tradition formed a crucial strand in Irving's development as a writer. But he largely confined the essays' influence on Irving to what he regarded as the young author's obviously imitative early

---

<sup>12</sup> James E. Evans, "The English Lineage of Diedrich Knickerbocker," Early American Literature 10, no. 1 (1975): 3-13; William L. Hedges, "Knickerbocker, Bolingbroke, and the Fiction of History," Journal of the History of Ideas 20, no. 3 (1959): 317-328.

essay serials, the Oldstyle letters and Salmagundi.<sup>13</sup> Most subsequent criticism has followed Hedges's lead, reading Irving's early debts to the British essays with impatience reminiscent of William Hazlitt's acid assessment of Irving's work. Irving "gives very good American copies of our British Essayists," Hazlitt sniffed, "which may be very well on the other side of the water, and as proofs of the capabilities of the national genius," but not in Hazlitt's England, where "the thoughts and sentiments" of "Addison, Sterne, Goldsmith, [and] Mackenzie" reside in all their original splendor.<sup>14</sup> In relation to these, their "rebound" in Irving's writing appears poorly "at second hand."<sup>15</sup> While they eschew his metropolitan snobbery, modern critics of Salmagundi essentially confirm Hazlitt's summary judgment that Irving's early essays were derivative at best, and warrant only the most casual mention.<sup>16</sup>

Part of the reason for this lies in the overbearing presence of the novel in most critics' attempts to come to terms with Irving's work. For Hedges and the rest, periodicals

---

<sup>13</sup> William Hedges, Washington Irving: An American Study, 1802-1832 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 17-64.

<sup>14</sup> William Hazlitt, "Elia, and Geoffrey Crayon," in The Spirit of the Age (London: 1825), 420. Hazlitt writes here of The Sketch Book and Bracebridge Hall, and one can only infer his feelings about Irving's earlier essay serials, which are much more clearly derivative of British originals than even the two works Hazlitt so excoriates.

<sup>15</sup> Hazlitt, "Elia," 420-421.

<sup>16</sup> Hedges, Washington Irving, 17-33; and Roth, Comedy, 45-60, each contain a chapter devoted to Salmagundi. Beyond this, the serial receives requisite mention and no more in the current criticism, and even Hedges and Roth more or less dismiss it as frivolous and secondhand. For the conventional line on Salmagundi as being "borrowed from the stock plan of the eighteenth-century magazine," see Stanley T. Williams, The Life of Washington Irving, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), 1: 79, an assessment still repeated even by the editors of the standard edition of the serial. See Granger and Hartzog, introduction to Oldstyle; Salmagundi, xix-xxiv. See also Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 416.

influenced the young writer only superficially, and were more or less forgotten once Irving began to write novelistic fiction in the History. Hazlitt and fellow British and American reviewers in the 1820s, and modern critics like Richard MacLamore and Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky alike have detected echoes of the Addisonian essay in The Sketch Book (1819) and Bracebridge Hall (1822).<sup>17</sup> But they hear in them more the weak resonance of a vestigial, antiquated literary sentimentalism than the strains of a particular tradition of urban belletristic writing. To understand the History as a summary comment on the aims of belletristic efforts at community-making, and on their ultimate failure in Irving's New York, we must grasp how conventional understandings of Manhattan's irreducibly commercial character gave the young author raw material from which to create his countervailing perspective on the city's cultural hopelessness. With these broadly cultural, rather than narrowly political, concerns placed at the center of our reading of the History, the book instantly becomes more thematically cohesive. At the same time, the History begins to look less like an imperfect instance of the novel genre and more like the sui generis literary performance it is.

A brief summary of the History is in order. As first published in 1809, the book purported to give a historical account of New York "from the BEGINNING OF THE WORLD TO THE END OF THE DUTCH DYNASTY" (H 1848, [1]). Irving conducted original research into New York's Dutch past, and a roughly accurate narrative of the

---

<sup>17</sup> Richard V. McLamore, "The Dutchman in the Attic: Claiming an Inheritance in The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon," American Literature 72, no. 1 (2000): 31-57; Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, Adrift in the Old World: The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 65-99. For contemporary reviews of The Sketch Book, see especially The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal, September 1819; Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review, 18 March 1820; New Monthly Magazine, March 1820; and Belles Lettres Repository, 15 May and 15 June 1820.

territory's exploration by Henry Hudson in 1609 through the Dutch colonists' capitulation to English forces in 1664 can be discerned amidst the scatter-shot satire of early nineteenth-century New York's "customs, manners and institutions" reflected in it (H 1848, 3). The battle lines in the story are drawn between the good-natured Dutch, who loll about smoking pipes and napping after their regular feasts, and the lean, hungry English Yankees whose drive to expand their territory matches in intensity the desire of the Dutch to remain in their comfortable slumbers. By the end of the book, the Dutch have lost their land to England's forces, and those who remain in the city categorically refuse to invite any English to dinner.

A great problem with summarizing A History of New York is that the book is more a chronicle of the whimsical Diedrich Knickerbocker's withering reflections on the possibility of determining historical truth than it is a plot-driven narrative. Whatever meanings are to be found in the History must be pulled mainly from the character of Knickerbocker's mind. For this reason, Irving describes Knickerbocker in a prefatory "Account of the Author" that pretends to be from the pen of "the public's humble servant, SETH HANDASIDE," owner of the boarding house where the old Dutchman roomed while composing his History (H 1848, 11). There, readers learn of a strange character who holes up in his room, surrounded by "scraps of paper and old mouldy books, laying about at sixes and sevens" in an order which only he can discern (H 1848, 9). An eccentric crank in the tradition of the whimsical humorist, Knickerbocker is apolitical in the best classical sense. He rants at Federalists and Republicans for being "like two rogues, each tugging at a skirt of the nation" without caring "that in the end they would tear the coat off its back, and expose its nakedness," and holds the inn's neighbors



spellbound with his discourses against both political parties (H 1848, 10). Indeed, Handaside remarks, Knickerbocker “would have brought over the whole neighborhood to his own side of the question, if they could ever have found out what it was” (H 1848, 10). The history he offers is thereby as much a cynical reflection on the influence of national interest in writing histories as it is a comical narrative of the city’s history. The historian in Knickerbocker’s account is “the patron of mankind,” sanctioning current habits and customs, as well as the present social and political order, by ostensibly grounding them in the immemorial past.<sup>18</sup>

This “Account” then establishes the centrality of books and reading to Knickerbocker’s life, and by extension to the imaginative history he – via Irving – presents to readers. This might seem a redundant observation were it not for the way the “Account” introduces readers to the History by pointing to the marginalization of literary characters in Knickerbocker’s New York. The city librarian is the only person in town who understands Knickerbocker’s bouts of “philosophiz[ing],” significantly enough for Irving’s satire, he appears a “stranger” to Handaside, and presumably to everyone else in the hotel owner’s orbit (H 1848, 10). As the sole person in the old Dutchman’s confidence, the librarian becomes something of a literary executor following Knickerbocker’s sudden disappearance. When Handaside and his wife find the manuscript of the History left behind in Knickerbocker’s now-vacant room, this “stranger” assures them that if published, this “most excellent and faithful HISTORY OF NEW YORK” would “be so eagerly bought up by a discerning public” that the profits

---

<sup>18</sup> Washington Irving, Knickerbocker’s History of New York, ed. Williams and McDowell, 12. All references to this edition of the History in this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated H 1809.

would exceed “ten times over” the bill for lodging Knickerbocker left unpaid at his disappearance (H 1848, 11). His confidence springs from the fact that he and Knickerbocker comprehend the world according to similar standards of value. But their common devotion to reading and learning makes them appear as odd curiosities to the city’s residents.

The librarian can thus only do so much to overcome the mutual incomprehension between Knickerbocker and his hosts. His explanation that as “one of the literati” Knickerbocker legitimately stands aloof from the petty concerns of day-to-day life, like paying for his room and board, is not much of an exculpation (H 1848, 10). Though the old man’s appearance and demeanor initially charmed her, Handaside’s wife understandably dissents from this spin on things; Irving nevertheless has a chuckle at her expense when he (in the persona of Handaside) notes that she supposed the “literati” to be “some new party in politics” (H 1848, 10). Likewise, her failure to grasp the meaning of Knickerbocker’s retort to her request for the money he owes cuts two ways. When Knickerbocker deems his manuscript a “treasure ... worth her whole house put together,” her puzzlement is ideally countered by the literary reader’s knowing indulgence (H 1848, 10). The wife’s inability to comprehend value in these terms manifests too in her reaction to Knickerbocker’s claim that he is “seeking for immortality” by immersing himself in what she sees as merely “so many books and papers” (H 1848, 10). The “poor old gentleman’s head was a little cracked,” she regretfully concludes (H 1848, 10). It is difficult not to read in this exchange a sketch of the relationship that will later be filled in by Rip and Dame Van Winkle, the good-natured idler and the pestering representative of

Franklin's industrious America.<sup>19</sup> But the disputatious Knickerbocker is no mere idler, for he labors madly at his manuscript, and Handaside's wife only asks for what she is wholly entitled to as the co-proprietor of the inn.

As the official (if unacknowledged) representative of New York's learned establishment, the librarian translates between what Irving renders here as two different concepts of labor, and two different scales of value. He recognizes Knickerbocker's work for the "treasure" it is, a "most excellent and faithful" history of a city that needs one (H 1848, 11). But New York society is unwilling to pay a man simply for the labors of his mind, which is part of what makes Knickerbocker a "mighty touchy" character (H 1848, 10). Once the fruits of his labors are printed and bound, however, the "discerning public" that the librarian believes exists out there will hopefully come to the rescue, granting both Knickerbocker his wish for immortality, and the Handasides the rent they are due. At the intersection of scholarship and commerce stands the public that all parties in this tale hope to reach. The question remains, however, whether this public actually exists outside the fantasies entertained by eccentric writers like Knickerbocker, and devotees of learning like the librarian.

---

<sup>19</sup> The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., ed. Haskell Springer, vol. 8 of The Complete Works of Washington Irving (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 28-42. For Rip's wife as a "mouthpiece for the values of work, responsibility, adulthood – the imperatives of Benjamin Franklin," see Judith Fetterley, The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 3. For a full exploration of this conflict in Irving's work, see Kurt Müller, "'Progressive' and 'Conservative' Concepts of American Identity: Washington Irving's Response to the Franklinesque Model," in The Construction and Contestation of American Cultures and Identities in the Early National Period, ed. Udo J. Hebel (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1999), 137-153.

New York's intelligentsia regarded libraries as key to the city's cultural improvement, so it is no wonder that Irving casts the librarian as a mediator between the whimsical and difficult historian and a public sufficiently impressed by Knickerbocker's odd ways, but largely unable to comprehend them. New York's only major libraries, one belonging to Columbia College and the other to the New York Society, were destroyed during the Revolution. By the time Irving wrote the History the philanthropist John Pintard had built up a substantial collection of books to replace the Society's library, and in the year of the History's publication this library was acquired by the recently-formed New York Historical Society.<sup>20</sup> From the vantage of a democratically-inclined approach to culture, this library's existence had perhaps greater symbolic than practical value, for access to it was limited to shareholders and members of the Historical Society. That the innkeepers and their neighbors in the "Account of the Author" regarded the librarian as a stranger then likely reflects as well on the exclusivity of those who sought to improve the city's cultural life. The average New Yorker might be a stranger to reading and learning not only because of personal inertia, but because he or she cannot get access to either. In the convoluted world of A History of New York, obstacles to historical consciousness, never mind historical truth, are legion.

Efforts to catapult New York into league with Philadelphia and Boston as a cultural center began in earnest at the very beginning of the nineteenth century. Before then, a number of informal literary and philosophical associations had come and gone, like the Calliopean Society (to which Irving's older brothers belonged), the Black Friars, and the Belles Lettres Club. The Friendly Club, formally constituted in 1793, was a New

---

<sup>20</sup> Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 378.

York analogue of Edinburgh's Select Society (1754-1764) in which physicians, lawyers, painters, a theater manager, and other professionals gathered to discuss matters of philosophy, literature, science, and politics.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the Select Society, however, the Friendly Club only survived for four years. Longevity was a perennial problem for voluntary associations devoted to stimulating interest in culture in New York, and their members typically blamed those more concerned with chasing the dollar than with pursuing cultural development for their failures. The New York Magazine, whose contributors were largely future members of the Friendly Club, lasted seven years (1790-97); its successor, the Monthly Magazine and American Review, appeared in 1799 and vanished a year later. There was certainly a will among this tenacious group of artists and professionals to put New York on the cultural map. But the public interest required to extend their efforts and bring them to fruition had yet to materialize.

By focusing specifically on the city's history, these men hoped to spark at once civic pride and a more widespread interest in, and valuation of, learning. Pintard thus established the New-York Historical Society in 1804, attracting a number of Friendly Club alumni in addition to younger lawyers, clergymen, and merchants. Their express purpose was to discover and preserve "whatever may relate to the natural, civil, literary, and ecclesiastical history" of New York, as well as of the nation as a whole.<sup>22</sup> Irving announces his awareness of these aims in the History's mock dedication to the Society, which critics typically cite as the "brash act" of a young upstart bent on tweaking the

---

<sup>21</sup> See chapter three, 46-47.

<sup>22</sup> "To the Public: The Address of the New-York Historical Society," in Collections of the New-York Historical Society, for the Year 1809 (New York: I. Riley, 1811), 1: 6.

noses of the city's elders.<sup>23</sup> Curiously little sense has been made of why, exactly, Irving would feel compelled to do this. Aside from suggesting that he sought to enhance his reputation as a man about town beyond the notoriety he had achieved with his involvement in Salmagundi, critical accounts of the possible motives for Irving's writing the History and adding this dedication remain fuzzy and unformed.<sup>24</sup> Recognizing how the book mounts a pointed literary response to the Historical Society's call for greater public interest in the city's past, however, allows us to see that a sense of history without primary reference to literature was anathema to Irving. A History of New York is a riposte both to notions of history as a handmaiden to modern commerce, and to a widespread sense among New Yorkers that belletristic writing was a frivolous endeavor. It reasserts in a more skeptical fashion the popular urban humanism most commonly associated with the periodical essay to supplement what Irving regarded as the myopic vision of civic pride endemic to the Historical Society's mission.

In the "Author's Apology" to the 1848 edition of the History Irving notes that he and his brother Peter initially conceived the book as a parody of "a small hand-book which had recently appeared, entitled 'A Picture of New York'" (H 1848, 3). Like that work, he maintains, theirs "was to begin with an historical sketch; to be followed by notices of the customs, manners and institutions of the city; written in a serio-comic vein and treating local errors, follies and abuses with good-humored satire" (H 1848, 3). The Irvings also intended to "burlesque the pedantic lore displayed in certain American

---

<sup>23</sup> Black and Black, introduction to A History of New York, xxx.

<sup>24</sup> See Black and Black, introduction to A History of New York, xxx-xxx; and Bowden, "Knickerbocker's History," 161-62.

works” with flourishes of “mock erudition” (H 1848, 3). But, he concludes, once Peter departed for Europe and Washington was left to complete the book on his own, he discarded “all idea of a parody on the Picture of New York” and expanded what had been intended only as “an introductory sketch” – a history of the city that “commence[d] with the creation of the world” – into a full-length work (H 1848, 3). As we will see, there are a number of reasons why readers should be wary of taking Irving’s later account of the History’s origins and character at face value. But most immediately the History’s original relationship with The Picture of New York requires further scrutiny, for Irving’s decision to preserve it as a matter of record in his final edition of the book proceeds from the historical conception of belles-lettres increasingly common to American essayists of his moment who, like him, wrote in dialogue with the British serial tradition.

By 1848, it is doubtful that anyone would have remembered The Picture of New York.<sup>25</sup> Published anonymously in 1807 and apparently never reprinted, it was the work of Samuel Latham Mitchill, one of the founders of the Friendly Club and a charter member of the New-York Historical Society. Mitchill was, in fact, what one historian has deemed “Manhattan’s closest approximation to a native renaissance man.”<sup>26</sup> In addition to his tenure as both a congressman and United States senator, he practiced medicine, oversaw agricultural and sanitation reforms, engaged in geological surveys, and started several professional and voluntary associations. It is therefore not surprising that such a commanding civic figure would elect to launch the first major public response to the

---

<sup>25</sup> [Samuel Latham Mitchill], The Picture of New York; or The Traveller’s Guide through the Commercial Metropolis of the United States, By a Gentleman Residing in this City (New York: Riley & Co., 1807).

<sup>26</sup> Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 376.

Historical Society's call for the promotion of learning and culture in Manhattan.

Assuming the disinterested guise of "a Gentleman Residing in this City," Mitchill sought to make citizens of the "commercial metropolis of North America" better acquainted with its topography and municipal structure.<sup>27</sup> The volume also aimed to demonstrate to other Americans that New York City was bent on overtaking Boston and Philadelphia in the drive to establish itself as the nation's most vibrant cultural center. Its enumeration of booksellers, newspapers, reading rooms, voluntary societies, and other evidence of civic and cultural health could be numbing, and the book's express topicality accounts for its near-total disappearance from the historical record by the time New York had, indeed, become the nation's cultural center in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Given this, it would seem that Irving recalled the Picture in the "Apology" mainly to differentiate what he had come to regard as his timeless contribution to New York's literary history from the initial circumstances of its writing. If, Irving implies, the History had remained merely a parody of The Picture it would likely have succumbed to history's oblivion along with its banal inspiration. The serendipitous idea to delve into New York's Dutch past and to treat it with "all the embellishments of heroic fiction" – with tongue firmly in cheek – saved the young writer and his work from such a fate (H 1848, 3). But the History's central contention that writing history is always a wholly interested endeavor still bears the marks of Irving's initial urge to burlesque Mitchill's book. While the History is not a strict parody of The Picture, it satirically refracts Mitchill's diminished approach to history and civic pride. Diedrich Knickerbocker fulminates

---

<sup>27</sup> Picture of New York.



against a society that refuses to see how both have become practically meaningless in an increasingly commercialized culture.

This reading might seem willfully to ignore Irving's protestation that his work veered away from The Picture once he discovered his own original way into writing a comic history of the city. But Irving's cheeky dedication of his book to the Historical Society only two years after Mitchill presented The Picture to its members suggests that Irving's claim to having discarded "all idea of a parody" of Mitchill is only true in the most superficial sense (H 1848, 3). A History of New York has little, if anything, in common with The Picture of New York in formal terms. Mitchill's volume is organized by headings such as "Taxes," "Wells and Pumps," and "Markets," and seeks to impress upon both citizens and "Traveller[s]" how much the city has to offer ambitious professionals.<sup>28</sup> It is, more than anything else, a guide book, meant to accompany potential investors on their travels through Manhattan as a handy reference. Irving's History is a sprawling ramble through the mind of a whimsical crank. These bald-faced differences in form and rhetoric do not, however, exclude all vestiges of what Irving acknowledges as his work's initial inspiration.

A slighting reference to Mitchill's reputation, frivolous though it might appear, evinces his persistent influence on the History's conception. Among his many distinctions, Mitchill had discovered and publicized the anaesthetizing properties of nitrous oxide in 1795, several years before Sir Humphry Davy gained much wider notice

---

<sup>28</sup> Picture of New York, 61, 63, 128, [i].

for the same discovery.<sup>29</sup> When Knickerbocker chastises “the ingenious inhabitants of this fair city (whose intellects have been thrice stimulated and quickened, by transcendent [sic] nitrous oxide ...)” for being unable to grasp why he has spent nearly a hundred pages reflecting upon the act of writing history rather than simply writing it, Irving pointedly alludes to Mitchill’s reputation, and by extension to the culture of Enlightenment among New York’s intelligentsia (H 1809, 98). Confronted with the force and rigor of Knickerbocker’s historical imagination, the city’s gas-addled citizens, for all their interest in empirical science, simply cannot comprehend it. The only kind of history they can comprehend is apparently the sort that Mitchill, the patron saint of nitrous oxide, has given them. This parenthetical aside was revised out of the History for the 1848 edition, reflecting Irving’s desire to remove traces of the original version’s topicality. But it reminds us that he conceived the 1809 edition as a timely response to its historical moment, whatever else Irving might suggest nearly forty years later.

Most immediately, the History reacted to what Irving saw as Mitchill’s laughable shortcomings as a chronicler of Manhattan’s origins and customs. The Picture of New York gives but the most cursory glance at the city’s Dutch and English roots, focusing instead on its banks, insurance companies, and descriptions of its various neighborhoods. “Nothing is easier than to write works of fancy,” Mitchill declares at the outset, and

---

<sup>29</sup> Though Joseph Priestly had isolated the nitrous oxide gas and written about it in 1790, Mitchill’s 1795 Remarks on the Gaseous Oxyl of Azote or of Nitogene... contained much more thorough experimental observations, and was a direct influence on the further experimental refinement performed and publicized by Davy in 1800. See June Z. Fullmer, Young Humphrey Davy: The Making of an Experimental Chemist (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2000), 94-97, 211-235.

“nothing [is] more difficult and laborious than to ascertain facts.”<sup>30</sup> And facts are what the book’s 223 pages retail, in all their painfully flattened clarity. Mitchill’s status as the city’s most well-known and highly regarded renaissance man might have led the young author of Salmagundi to expect something more from him than a Chamber of Commerce-style publication. His offhand denigration of “works of fancy,” moreover, would surely have piqued a writer who cared for little else, especially when Mitchill’s book offered not much more than a litany of Manhattan’s locales. It also doubtless appeared strange for a volume meant as a riposte to critics of New York’s commercially-oriented character to celebrate the city’s literary attainments almost solely in terms of their material production. Instead of highlighting the city’s great minds and prolific authors, Mitchill crows about New York’s status as “a most extensive mart and manufactory of books.”<sup>31</sup> The view of Manhattan’s cultural life The Picture of New York affords makes it difficult to discern the life of the mind amidst the bustling marts of commerce.

The Salmagundi essays, on which Irving collaborated with his brothers Peter and William, along with James Kirke Paulding, at the same time Mitchill brought out The Picture, amply illustrate the young writer’s attitude toward the kind of culture that thrives in this “Commercial Metropolis.”<sup>32</sup> The serial’s many gibes at New York’s fashionable elite proceed self-consciously within a tradition of light satire of the bon ton’s pretensions long associated with the English periodical essay. But Irving’s critics have made too much of Salmagundi’s echoes of The Spectator and The World insofar as they are

---

<sup>30</sup> Picture of New York, vi.

<sup>31</sup> Picture of New York, 161.

<sup>32</sup> Picture of New York, [i].

adduced as evidence of the series' poverty of imagination. In older criticism, the Salmagundi circle's imitation of the English essay appeared as a form of neoclassical inertia, marking an unfortunate refusal to leap into the newly stirring Romantic currents sweeping westward from England.<sup>33</sup> The few recent critics who have glanced at Salmagundi in writing about The Sketch Book have either read the serial's participation in the British periodical tradition as an instance of the provincial anxiety endemic to the conditions of postcolonial authorship, or studied its anti-populist polemics as evidence of Irving's temperamental Federalism.<sup>34</sup> Such readings have helped move Irving criticism beyond the neoclassic-Romantic dyad which continued to plague study of his work through the 1990s.<sup>35</sup> But they still figure the Salmagundi circle's engagement with the British essays in terms of privation, rather than as an instance of creative adaptation. And it is precisely through his adapting the tradition to New York's cultural circumstances

---

<sup>33</sup> Henry S. Canby, Classic Americans: A Study of Eminent American Writers from Irving to Whitman (New York, 1931), 67-68, 80-81; William L. Hedges, "Washington Irving: Nonsense, the Fat of the Land and the Dream of Indolence," in 1860-1974: A Century of Commentary on the Works of Washington Irving, ed. Andrew B. Meyers (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1976), 440-456; Williams, Life of Irving, 1: 78-83.

<sup>34</sup> Michael T. Gilmore, "The Literature of the Revolutionary and Early National Periods," in The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume 1 1590-1820, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 662-64; Looby, Voicing America, 68-86; Laura J. Murray, "The Aesthetic of Dispossession: Washington Irving and Ideologies of (De)Colonization in the Early Republic," American Literary History 8 (1996): 205-31; and Walter Sondey, "From Nation of Virtue to Virtual Nation: Washington Irving and American Nationalism," in Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender, and Nationalism, ed. Jean Pickering and Suzanne Kehde (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1997), 53-58.

<sup>35</sup> See especially Gilmore, "Literature," for an account of Irving as "an innovator" whose reputation as a "backward-looking man of letters" is belied by the "stirrings of Romantic sensibility" in Salmagundi (661, 663).

that a new sense of belletristic writing's relationship to history emerges in Irving's work, which then serves as the basis for his fully articulated satiric vision in A History of New York.

The Salmagundi essays revolve around a basic cluster of themes and topics. The fashions of the day are noticed ironically by Anthony Evergreen, a direct descendent of Will Honeycomb, The Spectator's aging dandy.<sup>36</sup> The Mustapha letters, patterned on Montesquieu's Les Lettres Persanes (1721) and Goldsmith's Citizen of the World (1760-61) satirize Jeffersonian populism and the assorted foibles of New York politics.<sup>37</sup> Will Wizard critiques the city's theatrical scene, while Launcelot Langstaff, Salmagundi's presiding persona, presents general reflections on morals, manners, and intellectual trends from his "Elbow-Chair," much as Bickerstaff in The Tatler had from the seat in his apartment (Sal, 69).<sup>38</sup> By patterning their serial so clearly on their British forebears, the Salmagundi authors made a bid to place Manhattan on the map in the international republic of letters. London had had its epoch-making series in The Tatler and Spectator, and again in Johnson's Rambler and the periodicals it inspired in turn, The Adventurer, The World and The Connoisseur. Edinburgh had The Mirror and The Lounger, while Paris had the Characters of La Bruyère. Dennie in The Port Folio's numerous periodical series on the British model was busy entering Philadelphia in the roll of those cities

---

<sup>36</sup> Salmagundi, in Oldstyle; Salmagundi, 75-77, 81-85, 93-98, 123-26, 152-57, 245-50, 294-98, 308-12. All references to this work in this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated Sal.

<sup>37</sup> See Sal, 90-93, 117-123, 141-47, 169-174, 189-95, 230-36, 260-66, 283-87, 288-94.

<sup>38</sup> For Wizard, see Sal, 73-75, 109-115, 136-41, 150-52, 157-64, 218-23, 243-45, 256-60, 312-16. Langstaff features in every essay in the series.

properly fitted with its own, notable belletristic culture, while the writers of the Monthly Anthology (1803-1811) were doing the same for Boston.<sup>39</sup> What critics have tended to view as imitation in a bad sense, the provincial rehearsal of old literary forms which no longer commanded readerships in their home countries, was rather a bid to speak in a common literary language. But to do so always involved adapting the ethical worldviews that were part and parcel of that language to the unique and unsettled cultural circumstances in the new nation. This is where the historical consciousness which had become manifest in early American receptions of the periodical tradition would begin to raise history itself as a recurrent subject for humorous reflection in a serial like Salmagundi.

As we have seen, it had become conventional by the mid-eighteenth-century for English essayists to reflect upon the possible fate of their work in the eyes of posterity. Mr. Spectator expressed concern with how he would appear to “future historians,” while The Adventurer in his final number laments the possibility that “if they are remembered at all,” his efforts “will be remembered with equal indifference” (§ 101, A 140). But Salmagundi invokes posterity often enough to border on obsession.<sup>40</sup> Dissatisfaction with the present binds personae and characters together in the serial’s imagined world, while placing them at odds with a Manhattan public apparently unable to think beyond the immediate moment. In his first address to readers, Launcelot Langstaff challenges them

---

<sup>39</sup> Among the periodical series in The Port Folio were The American Lounger, The Beehive, The Polite Scholar, The Recluse, and The Salad. The Monthly Anthology featured The Loiterer, Silva, and The Observer among its periodical essays.

<sup>40</sup> See Michael Warner, “Irving’s Posterity,” ELH 67 (2000): 773-799, for an account of this aspect of Irving’s writing across his authorial career.

to purchase the essays out of concern for posterity. This directive is deeply confused, however. As a motley collection of whimsical humorists, Salmagundi's authors could care less whether or not anyone buys the essays. They write only to please themselves, and it follows that the "public are welcome to buy this work, or not, just as they choose" (Sal, 69). Yet if the public exercises its right not to purchase the essays, the authors "shall burn" the lot "in one promiscuous blaze; and, like the books of the sybils, and the alexandrian [sic] library, they will be lost forever to posterity" (Sal, 69). In a gesture of supreme mock magnanimity, they conduct this attempted blackmail on behalf of their publisher, the public itself, and "the Public's children, to the nineteenth generation" (Sal, 69). The authors' refrain that they "have nothing to do with the pecuniary concerns of the paper" and that "its success will yield [them] neither pride nor profit" sounds especially pointed, given that it addresses the citizens of a "place" known above all for "great trade and commerce" to the exclusion of most everything else (Sal, 68, 187). But the significance of posterity for the Salmagundi authors is not confined to its ironic use in their attempts to strong-arm readers into buying the series. Nor is it limited to the deeper irony through which these blandishments reveal the essayists to be New York writers par excellence, given to the hard-sell despite their elaborate protestations to the contrary. The passage from nominally ephemeral essay sheets to the greater order of history that Salmagundi playfully invokes belongs to a current of thought that was running through the Enlightened circles of New York's intelligentsia.

One of the New-York Historical Society's presiding members, the Reverend Samuel Miller, had assigned periodicals a significant historical role in his chronicle of how Enlightenment emerged and spread, A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century

(1803).<sup>41</sup> The Retrospect argues that the European and American Enlightenments sprung directly from the printed page, and most especially from the cheaper, popular sheets churned out by metropolitan presses. Across two substantial volumes he comprehensively surveys all the major developments in knowledge and the arts in the previous century: “MECHANICAL PHILOSOPHY” (physics), agriculture, painting, navigation, architecture physiognomy, language study, encyclopedias, and educational theories, among many others.<sup>42</sup> Two major themes underlie the narrative Miller develops throughout the work. Without printing, he maintains, the Enlightenment would never have happened. Hastened by print, Enlightenment spread rapidly from elite custodians of knowledge to the general public, revealing an inherently democratic logic at its core. The progressive improvements that British, Continental, and American societies have witnessed spring directly from this democratic diffusion of knowledge, Miller insists. But he also repeatedly regrets how the translation of knowledge beyond the circles of the elite tends to generate popular demands for only that knowledge which is instantly graspable, and conducive to self-satisfaction. While Miller conceived his Retrospect as part of the effort to realize Enlightenment’s democratic potential, and therefore as an instance of what it chronicles, a current of exasperation percolates through the work. He sought to make his introduction to Enlightenment popularly accessible. But he also wanted to

---

<sup>41</sup> Samuel Miller, A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century, 2 vols. (1803; reprint, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2001). All references to this work in this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by volume and page number and abbreviated Retrospect.

<sup>42</sup> The other topics Miller covers are natural history, medicine, geography, mathematics, mechanic arts, sculpture, engraving, philosophy of the human mind, classic literature, oriental literature, history, biography, romances and novels, poetry, literary and political journals, literary and scientific associations, and “nations lately become literary” (Russia, Germany, and America) (302).



challenge readers to confront the limits of their own knowledge by comparison, and confrontation, with the past. The Retrospect is, after all, a history of thought. That Miller singles out the periodical essay for special praise as perhaps the Enlightenment's greatest contribution to literature should therefore come as no surprise. In his reading, periodical essays are, above all else, a new source of historical knowledge especially suited to this task.

"[I]t appears that the eighteenth century may be emphatically called the age of periodical publications," Miller asserts in conclusion (Retrospect, 2: 246). He had earlier in the volume marveled over how the period generated more original forms of history writing than any previous. Yet the connection he draws between this explosion of historical writing and the emergence of the periodical essay goes beyond their simple common denominator in print. Periodical publications "form the principal means of diffusing knowledge through every part of the civilized world," Miller declares (Retrospect, 2: 247). They "convey, in an abridged and agreeable manner, the contents of many ponderous volumes," and "record every species of information, from the sublime investigations of science to the most trifling concerns of amusement" (Retrospect, 2: 247). "But the great popularity, and the unexampled circulation of these periodical works," he notes regretfully, "have also been attended with some disadvantages" (Retrospect, 2: 242). Miller singles out magazines for having "operated unfavourably to sound and deep erudition" and fostering "the deceitful expectation of finding short and easy paths to real scholarship" (Retrospect, 2: 242). Because these publications "have discouraged those habits of connected reading and of patient systematic thinking, which were the glory of the learned in former ages," Miller suggests that "the general diffusion

of superficial reading and scraps of knowledge may be said, pre-eminently, to characterize the last age” (Retrospect, 2: 242-43). The periodical essay, however, appears as an antidote to these unintended effects due to its unique synthesis of casual learning and historical awareness.

But here, for Miller, also lies the problem. While these essays had at one time taught “the minuter decencies and inferior duties” while aiming “to regulate the practice of daily conversation” and “to correct those depravities which are rather ridiculous than criminal,” at present “this mode of writing ... is nearly exhausted” (Retrospect, 2: 243-44, 246).<sup>43</sup> The increasing commerce in letters and the exigencies of publishing have made it almost impossible for this sort of publication to flourish. The frantic pace of New York society disallows the “leisure” required for conceiving and writing essays on this reflective model (Retrospect, 2: 246). At a deeper level, the disconnected and superficial knowledge the now-dominant magazine form has constituted brings forth a culture in which neither the “diligence” nor the “ability” necessary to crafting essays after the example of the Spectator or Connoisseur can manifest and flourish (Retrospect, 2: 246). The promise of Enlightenment that “periodical publications” represented has been betrayed by nothing less than the intellectual culture they engendered (Retrospect, 2: 246).

Miller’s Retrospect surveys Enlightenment from a moment in history which his subject brought to bear, but which also stands in imminent danger of passing from the world stage due to increasing tension between an ideal of democratic intellectual culture

---

<sup>43</sup> The first portion of the quote (243-44) is taken by Miller from Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, 2 vols. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1968), 1: 333-34.

and its less rigorous practice in the popular press. His optimistic refrain throughout the volumes that whatever its drawbacks, the diffusion of “superficial” knowledge among the “multitudes” is surely better than “total ignorance” is sustained by his belief that Enlightenment has supplied unprecedented opportunities for writing history (Retrospect, 2: 239). The bare fact that the “art of printing has multiplied records beyond all former example” becomes especially significant in relation to “[a]nother great improvement:” the “connecting [of] the progress of literature, science, arts, and manners, with the chain of civil and military transactions” (Retrospect, 2: 132). As they moved from focusing exclusively on state affairs and the battlefield to studying “the course of improvement which the human mind has exhibited,” Enlightenment historians have thrown new “light on the progress, genius, and condition of different communities” (Retrospect, 2: 132). This broadening of what counts as history to include the more mundane realms of culture forges the link between history and the periodical essay that appears so prominently in Miller’s Retrospect.

The historian – like Miller himself – who chronicles such “progress” and “genius” produces a bifocal narrative (Retrospect, 2: 132). There is, on the one hand, the history of possibilities represented by Enlightenment ideals, like the democratization of knowledge and the “improvement” of “the human mind” (Retrospect, 2: 132). Running parallel to this story is the history of the failures wholly to realize these ideals. The historian’s task is then to keep the ideals alive in the public mind with his account, highlighting failures in the present while yet holding out the possibility for imminent fulfillment of Enlightenment’s promises. This is where the phenomenon of retrospect itself takes on such grave importance in relation to the periodical press. Miller imagines a “future

historian” having recourse “to the periodical publications of the day” in his quest “to obtain a correct view of the state of literature and of manners, during this period” (Retrospect, 2: 247). Not only are these “the richest sources of information” the historian will find concerning the culture of the time, but they form “the most enlightened and infallible guides in his course” (Retrospect, 2: 247). The implication here is that these periodicals are not merely “enlightened,” but enlightening in their turn, for they preserve the ideals which inspired their publication along with the more prosaic “information” about “literature” and “manners” they convey (Retrospect, 2: 247).

While they share his understanding of the periodical essay’s historical character, the Salmagundi authors dissent from Miller’s guarded optimism. The differences between them are most manifest in how they imagine their intended audiences. Miller addresses fellow literati endowed with egalitarian sensibilities; Irving and his cohorts write directly to members of “Town” society, the circles of the fashionable set and the coffeehouse quidnuncs. That the past is irrelevant to a population for whom parvenu wealth is the order of the day, never mind to a nation whose self-image was polemically predicated on a triumphant break with European history, is a stubborn fact to Salmagundi’s personae and their associates. One malady becomes symptomatic of the other. The political satire of Jefferson and of the populism extolled in his name blends with depictions of thoughtless fashion-followers and self-obsessed pedants in a total portrait of the consequences of mass self-absorption. A passage in one of the Mustapha letters figures the political ramifications of this in terms strikingly reminiscent of the crowd in Spectator 460.<sup>44</sup> The popular orators “thunder away their combustible sentiments at the heads of the

---

<sup>44</sup> See chapter one, 33-34.

audience, who are generally so busily employed in smoking, drinking, and hearing themselves talk, that they seldom hear a word of the matter” (Sal, 191). Because everyone present is already predisposed to “agree at all events to a certain set of resolutions, or articles of war,” the speeches become superfluous, and consensus operates through force of inertia rather than as the outcome of sustained, informed debate (Sal, 191). Before a crowd in which each individual has “as great a desire to talk as the orator himself,” and is therefore not just unwilling, but unable to listen to anyone else, oratory loses its power to bring citizens together (Sal, 256). This reflection appears amidst a series of essays that follow “the tyro[s] of fashion” as they busy themselves “in feeling superior to the honest cit” by fleeing from “the stupid company of their own thoughts” to the easier, if more expensive, game of trying to outdo each other with the latest styles (Sal, 257). Across the social spectrum in New York, the self is the measure of all things, and an especially shallow one at that.

The Manhattan public of Salmagundi is clearly a version of the heedless publics familiar to readers of the London essay serials. But it has detached itself almost wholly from the literary engagement which had previously sustained, however tenuously, the possibility that such a public could be transformed into a society of belletristic readers. The persona of The Lounger, we recall, constructed a new kind of society around himself from his occasional writings. He represented a changing understanding of the periodical essay’s relationship to the society that produced it, one in which the genre’s social usefulness was a product of its original literariness.<sup>45</sup> It was but a short step,

---

<sup>45</sup> See chapter three, 151-56.

conceptually, from this sense of the genre to the view of the periodical essay as a medium for historical witness adopted in The Port Folio. Yet the Lounger sent his essays and sketches out into Edinburgh with the belief that they might still spark the sympathetic currents between him and his fellow citizens that literature, at least ideally, was meant to manifest. No such hope appears in Salmagundi. Langstaff and his fellows record their thoughts and observations expressly to spite the present and its publics.

This defiance goes beyond the personae's rhetoric and into the real-world choice Irving and his associates made to publish Salmagundi in discrete numbers, rather than feature the essays as columns in a newspaper or magazine (as Irving had done with The Letters of Jonathan Oldstyle in Peter's Morning Chronicle).<sup>46</sup> By the last third of the eighteenth century most essay serials modeled on The Spectator appeared in miscellaneous publications instead of being published separately on the traditional folio half-sheet. This trend had begun in the 1740s, prompted mainly by the changing economics of the publishing business. With their appealingly miscellaneous content and extra space for advertisements, magazines had overtaken the periodical market by mid-century. When Johnson decided in 1750 to publish The Rambler in single sheets, as we have seen, he did so in direct reaction to the magazine's increasing dominance.<sup>47</sup>

The single sheet essay afforded readers the opportunity to reflect on the essay's subject matter without distraction, suiting form to function in a way that appealed to Johnson's sense of what periodical essays could do for their readers. Iona Italia notes

---

<sup>46</sup> The nine Oldstyle letters appeared in the Morning Chronicle between November 1802 and April 1803.

<sup>47</sup> See introduction, vi-viii; chapter one, 42-45.

how “magazines reproduce in print the fragmentation of Johnson’s society and the isolation of each group from the others, as each reader only peruses the one section of the magazine which is of interest to them.”<sup>48</sup> Johnson’s appeal to the common reader is, in this account, materialized in the discrete essay sheet, which formally encourages “readers to define themselves primarily as members of a larger body” through having them momentarily reflect together on the same ruminations within the rhythms of periodical circulation.<sup>49</sup> The Rambler’s example was, of course, immediately influential at mid-century.<sup>50</sup> Even so, its format made it a losing proposition in publishing terms, so much so that Johnson’s subsequent series The Idler appeared out of necessity in The Universal Chronicle, or Weekly Gazette.<sup>51</sup> The business of periodical publication had become a vexed endeavor, pitting the ideal experiences of reader reflection and literary consciousness against hard economic realities. While magazines ultimately proved to be highly profitable for their publishers, essay serials in the moral tradition of The Spectator that were published as columns in this miscellaneous format could be lost to readers amidst the advertisements and other frivolous matter competing for their attention in the magazine’s pages.

Publishing periodical essays separate from magazines, whatever the financial risks involved, thus appears to have had great significance for provincial writers intent

---

<sup>48</sup> Iona Italia, The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century: Anxious Employment (London: Routledge, 2005), 144.

<sup>49</sup> Italia, Rise of Literary Journalism, 145.

<sup>50</sup> See chapter one, 41-44.

<sup>51</sup> The Universal Chronicle, a weekly newspaper, was started in 1758 by Johnson’s friend John Payne, who had previously published The Adventurer.

upon establishing respectable belletristic cultures in their cities. The Mackenzie circle made a point of circulating The Mirror and The Lounger after The Spectator's example, even though it meant that their efforts would reach fewer readers than if they had published the series in one of Edinburgh's popular magazines.<sup>52</sup> The Salmagundi circle followed suit, bent on making Manhattan a genuine metropolis by giving the city its very own periodical series, whether readers wanted it or not. This was partly a matter of claiming for their respective cities equal representation in the international republic of letters. Symbolically, though, the discrete essay (in Salmagundi's case "a small pamphlet in a neat yellow cover") could also represent a rallying point for the consensus the essayists tried to promote amongst a diverse readership (Sal, 83).

Yet never before had a periodical series expressed such defiance of its putative readership. At one level, of course, we can read this as rhetoric in the commonplace sense, a use of words as a smokescreen to obscure the authors' real motivations or intentions. Every essayist in this tradition claimed to disregard popularity in pursuing his whims for the good of the public. In particular, Langstaff looks back to Goldsmith, whose persona in The Bee pits his integrity against the degradations of the marketplace.<sup>53</sup> This Goldsmith, rather than the sentimental author of The Vicar of Wakefield with whom critics typically associate the post-Sketch Book Irving, stands foremost in the young

---

<sup>52</sup> The Edinburgh Weekly Magazine (1768-1784), Edinburgh Magazine; or, Literary Amusement (1779-1782), and Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany (1785-1803) would each have likely enjoyed a wider readership than did the Mirror and Lounger series.

<sup>53</sup> See chapter two, 85-90.



Irving's mind.<sup>54</sup> Goldsmith's essays, Irving writes in his biography of the author, "did not produce equal effect at first with more garish writings of infinitely less value."<sup>55</sup> And therein lies their ultimate success, for while "they did not 'strike,' as it is termed," the essays nonetheless "had that rare and enduring merit which rises in estimation on every perusal" by properly thoughtful readers.<sup>56</sup> Having survived the public's initial neglect – or, more properly, precisely because of that neglect – these essays "are now garnered up among the choice productions of British literature."<sup>57</sup> In these defiant terms, Salmagundi appears as a New York manifestation of the humorist strain in periodical writing that came to Irving and his fellows through The Tatler, The Connoisseur, The Mirror, and other titles. But even taken purely as rhetoric in this sense, it marks a significant turn in how the orientation of the essayist toward his audience is represented. To push for a consensus in which the essayist's readers are effectively disbarred from participating moves Salmagundi a step further into the literary disillusionment that had characterized the Port Folio's relationship to the British periodical tradition. With one additional push

---

<sup>54</sup> From the 1820s forward it became a critical commonplace to link Irving and Goldsmith, mostly in terms of how they both reflected sentimentally on the vanishing world of village life in England. For a dissenting view, see Williams, Washington Irving, 2: 219-223. Leary, "Irving and the Comic Imagination," 193, is alone in pointing to the influence of Goldsmith's The Bee on Irving's literary development.

<sup>55</sup> Oliver Goldsmith: A Biography, vol. 17 of The Complete Works of Washington Irving, ed. Elsie Lee West (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 75. The full-length biography of Goldsmith which Irving brought out in 1849 as part of his complete works was an expanded version of a lengthy prefatory essay on Goldsmith's life which Irving had written in 1824 for a Paris edition of Goldsmith's works.

<sup>56</sup> Irving, Oliver Goldsmith, 75.

<sup>57</sup> Irving, Oliver Goldsmith, 75.

in this direction, the still-genial Langstaff would give way to the aggressively recalcitrant Knickerbocker.

The authors of Salmagundi finally point to their historical consciousness as what distinguishes them from New York's broader public. But this is problematic, for they cannot find a fit precedent for that public's character. In a caustic assessment Knickerbocker in the History will soon pick up and amplify, they castigate "this degenerate age" for its inhospitality to their "moderate and reasonable expectations" of achieving even minor success in reforming the Town with Salmagundi (227). But this is no standard complaint regarding how the present has fallen from the higher standards of the past. Theirs is so "odd singular and indescribable" an "age" that the authors cannot even find a standard against which to measure it (227). Since "neither the age of gold, silver, iron, brass, chivalry, or pills" can be appealed to as adequate points of comparison, they turn to a literary example to define their predicament (227). The traditional republican juxtapositions of present corruption and past probity like those underlying The Tatler's censorial approach to London society, or The Port Folio's exposure of the raw economic self-interest at the roots of modern populism, gave these series a historically-ratified logic by which to proceed in their satire. New York's cultural malaise is by contrast "singular and indescribable," exceeding the essayists' capacity to give it form in their writing (Sal, 227). Indeed, the moral essayist in Salmagundi's New York "will fare like Smollet's honest pedant" in Peregrine Pickle, "who clearly demonstrated by angles &c., after the manner of Euclid, that it was wrong to do evil – and was laughed at for his pains" (227). In the absence of compelling historical precedents, the periodical essayist cannot even begin to connect his moral impetuses and promotions of literary citizenship

with the society he hopes to reform. He and his imagined readers exist on two entirely distinct imaginative planes.

The event of Salmagundi's having nearly reached enough numbers to warrant their publication together in a volume prompts Langstaff to this reflection. He notes that pausing to dwell on this fact opens him "to the charge of imitation," for from The Tatler forward British essayists had marked the occasion of reaching this milestone with mock reflections on the tremendous effect their essays have had on readers' manners and morals (in other words, marking how they have had no effect at all) (Sal, 224). He breaks with tradition, however, in conducting this reflection in the final essay of what will become Salmagundi's first volume, rather than in the first essay of the second volume. Langstaff's justification for having "deviated a little from this venerable custom" speaks directly to the complex of problems that will soon inform A History of New York's burlesque of the very notion of writing the city's history (Sal, 224).

Langstaff's break with the customary timing, and publishing protocol, of the periodical essayist's traditional "retrospect" is a declaration of whimsical freedom even from the body of writing to which he and his cohorts ultimately refer in trying to give literary shape to Manhattan society (Sal, 224). It is not mere whim that has prompted him to this, however. In choosing to deliver his reflections in "the Dog Days" of August he aligns the Salmagundi writers' mock-inflated sense of their own status as the world's "disinterested benefactors" with the season's determining force on the public world of fashionable society (Sal, 224-25). Though they have "thrown [their] mite into the common stock of knowledge" with their essays, theirs is not a dialectical relationship with the public (Sal, 225). The volume which will now be made available for readers'

perusal is not the collective result of what the authors have learned in their seven months' endeavor as public essayists. They have, Langstaff declares, learned nothing, for they "were fully possessed of all the wisdom and morality it contains at the moment [they] commenced writing" (Sal, 225). But by deferring to the season rather than tradition, the authors hope at last to spark in readers a historical consciousness by encouraging their momentary "indulgence" in "a little self-sufficiency" (Sal, 224). The Dog Days provide a singular opportunity for rapprochement between the essayists hived off in their own preserve of self-sufficient "wisdom" and the heedless public spinning round in its own orbit (Sal, 224). With the summer heat temporarily bringing the rout of public amusements to a halt, New York's citizens have "little to do but to retire within the sphere of self, and make the most of what they find there" (Sal, 225). For Langstaff, the essence of historical reflection lies paradoxically in this retreat from social life, as it subsequently will for Knickerbocker.

Personal retrospection resolves, at least temporarily, the ostensible conflict between knowledge understood in terms of self-sufficiency and the traditionally sociable form of the periodical essay. It appears in this essay as the natural state of the mind when individuals are removed from the bustle of social life. Viewed through the late-afternoon haze of late-summer repose, America's future-oriented drive of progressive improvement begins to look like a state of delirium. The hurriedness of daily commerce makes things unpleasant and impersonal; yet Langstaff asserts that people have confused this outcome with "progress." As with the antagonism between Knickerbocker and his landlady, this moment in Salmagundi looks ahead to the sustained articulation of the conflict between tradition and progressivism in "Rip Van Winkle." Yet while in all his shiftlessness Rip

“stands in opposition to Franklin’s notorious ‘self-help’ philosophy,” and represents “not only a rejection of the Franklinian profit motif [sic], but also of the puritan-capitalist work ethic as such,” Salmagundi mounts a much sharper challenge.<sup>58</sup> Langstaff entirely inverts the terms of this opposition, charging the progressive, future-oriented mind, rather than the mildly abstracted and thoughtful one, with being “idle and unprofitable” (Sal, 223). “[F]or a man to send his wits a gadding on a voyage of discovery into futurity; or even to trouble himself with a laborious investigation of what is actually passing under his eye,” he avers, recapitulates the errors of a nation determined to dissolve the past in dreams of the future (Sal, 223). “RETROSPECT” in such moments does not provide a complete escape from the present, however (Sal, 224). Nor does it involve a conservative refusal to see the future as anything more than a projection of the accumulated wisdom of the past.<sup>59</sup> Langstaff instead figures it as a discrete source of pleasure and wisdom with special claims on the minds and sensibilities of his New York readers due to their unique historical circumstances.

The “way-faring traveler” in this number of Salmagundi stands at once for the author on the verge of completing a volume, the Manhattan reader in the midst of his or her life, and the collective entity of the American public (Sal, 223). Every American writer and citizen should pause regularly to reflect on the past, Langstaff insists. Doing so not only keeps the memory fresh, but introduces new ways of making the present interesting. A banal variety of criticism would have it that “the pleasures of memory”

---

<sup>58</sup> Müller, “‘Progressive’ and ‘Conservative,’” 147.

<sup>59</sup> In this way my reading dovetails with Sondey, “Nation of Virtue,” though I am not prepared to follow him in concluding that Irving ultimately abandoned “the myth of the republic for the genteel American Dream” (68).

Langstaff refers to here might be yoked to neoclassicism, while “those of the imagination” could stand in for the stirring energies of Romanticism (Sal, 223). In a bland political allegory, Federalists could be those who remember while the Jeffersonians rush heedlessly into a vigorously democratic future. But neither of these really illuminates the imaginative relationship to history that Irving outlines in this essay. The act of “contemplat[ing] the ground we have travelled” is for him more than simple retrospection (Sal, 223). To pause and reflect regularly on the past ensures that living in the present will take on greater significance. The countervailing impulse always to imagine “the region which is yet before us” represents for Langstaff a falling off from meaningful participation in everyday life (Sal, 223). It substitutes striving for thinking, and distracts attention from the present in its willful forgetting of the past. But its nominally progressive force leads nowhere, according to Langstaff, without the active accumulation of past experience to act as ballast. To regard retrospection as a source of pleasures peculiar to itself, without which “those of the imagination” would become as empty and fleeting as the consumer desires satirized throughout Salmagundi and the essay tradition to which it is heir, is to grasp at once the core ethic of belletristic writing and reading as the periodical essay styles it (Sal, 223).

There is, of course, more than a hint of irony in Langstaff’s entreaty to New York’s citizens to “retire within the sphere of self” in order to recognize this; Salmagundi has consistently represented their society as being in real danger of imploding from the density of excessive self-absorption (Sal, 225). But the occasion of this appeal – the imminent publication of a volume of the periodical presented as a comprehensive stock of “wisdom and morality” – metaphorically links readers’ momentary, individual

reflection on their personal histories with summary publication of what had, at one time, been considered topical ephemera (Sal, 225). This old trope, in which life is equated with books, here receives another turn. What had formerly seemed insignificant or fleeting, and thereby wholly consigned to the past, has now become the measure of meaning in the present. It follows that whatever is immediately occurring for Salmagundi's readers, and especially those events that are seemingly beneath notice, will in turn exert their force, however unexpectedly, in the future. Posterity always exerts profound claims upon everyday life in this way, according to Langstaff. The apparently unremarkable event of his volume's publication is yet one more instance of this phenomenon.

Langstaff's insistence that by retreating into the self readers can tie "the pleasures of memory" they indulge there to the social "retrospect" the serial-as-volume represents invokes a paradox to which Diedrich Knickerbocker gives personal character (Sal, 223, 225). In the transition from Salmagundi's mundane historicism to Knickerbocker's overheated historical imagination, Irving summarizes the tradition of writing that produced him while using it to refract the inescapably political culture of Jeffersonian America. "Knickerbocker may be a whimsical crank," Robert Ferguson remarks, "but he is the only source of coherence in A History of New York."<sup>60</sup> One key dimension of this coherence is Knickerbocker's relentless urge to make readers view history itself as a record of incoherence. A pervasive "simultaneity" marks Knickerbocker's vision, whereby in his example Jason and the Argonauts are at once the "heroes and demigods" they appear in legendary accounts of their exploits and "a mere gang of sheep stealers on

---

<sup>60</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 165.

a marauding expedition” (H 1809, 71).<sup>61</sup> Likewise the History offers glimpses of “a nation of swindlers and belligerents beneath America’s pious myths of the Founding Fathers”.<sup>62</sup> His frustration with how factionalism masquerades as politics, and self-absorption gets mistaken for progressive knowledge, leads Knickerbocker to seek refuge in “poring over” what he wryly denotes “worm-eaten, obsolete, good-for-nothing books” (H 1809, 42). These connect him with the city’s history even as they abstract him from the society it has produced. But this paradox generates for him an acute awareness of the fictional character of all history writing, which becomes one of the History’s recurrent themes. One of its legacies in Irving’s writing, and in nineteenth-century New York literary culture as a whole, is a school of thought for which politics always presume a literate culture in which they can thrive, while that culture generates media that allow for, and even mandate, resistance to the reduction of everything to politics.

The political commentary running through A History of New York is, I would argue, less interesting in itself than in its larger cultural, and especially literary, implications. The satire of Jefferson as William the Testy, “one of the most positive, restless, ugly little men, that ever put himself in a passion about nothing,” has already been noted (H 1809, 179). Beyond this protracted attack on Jefferson (which occupies all of Book IV in the 1809 edition), the History glances throughout at the obstinacy Irving regards as an American national characteristic. This appears in popular political assemblies as well as in religion, where it finds its natural dwelling place. The “right of talking without ideas and without information – of misrepresenting public affairs” and its

---

<sup>61</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 165.

<sup>62</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 165.



cognate right of “aspersing great characters, and destroying little ones” proceeds from this peculiarly American brand of self-righteousness (H 1809, 156). Adjacent to this version of “liberty of speech” stands “the liberty of conscience,” by which is implied “nothing more, than that every man should think as he pleased in matters of religion – provided he thought right” (H 1809, 157). The majority define rightness, of course, being “perfectly convinced that they alone thought right” and “that who ever thought different from them thought wrong” (H 1809, 157). None of this is especially original, for their opponents had long charged Puritans and Dissenters in England with mistaking obstinacy for principle and right, and had regularly depicted popular political action in the print era as being inherently thoughtless. The History’s originality lay elsewhere, in its revelation of history as being whatever the present moment demanded it to be.

Knickerbocker’s greatest insight concerns the momentary character of history, both in the way those attuned to it experience it, and in the way the historian creates it, moment by moment, with his imagination. The historian experiences “intimacy” with his subjects through his acts of imaginative sympathy (H 1809, 39). Yet this experience remains bounded in his mind, recalling the phenomenon of “retrospect” in Salmagundi (H 1809, 39; Sal, 224). This retreat into his mental world does not exempt him from the political exigencies of his moment, however, for they demand that history explain the present only on the present’s own terms. When Knickerbocker deliberately confuses personal familiarity with an abstract sort of acquaintance born of mere repetition, he thus points to the inseparability of personal character from writing and reading of all kinds. But even more he highlights the flexibility of truth claims, which increases in direct proportion to a historian’s insistence that he knows the truth better than anyone else. Like

the personal “intimacy” between friends and lovers, Knickerbocker avers, that between historians and “the patriarchs and other great men of antiquity” grows “with time” (H 1809, 39). Rather than diminishing access to the truth, therefore, the passage of time makes it possible for “future writers” to “give us a picture of men and manners ... far more copious and accurate” than whatever accounts their contemporaries could give (H 1809, 39). The burden of proof in such writing lies simply with the raw fact of historical distance, and the duration of the historian’s study. History then is the tautological product of the historian’s affective imagination, in which the standards of verification cannot be untangled from the imaginative acts which created them in the first place.

The political uses of this conception, especially in “this age of skepticism” and Enlightenment, are obvious to Knickerbocker (H 1809, 42). What a common law jurist like Blackstone shares with natural law theorists like Grotius and Pufendorf is constant recourse to history to legitimate his conception of law. They all invoke precedent to supply justification for whatever requires it in the present, rather than conceiving precedents as stable baselines against which to measure the legitimacy of present actions. The Dutch and English colonists knew this very well, and in their admittedly perfunctory search for historical pretext for seizing native American land they latch on to the one inalienable right they can agree upon after thumbing through “Blackstone, and all the learned expounders of the law:” “the RIGHT OF EXTERMINATION, or in other words, the RIGHT BY GUNPOWDER” (H 1809, 62). It is but a small step from this abuse of legal history (which Knickerbocker typically associates with the natural law tradition) to the wholesale concoction of explanatory systems to support the claims of empire. If it is most convenient for the colonizers to conclude that “this country was never populated” in

order to assert the right of acquiring property merely by “DISCOVERY,” then in modernity’s relativistic climate it is perfectly acceptable to come to such “a conclusion,” for it agrees so “perfectly” with “the rules of logic” which, conveniently enough, they also determine themselves (H 1809, 42, 52). Since a people so engaged in the enterprise of conquest and empire employ their learned men to “weave whole systems out of nothing” to support their designs, Knickerbocker reciprocates by undoing the threads of such systems to reveal the “nothingness” at their core (H 1809, 48, 443).

But there is more to this whimsical conception of, and assault on, history than caustic political critique. Knickerbocker addresses readers in a manner consistent with the uneasy author/reader relationship Irving and his cohorts established in Salmagundi. He badgers them to adopt his impatience; he piques their interest with dramatic turns in his narrative, setting up expectations only to suspend their fulfillment indefinitely; and he prompts them to imagine their own resolutions to historical events since, after all, that is what historians do as well. By making his readers parties to the creation of history in language, Knickerbocker challenges them not to accept history passively but to read against the grain of whatever they receive as historical truth. As the History formulates this challenge, it can only ever be a collaborative enterprise, much like the making of a society-within-a-society in the pages of periodical essays. But instead of leaving the making of history at the level of implication as it had always been in the periodical tradition, Knickerbocker’s direct turn to history represents a culmination of that tradition in American letters. Irving thereby creates a kind of shadow conscience for American literature, the ethical assumptions of which had originally become part of American

literary culture through the influence of a body of essay writing which was at that very moment hastening to its end in early nineteenth-century New York.

A History of New York's impact on readers was immediate and far-reaching.

Within a year the book sold enough copies to establish Irving as a more or less professional author.<sup>63</sup> While Walter Scott laughed at Knickerbocker's impudence and puzzled over the book's political allusions in Scotland, American readers as far west as Mackinac likewise passed copies from hand to hand.<sup>64</sup> Not everyone was pleased, however. An 1809 letter survives in which a friend of Irving's notes that some in New York were stung by what they took for "satire and ridicule of the old Dutch people," and the year before Irving brought out The Sketch Book Gulian C. Verplanck delivered a speech to the New York Historical Society in the course of which he bemoaned the History's indulgence in "coarse caricature."<sup>65</sup> But in the three decades following Verplanck's censure, references to the History as Irving's crowning literary achievement had become routine in critical notices of his subsequent work.

The almost unalloyed praise American and British reviewers heaped on the History following The Sketch Book's publication has led critics generally to assume that Irving's return to the Knickerbocker persona at the start of the 1840s was either a sign of flagging creative energies, or the desperate act of a struggling writer to maintain popularity by sticking to a tried-and-true formula. But this overlooks the core import of

---

<sup>63</sup> Williams, Washington Irving, 1: 119. Tradition has it that Irving netted over two thousand dollars in profits from sales of the original edition of the book.

<sup>64</sup> Williams, Washington Irving, 1: 117, 119.

<sup>65</sup> Life and Letters, 1: 247, 241.

Knickerbocker history to Irving's sense of his role as a public author. In the wake of The Sketch Book's success with British reviewers, some American critics began to question Irving's cultural loyalties. Their fears that Irving was in danger of selling short his national origins to curry favor with the English public seemed confirmed by the even more Anglophilic Bracebridge Hall (1822). No one questioned his skills as a stylist or abilities in the sentimental vein. But Irving seemed to these reviewers to be coasting, exchanging verve and originality for easy popularity. The North American Review declared in 1819 that whatever The Sketch Book's undeniable merits, the History was nonetheless the "much more powerful" book.<sup>66</sup> Three decades later in a review of the 1848 History, the Literary World marveled at how the work "conveys an idea of powers far beyond anything [Irving] has ever accomplished."<sup>67</sup> Knickerbocker was, however, more than an easy meal ticket for his author.

As Irving conceived him, Diedrich spoke from the past in two important respects. His imaginative dwelling in Old Dutch New York, coupled with his anti-factional and literary politics, casts him as a remnant of a previous time. With the 1812 edition of the History, however, Knickerbocker's voice literally became consigned to the past. After reading the "exuberant eulogium passed on him in the Port Folio" Diedrich was "overpowered," and a short time later he died (H 1848, 14).<sup>68</sup> Irving's decision to put

---

<sup>66</sup> The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal, September 1819, 337.

<sup>67</sup> The Literary World, 2 September 1848, 604.

<sup>68</sup> No scholar (including the present one) has been able to locate a review of the History in The Port Folio prior to a notice of the 1812 edition in the magazine's October 1812 issue. But it would appear that Irving in this addition to the "Account of the Author" refers to the flattering account of himself in the January 1812 Port Folio, which is discussed below.

Knickerbocker to rest accentuated that part of his former persona's character which pulled further and further away from the present toward total immersion in what time's forward march was leaving behind. In this way, Irving – deliberately or not – anticipates subsequent developments in his authorial career. At a crucial moment in the 1809 History, Knickerbocker pauses on the Battery to lament “the melancholy progress of improvement” and the force of “the overwhelming tide of modern innovation” (149-150). When he contrasts “in sober sadness, the present day, with the hallowed years behind the mountains” it is difficult not to hear stirrings of what will become Irving's turn to the Catskills for inspiration in the next productions to issue from the Knickerbocker persona, “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (H 1809, 149). And this is, in fact, where Knickerbocker went after he left his manuscript at the Handasides' inn, “for the purpose of inspecting certain ancient records” pertaining to old Dutch life along the Tappan Zee (H 1848, 12). The manuscripts he putatively left behind at his death then furnished Irving with the two sketches for which he is best remembered.

Yet even here, as Irving apparently looks toward his reinvention as the complaisant Geoffrey Crayon, his old resentments of both thoughtless consumers and New York's civic elite for their collective neglect of literature still simmer. When he declares in this revised “Account of the Author” that “few authors have ever lived to receive such illustrious awards” as Knickerbocker had, Irving throws down the gauntlet, daring readers to see clearly the fate of the author and intellectual in Manhattan circa 1812. In the wake of his manuscript's publication by Handaside and the librarian, Knickerbocker received “various honours and distinctions” befitting a historian of his

---

stature (H 1848, 14). Indeed, he was lucky enough to have gained all “the advantages of a literary reputation” which, in New York City, amount to being “continually importuned to write advertisements, petitions, hand-bills, and productions of similar import” (H 1848, 14). The man of letters is thus reduced to a cog in the wheels of petty commerce and even pettier politicking. For its part, the New-York Historical Society gets in its licks as well. It “is rumored,” Irving dryly remarks, that its members “have it in mind to erect a wooden monument in the Bowling Green” to Knickerbocker’s memory, assured of shortly being devoured by worms and the elements (H 1809, 461). Old Diedrich’s melancholy fate gives especially bitter point to the notion of being killed with kindness.

That Irving was determined to keep this sardonic strain in his writing alive, if muted, in subsequent decades is nowhere made clearer than in the Knickerbocker Magazine, where Geoffrey Crayon returns to Knickerbocker’s seat (literally his “elbow chair”) for inspiration.<sup>69</sup> This 1839 letter to the Knickerbocker performs a remarkable act of splitting and rapprochement among Irving’s two personae. Crayon claims that when he was but “an idle stripling” Knickerbocker took him by the hand and led him “into those paths of local and traditional lore” whose literary rendering was to become Irving’s métier.<sup>70</sup> When Crayon’s “vagrant fancy” spurred him “to wander about the world,” Knickerbocker “remained at home,” composing the tales which ended up bearing his name in The Sketch Book and, as readers learned in the additions to the “Apology” in the 1812 History, watching with some pride as “his name had risen to renown” in the wake

---

<sup>69</sup> “[Letter of ‘Geoffrey Crayon’ to the Editor of the Knickerbocker Magazine],” in Miscellaneous Writings 1803-1859, 2 vols., ed. Wayne R. Kine, vol. 29 of The Complete Works of Washington Irving (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 2: 103.

<sup>70</sup> “[Letter],” 2: 102.

of the History's success.<sup>71</sup> Upon Crayon's return to his "parent soil," the disconnection he experiences in witnessing how Manhattan's citizens memorialize Knickerbocker leads him not simply to pen his "rambling epistle" in more apt memory of the old historian, but to seek solace from this depressing spectacle by taking his seat at the "old Dutch writing-desk" where Knickerbocker had studied and written.<sup>72</sup> The ostensible Knickerbocker manuscripts which then make up Crayon's contributions to the magazine in the early 1740s form an imaginative alternative to a society that has "decreed all manner of costly honors to [Knickerbocker's] memory."<sup>73</sup> While noting bemusedly how "a great oyster-house" now bears "the name of 'Knickerbocker Hall'" and "new-year cakes" are sold with the old Dutchman's "effigy imprinted" on them, Crayon narrowly escapes "the pleasure of being run over by a Knickerbocker omnibus!"<sup>74</sup> It is as if Irving has unintentionally created a monster of commerce that threatens his very life. Compared with this perverse embalming of Knickerbocker in the marts of commercial exchange he so detested, even the Historical Society's erection of a wooden monument to his honor seems a more considered, and considerate, gesture.

At least some of Irving's early contemporaries recognized in Knickerbocker's History precisely the sort of literary resistance to a society vitiated by the imperatives of the market that Irving feels compelled to reiterate thirty years later. Reviews in both the Boston Monthly Anthology and The Port Folio identify the book's greatest strength as its

---

<sup>71</sup> "[Letter]," 2: 102.

<sup>72</sup> "[Letter]," 2: 102.

<sup>73</sup> "[Letter]," 2: 102.

<sup>74</sup> "[Letter]," 2: 102.



capacity to spark in readers a sense of alliance against the mass myopia endemic to modern urban life. Generically, the touchstone for this reading is, of course, satire rather than history. But even more, it is redolent of the periodical essay's mode of ironic consensus-building. "To examine [the History] seriously in a historical point of view, would be ridiculous," the anonymous reviewer in the 1810 Monthly Anthology contends.<sup>75</sup> But its satire of Jeffersonian Republicans surely carries a sting. If "any thing can be hoped from [Knickerbocker's] ridicule," he offers, the Jeffersonians "might by this work be shamed into a retreat and concealment."<sup>76</sup> More important, however, is the sense of belonging the History gives to readers who share its manifest pleasure in "that ridicule which is caused by trifling, and, to the mass of the world, unobserved relations and accidents of persons and situations."<sup>77</sup> They move together with Knickerbocker "in his pilgrimage through the lanes and streets, the roads and avenues of this uneven world," participating in his campaign to uncover the absurdities and pretensions lurking around every corner, and behind every visage.<sup>78</sup> As he "refreshes himself with many a secret smile at occurrences that excite no observation from the dull, trudging mass of mortals," his readers learn by example how to do so in their own rounds through the city.<sup>79</sup>

Two years later the "Stranger in New York" series in The Port Folio similarly characterizes Irving as a good-humored scourge of ridiculous behavior and a standard-

---

<sup>75</sup> The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review, February 1810, 123.

<sup>76</sup> The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review, February 1810, 123.

<sup>77</sup> The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review, February 1810, 124.

<sup>78</sup> The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review, February 1810, 124.

<sup>79</sup> The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review, February 1810, 124.

bearer for literature in a resolutely un-literary city. Irving's "vigour and brilliancy" and "talents for satire" are especially worth remarking given that they shine forth among an "enterprising people" whose devotion to "mercantile pursuits" is "calculated to dampen the ardour, and check the enterprise of literary ambition."<sup>80</sup> This reviewer places Salmagundi and "Knickerbocker" firmly in the tradition of The Spectator, asserting that Irving rivals even this illustrious predecessor in the powers of discernment he displays.<sup>81</sup> Like the Monthly Anthology reviewer, this "Stranger" in The Port Folio focuses on the quickness of Irving's "conceptions" and the striking aptness of the "ludicrous combinations of images" through which he renders his singular vision of the "reigning follies of the day."<sup>82</sup> Nine months later The Port Folio printed a notice of the History's second edition, lauding Knickerbocker's "genius" and "humour" in language taken directly from the periodical tradition which still, as we have seen, thrived in The Port Folio's pages.<sup>83</sup> As it should for his readers, "habit had strengthened" Knickerbocker's "natural tendency to investigation" until "he had become a keen and minute observer" of everyday life.<sup>84</sup> His "attention" to "the nice and delicate shades of conduct and manners" helped Knickerbocker see "every thing with an original eye" that "seized whatever was ludicrous in passing events" for the edification of his readers.<sup>85</sup> "In his strictures on the

---

<sup>80</sup> The Port Folio, January 1812, 32.

<sup>81</sup> The Port Folio, January 1812, 32.

<sup>82</sup> The Port Folio, January 1812, 32.

<sup>83</sup> The Port Folio, October 1812, 344.

<sup>84</sup> The Port Folio, October 1812, 344.

<sup>85</sup> The Port Folio, October 1812, 344.

fine arts, and his reflections on men and manners,” the “Stranger” writes, Irving “displays a knowledge of polite learning and of human nature, extensive, critical, and just.”<sup>86</sup>

However much (or little) Manhattan’s civic elite might have been nettled by the fun Knickerbocker had at their expense, fellow literati of Irving’s stripe were clearly equipped to grasp the mode in which he wrote for they all modeled their efforts on a common body of writing.

Irving’s fifty-year engagement with the Knickerbocker persona thus represents his continuing literary debt to the “double dissimulation” characteristic of the periodical tradition’s ironic take on the urban world of commerce.<sup>87</sup> This is why one must be wary of taking too seriously Irving’s contrition in the 1848 edition of the History. The sincere reflection on the distance he has traveled from the angry young man of the 1809 History to the complacent patriarch of American letters in 1848 that modern critics typically regret in their disappointed assessments of Irving’s career turns out not to be so sincere after all.<sup>88</sup> When he protests too much the innocence of his motives and exaggerates the offense the book putatively caused, Irving deliberately magnifies the History’s status as itself an historical event. The self-regard he ironically reveals in the 1848 “Author’s

---

<sup>86</sup> The Port Folio, October 1812, 344.

<sup>87</sup> Alexander Chalmers, preface to The World, vols. 22-24 of The British Essayists, comp. A. Chalmers, 38 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1855), 22:15.

<sup>88</sup> Ferguson, Law and Letters, 150-172, is the most forceful statement of the “angry young man” thesis, but see also Hedges, Washington Irving, 65-106. Warner, “Irving’s Posterity,” offers the dissenting view that “Irving’s characteristic tone” is “at once ironic and sentimental” throughout his authorial career, an assessment with which I wholly concur (775).

Apology” thus assumes a renegade guise that recapitulates Knickerbocker’s defiant resolution and arch megalomania.

To recognize this is to see how even at this late date Irving places his first major literary work in a set of relationships with readers whose terms are marked out by the imaginative, ironic historicism most immediately associated in the early nineteenth century with the periodical essay. At first glance Irving’s explanation of the History’s genesis here slots in neatly with the “Romantic historicism” associated in Irving’s time (and ours) with the works of Sir Walter Scott and Madame de Staël.<sup>89</sup> He casts his younger self as an imaginative archivist, reaching into the “remote and forgotten region” of Old Dutch New York to bring forth “the poetic age of our city,” hopeful that with “some indulgence from poetic minds” the loose conception of “history” which had guided his efforts would stimulate interest in the city’s past, and enliven the present with the recovery of old traditions (H 1848, 3, 4). “Before the appearance of my work,” he grandly claims, “the peculiar and racy customs and usages derived from our Dutch progenitors were unnoticed, or regarded with indifference, or adverted to with a sneer” (H 1848, 4). Thanks to the History, however, they now “form a convivial currency” and “link our whole community together in good humor and good fellowship” (H 1848, 4). In this self-presentation, the “far greater part” of New York’s readers sympathize with the

---

<sup>89</sup> James Chandler, England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 211. See Sir Walter Scott, “An Essay on Romance,” in Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and the Drama (Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1834); Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, ed. J. G. Lockhart (Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1833); and W. F. H. Nicolaisen, “Scott and the Folk Tradition,” in Sir Walter Scott: The Long-Forgotten Melody, ed. Alan Bold (London: Vision Press Limited, 1983), 127-142. See also “Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions,” in Madame de Staël on Politics, Literature and National Character, trans. and ed. Morroe Berger (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1964), 111-201

author's benevolent intentions and share his poetic understanding of the function of history, receiving his efforts "in the same temper with which they were executed" (H 1848, 5). One might even say, with critics operating in an older mode of Romantic historicism, that the History captured the spirit of the age.

But the proof Irving adduces of his work's far-ranging effects on the public resonates with the ironic views of modern consumer culture, and its antithetical relationship with the life of the mind, that Irving had reiterated in his revised 1812 "Account of the Author," and again in his 1839 letter to the Knickerbocker Magazine. Knickerbocker's rollicking satire of pedantic self-absorption, political opportunism, and immature nationalism has been literally domesticated. The cantankerous historian who had vexed readers with his whimsical harangues has become a folk figure of the most neutered sort. His "very name" has indeed "become a 'household word,'" Irving notes (H 1848, 5). But his evident pride in this development demands to be read within the scare quotes Irving provides. This is because, in Manhattan circa 1848, that name lives on only as a form of branding. Knickerbocker "insurance companies," "steamboats," "omnibuses," "bread," and "ice" proliferate in the city, and in the mock pride with which Irving itemizes these products and services we once again hear the old historian's voice (H 1848, 5). From the obscure and "poetic" character of New York the History sought to bring to light springs only the most banal forms of commercial exchange (H 1848, 3). The "pleasant associations and quaint characteristics" of Knickerbocker's Manhattan have not, after all, led to mass wonderment or public desires to perpetuate knowledge of the past (H 1848, 5). Rather, they have been adapted to "the customs and usages" of buying and selling (H 1848, 5).

The “Author’s” civic pride in having “struck the right chord” with the History does appear genuine to a certain degree: Irving is hardly a Juvenal or a Swift, or even a Cooper (H 1848, 5). His efforts to maintain in public memory the “good old Dutch times” and to give the city a popular humorous account of its origins were at least partly successful, if only in how they had initially secured New York a seat in the international republic of letters (H 1848, 5). And when he claims status for the book as a kind of folk history, his certainty that the History “will still be received with good-humored indulgence, and be thumbed and chuckled over by the family fireside” places the work firmly within the line of familiar transmission which is the province of folk culture (H 1848, 5). Yet this literal domestication of what had been a most manifestly public satire feels tinged with the author’s regret, especially in light of how the “harmony” his literary “dealings” have forged “with the feelings and humors of [his] townsmen” amounts to a crass commercialization of his persona (H 1848, 5). Here finally, if in a tamped-down manner, the Knickerbocker of old lives on in the author’s mock-apology, standing as a stubborn reminder of the ironic mode of literary citizenship whose relative absence in New York circa 1809 had originally compelled the young Irving to launch his History into the world.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, John. "A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law." In Papers of John Adams, vol. 1, edited by Robert J. Taylor et al. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977 - .
- Agnew, Lois. "The Stoic Temper in Belletristic Rhetoric." Rhetoric Society Quarterly 33, no. 2 (2003): 69-88.
- Allan, David. Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993.
- Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso, 1991.
- Anderson, Quentin. The Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.
- Appleby, Joyce. Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s. New York University Press, 1984.
- Astin, Alan E. Cato the Censor. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.
- The Athenian Gazette or Casuistical Mercury, 17 March 1691.
- Author of Harlot's Progress. The Progress of a Rake: or, the Templar's Exit. In Ten Cantos, in Hudibrastick Verse. London, 1732.
- Baker, Keith Michael. "Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas." In Habermas and the Public Sphere, edited by Craig Calhoun. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.
- Baldwin, Edward Chauncey. "La Bruyère's Influence Upon Addison." PMLA 19, no. 4 (1904): 479-495.
- . "The Relation of the Seventeenth-Century Character to the Periodical Essay." PMLA 19, no. 1 (1904): 75-114.
- Barker, Hannah. Newspapers, Politics, and English Society, 1695-1855. Harlow, England: Longman, 2000.
- . Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Barrell, John. "Introduction: A Republic of Taste." In The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

- Bate, Walter Jackson. Introduction to The Rambler. Vols. 3-5 of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, edited by W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.
- Becker, Marvin B. The Emergence of Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century: A Privileged Moment in the History of England, Scotland, and France. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Beer, Samuel H. To Make a Nation: The Rediscovery of American Federalism. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1993.
- Belles Lettres Repository, 15 May and 15 June 1820.
- Bertelsen, Lance. The Nonsense Club: Literature and Popular Culture, 1749-1764. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.
- Black, Jeremy. The English Press in the Eighteenth Century. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987.
- Black, Michael L. "Political Satire in Knickerbocker's History." In The Knickerbocker Tradition: Washington Irving's New York, edited by Andrew B. Myers. Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1974.
- Black, Scott. "Social and Literary Form in the Spectator." ELH 33 (1999): 21-42.
- Blackmore, Sir Richard. "An Essay Upon Wit." In Essays Upon Several Subjects. London, 1726.
- Blackstone, William. Commentaries on the Laws of England. 4 vols. London: A. Strahan, for T. Cadell and J. Butterworth and son, 1825.
- Bloom, Edward A. and Lillian D., and Edmund Leites. Educating the Audience: Addison, Steele, and Eighteenth-Century Culture. Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1984.
- Bloomfield, Maxwell. "Antilawyer Sentiment in the Early Republic." In American Lawyers in a Changing Society, 1776-1876. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Bond, Richmond P., ed. Studies in the English Periodical. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957.
- . The Tatler: The Making of a Literary Journal. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.



- Booth, Wayne C. A Rhetoric of Irony. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Boswell, James. Boswell's Life of Johnson, edited by George Birkbeck Hill. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934.
- Bowden, Mary Witherspoon. "Knickerbocker's History and the 'Enlightened' Men of New York City." American Literature 47, no. 2 (1975): 159-172.
- Boyte, Harry C. "The Pragmatic Ends of Popular Politics." In Habermas and the Public Sphere.
- Brand, Dana. The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Brewer, John. The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- The British Censor. A Poem. London, 1712.
- Browning, Reed. Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.
- Burke, Edmund. "Mr. Burke's Speech on Moving His Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies." In On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters: Edmund Burke, edited by David Bromwich. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Burke, Peter. The Art of Conversation. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- . "A Civil Tongue: Language and Politeness in Early Modern Europe." In Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Burrows, Edwin G., and Mike Wallace. Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Burton, John Hill, ed. Life and Correspondence of David Hume. 2 vols. 1846. Reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, 1983.
- Calhoun, Craig, ed. Habermas and the Public Sphere. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.
- Canby, Henry Seidel. Classic Americans: A Study of Eminent American Writers from Irving to Whitman. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932.
- Carter, Philip. Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800. London: Longman, 2001.

Cavell, Stanley. "Being Odd, Getting Even." In Emerson's Transcendental Etudes, edited by David Justin Hodge. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Chalmers, Alexander, comp. The British Essayists; with Prefaces, Historical and Biographical. 38 vols. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1855.

The Censor. London, 1715-17.

Chandler, James. England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

The Character of a Coffee-House, with the Symptomes of a Town Wit. London, 1673.

The Characters, or the Manners of the Age. By Monsieur de la Bruyere [sic], of the French Academy. London, 1699.

Christensen, Jerome. "The Commerce of Letters." In Practicing Enlightenment: Hume and the Formation of a Literary Career. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.

Cicero, Marcus Tullius. De Officiis. Translated by Walter Miller. 1913. Reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

---. De Officiis (On Duties). Edited and translated by M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

---. De Oratore. Translated by E. W. Sutton. 2 vols. 1942. Reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

---. Tusculan Disputations. Translated by J. E. King. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945.

Clark, J. C. D. English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics in the Ancien Regime. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Clive, John, and Bernard Bailyn. "England's Cultural Provinces: Scotland and America." The William and Mary Quarterly 11 (1954): 200-213.

Coffee-houses Vindicated. London, 1675.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. The Major Works. Edited by H. J. Jackson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Collins, William. "Ode to Liberty." In The Poems of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith, edited by Roger Lonsdale. London: Longman, 1969.

A Condoling Letter to The Tattler: Or Account of the Misfortunes of Isaac Bickerstaff Esq. London, n.d.

Copley, Stephen. "Commerce, Conversation and Politeness in the Early Eighteenth-Century Periodical." British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies 18, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 63-77.

---. "The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture." In Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art 1700-1850, edited by John Barrell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Cowan, Brian. "Mr. Spectator and the Coffeehouse Public Sphere." Eighteenth-Century Studies 37 (Spring 2004): 345-366.

Cowper, William. The Poems of William Cowper, Vol. 1: 1748-1782. Edited by John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

Damrosch, Leopold Jr. "Johnson's Manner of Proceeding in the Rambler." ELH 40 (Spring 1973): 70-89.

Davidson, Jenny. Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Defoe, Daniel. The Best of Defoe's Review: An Anthology. Edited by William L. Payne. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.

---. A Tour Thro' London. London, 1725.

Dekker, Thomas. Lanthorne and candle-light. Or The bell-mans second nights-walke In which hee brings to light, a broode of more strange villanies, than euer were till this yeare discouered. London, 1608.

Dixon, John Converse. "Politicizing Samuel Johnson: The Moral Essays and the Question of Ideology." College Literature 25 (Fall 1998): 67-91.

Dowling, William C. "Augustan England and British America." In The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780, edited by John Richetti. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

---. The Epistolary Moment: The Poetics of the Eighteenth-Century Verse Epistle. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

---. Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999.

- Downie, J. A., and Thomas N. Corns, eds. Telling People What to Think: Early Eighteenth-Century Periodicals from The Review to The Rambler. London: Frank Cass, 1993.
- Dryden, John. "A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire." In Essays of John Dryden. Vol.2. Edited by W. P. Kerr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961.
- Durant, David. "Aeolism in Knickerbocker's A History of New York." American Literature 41, no. 4 (1970): 493-506.
- Dwyer, John. Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland. Edinburgh: J. Donald, 1987.
- Eagleton, Terry. The Function of Criticism: From "The Spectator" to Post-Structuralism. London: Verso, 1984.
- Earle, John. Microcosmography, or a Piece of the World Discovered in Essays and Characters. London, 1633.
- Eisenstein, Elizabeth. The Printing Press as an Agent of Change. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Elkins, Stanley, and Eric McKittrick. The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Ellis, Harold Milton. Joseph Dennie and His Circle: A Study in American Literature from 1792 to 1812. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1915.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self-Reliance." In Emerson: Essays & Poems, edited by Joel Porte, Harold Bloom, and Paul Kane. Library of America, 1996.
- Emerson, Roger L. "The Social Composition of Enlightened Scotland: the Select Society of Edinburgh, 1754-1764." In Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 114 (1973): 323-328.
- Epictetus. Discourses. 2 vols. Edited by W. A. Oldfather. London: William Heinemann, 1925.
- Evans, James E. "The English Lineage of Diedrich Knickerbocker." Early American Literature 10, no. 1 (1975): 3-13.
- Ezell, Margaret J. M. Social Authorship and the Advent of Print. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- The Federalist Papers. Edited by Clinton Rossiter. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999.

Ferguson, Robert A. "The Emulation of Sir William Jones in the Early Republic." New England Quarterly 52 (March 1979): 1-26.

---. Law and Letters in American Culture. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Fetterley, Judith. The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.

Fielding, Henry. The History of Tom Jones. Edited by R. P. C. Mutter. London: Penguin, 1966.

---. The Temple Beau. In The Works of Henry Fielding. Vol. 8. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967.

Ford, Miriam Allen De. The Overbury Affair: The Murder Trial that Rocked the Court of King James I. Philadelphia: Chilton Co., 1960.

Fortier, Mark. The Culture of Equity in Early Modern England. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005.

Furtwangler, Albert. "The Making of Mr. Spectator." MLQ 38 (March 1977): 21-39.

France, Peter. Politeness and Its Discontents: Problems in French Classical Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Franklin, Benjamin. Benjamin Franklin: Autobiography, Poor Richard, and Later Writings. Edited by J. A. Leo Lemay. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1997.

Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In The Phantom Public Sphere, edited by Bruce Robbins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Fullmer, June Z. Young Humphrey Davy: The Making of an Experimental Chemist. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2000.

Gally, Henry. "A Critical Essay on Characteristic-Writings." In The Moral Characters of Theophrastus. London, 1725.

Gaskell, Philip. A New Introduction to Bibliography (1974; reprint with corrections, New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1995), 73-83.

Gerrard, Christine. The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

- Giddens, Anthony. Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Gilmore, Michael T. "The Literature of the Revolutionary and Early National Periods." In The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume 1 1590-1820, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Gippert, Susanne. "The Poet and the Statesman: Plutarchan Biography in Eighteenth Century England." In The Statesman in Plutarch's Works ... Volume 1: Plutarch's Statesman and His Aftermath: Political, Philosophical, and Literary Aspects. Edited by Lukas De Blois et al. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Goldsmith, Oliver. The Citizen of the World & The Bee, By Oliver Goldsmith. Edited by Austin Dobson. London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1934.
- Goodman, Dena. The Republic of Letters. A Cultural History of the French Revolution. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Gordon, Daniel. Citizens Without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Gordon, Scott Paul. "Voyeuristic Dreams: Mr. Spectator and the Power of Spectacle." The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation 36 (1995): 3-23.
- Graham, Walter. The Beginnings of English Literary Periodicals: A Study of Periodical Literature 1665-1715. 1926. Reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1972.
- . English Literary Periodicals. New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1930.
- Greene, Donald. Samuel Johnson. New York: Twayne, 1970.
- Guttmann, Allen. "Washington Irving and the Conservative Imagination." American Literature 36 (1964): 165-173.
- Habermas, Jürgen. The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society. Trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.
- Hall, Joseph. Characters of Vertues and Vices. In The Works of the Right Reverend Joseph Hall. Vol. 6. Edited by Philip Wynter. New York: AMS Press, 1969.
- Handwerk, Gary J. Irony and Ethics in Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Hazlitt, William. "Elia, and Geoffrey Crayon." In The Spirit of the Age. London: 1825.

- Hedges, William. "Knickerbocker, Bolingbroke, and the Fiction of History." Journal of the History of Ideas 20, no. 3 (1959): 317-328.
- . Washington Irving: An American Study, 1802-1832. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965.
- . "Washington Irving: Nonsense, the Fat of the Land and the Dream of Indolence." In 1860-1974: A Century of Commentary on the Works of Washington Irving, edited by Andrew B. Meyers. Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1976.
- Hofstadter, Richard. Anti-Intellectualism in American Life. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963.
- Holdsworth, W. S. "Some Aspects of Blackstone and His Commentaries." The Cambridge Law Journal 4, no. 3 (1932): 261-285.
- Home, Henry (Lord Kames). Loose Hints Upon Education Chiefly Concerning the Culture of the Heart. 1782. Reprint, with a new introduction by John Valdimir Price, London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1993.
- Horace. The Essential Horace: Odes, Epodes, Satires, and Epistles. Translated by Burton Raffel. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983.
- Hume, David. Essays Moral, Political, and Literary. Edited by Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985.
- Hutcheon, Linda. Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Ibbetson, David. Common Law and 'Ius Commune'. London: Selden Society, 2001.
- Irving, Washington. Diedrich Knickerbocker's A History of New York. Edited by Stanley Williams and Tremaine McDowell. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927.
- . A History of New York. Edited by Michael L. Black and Nancy B. Black. Vol. 7 of The Complete Works of Washington Irving. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984.
- . "[Letter of 'Geoffrey Crayon' to the Editor of the Knickerbocker Magazine]." In Miscellaneous Writings 1803-1859. 2 vols. Edited by Wayne R. Kine. Vol. 29 of The Complete Works of Washington Irving. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981.
- . Oliver Goldsmith: A Biography. Edited by Elsie Lee West. Vol. 17 of The Complete Works of Washington Irving. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978.

- . Salmagundi. In Letters of Jonathan Oldstyle, gent.; Salmagundi: or, The whim-whams and opinions of Launcelot Langstaff, Esq. & others. Edited by Bruce I. Granger and Martha Hartzog. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977.
- . The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. Edited by Haskell Springer. Vol. 8 of The Complete Works of Washington Irving. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978.
- Italia, Iona. The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century: Anxious Employment. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Jebb, Richard C. Introduction to The Characters of Theophrastus. London: Macmillan and Co., 1909.
- Jefferson, Thomas. Thomas Jefferson: Writings. Edited by Merrill D. Peterson. New York: Library of America, 1984.
- Jeffery, Sally. "Architecture." In Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Cambridge Cultural History, edited by Boris Ford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Johnson, Samuel. The Lives of the English Poets. 2 vols. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1968.
- Jordan, Sarah. The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003.
- Junius [pseud.] The Letters of Junius. Edited by John Cannon. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.
- Kerber, Linda K. Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America. 1970. Reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.
- Ketcham, Michael G. Transparent Designs: Reading, Performance, and Form in the "Spectator" Papers. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985.
- Kimball, Bruce A. Orators & Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education. Exp. ed. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1995.
- King, Everard H. James Beattie. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977.
- Kinsley, William. "Meaning and Format: Mr. Spectator and His Folio Half-Sheets." ELH 34 (1967): 482-94.
- Klein, Lawrence E. "Coffeehouse Civility, 1660-1714: An Aspect of Post-Courtly Culture in England." Huntingdon Library Quarterly 59, no. 1 (1997): 31-51.
- . "Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England." Historical



- Journal 32, no. 3 (1989): 583-605.
- . "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century." The Historical Journal 45, no. 4 (2002): 869-898.
- . Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- . "The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness," Eighteenth-Century Studies 18 (1984-85): 186-214.
- Knight, Charles A. "The Created World of the Edinburgh Periodicals." Scottish Literary Journal (December 1979): 20-36.
- . "The Spectator's Generalizing Discourse." Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism 16 (April 1993): 44-57.
- . "The Spectator's Moral Economy." Modern Philology 91 (1993): 161-179.
- Korshin, Paul J. "Johnson, the Essay, and The Rambler." In The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson, edited by Greg Clingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Kramnick, Isaac. Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole. 1968. Reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Kramnick, Jonathan Brody. Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- La Bruyère, Jean de. The Characters: or, Manners of the Age. London, 1699.
- Landon, Michael. The Triumph of the Lawyers: Their Role in English Politics, 1678-1689. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1970.
- Langford, Paul. A Polite and Commercial People, England 1727-1783. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Latham, Sean, and Robert Scholes. "The Rise of Periodical Studies." PMLA 121 (March 2006): 517-531.
- Leary, Lewis. "Washington Irving and the Comic Imagination." In Critical Essays on Washington Irving, edited by Ralph M. Aderman. Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1990.
- Lemmings, David. Professors of the Law: Barristers and English Legal Culture in the

Eighteenth Century. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Lieberman, David. "The Legal Needs of a Commercial Society: The Jurisprudence of Lord Kames." In Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Enlightenment, edited by Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

The Life of Cato the Censor. Humbly Dedicated to R. S---le, Esq.. London, 1714.

Lipking, Lawrence. Samuel Johnson: The Life of an Author. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review, 18 March 1820.

The Literary World, 2 September 1848.

Looby, Christopher. Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

---., ed. The William and Mary Quarterly 62, no. 1 (2005).

The Lounger's Common-Place Book ... To Be Continued Occasionally. London, 1792.

The Lounger's Miscellany; or the Lucubrations [sic] of Abel Slug, Esq. London, 1789.

Lowenstein, Joseph, and Paul Stevens, eds. Criticism 46 (Spring 2004).

---. "Introduction: Charting Habermas's 'Literary' or 'Precursor' Public Sphere." Criticism (Spring 2004): 201-205.

Lupton, Donald. London and the countrey carbonadoed and quartred into seuerall characters. London, 1632.

Mackie, Erin. Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

The Malefactor's Register; or, the Newgate and Tyburn Calendar.... 5 vols. London, 1779.

Manning, William. The Key of Libberty. Edited by Samuel Eliot Morison. The William and Mary Quarterly, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 13, no. 2 (1956): 202-254.

Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius. Edited by C. R. Haines. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Marr, George S. The Periodical Essayists of the Eighteenth Century. Appleton, 1923.

- Maurer, Shawn Lisa. Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- McCoy, Drew R. The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.
- McElroy, David D. Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Literary Clubs and Societies. Washington State University Press, 1969.
- McInerney, David. "Print-Capitalism?" In Masses, Classes and the Public Sphere, edited by Mike Hill and Warren Montag. London: Verso, 2000.
- McLamore, Richard V. "The Dutchman in the Attic: Claiming an Inheritance in The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon." American Literature 72, no. 1 (2000): 31-57.
- Meehan, Michael. "Neo-Classical Criticism." In The Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism, edited by Martin Gayle et al. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Middleton, Conyers. History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 3 vols. London, 1741.
- Mikics, David. "Emerson's Individualism." In The Romance of Individualism in Emerson and Nietzsche. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003.
- Miller, Peter N. "The Figure of Cicero." In Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Miller, Samuel. A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century. 2 vols. 1803. Reprint, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2001.
- Milton, John. Areopagitica. In Complete Poems and Major Prose, edited by Merritt Y. Hughes. New York: Odyssey Press, 1957.
- [Mitchell, Samuel Latham]. The Picture of New York; or The Traveller's Guide through the Commercial Metropolis of the United States, By a Gentleman Residing in this City. New York: Riley & Co., 1807.
- Montaigne, Michel de. The Complete Works of Montaigne: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters, translated by Donald M. Frame. 1948. Reprint, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.
- The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review, February 1810.
- Morris, Corbyn. An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit...To which is

Added, an Analysis of the Characters of an Humourist.... London, 1744.

Müller, Kurt. "'Progressive' and 'Conservative' Concepts of American Identity: Washington Irving's Response to the Franklinesque Model." In The Construction and Contestation of American Cultures and Identities in the Early National Period, edited by Udo J. Hebel. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1999.

Murray, Laura J. "The Aesthetic of Dispossession: Washington Irving and Ideologies of (De)Colonization in the Early Republic." American Literary History 8 (1996): 205-31.

The Museum: or, the Literary and Historical Register. London, 1746-47.

Nauert, Charles G. Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

New Monthly Magazine, March 1820.

A New View of London; or an Ample Account of That City. London, 1708.

Newman, Donald J., ed. The Spectator: Emerging Discourses. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005.

Nicolaisen, W. F. H. "Scott and the Folk Tradition." In Sir Walter Scott: The Long-Forgotten Melody, edited by Alan Bold. London: Vision Press Limited, 1983.

Norris, John. An Essay Towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World. 2 vols. London, 1701-1704.

The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal, September 1819.

Nowotny, Helga. Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience. Translated by Neville Plaice. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994.

O'Flaherty, Patrick. "Johnson's Idler: The Equipment of a Satirist." ELH 37 (June 1970): 211-225.

Ogborn, Miles. Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies 1680-1780. New York: The Guilford Press, 1998.

Osell, Tedra. "Tatling Women in the Public Sphere: Rhetorical Femininity and the English Essay Periodical." Eighteenth-Century Studies 38 (2005): 283-300.

Ostrander, Gilman M. The Republic of Letters: The American Intellectual Community, 1775-1865. Madison, WI: Madison House Publishers, 1999.

- [Overbury, Sir Thomas]. A Wife ... Whereunto are added many witty characters, and conceited newes, written by himselfe and other learned gentlemen his friends. London, 1614.
- Pask, Kevin. "The Bourgeois Public Sphere and the Concept of Literature." Criticism (Spring 2004): 241-256.
- Peltonen, Markku. Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought 1570-1640. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Phillipson, Nicholas. "Culture and Society in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Province: The Case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment." In The University in Society. Vol. 2. Edited by Lawrence Stone. Princeton University Press, 1974.
- . "Lawyers, Landowners, and the Civic Leadership of Post-Union Scotland." Juridical Review (1976): 97-120.
- . "Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of Early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Culture." In Scotland and England, 1286-1815, edited by Roger A. Mason. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, Ltd., 1987.
- . "Politics and Politeness in the Reigns of Anne and the Early Hanoverians." In The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800. Edited by J. G. A. Pocock, Gordon J. Schochet and Lois G. Schwoerer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- . "The Scottish Enlightenment." In The Enlightenment in National Context, edited by Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich. Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Pilon, Frederick. Aerostation; or, the Templar's Strategem. A Farce. In Two Acts. Dublin, 1785.
- Pincus, Steve. "'Coffee Politicians Does Create': Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture." The Journal of Modern History 67 (1995): 807-834.
- Plutarch. The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans. Translated by John Dryden and revised by Arthur Hugh Clough. 1683-86. Reprint, New York: Modern Library, n. d.
- Pocock, J. G. A. The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition. Princeton University Press, 1975.
- . Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- The Port Folio, 1801-1812.

- Porter, Roy. The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000.
- Potkay, Adam. The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- . The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Prostko, Jack. "‘Natural Conversation Set in View’: Shaftesbury and Moral Speech." Eighteenth-Century Studies 23 (1989): 42-61.
- Punter, David. "Fictional Representation of the Law in the Eighteenth Century." Eighteenth-Century Studies 16 (1982): 47-74.
- Randall, Randolph C. "Authors of the Port Folio Revealed by the Hall Files." American Literature 11, no. 4 (1940): 379-416.
- Richard, Carl J. The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Riley, Denise. The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Robinson, Edward. The Early English Coffee House: With an Account of the First Use of Coffee. 1893. Reprint, Hants, England: The Dolphin Press, 1972.
- Rogers, Pat. "‘The Rambler and the Eighteenth-Century Periodical Essay: A Dissenting View." In Telling People What to Think.
- Roth, Martin. Comedy and America: The Lost World of Washington Irving. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1976.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality." In The Social Contract and The Discourses, translated by G. D. H. Cole, revised and augmented by J. H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall. London: David Campbell Publishers, Ltd., 1993.
- Rubin-Dorsky, Jeffrey. Adrift in the Old World: The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ryan, Mary P. "Gender and Public Access: Women’s Politics in Nineteenth-Century America." In Habermas and the Public Sphere.
- Saccamano, Neil. "The Sublime Force of Words in Addison’s ‘Pleasures.’" ELH 58

(1991): 83-106.

Sambrook, James. The Eighteenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1700-1789. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Longman, 1993.

Sir Walter Scott. "An Essay on Romance." In Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and the Drama. Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1834.

---. Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border. Edited by J. G. Lockhart. Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1833.

Sellers, Charles. The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Seneca. Moral Essays. 3 vols. Edited by John W. Basore. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Shaftesbury, Third Earl of, Anthony Ashley Cooper. Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times. Edited by Lawrence E. Klein. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Sharp, James Roger. American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. Shelley's Poetry and Prose. Edited by Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977.

Sher, Richard B. Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Sherman, Stuart. Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form 1660-1785. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Shields, David S. Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Simpson, Lewis P., ed. The Federalist Literary Mind: Selections from the Monthly Anthology and Boston Review, 1803-1811. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962.

---. "The Symbolism of Literary Alienation in the Revolutionary Age." In The Brazen Face of History: Studies in the Literary Consciousness in America. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.

Skinner, Quentin. "Classical Eloquence in Renaissance England." In Reason and

- Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Small, Christopher. The Printed Word: An Instrument of Popularity. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1982.
- Smeed, J. W. The Theophrastan 'Character': The History of a Literary Genre. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.
- Smith, Adam. An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations. 2 vols. Edited by R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981.
- . Theory of Moral Sentiments. Edited by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982.
- Smith, Nigel. Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Sondey, Walter. "From Nation of Virtue to Virtual Nation: Washington Irving and American Nationalism." In Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender, and Nationalism, edited by Jean Pickering and Suzanne Kehde. Washington Square: New York University Press, 1997.
- Speck, W. A. Stability and Strife: England, 1714-1760. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- The Spectator. 5 vols. Edited by Donald F. Bond. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Spector, Robert D. "The Connoisseur: A Study of the Functions of a Persona." In English Writers of the Eighteenth Century, edited by John H. Middendorf. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.
- . English Literary Journals and the Climate of Opinion During the Seven Years War. The Hague: Mouton, 1966.
- . Samuel Johnson and the Essay. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997.
- Spufford, Margaret. Small Books and Pleasant Histories. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981.
- A Spy on Mother Midnight: or, the Templar Metamorphos'd. London, 1748.
- Staël, Germaine de. "Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions." In Madame de Staël on Politics, Literature and National Character, translated and edited by Morroe Berger. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1964.



- Stallybrass, Peter and Alan White. The Politics and Poetics of Transgression. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Steele, Richard. The Christian Hero. Edited by Rae Blanchard. New York: Octagon Books, 1977.
- Stein, Peter. "The Influence of Roman Law on the Law of Scotland." Juridical Review (December 1963): 213-222.
- Stewart, M. A. "The Stoic Legacy in the Early Scottish Enlightenment." In Atoms, 'Pneuma,' and Tranquillity, edited by Margaret J. Osler. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Sterne, Laurence. The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy. Edited by Ian Campbell Ross. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Stow, John. A suruay of London Contayning the originall, antiquity, increase, moderne estate, and description of that citie, written in the yeare 1598.... London, 1598.
- Sutherland, James Runcieman. The Restoration Newspaper and its Development. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Swift, Jonathan. Gulliver's Travels. In The Writings of Jonathan Swift, edited by Robert A. Greenberg and William B. Piper. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973.
- The Tatler. 3 vols. Edited by Donald F. Bond. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.
- Tave, Stuart M. The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Thompson, Edward P. "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism." In Past and Present 38 (Dec. 1967): 56-97.
- Thomson, James. "Winter." In The Seasons and the Castle of Indolence, edited by James Sambrook. 1972. Reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Thrift, Nigel. "Owners' Time and Own Time: The Making of a Capitalist Time Consciousness, 1300-1880." In Space and Time in Geography: Essays Dedicated to Torsten Hägerstrand. Lund Studies in Geography. Series B. Human Geography, no. 48. CWK Gleerup: Royal University of Lund Department of Geography, 1981.
- Tierney, James E. "The Museum, the 'Super-Excellent Magazine.'" SEL 13 (1973): 513-515.

“To the Public: The Address of the New-York Historical Society.” In Collections of the New-York Historical Society, for the Year 1809. New York: I. Riley, 1811.

Toilet; a Weekly Collection of Literary Pieces. Philadelphia, 1801.

Trenchard, John, and Thomas Gordon. Cato’s Letters. 2 vols. Edited by Ronald Hamowy. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1995.

Tytler, Alexander Fraser. Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Honourable Henry Home of Kames. 2 vols. 1807. Reprint, with a new introduction and chronology by John Valdimir Price, London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1993.

Walker, William. “Ideology and Addison’s Essays on the Pleasures of the Imagination.” Eighteenth-Century Life 24 (2000), 65-84.

Warner, Michael. “Irving’s Posterity,” ELH 67 (2000): 773-799.

---. The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

---. “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject.” In Habermas and the Public Sphere.

Warren, Leland E. “Turning Reality Round Together: Guides to Conversation in Eighteenth-Century England.” Eighteenth-Century Life 8 (1983): 65-87.

Watterston, George. The Lawyer, or, Man as He Ought Not to Be: A Tale. Pittsburgh, 1808.

Whitrow, G. J. Time in History: The Evolution of Our General Awareness of Time and Temporal Perspective. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Williams, Stanley T. The Life of Washington Irving. 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1935.

Wills, Garry. Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence. 1978. Reprint, with a new introduction, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Mariner Books, 2002.

Wilson, Kathleen. “Libertarianism, War and Empire, 1736-1762.” In The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Winship, George P. Jr. “The Printing History of the World.” In Studies in the Early English Periodical.

Wood, Thomas A. Some Thoughts concerning the Study of the Laws of England in the Two Universities. London, 1708.

Woodman, Thomas. Politeness and Poetry in the Age of Pope. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989.

Woodruff, James F. "Johnson's Rambler and Its Contemporary Context." Bulletin of Research in the Humanities 85 (Spring 1982): 27-64.

Woolf, Virginia. The Common Reader. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953.

Zaret, David. "Religion, Science, and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth-Century England." In Habermas.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

RICHARD J. SQUIBBS

## Education

- 1997 B.A., English, Southern Connecticut State University
- 2000 M.A., English, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- 2007 Ph.D., English, Rutgers University

## Positions Held

- 1997-2000 Teaching Assistant, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- 2000-2002 Lane Cooper Fellow, Rutgers University
- 2002-2007 Teaching Assistant, Rutgers University

## Publications

“Preventing the Star-Led Wizards: Blake’s Europe and Popular Astrology,” in Prophetic Character: Essays on William Blake in Honor of John E. Grant, ed. Alexander S. Gourlay (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 2002).

“John Dennis” and “Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury,” in The Age of Milton: An Encyclopedia of Major Seventeenth-Century British and American Authors, ed. Alan Hager (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

“Taking Reading Seriously,” review essay of Peter Kivy, The Performance of Reading: An Essay in the Philosophy of Reading and Scott Black, Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain, in Eighteenth-Century Studies 40, no. 4 (Summer 2007).

“Civic Humorism and the Eighteenth-Century Anglo-American Periodical Essay,” forthcoming in ELH.