

PRINT AND THE CULTURES OF CRITICISM

by

MICHAEL GAVIN

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Title

By MICHAEL GAVIN

Dissertation Director:
Jonathan Kramnick

Print and the Cultures of Criticism reconsiders Restoration and eighteenth-century literary criticism as a material practice of writing and publication. In prefaces, pamphlets, libels, and mock-epics, poets used print as an instrument of literary rivalry and in the process gave shape to a cultural field of poetry and criticism. Through tracing their controversies, I revise the consensus view that early criticism disciplined readers with a disinterested discourse of polite taste. Rather, criticism was forged in a turbulent print marketplace where authors' commercial and political interests often collided with their intellectual and professional ambitions. Placing factionalism at the center of criticism's history suggests that literary ideas proliferated through conflict and became most powerful when subject to the most vocal objection.

My project focuses on moments of literary controversy to explore how printed disputes shifted as they moved across the still-fluid genres of critical writing. From 1660 to the first decades of the eighteenth century, sporadic debates between playwrights had evolved into a widely shared practice of literary rivalry. The success of John Dryden's heroic dramas sparked heated debates over prosody and dramatic form: opinions came

out in play performances, verse prologues and epilogues, prefatory essays, pamphlets, and eventually manuscript satires. By the turn of the century, poets, critics, playwrights, scholars, booksellers, and even readers were seen to engage in a special kind of combat—the mock-epic battles of “Parnassus”—that divided them into factions while binding them together in a common project of public dispute. I then turn to writers who, in very different ways, attempted to insulate poetry from the turmoil of literary factionalism. Anne Finch and Alexander Pope concluded that modern criticism had become irredeemably dysfunctional. Critics haunt their poems with ambient violence. Through these case studies, I argue against the prevailing notion that early criticism regulated culture while dictating to a passive readership of anonymous book-buyers. Taking a broader view that accounts for the wide range of genres at critics’ disposal suggests that few had the clout to impose their judgments and that literary value emerged most powerfully from below.

Acknowledgement and Dedication

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Michael Gavin

Rutgers University

Literary Factionalism in England, 1660-1730

Print and the Cultures of Criticism reconsiders Restoration and eighteenth-century literary criticism as a material practice of writing and publication. In prefaces, pamphlets, libels, and mock-epics, poets used print as an instrument of literary rivalry and in the process gave shape to a cultural field of poetry and criticism. Through tracing their controversies, I revise the consensus view that early criticism disciplined readers with a disinterested discourse of polite taste. Rather, criticism was forged in a turbulent print marketplace where authors' commercial and political interests often collided with their intellectual and professional ambitions. Placing factionalism at the center of criticism's history suggests that literary ideas proliferated through conflict and became most powerful when subject to the most vocal objection.

I focus throughout on moments of literary controversy to explore how printed disputes shifted as they moved across the still-fluid genres of critical writing. From 1660 to the first decades of the eighteenth century, sporadic debates between playwrights had

evolved into a widely shared practice of literary rivalry. For example, the success of John Dryden's heroic dramas, especially *The Conquest of Granada* (1672), sparked heated debates over prosody and dramatic form: opinions came out in play performances, verse prologues and epilogues, prefatory essays, pamphlets, and eventually manuscript satires. Such debates gave the literary field a sense of itself. By the turn of the century, poets, critics, playwrights, scholars, booksellers, and even readers were seen to engage in a special kind of combat—the mock-epic battles of “Parnassus”—that divided them into factions while binding them together in a common project of public dispute. In England, I argue, the idea that literature and criticism occupied a peculiar cultural space predated by many decades the idea that literature was a peculiar kind of discourse. Carving poetry into social parts gave literature a social whole.

Other writers who attempted to insulate poetry from the turmoil of literary factionalism. Anne Finch and Alexander Pope concluded that modern criticism had become irredeemably dysfunctional; in their view, destructive back-biting had perverted the public sphere to the point that disparagement was now the only trustworthy barometer of literary prestige. Critics haunt their poems with ambient violence. I analyze Finch's poetry as it appears in fair-copy manuscripts, published miscellanies, and a print edition to show how she cultivates a readership free from the contravening disruptions of critics and satirists. For the Scriblerians such disruptions could only be folded into burlesque narratives, a technique most famously and fantastically encapsulated on the pages of *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729). Through these case studies, I argue against the prevailing notion that early criticism regulated culture while dictating to a passive readership of anonymous book-buyers, a conclusion scholars draw almost exclusively from the

periodicals of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Taking a broader view that accounts for the wide range of genres at critics' disposal suggests that few had the clout to impose their judgments and that literary value emerged most powerfully from below.

My research extends a line of inquiry following in the footsteps of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and literary theorist John Guillory, who have argued that tracing the history of transformations in the "field of cultural production" is the best way to unlock a history of artistic or literary value.¹ During the Restoration and early eighteenth century, the book trade was the most important cultural institution of criticism.² Book history offers useful insights to the historian of criticism. In the past decade or so, scholars have shown the book trade to be central to, for example, canon-formation,³ early modern science,⁴ and the Scottish Enlightenment.⁵ For criticism in particular, such a view is especially useful because so much critical writing was conducted between authors who shared this cultural space, often publishing through the same booksellers. I find

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

² For the argument that the book trade should be considered in this light, see Thomas Bonnell, "Speaking of Institutions and Canonicity, Don't Forget the Publishers," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21, no. 3 (1997): 97-99..

³ Thomas Frank Bonnell, *The Most Disreputable Trade: Publishing the Classics of English Poetry, 1765-1810* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁵ Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, & America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

particularly valuable Robert Darnton's model of the "communications circuit," which shows how books travel through a series of social positions in the book trade, from authors to readers, but including along the way printers, censors, distributors, and retailers.⁶ Darnton emphasizes that his model is a circuit in which the transmission of texts from authors to readers returns back to authors in a reciprocal cycle: "Authors are readers themselves. By reading and associating with other readers and writers, they form notions of genre and style and a general sense of the literary enterprise which affects their texts."⁷ A sociological framework such as Darnton's emphasizes that the publishing and reading of books were communicative acts between people. D.F. McKenzie has argued that bibliography and book history should conduct a "sociology of texts" that takes the book to be an "expressive form."⁸ Central to this claim is the idea that books should be thought of as carriers of authorial subjectivity, as media that project identity, a point made by Roger Chartier and Joseph Loewenstein, who calls this identity the "bibliographic ego."⁹ Taking the individual material text as a carrier of subjectivity suggests that the book trade and its customers—Darnton's communications circuit—provided a field of interaction that put these subjects into dialogue across texts and across

⁶ Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books?," in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006), 9-26.

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); D. F. McKenzie, "The Book as an Expressive Form," in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006), 35-46.

⁹ Roger Chartier, "Figures of the Author," in *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 25-59; Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

time. For this reason, I argue that print should be seen as a social, interactive medium.¹⁰

Books were tools of interaction between living authors and a means to project conceptual structures of sociality to readers, both public and coterie. This is especially true of printed criticism, which was fundamentally dialogic.

In describing the relationships that were created between authors through critical debate, I use the term *literary factionalism*. Literary factionalism describes the process by which critics use media to forge relationships (whether of friendship or rivalry) around topics of critical controversy. Often, this was simply a matter of identifying groups of readers with whom one agreed. When John Dryden published his rhymed heroic drama, *The Indian Emperor* (1667), he dedicated it to the duchess of Monmouth: “The favour which Heroick Plays have lately found upon our Theaters has been wholly deriv'd to them, from the countenance and approbation they have receiv'd at Court.”¹¹ Similarly, when John Dennis wrote his *Remarks on Prince Arthur* (1696), he begins by dividing the field of readers: “The Poem upon which I have made the following Remarks has met with very different success in the World. Some have admir'd it as a Master-piece of Art and Nature. Others have exploded it with extream Contempt.”¹² Without an institutionalized regime for distributing prestige within the literary field, free-wheeling debates divided poets and other commentators into competing factions. Once set, these lines of division encouraged new participation in critical controversy as a natural act of “taking sides.” In

¹⁰ This approach to print has also been emphasized by The Interacting with Print Research Group at McGill University. See “About,” *Interacting with Print*, <http://interactingwithprint.mcgill.ca/about.html>. Accessed 11 June 2009.

¹¹ John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker and H. T. Swedenberg, 20 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

¹² John Dennis, *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939).

this way, poetic criticism provided a new set of terms for imagining a social field peculiar to poets and their readers.

From a bird's-eye view, literary factionalism looks very much like what Jürgen Habermas called the “literary public sphere.”¹³ Habermas argued that a habit of public discourse on literary topics paved the way for the development of the bourgeois public sphere, a mode of private discourse that aggregated into “public opinion” and functioned as a check on state power. I will argue the converse: awareness of literary factionalism as a coherent, separate sphere of public discourse emerged reciprocally within debates over national welfare. The “literary field” became visible as such only as a subset of a larger national reading public. Politically divided publishers in the 1690s, like Anne Baldwin, Awnsham Churchill, John Nutt, and Elizabeth Whitlock, published widely on affairs of state; they also published literary controversies, which gained new meaning when circulated in these politically charged contexts. The literary disputes of this period were usually understood to be distinct conflicts with their own stakes, rules of conduct, and outcomes, but they were not autonomous or disconnected from other cultural divisions. Literary factionalism was a distinct mode of affiliation, but it often overlapped with or bumped against other kinds of affiliation, like political partisanship. Sometimes, members of the same political party found themselves on opposite sides of a critical debate; other times political opponents became strange critical bedfellows. Such moments throw the internal politics of literary factionalism into particularly sharp relief.

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

My emphasis is on criticism published in English between 1660 and 1730.

However, I begin by looking back to the 1650s, when poets like William D'avenant and Richard Flecknoe used critical writing to appeal to Royalist exiles; after the Restoration, dedications and prefaces were used dialogically to market playbooks by promoting the shared expertise of disagreeing authors. My argument extends to the literary controversies of the Scriblerians, who were perhaps the most famous and successful exploiters of literary factionalism in the eighteenth century. Alexander Pope's *Dunciad Variorum* (1729) takes its place as the grand epic of literary factionalism. *The Dunciad's* parodic force, I argue, comes from an act of radical condensation: by transforming critical exchange into absurd narrative, Pope turns authors into characters, and published exchange into fanciful action. In the process, *The Dunciad* extends a critical discourse that situated authors as public controversialists—that is to say, as figures in texts—while collapsing dialogic exchange into a single work and condensing the print medium into just one of its books. However, Pope was not the first to use burlesque narrative to capture the otherwise-ethereal relationships that critical exchange made possible. My historical arc takes the 1690s (roughly, the reign of King William) as its crucial turning point, when moralist concern over the role of poetry in the nation-state gave increased visibility to a subculture of naughty poets thought to require moral regulation. At this time “Parnassus” gained new meaning as a marker of poetic culture; no longer just a locus of classical learning or poetic inspiration, Parnassus came to name a field of poetic debate, with battles of its own and a politics separate from Britannia's. By the early eighteenth century, criticism had blossomed into a discourse that no poet could ignore. During the Restoration, “writing Criticks” like John Dryden and Thomas Shadwell could

be dismissed as affected hacks whose disingenuous musings were poor masks for vanity and self-promotion. By 1730, printed criticism was the field within or against which poetic value was agonistically constructed.

This dissertation suggests an alternate teleology for early English criticism. Usually, works of this period are placed into a trajectory that points to modern criticism. The traditional method, exemplified in René Wellek's *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* (1955), is to identify matters of Neoclassical literary doctrine and to show how they were replaced by Romanticism over the course of the eighteenth century.¹⁴ A more recent approach traces criticism as an institutional formation that gradually evolved into the modern disciplines and, eventually, into literary studies as practiced in the academy.¹⁵ In either case, criticism before the mid-eighteenth century needs to be read selectively; the historian must choose texts that seem to exhibit either an unusually high degree of aesthetic/philosophical sophistication or that concern themselves explicitly with defining the boundaries of criticism or national literatures. However, most criticism published at this time did not qualify on either count. Typically, prefaces, pamphlets and satires traded charge and counter-charge with little concern for anything beyond the topic at hand or, just as often, the personal rivalries between authors. Taking literary

¹⁴ René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).

¹⁵ Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Kramnick, *Making the English Canon*; Jonathan Brody Kramnick, "Literary Criticism Among the Disciplines," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 3 (2002): 343-60.

factionalism as a model for early criticism does not suggest much correlation with academic literary history nor with systematic philosophies of literature or aesthetics. Instead, it suggests a strong continuity with literary controversies that erupted between authors and their readers across the eighteenth century, but that are rarely included in histories of criticism, per se. The history of literary factionalism points not to Thomas Wharton or Samuel Coleridge, but to *Tristram Shandy*.

Twentieth-century histories, like Wellek's, reacted against an earlier tradition that dismissed much old criticism as inconsistent, uninteresting, and unphilosophical. The first volume of Wellek's history was premised on the claim that criticism's passage into modernity was made possible by the development of Neoclassical literary doctrines inherited from the Renaissance, a general pattern found in many histories from this time.

¹⁶ In these explicitly teleological models, the evolution of criticism occurs across a long duration and is punctuated by a series of crisis points; individual critics are praised insofar as their contributions sparked changes that led criticism towards theories more recognizably and respectably modern. As such, these studies are part of a post-Romantic revaluation of the past advocated most forcefully by Modernist poet-critics like T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound. They are marked by their willingness to take seriously the critical ideas of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, though always as a precursor to the Romantic literary movement that poets like Eliot and Pound

¹⁶ See J. W. H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism: 17th and 18th Centuries* (London: Methuen, 1951); J. E. Conington, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England, 1684-1798* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952); Samuel Holt Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1935); William K. Wimsatt, *Literary Criticism; a Short History*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1957)..

saw themselves as replacing. “Neoclassical” marks the outdated predecessor whose ideas would find their fullest and best expression only later. Thus, these studies are characterized both by their explicit teleology towards Romanticism and an implicit impulse towards the post-Romantic Modernist critique.

The earliest and most strident opponent of this model was R.S. Crane. Crane was a leading figure in the Chicago School of neo-Aristotelian critics, who argued that literature is best understood historically within the context of changes in literary genres. In his review of J.W.H. Atkins’ *English Literary Criticism: 17th and 18th Centuries* (1951), Crane advocates a similar approach for the history of criticism. He calls for less attention to broad doctrinal trends, like Neoclassicism or Romanticism, and for more attention to changes in critical modes and genres. Histories of criticism should proceed, Crane writes,

without prior commitments as to what criticism is or ought to be, its assumption merely that criticism is any kind of argued writing about the literary arts that has seemed appropriate, at one time or another, to their natures. It would therefore be free to exhibit critics speaking for themselves with respect to problems they themselves had formulated in the process of solving them, rather than a set of problems set for them, after the event, by the historian; and its criteria of praise and blame would be based on no demand for conformity to a particular ideal of excellence in criticism but solely on an estimate of how much different critics were able to accomplish with the principles, devices, and materials at their disposal.¹⁷

Such a model is premised on old criticism’s discontinuity from the present. Whereas Wellek claimed that critical works of the past “can be read, commented upon, interpreted,

¹⁷ Ronald Salmon Crane, “On Writing the History of Criticism in England 1650-1800,” in *The Idea of the Humanities, and Other Essays Critical and Historical*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 174.

argued about, and criticized in turn, as if they had been written yesterday,”¹⁸ Crane emphasizes instead that old criticism operated under social and formal constraints different from those of the present. At issue here is the question: Does criticism have anything like a continuous history? If not, attempts to draw broad generalizations across large periods of time will always be attenuated by discontinuities of critical practice that undermine the validity of comparisons across historically and generically disparate texts.

Crane’s definition of criticism as “any kind of argued writing” that “seemed appropriate” suggests a fundamentally rhetorical framework of analysis, one that sees all criticism as addressed to historically specific audiences. It implicitly calls for greater attention to the social contexts of writing that determine what did or did not seem appropriate at any given time. This set of questions has been taken up and theorized by Pierre Bourdieu. In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *The Rules of Art* (1995), Bourdieu develops his theory of the *habitus*, a social field of cultural producers (writers, artists, etc.) with values and structures of power independent of other social fields, like capitalism and politics.¹⁹ Whereas Crane writes in fairly neutral, benign terms of generic propriety, Bourdieu emphasizes struggle between participants in the field of cultural production: “The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement in their struggles

¹⁸ René Wellek, “Reflections on my History of Modern Criticism,” in *The Attack on Literature and Other Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 135. This point has been reiterated in Phillip Smallwood, “Introduction: Problems and Paradoxes in the History of Criticism,” in *Critical Past: Writing Criticism, Writing History* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 1-12..

¹⁹ Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Emanuel Susan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995)..

to defend or improve their positions.”²⁰ For Bourdieu, this agonistic jockeying for position always turns towards its “fundamental stake,” which is “the monopoly of literary legitimacy.”²¹ The literary field takes shape through this struggle. Although its occupants “may never meet each other, or may even methodically ignore each other, [they] remain profoundly determined, in their practice, by the relation of opposition which unites them.”²² Through such oppositions, different groups have promoted different ideas about what it means to be a great writer, a great artist, etc.

For this reason, Bourdieu’s method is characterized by a productive, enabling circularity: historians search the discourse of the field to find definitions of what it meant to be a participant in the field. Bourdieu writes, “There is no way of getting out of the circularity unless it is addressed as such. It is up to the study itself to collect the definitions confronting each other, together with the vagueness inherent in their social uses, and to furnish the means of describing their social bases.”²³ Historians of literature can “break the circle” by examining the process of canonization “through an analysis of the different forms embraced by the literary pantheon, at different periods.”²⁴ In Bourdieu’s model, criticism is the internal discourse of the literary field: it is the aggregate of “position-takings” that determine hierarchal “positions” within the field.²⁵

²⁰ *Field of Cultural Production*, 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²² *The Rules of Art*, 218.

²³ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Bourdieu writes, “The *space of literary or artistic position-takings*, i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field -- literary or artistic works, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc. - is inseparable from the *space of literary or artistic positions* defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation

That is to say, criticism is the manifestation of social forces that impinge on literary value, which stands apart as the real object of historical inquiry. By tracing historically contingent definitions of great writing, great writers, and great works, this method seeks to uncover how the literary field took shape, how it dispensed prestige to participants, and how it assigned value to the works of the past. Not surprisingly, Bourdieu's theories have been most useful for histories of the literary canon and for studies that emphasize problems of legitimacy and cultural hierarchy.

When addressed to the history of criticism itself, such an approach tracks how criticism formed into a distinct institution or discipline—into something like the field of *critical* production, to adapt Bourdieu's term. The historical question changes from how literary value was produced to how criticism emerged as a distinct field of discourse. In his essay, "The Institution of Criticism in the Eighteenth Century," Douglas Lane Patey asks, "What does it mean to be a critic in the eighteenth century?"²⁶ Patey traces two broad movements across the period. In the first, "an older, more court-centred and rationalist criticism gives way... to a broader-based empirical inquiry."²⁷ This move is typified by Joseph Addison, who used a public genre (the periodical essay) to advance a theory of literary appreciation potentially available to all his readers (taste). Later in the eighteenth century, the advent of "high" literary culture restricts this public, and "the qualifications of the critic again become stringently exclusive in something like the old

of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of the specific capital" (*Field of Cultural Production*, 30.).

²⁶ Douglas Lane Patey, "The Institution of Criticism in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H.B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson, vol. 4 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11.

²⁷ Ibid.

manner: the critic must once again be either scholar or member of a new quasi-aristocracy of 'fine taste'.”²⁸ Here, Patey’s reference to scholarship points to the rise of literary studies as a discipline, a line of inquiry taken up and expanded by Clifford Siskin and Jonathan Kramnick. Siskin’s systemic approach in *The Work of Writing* (1998) shows how criticism emerged, dialectically with “literature,” as a “narrow but deep” mode of disciplinary knowledge.²⁹ In his essay “Literary Criticism Among the Disciplines” (2002), Kramnick emphasizes instead divisions within criticism itself: he shows how historicist scholarship emerged in opposition to public-oriented print journalism, which continued strong throughout the century.³⁰ Unlike Patey, who argues that specialized criticism replaced a public discourse of taste, Kramnick’s essay provides a more inclusive account that shows, not the transformation of one kind of criticism into another, but the proliferation of critical genres taken up in increasingly specialized fields of production.³¹ By taking the eighteenth century as their chronological frame, these studies identify the midcentury as their crucial turning point, when the advent of book review magazines, like *The Critical Review* and *The Monthly Review*, roughly coincided with the rise of historicist, specialized criticism. Kramnick argues that these twin developments split the field of criticism into two parts, public book reviewing and academic scholarship, which remain divided to this day.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Siskin, *The Work of Writing*.

³⁰ Jonathan Brody Kramnick, “Literary Criticism Among the Disciplines.”

³¹ This point has been further elaborated by David Fairer, who has shown differences within the field of eighteenth-century historicist criticism. See David Fairer, “Historical Criticism and the English Canon: a Spenserian Dispute in the 1750s,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 24 (Spring 2000): 43-64.

One of the major methodological moves of this dissertation is to shift the historical framework several decades earlier, working from the middle of the seventeenth century and ending after the first few decades of the eighteenth. One goal is to suggest less continuity between criticism of this period and the “modern” disciplines than studies that take 1700 as their starting point sometimes imply. Seventeenth-century critical texts in particular offer few analogues to the categories of print journalism or historicist scholarship. Hence, Patey and Kramnick strongly emphasize John Dennis, who features in both as the first major figure to take on the mantle of “critic” as a public occupation. However, Dennis’ career is invoked as a story of failure. His would-be folio treatise, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), failed to find sufficient subscribers and appeared only as an advertising octavo. Subsequently, Dennis was plagued by ridicule at the hands of Alexander Pope, who lampooned him vociferously over the 1710s and 1720s as an impolite, out-of-step drudge. These failures suggest that, although the concept of the “critic” as a social role was available by 1700, it awaited later cultural developments to gain legitimacy. For these reasons, attention paid to Dennis is overwhelmingly forward-looking, as he is used to represent a potential for professionalization that would not be realized until the latter half of the eighteenth century.

By ending my historical account well before this professionalization, I have more freedom to explore other aspects of Dennis’ writing. As I argue in chapter 2, Dennis’ early career does not support the assumption that he was out of touch with the literary culture of his day. An ambitious young poet and essayist, Dennis published original and translated poems, plays, essays, and correspondence, and was one of the leading proponents of Will’s Coffeehouse as a social scene of poetry and wit. For Dennis,

publishing criticism in print was a social (and sociable) act that connected him to a rich network of peers. Only in retrospect can his career be defined by absence and failure. In this way, narratives of the emergence of criticism as a discipline risk paying too little heed to R.S. Crane's admonition to proceed "without prior commitments as to what criticism is or ought to be." Although free of the explicitly evaluative judgments that measure old critics against unhistorical standards, such studies have a selection bias towards earlier texts that look as much as possible like criticism from the later eighteenth century. About Dennis in particular, I argue that much of his most interesting work does not fit in this scheme.

Revaluing Dennis in this way suggests a broader question. If turn-of-the-century criticism was not "not yet" professional, what was it? Without codified institutional genres, marking the boundaries of early criticism can be especially tricky. René Wellek and R.S. Crane began with very similar definitions: "I am content to [say] that criticism is any discourse on literature," Wellek wrote.³² However, Crane's attention to the historical contingency of critical forms suggests a radically expansive view of what might count as a critical act, much more so than Wellek's history accounts for. "Criticism," Raymond Williams wrote, "has become a very difficult word."³³ On the one hand is the need to separate it from other kinds of discourse that also involve the public exercise of one's reason, what we now more typically call "critical thinking," like political controversy, law, science, religious debate, etc. On the other hand is the need to identify "literary" criticism as a subcategory within criticism more generally. Both words have a murky

³² "Reflections on my History of Modern Criticism," 137.

³³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 84.

polyvalence, and they carry a strong risk of presentism when applied to seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century texts.

Compounding this problem is the ambiguity of the word “critick,” which has a related but separate history. For example, Dryden complained bitterly in his preface to the second edition of *Tyrannick Love* (1672) about “the little Critiques who pleas’d themselves with thinking they have found a flaw.”³⁴ For Dryden, to be a critic was to find faults with plays, but writing a preface to one’s play was something else entirely. As I argue in chapter 1, the advent of criticism as a printed discourse involved differentiating published debates between playwrights from the activities of criticks, who responded with praise or blame to individual plays. This suggests, first, that any study premised on tracing the history of the “critick” as a subject-position will provide at best an incomplete history of critical practices. Second, it highlights the need to develop a conceptual framework capacious enough to account for activities that writers like Dryden saw as distinct but clearly related, and that don’t fit neatly into a modern definition of criticism as “studies concerned with defining, classifying, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of literature.”³⁵

At its broadest level of generalization, criticism is discourse on the ethics of discourse. Put another way, criticism is writing, speech or some other signifying act that takes as its subject the proper conduct of writing, speech, or some other signifying act. Under this definition, a pamphlet criticizing the government may or may not be a piece of criticism, but a pamphlet that criticizes a political speech almost certainly is. It could

³⁴ Dryden, *Works*.

³⁵ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 8th ed. (Boston: Thomson, Wadsworth, 2005), 50.

include at its extremes anything from playhouse heckling and the throwing of oranges to the writing of labored dissertations. Acknowledging that critics could choose from widely disparate forms highlights the question of why they chose the forms they did, and with what consequence. Another important point is that criticism need not be distinct generically from the objects of its analysis. Any history of seventeenth-century criticism must have room, for example, for *The Rehearsal* (1672), a play about plays, and *A Satyr Upon a Late Pamphlet Entitled, A Satyr Against Wit* (1700), a verse pamphlet about verse pamphlets.³⁶ Also, this definition does not presuppose a unified text or utterance. Criticism sometimes happens in texts designed expressly for that purpose, such as an essay, a prologue, or a prepared lecture, but this need not be the case. It was also common for stray critical remarks or ideas to be embedded in otherwise non-critical forms, like letters, plays, or poems.

The point here is to begin with a definition of criticism capacious enough to account for the varieties of discourse employed in the conduct of literary controversy. I use *controversy* as a guiding heuristic that is closely analogous to struggles within the literary field—Bourdieu calls them “position-takings.” “Literary criticism” is best understood in Bourdieu’s sociological terms as the internal discourse of the literary field. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, this meant the field of poets, and especially dramatic poets. For this reason, I generally use the terms “dramatic criticism”

³⁶ George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham, *The Rehearsal, as It Was Acted at the Theatre-Royal* (London: printed for Thomas Dring, at the White-Lyon, next Chancery-lane end in Fleet-street, 1672); *A Satyr Upon a Late Pamphlet Entitled, A Satyr Against Wit* (London: s.n., 1700).

and “poetic criticism” when analyzing the texts of this period.³⁷ However, the term “literary criticism” remains valuable because it leaves open the possibility of continuity with later controversies that emerged around prose writers, especially novelists like Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Laurence Sterne. In this sense, literary criticism is not necessarily confined generically to texts that take “literature” (however defined) as their unambiguous subject. Critics sometimes wrote about texts or genres, but they felt equally free to comment on poets and readers too: early criticism is rife with *ad hominem* attacks and fulsome flatteries. Distinguishing between personal comments and interpretive claims was one of the more fiercely contested pragmatic issues for critics in this period, and it gains no clarity from the historian’s retrospective viewpoint. To try to tease them out definitively is a fool’s errand. As Bourdieu’s model suggests, and as this study reaffirms, a competition of ideas is often indistinguishable from competition between people.

Taking controversy as an organizing principle means there is less at stake in categorizing individual texts as either critical or not critical, and more at stake in looking at how different forms of opinion-making interacted. For example, the controversy surrounding John Dryden’s early successes, especially *The Conquest of Granada* (1672), crossed media forms and critical genres: opinions came out in play performances, verse prologues, published essays, and printed pamphlets. Voices were marked differently. Some wrote with ostentatious sincerity, others with strategic scurrility. This interactive exchange between competing authors and their ideas—and between texts and their

³⁷ This approach has also been taken by Paul Cannan, whose recent history confines itself to “dramatic criticism.” See Paul D. Cannan, *The Emergence of Dramatic Criticism in England: From Jonson to Pope*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

genres—is at the heart of literary factionalism as a dynamic process. As such, it can never be reduced to its representation in any one text. Single critical works, taken alone, are just that: singular. They're characterized by the idiosyncrasies of their authors, and rarely can you extrapolate from them to make meaningful generalizations about literary culture. However, taken together as an ongoing discourse in books between people (usually but not necessarily authors), criticism is more than the sum of its instances of reception. It articulates a nexus of ideas that structure receptivity. This is different from and goes well beyond the question of taste, of deciding between good and bad writing. Rather, criticism manifests as it narrates competing pragmatics of authorship and reading, providing a structured vocabulary around necessarily fraught questions like: Why write books or read them? When, how, and in what forms should they be published? How does a work situate a writer or publisher in relation to her peers, to readers, or to the past (or the future)? On what basis and in what ways should those involved be judged?

Following the Restoration, such questions were increasingly taken up in print, and by the early 1670s criticism had evolved into an ongoing public discourse between playwrights. After a first chapter that reflects on the relationship between the history of criticism and the social history of print, my historical argument begins in earnest with a look at the early Restoration, which witnessed a broad debate over the propriety of preface-writing. Rivals like Dryden, Sir Robert Howard, and Thomas Shadwell appended essays to their playbooks as a way to enact their collective expertise through sociable disagreement: published as an ongoing public dialogue, their differing opinions about dramatic genre and history promoted their shared prestige while carefully avoiding damaging critiques of each others' work. However, upstart competitors like Elkanah

Settle, Edward Ravenscroft, and Aphra Behn used satirical addresses to the reader to puncture the veneer of sociability that underpinned preface-writing, casting it as an exclusionary practice that alienated readers unconcerned with theoretical debate. Thus, attempts by some to create and monopolize a literary public sphere were attenuated by forces of commercial and professional competition unconstrained by the norms of decorous exchange.

Whereas critical debates of the early Restoration were confined primarily to playwrights, by the 1690s the cultural field of criticism had broadened considerably. My third chapter argues that public debates over the value of poetry in the nation-state gave heightened visibility to a subculture of poets and critics in London. I focus on the War of Wit between the comedy-writers affiliated with Will's Coffeehouse and Sir Richard Blackmore, an epic poet who argued that sacrilegious and immoral comedies threatened civic virtue and national welfare. Blackmore's sudden commercial and critical success sparked vehement rejoinders that attacked his epics as dull nonsense and that promoted an urbane culture of poetry and wit centered in Covent Garden. Writers like John Dennis, Charles Gildon, and William Congreve published collaborative epistolary criticism that publicized and flaunted their shared membership in this community. As Blackmore and the Wits traded public barbs, their controversy contributed to the growing sense that literary debate was a distinct and special kind of public discourse that occupied its own space of conflict. Satires and burlesques like Daniel Defoe's mock-epic *The Pacificator* (1699) called this space "Parnassus," a scene of cultural conflict where modern-day poets do battle. I argue that the allegorical geography of Parnassus separated poetic controversy from state-politics while opening a conceptual a space for literary jockeying; as such, it is

an important predecessor to spatial abstractions like “literary public sphere” and “field of cultural production” that scholars use to conceptualize the relationships that writers construct through published discourse. At the turn of the century, imagining a virtual context for literary factionalism made criticism legible to a generation of poets eager to join in the benign sensationalism of critical dispute.

While the wars of Parnassus were raging in print, others worried about the potentially damaging consequences entailed by a poetic culture increasingly defined by its controversies. In Chapter Four, I discuss the poetry and criticism of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, whose poems circulated through coterie networks of exchange across the English provinces. Long reputed to be among the best women poets of the long eighteenth century, Finch was deeply concerned with the problem of evaluation itself. How can any poetic talent, but especially a woman’s, be recognized by critics who seem to value only detraction and libelous satire? By tracing her poetry across various formats, from fair-copy manuscript volumes to poetry miscellanies to her own published collection, I show her ongoing worry about how critical judgment was influenced by the context of poetry’s circulation. In her unpublished collections, Finch advances a pastoral ideal of the provincial coterie network as the locus of true critical judgment, where women’s writing is legitimated by male authorities, whether patriarchs of rural estates, the neoclassical theorists of the past, or allegorized figures like Apollo. For Finch, this world of manuscript exchange exists in stark contrast to public realms of the court and the print marketplace. In the 1690s, when her poems first appeared in printed anthologies, they were divided according to the competing polemical needs of her editors, for whom Finch’s pastoralism could be made to serve factional cross-purposes. When she finally

published a collection of her own, Finch eschewed the primary staples of literary factionalism, the preface and the commendatory poem, to advocate an individualist mode of reading for pleasure. In contrast to recent scholarship that has emphasized Finch's interest in a private female subjectivity, I argue that the ostensible individualism that marks her published work represents, not de-politicization, but an important agenda of critical discontent.

Discontent with literary factionalism is also the subject of my fourth chapter. Early in their careers, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope became convinced that modern criticism had become perverted to the point that good writing would always inspire attacks from jealous critics. At its extreme, this notion suggested that public disparagement might even be a mechanism of greatness. In *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729), Pope carried this logic to its fantastical conclusion. *The Dunciad* gains parodic force, I argue, from an act of radical condensation: by transforming critical exchange into absurd narrative, Pope turns authors into characters and published books into fanciful action. *The Dunciad* extends a critical discourse while collapsing dialogic exchange into a single work and condensing the print medium into just one of its books. In the process, Pope wrote the first extended history of English criticism as such. Scholars usually argue that Pope's thinking is characterized by ambivalence, especially towards print, but I argue that the contradictions which seem to mark his writing result from his efforts to exploit what he saw as criticism's irredeemable dysfunction.

My dissertation concludes with a look ahead to the afterlife of literary factionalism. I examine the early career of James Boswell, who, in collaboration with Scottish friends, used print criticism as a social instrument, seeking acceptance in London

society by strategically offending some (and delighting others) with scurrilous publications. Rather than show how the criticism of the seventeenth century evolved into public literary journalism or the modern discipline of literary study, I conclude by suggesting that literary factionalism continued unabated and largely unchanged throughout the entire eighteenth century. Criticism held a tenuous and contested status in the literary marketplace. Writers of this time enjoyed a broad consensus that the purpose of literature was to delight and instruct its readers, but what caused pleasure was difficult to pin down, and the instructing voice was best heard alongside a chorus of objection.

Chapter One

Writing Print Cultures Past:

How the history of literary criticism can contribute to the history of the book

Literary criticism from the past is enormously useful to many kinds of cultural history. Through the trade of accusations and exonerations acted out in prefaces, dedications, pamphlets, and lampoons, criticism tells the stories of authors and their patrons, their readers, their publishers. It comprises an archive of overlapping and conflicting narratives that touch on the questions that have occupied scholars for the past thirty years or so: How do literary texts intersect with politics, whether narrowly or broadly considered? How did the modern author as we know it emerge? How have reading practices and literary genres changed over time? In the factional disputes of critics, we find authors talking about themselves and their peers, often contentiously, but always with an eye to what's at stake (socially, professionally, and politically) when it comes to writing texts and making books. Criticism was used to construct competing meta-narratives of print culture, all of which posited a social context of authors and readers within which books were said to do their cultural work. For this reason, published criticism from the past presents a rich and tempting archive for book history, but one that I'll argue should be approached with caution. As attention has turned to questions about

the rise of the public sphere and print culture, about the transformation of reading practices, and the emergence of modern authorship, scholars have consistently turned for their evidence to the critical texts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹ In the process, criticism has tended to fade from view as an object of scholarly attention in its own right; indeed, many of the best books written over the past two decades on early criticism don't even claim it as their subject-matter but rather present themselves as histories of authorship, reading, or some other aspect of literary culture.² In this essay I'd like to put criticism and its generic and historical problems back in the center of the discussion. In doing so, I hope to bring to light the (perhaps surprising) importance of

¹ The most salient example in this case is Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

² My argument takes as its starting point a tendency among many recent studies to conflate the history of criticism with the history of the literary marketplace or print culture. However, two worthy studies that take the development of criticism as their explicit theme deserve to be noted here: Paul D. Cannan, *The Emergence of Dramatic Criticism in England: From Jonson to Pope*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007). It is of late more fashionable to define criticism as the reflection of some prior social phenomenon. For example, the critical essay is redefined as a record of reading practices and debates over reading in Scott Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Lee Morrissey, *The Constitution of Literature: Literacy, Democracy, and Early English Literary Criticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008). A similar example can be found in William Warner's study of critical debates over the novel, which he presents as a history of novel reading. *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). In histories of authorship, studies that rely primarily on Restoration and eighteenth-century criticism for their evidence include Paulina Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England, 1660-1710* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and Brean S. Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740: Hackney for Bread* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Published criticism from the period formed the basis of Dustin Griffin's history of patronage. *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Similarly, Abigail Williams presents her study of poetry and Whig literary criticism as *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

published criticism to social histories of print, as well as to suggest that book history participates in a long tradition of concern about criticism and the ethics of authorship.

Although old criticism is now studied because it implicates authors, commerce, and politics in the history of literature, this has long troubled those interested in the history of literary criticism as such. My argument will begin with a look at how scholars in the nineteenth century dealt with their sense that early criticism was overly political, subservient to patrons, and an instrument of bald careerism. In response to this approach, twentieth-century scholars attempted to extract a history of ideas from the biographical messiness of criticism's past. After surveying this turn, I'll turn my attention to D.F. McKenzie's notion of the "sociology of texts." I'll argue that his method relies more heavily on criticism for its evidence than he makes explicit and that it oscillates (sometimes uncomfortably) between treating old criticism as a repository of concepts, on the one hand, and, on the other, as evidence reflecting the social realities of the past. I'll conclude with a case study in the criticism of the English Restoration, showing how John Dryden and one of his competitors offer starkly contrasting sociologies of their own texts. Mediating between them as evidence in the history of print demands that we read them skeptically and with close attention to their rhetorical predicaments and generic demands. Understanding how they work as criticism, I'll argue, is a necessary step towards evaluating their trustworthiness as evidence.

In the nineteenth century, it was a commonplace to dismiss much of the English poetry and prose of the Restoration and early eighteenth-century as inconsistent,

uninteresting, and unphilosophical. Matthew Arnold's famous injunction in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1865) was for criticism to maintain its "disinterestedness" by "keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things' ... [and by] steadily refusing ... any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas."³ This seemed to leave little room for critics like Dryden and his contemporaries, whose implication in systems of literary preferment and rivalry were all too apparent. Dryden in particular was vulnerable to accusations of hypocrisy and opportunism; as one commentator wrote in 1909, "Dryden's reputation as a writer has been subject to great fluctuations."⁴ Of particular concern was his profiteering at the feet of patrons, his tendency to praise them above their merits while engaging in politically motivated pamphlet warfare, and especially his suspiciously timely conversion to Catholicism during the reign of James II. Macaulay's "History of England" (1856) declared Dryden to have led a life of "mendicancy and adulation," a judgment echoed by Dryden's editor in 1870, who declaimed against Dryden's "abject adulations and servile flatteries."⁵ The editor continues, "His great powers of mind were ill-employed in these florid dedications, and that they brought him money made it worse."⁶ They wanted to look at past criticism and see intellectual history, but social history kept peering back at them. For decades, it seemed the best to be said about Dryden's sincerity—about what

³ Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time (1865)," in *Prose of the Victorian Period*, ed. William Earl Buckler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 429.

⁴ *The Poetical Works of John Dryden*, ed. George R. Noyes (Houghton Mifflin, 1909), xxxviii.

⁵ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: E. H. Butler, 1856), 199; *The Poetical Works of John Dryden*, ed. W.D. Christie (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1870), xxxvii.

⁶ Christie, ed., *The Poetical Works of John Dryden*, xxxvii.

might be called his ethics of authorship —was that he managed “the courtly profusion of compliment ... with singular dignity.”⁷

This implied a new scholarly project that had been gaining momentum: to identify that dignity, to see in what ways the best grains of prose could be separated from the chaff, to identify the mind-at-work behind the cynical self-advertisement, to find pearls of laudable critical judgment, and to tease out from the messiness of biographical detail Dryden’s contribution to the development of English poetry and prose. Dissertations and collected lectures across the 1890s and early 1900s took this as their theme, often placing Dryden at the beginning of narratives of “The Evolution of English Criticism,” to take the title of one 1894 dissertation.⁸ A new consensus emerged: the age was dissipated, but Dryden, though tainted by his complicity, was demonstrably special.

However, the problem of hypocrisy remained. It raised a number of questions that continued to occupy scholars for much of the twentieth century. How can we evaluate the ideas expressed in criticism, given their implication in a corrupted patronage system and print marketplace? How can we believe anything Dryden says on the topic of “wit,” for example, when he holds up Charles Sackville (a minor poet but major patron) as England’s greatest example of it? Or, even more problematic, when his definition is indistinguishable from an argument on behalf of his own plays? How can we extract the ostensibly objective critical judgments which we find expressed in prologues, prefaces

⁷ Arthur Woollgar Verrall, *Lectures on Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 5.

⁸ Laura Johnson Wylie, *Studies in the Evolution of English Criticism* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1894). Such studies were equally invested in the development of Dryden’s aesthetic theories and with his place in the rise of criticism as such. See also William E. Bohn, “John Dryden’s Literary Criticism,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 22 (1907): 56-139.

and dedications, from the subjective concerns of authorial self-promotion that seem to have motivated those same texts? To what extent did Restoration critics “create a current of true and fresh ideas” (Arnold’s description of the ideal critic’s mission), and to what extent were they just using books as instruments of literary politicking? Expressed in this way—more naively and dichotomously than is now fashionable—these questions seem to present obviously false choices. But they allow for different solutions, and how scholars *chose* to solve them led to very different kinds of studies.

One approach was to treat Restoration and early eighteenth-century literature as one part in the history of society. In a set of 1903 lectures published as *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Leslie Stephen argues that “adequate criticism must be rooted in history,” and, even further, that literary history can contribute valuably to something more ambitious:

If we allow ourselves to contemplate a philosophical history, which shall deal with the causes of events and aim at exhibiting the evolution of human society ... we should also see that the history of literature would be a subordinate element of the whole structure. The political, social, ecclesiastical, and economical factors, and their complex actions and reactions, would all have to be taken into account, the literary historian would be concerned with the ideas which find utterance through the poet and philosopher, and with the constitution of the class which at any time forms the literary organ of society.⁹

Building off and synthesizing a nineteenth-century tradition of concern about hypocrisy and mercenary motives, Stephen moves the discussion toward a generalized account about the manifold transformations of literary culture across time, with close attention to their modes of production and their place among other historical phenomena. About the Restoration and early eighteenth century, Stephen argues that “the relation between the

⁹ Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1904), 3, 8.

political and literary class was at this time closer than it had ever been.”¹⁰ These men formed what Stephen calls the “literary organ” of society, who “[met] at coffee-houses and in a kind of tacit confederation of clubs to compare notes and form the whole public opinion of the day.”¹¹ Reprinted several times through 1968, Stephen’s 1903 lectures proved influential and were cited authoritatively by Arnold Hauser in *The Social History of Art* (1951), by Ian Watt in *Rise of the Novel* (1957), and by Jürgen Habermas in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962). (I’ll return to Habermas in a moment.)

While Hauser, somewhat reductively recapitulating Stephen, could argue that early eighteenth-century literature was “political propaganda ...and nothing but propaganda,” specialists in English departments had charted a very different direction of research, one that tended to re-contextualize the criticism of the period—often under the banners “Augustan” or “neoclassical”—within intellectual traditions that stretched from the Renaissance to the present.¹² A number of studies that appeared in the 1940s and 1950s read Restoration critics like Dryden and his lesser-known contemporaries, Thomas Rymer and John Dennis, with unprecedented care and attention, evaluating each for his contribution to the history of criticism as a history of ideas. The most famous of these, René Wellek’s *A History of Modern Criticism* (1955), described how criticism’s passage into modernity was made possible by a broadly dispersed evolution of Neoclassical literary doctrines that were inherited from the Renaissance.¹³ In these explicitly

¹⁰ Ibid., 21.

¹¹ Ibid., 32.

¹² Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, vol. 3, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 41.

¹³ Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*. Other studies that took a similar approach include Atkins, *English Literary Criticism*; Congleton, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in*

teleological models, the evolution of criticism occurs across a long duration and is punctuated by a series of crisis points (roughly following the narrative that Neoclassicism, confronted by empiricism, evolved into Romanticism). Although these narratives have proven vulnerable to the poststructuralist critique of teleology and now seem restrictive in their commitment to hierarchy, it's worth keeping in mind that they began as a project of breaking open the canon of criticism by taking seriously the ideas of the past, whomever the source, and incorporating those ideas into a long story about how we got here as a discipline.

The story I've roughly outlined so far stretches over about a hundred years, from the 1860s to the 1960s. The nineteenth-century concern over the problem of hypocrisy—over the dangerous implication of politically and financially self-serving motives behind early criticism—was carried in two separate directions, one that incorporated literature into politics and social history and another that tried to evacuate biographical concerns altogether. That is, some ignored the problem by treating these texts as politics, plain and simple: writers wrote for patronage within a public sphere dominated by political concerns and acted out through a newly opened press. Others sought to free Augustan writers from the charge of servility by showing how their texts contributed to intellectual traditions not reducible to biography and to show how their prose and poetry stood out from the factional disputes of Grub Street. As scholarly attention in the 1970s turned toward the relation between literature and politics as discursive formations, the problem of hypocrisy became much less urgent, rooted as it was in old-fashioned biographical

England, 1684-1798; Monk, *The Sublime*; Wimsatt, *Literary Criticism; a Short History*. For a critique of this method, see Crane, "On Writing the History of Criticism in England 1650-1800."

scholarship that involved now-quaint handwringing about the ethics of authorship and the nitty-gritty details of the print marketplace.

When we consider how these old topics were taken up in new ways (minus, of course, the handwringing) a couple issues need to be kept at the foreground. The split between the history of ideas and social history is obviously not a hard and fast one, and it's as subject to complication as any such division. However, I'd like to use it as a heuristic for thinking about old criticism and its usefulness for book history. A more familiar methodological division is that between literary interpretation and bibliographical analysis. We (by which I mean book historians in literature departments) often ask, How much prominence should our studies give to "readings" of texts, and how much to descriptions of their material form, production, and dissemination? Besides this perennial anxiety, we might also ask, What are we reading when we read texts that *take as their subject* the material form, production, and dissemination of books? When we read criticism from the past, are we recovering a history of ideas about how books *should* be made and used, or are we finding evidence about how they *were* made and used? These two modes are of course not exclusive, but they suggest very different emphases. Although we no longer deplore (indeed often celebrate) strategies of rhetorical masking, the question of what we take criticism to be evidence of often hinges on whether or not we take the author to be sincere. That is, it hinges on the problem of hypocrisy.

However, I wouldn't want to suggest that this methodological tension means the same thing for us that it meant for someone like Matthew Arnold or Leslie Stephen. The vocabulary has changed dramatically, and that matters. A perfect example here is Habermas on the public sphere. Specifically on the topic of late seventeenth and early

eighteenth-century print culture in England, Habermas synthesized just a handful of books, most of which were already synthetic histories.¹⁴ His claim about the rise of a literary public sphere in England was based on primary research much of which dated back to the nineteenth century, a hundred years or more before the 1989 translation. One could say that Habermas's reintroduction perfectly exemplifies a turn toward the kinds of questions that occupied his (and our) predecessors. However, one consequence of reconfiguring his subject as a "category" of bourgeois society involved shifting the emphasis from social history (the moniker under which most of his sources were advertised) and toward a history of sociological concepts. In this sense, the book remained quite timely in the 1990s, as a range of broadly similar projects blossomed around the same time.

Within book history, investigations into the history of authorship, publishing and reading often blend reconstructed accounts of these phenomena as social practices with a survey of the norms, categories, and concepts that have defined those practices across time. Old criticism has proven enormously valuable to this project because it sits at the nexus of materiality and ideality, not in any special metaphysical sense, but at the form of scholarly argumentation. That is, in terms of what it counts as evidence for. When criticism is found in a paratext like a preface or dedication, it qualifies as materiality. As commentary directed at reading communities, it qualifies as evidence of distribution and reception. As testimony of writers, it reintroduces authorial intent unscathed by the skepticism reserved for literary artifacts. When directed to a patron or signed by a

¹⁴ In addition to Stephen and Hauser, one of Habermas's other important source for this chapter is George Macaulay Trevelyan, *English Social History; a Survey of Six Centuries* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942).

publisher, criticism tells us about the means of production. Precisely because of its blurry applicability across these touchstones of bibliographical and interpretive method, reading criticism allows literary historians with a book-history bent to present their readings of texts as readings of the material book and even of the past itself. To tease out these various evidentiary uses of criticism is already to begin a critique. Acknowledging the crucial but usually unexamined role old criticism plays in the history of the book raises several complicating issues that invite a more detailed examination.

D. F. McKenzie's 1985 lecture, "The Book as an Expressive Form" (which has since gained new prominence through its inclusion in the *Book History Reader*), could be described as book history's retort to New Criticism. McKenzie argues that bibliography, as he broadly conceives it, offers a set of tools for returning human agency to overly formalist literary analyses, to "show the human presence in any recorded text."¹⁵ In this famous rebuttal to W. K. Wimsatt's and Monroe Beardsley's notion of the "intentional fallacy," McKenzie argues for a return to an author-centered idea of intentional meaning, to be inferred from bibliographic evidence. McKenzie shows that Wimsatt's and Beardsley's reliance on modern editions exposes them to textual inaccuracies that undermine their efforts at close reading. "This famous essay on the interpretation of literature," he says, "opens with a misquotation in its very first line."¹⁶ It's no coincidence that the text McKenzie focuses on is a piece of William Congreve's

¹⁵ "The Book as an Expressive Form," 45.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

criticism, the prologue to *The Way of the World*. By showing that the New Critics misread Congreve's claim to have "wrought" his scenes, as opposed to having "wrote" them, McKenzie highlights a gap between eighteenth- and twentieth-century notions of authorship. Congreve thought of himself as a craftsman: his readership would judge him based on the quality of his product. Only when translated through modernized editions can poetry seem like a verbal icon of merely internal reference.

Thus in one fell swoop McKenzie discredits New Criticism as inaccurate because textually sloppy—but the real force of his argument comes from the way he puts Congreve in dialogue with Wimsatt and Beardsley *as competing critics*. He shows that Congreve and the New Critics disagree on a topic of authorship and interpretation. How can their arguments be right, McKenzie implicitly asks, when premised on the idea that Congreve was wrong? But, McKenzie never mentions that he's referring to criticism, and it's by no means clear that his critique of the intentional fallacy would succeed if focused on, say, an ode by Keats. In such a case, we'd have a situation more like Fredson Bowers's New Bibliography, which identified textual irregularities to provide the basis for a new, best reading without really challenging the fundamental philosophical premise of New Critical interpretation. It's only because the text at issue offers a competing definition of authorship that it can serve this purpose so effectively. Although presented as an empirical induction from bibliographic facts, the argument ultimately rests on Congreve's authority as a commentator; or, not really so much his authority, as his self-evident historical interest. Because we could not bear dismissing Congreve's notions entirely, the intentional fallacy must be relegated to the status of one opinion among many across history.

In this way, McKenzie's bibliographic humanism depends on a history of ideas about authorship, publishing, and reading. Here's how he describes it: "What writers thought they were doing in writing texts, or printers and booksellers in designing and publishing them, or readers in making sense of them are issues which no history of the book can evade."¹⁷ What writers *thought they were doing*. Where can we find evidence for such a thing? Elsewhere in his defense of a strong notion of authorial intention, visible through the mediating intentions of printers, McKenzie is even more explicit: "We must look into the past, not only for material evidence of printing-house documents, but for any references at all which express conceptions of the book or demand that its readers interpret its signs in particular ways."¹⁸ In other words, we should seek out texts that express what authors intended and how they wanted readers to think. Not surprisingly, McKenzie spent a lot of time reading paratextual criticism. What he consistently found were historical theories of textuality; the second step was to show how the books as material objects manifest and express those theories. By reading things like prefaces and prologues as evidence of intent, and then showing how page-layout conforms to that intent as its physical manifestation, McKenzie develops a powerful argument for the book as an expressive form which carries meaning in its every aspect.

But, McKenzie goes further. The goal of his method is not merely to recover authorial intention by itself. His argument that we must attend to *all* aspects of the text demands that we look at various parts of a book, many of which the careful bibliographer

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ D. F. McKenzie, "The London Book Trade in 1668," in *Making Meaning: "Printers of the Mind" and Other Essays*, ed. Peter D McDonald and Michael Felix Suarez (Amherst: University Of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 206-07.

can verify are not attributable to authors alone. Indeed, it's in relation to these other people—printers, distributors, readers, and so on—that the author becomes not just visible but indispensable as a figure around which to organize our interpretations. Whether or not this really solves the metaphysical problem posed by the New Critics is not a question that need detain us here. The point is that the author emerges within a narrative of dispersed intent. The sociology of texts, by this reading, is the process by which the historian distributes attributions of agency among various figures of the past, whether authors, stationers, censors, patrons, or readers. When you've figured out who's responsible for what and described the meaning of the whole book on that basis, you know you've succeeded as a sociologist of texts.

This returns us again to the problem of hypocrisy. The nineteenth-century complaint about Dryden and his contemporaries came from biographical critics who looked for evidence of the "mind at work," by which they meant authors who stood out from their times by writing great philosophy or works of imaginative genius. The complaints about Dryden's character were that he was an insincere political opportunist, that his ideas were compromised by abject flatteries to patrons, and that his poetry and drama catered to the depraved taste of vulgar, libertine book-buyers and playgoers. It was too difficult, in other words, to confine meaning to a laudable figure of the past. Intent and agency were too evidently dispersed to be attributable to Dryden (the great author who speaks objectively), and so they must be attributed to Dryden (the toady who is compromised by his participation in a network of relations commercial, political, and professional). When it comes to Restoration criticism in general, we have a curious situation in which a body of texts that used to be dismissed as too subjective is now

valuable precisely for the way it communicates subjectivity. Criticism that used to be disvalued for failing to suppress the context-bound self—that is, for failing to achieve the kind of objectivity and disinterestedness advocated by Matthew Arnold—is now eagerly studied for the fact that it doesn’t suppress things like political and financial motives. What had been seen as a morass of rhetorical exchange—a kind of tar-pit of failed objectivity—is now taken to be a fertile garden, a discursive playground of subjectivity, an archive of agency.

Paying attention to the generic properties of criticism can contribute helpfully to this approach, at least in part by subjecting it to critique. When we’re using old criticism for evidence in social history, thinking about it *as criticism* will help to treat it a bit more skeptically. Prefatory writing does not transparently express “conceptions of the book” or “demands on readers,” but is bound by the formal and rhetorical considerations of literary argument. How old criticism dispersed attributions of agency to the people around the books—the patrons, publishers, authors, readers, etc.—often varied quite contentiously according to such considerations, and so a certain caution is in order when using any individual expression as evidence of the past, which presents a difficulty if we understand the success of a project as the faithful and accurate attribution of agencies. Second, when we take criticism as evidence in a history of ideas about print culture, attention to genre and form can help provide a different way to think about how these topics (what it means to be an author, what is the status of print, how should reading communities be organized, etc.) emerged in relation to critical topics that were, often, more central preoccupations of the texts at issue. Teasing out the relationship between arguments over literary form and conceptualizations of print culture offers another avenue for bridging the gap between the

history of the book and literary studies. The rest of this essay will be devoted to a short case-study that will demonstrate in more concrete terms the issues I've laid out so far: the problem of hypocrisy, the troubled relationship between intellectual and biographical history, and the central but ambivalent place of criticism in our narratives about print culture.

During the Restoration and early eighteenth century, the genres of criticism were fluid, heterogeneous, and hotly contested. As poets argued over how criticism should be written, over who wrote well and who poorly, they opened a decades-long debate over whether criticism should be written at all. To be a “critick” meant being a playhouse heckler or a coffeehouse wit, but to write and publish essays on literary topics was an undefined practice open to competing interpretations. Some eagerly published their opinions about poetic form as a way to craft a community of experts through sociable disagreement, while others rejected such efforts as a perversion of social order that undermined poetry through misguided efforts to innovate. Writers like Dryden and John Dennis popularized innovative critical forms—prefatory essays, dialogues, correspondences, and practical critiques of published works—that gave heightened visibility to a culture of poets and laid the groundwork for what has traditionally been known as Restoration literary criticism but has more recently tended to be gathered under sociological phrases like “the literary public sphere” or “the field of literary production.” However, much of this period’s most important critical writing came from outside such exchanges and directly opposed the explicit theorization of literary form as such. The

poets and playwrights of the Restoration and early eighteenth century generated a rich body of cultural commentary that staked out shifting boundaries between poetry and criticism and articulated diverse ideas about how a textual community of poets might serve interests larger than their own.

As I argue in Chapter Two, after 1660, playwrights were forced to confront in nuanced ways their various audiences, not just playgoers and book buyers, but other playwrights.¹⁹ Prefatory writing was used to demonstrate authors' worthiness to patrons and other readers, but it also brought them into a dialogic exchange with other authors, many of whom sought preferment on comparable terms. Playwrights like John Dryden, Robert Howard, and Thomas Shadwell all published their works through one publisher, Henry Herringman, who would become the most important promoter of dramatic criticism during the first two decades of the Restoration.²⁰ I will discuss Herringman's

¹⁹ I will treat these topics more extensively in the next chapter. For Davenant's participation in social networks of Royalist exiles during the Interregnum, see Steven N. Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture, 1649-1689* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Deborah C. Payne, "Patronage and the Dramatic Marketplace under Charles I and II," *Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991): 137-152; Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). The literature on Flecknoe is far less extensive, but an introduction to the author from a book-historical perspective can be found in Harold Love, "Richard Flecknoe as Author-Publisher," *BSANZ bulletin* 14, no. 2 (1991): 41-50. Love also mentions Flecknoe in passing in *The Culture and Commerce of Texts: Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 64. Typically of scholars who are interested in the meanings and uses of media, Love does not pause over the fact that his primary evidence for Flecknoe's "practice" as an author comes from critical essays, poems, and dedications he wrote and published. As a consequence, Love emphasizes Flecknoe's entrepreneurial self-publishing rather than his use of critical argumentation as a mode of self-presentation and advancement. My argument is that the latter is far more important and that, in fact, it is the basis of the former's legibility.

²⁰ I discuss Herringman at greater length in the next chapter. The best sources for biographical information are the relevant entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National*

career at greater length in the next chapter, but it may be helpful to lay out several introductory points here. As a group, the books that carry Herringman's imprint feature critical prose prominently. 49 new playbooks appeared from his shop, and of those 36 include a dedication, a preface, or both. This comprises a surprisingly large segment of Restoration criticism, and almost all of it for the first ten to fifteen years. As I'll argue in chapter two, Herringman's playbooks mark an unusual confluence between the competing ambitions of playwrights, on the one hand, and, on the other, the commercial motivations of a bookseller looking to capitalize on a little controversy—although the question of the bookseller's agency, we'll see, remains ambiguous and was an object of contention at the time.

Herringman's authors (if we can call them that), not only Dryden but also Shadwell and the Howards, offered prefatory criticism as a way to exchange often conflicting controverting opinions in print. In this sense, it was closely comparable to efforts in other cultural arenas to cultivate postures of diffidence, sobriety, and shared curiosity, as in the *New Science*. (Herringman was also a publisher of the chemist Robert Boyle, coincidentally.²¹) As I argue in the next chapter, when structured around strictly defined questions, critical disagreement gave a new coherence to the core practices of

Biography and C. William Miller, "Henry Herringman, Restoration Bookseller-Publisher," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 42 (1948): 292-306.

²¹ For example, Robert Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations Touching Colours. First Occasionally Written, Among Some Other Essays, to a Friend; and Now Suffer'd to Come Abroad as the Beginning of an Experimental History of Colours. By the Honourable Robert Boyle, Fellow of the Royal Society* (London: printed for Henry Herringman at the Anchor in the lower walk of the New-Exchange, 1664); Robert Boyle, *Certain Physiological Essays, Written at Distant Times, and on Several Occasions: By the Honourable Robert Boyle* (London: printed for Henry Herringman at the Anchor in the lower walk in the New-Exchange, 1661).

playwriting. The essays shared a commitment to describing drama's underlying principles, which often included outlining rules for composition, but rarely were such rules offered as strongly binding. Each poet had to be careful not to appear "magisterial" in style, an accusation often directed at Dryden, for example.

At first blush, such rhetorical moves might seem like an attempt at disinterestedness in Matthew Arnold's sense. Especially, for example, in the way Dryden describes critical exchange as a "war of opinions" acted out "betwixt Friends," one might infer a desire to seek truth regardless of one's partiality. There's no question that Dryden was committed to *getting it right*, but his main concern—and this is echoed across playbooks by other Herringman authors—is to ensure decorum by separating opinion-making "persecuted by some, like Pedants, with violence of words" from that "manag'd by others like Gentleman, with candour and civility."²² What we have here is not really disinterestedness, but diffidence. The function of criticism at this time needed not to involve mentally extracting yourself from your political investments, because its purpose was to explain and rationalize and thereby advance your place within a social network of patrons, rivals, and other auditors and readers.

What makes the prefatory criticism so interesting to me is that it uses literary concepts to achieve this effect. Consider one of Dryden's earliest pieces of prose, the dedication to his 1664 play, *Rival Ladies*, addressed to Roger Boyle, brother to chemist Robert, and the newly named Earl of Orrery. A nobleman and a poet, Boyle was among the first to compose plays after the Restoration, in his case at the explicit request of King Charles II. His decision, knowing that Charles enjoyed plays "after the French fasshion,"

²² Dryden, *Works*, xvii:5.

was to use rhyme.²³ The use of rhyme for serious drama would prove controversial over the next decade or so. In response to detractors who, Dryden reports, have declared rhyme unnatural, he counters that it is so only

when the Poet either makes a Vicious choice of Words, or places them for Rhyme so unnaturally, as no man would in ordinary Speaking: but when 'tis so judiciously order'd, that the first Word in the Verse seems to beget the second, and that the next, till that becomes the last Word in the Line, which in the negligence of Prose would be so; it must then be granted, Rhyme has all the advantages of Prose, besides its own.

Having laid out this basic point, relating it to examples from Renaissance drama and contemporary French theory, Dryden continues,

But, my Lord, though I have more to say upon this Subject, yet I must remember 'tis your Lordship to whom I speak; who have much better commended this way by your Writing in it, than I can do by Writing for it. Where my Reasons cannot prevail, I am sure your Lordship's example must. Your Rhetorick has gain'd my cause; at least the greatest part of my Design has already succeeded to my Wish, which was to interest so noble a Person in the Quarrel, and withal to testify to the World how happy I esteem my Self in the honour of being, / *My Lord, / Your Lorship's most / Humble, and most / Obedient Servant,* / John Driden.

I think what Dryden's nineteenth-century skeptics were picking up on when they felt compelled to concede that his dedications were handled with "singular dignity" is that in almost every case critical ideas serve as the crux through which the patron-client relationship is imagined. Dryden does not merely declare his subservience to a social superior, he based that service on the idea that they share a common critical cause. The self-interest of the critic is explicit; indeed it's crucial to the form. So, too, is the intellectual concept which stands apart from the poet as an individual; the concept

²³ This brief comment is recorded in a letter to the Duke of Ormonde. Cited in James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 146.

bridges the patron and client while connecting the poet (as he'll find out over the next few years) to a network of rival interlocutors.²⁴

But let me return to the question: What should we take this to be evidence of? As a trace of Orrery's practice as a patron, it's pretty ambiguous, and not very trustworthy. On the question of agency, Dryden presents himself as an explicator of Orrery's beliefs—"your Rhetoric has gain'd my cause," he says. Is he being sincere? I don't think we can really know. It's certainly possible, but there's precious little in Orrery's writings to confirm it, except, as Dryden says, the example of his plays. But what I take to be the key issue, the idea that Orrery's plays are an example of something about which we should have an opinion, seems to come from Dryden.

This also leaves open the question of what role the bookseller played. Herringman's publication record is remarkable for the consistency of style and tone in his paratexts. If that record can be taken as an indication (and I think it can), he was an intelligent, careful, thoughtful, and ambitious publisher. He might have considered it in his interest to put Orrery's name at the front of his book, just as he might have considered it in his interest to suggest to Sir Robert Howard, Dryden's opponent on the topic of rhyme, to publish his contrary opinions on the topic the next year in the preface to his collected *Plays* (1665).²⁵ On the topic of readership, Dryden implies a reading

²⁴ The notion of "bridging" is a concept developed by Erving Goffman, but which I borrow most directly from Paul Douglas McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

²⁵ Howard is clearly posturing when he claims to publish as a favor in response to the "many Solicitations of M^r Herringman's." *Four New Plays* (London: Printed for Henry Herringman, 1665), sig. A2v. To what extent we credit Howard's account depends on what I have described as the problem of hypocrisy. Maintaining such an impressive list of

community starkly divided on questions of poetic form, but I don't think we can know if that was the case. The rigor and care with which writers like Dryden described the sociology of their texts makes them the best witnesses from which to draw testimony as we try to reconstruct that sociology, but that very care and rigor also introduces rhetorical distortions that can be maddeningly difficult to untangle.

Bernard Schilling, in his introduction to a 1963 collection of essays on Dryden, complains that the tradition of dismissing him as a hypocrite and opportunist gave too much credit to attacks that were leveled against the poet during his lifetime.²⁶ My last example will draw from such an attack. This is taken from the dedication to *The Empress of Morocco* (1673), a rhymed heroic play very much in Orrery's style, written by Elkanah Settle and published by one of Herringman's minor competitors. Rather than address questions of dramatic genre, Settle uses the opportunity to challenge the propriety of critical discussion in the dedication form:

And thus a Dedication which was formerly a Present to a Person of Quality, is now made a Libel on him, whilst the Poet either supposes his Patron to be so great a Sot, to defend that in Print, which he hist off the *Stage*: Or else makes himself a greater in asking a Favour from him which he ne'er expects to obtain. However, that which is an abuse to the *Patron*, is a Complement to the *Book-seller*, who whispers the *Poet*, and tells him, *Sire*, Your Play has misfortune, and all that- - but if you'd but write a Dedication, or Preface---The *Poet* takes the hint, picks out a person of Honour, tells him he has a great deal of Wit, gives us an account who writ sense in the last Age, supposing we cannot be Ignorant who writes it in This; Disputes the nature of *Verse*, Answers a Cavil or two, Quibbles upon the *Court*, Huffs the *Critiques*, and the

aristocratic authors would likely have required considerable effort on Herringman's part, so there is little reason to disbelieve Howard here, yet the problem remains.

²⁶Bernard Nicholas Schilling, *Dryden; a Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963).

work's done. 'Tis not to be imagined how far a Sheet of this goes to make a *Book-seller* Rich, and a *Poet* Famous.²⁷

Whereas Dryden portrays critical discourse as the natural point of connection that joins patron and poet in a common cause, Settle presents an opposite picture, one which presents the patron as an uninterested non-participant. The poet himself works from no inner conviction, but writes on the fly according to a kind of generic recipe at the suggestion of the avaricious bookseller. If we treat these texts as evidence in the social histories of patronage, authorship, and commercial publishing, they remain incompatible. That is, they distribute their attributions of agency very differently.

Adjudicating between these accounts will, on this score, involve separating what we take to be the fact of the matter from the distortions (and, as such, will involve making judgments about who's being sincere). What I propose in this dissertation, though, is that we think of these texts not so much as evidence in the history of patronage or bookselling, but as evidence in the material history of dedication-writing. From this view, with a steady attention to the problems of genre at dispute, the threat of distortion becomes legible as a practice of critical intervention. We can see Dryden, for example, trying to straddle various institutional demands (including the playhouse, the print marketplace, and the social networks of patronage and professional rivalry) while advocating critical discourse as a technique of authorial presence within these contexts. Thus the prominence that he gives to critical questions—in this case, whether drama should rhyme—as a fulcrum around which social relationships can be imagined.

²⁷ Elkanah Settle, *The Empress of Morocco, a Tragedy* (London: Printed for William Cademan, 1673), sig. A2v-A2r.

Keeping this in mind suggests we ought to understand Dryden's account of the social life of his book not necessarily as a faithful description of what happened but as a set of norms which he advocates, and so we needn't dismiss Settle's description entirely. Settle argues that these arenas are separate, that noblemen don't really care about criticism, and that its function is primarily commercial and public. He uses his dedication to gain favor by pointing out this disjunction. The extent to which we credit his account, then, is the extent to which we appreciate a set of difficulties that critics like Dryden and others may have faced. If it's true that he, Shadwell, Flecknoe and the like were appropriating the cultural authority of patrons for their own ends, or that Herringman encouraged them to do so, what we have then is a very early attempt to make the print marketplace function as a cultural institution of criticism. That their success in this endeavor was partial, haphazard, and subject to public ridicule does not, I think, diminish in any way its historical significance.

In working through this case, I have tried to identify an overlap between the concerns of old criticism and the ambitions of social histories of books: both are designed to talk about how books interact with the world, both try to describe the author's intent, both often reflect on the institutional or commercial contexts of book production, and both try to account for the effects of books on readers. Both are, to borrow a phrase from Robert Hume's excellent treatise on historical method, "simulacra of the past."²⁸ This makes old criticism an indispensable archive of evidence for book history, especially as it's practiced in literature departments. However, as we strive as much as possible for

²⁸ Robert D. Hume, *Reconstructing Contexts: The Aims and Principles of Archaeo-Historicism* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

plausibility, using criticism as evidence means making a series of judgments about how accurately it reflects the past, implying ethical decisions that bear an implicit similarity to the concerns that motivated old-fashioned modes of biographical criticism. But it also involves doing something like a history of ideas. In the words of one scholar, “The history of ideas is a dense texture of disparate and overlapping threads of thought that stubbornly resists the unraveling of a single favored tradition which all others subserve.”²⁹ This remains true whether we’re talking about the history of concepts in philosophy, religion, aesthetics, or politics, or whether we’re talking about the history of ideas about authorship, reading, or publishing. Literary criticism from the past stands athwart these various threads but also across the divide between the history of ideas and the aspirations of historical sociology. Understanding its implication in all these arenas, and doing our best to keep them simultaneously in view, is the key to getting the most we can from criticism in our histories of books. In the next chapter, I will explore these issues at greater length, but with a closer eye to the development of criticism in the wake of the English Restoration. In the critical controversies that emerged surrounding the early success of John Dryden, the norms of writing and publishing as a material practice came under serious pressure. The emergence of criticism as a discourse resulted in the proliferation of writing about what it meant to be an author, about the proper conduct of bibliographic self-presentation, and about the proper constitution and conduct of literary community. Following the history of these debates means following these interweaving threads of argument, but the basic point is that there was a difference between being an

²⁹ Michael McKeon, “Civic Humanism and the Logic of Historical Interpretation,” in *The Political Imagination in History: Essays Concerning J.G.A. Pocock*, ed. D. N. DeLuna (Baltimore: Owlworks, 2006), 72.

author who published her or his opinions and being an author who did not. In what follows, I will trace some of the consequences of this difference.

Chapter Two

Dramatic Criticism and the Print Marketplace, 1664-1675

I am of the opinion they cannot be good poets, who are not accustomed to argue well.

—John Dryden, *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*

This dissertation describes the emergence of literary criticism in England during the Restoration and early eighteenth century. Without institutionalized support or clearly codified genres, critics had to grapple with basic questions that after the mid-eighteenth century could be left unspoken: What is critical writing for? How and in what forms should it be written? What relation do an author's opinions about literary topics have to that author's poetry or career? How do opinions situate an author in relation to his peers? In this chapter, my focus will be on the first decade or so of the Restoration—from about 1660 to the early 1670s—when a new flourish of critical writing brought these issues to the forefront of public discussion about plays, playwrights, and playbook publishing. On the one hand, I will make a specific historical argument about this decade, exploring how

playbook publishers in London adapted forms of poetic criticism, which during the 1650s were used to appeal for patronage from out-of-power Royalists, to the new demands of the print marketplace. I hope to show that the structure of critical discourse in the first decade of the Restoration was intimately tied to dynamics of competition in the print marketplace. In recounting this historical narrative, my goal is to elucidate a set of general issues that pertain across the Restoration and early eighteenth century, and which will be further explored in later chapters. Whereas other scholars have read this criticism as a bid to corral interpretation, to regulate the public, or to engage in post-Civil War ideological battles, I want to ask instead, What kind of thing to do was it to publish one's thoughts on playwriting? By tracing the outlines of the debate in the 1660s and 1670s between those who embraced this new technique of authorship and those who challenged it, this chapter tests the boundaries of Restoration dramatic criticism and its conditions of viability. I begin with a discussion of the criticism that emerged during the 1650s and its usefulness within the context of Royalist patronage. I then turn to prefatory criticism published by Henry Herringman, a leading London bookseller who held a near monopoly over English belles-lettres at this time, contrasting it from criticism published by some of his rivals in the early 1670s. After providing this overview of the general contours of critical discourse, I focus on a specific debate, the feud between John Dryden and Sir Robert Howard over rhyme in drama, to anatomize in more detail the capabilities and limitations of theoretical criticism. I conclude with a discussion of critical pamphlets, which both expanded the field of debate and demonstrated how print exchange could emerge as an autonomous social context of literary controversy.

During the Interregnum, critical writing was used by writers to gain support from exiled or out-of-power supporters of King Charles II. Poetic criticism was useful because it sought to explain how poetry supports Royalist claims of cultural prestige in the absence of actual political power: the individual poet's claim to fame finds justification as it buttresses the cultural authority of his social network as a whole.¹ This process can be seen for example in the "Preface" to William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1650), written as a letter to Thomas Hobbes and bound with Hobbes' reply.² Both writers were living at the time as exiles in Paris, and both were closely dependent on supporters living abroad. Hobbes corresponded with philosophers from the Dutch Republic and England while working as a mathematics tutor to the young Prince Charles in the 1640s. Like Hobbes, Davenant was of humble birth and wrote under the support of powerful patrons. Both were connected at times to William Cavendish, later Duke of Newcastle, who was among the most important patrons among the exiles.³ In addition, Davenant was closely

¹ My discussion of Royalist criticism in this section brackets off the question of whether or not there was such a thing as Royalist or "cavalier" poetry, a point which has been contested by scholars of seventeenth-century poetry. For a discussion about how this question applies to Davenant specifically, see Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing*, 94-100. James Loxley introduces his study of cavalier poetry with these rhetorical questions: "What can it mean ... to construct a verse practice in accordance with partisan needs? In what ways might such partisanship find textual form? How might this verse practice represent itself?" *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: The Drawn Sword* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 3. As I will argue, these are Davenant's questions as well. I want to highlight how the very difficulty of this problem—of how poetic form could be made to serve partisan ends—provided an opportunity and *raison d'être* for critics at this time, as well as in our own.

² William D'Avenant, *Sir William Davenant's Gondibert*, ed. David F Gladish (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971)..

³ Unlike many noblemen who found themselves scrambling for cash after fleeing England, where their estates were subject to large fines and, in some cases, confiscation, Cavendish was uniquely situated among exiles living abroad in his ability to maintain a large and prosperous home, and so he became one of the most influential patrons of the

associated with the court of Henrietta Maria, and composition of the poem was interrupted when he accepted a post to serve in one of the American colonies still under royal allegiance.⁴

In this context, Davenant's exchange with Hobbes has been read as a founding document of English neoclassicism and an important early expression of an aristocratic, Royalist poetics. Steven Zwicker has used Davenant's preface and Hobbes's reply as evidence for the "polemicization" of literary culture around mid-century: "It is difficult to imagine an aesthetic program more exactly responsive to the circumstance of royalist exiles in 1650 than that devised by Davenant and Hobbes."⁵ Zwicker's emphasis on Davenant's and Hobbes's "responsiveness" points to several characteristics of the argument laid out in Davenant's "Preface," but primarily to his sociological understanding of "witte." Davenant defines wit as a "dexterity of thought" closely tied to the decorum of social rank and position: among clergy, wit is "Humility, Exemplariness, and Moderation," among statesmen, "Gravity, Vigilance, Benigne Complaisancy, Secrecy, Patience, and Dispatch," among soldiers, "Valor, Painfulness, Temperance" (18, 19). For poets, wit is "a full comprehension of all recited in these; and an ability to

arts during this time. Geoffrey Smith argues that "this aristocratic magnate's experience of exile was as unusual as it was distinctive; his settled and elegant life in Antwerp, when so many exiled Cavaliers, from Charles II downwards, were impoverished wanderers, sets him apart from his fellow émigrés." "Nothing so Rare as Money," in Geoffrey Smith, *The Cavaliers in Exile, 1640-1660* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 100-01.

⁴ Davenant would not serve this post. He was captured en route and served two years in jail. While imprisoned, he published the unfinished *Gondibert*, which included commendatory poems by Abraham Cowley and Edmund Waller. See Robert Wilcher, *The Writing of Royalism, 1628-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 317-20. Wilcher's chapter on the Interregnum, "Coping with Defeat and Waiting for the King: 1649-1660" offers a useful overview of the cultural use of poetry as a means to advertise one's loyalty to the crown during this time (308-48).

⁵ Zwicker, *Lines of Authority*, 26.. See also Wilcher, *Writing of Royalism*, 318.

bring those comprehensions into action” (19). Davenant is most careful to separate wit from “*inspiration*,” which he calls “a dangerous word” (22). Inspiration is an “extemporary fury” that, he warns ominously, “many have of late successfully us’d” to “pretend authority over the people” (22). So, while the wit of the poet renders the decorum of prevailing social hierarchies into “full comprehension,” inspiration threatens those very hierarchies by giving dissemblers a tool for exerting false authority over the people.

Against this familiar trope of enthusiasm run amuck, Davenant contrasts the work of the poet who labors over his art. “I beleev’d paines most requisite to this undertaking: for though painfulnesse in Poets ... seems always to discover a want of naturall force, and is traduc’d, ... the naturall force of a Poet [is] more apparent, by but confessing that great forces aske great labour in managing; then by an arrogant braving the world, when he enters the field with his undisciplin’d first thoughts” (21-2). Poetry, then, is a specialized kind of labor, one that makes evident a poet’s natural genius by highlighting the grandeur to which she aspires. It emerges alongside the specialized work of clergy, politicians, and soldiers while encapsulating each by demonstrating the norms of their respective social roles. The poet achieves this effect both in the content of her poetry and enacts it through her labor of composition, which stands in contrast to behaviors typical of the unruly and enthusiastic multitude.⁶

⁶ This also closely relates to Davenant’s deep concern with the relationship between poetry and religion as competing—but overlapping—forms of sacred discourse. Poetry in Davenant’s view is not an alternative to religion but an alternative to the highly politicized popular forms of religious argumentation—gathered loosely under pejorative terms like “*inspiration*,” enthusiasm, or ranting—that opposed entrenched hierarchy, and in particular those that seemed to endanger hereditary sovereignty. According to

Further, Davenant's theory of wit is closely tied to the assumption that epic poetry addresses an exclusive audience of social elites. In a memorable rhetorical flourish, Davenant argues that common people "looke upon the outward glory or blaze of Courts, as Wilde beasts in darke nights stare on their Hunters Torches" (12). The poet ought not to tread in that darkness. He continues, "Nor is it needfull that Heroique Poesy should be leuell'd to the reach of Common men; for if the examples it presents prevaile upon our Chiefs, the delight of Imitation ... will rectify by the rules, which those Chiefs establish of their owne lives, the lives of all that behold them" (13). In this formulation, the heroic poet achieves his social function by offering "examples" to political leaders who, prompted by the pleasure of poetic representation, will develop rules for conduct which entail benefits that trickle down to the common populace. Despite its printedness, then, poetry and criticism stand apart from widely circulating discourse characteristic of the public sphere. It fulfills its age-old promise to both instruct and delight and to further the aspirations of a nation or people, not by circulating among those people, but by influencing a narrow group of readers who will in turn act upon the multitude. In Davenant's view, heroic poetry becomes public—that is, it gains political force over "the people"—only through this process of readerly mediation that radiates outward from a narrow audience of elites.

If successful in this way, poetry will bring no small measure of reward to the poet, a point Davenant is not shy about making. "Men are cheefly provok'd to the toyle of

Davenant, the poet borrows more authentic forms of religious discourse—the parable—and directs them to a proper audience of the politically powerful.

compiling Bookes, by love of Fame,” he writes (25).⁷ In the context of poetry’s social utility, the desire for fame need not imply a vain or otherwise corrupted self-interest. Davenant addresses this issue directly: “Nor is the desire of Fame so vaine as divers have rigidly imagin’d; Fame being (when belonging to the Living) that which is more gravely call’d, a stedly and necessary reputation; and without it, hereditary Power, or acquir’d greatnesse can never quietly governe the World” (25). By overturning a commonsense association between fame and vanity, Davenant connects it instead to “reputation,” a term with more positive connotations. Reputation—especially one that is “steddy and necessary”—emphasizes the poet’s embedded place within social networks that confer value reciprocally.⁸ It’s a form of legitimation and discipline of the same kind that empowers sovereigns to govern “quietly” without coercion or war. The poet’s fame is good in the same way that respect for sovereign power is good, and it brings with it similar benefits to social harmony.

For this reason, my reading of Davenant’s “Preface” shares much with those that emphasize his role in establishing an aristocratic and specifically Royalist poetics. However, I want to suggest a subtle but important shift in perspective by “zooming out” from Davenant’s explicit arguments about poetry and giving focus to his implicit

⁷ Davenant’s full comment reads, “Men are chiefly provok’d to the toyle of compiling Bookes, by love of Fame, and often by officiousnesse of Conscience, but seldom with expectation of Riches” (25). By “officiousnesse of Conscience,” Davenant seems to refer to politically inspired writing, especially on matters of religious debate; that is, the kind of books scholars often see as characteristic of the early public sphere. This suggests, again, that Davenant’s notion of fame ought not to be conflated with modern notions of publicity.

⁸ The reciprocal nature of this process is emphasized in the epistolary form of Davenant’s preface and Hobbes’s reply. Maintaining one’s reputation would have been of vital concern to exiles who often depended almost entirely on credit for their subsistence. Smith, *Cavaliers in Exile*, 97.

assumptions about criticism. In the process of explaining poetry's political value, Davenant also models a particular use for prefatory writing. In this 1650s patronage context, criticism's purpose is manifold: to reaffirm an embattled cultural hierarchy, to explain the value of poetry in broad strokes as well as the merits of specific works, and to highlight poetry-writing as a specialized kind of labor. These effects will combine, it is hoped, to advance the reputation of the poet among his elite readers who, it is implied, might reward him in any number of ways. For a writer like Davenant, who depended on the kindness of patrons his entire career, such concerns are not peripheral to theoretical questions but are central to them because they provide the very structure of critical argumentation. What values does poetry affirm? How does it do so, and which poems have been most successful? How might new works contribute to this tradition? What is required of the poet and what can he expect in return? These questions are Davenant's questions, and by printing his thoughts on them he fastens his personal reputation inextricably to the answers he provides.

Perhaps the most eager poet to follow in Davenant's footsteps was Richard Flecknoe. Like many of the king's supporters, Flecknoe fled England in the 1640s, traveling to Italy and France where he received a small, subsistence living from various aristocrats in return for his work as a poet and musician. After his return to London in the early 1650s, Flecknoe began printing his work and distributing it among patrons. Flecknoe was a prolific and often witty writer; for a twenty-year span, his books ranged genres, including poetical epistles, epigrams and songs, plays and operatic masques, travel narratives, essays, character portraits, and satirical pamphlets. Flecknoe has been identified by Harold Love as the epitome of the author-publisher who sought an income

from writing through patronage rather than book-selling, a practice typically associated with manuscript circulation but which Flecknoe “daringly transposed ... into print.”⁹ Less than a third of Flecknoe’s printed works carry the imprint of a bookseller: he wrote and self-published primarily for the assortment of patrons whose praise appears throughout his texts. “I write onely for my self and private friends,” Flecknoe insisted, “and none prints more, and publishes less, than I.”¹⁰ He frequently assured his chosen readership that despite the printed form of his books their contents were directed faithfully to the elite audience of his addressees.¹¹

Criticism was a central facet of Flecknoe’s self-presentation; each of his books features a preface or essay that demonstrates his expertise and flatters the authority of his readers. His first work to appear in print, *Miscellania, or, Poems of all sorts with divers other pieces* (1653), includes, in addition to many poems directed to potential patrons,¹²

⁹ Harold Love, *The Culture and Commerce of Texts: Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 60. For a fuller discussion, see Love’s earlier essay, “Richard Flecknoe as Author-Publisher,” *BSANZ bulletin* 14, no. 2 (1991): 41-50..

¹⁰ Richard Flecknoe, *Sr William D’avenant’s voyage to the other world with his adventures in the poets Elizium: a poetical fiction* (London: Printed for the author, 1668).

¹¹ For example, Flecknoe assures the Duchess of Richmond and Lenox that his operatic masque, *Ariadne Deserted by Theseus* (1654), is addressed only to the “Noblest and Worthiest,” to whose “admirable faculty of judging and understanding” he eagerly submits. Richard Flecknoe, *Ariadne Deserted by Theseus, and Found and Courted by Bacchus*. (London: s.n., 1654), sig. A2v-A2r. In his dedication to *Love’s Dominion* (1654), Flecknoe assures Lady Elizabeth Claypole that a return of the stage “is so much longed for still, by all the nobler and better sort.” Richard Flecknoe, *Love’s Dominion, a Dramatique Piece, Full of Excellent Moraltie; Written as a Pattern for the Reformed Stage* (London: s.n., 1654), sig. A3r. The fact that Claypole was Cromwell’s daughter suggests that Flecknoe’s notion of the “better sort” was based as much on wealth and prestige as it was on a specific political alignment.

¹² Throughout, Flecknoe is explicit about how his writing is meant to secure financial remuneration from a noble readership. Consider for example the poem, addressed

three lengthy prose essays, “A Discourse of Languages. And Particularly of the English Tongue,” “Of Translation of Authors,” and “A Letter Treating of Conversation, Acquaintance and Freindship.” Perhaps even more so than Davenant’s, Flecknoe’s work-a-day essays treat issues of concern to the exiled elite. In these essays, Flecknoe compares English to European and classical languages and proposes restoring the stage as a technique for its elevation and refinement; he theorizes the role of translators as proponents of learning for Englishmen confronted by texts outside their national tradition; and he warns against conversational impropriety that threatens the sociability of English-speaking communities living in foreign lands. *Miscellania*’s final essay narrates Flecknoe’s return to England, where he lingers outside the deserted Blackfriars Theatre to lament the cultural havoc wreaked, in his view, by the vulgar and seditious preaching of

possibly to William Cavendish or Henry Howard, “To N.N., *In recommending to him a certain Memoriall*,” quoted here in full:

I must beg of you (sir) nay what is more,
 ‘Tis a disease so infectious to be poore,
 Must beg, you’d beg for me, which whilst I do,
 What i’st, but even to make you Beggar too?
 But poverty being as honorable now,
 As twas, when *Cincinnatus* held the Plow:
Senators sow’d and reap’t and who had been
 In Carr of Triumph, fetcht the Harvest in.
 Whilst mightiest peers do want, nay what is worse,
 Even greatest Prince live on others purse
 And very Kings themselves are Beggars made.
 No shame for any (Sir) to be oth’ Trade.

The primary conceit of the poem is to bring poet and patron together under their shared condition of dependence. The injustice caused by Royalist dispossession is an ongoing theme in Flecknoe’s poetry of the 1650s, and he frequently uses it in similar ways. Richard Flecknoe, *Miscellania. Or, Poems of All Sorts, with Divers Other Pieces* (London: printed by T.R. for the author, 1653).

radical Protestantism.¹³ Flecknoe's uncelebrated career in the mid-seventeenth century offers several lessons about criticism at this time. Though often printed in books, criticism does not imply motives that were commercial in any conventional sense nor that its readers were anonymous, because a poet's livelihood depended on his reputation among the powerful more than his success with book-buyers. Instead, prefatory writing like Davenant's and Flecknoe's promoted poetry as an employment worthy of reputation and patronage—nothing so formal as a profession, but nonetheless a service that bound poets in stable and legitimate patron-client relationships. To print your thoughts on poetry is to publicize your place within this system.

After the Restoration, the re-opening of the theaters and the increase of commercial playbook publishing put these aspects of criticism under serious strain. Although poets continued to use criticism as a way to demonstrate their affiliation with the politically powerful—most evidently in dedications to playbooks—the increases in audience and participation fundamentally changed what was at stake in critical writing. After 1660, critics found themselves navigating several different audiences: they still kept an eye toward the social networks of patronage, but their writing now addressed as well playhouse audiences, book-buyers, and, perhaps most importantly, other playwrights. Whereas during the 1650s Davenant and Flecknoe could confidently differentiate their readership from the “vulgar multitude,” after 1660 poets were forced to confront in more

¹³ See in particular the poem embedded in this essay, “*Epilogue to all the Playes were ever Acted*,” Ibid., 141-42.

nuanced ways the various audiences their plays addressed. At the same time, because many playwrights began writing within the same five- to ten-year period, criticism became interactional in a way that it wasn't during the prior decade. That is to say, when an author published her thoughts on how poetry or criticism should be written, she did so under the assumption that others might respond in kind. Prefatory writing not only demonstrated authors' worthiness to patrons, but also placed them in (potentially antagonistic) relationship to others who sought preferment on comparable terms, all the while in full view of playhouse critics and the buyers of books. How theoretical argumentation would fare under this new dispensation will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

The most important publisher of dramatic criticism during the first two decades of the Restoration was Henry Herringman. Besides being the exclusive publisher of John Dryden, Herringman also brought out the works of some of his most important rivals, including Thomas Shadwell and Sir Robert Howard. He also published the leading gentlemen poets of the Restoration, while reprinting older works by past greats like John Donne, Sir John Suckling, and Ben Jonson.¹⁴ By the late 1660s, Herringman was among the most prominent booksellers in London, leading one recent commentator to claim that his list of authors "virtually defines contemporary literature."¹⁵ Belletristic in their style

¹⁴ For Herringman's life, see the relevant entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: In Association with the British Academy: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also C. William Miller, *Henry Herringman Imprints: a Preliminary Checklist* (Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1949); Miller, "Henry Herringman, Restoration Bookseller-Publisher."

¹⁵ Paul Hammond, *The Making of Restoration Poetry* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 6. Hammond credits Herringman, along with Jacob Tonson, as one of the inventors of

and often Royalist in their sympathies, Herringman's publications during the 1660s and 1670s encompass much of the most important English poetry of the mid-seventeenth century.

Publishing critical prose was an important part of Herringman's business model, especially regarding plays. Of the 49 new playbooks that carry his imprint, 36 include a dedication, a preface, or both. (See Table 1.) About half include prose essays that engage debates over the nature of drama or its history; together, these account for most of the texts traditionally categorized as "literary criticism" for a ten-year period from the mid-1660s to the mid-1670s. It's worth emphasizing that this represents a sizable segment of the canon of early English criticism. Dryden was a Herringman author when he published his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), for example, and the dialogue narrated in the essay was shaped by its participation in a larger dialogue between playbooks. The problem was: in the absence of disciplinary controls, how could critical debate maintain sufficient decorum? How could disagreements between rivals advance, rather than undermine, a field of new English drama that after the Restoration was quickly growing? Herringman's playbooks mark an unusual confluence between the competing ambitions of playwrights, on the one hand, and, on the other, the commercial motivations of a bookseller looking to

Restoration literature. Twentieth-century bibliographers knew Herringman as "the first London Wholesale Publisher." *The Term Catalogues, 1668-1709* (London: 1903-06), ii.642. Cited in Miller, "Henry Herringman, Restoration Bookseller-Publisher," 292. For quantitative analyses of the Restoration book trade, including Herringman's role, see Steven N. Zwicker, "Is There Such a Thing as Restoration Literature?," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2006): 425-49; McKenzie, "The London Book Trade in 1668." Most recently, Sonia Massai has examined his role as the publisher of Shakespeare's Fourth Folio in Sonia Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also Francis X. Connor, "The Sociology of Paradise Lost: Dryden, Herringman, and Carolean Publishing Convention" (M.A. Thesis, George Mason University, 2003).

Table 1. New playbooks published by Henry Herringman (1656-1678)

Author, Title, Year	Dedicated to	Theoretical prose
1. William D'Avenant, <i>Siege of Rhodes</i> (1656)	None	Brief preface defends the use of irregular meter in an heroic play by arguing its usefulness for adaptation to recitative music, while requesting that readers invest in a larger stage for more elaborate performances.
2. William Lower, <i>Enchanted Lovers</i> (1659)	None	None
3. Abraham Cowley, <i>Cutter of Coleman-Street</i> (1663)	None	Preface defends the social value of comedy against critics that believe it to be anti-Royalist political satire.
4. Thomas Porter, <i>The Villain</i> (1663)	None	None
5. Sir Samuel Tuke, <i>Adventures of Five Hours</i> (1663)	Henry Howard	None
6. Sir Charles Sedley, et al., <i>Pompey the Great</i> (1664)	None	None
7. John Dryden, <i>Rival Ladies</i> (1664)	Orrery	Dedication vindicates rhyme, defines its propriety, and suggests a brief history of rhyme on the stage.
8. George Etherege, <i>The Comical Revenge</i> (1664)	Buckhurst	None
9. Thomas Porter, <i>The Carnival</i> (1664)	None	None
10. Sir Robert Howard, <i>Four New Plays</i> (1665)	None	Preface theorizes national traditions (Ancient vs. Modern, French vs. English). He discusses representation vs. narration, rhyme, Orrery
11. John Dryden, <i>Indian Emperour</i> (1667)	Anne, Duchess of Monmouth	Second edition defends "Of Dramatick Poesie."
12. John Weston, <i>Amazon Queen</i> (1667)	?	?
13. John Dryden, <i>Secret Love</i> (1668)	None	Preface to the reader argues for the importance of rules in the evaluation of works; defends individual characters against criticisms.
14. George Etherege, <i>She Wou'd if She Cou'd</i> (1668)	None	None
15. Edward Howard, <i>The Usurper</i> (1668)	None	Epistle to the reader argues that playbooks are subject to more serious criticism than performed plays, defends

		blank verse, and laments the popularity of farce.
16. Sir Robert Howard, <i>The Great Favourite</i> (1668)	None	Preface refutes Dryden's arguments in favor of rhyme in <i>Of Dramatick Poesie</i> .
17. Roger Boyle, earl of Orrery, <i>Henry the Fifth; Mustapha</i> (1668)		None
18. Sir Charles Sedley, <i>The Mulberry-Garden</i> (1668)	Duchess of Richmond and Lenox	None
19. Thomas Shadwell, <i>The Sullen Lovers</i> (1668)	Newcastle	Preface justifies the comedy's design according to the rules of Horace and the examples on Jonson, while placing "humour" above "repartie."
20. Thomas St. Serfe, <i>Tarugo's Wiles</i> (1668)	Huntley	* None. (Long prologue jokes about the author's inability to write rhyme, comparing rhyme to the senseless noise of a rattle. I see this play as an exceptional case.)
21. Sir William D'Avenant, <i>The Man's the Master</i> (1669)	?	?
22. John Dryden, William Cavendish, <i>Sir Martin Mar-all</i> (1669)	None	None
23. John Dryden, <i>Wild Gallant</i> (1669)	None	Defends publishing the play years after its poor reception at the playhouse.
24. Roger Boyle, <i>Two New Tragedies</i> (1669)	None	None
25. Thomas Shadwell, <i>The Royal Shepherdess</i> (1669)	?	Epistle to the reader defends the use of Jonsonian humors and argues for morality in plays.
26. John Dryden, <i>Tyrannick Love</i> (1670)	Monmouth	Dedication vindicates heroic drama, and the preface to the reader vindicates the character of Maximin.
27. William Joyner, <i>The Roman Empress</i> (1670)	Sedley	Preface to the reader explains that the play was composed according to Grecian models of tragedy, newly applied to Roman history, with language appropriate to the form, and plot designed to appeal to an English audience.
28. John Caryll, <i>Sir Salomon</i> (1671)	None	None
29. John Dryden, <i>Evening's Love</i>	Newcastle	Preface values tragedy above comedy and accuses comedy of too closely approaching farce, defends

(1671)		"repartie" in comic writing, and critiques those who claim to follow the model of Jonson.
30. Sir Francis Fane, <i>Love in the Dark</i> (1671)	Rochester	None
31. Edward Howard, <i>The Woman's Conquest</i> (1671)	None	A lengthy preface defines tragi-comedy from classical precedents; argues for the importance of comedy; lambasts a modern penchant for farce, and ends with a swipe at Dryden's <i>Essay</i> ; the prologue includes Ben Jonson rising from Elizium to condemn farce as an affront to true comedy.
32. Thomas Shadwell, <i>The Humourists</i> (1671)	Newcastle, Margaret	Preface to the reader explains in detail Shadwell's theory of the social usefulness of comedies based on "humor," derived from Jonson.
33. John Dryden, <i>Conquest of Granada</i> (1672)	York	Prefatory essay defends heroic drama as a genre, and Almanzor as a character; appended essay argues that modern drama has achieved greater refinement than in Shakespeare's and Jonson's time.
34. William Wycherley, <i>Love in a Wood</i> (1672)	Cleavland, Duchess	None
35. John Dryden, <i>Amboyne</i> (1673)	Clifford	None
36. John Dryden, <i>The Assination</i> (1673)	Sedley	Dedication refutes pamphlet attacks by equating "wit" with gentlemanly discourse and contrasting it from unsociable printed criticisms.
37. John Dryden, <i>Marriage a-la Mode</i> (1673)	Rochester	Dedication playfully delimits the roles of poet and patron.
38. Thomas Shadwell, <i>Epsom Wells</i> (1673)	Newcastle	None
39. William Wycherley, <i>The Gentleman Dancing-Master</i> (1673)	None	None
40. Thomas Shadwell, <i>Psyche</i> (1675)	Monmouth	Preface defends his decision to write a rhymed drama, and defends him against accusations of plagiarism.
41. John Dryden, <i>Aureng-Zebe</i> (1676)	Mulgrave	Dedication defends his turn away from comedy, categorizes the play as a tragedy close to heroic, and defends individual characters against criticisms.
42. George Etherege, <i>Man of Mode</i> (1676)	Duchess (of York?)	None
43. Thomas Shadwell, <i>The Libertine</i>	Newcastle	Preface defends the irregularity and the plot and the representation of vice; also offers an extended critique

(1676)		of Elkanah Settle's paratexts to <i>Love and Revenge</i> and <i>Conquest of China</i> .
44. Thomas Shadwell, <i>The Virtuoso</i> (1676)	Newcastle	Dedication differentiates his use of comic humours from the representation of affected, Frenchified characters.
45. John Dryden, <i>The State of Innocence</i> (1677)	Duchess (of York?)	"Apology for Heroic Poetry" defends the use of metaphoric imagery, using classical and modern precedents, against the "hypercritiques" whose "Wittycisms" dismiss poetic language as nonsense.
46. William Cavendish, <i>The Humorous Lovers</i> (1677)	?	?
47. William Cavendish, <i>The Triumphant Widow</i> (1677)	None	None
48. John Dryden, <i>All for Love</i> (1678)	Danby (Osborne) ?	The preface includes a lengthy attack on courtly wit as inadequate to proper criticism, which needs to be informed by knowledge of generic propriety, and a vehement response to Rochester's "Allusion of Horace."
49. Thomas Shadwell, <i>Timon of Athens</i> (1678)	Buckingham	Brief dedication praises "The Rehearsal."

**Other Theoretical
Texts by
Herringman:**

John Dryden, <i>Of Dramatick Poesie</i> (1668)	Sackville	Offers a fictionalized dialogue that offers competing views on the theoretical debates of the day.
Rapin, Rene; Thomas Rymer, <i>Reflections on Aristotle</i> (1674)	None	Offers a domestication of Rapin's reflections, newly applied in the long preface to English writers.

capitalize on a little controversy—what Zachary Lesser has called “dialogic publishing.”¹⁶ Herringman’s career thus offers a valuable case-study in the relationship between literary criticism and the (often fragile) institutions that enable and promote it.

An associate of Humphrey Moseley, Herringman was a leading figure in the trade and became Master of the Stationers’ Company later in his career. He began publishing during the Interregnum (his first imprint appeared in 1653) and by 1666 he had purchased many old copyrights. He profited significantly from the London fire of 1665 which his shop in the Strand escaped but which destroyed the stock of many of his competitors and (possibly) sparked demand for new editions of older works.¹⁷ Over the decade to follow Herringman flourished as a publisher of reprints and of new plays and poetry, and this period—roughly 1665 to 1675—is when he was most active as a publisher of dramatic criticism. These two sides of the business were mutually supporting. The essays and epistles that preface his new playbooks locate his authors within the very context of English belles-lettres that he was busy reprinting. Old works provided a traditional context for new plays, while new writers reinforced the sense that this tradition should be valued as such. For example, in his 1664 dedication to Roger Boyle, earl of Orrery, Dryden credits three poets with refining English meter to its modern perfection: John Denham, Edmund Waller and William Davenant. “This sweetness of Mr. *Waller’s* Lyrick Poesie was afterwards follow’d in the Epick by Sir *John Denham*, in his *Coopers-Hill* ... [and] we are acknowledging for the Noblest use of it to Sir *William D’avenant*.”¹⁸ By

¹⁶ Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 124.

¹⁷ Miller, “Henry Herringman, Restoration Bookseller-Publisher.”

¹⁸ Dryden, *Works*, viii:100.

1664, both Waller and Davenant were published under Herringman's imprint; Denham would be added to the list three years later.

Besides buying up old copyrights, Herringman built his business by cultivating relationships with the powerful, and he benefited from his extensive contacts with newly empowered supporters of King Charles II. Most important were his connections to the Boyles, Cavendishes, and Howards. Besides publishing Roger Boyle, earl of Orrery's fiction and plays, he also published Orrery's brother, chemist Robert Boyle. No less important were his connections to the Howards, especially playwrights Sir Robert and Edward. Besides their plays, he also brought out Edward's epic, *The Brittish Princes* (1669), and Sir Robert's collected *Poems* (1660). Sir Samuel Tuke's *Adventures of Five Hours* (1664) included a dedication to their uncle Henry Howard, earl of Norfolk.

Herringman also associated with William and Margaret Cavendish, duke and duchess of Newcastle. Besides Newcastle's posthumous plays, *The Humorous Lovers* (1677) and *The Triumphant Widow* (1677), he also published *Sir Martin Mar-all* (1669). Six of Herringman's playbooks are dedicated either to the duke or his wife (five are written by Shadwell). Herringman also brought out plays and poems by aristocratic poets and their associates, like Sir Charles Sedley, Charles Sackville, lord Buckhurst, George Etherege, Katherine Philips, and Abraham Cowley. However, critical writing in Herringman's playbooks remained powerfully determined by the structure of patronage that defined criticism in the 1650s. Few noblemen actually wrote critical essays themselves, and most of Herringman's playbooks that do not include essays were written by aristocrats or their associates. While Orrery and Newcastle allowed themselves to be named as addressees for several theoretical essays, none of their own works includes a dedication or a preface.

Plays by court wits like Sedley and Etherege also tend to avoid prose introductions. Two include dedications, Sedley's *Mulberry Garden* (1669) and Etherege's *Man of Mode* (1676), but both of these are playful addresses to women of the court that emphasize their plays' social life, without expressing opinions on topics of critical controversy, per se. The exceptions to this rule are Sir Robert and Edward Howard, who are unique among the gentry in their willingness to commit opinions to writing in prose form.¹⁹ When Henry Herringman began publishing plays by writers like Dryden and Shadwell, these interrelated families and their poet-clients found a publisher eager to present their relationships as a new social context for printed playbooks.

Theoretical writing was offered as a way of talking through print in which opinions could be freely exchanged and controverted. When structured around strictly defined questions, critical disagreement gave a new coherence to the core practices of playwriting. The essays had to maintain decorum by adhering to a haphazard intellectualism, a shared commitment to uncovering drama's underlying principles. Sometimes playwrights tried to outline "rules," but rarely do they presume to dictate explicitly to each other, and they had to be careful not to appear "magisterial" in style. Often, poets' first order of business was to explain the reasons behind their choices—to defend their plays according to generic propriety or historical precedent. For example, William Joyner prefaces his *Roman Empress* (1671) with the familiar claim that "the

¹⁹ This may be, in part, why Howard emphasizes the "many Solicitations of M^r Herringman's" in his preface to his folio collection, Howard, *Four New Plays*, sig. A2v.

chief intent of Tragedy [is] to raise Terror and Compassion.”²⁰ He assures his readers that his “endeavour has been to conform this piece to the best rules of Art,” and explains that his complexly interwoven plot was adapted to the “satisfaction of the *English* Stage, which delights in variety” (sig. A3^r). Other poets worried about the corrosive influence of an unlettered audience. In his epistle to *The Usurper* (1668) Ned Howard laments that farce “debases the Dignity of the Stage” and that “true *Comedy* is fool'd out of Countenance.”²¹ Like Howard, Thomas Shadwell was an enthusiastic proponent of comedy: “I confess a Poet ought to do all that he can, decently to please, that so he may instruct.”²² The poet should make “*Vice* and *Folly* ... ugly and detestable.” To this end, Shadwell believed “Comedy [is] more useful than Tragedy” because “the Cheats, Villanies, and troublesome Follies, in the common conversation of the World, are of concernment to all the Body of Mankind.”

Arguments about drama often turned on disputes about past greats. The acknowledged master of comedy was Ben Jonson, and like many Restoration dramatists Shadwell looked to him for inspiration: “I have known some of late so Insolent to say, that *Ben Johnson* wrote his best *Playes* without Wit; imagining, that all the Wit in *Playes* consisted in bringing two persons upon the Stage to break Jests, and to bob one another,

²⁰ William Joyner, *The Roman Empress. A Tragedy* (London: In the Savoy, printed by T.N. for Henry Herringman, and are to be sold at the sign of the Anchor in the lower Walk of the New Exchange, 1671), sig. A3^r.

²¹ Edward Howard, *The Usurper, a Tragedy* (London: printed for Henry Herringman at the Anchor in lower walk of the New Exchange, 1668), sig. A3^r.

²² Thomas Shadwell, *The Humorists, a Comedy* (London: printed for Henry Herringman, at the sign of the Blew Anchor in the lower walk of the New Exchange, 1671), sig. A3^v.

which they call Repartie.”²³ On the other side, Dryden argued that comedy is “in it's own nature, inferiour to all sorts of Dramatick writing.”²⁴ As often happened, a particular disagreement on a topic of dramatic theory—in this case, the value of Jonsonian comedy—could be expanded to confront larger psychological or philosophical questions: Dryden continues, “To make men appear pleasantly ridiculous on the Stage was, as I have said, [Jonson’s] talent: and in this he needed not the acumen of wit, but that of judgement” (x:205).

Because such disputes always risked turning ugly, playwrights frequently disavowed aggressive intent. When Ned Howard came out against rhyme, he wrote, “I would not be thought to detract from any that have been Considerably welcom’d on the Stage in this Garbe; since many Excellent Pens, and Honourable Persons, have thought fit to spend some Treasure of their Muses in Compositions of this kind.”²⁵ Such comments were commonplace in Herringman’s playbooks. Except for a small number of very exceptional cases, nowhere in Herringman’s books does one poet make an explicitly negative reflection on another’s play. The potential for irony in such exchanges was perhaps its greatest asset. Consider one swipe that Shadwell took at Dryden: “And here I must make a little digression, and take liberty to dissent from my particular friend, for whom I have a very great respect, and whose Writings I extreamly admire; and though I will not say his is the best way of writing, yet, I am sure, his manner of writing it is much

²³ Thomas Shadwell, *The Sullen Lovers, or, The Impertinents* (London: In the Savoy, printed for Henry Herringman at the sign of the Anchor in the lower-walk of the New-Exchange, 1668), sig. A2r.

²⁴ Dryden, *Works*, x:202.

²⁵ Howard, *The Usurper, a Tragedy*, A2r-A3v.

the best that ever was.”²⁶ Back-handed compliment, indeed. Shadwell acknowledges Dryden to be the foremost of all heroic poets, while implying that it’s a low form and predicting that any who attempt to follow in his footsteps “will be found to flutter, and make a noise, but never rise” (sig. a2^r). Such comments can be dismissed as thinly veiled insults, but the veil was important. Herringman’s writers usually kept direct criticisms below the surface. So, while Shadwell’s praise for Dryden’s heroic drama was clearly back-handed and ironic, critical exchange depended on such fictions to maintain its veneer of sociability.

Thus, dramatic theory promised to solve an essentially social problem—differing values that threaten reputations—by talking about drama in a way that buffered authors, not only from each other, but from their own plays. More than anything else, Herringman’s playbooks depended on a commitment to the basic premise that drama ought to be theorized, that the best way to talk about plays was through an investigation of their kinds and their history. Focusing on general topics lowered the ethical stakes of disagreement. In his preface to *Secret Love*, Dryden takes up the question of whether poets can judge their own work. They can, he argues, because opinions about form are dispassionate, and anyone can judge whether a play conforms to its model. He says, “[A]s a Master-builder he may determine, and that without deception, whether the work be according to the exactness of the model; still granting him to have a perfect Idea of that pattern by which he works: and that he keeps himself always constant to the discourse of his judgment, without admitting self-love.” Dryden hopes that his readers and his audience will evaluate his work the same way. He worries that some readers

²⁶ Shadwell, *The Humorists, a Comedy*, A2r.

might prefer his heroic drama, *The Indian Emperour*, to the new play because it was “much more noble, not having the allay of Comedy to depress it.” Yet, Dryden hopes such readers will keep an open mind, and wants them to acknowledge that a mixed dramatic form can be good in its own way: “[I]f this be more perfect, either in its kind, or in the general notion of a Play, 'tis as much as I desire to have granted for the vindication of my Opinion” (ix:115-16). Dryden brackets off individual preference as matter unavailable to theorization, thus evacuating critical opinion of its disruptive potential. He counts on a constant attention to dramatic kinds to inform every instance of evaluation. As we have seen from comments by Shadwell and Howard, this was not an unreasonable expectation on Dryden’s part, but a norm of theoretical discourse that had to be constantly repeated in order to be kept believable. By publishing the various positions offered by these competing playwrights through a single shop, Herringman capitalized on the benign sensationalism of this kind of critical dispute. He took up traditional critical genres—prefaces, dedications, essays—and created a new infrastructure for expression, one that specifically valued the kinds of writing and argumentation we now call neoclassical poetics.

In this environment, critical writing briefly flourished, but without disciplinary controls it was always on the verge of collapsing on itself. The pose of disinterested inquiry was difficult to maintain on all sides, and such debates always threatened to spill over into disruptive conflicts. Dryden describes this problem in his dedication to *Of Dramatick Poesie*:

For my own part, if in treating of this subject I sometimes dissent from the opinion of better Wits, I declare it is not so much to combat their opinions, as to defend my own, which were first made publick. Sometimes, like a Schollar in a Fencing-School I put forth my self, and show my own ill play, on purpose

to be better taught. Sometimes I stand desperately to my Armes, like the Foot when deserted by their Horse, not in hope to overcome, but onely to yield on more honourable termes. And yet, my Lord, this war of opinions, you well know, has fallen out among the Writers of all Ages, and sometimes betwixt Friends. Onely it has been persecuted by some, like Pedants, with violence of words, and manag'd by others like Gentleman, with candour and civility. (xvii:5)

Dryden's claim to advance opinions "Sometimes ... on purpose to be better taught" has been taken as false modesty meant to placate his social superiors.²⁷ His imagery ameliorates conflict even as it invokes violence in the war metaphor. If critical dispute is violence, it's controlled violence. Battle can be like a play at fencing. Or, it can prepare for an honorable surrender and, implicitly, an amicable reconciliation. These softening gestures presage the contrast with which the passage ends: dispute need not be socially disruptive; rather, it can be conducted with the civility of gentlemanly conversation. This assumption (or perhaps hope?) underlies *Of Dramatick Poesie* as a whole and informs its dialogic structure. As Dryden says at the end of his epistle, the various conflicts and points of disagreement between his speakers are "mingled, in the freedom of Discourse" and are not meant be reconciled, but "merely related" (xvii:6). Whether or not we accept at face value his claim to present competing positions without bias, the norm he invokes—gentlemanly civility—is generally presumed self-evident by later commentators, and his use of it in the *Essay* is usually taken to be successful.²⁸

²⁷ This view is neatly summed up by Michael Werth Gelber in *The Just and the Lively: The Literary Criticism of John Dryden* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press; St. Martin's Press, 1999, 1999). He writes, "Dryden assumes the pose of well-bred humility. He feigns indifference towards those of his works, both plays and essays, which he in fact takes quite seriously and he does so through the commonplaces of affected modesty" (28).

²⁸ For an extended analysis of sociable conversation as modeled in the essay, see Trolander and Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725*, chap. 4.

However, debating poesy was a unique kind of social interaction, and we ought not to accept the gentility of Dryden's pose at face value. The problem here involves the term "opinion." It is his opinions, after all, that Dryden says he hopes to defend, and the opinions of others that he combats. The war has fallen out between friends, but remains nonetheless a "war of opinions" in which ideas are strangely alienated from those who hold them. After all, opinions are not people: they can be advanced under false pretenses; they can be changed and taught; they can be surrendered; and, in a striking term, they can be "manag'd." So while Dryden's *Essay* is most famous for the way it anthropomorphizes critical positions through fictionalized dialogue, opinions and persons needed to be conceptually separated prior to their conflation. The problem was to ensure that these opinions were compatible enough to form a dialogue. After all, it's not really a war of opinions if your opinion is that I'm a fool.

It was precisely on these terms—an ethical complaint against poets for using criticism disingenuously—that Herringman's authors were attacked. When disputes were taken up in books outside Herringman's shop, they were framed differently. We find an increase in ad hominem attacks and a near total disregard for abstract questions of dramatic form. Scholars of Restoration criticism have a tendency to group their studies around Dryden, with the laureate on one side, and everyone who disagreed with him on the other.²⁹ However, his disagreements with fellow Herringman authors were of a

²⁹ Paul D. Cannan writes, "Any history of late seventeenth-century dramatic criticism must focus on the achievements of John Dryden, while also recognizing the problems

fundamentally different kind from those he had with others. In the dedication to *The Empress of Morocco*, published by Cademan in 1673, Elkanah Settle writes:

And thus a Dedication which was formerly a Present to a Person of Quality, is now made a Libel on him, whilst the Poet either supposes his Patron to be so great a Sot, to defend that in Print, which he hist off the *Stage*: Or else makes himself a greater in asking a Favour from him which he ne'er expects to obtain. However, that which is an abuse to the *Patron*, is a Complement to the *Book-seller*, who whispers the *Poet*, and tells him, *Sire*, Your Play has misfortune, and all that- - but if you'd but write a Dedication, or Preface---The *Poet* takes the hint, picks out a person of Honour, tells him he has a great deal of Wit, gives us an account who writ sense in the last Age, supposing we cannot be Ignorant who writes it in This; Disputes the nature of *Verse*, Answers a Cavil or two, Quibbles upon the *Court*, Huffs the *Critiques*, and the work's done. 'Tis not to be imagined how far a Sheet of this goes to make a *Book-seller* Rich, and a *Poet* Famous.³⁰

In this passage, Settle makes explicit two key elements of the “war of opinions” that were usually kept tacit, often through outright denial: its use by authors as an instrument for self-promotion and its complicity in the commercialized realm of the print marketplace. From the outside, such disavowals were laughable: dramatic theory was a sham, a trick played by greedy booksellers and self-serving playwrights whose opinions carry little weight. In making these arguments, plays brought out by Herringman’s competitors subvert the critical preface as a form and challenge its attempt to combine theoretical inquiry, poetry, and sociability.

inherent in doing so.” “Restoration Dramatic Theory and Criticism,” in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), 20. In his later book, Cannan attempts to solve this problem by dividing anti-Drydens into two groups: imitators and satirists. *The Emergence of Dramatic Criticism in England*, 32-53.

³⁰ Settle, *The Empress of Morocco, a Tragedy*, A2v-A2r.

On June 19, 1672, William Cademan and Thomas Dring, Jr. jointly entered *The Rehearsal* into the Stationer's Register.³¹ These two booksellers were not prestigious, nor were they well-established figures in the company.³² Both had begun operating in the late 1660s, around the time of Dryden's rise to prominence. Beginning in 1667 or 1668, Dring took over his father's shop, specializing in law books which appear to have been the bulk of his business.³³ However, as had his father, Dring also sold and occasionally published plays. The first work to appear with the imprint of Thomas Dring the Younger was a play by Abraham Bailey, *The Spightful Sister* (1667). A booklist placed below the *dramatis personae* promises customers that, at young Dring's shop, "you may be furnisht with most sorts of Playes."³⁴ As a publisher, Dring began by re-issuing old plays with new title pages, like Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling*, and by retailing an assortment of pre-Civil War plays. He also reprinted James Shirley's *Love Tricks* (1667) with a new prologue. However, over the next several years he would also bring out some of the most important plays of the early 1670s: not only *The Rehearsal*, but also the early plays of Aphra Behn (*The Amorous Prince* and *The Dutch Lover*), Edward Ravenscroft (*The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman*) and William Wycherley (*The Gentleman Dancing Master* and *The Country Wife*). Of the 17 plays published by Dring, only one has a typically critical

³¹ *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers; from 1640-1708 A.D.* (London, 1913), ii.444.

³² John Dunton's epithets highlight this contrast: "rich Herringman," versus "blunt Cademan," and "witty and active Dring." John Dunton, *Life and Errors of John Dunton, Citizen of London* (Published by J. Nichols, son, and Bentley, 1818), i.292.

³³ Henry Robert Plomer, *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1668-1725* (Oxford: Printed for the Bibliographical Society, at the Oxford University Press, 1922), 107.

³⁴ Abraham Bailey, *The Spightful Sister. A New Comedy* (London: printed for Thomas Dring the Younger, at the White Lion next Chancery-Lane, in Fleet-Street, 1667).

essay appended, Ned Howard's *New Utopia* (1672). (See Table 2.) And, in the wake of *The Rehearsal*'s success, Dring published several plays with epistles to the reader that satirized the conventions of critical argumentation used by poets like Dryden. The contrast with Herringman's business could not be starker.

William Cademan's shop began operating around the same time.³⁵ Like Dring's, his first imprint was also a play: a posthumous publication of William Davenant's, *The Rivals* (1668).³⁶ Also like Dring's, Cademan's books eschew the preface form. None includes an appended essay or preface. (See Table 3.) When dedicated to a patron, they make none of the theoretical gestures typical of a Herringman dedication. Cademan published a variety of playwrights, none of whom achieved lasting success or made it into the traditional canon of Restoration literature. Cademan's most successful poet was Elkanah Settle, an author of rhymed heroic plays very much in the style of Dryden's early period. Settle's reputation dwindled significantly after his first flush of success, however, and he never held a major place on the English stage. Unlike Herringman's business, which was built on a combination of valuable publishing rights over older works and a set of deep connections to influential families, Cademan's and Dring's booklists were more haphazard. With the exception of Settle, none of their authors developed lasting relationships with either publisher. As a consequence, their plays evince an opportunistic

³⁵ Plomer, *Dictionary*, 62.

³⁶ *The Rivals* was entered 9 November 1668, about seven months after Davenant's death. Davenant's second wife during the 1650s was Anne Cademan, and one of her sons, Philip Cademan, was a working actor at this time. Although William isn't recorded among Philip's brothers, it's possible that he was a relative. For Davenant, see the relevant entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. A biography of Philip Cademan is available in Philip H Highfill, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973).

tone, and playwrights like Ravenscroft, Behn, and John Lacy specifically portray themselves as interlopers in an ossified field of already established writers.

These authors' epistles react against the formalized conventions of preface-writing. They're marked by an ironic self-awareness, especially regarding their own commercialization. Dring's first publication, Bailey's *Spightful Sister*, opens with this address, quoted in full:

Epistles and Prologues being for the most part skipt over without reading, I had thought to have silenc'd my Pen as to either of them both, had not the importunity of the Stationer (who was unwilling to have a blank page, but that the Buyer might have enough for his money) prevailed with me so far as to give thee this short account of it; That as it is a Play, so I made the writing thereof onely my Recreation, not my Study; done in few hours and youthful years, that may (rightly consider'd) excuse the Faults therein, which (if I am not partial) are not great, nor many; onely these few committed by the negligence or oversight of the Printer: I must desire thee either gently to pass over, or else with thy Pen to correct.³⁷

From this view, prefaces offer nothing of value to a general reader, who will be unfettered by authorial pretensions. Bailey playfully exposes the form's commercial function: the words of a preface serve only to fill blank page-space. The reader skips over the text, and the bookseller hopes only to fill sheets with "enough for his money," as if the value a text holds for book-buyers can be quantified by sheet-count alone. This absurdity of text-as-filler is combined with a subtle critique of its use by authors as an occasion for excuse-making. Bailey's parenthetical insertions mock the way poets use prefaces to assert authorial control. Because the play was carelessly written in my youth, Bailey is saying, readers should excuse my faults, which aren't many, at least to my impartial judgment, and they're probably the printer's fault anyway. Bailey points to the fundamental contradiction at the heart of the preface form: its weak-kneed attempt to

³⁷ Bailey, *The Spightful Sister. A New Comedy*, A2r.

Table 2. New plays published by Thomas Dring (1667-1675)

Author, Short-title, Year	Dedicated To	Theoretical Matter
1. Abraham Bailey, <i>Spightful Sister</i> (1667)	None	Satirical epistle to the reader briefly jokes that such epistles are insisted upon by booksellers who seek only to fill empty sheets.
2. John Caryl, <i>The English Princess</i> (1667)	None	Prologue mocks translation and modish fashions of plays.
3. Robert Stapylton, <i>Hero and Leander</i> (1669)	Monmouth, Duchess	None
4. Aphra Behn, <i>Amorous Prince</i> (1671)	None	None
5. Edward Howard, <i>New Utopia</i> (1671)	None	* Long theoretical preface, numerous commendatory poems.
6. Edward Revet, <i>Town Shifts</i> (1671)	Stephen Mosedelf	None
7. Buckingham, George Villiers, <i>The Rehearsal</i> (1672)	None	None
8. John Lacy, <i>The Dumb Lady</i> (1672)	Charles, Lord Limrick	Both the dedication and epistle burlesque the poet's pose of modesty and emphasize writing as profiteering, theorizing about poetry as a kind of dementia.
9. John Lacy, <i>The Old Troop</i> (1672)	George, son of Cleavland	Epistle to the reader jokingly asks for favorable reports that will dupe book-buyers into purchasing the play.
10. Edward Ravenscroft, <i>Citizen Turn'd Gentleman</i> (1672)	Rupert	Dedication mocks the idea that dedications can protect poets from critics, or boast of individual favors; Rupert is praised for the example he sets the nation.
11. Aphra Behn, <i>The Dutch Lover</i> (1673)	None	Burlesque epistle to the reader mocks the fawning pose of epistles to strangers, and jokes about the absurdity of theorizing comedy.
12. Henry Neville Payne, <i>The Fatal Jealousie</i> (1673)	None	None
13. Henry Neville Payne, <i>The Morning Ramble</i>	None	None

(1673)		
14. William Wycherley, <i>The Gentleman Dancing-Master</i> (1673)	None	None
15. Anon., <i>Woman Turn'd Bully</i> (1673)	None	None
16. Henry Neville Payne, <i>The Siege of Constantinople</i> (1675)	None	None
17. William Wycherley, <i>The Country Wife</i> (1675)	None	None

Table 3. New Plays Published by William Cademan (1669-1677)

Year	Author, Title,	Dedicated To	Theoretical Matter
1.	Frances Boothby, <i>Marcelia</i> (1669)	Lady Yate?	None
2.	Richard Rhodes, <i>Flora's Vagaries</i> (1670)	None	None
3.	John Crowne, <i>Juliana</i> (1671)	Orrery	
4.	Elkanah Settle, <i>Cambyses</i> (1671)	Monmouth	
5.	Joseph Arrowsmith, <i>The Reformation</i> (1673)	None	None
6.	Samuel Pordage; Elkanah Settle, <i>Herod and Miriamne</i> (1673)	Albemarle	None
7.	Edward Ravenscroft, <i>Careless Lovers</i> (1673)	None	Satirical epistle to the reader mocks the preface form, compares theoretical dispute to an argument between prostitutes, and faults all "Writing Criticks."
8.	Elkanah Settle, <i>Empress of Morocco</i> (1674)	Henry Howard	Dedication satirizes dedications that insert theoretical matter as attempts to make "a <i>Book-seller</i> rich, and a <i>Poet</i> famous."
9.	J.D., <i>Modish Lovers</i> (1674)	William Whitcomb, Jr.	Potentially a mock-dedication?
10.	Thomas Duffett, <i>The Spanish Rogue</i> (1674)	?	?
11.	Thomas Duffett, <i>The Mock Tempest</i> (1675)	None	None
12.	Thomas Otway, <i>Alcibades</i> (1675)	Middlesex	None
13.	Elkanah Settle, <i>Love and Revenge</i> (1675)	Newcastle	The dedication insists that public knowledge of Newcastle's virtues must render the circle of his admirers similarly public; the post-script mocks poets who use prefatory apologies for their faults. (Shadwell interpreted this as a direct attack.)
14.	Thomas D'Urfey,	Henry	None

<i>Siege of Memphis</i> (1676)	Chevers	
15. Nathaniel Lee, <i>Piso's Conspiracy</i> (1676)	None	None
16. Elkanah Settle, <i>Conquest of China</i> (1676)	Castle- Rizing	Apologizes for complicity in the impudence of dedications.
17. John Bankes, <i>The Rival Kings</i> (1677)	Katherine Herbert	Ridicules theory by equating "refinement" in language with changes in fashion.
18. Thomas Rawlings, <i>Tom Essence</i> (1677)	None	None
19. Elkanah Settle, <i>Ibrahim</i> (1677)	Albemarle	None
20. Elkanah Settle, <i>Pastor Fido</i> (1677)	Lady Elizabeth Delaval	Epilogue complains that rhymed plays no longer please stage audiences.
Other theoretical texts published by Cademan:		
Elkanah Settle, <i>Notes ... Revised</i> (1675)		
Rene Rapin; A.L., <i>Reflections</i> (1677)		

influence response while claiming humility. In its place, Bailey offers a different appeal to the reader, one that invites readers to share in his amusement with the conventionality of the form itself.

John Lacy's preface to *The Dumb Lady* dispenses with these conventions in a single, fantastically absurd sentence: "Gentle Reader, (for so most Epistles begin) being conscious of my own weakness (for so they go on) I let thee know my own modesty had kept me from the Press, but for the importunity of friends, (and so they make an end.)"³⁸ Lacy's juxtaposition of address and parenthetical aside is a perverse version of Dryden's appeal to the perfection of an idealized model. Except in this case the model is ridiculous, rather than perfect, and it's condensed and ironized, rather than adhered to. Aphra Behn's preface to *The Dutch Lover* offers a similar case. "Good, Sweet, Honey, Sugar-candied READER," she writes, "I think a Play the best divertisement that wise men have; but I do also think them nothing so, who do discourse as formallie about the rules of it, as if 'twere the grand affair of humane life. This being my opinion of Plays, I studied only to make this as entertaining as I could, which whether I have been successful in, my gentle Reader, you may for your shilling judge."³⁹ More explicitly than Lacy, Behn contrasts the social perversities of dramatic theory to a common-sense sociability grounded on a shared understanding of money exchange.

From such a perspective, dramatic theory could be nothing but socially inhibiting. When Edward Ravenscroft published his second play, *Careless Lovers*, he saw men like

³⁸ John Lacy, *The Dumb Lady: Or, The Farriar Made Physician* (London: printed for Thomas Dring, at the White-Lyon, next Chancery-Lane end in Fleetstreet, 1672), A3r.

³⁹ Aphra Behn, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet M. Todd (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 160, 162.

Dryden and Shadwell as “Unconscionable and Malicious ... Writing *Criticks*, who say all they can for themselves, and will hear nothing in Defence of others.”⁴⁰ He writes,

This sort of Men you shall hear say in the Pit, and at the *Coffee-House* (speaking of an Author) Dam me! How can he Write! He's a Raw Young Fellow, newly come from the *University*; How can he understand Humour or Character that is just come from a *Colledge*? Of another they Cry, S'death, he's no Scholler; he can't Write true *Grammar*: Then strutting, and looking Big; S'blood, sayes he, I understand Greek, as you may see by the Quotations in my *Preface*, and at the Front of my last New *Play*: But if they can neither Talk, nor Write a Young *Poet* out of the Humour of Making *Playes*, they give him o're for a peremptory Fop, and so fall to writing Siedges and Opera's.

The “writing critick” is thus exposed as a pompous fool who disguises jealousy with ostentatious (but implicitly inadequate) learning. Rival poets populate pits and coffee-houses, spreading maliciously personal attacks clothed in the language of theoretical discourse: the young poet can't understand “humour,” or he isn't fluent in the conventions of the preface and the printed play. Finally, these writers exclude others through adherence to rigid generic forms—“Siedges and Opera's”—that alienate all except their theoretically partisan compatriots.

The Rehearsal offers the most comprehensive and famous elaboration of this argument, and it was one of Dring's best-selling playbooks.⁴¹ The play was written by Buckingham and a circle of collaborators, who level their pointed satire on a wide range of dramatic conventions that had been popular over the previous decade, but particularly on the kinds of conventions that Davenant and Dryden associated with the “heroick”

⁴⁰ Edward Ravenscroft, *The Careless Lovers: A Comedy* (London: printed for William Cademan, at the Popes Head in the Lower Walk in the New Exchange, 1673), sig. A2v.

⁴¹ *The Rehearsal* (Q1 version) was first advertised in the Term Catalogues on June 24, 1672. The Q3 version, “with large Additions and Amendments,” was advertised on 15 February 1675. *The Term Catalogues, 1668-1709*, 111, 179. There were five editions during Buckingham's lifetime: 1672, 1673, 1675, 1683, 1687.

form.⁴² However, *The Rehearsal* is not properly a satire on heroic or mixed drama: to think of it in such terms is already to give the game away to Dryden. There's no evidence that Buckingham and his collaborators would grant these conventions the status of a genre. In fact, the key issue is whether experimental plays like *Marriage a la Mode* have something like that status; that is, whether they operate according to rules to be inferred and followed, or whether they are mere innovations backed by specious reasoning. Throughout, Buckingham pays special attention to the critical opinions that inform the extravagance he mocks. "I will both represent the feats they do," speaks John Lacy in the prologue, "And give you all the reasons for 'em too." ("Prologue," lines 19-20).

The Rehearsal follows two fashionable gentlemen into the theater, where they get a sneak peek at preparations underway for a new play. The author, Mr. Bayes, invites them in to watch the players rehearse. The ongoing joke is that Bayes' play makes absolutely no sense: its plot turns go unexplained, its verse is pompous and ridiculous, and its scenes mix farce and tragedy with a complete disregard for narrative or thematic continuity. Mr. Bayes is a vain fool, unaware that he's held in contempt by his social superiors and the players alike. *The Rehearsal* begins when Bayes' commentators meet; Smith arrives in London to learn from Johnson that the town has been duped by a new brand of theorized drama.

Smi. I have heard, indeed, you have had lately many new Plays, and our Country-wits commend 'em.

⁴² See George Villiers Buckingham, *Plays, poems, and miscellaneous writings associated with George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham*, ed. Robert D. Hume, Harold Love, and Wallace Kirsop, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Hume's and Love's introduction (vol. 1, 333-95) offers the best available overview of the play and its many targets, as well as its complicated authorship and textual history. All citations are from this edition.

Johns. I, so do some of our City-wits too; but they are of the new kind of Wits.

Smi. New kind? what kind is that?

Johns. Why, your Blade, your frank Persons, your Drolls: fellows that scorn to imitate Nature; but are given altogether to elevate and surprise.

Smi. Elevate, and surprise? pr'ythee make me understand the meaning of that.

Johns. Nay, by my troth, that's a hard matter: I don't understand that my self. 'Tis a phrase they have got among them, to express their no-meaning by. I'll tell you, as well as I can, what it is. Let me see; 'tis Fighting, Loving, Sleeping, Rhyming, Dying, Dancing, Singing, Crying; and every thing, but Thinking and Sence. (I.i.28-43)

Such are the dangers of jargon. Two nonsensical words, “elevate” and “surprise,” create silly people and even sillier plays. Only in the narrow, self-contained world of “City-wits” do these terms carry any value. To anyone else, their plays are a jumble of activities without order. Johnson takes on board only one piece of theoretical jargon: “imitate Nature,” which stands in as the un-theorized ground of common sense.

The value of “imitating nature,” as is made clear during the long interaction with Bayes, is that it emphasizes at all times the way a play communicates to an audience, rather than its adherence to a type or set of rules. Bayes asserts that none can write a proper play, “except it be with the help of these my Rules” (I.i.85). Echoing Dryden, Bayes claims the authority that comes with expertise: “as for Poetry, give me leave to say, I understand that better: it has longer been my practice” (IV.i.125-6). The problem is that his expertise takes the form of rule-making that organizes a play, not around its story, but around theories of writing. Bayes says, “[T]he chief Art in Poetry is to elevate your expectation, and then bring you off some extraordinary way” (IV.i.177-9). From this general opinion, Bayes concludes, “[Y]ou must ever make a *simile* when you are surpris'd; 'tis the new way of writing” (II.iii.14-6). When faced with auditors who respond perplexed, Bayes can only complain: “Now, Sir, I gad, this is the bane of all us Writers:

let us soar never so little above the common pitch, I gad, all's spoil'd; for the vulgar never understand us, they can never conceive ... the excellencie of these things" (III.i.73-6). By mocking Bayes for presumptuously dismissing the reactions of those around him as "vulgar," Buckingham turns on its head the value writers like Davenant, Flecknoe and, later, Dryden and others placed on their poetry's exclusive address to a knowledgeable elite. Under the aegis of Royalist patrons, criticism presented dramatic poetry as an expert discourse: investigations into generic propriety or the history of the stage demonstrated a poet's competence and legitimized his labor as worthy of recognition and compensation, regardless of its success among the generality. For Buckingham and his collaborators—as in the satirical prefaces of Dring's and Cademan's other playbooks—such investigations merely alienate playgoers and readers. What might be called anti-theoretical criticism highlights the gap between the closed world of poets who trade opinions and the larger field of London readers and play-goers for whom reading and attending plays were now widely shared experiences.

To this point, I have traced two competing notions about the purpose and usefulness of critical writing in the Restoration. On the one side, writers like Dryden and Shadwell advanced the notion that investigation into general matters of dramatic form was a proper mode of public discourse for playwrights, whose exchanges became a way of framing the reading and interpretation of drama. On the other side, writers like Behn, Ravenscroft, Settle, and Buckingham highlighted a gap between the opinion-making of playwrights and the experience of play-going and play-reading among others. The single

most important question for criticism, then, was whether or not to write criticism. In the competitive Restoration print marketplace, these modes were exploited by publishers whose books operated under one or the other model. One mistake might be to dismiss anti-theoretical prefaces like those published by Dring and Cademan as mere anti-intellectualism, or to exclude them from the history of Restoration criticism (as, traditionally, they were excluded). However, satirists like Ravenscroft and Settle pointed to a real problem at the heart of critical exchange: why should readers trust the disinterested pose of theoretical inquiry when prefaces were written so obviously with an eye to self-interest?

The rest of this chapter will be devoted to exploring the various ways that critics dealt with this problem. The context of patronage in the 1650s allowed a writer like Davenant to proclaim his desire for fame openly, because he felt that he could safely portray himself as contributing to an ideology of Royalist hierarchy with which his fame was coextensive, and indeed directly analogous. After 1660, critics who traded opinions through Herringman's bookshop continued to clothe themselves with the approval of aristocratic supporters, but because critical writing was now an *exchange* characterized by disagreement, no individual poet could depend on such legitimating ideology to protect him from the arguments of others. As I have argued, for dialogical publishing to work, poets needed to adhere to a strict set of norms that putatively depersonalized debate even as it put poets into personal dispute. This required a delicate balance in which disagreements between poets could occasion the proliferation of reasoned criticism, but such disagreements risked exploding into antagonisms incompatible with impersonality, no matter how thin its veil. I turn now to a famous debate that erupted between Dryden

and his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard. I offer their feud as a case study in the function of Herringman's bookshop as a context of criticism in the seventeenth century. Their dispute highlights the capacity of dialogic publishing as a means to generate and authenticate critical writing, but it also serves as a limit-case that shows the strain the system came under almost immediately.

Situating "poesie" as a discrete category of inquiry—as a "subject" to be "treated"—promised the conceptual tool necessary to turn disagreements between people into differences of opinion. As we have seen, this opened up a fairly wide scope for Herringman's authors. Single essays could cover a wide range of adjacent topics, all under the rubric of poesy. Or, readers could trace disputes on individual topics across books, between authors, and over time. Dryden's and Howard's debate over the propriety of rhyme in drama was the longest exchange on a single question.⁴³ Dryden's biographers know this as the "Dryden-Howard feud."⁴⁴ Their dispute crosses five texts from 1664 to 1668. Dryden recounts the exchange: "But I gave not the first occasion of this difference in opinions. In my Epistle Dedicatory, before my *Rival Ladies*, I had said somewhat in behalf of Verse, which he was pleased to answer in his Preface to his Plays: that occasioned my Reply in my Essay, and that Reply begot this rejoinder of his in his Preface to the Duke of *Lerma*. But as I was the last who took up Arms, I will be the first to lay them down" (ix:22). Replies beget rejoinders. All sold by Henry Herringman, these books epitomize dialogic publishing.

⁴³ For an anthology of the dispute, see D.D. Arundell, *Dryden & Howard, 1664-1668: The Text of An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, The Indian Emperor and The Duke of Lerma with Other Controversial Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929).

⁴⁴ For an account, see Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 196-99.

Dryden began his playwriting career just as the theaters reopened in England, and his first play, *The Rival Ladies* (1664), was dedicated to Roger Boyle, the new earl of Orrery. A politician and poet, Orrery was the first to offer King Charles rhymed plays, and Dryden seems to have believed that he found a literary ally in the Irish lord. “Where my Reasons cannot prevail,” Dryden writes, “I am sure your Lordship’s example must” (viii:100). But it’s clear from his epistle that he’d already heard objections to the style for being unnatural. Dryden argues that rhymed verse, when “judiciously order’d,” “has all the advantages of Prose, besides its own” (viii:100). Those who say rhyme is unnatural are just reacting to poorly written verse that perverts its syntax and diction to fit its scheme; as long as the sentences seamlessly map onto their couplets, Dryden believes, there’s no reason for a poet to hold back. To Howard, who published his opinions the next year in the preface to his collection, *Four New Plays*, the problem was not awkward, disjointed sentences, but the opposite: rhymed poetry was too stylized and too excellent. Rhyme signals its artificiality too obtrusively. People just don’t talk that way. It’s “impossible ... unless it were possible that all Persons were born so much more than Poets, that Verses were not to be compos’d by them, but already made in them.”⁴⁵ In the process of working through these issues, Howard and Dryden record some of the most sophisticated analysis on issues of representation in the seventeenth century, including remarks on the nature of literary imagination, the conditions for the suspension of disbelief, and the relationship between generic conventions and expectations of realism.

However, when Dryden returns to this set of issues in *Of Dramatic Poesie*, he does so with palpable anxiety. Was it acceptable for him to disagree with a social

⁴⁵ Howard, *Four New Plays*, sig. A4r.

superior, especially considering that Howard was Dryden's first real patron? What do you do when the demands of critical inquiry come into conflict with personal obligation? Scholars tend to focus on the conversation narrated in the *Essay*. But, it's important to remember that *Of Dramatic Poesie* was just one utterance within a larger published dialogue, and Dryden was keenly aware of his very real interlocutor. Within the fiction of the *Essay*, Dryden gives the debate to Neander, who favors rhyme, and Crites, who speaks against it. Neander insists that his arguments will proceed "with all imaginable respect and deference both to that person from whom [Crites has] borrow'd [his] strongest Arguments, and to whose judgment when I have said all, I finally submit" (xvii:68). However, Neander's claim to speak with "respect and deference" can only be credible to those who agree that it's more important for Dryden to say "all" than to submit respectfully in the first place.

In the exchange between Crites and Neander, the norms of critical sociability are most explicit precisely because they're near a breaking point. Neander begins with a typically self-deprecating nod: "when I should have prov'd that Verse may be natural in Playes, yet I should alwayes be ready to confess, that those which I have written in this kind come short of that perfection which is require'd" (xvii:68). He insists that he defends rhyme only in general, and only given several qualifications: "I exclude all Comedy from my defence; and next that I deny not but blank verse may be also us'd, and content my self onely to assert, that in serious Playes where the subject and characters are great, and the Plot unmix'd with mirth, which might allay or divert these concernments which are Produc'd, Rhyme is there as natural, and more effectual then blank Verse" (xvii:68). Notice how Neander limits his proposition: the play must be serious, its

characters elevated, its plot unmixed. Given these conditions, one way of writing is determined to be “more effectual” than another. Yet, even this claim is undercut by Neander’s admission that, despite all his arguments, “blank verse may be also us’d.”

Nonetheless, when Howard published his new play, *The Great Favourite, or, the Duke of Lerma* later that year, it was clear that he had taken offense. Throughout his preface, he accuses Dryden of being arrogant and magisterial: “nothing cou’d appear to me a ruder folly, than to censure the satisfaction of others” (sig. A2^v). He refers to *Of Dramatick Poesie* as “that Essay for regulating the Stage” (sig. a^r) and accuses Dryden of too-confidently prescribing to other poets, of “attempt[ing] to infringe the Liberty of Opinion by Rules so little demonstrative” (sig. A4^v). In his closing image, Howard compares Dryden’s arguments to a shadow cast by a declining sun: “when descended and grown low, its oblique shining renders the shadow larger then the substance, and gives the deceiv’d person a wrong measure of his own proportion” (sig. a^v).

So, while Dryden’s *Essay* presents an idealized picture of gentlemen trading opinions in conversation, the actual exchange ongoing in print quickly diverged from this ideal. As the dispute with Howard continued, their opinions only became more rigid, and their arguments increasingly rancorous. Dryden’s “Defence of an Essay of Dramatique Poesie” was appended to the second edition of *The Indian Emperour*, but survives only in some copies. The essay is lengthy, vehement, and shot through with sarcasm. Dryden refutes Howard’s reasoning on an almost line-by-line basis. In the process, he accuses him of writing ungrammatically, suggests that *The Great Favourite* was plagiarized, and corrects his Latin. In a particularly insulting passage, Dryden mocks Howard’s explanation that a mistranslation resulted from a compositor’s error:

Well, since it was the Printer, he was a naughty man to commit the same mistake twice in six lines ... those Rascals ought to be the Proxies of every Gentleman Author, and to be chastis'd for him, when he is not pleas'd to own an Errour. Yet since he has given the *Errata*, I wish he would have enlarged them only a few sheets more, and then he would have spar'd me the labour of an Answer: for this cursed Printer is so given to mistakes, that there is scarce a sentence in the Preface, without some false Grammar, or hard sence in it.
(ix:9)

Comments like this make Dryden's "Defence of an Essay" unique among Herringman's playbooks. Scholars have offered various explanations for Dryden's ire, but it is not hard to imagine why the text was expunged, nor is it surprising that Howard never responded in print. The rumor, suggested later that year in an anonymous pamphlet, is that Howard was so affronted he challenged Dryden to a duel, but that Dryden suppressed the essay out of cowardice.⁴⁶ Herringman may also have decided to pull the plug, or they could have made the decision together. What is clear is that the "Defence" was uncharacteristic not just of Dryden's writing but of the prefatory criticism that appeared in Herringman's playbooks.

By 1669, Sir Robert Howard had realigned politically with George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham. The two collaborated on a play, suppressed from the stage and not printed, called *The Country Gentleman* (1669). Although this play's most satirical moments come at the expense of one of Buckingham's rivals at court, it includes a passing swipe at Dryden's *Essay*:

Caut. Sir Gravity I have of late contriv'd a way to debate a matter or a buisnes all alone, and yet by way of Dialogue.

Emp. How by Dialogue, and yet alone, Gad that would bee very pretty.

Caut. Yes Sir Gravity, by Dialogue and yet alone, as thus to intimate in my self; I thus propose a question, and first Sir Cautious he speaks to't, and gives his sense of it, Then Trouble-all answers, and so debate alternative: Then joyning Sir Cautious to Trouble all, Cautious and Trouble all summe up the

⁴⁶ See Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 575.

debate and determine the question

Emp. Would I may never stir now, it is very pretty, I have it, for though I say it, I am as quick as another, as for example, I propose a thing, you answer it, and thereupon I and you—no Gad that's not right.⁴⁷

In this caricature, fictionalized dialogue is recast as an absurdity, an exchange of proposals and answers that serves no purpose except to advance a person's foolish and vain dullness. It's impossible for any debate to be taken up meaningfully by another, because the debate is a ridiculous construction based on the dissolution of the debater's subjectivity: Sir Trouble-all Cautious splits into two, Cautious vs. Trouble-all, so as to conduct an entirely self-enclosed argument. Instead of an orderly, free discourse of gentlemen, critical debate becomes an absurd tangle of disingenuous and ultimately pointless disputation conducted entirely by the speaker himself. This critique is leveled both at the dialogue form and at the speaker, whose casual tossing to-and-fro of opinions suggests a lack of conviction as well as a lack of seriousness.

In this sense, the passage anticipates the more extensive critique that Buckingham would level against Dryden and others in *The Rehearsal*, but it highlights another problem as well. When taken up by Empty, Cautious's fictionalized debate falls apart: "I propose a thing, you answer it, and thereupon I and you—no Gad that's not right." Empty's confusion suggests a problem in how any outside interlocutor could insert himself in such a debate. This question pertains whether or not we consider the dialogue as a form of text or, more broadly, dialogic publishing as a form of critical practice. In theory, the questions proposed and debated in alternating prefaces could and should be taken up by anyone. Whether debates over rhyme, the nature of wit, or the reputation of

⁴⁷ *The Country Gentleman*, in Buckingham, *Plays, poems, and miscellaneous writings associated with George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham*, 1:III.i.25-38.

Jonson, the disinterested inquiry into poetics seems to invite any reader to contribute, and suggests the possibility of a full-fledged literary public sphere with all the trappings of public debate geared towards the consolidation of a properly reasoned public opinion. However, few outside of Newcastle's and Herringman's circles took such matters to be self-evidently important. The difficulty that Empty has in imagining himself part of Sir Cautious's debate was echoed in the satirical prefaces and plays published by Thomas Dring and William Cademan. When criticism was taken up in pamphlet debates, to which I'll now turn, the first order of business was usually to figure out who was arguing, and why, and under what terms. Rather than sustain critical debates on generalized questions of how drama ought to be written, pamphleteers used the press to attack poets and each other. In the process, the theoretical questions that writers like Dryden tried to emphasize were transformed into ethical questions about how a poet's opinions should inform the evaluation of his works and his reputation. For these writers, the subject to be treated was no longer poesy, but poets.

Critical pamphlets published in the 1660s and 1670s violated all of the norms that guided opinion-exchange in prefatory criticism, but writers like Dryden had little recourse except to complain. The print marketplace offered few mechanisms for controlling the content or tone of critical argument. Although the 1662 Licensing Act limited the number of printers that were allowed to operate in London, its primary function was to protect against sedition and religious disputation that was perceived to threatened the Crown. Licensor Roger L'estrang had little positive control over the

contents of published books.⁴⁸ Just as important for regulating the book trade, as Adrian Johns and Joseph Loewenstein have shown, were the formal and informal codes of conduct that stationers used to maintain credit with each other and avoid destructive competition.⁴⁹ However, Stationers' Hall had little interest in regulating dramatic criticism, per se. Nor were institutions of stage censorship much help.⁵⁰ The Master of the Revels had little real power after the Restoration, and when plays were suppressed, it was usually to avoid giving offense to specific, influential politicians. Even when offending plays or passages of plays were kept off the stage, they could often be included in book form. There was little outside control over the book trade, and dramatic criticism seems to have slipped under the radar of those who exerted what influence they had. Consequently, the formal and informal rules that helped the book trade work had little concern with minor matters like literary dispute, and so although as I have argued the trade was the most important cultural institution of criticism, it afforded few opportunities for individuals to impose a programmatic set of standards and it lacked an effectual system for policing participation. While prefatory criticism evinces a coterie mentality of practitioners speaking to each other—either as experts trading ideas or as

⁴⁸ See Lyman Ray Patterson, *Lyman Ray Patterson, Copyright in Historical Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 6; Joseph Loewenstein, *The Author's Due: Printing and the Prehistory of Copyright* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Jody Greene, *The Trouble with Ownership: Literary Property and Authorial Liability in England, 1660-1730* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1; Ronan Deazley, *On the Origin of the Right to Copy: Charting the Movement of Copyright Law in Eighteenth-Century Britain (1695-1775)* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2004).

⁴⁹ Loewenstein, *The Author's Due*; Johns, *The Nature of the Book*, especially chapters 2 and 3.

⁵⁰ See Matthew Kinservik, "Theatrical Regulation during the Restoration Period," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001).

experts satirizing such exchanges—the wider dissemination of print and the conceptual openness of critical inquiry meant that debates always had the potential to spread beyond playwrights themselves.

When compared to prefatory essays like those published by Herringman, several characteristics of pamphlet criticism stand out immediately: their anonymity, their often inventive narratives, and, perhaps most importantly, their willingness to cite plays and find faults in them. These elements were closely related. As we have seen, prefatory criticism was more than anything a discourse of authorship, a mode of talking about plays that put playwrights in conversation across books—in conversation with each other, with patrons, with readers who were often acquaintances, and usually in contrast with the public audiences of the playhouse and the coffeehouse. The anonymous pamphlet behaves in ways more typical of the “public sphere.” Ostensibly depersonalized by anonymity, pamphleteers presented their arguments as a debate between strangers while presuming to speak on behalf of a play-going public disenfranchised by critical argumentation. However, this does not diminish the role of the named author, who was always the subject of debate: as pamphleteers heaped scorn on poets, the interplay between the author and his anonymous attackers came to define the structure of critical argument. By taking on the role of the ill-natured critick, pamphlets often narrate scenes where individual passages of plays are subjected to an invasive and confrontational form of commentary, one meant to reflect poorly on the poet himself.⁵¹ That is, as pamphlets

⁵¹ The very technology that fixes a work as a work (in Elizabeth Eisenstein’s terms) also created a field of circulation in which it would be read as text among texts, always subject to decomposition and recomposition in the process. That is to say, from one point of view, print promoted the “fixity” of a given work by disseminating many (more or

were increasingly used to expose the faults of playwrights, dramatic criticism became more personal precisely as it became more textual.

By the 1670s, pamphleteering had a tradition in England stretching back about a hundred years. As Joad Raymond has shown, the pamphlet gained recognition as a form unto itself during the late sixteenth century, when increases in literacy and commercial publishing led to a corresponding rise in pamphleteering.⁵² “Pamphlets were closely associated with slander or scurrility,” Raymond writes (7). From the beginning, the genre was defined by its naughtiness: “Pamphlets were small, insignificant, ephemeral, disposable, untrustworthy, unruly, noisy, deceitful, poorly printed, addictive, a waste of time. As the form of the pamphlet emerged, the name given to it was, like 'Puritan', an insult” (10). However, despite the comparatively low cultural value the term was meant to signify, writers often brought to their own books, no matter how ephemeral, a high degree of inventiveness. Raymond insists, “Pamphlets constitute a literary form. They are literary texts, often highly artful and indirect, best understood and appreciated with reference not only to immediate social and political context, but to the traditions and conventions of pamphleteering” (25). In the critical skirmishes of the 1670s, which

less) identical copies, but from another perspective its system of moveable type allowed for quick responses and careful citations that wrapped any given book in an intertextual web of other books. For an enthusiastic argument for the importance of quotation to postmodern theories of intertextuality, see Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2003), chap. 4.

⁵² Raymond writes, “During the 1580s the meaning of the word 'pamphlet' coalesced with frequent use: it came to refer to a short, vernacular work, generally printed in a quarto format, costing not more than a few pennies, of topical interest or engaged with social, political, or ecclesiastical issues.” *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7.

occurred first around Dryden and then around his imitator, Elkanah Settle, writers made ample use of the possibilities afforded by the pamphlet form.

The Censure of the Rota and its follow-up, *Mr Dryden Vindicated*, narrate scenes of conversational criticism. These pamphlets were both published in 1673 in response to Dryden's two-installment heroic drama *Conquest of Granada* (1672). In them, a group of wits gather to read and discuss Dryden's books, the first to censure, and the second to vindicate facetiously. The scenes depend on a careful representation of the use (and abuse) of books. *Censure* mocks the pretensions to learning in the Dryden's *Essay*: "Almanzor's playing at the Bull was according to the Standard of the *Greek Heroes*, who, as M^r. Dryden had learnedly observ'd (*Essay of Dramatique poetry*, p. 25.) were great *Beef-Eaters*."⁵³ On the next page, the pamphlet cites *Conquest of Granada* extensively: "we have *Almanzor shaking his Chaine*, and *frighting his Keeper*. p. 28. broke loose. p. 64. and *tearing those that would reclaim his rage*. p. 135."⁵⁴ The conversation turns quickly to Dryden's provocative claims in the "Defence of the Epilogue":

But he was interrupted by a grave Gentleman *that us'd to sup in Apollo and could tell many Storys of Ben. Iohnson*, who told them, that in his opinion M^r Dryden had given little proof of his Courage, since he for the most part combated the dead; and the dead--send no Challenges; nor indeed need they, since through their sides he had wounded himselfe; for he ever play'd the Critick so unluckely, as to discover only his own faults in other men, with the advantage of this aggravation, that the *Grammaticall Errors* or older Poets, were but the Errors of their Age, but being made his, were not the Errors of this Age: since he granted this Age was refin'd above those *Solecismes* of the last: thus the *Synchoesis*, or ill placing of Words, a fault of *B. Johnsons* time,

⁵³ Richard Leigh, *The Censure of the Rota. On Mr Driden's Conquest of Granada* (Oxford: printed by H[enry]. H[all]. for Fran. Oxlad junior, 1673), 1. The attribution of *Censure* to Richard Leigh was after-the-fact, and it's not clear whether London readers at the time would have been privy to its composition.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

was an usuall Elegancy in Mr *Drydens* writings, as in the Prologue to his *Indian Emperour*

Such easie Iudges, that our Poet may
Himself admire the fortune of his Play.

Himself in the second verse, which should have been plac'd before *may* in the first. In the *Indian Emperour*, *Guyomar* say's,

I for my Country fought, and would again,
Had I yet left a Country to maintain.

left should not have preceded *Country*, but follow'd it.⁵⁵

Deliberately turning the tables on the laureate, *Censure* thus carefully selects passages from Dryden's plays that violate the general rules elaborated in his criticism. *Censure* could not be said to make a contribution to dramatic theory, really, nor does it engage in theoretical dispute. Indeed, virtually every aspect of Dryden's *general* claims are taken on board: his aesthetic of refinement, his grammar, and his rules of versification. Even Dryden's historical narrative about the progress of English drama seems to be accepted, at least insofar as it can be deployed against him. The only point of disagreement relates to how dramatic theory situates Dryden as an author. What is a critic's relationship to the generalizations that he makes? Dryden's critiques of Jonson are recast as a peculiar kind of cowardice. The texts of the past should not be treated as an archive against which theories can be tested; to do so is affront to common sensibilities and is all the more infuriating because the dead can no longer defend themselves. Historical generalizations like "the Age" do nothing to mitigate the inevitably intersubjective content of any critical act. An attack pamphlet like *Censure* embraces its status as an exchange between

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

Table 4. Pamphlet Criticism, 1668-1675

Author	Short Title	Year	Imprint	Synopsis
1. R.F. (Richard Flecknoe?)	<i>A letter from a gentleman to the Honourable Ed. Howard</i>	1668	In the Savoy : Printed by Thomas Newcomb	Faults Dryden for disputing with his social superior, Sir Robert Howard, and a perceived disregard of the propriety of rank.
2. Richard Flecknoe	<i>Sr William D'avenant's voyage to the other world</i>	1668	London: Printed for the author	Printed soon after D'Avenant's death, satirically narrates his trip to Elysium, where he is not welcomed.
3. Anon. (Richard Leigh?)	<i>The Censure of the Rota</i>	1673	Oxford: Printed by H.H. for Fran. Oxlad, Junior.	Narrates a fictionalized coffee-house discussion in which Dryden's works are criticized; includes frequent citations and close readings of lines for the purpose of identifying "nonsense" and "bombast"
4. Anon.	<i>The Friendly Vindication of Mr. Dryden</i>	1673	Cambridge	Facetiously titled, this narrates an attempt by Dryden's "cabal of wits" to vindicate his reputation against <i>Censures</i> , while actually exposing his poems as lewd nonsense.
5. Anon. (Charles Blount?)	<i>Mr. Dreyden Vindicated</i>	1673	Printed for T.D., and are to be sold in Fleetstreet, the Exchange, and Westminster-Hall.	This faults Dryden's attackers for using a burlesque style, disputing their complaints as mere quibbles, refuting them on a line by line basis, and concluding with an "Errata" sheet that corrects their interpretive errors.
6. Anon.	<i>A Description of the Academy of the Athenian Virtuosi</i>	1673	London: Printed for Maurice Atkins.	Also narrative burlesque, this describes coffee-room of the critics and finds them to be a bunch of malicious and bumbling fools. Of particular note is the pamphlet's fantastic imagery: Dryden's books are laid out in a scene of bodily torture.
7. Anon.	<i>Raillerie a la Mode Consider'd</i>	1673	London: Printed for T.R. and N.T. for Henry Million at the	This satirizes the pamphlet exchange as the unsociable excess of an out-of-control press, generally defending Dryden against his detractors.

				Bible in Fleetstreet	
8.	Anon. (John Crowne, John Dryden, Thomas Shadwell?)	<i>Notes and Observations on the Empress of Morocco</i>	1674	London	Provides a line-by-line attack on Settle's <i>Empress of Morocco</i> .
9.	Elkanah Settle	<i>Notes and Observations ... Revised</i>	1675	London: Printed for William Cademan	Refutes <i>Notes and Observations</i> line by line.

persons: the elaborate citations of Dryden's texts bind his persona within the social scene narrated among the Rota.

Like the sociably critical texts that prefaced so many of Herringman's playbooks, these pamphlets offer themselves as part of a shared system of textual exchange.

However, they do so without the organizing frameworks of dialogic publishing and patronage. Instead, the pamphlets use print conventions to call special attention to their authors' status as strangers, as interlopers from outside elite social networks. They are provocateurs. The Cambridge follow-up to *Censure of the Rota*, *The Friendly*

Vindication, closes with this taunt: "FINIS or not FINIS / As Mr. *Dryden* pleaseth."⁵⁶

(See Figure 1.) To end or not to end? The relationship between text and book is here playfully dispensed with. It doesn't matter whether this particular book has finished; instead, the question is, will Dryden respond? The conventions of the printed page are manipulated so as to bring different books into dialogue with each other.

Such moves are striking examples of what anthropologists Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban have called "entextualization," the process by which a stretch of discourse is segmented from its surroundings and marked out as a single, specific "text."⁵⁷ To take a string of words and turn them into a text, you have to give them a clear set of boundaries; that way, they can continue to be read as the same text at different times and in different places. As Silverstein and Urban point out, entextualization always involves its reciprocal opposite, "co(n)textualization," which situates the text against a

⁵⁶ *The Friendly Vindication of Mr. Dryden from the Censure of the Rota by His Cabal of Wits* (Cambridge: s.n., 1673), 17.

⁵⁷ Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, "The Natural History of Discourse," in *The Natural Histories of Discourse*, ed. Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1-44.

*So may'st thou live thy Writing Tears in Peace,
And see thy Airy Progeny increase.*

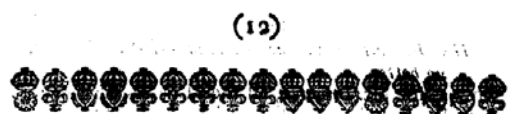
FINIS or not FINIS

As Mr. Dryden pleaseth.

Figure 1. Anon., The Friendly Vindication.

social background and in proximity to a set of related “co-texts.” Critical pamphlets like *Friendly Vindication* offer a useful case for demonstrating the relationship between these two processes. Multiple citations from Dryden’s books tie them together as “co-texts” within a shared “context.” Taunting paratextual markers, like “FINIS or not FINIS / As Mr. *Dryden* pleaseth,” identify the pamphlet as one utterance within a larger dialogue. The *idea* of Dryden’s authorship is particularly important here. He has to stand in as the person being attacked. That way, the dialogue between texts can be thought of as a conflict between people. This social interaction has a compelling story line: “Mr. Dryden” battles his anonymous criticks. Co-textuality is thus conceptualized as interlocution. However, it turned out that it wasn’t necessary for Dryden to respond. Once the rhetorical positions had been set, any other interlocutor could take his place. A third pamphlet appeared, *Mr. Dreyden Vindicated*, defending the laureate against the quibbles of ill-natured fault finders. This text compiles those quibbles into a burlesque errata page, a “Collections of Quibbles”. (See Figure 2.) This page is meant to expose the ill-nature of the anonymous attacker. The list form accumulates and compiles the errors, while making them available at a glance. This pamphlet ends with a similar taunt: “If here be not enough, stay for his next Reply.”

The final text in this pamphlet exchange, *A Description of the Academy of the Athenian Virtuosi* (1673), published in London, took special issue with the way anti-Dryden tracts fictionalized a conversational setting for their attacks. The narrator plans a journey to the coffeehouse where the critics were supposed to have their dialogues. He speaks to his friend: “I then askt him, why the Academy thought it fit, to place it self in a Coffee-house, since it was instituted by *Apollo*; it had been more agreeable to have been



(12)

THE ERRATA:

VIZ.

A COLLECTION OF QUIBBLES

Out of the

Friendly Vindication.

See the *Friendly Vindication*, page and line as followeth.

OF *Critical Engines* levell'd against Mr. Dreyden's
Sieges and Conquests. Pag. 1. lin. 10.

Sawcie Boldness, a pretty *Sawcebox-word*. See p. 4. l. 4.

He converts the word *Courfing* in *Maximin*, to be
meant the *Rota Courfing his Muse*, p. 5. See the Margin.

Cordials extracted from Mr. Dreyden's *Muses Lim-*
beck's. See the Receipt, p. 6. l. 1.

His Quibble upon the *Assignment*, or *Love in a Nun-*
nery. p. 6. l. 17.

White day: he there interprets *White* for a *Whop*, or
of *White Money*. p. 7. l. 6.

That the *Drama* did require *too many drams of Wit*.
p. 7. l. 15. that we must pardon.

A *Sir Positive Truth*. p. 8. l. 17.

He was going to adde *A Gloomy Smile*. p. 10. l. 3.

His *Logical Quibble*. See p. 11. l. 11, 13.

The

(13)

The *Dildo* of Mr. Dreyden's *Muse*. p. 12. l. 28. A
Bawdy Quibble.

That Mr. Dreyden writ as well as any man--that could
write no better. p. 14. l. 29, 30.

Being under a *Gloomy Sullen Censure* of the *Rota's*.
p. 16. l. 11.

His *Muse* to undergo a *Severe Penance* for his *Assigna-*
tions of Love in a Nunnery. p. 16. l. 13.

He would not suffer with a *Sbrill Tender* easiness of
minde. p. 16. l. 14.

No more disturb'd, then if a *Horrid Stilness* did invade
my ear. p. 16. l. 23.

If here be not enough, stay for his next Reply.

His Objections against *Annu Mirabilis* are not worth
Answering: besides, I leave them for a New Text for
his *Muse*.



FINIS.



Figure 2. Anon. (Charles Blount, attributed), *Mr Dreyden Vindicated*.

in a Tavern; O, said he, that may be for many reasons, first, as well to hinder expences, as to vindicate the sober inclinations of the persons; since they intended to tax the manners of a poet as well as his writings, it was convenient at least to be hypocrites, and to disguise their own.”⁵⁸ The coffeehouse signals several things about this cabal of critics: they’re poor, they’re intemperate, and they’re hypocritical. When the narrator arrives on the scene, what he finds exceeds his expectations:

So walking up the room we found whole rowes of teeth, and many *nailes* sow'd upon cloath, and pinn'd to the hanging; and looking more earnestly, I perceiv'd that most of them were such as we call doggs teeth. I could not imagine at present that these were meant to make good my simile, I apply'd to them; nor did I think that the *Virtuosi* were Toothdrawers. Yet they would be glad that their adversaries teeth and nailes were drawn, for even then a lyon would be an innocent beast. But a little further we beheld many engines of torture: here indeed was the scene of death, here was one book suspended, another torn upon a tenterhook, a third dead from a stab receiv'd from a cruel Penknife; drawing nearer I found them all belonging to Mr. *Dryden*. Here lay *Alamanzor* stretcht upon the rack, that pain might force out words far distant from his thoughts; here the *Maiden Queen* lay deflower'd, and there the *Indian Emperour* was defac'd with the scratches of a barbarous stile. (12-13)

In this vision of monstrosity, the critics put books through physical torture. Thirty years before *The Battel of the Books* first was published, this pamphlet uses a book-as-person metaphor to describe critical exchange. It's necessary to unpack two layers of metaphors happening here simultaneously. First, the harping criticisms leveled at Dryden's texts are presented as physical vandalism on the material books themselves. At the same time, the characters from those plays personify the books: so it's Almanzor's words that have been tortured away from his thoughts, and it's the Maiden Queen who's been raped. The physical punishment of the book is thus resituated in the most urgent ethical terms. The

⁵⁸ *A Description of the Academy of the Athenian Virtuosi: With a Discourse Held There in Vindication of Mr. Dryden's Conquest of Granada; Against the Author of the Censure of the Rota* (London: printed for Maurice Atkins, 1673), 9.

critics are cast as monsters that surround themselves with “engins of torture” in a “scene of death.” Like all burlesques, *Description of the Academy of the Virtuosi* derives much of its pleasure from exploiting the gap between its hyperbolic style and the pedestrian problem at hand. Of course, no one’s been raped or murdered. Although it’s motivated by horror at the anti-Dryden pamphlets, *Description* remains at the same time a playful celebration of what a pamphlet can do. Its elaborate narrative and high burlesque style takes too much pleasure in its own inventiveness to be read as a serious call for the return of stodgy prefaces on abstract questions. Pamphlet exchange as a trade in wit remains its firm focus.

Under heavy attack from two very different sides—*The Rehearsal* and *Censure of the Rota*—Dryden responded by trying to reinvigorate the prefatory essay. He hoped to link it to an exclusive culture of male sociability. In 1673, Dryden dedicated two plays, *The Assination* and *Marriage a la Mode*, to two courtier wits, Sir Charles Sedley and Lord Rochester. The dedications have been usefully read (by James Winn and George McFadden) as awkward attempts by a work-a-day poet to insert himself into a circle of aristocrats. His description of gentlemanly conversation is famous for its idealization. Dryden writes, “We have, like [the Ancients], our Genial Nights; where our discourse is neither too serious, nor too light; but always pleasant, and for the most part instructive: the raillery neither too sharp upon the present, nor too censorious on the absent; and the Cups onely such as will raise the Conversation of the Night, without disturbing the business of the Morrow.”⁵⁹ Addressed to one of the Restoration’s most notorious libertines, this letter’s characterization of their genial and moderate drinking can hardly

⁵⁹ Dryden, *Works*, xi:320-21.

have been accurate.⁶⁰ However, this ideal is set up in direct contrast to the social scenes dramatized in critical pamphlets like *Censure of the Rota*:

Such Wits as they describe, I have never been so unfortunate to meet in your Company: but have often heard much better Reasoning at your Table, than I have encounter'd in their Books. The Wits they describe, are the Fops we banish . . . I am sure for your own particular, if any of these Judges had once the happiness to converse with you, to hear the Candour of your Opinions; how freely you commend that wit in others, of which you have so large a Portion your self; how unapt you are to be censorious; with how much easiness you speak so many things, and those so Pointed, that no other Man is able to excell, or perhaps to reach by Study; they wou'd, in stead of your Accusers, become your Proselytes.⁶¹

What's at stake here is the relationship between the printed book, in which the norms of criticism are very much up for grabs, and sociable conversation, in which the norms feel evident and are more neatly tied to distinctions of rank. "The Wits they describe, are the Fops we banish." Dryden is attempting to separate the world of their books from the world of true wit, embodied by men like Sedley and Rochester. Dryden thus undermines the pamphlet attacks in two ways: first, by resituating wit in an elite, gentlemanly sphere diametrically opposed to the coffeehouse, and second, by reaffirming the dedicatory epistle and preface form as the best means for negotiating between poets, their plays, and the social sites of cultural authority.

Dryden concludes the epistle to Sedley with a swipe at his detractors: "But I have neither concernment enough upon me to write any thing in my own Defence, neither will I gratifie the ambition of two wretched Scriblers, who desire nothing more than to be Answer'd. I have not wanted Friends, even amongst Strangers, who have defended me

⁶⁰ Scholars have struggled with this problem. James Winn has argued, for instance, that Dryden's purpose here is to offer a subtle admonition to his social superiors, perhaps embarrassing them into proper behavior so as not to seem hypocrites.

⁶¹ Dryden, *Works*, xi:321-22.

more strongly, than my contemptible Pedant cou'd attacque me. For the other: he is onely like *Fungoso* in the Play, who follows the Fashion at a distance, and adores the *Fastidious Brisk of Oxford*.”⁶² Since being taken up as a figure in the history of English literary criticism, Dryden is generally praised when this aloof pose seems believable. For scholars most interested in Dryden's biography, his decision not to write in his own defense seems like evidence of his artistic seriousness. However, quite clearly, Dryden *is* writing is his own defense. The formal differences between this epistle to Sedley and, say, his “Defence of the Epilogue” in no way imply that either is more or less active in its engagement with specific detractors. Instead, what we see in these epistles is a desperate attempt to recover the printed dedication as a prestigious genre of critical practice.

However, the vulnerabilities of printed dramatic theory remained. It had become increasingly clear over the early 1670s that Herringman, his authors, and their patrons lacked the means to keep critical discourse under control. In 1673, Elkanah Settle was an up-and-coming young playwright, still fresh from university. His first play, *Cambyeses*, was a rhymed heroic drama following closely in the footsteps of Dryden's *Indian Emperor*. (Indeed, Dryden contributed the epilogue for the production.) Though *Cambyeses* was immediately successful, it was Settle's second heroic drama, *The Empress of Morocco*, which established him as an important new figure on the London stage. Settle's play had two successful court performances, and its first edition included three prologues. Two were written especially for the court; one each by Rochester and John Sheffield, lord Mulgrave. A third prologue, written by Settle, was read to the public stage. The playbook was dedicated to none other than Henry Howard, duke of Norfolk

⁶² Ibid., xi:322-23.

and uncle to his scribbling nephews, Sir Robert, Edward and James. The printed book also included ostentatious “sculptures,” illustrations of the elaborate stage performance that was put on by the Duke’s Company.⁶³ (These illustrations remain famous today mostly because they offer the best surviving pictorial evidence of the inside of the London theaters at this time.) In all of these ways, *Empress of Morocco* mimics much of what worked best in the plays published by Henry Herringman: it was a fashionable play written to a fashionable audience in a fashionable style. However, Settle was not a Herringman author, and his dedication mocks the theoretical preface as a form, accusing both Dryden and Herringman of disingenuous profiteering.

Printed dramatic theory, as it had been practiced over the previous ten years, had no way to respond to Settle’s mockery. Theorizing generic propriety would not help, because Settle’s plays followed all the rules of heroic drama. He could not be dismissed like the authors of panegyrics or pamphlets, because he had been accepted by the highest echelons of the court—and across partisan lines, no less. Thus, it should be no surprise that Dryden and Shadwell turned to the pamphlet form to deflate the pretensions of their new rival. After the play made it into print, Shadwell and Dryden collaborated with John Crowne to produce a tediously long pamphlet attack, entitled *Notes and observations on The empress of Morocco. Or, Some few erratas to be printed instead of the sculptures with the second edition of that play* (1674). The book carries no imprint. In much the

⁶³ Outside the playbooks themselves, scanty evidence has survived regarding the *Empress* in performance. *The London Stage, 1660-1800* records one performance during what would have been its initial run: December 6, 1673, as reported in the diary of Robert Hooke. *The London Stage, 1660-1800; a Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces, Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment. Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960), i:213.

same vein as “Defence of the Epilogue” or *Censure of the Rota, Notes and Observations* offers a line-by-line refutation of Settle’s poetry, usually to show that something has been awkwardly phrased or can be quibbled into nonsense.

In the introduction to his facsimile edition of the controversy, Maximillian Novak calls this pamphlet the first piece of extended practical criticism in English history.⁶⁴ However, to most scholars of Dryden’s criticism, whose biographical bias tends to emphasize their subject’s intellectual fortitude in an age of dissipation, *Notes and Observations* has always been something of an embarrassment. Indeed, 1668 to 1674 is a remarkably short time for the new generation of English literary theorists to have fallen so far from grace. However, in just six years it had become clear that dramatic theory, as practiced and idealized in Dryden’s *Essay*, would never be realized. Herringman continued to publish plays with theoretical front-matter for the next few years, but they contributed little to the theories that had come before. Herringman’s last new play, Shadwell’s *Timon of Athens* (1678), includes a dedication to Buckingham that praises *The Rehearsal*. Cademan and Dring, their moment over, had given off publishing new plays altogether. Dryden, of course, became embroiled in manuscript disputes with Rochester and Shadwell. Dramatic theory in England would move in different directions over the next ten years or so, with an increased prominence of translations and poetic essays. Never again would it be so narrowly tied to decisions made by such a small handful of booksellers, playwrights, and patrons.

⁶⁴ Maximillian Novak, ed., *The Empress of Morocco and its Critics: Settle, Dryden, Shadwell, Crowne, Duffet* (Los Angeles: William Clark Memorial Library, 1968).

What had become clear, however, was that print was an enormously powerful tool for disseminating critical thought. Printed criticism offered its writers and its readers a way of talking about and to each other; it could be used to forge a different kind of social connection, one enacted entirely through textual exchange. In Settle's response to *Notes and Observations*, he focused in immediately on his attackers' anonymity:

Casting my Eye upon a Pamphlet entitled *Notes and Observations on the Empress of Morocco*; and finding no Authors name to it, I used my best indeavour to get that knowledge by Examination of the Style, which the unkind Printer had denied me. ... And thereupon with very little Conjuraction, by those three remarkable Qualities of *Railing, Boasting, and Thieving* I found a *Dryden* in the Frontispiece. Then going through the Preface, I observ'd the drawing of a Fools Picture to be the design of the whole piece, and reflecting on the Painter I consider'd, that probably his Pamphlet might be like his Plays, not to be written without help. And according to expectation, I discovered the Author of *Epsom-Wells*, and the Author of *Pandion* and *Amphigenia* lent their assistance.⁶⁵

Thus, the critical text has become extraordinarily peopled. The pages that follow accumulate arguments and counter arguments in the absence of any substantial disagreement about aesthetics in any general sense. What matters most about a text like *Notes and Observations ... Revised* is its conceptualization of the disagreement itself: the imagined social scene of disputation provides the organizing logic to the piece, which otherwise might seem hopelessly paratactic. Settle uses grammatical markers to create a sense of confrontation on the page itself: "The Reader is desired to take notice in the following Discourse, that all Lines with this Mark---"---before them are Mr. *Drydens*; taken out of several of his *Poems*: And all Discourse in an Italick Character within these

⁶⁵ Elkanah Settle, *Notes and Observations on the Empress of Morocco Revised* (London: Printed for William Cademan at the Popes-Head in the Lower Walk of the New Exchange in the Strand, 1674), sig. A2r.

(22)

But granting this mistake in our Laureats to be nothing; as for my part if you'll all agree I am very willing to grant it, and can as easily forgive the Non-sense he writes now for the sense he has writ; as some charitable people cherish old Lane Hayes for their past services, and the strength they have had: But now I am in the pardoning humour, I'll examine his natural Philosophy in this Argument, and now my hand is in, forgive his mistakes in that too. If he be against it [*Thus Labas his joy jumping over his grief; and his grief jumping over his joy*] (as he calls it,) therein must be for their not jumping one o're another, unless he be like Mr. Girden that would have his language *rather in Verse than Prose*. First he'll grant that Labas had reason to be joyful for the enjoyment of his *Reflex*; and sorry for his *Fathers death*, and it these two surprises he must either think and reflect upon them severally or together, but together he cannot; for 'tis a Maxim in nature that no man can think of two things, much less two such contraries as *Joy* and *Grief*, at one and the same Moment; and words being the description of thoughts, to speak o'm as at it impossible. If then they cannot jump but by turns, Farbox Muly Labas is not the Fool this house. But now too [*the most unintelligible piece of Non-sense has been met with yet*]

Heaven for our swelling passions to our souls:

[*If every word had been Sphers, Oebs, Infellion, White Worms, &c. the first had been as good.*] But now for this Gordian, Heaven predestinates nothing for any man that should raise him to an excess of joy or grief, or any other passion more than what he can bear, which I think is *fitting passions to our souls*: The soul being the seat of Passions. But though it be not Non-sense, yet unintelligible I'll grant it is, wit. with Mr. Commentatour. Sense and understanding I confess have been formerly of his acquaintance, but he has long since shook hands with them, I assure you. And indeed I commend him for it, he consults his own ease in it, as a man ought to do at his Years, and why should he burden himself more than his occasion requires.

When some great fortune to Mankind's convey'd;
Such blessings are by Providence ally'd.
Thus Nature to the World a Sun creates,
But with cold Winds his pointed rays rebates.

[*Cool winds ally the blessing of the scorching Sun.*] Why the scorching Sun? O yes, the blessing of the scorching Sun looks like a Contradiction; and therefore [*scorching*] is the word for thy tune.

Well to humour the Child [*scorching*] shall be the word: But then sure the heat of the Sun that scorches men, produces Plants and Fruits, &c. and though it offends their Bodies, it maintains their Lives, and if this be not a blessing, Notes is infallible: Nay, where the heat of the Sun is so excessive that it makes the Earth barren, as to the production of plants, yet there it operates another way, and produces Gold. And there are those who (say Bays what he can) will think that a blessing too.

Thy early growth we in thy Chalm had crutch;
And mix'd thy Aspes with thy Fathers dust.

[*A strange Engine to must be that can crush a man so After; and as strange a Poison that can turn a man to Dust in two bowyer time, for it could be no longer since the Emperor dyed.*]

Bear

(23)

Bear up bravely Laureat, there you have him: For the Poet I yes Divellishly if he tells you that his Emperor can be really Dust and After in so little a time. But if Mr. Dryden had ever had a friend worth following to the Grave, he would have heard o're this time of Dust to Dust and After so After, said of those that had been neither of them. How common a Figure is this in Discourse. Does his *Monteruma* (when he says of *Cortez*).

"Grant only he who has such honour shown,
When I am dust may fill my empty throne."

Desire that *Cortez* may not enjoy his Throne immediately after his Death, but stay till he is Dust first: See what mistakes his malice makes, though to his own disadvantage. He has two more observations of the same kind in the Fifth Act. page 55. His Blood shall pay what to your Brothers dust I owe, [*He turn'd Dust very quickly in a Country which preserves Mummy 3000. years.*]

Page 57. So may my Body rot when I am dead,
Till my rank Dust has such contagion bred,
My Grave may dart forth Plagues, as may strike Death
Through the infected Air where thou drawst Breath.

[*By that time it is Dust, it will cease to be rank, and consequently breed no contagion, if it breed none before.*] Well but to make it sense in Bays his Style let it run thus,

So may my Body rot when I am dead,

"Till my rank Putrification, or rank Corruption, or Filth, Nastiness or the like. How delicately this would run in Heroick Verse, and how proper and pleasant would it be for a Gentleman to speak, and an Audience to hear. If the Author had used [*Dust*] in a strict sense, (as Bays to make it Non-sense would have you believe he does) he should not have said, *so may my body rot when I am dead*, till my rank Dust, &c. but thus. *After my Body has done rotting may my rank Dust, &c.* for I take it, the *Rotting* must be over before it be really Dust. This Positive (which force would find infinite fault, with such an expression as [*the Turkish Crown*] and to bring it to his sense, alter it, and say *Turkish Turbant*, for they wear no Crowns.

Poison'd my Husband, Sir, and if there need,
Examples to instruct you in the deed,
I'll make my actions plainer understood,
Copying his Death on all the Royal Blood.

[*She will instruct him by an Example to do a deed that's done, and by an Example that must be Copy'd after his Example, which he again is to Copy, &c.*] A great deal more pudder he makes about a Copy and a Copy much a Copy, &c. This Objection has a little of the Falsh in it, for he talks of a Copy much at the rate of the Clock-bag: But now to the Argument. [*She will instruct him to do a deed that's done, &c.*] Here he's at his old way of begging the meaning, but a wiser Body would have quest her meaning to have been, that for his better understanding what she had already done, she would give him more examples of the same kind for his instruction.

I am a Convert, Madam, for kind Heaven,
Has to Mankind immortal Spirits given,

And

Figure 3. Elkanah Settle, *Notes and Observations ... REVISED.*

Figures [] are His words in his *Notes upon Morocco*, or in his *Conquest of Granada*.⁶⁶

Each paragraph pairs these citations with new, independent commentary that refutes his interlocutors' fault-finding.

Such are the possibilities of moveable type. No one but an improvising novice could have designed so clumsy a citation protocol. A heteroglossic mash-up, Settle's disjointed mise-en-page stands in stark contrast to the studied and essayistic dialogue in Dryden's *Of Dramatick Poesie*. There's no appeal here to some conversational setting. The social scene is a scene of conflict, and it's acted out on a printed page that conjures selves through fonts. There's no expertise here and no order. There are no rules for this form, nor for the phantasmal meeting of minds it narrates.

⁶⁶ Ibid., sig. A2v.

Chapter Three

Politics of Parnassus

After a decade of seemingly endless conflicts acted out through print, there was by 1700 a palpable sense that such controversy would remain an unfortunate and perhaps inevitable feature of the press. Daniel Defoe's mock epic, *The Pacificator* (1700), captured this feeling and called for rapprochement. Known as "Defoe's Dunciad," *The Pacificator* narrates a destructive civil war on the hills of Parnassus between the forces of "wit" and "sense."¹ Using the exaggerating imagery of high burlesque, Defoe decries the "Private Feuds and Passions" that fuel poetic debate.² As a result of these conflicts, "The Publick suffers, harmless Subjects bear / The Plagues, and Famines, which attend the War" (312-13). With the whole nation watching, poetic controversy becomes a serious business, at least on the surface of the burlesque's hyperbolic analogies. To pacify poetic controversy is to prevent injury to the body politic, to avert famines, and to contain

¹ D. N. Deluna, "Modern Panegyrick" and Defoe's "Dunciad," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 35, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 419-435.

² Daniel Defoe, "The Pacificator," in *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714*, ed. Frank H. Ellis, vol. 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), line 311. All citations are by line number and are from this edition.

plagues. By adopting the rhetorical stance of the amused observer, Defoe presumes to speak on behalf of an offended national common sense. The problem, he suggests, is that poetical disputes are merely private feuds, and that controversialists pay too little regard for the public consequences of their spats. But who were these disputants? Attention to the public injury caused by poetic controversy brings this question to the fore, but writers like Defoe struggled to articulate exactly who was behind this toxic public discourse, or why their conflicts were so vehement.

The problem, for both controversialists and outside commentators alike, was their limited vocabulary for describing what we might now call “literary controversy.” After all, what brought together the various literary debates of the 1690s? The outlines of these conflicts are still familiar: classical scholar Richard Bentley denied the authenticity of the *Epistles of Phalaris*, sparking an intense debate between the “ancients” and the “moderns”; Jeremy Collier unmasked the profanity and irreligion of English comedies; and Sir Richard Blackmore condemned wit and offered his rhymed epics as a curative to national virtue. In each case, these commentators were met with contempt and derision from London poets and critics who felt as if gentlemanly, urbane writing—wit itself—was under new and powerful attack from a variety of quarters. They responded with critical essays, satires, pamphlets, and collections of epigrams, all of which dripped with scorn and invited rejoinder. It’s worth pausing to consider, though, the very breadth of these debates. They brought together classical scholars, dramatists, critics, poets and patrons. That is to say, they were *literary* debates. Indeed, “literary field” and “literary public sphere” would have been useful terms to have at one’s disposal. Without an explicit concept for the category of discourse that united these debates, writers struggled

to articulate the ineffable *something* that bound them together in a common project of public controversy.³

This chapter will examine the ways writers described the relations that made them thinkable as a group. Poetic controversy both depended on and encouraged the conceptualization of a subculture of poets, critics, and scholars. Late-seventeenth-century debates over the role of poetry in the nation-state inadvertently provided a new vocabulary to describe the politics of poetry itself. To borrow Pierre Bourdieu's terms, debates about poetry within the *field of power*—over questions like, “Does comedy compromise our national virtue?”—inspired writers to conceptualize a *field of literary production*—reaching conclusions like, “Witty drunkards are to blame.”⁴ Rather than a system in which critical texts emerge in a reciprocal dialectic with literary texts, much seventeenth-century criticism was used to develop ideas about the people of literature, and to develop a social context specific to poetry and poetic debate.

In this light, I look to texts like the “sessions poems,” a group of poetical and verse satires that appeared across the period, each based on the premise that contemporary poets have gathered before Apollo to be chosen the next laureate. By the end of the century, gatherings of poets were seen by some to threaten public virtue. In his *Satyr against Wit* (1700), Sir Richard Blackmore depicts such groups as a plague that undermines the well-being of the nation. At the same time, critics like John Dennis and Charles Gildon publicly embraced the idea that poets and critics in London should be seen as a culturally elite avant-garde. They published collaborative critical forms—

³ The term literary public sphere is taken from Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

⁴ Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*.

correspondence, poetical miscellanies—to advance their own ideas while situating themselves in a larger socio-literary context.

Before turning to the earlier material, I want to begin by suggesting that Defoe's satire is characteristic of turn-of-the-century critical controversy in two ways: first, that it conceptualizes a social field of poets and critics as such, and second, that it posits a virtual space of textual exchange that is part of the nation, but distinct from it. Most often, this space was called "Parnassus," and in satires like *The Pacificator*, burlesque narratives allowed for elaborate, but ultimately hazy, descriptions of this mythical realm. Defoe writes,

For Wit, by these Misfortunes desperate,
Begins to arm at an unusual Rate,
Levies new Forces, gives Commissions out,
For several Regiments of Horse and Foot,
Recruits from every side come in amain,
From *Oxford*, *Cambridge*, *Will's*, and *Warwick-lane*,
The scatter'd Troops too, from the last Defeat,
Begin to Halt, and check their swift Retreat:
In numerous Parties Wit appears again,
Talks of another Battel this *Campagne*,
Their strong Detachments o'r *Parnassus* range,
And meditate on nothing but Revenge. (317-28)

Underneath the humorous, mock-epic veneer is the idea that "wit" can be used as a category of men, and as a group with a real, if nebulous, social structure. This group is at once both obvious and indescribable; its informal organization can be approximated only through parodic analogy. The language of military troop management that saturates Defoe's account (with its levies, its regiments, and its recruits) creates an exaggerating dissonance between rigid militaristic systems of discipline, on the one hand, and, on the other, loose collaborations of poets, critics, and other men about town. Defoe uses

references to real locales to serve as a metonymic geography of wit: the university towns, the coffeehouse, and the College of Physicians. These places signify the kinds of persons who occupy them, as scholars, critics, and amateur poets are united by their common participation in a nation-wide poetical war. The theater of action is Parnassus, a virtual realm of writing, reading, and publishing. By laminating this mythical space onto the real places of England, Defoe locates poets and critics within the British nation while marking them out as a distinct subculture.⁵ They are the numerous parties of wit, and in Parnassus they contend the armies of sense.

Long before the term “literature” coalesced into its modern form, scholars, critics and poets saw themselves as combatants in a shared terrain, as members of a common subculture. However, this view did not depend on cultural institutions dedicated to specifically literary objectives, at least not institutions like the academies, specialty publishers, museums, and magazines that Bourdieu argues were so crucial in nineteenth-century France.⁶ (Indeed, as we shall see, such institutions could only be imagined and mythologized by turn-of-the-century Englishmen.) Bourdieu sees criticism as a discourse that dispenses prestige within the institutions of the literary field: but for Blackmore, Dennis and others, critical controversy *was* the field. Arguing about poetry in the national

⁵ In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, 1977), Yi-Fu Tuan describes mythical space: “Mythical space is an intellectual construct. It can be very elaborate. Mythical space is also a response of feeling and imagination to fundamental human needs. It differs from pragmatic and scientifically conceived spaces in that it ignores the logic of exclusion and contradiction” (99). In this discussion, Tuan focuses on world religious myths that constructed anthropocentric geographies of the universe (91). The appeal to myth in fin-de-siecle descriptions of Parnassus gains its energy from highlighting the contrast between the mythical relationships of poets and the pragmatic places of England between which they are imagined to move.

⁶ Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, 32.

public sphere created a habit of print controversy that divided writers into contending parties. Dividing poets and critics in this way presupposed an often-unarticulated social whole that they were imagined to comprise. Criticism conceptualized this culture, while its partisan logic justified, even compelled, new writing as a way of taking sides.

Parnassus was a useful myth because it gave this subculture a geography of its own.

Invocations to the legendary home of the Greek muses were not new to English poetry in the late seventeenth century. Indeed, such appeals are deeply rooted in the vernacular tradition. In the Proem to the second book of his *House of Fame*, Geoffrey Chaucer calls out to the muses for poetic inspiration: “So be my favour at this tyme! / And ye, me to endite and ryme / Helpeth, that on Parnaso duelle, / Be Elicon, the clere welle.”⁷ Apostrophes like this situate the vernacular poet in relation to a larger classical tradition; at the same time, his emphasis on receiving inspiration keeps a firm focus on the poet’s desire to produce new works. In this way, a gesture to the classical past is used to justify new poetry in the vernacular. However, this was not the only way the “Parnassus” metaphor could be used. To take another example from Chaucer, this time from *The Canterbury Tales*: “At my bigynnyng first I yow biseche, / Have me excused of my rude speche. / I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn; / Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyn. / I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso, / Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Scithero.”⁸ The speaker here is Chaucer’s Franklin, a land-owning commoner who assumes the pose of a plain-spoken businessman while addressing his famously mixed audience of *gentils* and *churls*. His disavowal, “I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso,”

⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), HF 519-22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, V.717-22.

signals his lack of training in classical rhetoric. Rather than a source of poetical inspiration, “Parnassus” is figured here as the exclusive seat of learning and as a site of self-cultivation. These two versions of the “Parnassus” metaphor, though not really incompatible, were nonetheless very distinct and carried a latent tension between them.

Around the end of the sixteenth century, this tension came to be felt quite strongly. A conflict erupted between the university theaters of Cambridge and Oxford and the professional playhouses of London, which increasingly rivaled their university counterparts for cultural capital. The universities sought to defend themselves as seats of true learning, while London poets, players, and stationers promoted the self-consciously modern poetry of the playhouse and the bookshop. This conflict was, at bottom, between two social places and the kinds of people imagined to occupy them. So one question became: Which of these places—the university or the city?—could most convincingly claim association with Parnassus? And, as a corollary, which use of the Parnassus metaphor would predominate? Nowhere can this tension be seen more clearly than in the 1598 Cambridge play, *A Pilgrimage to Parnassus*, and its two sequels.⁹ A Christmas Day performance at St. John’s College in 1598, *Pilgrimage to Parnassus* offers a simple allegory meant to admonish students towards a properly studious frame of mind. The young heroes of the play, brothers Studioso and Philomusus, engage on a journey towards Parnassus, and the rest of the short, three-act play narrates the temptations they meet (and resist) along the way.

⁹ For descriptions of the role of the “Parnassus plays” in this context, see Edward Gieskes, *Representing the Professions: Administration, Law, and Theater in Early Modern England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006); and James P Bednarz, *Shakespeare & the Poets’ War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

In the opening scene, their father warns the brothers to be “warie pilgrims” and, in particular, to spurn the company of “graceless boys / That feede the tauerne with their idle coyne.”¹⁰ Not surprisingly, they meet just such a character along the way: Madido, a poet and a drunkard. This wine-besotted tavern wit reads Horace and writes poetry in English in celebration of tavern life. When the brothers invite him to join them in their pilgrimage, Madido exclaims, “Zouns, I trauell to Parnassus? I tell thee its not a Pilgrimage for good wites; let slowe brainde Athenians trauel thither” (III.184-85). He insists that “Parnassus and Hellicon are but the fables of the poetes, there is no true Parnassus but the third lofte in a wine tauerne, noe true Hellicon but a cup of browne bastard” (III.199-201). Madido’s off-handed dismissal of the Greek myth satirizes the idea of divine poetic inspiration: poets’ frenzied enthusiasm comes not from the muses, but from the bottle. Madido is all the more debased by the narrow extent of his poetic ambitions. He counsels Studioso and Philomusus: “If therfore youe be good felowes, or wise felowes, trauell noe farther in the craggie way to the fained Parnassus, returne whome with mee, & wee will hire our studies in a tauern, & ere longe not a poste in Pauls church yarde but shall be acquainted with our writings” (III.217-22). Madido’s desire to spread his writings across the posts of St. Paul’s Churchyard, then home to London’s most prominent booksellers, signals his complicity in the unsavory world of the book trade. Poetic fame of this kind is an obstacle on the way to Parnassus, and the neighborhood of the bookshops is at best a debased parody of the muses’ legendary home.

¹⁰ J. B. Leishman, ed., *The Three Parnassus Plays (1598-1601)* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1949), I.66, 69-70.

At the same time, poets, editors, and publishers in London were actively promoting the idea that English books could create a new version of Parnassus, modern and in the vernacular. This can be seen in particular in poetic collections that appeared around this time. Books like *England's Parnassus, or the Choysest Flowers of Our Moderne Poets* (1600) collected excerpts from leading writers of the day under commonplace headings. In such books, Parnassus is refigured as a body of poetical knowledge, as a specifically modern treasure trove that could be borrowed from when composing new works. Numerous similar books appeared around 1600, including such titles as *Englands Helicon* (1600) and *Bel-vedere, or the Muses Garden* (1600).¹¹ Related forms continued to appear in poetic primers like Joshua Poole's *The English Parnassus* (1657), and even into the eighteenth century with Edward Bysshe's *The British Parnassus* (1714).¹² These books offer themselves as poetic vade-mecums, providing a source book of poetic wisdom and useful how-to advice for writing new poems. In this

¹¹ Robert Allott, *Englands Parnassus, or, The Choysest Flowers of Our Moderne Poets, with Their Poeticall Comparisons Descriptions of Bewties, Personages, Castles, Pallaces, Mountaines, Groues, Seas, Springs, Riuers, &c.: Whereunto Are Annexed Other Various Discourses Both Pleasant and Profitable* (Imprinted at London: For N.L., C.B. and T.H, 1600); *Bel-Vedére or The Garden of the Muses* (Imprinted at London: By F[elix] K[ingston] for Hugh Astley, dwelling at Saint Magnus corner, 1600); L N. and B A., *Englands Helicon. Casta Placent Superis, Pura Cum Veste Venite, Et Manibus Puris Sumite Fontis Aquam* (At London: Printed by I. R[oberts] for Iohn Flasket, and are to be sold in Paules Church-yard, at the signe of the Beare, 1600).

¹² Josua Poole, *The English Parnassus: Or, A Helpe to English Poesie. Containing a Short Institution of That Art, a Collection of All Rhyming Monosyllables, the Choicest Epithets, and Phrases: With Some General Forms Upon All Occasions, Subjects, and Theams, Alphabetically Digested by Josua Poole. M.A. Clare Hall Camb* (London: printed for Tho. Johnson, at the golden Key in St. Pauls Church-yard, 1657); Edward Bysshe, *The British Parnassus: Or, a Compleat Common-Place-Book of English Poetry: ... To Which Is Prefix'd, A Dictionary of Rhymes; ... In Two Volumes. ... By Edw. Bysshe Gent* (London: Printed by J. Nutt in the Savoy: and sold by J. Pemberton, and J. Morphew, 1714).

regard, “Parnassus” is both a body of modern, English poetry and a stimulus to new works.

Such books were specifically targeted for satire in the third Parnassus Play. After the simple and optimistic allegory of the first, in which the young brothers successfully resist temptation and begin their climb up Mount Parnassus, the sequels turn to a more cynical satire. *Studioso* and *Philomusus* have returned from the seat of learning, discontented by the poverty and low status afforded to scholarship. They find themselves thrust into the corrupt, unforgiving world of the London book trade. In the first act, their friends *Ingenioso* and *Iudicio* open their copy of the recently published *Bel-vedere, or the Muses Garden* to mock its literary pretensions. This book includes excerpts from Renaissance greats like Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare, none of whom merit better than mixed praise from their allegorical commentators, and several are openly insulted. In particular, *Ingenioso* notices its frontispiece illustration, which depicts Mount Parnassus as a natural setting for modern poetry: “Parnassus with the sunne and the lawrel? I wonder this owle dares looke on the sunne, and I maruail the go[o]se flies not the lawrell: his deuise might haue been better, a foole going into the market place to be seene, with this motto, *scribimus indocti* [unlearned, we write]” (I.ii.190-94). For the university crowd, the apparent incommensurability between the Greek legend and its modern, print- and city-based counterpart prompted ridicule. Parnassus must be defended from the pretensions of upstart scribblers, whose proper setting is a marketplace of vain, unlearned fools. However, such insults belie a defensiveness born of insecurity. What’s frightening is that these two worlds actually *could* be conflated.

The sense of disparity between Parnassus and modern literary culture never fully disappeared. Over the course of the seventeenth century, that disparity was increasingly exploited for its comic potential in burlesque and satirical forms. In this regard, I see Sir John Suckling's "The Wits [A Sessions of the Poets]" (1637, 1646) as a small but significant watershed moment in the history of English literary criticism. Suckling's poem narrates a meeting at the court of Apollo, during which the leading London poets of the 1630s gather to compete for the laureate. For one reason or another, each is found wanting and subjected to ridicule. One by one, the poets are denied, until Apollo finally confers the laurels upon a wealthy alderman, saying, "'twas the best signe / Of good store of wit to have goode store of coyn" (107-08).¹³ The basic framework of Suckling's narrative was repeatedly imitated over the next hundred years or so, and the "sessions poem" became something of a mini-genre unto itself. After the Restoration, the form was revived to satirize the playwrights of the newly opened theaters. Versions appeared in manuscript and in print; in verse as well as in prose. The "sessions poem" found an answerer in Richard Flecknoe in the 1660s, and an imitator in Matthew Prior a generation later.¹⁴ The form was adapted to mock sexual politics in "The Lover's Session" (1687, 1703) and to the music world in *The Session of the Musicians* (1724).¹⁵ University wits

¹³ Sir John Suckling, "[The Wits] ('A Sessions of the Poets')," in *The Works of Sir John Suckling*, ed. Thomas Clayton and L. A. Beaurline, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

¹⁴ Matthew Prior, *Dialogues of the Dead, and Other Works in Prose and Verse*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 299-301.

¹⁵ "The Lovers' Session" is dated 1687, but was first printed in *POAS* (1703); see G. M. Crump, ed., *Poems on Affairs of State; Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714*, vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). *The Session of Musicians. In Imitation of the Session of Poets* (London: printed for M. Smith, near the Royal-Exchange, in Cornhill, 1724).

contributed with sessions of the poets in Cambridge (1728) and Oxford (1730).¹⁶ The sessions poem was used consistently across the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and new versions appeared in almost every decade between 1630 and 1740. At the most basic level, the value of this narrative structure is that it imagines a physical proximity for authors who otherwise may have no connection except through their texts. By putting authors next to each other, the sessions poem imagines a social setting in which they can compete for attention and prestige. What's new is the conflation between the world of Apollo and world of London. By bringing these worlds together, even as lampoon, the sessions poem asserts the cause of English literature in general (by populating Apollo's courts with English writers) while mocking individual poets and their pretensions to fame.

In Suckling's original, Apollo visits London to preside over a city court, where poets then gather to compete for distinction. After a long hiatus (presumably since the age of the ancients), it's time to declare a new laureate, and news spreads that Apollo has come to town.

A sessions was held the other day,
And *Apollo* himself was at it (they say;)
The Laurel that had been so long reserv'd,
Was now to be given to him best deserv'd.

And

Therefore the wits of the Town came thither,
'Twas strange to see how they flocked together;
Each strongly confident of his own way,
Thought to carry the Laurel away that day. (1-8)

¹⁶ William Pattison, "Session of the Cambridge Poets," in *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Pattison, Late of Sidney College Cambridge* (London: printed ... For H. Curll in the Strand, 1727); George Woodward, "A Session of the Oxford Poets," in *Poems on Several Occasions* (Oxford: Printed at the Clarendon Printing-House, 1730).

As in all versions of the sessions poem, the joke here relies on a contrast between the Parnassian figure of Apollo and the bustling world of modern fame-seeking poetasters. What's striking, though, is how accessible Apollo's court has become. People are able to come or go as they please, and his arrival is public news reported by the gossip of the city. (Indeed, the whole poem is presented as hearsay.) Bringing Apollo into the "town" like this makes the rest of the narrative possible: it re-constitutes the city and its courts as a context for poetic criticism. The search after fame is burlesqued as a lawsuit in a common pleas courtroom. To compete for poetic distinction is thus reconceived as activity in a more typical, everyday social space. This conceit simplifies and reduces a complex set of functions through which literary prestige is negotiated—authorship, reading, criticism, canon-building—and lends them the legibility of more familiar social conventions. Of course, it is precisely the familiarity of the city courtroom that gives teeth to Suckling's burlesque: by crowding in Apollo's court, his poets are associated with the dubious publicity of city fame.

As the sessions poem form was reiterated over the rest of the century, it came to rely increasingly on the idea that poets were a kind of social group unto themselves that demanded regulation. The early versions were all first written and circulated in manuscript, and they evince a coterie mentality that looks askance at poets who appeal too eagerly to a city public of commoners. Suckling's is tentatively dated 1637, but it wasn't printed until Royalist bookseller Humphrey Moseley published the posthumous collection of Suckling's works, *Fragmenta Aurea* (1646). The Restoration versions survive in numerous manuscript miscellanies, but were not printed until much later.

These versions (traditionally dated 1668 and 1676) follow Suckling's model closely.¹⁷

One begins, "Since the sons of the Muses, grow num'rous and loud, / For th'appeasing so clam'rous and factious a crowd; / Apollo thought fit in so weighty a cause / To establish a government, leader, and laws."¹⁸ Needless to say, this effort meets with ill success.

Apollo, in frustration, awards the bays to Thomas Betterton, the leading actor of the time. Betterton is rewarded because, unlike the crowd of "play scribblers," he has the modesty and good sense to keep plays he writes out of print.¹⁹ In this way, the sessions poems bear a strong affinity to Restoration verse satires like John Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* and John Wilmot, earl of Rochester's "Allusion to Horace," which first circulated around the same time, and which in fact survive in many of the same manuscript verse miscellanies.²⁰

¹⁷ The dates are given in *POASY*, vol. 1, which contains both poems. However, Richard Flecknoe responds to a poem that he refers to as "A Sessions of Apollo" in 1665. Flecknoe may very well be responding to Suckling's original, which had recently been reprinted in *Merry Drollery, or A Collection of Jovial Poems, Merry Songs, Witty Drolleries Intermix'd with Pleasant Catches* (London: Printed by J.W. for P.H. and are to be sold at the New Exchange, 1661). However, it's also possible he read an earlier version of "Apollo concern'd to see the transgressions." See Richard Flecknoe, "Of a Stage-Critick," in *Rich. Flecknoe's Ænigmatical Characters. Being Rather a New Work, Then New Impression of the Old* (London: printed by R. Wood, for the author, 1665), 32-4. Additional evidence for the earlier date of some version of the poem is presented in Gillian Fansler Brown, "'The Session of the Poets to the Tune of Cock Lawrel': Playhouse Evidence for Composition Date of 1664," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 13, no. 1 (May 1974): 19-26, 62.

¹⁸ George deF. Lord, ed., "The Session of the Poets," in *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), lines 1-4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, line 99.

²⁰ Either of the two Restoration sessions poems, "Apollo, concerned to see the transgressions," and "Since the sons of the muses grew numerous and loud," are included in 14 of the manuscripts in Harold Love's microfilm collection, *English Clandestine Satire*. In 7 cases, either "An Allusion to Horace" or *MacFlecknoe*, or both, are included in the same manuscript; in two miscellanies, all four poems are included. The sessions poems are usually (but not always) grouped with other poems that comment on contemporary writers, and are sometimes paired together. See the index to the microfilm

Where they differ, however, is in their ostensibly neutral, observing stance. Rather than stake out a position with strategically targeted satire and praise, the sessions poems dispense their vitriol more or less equally to all. This makes their authorship particularly difficult to establish. More importantly, it means that they mark an effort to represent poetic culture in something like its entirety: the court of Apollo offers a framework for thinking about a social group that exists only insofar as it is mediated through manuscript circulation and print. The sessions poem gives this social network a new model for itself—the tumultuous crowd. It gives a virtual, mediated culture order by marking it as a recognizable disorder.

Later incarnations of the “sessions poem” blurred the line between English poetic culture and Parnassus with ever greater exuberance. In traditional uses of the “Parnassus” metaphor, the muses’ home is a faraway place—the source of poetic inspiration, the seat of true learning. It’s a place you can reach only through long and diligent study; or, it’s where the wisdom of modern poetry is gathered. That is to say, Parnassus is a place that houses important literary ideals, but the day-to-day work of writing and reading poetry happens in the real world outside. In the “sessions poem” form, this perspective radically shifts. Parnassus changes from a place into a space. It becomes a scene of action and mobility where poets interact.²¹

collection, included as an appendix to Love’s book, *English Clandestine Satire, 1660-1702* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 303-414.

²¹ I borrow this distinction from theorists Michel de Certeau and Yi-Fu Tuan. In his classic study, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience*, Tuan writes, “The ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa.” *Space and Place*, 6. Timothy Cresswell summarizes their relationship this way: “Spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space between them.” *Place: A Short Introduction*

A Journal from Parnassus (1688) expands upon the satirical possibilities of this shift in perspective. Editor Hugh MacDonald describes the prose manuscript as “the longest and most elaborate account” of the “Sessions.”²² Its premise is that, thanks to improvements in telescopes, Parnassus can now be seen clearly from London, just as mountains have been discovered on the moon. Like the crazed astronomer Doctor Baliardo in Aphra Behn’s *Emperor of the Moon* (1687), who uses his telescope to pry into the privy counsels of celestial monarchs, the *Journal* promises access to and communication with a mythical world. However, unlike Baliardo, whose virtuoso-enthusiasm marks him as a fool, the *Journal* adopts a pose of cynicism. To communicate with Parnassus is no great feat, because “the ascent ... is not now so steep, nor the way so rugged as formerly” (3). Indeed, “the Road has been so beaten within these hundred Years that many Persons of Quality have been seen to ride thither in their Coaches,” and “Helicon has been as much frequented of late by the Sparks & Ladies, as the Bath or Hodsden-Waters” (3). From this perspective, Parnassus is nothing more than an extension of the town, a fashionable destination for leisure travel.

However, Parnassus is also a scene with its own politics. The *Journal* reports an assembly that gathers in the Senate house, “like that of other Parliaments,” to redress

(Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 8. Places involve exclusivity and specificity: Michel de Certeau says that places “are *beside* one another, each situated in its own ‘proper’ and distinct location, a location it defines.” *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

²² Hugh MacDonald, ed., *A Journal from Parnassus: Now Printed from a Manuscript circa 1688* (London: P.J. Dobell, 1937), vii. MacDonald describes the manuscript: “*A Journal from Parnassus* occupies sixty-eight pages of a quarto notebook of fifty-eight leaves. It is a transcript in a beautiful and educated hand, with only an occasional erasure. It was evidently made soon after the original was written. The book is bound in contemporary limp vellum with gold borders and central decorations. The paper label on the spine gives a pressmark of a large library” (xii).

complaints that have disgraced the society (5). As in the earlier versions, great fun is made by describing poets as a bustling crowd, where each elbows and shouts for priority. After the orderly entrance of traditional greats John Gower, Chaucer, Jonson, and Shakespeare, the more recent poets jostle to gain entrance. (Dryden and Flecknoe share a particularly long and funny exchange, much of it in verse. Flecknoe is eventually left behind, unable to enter the Senate house because he's too overweight to pass the doorway.) Finding the assembly over-crowded with pretenders, Apollo reviews their applications for membership. Waller and Dryden are admitted, but Nathaniel Tate, John Crowne, Elkanah Settle, Thomas Creech, Thomas D'Urfey, George Etherege, Aphra Behn, and Roger L'estrage are all mocked and dismissed. Most of the "sessions poems" would leave it at that, content with mocking local poetasters, but *A Journal from Parnassus* continues on to make a general satire on London literary culture. Properly purged, the Senate can then hear grievances leveled against poets: plaintiffs include booksellers and printers, noble patrons, readers, and the players.

In the process, *A Journal from Parnassus* attempts to represent the cultural institutions of poetry in their full complexity. Poets, booksellers, players, readers, patrons, and the revered author-figures of the past are brought together in a fantastic space that promises systematization to this messy hodge-podge of relationships. The general theme is that London has been overrun by fops and would-be wits, men who flatter and jest but ultimately overload the theaters and the bookshops with their nonsense. The Parnassian Senate vehemently debates how to deal with this set of problems. (Much of the pleasure of reading the text comes in scenes where, for example, Shakespeare argues with Dryden about the propriety of preface writing.) In these back-

and-forth exchanges, *A Journal from Parnassus* tries to imagine a workable system for regulating English poetry. The joke, though, is that such regulation is impossible. What does it really mean, after all, to appoint Beaumont and Fletcher licensers of tragicomedy, as the Senate does, in 1688? Such resolutions work mostly to illustrate the disorder of the world as it is, and laugh.

In the 100 years between *A Pilgrimage to Parnassus* and Defoe's *The Pacificator*, the home of the muses had changed dramatically. The naughty poetasters who detained Studioso and Philomuses on the way to Parnassus now populated its very Senate floor. Parnassus came to look increasingly like England, replete with the trappings of the nation-state (like courts and parliaments) as well as a complex literary culture of poets, booksellers, patrons, players, readers and, by the end of the century, critics. In *The Session of the Poets: Holden at the Foot of Parnassus-Hill* (1696), critics appear as judges at a city court, putting Grub-Street writers on trial. (Tom Brown is arraigned for bankruptcy.) In *The New Sessions of the Poets: Occasion'd by the Death of Mr. Dryden* (1700) critics John Dennis and Thomas Rymer are the first to compete for the bays, and the first to be rejected. With this more complex sociology came the sense that Parnassus was an open space where any Londoner could gather, either as one of the poetasters or as a plaintiff against them. In this sense, to publish poetry or criticism was to contend in Parnassus—just by reading poetry you could become a member of this mythical polity. “Parnassus” came to signify a virtual space laminated onto the real places of England.

That is to say, the Parnassus metaphor was used to describe a very particular version of (or segment of) print culture. After 1695, after the lapse of the Licensing Act, there was a burst of publishing activity among the “sessions poems.” One of the

Restoration-era poems was printed for the first time in the *Poems on Affairs of State* collection of 1702. New versions also appeared, now written specifically for print. The form was taken up by publishers like the widow Anne Baldwin, who, after taking over her husband's shop in 1698, specialized in political pamphlets. She also brought out *A New Session of the Poets* and one reply to it. Daniel Defoe's publisher, John Nutt, brought out *The Pacificator* as well as his more notorious political satire *The True-born Englishman*. In the late 1690s and early 1700s, the basic conceit of the "sessions poem" was increasingly relied upon to provide a framework for thinking about the politics of literary controversy. Parnassus came to signify a particular subculture of poets, critics, and booksellers. This culture existed as a body of writing that was a subset of a larger national public-sphere discourse; the Parnassus metaphor came to be used in common parlance to differentiate the business of literary controversy from other kinds of debate. In this way, Parnassus gradually transformed into a name for the social field of literary controversy. The problem of its politics, then, became a matter of greater urgency. By 1707, the Grub-Street poet and critic Samuel Cobb could write, "*You will cry, Who expects any thing from the Politicks of a Poet? How goes the state of Parnassus?*"²³

Although it also invokes the Collier controversy, *The Pacificator* responds most directly to a pamphlet exchange that had erupted a few months earlier, sparked by Sir

²³ Samuel Cobb, *Poems on Several Occasions. With Imitations from Horace, Ovid, Martial, Theocritus, Bachelides, Anacreon, And Others. To Which Is Prefix'd a Discourse on Criticism, and the Liberty of Writing, by Way of Letter to a Friend. By Samuel Cobb, M.A* (London: printed for R. and J. Bonwick, at the Red-Lyon in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1707), sig. A4r.

Richard Blackmore's *A Satyr against Wit* (1700).²⁴ An invective against the wits of Will's Coffeehouse, particularly Dryden and Samuel Garth, Blackmore's poetic pamphlet invited passionate rejoinders. A reply appeared only weeks later, *A Satyr upon a late Pamphlet Entituled, a Satyr against Wit* (1700). Defoe's *Pacifcator*, which was published in February, did little to dampen the controversy. A group of poets led by Tom Brown, including Sir Charles Sedley and Charles Boyle, among others, produced a collection of insulting epigrams, facetiously titled *Commendatory Verses, on the Author of the Two Arthurs, and the Satyr against Wit* (1700).²⁵ This collection was met with the reply, *Discommendatory Verses, on Those Which are Truly Commendatory, On the Author of the Two Arthurs, and the Satyr against Wit* (1700). Later that year was published *A New Session of the Poets. Occasion'd by the Death of Mr. Dryden*, containing a particularly insulting passage on Blackmore; this poem found a respondent in *An Epistle to Sr. Richard Blackmore, Occasion'd by The New Session of the Poets* (1700). These poems were both widely dispersed (in terms of authorship) and sharply

²⁴ Although its imprint carries the date 1700, Blackmore's satire appeared in late 1699, well before Dryden's death. The literary controversy between Blackmore and the wits is well documented. The most detailed studies are have been biographically based; see Richard C. Boys, *Sir Richard Blackmore and the Wits; a Study of "Commendatory Verses on the Author of the Two Arthurs and the Satyr Against Wit" (1700)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1949); Harry M. Solomon, *Sir Richard Blackmore* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 3; Albert Rosenberg, *Sir Richard Blackmore, a Poet and Physician of the Augustan Age* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953), 3. Class-based analyses tend to position Blackmore as a spokesman for a new bourgeois aesthetic; see Robert C. Krapp, "Class Analysis of a Literary Controversy: Wit and Sense in Seventeenth Century English Literature," *Science and Society* 10 (1946): 80-92; or, more recently, Aparna Dharwadker, "Class, Authorship, and the Social Intertexture of Genre in Restoration Theater," *SEL* 37 (1997): 461-82.

²⁵ Boyle featured prominently in the "Battle of the Ancients and the Moderns," as well. See Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), chap. 2.

partisan. These are essentially poems about poets, and as the contending groups tossed accusations at one another, they created a sense that writing verse could be a natural act of “taking sides,” and that such controversy was the defining context of contemporary poetry. In this explicitly literary-partisan writing, theoretical debates (over the nature of wit, the category of the epic, and the propriety of satire) served as an entry point for would-be critics, and a fulcrum around which a community of controversialists could be imagined and described. In the battle between Blackmore and the Wits, the formation of this literary polity—with its divisions, its forms, and its personalities—stands in particularly sharp relief.

The outpouring of texts in 1700 on this controversy bespeaks the interest that Blackmore’s poetic success had generated. Virtually unknown before 1695, Richard Blackmore was a middle-aged Cheapside physician of moderate standing on track for a successful, if unspectacular, medical career. However, fame would find Blackmore through poetry, rather than medicine. By the turn of the century he had written and published three book-length poems: *Prince Arthur* (1695), *King Arthur* (1697), and *A Paraphrase on the Book of Job* (1700).²⁶ The first two of these poems, his so-called “two

²⁶ Rosenberg’s biography includes a careful bibliography of Blackmore’s works. The following is drawn from Rosenberg’s bibliography: *Prince Arthur. An Heroick Poem. In Ten Books*. 1695. [Advertised in the *London Gazette*, Feb. 28-March 4, 1695; 2nd ed. same year; 3rd ed., 1696, *Term Catalogues*, Feb. 1696; 4th ed., 1714, *The Englishman*, Jan. 28, 1714. There was a Latin translation of the first book done by William Hogg that appeared in 1700.]; *King Arthur. An Heroick Poem. In Twelve Books*. 1697. [*London Gazette*, March 18-22, 1696/97; *Term Catalogues*, June 1697.]; *A Paraphrase on the Book of Job: As Likewise on the Songs of Moses, Deborah, David: On Four Select Psalms: Some Chapters of Isaiah, and the Third Chapter of Habbakuk*, 1700. [*London Gazette*, Feb. 26-29, 1699, *Term Catalogues*, June 1700; 2nd ed. 1716, *Evening Post*, June 26-28, 1716.]

Arthurs,” were widely seen as flattering allegories in support of the current regime.²⁷ In 1697, just before the second installment was published, Blackmore earned an appointment as physician in ordinary to the king, a knighthood, and a £150 award from the crown in return for a presentation copy of *Prince Arthur*.²⁸ The poem achieved popular success as well, going through three folio editions in its first year. With the active support of Whitehall and three long poems under his belt, by 1700 Blackmore had achieved a swift and meteoric rise as a poet.

Prince Arthur was also successful critically. Although Blackmore’s epics would be lampooned by witty adversaries repeatedly over the next several decades (they’re best known today for providing the selectively cited doggerel in *Peri Bathous*), they received lavish praise from other quarters, drawing frequent comparisons with Milton and Virgil. To some, Blackmore had successfully, even gloriously, domesticated the epic poem to a new English context: besides drawing on the traditional English myth, Blackmore’s Arthurs were composed originally in the vernacular; they adopted the modern form of heroic couplets; they were Christian in theme; and they were written in justification of an English monarch. (Indeed, it could be said that Blackmore’s *Prince Arthur* domesticates King William, as much as it does the epic form.) A statement from Edward Howard’s *An Essay Upon Pastoral* (1695) can be taken as representative of the enthusiasm that met Blackmore’s debut: “The two Elaborate Poems of *Blackmore* and *Milton*, the which; for the dignity of them, may very well be looked upon as the two grand Exemplars of Poetry,

²⁷ This point was noted, and satirized, by Sir Charles Sedley, among others; see “Upon the Author of the Satyr against Wit,” *POAS* 6: “Amaz’d we find, in ev’ry Page he writes, / Members of Parliament with *Arthur*’s Knights” (lines 11-12).

²⁸ Rosenberg, *Sir Richard Blackmore*, 34-6.

do either of them exceed, and are more to be valued, than all the Poets both of the *Romans* and the *Greeks* put together.”²⁹ In this fairly common formulation, Blackmore joins Milton in a new English canon of modern authors who equal or excel their classical past. They are exemplars to be valued and imitated, as Howard’s comment implies, because they form the basis of a new English and (Protestant) Christian poetic tradition.

However, most of the published responses to Blackmore’s writing didn’t emphasize his place within a tradition of epic poets. Instead, they responded to him as a public controversialist. After all, Blackmore did not promote the dignity of his poem by comparing it to classics like the *Aeneid*; for Blackmore himself, what mattered most about his epics was their opposition to the profanity and blasphemy of naughty comedies. “To what ill purposes soever Poetry has been abus’d,” writes Blackmore in the preface to *Prince Arthur*, “its true and genuine End is by universal Confession, the Instruction of our Minds, and Regulation of our Manners.”³⁰ Thus, the value of the epic comes from its didactic potential, as described by French theorist Bossu, from whom Blackmore borrows extensively. However, that potential isn’t advanced merely through a theoretical investigation of the epic form. It’s best seen in contrast to the “ill purposes” that inform most modern poetry, especially comedy. Blackmore writes,

²⁹ Edward Howard, *An Essay Upon Pastoral: As Also an Elegy Dedicated to the Ever Blessed Memory of Her Most Serene Majesty Mary the Second, Queen of England* (London: printed for R. Simpson at the Harp in St. Paul's Churchyard, 1695), sig. B2r. Cited in Rosenberg, *Sir Richard Blackmore*, 26. Edward Howard was a younger son to the venerable Henry Howard, who was uncle to the Restoration poets Sir Robert, James, and Edward. The older Edward Howard dabbled in the idea of an English epic some thirty years earlier, in his *Brittish Princes* (1669), but that effort was lampooned by court wits like Buckhurst and Buckingham.

³⁰ Richard Blackmore, *Prince Arthur: An Heroick Poem: In Ten Books* (London: Printed for Awnsham and John Churchil at the black Swan in Pater-noster-Row, 1695), sig. π2r.

There have been in all Ages such ill Men that have perverted the right Vse of Poetry, but never so many, or so *bold* or *mischievous* as in ours. Our Poets seem engag'd in a general *Con'federacy* to ruin the End of their own Art, to expose *Religion* and *Virtue*, and bring *Vice* and *Corruption of Manners* into Esteem and Reputation. The Poets that write for the Stage (at least a great part of 'em) seem deeply concern'd in this *Conspiracy*. These are the *Champions* that charge *Religion* with such desperate Resolution, and have given it so many deep and ghastly Wounds. The Stage was an Outwork or Fort rais'd for the Protection and Security of the Temple, but the Poets that kept it, have revolted, and basely betray'd it, and what is worse, have turn'd all their *Force* and discharg'd all their *Artillery* against the Place their Duty was to defend. If any Man thinks this an unjust Charge, I desire him to read any of our modern Comedies, and I believe he will soon be convinc'd of the Truth of what I have said.³¹

For Blackmore, the public field of book circulation has been morally compromised by the actions of poets as a particular group within that larger public field. Those responsible for these moral atrocities, the dramatic poets, are at once both a confederacy of individuals and derelict agents of public welfare. As a writer of epic, Blackmore imagines himself to stand outside this category of poets: we do not see here a practitioner speaking to his fellows. Rather, his preface joins with an implied reader to express the disapproval they are presumed to share; his reader is the anonymous “any reader” imagined to sit in judgment over printed works. Worried that such men might find his preface too provoking, Blackmore invites them to read printed comedies and share in his displeasure. This introduces a tension that, as we shall see, emerges clearly in the poetic controversies of the 1690s. On the one hand, Blackmore’s concern is the circulation of dangerous ideas among a nationalized public of fellow Englishmen, and so his preface is directed to that public as his primary audience. On the other hand, this concern leads him to investigate the particular social group of writers who generate these dangerous ideas. Once poetry

³¹ Ibid., sig. Av.

has been identified as a potential threat, it must be explained and defended against, leading Blackmore to describe a subculture of writers whose particular failings have such toxic general consequences. In this way, theorizing poetry's place in national discourse leads him to think about poets as a particular group of men within the British public. Grounded in a sense that some kind of moral conflict had taken place, Blackmore develops a vague sociology of poetry as a cultural practice, re-inscribing differences in poetic genre and tone as a confrontation of persons, howsoever ill defined.

Of particular note here is the bizarre rhetorical overlap between modes of describing poetic controversy: mock-epic, polemic, myth, and history all use the same fantastic imagery of war and battle. Like Defoe's *Pacificator*, Blackmore's language is thick with hyperbolic analogy, using an elaborate metaphor that approximates the ethical consequences of poetry by comparing it to civil war.³² Without a ready vocabulary to describe the relationship between literature and culture, other than to say that comedies have brought "*Vice* . . . into esteem," Blackmore imagines a war between the stage and the church, replete with the trappings of mock-epic.³³ The stage is a fort, armed with artillery and manned by rebellious champions of sacrilege. Unlike Defoe, however, Blackmore writes in a tone of deadly earnest. In the physician's view, religion has

³² This rhetorical overlap has caused confusion among commentators, leading some to see Defoe's attempt to reconcile sense and wit as unambiguously taking the side of Blackmore's satire; see Rosenberg, *Sir Richard Blackmore*, 48; Krapp, "Class Analysis of a Literary Controversy: Wit and Sense in Seventeenth Century English Literature," 87; Solomon, *Sir Richard Blackmore*, 75. These commentators are cited and refuted in Deluna, "Modern Panegyrick" and Defoe's "Dunciad," 425. Deluna has made the opposite mistake; she relies on inventive readings of particular passages and assumes that Defoe's burlesque technique satirizes the language of Blackmore's epics.

³³ The metaphor of war continued to saturate accounts of this particular literary dispute and was used by all of its twentieth-century commentators.

suffered “many deep and ghastly Wounds” at the hands of bad poets. As in *The Pacificator*, a war metaphor supplies the absence of a more precise analytical language, now by re-inscribing a claim about dramatic genre as a conflict between cultural institutions. It is the stage versus the church. Blackmore does not offer his thoughts here as commentaries on a specific play, or even group of plays. Rather, he presents a social history of comedy as a history of conflict between kinds of persons and kinds of places, exemplified by and obvious in playbooks sold about town. In doing so, Blackmore’s fuzzy history grounds these books in a mythical reality, giving them power to do things like make war and wound bodies. This literature-as-combatant anthropomorphism implies a social context within which literary dispute is imagined to happen: these ideal geographies enable commentators like Blackmore to “think” relationships that exist only virtually but on which the fate of the nation depends.

Such is the stuff of legend. Blackmore presents the history of drama as a showdown between religion and vice, and between the British nation and a subculture of playgoers within it. In this way, the conceptualization of a literary sphere emerged reciprocally with a national imagined community. Blackmore extends this point by weaving a satire against bad poets and their friends into *King Arthur* (1697), his new epic. In this portrayal, the conflict between the nation and its subculture of poets is naturalized and re-written as an always-present (if ancillary) element of British national origin. After calling the British nation to arms for a campaign to free Europe from tyranny, King Arthur finds only one group of men unwilling to rise to the occasion: “Some few Inglorious Youths for Arms unfit / Refus'd the Pleasures of the Stage to quit. /

Who only War in Theaters have seen, / And Camps and Battles only on the Scene.”³⁴

Like Parnassus, Arthur’s Britain is anachronistically modern Britain, theaters and all, uncannily both of the ancient past and in the present. The Arthur legend allows Blackmore to naturalize into British history the character type of the poet and playgoer—a lover of entertainments who, distracted by the pleasures of artistic representation, “shout[s] amidst th’applauding throng, /As *Britain* 's Sons in Triumph pass along” (19), thus dissolving into an anonymous crowd and becoming a parasite to his nation.

In *A Satyr against Wit*, Blackmore extends this line of argument to its most provocative terms, comparing men about town to carriers of the plague.³⁵ In the *Satyr*, Blackmore offers an elaborate commentary on the poetic culture of his time. It is most often read for the stances that Blackmore takes and for the arguments that he makes about

³⁴ Richard Blackmore, *King Arthur. An Heroick Poem. In Twelve Books* (London: printed for Awnsham and John Churchill at the Black Swan in Pater-Noster-Row, and Jacob Tonson at the Judges Head near the Inner-Temple-gate in Fleet-street, 1697), 19.

³⁵ The comparison between wit (along with, often, atheism) and public contagion was frequently drawn in the period. See Roger D. Lund, “Infectious Wit: Metaphor, Atheism, and the Plague in Eighteenth-Century London,” *Literature and Medicine* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 45-64. Drawing on sources from across the early part of the century, including Blackmore’s *Satyr*, Lund argues that metaphors of infection implied an urgent public need that demanded active reform and intervention, and was most often deployed by supporters of the High Church looking to stamp out ideas that were seen as threatening to public orthodoxy. However, a similar idea can also be found in René Rapin’s *Reflections*, as translated by Thomas Rymer more than twenty years before Blackmore wrote. Like Blackmore, Rapin (and Rymer) connects “petty wits” to “publick contagion”: “All *Poetry* that tends to the Corruption of Manners, is Irregular and Vicious; and *Poets* are to be look’d on as a publick Contagion, whose Morals are not pure: and 'tis these dissolute and debauch'd Poets that *Plato* banish'd his Commonwealth. And true it is, that the petty Wits onely are ordinarily subject to say what is impious or obscene.” René Rapin, *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie. Containing the Necessary, Rational, and Universal Rules for Epick, Dramatick, and the Other Sorts of Poetry. With Reflections on the Works of the Ancient and Modern Poets, and Their Faults Noted*, trans. Thomas Rymer (London: printed by T[homas]. N[ewcomb]. for H. Herringman, at the Anchor in the Lower Walk of the New Exchange, 1674), 12.

wit, or it is read as a piece of evidence in Dryden's or Congreve's critical heritage. However, my interest lay in the way Blackmore conceptualizes poetic controversy itself, in how his attention to the role of poetry in a larger national politics leads him to hypothesize a literary polity with its own parallel political structure. In the *Satyr*, the vague cultural narrative upon which Blackmore justified his career ("Bad poets are destroying the nation, and I'm going to take a stand against them") is given its clearest and most detailed expression. He begins by asking, "Who can forbear, and tamely silent sit, / And see his Native Land undone by Wit?"³⁶ The indignation that informs the prefaces to his Arthur poems is given free exercise in the *Satyr*, where he faults witty poets for destroying religion, undermining education, and otherwise contributing to urban corruption. The poem synthesizes several public controversies of the 1690s, including the establishment of a public medicine dispensary by the College of Physicians; the regulation of the stage, as urged by social reformers like Jeremy Collier; the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, in particular the dispute between Richard Bentley and Charles Boyle; as well as the coinage debates surrounding the stabilization of the national currency and the formation of the Bank of England. Blackmore brings these issues together by positing a group of literary men who stand on the wrong side of each of these issues, who promote urban corruption, and who thus require public regulation. They are "Fierce Insect-Wits [who] draw out their noisy Swarms, / And threaten Ruin more than Foreign Arms. / O'er all the Land the hungry Locusts spread, / Gnaw every Plant, taint every flowry Bed" (8-11). Thus, the corruption of poetry is a public danger comparable to

³⁶ Richard Blackmore, "A Satyr Against Wit," in *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714*, ed. Frank H. Ellis, vol. 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), lines 1-2. All citations are from this edition.

foreign invasion, but all the more terrifying because, whereas “Foreign Arms” represent an obvious clear-and-present danger to the nation-state from the outside, literary corruption is a shadowy monstrosity that threatens society from within. As such, the swarm of insects is both within the nation but alien to it, both a part of nature and parasitically mutilating nature’s best products.

This general assumption—that the public at large is at risk—informs a closer inspection of the men of wit who threaten so violently. He ultimately locates this corrupt culture of wit in the coffeehouse and in a group of specific individuals. After opening in the general terms of the “Native Land,” Blackmore’s frame of reference becomes increasingly delineated. As he does in *King Arthur*, Blackmore laments a debased modernity that clashes with Britain’s ancient past, which prompts him to bemoan the corruption of the “town.” He then moves toward a more precise social pathology, identifying one coffeehouse as an originating site of public contagion: “Had but the People scar’d with Danger run / To shut up *Wills*, where first this Plague begun: / Had they the first infected Men convey’d / Strait to *Moorfields*, the Pest-house for the Head; / The wild Contagion might have been suppress’d, / Some few had fal’n but we had sav’d the rest” (42-47). Like the author of *The Description of the Academy of Virtuosi* (1673), Blackmore uses the figure of the coffeehouse to provide an architectural imaginary for public misjudgment, to stand in as a kind of place where bad decisions are made about poetry.

By locating the problem in Will’s specifically, Blackmore’s comment is part of an increasing trend in the representation of London that identified particular coffeehouses with the social groups that were thought to patronize them, a trend most famously

exemplified in Richard Steele's *Tatler* and described recently by historian Brian Cowan.³⁷ Paired (and compared) with the mental hospital at Moorfields, known commonly as Bedlam, Will's is one place within a larger place (London), and it signifies one group of persons within a larger community of people. Had Will's been properly quarantined, Blackmore tells us, "Some few [would have] fal'n, but we [would have] sav'd the rest" (48-49). Lest anyone doubt just who these "few" men are that would have been lost to wit, Blackmore helpfully gives names. About Samuel Garth, we learn that "Wit the Doctor has undone" (159). We learn that "An able Senator is lost in *Moyle*, / And a fine Scholar sunk by Wit in *Boyle*" (161-62).³⁸ Dryden comes in for particular abuse, singled out as a rabid dog whose bite causes "Froth at the mouth, a certain Sign of Wit" (58). Throughout the first half of the poem, Blackmore contrasts negative figures like Garth and Dryden with those he sees as allies: men like Richard Bentley, John Locke, and physician John Radcliffe. So, whereas some threaten the nation with ruin, others fill "the grateful Realm with ... Applauses" (142). In either case, the question at hand involves how these men work within and contribute to the "Realm" they inhabit.

But what realm, exactly, is that? About midway through the poem, the scene of action shifts from "Britannia" to "Parnassus," and the question for Blackmore becomes how to best manage the unruly population of this dangerous virtual space. Comparing wit

³⁷ See Brian William Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), chap. 4.

³⁸ In the editions of *Satyr against Wit* printed during Blackmore's lifetime, only initials were given in the place of most proper names. In most cases, this would have caused little confusion, but some of his references to lesser-known writers may have been obscure at the time and are still doubtful. In his review of this volume of *POAS*, Claude Rawson faulted the editors for printing the names in full. "Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714. Volume VI: 1697-1704 [book review]," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 2 (1972): 274-76.

to coinage, Blackmore proposes regulation for poetry analogous to the new ministries of the state, and his satire culminates in a mock proposal for a national bank of wit on Parnassus. The satirical bite of the rest of the poem comes his descriptions of how various writers would suffer or flourish under this scheme—Dryden, for example, would find a great store of false currency melted down to a single coin; critics Thomas Rymer and St. Evremont would be given places of honor and authority; William Congreve and John Vanbrugh would be more strictly required to pass their sense in “good sterling.” However, insofar as Blackmore evinces a kind of governmentality over poetry, it’s important to keep in mind that this regulation, though analogous to the state, is emphatically not *of* the state. Instead, Parnassus is imagined to have its own parallel political structure, which Blackmore anatomizes in characteristic detail.

O Somers, Talbot, Dorset, Montague,
 Grey, Sheffield, Cavendish, Pembroke, Vernon, you
 Who in *Parnassus* have Imperial Sway,
 Whom all the Muses Subjects here obey,
 Are in your Service and receive your Pay;
 Exert your Sovereign Power, in Judgment sit
 To regulate the Nation’s Grievance, Wit.
 Pity the cheated Folks that every Day
 For Copper Wit good Sterling Silver pay.
 If once the Muses Chequer would deny
 To take false Wit, ‘twould lose its currency. (182-93)

This passage neatly encapsulates Blackmore’s concerns, and it introduces the conceit that the rest of the poem is devoted to elaborating. His proposal depends on the naming of names; he needs a specific and identifiable group of people in whom cultural authority can be invested. The underlying concept here is that Parnassus has a politics that is, or could be, comparable to state politics. In this way, Blackmore’s *Satyr*, like Defoe’s *Pacificator*, exemplifies a trend that I see gaining strength in the late 1690s: the explicit

politicization of poetry. The problem as Blackmore sees it is the suffering of these “cheated Folks,” the same group he enjoined in his preface to *Prince Arthur* to share in his disapproval of modern comedies. These anonymous readers are cheated by the productions of a social system—Parnassus—that they are not a part of, but a captive audience to. It is on behalf of these folks that men like Blackmore and Jeremy Collier presumed to speak. The point here is that “public sphere” debates over the role of poetry in the nation state lead to an explicit politicization of the literary sphere itself. Indeed, the spatial metaphor at bottom of a phrase like “literary sphere” can be said to have an important predecessor in metaphors like “Parnassus.” What Blackmore needed was a way to conceptualize a properly functioning social context of poetry, to concoct a model literary polity that could then be imagined as the subject of regulation. For Blackmore, this meant elevating a group of patrons to positions of acknowledged authority and exhorting them to exert that authority, while condemning dangerous sites of poetry and criticism, like the playhouse and the coffeehouse.

Of course, Blackmore was not the only writer confronting this new, vaguely frightening social form. The idea that poetry invited a potentially dangerous kind of sociability—often located in Will’s Coffeehouse, particularly—was embraced by detractors and proponents alike. At the same time that Blackmore was advancing himself by opposing a subculture of urban wits, others were busy promoting that very culture by ironically glamorizing it on the stage. References to an urban community of “wits” were commonplace in the Restoration theater. During the 1690s this group came to be more

closely associated with the coffeehouse as a kind of place. The image comedies present is similar to that in Blackmore's *Satyr*, but lacks his breathless indignation. In Thomas Southerne's *The Wive's Excuse* (1692), the hired thug Ruffle promises to make a public apology for provoking a duel, "I'll beg your Friends pardon, in any publick Place . . . before the Beau's, or the Officers of the Guard; or at *Will's* Coffee-House before the Wits, or in the Play-House, in the Pitt, before the Vizard Masks, and Orange-Wenches."³⁹ Similar references to Will's can be found in William Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695), John Dennis's *A Plot and No Plot* (1697), George Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle* (1699), and William Burnaby's *The Reformed Wife* (1700).⁴⁰ In these comedies, the character of the "wit" is always ironized and playfully condescended to. The coffeehouse is a place where harebrained (but ultimately harmless) young men write lampoons, read newspapers, trade puns, and damn plays.⁴¹ In Congreve's *Love for Love*, for example, the servant to the prodigal young hero insists, "Pox confound that *Will's* Coffee-House, it has ruin'd more Young Men than the *Royal-Oak* Lottery."⁴² As in

³⁹ Thomas Southerne, *The Wives Excuse: Or, Cuckolds Make Themselves. A Comedy* (London: printed for Samuel Brisco, over against Will's Coffee-house, in Russel-Street, in Covent-Garden, 1692), 28.

⁴⁰ William Congreve, *Love for Love: A Comedy* (London: printed for Jacob Tonson, at the Judge's-Head, near the Inner-Temple-Gate, in Fleet-street, 1695); John Dennis, *A Plot, and No Plot, a Comedy*. (London: printed for R. Parker, at the sign of the Unicorn under the Royal Exchange in Cornhil: P. Buck, at the sign of the Temple, near the Inner Temple Gate, Fleetstreet: and R. Wellington, at the Lute in St. Paul's Church-yard, 1697); George Farquhar, *Love and a Bottle. A Comedy* (London: printed for Richard Standfast, next door to the Three-Tun Tavern, near Temple-Bar; and Francis Coggen, in the Inner-Temple-lane, 1699); William Burnaby, *The Reform'd Wife. A Comedy* (London: printed for Thomas Bennet, at the Half-Moon, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1700).

⁴¹ This is a significant shift from representations of the coffeehouse in the 1670s and 1680s, when they were often figured as politically dangerous sites of political dissension and even rebellion.

⁴² Congreve, *Love for Love*, 3.

Blackmore's *Satyr*, the coffeehouse in comedy is a place where transgressive ways of reading and talking undermine one's economic well-being. The difference, of course, is that in comedies this transgression is steeped in self-irony and set up for a laugh.

Indeed, for all its later reputation as an important cultural institution in the history of the literary public sphere, one is hard-pressed to find a representation of Will's Coffeehouse from the 1690s that isn't satirical. This is all the more surprising when one considers that this decade was nostalgically reconstructed as Will's heyday: as Richard Steele wrote in the first issue of the *Tatler* (1709), "This Place is very much altered since Mr. *Dryden* frequented it; where you us'd to see *Songs, Epigrams, and Satyrs*, in the Hands of every Man you met, you have now only a Pack of Cards; and instead of the Cavils about the Turn of the Expression, the Elegance of the Style, and the like, the Learned now dispute only about the Truth of the Game."⁴³ During the 1690s, the very traits for which Steele idealized the coffeehouse made it seem dubious and dangerous.

The coffeehouse's most vocal proponent at the time was, perhaps, John Dennis. Dennis is now known as England's first professional critic and as an advocate for the institution of criticism in general.⁴⁴ He is best known today for his long rivalry with

⁴³ Richard Steele, *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), i.19.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Kramnick argues that Dennis "carved for himself the space of precise rule-making that constitutes literary criticism as a discipline," and that the critic, as exemplified by Dennis, lives in a "cultivated and unhappy solitude." Jonathan Brody Kramnick, "Literary Criticism Among the Disciplines," 349. In a similar vein, Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger put forward John Dennis as the ultimately unsociable critic, bent upon regulating the public, with a "theoretical position for criticism that was print-centered and geared toward the public sphere and thus significantly and openly departed from coterie ideals of dialogue and reciprocity in critical exchange." Trolander and Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725*, 148.

Alexander Pope. From 1711 until Dennis's death in 1734, the younger poet's elegant verse lampooned Dennis as a plodding critic out of step with the modern, polite society of eighteenth-century London. So, although Dennis later earned the reputation of a dull critic who sparred with better wits, in the 1690s he set up for an ambitious polymath: writing critical treatises would be only one part of a multifaceted career. During the same period when he published his comparatively well-known critical essays, *The Impartial Critick* (1693), *Remarks on Prince Arthur* (1696), and *The Usefulness of the Stage* (1698), Dennis also brought out plays, poetry (both original and in translation), as well as his own and others' correspondence. The view of Dennis as a fastidious and beleaguered critic is belied by early works like his *Poems in Burlesque* (1692), or his translation of Ovid (1693).

What all of these texts have in common is their commitment to promoting Dennis's membership in a culture of literary men-about-town. Far from assuming the role of a critic whose lonely voice regulates public taste, Dennis presents himself as one voice among many, as a wit among wits; and, in his most frequently reprinted early work, *Letters upon Several Occasions* (1696), he presents himself as an avid patron of Will's Coffeehouse.⁴⁵ In this collection, Dennis trades letters with the major poets of the day, including up-and-comers like William Congreve and established figures like Dryden and Wycherly. Writing to Dennis in a letter dated 14 December 1694, Wycherly assures the

⁴⁵ John Dennis, *Letters Upon Several Occasions: Written by and Between Mr. Dryden, Mr. Wycherly, Mr. ----, Mr. Congreve, and Mr. Dennis, Published by Mr. Dennis with a New Translation of Select Letters of Monsieur Voiture* (London: Printed for Sam Briscoe, 1696). Hereafter in parenthesis.

younger writer that “all the Poets or Wits-at-Wills, since your departure, speak well of the Absent” (27). Many of the letters are posted either to or from the coffeehouse, and they discuss a range of predictable topics: celebrations of bachelorhood, the nature of wit, performances of recent plays, and past authors like Shakespeare and Jonson. “I Have now read over the Fox,” Dennis writes to Congreve, of Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*, “yet I did not find it so accurate as I expected” (73). The letters range in their formality, from Congreve’s “Essay Concerning Humour in Comedy,” to Dryden’s scattered thoughts on Shakespeare, to a burlesque defense of the word “For.” In this collection, Dennis drapes himself in the late-seventeenth-century milieu of comic writers—the very people Blackmore had so forcefully lambasted the year before in his preface to *Prince Arthur*. Dennis’s critical treatises, including his *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, were written within this self-consciously sociable context.

In *Sir Richard Blackmore and the Wits* (1949), Richard C. Boys feels compelled to pause over Dennis’s contribution to the poetic controversies of the decade. He writes, “In many ways Dennis seems out of place among the Wits . . . It is hard to associate him with the gaiety and conviviality we usually think of in connection with Will’s.”⁴⁶ Boys is not alone in feeling this disjunction: it has led some to argue that Dennis’s criticism “represents an attempt to remove local social relationships from the grounds of judgment.”⁴⁷ Part of the reason for this misunderstanding is the ambiguous place that many of Dennis’s works (or Tom Brown’s, or Peter Motteux’s, or Charles Gildon’s, for that matter) have in the traditional archives of English literary criticism. These authors’

⁴⁶ Boys, *Sir Richard Blackmore and the Wits; a Study of "Commendatory Verses on the Author of the Two Arthurs and the Satyr Against Wit" (1700)*, 4.

⁴⁷ Trolander and Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725*, 149.

texts are often scattered across miscellaneous forms: this includes both the first literary periodical, *The Gentleman's Journal* (to which Dennis was a frequent contributor), as well as poetic anthologies, plays, correspondences, and essay collections. Many of these books bring together a variety of authors (some translated from French, Latin, or Greek sources) on a range of topics, dramatic, political, and gallant. This makes them both difficult to categorize and resistant to historical approaches that emphasize broad categorical changes across critical history. Relentlessly intertextual, these works present literary debate as one part of a more general, ongoing, and very much of-the-present conversation.

Letters upon Several Occasions provides a useful example. The simplest reason for its near-absence from the record is its exclusion from the standard edition Dennis's works, *The Critical Works of John Dennis* (1939), which includes, in the second volume, only a few excerpts from the preface and letters by Dennis. Like many of his writings, Dennis's *Letters* doesn't fit the editor's narrow, anachronistic definition of "critical works." By mixing letters of friendship and love with letters explicitly engaged in matters poetical, *Letters* cannot be defined as merely or specifically "critical." On the other hand, because it's collaboratively authored, it can't be claimed unambiguously as one of Dennis's "works." (Indeed, the most famous passage from the book is by Dryden, and its most elaborately theoretical essay is by Congreve.)

Another reason is the relatively small footprint *Letters* left in bibliographic catalogues: the work appears only once as a book unto itself, titled *Letters upon Several Occasions*. However, the complete text was also frequently reprinted as part of larger collections. *Familiar and Courtly Letters* (1700, 1701, 1718, and 1724), is a collection

catalogued under the authorship of Monsieur de Vincent Voiture, but it includes original and translated letters by Dennis, Dryden, and satirist Tom Brown, among others. In these collections, Dennis's original text was reprinted in full under the heading "Letters of Friendship" or simply "A Collection of Letters, Written by several Eminent Hands." When Dennis re-printed his *Select Works* (1718, 1721), the correspondence appeared under its original title, while the other texts of the 1690s, those that have since been used to define him as the "first professional critic," were left out. The point here is that Dennis used print to perform his membership in this club of wits. What's ironic about this is that our sense of Will's Coffeehouse as a site of conviviality originates in books like these, but because historians of literary criticism read only Dennis's stand-alone treatises, he came to be erased from the context that he had an important hand in first elaborating.

In *Letters*, Dennis works hard to construct a believably witty authorial persona; his main strategy is to cultivate praise from more established and successful poets, like Wycherly and Dryden. However, by also bringing together writers relatively new to the London theater scene, like Congreve and Walter Moyle, *Letters* presents its authors as a coterie group, a poetic avant-garde located precisely in the larger geography of London. To this end, the letters are also deeply invested in the *idea* of Will's Coffeehouse as a site of witty criticism, conversation, and sociable exchange. For example, the opening letter, addressed to Walter Moyle, depicts Will's as a kind of miniature state, whose politics have been upended by the removal of its traditional head, proprietor Will Urwin: "To leave off Poetical Similies, this Body-Politick is in a Cursed Condition; and cannot keep long together without a Head. The Members are at present in a Grave Debate how to get one. To morrow the Whole House will resolve it self into a Grand Committee, to consult

about Ways and Means of making Provision for the Common Necessities” (3). Without Will Urwin to collect a daily tax on wit (i.e., to sell coffee), the society of fellows will need to develop new fundraising techniques. Dennis proposes a tax on bombast: “I would have none Pay, but they who put Gravity upon us for Wisdom, Visions for Politicks, and Quibbles for Wit; and I would have no Man at any Expence for being call'd a Poet, a Wit, or a Critick, unless it be by himself” (5-6). Similar jokes appear throughout the collection, as in an anonymous, undated letter marked from Will's, “Can there be a more Damnable Satyr upon Wit, than that so many Gentlemen who have so very much of it, should be forc'd to play the Fool to divert one another?” (66). Such self-deprecating humor served to highlight the wits' good nature while insulating them from criticism through strategically self-aware irony.

Similar letter collections appeared in great numbers around the turn of the century, and published correspondence was an important genre of criticism at the time. These books did not merely collect the letters of dead greats from the past; instead they were a venue for new writers to enter into London literary culture. Although some of the letters were posthumous, of course, and the collections were sometimes marketed under the names of well-known figures from the past, like Voiture or Rochester, they also included letters by young or new-to-London writers like Dennis and Charles Gildon. Usually the collections mixed letters with love poetry, as in William Walsh's *Letters and Poems, Amorous and Gallant* (1692) and George Farquhar's *Love and Business* (1702). Some were used as vehicles for epistolary narrative, like *Letters of Love and Gallantry* (1693), which included a collection now known as Catharine Trotter's *Adventures of a*

Young Lady.⁴⁸ Some collections, like Walsh's, were single-authored and confined more or less to matters of gallantry. Others exploited the miscellany form more fully, bringing together a wide range of authors and kinds of texts. For example, *Familiar and Courtly Letters*, in which Dennis's correspondence frequently appeared, also brought together letters by Voiture and his seventeenth-century French friends, as well as ancients like Aristaenetus, Pliny, and original letters by their translator, Tom Brown. Although Brown was responsible for most of the translation, some letters were Englished by various hands, including Dryden, Dennis, Henry Cromwell, and Thomas Cheek. These names appear prominently on the title page, and the publisher's preface insists, "The Gentlemen who are concern'd in the Collection are too well known to want my praises."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Letters of Love and Gallantry. And Several Other Subjects. All Written by Ladies. Vol. I* (London: printed for S. Briscoe, over against Will's Coffee-House in Russel-street [sic], Covent-Garden, 1693). Briscoe published a follow-up volume the next year, *Letters of Love and Gallantry. And Several Other Subjects. Written by Ladies. Vol. II. With a Dialogue Between Love and Reason: Shewing, the Reasonableness and Unreasonableness of Love; the Nun's Letter to the Monk; Characters and Pictures of Several Ladies and Gentlemen; with Other Passionate Letters, That Passed Betwixt Both Sexes, in Town and Country. Dedicated to the Beaux* (London: printed for S. Briscoe, at the corner of Charles-street in Russel-street, Covent-Garden, 1694). Though an important Covent Garden publisher of the 1690s and one of the central figures in this chapter, Briscoe has received little attention from historians, and is best known as the publisher of Aphra Behn's posthumous novels. For a brief overview of his career, see Germaine Greer, "Honest Sam. Briscoe," in *A Genius for Letters: Booksellers and Bookselling from the 16th to the 20th Century*, ed. Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester, UK: Oak Knoll Press, 1995), 33-48.

⁴⁹ *Familiar and Courtly Letters, Written by Monsieur Voiture to Persons of the Greatest Honour, Wit, and Quality of Both Sexes in the Court of France. Made English by Mr. Dryden, Tho. Cheek, Esq; Mr. Dennis, Henry Cromwel, Esq; Jos. Raphson, Esq; Dr. -, &c. With Twelve Select Epistles Out of Aristænetus: Translated from the Greek. Some Select Letters of Pliny, Jun. and Monsieur Fontanelle [sic]. Translated by Mr. Tho. Brown. And a Collection of Original Letters Lately Written on Several Subjects. By Mr. T. Brown. Never Before Publish'd. To Which Is Added, a Collection of Letters of Friendship, and Other Occasional Letters, Written by Mr. Dryden, Mr. Wycherly, Mr. -*

Translation, criticism, and gallantry gathered these writers into a social group in the present, while also associating them with important precedents in France and among the ancients. Such publications idealized a virtual community of poets and urbane wits, whose “coterie critical practices” worked both as sociable exchange between each other and as a public claim for collective cultural authority.

To take another example. A collection edited by Abel Boyer appeared in 1701. Its title is *Letters of wit, politicks and morality. Written originally in Italian, by the famous Cardinal Bentivoglio; in Spanish by Signior Don Guevara; ... Done into English, by the Honourable H- H- Esq; Tho. Cheek, Esq; Mr. Savage. Mr. Boyer &c. To which is added a large collection of original letters*. Like Dennis, Boyer dedicates his collection to Charles Montague, earl of Halifax, an important Whig literary patron of this period.

He says,

I confess an Author's endeavouring to make himself known to your Lordship, argues a great deal of Presumption: for what Performance can stand the Test of your discerning Judgment? Being conscious of this, and, at the same time, of the unworthiness of any thing of my own, I have ventur'd to wait upon your Lordship with *Bentivoglio, Guevara, Aristaenetus, Fontenelle*, and some other great Men, who come to entertain you in English.⁵⁰

Name-dropping in this context is incredibly important. One of Boyer's letters, signed only, “From a French Gentleman in London to his Friend in Paris,” describes the social life of the English capital. He ventures into Will's Coffeehouse.

Mr. Congreve, Mr. Dennis, and Other Hands (London: printed for Sam. Briscoe, in Russel-street, Covent-garden, and sold by J. Nutt, near Stationers-hall, 1700), sig. A4v.

⁵⁰ Abel Boyer, ed., *Letters of Wit, Politicks and Morality. Written Originally in Italian, by the Famous Cardinal Bentivoglio; in Spanish by Signior Don Guevara; ... Done into English, by the Honourable H- H- Esq; Tho. Cheek, Esq; Mr. Savage. Mr. Boyer &c. To Which Is Added a Large Collection of Original Letters* (London: printed for J. Hartley. W. Turner: and Tho. Hodgson, 1701), A2v.

Will's Coffee-house in *Covent-Garden*, holds the first Rank, as being consecrated to the Honour of *Apollo*, by the first-rate Wits that flourish'd in King *Charles II's* Reign, such as the late Earl of *Rochester*, the Marquis of *Normanby*, the Earl of *Dorset*, Sir *Charles Sidley*, the Earl of *Roscommon*, Sir *George Etherege*, Mr. *Dryden*, Mr. *Wycherly*, and some few others; and tho' this Place has lost most of its illustrious Founders, yet it has ever since been supported by Men of great Worth; but its being accounted the Temple of the *Muses*, where all *Poets* and *Wits* are to be initiated, have given occasion to its being pester'd with abundance of false Pretenders, who rather darken, than heighten its former Splendor. (216)

Boyer continues, “The Company which now generally meets at *Will's*, may be divided into two Classes; the first of which contains the *Wits*, justly so call'd, and the other the *Would-be-Wits*” (216). When it comes to the true wits, Boyer names names: Charles Boyle, Wycherly, Garth, William Burnaby, and Nicholas Rowe are praised. The false wits can be simply dismissed as those who “distinguish themselves by Railing both at the *French* Writers, whom they don't understand, and at those *English* Authors, whose Excellencies they cannot reach” (220).

This informal social imaginary was used as a context to legitimate critical writing: to publish poetry or criticism was to be a member of this recognizable and prestigious (to some at least) community. This culture was also understood to value critical writing for its own sake. For example, Congreve's “Essay Concerning Humour in Comedy” is prefaced with a gesture to its social origin: “To make this appear to the World, would require a long and labour'd Discourse, and such as I neither am able nor willing to undertake. But such little Remarks, as may be continued within the Compass of a Letter, and such unpremediated Thoughts, as may be Communicated between Friend and Friend, without incurring the Censure of the World, or setting up for a *Dictator*, you shall have from me, since you have enjoyn'd it” (81). On the surface, Congreve premises his essay on its private status: because only communicated between friends, he can offer

“unpremeditated” ideas without the “long and labour’d Discourse” like that of an unmannerly, public critic. (The character type later assigned to Dennis, his correspondent.)

However, it’s important to keep in mind that the notion of a “Dennis-Congreve correspondence”—that is, a collection of manuscript writings that were exchanged between real people—is an idea *advanced by the printed book*. Congreve’s ideas about “humour” are here couched within a social context that the letter collection has gone to great pains to invent and idealize. The premise of the book is that learned and witty men gather in scenes of conviviality to share friendship and to trade wisdom on matters poetical; familiar letters passed between them will contain their free and easy discourse. Dennis’s *Letters upon Several Occasions* is particularly devoted to promoting this ideal, and its frequent reprinting suggests it was valued for doing so. The mistake here would be to just conclude that the sociability is somehow feigned or disingenuous. What Congreve says here *isn’t untrue*. His thoughts are communicated between friend and friend; they are within the compass of letter; they don’t presume regulate others’ tastes. Friendship is something you can do with books. With these extra layers of mediation, selection, and compression, the letters’ authenticity lies in the reproducibility of the social structures they imply: groups of literary minded men-about-town trade in gallantry and fanciful social commentary. The conviviality of the coffeehouse—like the sociability of English wit and criticism in general—mimics and self-consciously parodies the tradition of courtly, Continental wit.

This ideal—criticism as interactive dialogue—was just as often advanced across different books. Critics were keenly aware of other works that appeared

contemporaneously in print. That is to say, the social context of criticism was often figured as the background to an exchange between printed books, typically under the rubric of partisan dispute on matters of literary opinion. In Charles Gildon's "Reflections on Mr. Rymer's Short View of Tragedy," directed as a letter to Dryden, he begins,

As soon as Mr. *Rymer's* Book came to my Hands, I resolv'd to make some *Reflections* upon it, tho' more to shew my *Will* than my *Abilities*. But finding Mr. *Dennis* had almost promis'd the World a Vindication of the Incomparable *Shakespear*, I quitted the Design, since he had got a Champion more equal to his Worth; not doubting but Mr. *Dennis* wou'd as effectually confute our *Hypercritic* in this, as all Men must grant he has, in what he attempted in his *Impartial Critic*.⁵¹

Such gestures confound schematic labels public or private. Offered as a letter between friends, and referring to the work of another friend, Gildon's concern rests nonetheless with defending Shakespeare's reputation to "the World."

In a later essay in the same volume, Gildon writes to Dennis directly, offering his ideas about tragedy as part of a larger literary-partisan exchange. "But to deal fairly with our Opponents, I shall first propose all their Objections against this Opinion I Defend, as I find them in *Rapin*, and his Copier, Mr. *Rymer*; and then examine how far they are from being fortified by Reason, as their Admirers boast" (146). As Gildon makes clear, the public address of printed criticism assumes that groups of readers will be divided along literary-partisan lines. The social context of critical debate thus comes into focus as smaller, competing subsets of the London public. Private friendships between critics are

⁵¹ Charles Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays, on Several Subjects: Philosophical, Moral, Historical, Critical, Amorous, &c. in Prose and Verse. Directed to John Dryden, Esq; the Honourable Geo. Granvill Esq; Walter Moile, Esq; Mr. Dennis, Mr. Congreve, and Other Eminent Men of Th' Age. By Several Gentlemen and Ladies* (London: printed for Benjamin Bragg, at the White-Hart, over against Water-Lane in Fleetstreet, 1694), 64.

performed insofar as they align with these divisions. Anonymous readers are organized along the lines of critical opinion, and the personal relationships of critics are figured specifically to match these schisms. Critical opinion thus becomes the crux around which social relationships—both personal and amongst strangers—come to be imagined. To publish one's thoughts in this context becomes an act of "taking sides."

Once the lines of literary partisanship had been drawn, critical treatises could participate in such exchanges without the need for an epistolary apparatus. Dennis's first piece of extended practical criticism, *Remarks on a book entituled Prince Arthur* (1696), should be understood in this light. Dennis's conclusion is that Blackmore's epic is fundamentally flawed, despite some merit in its design. *Prince Arthur's* "Action has neither unity, nor integrity, nor morality, nor universality," and its "Narration ... is neither probable, delightful, nor wonderful."⁵² Throughout the text, Dennis is aware of potentially damaging social repercussions that might result from putting himself forward in this way. His text is littered with references to his own and Blackmore's "friends." "I would feign put the following Questions to Mr. *Blackmore's* Friends," he writes (i:60). The presence of this social group—Blackmore's allies—was an unavoidable reality for anyone writing against *Prince Arthur*. Dennis tried to deflect this problem by referring back to the poetasters of classical fame: "I am perfectly persuaded that *Bavius* and *Maevius* had a formidable Party in ancient *Rome*, a Party, who thought them by much superiour both to *Horace* and *Virgil*. For I cannot believe, that those two great Men would have made it their business, to fix an eternal brand upon them, if they had not been Coxcombs in more than ordinary credit" (i:70).

⁵² Dennis, *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, i:46.

The problem for Dennis was that Blackmore's "friends" had increased dramatically both in number and influence since the publication of *Prince Arthur*. Like Blackmore, Dennis was a supporter of King William and the High Church, and his main challenge was to confine their dispute to literary partisanship in particular. In his preface, Dennis acknowledges objections to his treatise. The most worrisome is the political one. As an attack on Blackmore, his criticism is "intended to expose a Poem which was design'd for the service of the Government" (I:51). This objection, Dennis reports, "was urg'd with all the force, that it was capable of receiving" (I:51). In a lengthy and fairly tortured set of arguments, Dennis reasons that *Prince Arthur*'s reliance on poetical machinery creates a fabulous narrative at odds with Anglican orthodoxy, and that Arthur's imperfection as a fictional hero undercuts any parallel with the present monarch. For this reason, Blackmore shouldn't be associated with state power, and Dennis's criticism of *Prince Arthur* is consistent with his support for the church and crown. Besides,

I never design'd to make an Enquiry into any of Mr. *Blackmor's* Principles, which may regard either Church or State. A Man had need have a great deal of time upon his hands, who has leisure enough to Examine a Poet's Politicks, or a Physician's Religion. My intention was only to consider this Gentleman in his poetical capacity, and to make some Remarks upon the reasonableness of his Design and upon the felicity of his execution. (I:52)

Such claims can be usefully read as part of a long history in the formation of criticism and literature as distinct disciplines, and in the institutionalization of the role of the "critic," as opposed to the political commentator. However, it's important to keep in

mind that the distinction Dennis makes here is not really between the political and the critical. Instead, the distinction here is between the politics of the state and the politics of Parnassus. By confining his reflections to the poem's style and structure, Dennis hopes that his readership can be divided along literary-partisan lines, rather than religious and political ones. Hence, the questions addressed to "Blackmore's friends." By taking an ostensibly apolitical stance, Dennis hopes, he will be free to practice literary politics.⁵³

Similar distinctions permeate *Letters upon Several Occasions*, published that same year. Dryden was still suffering politically for his conversion to Catholicism and his opposition to the Revolution of 1688. However, it was thought that such unfortunate business should not interfere with critical sociability. In a letter addressed to Dennis, John Dryden insists, "For my Principles of Religion, I will not justifie them to you. I know yours are far different. For the same Reason I shall say nothing of my Principles of State. I believe you in yours follow the Dictates of your Reason, as I in mine do those of my Conscience" (56). What results is curious kind of toleration. Divisions of religious and state politics should be ignored so that the lines of literary partisanship can be drawn more brightly. Whether appealing for consensus across lines of difference in state politics (Dennis & Dryden), or articulating literary opposition within a shared political party (Dennis vs. Blackmore), these critics tried to maintain fairly tenuous social alliances.

⁵³ In the process, he solidified "friends" of his own. It should be no surprise that *Remarks on Prince Arthur* garnered Dennis lavish praise in Gildon's edition of Gerard Langbaine's *The Lives of the Poets* (1699). Gildon wrote that Dennis "shewed himself a perfect Critick, and Master of a great deal of Penetration and Iudgment; his Remarks being beyond Controversy just, and the Faults he finds undeniably such." Gerard Langbaine and Charles Gildon, *The Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick* (London: printed for Nich. Cox, and William Turner, and are to be sold at the White Horse without Temple-Bar, 1699), 38.

What's at stake is the possibility that literary opinion and criticism can be a kind of sociability unto itself. The very vulnerability of such communities meant that they had to be insisted upon all the more vehemently.

The atmosphere of literary controversy of the 1690s and early 1700s provided a fruitful ground for launching literary careers. Eager to find allies in a dog-eat-dog world, writers supported each other through puffery, collaboration, and criticisms of rivals. (It was during this time, for example, that Dryden developed a reputation for supporting up-and-coming poets.) A partial list of authors whose publishing careers began during this time includes Richard Blackmore, Tom Brown, Colley Cibber, William Congreve, John Dennis, George Farquhar, Samuel Garth, Peter Motteux, Jonathan Swift, John Vanbrugh, and William Walsh. However, except for Congreve and Swift, few of these writers experienced lasting reputation, nor do their works continue to be read except by specialists. Vanbrugh and Garth continued as members of influential literary circles for some decades, but by and large they had stopped publishing by 1710. Except for a couple prefaces by Dryden and Dennis's famous failure, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1702), little criticism is read between Thomas Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy* (1692) and Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711). The period famous among book historians as that between the lapse of the Licensing Act (1695) and the institution of authorial copyright (1709) is strangely absent from the traditional literary record.

Part of the reason for this, I think, has to do with the way literary debate came to be structured and with the way writing poetry was understood. Because to write poetry or criticism was to "take sides," new writers would be enthusiastically encouraged, even if their works displayed only modest talent. It's lucky for Dryden, for example, that

Congreve would go on to write *The Mourning Bride* and *Way of the World*, because when he wrote his enthusiastic praise in “To my Honour’d Friend, William Congreve,” and allowed it to be published at the front of Congreve’s failed *Double Dealer*, the young comedian had only two plays under his belt, neither of which were the basis of his later fame. When writing criticism, men like Blackmore and Dennis saw themselves as combatants in a field of literary politics. The political terms of these debates—that is, the splitting into factions and the competition between those factions—became the organizing framework that justified writing new criticism. The great accomplishment of printed works at this time is that they constructed, *sui generis*, a vibrant social context for the production of poetry and poetic criticism. Unfortunately, literary “combat” was so powerful a trope that even the best writers struggled to get out from under its shadow, and few of the new works retained urgency outside their original literary-partisan debate.

Chapter 4

Critics and Criticism in the Poetry of Anne Finch

In the last two chapters, I describe the advent of public debate around poetics in the controversies between poets of the Restoration and into the early eighteenth century. I have argued that this practice of print exchange advanced an understanding of authorship that was fundamentally dialogic and agonistic. In the 1690s, factionalism became a dominant trope of literary life; metaphors of war were used to conceptualize a social imaginary of poets and critics that was part of, but distinct from, British culture more generally. Early criticism and the exchange of opinions on critical topics both depended on and advanced the idea that to publish poetry, or even to read newly published poetry, was to participate in this world. To draw these points out, I have focused on critical discourse that emerged out of the bookshops of London. However, this period also witnessed the emergence of women's poetry within provincial coterie networks. In this chapter, I will turn away from London to consider how poetry and criticism evolved in the provinces, outside the field of literary factionalism and, to a certain extent, outside of print. Provincial writers required a different way to conceptualize the work of poetry and of criticism, and in this chapter I will consider the work of a single poet, Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, who was among its ablest commentators.

The poems of Anne Finch are haunted by critics. Her writing was collected mainly in a handful of manuscript volumes, printed miscellanies, and in a single published collection, *Miscellany Poems, On Several Occasions* (1713). One curious fact is that Finch's most explicitly critical texts—a prose preface and a polemical introductory poem—were written for her manuscript collections but excluded from the printed book. During the 1690s, the poetic controversies that raged in print informed Finch's first efforts to gather and preserve her work. In her oft-cited poem, “The Introduction,” Finch invokes the unsavory reputation of would-be wits and of criticism in general to justify her authorship as a woman poet. “Did I, my lines intend for publick view, / How many censures, wou'd their faults pursue, / Some wou'd, because such words they do affect, / Cry they're insipid, empty, uncorrect” (1-4).¹ This familiar barrage of censures will come, Finch imagines, from a familiar source: “And many, have attain'd, dull and untaught / The name of Witt, only by finding fault” (5-6). Although she concedes that “True judges, might condemn [her] want of witt” (7), Finch anticipates a broad anti-feminist complaint from an anonymous and ill-natured crowd of bad critics. “And all might say, they're by a Woman writt” (8). Throughout her poetry, Finch imagines this hypercritical readership as an always-present specter of male disapproval—even though her manuscript collections were kept in her Eastwell home and would have been read only by family and friends. The hostility of these rude men justifies Finch's decision to

¹ The standard edition of Finch's poetry remains Anne Kingsmill Finch Winchilsea, *The Poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea*, ed. Myra Reynolds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903). Unless otherwise noted, all citations are from this edition, with poems cited by line number and prose by page number.

forgo publishing her work. “Be caution'd then my Muse, and still retir'd; / Nor be dispis'd, aiming to be admir'd” (59-60). Finch conjures these ghosts to keep them at bay. She invites her readers to share in her frustration with imagined insults. Indeed, the sense of intimacy so pervasive in Finch’s best poems is achieved in large part by anticipating for them a troubled, tragic publicity.

Historians of English literary criticism should consider Finch’s work. Although her output was small compared to many male contemporaries, Finch provides a unique and rich body of commentary on the poetic culture of her day. By itself, this assertion is not new. A handful of Finch’s texts, including “The Introduction,” were included in *Women Critics 1660-1820: An Anthology*, published by the Folger Collective on Early Women Critics in 1995.² The editors notice that Finch “anticipated criticism for aspiring beyond her sphere” and conclude that such fears “undermined her self-confidence and caused her to curb her ambition and shrink from publicity” (45). The editors paint a familiar image of Finch silently seething while holding back to accommodate a masculinist public sphere. Such readings give too much credence to Finch’s self-presentation as if it were a simple statement of historical fact. As a consequence, the nature and content of her critical engagement with post-1688 poetic culture has gone largely unremarked. Finch was a shrewd observer of her network of literary friendships, which seemed to contrast so sharply with published poetry and criticism. Perhaps her most important contribution was the clarity with which she articulated the boundaries of this network, as well as its modes of authority and its kinds of prestige. Finch advanced

² *Women Critics 1660-1820: An Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

an ideal of femininity and country life that was not so much restrictive as it was *disciplinary*. That is to say, Finch argued for women's writing as a life-work, as a discipline.

As she increasingly sought publishers for her poems, Finch stripped critical discourse from her self-presentation, explicitly avoiding public controversy. When it's noticed at all, this move is usually ascribed to Finch's modesty, her reluctance to insert a too-authoritative woman's voice in a public sphere dominated by men. However, I argue that this shift reflects her deliberate intervention in the relationship between criticism and poetry. Finch looked at the printed works of the 1690s and early 1700s and saw a desolate field that had abandoned the pursuit of pleasure, and a reading public that valued only joyless techniques of back-biting satire. By bringing the public discourse of criticism into her ostensibly private writings, Finch engenders poetry as a new kind of intimacy. In print, Finch eschews the typical practice of provoking controversy as a way to mediate between text, author, and reader. In all cases, we see in Finch a poet re-thinking criticism as an instrument for advancing poetry.

Recent studies have brought to light a thriving culture of literary exchange that emerged outside London in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.³ Groups

³ Helen Ostovich and Elizabeth Sauer, "Introduction," in *Reading Early Modern Women: an Anthology of Texts in Manuscript and Print, 1550-1700* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Sarah Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); George Justice and Nathan Tinker, eds., *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship*

of writers and patrons stretched across provincial towns and country estates. These “coterie provincial networks” were maintained through epistolary exchange, but also involved numerous connections with London publishers.⁴ For women writers especially, these networks were often the easiest avenue to a varied and influential readership. Writers like Jane Barker and Elizabeth Singer Rowe (both of whom wrote poetry and novels) distributed work through personal connections with provincial readers in tandem with commercial publishing. As Sarah Prescott has argued, “many women did inhabit and benefit from different kinds of literary circles. These range from close-knit provincial literary groups, often based around literary-minded female friends, to broader networks of friends and acquaintances which included male literary figures, patrons, and the London booksellers.”⁵ The term “patron” here should be understood broadly. Although wealthy supporters sometimes made direct payments to struggling writers, just as important were the intellectually rich social connections that encouraged poetry and built reputations. These relationships were often represented under the signs of female friendship, piety, poetry (conventionally personified as the Muses), and a shared condition of pastoral retirement.

The coterie provincial network of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries was a social form with clear antecedents among women writers stretching back

and the Advent of Print (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Kathryn R King, *Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary Career, 1675-1725* (Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press, 2000); Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 3.

⁴ Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740*, 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

to the sixteenth century or earlier.⁶ Two developments in the later seventeenth century broadened the scope of such collaboration. First, the advent of the postal service and the improvements of country roads meant that communication and travel between towns and estates, and between London and the provinces, were easier than ever before, enabling the proliferation of what Gary Schneider has called “epistolary communities.”⁷ For example, this meant that Finch could maintain a correspondence with and occasionally visit the Thynne family at Longleat House near Bath. Heneage Finch’s sister, Frances, was married to Sir Thomas Thynne, Viscount of Weymouth, who became a major supporter to non-jurors after 1688. Although their estates were separated by more than 150 miles, Anne Finch and her sister-in-law’s family were able to keep up a robust correspondence, and Longleat House remains one of the most important repositories of Finch’s papers. Poems addressed to the Thynne family include “To the Honorable the Lady Worsley at Long-leate,” “On the Death of the Honourable Mr. James Thynne,” “To the Painter of an Ill-drawn Picture of Cleone, the Honorable Mrs. Thynne,” and “To the

⁶ On this point, see Helen Ostovich and Elizabeth Sauer, eds., *Reading Early Modern Women: an Anthology of Texts in Manuscript and Print, 1550-1700* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Justice and Tinker, *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas*; Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife*. Recent studies of women’s reading have also emphasized continuity; see Paul Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E Kelly, eds., *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁷ Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 20. For the development of the post office, see Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office, a History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1948). For the cultural importance of women’s letter-writing during the sixteenth century, see James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). For a broad overview of eighteenth-century letter writing, see Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Right Honorable Countess of Hertford.”⁸ As Lady Hertford, the very young Frances Thynne (1699-1754) became one of the most important provincial patrons of the first half of the eighteenth century, most notably supporting and maintaining a long correspondence with Elizabeth Singer Rowe.⁹

The second major change was an increase in publishing opportunities for writers living in the provinces, especially women. Periodicals like *The Gentleman's Journal* solicited contributions from its readers in ways that mimicked coterie circulation.¹⁰ Rowe got her start by sending anonymous contributions to John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury*.¹¹ Printed miscellanies also often included poems by women, who were usually anonymous. Finch's first adventures into print took this path. At least six (and perhaps twelve¹²) poems by Finch appeared in 1696 in a collection by the new poet-laureate Nahum Tate, *Miscellanea Sacra or Poems on Divine & Moral Subjects*, right around the same time Finch began gathering her poems into fair-copy manuscripts. Five years later a group of Finch's poems, including her most famous, “The Spleen,” appeared in Charles Gildon's

⁸ These poems are all included in Reynolds. Several more poems to the Thynne family can be found in the Wellesley manuscript, which Reynolds had not seen, but are available in *The Anne Finch Wellesley Manuscript Poems*, ed. Barbara McGovern and Charles H. Hinnant (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

⁹ Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740*, chap. 6.

¹⁰ Margaret J. M. Ezell, “The Gentleman's Journal and the Commercialization of Restoration Coterie Literary Practices,” *Modern Philology* 89, no. 3 (February 1992): 323-40.

¹¹ Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740*, chap. 5.

¹² Six poems from this collection are included in Finch's manuscripts, and in Reynolds. Ellen Moody identifies an additional six poems that may be by Finch. See “Anne Kingsmill Finch, Countess of Winchilsea: poetry, biography, and sources, by Ellen Moody,” <http://www.jimandellen.org/finch/AnneFinchShow.html>.

A New Miscellany of Original Poems on Several Occasions (1701). During her lifetime, Finch's work appeared in other miscellanies in 1704, 1709, 1714, and 1717.¹³

The London book trade had a greater proximity to women's coterie writing than is sometimes assumed. Citing Anne Finch among a diverse range of writers, including Aphra Behn, Delariviere Manley, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Margaret Ezell argues, "Songbooks and verse miscellanies ... can be seen as a type of publishing middle ground, where the circulating manuscripts of women poets could be posthumously preserved in print, where live social poets could contribute a small piece or two with little expense or effort."¹⁴ These new publishing techniques all featured a "welcoming format" that solicited contributions from provincial writers like Finch.¹⁵ Sending off selected pieces to be printed in London was something a typical provincial poet might do, or at least consider doing. We now know with some confidence that simple divisions between print and manuscript, and between commercial and coterie authors, are difficult to sustain against the variety of eighteenth-century literary practices. This introduced an element of

¹³ *Poems on Affairs of State, from 1640. to This Present Year 1704. Written by the Greatest Wits of the Age* ([London], 1704); *Poetical Miscellanies: The Sixth Part. Containing a Collection of Original Poems, with Several New Translations. By the Most Eminent Hands* (London: printed for Jacob Tonson, within Grays-Inn Gate, next Grays-Inn Lane, 1709); *Poetical Miscellanies, Consisting of Original Poems and Translations. By the Best Hands. Publish'd by Mr. Steele* (London: printed for Jacob Tonson at Shake-Spear's Head over-against Catherine-Street in the Strand, 1714); *Poems on Several Occasions. By His Grace the Duke of Buckingham ... Sr. Samuel Garth ... Bevil Higgins Esq; And Other Eminent Hands* (London: printed for Bernard Lintot, 1717).

¹⁴ Margaret J. M. Ezell, "From Manuscript to Print: a Volume of Their Own?," in *Women and Poetry, 1660-1750*, ed. Sarah Prescott and David Shuttleton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 140-59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

choice to literary activity.¹⁶ What should be sent to publishers, and what withheld? Either way, what's at stake? Manuscript exchange and print publishing were interrelated in these provincial networks, and so these old questions attained new urgency. Because the actual business of literary life cut across these divides—print and manuscript, city and country, man and woman—writers were forced to grapple with them explicitly and at length.

Accordingly, Finch's poetry is deeply concerned with what she thought it was like to be a woman poet outside London. Scholars interested in the politics behind her poetry have tended, for understandable reasons, to focus on state politics, in particular on Finch's Jacobite sympathies.¹⁷ Such issues are of undeniable importance. However, she was also a practitioner of literary politics. Poems like "The Introduction" should be read, not just as statements of individual feeling, but within their context of coterie production. In her worries about the masculine field of poetic controversy, as we shall see, Finch advocated provincial writing and women's writing. By situating herself within this context, Finch advances a coherent poetic identity while complexly engaging the various

¹⁶ The same point has been made by George Justice in the introduction to his volume of essays on women's writing: "The women writers and editors described in these pages are active agents who choose, as far as they can, among media that offer different cultural, economic, literary, religious, and personal advantages." *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas*, 11.

¹⁷ This element of Finch's life is frequently mentioned, at least in passing, by critics. However, the point has been argued forcefully by Charles Hinnant in *The Poetry of Anne Finch: An Essay in Interpretation* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994). by Carol Barash in *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714: Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). and, most recently, Nicolle Jordan, "'Where Power is Absolute': Royalist Politics and the Improved Landscape in a Poem by Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea," *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 255-75. See also Hinnant's and McGovern's introduction to Winchilsea, *The Anne Finch Wellesley Manuscript Poems*.

poetic cultures of her time. This set of concerns can be seen in Finch's "The Circuit of Appollo," her version of the "sessions poem."¹⁸ Traditionally, the sessions poem gathers authors in a familiar setting of judgment and laughs at the disorderly bustle caused by their clamoring for fame. It describes how writers are bound in relationships of rivalry by the promise of an authoritative judgment that's always deferred. By adapting the sessions poem to women writers in the provinces, Finch revises the terms of that failure. Whereas modern poets are usually exposed as vain competitors who seek preferment they do not deserve, in "The Circuit of Appollo," Finch asks whether such preferment could ever be extended to provincial women writers, no matter how deserving. Throughout the poem, Finch's earnest investment in women's writing is balanced by this witty sensibility of amused disappointment.¹⁹ Apollo sends out a summons to the poets of Kent, only to find that it "was obey'd but by four" (line 7). He asks them to "show him their papers, to sing, or to say, / What 'ere they thought best, their pretention's might prove" (lines 20-21). The first to go is "Alinda," who "began, with a song upon Love / ... compos'd with such art, / That not one expression fell short of the heart" (lines 22-4). Apollo is transported, but soon finds that he must choose among several worthy candidates. The next poet to come is Laura, whose poetry "had reach'd him, while yett in the sky, / That he thought with himself, when itt first struck his ear, / Who e're could write that, ought the Laurel to wear" (lines 32-4). The choice between Alinda and Laura leaves Apollo stuck "in a musing suspence" until confronted by another poet, Valeria, whose work he read with

¹⁸ For a fuller account of the "sessions poem" tradition, see chapter 3.

¹⁹ Jean Mallinson aptly glosses the poem as "mak[ing] common cause with fellow eccentrics." "Anne Finch: a Woman Poet and the Tradition," in *Gender at Work: Four Women Writers of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Ann Messenger (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 44.

“delight” and which he urged her to share more widely or “he’d the Talent recall” (lines 35, 39, 42).

In her treatment of these three women writers, Finch gives few clues to into their identities or their poetry. In each case, Finch emphasizes Apollo’s reaction: he’s “influenced” by Alinda’s love songs to “catch up his Lyre”; Laura’s poetry “reach’d him, while yett in the sky”; and Valeria’s traps him in an absorptive and pleasurable reading. In this particular idealization of poetry, love songs bring pleasure and music, panegyrics speak to an abstracted posterity, and the poet writes privately to a personified figure of true judgment. All the while Apollo’s decision is suspended; the plan to elevate one woman writer amongst many has led him to recognize the talents of each. Yet, the desire to be recognized remains. Finch describes herself next,

Ardelia, came last as expecting least praise,
 Who writt for her pleasure and not for the Bays,
 But yett, as occasion, or fancy should sway,
 Wou'd sometimes endeavour to passe a dull day,
 In composing a song, or a Scene of a Play
 Not seeking for Fame, which so little does last,
 That e're we can taste itt, the Pleasure is Past.
 But Appollo reply'd, tho' so carelesse she seemd,
 Yett the Bays, if her share, wou'd be highly esteem'd. (lines 43-51)

Like any author’s self-portrait, this one should be read carefully and skeptically. It’s tempting to give interpretive weight to Apollo’s perspective. By giving him the last word, Finch seems to undercut Ardelia as a simple hypocrite. Sure, Ardelia says she writes only

for leisure and cares little for fame, but the truth is she wants to win the prize, just like anyone else. If we grant that Apollo is right to say she pretends to be “carelesse” (meaning disinterested and lazy), then clearly he’s right to see a contradiction in her desire to be recognized as a talent. And no doubt there’s tension around Ardelia’s attitude towards praise. She says she doesn’t expect it. But, as Apollo points out, you can still desire praise, even if you don’t expect it, and you can still write for prestige, whatever your other motives. To the extent that we credit Apollo, then, the passage becomes a naked expression of Finch’s poetic ambition, as she brazenly satirizes her own pretensions to modesty. (Such a reading also fits nicely with modern scholars’ skepticism about modesty in general.)

However, as the poem progresses, Apollo seems less trustworthy as a judge. He overstates the tension between Ardelia’s pose and her ambition by implying a contradiction. In so doing, he reduces her poetic labor to a kind of simple vanity. In fact, Ardelia’s self-portrait is largely compatible with her desire to be recognized as a good poet. She writes for pleasure, to indulge her imagination, and to meet appropriate occasions. She writes songs and closet drama without seeking an audience outside her circle. Her phrase, “to passe a dull day,” suggests considerable labor as a marginal member of an aristocratic household with few other responsibilities. Although she doesn’t strive for wider publicity—such is the fleeting Fame that “so little does last”—writing poetry is what she does, and there’s nothing inconsistent about wanting to do it well. The implicit hope in Ardelia’s appeal is that such activities will be adequate to the

demands of evaluation, and that literary prestige can be extended to the kinds of poetry she writes.²⁰

For this to work, though, Apollo has to act like the true and perfect judge of classical fame, evaluating poets and choosing the best among them. Instead, he becomes more interested in flirting with the women than in judging their poems. After teasing Ardelia, Apollo prepares “to make an Oration,” tossing back his hair “with a delicate fassion” (lines 52, 53). Standing before the women “most genteely” (line 54), Apollo remembers the story of Paris, who brought down the wrath of the gods by choosing between Aphrodite and Helen in a contest of beauty. So, Apollo decides to withhold judgment and praise them all equally. “Since in Witt, or in Beauty, itt never was heard, / One female cou'd yield t' have another preferr'd” (lines 60-61). Apollo increasingly plays the part of the country gallant: he “smil'd to himself, and applauded his art, / Who thus nicely has acted so subtle a part” (lines 66-67). In “The Circuit of Appollo,” feminine disinterest can't mask women's desire, and evaluation can't escape the politics of judgment.

²⁰ Finch's attempt to elevate provincial writing should not be confused with a whole-cloth rejection of literary hierarchy. Susannah Mintz overstates how Finch “daringly ... articulates resistance to male literary norms” in this poem. “Anne Finch's ‘Fair’ Play,” *Midwest Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (Autumn 2003): 82. Mintz argues, “Finch voices a tripartite petition: for women to stand behind their writing, to trust to that alone, and not to showy forms of persuasion; for men to accept and acknowledge women on the basis of their writing, and not for some superficial attributes or pleasures; and for a world in which all manner of women and writing might be possible and accepted, a world without hierarchization or false division through competition and antagonism” (82-83). In making this argument, Mintz fails to consider that to place “writing” above “showy forms of persuasion” is itself an important “male literary norm,” and one that is fundamentally hierarchal in its dependence on competition, if not antagonism. “Circuit of Appollo” is also discussed in Paula R. Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 62-3.

Whereas the typical sessions poem narrates modern poets' failure to meet an ancient ideal, Finch's version focuses on the inadequacy of the ideal. True judgment is impossible because it inevitably will be short-circuited by gender. The poem concludes with Apollo's frustration, having

found 'em too many,
 For who wou'd please all, can never please any.
 In vain then, he thought itt, there longer to stay,
 But told them, he now must go drive on the day,
 Yett the case to Parnassus, shou'd soon be referr'd,
 And there in a councill of Muses, be heard,
 Who of their own sex, best the title might try,
 Since no man upon earth, nor Himself in the sky,
 Wou'd be so imprudent, so dull, or so blind,
 To loose three parts in four from amongst woman kind. (lines 68-77)

The poem thus ends with a joke at everyone's expense. The women poets are good enough to earn the laurel, but there isn't any judge willing to risk their displeasure by taking them seriously. Apollo's cowardly decision to pass the buck to the Muses promises a new procedure for elevating women's poetry, but its real effect is to defer judgment permanently. The point here, finally, is that competition between poets can't be appealed to any higher authority; in particular, women writers can't rely on male authority. Nor do they need to. By presenting Apollo as an ironized but ultimately benign figure of literary authority, Finch borrows the legitimacy of masculine classical ideals while effectively severing women's poetry from men's judgment.

However, this leaves open the question of how women's poetry was to be evaluated, and on what terms, issues that Finch considered among the most urgent. Indeed, perhaps more so than with men writers of the period, the question of Finch's talent—of whether or not she was any *good*—continue to have urgency for her commentators. In her wide-ranging book, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry* (2005), Paula Backscheider cites Finch as the paradigmatic case of “what women wrote”: “She lived out what it means to be a serious writer by studying poetry, by writing consistently and seriously, by experimenting, polishing, and revising.”²¹ This judgment is echoed by Susan Staves in *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (2006). Staves declares Finch's *Miscellany Poems* “the most accomplished volume of poems published by a woman between 1660 and 1789.”²² For both Backscheider and Staves, making such evaluative distinctions is part of an important next step in feminist literary history. These studies are marked by their incredible breadth and for their attempt to synthesize hundreds of texts into a visible tradition of women's writing. Staves in particular argues for the compatibility of evaluative and feminist criticisms: “It cannot be a sin against feminism to say that some women wrote well and others wrote badly, that some were intelligent, reflective, and original, others dull, unreflective, and formulaic.”²³ For Staves, literary history is the history of good writing. She seeks out texts “written

²¹ Ibid., 28, 58.

²² Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 138.

²³ Ibid., 4.

with care by women with talent.”²⁴ Just by its very breadth, then, Staves’ book gains force as an argument for the value and quality of women’s writing across the century. The best writers function in both studies not so much like a “canon” but, implicitly, like a tide that lifts all boats.

Here is where Finch’s investment in criticism most obtains. The evaluative distinctions that guide Backscheider’s and Staves’ feminist histories—which pit the serious and the intelligent against the unserious and the dull—found a powerful advocate in Finch herself. To write with studious care is to write within agreed-upon standards of good composition (or self-consciously against them). Only in relation to such standards can an individual’s talent be recognized as such. Finch felt this dynamic quite keenly. When she completed her largest and most ambitious manuscript collection in the early 1700s, she composed a prose preface that invokes such standards explicitly. Of particular interest to me is the way Finch strategically calls upon the authority of past critics as a way to legitimize her own writing:

Poetry has been of late so explain’d, the laws of itt being putt into familiar languages, that even those of my sex, (if they will be so presumptuous as to write) are very accountable for their transgressions against them. For what rule of Aristotle, or Horace is there, that has not been given us by Rapin, Despereaux, D’acier, my Lord Roscommon, etc.? What has Mr. Dryden omitted, that may lay open the very misteries of this Art? ... If then, after the perusal of these, we fail, we cannott plead any want, but that of capacity, or care. (9-10)

Several themes immediately stand out that demand attention: Finch’s ambivalent gender politics; her elevation of a recent tradition of poetic theorists; her emphasis on translation and the accessibility of books; and not least her claim that poetry had been fully and

²⁴ Ibid., 231.

finally theorized. Finch argues that these developments laid the groundwork for a new system of accountability and a new kind of transgression. Such moments of explicit positioning are rare in Finch's *oeuvre*, and so I want to pause briefly over the argument she makes here.

Finch refers to two distinct kinds of wrongdoing, and it's useful to keep them separate. On the one hand is a generalized objection against those of her sex who are, she says, "so presumptuous as to write," an all-encompassing anti-feminist complaint that discounts all women's writing as a violation of feminine propriety. As she does throughout her poetry, Finch takes this complaint on board and then summarily dismisses it. (In this passage, she literally brackets it off, reserving it for a third-person parenthetical aside.) She highlights instead a different system of accountability, one which all poets, including women poets, are now subjected to. Recent translators like René Rapin, André D'acier, Boileau, and Wentworth Dillon, Lord Roscommon, have brought Greek and Roman authorities into the vernacular; their newly available classics are supplemented by a completed system of poetic theory from John Dryden. Finch's phrasing hints at a secret trade knowledge—the "misteries" of an "Art"—now open for anyone's "perusal." Her tone is both admonitory and triumphalist, as she suggests this new availability of knowledge has fundamentally changed the game. Unlike in "The Introduction," where Finch expresses concern that women's education has failed to match this ideal, here a more rose-colored vision is used to advance the notion that criticism's fulfillment

legitimizes women's writing.²⁵ Now that everyone can discriminate faithfully between good and bad writing, Finch hopes, all poets can and should be called to account if they fail to abide by these laws. For women poets in particular, to be held accountable in this way is, if not really an emancipation, an important kind of license. To submit to a system of evaluation on the score of "capacity" (talent) and "care" (labor) is to apply for a place at a very prestigious table. Whereas many male contemporaries derided critics for slavishly judging according to "rules," here Finch suggests that such rules meant women's talents could be recognized for the first time. Now fully theorized, poetry is more egalitarian in gendered terms because it enables a more precise hierarchy of literary merit.

This is not to suggest, however, that Finch believed poets must adhere strictly to any particular theoretical doctrine, nor that her own poetry was unambiguously "neoclassical." Scholars have shown that her embrace of neoclassical poetics was ambivalent, and that her poetry often resists or undermines typically Augustan values.²⁶ One might ask, what are the "rules" Finch refers to here? She doesn't say, and although

²⁵ In "The Introduction," Finch writes that women are "Education's, more than Nature's fools, / Debarr'd from all improve-ments of the mind, / And to be dull, expected and designed." (lines 52-4).

²⁶ This argument is developed most completely in Jennifer Keith, "The Poetics of Anne Finch," *SEL* 38, no. 3 (1998): 465-80. While showing how Finch substitutes a poetics of identification for one of mimesis, Keith concurs with Hinnant, who argues that Finch's "achievement ... lies in taking over poetic forms and tropes that had hitherto largely been employed by men and giving those poetic forms a subversive twist by speaking through them as a woman." Hinnant, *The Poetry of Anne Finch*, 32. Susannah Mintz emphasizes Finch's "resistance to male literary norms" in Mintz, "Anne Finch's 'Fair' Play." Overviews of Finch's place in Augustan poetics can be found in Mallinson, "Anne Finch: a Woman Poet and the Tradition." and in relevant discussions in Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

she invokes these critics as authorities, Finch feels no need to rearticulate their theories nor to lay out a poetics of her own. An important consequence of Finch's strategic elevation of past criticism is that, by portraying poetic theory as complete, she also renders it inert. In a subtle subversion of the authority she places herself under, Finch describes critical theory as a discourse that is safely unassailable and so need be neither controverted nor assented to. Myra Reynolds complained, "It is a pity that Lady Winchilsea's critical remarks are so few, for they show considerable acumen and an unexpected cleverness in playfully sarcastic analysis" (cxii). However pitiable in retrospect, Finch's reluctance to participate in critical debate should not be surprising. We have seen so far two ways that she distances her poetry from criticism: first in depicting critics as reader-barbarians at the gates, and second by allocating their authority to a past that authorizes new poetry but invites no further contribution to its theory. For Finch, criticism is not the best employment for a poet's acumen, a significant point of departure for someone who venerated Dryden and would befriend Alexander Pope.

By elevating figures of authority without engaging them directly—by embracing them at arm's length, so to speak—Finch opens a space for poetic innovation and play. Such a view finds confirmation across Finch's poems. We have already seen how Finch playfully mocks masculine authority in "The Circuit of Appollo," where a befuddled god must refer women poets to a council of muses. However, the muses themselves come in for gentle mockery in "To Mr. F. Now Earl of W," in which they're depicted as "affrighted Sisters," corrupted by the town and unable to inspire poems of domestic contentment (41). She shows great willingness to play with her period's sense of poetic hierarchy, as in "The Critick and the Writer of Fables," in which Finch's narrator trades

barbs with a complaining critic, who considers the fable a low form that “dies, as it was born, without Regard or Pain” (11). Although such critics might disvalue the form, Finch insists that she “descend[s]” to fable “with soft Delight” (3). Weary of more prestigious forms, like Pindaric and epic, Finch’s narrator claims that the fable is particularly well-suited to “Teach, as Poets shou’d, whilst they Divert” (8). In contrast, epic is an exhausted form, at once both fashionable and archaic: “Is this the way to please the Men of Taste, / . . . this old Bombast? / I’m sick of *Troy*, and in as great a Fright, / When some dull Pedant wou’d her Wars recite, / As was soft *Paris*, when compell’d to Fight” (27-31).

One of Finch’s ongoing concerns is the separation of criticism and poetry from the social context of the patriarchal, and typically pastoral and rural, family. If poetry offers a compelling framework for putting one’s “capacity” on display, what’s needed is a reading community within which the individual talent can be recognized. As she writes in her “Preface,” the opportunity to perform her skill creates “powerful temptations” to write (9). She describes the psychological effect as an “irresistable impulse,” as a “pleasure of writing” that she’d not “deny” herself (8, 7). However, Finch argues that her desire could find gratification only in the context of her country home. After the Glorious Revolution, Anne and her husband, Heneage Finch, were exiled from London as non-jurors, refusing to swear loyalty to the newly installed king, William III. Finch and her husband went to live with his nephew, Charles Finch, then Earl of Winchilsea. (When Charles died in 1712, the title was conferred to Heneage and Anne became the Countess of Winchilsea.) As disastrous as disenfranchisement and exile were in so many respects,

Anne Finch often portrays it as serendipitous to her writing career.²⁷ She never could have flourished “in such a publick place as the Court, where every one wou’d have made their remarks upon a Versifying Maid of Honour; and far the greater number with prejudice, if not contempt” (7-8). At Eastwell she found “solitude, & serenity” and—just as important—the “generous kindnesse” of a noble patron (8). Charles Finch was “indulgent to that Art, so knowing in all the rules of itt, and att his pleasure, so capable of putting them in practice; and also most obligingly favorable to some lines of mine” (8). Under the auspices of such encouragement, Finch relies on “the partiality of ... freinds” who treat her with “good nature or civility” (7, 10). So, although the finalization of poetic law makes it newly possible to recognize female talent, women poets continue to depend on the mediation of powerful readers in narrow circles who will apply such law judiciously.

Such mediation is evident throughout the collection. The fair-copy manuscript bears the title, *Miscellany Poems with Two Plays by Ardelia*, proudly announcing its individual authorship under the Latinate pseudonym that Finch would use throughout her career.²⁸ Prefatory poems by William Shippen and Finch’s otherwise-unknown friend, Mrs. Randolph, praise her highly. While hailed as an individual author, Ardelia is situated within the social settings of marriage and a large network of female friendships. Poems expressing love for her husband and other relations narrate a scene of domestic contentment. In her pastoral idealizations of country life as a kind of retirement from

²⁷ For Finch’s life, see Barbara McGovern, *Anne Finch and Her Poetry: A Critical Biography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Hinnant, *The Poetry of Anne Finch*.

²⁸ MS Folger N.b.3. *Miscellany poems with two plays by Ardelia*. Anne (Kingsmill) Finch, Countess of Winchilsea. Folger Shakespeare Library.

publicity, like “A Petition for an Absolute Retreat,” Finch populates her privacy with sympathetic others. It’s worth noting, too, that the manuscript was not compiled by Finch herself. Instead, most of the collection is in the hand of her husband. Acting as both archivist and curator, Heneage brings Anne’s poetry into a form conducive to preservation and display. The point here is that one should not think of Finch’s manuscript poems as unmediated—and certainly not as private, if by private one means hidden or unsocial. Simply to contrast it from a published book risks eliding the roles played by male mediators like Heneage and Charles Finch. In the mid-1690s, to collect Anne’s poems by hand was a deliberately chosen alternative to print publishing—one that explicitly theorized the country estate as a viable and independent site of cultural production.

A full view of Finch’s attitude towards criticism can now be brought into focus. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Finch claims, a new generation of women poets can be judged more accurately than ever before, their talents and private labors newly legible within a putatively transparent system of evaluation. To a writer like Finch, this presents a powerful temptation. But, there’s a catch. Law cannot speak for itself; it needs human advocates. Although this new dispensation should work as a fine-tuned instrument for distinguishing between poetasters and writers of true skill, a dysfunctional, censorious reading public discounts the merits of all poets, and especially female ones. A poetess faces an implacable audience: “So strong, th’ opposing faction still appears, / The hope to thrive, can ne’re outweigh the fears” (“The Introduction,” lines 57-58, repeated in “The Preface,” page 9). This ambient contempt permeates both the field of print exchange and the realm of courtly verse. By invoking these sites of dangerous publicity

in a non-circulating manuscript collection, Finch imbues the folio volume with a powerful rhetoric of form. It becomes a monument, not only to Finch's poetic talents, but to the patriarchal estate she valorizes as a scene of critical virtue.

Much like her half-hearted elevation of neoclassical theorists, the expertise and virtue of "true" critics like Charles Finch had to be taken more or less for granted without being interrogated too closely. Her strategy was to insist on a contrast between her provincial coterie and an urban culture of gossipers and satirists. Throughout her poetry, she depends upon pastoral tropes that celebrate a virtuous, learned rusticity, borrowing their self-evidence as a tool for advocating her own work. In this sense, Finch participates in what Michael McKeon has called a "revolution" in pastoral that gained strength around the end of the seventeenth century: "The privacy of retreat is revalued ... from the status of a normative but merely passive privation to that of an active agency, the negative liberty of a chosen solitude that might even take the form of a chosen marriage."²⁹ By mapping value-laden pastoral tropes onto divisions between poets and readers, her pastoralism becomes inextricably bound with ideas about reading and criticism.³⁰ Whereas Renaissance pastoral involves urbanity reflecting upon itself through figures of rusticity, in Finch we find a situation roughly the converse: poets in the country

²⁹ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 414.

³⁰ Extended treatments of Finch's use of pastoral forms and themes and their relation to gender ideologies can be found in Ann Messenger, *Pastoral Tradition and the Female Talent: Studies in Augustan Poetry* (New York: AMS Press, 2001); McGovern, *Anne Finch and Her Poetry*, 9; Hinnant, *The Poetry of Anne Finch*, 5. For the connection between Finch's nature poetry and post-1688 monarchical politics, see Jordan, "'Where Power is Absolute': Royalist Politics and the Improved Landscape in a Poem by Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea."

adopting pastoral figures as a strategy to legitimize the provinces as a site of cultural production.

Finch frequently valorizes her country home and her network of friends and family as a locus of true poetry and true critical judgment. “Lett us my Dafnis, rural joys persue,” Finch writes in a poem to her husband (“An Invitation to Dafnis,” line 63). The intimacy between them becomes an occasion for poetic expression and for proper critical reading, because it ensures that motivations will be transparent. Judgment is free to happen without inviting corrosive tensions. Finch insists, “But this from love, not vanity, proceeds, / You know who writes; and I who 'tis that reads” (“A Letter to Dafnis,” lines 12-13). At the same time, Finch adapts a public discourse of poetic criticism—of judging skill, of censure and approbation—to provide a new vocabulary for conjugal intimacy: “Judge not my passion, by my want of skill, / Many love well, though they express itt ill; / And I your censure cou'd with pleasure bear, / Wou'd you but soon return, and speak itt here” (lines 14-17). The critical act of distinguishing passion from the inadequacy of its expression thus ultimately re-affirms the truth of the passion and so becomes a pleasurable and intimate act.

For Finch, patriarchal estates like her country homes or the Thynne’s manor at Longleat bring men and women together under the banner of a shared poetic tradition.³¹ This is thoroughly ideological. Family is made newly visible when narrated through

³¹ Finch’s place in the “country house poem” tradition has been treated by Hugh Jenkins in Hugh Jenkins, *Feigned Commonwealths: The Country-House Poem and the Fashioning of the Ideal Community* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), chap. 5. Although limited primarily to a reading of “A Petition for an Absolute Retreat,” and riddled with unfortunate textual errors, Jenkins’s account captures accurately the ideal of community in Finch’s country poems.

poetic conventions; in the process, those conventions are naturalized as an expression of family. About Henry Thynne, we learn that “his nicer Judgment gives Delight,” that his “soaring Mind do's to Perfections climb,” and that he never “owns a Relish, but for Things sublime” (“A Description of a Piece of Tapestry,” lines 107, 108, 109). Such virtues can be transmitted through blood. Thynne’s daughter, Lady Worsley, has a “matchlesse Grace” that “draw[s] paternall Witt deriv'd into her Face” (“To Lady Worsley at Longleate,” lines 95, 96). About Catherine Tufton, the daughter of a local earl, Finch exclaims, “Who yett cou'd scacely take itt for a truth / That such perfection came from so much youth,” and concludes that she “inherit[ed] ... acquired Arts” (“To the Lady C Tufton,” lines 19-20, 23-24). These moments naturalize as they collapse the social, the biological, and the poetic. This collapse is inscribed onto the patriarchal landscape itself, which is imagined as an object of description for dead poets like Cowley and Denham, while the Finches even went so far as to name a hill in their garden at Eastwell “Parnassus.”³²

In contrast, one of the main problems with urbanites, according to Finch, is that they’re such bad writers and readers of poetry. In the town, women embrace a dubious, coquettish femininity and men write poetry that fails to meet basic standards of common decency. In the town, a poet is dismissed as “vain, that knows his unmatch’ed worth, / And dares maintain what the best Muse brings forth” (“Ardelia’s Answer to Ephelia,” lines 18-19). Women poets, in particular, are made “a com[m]on jest” (line 196). Such contempt is part of a “gen’rall censure on mankind” characteristic of urban discourse: “In Satir vers’d, and sharpe detraction, bee, / And you’re accomplish’d, for all company”

³² “To the Honorable the Lady Worsley,” (line 44) and “From the Muses, at Parnassus.”

(lines 13, 22-23). This applies equally to gossip-mongering female socialites as it does to coffee-house satirists. In “The Appology,” Finch demands, “Tis true I write and tell me by what Rule / I am alone forbid to play the fool” (lines 1-2). This question is directed on the one hand to familiar female foolishness: “Why shou'd it in my Pen be held a fault / Whilst Mira paints her face, to paint a thought / Whilst Lamia to the manly Bumper flies / And borrow'd Spiritts sparkle in her Eyes”? (lines 5-8). This over-determined figure of superficial femininity meshes easily with the equally familiar character of the foppish would-be wit. She writes, “Nor to the Men is this so easy found / Ev'n in most Works with which the Witts abound / (So weak are all since our first breach with Heav'n) / Ther's lesse to be Applauded then forgiven” (lines 17-20). For Finch, the battle-lines are clearly drawn. In the country, men are virtuous patriarchs who know the rules of neoclassical poetry and encourage their practice; women are learned, warm-hearted, and use poetry as a technique of love and friendship. In the town, women fail to embody their proper gender and men fail to write proper poetry. In both cases, Finch borrows familiar tropes of cultural criticism to position her own authorship as a benign transgression of social decorum. She instrumentalizes the commonplace of the virtuous, landed patriarch to legitimize her own work while critiquing the London culture of publicity she engages from a distance.

Throughout her life, Finch was ambivalent about putting her work in print, but not for the reasons that might be assumed. Although she was concerned about feminine propriety and sometimes expressed a disdain for public address, there's little evidence

that Finch felt excluded from print on the basis of either gender or class. As I have argued, her ambivalence is best understood as an outgrowth of a specific complaint about modern poetry: Finch felt that bad poets catered to an ill-natured urban readership, that critics valued nothing but back-biting satire, and that these two factors engendered a culture of mutually assured detraction. However, Finch did not avoid print altogether. During the same decade that she collected her poems in large manuscripts for presentation in her country homes, Finch also contributed to several printed anthologies. Publication meant addressing the same contentious reading public that she simultaneously decried in her hand-written collections. Rather than shrink from publicity, Finch sought ways to engage readers without being subsumed by a context of print controversy that dominated poetry around the turn of the century.

In print, Finch entered a field sharply divided along the lines of state-political partisanship. Although her complaints about “critics” tended to gloss over such divisions by contrasting the town from the country, in reality such readers were not an undifferentiated mass of individual fault-finders. On the one hand, her critical opinions had much in common with a “country ideology” usually associated with Tory writers disaffected by the 1688 Revolution.³³ But they also fit (or seemed by some to fit) with a Williamite push for moral reform championed by Whig poets like Joseph Addison. Because Finch’s views intersected with both camps, when her poems were included in anthologies they could be made to serve political cross-purposes. The first was a 1696 collection of religious verse edited by the new Whig poet laureate, Nahum Tate. On the

³³ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 127.

other side, anthologies of 1701 and 1709 gathered Finch along with primarily Tory writers under the banner of urbane wit. Although these collections were at odds politically, both overlapped in significant ways with Finch's critical opinions. The Tory complaint about "dullness" matched neatly with her devotion to Augustan literary excellence, while the Whig backlash against "wit" paralleled her idealized vision of pastoral retirement and feminine virtue. However, both sides were also in tension with other views that Finch was espousing in manuscript—especially her support for provincial writing—and they differ significantly from her self-presentation in 1713. Finch's challenge was to corral this unintended political multivalence and to craft a self-representation—irreducible to literary factionalism—that was in line with her poetic and critical ambitions.

Given that Finch has long been associated with the state politics of Toryism and Jacobitism, it may be surprising that her first significant publication was closely allied with Whig writers. She contributed at least six poems to Tate's *Miscellanea Sacra* (1696). Tate has been identified, along with men like Addison and Charles Montague, earl of Halifax, at the center of an emergent Whig literary culture around the turn of the century.³⁴ Tate's career offers a useful prism through which to view transformations of the state-political context for poetry around the 1688 Revolution.³⁵ During the early 1680s, Tate established himself as a playwright and an ally of John Dryden's—he collaborated on *The Second Part of Absalom and Achitophel*, for example. Today, he

³⁴ See David Womersley, Paddy Bullard, and Abigail Williams, eds., *"Cultures of Whiggism": New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005); Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714*.

³⁵ For Tate's career, see the relevant entry in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

remains most famous for the adaptations of Shakespeare he wrote during this time, particularly for his notorious happy-ending version of *King Lear* (1681). After the exile of James II, however, Tate turned his literary allegiance towards the new king, and he succeeded Thomas Shadwell as poet laureate in 1692.

Publishing pious poetry was part of a specifically Williamite agenda. In a speech to the House of Commons in 1697, King William declared, “I esteem it one of the greatest Advantages of the Peace that I shall now have Leisure ... effectually to discourage Profaneness and Immorality.”³⁶ His wife, Queen Mary, and other female politicians were held up as symbolic leaders of a modern reformation of manners. Voluntary associations for promoting moral reform began sprouting up in the 1690s and would gain influence during the early eighteenth century.³⁷ During this time, Tate eagerly embraced his new role as a state poet. In dedicating *Miscellanea Sacra* to Princess Anne, Tate writes, “The Reformation of Poetry, and Restoring the *Muses* to the Service of the Temple, is a Glorious Work, and requires a Patroness.”³⁸ The 1698 edition was dedicated to Elizabeth Russell, the sixteen-year-old Marchioness of Tavistock, and daughter-in-law to the newly created Duke of Bedford. Prefatory poems added to that edition praise Tate:

³⁶ Cited in Leo Braudy, “Unturning the Century: the Missing Decade of the 1690s,” in *Fins De Siècle: English Poetry in 1590, 1690, 1790, 1890, 1990* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press), 76.

³⁷ See Richard Price, *British Society, 1680-1880: Dynamism, Containment and Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 6; Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), chap. 4. For the symbolic importance of Queen Mary, see Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714*.

³⁸ Nahum Tate, ed., *Miscellanea Sacra: Or, Poems on Divine & Moral Subjects. Vol. 1. Collected by N. Tate, Servant to His Majesty* (London: printed for Hen. Playford in the Temple-Change, in Fleetstreet, 1696), sig. A2r.

“Far as lewd Wit her Empire does extend, / Do *You* your healing Miscellanies send.”³⁹

(sig. a^v). Another concludes, “Chast *Poets* now, like Prophets must expect / Spight from Ill Men, and from the Best, Neglect. / Yet shall their Laurels flourish in the *Shade*, / While those that have the Sun’s warm *Beams* shall *fade*.”⁴⁰

Such passages make a striking parallel with Finch’s self-presentation as a poetess of retirement, as one who flourishes in the shade. Her famously feminist polemic, “The Introduction,” was written almost exactly contemporaneously to Tate’s anthologies. She worries about the same spite from the same ill men, while reaching an almost identical conclusion, “For Groves of Lawrell, thou wert neuer meant; / Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou there content” (lines 63-64). When reading Finch alone, it’s easy to miss the self-congratulation behind such rhetoric. State-supported poets like Blackmore and Tate were equally eager to present themselves as the victims of a reading public whose corruption compels intervention.

Finch’s contributions to Tate’s miscellany build on this idea. Her poem “On Easter Day” celebrates the return of Christ as a righteous ruler: “Be now thy Foes thy Footstool made.”⁴¹ In “A Preparation for a Prayer,” Finch worries about false piety: “In *Spirit* and in *Truth*, his God must worshipt be.”⁴² This call for earnestness in a world that disvalues faith is repeated in her poem, “On Affliction”:

Affliction is the line, which every Saint
Is measur’d by, his Stature taken right;

³⁹ Nahum Tate, ed., *Miscellanea Sacra: Or, Poems on Divine & Moral Subjects. Collected by N. Tate, Servant to His Majesty* (London: printed for Hen. Playford in the Temple-Change, in Fleet-street, 1698), sig. av.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, sig. a2r.

⁴¹ Tate, *Miscellanea Sacra* 1696, 84.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

So much it shrinks, as they repine or faint,
 But if their Faith or Courage stand upright,
 By that is made the Crown, and the full Robe of Light.⁴³

These lines are immediately followed by Finch's translation of the 137th psalm, "How can we, Lord, they Praise proclaim, / Here in a strange unhallow'd Land, / Lest we provoke them to blaspheme / A Name they do not understand!"⁴⁴ When read in the context of Finch's biography, such lines seem like barely concealed Jacobitism. Her emphasis on true faith and on a righteous people persecuted by the ungodly fits neatly with our image of a poetess in exile. Yet, this line of cultural critique was easily adapted by reform-minded Whigs who premised their service to the state on the idea that moral transformation was urgently needed.

However, Finch could also be used by the very poets who were thought to require this regulation. Several of her poems were featured in a collection edited by Charles Gildon, *A New Miscellany of Original Poems* (1701). This anthology is affiliated with politicians and writers that were out of favor during the reign of King William: it includes several poems by and to George Granville, who would become the important literary patron Lord Lansdowne during the reign of Queen Anne, but who in 1701 was still in retirement. The book was dedicated to Benedict Leonard Calvert, whose Catholic father lost control of the Province of Maryland in 1689. Contributors included leading figures of the Restoration like Sir Charles Sedley and the recently deceased John Dryden. In his epistle to Calvert, Gildon asks, "To whom shou'd the Muses fly for Succour from the terrible Persecution, they at this time endure, but to Men of Rank and Merit that do not

⁴³ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 91-92.

only Love the Art, but are Generous to its Professors, and themselves Proud to profess it.”⁴⁵

In this context, to love the art of poetry implies a specifically neoclassical perspective. In his poem, “Concerning Unnatural Flights in Poetry,” Granville identifies with the same poetic theorists that Finch claimed to idealize: “*Roscommon* first, Then *Mulgrave* rose, Like light / To clear our Darkness, and to guide our flight, / ... The *Stagyrite*, and *Horace*, laid aside, / Inform'd by Them, we need no foreign Guide.”⁴⁶

Under pressure from moral reformers and with the task of preserving this rich though recent tradition, Gildon’s anthology tries to put secular poetry’s best foot forward. He not only features several poems by Finch, he also prefaces them with a laudatory poem by Nicholas Rowe who hails her as a feminine savior: “[S]he alone of the Poetic Crowd, / To the false Gods of Wit has never bow'd; / The Empire, which she saves, shall own her sway, / And all *Parnassus* her blest Laws obey.”⁴⁷ Finch embodies what’s right about contemporary poetry. We don’t need outside regulation, Rowe suggests, because we can obey our own laws and set our own standards of excellence. The collective identity posited here is reinforced in the anthology form, which highlights dialogue between contributors who trade praise and criticism.

As we might expect, Finch’s contributions to this miscellany are markedly different from her contributions to Tate’s. Most prominent is her Pindaric ode, “The Spleen,” for which she was publicly known during her lifetime. Here, her approach is

⁴⁵ *A New Miscellany of Original Poems, on Several Occasions* (London: printed for Peter Buck; and George Strahan, 1701), sig. A3r.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

essayistic, and uses poetic form to engage in social commentary: “Whilst, in the Muses paths I stray, / Whilst in their Groves, and by their secret Springs, / My hand delights to trace unusual things, / And deviates from the known, and common way.”⁴⁸ Her other poems are similarly topical and inventive, including historical narratives like “An Epistle from Alexander to Hephaestion in his Sickness.”

In comparison to her contemporaneous manuscript poetry, the Tate and Gildon miscellanies offered only a partial and distorted view of Finch’s work. In these books, her poetry was taken up anonymously, and their anonymity dissolved them into the general characters of the books themselves. Her poems worked well in both contexts, but neither reflected an accurate cross-section of her work as a whole. Absent from these anthologies are any hints of Finch’s female friendship poems, her meditations on country life, her self-reflexive poems about female authorship, or her lyrics. A 1709 miscellany published by Jacob Tonson included some of her pastorals alongside those of Alexander Pope and Ambrose Philips, but huge gaps in her public representation remained. The overall view is one of Finch using the competitive dynamics of poetic publishing to her advantage: divisions in the literary field allowed her to play one side off the other, while demonstrating poetic interests more varied than any of her male counterparts’. But this process must have felt constraining—not because Finch was a woman nor because of her political exile, but because the dynamics of literary factionalism divided published poetry into camps limited by their mutual antitheses. It’s little wonder that she chose manuscript circulation and collection as her primary venue during this time. She could create hand-written books like *Miscellany Poems and Two Plays by Ardelia* without having to define

⁴⁸ Ibid., 65.

herself within these constraining limits. If poetry was going to work as a way to perform one's talents, or as a way of preserving and extending Augustan values of neoclassical verbal beauty, the politics of literary dispute could only distract from and undermine this project.

When Finch finally decided to put a collection of her work in print, her life had changed in many ways.⁴⁹ The most obvious change occurred with the death of her nephew in 1712, when her husband succeeded him and Anne became the Countess of Winchilsea. However, this was not a radical shift in and of itself. During Queen Anne's reign, Finch's period of exile had begun to subside, and the Finches travelled frequently between friends, and took a home in London in 1710 or 1711.⁵⁰ She had cultivated friendships with well-known writers like Matthew Prior, Nicholas Rowe, Jonathan Swift, and Alexander Pope, and her social circle overlapped with Delariviere Manley's. Accordingly, she became more active in an urban context of poetic exchange, traces of which appeared in print. Her contributions to Tonson's 1709 miscellany have already been mentioned. In the years to follow, she also traded barbs with Pope over *The Rape of the Lock*; she contributed a poem to Manley's *New Atalantis* (1709) and another to its sequel, *Court Intrigues* (1711); and she wrote an epilogue to Rowe's she-tragedy, *Jane Shore*, which debuted in early 1714. In a 1711 miscellany, a flirtatious poem by Jonathan Swift praised Finch openly, titled: "Apollo Outwitted. To the Honourable Mrs. Finch,

⁴⁹ For these developments in Finch's life, see McGovern, *Anne Finch and Her Poetry*, chap. 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

under her Name of Ardelia.”⁵¹ So, Finch’s involvement in London publishing had increased significantly in the years leading up to her book. However, what hadn’t changed was the contentiousness of poetic debate. Finch would have been an interested witness in the dispute that erupted between Pope and John Dennis following her friend’s *Essay on Criticism* in 1711 and which was continued around Addison’s *Cato* in 1713. The famously vitriolic back-and-forth between the young poet and older critic served as a pointed reminder to anyone concerned about the dangers of addressing a censorious reading public.

With this in mind, Finch began assembling a new set of poems that would be included in her 1713 book, *Miscellany Poems, On Several Occasions*. In composing the book, she faced the challenge of creating a poetic voice that could stand outside the politicized literary field which threatened to reduce her to a cipher. Other female poets used prefatory criticism to situate themselves as women intervening in a masculine field. Sarah Fyge Egerton prefaced her *Poems on Several Occasions* (1703) with a dedication to Montague and several commendatory verses. Lady Mary Chudleigh prefaced both her *Essays Upon Several Subjects in Prose and Verse* (1710) and her *Poems on Several Occasions* (1703, 2nd ed. 1713) with essays to the reader. “I judg’d it advisable to take this Opportunity to justify my self,” Chudleigh writes, “that it may appear I am not so blame-worthy as I’ve been represented.”⁵² Finch decided against this approach. Her book appeared without a preface or dedication; instead, she chose to open her volume with a

⁵¹ Jonathan Swift, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (London: printed for John Morphew, near Stationers Hall, 1711), 399-403.

⁵² Mary Lee Chudleigh, *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, ed. Margaret J. M. Ezell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 248.

prefatory poem that explicitly offered an alternative to critical prose and verse as a method of self-presentation.

“Mercury and the Elephant, a Prefatory Fable” recounts a story meant to symbolize the poet’s relationship to readers, and critics in particular. Finch tells of an elephant that interrupts Mercury on a country road, hoping to get news about his fame in the heavens. Having fought a mighty battle with a boar, the elephant finds himself the object of public disdain because critics accused him of fighting unfairly. “But I defy the Talk of Men,” the elephant declares, “Th’ impartial Skies are all my Care, / And how it stands Recorded there” (lines 21, 23-24). He assumes that the disputes surrounding his battle had attracted the interest of heavenly judges, and so he invites the god to choose sides in an ongoing debate. “Amongst you Gods, pray, What is thought?” to which Mercury replies, “Then have you Fought!” (lines 25, 26). Mercury knows nothing of the matter, and his abrupt response both deflates the elephant’s pretensions to fame and, more importantly, highlights the absurdity of asking someone to take sides in a debate before giving them opportunity to judge a matter in its own right.

In the application of the fable, the god’s innocent question mirrors the confusion of readers greeted by prefaces that present poetry as an object of critical dispute:

Solicitous thus shou'd I be
 For what's said of my Verse and Me;
 Or shou'd my Friends Excuses frame,
 And beg the Criticks not to blame
 (Since from a Female Hand it came)
 Defects in Judgment, or in Wit;
 They'd but reply - Then has she Writ!

Our Vanity we more betray,
 In asking what the World will say,
 Than if, in trivial Things like these,
 We wait on the Event with ease;
 Nor make long *Prefaces*, to show
 What Men are not concern'd to know. (lines 27-39)

Scholars usually read this as an expression of Finch's unease with print, and in particular her trepidation about being seen as inconsequential or transgressive in a public sphere dominated by male voices. Charles Hinnant sees this poem as Finch's awareness that she wrote "within a culture where men are the central value-bestowing force" and so was forced to "conform to the constraints of the literary marketplace."⁵³ Paula Backscheider interprets this in an opposite way, as a rejection of the reading public: "By taking the position that she is inconsequential to the London critical world as the elephant is to the gods, Finch frees herself to invoke an intimate circle of readers and poets."⁵⁴ Susan Staves argues that this records Finch's actual view about how her poetry has been received: "Finch has learned that her poems prompt critics to no response more nuanced than surprise that she has 'Writ!'"⁵⁵

Such interpretations miss that Finch is at least as concerned here with the propriety of preface-writing in general as she is about her own reception. Mercury stands in for the ideal reader who is unconcerned with petty rivalry of the kind acted out in prefaces. Readers don't care about critics or reputation. They are "untouch'd how we

⁵³ Hinnant, *The Poetry of Anne Finch*, 76.

⁵⁴ Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry*, 59.

⁵⁵ Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, 143.

succeed,” because “‘Tis for themselves, not us, they *Read*” (lines 40, 41). Rather than portray her collection as a factional confrontation between approving friends and threatening critics—a move typically made by male and female poets alike—Finch advocates a model of reading that steps outside of critical dispute to value pleasure and merit for their own sakes. By refusing to preface her book with commendatory verses or essays to the reader, like those she included in her manuscript collection, Finch chooses not to present herself as an object of critical controversy. In making this choice, she differentiates herself from a tradition in English poetry that stretches back at least to the sixteenth century, but also from contemporary women writers like Egerton and Chudleigh. By replacing her explicitly critical and polemical paratexts with a fable that gently satirizes such poses, Finch hopes to remove controversy as the guiding mode of interpretation and replace it with something like disinterested judgment. She advocates for readers to disregard critical dispute and focus on readerly pleasure. If we’re to take seriously Backscheider’s claim that Finch was a “serious” poet who wrote “seriously,” we need to recognize Finch’s ambition in *Miscellany Poems*: to take poetry out of the factional field of critical exchange, evident in the Tate and Gildon anthologies, and to reformulate reading as an aesthetic experience of pleasure and amusement.

This suggests too that we should reconsider the notion, argued by Carol Barash, that Finch’s 1713 volume depoliticized her poetry.⁵⁶ By attempting to forge a speaking position outside the contentiousness of literary dispute, Finch did not merely shroud herself in “myths of the private female self,” but engaged in a different kind of

⁵⁶ Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714*, chap. 6.

advocacy.⁵⁷ She is best understood as a participant in the revaluation of criticism usually associated with men like Joseph Addison and Alexander Pope. For them, criticism could be a valuable act of exercising one's judgment, an empirical investigation into beauty and its operation on the passions, and a mode of polite sociability that promised to transcend both the discord of state politics and the unsociable harping of ill-natured rivalries.⁵⁸ However, as Addison and Pope knew well, the actual conduct of print critics during the first decades of the eighteenth century rarely conformed to these ideals. Instead, disputes acted out in prefaces and pamphlets tended towards what they saw as unsociable, factional bickering commonly lumped under pejoratives like "Grub Street" or "dullness." Given this gap between criticism theorized and criticism practiced, Finch's problem was to create poetry that would encourage reading (and, perhaps, writing) of the better sort. In published poems like "The Critick and the Writer of Fables" and "To the Nightingale," Finch lambasts those who "praise with such Reserve, / As if [they]'d in the midst of Plenty starve" and who "Criticize, reform, or preach, / Or censure what [they] cannot reach."⁵⁹ Finch's concerns about the critics who haunt her poems are ultimately less about herself and her fears—if, indeed, fears she had—than they are about a discordant literary culture at odds with itself.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 271.

⁵⁸ For the movement towards polite sociability in English criticism, see Patey, "CHLC"; Jonathan Brody Kramnick, "Literary Criticism Among the Disciplines"; Trolander and Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725*.

⁵⁹ "Critick and the Writer of Fables," lines 56-57; "To the Nightingale," lines 34-35.

Chapter Five

Pope's *Dunciad* and the Place of Criticism in the History of Print

As I argued in the first chapter, published criticism from the past presents a rich and tempting archive for book history. As scholarly attention has turned to questions about the rise of the public sphere and print culture, about the transformation of reading practices, and the emergence of modern authorship, scholars have consistently turned for their evidence to the critical texts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the process, criticism has tended to fade from view as an object of inquiry in its own right; indeed, many of the best books written over the past two decades on early criticism don't even claim it as their subject-matter but rather present themselves as histories of authorship, reading, publishing, or some other aspect of literary culture. Turn-of-the-century ideas about "wit," for example, have been reconsidered as a nascent form of intellectual property¹; the essay genre, to take another example, as a record of reading

¹ Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740*.

practices²; the debates between Restoration playwrights acted out in prefaces and pamphlets as “authorial discourse.”³ One of the arguments of my dissertation is that there’s a good reason for this: without the institutional controls characteristic of literary study as an academic discipline, critics were forced continually to contend over the basic norms of literary practice. Developing and defending theories of poetry entailed developing and defending theories of poetic community within which poetry operated. Thus the emergence of critical writing as a material practice resulted in the proliferation of discourse on the uses and abuses of media technology: most importantly for my purposes in this chapter, on the uses and abuses of print. Scholars are now less likely to mine these texts to uncover the influence of French neoclassicism, and more likely to seek representations of literature’s material history. This chapter will focus on Alexander Pope’s *Dunciad Variorum* (1729) as a means to explore this issue, which I treat as both a historical question and a methodological problem; that is, what role did criticism play in the formation of print culture, and how can we (or even should we) keep these objects of inquiry separate, given their intimate co-implication?

In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest in the capacity of media to facilitate communities of various kinds. New Media studies in particular have focused on the ability of electronic technologies to create “virtual communities,” especially on the

² Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain*. Because criticism is a kind of writing that explicitly records reading (as of course all writing does implicitly), it has proved useful for scholars working on the history of reading as such. Like Black’s, Lee Morrissey’s recent study simply redefines the history of criticism as a history of debates over reading. *The Constitution of Literature*, 4-5. It is more common for such assumptions to be implicit, as in, for example, William Warner’s study of the history of debates over novel writing and reading, *Licensing Entertainment*.

³ Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation*.

Internet.⁴ Through its blogs, social-networking sites like Facebook, or three-dimensional virtual worlds like World of Warcraft or Second Life, the Internet has been hailed as a new form of “virtual world” in which the technology enables new kinds of social interaction.⁵ The utility and importance of these technologies are highlighted in contrast to putatively static media forms, specifically to print objects like books and newspapers, which lack the interactive tools and “navigable space” characteristic of video games, for

⁴ The literature on virtual communities has emerged mostly from the social sciences and in the popular press. Because their research is premised on an often tacit contrast with print, such studies tend to focus on the technological determinations of these new social forms. In the words of Marc Smith and Peter Kollock, “Each online communication system structures interaction in a particular way.” “Communities in Cyberspace,” in *Communities in Cyberspace*, ed. Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999), 4. The most enthusiastic proponent of electronic media might be Howard Rheingold, whose books, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002) and *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000) make the case that Internet technologies mobilize new forms of human community. See for example Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia, “Virtual Communities are Communities: Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone,” in *Communities in Cyberspace*, ed. Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999); Barry Wellman, “Connecting Community: On-and Off-line,” *Contexts* 3, no. 4: 22-28; Barry Wellman, *Networks in the global village* (Westview Press, 1999). For a critique of the often untheorized ideal of “community” in this field of study, see James Hay, “The New Techno-Communitarianism and the Residual Logic of Mediation,” in *Residual Media*, ed. Charles R. Acland (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). For a spirited if less carefully considered critique of idealizations of Internet community, see Lee Siegel, *Against the Machine: Being Human in the Age of the Electronic Mob* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2008).

⁵ I borrow the term “virtual world” from Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). In describing social media this way, Boellstorff adapts the now-unfashionable term, “virtual reality,” to describe what is usually phrased less elegantly as “interactive multimedia” or sometimes “immersive interactive multimedia.” While dismissing the term as verging on obsolescence, Martin Lister identifies virtual reality's “two major but intertwined reference points: the immersive, interactive experiences provided by new forms of image and simulation technology, and the metaphorical 'places' and 'spaces' created by or within communications networks.” *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), 35.

example.⁶ While media theorists, sociologists, and anthropologists have grappled with these digital technologies, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literary scholars have, at roughly the same time, recovered a rich history of manuscript circulation in England. Work by Harold Love, Margaret Ezell, and Kathryn King has shown that hand-copying continued to be a vital means of textual transmission, well into the later-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.⁷ These studies conclude that, unlike the fixed printed book, the manuscript text is a “social text.” Its transmission depends on the choices of individual reader-copyists, and its form is therefore malleable because collaboratively written by “social authors.”

These two fields of inquiry—New Media and manuscript studies—are separated by wide gulfs, both chronological and disciplinary. But they share a common straw man: print and the published book. This can be seen in their curiously redundant key terms. The phrases “social media” and “social authorship” invite the question of how any medium or any kind of authorship could be unsocial or somehow lack sociality. However, these redundancies exist for the sake of emphasis: they imply that manuscript and Internet media are *more* or *especially* social when compared to printed books. Such contrasts reify a monolithic image of print as the paradigmatic commercial medium, speaking to and regulating an anonymous, nationalized public of book-buyers. Yet, for many authors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this does not really describe the experience of being in print. Writers like Pope were often deeply concerned with how

⁶ For the idea that video games offer a new kind of “navigable space,” Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), chapter 5.

⁷ Love, *The Culture and Commerce of Texts*; Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*; Kathryn R. King, “Jane Barker, Poetical Recreations, and the Sociable Text,” *ELH* 61, no. 3 (1994): 551-570.

friends (or enemies) might respond to their books, while the print exchange invited them to imagine relationships with anonymous strangers. Printed books might seem static, but bookshelves are fluid, changeable, and often sites of hard-fought contest. My goal is to borrow insights from New Media and manuscript studies to reflect back on print and look at how Restoration and eighteenth-century writers responded to the forms of sociality made possible by books. I'll treat two closely related themes: first, the continuing ability of published books like *The Dunciad Variorum* to speak to local, coterie audiences; second, the virtual relationships created between people through printed dialogue and debate. In other words, I'll examine published books as *tools* of interaction and print exchange as a *site* of interaction. Print, I argue, is a social medium.

There is perhaps no figure in literary history that better exemplifies this trend than Alexander Pope, whose status as the first independently successful commercial author has cemented his place in the history of print as well as the history of English poetry.⁸ “It is to *The Dunciad* that we must turn for the epic of the printed word and its benefits to mankind,” wrote Marshall McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.⁹ This theme was picked up again 25 years later by Alvin Kernan, who argued that, in *The Dunciad*, “Print is the destructive force, the instrument of Dulness, corrupting every area of traditional learning

⁸ Pope's status as an independent authorial entrepreneur is often taken for granted. The questions surrounding Pope's “independence” are dealt with at length by David Foxon, who devotes a chapter to the subject. *Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 102-52. More recently, Jody Greene has challenged this view by emphasizing that Pope continued to rely on patrons to distribute his potentially scandalous verse. Because of their social station, noblemen were less vulnerable to prosecution for libel. See *Trouble with Ownership*, 150-94.

⁹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy; the Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 255.

and letters [it] replaces the literary arrangements of the old regime with those more in the spirit of its own mechanical, democratic, and capitalistic tendencies, creating a new world of writing, Grub Street, where writers became paid hacks, books print commodities, and the literary audience the reading public.”¹⁰ In his study, Kernan takes Pope’s apocalyptic vision of collapse into eternal darkness and exuberantly rewrites it as a process of democratization and progress; though differing from the poet in his Whiggish progressivism, Kernan shares with Pope a concern about printing technology as a determinant force within culture.

More recently, James McLaverty, building on the biographical and bibliographical work of David Foxon, has teased out Pope’s ambivalence about the technology. He argues that we

must face up to the two Popes: the Pope who loved print and the Pope who hated it. The Pope who hated print [that of McLuhan and Kernan] loathed the great mass of printed matter: Grub Street scandal, party pamphlets, weekly journals, scholarly editions, boring poems, most plays, critics, and booksellers. He also hated attacks on Pope, though he collected them. This Pope is well known. ... But the other Pope ... was fixated on print. He loved the look of print: dropped heads, italics, black letter, caps. and smalls; fine paper, wide margins, and good ink; headpieces, tailpieces, initials, and plates. This Pope is a better-kept secret.¹¹

McLaverty’s exuberance for the technology matches Kernan’s, but from a rather different perspective: whereas Kernan follows stride-for-stride Pope’s imaginative expansion of technology across space and time, McLaverty indulges a microcosmic sublime of bibliographical fetishistic excess. Once subjected to the bibliographer’s gaze—a gaze that McLaverty convincingly shows Pope shared—each book becomes a cornucopia of its

¹⁰ Alvin B. Kernan, *Printing Technology, Letters, & Samuel Johnson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 9.

¹¹ James McLaverty, *Pope, Print, and Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.

composite physical parts. No book more so than *The Dunciad Variorum*, with its sumptuously dialogic citational structure. So, while they disagree about the precise character of his affect—McLavery finding ambivalence where Kernan found only horror—they agree that “in reading Pope, print matters” (McLavery 1). By the eighteenth century, print had become, in Kernan’s words, “the basic, inescapable technological fact of letters, the medium in which writing must exist and communicate in the world” (9).

This last point—not just that print mattered, but that it was the only game in town—is demonstrably false, both about the eighteenth century and about Pope in particular.¹² In her study of the circulation of poetry by manuscript, Margaret Ezell has shown that Pope’s works had a surprisingly long pre-print existence.¹³ Not counting works published posthumously, about six years passed on average between the dates of first composition and first publication. Rather than sit silently, Pope’s poems often circulated widely among friends and fellow authors, suggesting that his poetry had a rich social life independent of the press: “Pope’s original commitment to the world of manuscript culture continued and nourished his participation in the world of print. Pope’s readers would have had the pleasure of reading his verse repeatedly through the years, first in script and then in print, first as part of a social practice of reading and writing and then as part of a commercial world of satire and commentary” (83). But, in exploring “other aspects of his activities as a poet” (64), Ezell supplements without really

¹² The standard account of Pope’s abiding interest in manuscript production is Maynard Mack’s masterful facsimile edition of Pope’s holographs. *The Last and Greatest Art: Some Unpublished Poetical Manuscripts of Alexander Pope*, ed. Maynard Mack (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984).

¹³ Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*.

challenging the received print-centered portrait. From two Popes, we now have something like three, each defined by his relation to print: the hater, the lover, the side-stepper. Notice, too, Ezell's binary, even dichotomous reasoning. The social is divided from the commercial, as writing and reading are divided from their textual encapsulations, satire and commentary (and what can we imagine to be the condition of difference across which these two terms are conflated by 'and'?), as Pope is divided and divided again against himself, always with the media technology—the printing press, the mechanically reproduced verbal object—as the fissure across which to tread is to be transformed.

To think about how we might bring these Popes together is one of my ambitions in this chapter. Ezell's work focuses on his early career, and she steadfastly averts her eyes from *The Dunciad* (though it, too, seems to have been known in some form by Pope's friends for years prior to publication).¹⁴ If Pope's readers had the "pleasure" of reading this work first in script, that pleasure cannot have been without its ambivalences and could not have been isolated from the "world of satire and commentary," to return to Ezell's phrase. By holding that friendship and sociality can be traced only through the

¹⁴ For a useful overviews of *The Dunciad*'s history of composition, see the relevant entry in Pat Rogers, *The Alexander Pope Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004). Valerie Rumbold also provides an overview in the introduction to her new edition of the 1728 and 1729 *Dunciad*. Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope: Vol III, The Dunciad (1728) & The Dunciad Variorum (1729)*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (New York: Longman, 2007), 1-5. More detailed accounts of are available in Foxon, *Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade*, 108-14; James McLaverty, *Pope's Printer, John Wright: A Preliminary Study* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical society, Bodleian Library, 1976); James McLaverty, "Lawton Gilliver: Pope's Bookseller," *Studies in Bibliography* 32 (1979): 101-24.

handwritten archive, she reifies a McLuhanesque notion of print as the efflorescent cultural unconsciousness that dislodged experience from embodiment.

Research into seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscript circulation has greatly enriched our understanding of early modern authorship and literary culture, but with one unfortunate side-effect: it tends to promote a stereotype about print that is at best incomplete and at worst seriously misleading. Whether in emphasizing manuscript's similarity with print (in its ability to reach a wide audience through "scribal publication") or its difference (in its circulation through amateur coterie groups), such research casts print as fixed, static, conventional, constrained, and irredeemably commercial. In her explanation of social authorship, Ezell contrasts the "activities of authors and his or her manuscripts" to works "forever fixed in print."¹⁵ She argues that social authors "existed independently from the conventions and the restrictions of print and commercial texts."¹⁶

Working explicitly from Eisenstein's notion of print culture, Ezell argues that the

dynamic network of writer and reader that ... characterizes manuscript literary culture and social authorship is created by the process of being an author rather than by the production of a single text, in Eisenstein's terms, one capable of being fixed, attributed, and catalogued. Likewise, a reader in a manuscript culture, with a fluid text that is always subject to change, is responsible for participating in literary production as well as consumption.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, 23. Such claims side-step an important debate within print-culture studies over the question of whether print is a fixed medium and in what ways that "fixity" should be understood. In *The Nature of the Book*, Adrian Johns made this his primary point of contention with Elizabeth Eisenstein's classic study, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Their debate was continued in Anthony Grafton, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, and Adrian Johns, "AHR Forum: How Revolutionary Was the Print Revolution?," *American History Review* (2002): 84-128.

¹⁶ *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, 24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

From this view, the fluidity of manuscript text is thus both evidence for and the manifestation of human agency and literary community. Manuscript authorship is thus processual and dialogic: practices of inscription and social reciprocity can be traced through the fluidity of the hand-written text. Notice the confidence with which Ezell claims that social authorship is defined by the “process of being an author.” No longer bound to a single text, the writing subject appears to the historian in the space between texts as the agent responsible for chronologically organized textual difference.

By locating the author here, *between versions of texts* rather than within or behind texts, each iteration of the fluid literary work can be imagined as a historical event in its own right—an entextualization—investing literature simultaneously with agency and self-evident historicity. Simply put, variations between texts imply the actions of individuals responsible for those variations. What Gilles Deleuze might call the manuscripts’ *difference* and *repetition* becomes the mark of its sociality. This argument—variation implies participation implies subjectivity and culture—depends for its self-evidence on an explicit contrast with print, in which the putative fixity of the published book corresponds to the passive reader/consumer. It’s no coincidence that, in a later chapter, Ezell takes the republication of classic literary works as the paradigmatic situation of print. Disconnected from authors by time, the commercially republished text confirms this view of print as a technological and commercial force that erects cultural monuments and interacts with readers only as consumers.¹⁸

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, chapter 6, “Making a Classic: The Advent of the Literary Series and the National Author,” 123–40. In this chapter, Ezell borrows heavily from the work of Thomas F. Bonnell, whose research has recently been collected in *The Most Disreputable Trade*. The most prominent study arguing for the book trade as a commercial force of

But for Pope, the experience of printedness was reducible neither to commercial considerations nor to the book-object's reproducible material fixities. Curiously *The Dunciad*, so often thought to epitomize the powers of print, found its first readers through social-network structures typically associated with manuscript. As Jody Greene usefully summarizes it, "Rather than selling the copyright to the work on the open market, Pope first circulated the amended text, complete with the names of all the Dunces, among his aristocratic 'friends,' the Lords Burlington, Bathurst, and Oxford. He ultimately signed over the copyright to them in hopes of shielding his bookseller, and presumably himself, from reprisals and protecting his work from piracy."¹⁹ Pope's strategy was to reduce his liability to accusations of libel (and threats of violence) by distributing the work first through these culturally prestigious intermediaries.

In a letter to the Earl of Oxford, dated 18 April 1729, Pope provided a script that would certify the noblemen's "ownership" (in Greene's terms) over the poem and asked that Oxford, Burlington, and Bathurst affix their names to it:

Whereas a Clamor hath been raisd by certain Persons, and Threats uttered, against the Publisher or Publishers of the Poem calld the *Dunciad* with notes Variorum &c. We whose names are underwritten do declare outselves to have been the Publishers and Dispersers thereof, and that the same was deliverd out and vended by our Immediate direction.²⁰

Greene uses this to disprove the idea that Pope's career allowed him to operate independently of patrons. Responding directly to those who characterized Oxford's support as an act of simple friendship, Greene contends, "Whether we call Pope's use of

canon-formation is St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*. which, incidentally, also cites Bonnell's earlier essays.

¹⁹ *Trouble with Ownership*, 166.

²⁰ Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), iii.31-32. Cited in Foxon, *Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade*, 111.

the noble lords friendship, patronage, or dependence ultimately makes no difference: what is clear is that neither financial security nor control of the means of production was sufficient to reduce the risks of authorship enough to allow the early eighteenth-century author to emerge as an autonomous, financially independent, propertied subject, endowed with the qualities of full personhood.”²¹ By conflating friendship and patronage, Greene keeps the focus on her primary concerns: the legal and commercial consequences of proprietary print authorship. In the process—besides inadvertently denying the affective power of friendship—Greene misses the opportunity to take into account practices that Ezell might consider “social authorship.” What Greene sees as undermining Pope’s status as an independent person could be better described as his participation in a reciprocal system of poetic self-fashioning. The pleasure of this particular moment of manuscript circulation lies specifically in its relationship to the realm of print publication and exchange. The hostility of those outside the coterie renders its intimacy all the more intense to the point that, as Greene emphasizes, the boundary of ownership over the text becomes blurred, as does Pope’s coherence as a rights-bearing subject. Where Ezell left us with three Popes, Greene leaves us with something like none.

In these ways, Pope’s *Dunciad* stands at the threshold for what might be called the sociality of print. As I’ll argue, it exemplifies both how print emerges within and speaks to the kinds of audiences typically associated with manuscript circulation, while at the same time actively promoting the sense of that intimacy on its pages. The view of Pope as a print-centered author merges with the notion of Pope as a manuscript-based, social author. *The Dunciad* does this, I’ll argue, in the way it stages critical exchanges

²¹ *Trouble with Ownership*, 167.

that surround its publication and reception. What we might think of as “print,” the social phenomenon of the book trade and “print culture” becomes an object of representation on the pages itself. Pope emerges within a dialogic network of critical writing and situates the author in a dense texture of voices. If one of the most salient characteristics of digital media is its capacity to facilitate communities through textual mediation, *The Dunciad* stages a very similar process. Of course, for Pope this entails a dangerous and even dystopian affect. But it’s the very intensity of Pope’s outrage that threatens to distract us from the more general point: the written and published criticism implied a social system with norms and rules that still hadn’t been worked out definitively by the early eighteenth century. Exactly how criticism should be conducted, and especially exactly how the grounds of authorship might shift with critical discourse as its new foundation, is the subject that features so centrally in its pages.

One effect of *The Dunciad Variorum*’s polyvocality is that it promotes the sense of a community of writers and readers within which the text is situated. In this respect, *The Dunciad* is typical of criticism of the period and shares much in common with the epistolary criticism discussed in Chapter 3. Not only is it complete with the names of the Dunces, the honorable and the friendly populate Pope’s pages as well. Whereas scholarship on manuscript cultures tends to treat print as addressing an unambiguously public audience, for Pope the readership of his text is more heterogeneous and layered: “Certain it is, that dividing our writers into two classes, of such who were acquaintance, and of such who were strangers, to our author; the former are those who speak well, and

the other those who speak evil of him.”²² Responding to accusations of critics in the “Testimonies of Authors,” Pope litters his prefatory material with sympathetic voices.

In verity the whole story of the libel is a *Lye*, Witness those persons of integrity, who ... did see and approve of the said verses, in no wise a libel but a friendly rebuke, sent privately in our author’s own hand to Mr. *Addison* himself, and never make publick, till by *Curl* their own bookseller in his miscellanies, 12mo. 1727. One name alone, which I am here authorised to declare, will sufficiently evince this truth, that of the right honourable the EARL of BURLINGTON” (149 [33]).

In this passage, Pope relies on a dichotomy much like that of contemporary manuscript studies, which tends to understand publication as commercial appropriation. The appropriation that Pope accuses Edmund Curl of committing here closely fits this model: the private papers written in Pope’s “own hand” are made “publick” by a profiteering book retailer.

However, these passages confound any attempt to comfortably divide the social world of manuscript from the public world of print. Pope’s invocation of witnesses presupposes its circulation through the same social network of readers that have seen his hand-written papers and conversed about them. In Pope’s world, books and people move along the same chains. “A noble person there is,” he tells us, “who well remembreth the conversation ... This noble person is the EARL of PETERBOROUGH” (151 [35]). Pope continues to pile sympathetic voices: “Surely if we add the testimonies of the Lord BOLINGBROKE, of the Lady to whom the verses were originally addresst, of *Hugh Bethel Esq*; and others who knew them as our author’s ... it is hoped, the ingenuous that affect

²² *The Poems of Alexander Pope: Vol III, The Dunciad (1728) & The Dunciad Variorum (1729)*, 151 [35]. All citations are from this edition. The Rumbold edition replaces the long-standard Twickenham edition; Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope: Vol. 5, The Dunciad*, ed. James Sutherland, Twickenham Edition. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943). For the sake of convenience, I have also included references to the Twickenham edition in brackets.

not error, will rectify their opinion” (150 [34]). The presence of a reading public to whom these “honourable and worthy personages” have been called as “witnesses that cannot be controverted” raises, rather than lowers, the social stakes of authorship (151 [35]). The point here is not the frequently made one that ostensibly private circulation has public resonance; rather, that printed books circulate through and address multiple audiences, including those we tend to associate with manuscript circulation. In the conduct of literary controversy during the early eighteenth century, teasing out these discrete readerships was an author’s crucial first task.

Separating those who have written on the topic of “Pope” according to personal proximity – the “acquaintance[s]” versus the “strangers” – Pope constructs a critical history of himself that is premised on his physical presence outside of print while being devoted to the consolidation of a textual apparatus of social authorship. Whereas the preface and frontispiece to Pope’s 1717 *Works* might be cited as an example of authorial self-monumentalizing, much in the tradition of Ben Jonson’s 1616 *Workes*,²³ the “Testimonies of Authors” shows how such monumentalizing requires a dense network of critical voices in order to be legible as such. The prefatory apparatus of Martinus Scriblerus brings this network to the page with an unusual level of specificity and Scriblerian copia.

JOHN Duke of BUCKINGHAM
sums up his personal character in these lines,

And yet so wond’rous, so sublime a thing
As the great Iliad, scarce should make me sing,
Unless I justly could at once commend
A good companion, and as firm a friend;

²³ For a reading of Jonson as a founding figure of modern authorship, see Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship*.

One *moral*, or a meer *well-natur'd deed*,
Can all desert in sciences exceed. (151 [35])

This quotation is followed by similar selections from Simon Harcourt, Walter Harte, Edward Young, and William Broome.²⁴ The testimony from Buckingham puts the author's work in tension with his person, contrasting the sociability of companionship and friendship from the "wond'rous" and "sublime" literary artifact. Yet, in making this contrast, Buckingham draws them into an implicit continuity: his friendship with Pope becomes rhetorically intensified through its contrast from the public knowledge-making it "exceeds" but to which it is proximate. In this way, criticism makes authors by wrapping them in a lattice of textual voices. Pope plucks names and voices from elsewhere to erect a simulacra of literary community across time, through print, but centered on the author. Whereas book historians like McLaverty tend to focus on Pope's attitude towards the technology, print might be a category mistake here, at least if we understand print as either books or the machines used to make them. The poem's most important subject is Pope, and it is this subject – this subjectivity, if you will – that criticism both acts upon and erects.²⁵ Criticism imbues the technology with patterns of representation that describe, that "witness" in Pope's terms, mentally projected structures of sociality which the poet-critic is then imagined to inhabit.²⁶

²⁴ Pope continued to compile quotations for the "Testimonies," and the Twickenham edition includes comments from David Mallet, James Thomson, James Hammond, and Jonathan Swift that were added later and not included in the 1729 edition (35-37).

²⁵ This subjectivity is different from that posited by Greene. e.

²⁶ Marshall McLuhan makes a similar point: "His intense concern with the *pattern* of action in his armed horde of nobodies has been mistaken for personal spite. Pope was entirely concerned with the *formalistic pattern* and penetrative and configuring power of the new technology." *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 262-63. I will discuss this problem in what follows, but it should be noted here that McLuhan's comment strikes to the heart of the uneasy straddling of the interpersonal and technological that "media" has at its

In this sense, representations of the social background of *The Dunciad* could be manipulated as Pope saw fit. He could make his audience look much like a coterie of authors and readers, but the boundaries of the literary field were as permeable and malleable as critical argument allowed. Although Pope is careful here to distinguish between those who are strangers from those who are not, the very fact that he feels compelled to make the distinction at all suggests an anxiety about how these two categories of readers and authors could be dangerously confused (or mischievously conflated). Because they exist from one perspective only as text—and as we'll see Pope was eager to exploit this perspective for its satiric potential—the interlocutors that Pope invokes could be catalogued and enumerated like any other bibliographical entry.

Pope's Grub Street is famously chaotic, but his Dulness is a Chaos that finds order through the organization of critical argument. Martinus Scriblerus introduces the "Testimony of Authors" by describing them as a collection of "the various judgments of the Learned concerning our Poet: Various indeed, not only of different authors, but of the same author at different seasons" (138 [23]). The author emerges as an object of description within a history of criticism:

Hereby thou may'st not only receive the delectation of Variety, but also arrive at a more certain judgment, by a grave and circumspect comparison of the witnesses with each other, or of each with himself. Hence also thou wilt be enabled to draw reflections, not only of a critical but of a moral nature, by being let into many particulars of the person as well as the genius, and of the fortune as well as merit, of our Author. (138 [23])

conceptual center. What McLuhan's analysis misses, I argue, is that the "formalistic pattern" he sees in critical discourse (like that leading up to and surrounding *The Dunciad*) is a fundamentally *social formation* represented within critical argument and so cannot be conveniently separated from personal spite; that is, because Pope imagines himself within the social structures whose patterns he diagnoses, his personal motivations become part of the story of the structures themselves.

As I will be placing considerable emphasis on the ideas that Pope lays out here, it's worth pausing at some length over this passage. The key point for my purpose is that the author emerges within a history of criticism, in particular in a history of critical "variety"—that is, critical difference. The "more certain judgment" that Scriblerus promises his readers here will happen through a project of "circumspect comparison." Finding out about authors is here conceived a process of reading against the grain. The author's personal qualities—his genius, fortune, and merit—can be best traced, not through any single definitive statement, but rather through the various misrepresentations and mischaracterizations from others of the past. The author emerges not within a text, but within a liminal space between texts. Not so much a voice; rather, a causal explanation that ties other voices together into a narrative of perdurable personhood across time and space. The reader's "reflection" and "judgment" is to be exercised on the history of critical writing. The author becomes visible by being a topic of contention—a subject of critical discourse. He can be reduced to no single description or text. Rather, he exists in the reader's mind as an imagined construct to be inferred from the various misprisions of literary factional disputation. *The Dunciad*'s project is to dramatize this process and bring it as much as possible onto the page.

Nor does Pope confine this effect to himself. Rather, the process of comparative reading that uses criticism to provide a sense of the author is the same process that he uses to diagnose the wider culture within which the poet is situated. In fact, this is the same process. For example, in one of the appendices attached to *The Dunciad Variorum*, Pope compares criticisms that he has received to those leveled at Dryden during the Restoration. "A PARALLEL OF THE CHARACTERS OF Mr. DRYDEN and Mr.

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VI.
A PARALLEL
OF THE
CHARACTERS
OF
MR. DRYDEN and MR. POPE,
As drawn by certain of their Contemporaries.
MR. DRYDEN.
His POLITICKS, RELIGION, MORALS.
Mr. Dryden is a mere Rengado from *Monarchy*, *Poetry*, and good *Sense*. (a) A true *Republican* Son of a *mercantile* Church. (b) A *Republican* *Abolish*. (c) Dryden was from the beginning an *emphatic*, and I doubt not will continue to be the last. (d)
In the Poem call'd *Abdram* and *Abdram* are notoriously traduced. The KING, the QUEEN, the LORDS and GENTLEMEN, not only their Honorable Persons exposed, but the whole NATION and its R-
PARTRAVES notoriously libell'd; It is *Standard Magazine*, yet of MAJESTY itself (e)
He looks upon God's *Colleg* as a *single* *Fable*, like the *Pope*, to whom he is a *partial* *Purveyor*. (f) His very *Christianity* may be questioned. (g) He ought to expect more *Severity* than other men, as he is *most* *unmerciful* in his own *Religion* on others. (h) With as good right as his *libel*, he sets up for *Periodical* *Infidelity*. (i)

(a) *Milburn* on Dryden's *Pragm*, 8^o, 10^g, p. 6. (b) *ibid.* p. 38. (c) *ibid.* p. 39. (d) *ibid.* p. 8. (e) *ibid.* p. 135. (f) *ibid.* p. 39. (g) *ibid.* p. 39. (h) *ibid.* p. 39. (i) *ibid.* p. 39.

APPENDIX 113

VI.
A PARALLEL
OF THE
CHARACTERS
OF
MR. DRYDEN and MR. POPE,
MR. POPE.
His POLITICKS, RELIGION, MORALS.
Mr. Pope is an open and moral Enemy to the *Country*, and the *Commonwealth* of *Learning*. (a) Some call him a *Popish* *Wig*, which is directly *inconsistent*. (b) Pope as a *Popish* must be a *Wig* and *High-flyer*. (c) He is *both* a *Wig* and a *Wig*. (d) He hath made it his custom to cackle to more than one *Party* in their own *Sentiments*. (e)
In his *Middleman*, the Persons should are, The KING, the QUEEN, His late MAJESTY, both Houses of PARLIAMENT, the *Prig*, *General*, the *Branch* of *Bishops*, the *Establish'd* Church, the *present* *Mis*-*mirry*, *etc.* To make *End* of some *pullages*, they must be confin'd into *ROYAL* *SCANDAL*. (f)
He is a *Popish* *Rhymer*, bred up with a *Contempt* of the *Sacred* *Wri*-*ting*. (g) His *Religion* allows him to *admir* *Heretics*, not only with his pen, but with his and sword; and such were all those *swallow* *Writ* whom he beribbon'd to his *ecclesiastical* *Principles*. (h) It deferred *Vengeance* to himself, that Mr. Pope had let *Infidelity* than his *Mammoth* at *Ram*. (i)

(a) *Duncan*, *Sketches* on the *Base* of the *Book*, pref. p. 11. (b) *Duncan* *afforded*. (c) *ibid.* p. 11. (d) *ibid.* p. 11. (e) *ibid.* p. 11. (f) *ibid.* p. 11. (g) *ibid.* p. 11. (h) *ibid.* p. 11. (i) *ibid.* p. 11.

Figure 4. Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad Variorum*

POPE” aligns, on facing pages, a pastiche of quotes drawn primarily from pamphlet attacks on each poet. The attacks fall under separate headings, such as “Mr. DRYDEN / His POLITICKS, RELIGION, MORALS,” and “Mr. POPE understood no *Greek*” (350, 353 [230, 233]).²⁷ We learn for example that “Mr. *Dryden*’s Genius did not appear in any thing more than his *Versification*, and whether he is to be ennobled for *that only*, is a question?” (352 [232]). About Pope we learn that “The *smooth numbers* of the Dunciad are *all* that recommend it, nor has it *any other merit*.” (353 [233]). About these parallels, Pope’s editor Valerie Rumbold suggests that their purpose is to bolster Pope’s connection to Dryden, and “to be taken seriously as an aspirant to the status of his great predecessor” (350).²⁸ Undoubtedly, this is so. However, I think something larger is at work here as well. Pope offers himself and Dryden as case studies in the history of English literary criticism. The attacks leveled at each are meant to exemplify their shared status at the pinnacle of poet-Restoration poetry, sure, but they also stand for something more important and more general. Pope’s and Dryden’s receptions demonstrate how English criticism operates according to the predictably dysfunctional mechanisms of dullness. Pope writes himself and Dryden into critical history.

Carefully arranged and footnoted, this parallel history identifies the authors as both individuals and types, as persons and as effects of a culture of print exchange that constrains the bibliographical self while also serving as the condition of its possibility.

²⁷ The image below is taken from *Alexander Pope, Poems in Facsimile*, ed. Geoffrey Day (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988).

²⁸ Rumbold develops this argument at greater length in “Plotting Parallel Lives: Pope’s ‘A Parallel of the Characters of Mr. Dryden and Mr. Pope,’” ed. Claude Rawson and Aaron Santesso, *John Dryden (1631-1700): His Politics, His Plays, and His Poets* (2004): 235-62.

On the one hand, they exemplify a social and psychological truth that Pope and Jonathan Swift had subscribed to for decades: “When a true Genius appears in the World, you may know him by this infallible Sign; that the Dunces are all in Confederacy against him.”²⁹ More than any other single idea, this encapsulates Scriblerian cultural politics: they felt true genius lay under continual siege from dunces. This is in no way a product or effect of print culture but is rather a universal truism. On the other hand, they represent the manifestation of this truism within the particular constraints and formal apparatuses of print exchange. As Pope would have it, English criticism is the “Great Man’s Curse” according to print logic.³⁰

This notion of the author is fundamentally similar to the author we inherit from print- and manuscript-culture studies. This is why *The Dunciad* and Pope have held such prominent places in both the histories of criticism and of print: *The Dunciad* shares with contemporary scholars a set of assumptions about how to talk about persons and their print selves. Pope was the first to understand that a history of print had to be a history of criticism, and vice versa, because it is on the basis of such histories that printed personhood exists as such, and with it print community and print culture.

If it’s right, as Lisa Gitelman and others have argued, that we ought to consider “media as socially realized structures of communication ... that [involve] not only the actual transmission of information, but also the ritualized collocation of senders and

²⁹ *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert John Davis and Irvin Ehrenpreis (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1939), i.242.

³⁰ I borrow the phrases “Great Man’s Curse” from Pope’s *Temple of Fame* and “print logic” from Kernan, *Printing Technology, Letters, & Samuel Johnson*.

recipients,”³¹ then this suggests that the histories of literary study as a discipline and as a category of discourse are more intricately implicated in the histories old media, like print and manuscript, than has generally been recognized. The “ritualized collocation of senders and recipients” is one way to describe the motivating typographical dynamic of *The Dunciad*, as well as its mock-epic verse narrative. But this presents an interesting problem. If we define a medium broadly to include not only the technology and its perdurable artifacts but also its protocols and discursive constructions, its rituals and its rhetoric, then criticism from the past acquires an uncannily potent place in the history of print. The line between the technology and the discourse of the technology as objects of scholarly inquiry becomes radically blurred, in effect erased.

For the book historian, this presents a curious and largely unexamined problem: that texts are afforded their ontologies based their conceptual content. In this model, texts are understood to be expressed through print and delimited by the material conditions of their production and circulation: they are, in Gitelman’s terms, communication. Criticism, on the other hand, which takes as its subject the material conditions of literary labor, counts as the social construction of old media and thus as both communication and medium, broadly considered, as both text and context. Both person and book. It suggests that a confident division between the social world of handwriting and the commercial world of print, to return to Margaret Ezell’s framework, will be difficult to sustain, but it

³¹ Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree, eds., *New Media, 1740-1915* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), xvi. This definition is expanded in *Always Already New*, where Gitelman argues that media should be understood to “include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation.” *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 7.

also tends strongly against McLuhanesque assertions about the nature of print culture and the consequences of its rise. But, we oughtn't merely dismiss print culture as "ethereal," as for example, Adrian Johns has done.³² The nature of that ethereality is precisely what's at issue here. At the level of historical argumentation – that is, in terms of what *counts* as evidence *for* it – "print culture" might best be understood as a kind of text.

Such questions are not anachronistic to a reading of Pope. In the third book of *The Dunciad*, Tibbald, the new King of Dulness, is transported to the poets' anti-Elyzium:

There, in a dusky vale where Lethe rolls,
Old Bavius sits, to dip poetic souls,
And blunt the sense, and fit it for a scull
Of solid proof, impenetrably dull.
Instant when dipt, away they wing their flight,
Where Brown and Mears unbar the gates of Light,
Demand new bodies, and in Calf's array
Rush to the world, impatient for the day. (lines iii.13-22)

"Old Bavius," the classical type against which modern Dunces are the antitype, waits in a mythologized past that serves as the gateway to the present. The transformation of the author's consciousness into material form imagined as a travesty of heavenly conception. Booksellers "Brown and Mears" open the "gates of Light," ushering the souls of poets into "new bodies" – that is, into leather-bound books – through which they rush into the world. The impenetrability of the skulls of bad poets marks the failure of bad writing while confidently signaling the permeability of mind and text that writers like Tibbald in their dullness exemplify all too clearly. The anthropomorphosis narrated here: person into author into book-as-person exploits the same ontological tension between technology and culture that words like "media" take as their defining conceptual structure. About this passage, it could be said that Pope is playfully dispensing with the distinction between the

³² Johns, *The Nature of the Book*, 18.

medium and its artifacts—between “print” and “book.” The great artistry of *The Dunciad* is the enthusiasm with which it condenses the print medium into just one of its books; the polyvocality of the page mimics the shifting and fluid nature of print as a medium and as an arena. The tendency among book historians to find subjects and cultures in the spaces between texts is mimicked on *The Dunciad Variorum*’s famously compacted pages. Pope is there in the space between verse and footnote. He is the organizing conceptual node that binds together “A List of Books, Papers, and Verses, in which our Author was abused, printed before the Publication of the Dunciad: With the true Names of the Authors” (326 [207]).

McLuhan and Kernan both turn to the ending of the poem, in which Pope envisions a sublimely apocalyptic future for England, buried under the accumulated sludge of bad writing, when, “Art after Art goes out, and all is Night” (iii.346). “Thy hand great Dulness! lets the curtain fall, / And universal Darkness covers all” (iii.355-56). But elsewhere in text, Pope imagines a different kind of future, one that has received much less attention. In the footnote to the passage I read a moment ago, Pope provides a gloss to the figure of the bad writer:

Bavius was an ancient Poet, celebrated by *Virgil* for the like cause as *Tibbald* by our author. ... Mr. *Dennis* warmly contends that *Bavius* was no inconsiderable author; nay, that “he and *Maevius* had (even in *Augustus*’s days) a very formidable Party at *Rome*, who thought them much superior to *Virgil* and *Horace*: For (saith he) I cannot believe they would have fix’d that eternal brand upon them, if they had not been coxcombs in more than ordinary credit.” An argument which (if this Poem should last) will conduce to the honour of the Gentlemen of the *Dunciad*. ... These are comfortable opinions! and no wonder some authors indulge them. (268 [151])

As elsewhere in *The Dunciad*, Pope connects the past to the present by offering each as a recurring common pattern: it is the case of the dunce to misrecognize these recurrences as a progressive difference that demarcates a forward-moving history by separating the past

as a recoverable because distinct phenomenon. The ill-considered elevation of Bavius made possible by the antiquarian uncovering of past conflict prefigures the role John Dennis would have in academic scholarship of later centuries. Dennis would indeed come to assume the position predicted here: as Pope's antagonist, as a theorist of Whig aesthetics and an advocate for literary criticism as a professional discipline. By positing his poem in the future anterior tense – in the condition of what will have been – Pope's opening of the past opens in turn a future around which *The Dunciad* becomes the defining center, just as the structures of sociality it projects stretch away from the poet while continually reflecting back on him. As the thesis of Pope's history of criticism, "Dulness" stands in its polysemy against an antithesis that collapses a variety of themes: sense, wit, virtue, to take only its most salient terms. However, "Dulness" also becomes the backdrop against which the figures of the Dunces become visible in their particularity. As a particular incarnation of a discursive position, typified by Bavius, Dennis ensures his visibility within a system of critical exchange that stretches back to the origins of Western letters, as well as being projected into its furthest imaginable future. Criticism, and in particular bad criticism, comes to be reconceived as the context that literary text renders knowable as such.

But I want to go one step further. Throughout this dissertation, I have asked how the norms of critical writing reflect back on Restoration and eighteenth-century notions of authorship and literary community. In particular, I have asked in this sense how criticism functions as evidence within literary history: as both text and context, as both printed artifact and the social construction of the meanings attached to printedness, criticism from this period holds a special place in literary history. What *The Dunciad* exemplifies

from this view is the way old criticism creates a discursive bridge between old literature and contemporary scholarship. By positing his own work as a object of critical inquiry and attack, by constructing Pope through a bibliography of writings about Pope, *The Dunciad* creates an author that is of the same stuff as the author who is the subject of modern scholarship. The conflicts of Bavius and Dennis are granted a seamless continuity with later writing. The author and the text become themselves as objects of critical contention.

Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" is famous for reconceptualizing authorship as a discursive process—a "function"—that organizes texts into chronologies and hierarchies. No longer a human person who is understood to generate discourse, the "author function" is a set of concepts applied after the fact by readers (especially scholarly readers) who hope to bring the abundance of unconstrained discourse into something like disciplined order. Such a view of textual personhood is not so very different from the Humean notion of a self without self-identity: the Humean self is a back-projected misrecognition of the radical differences that separate a person from her earlier physical iterations. In each case we find that identity is an imagined construct, a narrative explanation of continuities that persist across physical, spatial, and temporal difference. In this sense, the Foucauldian author-function is a subcategory of selfhood, one not so very different the everyday experience of believing in the persistence of one's own identity across time. What am I except a principle of thrift in the proliferation of experience? The Humean self and the Foucauldian author both exist in the imagined spaces between their moments of physical or mental manifestation.

It is precisely because *The Dunciad Variorum* gives us nothing of Pope that we see him so clearly. To borrow a phrase from Fredric Bogel, this is the difference that satire makes.³³ The double-voice of irony writes the author-self into its text at the most atomistic level. It is in the undecidable oscillation between the generic conventions of epic and the quotidian conditions of modernity that Augustan satire evinces the mind at work. The author is what persists across these often jarring shifts in perspective. More perhaps than any other text in the literary tradition, *The Dunciad* constructs and communicates the sense of its author, so much so that Aubrey Williams in his classic study had to insist that readers disregard the personality that appeared so distinctly through its pages.³⁴ What Pope knew is that the author is not visible through or behind a sincere statement but in the cross-fire of raucous dishonesty. And in *The Dunciad* you are always between texts and between perspectives no matter how closely you read.

³³ Fredric V. Bogel, "Dulness Unbound: Rhetoric and Pope's *Dunciad*," *PMLA* 97, no. 5 (October 1982): 844-55. See also his expanded account, Fredric V. Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

³⁴ Closely related to the revaluation of Dryden discussed in chapter 1, Williams's study appeared within the backdrop of the emergence of New Criticism. Williams writes, "It is rather obvious that criticism in the past has shown little tendency to regard the *Dunciad* as in any way separable from the personality of its author ... But at the same time it should be admitted that, if ever a poem has conspired, by its very nature, to tempt a critic into such a procedure, the *Dunciad* is that poem. Because the poem uses historical circumstances and real personalities as the very stuff of its composition it never appears to be an entirely fictional creation." *Pope's Dunciad; a Study of Its Meaning* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1955), 2-3.

Conclusion

Boswell & Co.: The Afterlife of Literary Factionalism

I CONGRATULATE with my country, that we now behold,
with eyes full of intrepid wonder and premature
astonishment, such a poet! and such critics!

—James Boswell, of himself and his friends, to Andrew

Erskine¹

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the editors and book reviewers of periodicals like the *Critical Review* and the *Monthly Review* had begun to establish themselves as spokesmen for a commercialized public taste.² Printed criticism remained

¹ James Boswell, *An Elegy on the Death of an Amiable Young Lady. With An Epistle from Menalcas to Lycidas. To Which Are Prefixed, Three Critical Recommendatory Letters* (Edinburgh: printed by A. Donaldson and J. Reid. For Alex. Donaldson, 1761). For an annotated edition of this letter, see *The General Correspondence of James Boswell, 1757-763*, ed. David Hankins and James J. Caudle (Edinburgh, New Haven and London: Edinburgh University Press, Yale University Press, 2006), To Andrew Erskine, 2-8? August 1761..

² Frank Donoghue describes the advent of review periodicals as part of an eighteenth-century consumerist revolution in Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), chap. 1. Jonathan Brody Kramnick traces the reviews' relationship to earlier periodicals as mediators of public consumption in "Literary Criticism Among the Disciplines."

factional and fractious, as critics used their new forum to launch personal attacks, to coalesce into literary circles, and to further their own careers. Although criticism sometimes appealed for consensus across a broad, nationalized audience of British readers, it also was a language of friendship and confrontation that writers used to speak for and against each other. The back-and-forth of critical argument wrapped authors in a web of texts that situated them among their fellows: to participate in these exchanges was to be a member of a world of London letters. In this essay, I argue that James Boswell's early publishing career, described in the *London Journal*, offers a unique perspective on these social dynamics of printed criticism. Those interested in Boswell's literary life have tended to focus on how he cultivated acquaintances with luminaries like Samuel Johnson. However, I argue that publishing was crucial to Boswell's project of self-advancement, however unconventional or self-defeating such advancement might seem at first glance. Scurrilous and surreptitious, collaborative and confrontational, Boswell's early criticism stirs up controversy for little reason except to make himself known as one of the controversialists. Boswell's brief (and mostly ignominious) career as a critic in London throws into sharp relief the way criticism could be used, not to regulate the taste of an impersonal public, but to mediate relationships between authors.

In recent years, studies have shown in various ways that criticism played a crucial role in the construction of eighteenth-century literary culture. Scholars have focused on the rise of criticism as a discipline, on its role in the formation of national literary canons, on its function as a regulatory discourse of taste, and, in Lee Morrissey's

recent study, on critics' efforts to order politicized reading practices.³ What these studies have in common is that they take criticism to be a print phenomenon that acts upon a public readership. Others have turned away from printed criticism to focus instead on manuscript "critical practices" as techniques of "social authorship."⁴ Such studies highlight the continuing importance of coterie circulation as a social practice by contrasting it with the commercial publicity of print. In *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, Margaret Ezell writes, "[W]e are still in the dark concerning the practices of authors who sought a publisher but not an income from writing. We are still in the process of constructing a history of the social text, as it existed in its original context and social moment and then as it moved into print culture."⁵ The largely unspoken premise

³ Morrissey, *The Constitution of Literature*. On the rise of literary criticism as a discipline, see Jonathan Brody Kramnick, "Literary Criticism Among the Disciplines"; Siskin, *The Work of Writing*; Patey, "CHLC." For studies of canon formation, see Jonathan Brody Kramnick, "Literary Criticism Among the Disciplines"; Trevor Thornton Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998); Simon Jarvis, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearean Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly Labour, 1725-1765* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); David Fairer, "Historical Criticism and the English Canon: a Spenserian Dispute in the 1750s." Studies that emphasize criticism's role in the regulation of taste and gender include Erin Skye Mackie, *Market À La Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in the Tatler and the Spectator* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Analysis of Beauty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Laura Runge, *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism, 1660-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴ For "social authorship" and "critical practices," see, respectively, Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*; Trolander and Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725*. Trolander and Tenger also offer a thoughtful review of the value of a practice-based model for understanding the history of literary criticism in "Abandoning Theory: Towards a Social History of Critical Practices," in *Critical Past: Writing Criticism, Writing History*, ed. Phillip Smallwood (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004).

⁵ Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, 102. See also King, "Jane Barker, Poetical Recreations, and the Sociable Text."

here is that manuscript is the locus of a text's "original context and social moment," while "print culture" is a secondary place of commercial appropriation. Criticism works against such assumptions—both criticism in general and Boswell's specifically. The *Journal* offers an illuminating perspective on this point because it narrates in detail Boswell's use of printed criticism as an instrument of socialization. Though ostensibly national in their address, Boswell's publications playfully spoke to more particular readerships, and they had very high *personal* stakes precisely because of their *public* character.

For Boswell, criticism was both a way to participate in a public of fellow Londoners and a way to insert himself into a distinct culture of London letters. Just two months after his arrival in the capital, Boswell joined his friends Andrew Erskine and George Dempster in attending a new play, *Elvira: a Tragedy*. The play was written by David Mallet, a Scottish author who they felt had betrayed Scotland by assimilating into English society too completely. Among other offenses, Mallet "Englished" his name from David Malloch. Boswell and his crew were eager to disrupt the play's first performance, and he describes their efforts in the pit: "[J]ust as the doors opened at four o'clock, we sallied into the house, planted ourselves in the middle of the pit, and with oaken cudgels in our hands and shrill-sounding catcalls in our pockets, sat ready prepared."⁶ Thus armed, the young men self-consciously enact the part of the ill-natured critics: "The prologue was politically stupid. We hissed it and had several join us" (155). Unfortunately, their attempt to disrupt the play finds little support beyond those few:

⁶ James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763*, ed. Frederick Pottle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), 155. Hereafter in parenthesis.

We did what we could during the first act, but found that the audience had lost their original fire and spirit and were disposed to let it pass. Our project was therefore disconcerted, our impetuosity damped. As we knew it would be pointless to oppose that furious many-headed monster, the multitude, as it has been very well painted, we were obliged to lay aside our laudable undertaking in the cause of genius and the cause of modesty. (155)

Unbowed by this failure, Boswell joined Erskine and Dempster in a written critique of the play, one that would extend their attacks into print: “After dinner, Erskine produced our observations on *Elvira* thrown into a pamphlet size. We corrected it, and I copied it out” (162). *Critical Strictures on the New Tragedy of Elvira, written by Mr. David Malloch* (1763) is a very small work of only twenty-four pages octavo and priced at six pence. Besides mocking his name change, the authors associate Mallet with profiteering and a depraved public taste. They write, “Bad as this Play is, yet will the Author have the Profits of his Three Nights: Few on the First Night having either Taste or Spirit to express their Disapprobation. Like the Rascals who plundered *Lisbon* after the Earthquake, Mr. *David Malloch* will extract his Guineas out of Rubbish.”⁷ Their tone is unrelenting in its viciousness. They focus in particular on Mallet’s Scottishness:

In this Play the Author has introduced a Rebellion unparalleled in any History, Ancient or Modern. He raises his Rebellions as a skillful Gardener does his Mushrooms, in a Moment; and like an artful Nurse, he lulls in a Moment the fretful Child asleep. The Prince enters an Appartment of the Palace with a drawn Sword; this forms the Rebellion. The King enters the same Appartment without a drawn Sword. This quashes the Rebellion. How to credit this Story, or to pardon this poetical Licence, we are greatly at a Loss; for we know in the year 1745 three thousand Mountaineers actually appeared at *Derby*. *Cataline*, we are credibly informed, had a Gang of at least a Dozen stout Fellows; and it is pretty certain that *Bedemar*, when going to enslave Venice, had provided Pistols and Battle Powder for more than fifteen fighting Men. We are almost tempted to think, that

⁷ James Boswell, George Dempster, and Andrew Erskine, *Critical Strictures on the New Tragedy of Elvira, Written by Mr. David Malloch* (London: printed for W. Flexney, near Gray's-Inn, Holborn, 1763), 21.

Mr. *Malloch* gets his Rebellions ready made, like his *Scotch* Tobacco, cut and dry, at the Sign the Valiant Highlander.⁸

This attack synthesizes commentary on the literary tradition with contemporary identity politics. The critics begin with degrading comparisons that associate Mallet's writing with menial household labor. They sharply contrast his play to two tragedies of failed rebellion prominent in the English literary tradition, Ben Jonson's *Catiline* and Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*. The casual tone with which they treat these figures heightens the contrast. The critics assure us that *Catiline* armed "at least a Dozen stout Fellows" and that the Marquis of Bedmar—the Spanish ambassador behind a 1618 plot to overthrow the Republic of Venice—provided weapons for "more than fifteen fighting Men."⁹ Unable to stage such violence convincingly, Mallet's *Elvira* is a debased parody of this tradition. If the elevation of a literary canon depends on demarcating other texts as noncanonical, as literary theorists have suggested, *Critical Strictures* exemplifies one way for this to happen: the angry critics here use tradition to show that Mallet fails to measure up.¹⁰ Boswell and his collaborators then associate the play's inauthentic staging with Mallet's supposedly inauthentic ethnicity.¹¹ "We know in the year 1745 three thousand Mountaineers actually appeared at *Derby*," they insist, contrasting the play's obvious artificiality with the actual appearance of Scottish rebels during a moment of intense suspense during the 1745 uprising. That year, Prince Charles had advanced within

⁸ Ibid., 13-14.

⁹ For a brief overview of Otway's use of this history, see the introduction to *Venice Preserved* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), xiv-xvi.

¹⁰ On the relationship between canonical and noncanonical literary works, see Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, 1; Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 1.

¹¹ For a more complete discussion of the relationship between the *Elvira* episode and the cultural politics of Britishness, see Evan Gottlieb, *Feeling British: Sympathy and National Identity in Scottish and English Writing, 1707-1832* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 107-09.

a hundred miles of London, and, although his army had been reduced by desertions, they presented for the moment a very real danger to the English capital. The legacy of Derby would be tragic to Scottish Jacobites, however. The Pretender's force was divided by faction and the rebels chose to withdraw, only to be defeated at the Battle of Culloden. *Elvira's* actions lack such drama, according to its critics. Mallet's rebellions, they suggest, come "ready made, like his *Scotch Tobacco*, cut and dry, at the Sign the Valiant Highlander." This final thrust of wit impugns Mallet for being severed from Scottish history and society, to which he is connected only through a commercial mediation that cheapens national identity by using it as an advertising gimmick.

Such satiric, associative juxtapositions serve several purposes. First of all, they attack Mallet concisely on several different grounds. The fact that these attacks are personal and unjustified makes them all the more effective at setting up their authors as rivals to the more established, but reportedly unpopular Mallet.¹² As these juxtapositions accumulate through amplification, they also put on display the authors' nationalistic passions, their knowledge of traditional English drama, and, most importantly, their facility for wit. In these ways, *Critical Strictures* identifies its authors quite firmly as Scots of facetious wit and sharp temperament in the mid-century London world of letters. They fuse personal attack with literary and political critique in order to raise the ethical stakes of their pamphlet: what might have been a mere matter of disagreement about a play becomes a public confrontation between enemies, with Boswell and his collaborators cast as impudent provocateurs.

¹² Such reports are based primarily on the opinion of Samuel Johnson, taken from Boswell's *Life*. See Pottle's discussion in *Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763*, 152n.

The point here is not that Boswell's, Erskine's and Dempster's critiques of the play and of Mallet were either fair or thoughtful. Indeed, the opposite was obviously the case. According to all evidence, *Elvira* was a success, both commercially and critically. The play enjoyed an unusually long fourteen-night run, and *The London Chronicle* reported after its opening that "the whole performance gave general satisfaction."¹³ Lengthy selections and summaries appeared in *The Universal Magazine*, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and the *London Chronicle*.¹⁴ It received begrudging respect in Ralph Griffith's *Monthly Review*,¹⁵ as well as fulsome praise in Tobias Smollett's *Critical Review*: "Mr. Mallet's character, as a dramatic writer, is so well established, that it could not have been affected by the fate of this performance, even if it had miscarried. Neither has the extraordinary success of it, in the face of a most illiberal opposition, been able to enhance the reputation he had before so justly acquired."¹⁶ Notice that, just like *Strictures*, the review is deeply invested in discussing Mallet's character and his reputation. Once caught up in the interplay between poet and attacking critics, the problem of evaluating a text becomes inextricably tied to the problem of evaluating the conflict it inspired. The back-and-forth of critical disagreement heightens the visibility of the "illiberal opposition," a position that Boswell and his friends were eager to occupy.

Texts like *Critical Strictures* defy easy generalization about their reception. Because it was so deliberately sophomoric in tone, the rebukes that the pamphlet received from the reviews are evidence of success, rather than failure. Boswell's, Erskine's, and

¹³ See *The London Stage, 1660-1800* and *The London Chronicle* (18-20 Jan. 1763), 72.

¹⁴ *The Universal Magazine* 32 (Jan. 1763), 43-8; *The Gentleman's Magazine* 33 (Jan. 1763), 29-31; and the *London Chronicle* 13 (20-22 Jan. 1763), 77-8.

¹⁵ *Monthly Review* 18 (Jan. 1763), pp. 67-8.

¹⁶ *Critical Review* 15 (Feb. 1763), 90.

Dempster's goal was to spark a controversy, and so the disapproval that met their pamphlet represents, not a failure to adhere to the norms of critical writing, but the effectiveness with which they flouted those norms. The *Monthly Review* speculated it to be the work of a "personal enemy of Mr. Mallet," while the *Critical Review* wrote it off in just one sentence, calling it "the crude efforts of envy, petulance, and self-conceit."¹⁷ Boswell was thrilled.¹⁸ As he would write in *Life of Johnson*, "There being thus three epithets, we, the three authours, had a humourous contention how each should be appropriated."¹⁹ That he did not resent the insult is unsurprising. The pamphlet is clearly intended to provoke a negative reaction, and there is nothing in Boswell's journal to suggest otherwise.

In fact, it was precisely on the grounds of their lack of prestige—their exclusion from learned, gentlemanly respectability—that Boswell positions himself three weeks later when he initiated a correspondence with David Hume. As part of a fairly dismal practical joke, Erskine and Dempster appropriated Hume's identity in a forged letter to Boswell. After sulking briefly, Boswell turned the situation to his advantage by using it as an excuse to send the philosopher-historian a letter of introduction. The tone of his address balances self-effacing embarrassment, for having been duped, with playful self-flattery. The letter concludes with this post-script: "If you will agree to correspond with me, you shall have London news, lively fancies, humorous sallies, provided that you give me elegant sentiments, just criticism, and ingenious observations on human nature. I

¹⁷ *Monthly Review* 18 (Jan. 1763), 68; *Critical Review* 15 (Feb. 1763), 160.

¹⁸ In the *Life*, Boswell suggests that George Dempster may not have shared this enthusiasm. *Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birbeck Hill and L. F. Powell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), i:409.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

should gladly endeavour to return you now and then something in your own style, which I am ambitious enough not to despair of doing” (p. 193-4). By offering to trade his “humorous sallies” for Hume’s “elegant sentiments,” Boswell predicates his appeal to Hume on a kind of division of labor in their correspondence, one that reaffirms the hierarchical difference between the two men while bringing them together within a more general conversational sociability. Boswell is a young man of wit, a man to be counted on for humorous critiques while the more learned and celebrated author provides the “ingenious observations” of high cultural commentary. This point is worth stressing, because some recent scholars have emphasized other moments when Boswell chafed under the influence of more powerful men during his stay in London.²⁰ Here, Boswell accepts subordination within a hierarchy of critical style that affords him the ambition to rise at some later time.

However, rather than offer elevated discourse, Hume’s reply is angry and condescending. He took umbrage for having been cited as an authority in *Critical Strictures*. Among their attacks on Mallet, the youthful collaborators cited a conversation, in which Hume claimed that Mallet’s plays were “destitute of the Pathetick.”²¹ Hume takes them to task for the indiscretion: “I repeat it, how the devil came it into your noddles to publish in a book to all the world what you pretend I told you in private conversation? I say *pretend I told you*; for as I have utterly forgot the whole matter, I am

²⁰ See William F. Hatzberger, “Boswell’s London Journal, Lord Eglinton, and the Politics of Preferment,” *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era* 10 (2004): 173-88; Thomas A. King, “How (Not) to Queer Boswell,” in *Queer People: Negotiations and Expressions of Homosexuality, 1700-1800*, ed. Chris Mounsey and Caroline Gonda (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 114-58.

²¹ *Critical Strictures*, 15.

resolved utterly to deny it. Are you not sensible that by this *étourderie*, to give it the lightest name, you were capable of making a quarrel between me and that irascible little man with whom I live on very good terms? Do you not feel from your own experience that among us gentlemen of the quill there is nothing of which we are so jealous (not even our wives, if we have any) as the honour of our productions?" (206-7). Instead of feeling chastised, Boswell and his friends are encouraged by this reply, which, Boswell feels, is "so good-natured as to lighten his reproof by blending it with an agreeable pleasantry" (207). It's little wonder that Boswell was pleased. Besides acknowledging their acquaintance, the reply makes clear that Hume shares at least some of their disdain for Mallet by calling him "irascible." Best of all, it gathers them all under the shared category "gentlemen of the quill." Boswell's response to this complaint continues the tone of raillery and expresses pleasure for having caused dissension (208-09). The letter is signed "Boswell & Co." (209). All in all, Boswell and his friends seemed to have considered *Critical Strictures* a success, in part because of the disapproving responses it generated. Boswell & Co. had officially entered the London world of wit, and, as far as Boswell was concerned, they had it on David Hume's authority that they counted as "gentlemen of the quill."

To see *Critical Strictures* as a success in this way demands setting aside the concerns that traditionally occupied historians of literary criticism. *Critical Strictures* is typical of its genre, and attack pamphlets like this are generally considered too transparent to invite or validate close study. Not surprisingly, it has received little

attention from Boswell scholars, even those who portray him as a literary critic.²² Indeed, a personal attack such as Boswell & Co. offered Mallet is very different from works that contribute to a philosophy or history of literature, such as Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762). The young collaborators added nothing to their culture's understandings of drama, literature, or aesthetics in any general sense. Nor was it their intent to do so. In the brief space of the pamphlet, they cite numerous authorities, including Sir David Dalrymple, Samuel Johnson, John Dryden, Lord Bolingbroke, Joseph Addison, and of course David Hume. This existing tradition of authoritative critics is deployed selectively to cast their target in as unfavorable a light as possible. Nowhere do the authors use their ostensible object—the tragedy *Elvira*—to question, revise, or in any way contribute to this tradition. The pamphlet's form and price suggest that it will be, if too scurrilous to be called modest, at least limited in its intellectual ambitions.

Attack pamphlets work differently from the essays and treatises usually gathered into a history of British criticism and aesthetics. They operate according to a different “psychodynamics of writing,” to borrow a phrase from Walter Ong.²³ Ong asserts that “the writer's audience is always fiction,” and that each act of reading and writing fictionalizes a social interaction between readers and writers.²⁴ For Boswell and his collaborators, their piece of criticism was not an intervention into a *history* of criticism.

²² Considerations of the pamphlet can be found in Erik Bond, *Reading London: Urban Speculation and Imaginative Government in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007); Bond Erik, “Bringing Up Boswell: Drama, Criticism, and the Journals,” *Age of Johnson* 15 (2004): 151-76; Joan Pittock, “Boswell as Critic,” in *New Light on Boswell*, ed. Greg Clingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 72-85.

²³ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), 102.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

Boswell & Co. do not address an audience of fellow thinkers, nor an imagined series of author figures structured according to a canon of criticism. Rather, their fictionalized audience involves both a network of friends and rivals, centered in this case on Mallet himself (who has his own network of friends to be disrupted), and a public audience of anonymous book-buyers. The work's unabashed publicity gives it rhetorical force within the narrower realms of personal acquaintance. In the journal, Boswell describes his six-penny pamphlet specifically as an extension of the critical work that their noisy disruptiveness in the pit failed to complete. If they could not prevent *Elvira* from gaining its third night, this thinking goes, a print attack might disrupt Mallet's literary friendships. In this way, the pit and the pamphlet share a common structure to their public address: attack criticism imagines itself as an exchange between critic and target that, because performed before an audience, will entail personal consequences outside the critical exchange itself.

The literary misadventures of Boswell & Co. exemplify in many ways the new possibilities opened up to Scottish authors by the establishment of publishing partnerships across Britain. Richard Sher has recently shown how a cadre of Scottish entrepreneurs transformed the British book trade by forging collaborative business relationships between the publishing centers of London and Edinburgh.²⁵ Besides protecting publishers from inordinate losses by diluting capital expenditure, such collaboration enabled booksellers to divide their efforts regionally. This simplified booksellers' relationships with authors and with customers while helping them to avoid

²⁵ Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book*. See in particular chap. 2, "Identity and Diversity of Scottish Authors," 97-194; and chap. 4, "Forging the London-Edinburgh Publishing Axis," 265-326.

competitive reprinting.²⁶ Sher's study exposes the interpersonal, even intimate, nature of this practice. Entrepreneurs like Alexander Donaldson, Andrew Millar and William Strahan succeeded because they were able to establish and maintain trustworthy social networks across national barriers. For eighteenth-century Scots, these interpersonal networks had profound effects: first, they encouraged travel to and from London; second, they offered financial and cultural opportunities for Scots living in a foreign and sometimes hostile land; and, third, they provided access to an increasingly powerful communication technology.²⁷

In the early 1760s Boswell's most important relationship in the trade was with Alexander Donaldson, the Edinburgh bookseller who would become famous for his legal disputes with the London establishment. During this time, though, Donaldson worked in loose collaboration with Robert and James Dodsley, who served as the London distributors of his second collection of Scottish poetry, for which he invited the young Boswell to correct sheets.²⁸ Dodsley published Boswell's first London poem—*The Cub, at New-market* (1762)—at the author's expense and, in 1763, Donaldson introduced Boswell and Erskine to the booksellers on Paternoster Row: "He engaged [them] to befriend us. In these matters the favour of *the trade* (as the booksellers call themselves) is a prodigious point" (240).

Printed criticism organizes relationships across these book-trade networks by signaling alliances and rivalries. When it came to publishing *Critical Strictures*, Boswell

²⁶ Ibid., 271.

²⁷ Ibid., 114-31.

²⁸ *A Collection of Original Poems. By Scotch Gentlemen* (London: Printed by A. Donaldson and J. Reid for A. Donaldson, Sold by R. and J. Dodsley; and J. Richardson, 1762). See also *The General Correspondence of James Boswell, 1757-763*, 35n.

& Co. avoided the prominent, established London booksellers. After all, Mallet's play *Elvira* was published by Andrew Millar, a leading figure in the London-Edinburgh publishing axis.²⁹ Mallet was noted, with Hume, among Millar's circle of literary counselors, and the volume was dedicated to none other than the Scottish Lord Bute.³⁰ For their pamphlet attack, Boswell chose William Flexney, a relatively minor figure known in London as the bookseller of satirist Charles Churchill. Boswell records the decision in his journal, "We resolved to take it to Flexney, near Gray's Inn, Holborn, who, being Mr. Churchill's bookseller, was well-known. . . . We explained our business, and he readily undertook it" (162). By publishing *Critical Strictures* through Flexney, Boswell & Co. placed their first foot in the door of a complex web of relationships between journalists, poets, and booksellers. Flexney was a marginal figure in the Nonsense Club, a loosely formed literary and libertine association centered on John Wilkes, Charles Churchill, and Bonnell Thornton.³¹ The literary partnerships of Thornton, Churchill, Wilkes, and George Colman were models that Boswell and Erskine deliberately sought to emulate while in Scotland.³² Besides publishing popular poetic works like Churchill's *Rosciad*, Flexney's shop sold Thornton's current periodical, *The St. James Chronicle*.³³ During this time, Boswell was an avid reader of *The North-Briton*,

²⁹ Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book*, 275-94.

³⁰ David Mallet, *Elvira: a Tragedy. Acted at the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1763). For Mallet's relationship to Millar, see Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book*, 284.

³¹ Lance Bertelsen, *The Nonsense Club: Literature and Popular Culture, 1749-1764* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

³² For Pittock's description of Boswell's fascination with this group, see "Boswell as Critic."

³³ Alvin Sullivan, ed., *British Literary Magazines* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), i:299.

a stridently anti-administration newspaper written collaboratively by Wilkes and Churchill. *The North-Briton* was sold by George Kearsley, who partnered with Flexney and others in 1763 to publish a large quarto edition of Churchill's collected works.³⁴ Further, Boswell and Erskine had good reason to believe their attack on Mallet would be welcome in this group: on January 20, the same day they approached Flexney about publishing their *Strictures*, a dismissive and satiric review of the play appeared in Thornton's and Flexney's *The St. James Chronicle*.³⁵

Thus, the pamphlet was just one salvo in a larger system of partisan publishing that included poetry and periodicals. Less than a month later, Boswell began work on a more ambitious publication that would extend his participation in this system. *Letters Between the Honourable Andrew Erskine and James Boswell, Esq.* is a neatly printed, compact octavo volume of 158 pages, priced initially at three shillings.³⁶ It includes forty-two letters, dated from August 1761 to November 1763, the last narrating Boswell's arrival in London, making it a sort of pre-history to the journal. In their mix of poetry and prose, *Letters* tells the story of two young aspiring poets, aspiring men of wit and men of letters. Rhetorically, they employ many of the same techniques used in *Critical Strictures*. In particular, Erskine and Boswell accumulate facetious metaphors in order to

³⁴ Charles Churchill, *Poems* (London: printed for the author, by Dryden Leach; and sold by W. Flexney, at Gray's-Inn Gate, Holborn; G. Kearsly, Ludgate-Street; T. Henderson, at the Royal-Exchange; J. Coote, in Pater-Noster-Row; J. Gardner, in Charles-Street, Westminster; J. Almon, in Piccadilly; and E. Broughton, at Oxford, 1763).

³⁵ The *St. James Chronicle*'s review is cited in Pottle's introduction to the facsimile edition of *Critical Strictures*. On Feb. 1, the magazine also published an excerpt from *Critical Strictures*. Cited in Frederick Pottle, *The Literary Career of James Boswell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20. Andrew Erskine and James Boswell, *Letters Between the Honourable Andrew Erskine, and James Boswell, Esq* (London: printed by Samuel Chandler; for W. Flexney, near Gray's-Inn-Gate, Holborn, 1763).

create, according to one scholar, “an effect of exuberant energy by piling up parallel phrases.”³⁷ Throughout, they comment on each other’s letter-writing and on famous printed works (including a statement of praise, added to the print edition, for Churchill’s *Rosciad*).³⁸ They describe their appearances in newspapers and pamphlets, and they discuss sending books by the post. They discuss at length their own adventures into print—between them, they mention Alexander Donaldson and Robert Dodsley no fewer than 28 times over just 42 letters. *The Cub, at New-market* is a frequent topic of comment, as are their contributions to Donaldson’s collections. In its theme, form, and distribution, *Letters* represents Boswell’s and Erskine’s emergence in London as authors and, in James Caudle’s words, Boswell’s “projected metamorphosis from a provincial Scottish boy-poet into a cosmopolite and London wit.”³⁹

Of particular note is the way Boswell and Erskine provoke family and acquaintances through strategic violations of propriety. As I have argued, much of *Critical Strictures*’ purpose was to set up its authors to be judged as wits or fools or both. *Letters* extends this project even more effectively, branding its authors men of impudence and imprudence. Filled with personal and sometimes embarrassing reflections, the text’s collective authorial persona is a type in direct opposition to the man of mature respectability. As his correspondent John Johnston had warned him, and as he and

³⁷ Thomas Crawford, “Boswell and the Rhetoric of Friendship,” in *New Light on Boswell*, ed. Greg Clingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13..

³⁸ See *Letters*: “Upon my word, Churchill does scourge with a vengeance ... He is certainly a very able writer. He has great power of numbers” (IV, 10 Oct. 1761). The full text of *Letters* is included in *General Correspondence* (2006).

³⁹ James J. Caudle, “Introduction,” *The General Correspondence of James Boswell, 1757-763*, liii.

Erskine anticipated, Boswell's father expressed dismay at the publication.⁴⁰ Boswell's friend and would-be patron Lord Eglinton, earlier embarrassed to be included in *Cub, at New-market*, worried that Boswell was endangering his position in London society by continuing to print: "Upon my soul, Jamie, I would not take the direction of you upon any account, for as much as I like you, except you would agree to give over that damned publishing. Lady N—— would as soon have a raven in her house as an author" (241n). Hugh Blair expresses disapprobation, worried that those outside the authors' direct acquaintance will see Boswell and Erskine as "two vain, forward young men that would be pert and disagreeable."⁴¹ Predictably, when Boswell and Erskine opened the *Critical Review* on June 1, they found that it questioned their sense of propriety and their poetic talents, and that it compared their witticisms to a joke gone flat because taken out of context: "Our reader will easily see the vast effect which the least alteration of circumstances has to the prejudice of those tender and volatile qualities true wit and humour. Hence it is, that a thing at one time may be very lively, and at another very insipid."⁴² This point—that the effectiveness of wit varies widely according to the context of its utterance—strikes to the very heart of what Boswell and Erskine were doing with their publication. While offering their private wit to an anonymous public across England and Scotland, the pair simultaneously performed their lack of discretion across the various interpersonal networks of acquaintance and family within which they were

⁴⁰ *Correspondence with John Johnston, The Correspondence of James Boswell and John Johnston of Grange*, ed. Ralph S. Walker (London: Heinemann, 1966), 28 Apr. 1763. For Lord Auchinleck's angry response, see *Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763*, 337-42.

⁴¹ Frederick Pottle, *James Boswell, the Earlier Years, 1740-1769* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 105.

⁴² *Critical Review* 15 (May 1763): 345. In the *Journal*, Boswell describes reading this review with Erskine over breakfast (271).

bound. The playful naughtiness of a text like *Letters* comes from the way it exploits the tension between these kinds of publicity.

Although *Letters* was specifically designed to spark disapproval from sources like fathers and unfriendly literary reviewers, the hope was that others with a greater taste for frivolity would appreciate the writers' stylistic mastery all the more for their rhetorical temerity. This hope can be seen clearly in a review, written anonymously by Boswell, which appeared in the *London Chronicle*. After praising the collection for "flashes of genuine wit and humour," Boswell concludes: "And although the cynical part of mankind may accuse them of vanity, yet we will venture to say, that there are few people who would not have been equally vain, had they written letters of equal merit."⁴³ They received other applause as well. The *Monthly Review* praised the collection and described Boswell and Erskine in encouraging, if somewhat condescending, terms: "They are pretty fellows in literature; and must not be roughly dealt with."⁴⁴ The various characterizations that Boswell accrued in the early months of 1763 are striking for their broad similarity, despite the diametrically opposed stances of his commentators: pretty, vain, pert, illiberal, envious, self-conceited, and petulant. Whether coming from the *Critical* or from Boswell himself, the language used to describe him consistently highlights his role as a particular kind of publishing author: the vain upstart. This was perhaps an odd choice for a subject position, but by exploiting the productive potential of critical antagonism, Boswell created a context in which he could be legible to a new audience of readers. He stirred up a debate for no reason except to be recognized as one of the debaters. Boswell's

⁴³ *London Chronicle* (26-28 April 1763): 404, 405.

⁴⁴ *Monthly Review* 18 (June 1763): 477.

commentators differ in how they value that activity, and the agonistic stance that he so gleefully took alienated many, but not all, of his readers.

For Boswell—and, I want to suggest, for eighteenth-century critics in general—this kind of exchange was a process of socialization that brought authors into a special set of relationships. Private interactions between individuals were informed by, molded, and even made possible by the ostensibly depersonalized exchange of opinion in print. The most important review that *Letters* received appeared in *The Public Advertiser*, which, Boswell discovered through inquiry, was written by none other than Bonnell Thornton, the poet and essayist whose periodical, *The St. James Chronicle*, just happened to be sold alongside Boswell's book in Flexney's shop. On May 24, Boswell records the occasion of their first meeting:

I received a very polite letter from Mr. Thornton, one of the authors of *The Connoisseur*, informing me that he had written the criticism on Erskine's and Boswell's *Letters* in *The Public Advertiser*, to which I had in return for their civility sent a little essay begging to know who had spoken so favourably of us. Mr. Thornton said he should be happy in our acquaintance. I wrote to him my thanks and said I would call upon him at eleven o'clock, which I did, and found him a well-bred, agreeable man, lively and odd. He had about £15,000 left him by his father, was bred to physic, but was fond of writing. So he employs himself in that way.

In a little, Mr. Wilkes came in, to whom I was introduced, as I also was to Mr. Churchill. Wilkes is a lively, facetious man, Churchill a rough, blunt fellow, very clever. Lloyd too was there, so that I was just got into the middle of the London Geniuses. They were high-spirited and boisterous, but were very civil to me, and Wilkes said he would be glad to see me in George Street. (266)

In Michel Foucault's famous formulation, authorship functions as a way of categorizing and valuing different kinds of texts.⁴⁵ Here we can see a situation that is roughly the converse: rather than biographies organizing books on shelves, in this scene the public circulation of texts gathers together men who are known to be their authors. For Boswell at least, the personae that these men cultivated in print informed his understanding of their conviviality: they are the London Geniuses, whose existence before this moment was textual and abstract. Now Boswell finds himself suddenly among them and celebrates that he has been accepted as one of the group. Boswell's numerous journals and publications would set similar scenes over the course of his career, and perhaps none felt more acutely than Boswell the glamour of print.⁴⁶ This meeting should be seen as, in many ways, the culmination and fruition of Boswell & Co.'s literary efforts. *Critical Strictures* and *Letters* were important because they established print identities for Boswell and his collaborators, which then served as the basis for their insinuation into the already established and well-known, even notorious, fraternity of Churchill and Wilkes. A week later, Boswell would introduce Erskine to Thornton, and the project was complete (271).

But it would be wrong to see this scene as merely one of Boswell's well-known eccentricities. The ambiguous overlap between nationalized public audiences and narrower networks of acquaintance was and is endemic to all forms of public address: to borrow the ears of one's countrymen is often to risk a great deal personally. Early literary

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 101-20.

⁴⁶ About this moment, Frederick Pottle speculates, "If Boswell had not previously met Johnson, this meeting with the 'Geniuses' might well have seemed to him the climax of his months in London" (266n).

criticism stands at a crisis point from which these two kinds of publicity can be made explicit and visible. Boswell made his career by exploiting the interpersonal consequences of criticism—bad criticism, in particular—as a vehicle of narcissistic glamour: he was naughty to others while seeing himself being seen as naughty by others, and knowing that others were seeing themselves being seen by others while condemning him.⁴⁷ The strategic violations of propriety for which Boswell is so famous, whether in his journals or in his published writings, are effective because they force these very issues into readers' awareness. In this sense, Boswell's writings exemplify a kind of criticism that seeks neither to understand nor to critique but to disturb. Boswell's early career shows how this dubious publicity could be used to engender new kinds of intimacy. To see Boswell & Co.'s success as a possible kind of success suggests that a more thorough examination of the social history of literary criticism may be long overdue.

⁴⁷ Donald Newman describes narcissism in Boswell's *Journal* in Donald Newman, "A Pretty Trifle: Art and Identity in Boswell's London Journal," *Prose Studies* 25, no. 2 (August 2002): 25-50.

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Curriculum Vitae

MICHAEL GAVIN

Colleges Attended

The Ohio State University
 Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

Education

Ph.D., English, Rutgers, 2010
 M.A., English, Rutgers, 2008
 M.A., English, Ohio State, 2005
 B.A., English, Ohio State, 1999

Publications

“James Boswell and the Uses of Criticism,” forthcoming in *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* (Summer 2010)

“Critics and Criticism in the Poetry of Anne Finch,” forthcoming in *ELH: English Literary History*

“Serial Publication and the Vendible Canon,” (review of Thomas F. Bonnell, *The Most Disreputable Trade: Publishing the Classics of English Poetry, 1765-1810*), forthcoming in *Eighteenth-Century Life*